

**Gustav Shpet's Theory of the Inner Form of the Word:  
A Phenomenological Study**

Liisa Bourgeot

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Liisa Bourgeot

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A Phenomenological Study**

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Series editors Tomi Huttunen, Johanna Viimaranta, Max Wahlström



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*Helsinki, November 2021*

*Liisa Bourgeot*

## ABSTRACT

Gustav Shpet (1879–1937) is one of the most noteworthy thinkers in the history of Russian philosophy. Yet having fallen from grace in the eyes of the Bolsheviks, he was executed in Stalin's Great Terror and removed from philosophy books for nearly fifty years. Shpet was rediscovered in the late 1980s, and the scholarship around his thought has since grown, both in Russia and abroad. Especially strong interest has been directed towards his idiosyncratic reading of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology. Shpet was Husserl's student in Göttingen in 1912–14 and published his own considerations about transcendental phenomenology on his return to Moscow. But while he has come to be seen as a pioneer in Russian phenomenology, Shpet's unconventional interpretation has also raised concerns.

For roughly the first half of his *Iavlenie i smysl* (1914), Shpet relies on Husserl's *Ideen I* (1913). But the book then takes an unprecedented turn, leading to an original view of phenomenology. Instead of focusing on structures of the experiencing consciousness, Shpet's philosophy raises questions about 'what is' and how 'meaning' originates. As its conclusion, *Iavlenie i smysl* proposes the existence of a special collective consciousness in which the world as we know it finds its form. It has been suggested that Shpet thus not only reinterpreted Husserl's terminology and made his own additions to it, but even reversed the latter's transcendental turn. According to this view, Shpet's own philosophy failed to adopt Husserl's fundamentally presuppositionless standpoint and instead remained in the natural attitude, albeit with a hermeneutic twist.

According to many, Shpet's reading was founded on a misinterpretation; he is seen as either unwilling to follow Husserl's idea or incapable of doing so. In addition, it is frequently proposed that Shpet's unorthodox approach may be explained by a certain Russianness at the foundation

of his system. The traditional philosophical standpoint in Russia has emphasized ontological questions, as well as the collectiveness of experience. It is suggested that Shpet thereby ‘Russianized’ Husserl by replacing his transcendental subjectivity with a collective consciousness.

The present dissertation proposes a new reading of Shpet’s interpretation of Husserl. The study first discusses the Russian roots of Shpet’s phenomenology, that is, the philosophical framework in which his thinking matured, and from which he approached Husserl’s thought. Subsequently, the dissertation presents a novel analysis of *Iavlenie i smysl*, comparing it not only to Husserl’s *Ideen I* but also his earlier *Logische Untersuchungen* (1900–01) and the considerably later *Formale und Transzendente Logik* (1929). The study maintains that Shpet not only followed through the transcendental turn but proposed themes and ideas which Husserl himself arrived at in the 1920s. It is suggested that the similarity between Shpet’s and Husserl’s approaches might be traced back to their shared questions and discussions in 1912–14.

The reinterpretation of Shpet’s phenomenology leads to the study’s second principal topic: his theory of the inner form of the word. After the October Revolution, Shpet’s phenomenology evolved into a philosophy of language and art. While his theory was known among the Moscow formalists, it was also deemed archaic and unscientific. The concept of the inner form seemed to return Shpet’s philosophy to Aleksandr Potebnia, against whose romantic theory of the ‘spirit’ of language the formalists fought. The dissertation builds its final argument as a response to Maryse Dennes’s pivotal article, published in 2006, in which she shows that Shpet’s theory of the inner form was in fact closely related to his earlier phenomenological ideas. Yet the significance of this phenomenological foundation to Shpet’s cultural theory had yet to be established. The dissertation’s last chapter thus continues Dennes’s work, expanding on her philosophical conclusions, and Shpet’s theory of the inner form of the word is tackled with the renewed understanding of his phenomenology. It is suggested that Shpet’s theory — especially in his 1922–23 *Esteticheskie fragmenty* — was in a strict sense phenomenological.

The concept of the inner form is just a circuitous route to the main issue. Whether I will ever start speaking about the main thing itself, when and how — I do not know.

*(Понятие внутренней формы — только обиходной путь к главному. Заговорю ли я о нем самом, когда и как, не знаю.)*

Shpet in a letter to Timofei Rainov in November 1927



## INTRODUCTION

This dissertation tackles the two themes that are probably most actively discussed in research concerning Gustav Shpet's (1879–1937) philosophy: his interpretation of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology and his conception of the 'inner form of the word' (*vnutrenniaia forma slova*). In what follows the two issues are treated as interrelated — but their connection is by no means my own discovery. The phenomenological foundation of Shpet's language theory was already brought to light by Maryse Dennes in 2006. Her detailed article specifies the moments in Husserl's thought which Shpet discussed first in 1914, and which later led him to formulate the conception of the inner form — even if outwardly the term seemed directly borrowed from Wilhelm von Humboldt and Aleksandr Potebnia. Through her analysis Dennes draws a definition of Shpet's inner form that both identifies its Husserlian core and places it within the Humboldtian-Potebnian tradition that was so significant for the development of Russian language theories in the twentieth century.

The present work suggests a new reading of Shpet's idiosyncratic phenomenology. In relying on this, I suggest a revised definition of Shpet's inner form of the word by associating it still more closely with Husserl. The proposed definition could thus be described as 'non-Humboldtian'. While the philosophies of Shpet and Husserl have been compared numerous times, the outcomes of these analyses have been fairly unvarying. It has been demonstrated that Shpet's *Iavlenie i smysl* begins with a rather straightforward paraphrasing of Husserl's *Ideas I*, but that in the fifth chapter we can see the emergence of his concern for the problem of 'sense' or 'meaning' (*smysl*, corresponding to Husserl's *Sinn*). By the end of the book Shpet is seen to have reinterpreted Husserl's phenomenology through a hermeneutic lens which — seemingly unbeknownst to Shpet himself — challenges his transcendental position. The conclusion of *Iavlenie i smysl* certainly raises questions of this sort. Shpet

there postulates a new ‘form’ of reality, the ‘social being’ (*sotsial’noe bytie*), in which objects appear carrying a meaning. This sphere of being consists primarily of man-made objects — books, benches, etc. — that have been constructed *for* a certain purpose. Their sense is found in an ‘entelechy’ that embodies the logic or motivation of their construction. However, Shpet also notes that *any* thing or object included in the social reality can be seen to inhabit an entelechy, or as he also calls it, an ‘inner sense’. Once we give a rock a meaning (whether it is taken as a tool or an object of aesthetic pleasure), it becomes a social object.

Commentators have found that although Shpet seems first to follow Husserl through his transcendental turn, at the end of his book he has returned to a ‘natural’ position. Instead of analysing the structures of the pure ego’s experience, Shpet focuses on an external and objective reality, questioning its forms and manner of being. This hermeneutic and ontological emphasis is often traced back to a certain ‘Russianness’ at the base of Shpet’s philosophy, exemplified especially in his doctoral thesis, *Istoriia kak problema logiki*. The perspective introduced there is indeed unusual. First, Shpet asserts that history should be treated above all as a hermeneutic discipline: the events of the past appear to us as ‘signs’ requiring interpretation. He then goes on to argue that reality itself should be treated through a similar prism: as a meaningful and objective whole constructed by a collective consciousness. Approaching the question of reality, Shpet thus redirects his attention to communal meaning-forming functions, as it were, behind it. To many his position has seemed to carry an echo of Vladimir Solov’ev’s idea of ‘*vseedinstvo*’, unity-of-all, or the Slavophiles’ conception of ‘*sobornost*’. Consequently, Shpet’s idea of the inner form of the word has often been associated with the logocentric tradition of Orthodox Christianity, in which the word is endowed with world-creating powers.

This study proposes another way of interpreting Shpet’s path from Husserl’s phenomenology, through a hermeneutical turn, to the theory of the inner form of the word. In the first chapter I argue that Shpet’s focus on the questions of ‘meaning’ and ‘being’ should be associated not with the religious philosophical tradition of Russian thought but rather, and more specifically, with the heritage of the Moscow metaphysical

school and its commitment to positive philosophy (*polozhitel'naia filosofia*). I suggest that this approach motivated Shpet's entrance to philosophy, which took place through a rejection of neo-Kantianism. Shpet argued that contemporary philosophy, bearing Kant's influence, had shifted its focus to 'what seems to be' instead of the eternal question of 'what is'. Shpet believed that to move forward, philosophy had therefore to backtrack and rediscover its original question. Interestingly, while he thus argued for a return to a 'pre-Kantian' standpoint, Shpet also discovered phenomenology as the next necessary step for positive philosophy. In chapter two I aim to show that Shpet's phenomenology did, in fact, remain rooted in Husserl's transcendental thought. To demonstrate this, I analyse *Iavlenie i smysl* not only in relation to *Ideas I* but also *Logical Investigations*, and include in my discussion the period during which Shpet's understanding of phenomenology matured (in a dialogue with Husserl), that is, his sojourn in Göttingen between 1912 and 1914. This was also a crucial time for Husserl as he reconsidered his early phenomenological insights from a novel perspective. As I will argue, it is in the problematic points of *Logical Investigations*, which Husserl was still at the time unable to reformulate according to the transcendental position, that we find the common ground he shared with Shpet.

The third chapter discusses Shpet's return to Moscow shortly before the First World War as the period during which he redefined the phenomenological entelechy as the inner form of the word. Shpet's 1917 essay '*Mudrost' ili razum?*' concludes that the motivation at the foundation of all sense-formation is by its nature linguistic; in other words, the nature of consciousness itself is linguistic. At the same time, Shpet presents the interesting and even puzzling view that words can grasp and express essences, the veritable 'truth' about 'being', wholly and directly. Thereafter, the inner form of the word was at the centre of Shpet's philosophical system. In the fourth chapter I take up an analysis of Shpet's concept as he presented it in the cultural debates of post-revolutionary Moscow. His theory of a 'realistic' poetic language became influential, first in the Moscow Linguistic Circle and later at the State Academy of Artistic Sciences. However, the opposition Shpet faced was equally strong. In the discussions with formalists, as well as in the later

analyses of these discussions, his concept has typically been considered outdated: the Humboldtian and Potebnian echo of the inner form is seen as countering the modern precision of Russian formalism.

My argument in the final chapter is that Shpet's clearest definition of the inner form of the word can be found in his *Esteticheskie fragmenty*, composed during his participation at Moscow Linguistic Circle. As I aim to show, this 1923 version inner form was firmly rooted in his conception of Husserl's phenomenology, and its meaning can thus be interpreted using the phenomenological terminology of Shpet's earlier texts. Seen in this way, Shpet's concept does not so much continue the Orthodox *logos* tradition as question it. Similarly, the inner form appears distinct from Humboldt's and Potebnia's metaphorical and psychological conceptions; its meaning is both more clear-cut and philosophically complex. The suggested phenomenological reading thus sheds new light on the unresolved debates between Shpet's 'organic' school and the empirical literary theory of the formalists.

Throughout his career Shpet was above all concerned with the 'true being' of reality, and how to gain a comprehensive and indubitable knowledge of it. As I will attempt to show in what follows, this was a concern he shared with Husserl, despite their different ways of approaching the question. In my understanding Shpet's theory of the inner form of the word is best understood as an intricate part of this general philosophical quest.

## 1. SHPET'S PATH TO PHENOMENOLOGY

Understanding Shpet's interpretation of Husserl's phenomenology, and how it led to his later structural theory of the word, requires some digging into the 'Russian roots' of his thinking. This will be the task of the present chapter. First, I will present a short analysis of the late nineteenth century philosophical debates — partly through Shpet's own commentaries on them — that formed the specifically Russian background of his emergence as a thinker. Then, I will discuss the development of Shpet's philosophy in the pre-Göttingen period, roughly between 1902 and 1912. During this period he began his career at St Vladimir University in Kiev, moved to Moscow University and participated in the city's philosophical and cultural circles, eventually making his way to Germany. The intellectual atmosphere of Moscow especially influenced Shpet's thinking; he began to philosophize against it.

Shpet's critique was directed primarily at the neo-Kantian philosophy that had become the leading intellectual trend in pre-war Moscow. Shpet opposed not only the new philosophical school, but indeed all thinking that had, as he argued, blindly followed Kant's 'Copernican turn'. In Shpet's opinion Kant's *Critique* had led philosophy to excessive subjectivism and abstraction. In denying the mind's access to what truly 'is', it had accepted the problem of what 'seems to be' as the primary problem of philosophy. In Kiev Shpet tackled Kant's philosophy systematically and then, upon his arrival in Moscow, he began to criticize the neo-Kantian influences he found prevalent not only in philosophical debates but also, for example, in Andrei Belyi's theory of symbolism. Finally, it appears that Shpet selected Göttingen as the 'least Kantian' of German university towns as a peaceful location to work on his doctoral dissertation. However, this plan failed as Shpet plunged into Husserl's phenomenology and indeed found in it a way to respond to Kant's philosophy.

Yet, although Shpet supported Husserl's approach, he suspected that even phenomenology had fallen prey to Kant's subjectivism. To counterbalance this flaw, inbuilt in Western rationalism, Shpet suggested that phenomenology should broaden its viewpoint and strive for the kind of 'concreteness', 'wholeness' and 'unity' that were inherent in the late nineteenth century Russian metaphysical tradition. As will be shown in the following chapters, these attributes can be discerned in Shpet's own interpretation of phenomenology. His unconventional reading accepted Husserl's transcendental turn and yet went against the latter's conception of transcendental subjectivity. With the Russian philosophical tradition as his foundation, Shpet conceived of a phenomenological method that was instead grounded in a collective consciousness and generated an original vision of phenomenology that emphasized its ontological, hermeneutical and intersubjective aspects.

The thesis as a whole aims to construct a chronological depiction of the evolution of Shpet's philosophy. However, in this first chapter the order of events will be somewhat altered: I offer a discussion of Shpet's own interpretation of late nineteenth-century Russian philosophy before tackling his own philosophical emergence in the early 1900s. The reason for this is simple: although Shpet only published his thoughts on the traditional traits or Russian philosophy in the 1910s, it is evident that a certain 'Russianness' influenced his attitude to Western philosophy from the start.

### 1.1. NINETEENTH-CENTURY DEBATES: SHPET'S EMERGENCE

Shpet's career began at a time when, as he argued, Western philosophy was hampered by the rise of Kantianism. This was mainly due to the growing neo-Kantian school, but Shpet conceived of the phenomenon as broader than this. For him it related to an entire modern attitude that endorsed a detachment of the mind from reality. Shpet indeed argued that the overall 'spirit' of Kantianism had led to excessive abstraction, logicism and psychologism in all areas of Western thought. However, he

believed that Russian philosophy could offer a cure for this. In his 1912 essay 'Odná put' psikhologii i kuda on vedet' ('One Path of Psychology and Where It Leads') Shpet suggested that especially the Russian philosophers Pamfil Iurkevich, Lev Lopatin and Sergei Trubetskoi exemplified how to argue against the contemporary trend.

The metaphysical philosophy of Iurkevich, Lopatin and Trubetskoi had developed as a counterreaction to the materialism and positivism that prevailed among the Russian intelligentsia in the mid-nineteenth century. According to Iurii Lotman, materialism affected Russian intellectual culture still more profoundly than other European cultures. He presents the example of France, where it was adopted mainly as a tool of social and political struggle, whereas in Russia materialism was at once perceived as 'the study of the nature of man and society':<sup>1</sup> a new atheist understanding of the human nature gained popularity along with a tendency to seek scientific answers to traditionally philosophical questions such as the mind-body controversy.<sup>2</sup> Ivan Sechenov's *Refleksy golovnogo mozga* (1863), which grounded the functions of consciousness in physical processes, became the new 'catechism' for human behaviour.<sup>3</sup> Aside from ground-breaking empirical innovations, the pamphlet presented statements on the innermost human nature, in particular the question of the soul. Sechenov writes:

All the endless diversity of external manifestations of cerebral activity ultimately leads to just one phenomenon — muscle movement. Be it a child laughing at the sight of a toy, Garibaldi smiling when pursued for his excessive love of country, a girl trembling at the first thought of

<sup>1</sup> Lotman 2000, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> Martsinkovskaia (2016a, p. 14) notes that the new trend evolved closely in conjunction with the emerging fields of the new human sciences, e. g. sociology and poetic theory. The mind-body controversy and the problem of free will became topics of intense public debate. For more on this see Janoušek & Sirotkina 2003, p. 432.

<sup>3</sup> Martsinkovskaia 2016a, p. 12. Sechenov's work retained its value during the Soviet era. In an edition from 1942, it is described as a perfect example of 'that fighting, materialist natural scientific literature which played an exceptional role in the formation of a materialistic worldview of the leading people of the sixties' (Koshtoiants 1942, p. 5).

love, Newton creating the first universal laws and writing them down on paper — the final fact everywhere is muscle movement.<sup>1</sup>

Spiritual considerations were thus largely set aside in Russia in the mid-nineteenth century. According to Aleksei Pavlov the majority of the intelligentsia concluded that ‘in the modern world, the answer to worldview questions needs to be sought in scientific studies, whereas philosophy is the study of the past, not to speak of religion, which finds refuge only in the heads of the uneducated’.<sup>2</sup> This trend was opposed from the 1860s by the so-called Moscow metaphysical school (*Moskovskaia metafizicheskaia shkola*), which attempted to reintroduce the questions of ‘spiritual’ experience to the public discourse. In Shpet’s opinion especially Iurkevich, Lopatin, and Sergei Trubetskoi, who were among the leading members of this school, had succeeded in expressing the very ‘soul of philosophy’ that was by its nature ‘vital, concrete’ and based on ‘reliable findings of internal experience’.<sup>3</sup> In what follows I discuss Shpet’s treatment of these nineteenth-century thinkers, as well as his own emergence as a philosopher as a continuation of their tradition.

### 1.1.1. Rediscovering ‘True Being’

In the era of materialism, psychology found itself torn between two academic traditions. Having long been considered a branch of philosophy, the empirical side of psychology now evolved rapidly. Experimental methods increased in sophistication, and the results were analysed mathematically. Through the growth of empirical accuracy, psychology came to be seen as the most reliable of the human sciences, and the only discipline that could provide objective knowledge of private states of mind. Furthermore, according to a popular psychologistic outlook, man-made phenomena such as works of art were treated as products of the subjective experience, and so they too became a subject matter for

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<sup>1</sup> Sechenov 1942, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Pavlov 2015, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 2006, p. 263.

psychology.<sup>1</sup> In a 1914 essay dedicated to Iurkevich's memory, Shpet asserts that even scientific 'truths' could thus be considered susceptible to human psychology. In his words, materialism, in the guise of psychology, in fact attempted to 'create an absolute physics which would exclude metaphysics'; it presupposed a metaphysical foundation but failed to open it to critical analysis. In other words, materialism set itself metaphysical goals but strove to achieve them by physical means.<sup>2</sup>

In Shpet's opinion this amounted to a dangerously naive reaction to Kant's distinction of the object of experience from the 'thing-in-itself'. Unable to respond to Kant, Shpet argued that materialists desired to find reality in the physical experience itself, and to proceed from it, as if from a firm basis, to an explanation of both natural and spiritual phenomena. To overcome such simplistic arguments, Shpet stated that philosophy must find a way to take on the challenge presented by the empirical sciences and respond to it on its own terms. He believed that with the great volume and variety of new scientific knowledge this task was now more crucial and also more difficult than ever since each 'new fact of natural science or history has a side which cannot be explained by the methods and principles of physics alone; it always contains a certain "remainder of being" which awaits its metaphysics'. Consequently, Shpet stated that the first and foremost question of philosophy must be that of 'being', understood as a metaphysical problem. He continued: 'Every further question about being, questions about whether the differences between material and spiritual phenomena are resolved in a higher unity, and whether they are not a simple consequence of our limited cognition [...] all these questions belong to metaphysics and equally cannot be resolved by any one science'.<sup>3</sup>

Shpet asserts that in an era that was hostile to philosophy Pamfil Iurkevich stood out as a 'fierce supporter' of its free spirit.<sup>4</sup> Iurkevich rose to popularity when philosophy was only about to re-enter Russian universities after a ban of more than a decade. Previously a professor

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<sup>1</sup> Martsinkovskaia 2016a, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1914a, p. 661.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1914a, p. 656.

<sup>4</sup> Shpet 1914a, p. 655.

at the Kiev Theological Academy, in 1860 he published a refutation of the overly crude positivist outlook on the human mind, '*Iz nauki o chelovecheskom dukhe*'. The essay became a small sensation after it was reissued in the widely read *Moskovskie vedomosti* in 1861, and Iurkevich was soon promoted to be a professor of philosophy at Moscow University.<sup>1</sup> The essay argued that the positivist method of identifying, classifying and analysing facts and phenomena was not directly transferrable to the study of the human mind: it was simply impossible to catalogue all that the mind contained.<sup>2</sup> Iurkevich writes:

Thousands of feelings, strivings, suppositions, concepts and ideas, habits, tendencies and passions emerge on the surface of consciousness unexpectedly and unbeknownst to us, define our actions, our view of people and circumstances, our likes and dislikes, the state of our souls every single minute — and all that diversity of phenomena, of which each one wants to tell us, in its own way, what the soul is, proceeds from reasons and conditions eternally in change.<sup>3</sup>

Iurkevich asserts that the new empirical psychology could fulfil a task that had been beyond the reach of the earlier idealists: to find the cognitive phenomena directly in introspection and analyse them systematically. In his opinion both psychology and philosophy were thus entering an entirely new field of research by focusing on the nature of ideal phenomena. For now, it was unnecessary even to touch upon the difficult metaphysical question of the 'true essence' of the mind's ideal realm. Instead, Iurkevich strives for a mere distinction between two kinds of modes of perception: the internal and the external. He writes that 'psychology studies matters provided for internal experience, whereas natural science studies matters which present themselves

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<sup>1</sup> Frede 2010, p. 77. Irina Sirotkina (2006, p. 242) adds that after the reintroduction of philosophy courses to the curricula few universities could make the necessary appointments due to a shortage of philosophy teachers. Iurkevich was one of the few qualified people available.

<sup>2</sup> The argument was directed especially against Nikolai Chernyshevskii. For more on the debate between them see Sirotkina 2006, pp. 242–243.

<sup>3</sup> Iurkevich 1860, p. 369.

in the external experience; in both, we repeat, science studies the world of phenomena, mental in the first case, and physical in the second'.<sup>1</sup>

The question of what kind of perception takes place in psychological introspection was still far from clear, Iurkevich asserts. Mental phenomena cannot be recognized by their movement, form, colour, sound, smell, taste, weight or temperature. In other words, they cannot be perceived sensually. Furthermore, introspection is always self-perception; only in his or her 'inner look' can the scientist recognize themselves as a 'thinking, feeling, striving being'. Because of this, psychological introspection must not be considered isomorphic with the empirical study of natural phenomena, Iurkevich argues:

A writer writes: 'we know that sensation belongs to certain nerves and movement to others'. Break that statement down. When an external push acts on a nerve, whether that nerve is one of sensation or one of movement, it will, all the same, as a result of that push, move or shudder: that much we may observe in a physiological experiment. Thus, it must be said: we know that every nerve starts to move as the result of an external impression. However, we do not at all know from physiological experiments whether 'a certain sensation belongs to certain nerves', because these 'certain nerves' merely represent for the purposes of an external physiological experiment movement, which, in the eyes of the observing physiologist, never turns into sensation, idea or thought.<sup>2</sup>

In the history of Russian philosophy Iurkevich came to be known as the founder of the Moscow metaphysical school.<sup>3</sup> This was a loosely defined group of likeminded thinkers, with Lev Lopatin its most acclaimed member. The group is sometimes considered a faction of Vladimir Solov'ev's religious-mystical circle, but this connection is only partial. Lopatin and Solov'ev were childhood friends, and their growth as professional philosophers was parallel. However, as Aleksei

<sup>1</sup> Iurkevich 1860, pp. 373–374.

<sup>2</sup> Iurkevich 1860, p. 385.

<sup>3</sup> Haardt 1992, p. 29.

Pavlov asserts, Lopatin emerged early as an independent thinker, 'and he may in no way be considered either the student or the follower of Vl. Solov'ev'.<sup>1</sup> Turkevich's school reopened concepts such as 'knowledge', 'mind' and 'reality' to metaphysical investigation. Consequently, the Moscow metaphysicians returned to the ancient idea of 'true being' (*istinno sushchee*) and its foundations (*poslednie osnovania*), but from a critical viewpoint.<sup>2</sup> In the words of Nikolai Losskii, Turkevich sought 'in the spirit of Platonism' to discover 'the eternal idea of the object', lying 'behind the everchanging phenomena perceived by the senses'.<sup>3</sup> In spite of this Platonic tradition, Shpet considered Turkevich a 'realist' and an 'empiricist' in the full sense of these terms. According to Shpet, he 'protested against the narrowness and one-sidedness of the conclusions of materialism, against the rejection of other methods and ways, against the conscious nihilism applied to the philosophical tradition'.<sup>4</sup>

Apart from Lopatin, Turkevich's work was continued in Moscow by Nikolai Grot and Sergei Trubetskoi. All of them played an important role in the launch of professional academic philosophy in Russia in the late nineteenth century. Through their association with the Moscow Psychological Society (*Moskovskoe psikhologicheskoe obshchestvo*), metaphysical concerns also became intricately connected with contemporary work in psychology. The Society was founded at Moscow University in 1884 on the initiative of Matvei Troitskii.<sup>5</sup> According to Thomas Nemeth this was 'the singular event' of the late 1880s, promoting communication within the professionally trained philosophical community in Russia.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, very soon after the Society's founding, according to the 1884 University Charter, the teaching of philosophy in Russia was limited to ancient Greek and Latin philosophy. The link between modern philosophy and psychology was thus cemented, as researchers from both fields united their efforts in studying cognition. In Moscow,

<sup>1</sup> Pavlov 2013, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Haardt 1992, pp. 27–29.

<sup>3</sup> Losskii 1951, p. 73.

<sup>4</sup> Shpet 1914a, pp. 655–656.

<sup>5</sup> Sirotkina 2006, p. 252.

<sup>6</sup> Nemeth 2017, p. 237.

the collaboration was further facilitated by the fact that psychology at Moscow University was administratively part of the faculty of humanities, even though the contemporary trend was to attach the experimental psychological laboratories to medical schools.<sup>1</sup>

Nemeth suggests that the Society's name excluded the word 'philosophy' mainly to avoid an association with the contemporary trends of revolutionary social thought. A different decision was made in the case of the journal *Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii* (*Questions of Philosophy and Psychology*, 1889–1918), which was undoubtedly the most important organizational undertaking of the Psychological Society.<sup>2</sup> The founder of the journal and its first editor was Nikolai Grot, whose liberal and broadminded attitude is often associated with his ability to found the first Russian journal of a professional philosophical level.<sup>3</sup> Trubetskoi and Lopatin collaborated at the Psychological Society at the beginning of the new century, and from 1900 to 1905 (when Trubetskoi died), they functioned as the co-editors of *Voprosy*. Lopatin continued in this function until the journal's closure.

It is generally accepted that the metaphysical school affected Shpet's thinking at the beginning of his career. Indeed, the idea of 'positive tasks' (*polozhitel'nye zadachi*) of philosophy became a guiding premise of his philosophy. This idea had been crystallized by Lopatin in his two dissertations, published in 1886 and 1891.<sup>4</sup> Shpet characterized positive philosophy as a tradition evolving from Plotinus to Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz.<sup>5</sup> In his opinion they had approached reality 'as it is', and not only as it 'appears', and thereby set positive philosophy in direct opposition to Kantianism. In contrast with mere phenomena Shpet maintained that positive philosophy could grasp the very foundations of being that were shared, objective and rational. His thought can thus also

<sup>1</sup> Sirotkina 2006, pp. 251–252.

<sup>2</sup> Nemeth 2017, pp. 237–238. Nemeth adds that the journal was financed by the Moscow confectionery merchant A. A. Abrikosov, who absorbed all its losses.

<sup>3</sup> See, e. g., Kozulin 1985, p. 23 and Sirotkina 2006, pp. 252–253. Grot's father, Iakov Grot, made a career for himself at the Imperial Alexander University in Helsinki, and Nikolai Grot himself was born in Helsinki. For more, see Byckling 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Pavlov 2013, p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> Shpet 1916, p. 20.

be seen as bearing an influence from Sergei Trubetskoi, who specialized in ancient Greek philosophy. Trubetskoi considered epistemic subjectivism a typical trait of Western philosophy, emanating from the ideals of Protestant Reformation. He criticized Western philosophy for building its conceptions on a narrowly defined conception of rationality and formulated his own philosophy of the 'universality of human consciousness', that is, his understanding of the ancient *logos*.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1.2. Towards Rationalist Metaphysics

Shpet's connection with the Moscow metaphysicians was partly direct — he attended Lopatin's lectures at Moscow University — and partly took place through his Kiev professor, Georgii Chelpanov. Nikolai Grot had been Chelpanov's professor at the Novorossiisk University in Odessa, as well as his colleague at Moscow University and the Psychological Society; in 1896, Chelpanov defended his *magister's* dissertation against both Grot and Lopatin.<sup>2</sup> In 1897 Chelpanov was appointed Professor at the University of St Vladimir in Kiev, where he led a famous seminar on psychology.<sup>3</sup> Shpet began to attend this seminar actively in 1902 and, in 1907 he relocated to Moscow with his family following the invitation of Chelpanov.<sup>4</sup> The same year he was elected (with recommendations from Chelpanov and Sergei Trubetskoi) a full member of the Moscow Psychological Society. Looking at the history of the Society more closely can thus inform us further about the origins of Shpet's philosophy.

The oscillation of the 'sciences of the mind' between their humanistic foundations and the new empirical ideals was a central theme for both psychologists and philosophers at the end of the century. According to Ol'ga Zakutniaia the change that took place in Grot's thinking, for

<sup>1</sup> Marchenko 2017, p. 192.

<sup>2</sup> Martsinkovskaia 2016a, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Martsinkovskaia 2016b, p. 90. For more on Chelpanov's seminar see Kozulin 1985, pp. 23–24.

<sup>4</sup> Shchedrina 2015, pp. 55–57.

example, was therefore typical of the time. At first a supporter of positivism, Grot saw the value of philosophy mainly as an instrument for the systematization of the empirical sciences. However, from the mid-1880s he became increasingly interested in idealism and acknowledged the significance of metaphysics as an independent field of research. Grot turned to questions concerning the essence of science, religion and art, and considered philosophy a special field of knowledge that could integrate the analyses of these disciplines. This in turn could provide a unified and more complete understanding of the world.<sup>1</sup> Grot suggested that psychology and philosophy should evolve through interaction and collaboration. The value of experimental psychology lay in its ability to access the 'real facts' (*real'nye fakty*) of spiritual life (*dushevnaia zhizn'*), and Grot asserted that its research must not be reduced to psychophysics, but that psychological experiments should instead approach any possible subject matter such as thoughts and emotions.<sup>2</sup>

In his editorial of the first issue of *Voprosy* Grot wrote that while the journal's core function was to offer a platform for the development of properly philosophical terminology and methodology in Russia, it would also embrace questions of arts and religion to offer a 'comprehensive knowledge' (*tsel'noe znanie*) of life. Such knowledge would help the reader navigate modern existence. Grot underlines that even though science and technology, in the West as in Russia, had moved forward with giant leaps, the happiness of humanity had not grown but, rather, has begun to fall. He is especially concerned about the modern individual's ability to gain an understanding (*vozzrenie*) about the reality which surrounds him:

It is precisely our time's outlook on life which is not only particularly nebulous and inconsistent but also cheerless. And how could it not be so when next to perfected telephones and other unusually fast and convenient means of communication between people, frighteningly destructive means for the [...] merciless destruction of people

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<sup>1</sup> Zakutniaia 2008, pp. 7–8.

<sup>2</sup> Martsinkovskaia 2016a, p. 17.

are invented and manufactured every day, when mutual love and the free interaction of people in the name of higher causes not only do not grow but ever weaken, and are limited as a consequence of fateful misunderstandings which fan the flames of rage and perfidy.<sup>1</sup>

Grot finds the reason for this state in an imbalance between people's inner and outer lives. While on the 'outside' life had become more comfortable, he argues that the 'inner life' was growing weak. Humanity had focused its efforts on perfecting the material aspects of existence that influenced people through their sensual experience. However, Grot asserts, only the knowledge acquired through 'inner feelings and experience' (*vnutrennie chuvstva i opyt*) could reveal life 'in its true root, in its inner content and meaning'.<sup>2</sup>

Lev Lopatin also emphasized the importance of not understanding 'knowledge' as merely the grasping of what is empirically or outwardly perceived. Aleksei Pavlov writes that materialism presented for him the belief that 'the sole reality belongs unconditionally to being, which is outside itself and absolutely unconscious, the features of which come down to duration, impenetrability, inertia, motility and other purely geometric and mechanical attributes'. Consequently, Lopatin considered materialism unable to explain how the external reality could become the object of consciousness in the first place because, in contrast, the soul 'possesses only internal attributes and is the opposite of all matter in its properties'. All human knowledge, Lopatin argued, was thus under a threat of being dramatically divided into two.<sup>3</sup>

The natural sciences, including psychology, could not serve as a foundation for philosophy in Lopatin's opinion. Instead, he argued that consciousness in itself presented a philosophical problem, and it must therefore be addressed through nonempirical methods of introspection.<sup>4</sup> In 1886 Lopatin presented a forceful attack on the prevalent empiricist

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<sup>1</sup> Grot 1889, p. VII.

<sup>2</sup> Grot 1889, p. VIII.

<sup>3</sup> Pavlov 2013, p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

and positivist attitudes, describing them as 'sophistry' and 'scepticism'.<sup>1</sup> He argued that their viewpoint, being 'cleansed from all metaphysical projections' (*metafizicheskikh dopolnenii*), would lead to 'the denial of the most important truths of reason, to the denial of all its truths which reveal the real nature of things and the true and universal relations between them'.<sup>2</sup> According to Lopatin to know an object empirically was to know it through observation (*nabliudenie*) and perception (*opyt*). However, such experience was entirely dependent on the observer's sensory organs and their position in space and time. In other words, his perception remained subjective and contingent: no truly objective knowledge of the object was given, but only a subjective image was reflected by it.<sup>3</sup> To grasp the true structure and essence of reality, a much richer metaphysical and epistemological viewpoint would be required.

Lopatin's conclusion was that metaphysics as a branch of philosophy should not yet be archived as a closed case. Returning to the old dispute between rationalism and empiricism, he writes: 'I refer to an old dispute, one declared so many times decisively resolved; I take my stand as a defender of speculative philosophy'. Lopatin understood the goal of rationalist philosophy as proving that 'by pure reason a justified study of that which exists is *possible and necessary*'. He argues that to deny reason as a source of true knowledge of being would be the same as denying the power of reason altogether.<sup>4</sup> The argument was directed not only against materialism, but also philosophical neo-idealism. He mentions the Hegelian Boris Chicherin, as well as Vladimir Solov'ev, who, he believed, had followed the path of the German post-Kantian generation too uncritically. Lopatin believed that Solov'ev, having realized that 'philosophy in Hegel's system arrived at an abstract and lifeless formalism', had merely demanded that philosophy must instead base itself on religious truths.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The attack was presented in the opening speech of Lopatin's defence of his *magister's* thesis.

<sup>2</sup> Lopatin 1911, p. XXII.

<sup>3</sup> Pavlov 2013, p. 20.

<sup>4</sup> Lopatin 1911, p. XXI.

<sup>5</sup> Lopatin 1911, p. XXIV.

In Lopatin's opinion Solov'ev had therefore accepted the neo-Kantian premise, which his trust in religious intuition could not overcome.<sup>1</sup>

Lopatin's mistrust of (neo-)Kantian philosophy can be understood within the broad framework of the conventional Russian scepticism concerning Kant. Russian philosophy indeed presents a long tradition of understanding Kant's ideas as a form of subjectivism and scepticism.<sup>2</sup> By introducing the unknowable *noumenon*, Kant seemed to deny the mind's direct access to reality, as well as the possibility of absolute values.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the turn of the century saw an intense growth in interest in Kant among the Russian intelligentsia. James West associates this phenomenon with the widespread quest for a 'reconciliation of rational enquiry and religious belief'. Kant's 'Copernican turn' of modern philosophy had suggested that instead of reality imprinting its form on the consciousness, it was the consciousness whose formal categories (such as those of space and time) formulated the information received through the senses. Modern philosophy and culture, in Europe as in Russia, were irreversibly influenced by this thought, leading to a variety of anti-rational intellectual and artistic trends. In Russia these formulations often acquired a religious formulation. West notes that Solov'ev, for example, admired Kant for 'laying the foundation of an analytical theory of knowledge that would enable critical philosophy to be extended to religion, relating belief to other forms of cognition and giving it the formal status it had hitherto lacked'.<sup>4</sup>

For Lopatin, in contrast, Kant's system was essentially 'morbid' (*bolezennyi*).<sup>5</sup> His main attempt was to formulate a new basis for rational philosophy; one that could achieve 'positive results' without running

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<sup>1</sup> Oleg Ermishin (2013, pp. 30–34) suggests that the success of both philosophical materialism and mystical neo-idealism at the end of the century was founded on the failure of rationalism to provide a secure epistemological basis. In turn, this had followed from German Idealism, resulting in the view that rationally based philosophy could only provide abstractions that had little to do with concrete reality.

<sup>2</sup> For more on the Russian 'anti-Kantian' tradition see Oittinen 2017.

<sup>3</sup> As James West (1996, p. 56) writes, Kant was held responsible for causing 'nothing less than a crisis in European civilization' by making it 'impossible to believe in revealed truths'.

<sup>4</sup> West 1996, pp. 55–56.

<sup>5</sup> Lopatin 1911, p. XXIV.

into the 'dead-end' of Kantianism and German Idealism. Lopatin based his metaphysics on the assumption that what appears in cognition, appears directly. Thus, he emphasized the metaphysical significance of his viewpoint, even if it approached reality by analysing the phenomena of consciousness. 'We know everything only through the prism of our own spirit,' he writes.<sup>1</sup> Lopatin held that the creative consciousness, or 'spirit', was located between the human psyche and external reality. In the consciousness the objects of the physical world were accessible through 'symbols', as the 'spiritual equivalents' of empirical objects. According to Oleg Ermishin, this symbolism of consciousness became a focal point of Lopatin's theory. He conceived it as a result of a complex process in the system of sensations, perceptions and ideas, and, at the same time a source of the immediate knowledge of being.<sup>2</sup>

Aleksei Pavlov suggests that Lopatin's final solution to the problem of the knowledge of being was found through a combination of 'faith' (*vera*) and 'understanding' (*ponimanie*).<sup>3</sup> By combining the two 'paths' of cognition, he arrived at a conception of knowledge that incorporated its rational, logical and abstract aspects, and united creative and intuitive forms of knowing. Lopatin asserts that 'the mind translates the dark ideas of creative reason to the language of clear, sharply defined concepts'.<sup>4</sup> In Vasiliï Zen'kovskii's assessment Lopatin never rejected empirical experience or denied its 'cardinal importance for the cognition of the world', but he did, however, subject empiricism to a 'thorough and devastating critique'. Zen'kovskii writes that since empiricism can only acquire information through sensations, its knowledge is restricted to appearances, and it thus builds up a questionable metaphysics — essentially, one of faith. This was the basis of Lopatin's adoption of 'faith' as a technical term: for him 'it stands *between* experience and reason' and must be subjected to a philosophical analysis, as well as a 'rational reworking'.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Ermishin 2013, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Pavlov 2013, p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> Cited in Pavlov 2013, p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> Zenkovsky 1953, pp. 656–657.

In 1911 Lopatin updated his argument in more contemporary philosophical language but asserted that he still held on to his earlier metaphysical conclusions. These were: that there is an external reality with certain absolute qualities; it exists independently of our experience of it; spatially and temporally, we always only grasp a small part of it; the philosophizing subject himself is real, as are other subjects. And, Lopatin concludes, there is 'some internal link in all that exists, a link independent of our thought and our subjective consciousness'. In modern terminology, he adds, 'we would be speaking of *transcendental* hypotheses'.<sup>1</sup> Lopatin's metaphysics have often been associated to the Leibnizian tradition in Russian philosophy. As some have suggested, he can thus be argued to have taken Russian thought back to a 'pre-modern' philosophical position.<sup>2</sup>

Philosophically speaking, the influence of a 'Lopatian' metaphysics on Shpet's thought is undeniable. Shpet not only opposed neo-Kantian philosophy as a form of 'negativism' and subjectivism, but constructed his own thinking as a way of approaching the fundamental question of 'being' through transcendental philosophy and, moreover, through a kind of 'symbolism'. Moreover, Shpet, too, expressed an interest in returning to a pre-Kantian philosophical frame of mind. For example, in a short and untitled manuscript, probably written in 1914 or 1915 (first published in 1991 as '*Rabota po filosofii*'<sup>3</sup>), Shpet suggests finding a methodological foundation in the philosophy of Leibniz, which sees as a continuation of the Platonic tradition. He writes:

Kant's philosophy sets the tone for philosophy for the entire nineteenth century; both negative and positive directions are attuned to it to a greater or lesser degree. Platonism continues to live, but is hidden under the surface of philosophical thought visible to all, while its purpose and role are insignificant: only insofar as the ideas of the last

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<sup>1</sup> Lopatin 1911, p. XI–XII.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Scanlan 2010, p. 158; Nemeth 2017, pp. 242–246; Tremblay 2020, pp. 179–180.

<sup>3</sup> See Mikela Venditti's and Liudmila Fedorova's publication of the manuscript, together with foreword, in *Nachala* 1/1992.

Platonist, Leibniz, are revived may the voice of Platonism be heard in the common choir of philosophy of the nineteenth century. Only recently does that voice sound more clearly and cleanly.<sup>1</sup>

In what follows, I will turn to a discuss of the evolution of Shpet's early philosophy towards his espousal of phenomenology. As the following chapters will demonstrate, Shpet's interpretation of Husserl's thought demonstrates his 'rootedness' in the Russian philosophical — and more specifically, the Moscow metaphysical — tradition. Shpet elaborated phenomenology in a direction where it could respond to questions regarding the 'eternal idea' and 'true being' of reality. He argued that Husserl had indeed discovered a way beyond the mere phenomenal, and thus subjective, knowledge of the world. For Shpet phenomenology was an example of how the modern philosopher could (re)learn to trust his 'inner knowledge' that could eventually provide philosophy with a more comprehensive understanding of that which is. Later, Shpet was to expand his phenomenological conception to a theory of a 'historical reality', or culture, as a peculiar hermeneutic structure, which can be seen as his suggestion for a Leibnizian kind of rational metaphysics.

## 1.2. GOING AGAINST KANT

In his 1916 doctoral thesis *Istoriia kak problema logiki* (*History as a Problem of Logic*), Shpet formulated the conception of a historical reality, based on Lopatin's principle of positive philosophy and an interpretation of pre-Kantian Enlightenment rationalism. He especially relied on Christian Wolff, the follower of Leibniz and the immediate predecessor of Kant; indeed, it was the very Leibnizian-Wolffian metaphysics that Kant refuted in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant doubted the possibility of reconciling traditional metaphysics with the exact sciences of his day. He argued that metaphysics would have to first discover

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1992, p. 41.

and justify its own principles — it needed to analyse the conditions of possibility of metaphysics — and only then could actual metaphysics be synthetically constructed. However, as phenomena proved necessarily separated from things-in-themselves, Kant ultimately rejected the possibility of any general metaphysics (as ontology). In contrast, what Shpet found appealing in Wolff's theory was his trust in the capacity of rational thought to make reliable metaphysical claims.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, Shpet's reliance on metaphysics was by no means ignorant of Kant's critique.<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, he began his philosophical career by tackling the scepticism of David Hume who, in the spirit of the Enlightenment, had questioned the utmost authority of rational thought: our trust in the causality of events.<sup>3</sup> Famously, it was Hume who shook Kant from his metaphysical slumber, leading him to the revolutionary turn. In his 1906 undergraduate thesis, however, Shpet asks: 'Did Kant answer Hume's doubts?' Shpet's pre-Göttingen philosophy presents a confrontation with all forms of scepticism and irrationalism, both of which were growing in popularity (mainly in various guises of mystical and religious thought) in Russia. Shpet associated this phenomenon with the rise of neo-Kantianism to the centre stage of the intellectual landscape. He argued that the problem in contemporary philosophy was not merely with individual thinkers, but that the whole spirit of the time was leading philosophy in the wrong direction. Thus, through his analysis of Hume and Kant, Shpet began by scrutinizing the very origins of Enlightenment scepticism — something that he would later endeavour to overcome with the help of phenomenology.

And yet, curiously, Shpet himself emerged as a philosophical sceptic in Moscow. It indeed seems that before travelling to Göttingen, he had yet to formulate the philosophical foundation on which he could strive to respond to Hume's doubts. An examination of Shpet's activities in pre-war Moscow demonstrates that he was a visible figure in the city's cultural and academic circles, where he would constantly appear arguing

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<sup>1</sup> For more on Shpet's reception of Wolff see Anan'eva 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Nemeth (2019a, p. vii) suggests that for all his later anti-Kantianism Shpet in fact went through a distinctly neo-Kantian (Rickertian) phase during his student years.

<sup>3</sup> For Shpet's early essays on Hume see Shchedrina & Pruzhinin 2012.

against neo-Kantian influences. Shpet's criticism was directed especially against Andrei Belyi, who at the time developed his theory of symbolism under the influence of Heinrich Rickert. Through his critique Shpet thus accessed the ongoing debates concerning the nature of the poetic word, a theme which he would take up afresh after the revolution.

### 1.2.1. Shpet's Response to Kant's Response to Hume

Having just begun attending Chelpanov's seminar in 1902, Shpet describes Hume through a Kantian prism, as the 'best thought provoker', who 'captures the reader's mind and mood, and forcibly plants in his mind that sceptical criticism which equally well protects both against an excessive enthusiasm with metaphysical fogs and against blind devotion to the vulgarity of common sense'.<sup>1</sup> However, while Hume had posed a crucial question, Shpet asserts that his own response to it had taken philosophy down a dangerous path. He finds Hume's attitude problematic from the start: it places no trust in the power of reason, and instead restricts the capacities of cognition. 'From the phenomenalist viewpoint, experience is itself in need of justification,' Shpet writes; 'it is from the start insufficient'. Thus, he finds that 'Hume goes round in circles hopelessly: real objects are not to be cognized; all cognition is limited by a sphere of phenomena; consequently, we cannot penetrate the real relations between things; causality as a relationship lying at the basis of the cognition of facts hangs in the air'.<sup>2</sup> In conclusion, Shpet states: 'Hume's philosophy thus merely proves yet again that the limitation of the rights of reason does not go unsanctioned, that the theory of cognition may not be transformed into the theory of ignorance, that the true path of philosophy is in the development of the endless creative forces of reason...'<sup>3</sup>

Yet Shpet believes that Kant had only made things worse. Citing Hume, he agrees that no one in their right mind would seriously

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet 2010a, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1911, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1911, p. 18.

question the authority of sensual experience (*opyt*), the 'great commander of human lives'.<sup>1</sup> In Shpet's reading Hume was not interested in tackling the question of the *ontological* reality of causality. Instead, his scepticism was 'contained in the fact that he subjected to doubt the possibility of logically justifying the universal scope of the law of causality'. From Shpet's viewpoint Hume was indeed unable — or unwilling — to draw metaphysical conclusions regarding causality. What he provided was 'a new *psychological* interpretation' of the matter.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, Shpet argues that Kant's response to Hume's dilemma presented a dangerous step that jeopardized the entire future development of philosophy.

Shpet sees Kant agreeing with Hume on many aspects. For one thing, both philosophers believed causality to be something that carried the quality of necessity. The difference, Shpet asserts, is that for Hume this necessity was subjective (each consciousness 'creates' itself a concept of causality, seeing that phenomenon A, seemingly, always follows phenomenon B, though in theory it could be otherwise), whereas Kant believed it should be objective (causality is an *a priori* structure of consciousness and cannot be otherwise).<sup>3</sup> In Shpet's opinion Kant thus turned Hume's psychological question into an epistemic one and took his scepticism in a new and philosophically questionable direction: the possibility of knowledge of reality became a matter of subjective perception.

Shpet sympathizes with some of Hume's basic statements. In his opinion, 'it is obvious in and of itself that our consciousness has nothing to do with anything other than perceptions, that is, impressions and ideas, "that external objects become known to us only thanks to the perceptions they arouse in us"'.<sup>4</sup> Shpet suggests, however, that if we take Hume's sceptical conclusion seriously, a collapse of the natural sciences is the result, since '[n]o matter how correct the flow of events in the past was, no mental conclusion gives us the right to make a conclusion in the future — *permanence in the past does not give us the logical right to draw*

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1906, p. 48. (*Kievskie universiteskie izvestiia*: 6 (1906): pp. 17–49.)

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1906, p. 41. (*Kievskie universiteskie izvestiia*: 6 (1906): pp. 17–49.)

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1907, p. 194. (*Kievskie universiteskie izvestiia*: 5 (1907): pp. 165–203.)

<sup>4</sup> Shpet 1906, p. 79. (*Kievskie universiteskie izvestiia*: 7 (1906): pp. 51–82.)

*conclusions about the future*'.<sup>1</sup> If no laws can be deduced from perception, the empirical sciences are rendered impossible. Hume's reaction to this threat was remarkable, according to Shpet: 'Let it collapse'. Kant, on the other hand, could not accept the destruction of scientific truth. Shpet asserts that he 'took up the task of proving the *a priori* nature of the causal idea and law'<sup>2</sup> and concluded that 'all synthetic *a priori* fundamentals are nothing more than principles of possible experience and can never be related to things in themselves, but only to phenomena as to subjects of experience'.<sup>3</sup>

Shpet argues that with his transcendental logic Kant formulated a *law* of causality according to which, while we cannot grasp the real connection between individual phenomena, we can perceive the *a priori* law that phenomena, in our perception, seem to follow without exception.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Shpet writes that in this case the mind no longer follows the 'forms' of reality, as it were, but imprints its own categories on the perceived reality. In 1916 Shpet described Kant's position as stating that

the authentically existing and cognizable is what it is, because *reason is incapable of thinking otherwise!* The mind does not wind the diversity of subjects around and does not detect its creative forces in its limitless resources, and through its inability to think otherwise it subjects all that exists to a uniform regulation and order. And that is called: *prescribing laws to nature..!* a far, far too *legalistic* idea of the reality of reason. *Quaestio juris* (a problem of the law)...<sup>5</sup>

From Kant's standpoint Hume's conclusion regarding the subjectivity of causal relations was the result of his having in mind 'things in themselves' rather than their appearances, Shpet asserts.<sup>6</sup> Kant's solution to Hume's problem was thus to turn the situation upside-down and to direct his philosophical question to appearances instead of 'things'.

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1906, 48. (*Kievskie universiteskie izvestiia*: 6 (1906): pp. 17–49.)

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1907, p. 196. (*Kievskie universiteskie izvestiia*: 5 (1907): pp. 165–203.)

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1907, p. 171. (*Kievskie universiteskie izvestiia*: 5 (1907): pp. 165–203.)

<sup>4</sup> Shpet 1907, p. 167. (*Kievskie universiteskie izvestiia*: 5 (1907): pp. 165–203.)

<sup>5</sup> Shpet 1916, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Nemeth 2019c, p. 280.

Causality could retain its necessary quality, but at a high price. Shpet concludes that Kant hereby posed the question of 'what seems to be' before the question of 'what is'. This was precisely the negative outcome against which positive philosophy must position itself.<sup>1</sup>

According to Shpet the Kantian categories 'through' which reality is perceived are translatable into the language of psychology. But he asserts that even if psychologists 'now proved that we [...] acquire the idea of causality due to habit [...], that would in no degree exclude the Kantian theory of cognition'. Shpet assumes that Kant's answer to such a discovery would be simple. The manner of the development of the mind's categories would make little difference to him: they nonetheless remain *a priori* in relation to what can be known.<sup>2</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, Shpet's conclusion, presented in his undergraduate thesis, stands in contrast to the reasoning of his teacher, Georgii Chelpanov, In his doctoral dissertation, *Problema vospriiatia prostranstva v sviazi s ucheniem ob apriornosti i vrozhdennosti*,<sup>3</sup> Chelpanov explains:

Upon hearing the word 'space', everyone thinks of the question of the 'reality' of space, the question of the nature of 'geometric axioms' and the question of the 'innateness' of the concept of space. What is space? Is it something 'objectively' given, or is it only a 'subjective form' of our consciousness? In what way do we learn to perceive space? From where does the concept of space come? How do our judgements on spatial relations, which find expression in geometric axioms, form?<sup>4</sup>

Chelpanov asserts that according to the traditional understanding we are empiricists if our answer to these questions is that we acquire our understanding of geometric forms through our experience of reality. However, if we conclude that geometrical axioms cannot be grasped

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Shpet 1916, pp. 12–13.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1907, p. 181. (*Kievskie universitetskie izvestiia*: 5 (1907): pp. 165–203.)

<sup>3</sup> Chelpanov defended the work as his doctoral dissertation in 1904. It appeared as the second part of a larger study, the first part of which was his magister's thesis in 1896 (*Martsinkovskaia* 2016a, p. 20).

<sup>4</sup> Chelpanov 1904, p. 1.

through the kind of induction that is at work in the physical sciences, we approach Kant's position. According to this view the axioms 'are a sui generis product of our mind's activity, one in which the senses' impressions appear only to be a reason'.<sup>1</sup> In other words, axioms are *a priori* forms of cognition. Chelpanov argues that this categorization is outdated and must be reconsidered. There is something uncomfortably archaic about the Kantian categories, Chelpanov claims: they appear 'ready-made' metaphysical forms of the mind to be 'found' in it. 'This view may in no way be brought into agreement with psychological views on the existence of mental processes; in general, the recognition of any ready forms is irreconcilable with the real psychological genesis of mental forms', Chelpanov writes. His aim in *Problema vospriiatiia* is thus to shed new light on the philosophical debate between 'nativists' and 'apriorists' with the help of modern psychology. Indeed, he suggests that a crucial contribution can already be made by distinguishing between the psychological and philosophical methodologies: the former studies the origin and evolution of a given conception, while the latter 'has as its aim the establishment of the "objective reality" of these conceptions'.<sup>2</sup> Chelpanov's answer to the problem of space perception is thus a combination of Kant's philosophy and contemporary psychology.

However, Shpet's views remained constantly critical of Kant. In 1916 he argued that the Kantian method had resulted in 'privatism' in contemporary thought. In his words, philosophy had begun to turn inwards, specializing in its own forms. Consequently, within philosophy itself

there is a constant battle between specialized directions, depending on one 'scientific' bias or other. Naturalism, mechanism, biologism, psychologism, historicism, etc. — all are different names and different 'worldviews' sharing in common the fact that they characterize different types of a single private 'scientific' form of negative philosophy.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Chelpanov 1904, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Chelpanov 1904, 2–3.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1916, p. 5.

Shpet likens Kant to the ancient sophists when, instead of actually negating reality, he merely modifies the ancient question concerning 'what is' into the form 'how is being possible?' In Shpet's opinion 'by the answer we receive we may judge the degree of sincerity hidden by that question'.<sup>1</sup> Kant's position contained a dangerous seed of philosophical tiredness, according to Shpet. He asserts: 'Age frequently refuses to understand youth; disappointed by its own experience, it foresees failure in bursts of creativity, is irritated by an urge to go beyond the limits of where it itself stopped, and to that into which it does not fit it reacts with sceptical self-limitation'. Shpet declares that such a temporary fatigue of the philosophical spirit is merely a sign indicating that it is time to move forward. But to do this, he believes it is necessary first to go somewhat back in time. Shpet writes that 'positive philosophy in its discrete forms never ceased its affirmative activity, and the time will come for it, too, to become common property'. In his work, Shpet attempts to get a grasp of a pre-Kantian — 'positive' in Lopatin's sense — metaphysical attitude to reformulate its spirit and goals to fit the needs of his day. 'Only by becoming common property may [positive philosophy] discover all its values and riches,' Shpet writes.<sup>2</sup>

Shpet's relationship with Chelpanov remained ambivalent throughout his career. While the years at Chelpanov's seminar were undoubtedly a crucial formative period for Shpet,<sup>3</sup> and even though the two engaged in a close collaboration in Moscow both before and after the revolution, Chelpanov's influence on Shpet's philosophy appears limited.<sup>4</sup> Still, as Galin Tihanov points out, Chelpanov was widely known as Shpet's mentor at Kiev University and his 'patron' in Moscow. Shpet was in turn considered Chelpanov's most gifted pupil.<sup>5</sup> Shpet's professional life underwent a considerable transformation after he was invited to accompany his teacher to Moscow in the spring of 1907. During

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1916, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1916, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Mikhail Polivanov (1995, p. 8) suggests that the acquaintance with Chelpanov was possibly the most important event of Shpet's career as a professional philosopher.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of Chelpanov's influence on Shpet's interpretation of Kant see Nemeth 2017, pp. 275–276.

<sup>5</sup> Tihanov 2008, p. 269.

the following autumn Shpet was teaching at Moscow University, the Moscow Pedagogical Courses (*Moskovskie pedagogicheskie kursy*) and the Moscow Higher Education Courses for Women (*Moskovskie vysshie zhen-skie kursy*). In 1908 he began teaching logic at the Alferov Gymnasium (*Alferovskaia gimnaziia*).<sup>1</sup> Describing the joint appearance of Shpet and Chelpanov in the Moscow circles, Andrei Belyi writes:

That Shpett [sic] was known among us, among philosophers at the ‘House of Song’ [*Dom pesni*] of the d’Algeims, at the Metners’, as a cunning, talented, nimble ‘rogue’. His academic career was rapidly on the up, while that of his patron, Chelpanov, progressed in some dreary philosophical backwaters somewhere. With some gallant grimace, bordering on outright irony, Shpett held on to Chelpanov; Shpett was seen everywhere. Chelpanov — nowhere.<sup>2</sup>

### 1.2.2. Belyi’s Neo-Kantian Symbolism

Remembering his first meeting with Shpet in 1910, Fedor Stepun writes, ‘who didn’t know Shpet?’<sup>3</sup> Although Stepun suggests that Shpet rarely participated in public discussions (guarding ‘his popularity and academic merit’<sup>4</sup>), the latter seems to have been remarkably well-connected in the social circles of the city. Shpet’s first serious association, as Tihanov notes, was with the Society of Free Aesthetics (*Obshchestvo svobodnoi estetiki*), or ‘*Estetika*’, which Riurik Ivnev describes as one of the main centres of artistic, literary and scholarly activities of its time.<sup>5</sup> This group, which had been founded under the informal leadership of Valerii Briusov, included, apart from the abovementioned Stepun, Andrei Belyi,

<sup>1</sup> Shchedrina 2015, pp. 55–58.

<sup>2</sup> Belyi 1934, pp. 306–307.

<sup>3</sup> Stepun 1956, p. 191. Shpet received Stepun in his home office. Stepun describes: ‘from the door to the bedroom, an apparently ordinary but actually rather unusual person emerged with a light, elegant gait, with a little round head and very small line of a smoothly shaven face, one still young, yet crumpled, wrinkled and in reddish spots’.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in Tihanov 2009b, p. 57.

Mikhail Gershenzon, Nikolai and Emilii Metner, Boris Vysheslavtsev, Jurgis Baltrušaitis, and many others.<sup>1</sup> Of these, Baltrušaitis was to become a lifelong friend of Shpet, who also collaborated extensively with both Gershenzon and the Metner brothers.<sup>2</sup> Yet it was Belyi especially who proved an intellectual supporter of Shpet during his first Moscow period. Belyi respected Shpet's taste, valued his philosophical knowledge and as Tihanov quotes, once confessed being 'in love' with Shpet's 'subtle and sophisticated mind'.<sup>3</sup> In exchange, Belyi's influence was visible in Shpet's future conceptions of art and its symbolic nature, and his name appeared as a focal point of comparison — and critique — in the 1922–23 *Esteticheskie fragmenty* (*Aesthetic Fragments*).

Shpet's acquaintance with Belyi took place during the latter's strong interest in neo-Kantian philosophy as a foundation for a symbolist theory.<sup>4</sup> Yet, as Klavdiia Nikolaevna Bugaeva attests in her memoirs, this was not a case of the poet's unequivocal acceptance of Kant; Belyi was at times even 'obsessively hostile' to his thought. Nevertheless, Bugaeva believes that he 'gave Kant almost all of his best years'.<sup>5</sup> This neo-Kantian period stretched roughly from 1901 to 1913/1915, when Belyi converted to antroposophy.<sup>6</sup> Between 1904 and 1908 he published 'a whole series' of reviews of books about neo-Kantian themes, and in 1909 reported in a letter to Marietta Shaginian that he was working on a 'theoretical book on the theory of symbolism' in which he would 'derive' symbolism from a 'critique of cognition' with the aid of the theories of Hermann Cohen, Heinrich Rickert and Emil Lask.<sup>7</sup> The period of Shpet and Belyi's friendship (roughly 1909–1912) coincides with the years when Belyi made his crucial discoveries for a concrete 'theory' of symbolism.

<sup>1</sup> For more on the Society and its members see Belyi 1934, pp. 218–223.

<sup>2</sup> For more see Shchedrina 2004, pp. 68–72.

<sup>3</sup> Tihanov 2009b, p. 57. Belyi (1934, p. 310) writes: 'I loved the refined Shpett [sic] mind, to admire it, but did not understand what it was fighting for'.

<sup>4</sup> 'I thought about the gnoseology of symbolism for 25 years', Belyi (1934, p. 211) asserts, and lists the texts in which this theory was developed. Of these the majority, '*Smysl iskusstva*', '*Emblematika smysla*' and '*Lirika i eksperiment*' were published in the 1910 collection by Musaget, *Simvolizm*.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in Cassedy 1987, p. 314.

<sup>6</sup> Cassedy 1987, pp. 313–314.

<sup>7</sup> Dmitrieva 2007, pp. 358–359.

While neo-Kantian thought was certainly not the only philosophical undercurrent of symbolism,<sup>1</sup> it was particularly visible during its consolidation as the leading ‘school’ of poetics around 1910.<sup>2</sup> That year, Belyi published (through the Musaget publishing house) a collection of essays, *Simvolizm*, at the same time as interest in neo-Kantian philosophy was rapidly growing. Indeed, in the first decade of the century, there appeared in Moscow ‘a whole group of young philosophers who had received a neo-Kantian “baptism”’, Nina Dmitrieva writes.<sup>3</sup> In Belyi’s words, Kant’s theory of knowledge had established an entirely novel perspective on reality: ‘Cognition — knowledge about knowledge’. This perspective was new to Russian culture, because epistemic questions were not developed in traditional Russian idealism. Thus, Belyi writes that Kantian themes were imported to Russia by ‘Cohen, Natorp, Cassirer, Kinkel, Windelband, Rickert, Lask, Cohn and others’.<sup>4</sup> The religious neo-idealism was likewise affected by them, even if it appeared in general opposed to the strictly academic neo-Kantian trend. Dmitrieva argues that neo-Kantians and neo-idealists shared common ground in emphasizing the subjective nature of experience. Their main disagreement concerned the nature of this subjectivity: whether it was to be viewed as inherently rational or irrational.<sup>5</sup>

Belyi refers to this, writing: ‘Ellis and Briusov were considered enemies until 1907; for Briusov, Ellis was a bungler; Ellis threatened Briusov with all retributions; I, upon my return to Moscow, find out they have made peace; an issue of *Vesy* is now a venue of Ellis’s attack on the enemies of Briusov’.<sup>6</sup> Collaboration between the neo-idealist and the neo-Kantian thinkers took place mainly at the Moscow Philosophico-Religious society (*Moskovskoe RFO pamiati V. S. Solov’eva*), also known as the *Kruzhok*. The ‘Argonauts’ group, organized around Belyi, Sergei

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<sup>1</sup> The other important philosophical influences came, at least, from Nietzschean existentialism, Bergsonian intuitivism, Steinerian anthroposophy, and the religious thought of Vladimir Solov’ev and his followers.

<sup>2</sup> Dmitrieva 2007, p. 332.

<sup>3</sup> Dmitrieva 2007, p. 359.

<sup>4</sup> Belyi 1934, p. 209.

<sup>5</sup> Dmitrieva 2016, p. 387.

<sup>6</sup> Belyi 1934, p. 218.

Solov'ev and Ellis (Lev Kobylisnii), appears to have been a 'reservoir' of members for the RFO, and Grigorii Rachinskii, one of the earliest Argonauts, indeed later became the spokesperson for the RFO.<sup>1</sup> The Philosophico-Religious society was officially founded in 1906, and its founding members included Sergei Bulgakov, Lev Lopatin, Pavel Florenskii, Vladimir Ern and others.<sup>2</sup> According to Iana Morozova Belyi took part in the RFO's activities from the start.<sup>3</sup> It also seems that, apart from '*Estetika*', the '*Kruzhok*' was also a place where Belyi and Shpet would meet.<sup>4</sup>

According to Andrea Zink Belyi's interest in Kantian and neo-Kantian theories can be traced back to 'a very specific occasion, which resulted in a sense of wounded pride'.<sup>5</sup> In 1902 Belyi gave a presentation on the question of forms of art ('*Formy iskusstva*') at a student philological society. He was later told by his listeners (among them Vladimir Ern) that he 'lacked adequate knowledge', especially when it came to the neo-Kantian concept of 'form'.<sup>6</sup> Belyi's paper, which also appeared as an article in *Mir iskusstva*, presented a discussion of literature's relationship to music.<sup>7</sup> Belyi had become interested in Schopenhauer's vision of music as an art form that was independent from the phenomenal world, thus offering an unhinged way to access the deepest forces underlying the universe. He appeared determined to discover a link between the phonetics of poetic language and musical sounds to emphasize the symbol's expressive powers.<sup>8</sup> Belyi identified rhythm as the common denominator between music and poetry.<sup>9</sup>

However, Roger Keys asserts that from about 1907 Belyi tacitly abandoned such an 'overtly mystical aesthetic' and with it 'the naive "correspondence" theory of language'. At this point Belyi's question about the

<sup>1</sup> Sobolev 1994, p. 104.

<sup>2</sup> Morozova 2008, pp. 184–185. Iana Morozova notes the quick success the society gained: its membership had grown to 150 in only a month.

<sup>3</sup> Morozova 2008, p. 186.

<sup>4</sup> Belyi 1934, p. 305.

<sup>5</sup> Zink 2011, p. 224.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* For more on the dispute see Dmitrieva 2007, pp. 351–352.

<sup>7</sup> For more on the article and Aleksandr Blok's reaction to it see Pyman 2004, p. 223.

<sup>8</sup> Keys 1996, pp. 111–115.

<sup>9</sup> Keys 1996, p. 121.

nature of art became intertwined with his systematic studies in language. According to Keys Belyi no longer regarded language as a ‘translucent medium’ for the reflection of the otherworldly. However, as his vision of language became increasingly opaque, its creative powers grew accordingly. It was no longer a medium that could express hidden realities; instead, it now seemed to Belyi that language could forge entirely new realities. Keys argues that Belyi’s interest thus shifted from a viewpoint of ‘mystical clairvoyance’ to a psychology of artistic creation, and that it can be suggested, broadly speaking, that he integrated Kant’s Copernican turn in his aesthetic vision. In the article ‘*Budushchee iskusstva*’ (written in 1907) Belyi expresses the hope that the question of the purpose of art can be transferred from an examination of the products of creation to the process of creation itself.<sup>1</sup>

A text from the same year, ‘*Smysl iskusstva*’ (1910) reflects another influence that Belyi had integrated in his thought: that of Aleksander Potebnia. The Ukrainian nineteenth century linguist had adopted Wilhelm von Humboldt’s Romantic theory, which suggested a metaphorical connection between the word and what it designated. Arguing against the understanding of language as a mere instrument, Humboldt considered it indivisible from cognitive acts. For him language was the ‘formative organ of thought’ through which an (internal) intellectual activity was turned into an (external) audible form. It thus existed in the form of *energeia*, a living force which constantly renews itself, instead of *ergon*, a set and determinable structure. Humboldt launched the term ‘inner form’ of language to explain what directed its evolution, and in Potebnia’s adaptation it proved highly influential for Russian modernism.<sup>2</sup>

Potebnia’s interpretation, presented in his 1862 *Mysl’ i iazyk* (*Thought and Language*) relied on an etymological conception. He understood the inner form of each word to be the etymon as the original form of a word. It was the morpheme, or a more authentic form of the word — a primal combination of (external) sound and (internal) meaning — from which

<sup>1</sup> Keys 1996, pp. 184–185.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion on Potebnia’s interpretation of Humboldt see Seifrid 2005, pp. 30–52.

the word in its final form was derived.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, Potebnia suggested that poetic language could help rediscover these combinations, whereas in the everyday uses of language, the original forms had been hidden due to sedimentations of time. According to Potebnia the poetic word still retained the image-nature (*obraznost'*) of symbol, revealing the inner form of the expression. In '*Smysl iskusstva*' Belyi speaks of poetic art as movement and creative energy, and refers to the *obraznost'* of poetry. He asserts that there is a vital power (*vulkanicheskaia sila*) in the image-symbol (*obraz-simvol*):

The artistic image is similar to a mountain, the slopes of which are covered in the vineyard of ideas; here, on the slope, a new wine is being made — the wine of new life. [...] The peaks of the mountain are covered in the clouds of emotions, out of which lightning flashes and thunders claps; and only in the breaks in the cloud do the icy peaks of duty shine to us, peaks which may, however, become a crater throwing a pillar of fire to the sky — a crater flooding the vineyard of ideas so the slopes of the new duty may be covered by a garden of new ideas.<sup>2</sup>

In '*Lirika i eksperiment*' (1909) Belyi took up the task of formulating a definition of art for the service of aesthetics. He argued that contemporary critics focused excessively on what they thought art *should* be and forgot to ask what art actually *was*.<sup>3</sup> In '*Emblematika smysla*' (1909) Belyi specifies this question to concern symbolist art, asking, 'What is the meaning of the aesthetics of symbolism? What is its ideological justification?'<sup>4</sup> Belyi's approach is epistemological: he questions the limits of scientific knowledge and searches for a formulation of a less constrained conceptualization of what it is to 'know' in art. Having analysed the basic elements of Kant's critique, he summarizes them as

<sup>1</sup> For example, the inner form of the word *okno* (window) was to be found in the word form *oko* (eye). (Seifrid 2005, p. 40.)

<sup>2</sup> Belyi 1910, p. 207.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Keys 1996, p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> Belyi 1910, p. 49.

follows: ‘The object of cognition, a thing in itself, becomes apparent only as a thought concept; thus the objectively given material of cognition flies into the void; the study of the laws of formation of concepts is simultaneously the study of the laws of objective being’.<sup>1</sup> Belyi thus finds a crucial task for symbolist art, establishing a connection between the concerns of contemporary philosophers and the poets, both tackling the problem of consciousness.

Dmitrieva suggests that Belyi’s ideas on symbolism’s ‘epistemological’ mission were especially influenced by Heinrich Rickert, even though the poet’s interpretation was somewhat eclectic and incoherent.<sup>2</sup> Belyi’s relationship with the neo-Kantians indeed appears complex. For example, in his memoirs, Belyi describes his impressions of the young Sergei Hessen, arriving in Moscow to make a presentation ‘in which there was not a single word not from Lask’s lexicon’: ‘the presentation gave me the impression of a nimble philosophizer, a snake-man, showing his agility as he jumped from a fourth-floor window to the pavement without breaking his nose — in the slogan “the form of form of form is the same as the form of form, which is not form, but norm”’. Belyi continues:

the ‘Cassirerians’ and ‘Laskites’ brutally, like termites, ate everything, while remaining just as dry and gaunt as ever; among other things they ate up the scholastics of Lev Lopatin; I had to deal with them to avoid surrendering my own positions; I even learned their terms as I practised their jargon; that was my game of chess: to mimic Rickert’s jargon to then use his language to topple his very stronghold...<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Belyi 1910, pp. 69–70.

<sup>2</sup> Dmitrieva 2007, p. 349. According to Keys (1996, p. 161) Belyi’s theory from this time ‘was a confused and confusing affair, more a feeling about the way the word is constituted and where it is heading, than a fully thought-through philosophical system’.

<sup>3</sup> Belyi 1934, p. 305. Andrea Zink (2011, p. 227) confirms that, for example, Rickert’s *Der Gegenstand der Erkenntnis* (1904) provided Belyi with the concepts of the ‘content of consciousness’ (*Bewußtseinsinhalt*) and ‘affirmation of judgment’ (*Urteilsbejahung*) — terms of which the poet made ‘liberal use’.

Concerning the theoretical force of his own views, Belyi was later to appear equally critical. In his memoirs, he concludes that 'symbolism is a critical disposition, a revolutionizing worldview, and not a school'.<sup>1</sup>

Shpet played an important role in Belyi's growing (self-)criticism of the neo-Kantian theory of art. The poet attests that Shpet saw 'right through' him and mentions him threatening jokingly, 'I'm going to come to the 'Kruzhok' and tear your mask off!'<sup>2</sup> Attracted by Shpet's scepticism, Belyi describes him as follows:

...he had just published his book *O probleme prichinnosti u Iuma* [On the Problem of Causality in Hume]; he had made himself comfortable in Hume's scepticism as in an armchair; that was merely his form of refusal from the then dominant currents; he particularly despised the 'uncleanliness' of Berdiaev's position and simply rabidly mocked Nietzschefied Orthodoxy; he pointed acerbically to the lipstick of Bulgakov, prepared from a clerical spirit and memories of an odd Marxism; more than anyone else he saw the Cohenites and Rickertists [...] Shpett [sic] had least sympathy of all for empiriocriticism; he was walking irony on the left — just as Lopatin was powerless anger on the right; Shpett [sic] was prepared, for a bet, to join Lopatin in teasing the Kantians, while at the same time keeping his distance from him.<sup>3</sup>

In Belyi's description Shpet appears critical of his attempts at philosophical theorizing, insisting that he was a philosopher only when writing poetry.<sup>4</sup> Belyi adds that in 1908 he was reading through a great deal of philosophy, from Shpet's *Problema prichinnosti u Iuma i Kanta* to Hume, Sigwart, Bacon, and Kant's *Critique*; 'and all that in view of the fact that Shpett [sic] strongly shook the Kantian in me'.<sup>5</sup> The poet

<sup>1</sup> Belyi 1934, p. 212.

<sup>2</sup> Belyi 1934, p. 305.

<sup>3</sup> Belyi 1934, pp. 305–306.

<sup>4</sup> Belyi 1934, p. 306. According to Bely Shpet valued the 1903 collection *Zoloto v lazuri*.

<sup>5</sup> Belyi 2016, p. 378. Nonetheless, Belyi concludes: 'but I remain "faithful" to my understanding of criticism and am again rereading Rickert, as well as Natorp'.

asserts that ‘None of the philosophers was friends with us as he was; and no one treated us with the same dread: in academic presentations’,<sup>1</sup> and concludes with a description of Shpet’s critically ironic attitude: “‘Boris Nikolaevich,’ he exhaled a curl of smoke, staring at some point behind me, “Boris Nikolaevich presents quite interesting thoughts in an intimate circle; but as soon as he starts giving presentations, he puts on a worn-out tailcoat he’s rented from Rickert’s wardrobe!’”<sup>2</sup> Thus, Shpet, in Belyi’s words, went to war with the neo-Kantians: ‘The Kantians went to battle in heavy armour, looking from a distance like Goliaths; and out came Shpet [sic], like David, enveloped in the nudity of scepticism; having torn it off, he released a bowling ball: ‘bang — Goliath’s forehead has cracked [...]’.<sup>3</sup>

### 1.2.3. Shpet’s Scepticism

In 1909, when it was still unclear whether Musaget would be launched as a publishing house or merely a journal, Belyi regarded Shpet as a potential contributor, who could write on Fichte, as well as Polish philosophy and culture.<sup>4</sup> Musaget (1909–1917) was a project led by the artistic collaboration of Emilii Metner, Belyi and Ellis.<sup>5</sup> According to Aleksandr Lavrov the leadership’s tripartite structure led to a division of Musaget’s various aspects as follows: its general book publishing activities; the publication of the philosophical journal *Logos*; and the publication of the *Orpheus* (*Orfei*) series, which focused on mystical and religious themes.<sup>6</sup> Together, the three branches were intended to ‘traverse the vital impulses enabling the formation and developing of a universal symbolist culture in mutually conversant spheres of artistic

<sup>1</sup> Belyi 1934, p. 306.

<sup>2</sup> Belyi 1934, p. 307.

<sup>3</sup> Belyi 1934, p. 310.

<sup>4</sup> Tihanov 2009b, p. 57.

<sup>5</sup> Lavrov 2014, p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> Boris Mezhuiev (2014, p. 55) points out that the founding of Musaget coincided with the period when Belyi was growing close to Viacheslav Ivanov and Anna Mintslova.

creativity, philosophical cognition and theurgist comprehension'.<sup>1</sup> Shpet was one among many philosophers who participated in the activities around Musaget; others who frequented there were Vladimir Ern, Sergei Bulgakov, Sergei Hessen, Nikolai Berdiaev and Mikhail Gershenzon.<sup>2</sup>

In Lavrov's assessment Musaget was from the outset divided by internal conflicts, some of which concerned organizational and other 'external' matters, while others were rooted in deep philosophical discords.<sup>3</sup> One of these demarcation lines stretched across the work of the Russian version of the international journal *Logos* (1910–1914), edited by Stepun and Hessen. According to Galin Tihanov there was 'a clear divide between those who were in favour of the line represented by *Logos* and those who opposed it as being too neo-Kantian and not heeding in sufficient measure other currents in contemporary philosophy'.<sup>4</sup> The shared goal of the writers of *Logos* was nonetheless clear: to become a 'crystal clear sphere of rational unification of all motives of a shared cultural, and in particular, philosophical creativity'. This vision was contrasted especially with the 'dark and irrational chaos', which the writers believed to be represented by the Slavophile school of thought.<sup>5</sup>

The journal was launched in close collaboration with some of the top contemporary philosophers in Germany. Dmitrii Filosofov describes the situation in the summer of 1909, as the future editors of the Russian *Logos* travelled to Freiburg to negotiate their contract with the German editorial board:

The journal was the idea of a small group of Rickert's close students, which included two young Russians. The group had already published a small volume of articles in German under the general title

<sup>1</sup> Lavrov 2014, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Tihanov 2009b, p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> Lavrov 2014, p. 14. In Lavrov's opinion the main division of the Musagetians was into two camps: those who followed the anthropological doctrine of Rudolf Steiner, and those who rejected it.

<sup>4</sup> Tihanov 2009b, p. 58.

<sup>5</sup> Polovinkin 2014, p. 454.

of ‘Messiah’.<sup>1</sup> The authors dream of the emergence of a new philosophical system which could provide a synthesis for our eclectic age, they dream of the coming of a philosophical messiah, for whom they prepare the way. [...] So far, the publication of two journals has been proposed: one in Russian in Moscow; the other in German in Freiburg. The tasks are broad, young and very Russian.<sup>2</sup>

The editorial of the first Russian *Logos* issue in 1910 declared its opposition to the Slavophiles, viewed as representing the traditional approach to philosophy in Russia. The editors, Hessen and Stepun write: ‘We, as before, in wishing to be philosophers, must be Westernizers. We must recognize that no matter how significant and interesting certain Russian phenomena in the area of natural philosophy are, philosophy, formerly Greek, is now predominantly German’.<sup>3</sup> The same position concerning the journal is described by Stepun in his memoirs: ‘As philosophers from a young age, we firmly intended to tackle the excesses of the Moscow neo-Slavophiles. I will not say we were right about everything, but we set about reforming the style of Russian philosophy with great self-confidence’.<sup>4</sup> According to Stepun the point that united the intellectual projects of *Logos* and *Musaget* was the ‘aim of spiritually splicing Russian culture with the Western one and to place under the discovery of Russian creativity a solid, professional and technical foundation’.<sup>5</sup>

Stepun contrasts *Logos* and *Musaget*’s goals and methods to those of the publishing house Put’ (1910–1919), which was an offspring of the Moscow Philosophico-Religious society. ‘The main question of Put’ was

<sup>1</sup> *Vom Messias. Kulturphilosophische Essaye von R. Kroner, N. von Bubnorrff, G. Mehlis, S. Hessen, F. Steppuhn* (Leipzig: Verlag von W. Ehglehmann, 1909). John Krois (2013, p. 103) mentions that the international *Logos* project was initiated by ‘a group of five doctoral students, three of whom were from Russia’.

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Kantor 2014, pp. 110–111.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Kantor 2014, p. 111.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* According to Vladimir Kantor (p. 109), *Musaget* and *Logos* were also equally dedicated to the promotion of German thought and culture in Russia. The publishing house received considerable funding from Emilii Metner’s friend Hedwig Friedrich.

“what is your faith”; the main question of Musaget was “do you have a command of your mastery?””, he writes. Even Belyi, who had only recently associated himself with the activities of the RFO, now busied himself with ‘technical issues’ of rhythm, poetics and aesthetics.<sup>1</sup> Belyi himself remembers having been torn between the opposite influences of technical neo-Kantianism and the existential depth of Nikolai Berdiaev, writing that ‘the personality of Berdiaev, perceiving the trepidation of the age and understanding the symbolists’ psychology, rather spoke to me’. Belyi considered Berdiaev not only as a profoundly original thinker but a ‘great man’, and he was drawn to the sincerity of the discussions with him ‘over tea’.<sup>2</sup> Thus, Belyi found himself in the centre of opposing philosophical currents, ‘making the work of self-consciousness more difficult’. He writes:

discussion with Metner and Shpet filled me with sometimes harsh criticism of Berdiaev’s ‘credo’: Shpet is an admirer of Shestov, and in those years he always directed the blade of his foil at N.A.’s mixture of metaphysics and mysticism; he said to me: ‘Mysticism should not be rationalized in thought; poetry is mysticism; a gnoseological treatise is philosophy. They must not be mixed’.<sup>3</sup>

Nonetheless, Vladimir Kantor suggests that Belyi saw himself as the ‘master’ of Musaget. He describes the new office in which the publishing company had recently settled in his memoirs: ‘a group sat here every day (Shpet, Rachinskii, Boris Sadovskii, Ellis, Mashkovtsev or others); this is where Musaget received visitors on business between six and eight; how many conversations flowed here — with Ivanov, Mintslova, Blok, Turgenev, Stepun, Shpett [sic]; the room became my domestic salon’.<sup>4</sup>

Belyi pays attention to the fact that, during these early years in Moscow, Shpet never revealed his own position in philosophical debates.

<sup>1</sup> Kantor 2014, pp. 111–112.

<sup>2</sup> Belyi 1995, p. 319.

<sup>3</sup> Belyi 1995, p. 320.

<sup>4</sup> Belyi 1934, pp. 339–340.

He appeared as a supporter of Hume — ‘in those years an exceptional phenomenon’ — and remained in the role of the sceptic.<sup>1</sup> In Belyi’s words, ‘he limited himself to poking the formal tailcoats of other positions: with Hume’s rapier; when he was asked to give his “credo”, he proceeded to the wine bottle; and twirled before us his taste, his precision’.<sup>2</sup> a related remark is made by Stepun, who in 1910 searched for philosophical support for his views in Shpet but in vain. He writes:

he does not have anything to do with it — whether Moscow University will see a flourishing of Lopatinist Leibnitzism, or Marburg neo-Kantism. As a great erudite and refined lover of philosophical problematics, Shpet, in many ways very close to Husserl,<sup>3</sup> who had fought against deep thoughtfulness in philosophy, did not physically withstand any confessional convictions in science. All that sufficed — I later noticed this more than once in conversation with him — was the slightest attempt to deepen scientific-philosophical thought to some confessional conviction, and he would immediately display an absolute ungrounded nihilism, which he defended brilliantly and with talent using dialectical mastery.<sup>4</sup>

Some years later, in a letter written from Göttingen to his new fiancée, Shpet explains his previous unwillingness to settle with any of

<sup>1</sup> Belyi 1934, p. 318.

<sup>2</sup> Belyi 1934, p. 306. Belyi (p. 307) continues his description: ‘Before me appears the face of Gustav Gustavovich: round, beardless and without whiskers, belonging to — whom? a youth or an old man? Smooth as a polished sphere of Karelian birch; but watch out: that sphere will hit you! [...] His face was not large; not lips but liplets; not a nose, but a noselet; not fast, brown, rose-tinted eyes, but — two nimble snouts — mouse ones: they sniffed out your ideal landscape, determinedly running from the brain hemispheres, they darted into your eyes, from them they ran into your skull; and there they raised a hurried rustling with a sceptical squeak; that was the impression when the door opened and out of it a trimmed, small, heavy head glanced questioningly; after that the whole thickset, fat figure, head out, appeared; it glanced up from under the eyebrows with a little smile, searching for a target for its gaze.’

<sup>3</sup> Shchedrina (2008, p. 110) doubts that Stepun must have made a mistake here, since Shpet never expressed his interest in Husserl’s phenomenology before his trip to Göttingen in 1912.

<sup>4</sup> Stepun 1956, p. 191.

the established standpoints of any philosophical current or school, or even to express his own philosophical views in debates.<sup>1</sup> Shpet writes that his reservation had landed him in trouble in Moscow: 'friends reproached me for not writing, my enemies pointed that out as my failure, they cried that I was hiding my views, because I had none... And it was very difficult for me, but in that there was some kind of satisfaction of *amour-propre*: to be silent until the thought was totally ripe'.<sup>2</sup> In another letter Shpet admits that his greatest weakness as a teacher is that in the classroom he has always felt obliged to convince his listeners of one philosophical view over another when he would prefer to refrain from stating any argument as definite:

here teaching is supposed to be strictly dogmatic, an alphabet must be taught, teaching must be *free of doubt*, but I know that everything that must be taught is full of doubt. Not everyone can take even a small dose of criticism, far from everyone, and for *classroom* teaching that is not suitable; here, criticism must be dogmatic for it to be learnt by heart. And I have a feeling, as if I am cheating, if I lay out everything 'as accepted'. [...] Therefore, I cannot be, for example, a member of a political party, because one then often has to act against one's conscience. That is why I am not a member of any of our philosophical 'sects'.<sup>3</sup>

Shpet's lecture course on logic, which he taught at the Higher Education Courses for Women in 1911–1912, reflects this fundamental unwillingness to accept anything akin to a philosophical dogma. At the very end of his course, as Shpet is drawing his conclusions in a passage titled 'The method of philosophy', he is ready to question even the necessity of pure rationality in philosophy. He writes:

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet divorced his first wife Mariia Krestovskaia in September 1912 and married his second wife, Natal'ia Guchkova, approximately a year later. (Shchedrina 2015, pp. 60–62.)

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 2005, p. 99.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 2005, pp. 119–120.

...it cannot be stated that rationalist philosophy is all philosophy. We know that in the history of philosophy we constantly face attempts to go beyond its limits, and we feel that every such departure beyond those limits is a step forwards for rational philosophy and thus also a step forwards for the approach of philosophy to life. There are minds which extend to more than the possible extent of rational philosophy. We need rational philosophy to be really penetrated by life philosophy. We need to understand philosophy like life; to understand life like philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

It appears that during the decade before the October revolution, the ‘irrational’ (or anti-rational) philosopher whom Shpet most looked up to was Lev Shestov. Shpet refers to this later, in 1917, when he is — by then already critically — reviewing the former’s article on Husserl (*Memento mori (po povodu teorii poznaniia Edmunda Gusserlia)*). In his review article Shpet writes that while Shestov now seems to have lost his touch, with the ‘earlier Shestov’ he had ‘never mustered up the courage to argue’ because, as he explains, ‘I would not have had the necessary tone, the tone of real “wisdom”, I would not have had the words to express my most serious queries, the ones which Shestov was able to expound with such mastery’.<sup>2</sup> The mutual appreciation that Shpet and Shestov felt for one another’s work is mentioned in a letter from Baltrušaitis to Shpet on 23 June 1912:

L. I. Shestov told me a big thing about you: he is deeply impressed by your work, both its internal message and its form... My heaven-sent inspiration, on which I build all my thoughts about people, from our very first meeting filled with the *deepest* human faith in you and with *heroic* hope for you. I *knew* that you would fulfil them, and I am so overjoyed to hear Shestov praise you. Alleluia!<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 2010b, p. 210.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 2010a, p. 211.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 2005, p. 342. The recipient’s address on the letter is in Rothenbrunnen, Switzerland.

Shestov's existential scepticism was independent from established schools of thought, and Shpet's collegial relationship with him placed him in between, or perhaps outside, the main neo-religious and neo-Kantian philosophical currents of the time. Yet Shestov appears to have previously belonged to Berdiaev's close circle (including Bulgakov, Belyi, Ivanov, Gershenzon, Rachinskii and others). Berdiaev remembers with warmth their debates on religious and existential themes:

at stake were the final, extremely vital questions about the primary, and not the reflected, not the secondary. That is how it was not only in religious-philosophical societies, but also in disputes in private homes which reminded one of the disputes between the Westernizers and the Slavophiles in the forties. Belinskii said after an all-night argument: no one can go home — we haven't sorted out the God question yet. That was what it was like when we got together [...]<sup>1</sup>

Still, by 1912, Shestov seems to have distanced himself from Berdiaev and Bulgakov, because, as Shpet writes in a letter, 'he cannot calm himself down with their truths'.<sup>2</sup> At that point, shortly before Shpet was to publish his preliminary conclusions about Husserl's phenomenology in *Iavlenie i smysl* (*Appearance and Sense*), both Shestov and he appear in the role of critical seekers. As Tat'iana Shchedrina writes, this also remained a theme of the two philosophers' conversations after the latter's 1914 work, and Shestov was involved in Shpet's process of finishing his 1916 thesis, *Istoriia kak problema logiki*. According to Shpet's letter to Natal'ia Konstantinovna Shestov liked the text but persuaded him 'not to write "ends" in this book, that is, not to write conclusive solutions and not to reveal his positive (*polozhitel'nye*) views until the end'.<sup>3</sup>

Shpet's philosophical position remained close to Shestov's early views, as they were expressed, for example, in his 1905 *Apofeo*

<sup>1</sup> Berdiaev 1949, p. 171.

<sup>2</sup> Shchedrina 2004, p. 186. For more on the interrelationship between Shpet, Shestov and Berdiaev see Shchedrina 2008, pp. 37–54.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Shchedrina 2004, p. 185.

*bezpochvennosti (opyt adogmaticheskogo myshleniia)*'. As Shchedrina points out, this was the very text which had made Shestov appear to many as a philosophical sceptic.<sup>1</sup> In it Shestov, like Shpet would a little later, took up the problem of Hume and Kant, writing:

Did Kant not have those thoughts when reading Hume's deliberations which rocked the basic principles of science? a philosopher is a person, and nothing human is foreign to him. He loves broad, well-trodden roads on which theoretical thought can easily and freely move, without a single tree or blade of grass, where the straight line rules. He feels best of all in a broad, level square. Here, to drumbeats, he can bravely proceed at a triumphant ceremonial march, glancing neither ahead nor back, with the one worry of not falling out of beat and of giving as much 'leg' as possible. The philosopher only values logical thinking, that is, an unhurried movement in a direction taken many times before, because thus inertia ensures that energy is not wasted on eternally looking around, seeking ways, fighting with 'free will' and its eternal fellow travellers, doubts.<sup>2</sup>

In June 1912, Shpet wrote to Natal'ia Guchkova, recommending her to read Shestov's books, which he considered 'exceptionally brilliant'.<sup>3</sup> He assures her that although Shestov is difficult to understand, it is not because he writes in a difficult manner. Instead, it is a question of his 'unique manner of drawing negative conclusions, which the majority understand as scepticism and pessimism'.<sup>4</sup> Shpet concludes that in spite of everything, he knows of no one who would seek for truth more sincerely and passionately than Shestov.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Shchedrina 2004, p. 186.

<sup>2</sup> Shestov 1996, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Shchedrina 2004, p. 184.

<sup>4</sup> Aron Steinberg (2009, p. 248) appears to confirm Shpet's impression, writing in his memoirs that 'Shestov and Berdiaev [...] were still very young, Nikolai Aleksandrovich said, when the tragic sensation of life started to thrust Shestov into inescapable nihilism'.

<sup>5</sup> Shchedrina 2004, p. 185.

### 1.3. DEPARTURE FOR GERMANY

Shpet's trips to Europe between 1910 and 1914 resulted in a groundbreaking change in his thinking, as he discovered a contemporary 'positive' philosophical programme to follow. This programme was Husserl's phenomenology, which, Shpet believed, offered an entirely new perspective on one of the oldest of philosophical problems. In at once overcoming the dispute between nominalism and realism, phenomenology had discovered a way to access reality just as it appears, revealing its nature in a pure, pre-theoretical way. According to Shpet the simple act of discovering and embracing reality as it is presented the ultimate answer to philosophical scepticism. Moreover, phenomenology's power to distinguish *all* forms of reality amounted to an argument against the contemporary trends of positivism and neo-idealism, as both the empirical and the ideal could be shown to result from corresponding forms of intuition.

Before travelling to Göttingen in 1912, after which he also visited Edinburgh, London and Paris, Shpet had the opportunity to visit psychological institutes and laboratories in Germany with Chelpanov.<sup>1</sup> His letters, sent to a friend in June and July of 1910, demonstrate his experience of travelling abroad for the first time in his life. Shpet writes: 'I feel as if I were born and grew up here, and I am to work here. When I came to Moscow, I noted the lack of that feeling in me even then — Kiev ceased to exist for me. Alas, I think, were I to say to myself, 'you shall live in Germany', I would move to Germany'.<sup>2</sup> And a few weeks later:

my mood is exceptional. It is as if after a heavy illness, you feel some sort of weakness and at the same time strength, and the main thing, hope and a bright view of the future. In Bonn I simply want to kiss the city; I feel filled with awe. Külpe is charmed, and how I regret not coming here immediately. Now I am convinced that as soon as I tear myself away from Russia I am coming here.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For the destinations of their trip, see Shchedrina 2015, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 2005, p. 320.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 2005, p. 321.

As fate would have it, Shpet would not stay in Germany. Likewise, any dreams he might have entertained about building a peaceful academic career were to be severely undermined by the revolution. Still, what Shpet acquired in Göttingen and brought back to Moscow was a philosophical method that he would subsequently develop to suit the changing philosophical needs in post-revolutionary Russia. Shpet's enthusiasm for Husserl's philosophy indeed stands in striking contrast with the preceding scepticism and non-commitment he had expressed only a few years earlier.

Although Shpet would quickly become the most renowned Husserlian in Russia, he was not alone in his interest in phenomenology. Indeed, as Thomas Nemeth writes, until the end of the First World War Russia was 'arguably the most receptive country to phenomenology outside its homeland'.<sup>1</sup> In 1909 the first part of Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, the 'Prolegomena to a Pure Logic' (originally published in 1901) appeared in a Russian translation with Semen Frank's foreword, and the same year saw the publication of Heinrich (Genrikh) Lanz's '*Gusserl' i psikhologisty nashikh dnei*'.<sup>2</sup> Husserl's *Logos* essay 'Philosophy as a Rigorous Science' was published in the Russian version of the international journal in 1911, the same year as the text's original German publication. In 1913, Boris Iakovenko published the article '*Filosofia E. Gusserlia*',<sup>3</sup> in which he analysed both volumes of *Logical Investigations*.<sup>4</sup> Thus, while discussing Shpet's rapid integration of Husserl's phenomenology in his own system of thinking, Nemeth rightly notes that it was 'a testimony not only to the perspicuity of the man but also of the Russian philosophical community of the time, as well as to its receptivity and commitment to philosophical involvement'.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nemeth 2009, p. 125.

<sup>2</sup> Chubarov 1997, p. 86. An extended version of the article was published in German in 1910 as '*Das Problem der Gegenständlichkeit in der modernen Logik*'.

<sup>3</sup> In *Novye idei v filosofii*, vol. 3: *Teoriia poznaniia* (1913).

<sup>4</sup> Haardt 1991, p. xviii. For more on the reception of Husserl in Russia see Dennes 1998.

<sup>5</sup> Nemeth 1991, p. ix. Nemeth adds that since Husserl's *Ideas* was published in April 1913, and Shpet's book appeared before June 1914, the latter must have indeed been 'conceived, thought through, and written in remarkable haste'.

### 1.3.1. From Moscow to Göttingen

As Shpet gradually made his way to Germany, there was another change in his academic environment: little by little, he seemed to distance himself from Chelpanov, until eventually finding a teacher in Edmund Husserl. On his arrival in Moscow in 1907, Chelpanov had founded a new psychological seminar within the Department of History and Philology at Moscow University. Two years later, he was ready to begin his own research in the field of experimental psychology. Shpet worked in close collaboration with this project and when, in 1910, the seminar received a generous donation of a hundred thousand roubles for the establishment of a Psychological Institute, he was naturally considered part of it.<sup>1</sup> Chelpanov was well prepared to undertake the grand project. He was acquainted with Wilhelm Wundt's Psychological Institute in Leipzig, which was indeed to function as a model for the Moscow Institute.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Chelpanov had already run a small-scale laboratory of psychology in Kiev (between 1897 and 1907)<sup>3</sup> and had gained, as he writes, a 'very clear idea of how a psychological institute should take shape in our Russian conditions'.<sup>4</sup> Chelpanov adds that he had also made a thorough study of the corresponding American institutes at Harvard, Cornell University and Leland Stanford University. He believed this to have been especially valuable because of the similarities between university education in Russia and the United States.

<sup>1</sup> Chelpanov (1914, p. 274) reports that Igor Sergeevich Shchukin's donation was to be directed to the creation of a psychological institute as part of Moscow University. It was to be planned and directed by Chelpanov, and to carry the name of Lidiia Grigorievna Shchukina. Chelpanov later remarks in a letter to Shpet, written from the United States, that Shchukin's donation 'astonishes the psychologists, and a notice thereof will appear in one of the psychological journals' (Shpet 2012, p. 70).

<sup>2</sup> Wundt was an influential figure in the evolution of Russian psychology. The first experimental laboratory in Russia was founded after his model at Kazan University in 1885, and in the same year the Moscow Psychological Society made Wundt an honorary member. According to one claim more of Wundt's works were translated to Russian than any other language. (Blumenthal 1985, p. 44; Sirotkina 2006, p. 247; Umrikhin 1997, p. 17.)

<sup>3</sup> For more on Chelpanov's colloquium at Kiev University see Kozulin 1985, pp. 23–24.

<sup>4</sup> Chelpanov 1914, p. 275.

In the summer of 1910 the project was accepted by the Ministry of Education and soon afterwards Chelpanov reported having departed on a journey with the ‘Privatdozent of Moscow University G.G Shpet’ to visit the most significant German psychological institutes, still unknown to him. He writes:

I became deeply acquainted with teaching in the Berlin laboratory of Professor Stumpf, thanks to the cooperation of Privatdozent Rupp. I then surveyed the Bonn laboratory with the assistance of Professor Külpe and Privatdozent Bühler, and then the large laboratory of Professor Marbe in the University of Würzburg. I had the occasion to discuss the plans for our institute with Professors Külpe and Wundt. Both provided me with rather valuable directions, which I used when correcting the plans.<sup>1</sup>

In the early spring of 1911 Chelpanov’s journey continued to the United States, where he visited Harvard, Yale, Cornell, Columbia and the University of Chicago, meeting along the way with Edward B. Titchener, Hugo Münsterberg, James McKeen Cattell and Charles Hubbard Judd.<sup>2</sup> In the meanwhile, the construction of a three-storey building in the grounds of Moscow University began, and by September 1912 the Psychological Institute was ready to accept students. The Institute’s official opening, however, took place only later, in March 1914. The event was publicized in Germany and the United States, and German psychologists, as Alex Kozulin writes, ‘not only congratulated their Russian colleagues but also used this event to point out that the Russian public appeared to be more sensitive to the needs of the scientific community than the German one’. Chelpanov’s Institute was well staffed and indeed, much better than the leading German psychological institutes, Kozulin notes: ‘Chelpanov could boast having five assistants, five laboratory assistants, and a mechanic’. Wilhelm Wundt expressed

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Kozulin 1985, p. 24. For Chelpanov’s extensive itinerary, see his letter to Shpet (2012, pp. 70–71).

his delight with the new Institute, calling it the 'offspring' of his own Leipzig institute.<sup>1</sup>

In the director's position Chelpanov could put the results of his Kantian research to practical use, and the multidisciplinary approach proved fruitful. In 1909 he prepared a course in experimental psychology that surveyed topics such as perception, memory and attention from the perspective of the methodology of psychological work. Chelpanov approached his themes from the point of view of psychophysics and reaction-time experiments; he discussed statistical methods, the theory of probability and the principles of electronic engineering.<sup>2</sup> Even with these modern methods, Tat'iana Martsinkovskaia suggests, his philosophical perception remained in much indebted to Kant.<sup>3</sup> For Chelpanov the Kantian categories were applicable to modern psychology, as long as they were not accepted as unchanging Platonic forms, but as structures of the mind, which evolve in time and can be traced through experimental methods.

However, by the time the Psychological Institute began working, Shpet had already left Russia for Germany, and this time for Göttingen.<sup>4</sup> He had spent the 1910–1911 academic year teaching at the A. L. Szaniawski City National University of Moscow (*Moskovskii gorodskoi narodnyi universitet imeni A. L. Shaniavskogo*) and to the 8th year of Alferov Gymnasium, where he met his future fiancée Natal'ia Konstantinovna Guchkova, then a student. In Göttingen Shpet chose to live separately from his family (his wife and two daughters had settled in another flat), and his intention was to engage in intense work on the second volume of his *Istoriia kak problema logiki*, as well as to finish the book's first volume as his doctoral dissertation.<sup>5</sup> Apparently, in order to have the maximum time and peace to work, Shpet did not even register at Göttingen University. Chelpanov met his decision with dismay, writing on 25 May 1912:

<sup>1</sup> Kozulin 1985, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Kozulin 1985, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Martsinkovskaia 2016a; pp. 19, 23.

<sup>4</sup> Shpet settled in a flat on Groner Chausse 22 on 13 April 1912, paying a hundred Deutsche Marks for the semester (April–August). (Shchedrina 2015, p. 59.)

<sup>5</sup> Shchedrina 2015, p. 59.

In no way can I approve your plan of not being at the University. That would be a great blow to your improvement. In that case, why did you have to travel to Göttingen, and what are you going to write in your report? And finally, it is even incredibly awkward when viewed from the outside. You return from two years in Germany without speaking or being able to understand the language.<sup>1</sup>

Judging from his correspondence, Shpet's greatest distraction from work during the Göttingen years, apart from his growing interest in phenomenology, was caused by longing for Guchkova, to whom he wrote daily.<sup>2</sup> Otherwise, Shpet appears happy with the German way of life, reporting to her five days after his departure from Moscow:

The lady of the house is very cautious. She gives me milk twice a day (I sensibly turned down their coffee and butter). Some German, who is also writing a book, is also living with her (in Göttingen the only ones who do not write books are those who let rooms for writers of books, dogs, children and, naturally, civil servants, though the latter write in books, however), so she is used to silence (as, by the way, is everyone in Göttingen, and those who do not write books understand what writing books means — that already relates to children and dogs — the former grow up to write, and the latter distribute margarine around the city to prevent the writers of books from having any gastronomic temptation).<sup>3</sup>

Shpet kept to his writing during the spring and summer of 1912 with apparently only one visitor, Shestov, who stayed with him for two days at the end of May. In mid-August he returned to Moscow for a month-long holiday during which he divorced his first wife and stayed at the estate of Varvara Il'inichna Zilotti, the mother of Natal'ia Guchkova. The return to Göttingen took place in September and roughly a month later

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet 2012, p. 71.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 2005, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 2005, pp. 36–37.

Shpet became acquainted with Husserl.<sup>1</sup> Shpet's grandson (the son his oldest daughter, Margarita Polivanova), the physicist Mikhail Polivanov, reports after Nikolai Zhinkin (who was Shpet's student in Moscow after the revolution) concerning the reasons Shpet chose Göttingen over other German universities. Zhinkin's opinion was that Husserl played a role in this decision, but only indirectly: 'a large number of German universities were influenced by Kant's philosophy, which was unacceptable to him, and he therefore chose Husserl as the one most free from Kantianism'.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, we can assume that Shpet was already familiar with Husserl's work. In the 1912 essay '*Odin put' psikhologii i kuda on vedet*' he makes reference to the second volume of *Logical Investigations*, applauding Husserl for his 'correct understanding of the nature of the psychical'.<sup>3</sup> As will become evident from analysing *Iavlenie i smysl*, Husserl's early presentation of phenomenology indeed had a fundamental effect on Shpet's thinking. Additionally, Igor' Chubarov has suggested that the very first mention of Husserl in the Russian literature was made by Chelpanov during the period Shpet was participating in his seminar (between 1902 and 1906).<sup>4</sup> This view has later been contested by Frédéric Tremblay, who identifies the first mentions of Husserl in Russian print with David Viktorov (in 1904) and Nikolai Losskii (in 1905).<sup>5</sup>

According to Tat'iana Shchedrina's account<sup>6</sup> Shpet began attending Husserl's course '*Logik und Einleitung in die Wissenschaftslehre*' in mid-October 1912, writing a précis of the lectures. In early November he attended Husserl's seminar '*Nature und Geist*' on the theme of '*Ding und*

<sup>1</sup> Shchedrina 2015, p. 60. Thomas Nemeth (2017, p. vi) points out that Shpet makes no mention of Husserl in his letter to Natal'ia Konstantinovna on 8 October 1912, but on 15 November he tells Elena Metner of a meeting with him. However, as Nemeth notes, in a letter from early August 1912 Shestov already asks Shpet about his impressions of Husserl, adding that '[j]udging from the card you sent me, he is a very important person'.

<sup>2</sup> Polivanov 1995, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 2006, p. 254.

<sup>4</sup> Chubarov 1997, p. 83.

<sup>5</sup> For more see Tremblay 2016, pp. 149–150.

<sup>6</sup> Shchedrina 2015, p. 61.

*seine Ausdehnung, Phantom*.<sup>1</sup> In 1913 Shpet's diary entries only resume in June, and the summer season seems to mark the intensification of his exchange with Husserl. On 8 June Shpet attended Husserl's lecture, reporting having talked to him in person from 1pm to 1:30pm. a week later Shpet was invited to supper with Husserl; they discussed matters concerning Kant and phenomenology. On 13 July Husserl presented Shpet with a photograph, signed: 'To Mr von Shpet with friendship in memory of Göttingen philosophical discussions 1912/13. E. Husserl'.<sup>2</sup>

Chelpanov's letter to Shpet in August 1913 suggests that Shpet's original plan had been to stay in Göttingen until January 1914. In his letter Chelpanov enquires whether Shpet believes his dissertation will be finished by then, or whether he will need to apply for separate funds to extend the stay. Regarding Husserl, Chelpanov writes 'I am delighted by your closeness with Husserl. If the viewpoint which you have adopted could be expressed in your dissertation, that would be splendid. It is a new and interesting viewpoint!'<sup>3</sup>

### 1.3.2. **Plunging into Phenomenology**

Shpet's sojourn in Göttingen (from April 1912 to July 1913, and again for a short period in the summer of 1914) took place at a crucial moment in the evolution of Husserl's phenomenology. After leaving the town on 16 July 1913<sup>4</sup> Shpet travelled to Edinburgh; according to his

<sup>1</sup> Among the participants of this seminar and Husserl's lectures at the time were e. g. Edith Stein, Roman Ingarden and Winthrop Bell.

<sup>2</sup> Shchedrina 2015, p. 61. Shpet returned to Göttingen briefly for a few weeks in the summer of 1914. The two philosophers resumed their talks, but the First World War soon cut their connection again. For an account of this visit, see Shchedrina 2015, p. 63.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 2012, p. 74.

<sup>4</sup> Shpet was seen off at the railway station by Alexandre Koyré and Jean Hering (Shpet 2012, p. 74). Yet he has rarely been mentioned by his Göttingen colleagues. Edith Stein (1986, p. 292) makes a possible exception by referring to a 'Russian professor'. It has nonetheless become customary to include Shpet's name in the list of philosophers associated with the early phenomenology movement. See e. g. Moran & Parker 2005, p. 12.

daughter, to visit the Advocates' Library, where the archives of Scottish philosophers, including David Hume, were kept.<sup>1</sup> While in Scotland, Shpet received a postcard from Husserl (dated 30 August 1913), who was taking a break from work in the Bernese Highlands.<sup>2</sup> Husserl writes that he had been unable to 'tear himself away' from the finishing of the text for the second volume *Logische Untersuchungen*. Husserl writes: 'I still have the better part of the work left to do. I hope that by the end of October I can send you a sample of the finished work as a return gift for your kindly sending me Mr Iakovenko's essay and in memory of the term in Göttingen.'<sup>3</sup>

The revision of the *Logical Investigations* for a new, corrected edition was indeed Husserl's constant concern during Shpet's visit. Besides, Husserl was in the middle of another monumental project: the writing of the first volume of *Ideen I*. Shpet was thus thrown right into the heart of phenomenology during the Göttingen period. The fact that he became deeply acquainted with Husserl's newest philosophy and integrated it in his own thinking, and produced an original work explaining Husserl's position, pointing out its weaknesses, and suggesting a way to ameliorate them — all of which happened within less than two years — may be considered proof of his dedication to the phenomenological method. In addition, the fact that Shpet's acquaintance with phenomenology was made at a time when Husserl was continuously questioning and rethinking the very foundations of his own system influenced Shpet's interpretation, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

Whereas Husserl finished the manuscript of *Ideas* swiftly, during 'a single feverish burst over eight weeks' in the summer of 1912, the work on the investigations turned out considerably more challenging than he had anticipated.<sup>4</sup> Husserl had first considered reworking the book already in 1905 in connection with a failed plan for an English translation, but took up the task only in 1911. However, Husserl then decided to set the

<sup>1</sup> Iakovich 2014, p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> On some unresolved questions concerning Husserl's postcard see Stolovich 2013, p. 109.

<sup>3</sup> Gusserl' 1992, pp. 234–235. Husserl is probably referring to Iakovenko's 1913 article 'Filosofia E. Gussertia'.

<sup>4</sup> Moran 2005, p. 28.

revisions aside to first publish the results of his latest research; *Ideen I* thus appeared in April 1913.<sup>1</sup> He spent the summer of 1913 working on the revisions, and by October he had been able to revise the Prolegomena and the first five investigations. However, the Sixth Investigation proved extremely difficult to rework.

Having realized it would be impossible to raise the whole of *Logical Investigations* to the level of transcendental apprehension of *Ideas*, Husserl decided that the reader should instead be led gradually to a higher level of insight while reading the updated investigations, ‘so that in the final Investigation the level of the *Ideas* would be reached’, Ulrich Melle writes. Thus, only the Sixth Investigation had to be brought ‘wholly and fully’ in line with *Ideas*, and therefore required ‘radical and total revision’.<sup>2</sup> According to Malvine Husserl, who wrote to Johannes Daubert on 31 July, the task was not easy: ‘It is hard work, the Sixth Investigation, the hardest that he has ever done’.<sup>3</sup> In the preface to the second edition of the *Investigations* of October 1913, published without this last investigation, Husserl gave the misleading impression that the missing part was completed and in print. This was in fact far from true, and at the very end of 1913 Husserl sounds defeated in a letter to Shpet. He writes on 29 December:

Dear friend!

Both your letters from Paris overjoyed both me and my wife.<sup>4</sup> I am cheered that the mountainous land of phenomenology has opened

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<sup>1</sup> As Ulrich Melle (2002, p. 111) reports, Husserl’s idea was for the *Investigations* to be revised ‘so that they could be read and used as a complement to the *Ideas*, in that they would introduce the reader to concrete phenomenological work. The reader would first study the *Logical Investigations* and get acquainted with “attempts at genuinely executed fundamental work on the immediately envisaged and seized things themselves” and “with a group of fundamental questions in explicit investigation”. Then, he would turn to the *Ideas* for the elucidation of the method from ultimate sources, the delineation of the main structures of pure consciousness and the systematic presentation of the fields of investigation’.

<sup>2</sup> Melle 2002, pp. 111–112.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Melle 2002, p. 112.

<sup>4</sup> Husserl’s (Gusserl’ 1992, p. 236) letter reveals that Shpet had the opportunity of meeting Henri Bergson in Paris, with an introductory letter from Husserl, but that he turned down the proposal.

before you, as it has before me, in its majesty, beauty and the strength which creates philosophy, and that you are not, in the name of 'eternal soulfulness', scared of those inexpressible difficulties which everyone who wishes to feel at home there must face. Thus, I paid my own tribute to those difficulties this winter: possibly as a result of the productivity of the years past, the work is going slowly, and I must agonizingly work at reproducing in my contemplation the former intuitions (*Einsichten*), and, something I strictly require of myself, faithfully representing and depicting that which is contemplated. My soul is weighed down by all the time I have lost due to the constant rainy and foggy weather in phenomenology, and by the fresh delay of a few months to the publication of the last section of my Logical Investigations. 'Art is eternal — life is short!' For I am now of a rather resolute disposition and simply resumed work; almost nothing remains of the old text, although as a core all the former thoughts should be presented here, and merely grasped more clearly, maturely and with a firm foundation (on the basis of my thorough studies in 1902–1910).<sup>1</sup>

Melle confirms that at some time between October 1913 and the end of the same year Husserl finally decided not to proceed with the revision manuscript from the previous summer, but to write an entirely new sixth investigation instead.<sup>2</sup> This plan was also doomed to fail, and finally in the spring of 1921 the second and only slightly revised edition of the last investigation was published. Analysing the manuscripts of the planned revision for the text, Melle comes to a sad conclusion: he sees it as a 'great pity' that Husserl abandoned this work, since the drafts from the summer of 1913 are 'of an exceptional quality':

<sup>1</sup> Gusserl' 1992, p. 235.

<sup>2</sup> Husserl refers to the pages of a new manuscript in a letter to Shpet dated 28 March 1914: 'After all, I have already written to you that I fully rejected almost six already printed, correspondingly, typed sheets and took the decision to write a *completely new volume* instead of reworking them, I still keep the set of the next six sheets in a bundle, as it contains only high-quality text (and completely new, for that matter)' (Gusserl' 1992, p. 237).

They show that Husserl was well on his way to incorporate the most recent results of his vast research into the structures of intuitive, signicative and categorial acts, of perception, fantasy and judging, of modalities, modification and intentional implications into a phenomenological theory of knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

Melle also points to another set of manuscripts, which was later discovered ‘in the papers of Winthrop Bell’.<sup>2</sup> These make up two fragmentary drafts, probably two alternative conceptions for a preface to the second edition of the *Investigations* also written by Husserl in the late summer of 1913. The drafts contain clarifications regarding the whole project — for example, concerning Husserl’s notions of the formal and material *a priori*, the conception of logic and of the ontology related to those notions, as well as his conception of phenomenology as an ontology of intentional consciousness.<sup>3</sup> Melle asserts that the texts offer a remarkably clear presentation of the founding ideas of phenomenology. The preface was to function as a ‘guide for the reader’, correcting the most common misunderstandings that Husserl was trying to combat.<sup>4</sup> The themes of the 1913 manuscripts had long-lasting effect on Husserl’s thinking. Having turned away from problems of logic for a long period, he resumed their examination only in 1929, as he rediscovered his ‘first interests’ in the book *Formal and Transcendental Logic*.<sup>5</sup>

The overall goal of the *Logical Investigations* was to establish a new foundation for pure logic and epistemology by determining the

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<sup>1</sup> Melle 2002, p. 114.

<sup>2</sup> Originally from Nova Scotia, Bell studied under Husserl in Göttingen simultaneously with Shpet, from 1911 to 1914 (Spielberg 1982, p. 129).

<sup>3</sup> Melle 2011, p. 249.

<sup>4</sup> Melle 2011, p. 251. The most common reproach was that after his powerful critique of psychologism in the *Prolegomena*, Husserl had fallen back into psychologism in the second volume of his book. (See e. g. Drummond 2002, p. 31)

<sup>5</sup> Husserl also refers to a return to his early interests in the 1921 foreword to the second edition of the *Sixth Investigation*, writing: ‘Only very recently have these systematic studies led me back into the territories where my phenomenological research originated, and have recalled me to my old work on the foundations of pure logic which has so long awaited completion and publication’ (Husserl 1970, p. 661).

conditions of possibility for objective knowledge.<sup>1</sup> As Shpet was to observe to his satisfaction, Husserl's leading question was not *whether* consciousness could attain knowledge of mind-independent reality; he presented a study of the ways in which it *does* do just that. *Logical Investigations* analyses the intentional nature of consciousness that is always directed towards its object — for example, the something perceived, doubted, loved or expected.<sup>2</sup> The first four of the investigations revolve around the theme of the various forms of such 'meanings', their status as ideal unities and their possible combinations. In the last two investigations Husserl takes up the question of 'pure logic', which is a theory not simply of meaning and grammar but of truth itself.<sup>3</sup>

The Sixth Investigation is a decisive part of the book. There, Husserl introduces the doctrine of categorial intuition to explicate the knowledge of universals, states of affairs, and 'logical forms captured by syntax', as Daniel Dahlstrom expresses it.<sup>4</sup> The idea is this: we have no difficulty in understanding the objective references of words such as 'house' or 'red'. But the issue gets more complex with grammatical parts of speech, such as the 'a', the 'the', the 'and', the 'all', the 'something', and so on.<sup>5</sup> There is no thing and no feature in things for such words to signify, as Robert Sokolowski writes. They lack any objective reference and instead add to speech 'an excess or surplus of meaning that seems to have no correlatives in the things that are being intended through the expressions'.<sup>6</sup> Yet Sokolowski asserts that the syntactic parts of speech serve not only to organize concepts in our minds. Instead, they express 'the manner in which things can be presented to us. They express relationships in the way things appear'.<sup>7</sup> For example, there might be a state of affairs in the world as we perceive it such as 'there is a cat on the table, looking out of the window'. Husserl writes:

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<sup>1</sup> Zahavi 2017, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Zahavi 2017, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Dahlstrom 2003, pp. 8–9.

<sup>4</sup> Dahlstrom 2003, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> See the discussion in Husserl 1970, pp. 773–774.

<sup>6</sup> Sokolowski 2003, pp. 114–115.

<sup>7</sup> Sokolowski 2003, p. 116.

If we were asked what it means to say that *categorially structured meanings* find fulfilment, confirm themselves in perception, we can but reply: it means only that they relate to the object itself *in its categorial structure*. The object with these categorial forms is not merely referred to, as in the case where meanings function purely symbolically, but it is set before our very eye in just these forms. In other words: it is not merely thought of, but intuited or perceived.<sup>1</sup>

Husserl's development of the theme of categorial intuition came to a halt, as the editing work on the Sixth Investigation remained unfinished. Since the *Investigations*' first publication, he had come to doubt, for example, his earlier theory of fulfilment, where an empty intention was 'filled' by a corresponding perception, as well as the very possibility of empty intentions in the first place.<sup>2</sup> According to Melle Husserl's new 1913 analysis of the empty intention attempted to overcome this 'residual sensualism'. In the first edition of the *Investigations* Husserl had conceived sense data as 'a kind of stuff which filled an empty form, consisting of the matter and the quality of an act'.<sup>3</sup> In the later manuscripts, he found such clear-cut fulfilling of intentions to be impossible and the constitutive process of intentional meaning now appeared more complex to him.

Overall, Husserl's manuscripts from this period suggest a deepening of his theory of meaning and a growing role of categorial acts in his philosophy. Rudolf Bernet points to yet another set of manuscripts from the same period, in which Husserl drafted a new theory of signification.<sup>4</sup> His new conception of a 'meaningful sign'<sup>5</sup> suggests that all signs 'signify on the basis of a deliberate decision, on the basis of a will': they refer to their objects in virtue of an intentional act which Husserl calls meaning-intention.<sup>6</sup> Bernet proposes that according to this theory, to '*bestow a meaning upon a sensuously given object* or, to put it otherwise,

<sup>1</sup> Husserl 1970, p. 785.

<sup>2</sup> Melle 2002, pp. 115–116.

<sup>3</sup> Melle 2002, pp. 117–118.

<sup>4</sup> See Rudolf Bernet's (1988a) article for a comprehensive account of this new theory.

<sup>5</sup> As opposed to a merely 'indicative sign' (Bernet 1988, pp. 5–6).

<sup>6</sup> Bernet 1988, p. 6.

to create or to use a meaningful sign is the result of a *voluntary decision* — even if, as he continues, ‘especially for lingual signs this will can become an impersonal, anonymous one’. In other words, in the use of language the intentional signifying act is performed in the form of a ‘blind, habitual tendency’.<sup>1</sup>

According to Bernet the argument contained a seed of the idea of intersubjectivity, as Husserl noticed that the intention to speak presupposes ‘a reproductive consciousness of a signifying, and this reproductive consciousness refers backward to an originary consciousness of signifying which is a *passive* understanding of the sign and not an active signifying or speaking’. To put it more simply, ‘the subject making a statement always already is part of a social community sharing the lingual signs’. This conclusion strikes Bernet as surprising: ‘Coming from Husserl, this is indeed a remarkable claim. Neither the *Logical Investigations* nor most of what has been written about Husserl’s philosophy of language ever since has prepared us for what looks like a hermeneutical turn in Husserl’s work’.<sup>2</sup>

Curiously, the phenomenological dialogue between Shpet and Husserl is defined by the very questions of meaning and hermeneutics. Indeed, these are precisely the themes that Shpet is generally suggested to have added to Husserl’s original philosophy in his *Iavlenie i smysl*. Thus, the timing of Shpet’s stay in Göttingen is certainly of interest. One is tempted to ask if Shpet could have influenced Husserl’s seeming hermeneutical turn. There is, however, nothing that would suggest that the philosophers engaged in phenomenological discussions as equals. Instead, in their correspondence Shpet remains visibly in the role of a student. The following chapters will discuss the similarities and differences between Shpet’s and Husserl’s phenomenological conceptions. I shall argue that to understand their interrelationship, we must look beyond Husserl’s transcendental arguments and Shpet’s hermeneutic ‘additions’ to it. Instead, it will be necessary to analyse the evolution of both their philosophies in parallel.

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<sup>1</sup> Bernet 1988, pp. 7–8.

<sup>2</sup> Bernet 1988, p. 16.

In the following chapter, I tackle *Iavlenie i smysl* and its complex relationship to Husserl's *Ideas I*. My aim is to show that, for all the significant changes and additions that Shpet suggests to Husserl's exposition, the two books remain closely interconnected. In the third chapter I will address the further hermeneutic and semiotic development of Shpet's phenomenology in *Istoriia kak problema logiki* (1916), as well as the two essays 'Soznanie i ego sobstvennik' ('Consciousness and Its Owner', 1916) and 'Mudrost' ili razum?' ('Wisdom or Reason?', 1917). While there is no doubt that Shpet's philosophy had in these works already fully distinguished itself from his teacher's example, my suggestion is that, given the later development of Husserl's genetic phenomenology, their lines of thought can still be seen to have followed a parallel path. Interestingly, the alterations Husserl would make to his own conception of phenomenology in the 1920s and 30s can partly be traced back to the revisions of the Sixth Investigation which he was unable to finish in 1913.

## 2. FINDING SENSE IN APPEARANCE: SHPET ON HUSSERL'S PHENOMENOLOGY

This chapter analyses Shpet's phenomenology, as expressed in the 1914 *Iavlenie i smyl*. Shpet intended his book to be a presentation of the transcendental phenomenology introduced in Husserl's *Ideen I* (1913) for the Russian home audience. However, his work turned out to be also an original contribution to phenomenology. Having only just acquainted himself with Husserl's latest philosophy, Shpet already discerned certain inadequacies in it. He doubted whether Husserl's dual classification of intuitions into empirical and ideal could describe *all* kinds of experience of reality, and even more importantly, he claimed that Husserl had failed to address a crucial phenomenological question: where did the meaning inherent in our experiences come from? In Shpet's opinion *Ideas* presented a clear analysis of the different 'forms' of intuition. That is, it successfully observed how we perceived something as something physical, something musical, something mobile, something sentient, and so on. However, he argued that it offered no explication of how these 'formed' experiences acquired a meaning, that is, how something musical proved to be a symphony, and something sentient a human being. In Shpet's opinion the very core of meaning appeared lacking in Husserl's depiction.

Shpet thus tackled Husserl's analysis of sense-bestowal, which he found inadequate. *Iavlenie i smysl* presents a quest for a 'motivation' of meaning, understood as a certain necessary rationality 'behind' all intuition. This leads Shpet to establish his own phenomenological terminology of 'intelligible intuition', 'internal sense' and 'entelechy', with which he creates a new vision of *hermeneutical* phenomenology. In Shpet's opinion 'sense' (*smysl*, or *Sinn*) is not to be accepted as simply included in the noema. Instead, he argues that it must be grounded in a special

interpretative act that 'penetrates' the noema to its core, discovering its entelechy, soul or essence. The sense of an object (Shpet uses Aristotle's example of the axe) is thus a 'sign' of the latter. This phenomenological conclusion already indicates the direction for Shpet's later hermeneutic and semiotic vision of culture; according to his theory words (as signs) themselves have the power to disclose essences.

Shpet's hermeneutical approach is thus connected with an ontological emphasis of positive philosophy. As Shpet asserts, he is interested not only in investigating the 'appearance' of reality, reality-as-it-appears, but in establishing reality-as-it-is. At the end of *Iavlenie i smysl*, he suggests treating reality itself as a 'social reality'. In other words, Shpet argues that for our vision of the world to be comprehensive of all forms of intuition and their correlative forms of being, it must include not just the empirical and the ideal, but also the 'social' or the 'meaningful' forms. For Shpet the world itself proves to be a hermeneutical structure. This ontological reading of transcendental phenomenology has often been met with distrust. It is suggested Shpet either failed to follow Husserl through his transcendental turn or abandoned it in raising the question of the nature of social objects. In contrast, I will argue that Shpet remained committed to Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. To prove this, it will be necessary to examine what it meant more closely, for both Shpet and Husserl.

Although the ontologism of Shpet's phenomenology is seen as problematic, the hermeneutic import of his thought is often said to have been ahead of its time. Indeed, Husserl tackled the problem of meaning properly only in the 1920s in connection with the development of genetic phenomenology and the conception of the 'lifeworld' (*Lebenswelt*). Shpet's thinking is thus sometimes associated with figures such as Martin Heidegger or Hans-Georg Gadamer, who developed hermeneutical viewpoints concerning experience and knowledge. The resulting interpretations of his philosophy have strongly underlined its hermeneutic aspects, and Shpet's Husserlian phenomenology is seen as an intermediate phase, from which he proceeded to develop an original theory of language and culture. My intention in the present chapter is rather to return Shpet to his Husserlian roots.

Without downplaying the distinctiveness of his argumentation, I strive to demonstrate the ways in which Shpet's thought remains founded in Husserl's phenomenology.

Thus, I suggest that a detailed phenomenological analysis of *Iavlenie i smysl* in its relationship with Husserl's thought must again be taken up. a need for such a work has previously been suggested by Nelli Motroshilova, who believes that the contrast between Husserl and Shpet has indeed been frequently exaggerated. In her opinion, readings of *Iavlenie i smysl* tend to interpret Shpet's discussion *through* his later hermeneutical philosophy of language and culture. 'A critical relationship to Husserlian phenomenology recorded [in Shpet's book] is therefore not exaggerated (as in several places and times it is genuinely warranted), but rather artificially placed in another problem plane, one which in my opinion [*Iavlenie i smysl*] does not yet examine,' Motroshilova writes.<sup>1</sup>

As the present work proposes, even Shpet's later texts on the theory of language and culture can be read as a direct continuation of his early phenomenology. Indeed, I believe that a phenomenological reinterpretation of Shpet's theory of the inner form of the word will shed new light on its meaning.

## 2.1. HUSSERLIAN PHENOMENOLOGY OR NOT?

Shpet's two Parisian letters to Husserl in the autumn of 1913 speak of his heartfelt enthusiasm for the phenomenological method. In the first letter, Shpet admits that the 'magic of phenomenology' has for the moment rendered him in certain aspects blind, but he is for the moment unwilling to question this enthusiasm. He describes his ongoing work

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<sup>1</sup> Motroshilova 2006, p. 301. Aleksei Savin expressed a similar view in a roundtable discussion organized by the journal *Voprosy filosofii* in 2014. He asserts that Shpet's book is an 'absolutely phenomenological work, by which I mean phenomenology in the Husserlian sense. This book is based on [that phenomenology]. [I]n this work Shpet is [...] unsatisfied by the Husserlian resolution of the question, but in precisely a Husserlian sense' (Denn & al. 2014, p. 148).

on an article, which was later to grow into a book, namely, *Iavlenie i smysl*.<sup>1</sup> Shpet writes:

Dear Professor,

I have been in Paris for four days, but my phenomenological hunger is growing larger than my traveller's curiosity, and I understand that notwithstanding the need to finish my expansive work quickly, a large amount of my time will be devoted to phenomenology; I found time in Moscow to rewrite my article, but did not find time to fundamentally rework and correct it. Nevertheless, I consider a fundamental rewrite of the work completely necessary. I want to concentrate the entire exposition: on the one hand, to put in first place the problem of ideal being and its relation to intuition, and respectively the problem of presentativism and representativism, and, on the other hand, to lay out the problem of nominalism more clearly. I think that such a rewrite should make the exposition fuller and clearer, along with which the meaning of phenomenology on the whole will become clearer, as well as the 'turn' ('Wendung') in philosophy itself.<sup>2</sup>

The three themes mentioned by Shpet were crucial for the evolution of his views. Husserl's phenomenology offered an invaluable opportunity to him: an immediate intuition of and a method to study essences as ideal beings.<sup>3</sup> Shpet believed that phenomenology could serve as a counterweight to nominalism, which he saw as a necessary outcome of epistemological theories rooted in a negative philosophy.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vitalii Kurennoi suggests that *Iavlenie i smysl* was indeed first meant to be published in the form of an article. (Shpet 1996, p. 129.)

<sup>2</sup> The original German versions of Shpet's letters were published in Husserl's *Briefwechsel. Band III: Die Göttinger Schule* (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994). For a Russian translation, see *Logos*, nro 7 (1996), pp. 123–133.

<sup>3</sup> As Husserl (1967, p. 81) writes in *Ideas*, he is engaging in a 'battle' with empiricism, which denies the being of 'Ideas', 'Essence' and the 'knowledge of Essential Being'.

<sup>4</sup> Shpet (1991, p. 4) is ready to admit that negative philosophy has often played an important role in the history of philosophy 'by drawing the attention of philosophers to new aspects and new types of what exists, and by raising new questions and new doubts about it'. He sees Locke as having inaugurated a critique that was 'sharpened to the finest edge' by Hume before being turned into a 'theory of knowledge' by Kant.

He writes in *Iavlenie i smysl*: '[...] the nominalism of a Berkeley, a Hume, or of a Mill is one with the nominalism of Kant and the neo-Kantian positivists. Nominalism leads to sceptical absurdity, as in Rickert's case with a proclamation about an ideal cognition removed as far as possible from actuality'.<sup>1</sup>

Shpet trusts that the long-awaited antidote is offered by Husserl's 'realism', which takes note of the sceptical question but formulates it in a crucially different — positive — way, leading to a 'creative construction of the foundation of philosophy'.<sup>2</sup> For him, phenomenology's central question is: 'How and on what basis do we come to see a certain X in the originally given intuition?' 'Or to put it in a quite general manner,' he continues, '*How does actuality exist?*'<sup>3</sup> It is evident from the outset that Shpet's phenomenology is conditioned by his commitment to the metaphysical tradition of positive philosophy, directed to the question of what is. Indeed, Shpet sees phenomenology as the next necessary step in the evolution of positive philosophy. In the first Parisian letter he writes that to better understand phenomenology, he must return to Plato and his question of essences. Shpet suggests that he is thus tracing the idea of phenomenology all the way back to its beginning:

Until now I have had a salutary fear of Plato... but I cannot without trepidation read something such as the following lines about Maine de Biran: '*C'est une de ses idées maîtresses et les plus familières que la véritable invention en philosophie consiste uniquement dans la détermination exacte des données immédiates de la conscience*'.<sup>4</sup>

Shpet writes that in turning all its attention to 'the solution of the problem of being', positive philosophy discovered 'with its first steps (Plato) the distinction between actual and ideal being as well as that between the various types of these forms of being'.<sup>5</sup> Phenomenology's

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> Shpet 1996, p. 124.

<sup>5</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 10.

greatest advantage for him is that it obtains its objects ‘simply by means of a shift of the advertence of our “vision”, by means of, as Husserl himself says, another “attitude”’. In addition, Husserl’s distinction between empirical and essential intuitions and with their factual and essential correlates allows phenomenology to study ‘everything’.<sup>1</sup> To Shpet this appears perfectly in line with the historical mission of positive philosophy, attempting to ‘affirm’ and ‘justify’ *everything in all its forms and types*.<sup>2</sup>

Shpet’s metaphysical approach to phenomenology has raised doubts concerning whether he actually understood what Husserl intended by his transcendental turn, and especially the *epoché*. I will tackle this question in what follows.

### 2.1.1. Ontological Approach to *Epoché*

At the beginning of *Ideas* Husserl asserts that the empirical and the essential appear, as it were, together. Empirical intuition gives us contingent ‘facts’. They are truly individual in form, have a spatiotemporal existence and thus exist ‘in *this* time-spot, having this particular duration’. Yet they could also be present in any other time-spot, have another form, and so on. Individual being of every kind is accidental according to Husserl.<sup>3</sup> ‘But the import of this contingency is limited’, he continues.

[T]he contingency is correlative to a *necessity* which does not carry the mere actuality-status of a valid rule of connexion obtaining between temporo-spatial facts, but has the character of *essential necessity*, and therewith a relation to *essential universality*. Now when we stated that every fact could be ‘essentially’ other than it is, we were already expressing thereby *that it belongs to the meaning of everything contingent that it should have essential being and therewith an Eidos to*

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1991, pp. 3–4.

<sup>3</sup> Husserl 1967, p. 52.

*be apprehended in all its purity; and this Eidos comes under essential truths of varying degrees of universality.*<sup>1</sup>

Shpet interprets Husserl's idea as follows: inasmuch as we determine the 'what' of the individual and 'put it into an idea', he states that 'it is not hard to see that this "what" becomes the "what" of the corresponding essence'.<sup>2</sup> Shpet argues that empirical intuition can thus be 'transformed' into an ideal intuition. He cites Husserl, who asserts that '*The essence (Eidos) is an object of a new type. Just as the datum of individual or empirical intuition is an individual object, so the datum of essential intuition is a pure essence.*'<sup>3</sup> Shpet emphasizes that empirical and essential intuition should not be considered two separate 'sorts' of intuition but instead a single 'regard', which either 'comes to a halt on the experientially given' or 'goes further inward, "penetrating throughout" the individual thing, right up to its essence in the different, perhaps infinite, stages of its specification and embodiment of genera'.<sup>4</sup>

Shpet's viewpoint allows him to highlight aspects of phenomenology that make it suitable for the tradition of positive philosophy. He suggests that, thanks to Husserl, 'we can see how the rug is pulled out from under nominalism'.<sup>5</sup> Certainly, negative philosophy had also analysed the problem of empirical and essential being, but it had always done it 'under the heading of the relation of consciousness to being', by taking cognition to be a 'condition of being'. In contrast, Shpet writes that Husserl 'restores the observer to his normal position', where the 'given is taken above all *as given*, as turning up *in front of us*, as an object, as the *given problem*'.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, with the aid of essential intuition, phenomenology probes 'further' and 'deeper' into the appearing reality. Shpet holds that phenomenology has thus found a method concretely to grasp the ideal being.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Husserl 1967, p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Husserl 1967, p. 55; Shpet 1991, p. 14

<sup>4</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> Shpet 1991, pp. 13–14.

<sup>7</sup> As Husserl (1967, p. 55) writes in *Ideas*, 'Essential insight is still intuition, just as the eidetic object is still an object'.

In the second chapter of *Iavlenie i smysl* Shpet turns to the question of pure consciousness, as the ‘only thing that unites’ the actual and ideal worlds. Shpet writes that ‘they are both given to me in consciousness, the spontaneous acts of which are constantly changing and flowing and are directed to the externally given’. In Shpet’s words the spontaneous acts of consciousness ‘examine and investigate’ that which is given to them; they ‘explain and express’ it conceptually. ‘They describe, compare, distinguish, and ponder over it. They are glad about it, afraid of it, etc., etc.’ According to Shpet we can indeed ‘designate this entire aggregate of “spontaneities” with respect to the “given” by the general Cartesian term, *cogito*’.<sup>1</sup> Shpet’s description corresponds to Husserl’s account of the natural world, ‘*the world in which I find myself and which is also my world-about-me*’. Husserl writes that this world is ‘centred around’ the Ego, through the acts of which ‘I become acquainted with the world as *immediately* given to me’.<sup>2</sup> Correspondingly, the world is present and accessible to the Ego: ‘I find it to *be out there*, and also *take it as it gives itself to me as something that exists out there*.’<sup>3</sup> Even doubts regarding the factual details of this world will not change this general thesis of the natural standpoint.

In contrast, to establish phenomenology as a radically new eidetic science (in Husserl’s words)<sup>4</sup> and as a fundamental philosophical science (in those of Shpet),<sup>5</sup> both philosophers agree that it requires a radical change of attitude. a phenomenological reduction, the ‘bracketing’ of the natural, the *ἐποχή* (*epochê*), must be implemented. Husserl writes:

The whole world as placed within the nature-setting and presented in experience as real, taken completely ‘free from all theory’, just as it is in reality experienced, and made clearly manifest in and through the linkings of our experiences, has now no validity for us, it must be set in brackets, untested indeed but also uncontested. Similarly all

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Husserl 1967, pp. 103–104.

<sup>3</sup> Husserl 1967, p. 106.

<sup>4</sup> Husserl 1967, p. 112.

<sup>5</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 25.

theories and sciences, positivistic or otherwise, which relate to this world, however good they may be, succumb to the same fate.<sup>1</sup>

Shpet follows Husserl's reasoning but suggests that a question now arises: 'What remains if we exclude the entire actual world with all our knowledge of it, exclude ultimately therefore everything, even ourselves with all our *cogitare*?' He replies: 'The entire "world as *eidós*" certainly remains.' Again, Shpet highlights the nature of consciousness (or 'cogito, i. e., our own mental processes') as 'the completely unique *being* that actually includes *everything*'. Consciousness thus appears to him a 'phenomenological residuum', which he characterizes as 'a region of being, which is of essential necessity quite unique and which can indeed become the field of a science of a novel kind'.<sup>2</sup> Husserl's depiction of the matter is notably similar when he writes that we must

fix our eyes steadily upon the sphere of Consciousness and study what it is that we find immanent in *it*. At first, without having yet carried out the phenomenological suspensions of the element of judgment, we subject this sphere of Consciousness in its essential nature to a systematic though in no way exhaustive analysis. What we lack above all is a certain general insight into the essence of *consciousness in general*, and quite specially also of consciousness, so far as in and through its essential Being, the 'natural' fact-world comes to be known. In these studies we go so far as is needed to furnish the full insight at which we have been aiming, to wit, *that Consciousness in itself has a being of its own which in its absolute uniqueness of nature remains unaffected by the phenomenological disconnexion*.<sup>3</sup>

Consciousness remains as a phenomenological residuum and becomes the 'field' of the science of phenomenology.<sup>4</sup> Yet, as many have noted, Shpet's interpretation of Husserl's *epoché* (presented in the third chap-

<sup>1</sup> Husserl 1967, p. 111.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1991, pp. 27–28.

<sup>3</sup> Husserl 1967, p. 113.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

ter of *Iavlenie i smysl*) seems strangely unwarranted in its ontological leaning. To him, phenomenology is a ‘science of being itself’ and thus the question it must answer is simply ‘What is?’<sup>1</sup> It must gain an understanding of being in all its forms, and Shpet suggests that the eidetic form of being can be grasped by ‘penetrating’ the outer appearance of reality.

It indeed sounds as though Shpet considers phenomenology a pathway to a Platonic ‘kingdom of ideas’, as Steven Cassedy has suggested.<sup>2</sup> Thomas Seifrid agrees with this, recognizing a certain ‘ontological anxiety running through Shpet’s works’, and accuses the latter of ontologizing or Platonizing Husserl.<sup>3</sup> To be sure, Shpet writes that it is ‘a matter of two worlds or, as Plato would say, of two kingdoms’. He continues by asserting that ‘the kingdom of ideas simply stands opposed to the kingdom of the actual, not because the latter is to be taken as actuality but because the former is to be taken as something fundamentally absolute’.<sup>4</sup> Thomas Nemeth argues that phenomenology actually provided Shpet with a foundation from which his own ontological inquiries could advance, and that his ultimate goal was distinctly non-phenomenological: ‘a delineation of all that actually exists’. Nemeth states that while Shpet ‘manifestly accepts the phenomenological reduction’, his account of it is ‘disquieting’. Whereas for Husserl the reduction involves ‘the methodic exclusion of nature and, concomitantly, of all intellectual and cultural formations that presuppose natural attitude, for Shpet the reduction is the exclusion of relative individuals, leaving the entire eidetic realm to be studied’, Nemeth argues.<sup>5</sup>

Yet Nemeth points out that unlike most of Husserl’s followers at the time, Shpet accepted the former’s notion of the transcendental ego.<sup>6</sup> Shpet did not object to the exclusion of the natural world and did not see it as an ‘abandonment of realism for some sort of Cartesian or, worse yet,

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 99.

<sup>2</sup> Cassedy 2009, p. 101.

<sup>3</sup> Seifrid 2009, p. 182.

<sup>4</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 38.

<sup>5</sup> Nemeth 2009, pp. 126–127.

<sup>6</sup> Nemeth 2009, p. 127.

Berkleyan idealism'.<sup>1</sup> Alexander Haardt has suggested that 'the peculiar feature of Shpet's acceptance of phenomenology lies in the fact that, on the one hand, he followed Husserl's turn to transcendental idealism, as presented in *Ideas I*, and yet, on the other hand, he also interpreted transcendental phenomenology as ontology'. Haardt concludes:

Considered from this perspective, Husserl's regression from objects to the stream of consciousness appears *primarily* as a demonstration of a sphere of absolute being on the basis of which the contingent being of objects is to be grounded. The distinction of the factual from the essential proves to be a deposition of contingent from necessary being.<sup>2</sup>

To many of Husserl's followers in Göttingen the reductions in *Ideas* indeed presented a stumbling block.<sup>3</sup> *Logical Investigations*, with its method of describing mental phenomena 'simply' in their givenness to consciousness, had embodied a liberation from metaphysical traditions. The transcendental turn, with its return to questions about the nature of the experiencing ego, seemed to restore this historical and theoretical baggage.<sup>4</sup> Shpet, as will be discussed later, was unwilling to follow Husserl to his 'egological' standpoint, and his philosophy has sometimes been associated with the early Göttingen school.<sup>5</sup> However, it is important to emphasize that Shpet in fact followed Husserl through his transcendental turn. For him describing phenomena in their immediate givenness was the correct path to answering the epistemologists' doubts (whether Humean, Kantian, neo-Kantian, and so on), and the *epoché*, he argues, allowed the phenomenologist to probe the given phenomena further and thus reach the eidetic forms of being.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless,

<sup>1</sup> Nemeth 2018, pp. 271–272.

<sup>2</sup> Haardt 1991, p. xxv.

<sup>3</sup> Sebastian Luft (2012, p. 251) suggests that perhaps only Husserl's closest pupils and assistants, Eugen Fink and Ludwig Landgrebe were able to 'fully discern' the meaning of the reduction.

<sup>4</sup> Luft 2012, p. 243.

<sup>5</sup> See e. g. Shiyon 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Nemeth (1991, p. x) points to Shpet's exceptional — at the time — readiness to follow Husserl in his new direction. He writes that few if any of the members of the Göttingen circle 'were willing to take up the call for philosophy as a rigorous science.

I argue that for Shpet, as for Husserl, the phenomenological reduction was a *non*-metaphysical step that had to be taken to reach a radically presuppositionless ground for philosophy.

Sebastian Luft writes that the reduction was so important for Husserl because ‘performing it meant overcoming with one stroke the problems concerning the foundations of knowledge’ that had originally ‘lured’ him into philosophy. ‘The reduction was an attempt to overcome all doubts by discovering an indubitable foundation for knowledge.’<sup>1</sup> As Luft summarizes, Husserl’s method for achieving such a foundation amounted to taking the *most basic* assumption (‘the world exists’) and suspending it.<sup>2</sup> This assumption is what Husserl refers to as the ‘general thesis’ that defines the natural attitude. The natural attitude thus accommodates an implicit prejudice, which Luft (like Shpet above) characterizes as Husserl’s ‘realism’: in the natural attitude, we take the world as existing ‘*independently* of anybody experiencing it’.<sup>3</sup> Yet one can always doubt one’s experience and perception of the world: our knowledge is limited by our meagre physical (and mental, even spiritual) abilities.

However, from the phenomenological perspective a sceptical negation of the perceived reality ‘misses the point’ of what the natural attitude can provide. One cannot negate it without ‘inadvertently being in another position *from which* one enacts such a negation’, Luft writes. Phenomenology must therefore be a presuppositionless description of the given, which does not criticize or refute the general thesis, but puts it ‘in parentheses’. ‘What is of interest to the phenomenologist is not the object before me, but the experience of the object, regardless of whether this experience is actual or imagined or dreamed, whether or not the objects actually exist or are figments of my imagination’, Luft concludes.<sup>4</sup>

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Even those personally closest to Husserl who had spent years under his tutelage were unwilling or unable to sound the clarion so forthrightly and so modestly, and this by a foreigner who could not have had any motive other than one based in conviction’.

<sup>1</sup> Luft 2012, p. 245.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Luft 2012, p. 246.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Søren Overgaard (2002, p. 214) clarifies that the reduction does not amount to ‘looking away from the “being” of the natural world with its perceived and perceivable objects [...]’ Instead, the ‘thematic focus of transcendental phenomenology

Shpet's phenomenological standpoint, with its strong ontological emphasis, certainly differs from Husserl's. Yet his treatment of the *epoché* appears to follow Husserl's original idea of parenthesizing the world as seen in the natural attitude and limiting the phenomenological study to the being of pure consciousness.<sup>1</sup> Shpet argues against interpreting consciousness and its content naturalistically, psychologically, or through any other theory, and instead demands that it be approached according to its own way of being. He conceives the task of phenomenology as the uncovering of the precise manner of this being. At the same time, Shpet considers phenomenology as a method for acquiring indubitable philosophical knowledge, free from the threat of scepticism and relativism. It can secure its own truthfulness by tracing back each of its steps and making sure they are infallible.<sup>2</sup> This is ultimately what the reduction amounts to for Shpet: it is the switch to a properly philosophical viewpoint, in which the philosopher can analyse and evaluate his or her own cognition purely and essentially, without any contingent clutter. Thus, Shpet writes, 'Phenomenology is not revelation [...] its merits should be assessed above all by *how* it arrives at its results'.<sup>3</sup> He summarizes this later as follows:

After all the reductions are carried out phenomenology turns out to be a discipline rigorously shut up in its own shell — this thanks to the rigor and *purity* of its absolute object. It is free not only from all

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is not the objects themselves and their properties (these constitute the theme of the sciences of the natural attitude), but precisely on the being of objects and the world; more precisely, transcendental phenomenology seeks to answer the question, how there can be objects and a world for me, given in my perceptual experiences, etc.'

<sup>1</sup> During the decades of Thomas Nemeth's pioneering research on Shpet's phenomenology, his opinion regarding the latter's success in interpreting Husserl's reduction has changed somewhat. In 2009 (p. 134) Nemeth still finds that Shpet's phenomenology 'is an eidetic phenomenology, but not a transcendental one', whereas in 2018 (p. 273) he asserts that 'there is no reason why we cannot label Shpet's program up to this point also as transcendental phenomenology'.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet (1991, p. 70) writes: 'By its essence phenomenology has no need to hurry justifying and establishing its methods. Rather, they must be established and justified within the very process of phenomenological work.'

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 5.

theoretical and practical presuppositions, but it also operates only with material that it is able to establish by itself. Being the foundation of all philosophical as well as special knowledge, phenomenology ‘accepts’ nothing. It ‘has’ only itself.<sup>1</sup>

Yet Shpet’s ontological reading of phenomenology is by no means unproblematic and requires further analysis. For example, Nemeth’s concern is that even though Shpet seems at first to accept Husserl’s turn, he later ‘drops or discards’ it to reach his independent goal of describing being in all its forms. Nemeth suggests that Shpet’s ultimate goal is to ‘return to the actual, which is in danger of being abandoned in the reduction’.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, this possibility seems plausible as we read through the fourth chapter of *Iavlennie i smysl*, where Shpet discusses the problems of phenomenological method. Husserl, opening his own analysis of this topic, writes:

Once the difficulties of the first beginnings have been overcome, we perceive [the field of eidetic knowledge] stretching endlessly in every direction. The variety of the species and forms of experience with their essential natures real and intentional is indeed inexhaustible; and correspondingly endless is the variety of the essential connexions and apodictically necessary truths that have their ground in these. Thus this infinite field of the *a priori* of consciousness which in its unique singularity has never yet come to its own, never strictly been seen at all, must now be brought under cultivation and the full value of fruitage drawn from it.<sup>3</sup>

‘But how [to] find the right beginning?’ Husserl asks. ‘The new field does not lie spread before our gaze crowded with given products, so that we could simply grasp them, confident of being able to make them objects of our science; nor can we be sure of the method we need for our

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> Nemeth 2009, p. 128.

<sup>3</sup> Husserl 1967, p. 187.

advance'.<sup>1</sup> Addressing the same issue, Shpet asserts that phenomenology must rely purely on intuition. He writes that phenomenology 'can satisfy itself only by analysing definite cases and examples and thereby establish the essence of Objects and relations through a purely exemplificational analysis'. But how can phenomenology ensure the validity of its intuitions, he asks? Shpet asserts that 'unclarity and vagueness' are connected with intuiting, 'and sometimes even preponderately so'.<sup>2</sup>

### 2.1.2. Looking for Clarity

Shpet asserts that in coming across intuitions of various degrees of nearness or remoteness, we must bring them to '*absolute nearness*', where they attain for us 'complete clarity', and we may reach a 'perfect degree of intuitedness'.<sup>3</sup> But the question arises of how to recognize an intuition that has been brought to complete clarity, to its absolutely highest degree of nearness and immediate intuitive givenness. What makes an intuition *evident*, Shpet asks; what conditions of consciousness produce immediacy for us?<sup>4</sup> The questions lead Shpet to his perplexing example, which, presented about halfway through *Iavlenie i smysl*, indicates a turning point from his description of Husserl's original thought. Shpet writes:

During these reflections I approached the window. From the window, I saw the city; I saw the roofs of houses and a far-off mountain, but all were covered with fog. I thought: 'The fog is rolling in from the sea.' All of a sudden, I noticed a *negro*<sup>5</sup> on the neighbouring roof, his head in black curls, his shoulders like a grey canvas coat. It must be an illusion — why would there be a black man on the *roof*? But why on earth is this *impossible*? More importantly, why is there a *black* man on

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1991, pp. 69–70.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 73.

<sup>4</sup> Shpet 1991, pp. 74–76.

<sup>5</sup> Shpet uses the term '*negr*'. My translation is modified from Thomas Nemeth's earlier translation from 1991. In what follows I will replace Shpet's term with 'black man'.

the roof? But I immediately put this doubt aside. I have encountered a number of [people of various origins — LB] here. *Evidently* it is a black man! But why has he not *changed* his position for such a long time? It has been too long for a *man* to be motionless. *Evidently* it is a chimney and not a black man!<sup>1</sup>

According to Shpet, what the example demonstrates is that even though his sensuous intuition was brought to the ‘highest possible degree of clarity’, he remained unsatisfied. His sensual ‘evidently’ was overcome by another ‘evidently’. ‘What was this second “evidence”?’ Shpet asks. ‘From the example there is clearly every reason to term the second “evidence” rational, and moreover rational in the mentioned sense: My intuition did not agree with the *whole* of my experience.’ As Shpet suggests, his initial intuition was corrected by the notions of possibility and impossibility; obviously, the ‘rational entered into my consciousness as the *motivation* for my assertions concerning what is intuitively seen’.<sup>2</sup>

Maja Soboleva has convincingly argued that Shpet’s example takes him back to a pre-transcendental phenomenological position. In her opinion Shpet’s treatment of Husserl’s method ‘awakens in any unbiased reader doubt about whether [Shpet’s] phenomenology as a descriptive science represents a new step in the development of philosophical thought’. Soboleva suggests that Shpet fails to appreciate the basic principle of transcendental phenomenology: ‘that the evidence of the given is nothing but the givenness of the evident’.<sup>3</sup> Shpet’s concern about the ‘correctness’ of his sensuous intuition certainly raises such a question. When Husserl writes about the intentionality of experiences, stating that ‘in so far as they are a consciousness of something they are said to be “*intentionally related*” to this something’, he also asserts:

We must, however, be quite clear on this point that *there is no question here of a relation between a psychological event — called experience*

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1991, pp. 80–81.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 81.

<sup>3</sup> Soboleva 2019, pp. 63–64.

(*Erlebnis*) — and some other real existent (*Dasein*) — called Object — or of a *psychological connexion* obtaining between the one and the other *in objective reality*. On the contrary, we are concerned with experiences in their essential purity, with *pure essences*, and with that which is *involved in the essence 'a priori', in unconditioned necessity*.<sup>1</sup>

Dermot Moran suggests that Husserl acknowledges that phenomenology is indeed in one sense fallible. We can come up with the wrong data, for example, if I have a toothache and I feel it in a certain tooth, which is in fact healthy. Thus, I have 'misperceived', Moran writes. 'But if I attend purely to the feeling of toothache, I have an evident and adequate perception.'<sup>2</sup> According to Moran, such a mistaken intuition should from Husserl's perspective be treated as some kind of misidentification, a lack of attention, or misdescription. However, Moran suggests that 'Husserl never seems to have seriously entertained that we could be absolutely misled by what appeared in consciousness, provided we attend only to what is given as it is given'. Phenomenology, as Moran describes, becomes possible when we come to question the very possibility of cognition and direct our analysis to it; when we raise the questions concerning the manner in which thinking refers to its object, and regarding the nature of the connection between the intentional object and the external world. 'We are now no longer interested in consciousness and cognition as occurrent facts or episodes in the world.'<sup>3</sup> All claims of validity have thus been disowned.

Shpet acknowledges the complexity of his own example, writing that the motivation he mentioned is an appeal to an intuition in the past, which he 'believes in more' than is given in immediate intuition. Is what appears rational now only so by virtue of the past? Shpet asks; 'In this analysis so much "theory" has been introduced that it is not apparent what phenomenological significance "present" experience can have. Indeed, the reference to the "past" can easily turn into a *regressus*

<sup>1</sup> Husserl 1967, pp. 119–120.

<sup>2</sup> Moran 2000, pp. 130–131.

<sup>3</sup> Moran 2000, p. 145.

*in infinitum* towards all our experience.<sup>1</sup> Considering the role of past experiences in one's current intuition, Shpet writes:

As for 'theories', we must free ourselves from them. First of all, <in our example> the something theoretical basically was a 'black man'. Actually what I saw was something 'black' along with something 'grey' in the 'fog', etc. But all the same I had reason to say 'black man' (in quotation marks), i. e., *like* a black man. My argument now assumes, as it were, the following form. Let us assume that it is a black man. The objection runs, however, that it does not belong to the 'essence' of a black man that he be on a roof. Yet another objection runs: It does not belong to the essence of a black man that he be here, etc. Whether such objections actually exist or not is unimportant. What is important is that I come to a halt at the *motive* for my rejection <of the theoretical>, viz. the immobility <of what is perceived>. Mobility actually belongs to the essence of 'man', and in ideal intuition for the 'ideal man' to be motionless is, *evidently*, nonsense.<sup>2</sup>

Shpet asserts that the topic of his discussion is thus an essence, that is, an ideal object, which has 'in general neither past nor a present'. Consequently, he observes that 'in fact, ideal intuitions motivate the evidence of sensuous intuitions, and ideal objects motivate sensuous objects'.<sup>3</sup> What then is the relationship between the sensuous and the ideal, Shpet asks.

In order to pass to this question let us turn our attention to what we said a moment ago about the 'black man'. Undoubtedly our presentation at the point where we said that the black man properly is 'as though it were a black man', a 'black man' (in quotation marks), etc. had to remain *unclear*. It had to remain unclear how and what distinguishes a 'black man', taken theoretically, and a black man, taken phenomenologically. This unclarity of presentation arose owing entirely

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1991, 81.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Translation modified.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 82.

to the difficulty involved in verbally presenting the thoughts occurring in the various 'attitudes' but which we are forced to express by means of words alone. Everyone who attempts to carry it out meets this difficulty of expressing his or her thought. Nevertheless the thought itself remains clear both in thinking it over and in its presentation provided we *understand* what we properly *mean* by the word in each individual case.<sup>1</sup>

As Shpet repeats, by 'black man' he had meant a 'man', by which he meant a complex of visual sensations. The new factor of understanding or comprehension thus comes to the fore of the phenomenological investigation, he asserts. What do we *mean* when we perceive a sensual object in this or that way, and associate it with this or that ideal object? What is the role of this act of understanding, 'how is it connected with the words <expressed> and in general with rational (concepts), and finally how can it help us resolve our chief problem?' Shpet asks.<sup>2</sup>

Yet when Husserl describes phenomenology as an eidetic science in *Ideas*, he seems to have something different in mind. For him the eidetic description of the transcendently given is not a 'penetration' ('*pronikanie naskvoz*'),<sup>3</sup> as in Shpet's vocabulary, into the essence of the given object. Neither is his concern regarding the correct method of apprehending essences with perfect clarity a problem of grasping the 'right' essence. Husserl writes about the process of clarifying the intuition, that is, of bringing it to the level of eidetic seeing. He warns his reader that this method should be understood precisely as a process, since 'as a rule no pure intuitions are present, and there are no pure empty presentations passing over into pure intuitions; it is the *impure intuitions* which, as intermediate grades maybe, play the chief part, bringing their objective matter on certain sides or in certain phases intuitively before us, and on the other sides or in other phases yielding mere empty presentations'.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1991, pp. 82–83. Translation modified.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 83.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1914b, p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> Husserl 1967, p. 196.

The object of the phenomenological study is not the ‘real world’ objects, as in the natural attitude, but the reduced objects-as-intuited. ‘The phenomenologically particular object’, Husserl writes, is the object-in-experience ‘in the whole wealth of its concreteness, precisely as it participates in the flow of experience, with the precise determinacy or indeterminacy with which it lets its thing appear, now in this aspect, now in that, and with just that distinctness or mistiness, that fluctuating clearness and intermittent obscurity, and so forth, which is peculiar to it’. Husserl emphasizes that it is indeed ‘*only the individual* element which phenomenology ignores, whilst it raises the whole essential content in its concrete fullness into eidetic consciousness’. Finally, Husserl concludes that we can ‘see at once that a conceptual and terminological *fixation* of this and every similar flowing *concretum* is not to be thought of’.<sup>1</sup>

While there should thus be no discussion of determining ‘eidetic singularities’ in the realm of Husserl’s phenomenological description, he writes that the case is entirely different with essences ‘at a *higher specific level*’. These are, Husserl argues, ‘susceptible of stable distinction, unbroken self-identity, and strict conceptual apprehension’. What he is referring to here are the ‘generic essences’ of perception, such as the perception ‘of physical thinghood, of animal natures, and the like; likewise of memory, empathy, will, and so forth, in their generality’.<sup>2</sup> Thus, Husserl again asserts that the experience in general, *cogitation*, is to be understood as the subject matter of phenomenology, and it is that experience that can be brought into the absolute clarity of givenness. He compares the work of the phenomenologist with that of the geometer who freely imagines any possible shapes, producing in his mind ‘an infinite number of new creations’ with the ‘freedom which opens up to him for the first time an entry into the spacious realms of essential possibility with their infinite horizons of essential knowledge’. The drawings, as Husserl asserts, only follow ‘*after* the constructions of fancy’, and they serve ‘chiefly to fix stages in the process already

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<sup>1</sup> Husserl 1967, p. 209.

<sup>2</sup> Husserl 1967, p. 210.

previously gone through, thereby making it easier to bring it back to consciousness once again'.<sup>1</sup>

It is evident that Shpet's idea of an eidetic science does not correspond to the method Husserl promotes in *Ideas*. Soboleva summarizes that 'Husserlian essence is a formal notion education, εἶδος [...]. Shpet, to the contrary, in the spirit of Plato, interprets essence as atemporal substantive being'.<sup>2</sup> Shpet appears to suggest that each individual thing has its own essence and that this essence, furthermore, can be discovered through phenomenological elucidation. The difference is also revealed in how Husserl seems at first to provide a rather similar example to Shpet's vision of a man/chimney on the roof, and how he then resolves his problem in a manner entirely different from Shpet's. Husserl writes that there is often a 'vague sense of distance' in the given data, and that the essence it produces can likewise 'only be something imperfect'.<sup>3</sup> He writes:

where the *single intuitions* which underlie our apprehension of the essence are on a lower plane of clearness, so *also* are the *apprehensions of the essence*, and correlatively of the *object apprehended* has an 'unclear' meaning, it has its disorderly mixtures, its lack of proper distinctions both within and without. It is impossibility or 'only roughly' possible to decide whether what is apprehended now here and now there is the same (the same Being) or something different [...]<sup>4</sup>

And yet, as Husserl writes, we must bring 'to complete clearness, what at any time floats before us shifting and unclear'. He now observes that for every essence there exists, 'so to speak, an *absolute nearness*, in which its givenness is in respect of this graded series absolute, i. e., *pure self-givenness*'. Husserl asserts that in such a case we are not only aware of the given as given, 'but it confronts us as a self given *in its purity, wholly*

<sup>1</sup> Husserl 1967, pp. 199–200.

<sup>2</sup> Soboleva 2019, p. 67.

<sup>3</sup> Husserl 1967, p. 193.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Later, when Husserl (1967, p. 199) describes the nature of 'outer perception', he points out that for all the possible differences of clearness which can take place 'perception is not ordinarily conditioned by fog'.

and entirely as it is in itself'. Any unclarity in such a seeing concerns the 'self-given phase, which therefore does not pass within the circle of light reserved for that which is given pure'. Most importantly, Husserl thus emphasizes his transcendental standpoint: 'We do not identify the "self-given" with the "primordially given", with the "embodied"'. Instead, to bring an unclear intuition to absolute clarity is to discover and examine it exactly in its particular unclarity: intuitions should be 'given a corresponding value' to the one in which the intended appears.<sup>1</sup> Husserl asserts that one should speak of 'exhibiting the clear "in itself" through the unclear'.<sup>2</sup> We observe that Shpet's understanding is quite different. In seeking a definition of 'immediacy' ('neposredstvennost') and 'self-giveness' ('samo-ochevidnost'), he asserts that from the perspective of phenomenology 'with its principle of all principles there can be only one answer, viz., there, where something that is intellectually seen *itself* actually stands before us as *ob-ject* (*pred-met*), where it is in truth *perceived* (*vosprinimaetsia*), in short, where it is given to us in its *originary givenness*.<sup>3</sup>

According to Soboleva from this differing understanding of evidence and the nature of phenomenological eidetics 'flows an endless row of other no less principled distinctions' between Shpet and Husserl.<sup>4</sup> The point indeed marks the beginning of a path that will lead Shpet to question Husserl's treatment of sense-bestowal, which eventually directs his theory to an original conception of hermeneutic phenomenology. In Soboleva's view the most problematic part of Shpet's interpretation is that his version of eidetic intuition actually takes him back to subject-object dualism.<sup>5</sup> I agree with many aspects of Soboleva's reading: Shpet's development of the questions of phenomenology as an eidetic science, of evidence, and of conceptual expression hardly follows Husserl's thought in *Ideas*. Nevertheless, as I will try to show, Shpet's reasoning is not entirely incompatible with Husserl's phenomenology. In particular,

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<sup>1</sup> Husserl 1967, p. 194.

<sup>2</sup> Husserl 1967, p. 196.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 76. (Shpet 1914b, p. 99.)

<sup>4</sup> Soboleva 2019, p. 67.

<sup>5</sup> Soboleva 2019, p. 68.

I aim to demonstrate that Shpet does, in spite of everything, remain firmly committed to the transcendental turn.

Without much of an introduction, Shpet now moves on to a problem of conceptual presentation. He states that he is presently interested in one question: 'How in general are concepts used for the purposes of knowledge; how are they its instruments?' Shpet's stated goal is to find grounds for the claim that concepts can be reliably used not only in discourse, but also in description. He writes that the question is 'merely the consequence of a doubt concerning the role of concepts, a doubt resulting from the fact that logic has not just failed to prove a satisfactory answer to these questions but actually has provided no answer at all. Logic has simply passed over this matter, taking it as something which "stands to reason"'.<sup>1</sup>

Shpet makes an important discovery, which will strongly direct his thought's evolution when he detects an intrinsic connection between essences (as the objects of phenomenological investigation) and concepts. He writes that ideal objects are 'objects which *in their essence* find expression *in concepts*'.<sup>2</sup> Agreeing with Husserl, Shpet also points out that although an eidetic science, phenomenology cannot follow the model of mathematical disciplines, which 'do *not* proceed *by description*'.<sup>3</sup> Husserl writes that 'geometry, for instance, does not grasp in single intuitions, describe and classify in order the lowest eidetic differences, the numberless spatial figures that can be drawn in space, as do the descriptive natural sciences in respect of empirical natural formations'.<sup>4</sup> Instead, it constructs its truths axiologically, and its ideal concepts are exact and unambiguous. (Husserl provides examples of 'fundamental constructs' such as the 'ideas of body, surface, point, angle, and the like'.<sup>5</sup>) Husserl

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 85.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 86. Here, Shpet seems to be referring to a point which Husserl presents only much later in *Ideas*, at the end of its third section. Husserl (1967, p. 347) writes that 'everything remembered or fancied can, as such, have its meaning (*Meinung*) in the noematic sense (and indeed as noematic nucleus) of any act whatsoever *can be expressed conceptually* (*durch "Bedeutungen"*)'. Shpet returns to this issue at the end of his book.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1991, pp. 86–87; Husserl 1967, p. 204.

<sup>4</sup> Husserl 1967, p. 204.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

juxtaposes the ideal concepts of mathematics and geometry with the vastly different descriptive concepts that are what phenomenology must define for itself:

Geometrical concepts are ‘*ideal*’ concepts; they express something which one cannot ‘see’; their ‘origin,’ and therefore their content also, is essentially other than that of the *descriptive concepts* as concepts which express the essential nature of things as drawn directly from simple intuition, and not anything ‘ideal’. Exact concepts have their correlates in essences, which have the character of ‘*Ideas*’ in the Kantian sense. Over against these Ideas or ideal essences stand the *morphological essences*, as correlates of descriptive concepts.<sup>1</sup>

Instead of Kantian ideas, Husserl’s phenomenology grasps in its descriptions the essential forms present in consciousness, as concrete essences, not through abstraction, but as eidetic *concreta*.<sup>2</sup> To find suitable conceptual expressions for such intuitively given essential data, Husserl writes, ‘we must indeed take them as we find them. And we do not find them otherwise than in a flux, and typical essences can in such a case be apprehended only in that essential intuition which can be immediately analysed’. Husserl, for now, takes his analysis no further than this, noting only that these fundamental problems are ‘still unsolved’, and that an attempt to answer them will be presented in ‘the sequel to these studies’.<sup>3</sup>

Shpet, too, states that we must ‘turn to a pure description of the intuitively given in its most concrete essence’. But at the same time he disagrees with Husserl’s conception of the essential intuition as an intuition of something concrete or individual, writing that ‘when the talk turns to logical expression and we address ourselves to concepts, we unwittingly feel embarrassed by this strange compound term “individual

<sup>1</sup> Husserl 1967, p. 208.

<sup>2</sup> Husserl 1967, pp. 208–209.

<sup>3</sup> Husserl 1967, pp. 207–208. Husserl has in mind *Ideas II*, which was published only posthumously. As Nemeth (1991, p. x) asserts, the themes of this text were however known to Shpet. According to Edith Stein’s testimony Husserl virtually read the manuscript of *Ideas II* during the lecture course ‘*Nature und Geist*’, which Shpet is known to have visited at least once.

concept”<sup>1</sup>. Thus, Shpet begins his analysis of the conceptual expression of concrete essences independently from Husserl's exposition of the same question in *Ideas*, and it indeed becomes his leading topic. Shpet stresses that he does ‘not want to discard *anything* from the problem of concept, conceived as an instrument of the theoretical and descriptive method’, and concludes his chapter:

Our question is now the following: We pointed out above that phenomenology would employ an unusual method were it to destroy life, to transform living cognition, living being, into an herbarium. But how is it possible to preserve the living if the means to preserve it amounts in essence to the destruction of the variety of life, preserving only its scheme and skeleton? *How* does the logical *concept* become an instrument of life and not its destroyer?<sup>2</sup>

Shpet's original question regarding being in all its forms has thus been broadened, but he argues that the underlying interest remains the same: ‘We ask of both intuition as well as of a concept: How does the actual exist? How do we arrive at it, and as a specific question within this general problem, how is the actual “expressed,” and more specifically, how is it expressed “conceptually”?’ For Shpet now the problem of realism (or nominalism), of the relation between experiencing and ideal intuition, between evidence and rational motivation, between actuality and truth, between intuition and ‘logos’ comes down to this ‘one point’.<sup>3</sup>

## 2.2. ‘BUT WHERE DOES SENSE-BESTOWAL COME FROM?’

In the second Parisian letter to Husserl, written some three weeks after the initial one, Shpet reports a change in his views concerning some of the central questions of phenomenology. He had received the

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1991, pp. 89–90.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 90.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 91.

newly published second edition of Husserl's first five investigations and writes to thank him: 'The book brought me much joy, though many troubles also. My article again occupies first priority in my work'.<sup>1</sup> Shpet announces that reading the revised *Logical Investigations* had led him to 'radically rework his entire exposition (*izlozhenie*)': 'The fifth part of my work is expanding in particular — relying on the *Untersuchungen* and wishing to review the study of "meaning" more fully, I divided its contents into parts five and six'.<sup>2</sup> However, Shpet states that he is still waiting for the last investigation to draw a satisfactory conclusion for his own work and adds that he had also anxiously waited for 'some explanations in the "Foreword", but... I had to turn my impatience into patience!'<sup>3</sup>

Correspondingly, the fifth chapter of *Iavlenie i smysl* is where Shpet clearly marks his departure from Husserl's original exposition: by questioning his analysis of the noema, by claiming that he fails to properly address the problem of sense-bestowal, and by suggesting that he has not accounted for a specific, third form of being (and its corresponding intuition), namely, the social being. Unsurprisingly, then, analyses of the relationship of Shpet's thought with Husserl's phenomenology have focused predominantly on these topics.<sup>4</sup> The way in which Shpet's 'hermeneutic turn' in the last part of *Iavlenie i smysl* leads to his later theory of culture and language has also been repeatedly discussed.<sup>5</sup> In the remaining part of the present chapter I will offer my own interpretation.

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1996, p. 124. By 'article', Shpet is referring to the manuscript of *Iavlenie i smysl*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1996, p. 125.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Seifrid (2009) and Anna Shiyan (2015) especially have advocated that Shpet essentially fails to follow Husserl. Another opinion has been offered by Aleksei Savin (2016) and Natal'ia Artemenko (2017), as well as Marina Bykova (2016), who instead associate Shpet's hermeneutic phenomenology with Husserl's later period of genetic phenomenology, and possibly also with the tradition established by Heidegger and Gadamer.

<sup>5</sup> This genesis has been analysed, for example, by Thomas Nemeth (2009 and 2018), Giulietta Ottaviano (2013), Natal'ia Artemenko (2017, 2018), Maryse Dennes (2006, 2010), Aleksei Savin (2015, 2016), Anna Shiyan (2015), and Thomas Seifrid (2009).

### 2.2.1. Shpet on the Noematic Sinn

Shpet's deviation from Husserl's presentation appears with little warning. In discussing the method of phenomenological description of different species of being and their modes of givenness, Shpet suddenly observes:

what strikes the eye here is that a peculiar species of empirical being is left out, namely *social* being ('bytie *sotsial'noe*'), which, according to the position we have taken, must have its own peculiar datum and its own peculiar mode of cognition. At the very start a simple descriptive analysis of this species of being reveals that we must actually be dealing here with a quite distinctive mode of cognition in which so-called empathy and acts similar to it play a fundamental role. Husserl recognizes that in this species of 'viewing' (*Ansehen*) we have an 'intuitive, presentive' viewing. He refuses to recognize it, however, as 'an act that is presentive of something *originarily*'.<sup>1</sup> This, it seems to us, is the reason for the fact that in the place mentioned Husserl does not pause to isolate social being as a peculiar species of being.<sup>2</sup>

Shpet's observation is surprising given that he has not mentioned the social being in any way before this. Again, the reader is left wondering whether Shpet has actually forgotten about the phenomenological reduction and taken up the study of 'intellectual and cultural formations that presuppose the natural attitude', as Nemeth doubts.<sup>3</sup> However,

<sup>1</sup> Shpet is referring to the very beginning of *Ideas* where Husserl (1967, pp. 51–52) writes: 'In "outer perception" we have primordial experience of physical things, but in memory or anticipatory expectation this is no longer the case; we have primordial experience of ourselves and our states of consciousness in the so-called inner or self-perception, but not of others and their vital experiences in and through "empathy". We "behold the living experiences of others" through the perception of their bodily behaviour. This beholding in the case of empathy is indeed intuitional dator, yet no longer a *primordially* dator act'.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 100. (Shpet 1914b, pp. 128–129.)

<sup>3</sup> Nemeth 2009, p. 127.

it is soon clear that what Shpet has in mind is actually related to the minutiae of the descriptive method of transcendental phenomenology itself. He asserts that an elucidation of his question is of fundamental importance, 'since the vistas opened up by such an analysis reveal all objects without exception, both those of scientific knowledge as well as those of philosophical knowledge, in a completely new way'. Indeed, Shpet argues that 'phenomenology itself undergoes a significant modification in this process'.<sup>1</sup>

Shpet believes that an investigation of the nature of social being reveals something crucial about the nature of consciousness itself. It leads, he writes, 'to the recognition of a factor that has been ignored up to now, a factor that makes a cognition merely by the fact that it *exists* show *how* it *exists*'.<sup>2</sup> Shpet refers to a correlation between the experiencing and the eidetic intuition and asks how it happens that 'we are not only in possession of intuitions, as the content of our knowledge, but also that we *use* intuitions as means'.<sup>3</sup> While the link between Shpet's earlier analyses and the present questions appears ambiguous at this point, he clarifies it by entering the discussion of sense-bestowal, as presented by Husserl. Shpet writes:

Throughout the breadth of the phenomenological domain a large role is played, in Husserl's opinion, by the remarkable 'duality in unity' of *sensuous* ὕλη and *intentional* μορφή, which is revealed in an immanent reflection on mental processes. Namely, among mental processes we must single out those that are 'primary contents', that is, '*sensuous*' mental processes or '*sensation-contents*'. These are sensuous Data of colour, sound, pleasure, and so forth. These concrete Data of a mental process enter as components in some other more inclusive concrete mental processes which, as a whole, are intentional, and, more particularly, we find those sensuous moments overlaid by a stratum which, as it were, 'animates', which *bestows sense* (or essentially involves

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 100.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 102.

a bestowing of sense) — a stratum by which precisely the concrete intensive mental process arises from the *sensuous, which has in itself nothing pertaining to intentionality*.<sup>1</sup>

As Shpet explains, this notion adds up to nothing other than ‘that which specifically characterises consciousness’, when we say that it points to something of which it is the consciousness: ‘In order to avoid equivocation Husserl introduces the special term *noesis*, or *noetic moment*, to designate this moment [of sense-bestowal]’. Shpet asserts that the question of sense-bestowal, introduced along with *noesis*, should obviously now become the centre of the phenomenologist’s attention. ‘Indeed, up to now we knew only that intentionality, the directedness of consciousness to *something*, belongs to the essence of consciousness and that consciousness is the consciousness *of something*. But where does sense-bestowal come from?’<sup>2</sup>

In late February 1914 Shpet wrote to Husserl again, now already from Moscow, drawing his attention to the parts of *Ideas* that troubled him. One of them was the question of noematic sense:

I have already said this once: it is not clear to me how ‘meaning’ can be only an abstract form when it is simultaneously the ‘content’ of the noema. [...] The process of achieving concrete meaning, as the object in the ‘How of its givenness’ (*Gegebenheitsweisen*) [...],<sup>3</sup> it seems to me, forces us to cross the boundary of ‘delimitation of the essence “noematic meaning”’,<sup>4</sup> the delimitation which avoids ‘all “subjective” expressions’ and among them [the expression] ‘*given*’.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 103.

<sup>3</sup> Husserl (1967, p. 368) writes that the ‘*Sinn*’ is indeed ‘*not a concrete essence in the constitution of the noema as a whole, but a kind of abstract form that dwells in it*’.

<sup>4</sup> This is the title of Husserl’s section § 130 in *Ideas* (see Husserl 1967, p. 363).

<sup>5</sup> Shpet 1996, p. 127.

Although Nemeth notes that Shpet's 'misunderstanding' was afterwards corrected by Husserl in his response to the former,<sup>1</sup> it is evident that the problematic nature of sense and its role in the noema remain far from resolved from the perspective of Shpet's theory. In the fifth and sixth chapters of *Iavlenie i smysl* he attempts to resolve these issues.

In *Ideas* Husserl argues that every intentional experience harbours in itself a 'meaning' thanks to its noetic phase. The noetic phases make the experience 'meaningful', and they exist in correlation with a corresponding 'noematic content', or 'noema'.<sup>2</sup> Famously, Husserl defines noema as the *intended* (perceived, judged, remembered, etc.) *as such*, and adds: 'We must everywhere take the noematic correlate, which (in a very extended meaning of the term) is here referred to as "meaning" (*Sinn*) precisely as it lies "immanent" in the experience of perception, of judgment, of liking, and so forth [...]'<sup>3</sup> However, Husserl's discussion of the conceptual pair of noesis and noema in *Ideas* is not entirely coherent, which is something Shpet also appears to notice. He doubts that Husserl's analysis has failed to account for the properly sense-bestowing moment in the noema and writes, 'something is disclosed that is *not really inherent*' in it.<sup>4</sup> Shpet continues, asserting that the sense

forms only, as it were, a certain central stratum, or *core*, on which essentially the other moments are founded. These other moments, however, can, in an extended construction, be designated as 'sense-moments'. The full noema consists of different strata grouped around this core, around a pure '*objective sense*'. The latter arises as something identical in all phenomenological descriptions, despite their variety and the different characteristics integrally inherent in the given. These characteristics depend upon whether our concern is the sense of something perceived or remembered or imagined, etc.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nemeth 2009, p. 129. See Husserl's answer to Shpet in *Logos* No. 3 (1992), pp. 236–237.

<sup>2</sup> Husserl 1967, p. 257.

<sup>3</sup> Husserl 1967, p. 258.

<sup>4</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 104.

<sup>5</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 105.

Thus, the objective sense, as the 'core' of the noema, or the 'object simpliciter' is the 'something identical' which is 'perceived at one time, another time directly presentiated, a third time presented pictorially in a painting', Shpet writes, citing Husserl.<sup>1</sup> He asserts that this conclusion must serve as a starting point for his own analysis:

Actually here the whole mystery of the very being of our cognition is discerned and light is shed on its nature in the sense mentioned above, i. e. on the nature of its being. We know cognition, qua being, as a *logical being*. In accordance with the entire spirit of the phenomenological doctrine of the correlation between the noesis and the noema the logical is evidently also one of the strata in the noesis and the noema, one of the acts in the mental process as a whole. Evidently, moreover, if we seek clarification of the essence of this being in its role as a cognitive instrument the more mysterious it is that this correlation pervades equally all spheres of the different attitudes while maintaining their identity proper.<sup>2</sup>

Shpet's deviation from Husserl's discussion, as well as the reason for it, become evident here. What he finds lacking in Husserl's treatment of the noematic sense is the logical stratum of meaning. Shpet continues that the central core of the noema, its 'object simpliciter', is indeed '*apprehended by a logical concept*', and that it becomes fixed in it. The moment of intuitive sense-bestowal proves an increasingly complex issue in Shpet's theory. As he attempted to show with the example of the man/chimney on the roof, the intention of an object simply *intended as such* does not grasp the logical *meaning* of the intention, because it fails to account for the rationally conceived context of the full experience. Shpet asks, can it belong to the essence of the intuitive acts of seeing, remembering, judging, and so on to 'give life' to the object simpliciter? Or does the 'necessary coexistence' of sense-bestowal and 'making something logical' have another, separate foundation?<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid. See Husserl 1967, p. 266.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 106.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Shpet only refers to *Logical Investigations* once during this discussion, and even then, merely in a footnote,<sup>1</sup> but it is obviously an important source for his present inquiry. Shpet, as it were, combines two lines of Husserl's argument: alongside discovering the consciousness and its object in their intentional correlation, as is Husserl's method in *Ideas*, he returns to the latter's earlier question of meaning intention and meaning fulfilment. As Shpet previously posed his two interconnected questions — how do we arrive at the actually existing, and how is it expressed conceptually?<sup>2</sup> — he now asks, what is a 'sense', and how does it relate to the object of intuition, the object simpliciter? Returning to the description of the noema's structure, as he finds it in *Ideas*, Shpet writes:

In every noema there is [...] a pure objective something as a point of unity, and we can distinguish regarding the noema two concepts of object: this pure point of unity, the *noematic 'object simpliciter'*, and the '*object in the How of its determinations*'. "The "sense"", that is to say, '*is this noematic "Object in the How"*', with all that which the *description characterized above* is able to find evidently in it and to express conceptually'. The sense, in general, can change from noema to noema, but it can remain absolutely alike and can even be characterized as 'identical'. There is, however, no noema in which sense would be wanting, and there is no noema which lacks its necessary center, point of unity, the pure determinable X. It is evident, on the other hand, that because of the need for sense to have a 'bearer' not only does each sense have an 'object' but different senses <can> also refer to the *same* object.<sup>3</sup>

'We undoubtedly sense some deficiency in all this', Shpet concludes. In his view it appears 'unintelligible how predicative determinations (of being remembered, perceived, etc.) of an object can *exhaust* the noema'. Moreover, it remains unclear to Shpet how predicative determinations

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<sup>1</sup> The footnote reads: 'In fact it was precisely from this side that Husserl himself came to the idea of phenomenology in the second of his "Logical Investigations." In particular, cf. Investigation I' (Shpet 1991, p. 119).

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 91.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 111.

alone could bring about the sense of the noema. On the contrary, he finds it evident that a sense must inhere 'immanently in the *logical something* because the claim of a sense-bestowing role for the act of predication qualifying the object simply claims this'.<sup>1</sup> In other words, Shpet finds that a 'logical stratum' is necessary within the noema-noesis structure. But what is it, and what is its origin?

Shpet is not alone in noticing the discrepancy in Husserl's description of the noema, and it has indeed led to all but opposing interpretations of the noema's meaning and function. Among others, Robert Solomon has argued that Husserl's characterizations of the relationship between the noema, the noematic correlate, and intentional content leave much to be desired. In his opinion there is also some confusion regarding the relationship between the noema, the object, and the noematic *Sinn*. At times, Solomon writes, 'it appears that that the "full noema" (*das volle Noema*) is equivalent to the object; other times it is only equated with the *Sinn*. Sometimes the noema is said to *be a Sinn*; elsewhere it *has a Sinn*'.<sup>2</sup>

One of Husserl's 'spectacular insights' in *Ideas*, according to Solomon, was his reinterpretation of perception along lines of analysis 'that are usually reserved for such "conceptual" acts as asserting, believing, judging, doubting, and denying'.<sup>3</sup> Thus, while Gottlob Frege limited the notion of *Sinn* to verbal expressions, Husserl observed that it could be extended to all acts of consciousness, including perceptual acts; and the 'insertion' of the Husserlian *Sinn* took place precisely through his noema. What this means, in Solomon's words, is that even pure perception (prior to any judgement) gives rise to a type of 'opaque context' and perception itself becomes, to a certain degree 'opaque'. This claim, as Solomon notes, is as old as Kant, though it remains radical to this day: all acts are 'judgment and concept-laden'.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Solomon 1977, p. 172.

<sup>3</sup> Solomon 1977, p. 173.

<sup>4</sup> Solomon 1977, pp. 173–174. In Rosemary Lerner's (2004, p. 207) words, phenomenology's revolutionary approach to the problem of reason 'consists in proposing a radical reform of the meaning of λόγος', which had traditionally been reduced to the sphere of reasoning.

According to Solomon the main competing interpretations of the noema, the Gurwitsch and Føllesdal 'schools', both agree that noema is something *by virtue of which* the consciousness relates to objects.<sup>1</sup> Otherwise, the two interpretations come with vast differences. For Aron Gurwitsch,<sup>2</sup> Solomon writes, the noema is nothing other than the 'perceived as such'. But for this reason, Gurwitsch's conception of *Sinn* 'is extremely emasculated', because it comes to embody both the reference of an intuitive act, as well as its meaning, forming as a whole the 'noematic correlate'. In Solomon's opinion this makes it not only difficult to provide an adequate analysis of the noematic structure, but it also renders unclear why Husserl would have placed such importance on his conception of noema. In Gurwitsch's view, Solomon writes, 'the doctrine of the noema reduces to little more than a restatement of the epistemological platitude that we never simply "see" material objects, but only material objects from a certain perspective, within a certain context, and so on'.<sup>3</sup>

Gurwitsch's interpretation leaves nearly no reason for the introduction of the term *Sinn*, and it appears that *epoché* alone would suffice to bring the phenomenologist to a first-person viewpoint from which to describe the objects of his/her experience. Dagfinn Føllesdal's noema, on the other hand, is closely related to Frege's *Sinn* as the meaning of a linguistic expression. According to this view the noemata are abstract (non-perceptible) entities and are thus not perceived by the senses. Yet since the noema is what directs consciousness to its object, it must as a whole be 'perceivable'. Føllesdal solves the problem by arguing that the noema is made up of two components: the unchanging ('common to all acts that have the same content') part, and the varying, 'thetic' part. In Solomon's opinion Føllesdal's interpretation is valid, but it omits something vital in the case of perception compared with Gurwitsch's view. The meaning of any experience proves founded in language, while its source remains hidden from the phenomenological investigation.

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<sup>1</sup> Solomon 1977, p. 171. For one thing, noema is thus not itself the object of consciousness. Even this point itself, however, is obscured by Husserl's talk of the 'noematic content', according to Solomon.

<sup>2</sup> Solomon (1977, p. 170) also calls the Gurwitsch interpretation the 'orthodox view'.

<sup>3</sup> Solomon 1977, pp. 170–171.

The intuition, as the actual object of the phenomenologist's study, only 'colours' the linguistically defined *Sinn*.<sup>1</sup>

In attempting to overcome the problems of Gurtwisch and Føllesdal, Solomon suggests his own reading of the noema, which bears certain similarities to Shpet's understanding. Notably, both their interests lie more in the epistemic judgements regarding experience than the purely first-person experience of the world: they focus on the positing character of experience. To justify his viewpoint, Solomon asserts that although in *Ideas* Husserl begins his analysis of sense in the perceptual paradigm, his larger discussion is devoted to questions of the noema of judgement. 'That is where Husserl's primordial interests lie', he writes.<sup>2</sup> Like Shpet, Solomon emphasizes the importance of the notion that noema is not only an 'appearance', because it also has a *Sinn*. In other words, a 'noematic nucleus', as the sense, must be in one way or another separated from the changing characters of givenness that belong to it. Solomon writes that all perception therefore involves judgements, and we are always not just 'seeing' 'but always seeing-as', and the object of our intention is 'not simply a "this" but always a "what" as well'. As a consequence, Solomon argues, it must then also be deduced that every act explicitly or implicitly harbours a logical factor: our experience is always concept-laden or 'meaning-full'. The 'what' of our experience is *constituted* in a judgement.<sup>3</sup>

The affinity of this reading with Shpet's interpretation is evident. Yet the two commentators' conclusions differ markedly. Solomon sees Husserl's radical reinterpretation of the originally Brentanian thesis as essentially Kantian. In his opinion Husserl's 'essence' could indeed be fairly unproblematically translated into Kant's 'concept'. Shpet, on the other hand, was precisely struggling against what he conceived as a Kantian influence in Husserl's thinking. Conceiving Husserl to suggest that constituting a 'synthetical unity' of the object of consciousness amounted to the same as a sense-bestowal, Shpet asks: 'Are we not going back to Kant, although now a "Kant" in parentheses?'<sup>4</sup> In the last two

<sup>1</sup> Solomon 1977, pp. 175–177.

<sup>2</sup> Solomon 1977, p. 171.

<sup>3</sup> Solomon 1977, p. 177.

<sup>4</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 103. For a clarification of Husserl's synthesis and its relationship with Kant see Jansen 2015.

chapters of his book Shpet attempts to give a non-Kantian (positive) definition of phenomenological sense. He understands sense not as the 'object in its determinant How but as the authentic sense', which is not an abstract form but is '*internally inherent in the object itself, its intimate something*'. Shpet argues that sense is therefore not only 'inherent in the concrete object, but it, sense, also determines the same'.<sup>1</sup> In Shpet's words, this is a question of 'passing on to actuality' and 'formulating the rule of this transition'.<sup>2</sup>

It has often critically been noted that through his analysis of the phenomenological *Sinn* Shpet arrives at a conceptualization of an 'authentic' and 'internal' sense of the concrete object.<sup>3</sup> Shpet's *entelechy*, abiding in objects, which is the main conclusion of *Iavlenie i smysl*, is without doubt an unorthodox ending for an analysis of Husserl's *Ideas*. However, while the metaphysical ring in Shpet's talk of the internal sense of a concrete object has been received with suspicion,<sup>4</sup> it has at the same time been repeatedly suggested that his introduction of a meaningful social reality brought him close to Husserl's conception of a lifeworld, thus foreseeing the development of the genetic and intersubjective phenomenology that Husserl would launch only considerably later.<sup>5</sup> In the following I aim to examine these claims more closely.

### 2.2.2. Finding Reason in Reality

Donn Welton writes that 'when Husserl speaks of bracketing the existence of the world, he does so in order to gain its *presence* and to open its meaning'. Welton adds that in this bracketing objects and 'even

<sup>1</sup> Shpet, p. 116

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 117.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Bykova 2016, p. 3; Nemeth 2018, p. 277; Shiyan 2015, pp. 106–107.

<sup>4</sup> Nemeth (2009, p. 125) indeed suggests that Shpet returns to a classic metaphysical notion of the essence of concrete objects. Later, he clarifies his view, writing that along with his conception of the 'intimate something' Shpet 'abandoned his earlier understanding of the phenomenological reduction, of the exclusion of actual existence from phenomenology, and thereby of its commitment to a form of idealism' (2018, p. 275).

<sup>5</sup> See e. g. Nemeth 2009, pp. 131–133; Savin 2016, pp. 42–46.

things (*Dinge*) remain. Yet in a radical difference to the natural standpoint they now function as “transcendental clues” to the analysis of the syntheses in which “new types of objects and new individual objects are constituted”.<sup>1</sup> Correspondingly, Husserl states in *Ideas* that ‘the bracketed matter is not wiped off the phenomenological slate, but only bracketed, and thereby provided with a sign that indicates the bracketing. Taking its sign with it, the bracketed matter is reintegrated in the main theme of the inquiry’.<sup>2</sup> Husserl therefore argues that even though the

physical nature suffers disconnexion, [...] we continue to have not only a phenomenology of the natural scientific consciousness on the side of its thought and experience, but also a phenomenology of nature itself as correlate of the natural scientific consciousness. Similarly, although psychology and mental science are affected by the disconnexion, we have a phenomenology of man, his personality, personal qualities, and his conscious course (as a human being); a phenomenology, further, of the mind of the community, its social institutions, its cultural creations, and so forth.<sup>3</sup>

For Husserl, whatever is transcendent can be the object of phenomenology, and as he emphasizes, ‘not only on the side of the *consciousness* of it’, but in the discovered correlation of the given and its ways of being given.<sup>4</sup>

Reasoning along similar lines, Shpet declares at the beginning of his sixth chapter (using parentheses around his undeniably troubling terms) that a ‘return’ to ‘actuality’ now takes place in phenomenology.<sup>5</sup> To understand what Shpet means by this return — and especially, what he does not mean by it<sup>6</sup> — we must examine his discussion of Husserl’s

<sup>1</sup> Welton 1977, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> Husserl 1967, p. 212.

<sup>3</sup> Husserl 1967, pp. 212–213.

<sup>4</sup> Husserl 1967, p. 213.

<sup>5</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 125.

<sup>6</sup> Here, I disagree with Nemeth’s (2018, p. 275) reading, which considers Shpet’s attempt to obtain an object’s sense in its actuality ‘particularly troubling’. Certainly, Shpet’s *entelechy* and the way he later conceptualizes it as a method of discovering

doxic modalities (e. g. believing, doubting or presuming something). As Husserl states, these 'noetic characters' are intrinsically correlated with different modes of being. For example, a sense of reality is inherent in our normal perception, where we are under a perceptual belief of the present as being real. To this perceptual assurance 'corresponds in the appearing "object" as noematic correlate the ontical character "real" (*wirklich*)'.<sup>1</sup> Thetic acts, therefore, 'posit' being, and as the doxic modality of givenness changes, so also the ontical modalities of the given change. Husserl asserts:

The way of 'certain' belief can pass over into that of *suggestion* or *presumption*, or into that of *question* and *doubt*; and, according to the line taken, that which appears [...] will adopt the *ontical modalities* of the 'possible,' the 'probable,' the 'questionable,' and the 'doubtful' respectively.<sup>2</sup>

In the course of his reasoning Husserl presents an example surprisingly reminiscent of Shpet's man/chimney thought experiment. Husserl writes that in our normal perceptual experience, the perceived object 'stands out there at first as a plain matter of course, a certainty'. Suddenly, we might become doubtful: what if it is after all a mere illusion, only seeming to be there? Or another possibility, 'that which appears preserves its ontical certainty, but we are uncertain with regard to some one or other of its sets of qualities'. For example,

The thing 'suggests' a man. Then a contrary suggestion sets in: it might be a moving tree, which in the gloom of the wood resembles a man in motion. But the 'weight' of the one 'possibility' is now considerably reinforced, and we decide in its favour perhaps, definitely presuming that 'it was surely a tree'.<sup>3</sup>

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the 'true meaning' of any cultural formation such as a work of art are suspect. I shall nonetheless argue that Shpet's turn towards the actuality can be justified from a Husserlian point of view.

<sup>1</sup> Husserl 1967, p. 297.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Husserl 1967, pp. 297–298.

Husserl does not find anything too problematic in the changing doxic modalities of the perceived being and allows his perceiving intuition to move spontaneously from one object-perception to another. He also presents the possibility of a 'neutrality-modification' of consciousness, as a contrast to a 'real' belief, presumption, doubt, and so on. In the neutralized presentation the posited presents itself as 'standing undecided'. According to Husserl we may shift between actuality and potentiality in a positing process, and their difference is not very unlike the difference between attention and inattention. He writes that the 'all-enveloping time-consciousness' is not '*a continuous immanent perception in the pregnant sense, i. e., in the sense of an actual positing perceiving [...]'*<sup>1</sup> Instead, the actual positing is itself an experience, and it thus has a duration, being constituted in time-consciousness. Nonetheless, Husserl believes that every consciousness is either actually or potentially positing. He writes:

Consider, for instance, the consciousness of the unobserved but subsequently observable background in perception, memory, and so forth. The explicit intentional experience is a 'completed' 'I think'. But the same 'I think' can also pass over into an 'unfulfilled' condition through changes in the process of attention. The experience of a fulfilled perception, a fulfilled judgment, feeling or volition, does not disappear even when the attention turns 'exclusively' to something new, and the Ego consequently 'lives' exclusively in a new *cogito*. The earlier *cogito* 'rings off', sinks into 'obscurity', but it still continues to experience a modified form of Being. Similarly *cogitationes* in the background of experience press their way up, sometimes following the path of recollection or neutrally modified, sometimes unmodified.<sup>2</sup>

Husserl believes a certain priority is assigned to actuality in our experience, since 'every thesis of whatever genus can, in conformity with essential laws, and through the doxic characterizations which belong inalienably to its essential nature, be transformed into an actual doxic

<sup>1</sup> Husserl 1967, pp. 314–315.

<sup>2</sup> Husserl 1967, p. 323.

positing'. There is a potentiality in every positing to become actual, as he writes: 'We become aware of value in valuing, of the pleasant in pleasure, of the joyous in rejoicing', and so on.<sup>1</sup> Husserl's conclusion is that a certain 'logical factor' is harboured in every act and its act-correlate. They can always be made logically explicit by an action where 'the noetic stratum of the "act of expression" attaches itself to all that is noetic'. This, in turn, means for Husserl that '*all acts generally — even the acts of feeling and will*' are potentially objectifying acts, '*original factors in the "constituting of objects"*'. Any act can be a world-constituting act as long as it is made in the actual mode of positing. In Husserl's words, 'Here lies the deepest of the sources for shedding light on the *universality of the logical*'.<sup>2</sup>

Shpet has no trouble agreeing with Husserl's discussion. From it he confirms, 'we obtain the already noticed universality of the *something logical* [...]'<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Husserl's conception of the positum, as, for example, the believed *as believed*, together with his analysis of its potentiality and actuality, seems to Shpet only to strengthen the claim he was making earlier.<sup>4</sup> He writes:

Let us now designate the posited itself as such by the term 'positum'. Hence, by virtue of everything that has been said we must see in the positum a unity of the posited characteristics and sense. Owing to this unity the concept of positum begins to play a fundamental role in the analysis of the noematic structure. This is because the concepts of sense and positum are inseparable from the concept of the object.<sup>5</sup>

Shpet maintains that it should be possible to express any positum, and it should thus also be possible to determine the logical signification of any positum. He writes that it now only remains to 'compare this with what we said above, where the delimitation of logical signification and

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<sup>1</sup> Husserl 1967, p. 331.

<sup>2</sup> Husserl 1967, pp. 332–333.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 114.

<sup>4</sup> Husserl also presented a discussion on the positing and objectifying acts in the fifth and sixth logical investigations, and this probably affected Shpet's conception in the last chapters of his book.

<sup>5</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 115.

sense was adduced, in order to see that the problem of the relation of sense to expression earlier received an unusual broadening and that this was carried over to the entire field of intentional consciousness'. According to Shpet his earlier problem not only retains its clarity and rigour but actually gains added importance: 'with this new formulation we become intuitively convinced that it is a matter not of a particular or specific question of logic but actually the basic question of the most fundamental philosophical discipline'.<sup>1</sup>

Clearly, sense is apprehended by a positum. But Shpet writes, 'it is not obvious how a positional act itself can "disclose" the sense in a noema or an object'. According to Shpet the previous unclarity is now shown even more vividly than before, because, as he writes, he does not grasp how the notion of sense-bestowal is connected with the discussion; 'where and why a positional act can be sense-bestowing?' Shpet asserts that he is finally persuaded to conclude that what Husserl has been designating with the name 'sense' is 'not really sense at all'. Rather, Shpet proposes that it would be better to call this sense 'content'. His claim is that Husserl's *Sinn*, 'being the object in its determinant How, is not [...] the concrete essence of the aggregate noema, but only a kind of abstract form inherent in it. Therefore, the full noematic core in its concreteness is obtained only in the mode belonging to the sense's fullness.'<sup>2</sup>

Shpet now approaches his own definition of sense, writing that he conceives of sense not as the *object in its determinant How* but as *the full and authentic sense*. This, according to Shpet, is 'by no means an abstract form but that which is *internally inherent in the object itself, its intimate something*'. For him what lies in the sense is what 'creates a whole and integral thing from the isolated content'. Finally, Shpet concludes that

If the object in its determinant How makes up only the content, then evidently something else must still be found in the noema besides the content and its bearer, something that demands its own phenomenological description, both from the noematic side and from the correlative noetic side. In other words, it is a question of the transition

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1991, pp. 115–116.

from sense, as the meant noema, *to the sense of this meant something*, as the being of the object, and thereby of its 'actuality'.<sup>1</sup>

Shpet enters here, as it were, a new level of phenomenological analysis. He moves from the question '*how is X given*' to '*how is X given as it is given*'. In other words, Shpet is interested not only in the fact that there is sense in the way things are given, but indeed in *how* this sense is there, what its origin and its nature are. Shpet states that he is thus looking for a formative beginning or a principle, included in the content of the noema. He finalizes his analysis with a formula: 'The determinant How of the object gives, in our opinion, sense *as sich*, the How in the modes of givenness gives sense *in sich*. The question to which we advance is that of the sense *für sich*'.<sup>2</sup>

Shpet's discussion stands in an interesting connection with the evolution of Husserl's thought in the period following the publication of *Ideas*, that is, the latter's gradual transition to genetic phenomenology. As Anthony Steinbock writes, in this transition Husserl's understanding of phenomenology as a whole changed considerably. If phenomenology had first designated a style of openness that 'allows one to be struck by modes of givenness, by phenomena', in the new standpoint, the phenomenologist's task lies, additionally, in uncovering a sedimented history implicit in sense constitution.<sup>3</sup> Husserl thus adopted an interpretive position with respect to the teleological genesis of sense and came to see the results gained in the static mode of phenomenology as leading clues to the new genetic problems.<sup>4</sup> Moving to a genetic point of view was in Husserl's words a way to 'overcome the level of static Platonism'.<sup>5</sup>

According to Donn Welton, Husserl was indeed able to see — more clearly than any of his predecessors — the necessary, even if unseen, functioning of sense-giving horizons in any experience. Without these

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 116. Italics mine.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 117. For a brief elucidation of Shpet's formula see Kuznetsov 2014, pp. 187–188.

<sup>3</sup> Steinbock 1998, p. 127.

<sup>4</sup> Steinbock 1998, pp. 128–133.

<sup>5</sup> Husserl used the expression in a letter to Paul Natorp in 1918. Cited in Steinbock 1998, p. 128.

horizons, as Welton writes, 'the world would cease to be significant'. But, as he also observes, problems of 'untold complexity' arose for Husserl when he turned to questions regarding the constitution of the horizon itself, of *how* the horizon is formed, and how exactly it makes possible the givenness of the world to us.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Welton attributes Husserl's difficulties in analysing the constitution of meaning-horizons to the abiding unclarity of his notion of meaning, which was noted above by Solomon. How meaning was conceptualized in *Logical Investigations* could not help Husserl with his new tasks, and the issue required thorough rethinking. Welton finds that Husserl did not at first succeed in this, and that his discussion on *Sinn* in *Ideas* had 'a disturbing effect' on his transcendental phenomenology project.

In *Ideas* the hyletic data are considered to be 'a formless, timeless, immanent, noetic content of consciousness', which the act of consciousness 'animates with a representative function'. Welton argues that Husserl, contrary to his most crucial principle, thus creates a split between the intentional object and the real object — and along with this come 'all the problems of Hume's empiricism'.<sup>2</sup> Welton understands Husserl's intentional object as that which is referred to through the meaning of an expressive act, which leads to the definition of the noema as 'that meaning which is bestowed or taken up by the expressive act (noesis)'.<sup>3</sup> But when Husserl attempts to apply this scheme to an analysis of perception, Welton notes, he runs into trouble:

On the one hand, we can contrast the 'self-same' object I perceive to the varying and different profiles of the object I see. This contrast, however, is not a contrast within a possible object but rather one made with an individual real object in view. And this starting point moves precisely from what the logical characterization of the intentional object excluded, namely, a concrete object of perception. On the other hand, Husserl wants to speak of this perceptual contrast between the same object and its profiles not merely as a difference 'in' the fulfilling

<sup>1</sup> Welton 1977, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> Welton 1977, p. 57.

<sup>3</sup> Welton 1977, p. 56.

object but as a difference in the perceptual act, as a difference which, in fact, makes the perceptual contrast possible.<sup>1</sup>

Welton maintains that the problem is that when Husserl characterizes the perceptual experience of an object, he must treat it through an interplay of intention and its fulfilment: the perceptual object is seen as a 'filled-in' intentional object. Welton continues:

As long as the coincidence between *Darstellungsinhalt* and the given was *adequate* and as long as meaning, logically characterized, was considered symmetrical with the unmodalized perceptual object fulfilling or ratifying it, Husserl had no reason to be concerned with the unique structure of the perceptual object. But once it is seen as inadequate, even for the immanent sphere, we are left with a nasty split between intentional and perceptual object, between 'mental' object and concrete object.<sup>2</sup>

Welton's criticism comes close to Shpet's earlier concerns. As Shpet's example of the man/chimney aimed to show, the *perceptual object* of a dark, unmoving figure and the *actual object* of a chimney did not at first coincide; the perception became adequate only after an act of reasoning seemed to change the perceptual object to correspond to the actual object. In other words, it is not clear to Shpet just *how* it happened that the intuition was eventually 'filled'. Shpet thus recognizes the need for a rational factor in experience and its correlative experiential actuality, arguing that phenomenology must find a way to show 'not only that *reason finds itself* in authentic actuality and asserts the *truth* in itself, but it must also show how reason arrives at itself by way of the *path of comprehension*'.<sup>3</sup> To strengthen his claim, Shpet quotes Husserl:

Just as every intensitive mental process has a noema and therein a sense by which it is related to an object, so, conversely, everything which we

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Welton 1977, p. 57.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 124.

call *object*, of which we speak, which we confront as actuality which we hold as possible or probable, no matter how indeterminately we think it, is precisely therefore already and object of consciousness; and that which signifies that whatever world and actuality taken universally may be called, they must be presented in the framework of actual and possible consciousness by corresponding senses or posita filled with more or less intuitive contents.<sup>1</sup>

Shpet's recognition of a rational factor in actuality is indeed not too distant from Husserl, who, in his book's fourth and last section (entitled 'Reason and Reality'), returns to what he calls a basic claim of consciousness: that it is related to an objective reference. How are these objective relations in fact valid or invalid, Husserl asks? He asserts that these are the questions that must now be 'made clear phenomenologically in the light of the distinction between noesis and noema'. Husserl asserts that he thus finds himself confronted with 'the great *problems of the Reason*'.<sup>2</sup>

Following a parallel reasoning and, again, referring directly to Husserl's text, Shpet writes:

The sense relates to its 'the same thing', the object, a certain X, as its 'bearer'. 'But', as Husserl then asks, '*is it (this X -GS) actually the same? And is the object itself 'actual'?*'<sup>3</sup> In every cognition as such there lie questions about actuality, since every cognition has its correlate in an 'object', which is meant as 'actually existing'. But the following question always arises: When is the noematically 'meant' identity of X the 'actual identity' of X and not 'merely' the meant identity, and what does this 'merely meant' identity signify?<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1991, pp. 125–126. See Husserl 1967, p. 374.

<sup>2</sup> Husserl 1967, pp. 360–361.

<sup>3</sup> Husserl (1967, pp. 376–377) writes: "The X in the different acts or act-noemata furnished with a differing "determining content" is necessarily known as the same. But *is it really the same?* And *is the object itself real?* Could it not be unreal whilst the various agreeing and even intuitively saturated posited meaning — whatever their essential content might be — fulfilled their function according to the measures of consciousness?"

<sup>4</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 126.

Similarly, Husserl continues by asking: what does the word 'real' mean when we are thinking of real objects, of things in the 'real world', but which are given 'only through meanings and positions'? Husserl again emphasizes that he is not interested merely in the 'fact-world of consciousness and the fulfilling of its functions'. Consciousness, or the conscious subject itself, in Husserl's words, '*passes judgments* about reality, asks questions about it, thinks it probable or doubts it, resolves the doubt and thereby passes "*verdicts of the reason*". What needs to be brought under phenomenological analysis is just this state of affairs, which leads the focus to 'the essence of this judicial right', which, in turn, Husserl writes, is 'correlatively the essence of "reality"'. He adds that the focus is, of course, not merely on realities (*Wirklichkeiten*), 'in whatever pregnant sense the term be used', but instead, all questions regarding reality are to be tackled in correlation with '*all forms of knowledge as such*'.<sup>1</sup>

According to Hanne Jacobs Husserl's main aim in providing phenomenological descriptions of the structures of consciousness was to develop an account of reason (*Vernunft*). That is, she asserts, 'phenomenology is ultimately a phenomenology of reason'. In Jacobs's reading Husserl's ultimate aim was not only to describe intentional experience as such, but to describe the structure of the kind of experience which is found to be 'rational (*vernünftig*) or justified (*begründet*)' — phenomenology is thus fundamentally set against the threat of psychologism, relativism, and scepticism, striving to secure the possibility of absolutely indubitable knowledge. As Jacobs writes, for Husserl I can intend something rationally if the way I take something to be 'is true to how it in fact is'. Such intending requires something more than a singular clear-cut moment of intention. In an experience of such fulfilment, I am at the same time 'aware of the grounds for taking something a certain way, and I am aware that I am rational in virtue of being aware of these grounds — when, for example, I see that the previously unseen backside of the object in front of me is how I took it to be'.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Husserl 1967, pp. 377–378.

<sup>2</sup> Jacobs 2016, p. 259.

In other words, things do not just turn up with a certain sense; we also take or posit them *to be the way they turn up*. According to Jacobs we must thus be pre-reflectively aware of *how* we take something to be, and accordingly, we must be sensitive to whatever speaks for or against taking something being in a certain way. Jacobs's notion could be a solution to Shpet's man/chimney dilemma: he was sensitive to the factors which directed him to take the blurry perceptual object in one way rather than another. This sensitivity adds up to 'nothing less than an exercise of rationality'. As Jacobs notes, such a phenomenological reflection is not obvious in Husserl's most commonly used examples, in which he speaks of something *as remembered, desired, imagined*, and so on.<sup>1</sup> Rather, the focus here turns to a reflection on the origin or genesis of the sense of a particular experience. Thus, the reflection now becomes doubly self-aware, as in Shpet's conception.

Jacobs writes that the pre-reflective self-awareness, that is 'presupposed for a reflection on how I am aware of something',

is not just a pre-reflective awareness of my conscious awareness of something but a pre-reflective awareness of my conscious awareness of something with a certain sense (i. e., in terms of how it is determined for me). And this awareness is constitutive of the exercise of rationality when not reflecting. That is, if we were not pre-reflectively aware of how we take something to be, we could not be sensitive to what speaks for or against us taking something in a certain way on the pre-reflective level.<sup>2</sup>

It is important to note the *pre*-reflective nature of this sensitivity: Jacobs asserts that we do not need to actively reflect on how we take something to be if we are to be aware, mostly implicitly, of the grounds for our taking it in that way. Our consciousness of the given shifts from inattention to attention, and we can at any time focus on something that was previously in the 'background' of our perception. It seems that

<sup>1</sup> Jacobs (2016, p. 262) refers to this as an 'explicit second-order awareness of our conscious experiences'.

<sup>2</sup> Jacobs 2016, p. 263.

mere attentiveness is enough to bring consciousness to a state of active positing. As Jacobs writes, 'when attentive I accept the sense with which something is afforded on the basis of it showing itself to actually be such and so'.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, she continues, 'the exercise of rationality extends beyond the rare moments of actual reflection'. To make a judgement about what I experience, to posit something, I already pre-reflectively hold the corresponding logical proposition to be true 'on the basis of the object appearing to me that way, which is why I judge it to be such'.<sup>2</sup> Jacobs cites a passage from Husserl's manuscript from 1911, where he writes that 'A sensuous grasping, a grasping of something sensible presupposes a sensuous appearance, and in this case the grasping entails an accepting, a taking on and taking up of something that already manifested itself'.<sup>3</sup>

Pre-reflective rationality is possible because of the sedimentation of sense. All our past perceptions, predicative activity, and other commitments (in short, all our positings) determine how we intend objects now.<sup>4</sup> Husserl's treatment of rationality is thus closely connected with his transition to genetic phenomenology: experience and sense-constitution, which are necessarily interconnected, have a dynamic and evolving character.<sup>5</sup> As Timo Miettinen puts it, Husserl's genetic approach was focused on questions of *how* and *why* certain forms of experience were possible. Instead of any empirical causality, Husserl was interested in the structures of motivation which found these experiences; there is a certain teleology which directs them. According to Miettinen this notion is already present in Husserl's discussion of positing (*Setzung*) in *Ideas*, although it still lacks the temporal dimension:

Introduced as a part of the static analyses of consciousness, teleology referred to the basic associative or synthetic structure of conscious

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<sup>1</sup> Jacobs 2016, p. 265.

<sup>2</sup> Jacobs 2016, pp. 263–264.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Jacobs 2016, p. 264.

<sup>4</sup> Jacobs 2016, p. 266. Jacobs argues that the historicity of sense also gives us the opportunity to scrutinize our perceptions and beliefs, since 'we do not always have grounds, let alone conclusive grounds' for taking something in a certain way.

<sup>5</sup> Miettinen 2019, p. 117.

life, which constitutes the basic unity of experience. To say that our conscious life is 'teleologically oriented' simply means that we do not live through mere fleeting experiences, but our conscious life aims at creating concrete beings as unities. For instance, individual perceptions of particular 'sides' of a thing have their *telos* in the constitution of 'complete' objects. Instead of a separate category of being, teleology was to be understood as the 'form of all forms' (*Form aller Formen*), that is, as the general structure of all meaning-constitution that we are constantly living through.<sup>1</sup>

Shpet locates this moment of motivation in Husserl's text. However, as earlier in the case of the noematic sense, he argues that Husserl has failed to account for its origin. Shpet writes that even if 'we can recognise that the mode of givenness in its completeness motivates the positing, then nevertheless <we can ask> *how does this motivation exist and how do we arrive at it. (That is, how is it that the given intuition is at the same time that which motivates?)*'<sup>2</sup>

Like Husserl, Shpet maintains that this core question of phenomenology concerns not only the rationally motivated character of the positing, but in the necessary correlation also 'the rationality of actual being itself'. He repeats Husserl's insight that to each truly existing object there corresponds 'the idea of a possible consciousness in which the object is grasped'.<sup>3</sup> From the phenomenological standpoint, there is indeed no other way of addressing the 'being itself' than from the perspective of it being given to a consciousness. Or, as Dermot Moran writes, there is no such thing as the thing in itself.<sup>4</sup> And as both Shpet and Husserl agree, a moment of reason is necessarily present in this givenness. Yet

<sup>1</sup> Miettinen 2019, p. 118.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 132.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Moran 2005, p. 6. Shpet (1991, p. 142) comments on the same issue in a footnote: 'We stress that what interests us is not the so-called problem of the reality of the external world, which is a purely metaphysical problem. We merely wish to terminate this analysis of the content of *appearance*, taking it as the object of phenomenology in its essential givenness. Kant's "*proof* of the existence of things outside me" belongs to the purely metaphysical side of the question.'

Shpet asserts that a crucial question remains unanswered: 'How does the object show its "truth", its rationality?' In other words, Shpet asks that if 'the mode of givenness in its completeness motivates the positing', how, consequentially, 'can an "appearance" prescribe "rules" for the positum? [...]'<sup>1</sup>

To a large degree, Shpet and Husserl agree on the necessity and nature of the discovered reason in actuality. Furthermore, it seems that for both of them being rationally demonstratable or identifiable correlates with being true and being actual. According to Daniel Dahlstrom reason, truth and actuality are indeed in some sense equivalent in Husserl's usage, or at least 'there is a kind of metonymy' in his uses of these terms.<sup>2</sup> Yet Shpet's consistent argument is that Husserl has not yet discovered the source of this reason. To him, it is 'surely unintelligible how givenness as such, filling a positum, *thereby* motivates the latter rationally'. Shpet concludes that he must thus 'suppose that "rationality" either is a *new* moment demanding explication or it refers to the essence of givenness and, consequently, must have *already* been revealed to us'.<sup>3</sup> In the final chapter of his book Shpet proposes a solution to this problem. In this dense chapter he introduces the concepts of 'social world', 'entelechy', 'internal sense', and 'intelligible intuition', which move his thinking decidedly towards a hermeneutic phenomenology, concerned, above all, with comprehending the given. The new terminology is presented without much explanation, and the concepts (particularly, perhaps, the 'internal sense') remain difficult to grasp.<sup>4</sup> Yet they are of crucial importance to the further development of Shpet's thinking.

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 132.

<sup>2</sup> Dahlstrom (2015, p. 275) adds that whereas Husserl's approach to reason breaks the Kantian tradition, it has notable affinities with Hegel's understanding of reason.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 132.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Nemeth (2019b, p. 268) writes that Shpet 'unfortunately, never devoted the kind of attention to a detailed elaboration of the means, or the "mechanism", by which we, as investigators, determine or uncover the purported sociality of an object that Husserl did to eidetic intuition'. Rakhmatullo Mukhamadiev (2008, pp. 137–139) has likewise criticized Shpet's vague treatment of the abovementioned concepts.

### 2.2.3. The Entelechy

Opening the final chapter of his book, Shpet writes:

the distinctive feature of phenomenology as contained in Husserl's exposition lies in the fact that *for the time being* he does not so much solve problems as *pose* them. This fact alone reveals the great productivity of the phenomenological method. For philosophy there is nothing which 'goes without saying'. Yet to *see* a philosophical problem demands a particular philosophical way of looking as well. The phenomenological attitude facilitates the intellectual seeing of problems. Indeed, it appears fraught with them. Every solution to a problem, or every attempted solution that can now be made, in turn discloses to us a new series of questions and demands probing anew deeper into the matter.<sup>1</sup>

It is this openness to questioning, Shpet writes, that has defined his approach to Husserl's phenomenology. He admits that he began his work with a doubt, or rather a demand for a critical answer concerning the distinction that 'goes without saying' between the two 'sorts' of intuition, which Shpet associates with the old dispute between nominalism and realism. Does this division in fact exhaust the characteristics of the sources of originary givenness, Shpet asks? He can now conclude:

By proceeding deeper into the content of phenomenology and revealing the fundamental moments in the structure of an *appearance*, our aim was to demonstrate that as we suspected from the very start there actually is a deficiency <in the mentioned division> and, as a consequence, the 'content' itself of an appearance does not turn out to be completely revealed.<sup>2</sup>

The source of the coincidence which occurs between the positional act and the sense in the positum, remains unclear for now, or as Shpet

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 145.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 146.

writes, incomplete. He declares that behind 'the veil of the object there still lies the riddle of the "beginning" of the object itself and along with it the "source" or its rational motivation'.<sup>1</sup> Shpet asserts that the *authentic sense* of an object is not found in the 'the How of its determinations'; instead, he declares that it is 'shown only by penetrating into the *internal intimate something* of that which stands before us!'<sup>2</sup> To clarify his idea, Shpet provides his second famous illustration:

Let us take a concrete object and recall the example given by Aristotle of the axe. We, it is true, find its 'internal sense' in its 'chopping'. That the sense is shown in the fully concrete 'independent' object is quite correct. But how can the *internal something*, which we have been stressing, be connected to the concrete independent object if the former is not in the proper 'Hows' of the object? And what is more, it, this internal something, is also not in the content of the abstract dependency of the object! As we pointed out, 'sense' remains a 'signification', although very broadened, and what we are looking for is not included *in it*.<sup>3</sup>

Shpet's reference to Aristotle reveals much about how he is reading Husserl. His example of the axe connects him to Aristotle's illustration of matter (e. g. wood and iron) and form (e. g. the power to chop), which together institute a composite, the axe.<sup>4</sup> The example appears in Aristotle's complex discussion of the notions of form and matter, as related to the notions of actuality and potentiality; his hylomorphic doctrine. We may have the material required to build an axe. While unbuilt, the material has the potential to become an axe. In gaining its final form as an axe, it gains actuality. The varying degrees of potentiality and actuality are present in all beings, animate or inanimate, for Aristotle. Each being has its own teleological direction: this assigns to each being their own way of being, or essence. Indeed, Aristotle writes that 'if a tool

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 148.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ackrill 1972-73, p. 122.

like an axe were a natural body, the substance of the axe would be the essence of the axe, and this would be its soul'.<sup>1</sup> As Fred D. Miller writes, the description (*logos*) of the axe includes the function of chopping, and were the axe to lose this function, it would no longer fit this description.

John Lloyd Ackrill has argued that Aristotle's conception, although immensely influential, remains open to interpretation. Interestingly, the concern Ackrill raises resembles that presented by Shpet. Aristotle gives the form of axe as chopping (or more exactly, the power to chop): if the initially formless material is manipulated so that it gains the power to chop, roughly put, it becomes an axe. But Ackrill notes that some interpreters have identified this form with the concept of *being an axe*, although the concept of chopping is not identical with the concept of an axe.<sup>2</sup> 'Having sight is not sight, nor is being blind blindness', Ackrill writes, following Aristotle; "[t]he power to chop and "being able to chop" are not interchangeable expressions. Nor, moreover, are "being able to chop" and "being an axe"."<sup>3</sup>

Ackrill's question concerns 'what-it-is-to-be-X'. He writes that for Aristotle to ask why an X is an X is 'to ask why certain specified matter is (constitutes) an X; and to answer such a question one must give the form of X'. He asserts that this is not to say that an X is identical with its form, since an X (say, an axe) is a composite of form and matter. Nonetheless, 'the form is what the matter has to get or have if it is to become or be an X; for the matter, to become or to be an X, is precisely to get or to have the form'.<sup>4</sup> Aristotle's concepts of form and matter thus function best to explain change, while, as Ackrill notes, the matter-form distinction is more difficult to apply when the matter is itself already necessarily formed, as in the case of living bodies.<sup>5</sup> Animate and inanimate objects are indeed crucially different in Aristotle's theory: all living beings have a soul as their 'principle of life', whereas man-made

<sup>1</sup> Cited in Miller 1999, p. 312.

<sup>2</sup> Ackrill 1972–73, p. 121. The interpretation Ackrill has in mind is one offered by David Wiggins in his *Identity and Spatio-Temporal Continuity* (1967).

<sup>3</sup> Ackrill 1972–73, p. 122.

<sup>4</sup> Ackrill 1972–73, p. 123.

<sup>5</sup> Ackrill 1972–73, pp. 125–126.

artefacts do not.<sup>1</sup> Yet there is a certain analogy between these two kinds of existing: the soul (*psuche*) of a living being stands in the same relationship to its body as the form of an axe to its matter.<sup>2</sup> The important difference, at least from the perspective of Shpet's thought, is that while axes are formed by giving the initial matter an outer form of a chopping tool, the form of a living being is their soul or essence as that which moves them from the inside.

Shpet's '*internal intimate something*' of the axe comes notably close to Aristotle's soul. For him it is found in the concrete object, as it belongs to its essence and indeed creates it for the first time.<sup>3</sup> The language Shpet uses also carries connotations of a soul, as he compares perceiving a transcendent 'concrete something' to the 'psychological seeing of the other's individuality as a "whole"'. He hopes to grasp not just the sense of the appearance 'but also that of the "object" (the X, the "bearer")'. In so doing, he aims to find 'that which makes the concrete something concrete and the individual something individual'.<sup>4</sup> Shpet's straightforward merging of Husserl's and Aristotle's philosophies appears questionable. Still, there is evidently a direct line connecting his concern regarding Husserl's sense, which he found to be but an abstract form and the internal sense of the axe, for which he is now looking. Shpet asserts that he the noema 'not only in the How of the object, the objective How, but also in the entire concrete nature of its fulfilment, i. e., in the fulfilment of its sense'.<sup>5</sup>

Whereas Shpet previously argued that he could not see where Husserl's sense-bestowal came from, he now makes a suggestion: once we are no longer 'limited to an "unsubstantiated" givenness and evidentness', we can reveal the meaningful object's *motivation*. 'This motivation leads us to the essence of the thing being described and at the same time also shows us in this essence the essential "concatenations" ("*sviazi*") of the thing described. Evidently they can be predicated as if

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<sup>1</sup> Miller 1999, p 309.

<sup>2</sup> Miller 1999, p. 311.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 149.

<sup>4</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 134.

<sup>5</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 149.

they formed “part” of the object in its determinant How’. At the same time, however, Shpet notes that

there is something peculiar to these predicates of ‘motivation’ that prompts us to speak precisely of the ‘motivation’, something that, as it were ‘leads’ us away from the central noematic core. Correlatively, the noeses, too, adopt a new direction, and we can state intentional consciousness ‘passes on’, as it were, to a new sphere of mental processes, without changing, however, the direction of its attention, which as before can remain directed to the corresponding central noematic core.<sup>1</sup>

Shpet proposes that a new ‘stratum’, connected with the determinant How of the object — but which must nonetheless be distinguished from it — is revealed here. Shpet writes that he has grounds for considering this new stratum ‘as lying even deeper’ than the examined stratum of sense since ‘the former is revealed only in the latter’. This stratum is what Shpet now designates as the internal something. He explains:

Certainly I can predicate this ‘chopping’ as a pure quality, but it is impossible to ignore the fact that this is precisely that quality which ‘leads’ me away from the ‘axe’, conceived as the ‘content’ of some noema, to the mentioned motivating concatenations. If I address myself to this quality, bearing in mind precisely this ‘aspect’ of it, it in itself will be for me only a ‘sign’, and the ‘chopping’ turns out to be the intimately internal something of the objective content itself. Thereby the ‘chopping’ on the whole turns out to be, according to Aristotle, the objective content’s ‘soul’ or *entelechy*. It is not difficult to represent in this entelechic stratum or, more accurately, in the core of the sense itself as content something that has its bearer in the same object as the entire noema, but for which the object in its determinant How is only an ‘external’ *sign*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 150.

It is of course somewhat surprising that Shpet uses Aristotle's example of an axe for his purposes, since, as we saw earlier, the latter specifically states that the axe does not have a soul. Shpet also goes further, associating the 'soul' (*psuche*) with Aristotle's original and difficult-to-pin-down concept of entelechy (*entelecheia*). Werner Marx, too, equates Aristotle's soul with *entelecheia*, or *energeia*, the two terms being nearly synonymous.<sup>1</sup> It is what constitutes the unity of a body and produces it as a living thing; 'it takes the body in its hand, so to speak, as it would a tool and thus actualizes it as an organized and ordered unity'. The soul is not therefore a part or a quality of a body, but that which determines it as what it is and fulfils it. Insofar as Aristotle considers the soul to be identical to the entelechy, Marx asserts that it could also be called 'life'.<sup>2</sup>

Shpet, at first, makes a clear distinction between the phenomena of the social world, such as an axe, and those of the natural world, such as a grain: the first should be seen as carrying an internal sense, whereas the latter is an 'object of pure content', in which the content of the noema is exhausted in its fulfilment. However, he continues that it 'is not difficult to convince ourselves that *any* object at all — in any case any concrete object — *can* have entelechy of its own. For this only the "assistance" of a *corresponding* act of intentional consciousness is necessary'.<sup>3</sup> According to Shpet there is always a possibility of such a 'motivational conversion'. He concludes that while we can see an entelechy in any object,<sup>4</sup> what we find is sometimes only a 'quasi-entelechy': when, for example, 'we say a grain dances, a star predicts or an axe narrates'. This conception is re-

<sup>1</sup> See Marx (1977, p. 41: footnote 93) for the complexities in interpreting the relationship of *entelecheia* and *energeia*.

<sup>2</sup> Marx 1977, pp. 41–42. The different 'functions' of life, as classified by Aristotle, are furthermore interesting from a phenomenological viewpoint. Marx notes that Aristotle 'distinguishes between different "parts of the soul", its powers or possibilities, beginning with the nutritive, self-propagating soul, proceeding to the perceiving soul, then the appetitive, up to the function of the soul which occurs in man alone, namely, *noesis*, intuitive understanding. For Aristotle, this last function represents the fulfilment of all the possibilities of the soul and thus the *energeia*, conceived as the *telos*, of the soul as a whole'.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1991, pp. 151–152.

<sup>4</sup> Nemeth (2018, p. 277) uses the examples of seeing a face in the clouds or taking it that the bridge of one's nose was designed as a place to rest one's spectacles.

lated to Husserl's notion of neutrality modification, since in these cases, as Shpet writes, we do not demonstrate against the 'falsity' of posita, but we also do not assert their 'truthfulness'.<sup>1</sup>

Hermeneutical acts are required for the grasping of the internal something or the internal sense. Through them we 'intellectually see in the content of the noema only a sign for something'. For Shpet the posited thus changes its character: it is not only the unity of sense and the moments of positional character, but 'their unity together with the unity of the entelechy and the moments of a hermeneutic character'. Correspondingly, the sense gains independence within the structure of the noema, and Shpet now notes that the act of sense-bestowal comes to be seen 'as an independent act *sui generis* not necessarily attached to a pure positional act'. The sense is thus distinguished from the logical, conceptual meaning of the object, even if the two are interconnected. Shpet asserts that concepts that have a definitive signification 'can turn out to be completely devoid of sense, for example, the concept of "nature" in the science of mechanics'.<sup>2</sup> He considers the sense-bestowing act and the hermeneutical, comprehending act as symmetrical, and the term that covers them both is *interpretation*. Shpet writes:

Above all, the question can arise here whether the givenness of entelechy is not simply an originary givenness, which we could call an intuitive givenness. If so, we would have to speak of a separate kind of *intelligible intuition*, as demanded in accordance with everything we have said. But how would we understand this? Is it to be a third 'genus' of intuition alongside with the other two [empirical and ideal — LB]? If such is the case, we would have the characteristic of some third genus of objects alongside objects experientially and ideally given.<sup>3</sup>

Shpet points out that in the natural attitude things continuously appear before us as signs: language, art, any social objects, organisms and people seem to Shpet to always appear 'with their own intimate sense'.

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 152.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1991, pp. 153–154.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 158.

He asserts that although we cannot in any way perceive it, we nevertheless *know*: 'We know that "*der Tisch*" means the table, the table means an instrument for such and such an end. [...] We know that birds have wings *for* flying, that a given pamphlet was written *for* a protest'.<sup>1</sup> The intersubjective aspect of Shpet's entelechy is obvious, as he points out: these purposes are learned. According to Shpet what is important is that it 'belongs to the essence of consciousness itself not only to see intellectually, but also to *understand*, to *comprehend*, what is intellectually seen. Indeed this "comprehension" is not merely an inference, just as it is not merely a representative function in general but also a presentative one'.<sup>2</sup>

Shpet asserts that a social union is indeed the very starting point of any intuition of the world and that to forfeit the faculty of intelligible intuition, or comprehension, which makes it possible, 'even granted the full faculty of experiencing and ideal intuitions, means to go mad'; this he sees as the sole exit from this union. He continues:

With regard to our formulation of the question in the fifth chapter we are now convinced that the sense of an appearance, to the extent that it is revealed in the content of the object, actually contains the principle for disclosing the physical thing as an actual being. But this principle is revealed in the object's entelechy only by means of comprehension. Indeed only here does this principle appear in its fundamental signification, since from it the principle that *every* object is sense bestowed is intellectually seen. Just as the sense of an ideal object lies in its very ideality and the sense of an abstract object in its abstractness as a dependent being, so the sense of the concrete is revealed in its intermediate position, its 'translating' relation, between part and whole, where the insight of entelechy is nothing other than the full act of seeing the 'idea' in its fulfilling signification.<sup>3</sup>

The being of reason consists in hermeneutic functions that establish the rational motivation or entelechy as the 'bearer' of objective being.

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 159.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 160.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 161.

In Shpet's words, it is the 'spirit of the object', which finds its characteristic in an expression, in *logos*, which is the 'manifestation' or the 'incarnation'. and at the same time the 'objectification' of this spirit. Ultimately, Shpet concludes that it is no longer necessary to suggest a third form of (intelligible) intuition, but that instead there is only a single intuition, which covers experience in its totality: every intuition can be elevated to the level of comprehension. 'Such an elucidation of the question, it seems to us, gives us the right to construct demarcations between philosophy as a whole and that "peculiar" comprehension which can take its stand in its own right,' Shpet writes. "Through a "comprehension" of the world as it is, through a self-comprehension of reason, philosophy arrives at the world's "truth" and its "beauty"'<sup>1</sup>

Certainly, Shpet's talk of a spirit of the object, as well as truth and beauty, seems both ambiguous and questionable. In a recent article Nemeth appears to express his disappointment in this treatment of the entelechy, which brings scarcely any new information into the givenness of the object. Nemeth writes:

Shpet claimed that a deeper examination of the structure of an appearance reveals that it contains more than the two species can show. Although in any object we can find its concrete noema, we cannot locate its 'authentic sense' in looking at it in abstraction. a concrete social or cultural object has an 'internal something' or 'internal sense', i. e., entelechy. True, this can be seen in the natural attitude, but Shpet asserted that in the phenomenological attitude we can see this more clearly. In the latter, we are not distracted by the sheer variety of individual properties given in experiencing intuition.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, Rakhmatullo Mukhamadiev doubts whether there is any novelty in his theory if Shpet's entelechy is a direct loan from Aristotle.<sup>3</sup> Nemeth's earlier analysis helps to clarify Shpet's elusive description of entelechy. He asserts that for Shpet an object's entelechy lies within the

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 163.

<sup>2</sup> Nemeth 2018, p. 277.

<sup>3</sup> Mukhamadiev 2008, p. 139.

core of the noematic content. Corresponding to entelechy there exists an 'entelechic noesis'. The entelechy requires an act that motivates the positing belief, but at the same time this act lies within the positional act and thus does not form an act of its own. In Nemeth's formulation 'such an act "sees" the noematic sense as a sign for entelechy, and therefore, as motivating the positional act, is hermeneutic. [...] In other words, the entelechic noesis is a hermeneutic act, and just as the noesis serves the function of sense-bestowal, so too does the hermeneutic act, the fulfilled expression of which is an interpretation'.<sup>1</sup> However, in a later text it appears to Nemeth that Shpet reaches this hermeneutic turn with a suspicious ease. He suggests that the philosopher's notion of intellectual intuition is ill-defined, as it can be simply identified with 'empathy' or 'comprehension', presenting a 'terminological inconsistency, if not confusion'. Further, Nemeth proposes that Shpet's turn might have been accomplished at the expense of the transcendental reduction.<sup>2</sup>

And yet, as Aleksei Savin writes, the idea of entelechy is 'the key idea and main result of the Shpetian development of phenomenology'. According to Savin the conception of entelechy is the logical outcome of Husserl's project for Shpet: 'If Husserl had been able to think his move through to the end, he would have then obtained "Iavlenie i smysl"'. That is what Shpet's claim is like; no more, no less'.<sup>3</sup> Shpet's entelechy, to be sure, has proven difficult to define. Savin suggests that one reason for the difficulties in accounting for its significance — in particular, its phenomenological significance — can be explained by the fact that since the first to analyse Shpet's thought were philologists and especially 'Western Slavist philologists', their point of view was often semiotically biased. Savin claims that 'for them the most interesting and significant was his analysis of the word, which they considered from the linguistic (semiotics') perspective'.<sup>4</sup> As a result, Shpet's work in phenomenology

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<sup>1</sup> Nemeth 2009, p. 130.

<sup>2</sup> Nemeth 2014, pp. 62–63. Nemeth asks whose consciousness, after all, is constituting the sense of a given 'social object'.

<sup>3</sup> Denn & al. 2014, p. 148.

<sup>4</sup> Savin 2015, p. 343.

was often viewed as a preparatory stage, interesting mostly inasmuch as it led to the more mature hermeneutic understanding of history, language and culture.

Savin wishes to question this style of interpretation. He argues that Shpet in fact never leaves his phenomenological position, and that his later works are modifications of his original interest. He describes the overall goal of Shpet's intellectual career as an 'explication of meaning of object and the conditions of its meaningfulness in light of the problem of the relation between constructive reason and reality, and respectively the resolution of the questions of meaningfulness and justification of life in its concrete forms'.<sup>1</sup> I agree with Savin's claim and believe that not only should Shpet's works, following *Iavlenie i smysl*, be analysed through his phenomenological conceptions, but that his hermeneutic turn itself, leading to the conceptions of entelechy, should be seen strictly as part of Shpet's phenomenological project. Here, I again follow Nelli Motroshilova, who suggests that all too often, something is read into *Iavlenie i smysl* which does not in fact occur in it.<sup>2</sup> It seems to me that nothing in this work suggests that Shpet had any intention of making a departure from Husserlian phenomenology in 1914.

In the following chapter I present a short discussion of Shpet's historical and social entry point to phenomenology, and how it affected the outcome of his thought. In the meantime, however, I suggest that *Iavlenie i smysl*, in as much as is possible, be read independently of this broader, historiographical, hermeneutic and semantic context. I believe that letting Shpet's phenomenological text 'speak for itself' — as I have tried to do — will enable us to bring to light its inherently Husserlian qualities. Apart from allowing a detailed discussion of Shpet's phenomenology, I argue that this might also alter how we understand the substance of his later theory of language and culture; especially his conception of the inner form of the word.

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<sup>1</sup> Savin 2015, p. 345.

<sup>2</sup> Motroshilova 2006, p. 301.

### 3. THE HERMENEUTIC TURN IN SHPET'S PHENOMENOLOGY

Shpet entered phenomenology from an angle that made him particularly sensitive to questions of meaning. Natal'ia Artemenko is right in asserting that as he was busy writing *Istoriia kak problema logiki* (*History as a Problem of Logic*, 1916) at the time when he discovered phenomenology, the 'historical problem', that is, the question 'in what way is historical knowledge possible?' served as the crucial philosophical context for Shpet's phenomenological explorations. The verdict of his doctoral dissertation was that history demanded its own semiotic and hermeneutic method, and this is indeed the method we can see Shpet approaching in *Iavlenie i smysl*.<sup>1</sup> It thus seems probable that his seemingly out-of-the-blue questions regarding the social being, and how the ideal being (ideas) can be expressed in concepts, discussed in the previous chapter, were motivated by this project. In the present chapter I will reconsider Shpet's phenomenological conclusions, drawn in *Iavlenie i smysl*, but from the perspective of his hermeneutical interest, elaborated not only in *Istoriia kak problema logiki* but in the subsequent essays 'Soznanie i ego sobstvennik' (1916) and 'Mudrost' ili razum?' (1917). My suggestion is that analysing their treatment of the historical nature of reality, the collective consciousness, and the linguistic nature of the latter will shed more light on Shpet's phenomenology of the social being. Finally, at the end of his 1917 essay, we will see how Shpet transforms his elusive concept of entelechy into that of the inner form of the word.

In *Istoriia kak problema logiki* Shpet explains how he has come to understand history as 'that reality which surrounds us, and from the analysis of which philosophy must originate'.<sup>2</sup> He thus addresses reality

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<sup>1</sup> According to Artemenko (2016, p. 153) Shpet's method was significantly influenced, e. g. by Dilthey, Sigwart, Wundt and Rickert.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1916, p. 21.

as a complex experience-structure, given through different forms of intuition: not only the empirical and individual intuition of physical and psychological states-of-affairs, but also the social intuition of intersubjectively constructed meanings, or, as he also calls them, facts. Shpet writes:

The fact of the matter is that an unbiased description of reality in all its concrete — historic — fullness demolishes the hypothesis of that reality supposedly only being a set of 'sensations'. Not only does reality have a colour, offer resistance and appear as smooth, rough, slippery, etc., but to that it is necessary to add the so-called internal experience, as these are all [...] experiences delimited by the individual sphere of the psychophysical body. With an equal lack of doubt we note the existence of *facts*, authorized not by theories and terms of individual psychology, but facts that clearly indicate that the human individual, despite the assertion of one contemporary logician, is not the inmate of a solitary prison. [...] Facts and acts of the collective, the 'shared', the very social order are just as real as the facts of individual experience.<sup>1</sup>

Social facts, things such as tables or laws, are both objective and socially constructed, which in Shpet's opinion hints at the foundational nature of a collective world-creating activity. He writes that, indeed,

A person for a person is absolutely not just a fellow person; together, they both constitute something which is not their mere sum, but at the same time each of them and both, as a new unit, constitute not only a part, but also an 'organ' of a new human whole, a social whole.<sup>2</sup>

Although Shpet's argumentation in *Istoriia kak problema logiki* is already clearly distinct from Husserl's *Ideas*, I suggest that significant points of comparison can be discovered between his hermeneutics and

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1916, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Husserl's later genetic phenomenology, and especially his 1929 book *Formale und transzendente Logik* (*Formal and Transcendental Logic*). Shpet's philosophy emphasizes the question of where the meaning-component, apparent in our everyday experience, comes from. After *Iavlenie i smysl*, he took on a study of collective rationality to discover the phenomenological 'roots' of meaning. Interestingly, in his 1929 work Husserl tackled a notably similar topic: the historicity of human rationality. Furthermore, Husserl's interest in this issue can be at least partly traced back to the questions he raised between 1913 and 1914 as he was attempting to raise *Logical Investigations* (and in particular its last part) to the level of transcendental phenomenology. According to J. N. Mohanty this is precisely what he finally succeeds in doing in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*.<sup>1</sup>

After discussing the similarities between the two phenomenologists' approaches to the hermeneutical problem, I will turn to Shpet's re-entrance in the Moscow philosophical society shortly before the beginning of the First World War. In contrast with his pre-Göttingen scepticism, Shpet now appeared to be a staunch supporter of phenomenology. In particular, he considered it a way to argue against neo-Kantianism, which had become the leading strand of academic philosophy in Russia. However, Shpet also believed that phenomenology could 'cure' Russian philosophy from all strands of mysticism and scepticism, which he now located even in Lev Shestov's thinking. In 1917, shortly before the revolution, Shpet founded his own journal *Mysl' i slovo*, which he would use to launch a new direction in Russian philosophy.

### 3.1. GENETIC AND HERMENEUTIC METHODS

Rudolf Bernet associates the evolution of Husserl's philosophy towards the genetic version of phenomenology with the changes in his understanding of the noematic sense. The problem of the noematic sense was in turn related to the transformation that had taken place

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<sup>1</sup> Mohanty 2011, p. 7.

in his conception of the sign since its original formulation in *Logical Investigations*. According to Bernet these changes in Husserl's views were due mainly to progress achieved elsewhere, and the problem of signification appears most often in his post-1913 works as a non-independent topic of investigation.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Bernet suggests that this problem can be seen very broadly as 'revealing phenomena in their phenomenological apprehension'.<sup>2</sup> As phenomenology focuses on how the world is given in human experience, the question of sense reaches beyond the problematics of signification and is instead part of the entire study, as the issue of the noematic sense.

The complexity of the question of sense was revealed to Husserl properly only in his transcendental turn. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka asserts that this created a gap between *Logical Investigations* and the texts that followed it. Phenomenology was initiated in a framework in which Husserl attempted to discover in our cognitive experience, as Tymieniecka describes,

recurring, perduring distinctive nuclei, postulated to be the 'certain' and 'necessary' foundation of reality as it manifests itself in phenomena, what he called 'essences,' 'eidos,' that is, clusters of tightly articulated significant moments having ideal necessity, which as inherently subjacent structures subtend the nature and coherence of the respective phenomena.<sup>3</sup>

The discovered essential structures of knowledge could guarantee a measure of stability in the flux of fleeting empirical appearances. According to Tymieniecka Husserl's investigations could provide 'modes of cognitive certainty as well as of necessity grounded in the necessary

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<sup>1</sup> The fields in which the mentioned progress was made were, according to Bernet (1988a, pp. 1–2): 'the phenomenological understanding of intersubjective empathy, of the ideality of linguistic meaning, of intentional acts of will, desire, tendency, etc., and eventually also [...] the understanding of the phenomenological reduction and of its relation to acts of phantasy'.

<sup>2</sup> Bernet 1988a, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Tymieniecka 2005, p. xxv.

interconnectedness of the intuited objectivities themselves'.<sup>1</sup> For Husserl's early followers this sufficed as a working method, and the members of the so-called Munich school used it to launch investigations of various regional ontologies. However, Donn Welton suggests that for Husserl himself the *Investigations* was 'more of a prolegomena to philosophy than philosophy itself'. Between 1901 and 1913 Husserl realized that while the investigations certainly supplied 'seminal studies into the phenomenological bases of a theory of logic and cognition', the method lacked 'the scope and universality required to make it genuinely philosophical'.<sup>2</sup> Andrea Staiti contends that in *Ideas* Husserl entered 'genuine philosophy' by formulating a critique of reason, albeit one that differed crucially from Kant's. He writes that in Husserl's treatment the very notion of reason underwent a radical transformation:

Husserl refuses to consider 'reason' a special faculty or a power that resides in the mind of specimens of *homo sapiens*. We do not have phenomenological access to 'minds' (whatever that is supposed to mean), let alone to special powers residing in them. All we have are concrete experiences (including their objective correlates) and the manifold ways in which experiences (including their objective correlates) relate to (or fail to relate to) and cohere with (or fail to cohere with) one another. The meaning of reason, then, has to be sought in the configurations that such intra-experiential relations take.<sup>3</sup>

According to Staiti Husserl's achievement in *Ideas* could be characterized as a 'thoroughgoing de-mentalization of reason' which brings it 'much closer to Ancient Greek and medieval *logos* than to early modern *ratiocinatio*'.<sup>4</sup> Husserl's question of reason thus approaches the sphere of ontology, while at the same time defying any naively metaphysical interpretations of being.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Welton 2000, pp. 70–71.

<sup>3</sup> Staiti 2017, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Staiti 2017, pp. 5–6.

### 3.1.1. Revealing Reality in its Rationality

Husserl's transcendental phenomenology focuses on the question of constitution. As Daniel Dahlstrom writes, this is a question of how, after familiarizing ourselves with all the different structures inherent in the intentional experience, we can combine the correlatively different acts into one act of constitution.<sup>1</sup> At the end of *Ideas* Husserl reveals the inherent teleology of his account of constitution, which, according to Sonja Rinofner-Kreidl, culminates in an 'ultimate rationalization of his project'.<sup>2</sup> a constituted higher order object-of-intention cannot be reduced to a mere sum of its dependent parts. Instead, in the final sections of his book Husserl raises the question of things like state, law or church, which 'defy any psychologistic and naturalistic re-interpretation'. He asserts that all such 'sorts of objectiveness' must be 'described, just as they are given, in terms of the basic kinds of them and in their successive orders, and the *problems of constitution* for them must be posed and solved'. Husserl asserts that these objects are 'founded unities' of a new kind, and each of them '*brings with it its own constitutive phenomenology* and, along with this, a *new concrete doctrine of reason*'.<sup>3</sup> Thus, in a genuine Aristotelian spirit, as Staiti writes, Husserl's reason 'takes on different forms and distinctive configurations depending on the ontological domain in which the rationally posited object (i. e., the object posited on the basis of an intuitively fulfilled intention) belongs'.<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately, *Ideas* ends rather abruptly after the various constitutive phenomenologies are only hinted at. The book was originally conceived as the first part of a three-volume project. The two subsequent parts, drafted around the same years as the first volume, presented for example studies of the material ontological domains of nature (physical and psychophysical or animal nature) and *Geist*, as well as an attempt to determine phenomenology's relationship with various empirical

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<sup>1</sup> Dahlstrom 2015, p. 280.

<sup>2</sup> Rinofner-Kreidl 2017, p. 287. In her opinion the end of the book presents some of 'the most important and illuminating parts' of Husserl's entire phenomenology.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Rinofner-Kreidl 2017, p. 301.

<sup>4</sup> Staiti 2017, p. 6.

sciences.<sup>1</sup> However, soon after the publication of the first *Ideas*, Husserl found himself faced with complex questions concerning constitution, related especially to the problem of the genetic method.<sup>2</sup> In other words, he came to realize that to be able to constitute something requires that one's intuition is founded in a wider, historically sedimented 'rational background'. Hanne Jacobs writes that 'our past perceptions, predicative activity, and other commitments, as well as what we take over from determinate and indeterminate others, shape our perceiving and acting in the world. That is, our positings (past and present, own and appropriated) determine how we intend objects and situations in the future'. This creates a sedimentation or a history of sense, which we can also critically study; while we are 'presumptuous in how we take the world to be', we can also question and correct our conclusions.<sup>3</sup>

Husserl's approach to the genetic method echoed the nineteenth century tradition of hermeneutics, which grasped the growing awareness of the importance of historical experience in how humans relate to their surroundings. In Timo Miettinen's words, one of the central ideas of the hermeneutical movement was that our relationship with the past is never a matter of pure description but involves an interpretative element between the whole and its parts. As the standard example goes, a particular text, for instance, 'cannot be understood without reflecting the overall context (or the "world") in which it has emerged'. Within the phenomenological tradition the same issue became conceptualized as pre-given 'horizons' of meaning. In the 1920s Husserl named these horizons the 'life-world' (*Lebenswelt*). In particular, in *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie* (*The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, 1936) and its manuscripts it was introduced as a novel 'path' to transcendental phenomenology that was to accommodate also for the genetic or 'generative' dimensions of meaning.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, in 1937 Husserl

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<sup>1</sup> Staiti 2017, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> According to Steinbock (1998, p. 131) the value of the genetic point of view to constitution had become clear to Husserl by 1915.

<sup>3</sup> Jacobs 2016, p. 266.

<sup>4</sup> Miettinen 2019, p. 115.

criticized his first *Ideas* for the lack of horizons, which he now believed must be considered from the very first steps of phenomenological analysis. Husserl writes:

In the *Ideen* I thought I could introduce the phenomenological reduction in one leap and in so doing lead the reader to the new working field of phenomenological philosophy, a field in which it is necessary to learn a new way of 'seeing', of 'experiencing' and correspondingly a new way of thinking [...]. In *Ideen* the point of departure was the 'natural concept of the world' [...] We shall see that this lifeworld (taken in its total temporal breadth) is nothing but the historical world. Therefore, it is palpable that a comprehensive systematic introduction to phenomenology begins and has to be carried out as a universal historical problem. If one introduces the epoché without the historical theme the problem of the lifeworld, viz., of universal history resurfaces. The introduction of *Ideen* does maintain its legitimacy, but now I consider the historical path more principled and more systematic.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to Husserl, Shpet entered phenomenology with an already formulated interest in the hermeneutic nature of historical knowledge. *Istoriia kak problema logiki* presents a survey of studies of historiography, or the logic of history as an independent discipline, from the pre-Kantian era. Shpet's argument is that after Kant's 'Copernican revolution'<sup>2</sup> Western philosophy had spiralled into a path of negativism,<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cited in Staiti 2017, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> In fact, Shpet (1916, pp. 2–3) disagrees with this term, writing that 'the comparison of Kantian philosophy with Copernicanism [...] is too formal. In our opinion, the parallel drawn by the Fichteanist and erstwhile professor at Kharkov, Shad, is more solid — that is the parallel between Kant and Luther, between Kant's philosophy and *Protestantism*. According to Shpet Luther did not establish a new system of thought, but instead 'overthrew a religious system that was highly harmful for mankind'. Shpet thus looks upon Protestantism as a form of protest, not a constructive force.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1916, p. 1. He writes: 'From the most militant to the most Quietist-deathly forms of positivism, we meet everywhere one enormous NON, non-metaphysics'.

scepticism and relativism, as well as scientism, in the form of privatism.<sup>1</sup> This had led to a polarization of contemporary philosophy, with positivism and idealism at extreme opposite ends, but both failing to grasp the world as a concrete and shared reality.

While rooted in the Russian late nineteenth-century discussions of positive philosophy, Shpet's viewpoint was also strongly influenced by Wilhelm Dilthey.<sup>2</sup> In his 1912 essay '*Odin put' psikhologii i kuda on vedet*' Shpet asserts that Dilthey had opened a way for the renewal of psychology, liberating it from 'lifeless' and 'abstract' forms.<sup>3</sup> Noting the problematic influence of psychologism in logic — which Husserl had argued against a year earlier in his essay '*Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft*' ('Philosophy as a Rigorous Science') — Shpet attests that the real problem regarding human knowledge is considerably broader. He writes:

As it happens, the site of the disease has been imprecisely located. More than logic is diseased: all of philosophy is ill; its entire organism is disturbed. The diagnosis needs to be supplemented. Philosophy is suffering not only from psychologism in logic, but perhaps also to a greater degree from a completely analogous disease — logicism in psychology.<sup>4</sup>

If psychologism in logic leads to relativism and scepticism, the effect of logicism in psychology is no less dramatic, according to Shpet, as it impoverishes the descriptions provided by psychologists who, instead of concrete facts turn towards empty abstractions. Thus, Shpet asserts,

The living, bright, colourful and ever-changing content of the life of the soul is starting to seem a sequentially placed row of dull, Chinese

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1916, p. 5. He writes: 'The private character of scientific philosophy is a self-evident thing. It is precisely from the privateness of that philosophy that its specialization in its forms flows, and that therein proceeds a constant battle between specialized directions, depending on one or the other "scientific" partiality'.

<sup>2</sup> For discussions of Dilthey's influence on Shpet see e. g. Plotnikov 2006 and Schastlivtseva 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 2006, p. 257.

<sup>4</sup> Shpet 2006, p. 250.

shadows, sharp only in outline. The life of our soul cannot be seen through our psychology's abstract schemes. a great master's large, complex painting has been cut into pieces. People, houses, trees and so on have been cut out of it. One thing is matched with something else completely different. No imagination is strong enough to reproduce the authentic original view of the work.<sup>1</sup>

Shpet believes that Dilthey's descriptive psychology presented a fruitful example of a new kind of psychology, as a study of the 'life of the soul'. In addition, he suggests that the descriptive psychological method is superior to abstract psychology, because it can lead us to the actual and complete reality.<sup>2</sup> Yet the crucial question remains unanswered for Shpet in 1912: how do we, in fact, transition from the knowledge of the life of the soul to that of reality? Shpet emphasizes the importance of this passage, writing that there is no reason to draw extreme conclusions about the 'spirituality' of all reality. Spiritualism, he asserts, supports a similar kind of naive metaphysics as absolute materialism; the spiritual in a metaphysical reading is understood as merely the highest level of material being. Shpet criticizes the position of William James in his *a Pluralistic Universe* (1909), arguing that spiritual intuition should not be considered a higher or superior form of experience, but simply one among its various forms.<sup>3</sup> The new philosophy for which Shpet's essay calls must be immune to the contemporary tendencies of 'logicizing and rationalizing', and instead direct itself to the really and immediately given. 'The new philosophy must stand out as a philosophy of life, as that life's *justification*, as justification and confirmation', Shpet declares.<sup>4</sup>

By 1916 Shpet seems to have found his solution to the transition problem. In *Istoriia kak problema logiki* he now treats *history* as the new 'form' of reality, which not only combines the material and the ideal,

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet 2006, p. 250.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 2006, pp. 257–258.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 2006, pp. 260–261. See Khoruzhii 2010 for a discussion on Shpet's views on religious or spiritual intuition.

<sup>4</sup> Shpet 2006, p. 262.

but does it in a way that reveals this combination as the concrete, actual and complete reality. Indeed, Shpet writes that by ‘reality’ he does not mean a theoretical premise or a construct. Instead,

Reality is the setting in which we live and philosophize, to which we ourselves belong, as a part and member of it; that is what surrounds us, what gives food for all our ruminations, cares, worries, raptures and disappointments, in equal fashion, of course, with those same ruminations and worries. That is the ‘natural’ reality which everyone knows well.<sup>1</sup>

Shpet’s ambitious goal, as he writes in 1916, is to include in philosophical description ‘[a]ll the colours and hues, sounds, the obstacles we encounter, the changes of spatial forms and relations, the pain and sweetness of sensation, love and hatred’ as parts of the ‘the only authentic reality [...] of our lives in all its vital fullness’.<sup>2</sup> This, Shpet argues, is the ‘everything’ (*vse*), the being of which emerges as the foremost problem for any positive philosophy that strives for an objective knowledge of being.

The discipline of history has the potential to provide truly objective knowledge due to its collective and shared nature. Shpet writes that if it proves possible to experience ‘one and the same thing behind different emotional indicators, if it turns out that different subjects speak of one and the same thing, regardless of the difference between their emotional givenness’, this is thanks alone to the power of reason (*razum*). Shpet believes that this is precisely where we find the correct path of positive philosophy, leading to an objective knowledge of being. If in phenomenology he had discovered a methodology for the study of social and meaningful reality, Shpet now asserts that to reach the objective being, reality must indeed be studied *in its givenness* to consciousness: ‘The actual world and the ideal world are in equal measure

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1916, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1916, p. 13. Savin (2016, p. 45) suggests that Shpet’s conception comes close to that of Husserl’s life-world.

worlds consciously perceived. Consciousness is thus a new general title for the philosophical problem'.<sup>1</sup>

As in his argument in *Iavlenie i smysl*, Shpet writes that only by focusing on the givenness of the appearing reality can we distinguish its essential characteristics: 'here, we are given together that which exists and that which "seems": partly, the reality surrounding us exists — it is the truth; and for another part it only "seems" — it is an illusion'. However, by illusion Shpet merely means that which is to be bracketed out in the phenomenological analysis. He writes:

Reality does not 'stand' before us — 'everything' moves and changes, appears and disappears. Everything in 'everything' is mere coincidence and chance. The philosophical statement of a fact so banal for life has momentous importance, as concurrently with the affirmation of randomness, the necessity which correlates to it is also affirmed. Together with the random, with the many is affirmed the necessary and singular which penetrates it; in that which changes 'the same', τὰ τὸν, opens.<sup>2</sup>

If in 1914 Shpet discovered a rational motivation that directed his experience of a man/chimney through a moment of comprehension, he now perceives reason as the unifying principle of reality-as-history. As we direct ourselves to this reality, reality-as-experienced, we discover its ideal foundation. 'The points of identity' (*punkty tozhdestva*) in the appearing reality 'give not only fulcrums and correlation for the phenomena of reality, but themselves stand out as a special subject and special basis for cognition — ἰδέα'. According to Shpet here a 'special world is formed, an ideal world, or a world of ideal object[s], with a firm internal predictability or order. This world in everything penetrates the world of actuality, discovering itself in every form and every phenomenon thereof'. Thus, the conceptions of ideality, reason, being and even truth prove nearly synonymous in Shpet's treatment; 'That which exists, exists, and is therefore always true; delusion proceeds from our ascribing

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1916, pp. 14–15.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1916, p. 13.

being to that with does not exist, or from our denial of being in that with exists [...].<sup>1</sup>

The connection between Shpet's books of 1914 and 1916 is thus evident. If in *Istoriia kak problema logiki* he searches for a hermeneutic method that could 'reveal' reality in its rationality, in *Iavlenie i smys* Shpet is dealing with the nature of this very rationality. The latter is precisely what Shpet discovers when analysing his visual experience, and what he criticizes Husserl for not having accounted for in his analysis of the noema. Finally, Shpet's own answer, which in *Iavlenie i smysl* is still presented only as a suggestion, is that this rationality, in the form of entelechy, should be treated as a foundation for all reality. Only after both these works, in his 1917 essay '*Mudrost' ili razum?*' is Shpet ready to assign a more exact definition to this rational principle. There, his answer is that the 'word', or *logos*, directs all thought (and all experience) following its own inner form or rule and presents the world accordingly.

### 3.1.2. The Logic of Knowledge

I suggested earlier that Shpet's version of phenomenology, though formulated as an analysis of Husserl's *Ideas*, also evolved in connection with *Logical Investigations* and their 1913–1914 revisions. Shpet alluded to this in his second Parisian letter to Husserl, but without specifying which parts of the revised investigations had rendered such a strong impression on him. Nevertheless, he asserts that he had been led to reconsider his exposition of phenomenological sense. Shpet never had the opportunity to acquaint himself with the revised sixth investigation (which was finally published in 1921), even though in 1913 he writes that he will await its appearance to finalize his own work.<sup>2</sup> Yet the fifth

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1916, pp. 13–14.

<sup>2</sup> A letter to Shpet from his former student (S. Shatenstein-Weizmann), written on 28 July 1922, suggests that he might have, in fact, received the new sixth investigation after it was finally published. Shatenstein-Weizmann writes: 'I managed to visit Freiburg, where Professor Husserl teaches, and to pass on your regards, albeit from quite some time ago, but Professor Husserl was very glad to hear that and asked

investigation alone provided Shpet with ample material on the question of sense.

There, Husserl's explorations concerning the act's matter and quality led him to the question of 'as *what*' something is experienced, that is, to the question of the sense of the experience. It is not difficult to see a connection between Husserl's theme and Shpet's man/chimney problem when Husserl concludes in the fifth investigation that 'matter' is that element in an act '*which first gives its reference to an object, and reference so wholly definite that it not merely fixes the object meant in a general way, but also the precise way in which it is meant*'.<sup>1</sup> Of course, Shpet was also well acquainted with the original version of Husserl's last investigation and fully aware of its presentation of the categorial intuition. There, Husserl turns to an analysis of how different acts may be expressed in words. He gives the example of looking into the garden and expressing his percept in words: 'There flies a blackbird!' '*What is here the act in which my meaning resides?*' Husserl asks, observing that the same perception could have been expressed in a number of other ways: 'That is a blackbird!' 'There flies that blackbird!' 'There it soars!' etc.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the same percept can serve as a foundation for several different statements, while the sense of these statements may vary.

As Rudolf Bernet notes, Husserl's exclamations owe their meanings only indirectly to the initial visual experience. Indeed, the lingual signs express not the perception itself, but the judgement made on the basis of the perception. The consequence of this, in Bernet's words, is that 'the aforesaid semantical intuition is fulfilled not by a purely sensuous intuition but by a categorial intuition'. The intentional object of such an intention is not one that 'one can see with one's eyes or upon which one can sit'; instead, it is an intellectual formation regarding 'states of affairs'.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Husserl concludes that a clear distinction must be drawn between sensuous and categorial intuitions, where the latter is

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about you in detail. I received a copy of the second edition of the sixth (final) part of *Logische Untersuchungen*, which I will try to send you' (Shpet 2012, p. 75).

<sup>1</sup> Husserl 1970, p. 589.

<sup>2</sup> Husserl 1970, p. 680.

<sup>3</sup> Bernet 1988b, pp. 35–36.

an 'intuition in the extended sense'. In Husserl's words, the founded acts, characteristic of the categorial intuition, 'now count as the thought which "intellectualizes" sensuous intuition'.<sup>1</sup> Bernet argues that after the first edition of the *Investigations* Husserl changed his mind about the nature of the givenness of the categorial intuition. Whereas in 1901 he had conceived it largely in analogy to the self-givenness of a *sensuous* object, in the foreword to the second edition Husserl admitted that this conception had been a 'fatal error'. According to Bernet Husserl was never able to give a satisfactory answer to his question of the categorial intuition.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, it seems this issue is connected to the complex themes that Shpet was also to tackle: the question of sense-bestowal, phenomenology's ability to grasp reality 'truthfully', as well as the rational foundation of any perception and its description.

Shpet's aspiration in *Iavlenie i smysl* comes close to what John Drummond has described as the overall goal of *Logical Investigations*: a formulation of the normative philosophical discipline of 'pure logic' upon which any scientific theory could be founded. Drummond argues that any fully developed theory, in any field of science, must be able to identify the underlying rules governing its formulations of propositions and arguments. It should also be able to clearly explain how the assertions presented in its framework are related to their possible object, and how the theory attempts to describe or explain the world, as its object, truthfully. 'Philosophical logic is, in other words, inseparable from both phenomenology and ontology', Drummond writes.<sup>3</sup> David Woodruff Smith has likewise highlighted the particular nature of Husserl's *Investigations*, which, he maintains, offers a unified system of philosophy; a 'case study' in 'how the philosophical disciplines of logic, ontology, phenomenology, and epistemology can be unified'. In Smith's opinion Husserl could attain the imposing goal of such a unity because he was able to synthesize the 'long traditions of logical theory and intentionality'. Husserl's phenomenology made possible a certain objective theory of knowledge which, arguably, overcame the main epistemological problems of Descartes,

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<sup>1</sup> Husserl 1970, p. 832.

<sup>2</sup> Bernet 1988b, p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> Drummond 2009.

Hume and Kant. Smith also points out that Husserl synthesized these results with the long tradition of ontology, beginning with Plato and Aristotle.<sup>1</sup>

To compare Shpet's attempt to formulate an 'objective theory of knowledge' with Husserl's, I suggest a final association of his phenomenology with the latter's considerably later work, *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (1929). It would of course have been impossible for Shpet to have any actual connection with this book, and yet some of its themes appear strikingly like his. In his 1929 work Husserl correlates the early presentation of formal logic in his *Investigations* with a new analysis of formal *ontology*. Drummond notes that Husserl arrives at this viewpoint through a study of two distinct lines of the logical tradition: that of Aristotle's apophantic logic (in which assertive statements are made in the form of a predicative judgement, 'of' something) and that of mathematical logic, which focuses on formalization, allowing us to speak of an 'objectivity in general' (freeing statements of their determined content). At the end of the seventeenth century Leibniz had already attempted to unite the two traditions. His *mathesis universalis* was a method by which all conceivable things would become exactly determinable, but the plan fell short of its goal. With his transcendently understood conception of intentionality Husserl now took up the task anew. His aim was to draft a *formal* method of approaching *everything*.<sup>2</sup>

In 1929 Husserl writes that, indeed,

one need only remind oneself that judging is the same as judging about *objects*, predicating *properties* of them, or *relative determinations*; taking this into consideration, one cannot fail to note that formal ontology and formal apophantics, despite their expressly different themes, must be very intimately related and are perhaps inseparable. Ultimately *all the forms of objects*, all the derivative formations of anything-whatever, do make their appearance in *formal apophantics itself*.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Smith 2003, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Drummond 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Husserl 1969, pp. 78–79.

*Formal and Transcendental Logic* is also mindful of the problems of the genetic nature of sense formation. While seeking an absolute foundational discipline for all science, Husserl notes that all sciences and logic itself are but cultural formations, ‘given to us beforehand and bearing within themselves their meaning, their “sense”; since they are formations produced indeed by the practice of the scientists and generations of scientists who have been building them’. Husserl continues that as they are thus produced, ‘they have a final sense, toward which they have been continually aiming’. Husserl’s task now is to ‘enter a community of empathy’ with scientists to understand this sense and place it under a ‘sense-investigation’.<sup>1</sup> The ultimate goal of *Formal and Transcendental Logic* is therefore not merely to uncover the true unity of formal logic and formal ontology; Husserl aims to develop a *transcendental logic*.

Husserl argues that, understood as a theory of science, logic had from the beginning constituted itself to serve ‘that criticism which creates genuine science’. It took the statements of sciences ‘as mere “judgments” (suppositions) and judgment-systems, which must be submitted to criticism and which then [...] must be fashioned in such a manner that the predicate “truth” can be rightly ascribed to them’. Husserl asserts that logic, therefore, ‘followed the attitude of the critic — who judges, not straightforwardly, but rather about judgments’. Logic was directed to the existent but ‘only mediately’.<sup>2</sup> Husserl asserts that the new phenomenological logic must in contrast turn its interest towards the cognizing itself, to study the scientist’s activity, as it were, from the inside. By thus altering our viewpoint ‘we stand within the horizon of a science’ and, Husserl adds, ‘in the case of a formally universal consideration, we stand within *logic*’ itself.<sup>3</sup>

Husserl thus asserts that it is possible ‘to convert any judging into a *judging at a second level*’.<sup>4</sup> Here, what was previously judged, and what

<sup>1</sup> Husserl 1969, p. 9. Husserl describes this investigation (*Besinnung*) as an act in which the sense, which has been only ‘vaguely floating before us’, is converted into a fulfilled, clear sense. For a discussion of the nature of Husserl’s radical ‘*Besinnung*’ in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* see Hartimo 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Husserl 1969, p. 130.

<sup>3</sup> Husserl 1969, p. 108.

<sup>4</sup> Husserl 1969, p. 132.

was therefore an existing objectivity for the judge, is no longer posited. Rather, *'the judged as such'* is posited in an act of reflection'. Husserl characterizes this act as a transition 'from a judgment (a supposed objectivity simpliciter) to a judicial meaning or opinion (a supposed objectivity as supposed)'. We move from the straightforward stating-and-judging attitude in which we 'have' only 'the pertinent objects' to a reflective attitude, 'the attitude in which the corresponding object-meanings and predicatively formed affair-complex-meanings become seized upon or posited'. Finally, Husserl designates this region *'the region of senses'*.<sup>1</sup> All this happens through a repositioning of our viewpoint that is very reminiscent of the move Shpet suggested in the fifth chapter of *Iavlenie i smysl*. Furthermore, Husserl associates the change with his earlier discussion of the categorial intuition:

*What is judged* in a judging is the judged — the judgably meant or supposed — *categorial objectivity*. As we have ascertained, not until there is a judging on a *second level* does the *proposition in logic's sense of the word* — the proposition as a sense, the supposed categorial objectivity *as supposed* — become the object; and, in this new judging, it is the judgably supposed objectivity simpliciter.<sup>2</sup>

Husserl continues that the sense of any judging 'lies' within it. While we cannot always judge something about something with objective evidence, whatever we can say with evidence is *'only'* by virtue of those judgments and evidences at a second level by which we "draw" from the simple judgments their suppositions, making these into *objects*'.<sup>3</sup> In other words, the sense of any statement or judgement must itself become thematic *'if "criticism" is to be instituted'*.<sup>4</sup>

In a footnote<sup>5</sup> Husserl adds that while the universal concept of sense, extending to all intentional spheres, had already emerged in

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<sup>1</sup> Husserl 1969, pp. 132–133.

<sup>2</sup> Husserl 1969, p. 134.

<sup>3</sup> Husserl 1969, pp. 134–135.

<sup>4</sup> Husserl 1969, p. 136.

<sup>5</sup> Husserl 1969, p. 135.

*Logical Investigations*, he had back then developed it without taking into consideration the ‘deeper intentional analyses’ required to clarify the question, and especially in the sense he approached it later in *Ideas*. Correspondingly, he notes that because his early inquiries into the sense of a pure logic were guided by ‘the ideal of specifically theoretical science’, disciplines such as geometry and theoretical physics, his view remained restricted. According to Husserl it should by now be obvious that ‘when we practice formalization on sciences of the type represented by psychology or phenomenology, or by history, and then ask what combines all the emerging proposition-forms to make up the unity of a system-form’, we can only answer that ‘such a science is an open infinity of propositions that hang together *by virtue of their objects* [...]’ What this means, Husserl writes, is that we can appreciate the ‘principle of unity’ of such sciences ‘only by going beyond the analytico-logical form’.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of his book Husserl concludes a decades-long journey, which had taken him from his first logical investigations to a transcendental logic. He writes that it was

the evidence-problems connected with the fundamental concepts and laws of logic that led us (since it is evidence that is constitutive for truth, and for what truly exists in every sense accepted by us) to the most universal constitutional problems and the radical nature of the method appropriate to them. If logic, as having originated from a naïve evidence, is not to remain suspended sky-high above any possible application, these problems, in their hierarchical sequence, must / be set and solved. [...] The possibility of science cannot be *shown by the fact* of sciences, since the fact itself is shown only by <their> subsumption under that possibility as an idea. Thus we are led back to logic, to its apriori principles and theories. But now logic itself is in question with regard to *its* possibility; and, in our progressive criticisms, it is continuously and very seriously called in question. These criticisms lead us, *from logic as theory, back to logical reason* and the new field of theory pertaining to it.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Husserl 1969, pp. 101–102.

<sup>2</sup> Husserl 1969, p. 267.

Like Shpet before him, Husserl equates the question concerning logical reason to that of *logos*. He writes that the meaning of this word 'leads us predominantly to assertive thinking — judging, in the usual sense of the word — and, correlatively, to judgments as thoughts'. But since 'human thinking is normally done in language, and all the activities of reason are as good as entirely bound up with speech', any act of thinking can indeed take the form of *logos*.<sup>1</sup> To analyse rationality is thus to analyse *logos*. Mirja Hartimo asserts that Husserl's method in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* exemplifies this ideal through a radical '*Besinnung*' or sense-investigation, which has the critical aim of considering, reshaping, analysing, purifying and improving any form of scientific evidence.<sup>2</sup> Ideally, the clarified and revised evidence can eventually be adopted as scientific norms, and transcendental logic should therefore ultimately lead to a complete revision of the fundamental concepts of the sciences.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from a radical and critical approach to rationality, *Formal and Transcendental Logic* also suggests a phenomenological ontology. All meaning-forms are correlated with and 'teleologically ordered toward' fulfilment in our recognition of object-forms. According to John Drummond if our suppositions are 'confirmed in fulfilling experiences, then we recognize the identity that obtains between the meaning-forms and object-forms, between the categorial object merely as meant and the categorial object as it evidently presents itself'.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, that is how the world *always* appears to us: any object-forms can *only* be present to us through the mediation of meaning-forms. As Husserl writes,

The being-in-itself of the world might make good sense, but one thing is absolutely sure: it does not have the sense of a world independent of an actually existent consciousness. The world is in principle what it is only as the correlate of an experiencing [*erfahrendem*] consciousness related to it — and an actual consciousness, not merely a possible one.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Husserl 1969, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Hartimo 2018, p. 260.

<sup>3</sup> Hartimo 2018, p. 260.

<sup>4</sup> Drummond 2019, p. 270.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in Drummond 2019, p. 269.

In other words, a phenomenological ontology is not the study of things-in-themselves distinct from the experience of them; it is the study of objects as experienced. The unity between *being* and *sense* is inherent to the very idea of phenomenological ontology; its topic is *the sense of being an object*.<sup>1</sup>

### 3.2. RETURNING TO MOSCOW

When Shpet returned to Moscow in late 1913, he did so in the role of a phenomenologist. In the following February he wrote to Husserl, describing his first impressions of the philosophical life of the city, which he now viewed from a novel perspective:

Dear Professor,

My return to Moscow gave me great joy in one respect: phenomenology here arouses a great and serious interest in all philosophical circles. The 'Ideas' is for the moment not very well studied, but almost everyone is talking about phenomenology; there are even special societies for the study of phenomenological questions. I defend the ideas of phenomenology at my lectures and seminars, and twice already have I had the occasion to speak publicly, 1) at a jubilee session for the opening of a new 'society for the study of scientific and philosophical questions' and 2) I gave a presentation on phenomenology as the foundational science in our old 'psychological society'.<sup>2</sup>

Shpet is happy to report that phenomenology 'is in high and favourable regard everywhere' and that it is seen 'as a serious and new step in philosophy'. He avers that most of the objections presented during his presentations had been of a general nature, resulting from a lack of understanding of the objectives of phenomenology.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Drummond 2019, pp. 270–272.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1996, p. 125.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1996, p. 126.

Shpet's letter also includes two questions regarding *Ideas*, as he was still working on his own argument for *Iavlenie i smysl*. Husserl replied in two parts, first with a postcard that addressed Shpet's question about noematic sense and then, some two weeks later, with a letter.<sup>1</sup> In the letter, written at the end of March, Husserl reports that he is still continuing the difficult battle 'for the new rational construction of the concluding volume of *Logische Untersuchungen*'. He writes that while the winter had been unproductive, he has of late been making progress; '...and God willing, something excellent will result'. However, what makes working difficult is that Husserl attests to being excessively aware of the responsibility he has taken on himself; 'You thus understand why I am replying to your letter which overjoyed me immensely only now, after a few weeks'.<sup>2</sup>

Husserl expresses his delight regarding the positive reaction phenomenology has elicited among the Moscow philosophers. He states that the most important thing is

for your countrymen who are so capable of enthusiasm to understand that we are speaking not of a new study of salvation, thanks to which the believer achieves bliss, but that a new science has been discovered, one endlessly fruitful, like the Russian plain, but like it only giving a rich harvest thanks to persistent labour (and not loud words).<sup>3</sup>

However, on 26 January 1914 Shpet himself can be seen to have used 'loud words' to deliver his message. This was: phenomenology is the philosophical answer in a period of spiritual, cultural, intellectual, moral and social crisis. The speech Shpet gave at the opening of the Moscow

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<sup>1</sup> The first of Shpet's two questions concerned his puzzlement regarding Husserl's characterization of sense as an 'abstract form'. The second question touched upon the question of the temporal constitution of cognition. This appears to have been a recurring theme for the two philosophers at the time: the following summer, when Shpet visited Göttingen again, Husserl reportedly read him an entire article on the question of time (see Shchedrina 2015, p. 63; Shpet 2005, pp. 208–209).

<sup>2</sup> Gusserl' 1992, p. 237.

<sup>3</sup> Gusserl' 1992, pp. 237–238.

Society of Scientifico-Philosophical Questions (*Moskovskoe obshchestvo po izucheniiu nauko-filosofskikh voprosov*) was a declaration of this new philosophical beginning.<sup>1</sup>

### 3.2.1. Shpet and *Logos*: Answer to Neo-Kantianism

The transcript of Shpet's January speech functioned as a prologue to *Iavlenie i smysl*, which was published a few months later. It is noteworthy that Shpet never mentions phenomenology or Husserl in his speech, which was to become something of a trend in his texts and public appearances in Moscow. At the same time, the text underscores the decisive nature of the questions the Russian intelligentsia was facing and does not belittle philosophy's potential for solving them. Considering the context in which the text was published, it is evident that Shpet is referring to phenomenology. He writes:

The hopeless time, when the 'bankruptcy' of the sciences was proclaimed, is being surmounted; the materialist era, when 'beggars of the spirit' ascended the throne in philosophy, is at an end. In all fields of scientific knowledge and in philosophy itself we are standing either at the radical breaking up of the old era and construction of a new one or on the verge of it. The period of doubt, decadence, sickly powerlessness, apathy and quietism are *behind* us! The unprecedented shocks in all fields of natural-scientific knowledge are only a consequence of the powerful increase and discovery of new forces and of a new life. The most fascinating bursts from and the all the more brightening light of our past in all fields of the humanities testify to the same. The penetrating aspiration of the philosophical spirits, withdrawing into its most secret depths, in philosophy, in its own self-consciousness, reveals the same features of our time! Indeed, we do not stand on the verge of a great epoch. We are *already* in it, in its irrepressible striving!<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Shpet refers to the speech in his letter to Husserl in February 1914.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1991, pp. 179–180.

Boris Iakovenko noted a year later that the appearance of the Society of Scientifico-Philosophical Questions, with a number of other societies, groups and educational institutions, was a sign of the rapid growth of interest in philosophy in Russia since the turn of the century.<sup>1</sup> There was a strong overall curiosity in philosophical — and generally spiritual — questions, and demands were made for the establishment of a modern and professional philosophy education in Russia. At the beginning of 1906 Moscow University took up this task, when, as Aleksei Pavlov writes, ‘a new curriculum was implemented in the Faculty of History and Philology; it provided for the establishment of ten highly specialized groups, including a philosophical sciences group consisting of three sections: a) history of philosophy; b) psychology; c) systematic philosophy’. Chelpanov’s invitation to relocate to Moscow in 1907 was itself a key moment in this process of professionalization, and had come to be known as a ‘skilled organizer and heated adherent of professional philosophical education’. Chelpanov led the philosophical instruction at Moscow University with Lev Lopatin, while Shpet began to organize seminars on contemporary philosophy.<sup>2</sup>

With the success of the *Logos* journal neo-Kantian philosophy had established itself as the leading, if not *only*, school of professional philosophy in Russia by the time of Shpet’s return. Neo-Kantians framed their philosophical position against the arbitrary ‘philosophizing’ that had long characterized the Russian intellectual tradition (and that in their opinion was continued in the practice of the *Put’* group). Instead, the neo-Kantian school taught philosophy students mental discipline and offered a solid technical foundation with professional competence; in Iakovenko’s words, a ‘unity of tendency, consistency of argumentation, clarity of principles, certainty of view’, as well as an ‘overall discipline’.<sup>3</sup> It seems probable that this academic professionalism is what drew Shpet to Musaget and *Logos* before his departure for Göttingen, even though he had expressed a strong distrust of neo-Kantian philosophy.

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<sup>1</sup> Iakovenko 1915, pp. 224–225.

<sup>2</sup> Pavlov 2016, p. 168. According to Pavlov Shpet’s seminars would discuss works by Husserl, Meinong and Bergson.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Dmitrieva 2016, p. 382.

However, by 1914 Shpet had arrived at his own understanding of what scientific philosophy should entail, and that his view differed from the neo-Kantian programme. Indeed, Shpet's January speech presents an attack not only on the contemporary materialist, mystical-religious and irrational philosophical trends, but also Russian neo-Kantian philosophy.

Shpet's declaration thus bears a resemblance to Husserl's 1911 *Logos* essay, which was his call for philosophy to be regarded as a 'rigorous science'. Although the phenomenological and neo-Kantian projects of renewing academic philosophy were in many ways similar, there were also fundamental differences that set them apart. Julia Jansen suggests that what united Kant and Husserl was their shared concern for saving scientific knowledge from the threat of relativism. The problem was met with wide social urgency in the eras of both philosophers. In Kant's time, the general public was awakening to a 'fundamental contingency of human life, which was no longer counterbalanced by an unquestionable order secured by an omnipotent, omniscient God'. With the growth and fast development of the natural scientific paradigm scientific thinking came to rely on an accumulation of observable and, thus, contingent matters-of-fact.<sup>1</sup> Jansen writes that for Kant,

one task of transcendental philosophy is to identify and validate those truths that retain their necessity amidst and in reference to the contingencies of nature and experience. At issue is therefore not primarily the necessity of analytic truths, which concern the laws of thinking as formulated by formal logic, but the necessity of truths about the contingent world experience, i. e., the necessity of synthetic truths.<sup>2</sup>

Both Kant and Husserl believed that the question of the 'truth' of reality could only be answered in reference to the structures of consciousness. Their transcendental philosophies therefore aimed to

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<sup>1</sup> Jansen 2015, pp. 47–48.

<sup>2</sup> Jansen 2015, p. 48.

uncover the necessary conditions of the (unquestionable) knowability of any contingent event in time and space.<sup>1</sup> Both thus set aside all traditional metaphysics and replaced it with an attempt to determine *a priori* truths about how objects could be known, or how they could appear to the consciousness. However, in terms of the question of *how* to find this 'necessity in contingency', the difference between Kant's and Husserl's approaches is evident. Jansen suggests that while Kant thought of the necessary unity between the given sensible manifold and its experienced unity as a unity that received its necessity 'top-down' from the 'highest point' of reason — that is, from the transcendental unity of apperception — Husserl thought of unity 'laterally', as a unity of 'coincidence (*Deckung*)'. According to Jansen this enabled for Husserl an *a priori* insight not only into necessities that 'reason itself produces according to its own plan', as Kant famously claimed, but also into necessities that reason 'genuinely *discovers*'.<sup>2</sup>

Husserl faced Kant's transcendental model mainly in the form of neo-Kantianism. It had become the most powerful philosophical movement in Germany in the 1870s and held this position until roughly the First World War. Neo-Kantianism offered an alternative to the earlier dominance of German Idealism, with Hegel as its leading representative. Instead of the traditional systematic philosophy and metaphysics, neo-Kantians argued that modern philosophy should become a 'science of experience', and that this goal could be achieved by adopting Kant's critical approach to the conditions of possibility for knowledge. The main difference with Kant was that his theory would now be buttressed by modern scientific knowledge. With the help of experimental psychology especially, philosophy could aspire to become the 'science of the sciences' (*die Wissenschaft der Wissenschaften*).<sup>3</sup> As John Krois writes, the

<sup>1</sup> This is just what Shpet (1991, p. 177) has in mind when he states in his speech that all contingency appears with necessity. He declares: 'peer into this unconditional and unrestrained contingency, gentlemen, and you will see that all of its trouble stems from what it demands and seeks for itself. Like a shadow something haunts it: unconditional necessity! The changing, the transient, the present-day, in all its different voices calls out to us to recognize its own necessity *to be this way*'.

<sup>2</sup> Jansen 2015, pp. 48–49.

<sup>3</sup> De Warren & Staiti 2015, p. 7.

rejection of traditional systematic philosophy raised a problem: ‘what did philosophers have to contribute to knowledge that the empirical sciences did not? The answer that emerged was simple: if philosophy could not explicate the nature of things in general as it had previously done, it could instead explicate knowledge itself’.<sup>1</sup>

The transformation of philosophy into ‘*Erkenntnistheorie*’, a theory of knowledge, was precisely what Shpet viewed as a sign of negativity and misplaced scepticism. In his January speech he disdained the ‘sickly powerlessness’ and ‘apathy’ of this approach that from the outset, as he argued, denies its own possibility of knowing the true nature of reality. In *Iavlenie i smysl* Shpet indeed asserts that any theory of knowledge ‘leads inevitably either to a subjectivistic metaphysics or to a direct rejection of philosophy’.<sup>2</sup> He thus begins his speech at the Scientifico-Philosophical Society with a rhetorical question concerning the epistemic role of philosophy. Shpet notes the term ‘philosophy’ has historically been used in two very different senses. On the one hand, it has designated ‘all of our knowledge’, as it did in antiquity, and on the other, it has later been understood to cover ‘only some *specific* delimited knowledge’. Shpet declares that philosophy must again adopt its original role as a foundation for all knowledge. In his opinion scientific views, ‘like any world-view in general, *must* rely on a philosophical groundwork because no other knowledge of foundations is possible’.<sup>3</sup>

Shpet thus sets scientific knowledge, as the contemporary and mainly neo-Kantian paradigm, against the pure and absolute philosophical knowledge of the beginnings of all reason. He argues that whereas the first is essentially pragmatic knowledge (*‘pour agir!’*), the second is free from all theory and outside impact. Moreover, Shpet asserts that by being pre-theoretical (phenomenological) philosophy can attain knowledge not from a scientifically defined ‘narrow’ perspective but from the whole of lived experience.<sup>4</sup> From this whole Shpet believes that truth itself,

<sup>1</sup> Krois 2013, pp. 101–102.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1991, pp. 175–176.

<sup>4</sup> Shpet (1991, p. 176) writes: ‘...let us take a closer look at the specifics of these world-views and see their distinguishing features. One is a mathematical world-view,

concerning the very being of reality, can be discovered. Philosophy will therefore be able to ask the kind of questions that he took Kantian philosophy to have denied itself. Shpet writes:

The mathematician tries to find *his discipline's bed-rock* and as a result of splendid discoveries and solutions to the most complex of tasks stands in bewilderment before its own foundation. The same holds true for physics, physiology, and history. What is space, time, a number, motion, force, life, death, the soul, society? The philosophical fundamental science is called upon not to solve the physicist's problems or those of the historian but to indicate to each their own roots, sources, *principles*, leading to the universal foundation underlying the entire colossus of contemporary knowledge. Moreover, it must indicate not only how everything existing *is* and how each form of existing *being is*, it must point out to each form not only its place and purpose, but also reveal the single *sense* and the single *intimate idea* behind all the various manifestations and outbursts of the creative spirit in its full and actual self-realization.<sup>1</sup>

In a somewhat similar vein, in 'Philosophy as Rigorous Science' Husserl promoted the idea that phenomenology could bring philosophy back to the concrete 'things themselves'. He contended that the modern scientific attitude had been snared in a physicalist and naturalist 'false objectivism'. Operating in scientific abstractions such as 'atom' or 'synapse', the natural sciences had had to relinquish a certain concern for their original foundations, the concrete experience. Conversely, this also resulted in the 'false subjectivism' of modern philosophy which, according to Husserl, was in the process of abandoning the whole idea of the rational pursuit of necessary and all-embracing truths. Husserl criticizes all types of relativism and most importantly the historicist idea that no truth can transcend its historical and cultural frameworks. He maintains

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another mechanical, yet another biological, sociological, etc. What is going on here? Each is fundamentally an unsuccessful, hopeless, and *narrow* attempt to usurp the rights of philosophy'.

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1991, p. 179.

that the natural scientist ‘sees everything as nature’, and the humanistic scientist ‘sees everything as spirit’, but neither of these *Weltanschauung* philosophers notices the limitations of their perspectives.<sup>1</sup> Thus, in 1911 Husserl accused neo-Kantians of not having been scientific *enough*. In his opinion the scientific value of philosophy must not be measured by its utility to other sciences, but philosophy must itself become a rigorous *a priori* science.

Sebastian Luft suggests that Husserl introduced his phenomenology as a wholly novel type of philosophy. Given the dominance of neo-Kantian thought, it thus appeared as the main antagonist of Husserl’s method. ‘If one had to choose an enemy for one’s own “liberation narrative”, it would have to be Kant and his successors’, Luft writes.<sup>2</sup> And yet in both Germany and Russia neo-Kantian and phenomenological schools evolved in close connection and even collaboration. In Russia this closeness was further underlined by the common enemy of the two groups: the traditionally ‘Russian’ and largely non-academic philosophy (*vol’naia filosofia*). Especially notable in the case of both Husserl and Shpet is their proximity to the (German and Russian versions of the) *Logos* journal, which Luft calls the ‘defining publication and dissemination outlet of the Neo-Kantian movement’.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Husserl was even part of the journal’s editorial board.<sup>4</sup>

This seeming paradox could be explained by the fact that, as Luft argues, the German neo-Kantian movement (particularly around *Logos*) was defined first and foremost not as a philosophy of science, but as a philosophy of culture (*Kulturphilosophie*).<sup>5</sup> Although the neo-Kantians would theoretically rely on a Kantian idea of *Erkenntnistheorie*, their spiritual background, according to Christian Krijnen, was the ‘ghost of

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<sup>1</sup> Miettinen 2013, p. 129.

<sup>2</sup> Luft 2018, p. 45.

<sup>3</sup> Luft 2015, p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> Krois (2013, p. 103) notes that the German *Logos: Internationale Zeitschrift für Philosophie der Kultur*, with Heinrich Rickert as its main editor, began publishing in 1910 and soon acquired ‘an illustrious editorial board’, including Husserl himself.

<sup>5</sup> Luft 2015, p. 29. Nikolai Plotnikov (2007, p. 621) suggests that *Logos* was, indeed, not defined by neo-Kantianism but by a broad liberal and international cultural project, which ended with the First World War.

nihilism' and the 'metaphysical void' to which Hegel's death had given rise in Germany. Along with Hegel his conception of the unity and facticity of meaning, of reason and reality, also faded. Neo-Kantianism thus made a case for the 'rehabilitation' of philosophy.<sup>1</sup> While the core of their system was rooted in rationalism, neo-Kantians also reached much further in their attempt to analyse human experience. In Luft's words, neo-Kantianism argued that while the human being was rational, he was however not wholly captured in this rationality. Thus, the space we occupy as human beings cannot be defined merely as the 'space of reasons'. Instead, 'the space we inhabit is more appropriately called the *space of culture* and a philosophy of culture has this space as its topic of investigation', Luft writes.<sup>2</sup>

Likewise, in Russia the neo-Kantian philosophy of culture was part of a much larger attempt to overcome a crisis that threatened the very possibility of establishing moral, spiritual, existential or aesthetic truths. According to Natal'ia Nemirova 'the reason for the revision of the positivist approach in science was, above all, not curiosity, not detached interests of thought, but complex questions of life, deep needs of moral consciousness'.<sup>3</sup> Shpet's philosophy matured in the same post-positivist atmosphere of the turn of the century. Thus, although he was strongly opposed to using philosophy as morality or a philosophy of life, Shpet's thinking was evidently driven by similarly fundamental concerns. He too expressed an urgent need for philosophical answers — on which, indeed, the entire future of Russian culture depended.

However, while there had still been room for a certain scepticism and existentialism in Shpet's thinking before his journey to Göttingen — especially in his admiration for Lev Shestov — his approach now turned out more strictly defined.<sup>4</sup> Shortly before the October Revolution Shpet expressed his criticism of Shestov, who argued against Husserl's method

<sup>1</sup> Krijnen 2015, p. 113.

<sup>2</sup> Luft 2015, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Nemirova 2007, p. 68.

<sup>4</sup> In 1935, writing from his exile in Eniseisk, Shpet (1995, p. 57) laments to his friend Liubov Gurevich that 'there is one thing in my articles of that time which I do not like and even irritates me sometimes: their arrogant tone. Looking back, I am amazed by their inappropriateness and untimeliness'.

in his 1917 essay ‘*Memento mori (po povodu teorii poznavaniia Edmunda Gusserlia)*’. Shpet believed that Shestov was severely misguided in his assertion that philosophy should not aspire to being rigorous and foundational, and that it should instead leave room for ‘wisdom’ (*mudrost*) and ‘eternal’ questions. In his response Shpet demanded that philosophy must instead clearly define its own jurisdiction as that of ‘pure knowledge’. As the influence of religious neo-idealism grew in Russia, especially after the revolution and under the authority of Nikolai Berdiaev, Shpet’s phenomenology proved increasingly disconnected from other forms of ‘idealism’.

### 3.2.2. Shpet and Shestov: Answer to Scepticism

Shpet returned to Germany briefly in June 1914. He travelled first through Switzerland, where he stayed a few weeks in Coppet with Shestov, visiting his first wife and daughters in Geneva, where they now lived with Shpet’s mother. From Coppet he continued to Göttingen, where he remained for almost a month. Shpet met with Husserl regularly, discussing ‘general matters’, work in phenomenology, as well as his professional plans. He had already sent the recently published *Iavlenie i smysl* — dedicated to Husserl — to his teacher but, without a translation, they could hardly discuss the book’s content.

Shestov’s opinion was that it would be necessary to have the book translated to German, no matter what the cost or the amount of work it would require.<sup>1</sup> It seems the question of a translation was also raised by Husserl during their first meeting. Shpet reports in his letter to Natal’ia Konstantinovna: ‘Regarding the translation, Frau Husserl wrote yesterday to one publisher to enquire whether he knew a translator’.<sup>2</sup> But finding the time to adapt the work for a translation appears to have

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet (2005, p. 191) mentions in a letter to his wife that having the book translated would indeed call for further editing of the text, for which he cannot seem to find the time.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 2005, p. 201.

been difficult for Shpet.<sup>1</sup> In general, the Göttingen letters of 1914 speak of a contrast between his professional aspirations and the realities he faced. Shpet writes that he has wondered why he feels so at ease abroad and what draws him to travel, and concludes that he is perhaps simply drawn away from Moscow, the city that now appears to be 'the only place' where he is 'not loved'. Shpet attests that he is surrounded by 'enemies' and mentions dreaming of moving away, possibly 'to the environs of Moscow'. He could thus attain a quieter life, similar to that of Shestov, whom he admits he envies.<sup>2</sup> Shpet also discusses the topic with Husserl, who is surprised to hear that instead of looking for philosophical allies in St Petersburg, Shpet entertains a dream of moving to Iur'ev (present-day Tartu), where, in his own words, he 'could now independently establish himself and receive a chair in the very near future'.<sup>3</sup>

The peace for which Shpet yearns, he believes, would allow him to focus on the theoretical tasks he had discovered during the writing of *Iavlenie i smysl*. At present, this is impossible due to the still unfinished doctoral thesis. Shpet writes:

I am glad that I could at least publish my *Iavlenie i smysl*, because here I was able to say something, albeit to a microscopic degree. However, on the other hand, I am even more disappointed by the fact that I must abandon the continuation of that very work for a long time. I know that the dissertation is not at fault here — to the contrary, even, and I will need to say a thing or two in it to save myself from returning to it — but in any event, if I were free, I would finish up with it quickly and move on to my own work, but as precisely it will take up my free time, I feel a certain reluctance towards it.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet (2005, p. 208) writes to Natal'ia Konstantinovna: 'When Shestov says that time needs to be found to rewrite the book for a German translation, I fully understand him — in his place, I would say the same to someone else — but I do not understand where to find that time'.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 2005, pp. 206–207.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 2005, p. 205. Shpet adds that Husserl had reportedly spent 'a few years' in Iur'ev himself, which made him 'absolutely not understand' Shpet's dream. For more on the philosophy faculty of the University of Iur'ev see Pavlov 2016, pp. 173–174.

<sup>4</sup> Shpet 2005, p. 207.

Following what Husserl tells him about his own method of writing,<sup>1</sup> Shpet fears that if he does not tackle the theoretical work now, he might lose his present clarity of intuition. He aims to continue from where *Iavlenie i smysl* ended and surprisingly writes that the work is to be ‘ethical’ in nature. Shpet was unable to realize these plans: his later philosophy does not, overtly at least, develop an ethical theme. Seemingly, due to the increasingly difficult circumstances, he repeatedly failed to seize the phenomenological opportunities presented to him. In one of the 1914 letters from Göttingen, Shpet writes:

Husserl suggested something to me: he had received a letter from an editor of a French philosophical journal with the proposal to write an article about his phenomenology. Husserl does not want to do so himself, but asked me to write, as an extract from the book — which [he felt would not be] difficult for me. However, I had to turn that down too, as again there was no time. That is of course very regrettable, as it would have meant a lot to me, but there was nothing to be done about it!<sup>2</sup>

Having returned to Moscow, Shpet resumed his life with a young family (the three children from his second marriage were born in 1914, 1916 and 1919), teaching and publishing. His 1916 essay ‘*Soznanie i ego sobstvennik*’ is one of the two texts in which Shpet continues to develop his phenomenological argument. The essay was published in a *Festschrift* dedicated to Chelpanov on the twenty-fifth anniversary of his academic career, written by former students of his Kiev and Moscow seminars. Shpet’s doctoral defence took place in May 1916, and in the autumn of 1917 he released the first issue of his own philosophical journal, *Mysl’ i*

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet (2005, p. 205) writes: ‘[Husserl] made some very interesting observations (which he even wrote down, but only for posthumous publication) about his own work. He says that he can only write when he has some “heaven-sent inspiration”, that for example, in his *Logische Untersuchungen*, almost everything was written by intuition, and that he only inserted some parts to give the whole a more finished appearance, and that those parts were the least successful’.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 2005, p. 208.

*slovo* (*Thought and Word*), in which he published his second significant phenomenological essay, ‘*Mudrost’ ili razum?*’<sup>1</sup>

It appears that during his stay in Göttingen Shpet had somewhat lost touch with his earlier philosophical circles. Boris Gornung, who would become a close associate of Shpet in the early 1920s, asserts that *Mysl’ i slovo* appeared at a time when Shpet had yet to found his own group. “To juxtapose the annual publication “*Mysl’ i slovo*” on the one hand [...] with “*Logos*” and, on the other, with those he would later call ‘nonsensical’, he with great difficulty had to assemble a circle of colleagues, and the only criterion for that was a negative quality — lack of membership of groupings which he considered his enemies’, Gornung writes.<sup>2</sup> *Mysl’ i slovo* was intended to become an annual publication, but this plan did not materialize. Instead, only two issues were published: in 1917 and in 1918–21.

Lev Shestov published in both issues of Shpet’s journal.<sup>3</sup> Yet at the same time the two philosophers were at odds in terms of their reactions to Husserl’s phenomenology. Shestov’s ‘*Memento mori*’ was published in *Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii* in the autumn of 1917.<sup>4</sup> This was a critical appraisal of Husserl’s philosophical programme as presented in the *Logos* essay. According to Shestov Husserl had been mistaken in stating that philosophy should be made scientific, arguing that it made phenomenology amount to nothing more than another theory of knowledge. Like Kant, Husserl seemed to Shestov to have simply excluded a region of philosophy from his system — whether it be called metaphysics or ‘wisdom’. In Shestov’s opinion this made phenomenology blind to the deeper mysteries of existence. Relying steadfastly on the powers of human rationality, Husserl seemed to him to deny that there was anything it could not achieve. Soon after the publication of Shestov’s essay Shpet wrote

<sup>1</sup> The date of the journal’s publication is unknown, but on 26 December 1917 Georgii Adolfovich Lemahn-Abrikosov wrote a letter to Shpet with a review of the first issue. (Shchedrina 2015, p. 66.)

<sup>2</sup> Gornung (2001, p. 353) adds: ‘Thus M. O. Gershezon and I. B. Rumer, who had nothing at all to do with the basic direction of the yearbook, ended up in “*Mysl’ i slovo*”’.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Self-evident truths’ in the 1917 issue and ‘Socrates and Blessed Augustine’ in the issue of 1918–21.

<sup>4</sup> *Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii*. Kn. 139. 1917.

a draft commentary on it, defending Husserl against what he considered a misinterpretation. The review was never published, but its manuscript remained in Shpet's archives.<sup>1</sup>

Shpet asserts that the argumentation in '*Memento mori*' is unusually weak given Shestov's habitual intellectual depth. In his opinion the essay lacks originality, insight and a true ability to express insights about the abyss, or the 'groundlessness' of existence: 'there are no dangerous mountaintops — there is office fatigue and an armchair'.<sup>2</sup> Apart from misinterpreting transcendental phenomenology as a theory of knowledge (and attacking it, as Shpet writes, with all the usual arguments used against gnoseology), Shpet accuses his colleague of making two grave mistakes: 1) criticizing gnoseological methodology from the perspective of ethical concerns ('Shestov is only interested in "how morals are possible"'); and 2) confusing the differing tasks of philosophy as rigorous science, philosophy as wisdom, and the search for non-scientific truths about life '...for he himself needs *God*, and not truth!').<sup>3</sup> Shpet claims this leads Shestov to the impression that Husserl has promised that scientific philosophy will answer 'all questions that perplex humanity' and achieve the 'final truth'.<sup>4</sup> In reality, Shpet asserts, Husserl is merely defining the possible research field of rigorous philosophy and only promising to answer all the questions attached to that field.

Principally, however, Shpet's dispute with Shestov concerns whether philosophy should try to account for knowledge of the religious type; knowledge about things beyond human rationality. In Shestov's opinion the metaphysical questioning of the ancient Greek philosophers, who were driven to know the foundations of all being, was of this kind. While the correctness of their claims could not be proven, the Greek

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<sup>1</sup> Tat'iana Shchedrina (2004, p. 188) has suggested that Shpet's decision not to publish his review might have been connected with the fact that Shestov had recently lost his son in the war.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 2010a, p. 210.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 2010a, pp. 220–221.

<sup>4</sup> Shpet 2010a, pp. 211–212; 217. Tomas Sodeika and Lina Vidauskytė (2015) have discussed Shestov's and Husserl's approaches to the dichotomy of 'chaos' or 'tragedy' and philosophy as rigorous science.

thinkers considered philosophy the highest of all forms of knowledge, reaching for the 'Truth' (*Istina*) itself, as something different from verifiable scientific facts. According to Shestov the direct juxtaposition of 'science' (*nauka*) and 'wisdom' (*mudrost'*) was in fact unknown in the history of philosophy until Husserl's statement. Indeed, he asserts that until then 'the accepted opinion was that if there was anywhere wisdom and deep thinking [...] could find a firm mooring, it was only in a philosopher's breast [...].'<sup>1</sup> According to the definitions of Aristotle and Plotinus philosophy was the 'most important, the most necessary, the most significant' activity of human minds, as well as the 'most divine' of all sciences.<sup>2</sup> Shestov maintains that Husserl would probably disagree with such statements:

...he would hardly agree to repeat that philosophy is divine among sciences, that it is most inherent of God, that it had God as its subject. In my opinion, he would probably not agree to do so. The word 'God' would remind him of wisdom, which he as we know considers the enemy of philosophy, and would drive it out of his republic, as Plato drove the poet out of his.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, Shestov argues that Husserl 'could agree only to recognize the kind of God of which reason were proof, because [...] alongside reason there is not and cannot be another authority'.<sup>4</sup>

Shestov acknowledges the boldness of Husserl's statement. The latter seems to him to be making his argument 'with all the impetuosity of a fanatically convinced person' to prove that 'it is possible, without resort to metaphysics, to save oneself from relativism, and that people, despite knowing little or not everything, really know what they know, and thus neither gods, angels or demons can dispute their truths [...]'.<sup>5</sup> Shestov thus admits that Husserl's search is directed towards a funda-

<sup>1</sup> Shestov 1993, p. 190.

<sup>2</sup> Shestov 1993, pp. 193–194.

<sup>3</sup> Shestov 1993, p. 194.

<sup>4</sup> Shestov 1993, p. 197.

<sup>5</sup> Shestov 1993, p. 208.

mental level of truth.<sup>1</sup> The potential consequences of such a search are serious:

Husserl wants no compromises: everything or nothing. Either evidence is the last point for which the human spirit strives when searching for truth, and that evidence is fully achievable by human means, or the kingdom of chaos and madness must descend on Earth, one in which all who wish to may lay a claim to reason's stately rights, to its sceptre and crown, and 'truth' will prove completely dissimilar to those unshakeable conclusions for which the strict sciences searched and which they have been finding until now.<sup>2</sup>

If that were to prove the case, Shestov concludes, philosophy might once again need to turn to 'wisdom'.<sup>3</sup>

Shestov's argument does not convince Shpet. He asserts that the former seems to suggest that, as Husserl confirms the correlation of the world to consciousness, he at the same time rejects the existence of anything that remains outside it — anything that is potentially beyond the grasp of human cognition. However, in Shpet's opinion there is nothing in phenomenology that would contradict Shestov's example of such an existence. For example, Shestov suggests it is entirely possible that

somewhere in other planetary spheres (and maybe much closer to us) masses are at present not attracted to each other, but freely approach and flee one another, in their movement not obeying any previously composed plan. That not only can, but must be allowed — if one is not, after Kant, to accept that reason dictates laws to nature.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Shestov and Husserl's friendship has been well documented, and it is often suggested that what drew the two philosophers together was the openness with which they disagreed with each other (see e. g. Szepieniec 2014; pp. 139–141). Shestov's article '*Pamiati velikogo filozofa (Edmund Gusserl)*', published in the Parisian journal *Ruskiia zapiski* in 1938, testifies to their philosophical comradeship.

<sup>2</sup> Shestov 1993, p. 214.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Shestov 1993, p. 221.

In addition, Shestov argues that there is a confusion in Husserl's usage of the terms 'ideal' and 'eternal' being. He demonstrates his argument with an example:

[...] in chess — this Husserl himself will tell you — the king or queen, in a word any chessman, is an ideal being which does not at all mutate because of its real embodiments. If the king were made of gold, ivory or dough, if it were the size of a bull or a sparrow, bear a crown or a tiara — its ideal being would of course not change the slightest because of that, as it would not change if a single chessman had never been embodied in reality. The same goes for the other chessmen. [...] It may even be triumphantly stated that monsters, angels and gods would have to see in it the same thing people see. And one must thence conclude that it is outside time, eternal — for were the whole world to perish, the ideas of chess would remain. However, even Husserl, with all his courage, would never think to speak on the subject of chessmen as eternal ideas [...].<sup>1</sup>

In contrast, for Shpet Shestov's example of the chess pieces is an accurate illustration of his unsound expectations of philosophical knowledge. He argues that the ontological status of the chess pieces is in fact a 'wonderful example of the ideal'. Opposing postulations of any realities beyond the knowable one, Shpet defines the nature of an ideal being simply as something which is accessed through the ideal intuition. He attests that ideal objects and relations such as the rules that govern the movement of pieces on a chessboard are not 'invented' but instead '*discovered*'.<sup>2</sup> For Shpet this is indeed an example of the kinds of truth that can be reached and analysed by philosophy as 'pure knowledge'. Shestov appears to him to be caught up in a psychological scepticism that denies knowledge the possibility of reaching truths, thus making any philosophical progress impossible. The truth which

<sup>1</sup> Shestov 1993, p. 222.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 2010a, p. 215.

Shestov is seeking, Shpet suggests, is in fact God, and thus beyond any philosophical endeavour.<sup>1</sup>

In what follows I discuss Shpet's two essays, '*Soznanie i ego sobstvennik*' (1916) and '*Mudrost' ili razum?*' (1917), which finalized the foundation for the phenomenological method he would use in his subsequent works. In the first of the texts Shpet formulates the idea of a collective consciousness, thus presenting an alternative to Husserl's transcendental subjectivism. The possibility of a shared consciousness supports Shpet's theory of the entelechy, which is in turn a topic for his second essay. In '*Mudrost' ili razum?*' he reinvestigates the question of the inherent rationality of all experience and reinterprets the entelechy, the directing 'force' of this rationality, as language. Especially this second essay, which was published on the first pages of the first issue of the journal *Mysl' i slovo*, can be considered programmatic for Shpet's post-Göttingen career. It not only promotes phenomenology, but also demonstrates the scope that Shpet considers fitting for philosophy as pure knowledge. As the title of the essay suggests, this is done at least partly in response to Shestov's concerns. Proposing a new conception of rationality for Russian philosophy, Shpet argues against treating it as wisdom.

It is uncertain which direction Shpet's philosophical work would have taken had it not been for the October Revolution. Nonetheless, by 1917 he had completed a certain transition from a visibly Husserlian viewpoint to his original hermeneutic and semantic phenomenology, which would later form the basis of his cultural theory of the 1920s. '*Mudrost' ili razum?*' illustrates how the source of 'meaning' which Shpet was seeking in the noetic-noematic structures in *Iavlenie i smysl* is now discovered in a 'word' and its 'inner form'. The foundation of Shpet's linguistic theory is therefore phenomenological. As I attempt to show, this should also affect how we interpret the meaning of his theory of the inner form of the word. The theory itself will be the main subject of the fourth chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet 2010a, p. 221.

### 3.3. FROM ENTELECHY TO THE INNER FORM OF THE WORD

Maryse Dennes has rightly spoken of the need to interpret Shpet's version of the Humboldtian-Potebnian concept, the inner form of the word (*vnutrenniaia forma slova*), from a phenomenological viewpoint. She identifies the root of the concept in the entelechy of *Iavlenie i smysl*, contending that Shpet's theory is thus not merely semantic but also, significantly, philosophical. Indeed, as Dennes suggests, Shpet's texts of the 1920s in the fields of linguistic and cultural theory are but 'variations' and 'fragments' of a broader and deeper issue, which he first discussed in 1914.<sup>1</sup> In my opinion Dennes correctly identifies the source of Shpet's theory, as well as the phenomenological problems that an interpretation of his inner form must address: for example, the noetic-noematic structure, the nature of positum, the question of sense-bestowal, Shpet's intelligible intuition and, of course, the nature of entelechy. These problems' relationship with the theory of the inner form of the word has itself yet to be addressed, and this is what I attempt to do in the remaining parts of the thesis.

Dennes maintains that Shpet treats the word as a triad structure of sense (*smysl*), signification (*znachenie*) and entelechy with the latter creating the connection between the former two. She compares this division with Frege's *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*, suggesting that the sense of an object is given in perception, while its signification is acquired through ideal intuition; it is part of a linguistic-cultural ideal structure.<sup>2</sup> The entelechy, then, is what makes the transition between the kinds of intuition possible: it 'translates' a sense perception to each culture's way of seeing and thus, for example, allows us to see the tall wooden object in front of us as a bookshelf and not a large ladder, or just an obscure symmetrical structure. This reading comes close to what I have suggested concerning Shpet's entelechy as a rational 'motivation' of

<sup>1</sup> Dennes (2006), of course, is referring to the titles of Shpet's two works, *Esteticheskie fragmenty* and *Vnutrenniaia forma slova. Etiudy i variatsii po teme Gumbol'ta*.

<sup>2</sup> Dennes 2012, pp. 20–21.

experience. Yet, it seems to me that if we assume that Shpet's entelechy simply 'gives the right word' for our sense-percept, the phenomenological weight of his idea remains modest. I therefore propose that a further investigation into the philosophical significance of Shpet's idea is still necessary.

According to Dennes entelechy and the inner form can be understood as variations of Shpet's conceptions of 'nation' (*narod*) and 'spirit' (*dukh*), which he uses in his 1927 work *Vvedenie v etnicheskuiu psikhologiiu* (*Introduction to Ethnic Psychology*). Thus, her interpretation of Shpet's theory relates it closely to Humboldt's and Potebnia's expositions, where meanings are seen as being created collectively, following a certain energy or teleology inherent in a culture or language.<sup>1</sup> Even though this view clearly resembles Shpet's formulation in *Iavlenie i smysl*, I suggest that we should treat his phenomenology separately from his ethnic psychology. If the rational motivation which Shpet discovers in the very core of sense formation is defined as something like national spirit, his conception is indeed all but identical to Humboldt's. But such a reading does not correspond to the view, shared by Husserl and Shpet, of phenomenology as an absolute and rigorous cognitive ground for the indubitable knowledge of the given. It seems to me that both Shpet and Husserl are striving for 'truths' instead of culturally defined meanings — even if the difference is not always easy to define.<sup>2</sup>

Discussions of Shpet's phenomenological hermeneutics have generally not addressed the truth-value of the culturally defined concept that can also be treated as a meaningful sign, such as 'bookshelf'.<sup>3</sup> This has been further reflected in the interpretations of his cultural theory. If the question of the relationship of the object-as-intended, the 'meaningful object' (e. g. chimney, axe, bookshelf) with truth is not raised, Shpet's

<sup>1</sup> Denn 2009.

<sup>2</sup> I am not the first to observe that Shpet's entelechy suggests more than a significant relationship to reality, or that the inner form of the word is intended to express something 'directly' about reality. See e. g. Roman Schastlivtsev (2006, p. 258), who writes: 'Concept [...] cannot be seen as empty, it contains a concrete meaning, it is embedded with a direct relation to reality as to its own object. Concept for Shpet is the reality of an object as deployed in reason'.

<sup>3</sup> Bernet (1988a, p. 3) asserts that this crucial distinction is also present in Husserl's theory of signs.

conception of culture potentially becomes relativistic.<sup>1</sup> In the following chapter I present a reading of the inner form of the word that is more intricately connected with Shpet's interpretation of Husserl's phenomenology, also tackling the evasive question of 'truth'. First, however, I will present a short analysis of the essays '*Soznanie i ego sobstvennik*' and '*Mudrost' ili razum?*'.<sup>2</sup> These texts are a necessary part of the foundation of Shpet's hermeneutics, as they introduce the possibility of a collective consciousness and integrate the notion of language with the phenomenological conception of the entelechy. The outcome of the essays is therefore a vision in which Husserl's pure consciousness as the 'place' where the constitution of reality occurs is replaced by a collective rationality in which each individual consciousness takes part. According to Shpet this rationality is ultimately language, which thus formulates our vision of the world at the most fundamental level.

### 3.3.1. Shpet's Collective Consciousness

Shpet's essay '*Soznanie i ego sobstvennik*' presents a clear-cut argument against Husserl's manner of constructing phenomenology, so to speak, around the 'pole' of the transcendental ego. It is sometimes suggested that he thereby returns to the earlier 'non-egological' conception of phenomenology, presented in *Logical Investigations*. For example, Thomas Nemeth writes that in 1916 Shpet questions 'what he regarded as Husserl's fundamental thesis regarding the I, namely that every *cogitatio* effected is of the form *cogito*'. Shpet asks: what, or who, is this *Ego cogito*? Nemeth continues, 'is it something other than the stream of lived experiences and, unlike ever changing stream of experiences, something numerically identical in those experiences or, even more fundamentally, that to which these experiences belong?' Nemeth argues

<sup>1</sup> This indeed is Patrick Flak's conclusion in his article (Flak 2010, p. 163), as he writes that 'Shpet appears very vulnerable to sceptical relativist criticism'.

<sup>2</sup> '*Soznanie i ego sobstvennik*', while interesting in its own right, will be presented only briefly, since its main content is repeated in '*Mudrost' ili razum?*'. For discussions on Shpet's analysis of the philosophical ego, see e. g. Molchanov 2014 and Chubarov 2014b.

that from Shpet's point of view, the positing of an 'I' 'behind' an individual consciousness 'leads directly to subjectivism'.<sup>1</sup> To tackle the issue, Shpet dedicates his essay to an analysis of what exactly we understand by an 'I', and what its relationship is to 'consciousness'.

In *Ideas* Husserl framed phenomenology as an analysis of the pure transcendental consciousness — not that of the personal and empirical ego, but of the reduced one. It is thus a study of the lived experience and of consciousness in its necessary correlation to that which is transcendent to it. Phenomenology considers the consciousness as yielding meaning to what is experienced and treats every transcendent 'being' as a unity of meaning. One thereby attains an absolute region of being which constitutes 'all mundane transcendence', in the words of Shlomit Baruch.<sup>2</sup> In *Ideas* Husserl attributes this absolute region of being to transcendental subjectivity. Famously, he states that while he had still doubted the existence of the pure ego in *Logical Investigations*, he could no longer do so. Even after the transcendental reduction, he now finds that the pure ego is necessary and endures in pure consciousness: it belongs to every lived experience as that which remains identical even as the experience itself can change, appear, and disappear.

Shpet challenges Husserl's conclusion, asking, '[...] how then did Husserl come to this identical I?' He finds that, contrary to the latter's habit as well as the principle of all principles, demanding evidence of all originary givenness, Husserl fails to provide any evidence for the presence of a pure ego in experience. Shpet notes that Husserl himself admits that the pure ego is not a 'part' in a lived experience, and states:

Here, to me, is how the matter stands: Having excluded the empirical I in the phenomenological reduction, Husserl can retain the ideal (eidetic) I only as an *object*, but by no means as the subject of consciousness. And then in the 'transcendental residuum', as the object of phenomenology, a pure consciousness would remain, but it would be, so to speak, *no one's*.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Nemeth 2019a, pp. 155–156.

<sup>2</sup> Baruch 2004, p. 201.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 2019a, p. 190.

Shpet discards Husserl's doctrine of 'transcendence in immanence' and asks, 'does his ornate combination of Latin terms provide any clarification of the matter?' For him the 'positing' of a pure ego as the subject of experience not only leads dangerously to subjectivism, but also forces Husserl to alter his own principles by introducing a theory 'where there is no need of it'.<sup>1</sup> In the phenomenological analysis, Shpet asks, would it not be 'more correct to say that there simply is nothing', that is, nothing that would reveal the presence of a transcendental subjectivity in lived experience? He concludes that 'nothing can be said, that nothing need be said and simply that there is *nothing* to say about this I, because it is not and I at all'.<sup>2</sup>

One of the three central claims of '*Soznanie i ego sobstvennik*' is that the I can be discovered only as a 'thing', a 'unity' among others. According to Shpet to speak of a 'psyche' or a 'person' is to speak of a social thing just as one speaks of ladders, books, apples and so on. Consequently, the I cannot form a foundation of any kind. As for the I as an empirical unity, Shpet suggests that 'a unity of lived experience or consciousness' seems an adequate characterization. He realizes that this suggestion will seem counterintuitive to many, writing that, perhaps, 'some Ivan Ivanovich will claim: I am a unity of consciousness. What are we to make of this? In my view, he will be right but only that Ivan Petrovich is also a unity of consciousness...'<sup>3</sup> Thus, Shpet believes that one can indeed ask the question of 'whose' a consciousness is, of who is its 'owner', but only as long as we understand the underlying 'I' as a social category, determined in place and time. 'For example', he writes, 'I live on such and such a street, I have a certain social standing, I am exhausted, I am wearing shabby clothes, I am bankrupt, etc.'<sup>4</sup> In this case, Shpet asserts, asking 'whose' the consciousness is will be much like asking 'Whose coat?' or 'Whose galoshes?'<sup>5</sup> This does not amount to a philosophical question. Meanwhile, however, the complex nature of the 'social' I remains a prob-

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 2019a, pp. 190–191.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 2019a, p. 193.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 2019a, p. 198.

<sup>4</sup> Shpet 2019a, p. 159.

<sup>5</sup> Shpet 2019a, p. 199.

lem for philosophy. Shpet asserts that it is something ‘inexplicable’, and as such a subject always open to interpretation and to a ‘translation’ to socially constructed language.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast, Shpet argues that if we understand consciousness as an ideal object and wish to examine it in its essence, ‘it makes no sense to ask *whose* it is’. This is the second claim of Shpet’s essay: a ‘unity of consciousness’ as such, eidetically understood, belongs to no one because it is not a ‘possession’ or a ‘property’. It is ‘consciousness itself’, and one must therefore respond to the question ‘Whose consciousness?’, ‘It is its own’. Consciousness itself is free. The third and final argument in Shpet’s essay concerns the possibility of a truly collective consciousness. He writes that if the unity of a single consciousness ‘certainly is the unity of *this* consciousness’, correspondingly, the ‘unity of a multitude or of a collective or of a communal consciousness is a unity of the collective consciousness!’ Shpet insists that this is not a mere play on words, but a distinction between a ‘meaning which has a *genetivus subjectivus* and a *genetivus objectivus*’.<sup>2</sup> In addition, he argues that there is nothing metaphysical about such a conception: a ‘unity of consciousness’ can refer to a variety of cases, just as any ‘thing’, ‘content’ or ‘object’ can always be understood as unities of sorts.

At the end of his essay Shpet suggests examples of cases where consciousness may be attributed to a collective subject, and where the communal sphere and its essential types should be understood as independent spheres of investigation. He writes: ‘Such expressions as the “moral consciousness”, the “aesthetic consciousness”, the “religious consciousness”, the “scientific consciousness”, etc. already show the directions from which corresponding problems arise [...].’<sup>3</sup> Shpet’s hypothesis is that the different kinds of communal consciousness should have their own ‘form’ so that ‘they can be designated and then the sense of that *designation*, its logos, could be revealed’.<sup>4</sup> The statement functions as an indication of the direction that Shpet’s work would take after

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet 2019a, p. 193.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 2019a, pp. 198–199.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 2019a, p. 202.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

the revolution. In the early 1920s he embarked on various studies of the nature of empirical communal consciousness(es) — most obviously in his research on ethnic psychology and on the philosophical issue of *logos* as a foundation of any communal consciousness, especially the aesthetic one.

Concerning the critique of Husserl's egological phenomenology, Shpet is, of course, not alone. Nemeth suggests that his commentary can be read in connection with two well-known criticisms presented, even if decades later, by Jean-Paul Sartre (*La Transcendance de l'ego. Esquisse d'une description phénoménologique*, 1936–37) and Aron Gurwitsch ('A non-egological Conception of Consciousness', 1940–41).<sup>1</sup> The second text is particularly interesting from the point of view of Shpet's phenomenology.<sup>2</sup> There, Gurwitsch points to the change that took place in Husserl's view of consciousness between *Logical Investigations* and *Ideas I*. In the former he had rejected the view that acts of consciousness were derived from any 'centre' of consciousness, whereas in the latter he endorsed the existence of a pure ego as just such a centre. Both Sartre and Gurwitsch argue that in a phenomenological introspection the ego should not be considered the source of consciousness; instead, it appears to them as constituted *by* consciousness. Gurwitsch sees consciousness as a multi-part dynamic and flowing whole, a 'field'. As Dermot Moran writes, Gurwitsch's consciousness is 'united into complexes that succeed each other, by the complexes themselves and not by any super-vening ego'. For him the ego is nothing but this united complex, and it 'derives its unity and its coherence from the very acts that enter into it and constitute it; and it is nothing other than the organized totality of these acts'.<sup>3</sup>

More recently, Shlomit Baruch has joined the criticism, arguing that there is in fact a tension within the very concept of transcendental consciousness in Husserl's exposition. She asserts that one must, indeed,

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<sup>1</sup> Nemeth 2019a, pp. 156–157.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Haardt (2009) has discussed the relationship of Shpet's aesthetics with Sartre's literary theory, but he does not take up the issue of '*La Transcendance de l'ego*'.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Moran 2019, p. 7.

criticize Husserl for returning in *Ideas I* to the classical assumption of a transcendental ego, so that the ego becomes a necessary structure of consciousness. This view is incompatible with Husserl's definition of the concept 'consciousness'. It is unnecessary as a unifying principle. The transcendental ego is 'death of consciousness'.<sup>1</sup>

Baruch suggests that consciousness knows itself only as the consciousness of a transcendent object. Consciousness, in other words, is a 'transparency'. While agreeing with her predecessors, Baruch believes that the criticisms of Sartre and Gurwitsch are insufficiently radical. She finds a problematic tension between what she considers to be two competing goals of Husserl's phenomenology: 'on the one hand, phenomenology aspires to be pure intuitive science that describes what is given as self-evident', and on the other, 'Husserl is looking for an absolute being, an absolute condition'. Thus, Baruch states that Husserl no less than contradicts his own definition of phenomenology as a descriptive science, 'because he goes beyond the conception of consciousness as an absolute fact and presents it as a system of conditions'.<sup>2</sup>

Shpet's motivation for rejecting Husserl's egological position was his fundamental mistrust of anything that might lead to a subjectivist or relativist philosophy. Therefore, while he provides an elaborate analysis on the meaning of 'consciousness', the 'I' and the 'ego', his main point is nonetheless elsewhere: in proving the possibility of a collective consciousness. In this vein, it is interesting to consider J. N. Mohanty's criticism of Gurwitsch's approach, which, he believes, fails its task of 'domesticating' the problem of inter-subjectivity. According to Mohanty Gurwitsch promotes a 'field theory of consciousness', according to which we should speak not of transcendental consciousness but only of a constitutive 'function' of consciousness. For Gurwitsch, as Mohanty summarizes, consciousness is but a field in the sense of the 'totality of copresent data', and the unity of any perceived object is due not to the perceiving subject, but the coherence of the system of which the object is part.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Baruch 2004, p. 204.

<sup>2</sup> Baruch 2004, pp. 205–206.

<sup>3</sup> Mohanty 1994, pp. 940–942.

But he finds that simply replacing the ego with a 'field' will hardly free consciousness from its privacy. Mohanty asserts:

To the contrary, it would seem that if mental life is private, it would be so even on a nonegological theory. The various fields of consciousness (replacing the putative egos) would not just become parts of a common public world (of consciousness); they would still be closed off from each other. So what is needed for solving the problem of intersubjectivity [...], then, is not to deny the 'I' as a component of prereflective consciousness but a suitable theory of consciousness which makes it 'visible' to the other in an appropriate manner.<sup>1</sup>

It is my view that Shpet, with his theory of the collective consciousness, the social world, and the inner form which functions as its foundation, is attempting to formulate just such a 'transparent' theory of consciousness and its functions.

### 3.3.2. 'Word' as a *principium cognoscendi*

Although Shpet never mentions Husserl's name in '*Mudrost' ili razum?*' — perhaps so that he might promote a distinct philosophical standpoint without attributing it to Husserl alone — it strikes the reader as a commentary on 'Philosophy as Rigorous Science', as well as a discussion on themes that Husserl presented in another programmatic work, his 1907 lecture course '*Die Idee der Phänomenologie*' ('The Idea of Phenomenology'). The essay also offers an indirect criticism of Shestov's 1917 '*Memento mori (po povodu teorii poznaniia Edmunda Gusserlia)*' and can thus be viewed as a response to the former's concerns.<sup>2</sup> In his text Shpet introduces his own philosophical programme, which reaches out

<sup>1</sup> Mohanty 1994, p. 952.

<sup>2</sup> The connection of Shpet's text with Shestov's essay has previously been discussed by Shchedrina & Pruzhinin 2016, pp. 39–40, as well as Nemeth 2019b, pp. 209–210. I have suggested its association with Husserl's 1907 lecture course in an earlier text (Bourgeot 2020).

for a knowledge of reality in its ‘wholeness’, ‘concreteness’ and ‘unity’ while at the same time remaining rigorous in the Husserlian sense. Most importantly, Shpet asserts that the method he is suggesting allows for a direct access to the true and essential being of reality. In other words, Shpet is proposing a phenomenological method adapted to the Russian philosophical discourse.

As previously discussed, Shestov accused Husserl’s *Logos* article of carving out an unnecessarily restricted philosophical method. According to Shestov the truth about reality could never be attained by rational thinking alone, and so philosophy should remain open to other, irrational and mystical, models of thought. In Shpet’s opinion Shestov dreams beyond what philosophy as pure knowledge can attain. He argues that all knowledge must be securely built on a rational foundation, the critical examination of which is the task of philosophy. Shpet attacks metaphysical theories that draw conclusions about reality without a philosophical justification and claims they are ‘quasi-philosophy’. Philosophy as knowledge, in contrast, must never stop reviewing its own reasoning. ‘*Mudrost’ ili razum?*’ presents a further development of the insights of *Iavlennie i smysl*. Shpet now tackles the ideal sphere of experience in more detail and approaches the question of entelechy from a new point of view, not only discovering it in experience, but attempting to distinguish its proper mechanisms.

Husserl also approaches the eidetic sphere in his *Logos* essay, stating that it is merely the ‘spell of inborn naturalism’ that makes it difficult for us to see essences, or ideas. Or rather, as he continues, ‘since in fact we do, so to speak, constantly see them, for us to let them have the peculiar value which is theirs instead of absurdly naturalizing them’. According to Husserl intuiting essences actually ‘conceals no more difficulties or “mystical” secrets than does perception’. Indeed, when we bring ‘colour’ to ‘full intuitive clarity, to givenness for ourselves’, the datum is an ‘essence’. Husserl argues that the phenomenological investigation must remain in the purely eidetic sphere, and its statements must describe the phenomena in full clarity ‘by means of concepts of essence, that is, by conceptual significations of words that must permit of being redeemed in an essential intuition’. When phenomena are grasped in essential

intuition, they will permit 'of being fixed in definitive concepts and thereby afford possibilities of definitive and in their own way absolutely valid objective statements'.<sup>1</sup>

This is precisely Shpet's task in '*Mudrost' ili razum?*': to develop a method of reliably describing eidetic phenomena. Shpet asserts that to achieve this goal, philosophy must further investigate the nature of ideas, the eidetic realm, as the content of consciousness.<sup>2</sup> This indeed appears to him the sole field of research for philosophy, which should accept no pre-given theories and only include in its subject matter what is clearly experienced through different intuitions (empirical, eidetic, etc.). Shpet understands these intuitions as the immediate and sole connecting point between consciousness and the external world, and as such they constitute the subject matter of philosophy. While other sciences take the givenness of reality for granted, philosophy must raise the question of *how* reality is given through intuition. The sphere of philosophical analysis is thus consciousness and more accurately, the correlative relationship between mind and reality.

Philosophy must take ideas *as* they are directed towards reality, Shpet argues. He speaks for the fundamental unity of epistemological and ontological viewpoints in such an outlook:

Being, understood as that which is, as truth, is then studied in an authentically philosophical manner when we direct our reflection on the very thought of being. For thought is revealed in itself to thought. It is revealed in its authentic essence and not as something that springs into being and passes away, something that 'seems to us'. We have here the authentically 'unshakeable heart of the complete Truth'. Being in itself is being and just that. Only through thought does being become an object of thought and, consequently, the object of philosophy as knowledge. We must come to the realization that philosophically

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<sup>1</sup> Husserl 1981, p. 181.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet's 'consciousness' should be understood in the light of his previous article, i. e. not as a subjective 'mind', but a realm — possibly a collective one — of consciousness.

being exists through thought, that the object of thought and the object of being are one and the same. They are a *single* object.<sup>1</sup>

Shpet asserts that positive and pure philosophy thereby finds a way of 'rigorously adhering to its tasks' and now confronts 'an infinite field of serious and fascinating work'. The tasks of philosophy are defined by its own essence; its goal is 'reality itself in its genuine being, namely *that which is, that which exists*'. Indeed, Shpet identifies 'reality' and 'being' as the same thing.

'As long as we simply "live", we find *everything* in our experience: One thing enters into it, another one leaves; one is added, another is taken away. Nevertheless, we *experience everything* and only it', Shpet writes. However, he notes that once we accept this, we must at the same time acknowledge that the initial question of positive philosophy, 'what is?' now appears differently. Shpet asserts that the question, in fact, 'removes us from the sphere of experience'. Instead, something 'comes to a stop before us and stands like an enigmatic question mark. It lurks "behind" everything and stops the continuous stream in which everything flows'.<sup>2</sup> Shpet notes that if what is given to us is the experience of something, the external reality remains on the 'other side' of experience and knowledge. Shpet finds a remedy to the problem in Husserl's *epoche* as a critical attitude. To attain true knowledge of being, one must discover what is absolute and unchanging in our directedness towards the ever-changing reality. The clarity and stability of intuitions vary, and Shpet states that not everything given in experience is 'really' given; 'not everything that exists is essential'. Thus, philosophy must 'distinguish the essential, the *essence*, in what exists from what is not essential'. According to Shpet we can

concentrate our attention on what is not essential and 'isolate' it from what is essential, carefully removing from the given what 'seems' to be and what is 'contrived', thereby 'cleansing' it of what to us is

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet 2019b, p. 217.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 2019b, p. 230.

'habitual', of presuppositions, conjectures, hypotheses, theories, and of what simply 'happens', 'occurs', or 'takes place' in what there is but does not *abide* in it. The essential, what abides in being, stays itself, '*the same*'.<sup>1</sup>

Shpet's quest is similar to Husserl's search for apodictic evidence that presents the given in a way that is 'stable' in its variations; it is the thoroughly reduced form of the given which could not appear in any other way. Husserl especially tackles the topic of apodictic evidence in his 1907 lecture course, in which he suggests that if we are, for example, presented with different shades of the colour red, 'can we not judge that they are similar to each other — not these particular, individual red phenomena, but rather the species, the nuances as such?'<sup>2</sup> The eidetic nature of 'redness' can thus be grasped in intuition. Shpet conceptualizes the same idea differently. He asserts that as we direct ourselves towards reality, our gaze might sometimes dwell on the contingent 'surface' of reality, and sometimes probe more deeply through its essential 'core'. The two sorts of intuition are a single intuition, but different degrees of seeing.<sup>3</sup>

To reach the essential, however, a change of attitude is necessary. Shpet points out that there are objects in our field of vision that are in constant movement, while others seem to remain stable and identical with themselves. 'Through theory', he writes, we learn that, in fact, everything changes in relation to space, distance, size, mass, time and so on. If we then consider our own position as the location point from which everything is perceived, this becomes easily evident: all the physical qualities around us change immediately, as our observing position is altered. This poses a problem for Shpet. He writes that to make some part or 'piece' of reality the object of our study, we must not only extract

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 2019b, p. 231.

<sup>2</sup> Husserl 1999, p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 2019b, p. 232. Nevertheless, it is important to remember the fundamentally different nature of Shpet's and Husserl's views. Shpet interprets that concept of essentiality not as the objectively valid and reduced self-given, which the phenomenologist looks for 'in' his or her cognition, but as an essentiality that he discovers by 'probing deeper' into reality.

it from the whole but even ‘freeze’ it in the flow of time. Thus, while reality itself and all our experiences have passed somewhere into the distance, we remain in ‘the past’, that ‘*itself* is not given, so to speak, directly to us, but only *reproduced* by us’.<sup>1</sup>

In the concluding part of ‘The Idea of Phenomenology’ Husserl also speaks of the ‘transcendencies’ that remain, even after the reductions, as if behind the truly self-given. He gives the example of hearing a sound or a melody:

If we look closer and now notice how, in the experience of a tone, for instance, even after the phenomenological reduction the *appearance and that which appears stand over against each other*, and do so *in the midst of pure givenness*, that is, within genuine immanence, then we begin to wonder. The tone lasts for a while; then we have the unity of the tone and its temporal span with its temporal phases — the now-phase and the past phases — in evident givenness; on the other hand, when we reflect, the phenomenon of the tone duration, which is itself a temporal phenomenon, has its own now-phase and phases of ‘having been’.<sup>2</sup>

The ‘above indication already suffices to make us aware of something new’, Husserl continues: ‘the phenomenon of tone perception, even the evident and reduced phenomenon, requires a distinction within immanence between the *appearance* and *that which appears*’. In other words, we now have two forms of absolute givenness, the givenness of the appearing and the givenness of the object. For things simply to be there, Husserl argues, is a ‘matter of certain experiences of a specific and changing structure, such as perception, imagination, memory, predication, etc.; and things are in them not as they might be in a case or container, rather, things *constitute themselves*’.<sup>3</sup>

A kindred concern is evident for Shpet in relation to any act of perception — even though his interpretation is again different from Husserl’s.

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 2019b, p. 234.

<sup>2</sup> Husserl 1999, p. 67.

<sup>3</sup> Husserl 1999, pp. 67–68.

Shpet writes that any 'slice' of experience, after the actual moment of its experiencing, can be brought back into consciousness, but only as a 'copy' of the original: it is not the perception itself. Shpet concludes from this that 'we always see the factually given as given mediately. It demands that it be the object of examination, of a *representation*'. Conversely, it is difficult to reach that which is 'actually originally given here, what is *presentatively* given, what, to put it another way, "remains" after removing everything that is introduced by our "imagination", "recollection", "understanding", "desire", "apperception", etc.'<sup>1</sup> Thus, in this rather striking contrast with Husserl Shpet rejects the latter's view of constitution as perceiving something *as it is imagined, remembered, desired* and so on. According to Shpet to access the essential content of experience, we must somehow get to it without the contingency of the appearances, the forms of givenness, typical of empirical being; these are merely viewpoints enshrouding the essential.

This brings Shpet back to the question of the problematic nature of the eidetic, which, he says, 'is often depicted as a system closed unto itself, abiding in a state of static equilibrium'. In this system 'each "idea" occupies a strictly determined and carefully doled out "spot". For this reason it cannot be "budded" without breaking its connection to the whole, without breaking certain "laws of logic", without creating — and this would be the kiss of death! — a "contradiction"<sup>2</sup> Shpet suggests that the misunderstanding regarding eidetic beings is that they have been understood as 'empty forms', general concepts or abstract universals that must be 'filled' with actual content to be exemplified in reality. On the contrary, he asserts that we should view eidetic beings as generalizations *from* reality, found as they are, with their contents.

Shpet is seeking a new kind of logic, which would not reduce the ideal to a static structure, writing that ideas are not 'savage beasts that must be caged'. The eidetic realm should be considered in all its richness of forms, even if contradictory, because the limitations of our minds should not be surmised to be also limitations of ideal being. Shpet

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet 2019, p. 234.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

asserts that the concepts themselves of ‘idea’, ‘essence’ or ‘eidos’ need revision. He writes that although they are by definition stable and ‘firm’, one must also account for their dynamism: ‘*eidos* not only always fills [...] forms with an active content, with a *sense*, but even in the most exacting manner reflects, by its own “movement”, the slightest demands on the part of the object’s formative content’. According to Shpet the instantiation of the eidetic being *in reality* allows it to appear as part of a whole, of a meaningful structure, the changes of which are reflected in each of its parts, and vice versa. If we can thus modify how we address reality, and how we single out the eidetic ‘forms’ in our reduced consciousness of reality, he argues that we might come to grasp the dynamic eidos that ‘lives’ in the everchanging reality and gives it meaning.

Evidently, Shpet’s phenomenology has at this point come a long way from Husserl’s conception. As in *Iavlenie i smysl*, the difference is connected to the problem of sense-constitution. If for Husserl it occurs in a combination of different cognitive processes, for Shpet meaning is here created by a context ‘out in the world’. The nature of the contextualized essence, which Shpet also calls ‘concept’, is dynamic: ‘Its dynamic is the dynamic of sense’.<sup>1</sup> In this new kind of seeing of essences — as a meaningful part of a whole — Shpet finds the true opposite of the natural attitude: the properly philosophical outlook. He characterizes the perception of facts as a grasping of mere moments and secondary representations of the actual being, contrasting it with the direct intuition of essences instantiated in reality. This originally given (*per vichno danoe*) is accessible ‘as itself’ (*samolichno*), and because of its perdurable nature it remains as something from which consciousness can always ‘detach’ itself and then ‘return’ to it, finding it unchanged.<sup>2</sup>

Shpet thus finds it possible for an intuition to truly and directly present (instead of merely represent) its object. The only way in which the eidos changes in our perception is in relation to its form (i. e. whether it is perceived, remembered, desired, etc.) or its ‘clarity’. Shpet writes: ‘The object toward which consciousness is directed is located at a distance of

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 2019, pp. 234–235.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 2019b, p. 235. (Shpet 1917, p. 32.)

more or less *nearness*. It is found farther away or closer to the clearest “center” of consciousness. But with all these modifications of consciousness [...] the essence intuited in it remains invariably and calmly *one and the same*. Although the eidetic realm is found *in* consciousness, as before Shpet is unwilling to attribute it to any subjective mind. He points out that the mind or consciousness of any actual person ‘appears to be entirely an empirical fact, a “contingency”’.<sup>1</sup> Correspondingly, empirical experience, which Shpet considers a subjective form of perception, only gives us a sense experience (*opyt*) of things, which, in the course of a person’s life, ‘accumulates passively or is actively enlarged, classified, ordered, etc.’<sup>2</sup> But ‘whether experience itself can be called cognition even in a broad, improper sense is doubtful’, he writes.

Philosophy must ‘stop considering experience itself as a “dogmatically” given thing of the real world’, Shpet declares. He argues that the strictly philosophical outlook, in which reality is considered ‘through consciousness’, can only be reached if one considers consciousness ‘not as an empirical experience of an individual, not as the data of “observation” or of “selfobservation”, but as consciousness given to consciousness, *consciousness in a reflection on itself*’. Shpet asserts that through this modification we reach ‘pure intentionality as the consciousness of any object and of any objective content’ without any metaphysical ‘baggage’, that is, without any singular viewpoint through which we would be tempted to jump to pseudo-philosophical conclusions. ‘There is no need to construct hypotheses and explanations here’, Shpet writes. ‘Since nothing “depends” on consciousness in its essence, it neither “acts” on anything nor does anything “act” on it. It is not a “thing”. It is not a “reality”. Rather, it is an “essence” and an “idea”’.<sup>3</sup>

A philosopher must remain firmly critical of their own thought, constantly analysing the content of their own consciousness *as* the content of their consciousness: the attention is now directed at the nature of this content. Indeed, as long as this position is held, that is, as long as thought studies thought, Shpet finds it possible to achieve

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 2019b, pp. 236–237.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 2019b, p. 238. (Shpet 1917, p. 35.)

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 2019b, p. 239.

pure knowledge. He asserts that the ‘guarantee of philosophical rigor lies simply in the “purity” of its descriptions, in the actual communication of what “we see” in the essential analysis of consciousness’. This clarificatory task of philosophy is eternal and never-ending, ‘invariable and stands outside time’.<sup>1</sup> Even though philosophers tend to rush and fail in their task, this in no way affects the potential truthfulness of philosophy itself, Shpet states.

The philosophers’ historical tendency to base their thinking on subjective experience and the philosophical ego has therefore been mistaken, in Shpet’s opinion. He writes that all too often, the ‘I’ proved to be the criterion, the measure, the source, the owner and even the guarantee, not only of its own arguments, but of ‘all things’ and of truth itself. Shpet expresses the concern that if we grant the ego the ‘power to legislate’ and consider it able to ‘construct everything’, we soon slip into relativism. On closer inspection, he argues that we can see that the ego appears merely as a ‘point of location’. What we have grown accustomed to taking as the ‘individual consciousness’ is only a ‘unity’ within something larger and non-personal. In Shpet’s opinion such a unity can ‘under no condition [...] serve as an “epistemological” guarantee’.<sup>2</sup>

Shpet distinguishes between two terms closely linked in Russian, *soznanie* (consciousness) and *poznanie* (cognition),<sup>3</sup> suggesting that this distinction remains unclear only insofar as we fail to see that, when taken as the subject matter of philosophy, consciousness must be treated in its essential form, as an eidetic consciousness, which is ‘*ideal and not real*’. Thus, it is not ‘*my* consciousness, or that of any other so-and-so or in general, of any *real* being’.<sup>4</sup> The relationship between consciousness

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 2019b, p. 241.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 2019b, p. 242. Following the reasoning of ‘*Soznanie i ego sobstvennik*’, Shpet continues: ‘In reality, the “I” is always a unicum, a social “unit”, a *so-and-so*. Certainly, each so-and-so is also a “unity” of consciousness, but this unity is surely a factual, empirical, and historical unity. If a unity of cognition, as essential, forms a certain “part” in the “whole” of consciousness, then obviously the *philosophical* problem of cognition simply goes past the so-and-so, “without touching” it. To an equal degree, it can neither give nor not give guarantees of knowledge’.

<sup>3</sup> For example, another term for epistemology in Russian is ‘theory of cognition’ (*teoriia poznaniia*).

<sup>4</sup> Shpet 2019b, p. 242.

and cognition brings Shpet back to the problem of experience as passively received '*opyt'*', which now appears to us in a new light:

When we say that our knowledge is obtained from *experience*, taking the concept of experience in its broadest sense, as that which we *live through*, we correctly indicate the source of our cognition, but upon a closer examination such a formula for the *principium cognoscendi* is too *crude*.<sup>1</sup>

In Shpet's opinion the picture of experience changes as soon as we consider more closely the fact that it is given by two very different kinds of intuition: the empirical and the ideal. The object towards which our consciousness is directed is one and the same, but it is presented to us with empirical or essential content, depending on our attitude. This, Shpet argues, cannot be explained if we understand 'experience' in its simple sense.

Regardless of the species of intuition, Shpet asserts, we do not intuit passively but actively switch from one intuition to another. To modify Husserl's earlier colour example, we may choose to see red at a certain moment as the colour of a particular apple and at another moment the colour red in general. In Shpet's opinion this is revealed in the philosophical gaze directed towards consciousness itself *as* it is directed towards reality. In this standpoint, he argues, objects of experience appear to us in already 'formulated' ways (empirically or ideally); they are revealed as the content of consciousness. This requires an act of understanding: the given object is understood *as* the given object. The simple and passive consciousness (of objects) now becomes cognition (which grasps the form in which the objects are given).

Shpet concludes that the final form which objects of experience take in cognition is undoubtedly that of the 'word' (*slovo*). This is the first time Shpet refers to the word as a foundational principle, yet the discovery is scarcely emphasized in the text. He asserts that because the linguistic sign combines the empirical with the ideal, it can signify

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet 2019b, p. 243.

transcendental objects in all their possible forms. In Shpet's opinion the word is indeed so central to our mental activities that he is ready to affirm it as '*the principium cognoscendi of our cognition*'. He finds that 'it is worth our while to pause on whatever is involved in cognizing consciousness, and we find it to be immediately impressed in words'. Illustrating this, Shpet cites Plato: 'When the mind is thinking, it is simply talking to itself, asking questions and answering them, affirming and denying'.<sup>1</sup>

Shpet suggests distinguishing several forms (*formy*) present in this word: at least the grammatical, the stylistic, the aesthetic and the logical.<sup>2</sup> Whereas the first-mentioned forms are either structurally defined by the language of which they are part (grammatical forms) or can be used to express the speaker's subjective nuances (stylistic forms), logical forms are found at the very root of any meaning formation. Shpet writes that they are 'particularly important to us. They are neither fortuitous nor empirical, but essential and necessary, as stable and uniform as the formative object is identical in itself.'<sup>3</sup> In other words, Shpet considers the logical forms of language (which he also calls the 'inner forms of the word') to coincide with the logical forms of thought.

The discovery has considerable consequences for Shpet's vision of phenomenology. This, finally, is his answer to the question of how meaning is bestowed upon raw experiential data, similarly to Husserl's theory of constitution. For Shpet the inner form of the word, that is, its logical form, serves to conceptualize the very point of meaning-constitution. The logic of this constitution appears 'transparently' in the inner form: our inherent logic of thought is the logic of the inner form. In other words, the given, *as it is given*, is directly presented in the word. According to Shpet the word can thus be seen as holding within itself the full richness of the logic of thought itself, and logic should thus study words as expressions of the mind's content. This prospect

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet 2019b, p. 244.

<sup>2</sup> By 'forms' Shpet seems to mean different 'aspects' of one word as it can be understood or 'looked at' as a grammatical structure or as an aesthetically pleasing word, for instance.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 2019b, p. 244.

of a new logic, Shpet finds, could ideally lead to an entirely new level of scientific explanation:

If a word, as an ideal inner form, could be immediately transmitted, perhaps our science would be as error-free as the truth itself that science wants to transmit. However, the essential source of error and delusions lies in the fact that the ideal logical forms in a word itself are closely connected with other forms and that the final empirical impression of a word is itself empirical.<sup>1</sup>

Shpet admits that with all that he has established his view of reality, and of how philosophy should address it, proves tightly interconnected with logic. But he finds this to be perfectly permissible since the logical form of thought should be located at the very core of knowledge itself. He asserts that we 'see all of our knowledge only through this stratum. Consequently, it, as knowledge, cannot be other than in the logical forms necessarily peculiar to it'. Shpet's conclusions strike one as somewhat radical: since the given is given directly in the logical forms of language, Shpet equates them with truth. In the word, he claims, we can find a *direct expression of being itself*. Yet, this is not a metaphysical statement, but rather a methodological notion, which Shpet opposes to the neo-Kantian and, especially, irrationalist currents in contemporary philosophy: 'This is why all the ruckus about logic by certain representatives of contemporary pseudo-philosophy is essentially absurd. a "protest" against logical forms of thought is just as absurd as a protest against a solution to a mathematical problem using the principles and techniques of mathematics'.<sup>2</sup>

The new dynamic logic of concepts Shpet proposes would be a 'non-formalistic' logic. However, what is required first is a reinterpretation of the notion of 'concept' (*poniatie*) itself. Shpet writes that the irrational argument against logic consists precisely in the fact that logical concepts are seen to 'impoverish' the lived experience, that they are considered

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet 2019b, p. 245.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 2019b, p. 245.

‘boring’, ‘static’ and ‘formalistic’. All this, he thinks, is correct ‘as long as it is the matter of the logic that looks on “concepts” as delimitations of one content from another purely in terms of their respective *extensions* and when it is concerned only with the relations between concepts in terms of their extension’.<sup>1</sup> But such a restricted understanding of concepts is not a necessary quality of logic, historically speaking, Shpet claims; it was not the case with Aristotle’s or the Stoics’ logic, with the logic of the Middle Ages, with Port Royal Logic or with the later rationalist logic. The novel term Shpet proposes to describe his logic is ‘semasiology’ (*semasiologiia*). He looks on words as ‘signs’ (*semata*) that have the potential of denoting their content, that is, their meaning, directly. As Shpet emphasizes, this is not a case of representation but of *presentation*: it is the presentation of the logic of thought itself. We can still understand or fail to understand these signs, Shpet argues, but this is a question of our fallibility, not that of the sign.

Indeed, the act of interpretation is not a simple task, as the sign must be understood in its context. That, properly speaking, is where meaning becomes constructed. Shpet writes:

A concept considered semasiologically in essence cannot be characterized as ‘static’ or as a ‘snippet’. On the contrary, it is fundamentally dynamic, as dynamic as is its meaning. Such a concept is not a ‘snippet’ but a living organ. An *understood* concept lives and moves. Any verbal particle is understood only in *connection* with others and with the greater whole. And this whole is understood again in a new whole of which it is a part. a word, a sentence, a period, a conversation, a book, an entire speech — there are no cessations here to endless penetrating acts of understanding.<sup>2</sup>

Shpet’s argument is that all contextual connections are indeed ‘found’ within each word (or some other part of speech): they are implied by its inner logical form. The work of phenomenological analysis, in seeking to

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet 2019b, p. 248.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 2019b, pp. 248–249.

untangle the structures of meaning, thus moves ever further from the consciousness of the transcendental ego in Shpet's theory. However, discourse, or language, now seems to 'embody' the impersonal cognition, which he considers the true foundation of knowledge. Not 'belonging' to anyone, it is instead constituted collectively through every use of language. It forms a hermeneutic 'reality' of concepts, created and understood, which covers 'everything'. Referring to the earlier conclusions of his *Istoriia kak problema logiki*, Shpet writes, we 'have still another name for the *whole* [*vse*], as the empirical whole, and it is "*history*" [*istoriia*].'<sup>1</sup>

Shpet therefore argues that we can grasp reality as a whole when we understand it hermeneutically. Herein lies the difference between philosophical understanding and empirical knowledge. The latter focuses always only on a part or moment of the flow of our total experience. In contrast, hermeneutic philosophy attempts to grasp everything as a moving and changing whole. This whole is therefore by its nature dynamic, and the logic that describes it is for Shpet dialectics.<sup>2</sup> At the end of the essay, he returns to the question of how such a dialectical and hermeneutic construction may be connected to reality. Shpet clarifies:

The issue here is that in a concept, as an internally formed word, we see not only the 'concept' but also — and this is essential — its eidetic content, which contains the sense or meaning of the concept. We penetrate to this sense not by means of a simple 'conceptualization', but through an act of 'establishing' that includes within itself — insofar as it is in itself only a formative act — a *sui generis* act of 'intelligible intuition'. It is this act that gives us an 'understanding' of the corresponding sense.<sup>3</sup>

The word-concept, which is not merely an extension or a class, but also a sign, requires an act of interpretation. Shpet describes this act as a penetration into the concept's meaning, 'into, as it were, its "intimate something," into the "living soul" of the word-concept'. The hermeneutic act

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 2019b, p. 249. (Shpet 1917, p. 50.)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 2019b, p. 251.

of understanding a concept thus corresponds to the phenomenological practice of analysing the constitutive acts of cognition.

According to Shpet when we first investigate the acts and content of our consciousness, this consciousness spontaneously becomes an interpretative one, and its content is converted into meaningful signs: consciousness becomes permeated with language. The meanings ‘found’ in consciousness are not constituted subjectively by the philosophizing ego, but they are formed through the collective meaning structure, that is, through language. Seeing the whole of reality thus saturated with meaning that changes dynamically with the historical changes in language (and its objects, the world), Shpet alters the saying ‘*nihil est in intellectu quod non fuerit in sensu*’ to ‘*nihil est in intellectu, quod non fuerit in historia, et omne, quod fuit in historia, deberet esse in intellectu*’.<sup>1</sup> As Nemeth comments, this is Shpet’s adaptation of the Scholastic doctrine that there is nothing in the intellect that does not come from the senses.<sup>2</sup>

A notable detail of Shpet’s theory of the word is that it does not, strictly speaking, refer to a reality outside itself. Words are signs that have a content, or a meaning, which they disclose. a sign (*znak*) expresses its meaning (*znachenie*), which is the ‘pure object’ as it is formulated into a cognizable object. Concerning the philosophical search for truth, Shpet writes, echoing Husserl’s argument in ‘Philosophy as Rigorous Science’, that the true nature and final goal of philosophy should be found, quite simply, in clarity of description. He asserts that to ‘avoid lapsing into fantastic pseudo-philosophical revelations, what we have to say about this further deepening of our philosophical understanding must — whether we like it or not — have a “purely” instructional character [*kharakter chistykh ukazaniï*]’.<sup>3</sup> Anyone who attempts to reach further will, in Shpet’s opinion, risk climbing too far on the ‘philosophical heights’, where ‘only the rare head was spared from spinning’, and will have us ‘bombarded with words written with a capital letter: Truth, Reason, Will, I, the Good’.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ‘Nothing is in the intellect that has not been in history, and everything that was in history should be in the intellect’.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 2019b, pp. 251–252.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 2019b, p. 252. (Shpet 1917, p. 54.)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

In Shpet's theory rationality assumes a prominent role as a philosophical principle. His conviction is that this is not a convention or a theoretical outlook, but rather a necessary condition of human thought. The mind's 'movement' from a sign to its meaning in the hermeneutic or understanding intuition is for Shpet a primary (*pervichnyi*) and immediate (*neposredstvennyi*) act, so that this meaning is perceived in an immediate intuition.<sup>1</sup> 'A semasiological acceptance of the essence *eo ipso* forces us to seek in it, as the "beginning", the *sense*, which is revealed to us as the *rational foundation* inherent within the essence itself', he writes.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the very correlation of consciousness to the world is rational: the world, for us, is rational. Ontological and epistemological viewpoints are thus all but merged in Shpet's phenomenology, and he appears committed to seeing word, language or eventually, culture, as a reality.

By 1917 Shpet had thus formulated a theory of how he thought philosophy could grasp reality directly, yet in its encompassing totality. He approached that which 'is' phenomenologically, accepting it in its givenness. Meanwhile, the hermeneutical focus that had been visible in Shpet's phenomenology from the start led him to its logical outcome when he moved from analysing the structures of consciousness to those of language. This transition allowed Shpet to gain a novel perspective on the problems of poetics and aesthetics, with which he became increasingly concerned after the revolution. Shpet's aesthetic theory would offer a counterargument to the leading neo-Kantian interpretations of art, as he argued that Russian artists had failed to come to terms with the actual and true reality. Correspondingly, even when speaking about art, Shpet never lost sight of his original and main interest, the being of reality.

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1917, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 2019b, p. 254.

#### 4. FORMULATING THE INNER FORM OF THE WORD

Shpet welcomed the opportunity for social and cultural reform in Russia in 1917. Philosophically speaking, however, the October Revolution posed a problem for him. To him it seemed that the revolution had been mainly a consequence of a longstanding romantic dream of the opposition intelligentsia. What had materialized in 1917 was nothing but their ‘illusion’, in Shpet’s opinion; the old reality had been torn down, but the negative logic of the revolution offered no replacement for it. Russia, Shpet argued, now had no reality. His post-revolutionary cultural theory, put forward mainly in his 1922–23 *Esteticheskie fragmenty* (*Aesthetic Fragments*), can be read as an attempt to create a new logic for Russian culture. Relying on his phenomenological conception of the inner form of the word, Shpet’s theory suggests that culture can express the nature of being directly, completely and unerringly. By being he means not the ‘naturalistic’ take on reality but the all-encompassing ‘reality as collectively understood’. As before, Shpet’s conceptions of logic, meaning and being intersect. Through a new logic of cultural creation, he claims to be able to generate a ‘new reality’. His conception is thus suggested as a cure for the disillusionment that had come to replace the anarchic fervour.

In this final chapter Shpet’s theory is approached in the cultural context of the early 1920s. Its philosophical foundation had been fully formulated by the time of the revolution, but only the dramatic events of 1917 properly defined the questions which Shpet would use it to tackle. The importance of expressing reality ‘as it is’ acquired a renewed urgency, and Shpet now joined in debates not only with other philosophical views but more importantly, other cultural visions. In *Esteticheskie fragmenty*, he attacks the ‘illusionism’ of symbolism, as well as futurism’s ‘pseudo theories’ as unsuitable for the requirements of the post-revolutionary

moment. Russia needed a new culture, and Shpet believed that only his theory displayed a sufficient and suitable philosophical foundation to manage this complex task.

Through his participation in the Moscow Linguistic Circle (*Moskovskii lingvisticheskii kruzhok*, or MLC), Shpet's theory was integrated into the ongoing debates concerning Russian formalism. Indeed, his reinterpretation of Humboldt's and Potebnia's idea has previously been analysed mainly in relation to the formalist conceptions of poetic semantics, evolving simultaneously with Shpet's theory. However, in what follows I will analyse the inner form of the word as a philosophical — Husserlian rather than Humboldtian — concept. While taking into account the crucial incentive that Shpet received from contemporary artistic, linguistic and semantic debates, my goal is to examine the uninterrupted influence of phenomenology on his thinking. Shpet's inner form of the word is thus inspected as not 'just' a principle of his cultural theory but as a philosophical idea, carried over from his phenomenological conclusions to the field of culture. I argue that its meaning is thus 'deeper' than is perhaps immediately visible in Shpet's texts from the 1920s.

The Humboldtian reading of the inner form of the word was discussed in the previous chapter. I will now suggest a further demarcation of the two interpretations of Shpet's conception. One version of the inner form can be extrapolated from works such as *Vvedenie v etnicheskuiu psikhologiiu* (*Introduction to Ethnic Psychology*) and *Vnutrenniaia forma slova* (*The Inner Form of the Word*), both published in 1927. In these texts the inner form is treated as a principle of creative activity — much like the Humboldtian *energeia* — and is considered from the perspective of a national language or culture. Here, Shpet's focus appears to be on culturally specific logics that allow different social groups — occupying a different 'spirit' — to formulate different expressions. But *Esteticheskie fragmenty*, published some five years earlier, offers another reading of the inner form. Here, the 'word' is examined not just as part of a culture (a 'structure' as Shpet calls it), but in its relationship to being, reality or truth — that which exists 'outside' culture and 'on which' the latter is established. In this visibly more Husserlian version Shpet's theory gains a more transparent ontological or metaphysical meaning.

The inner form thereby remains the same, but it can be viewed from two distinct points of view. Consequently, Shpet's theory reveals an internal tension that had been present in his philosophy from the beginning. On the one hand, Shpet approached a cultural theory that would seek the most suitable forms of expression to reflect the spirit of post-revolutionary Russian society. On the other, he remained invested in the philosophical problem of how to grasp reality in its true being. As the previous chapters have described, he reached the concept of the inner form through a long phenomenological search, culminating in the discovery of a rational principle of the non-subjective consciousness. In the 1920s Shpet puts this same principle into use in the delicate task of devising the kind of 'word' that could reflect the experienced reality as immediately as his phenomenological theory promises.

The present chapter will first outline the professional circumstances which Shpet faced after the October Revolution. It will then turn to his analysis of the problematic history of the Russian intelligentsia in the 1922 *Ocherk razvitiia russkoi filosofii* (*Outline of the Development of Russian Philosophy*). According to Shpet Russian intellectuals had been misguided from the start, and by 1917 their actions had brought the nation's culture to the brink of collapse. Thus, through destruction the revolution offered something valuable: an opportunity for a complete re-creation of Russian culture. Finally, the last part of the thesis will be dedicated to a discussion of Shpet's own cultural theory (as just such attempt at recreation) and his detailed elucidation of the inner form of the word in *Esteticheskie fragmenty*.

#### 4.1. TOWARDS A NEW LOGIC OF CULTURE

University life in Moscow was almost unaffected by the First World War. Lectures were held as usual, and the missing teachers were replaced by hiring the most promising graduates. Nor was there any dramatic change in the direct aftermath of the revolution. Although several professors left the philosophy department during the Civil War (most notably, Pavel Novogorodtsev, Sergei Bulgakov, and Evgenii Trubetskoi),

the faculty at the same time welcomed such renowned thinkers as Nikolai Berdiaev and Pavel Struve.<sup>1</sup> Since his return from Göttingen, Shpet had become one of the department's most popular lecturers.<sup>2</sup> Andrei Belyi attests that Shpet's recognition had grown from early on, and that at the 'Guerrier Courses' (*Moskovskie vyshchie zhenskies kursy*), he already 'fought off female listeners of the philosophy courses in rows [...]; and female "Shpettists" [sic] multiplied by the dozen [...]; very many of them wore a medallion with Shpet's [sic] portrait on their breast; and at lectures he twirled philosophers' systems like spinning tops'.<sup>3</sup>

At the end of March 1917, Belyi mentions Shpet joining meetings among a group of Moscow intellectuals, engaging in 'endless debates' following the February revolution.<sup>4</sup> An anonymous note from a student at the Higher Courses for Women indicates that on 14 March Shpet delivered a lecture on the current political situation. The note reads: 'Your words were a true revelation for me'.<sup>5</sup> Another student would contact Shpet in February 1931, when he had already long been banned from all philosophical work. She also recollects Shpet's words to the still 'green students' in 1917, 'You must be not only contemporaries of the great revolution, but participants in it'.<sup>6</sup> In a letter to his wife, written on 30 August 1917, Shpet expressed a lack of sentimentality concerning the end of 'old Russia'. He writes:

You write: 'as long as Russia does not perish'. She has already perished — that Russia which you love, and on the basis of which you imagine the future. Will there be a new Russia? In any event, she — if she comes to pass — will not be founded by those who now speak of love for her, as that is love not for the future Russia, but for the one that has already perished.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pavlov 2003, p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> Severtseva 2000, pp. 173–174.

<sup>3</sup> Belyi 1934, p. 310.

<sup>4</sup> Belyi 2016, p. 434.

<sup>5</sup> Shpet 2012, p. 126.

<sup>6</sup> Shpet 2012, p. 133.

<sup>7</sup> Shpet 2005, p. 281. Shpet's letter reacts to the recent 'Kornilov affair', of which he is extremely critical. For more see pp. 280–281.

In Shpet's view, Russia's faith depended entirely on the future of its intellectual elite: culture needed to be renewed through education and a philosophical reformulation of its principles. This, he believed, could initiate a cultural 'Renaissance' in Russia, as a veritable rebirth of the nation. In what follows I will discuss Shpet's views regarding the Russian intelligentsia, their past mistakes and contemporary challenges.

#### 4.1.1. Philosophy after the Revolution

During the years of the revolution, Shpet managed a range of different tasks from editing his philosophical yearbook to writing new material, lecturing, participating in committees and societies, and organizing new academic institutions.<sup>1</sup> In addition to these endeavours, he returned to work at the Psychological Institute. Irina Sirotkina writes that with Chelpanov's help it survived 'the anxious and cold winter' of 1917 (the building was unheated) and even managed to launch the journal '*Psikhologicheskoe obozrenie*', founded on the eve of the revolution. The Institute began to receive funding from Narkompros and was even subsidized to open new sections of applied psychology and work psychology.<sup>2</sup>

Between 1917 and 1918 Shpet published a series of articles under the title '*Predmet i zadachi etnicheskoi psikhologii*' ('The Topic and Tasks of Ethnic Psychology').<sup>3</sup> They formed the foundation for what was intended to become a lecture course at the Cabinet for Ethnic Psychology at Moscow University, recently founded by himself and Chelpanov. The Cabinet grew into a large scientific centre, as Tat'iana Martsinkovskaia asserts: 'Reports were sent there on various ethnographic and ethnopsychological expeditions, the analysis of which was the basis for the preparation of a programme of ethnopsychological studies of the peoples of Siberia, Central Asia and Transcaucasia'.<sup>4</sup> Shpet's project culminated in 1927, when he published *Vvedenie v etnicheskuiu psikhologiu*, wherein he

<sup>1</sup> See Shpet's activities during the Civil War years in Shchedrina 2015, pp. 66–69.

<sup>2</sup> Sirotkina 2006, p. 258.

<sup>3</sup> In *Psikhologicheskoe obozrenie*, issues 1.1 (1917), 1.2 (1917), and 1.3–4 (1918).

<sup>4</sup> Martsinkovskaia 1996, p. 6.

formulated the methodology for a study of the psychology of a collective consciousness that expressed itself in culture. Later in this chapter I will suggest that Shpet's ethnic psychology can be seen as developing a distinct perspective on his theory of the inner form of the word. This interpretation found its full expression in the 1927 *Vnutrenniaia forma slova*, which places Shpet's concept solidly in the Humboldtian tradition.

Meanwhile, phenomenology's influence on Shpet's thinking became outwardly less visible after the revolution. The correspondence between Shpet and Husserl was cut short by the war. In June 1918, taking advantage of the 'first opportunity', Shpet contacted his teacher. He writes:

The madness of ageing mankind, in all obviousness, is far from over, and we do not know what the near future will bring us. The only thing I can say with certainty is that all that occurred could not change my assessment of German philosophy, and there is nothing in the world which could shake my deep devotion to you personally! In these four long years past, I have not spent one day during which I did not ruminate on phenomenology and rejoice at my spiritual meeting with your work.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, references to Husserl's philosophy are scarce in Shpet's post-revolutionary works. Overall, his correspondence from the Civil War years suggests that Shpet was in a state of physical and mental exhaustion. In July 1919 Lev Shestov wrote to him from Kiev, having heard that since their last meeting Shpet had 'become excessively tired' and 'at one time could not work at all'.<sup>2</sup> In November 1920 Shpet explains his sorry state to his friend Natal'ia Ignatova:

I've always said: you only need to decide to fall ill, and a thousand maladies will appear. My legs are painful too — that's my old rheumatism. It's unpleasant, because the pain is tiring, distressing and unrelenting. And my psychasthenia is really bad: worse than on the days I was

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1996, pp. 128–129. Husserl replied to Shpet in a similarly friendly tone but also reported the death of his youngest son on the front.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 2005, p. 336.

tired. I write and don't remember; I read and don't understand. I see badly — everything blurs together. In general when I 'relax' I just feel the fatigue even more strongly. For it sometimes seems that I have [...] a circular psychosis or simply a manic-depressive condition.<sup>1</sup>

In his letters Shpet complains of recurring headaches, noise in the communal apartment and depression.<sup>2</sup> It seems that the work on *Ocherk razvitiia russkoi filosofii* was especially hard. At the beginning of December 1920 he writes to his editor, Ferapont Vitiazev-Sedenko, to explain why he has been unable to finish a part of the manuscript by the promised date:

...I wanted to finish writing by December, with which aim I intended to stop everything else in November and just write. However, at the very start of November I was arrested, and even though I was released after just a few days, I needed a few more days to get my office and library unsealed and to get my files, and another few to tidy everything up, and it was only after the 20th that I got down to work. But here a new circumstance intervened. I stopped everything else I was occupied with, but it was too late. The cold weather set in, we're huddling in three rooms, and the children are wailing by our sides. However, that is only half a tragedy — I can write at night, which I usually do. The real tragedy came last Saturday: during that week I had been tormented by stomach spasms. I thought it was normal gastritis, but on Saturday I fainted. The doctor diagnosed spasms as stomach ache on the basis of general 'over-tiredness' and, as he said, 'anaemia'. On top of that, the psychasthenic symptoms I had two years ago returned with fresh strength — for example, after working for two hours I can no longer see, the lines I read or write blur into one another, my eyes hurt, and I have to stop working. Now my doctor is insisting I go to a sanatorium for a while (for three or four weeks), or at the very least stop working entirely. I am insisting he gives me at least the minimal time I need each day to work on the *Ocherk*, although I agree that once

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 2005, p. 348.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 2005, pp. 349, 350, 354, 364.

I am well again, I can catch up both in quality and quantity. However, on the other hand, I feel that total inactivity combined with my unfulfilled commitments would depress me, and the correction itself is going slowly. Such are the external circumstances.<sup>1</sup>

A few days later Shpet writes to Ignatova: ‘How I hate the lines of my book lying before me! Are they even thoughts? They are some broken smithereens of a beautiful living language gathered in a heap to kindle a communal stove — by a neurasthenic or an anaemic! THE DEVIL KNOWS WHAT!!!!!!’<sup>2</sup>

The teaching of philosophy at Moscow University remained almost unchanged until 1919, but the curriculum then went through a radical reorganization. At the end of 1918 Narkompros published a decree closing down the faculty of law and setting up a new faculty of social sciences (*Fakul'tet obshchestvennykh nauk*, or FON). Gradually, FON took charge of the teaching of law, as well as economics and politics. Various history subjects were either transferred to FON or abolished. In connection with this the faculty of history and philology — which oversaw the teaching of philosophy — was reduced to the faculty of philology. Yet Aleksei Pavlov suggests that some of the old professors continued to give lectures that were ‘full of philosophical content’. Lev Lopatin lectured at Moscow University until his death in 1920; Berdiaev, Boris Vysheslavtsev and Ivan Il'in until they were exiled in 1922; and Chelpanov until 1923.<sup>3</sup>

With the dissolution of the old faculties the question arose of how to prepare future specialists in the humanities. Seven scientific institutions were therefore created under FON in 1921: the Institute of History; the Institute of Soviet Law; the Institute of Psychology; the Institute of Archaeology and Art Studies; the Institute of Linguistics; the Institute of Literary History; and the Institute of Scientific Philosophy.<sup>4</sup> Shpet played an active role in the organization of the latter and was also appointed

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 2005, pp. 471–472.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 2005, p. 351.

<sup>3</sup> Pavlov 2003, pp. 69–70.

<sup>4</sup> Kogan 1999, p. 41.

its director. According to Leonid Kogan he showed a personal interest in the details of the Institute's work, selected its associates, developed its first study programmes and fought to set up a philosophical society, as well as a philosophical journal.<sup>1</sup> Pavlov adds that on Shpet's initiative the Institute of Scientific Philosophy also organized classes in logic and the methodology of sciences, ethics, psychology and the history of philosophy for those students who wished to complete their philosophy education in accordance with previous programmes.<sup>2</sup>

The designation of the new institute as 'scientific' played an important role in its legalization in the conditions of the time. Kogan suggests that term 'served as a password to the new society', but it also differentiated the Institute's philosophy from mystical and vulgar materialist thinking — as well as Marxist philosophy.<sup>3</sup> According to Kogan Shpet's position at the Institute may have been supported by the fact that there was a tendency (albeit a weak one) at the beginning of the 1920s among Russian Marxists to recognize the merits of Husserl's phenomenology. Liubov' Aksel'rod, a 'militant materialist' in Kogan's words, was especially sympathetic to Shpet's philosophy. She hailed phenomenology as a new current that 'rejects scepticism in the most decisive way' and defends 'the self-evidence of objective absolute truth'.<sup>4</sup> Correspondingly, the journal *Pod znamenem marksizma* gave its support to Shpet twice in 1922. Vladimir Nevskii characterized his 1919 essay '*Skeptik i ego du-sha*' ('The Sceptic and His Soul') as 'interesting in many respects',<sup>5</sup> and Vladimir Iurinetz mentions *Iavlenie i smysl* as showing 'talent'.<sup>6</sup>

During the last years of Shpet's functioning at Moscow University, the Moscow Linguistic Circle, organized as part of the university, became an important location for the development of his thinking. Shpet became a member of the MLC in 1920, and this was where he developed his aesthetic theory in collaboration with the Circle's younger generation, to be published in *Esteticheskie fragmenty*. Shpet taught at

<sup>1</sup> Kogan 1999, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> Pavlov 2003, p. 70.

<sup>3</sup> Kogan 1999, p. 42.

<sup>4</sup> Cited in Kogan 1999, pp. 42–43.

<sup>5</sup> Nevskii 1922, p. 98.

<sup>6</sup> Iurinetz 1922, p. 61

the university until the summer of 1922, and later the same year the department was shut down. On 26 May 1922 he held his last seminar. Many of its participants would become his colleagues at the Russian Academy of Artistic Sciences (*Rossiiskaia akademiia khudozhestvennykh nauk*, or RAKhN — after 1925 GAKhN), of which Shpet had been an active member since September 1921.<sup>1</sup> The topic of his seminar was ‘Philosophy as Rigorous Science’. In his university lectures Shpet indeed defended a Husserlian position. Iosif Levin, who would later become a notable legal scholar and philosopher in Soviet Russia, writes: ‘The Husserlians knew that Shpet had answers to all the questions. They had a humorous four-line ditty, of which I remember only the last two lines: There is no God but Husserl, / and Shpet is his prophet’.<sup>2</sup>

It is unclear whether Shpet ever attempted to return to Germany to continue his work with Husserl. In April 1921 Husserl in fact invited him to Freiburg, where he had settled in 1916. Having heard about Shpet’s continuing philosophical activities from a visiting Russian student,<sup>3</sup> Husserl writes:

In Russia you are a called representative of phenomenological philosophy — the only thoroughly radical philosophy — absolutely honest and principled philosophy, for which the young generations strive both here and there. The time has come for you to join me in continuing our work, our new endeavours, our new achievements, to make that which is thought here accessible to your students too. And we would also like to hear what idea content in the philosophical Russia turned out powerful, and we would like to hear that from the mouth of the one with a calling.<sup>4</sup>

Whether Shpet responded to the invitation is unknown. The following year he received a letter from Shestov, who was residing in Paris,

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<sup>1</sup> Severtseva 2000, p. 175.

<sup>2</sup> Levin 1991, p. 284.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet mentions Elena Zaitseva in his letter to Natal’ia Konstantinovna on 18 June 1915 (2005, pp. 231–232).

<sup>4</sup> Gusserl’ 2013, p. 119.

describing the growing phenomenological schools in Germany and France. Shestov tries to leave Shpet no excuse for not travelling, writing:

And you should, if you can, get abroad for two–three months to get to know the scientific movement here. They say it’s not too hard to get an exit permit these days. You would benefit from it greatly. It is of course a question of means. But I think that if that is the only obstacle, you could try applying to various societies concerned with Russian culture (particularly American ones) for support.<sup>1</sup>

Shestov emphasizes the importance of collaboration between Russian, European and American philosophers, suggesting that the newly published *Ocherk razvitiia russkoi filosofii* could well be sold in Europe, even in the original Russian, and that with the weak currency the venture might indeed prove profitable. However, this plan did not materialize either.

Shpet was twice presented with the possibility of emigrating to Europe. According to his daughter, Jurgis Baltrušaitis, who had become the representative (and would later become the ambassador) of independent Lithuania in Moscow, offered to organize Lithuanian passports for the whole family in 1920.<sup>2</sup> Second, in the autumn of 1922 Shpet was nearly expelled from Russia with some of the most eminent philosophers of the time. On 2 September the Berlin-based émigré newspaper *Rul’* reported that on the night of 16 August he had been arrested in Moscow with the ‘entire Berdiaev Circle’.<sup>3</sup> Within a few months the members of the circle, but not Shpet, were deported on the infamous Philosophers’ ships.<sup>4</sup> Apparently, Shpet managed to appeal his case thanks to his

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet 2005, p. 340.

<sup>2</sup> Iakovich 2014, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Artizov 2008, pp. 589–590.

<sup>4</sup> On 29 September the steamship *Oberbürgermeister Haken* sailed from Petrograd to Stettin in Germany (among the passengers were N. A. Berdiaev, S. L. Frank and S. E. Trubetskoï). On 16 October another steamship, *Preussen*, carried N. O. Losskii, L. P. Karsavin, I. I. Lapshin and others to the same destination (Makarov & Khristoforov 2003, pp. 113–116).

long-time acquaintanceship with Anatolii Lunacharskii.<sup>1</sup> By the end of 1922 the Institute of Scientific Philosophy also ‘reached a turning point’, in Kogan’s words. In the spring of 1923, it came under severe criticism and was thoroughly reorganized. Shpet lost his position, and Chelpanov, with other ‘idealists like him’, were forbidden future work. However, at this point Shpet had already settled into a new academic environment, GAKhN, where his thinking was directed increasingly towards cultural theory.

#### 4.1.2. The Spirituality of ‘Old’ Russia

Shpet was displeased with the intelligentsia’s reactions to the events of 1917. He believed that the only way to move forward was to accept the revolution and proceed from its negative logic to a new constructive post-revolutionary culture. Yet it seemed to him that revolutionary intellectuals had been no more successful at this task than conservatives. In a letter to his wife, written shortly before the October Revolution, Shpet asserted that half of Russia’s socialists and liberals had absorbed their knowledge from books but lacked all practical experience, while the other half was blinded by their exclusive belief in class hierarchy; neither could see the wood for the trees. Post-revolutionary Russia thus needed an entirely new intellectual elite, as Shpet argued that the more ‘the current “lovers” of Russia attempt to implement their ideas related to the past in which they have rooted themselves, the more difficult it will be to create a new Russia’.<sup>2</sup>

In his 1922 work *Ocherk razvitiia russkoi filosofii* Shpet traces the intelligentsia’s problems in the face of the revolution to its evolution during

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<sup>1</sup> Tihanov (2009a, p. 4; 2009b, p. 16) points out that neither the fact that Shpet’s name appeared on the list, nor the identity of his helper has been conclusively confirmed. Yet Shpet appears to have had a close relationship with the Peoples’ Commissar. Shpet’s daughter Marina Shtorkh reports that when the family home on Dolgorukovskaia Street was turned into a communal flat, Lunacharskii secured the largest room for the Shpets because of their sizeable and valuable library (Iakovich 2014, pp. 28–29).

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 2005, p. 281.

the previous centuries. If he had earlier expressed his admiration for the Moscow metaphysics of the 1860s, Shpet's *Ocherk* presents a critical view of the history of Russian thought that preceded this school of thought. Shpet discovered in seventeenth-, eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Russia a long tradition of 'ignorance' (*neveglasie*) and intellectual utilitarianism, combined with a fear of philosophy. Over time the Russian intelligentsia had turned itself into an opposition force, claiming to carry the real voice of the nation and directing its path towards its true destiny. According to Shpet, however, the intelligentsia's chosen path had led the nation astray, resulting not only from their detachment from the people, but also from the generally uncultured state of the Russian mind.

Shpet describes the revolution as an opportunity to uproot Russian culture, cleanse it from unwanted influences and initiate a true twentieth-century Renaissance. The revolution thus presented a magnificent challenge to the intelligentsia, but sadly, Shpet believed, it was not up to it. He points out that the events of 1917 had not presented an accidental outcome of arbitrary events, but an actualization of the very intelligentsia's hopes and ideals. Shpet writes that the revolutionary dream 'was hatched, pampered and used by the intelligentsia of the nineteenth century to raise itself'. And yet he asserts the October Revolution had turned out nothing like the majority had pictured. What does this mean, Shpet asks, 'the reality of the revolution or the unreality of the intelligentsia ideal, and consequently the intelligentsia itself, insofar as it lived by that ideal?' Shpet was inclined to believe the latter.<sup>3</sup> For him the core of Russia's intellectual weakness was in the disproportionate weight that its history had placed on religious and spiritual issues. He argued that the intelligentsia had from the start directed its hopes and interests towards an illusionary vision instead of the actual and concrete reality. Indeed, he believed that the revolution itself had been the result of a romantic dream appropriated from Christian eschatology. Even in the new decade Shpet argued that the revolution continued to be perceived through this romantic prism.

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<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1922a, pp. x-xi.

Although the years following the revolution saw a strengthening and institutionalization of scientific philosophy, the popularity of religious neo-idealism, indeed, grew even more strongly. The ‘old idealists’ remained the leading figures of intellectual life in Russia, and their critique of Marxism and Bolshevism was influential. Holding high positions in the universities, the idealists were also in competition with academic philosophy.<sup>1</sup> During the Civil War years Nikolai Berdiaev took the philosophical centre stage in Moscow.<sup>2</sup> Having founded the Free Academy of Spiritual Culture (*Vol'naiia akademiia dukhovnoi kul'tury*) in 1918, Berdiaev believed that what revolutionary Russia needed most was spiritual healing. He contended that the revolution had unravelled exactly as the writers of *Vekhi* had foreseen in 1909 — in other words, miserably. Accusing the left intelligentsia of a misguided trust in the power of the people, he asserted that in that enormous mass of workers and peasants, ‘not the higher truth, but the as yet dark instincts were uncovered’.<sup>3</sup> Instead of trying to attain a collective reform, Berdiaev maintained that the revolutionary culture must focus on refining the spiritual life of each individual. He writes: ‘The people must rise to a higher spiritual culture and higher culture in general; the people must reveal human identity, its qualities, its responsible creation’.<sup>4</sup> The solution to the problem was Christian philosophy, which would promote a less blindly collectivist and more responsibly individualist way of thinking. Berdiaev advocated a reliance on the older generation of idealists and strove to bring out their voice in the revolutionary debates.<sup>5</sup>

Without state funding Berdiaev’s Free Academy relied entirely on donations from listeners and supporters — but proved a success. The goal of the Academy, in the words of Aleksandr Galushkin, was ‘the study of spiritual culture in all its expressions and forms in the area of scientific, philosophical, ethical, artistic and religious creation and

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<sup>1</sup> Malinov & Troitskii 2013, p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> Gornung 2001, p. 353.

<sup>3</sup> Berdiaev 1990, pp. 186–187. ‘*Torzhestvo i krushenie narodnichestva*’ was first published in *Russkaia svoboda* № 14–15 in 1917.

<sup>4</sup> Berdiaev 1990, p. 187.

<sup>5</sup> Berdiaev 1949, p. 258.

thought'.<sup>1</sup> Berdiaev asserts that during the 'difficult years' his institution proved to be the only place 'where thoughts could still run freely, and where the questions asked still reflected a high status of culture'.<sup>2</sup> Among the Academy's most important contributors were Andrei Belyi, Viacheslav Ivanov, Semen Frank, Boris Vysheslavtsev, Iulii Aikhenval'd, Fedor Stepun and Mikhail Gershenzon.<sup>3</sup> Shpet also spoke at Berdiaev's Academy once, on 22 May 1920. His '*Krizis filosofii*' outlined a history of philosophy and its moments of crisis, leading up to his own view of what contemporary philosophy should be. The harshest words of the speech are directed against Henri Bergson. Shpet states that in the 'bestial' philosophy of Bergson irrationalism and alogism reached their highest point; 'Bergson is the last word, and therefore the hope that the crisis is over!'<sup>4</sup> The rigorous rationalism that Shpet promoted was clearly incompatible with Berdiaev's philosophical vision. Fedor Stepun describes his critical response to one of the latter's lectures at the Free Academy, writing:

The Christian tendency, which represented for [Shpet] nothing new, [...] suddenly excessively worried and even dismayed him. His little nose twitched, the cleverest little eyes in the world sparkled, and out came a nit-picking speech of the wittiest kind, rich in knowledge, associations and paradoxes, but on the whole unconvincing and unnecessary.<sup>5</sup>

Stepun finds Shpet's passionate attack on Christianity 'incomprehensible' and considers it equally surprising that in the Bolshevik Moscow he turns to a defence of ancient Greek thought. Stepun asserts: 'I think that Shpet, feeling to an exaggerated degree the closeness of the Christian and Communist utopias, for that reason spoke only of a bright, sober and grounded Greek thought, that he was irritated by the traditional

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<sup>1</sup> Galushkin 1997, p. 238.

<sup>2</sup> Berdiaev 1949, p. 259.

<sup>3</sup> Galushkin 1997, p. 238.

<sup>4</sup> Cited in Shchedrina 2007, p. 99.

<sup>5</sup> Stepun 1956, p. 192.

and religious-philosophical view of the academy of Moscow as the Third Rome'.<sup>1</sup>

In his two texts of 1922, *Ocherk razvitiia russkoi filosofii* and the first volume of *Esteticheskie fragmenty*, Shpet indeed proposed a return to a 'classical' frame of mind, that is, a pre-Christian cultural logic. In *Ocherk* he argues that the seed of the intelligentsia's problems had been sown in the actions of the revered 'Thessalonian brothers', the missionaries Cyril and Methodius. According to Shpet their undertaking of translating the Bible into Church Slavonic had done an enormous disservice to Russian culture: it was left with a highly literal translation of the holy scriptures and no access to their original sources. This put Russia in an extremely weak position compared to Western civilization. Shpet writes that any European experiencing a momentary hesitation about the value of his or her civilization 'could save himself or herself from desperation about the value of culture as a whole by consulting the undoubted original source directly'. Even when the Western Christian culture brought itself to the brink of a crisis, it could simply turn towards its own cultural past, find its roots, and *recreate* (*vozrodit'*) itself in the Renaissance.<sup>2</sup>

Through the Church Slavonic language, Russia inherited not the Hellenic tradition but merely that of a minor Bulgarian nation, Shpet argues. What could 'a language of a people deprived of cultural traditions, literature and history offer', Shpet asks? He asserts that the heritage of Byzantium had in fact trickled West, while Russia was left with 'the mere surrogates of their own production, ones invented in the era of Russia's moral and intellectual degeneration'.<sup>3</sup> As long as the Russian culture evolved on its adopted Christian track, a 'Russian Renaissance' remained inconceivable, in Shpet's opinion.<sup>4</sup> Because of the power of the Eastern Orthodox Church, Russian culture had devel-

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1922a, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Shpet (1922, p. 12) notes that the situation might have been different had the Russian intelligentsia been brought up in Greek. What could have such a Renaissance been like, Shpet asks, 'if the intelligentsia of the Muscovite period knew Greek the same way that the West knew Latin?'

oped through the centuries not in a spirit of humanism but of religion; at its worst the latter was reduced to church dogma. Shpet argues that the Muscovite Patriarchate had indeed failed in its effort to offer a spiritual counterinfluence to the Medieval European culture. It 'feared the temptation of Western "spiritual delusion" but did not think of juxtaposing it with a living faith in its actual source'. The message of the patriarchate was deemed 'Godly' because it was written in a sacred language. In reality, Shpet claims 'it was a forgery based on "divine inspiration" and sometimes even a parody'.<sup>1</sup>

The authoritarianism of the patriarchate resulted in passivity and a growing ignorance among the intellectual elite. While the original cause of Russia's intellectual weakness was in its Church Slavonic past, the ongoing problem of all Russian culture, in Shpet's opinion, was the general uninterest and lack of enlightenment that had followed the latter. These traits had defined the evolution of Russian minds for centuries, and in the post-revolutionary moment Shpet considered them to be as strong as ever. He therefore argued that Russian culture remained not only underdeveloped but *non*-developed, since it had, properly speaking, not even begun.

#### 4.1.3. The Problem of Russian Intelligentsia

Since Shpet believed that the problems of Russian culture were originally linguistic — stemming from the creation of the Church Slavonic — he considered them to have grown into the very fabric of the Russian language. In his opinion the Russian 'word' had thus remained particularly weak and had yet to find its true form as a bearer of the national spirit. But the intelligentsia's problem was also related to the fact that when the Russian intellectual life had finally begun to develop during the reign of Peter the Great, it did so in German. Shpet writes that the Russian nation, lacking their own homegrown word (*slovo*), had to 'borrow from those who had not renounced their ancestors, were not scared

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1922a, p. 13.

by their temptation and did not cover their spiritual nudity with a letter'. In other words, once again, 'a foreign language became the medium between the source of spirit and the Russian soul'.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, Shpet suggests that in the seventeenth century 'lights of knowledge' began finally to appear in the 'Moscow murk' as Russia's first establishment of higher education, the Slavic Greek Latin Academy (*Slaviano-greko-latinskaia akademiia*) was founded in 1687. According to him this was less a result of the nation's consolidated effort than an imported idea, and the impact of the Academy remained correspondingly superficial. The level of enlightenment among Moscow inhabitants remained barely higher than a hundred years earlier, when they had destroyed the city's first typography, founded a hundred years after the invention of the technique. 'The people were simply silent', Shpet continues, '- perhaps because they had nothing to say [...], or perhaps because Moscow had learned to force them to be silent'.<sup>2</sup> Gradually, The Slavic Greek Latin Academy was turned into an establishment of higher theological education, and in 1721 it was transferred to the care of the Holy Synod. There thus emerged 'a specialized theological science of interest to few', Shpet writes.

From then on, the Russian intelligentsia was no longer tied to spiritual work, and in the course of the eighteenth century it experienced a transformation and gained a new goal and a meaning. In Shpet's words the intelligentsia turned into an administration (*pravitel'stvo*) and remained in this role for another hundred years.<sup>3</sup> Along with this transformation, Shpet argues, the elite's lack of enlightenment (*nevezhestvo*) gradually turned into a utilitarian ideology. Petrine Russia valued practical knowledge above all else, which was shown in the rise of new schools for navigation, artillery and engineering, for example.<sup>4</sup> Shpet notes that although the appreciation of scientific knowledge grew, Russians' interest indeed remained at a level of professionalism and showed no signs of academic ambition. Not even the Academy of Sciences (*Akademiia*

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1922a, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1922a, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1922a, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Shpet 1922a, p. 18.

*nauk*), founded in 1724, lived up to its founding idea of representing all fields of science and scholarship; eventually only physics and mathematics were taught at a high level.<sup>1</sup> The Academy also suffered from a lack of ideological freedom, which affected a wide field of humanities, but especially philosophy. Shpet remarks that

the charter of 1747 strictly required professors to teach nothing contrary to the Orthodox faith, good morals and the form of the administration. Professors had to present the Chancellery with summaries of their lectures for evaluation of whether they were diverging from the teaching of the Orthodox faith and doubting the glorious position of the state.<sup>2</sup>

Only the opening of Moscow University in 1755 established philosophy permanently as a subject of higher education. Yet even with the new academic freedom philosophy failed to gain the interest of students, who continued to view their education mainly as a pathway to a comfortable position either in the state administration or the army. Shpet cites a history of Moscow University, stating that its goal had been from the outset to prepare Russian youth for all the branches of the state service. Therefore, he asserts, the history of the Russian university system is a history of ‘constant, useful and faithful service of this state aim’.<sup>3</sup>

Although cultural evolution accelerated in the nineteenth century, Shpet argues that in the sphere of the Russian ‘word’ progress could be seen mainly in poetic language. He asserts that ‘Russian fiction struggled heroically with the legacy of Cyril and Methodius in the language, and when Pushkin began to shine, the Bulgarian fog was dispelled forever’. In various fields of academic writing, however, ‘foreign languages had still to be used for a long time’.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, what continuously hampered Russia’s intellectual and philosophical development

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1922a, pp. 19–20.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1922a, pp. 21–22.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1922a, p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

was the deep seated *sophophobia* of the intelligentsia. Shpet notes that during the Catherinian era, the social role of the Russian intelligentsia changed again — but their lack of enlightenment remained. The empress supported the ideals of the Enlightenment, famously engaging in correspondence with leading French philosophers. Shpet suggests that the state now adopted the role that had traditionally belonged to the intellectual elite: it began to ‘educate’.

As a result, the quest for ‘pure’ wisdom was once again blocked, but this time by the state’s paternalistic attitude. The intelligentsia, who continued to suffer from a lack of freedom, now transformed itself into an opposition. ‘That which had to happen happened,’ Shpet writes. ‘Radishchev happened — the prototype of that opposition intelligentsia who replaced the government intelligentsia in Russian history’.<sup>1</sup> Shpet considers Radishchev’s role in Russian history through a comparison with the founder of Moscow University, Mikhail Lomonosov. As models of the intelligentsia, he finds them to be each other’s opposites. Shpet writes that Lomonosov

went to Europe, studied what he needed to, returned and began to teach that which no one needed, and only by the time of his 200th anniversary did his descendants guess who our own ‘Newton’ was. The other one also travelled to Europe, learned what was not taught, and did not learn what was taught — one and a half centuries later his grateful progeny recognized him as ‘the first Russian revolutionary’.<sup>2</sup>

When Radishchev’s attempts to shake the autocratic structures of the state were annulled by the enlightened empress, the intelligentsia finally turned itself into a revolutionary force of resistance.

The level of academic discussions, especially philosophical ones, remained low throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, Shpet argues. Freedom of thought was repeatedly restricted by both the church

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1922a, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1922a, pp. 24–25.

and state, and in 1817 the two powers were administratively united. The new institution supervised all spiritual and ideological education in Russia and its central idea, Shpet writes, was to direct ‘the popular education [...] for the purposes of inclusion in a society of constant and saving agreement between faith, behaviour and power’.<sup>1</sup> He considers the consequences of this policy ‘most pitiful’. It began an ‘unhinged period’ in the history of Russian enlightenment: ‘books, people, convictions and intentions were persecuted’. Eventually, all philosophical faculties in Russia were closed in 1850, because, in the words of the minister of education Platon Aleksandrovich Shirinskii-Shikhmatov, ‘the use of philosophy is unproven, but its harm is possible’.

How is it possible that all this was accepted by Russian society, Shpet asks? After all, Russians were no longer uneducated and had access to information — not only through the state but also independently of it. And even more so, since the intelligentsia had turned into an opposition force, it was now free and supposedly able to defend its rights. ‘How could it withstand it?’<sup>2</sup> Shpet believes the answer is found in the general ignorance and lack of intellectual curiosity of educated Russians. He cites a contemporary commentator, who remarks that on their graduation from universities students were quick to lose their interest in critical thinking: ‘They are being destroyed by the materialism and the immoral indifference of our society’.<sup>3</sup> There was simply no demand for intellectual culture, Shpet states:

The exclusively utilitarian attitude to cultural creativity flows either from the barbarian ignorance of the nature of science, art and philosophy, or from an organic incapacity for free creation, from a lack of talent. In both cases the *requirement* for creativity is lacking; the creative organ is idle. The people do not have anything to express them; there is no bearer of the nation’s creative soul.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1922a, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Shpet 1922a, p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

In an especially Chaadaevian tone Shpet asserts that the Russian nation was for centuries unable to create (*tvorit'*) its own culture. Russia had become 'European', but only because it was guided by German bureaucrats. The 'living spirit' of Russian culture remained undeveloped, and its Westernizing efforts represented, in Shpet's words, merely a 'popular instinct for self-preservation'. The opposition intelligentsia was doomed to fail in the task of cultural creation as well, as it was inherently nihilistic by nature — 'all nihilism proceeds from the word nihil,' Shpet writes. Consequently, he suggests that the typical battle between freedom-yearning people and the controlling state proved feeble and unproductive in Russia: 'this struggle is cast in the paradoxical form of bickering between an ignorant state, in the form of the government, and the free culture of ignorance, in the form of the opposition intelligentsia'.<sup>1</sup>

The shape which the Russian intelligentsia adopted in the 1820s was to be its final one. It became the intelligentsia '*par excellence*'. 'Nobody was bothered,' Shpet concludes, 'by the fact that our rather uneducated opposition intelligentsia pulled from its very own sphere judges for the sentence in the matter of enlightenment value of scientific and philosophical theories.'<sup>2</sup> Although Shpet argues that the intelligentsia who gave rise to the revolution had indeed been an ignorant one, he insists that this was merely a historical contingency, a phenomenon of social psychology, and not a universal characteristic of the Russian people. There was no real obstacle for the development of serious, academic and politically uninterested philosophy in Russia, and Shpet suggests that the utilitarian history of Russian thought should indeed be considered a *pre-history* of Russian philosophy proper.<sup>3</sup>

But to initiate a pure and serious Russian philosophy, Shpet states that Russian thinkers must first critically investigate the foundations of their own thinking. He suggests that over the centuries the Russian intelligentsia had repeatedly raised the question of the origin and nature of the Russian nation — in other words, of *themselves* — to the level of

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1922a, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1922a, p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1922a, pp. 35–36.

a philosophical problem; to them ‘all Russian history is a mystery of some kind’.<sup>1</sup> The trend had prompted generations of intellectuals to ponder the Russian soul or the Russian idea, feeding on ideas such as that of the ‘Third Rome.’ In short, Russian philosophy had become thoroughly utopian, revealing a national psychology that Shpet describes as a kind of mental cannibalism. Finally, he laments that intellectual discipline has traditionally been considered a sign of dryness, narrowmindedness, and one-sidedness in Russia. This is precisely what he now hoped to change: the revolution had created the opportunity for the ascent of a new ‘aristocracy of talent’.<sup>2</sup>

The critical approach of the *Ocherk* was not celebrated by the Russian philosophical community at large. Yet the work found support in the medieval historian Dmitrii Petrushevskii, who reviewed the book in a letter to Shpet. Petrushevskii considered Shpet’s text an accurate, if painful, self-diagnosis of the nation’s current situation. He believed that its timing could not have been better either, as it offered a fresh perspective on Russia’s tragic situation after years of war and struggle. Petrushevskii writes: ‘The cup you bring to the current citizen is immeasurably bitter, but only such a draught (and only if it is taken very spiritually and with much soul) can be good for him’. The publication of Shpet’s book gave him hope in the future; for him, it was an ‘eloquent indicator that we are still capable of life’.<sup>3</sup>

The task defined in *Ocherk razvitiia russkoi filosofii* was taken up by Shpet in his *Esteticheskie fragmenty*. There, he approaches the construction of a new culture for Russia: one that is formulated on pre-Christian philosophical principles and thus emancipates Russian culture from its overgrown spirituality and corresponding self-centredness. This was a way to overcome the romantic revolutionary mindset and initiate a new culture of realism. He writes in the first volume of *fragmenty*:

Romanticism — like all Christianity — lacked the resolve of a sincere lie, such as that held by the cynics and Pyrrho, and hid behind irony.

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1922a, p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1922a, p. 37.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 2005, p. 449.

Such a transparent anagram, and nonetheless the Christian world has not solved it. *Ειρωνεία* = *illusio*, romanticism = illusionism. Christianity has not been able to understand that, because it is itself romanticism. In announcing itself, romanticism announced Christianity, and in announcing Christianity, it announced itself. In both Christianity and romanticism conscious illusionism covered the insincerity of the lie. The current cultural crisis is a crisis of Christianity, because for the twentieth century [...] there is no other culture.<sup>1</sup>

Instead of the old illusion, Shpet hoped that the intelligentsia might now at last discover the true being of Russia. And as he argues in *Esteticheskie fragmenty*, the construction of the new culture must begin with it a renewal of the Russian *slovo*.

#### 4.2. SHPET'S THEORY OF CULTURE

*Ocherk razvitiia russkoi filosofii* contested a popular notion that Russia had in fact inherited the classical culture *more* directly than the West: that precisely because the roots of Russian culture were in Byzantium and not in Rome, the Greek influence remained more concrete in it.<sup>2</sup> Poets such as Viacheslav Ivanov and Osip Mandel'shtam, and religious thinkers such as Pavel Florenskii, Sergei Bulgakov and Aleksei Losev, famously conceived that the link between early twentieth-century Russian culture and the Hellenic tradition could, in one way or another, be discovered within the Russian language. Their views exemplified some of the founding ideas of the 'Silver Age' culture: its spirituality, connectedness to the Orthodox heritage, the idea of the Russian *logos* and the belief that the Russian cultural Renaissance should be

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1922b, pp. 62–63.

<sup>2</sup> Clare Cavanagh considers the main initiator of this idea to be Faddei Zelinskii (Tadeusz Zielinski), who taught at St Petersburg University between 1885 and 1921. His interpretation of Russia's relationship with Hellenistic culture 'attracted not only poets and philosophers; it captivated a generation of Russian intellectuals in search of "true community" in a disrupted age', Cavanagh (1995, p. 124) writes.

intrinsically religious.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, according to Boris Gasparov the cross-fertilization between Orthodox Christianity and art was precisely what gave the Russian *fin de siècle* culture its unique characteristics. He asserts that many (if not all) major achievements of the period resulted from 'transplantations of Western concepts into a cultural context shaped by the Orthodox Christian tradition'. While this dynamism was as old as Russian culture itself, Gasparov argues that it became especially productive at the turn of the century 'when a resurgence of interest in Christianity among the Russian intellectual and artistic elite merged with neo-Kantian trends in philosophy, utopian social ideas, and the advent of Modernism in literature and art'.<sup>2</sup>

Shpet's proposal for a post-revolutionary Russian culture, in its anti-religiousness and anti-spirituality, rationalism, and the quest for the 'true' ancient philosophical foundation, is the direct antithesis of these views. Yet when it comes to his theory of the inner form of the word, this contrast has not always been clear. Shpet's mystical sounding concept, with its roots in the Humboldtian-Potebnian tradition, has indeed often been situated as part of the religious *logos* movement. For example, Thomas Seifrid asserts that Shpet's conception of language 'combined a complex series of influences from German linguistics to Orthodox doctrines of Christology, Trinitology, and icons'.<sup>3</sup> In the following I will attempt to re-contextualize Shpet's description of the new post-revolutionary culture as he believed it should unfold in some of the contemporary artistic debates. Shpet's account in the first volume of *Esteticheskie fragmenty* was directed especially against symbolism, whose views he considered outdated, and futurism, which he argued was built on unfounded theories. For a while Shpet associated himself

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'Renaissance' (*Vozrozhdenie* or *Renessans*) was first used in the context of modern Russian culture by Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, who conceived that the future (or already ongoing) Russian Renaissance would be intrinsically Christian. Hence, he believed that it should be treated as the second historical Renaissance, which the West would soon follow (Ermichev 2012, p. 96). According to Vladimir Pustarnakov (2003, p. 203) the first to raise the notion in a philosophical discussion was Sergei Bulgakov. For him, too, the idea was connected with the 'new religious consciousness'.

<sup>2</sup> Gasparov 1993, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Seifrid 2005, p. 134.

with the imaginists, who represented a new poetic vision in Civil War Moscow, but eventually concluded that they too were unable to reflect the spirit of the time. Throughout, Shpet's vision of culture remained faithful to the principles laid out in *Ocherk razvitiia russkoi filosofii*, and when he took up the construction of his own cultural theory, it supported a neo-classicist and realist approach to art.

#### 4.2.1. From Symbolism (and Futurism) to Imaginism

After the October Revolution neo-idealist conceptions of language gained a renewed intellectual and ideological significance in the struggle against Marxism. For example, Viacheslav Ivanov's 1918 essay '*Nash iazyk*', published in the collection *Iz glubiny*, describes the special features of Russian that make it unsuitable for pragmatic and utilitarian purposes. Ivanov writes:

Many features of this language are worthy of wonder: its flexibility, majesty, euphony, phonetic and rhythmic grace, its direct, capacious, sharp, powerful brevity and artistic expressiveness, its freedom in the composition and order of words, the complexity of its manner and construction of its speech which reflects the uncatchable shades of soulfulness.<sup>1</sup>

According to Ivanov the inner form of Russian integrates a dualism of divinity and humanity, while embodying a balance between Hellenic and Slavic influences. He asserts that this has allowed Russian to evolve without breaking the connection with its origins, and that it remains the only modern language which still carries the 'independent and pure element' of the Hellenic civilization: its spirit, image and word structure. Having originated in the spirit of ancient Greece, Ivanov argues that Russian was 'blessed for the second time' (*vtorichno*

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<sup>1</sup> Ivanov 1990, p. 145.

*oblagodatstvovan*) through the 'mysterious baptism' in the 'life-giving jets' of Church Slavonic.<sup>1</sup>

While the symbolists had been Shpet's first connection with Moscow's cultural circles, in the first years of the 1920s he began to distance himself from the group. This concerned not only Belyi but also Ivanov, with whom Shpet seems to have been in regular contact in 1914 and 1915.<sup>2</sup> According to Galin Tihanov their relationship grew gradually 'from Shpet's respect and interest in Ivanov the poet and thinker into a friendship in which Ivanov gradually came to acknowledge Shpet's seriousness as a philosopher and commentator on literature'.<sup>3</sup> Ivanov shared Shpet's fascination with Husserl's thinking, and Gennadii Obatnin suggests that the former's characterization of phenomenology as a solution to the problem of nominalism versus realism, as well as his conception of the collective consciousness, might indeed have been relevant for Ivanov's symbolist theory.<sup>4</sup> In the first polemical volume of *Esteticheskie fragmenty*, however, Shpet states that as an artistic vision, symbolism was out of touch. Having long dreamed of transcending or even transforming reality, symbolists had experienced the war and the revolution almost as eschatological events.<sup>5</sup> And yet, as Shpet argues, the reality which Russians now faced was not a reality at all, but an 'ontological fiction' (*ontologicheskaiia fiktsiia*). He asserts: 'Our history now is an illusion. Our past is ash.'<sup>6</sup> According to Shpet symbolism was a necessary quality of any poetic expression, but it was not enough to explain its nature — it could not be considered a theory of art. Thus, soon after the revolution, Shpet's interest turned towards another poetic group in Moscow: the imaginists.

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<sup>1</sup> Ivanov 1990, p. 146.

<sup>2</sup> Shchedrina 2015, pp. 63–64.

<sup>3</sup> Tihanov 2019, p. 75.

<sup>4</sup> Obatnin (2018, pp. 434–435) adds that Shpet presented Ivanov with three inscribed copies of his works: *Iavlennie i smysl*, *Filosofskoe nasledstvo P. D. Iurkevicha*, and *Istoriia kak problema logiki*. According to Obatnin Shpet's philosophical yearbook also belonged to Ivanov's library.

<sup>5</sup> For more see Hellman 1995.

<sup>6</sup> Shpet 1922b, p. 64.

Sergei Esenin was the first imaginist to make Shpet's acquaintance, and in 1918 Shpet joined in an attempt to assist him with a thorny tax issue.<sup>1</sup> Contact between the two seems to have intensified in 1919 and peaked between 1920 and 1921. Apart from their drinking companionship (in Tihanov's words, Belyi 'saw behind this friendship a shared proclivity to alcohol-induced merriment'), Shpet had an interest in Esenin's poetry, and the latter gave him several of his books. Furthermore, Tihanov argues that Shpet must also have 'lent a sympathetic ear' to Anatolii Mariengof's works, since, for example,

in the first half of September 1921, the Imagists, insulted by an article in which Lunacharskii referred to them as 'charlatans who wish to fool [...] the public' [...], published a challenging response in the journal *Pechat' i revoliutsiia*, calling Lunacharskii to a 'public discussion on Imagism, where Prof. Shpet, Prof. Sakulin and other representatives of science and the arts will be invited in the capacity of competent judges.'<sup>2</sup>

Just what made Shpet favourable towards imagism is not immediately evident. According to Tomi Huttunen the main distinguishing features of the group in the field of post-revolutionary Russian poetry were their emphasized individualism (outwardly shown in dandyish dress) and anarchic attitude to the state and its ideology (exemplified in provocative stunts).<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the imaginists were suspicious of all ideologies and philosophies, which lent them an image of bohemian nihilist-hooligans.<sup>4</sup> In 1922 Valerii Briusov characterized the group's poetics through their denial of any ideal content (*ideinost'*) in poetry. He writes:

The imaginists drew a conclusion: if the essence of poetry is the image, then secondary to that is not only the phonetic structure, [...]

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<sup>1</sup> Tihanov 2009, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Tihanov 2008, p. 268.

<sup>3</sup> Huttunen (2013, p. 64) suggests viewing the imaginists' performances and happenings as 'everyday life theatre' or an early form of street art.

<sup>4</sup> Huttunen 2007, pp. 10–13.

not only rhythmicity and so on, but the nature of the ideas; 'music is for composers, ideas are for philosophers, political questions are for economists, the imaginists said — and poets get images and images alone'.<sup>1</sup>

However, the imaginists were the latest and loudest poetic school in the Moscow of the early 1920s. They were able to win the support of Anatolii Lunacharskii, with whom Shpet was likewise on good terms.<sup>2</sup> And perhaps most importantly, both Shpet and the imaginists formulated their own artistic visions in opposition to futurism. In *Esteticheskie fragmenty*, Shpet asserts that although futurism had been presented as the artistic answer to the new reality, it had little substance to support this claim. He found the futurists' pretence to theoretical relevance particularly upsetting, stating:

...it immediately became distasteful and one's sense of smell was repulsively tickled when the Manifesto announced the age of Their Majesties: the oldest of us, it said, are thirty! How? You are thirty and you already have a theory of art? Then you are not artists, artists in creativity [...]. You could only be artists in theory! [...] Those who claimed the primacy of poetics over poetry — the futurists.<sup>3</sup>

According to Shpet the futurists' dilettantism had led to dangerous misunderstandings regarding the nature of art. Modern Russian poetry, Shpet claims, had for instance failed to appreciate the structural distinctions between different art forms. 'A funny matter', Shpet writes, 'is the occupation of modern poeticism, which brings musical analogies into poetry. [...] Poetry as a "synthesis" of music and sense is a synthesis of cobwebs and honey. How can sense make music? Sense does not make music — music kills sense — tone disables poetry.'<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Shpet criticizes the idea of a Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* and any use (*prime-*

<sup>1</sup> Cited in Huttunen 2007, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Huttunen 2011, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1922b, p. 45.

<sup>4</sup> Shpet 1922b, p. 28.

*nenie*) of works of art for something for which they were not originally intended. In his opinion,

When the brothel was taken out of the temple, and music, painting and poetry out of the palace, when theatres were transformed from a celebration for all the people into a cash register open all day, art lost its ‘purpose’. The modern pinacothèques, louvres, national museums [...] have begun to serve pedagogy. As if it were possible to hide behind that the tastelessness and state encouragement of the accumulation of a collection in a single barn — like wine in cellars — of the products of artistic creativity which failed to find ‘purpose’ or even worse, removed from their ‘purpose’, ‘nationalized’.<sup>1</sup>

Shpet’s argument can be associated with the imaginists’ demands that art be separated from the constraints of the state, although their reasons differed. Huttunen asserts that the anarchistic and individualistic behaviour of the imaginists mainly represented an attempt to overcome futurism, which had previously been ‘the main disruptor of social calm’. However, starting with the revolution, *avantgarde* art had entered a collaboration with the new regime. In the eyes of the imaginists, futurist collectivism had now joined the ranks of cultural conservatism.<sup>2</sup> For them, in the era of state communism, it was necessary for art to formulate a deeply individualist ideal, but not of the bourgeois kind of the Russian symbolists, but a modern, urban and forward-looking individualism. As Vadim Shershenevich wrote in 1920: ‘The contemporary individualist goes onto the square, mixes with the crowd, throws these fragments into the noise of the crowd, becomes poor of soul (content) and is filled with something “from the city” (form)’.<sup>3</sup>

As Huttunen remarks, it is also likely that the near-simultaneous considerations on ‘differentiation’ by Shpet and the imaginists were interconnected.<sup>4</sup> The poets declared: ‘We are preaching the most precise

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1922b, pp. 17–18.

<sup>2</sup> Huttunen 2007, pp. 12–18.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Huttunen 2007, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Huttunen 2013, p. 68.

and clear division of one art from another; we are defending the differentiation of the arts'. According to Huttunen their opposition to the unification of artistic languages was directed against the 'intersemiosis' of the futuristic books of Aleksei Kruchenykh and Ol'ga Rozanov, as well as Briusov's and Ivanov's symbolism.<sup>1</sup> Shpet's call for artistic differentiation again resulted from his reinterpretation of the inner form of the word as an artistic principle. This lent each art form a distinct inner logic and therefore an individual structure. Furthermore, since artistic structures developed as part of the shared and objective meaning-creative 'language' of culture, Shpet argued that their composition was 'organic'. He viewed cultural objects as in-depth structures, beginning with an inner logic, and resulting in the corresponding expression.<sup>2</sup>

In *Esteticheskie fragmenty*, Shpet asserts that 'the structured nature of each art, of each work of art, that is, the organic nature of its construction is a sign of the concrete nature of aesthetic objects'.<sup>3</sup> The vision of art as a form of reality gets an especially tangible formulation when Shpet describes that '[t]he master, performer, artist, poet mould. Their path is from particularity to individuality. Shpet concludes: 'Down with synthesis, unification, unity! Long live division, differentiation, disorder!'<sup>4</sup> His conception of 'differentiation' was especially significant in the field of theatre theory. The 1921 pamphlet '*Differentsiatsiia postanovki teatral'nogo predstavleniia*' drafts his unusual argument that theatre companies should offer their plays to a professional 'interpreter' specializing in elucidating textual meanings before staging them. Hence, Shpet also argued for the differentiation of tasks within one artistic field.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Huttunen 2007, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Continuing the organic metaphor, Shpet (1922b, p. 28) writes: 'Art is the organs of philosophy; philosophy needs not only a head, but also hands, eyes and ears to feel, see and hear. It is time to stop walking on our heads and applauding (futurism) with our ears!'

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1922b, p. 20.

<sup>4</sup> Shpet 1922b, p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> According to Huttunen (2013, p. 68) Shpet's and the imaginists' versions of 'differentiation' probably come closest to each other in their respective theatre theories.

Shpet's theory of art tackled the artistic expression's relationship with being and meaning through the theory of the inner form. In his opinion all art was by its nature symbolic. Correspondingly, he argued, symbolism should not be expected to function as an artistic school or style.<sup>1</sup> 'As naturalism is the denial of art, symbolism is the substantial quality of art', Shpet writes; '[t]he symbol is the juxtaposition of the order of the sensual with the sphere of the ideal'. The symbol carries and formulates the meaning, uniting the 'two kingdoms' of empirical and ideal being. It thus comes close to Shpet's previous concept of the word. He writes that 'the symbol is a sign in the sense of "word" as a sign for other words, directly (or metaphorically) naming a "thing" [...]'.<sup>2</sup> According to Shpet all art must harbour a certain amount of realism, understood as the inclusion of content. He asserts that the requirement of the form 'flows from the content'. 'Content without form is pure passivity. Content is subject to form — and suffers without it [...]'.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, Shpet emphasizes that this content must not be understood in a naively naturalistic fashion. Instead, his cultural theory returns to his earlier phenomenological argument, in that it accepts reality only as an experienced reality. Shpet writes: 'Realism, if it is not realism of the spirit, but merely of nature and the soul, is distracted realism, a slope into the "nothing" of naturalism. Only the spirit in the real sense is realized — even materialized [...]'.<sup>4</sup>

Even the imaginists had not succeeded in expressing the spirit of the new reality, in Shpet's opinion. However, *Esteticheskie fragmenty* names one poet who had accomplished this difficult task. He writes: 'Did our artists already see the new reality [...]? The common view is that Blok did. I think that Andrei Belyi did.' In Shpet's opinion Blok had trapped himself in the old illusionism of symbolism, when he 'was

<sup>1</sup> When symbolism 'poses' as an artistic style, Shpet (1922b, p. 35) claims that it turns into stylization (*stilizatsiia*).

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1922b, p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1922b, p. 38. Describing the imbalance in contemporary poetry, Shpet (1922b, pp. 64–65) writes: 'When reality becomes an illusion, only empty *form* exists. That is where our current sophistication in poetic technique comes from, our ability even to forge new forms — for no content whatsoever.' Shpet accuses Anna Akhmatova especially of such 'aesthetic falsehood'.

<sup>4</sup> Shpet 1922b, p. 39.

not satisfied with *seeing*' but 'wanted an *apparition*'<sup>1</sup> In contrast, in his *Khristos voskres* (1918) Shpet argues that Belyi was no longer a symbolist. This poem presented already 'another vision: external, present, real'.<sup>2</sup>

#### 4.2.2. From New Realism to Neo-Classicism

What is expressed in art, according to Shpet, is not the empirical reality which simply 'exists'. Instead, it is the 'soul' that 'lives and narrates [its own] biography', or the 'spirit' that is 'present to appear in culture, waits, suffers long, hopes, weathers all, does not rampage, is not proud, is not self-seeking'. Shpet asserts that this spirit has long been misinterpreted by the Christian tradition as 'love', while that too is indeed merely a creation of the former.<sup>3</sup> At the same time he underlines the importance of not conceptualizing the spirit through a Platonic model. This mistake, he argues, had been shared by both symbolism and futurism, which harnessed poetry to reach for otherworldly spheres.

However, the key culprit in spreading such illusionism had been Berdiaev's philosophical school, or as Shpet calls it, the 'Balderdash' ['*Beliberdii*']. He writes that the latter 'gave out theosophical employment records to artists', and so 'theosophical wisdom drove creative reality into the underground'.<sup>4</sup> The mystical theories of art suggested going beyond reality, which, according to Shpet, was a grave misunderstanding:

Since time immemorial the theosophic theories have told us that reality is under a blanket; the folds of it which have risen up are the horror of madness. And truth be told: before the *black nothing* who would not go mad? Here is a criterion for identifying an artist: place the subject before a blanket, convince him to lift it up, and the artist, not a theosophist, will strictly expel the experimenter. Is it really possible to destroy that mystery, the beauty of the folds of the blanket, with

<sup>1</sup> Shpet is referring to Blok's 1918 poem *Dvenadtsat'*.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1922b, p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1922b, p. 39.

<sup>4</sup> Shpet 1922b, p. 47.

a cynical hand movement? Can the artist really independently destroy the reality which is placed before his eyes and therefore authentic? Is there really another reality? Can another really exist? It can only be 'imitated'; it needs to be created; it is obvious; behind it there is nothing. Depict it, but do not disfigure it.<sup>1</sup>

Shpet asserts that the spirit is no 'metaphysical open sesame'. It is 'real not "in itself", but in its recognition'. In art the spirit acquires a form and a matter. Shpet characterizes realism as an ongoing process of concretization: 'Realism is realization, and not being'. When the spirit is formulated and materialized in accordance with its own character, Shpet argues that 'art' can develop into a 'style'; to 'cognize the real, to realize the idea and make it exist — such is the path from the Renaissance to style'. He maintains that the new artistic style that could result from a post-revolutionary Renaissance of Russian culture must be a 'new realism'.<sup>2</sup>

*Esteticheskie fragmenty* describes the post-revolutionary transition period as 'the hours and months "between" — the hours and months of waiting'. One must have patience, Shpet asserts; even if the old reality had been swept away in an explosion, the birth of the new being would be a serene appearance, 'quiet, calm'.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, Russian culture appeared to Shpet to be at a loss. He writes: '[...] we do not know what reality is. We have lost it. We dream of it; we do not know *what* it is. Our life has become unreal; our reality has become nonsense.'<sup>4</sup> Futurism, as art that 'cannibalizes, reflects' is symptomatic of the present state of lifelessness, that is, a cultural crisis. Shpet writes:

Never before, it seems, has there been such absurdity in spiritual life: philosophy, instead of reflection, seeks cognition through 'experience', it has mixed up all meanings and senses of the word *concipio* and runs from the face of reason, hating it, and art, instead of spontaneously creating, reflects, fulfils all meanings of the word *experior* and

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1922b, pp. 47–48.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1922b, 40.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1922b, p. 43.

<sup>4</sup> Shpet 1922b, p. 47.

subjects experience to 'poeticism' — of the present, past and future, as there is no absolute poeticism outside time. The poeticism of the future is considered absolute poeticism. Futurism is the theory of art without art itself.<sup>1</sup>

*Esteticheskie fragmenty* does not offer much more information about the actual nature of 'new realist' art, as Shpet's definition of it is drawn mainly through the negative: new realism opposes the mystical visions of symbolism and the avantgarde hubris of futurism. However, his simultaneous involvement in the Moscow Linguistic Circle, the younger generation of which adopted Shpet's arguments as their own, offers a wider viewpoint on his aesthetic project.

Shpet was elected a member of the Circle on 14 March 1920, following his presentation of a paper entitled '*Esteticheskie momenty v strukture slova*' ('Aesthetic Features in the Structure of the Word'). Nikolai Plotnikov asserts that although Shpet's paper has not survived, the meeting's transcript offers an idea of his argument. Plotnikov suggests, in responding to Dmitrii Ushakov's question — 'is using the concept of "structure" necessary at all, and is it not enough to speak merely of the "aesthetic aspects of the word"?' — that Shpet spells out one of his central theses. The transcript reads: 'G.G. Shpet argues that structure means construction into the depths [of the word], vertically. Linguists, in contrast, usually direct their attention to one of the layers of this structure, taken horizontally [...].'<sup>2</sup> Shpet's atypical theory of the word (as well as, according to some, Shpet's personality) played a role in the organizational history of the Circle, which had existed since 1915: his influence was arguably the catalyst that resulted in its break-up in 1924.<sup>3</sup> Igor' Pil'shchikov suggests that the MLC was divided into two competing factions after 1920, the 'phenomenological wing', formed by Shpet and his young followers, and the 'empirical positivists' (especially Roman Jakobson and Boris Iarkho). Whereas the empirical wing had previously been the Circle's dominant force, the phenomenologists now 'wanted

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1922b, p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> Plotnikov 2010, p. 37.

<sup>3</sup> Dmitriev 2009, p. 86.

to build a system of poetics based not on phonology, but on semasiology (semantics), because they considered language a semiotic phenomenon par excellence', Pil'shchikov writes.<sup>1</sup>

In 1921 the Circle was further fractured when Boris Gornung, Aleksei Buslaev and Maksim Keningsberg (apparently, with the support of Shpet's students Nikolai Zhinkin, Nikolai Volkov, Aleksei Tsires and Aleksandr Akhmanov, known as the phenomenological 'kvartet')<sup>2</sup> established a group of their own. Ars Magna, Gornung asserts, was founded to broaden the sphere of discussion from theoretical linguistics to more general philosophical questions.<sup>3</sup> Shpet was a central figure for the members of Ars Magna; in particular, Gornung's memoirs depict the close relationship between himself, Keningsberg and Shpet.<sup>4</sup> Gornung states that he did not associate Shpet, some twenty years their senior, with the philosophers closest to his age: Berdiaev, Frank and Lev Karsavin. Their worldview appeared foreign to Gornung's generation, who felt isolated by their experience of the revolution and identified as the first generation of 'Soviet youth'. Gornung asserts that 'like the generation of Andrei Belyi', his own generation were also 'children of the turn' (*det'mi rubezha*), albeit not of the turn of the century, but the revolution. He writes: "Ours" was only the turn itself, in its facing to both sides (and with its "transitional" daily life), but both the eras themselves were foreign in some way.<sup>5</sup> Identifying with none of the existing philosophical or artistic schools, this generation looked for guidance in individuals. Gornung writes:

When there was no unity of the 'style of perception of the world', there was no common language with our peers, and the peers with

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<sup>1</sup> Pilshchikov 2017, p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> For the 25th anniversary of their teacher's academic activities the 'kvartet' published a collection of phenomenological essays in 1925. For more see *Antologiya fenomenologicheskoi filosofii v Rossii*. T. 2. (Moscow, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Gornung 2001, p. 372. According to Maksim Shapir (1994, p. 77) the group was organized during the summer months of 1922. Among other themes Ars Magna also dedicated a series of discussions to Husserl's philosophy.

<sup>4</sup> Gornung 2001, p. 353.

<sup>5</sup> Gornung 2001, pp. 327, 330.

whom we lived as if on different planets were the majority. They could include members of the Komsomol, young Communists, inveterate 'internal emigrants', and politically neutral but perfectly loyal young men and women. And precisely because age did not play a decisive role, we, like the 'younger symbolists' had our members who were a 'little older'.<sup>1</sup>

Among older colleagues Gornung asserts that what distanced them from Belyi was the latter's inability to accept the new reality and formulate a positive aesthetic programme compatible with it. Instead, he writes: 'the 'halo' of G. G. Shpet [...] soared above all of us: we were the ones 'he' valued and promoted in all sorts of ways, the ones he protected in all our endeavours'.<sup>2</sup> According to Gornung Shpet had already presented the second and third theoretical volumes of *Esteticheskie fragmenty* at the MLC in 1920, and in January 1922 when 'the first issue came out [...]; we were at first shocked by the style, but then appreciated and valued it and cited the most mischievous formulations in the way Hegel is cited'.<sup>3</sup> At the same time Shpet was hated by many, but because of his influential position, they were forced to ally themselves with Shpet, as well as his younger students for 'tactical' reasons. Among such associates, Gornung surmises, were the imaginists, as well as the Moscow *Kamernyi teatr*, where Mariengof's wife worked as an actress.<sup>4</sup>

Shpet's influence is especially visible in the typewritten journal of *Ars Magna*, *Hermes*.<sup>5</sup> It was aimed at a small circle of readers and prepared independently from the MLC's official publication, *Trudy MLK*. Indeed,

<sup>1</sup> Gornung 2001, p. 332.

<sup>2</sup> Gornung 2001, p. 355.

<sup>3</sup> Gornung 2001, pp. 375–376.

<sup>4</sup> According to Gornung (2001, p. 355) this was especially the case with Anatolii Mariengof during the period of the publication of the journal '*Gostinitsa dlia pute-shestvuiushchikh v prekrasnom*' (1922–24).

<sup>5</sup> The first issue of *Hermes* (*Germes*) appeared in July 1922. The journal came out in twelve copies, circulated mainly from hand to hand in Moscow and Petrograd, and were read until they 'literally fell apart' (Shapir 1994, p. 77). The fourth and last issue was not published, probably due to the untimely death of Maksim Keningsberg in June 1924. Lev Gornung writes that Keningsberg, who had a weak heart, collapsed while working on the journal. For more see Gornung 1992, p. 176.

according to the declaration of the group the MLC had by 1922 ‘stopped being an organization which united people with a single credo in the area of linguistics and poetics’, and *Trudy MLK* could therefore no longer function as its programmatic publication.<sup>1</sup> In Georgii Levinton’s words, the editorial board of *Hermes* was made up of ‘part of the second generation of the MLC, the direct students of G. G. Shpet, of a sharply anti-futurist and anti-OPOIAZ bent’.<sup>2</sup> Although Shpet’s participation in the *Hermes* issues was mainly indirect, the mark of his views is nearly omnipresent.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, his authority affected even the journal’s orthography: like Shpet, the editors ‘also wrote and typed in several cases without doubling consonants — masa instead of massa, klasa (klassa), gramatika (grammatika)’.<sup>4</sup>

*Hermes*’ aesthetic programme was likewise anchored in Shpet’s cultural theory. In exchange, *Ars Magna* seems to have offered him the scholarly approach to art that he found lacking in Russia. In *Esteticheskie fragmenty* Shpet indeed laments the difficulty of initiating a new artistic style when Russian culture had for so long been in a state of intellectual decay. The new style must be ‘theirs’, formed by the cultural spirit of the people, but it could only appear ‘after the school’. Shpet continues:

But we did not go to school. Therein lay our cultural antinomy. The West was schooled, but we only learned from the West when we needed to attend the school the West had. We never had time to study [...]. Instead of the alphabet, we immediately read the latest news in the newspapers; we love the latest words; we solve the most recent questions. It is as though we were children, but on the school bench we are the uneducated. So we were born — our antinomy was born — from birth, or rather, from baptism: we were baptized and are baptized in the Byzantine manner, learned the Bulgarian alphabet, read German books and write books without style.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cited in Shapir 1994, p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> Levinton 2017, p. 75.

<sup>3</sup> According to Lev Gornung’s (1992, p. 175) description ‘Several times Shpet visited our flat, kindly and with interest regarded our manuscript journal *Hermes* and even participated in it a little’.

<sup>4</sup> Levinton 2010, pp. 267–468.

<sup>5</sup> Shpet 1922b, p. 34.

Shpet locates the hope of Russian culture in the study of its language, as the objective semantic structure that allows meanings to evolve. Shpet asserts that the 'philologists' secret must be debunked: everyone must become word-lovers, everyone is called to cognition of the cognized'.<sup>1</sup> Some of the essays published in *Hermes* can indeed be treated as formulations of an aesthetic programme, suggested — at least partly — by Shpet's cultural theory. Here, his anti-futurist idea of new realism was re-interpreted as an aesthetic programme of neo-classicism. Maksim Shapir asserts that the classicism of *Hermes* was understood as "new", "spiritual", "verbal realism" — that is, in opposition to "nominalism". This was a 'realism of the "sign" in all the conscious and expressed definition of its structure'.<sup>2</sup> Viktor Mozalevskii, who was engaged in the journal's work, also suggests that

In the formation of literary-philological outlooks of the participants of *Hermes*, Shpet's influence played a decisive role. Their ideas of the necessity of the emergence of a new classicism and expressed anti-futuristic position flowed directly from Shpet's views on literary evolution.<sup>3</sup>

Mapping the direct references to Shpet on the pages of *Hermes*, Levinton points, for example, to an essay by Maksim Keningsberg, published in the journal's second issue, '*Iskusstvo i istina (v zashchitu i protiv realizma)*'. Keningsberg, who was arguably Shpet's closest student at the time, asserts:<sup>4</sup>

Classical art may be realistic art. Classical art should be called the art of expression — a sign possessing content. Classical art is art as knowledge. Knowledge has as its subject truth. Truth is reality. The truth of art is aesthetic reality.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1922b, p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> Shapir 1994, p. 78.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Gornung 1992, p. 183.

<sup>4</sup> Shpet dedicated *Vnutrenniaia forma slova* to the memory of Keningsberg and tried to have his unfinished works posthumously published by Kolos (Shapir 1994, p. 82). For more see Shpet 2012, pp. 572–573.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in Levinton 2010, p. 472.

Approaching Shpet's phenomenological pairing of truth and being, Keningsberg recommends Shpet's introduction to *Istoriia kak problema logiki* as further reading, as well as Husserl's *Logical Investigations*. He concludes: 'True art is art as the knowledge of aesthetic reality. Only art as knowledge, an art [that is] material and conscious, real and positive, can be called classical art'.<sup>1</sup>

Likewise, the opening article of the journal's first issue declared an unbreakable connection between philosophy and poetics, that is, between art and 'reality'. The editors assert: "'Style" contains an issue of the interpretation of reality, and the problem of reality, the dismantling of this term is the basic problem of philosophy'.<sup>2</sup> Thus, they argue that new artistic phenomena must first be 'justified' by aesthetics, and this discipline must in turn be founded on 'principles of pure logic, which now presents to us as the *study of the word*'. Referring to ongoing debates concerning the real nature of the poetic word, they conclude:

The strictly scientific achievements of aesthetics of recent years shed light on the concepts of the aesthetic object and aesthetic perception, forming an unbreakable link between that concept and the issue of sense in the phenomenon. In the light of these achievements, the foundations of the supposedly scientific theories which had trampled the foundations of Russian futurism, and which had been laid by the academic and dialectical scholars sympathetic to it (futurism), crumble.<sup>3</sup>

*Hermes* was interpreted as a declaration of war against the formal method. Indeed, 'Already that very phrase appears as a kind of cat-achresis', asserts Keningsberg in '*Vyrozhdienie slova (k uiasneniiu futuristicheskoi poetiki)*', published in the first issue. He avers that the main mistake of Opoiazian formalism was that it based its method on the poetic language of futurism, the ideas of the 'self-sufficient word' ('*samovitoe*

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Gornung 2001, p. 207.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Gornung 2001, p. 206.

*slovo*’) and the ‘*zaum*’ language. For Keningsberg ‘that which was prepared by Russian decadentism, which apprehended the ideas of French symbolism when it was exercised by the symbolists who transferred the cult of the aural side of the poem to Russian soil, was brought to its conclusion and to absurdity by the futurists’. Futurism therefore only accentuates ‘the awkward ideas of Bałmont’s “*Poeziia kak volshebstvo*”’ and ‘the magical Steinerism of Belyi’, moulding them into their own ‘pure art of sound, of the homonym’. Thus, Keningsberg reserves the right to call them by the old name, ‘decadentism’.<sup>1</sup>

According to Keningsberg Opoiaz had forgotten about the language’s essence. He asserts that only a very ‘low step of a cultural level’ could have led them to ‘the ability to see in an arrangement of sounds the word [...], as if all the zoological species *Homo sapiens* had to do was open his mouth and start pulling sounds out of it for that to forthwith become a language, words’. In conclusion, he states that this has led Russian formalism into terminological confusion, clearly displayed on the pages of Roman Iakobson’s ‘*Noveishaia russkaia poeziia*’. Keningsberg writes:

R. Iakobson [...] formulated these ideas in the words ‘poetry is language in its aesthetic function’ but did not even spend a minute thinking about the great responsibility incurred by that formulation. Here not one word is thought out or grasped. To characterize a thing — and a word is a thing — by its function means to fail completely to notice the thing itself. Moreover, the term ‘aesthetic’ requires understanding, and neither the futurists nor Iakobson [...] give that or are able to give it.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cited in Levinton 2017, p. 64. According to Keningsberg the only exceptions among futurists were Viktor Zhirmunskii and Boris Eikhenbaum, ‘who had clearly turned up there by mistake’.

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Levinton 2017, pp. 65–66. Emphasizing the need for the study of ontological and logical characteristics of the word, Keningsberg refers to the theory of the inner form. Curiously, his reference is not to Shpet, but to the theory of Anton Marty, as well as the first volume of Husserl’s *Logical Investigations*. Regarding Marty, he writes that the latter’s conception must be ‘cleansed’ of some of its psychologism.

Shpet's theory of the inner form of the word, as it was explicated in the second volume of *Esteticheskie fragmenty* — known to the members of *Ars Magna* since 1920 — can be interpreted in relation to Keningsberg's frustration. There, Shpet attempted to offer a comprehensive analysis of the constitution of the word as an objective being, as well as a sign with a potentially poetic nature.

### 4.3. THE INNER FORM OF THE WORD

Shpet's presentation of the inner form of the word is far from unequivocal, not least in its relation to Humboldt's original theory. In the second volume of *Esteticheskie fragmenty* Shpet notes that Humboldt's elucidation of his own term was likewise 'not always clear'. He cites what he believes to be an example of the very core of Humboldt's theory, namely his claim that 'the character of languages consists "of the particular means of connecting thoughts with sounds" (*in der Art der Verbindung des Gedanken mit den Lauten*)'. This, Shpet observes, could be interpreted 'in this way and that', and adds: 'On the whole, [...] I merely borrow the term from Humboldt, but contribute my own meaning'.<sup>1</sup> Yet his subsequent *Vnutrenniaia forma slova* carries the subtitle '*Etiudy i variatsii na temy Gumbol'ta*' and indeed presents a discussion of Shpet's theory as reflected against Humboldt. Apart from the latter, Shpet cites a wide range of thinkers from Wolff and Kant to Hegel and Schelling, as well as Heymann Steinthal and Anton Marty. This creates a contrast with *Esteticheskie fragmenty*, in which Shpet's theory stands alone.

If the second volume of *Esteticheskie fragmenty* especially advances a systematic elucidation of the conception of the inner form, the focus is quite different in his 1927 work. On the first pages of *Vnutrenniaia forma slova* it becomes evident that Shpet is interested in a broader topic. He discusses, for example, the 'national spirit' (*natsional'nyi dukh*) that creates language and directs a community's relationship with reality; an individual's experience of language as a tool of expression

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1923a, p. 67

and communication; language as *energeia*, as well as the different ways in which the inner form may be conceptualized. Echoing Humboldt's original style, Shpet's characterizations adopt a metaphorical tone. He writes, for instance:

the internal verbal-logical form is the law of the very formation of understanding, that is, of a kind of movement for development, the consequent exchange of ideas which we call the dialectical exchange, reflecting the development of sense itself: its *Wandlungen* (changes) are transformations or even transubstantiations. That is not a scheme and not a formula, but a device, a means, a method of forming word-concepts.<sup>1</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Shpet's book was met with criticism by the formalists. Mikhail Grigor'ev wrote in his 1927 *Literatura i marksizm* review: "The formalists will not like G. Shpet's book: they will say (and are already saying) that G. Shpet's definition of inner form is so broad that it can include anything, and that nothing remains of language itself in its specialized characteristics".<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Grigor'ev notes that Shpet's analysis remains so ambiguous that he cannot imagine "how [...] linguists and literary scholars can use that concept in their work".<sup>3</sup>

Later attempts to decipher Shpet's conception have often resulted in similar outcomes: compared to the formalists' perspicuous language, his theory has appeared figurative and vague. However, as I will try to demonstrate in the following, the second volume of *Esteticheskie fragmenty* offers a different version of Shpet's concept: one that can be straightforwardly defined with the help of his earlier phenomenological terminology, used in *Iavlenie i smysl*, '*Soznanie i ego sobstvennik*' and '*Mudrost' ili razum?*' The phenomenological interpretation of the inner form is visibly more precise than its Humboldtian reading. Yet Shpet's conception remains philosophical in its nature, and thus its utility to poetic theory remains unclear.

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1927, p. 117.

<sup>2</sup> Grigor'ev 1928, pp. 30–31.

<sup>3</sup> Grigor'ev 1928, p. 38.

### 4.3.1. The Elusive Inner Form

The Petrograd formalists perceived Shpet as a foe. The MLC's reform, through which his influence had become 'overpowering', was associated with Roman Jakobson's emigration to Czechoslovakia in 1920.<sup>1</sup> In 1965 Jakobson would look back at the history of the Moscow Circle with nostalgia, describing how in the mid-1920s:

In vehement disputes on linguistic essentials — phenomenology of language and the strictly empiricist approach; the place of phonetics and semantics in the science of language; the problem of the Humboldtian internal form; criteria for the delimitation of poetic and ordinary language; or finally the relation between language and culture — the Moscow team lost its former unity of purpose and principles. New institutions, like for instance the State Academy for the Study of Arts (*GAXN*), attracted the most active workers of *MLK*, and in the summer of 1924, during the tenth year of its existence, the Moscow *kružok* was formally dissolved.<sup>2</sup>

Jakobson viewed Shpet's views as insufficiently radical.<sup>3</sup> There was thus a certain symbolism in the fact that the last session Jakobson led on 25 April 1920 included Keningsberg's first presentation at the Circle. According to Pil'shchikov 'The Keningsbergian phenomenology of the poem was almost in all points contrasted with the empirical statistical poetry studies — both in the version of it developed by Iarkho and in the one developed by Tomashevskii'.<sup>4</sup> Pil'shchikov suggests that Shpet's phenomenological approach was especially hard to swallow for Boris Eikhenbaum. In a letter to Grigorii Vinokur on 30 June 1924 he mentioned the necessity of 'liberating' poetics from the influence of aesthetics and philosophy, 'because only thus can the science of literature

<sup>1</sup> Tihanov 2019, p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Pil'shchikov & Ustinov 2020, p. 413.

<sup>3</sup> Pilshchikov (2017, p. 48) suggests that Jakobson later attempted to synthesize the two antagonistic methodologies of the MLC, combining the linguistic and semiotic approaches.

<sup>4</sup> Pil'shchikov & Ustinov 2020, p. 410.

become independent and concrete'. Eikhenbaum adds: 'I do not believe in Shpet — that is pure oratory'.<sup>1</sup>

Yet the formalists' approach to Shpet was not entirely negative. For example, as Tihanov writes, *Esteticheskie fragmenty* provided the idea of poetics as 'the grammar of poetic language and poetic thought'. In the 1960s Iakobson adapted Shpet's concept for his study of 'the poetry of grammar and the grammar of poetry', although, Tihanov asserts, he 'purified' and developed it into a 'term with distinct scope and content'. Shpet's conception of 'structure' also appeared in some formal studies of poetic language during the 1920s. Most notably, Viktor Vinogradov utilized a distinction between 'system' (horizontal organization) and 'structure' (suggesting depth).<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Vinogradov makes a positive reference to Shpet in his memoirs:

At that time in Moscow people began to be interested in Professor Gustav Gustavovich Shpet's aesthetic works, and when Muscovites came to Leningrad they got to know those propositions, but [we] had a very negative attitude towards that [...]; both Shpet's 'Esteticheskie fragmenty' and the later 'Vnutrenniaia forma slova' could not satisfy us then, at least not fully; but one idea, unnoticed and without references to Gustav Gustavovich's work nevertheless was found in our work. This was the idea. In general, Shpet differentiated between the concepts of system and structure. I remember one discussion with him personally. He was talking about what a system is in general. It is something given in one plane. a system is a row formation of elements found in relations to each other, and a structure is an internal unification of different little clouds which, one covering the other, allow for reaching into the depth, into the essence, and at the same time form an internal unity. The concept of structure seemed more suitable when studying the composition of an artwork, because only thus could some internal essence of the whole be discovered.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Dmitriev 2009, p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> Tihanov 2019, pp. 87–88.

<sup>3</sup> Vinogradov 1975, p. 265.

The formalists' interest in Husserl's phenomenology is, of course, well known; according to Igor' Chubarov Husserl's phenomenological reduction even influenced Shklovskii's idea of *'ostranenie'*, and Nikolai Plotnikov asserts that Shpet's 'pathos of the overcoming of psychologism with the help of phenomenology was quite compatible with their goals and ideals'.<sup>1</sup> Yet to many his own the hermeneutical phenomenology of reason seemed a strangely old-fashioned reading of Husserl. Tihanov asserts that compared to the empirically minded formalists Shpet's approach to poetics was 'still very much rooted' in a Diltheyan nineteenth century hermeneutic paradigm. Shpet appears to him to have been torn between traditional and modern paradigms, at times appreciating literature and culture mainly as manifestations of national consciousness, while at others focusing on distinct forms of poetic expression.<sup>2</sup> Tihanov rightly states:

Ultimately — and here lies the crucial difference between Shpet and Formalism — literature was for him not a self-sufficient system to be explained with reference to the specifically poetic function of language; literature for Shpet — even when all his semiotic inclinations are taken into account — is primarily just one of the spheres of creativity appropriated by what he calls 'aesthetic consciousness'.<sup>3</sup>

However, the juxtaposition of Shpet's views with those of formalists as 'anti-modern' advocates a somewhat biased interpretation of his theory. This is visible, for example, in Dušan Radunović's reading of Shpet. Radunović asserts that the first generation of Moscow formalists were the authors of a methodological revolution in that they emancipated the study of poetic language from the traditional semantic burden. He suggests that Shklovskii's theory of *'ostranenie'* had 'liberated art from an ontologically subordinate status' in relation to reality, espoused

<sup>1</sup> Chubarov 2014a, p. 98 and Plotnikov 2010, p. 37. Of the formalists there is no doubt that Husserl's influence was strongest in Jakobson's work. For more on this connection see e. g. Holenstein 1976, pp. 2–5.

<sup>2</sup> Tihanov 2019, p. 88.

<sup>3</sup> Tihanov 2019, p. 89.

since Plato's institution of the concept of art as mimetic presentation. Following Shklovskii, the formalists had discovered an entirely new paradigm for their thinking, which was the idea that 'art is an autonomous field with its own, self-governed mechanisms of emergence, growth and decline', Radunović writes.<sup>1</sup> To him Shpet's influence in the MLC appears as an opposite force. He contends that

in the midst of the non-semantic coup and a demand for literature to be considered as an autonomous domain, an alternative conceptual dominant emerged to take on the previous one, conquer the scientific field and in fact restore the old *épistème*. Inaugurated, or rather, reintroduced by the Russian philosopher Gustav Shpet, the category of 'inner form' was meant to assert itself as an alternate conceptual dominant, one with the power to challenge the validity of the non-semantic conceptualisation of form and, seemingly at least, establish a bond between those new epistemological conditions and the logocentric legacy of the past.<sup>2</sup>

Radunović is apprehensive concerning Shpet's use of 'a rather obsolete, and, in the context of Russian modern humanities, all but notorious, concept of *inner form*'. In his opinion the revitalization of such an outdated term 'emerges as a thorough denunciation of the epistemological foundations on which the transformative changes in the Russian art and studies stood'. Radunović surmises that one could even take the argument further: Shpet's rejection of the idea of art and language as autonomous phenomena could be seen as 'a rejection of the project of intellectual modernity as a whole'.<sup>3</sup>

Shpet's use of the archaic term, carrying an unwelcome echo of Aleksandr Potebnia, is indeed noteworthy.<sup>4</sup> Possibly for provocative

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<sup>1</sup> Radunović 2017, p. 141.

<sup>2</sup> Radunović 2017, p. 142.

<sup>3</sup> Radunović 2017, p. 148.

<sup>4</sup> As Radunović (2017, p. 148) contends, it was 'precisely against the understanding of language as inner form as articulated by Potebnia, that the non-semantic revolution in Russian studies of language and art broke out.'

purposes, he even fails to state his opposition to the latter's psychologistic theory before the third volume of *Esteticheskie fragmenty*. There, Shpet writes: 'Psychological poetics, poetics as the "psychology of artistic creation", is a scientific vestige. Our anti-Potebnianism is a healthy movement'. According to Shpet Potebnia 'compromised the concept of the "inner form of language"'.<sup>1</sup> Yet although Potebnia's name is not mentioned in the second volume of the same work, a reference to his theory is already implied. Shpet clearly rejects the Ukrainian linguist, writing:

Thus, the non-linguist may also group certain words with an initial root or basis, insofar as one word formation or another seems obvious to him, for example, when he is dealing with a newly formed loan term. At the time, some were discomfited by the word 'vliianie' ('influence', introduced by Karamzin), from the verbs 'lit', 'vliiat' ('pour', 'pour in'), and for that matter, the phrase 'vliianie na kogo' ('influence on someone'). To the layman, it is clear: 'poniatie' ('concept') from 'poiat' ("to start doing" — 'to take'). And so on. In such 'ruminations', in the absence of syntactically formulated sentences, it is as if its own internal form is formed from the relationship between 'initial meaning' (etimon) and the lexical-logical meaning used.<sup>2</sup>

The formalists struggled for clear-cut definitions in their reinterpretations of the inner form. In the 1920s Potebnia's theory, or more generally, poetic semantics, was a prevalent theme among them; the issue was considered at least by Iurii Tynianov, Grigorii Vinokur, Roman Jakobson, Boris Iarkho and Viktor Zhirmunskii.<sup>3</sup> From the perspective of the history of Russian formalism Shpet's conception indeed appears merely one among many. It has therefore also typically been analysed

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1923b, pp. 38–39. In Sergei Zenkin's (2004, p. 156) formulation, in using the term 'inner form', Shpet's aim was 'to return to the philosophical foundations of that idea, having released it from philological and particularly "psychological" simplifications, that is, to return to Humboldt via the head of Potebnia'.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1923a, p. 69.

<sup>3</sup> For an analysis of their corresponding views see Pilshchikov 2017.

as a semantic theory. For example, Pil'shchikov approaches Shpet's idea through Keningsberg's characterization of the inner form as 'a relation between the grammatical form and the logical form'. As Pil'shchikov asserts, Shpet's inner form is essentially a 'relation' (between the 'outer' signicative form and the 'object form' which is the word's 'content'). It is therefore not 'meaning' itself, but that which motivates the meaning and connects the content of the word to its audible or visible form. The inner form is indeed described by Shpet as an 'algorithm' that constitutes the relation between sign and sense.<sup>1</sup> Pil'shchikov cites a passage from Shpet's treatise *Iazyk i smysl* (*Language and Thought*), drafted in 1921–25 but published only posthumously:

Forms are that which or thanks to which understanding occurs; meaning is that which is understood itself. In living experience they are united, and their unity is in form. a concept, as a means of understanding, is not meaning in the actual sense, but rather formalized meaning. The inner form of the word, as a concept, is not meaning itself, but a kind of relationship between the terms of correlation: word — meaning.<sup>2</sup>

In a similar vein Vladimir Feshchenko describes Shpet's theory of the inner form as a theory of 'deep semiotics'. He suggests that the metaphor of depth was omnipresent in Shpet's writings on language, signs and understanding, and that the main objective of this approach was indeed to study the 'vertical' dimension of the sign's structure, 'that is, the relation of inner and outer dimensions of the sign as a carrier of human cognition'.<sup>3</sup> Feshchenko notes that Shpet was probably the first Russian to use the term 'semiotics' in its modern meaning. Yet his approach to it was original: instead of remaining on the 'surface' of the sign's formal properties, he immersed himself in the 'semasiological' correlation of the sign to its referential meaning. Feshchenko asserts that Shpet's approach to language remained ontological, as he sought

<sup>1</sup> Pilshchikov 2017; pp. 46, 54.

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Pilshchikov 2017, p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> Feshchenko 2015, p. 236.

to determine the ontological (semasiological) properties of the sign. In other words, he endeavoured to discover what made a sign or word ‘meaningful’ — what made a sign a sign.<sup>1</sup>

While the semantic-semiotic interpretation presented by Feshchenko and Pil’shchikov is quite correct, my aim in the last part of the thesis will be to offer another, phenomenological, reading of Shpet’s idea. It indeed appears that Shpet developed his theory within two distinct discourses. The phenomenological version of the inner form, I argue, is found in the second volume of *Esteticheskie fragmenty* (published in 1923). There, the correlation between sign and its meaning is placed under phenomenological scrutiny. In other words, I suggest that Shpet’s search for the ‘source’ of sense, as it unfolded in his earlier phenomenological studies, is now transferred to the field of language and culture. In ‘*Mudrost’ ili razum?*’ he discovered the ‘inner’ or ‘logical’ forms of the ‘word’ as the rational principle that directs all cognition. In *Esteticheskie fragmenty*, the theory of the inner form itself is elevated to a topic of investigation.

The 1923 phenomenological reading of the inner form of the word is thus to be distinguished from Shpet’s analyses in the 1927 *Vnutrenniaia forma slova* and even the aforementioned *Iazyk i smysl*. Their focus is on the dual problem of signification and understanding, that is, the question of how a sign emerges and lives in a language or culture; how a ‘subjective’ meaning is ‘objectivized’ into a language to be used and understood. According to Boris Gornung this topic was already quite distant from the questions Shpet shared with the members of *Ars Magna*. Gornung writes that in *Vnutrenniaia forma slova* ‘Shpet in many respects distanced himself from his own thoughts of the early 1920s’.<sup>2</sup>

To clarify the distinction between the two versions of the theory, I suggest considering the semiotic conception of the inner form in relation to Shpet’s ethnic psychology presented in *Vvedenie v etnicheskuiu psikhologiiu* (1927). There, he argues that in any cultural expression,

<sup>1</sup> Feshchenko 2015, p. 242.

<sup>2</sup> Gornung 2001, p. 368. On a personal level Gornung (p. 355) attests that many of his earlier followers had distanced themselves from Shpet by 1926.

there is a ‘conscious or unconscious relationship with “sense”’, and that this very relationship is the subject of collective psychology; ‘Not sense, not meaning, but co-meaning, the *accompanying* implementation of the historical, subjective reactions, worries and the relation to it are the subject of psychology’. According to Shpet this ‘sphere of life’ (*sfera zhizni*), as the properly social reality, surrounds the fundamentally objective sense (*smysl*) of all expressions. He asserts that one must ‘be able to read the “expression” of culture and social life in a way that understands their sense and sympathetically catch, feel, and co-experience their subjective moods’.

It is as if, Shpet argues, there are two sides to a cultural expression: it is expressed (*vyrazheno*) objectively, but in the objective meaning of the expression the ‘attitude’ of the creative subject is also reflected (*otrazheno*). Ethnic psychology treats this creative subject as a member of a collective consciousness and analyses the distinctive features of different cultures. Meanwhile, analysing the objectivity of an expression’s ‘meaning’ requires an altogether different approach. This, it seems to me, Shpet found in phenomenology. In what follows I present Shpet’s elucidation of the inner form of the word as it unfolds in the second volume of *Esteticheskie fragmenty*. As Shpet returns to his earlier phenomenological terminology, his conceptions of ‘sense’, ‘truth’ and ‘being’ again converge.

Arguably, Shpet comes closest here to solving his problem of how to grasp reality in its true being. If this is the case, one may agree with Radunović’s argument: Shpet indeed goes against a founding idea of modern language theory, namely, Saussure’s argument that the relationship between the ‘signifier’ and the ‘signified’ is arbitrary.

#### 4.3.2. a Phenomenological Reading of the Inner Form of the Word

The second volume of *Esteticheskie fragmenty* offers an elucidation not only concerning the inner form of the word but the latter’s structure in its entirety. In this structure the inner form is a ‘technical’ part like

any other, and Shpet refers to it sometimes in the singular and sometimes in the plural; its name also varies from an 'inner' to a 'logical' form. This fluctuation already seems to distance his theory from the religious-metaphysical 'logos interpretation' of the inner form that is sometimes assigned to it. This was noticed in 1926 by an unknown author (probably one of Shpet's students from GAKhN) of an unpublished review article of *Esteticheskie fragmenty*. The review reads:

The eternally generated secret of the word has since ancient times attracted poets, religious thinkers and philosophers to itself; but they usually stopped at the contemplation of the beauty and strength of verbal bliss, without attempting to subject it to strict philosophical analysis. But if communion with the sacrament of the artistic being of logos permeates the poet's creativity, and if the greatest mastery of logical thinking is simultaneously the greatest mastery of the dialectical word, the philosophical reflection as such has no straighter or more essential object of its practice than the word itself.<sup>1</sup>

The reviewer associates Shpet's book with phenomenology, writing: 'If for Husserl the sphere of pure logic is the sphere of absolutely pure ideal connections, if the foundations of his philosophy do not allow him to review the social being as primary, categorical', Shpet's work is an attempt to overcome these restrictions.<sup>2</sup> Shpet's analysis of the structure of the word indeed evolves in accordance with his earlier phenomenological arguments; specifically, his development of the problem of sense formation and the analysis of noema-noesis correlation — but he now approaches these questions but from the opposite direction: looking at language, Shpet's task is to discern the teleological source of reason within it.

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<sup>1</sup> Polivanov 1992, p. 72. The manuscript of the review was discovered by the son of Viacheslav Ivanov, Dmitrii Ivanov, in Rome in 1989. It was taken out of Moscow in 1928 by Olga Shor, who apparently intended to have it published in Europe. It seems the text had been inspected by Shpet himself, whose markings were visible in its margins.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Despite the title, Shpet's concern in the second volume of *Esteticheskie fragmenty* is not first and foremost with the aesthetic aspects of the word. Instead, he states that the word 'is not in itself an aesthetic object'; it takes a separate analysis to discern the aesthetic moments of the word which come into view in correlation with an aesthetic consciousness.<sup>1</sup> In its essential being the word is a sign (*znak*) *sui generis* which indicates that the connection between it and its meaning is of a specific kind. Shpet asserts that all psychological attempts to explain this signicative connection, based on 'associations, connections of cause and action, means and goals, pre-meditated agreement, and so on', are merely hypotheses, 'the working value of which, in the present crisis, descends to nil'. To understand the nature of the relationship between the word and its meaning, Shpet argues that it does not help to study the empirical, outer, characteristics of the word. Instead, one must investigate the distinctive nature of meaning (*smysl*).<sup>2</sup>

Shpet points out that his definition of the word (*slovo*) is broad: 'what "one" word or a "discrete" word is defined by the context'. Indeed, according to him, almost any distinguishable meaning-complex can be defined as a word. Shpet writes:

'Khod' ('motion') is a discrete word, as are 'parokhod' ('steamship'), 'belyiparokhod' ('whitesteamship'), 'bol'shoibelyiparokhod' ('big-whitesteamship') and so on. [Words deliberately run together without spaces for effect — translator's note.] The syntactic 'connection between words' is also a word, consequently speech, a book, literature, the language[s] of the whole world, all of culture is a word. In the metaphysical aspect nothing prevents the consideration of the cosmic universe as a word. Everywhere, the essential relationships and typical forms in the structure of the word are one.<sup>3</sup>

Correspondingly, Shpet asserts that in his discussion of the word's structure 'not a morphological, syntactic or stylistic construction is

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1923a, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1923a, pp. 8–9.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1923a, p. 10.

presupposed, not at all its location in a “plane”, but, on the contrary, its organic one, in depth’. Structure is a ‘concrete relationship’ between the word’s individual parts, ‘from the sensually perceived to the formal-ideal (eidetic) object, [which spreads] to all relations located on all steps between these two terms’.<sup>1</sup>

Not all parts of the word carry meaning, according to Shpet: a phonetic expression, as a purely material voice (*golos*), might convey an emotional tone, but no significance. ‘Thus, a phoneme, by dint of its direct involvement with nature and independence from sense, does not yet constitute a *word* as such’, Shpet writes.<sup>2</sup> The first ‘layer’ of the word to carry a kernel of meaning, according to him, is the morpheme. It is ‘the first step from the emotional to the cerebral, the outer clothing of sense, the first fulcrum for the level of understanding’. Echoing a Potebnian metaphor, Shpet continues:

a morpheme, as a sound formation, being wholly subject to the laws of phonetics, cannot liberate itself from the pressure of sense without effort. It can, to a certain point, like lava, harden and fetter sense with itself, but beneath the surface it bubbles and retains its flame. Historical and archaeological excavations reveal its dynamism and movement, but sometimes a simply successful use of a word — particularly in poetic speech — reminds us of a living soul which gushes under the petrified wrinkles of the morpheme.<sup>3</sup>

But, he adds, for the morpheme to become a ‘first step’ towards a word, ‘it needs not be the only one, it needs to be merged into a united whole with the consequent steps, it needs to be included in the *context* of authentic and immediate forms of the sense itself as such’.<sup>4</sup> Shpet’s thought is reminiscent of his argument in ‘*Mudrost’ ili razum?*’ as he states that an ‘individual word’, ‘strictly speaking, when deprived of sense is not λόγος’, but merely a ‘lexis’; ‘It is not the *word of a mes-*

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1923a, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1923a, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1923a, p. 26

<sup>4</sup> Shpet 1923a, p. 27

sage, although it is *already a means of communication*'.<sup>1</sup> The argument corresponds to Shpet's earlier statement about the need to renew logic as a study of the eidetic being so that it offered not 'a static picture' of 'empty' forms but instead presented a way to grasp ideas in their 'context' and 'movement', filling forms with a sense.

For Shpet the word is defined by its connection to the eidetic realm. Similarly to his previous assertion, alongside Husserl, that the ideal can be intuited with no special effort, Shpet now sees no reason to question the word's capacity to draw the connection. He writes: 'N, when he utters a word-name, and I, when I hear it, will *understand* the word to mean *one and the same thing*. That is the *object* being spoken about, the one that the "word" talks about'. Thus, the word 'relates not to sensual, but to intellectual givenness'. This makes the word's meaning objective, as Shpet suggests that '[t]hat to which the word now refers is understood by it; by the word the object is understood. N understands it, and we understand it; he "has it in mind" and we "have it in mind"'. But the ability of the speaker and the listener to grasp the same eidetic object is not yet enough to create understanding, according to Shpet. He argues that understanding 'something as something is not understanding, but only cognition [...], grasping, holding, conceptualizing, having it in mind. There is nothing about the *content* and meaning-sense, only about the volume and form'.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the pure idea (*predemet*) 'is merely a certain point of attention, "something", a provided theme', or even a 'secret', an 'X'. As in *Iavlenie i smysl*, the pure ideal object (a 'certain X') is merely the potential bearer of actualized meaning.

The ideal (non-empirical and non-existing) content of a word is revealed through its meaning via a 'complex process of the discovery of sense, content'; it is a 'transfer to the empirical, *singly* real being'.<sup>3</sup> Shpet writes: '[b]ut precisely because the object can be realized, filled with content, implemented, and precisely through the word it will also be given sense; it is the formal formative beginning of that sense'. This

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1923a, p. 28

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1923a, p. 36

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1923a, p. 38

speaks for the absolute necessity of an ideal content in the word, without which its structure falls apart. Shpet writes:

The object groups and forms the word like a message and like an utterance in general. It contains in itself content, forming it from the semasiological side, it is the “bearer” of sense [...] If the word was not understood to contain an object, fettering and cementing things in the unity of conceivable form, they would disintegrate under their own name, as sand flows from the palm of the hand when one makes a fist.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time as Shpet takes non-referential words (suggested, for example, by the futurists’ *Zaum* language) not to be words at all, he also considers non-verbal thinking an impossibility. According to him a ‘non-sensual thought is normal; it is a thought which hovers above bestial experience’. However, a ‘non-verbal thought is pathology; it is a thought which cannot be born, one stuck in an inflamed womb and there disintegrating in pus’. Shpet states that the word is not ‘the swaddling clothes of thought, but its flesh. Thought is born in the word and together with it. Even that is but little — the thought is conceived in the word’.<sup>2</sup>

Located between the ideal (ontic) forms and the sensual (morphological) forms, ‘is inserted as a *system of relations between them*, an intertwinement of new forms, precisely *logical forms*’, Shpet writes. It is by learning to distinguish these inner forms that ‘the whole content of what N is communicating now flows for us’. According to Shpet

we follow [them] — ‘we notice’ [them], somewhere in the second level of consciousness, we remark [them] — beyond the oscillations of morphemes and ontical forms, but only insofar as the changes in them modify the logical forms of the sense itself. When we again transfer to them the strike of attention or they themselves force us to do so with their ‘unexpected falseness’, grotesqueness, ugliness or, on the

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1923a, p. 39

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1923a, p. 43

contrary, unexpectedly charming delight, we lose the balance of ‘understanding’, and meaning as such slips away from us.<sup>1</sup>

In a move reminiscent of the phenomenological reduction Shpet turns his focus to the expressive word, as an analogue to the experiencing consciousness, to ask *how* the word expresses what it expresses. He suggests that it is through such an ‘inward’ look that we gain a true understanding of the word as a sign. In other words, Shpet treats language not as a transparent, neutral stratum reflecting ‘reality as such’. Instead, he asserts that such an outlook allows not for understanding, but merely crude conceptualization: ‘we would *only* receive “concepts”, [...] that is, the outlines of sense, a riverbed, but not the actual flow of sense along that bed’.<sup>2</sup> According to Shpet, the one who ‘perceives concepts, “volumes” of thought for the thought itself, for “concept” is precisely the one who does *not* understand’.<sup>3</sup>

To reach a sufficient level of understanding through language, Shpet suggests viewing the functioning of the inner forms at a level ‘higher’ than the morphological one, that is, the syntactic level. According to Shpet it might seem intuitively correct to identify the syntactic forms of language with logical forms of thought, but this, he asserts, would be a mistake. Shpet illustrates his argument with a staircase: ‘if the whole process is depicted as an ascent of steps, it emerges that one may not simply proceed from the syntactic step to the logical one; rather, one must go from one to the other via special, sometimes peculiarly laid connecting bridges’. In other words, ‘[b]etween the syntactic and logical forms [...] it is as if a delay in the movement of thought occurs’.<sup>4</sup> The syntactic forms, Shpet argues, are not only ‘forms of thought’; they also function as self-referential signs of their own, reflecting the very task they fulfil in a context: for example, as suffixes. They thus display the expressive capacity of the language itself. In Shpet’s words, this is the same as demonstrating the ‘vital energy’ of language; ‘The phoneme and

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1923a, p. 46

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1923a, pp. 46–47.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 2007, p. 223. This sentence is not included in the original 1923 publication.

<sup>4</sup> Shpet 1923a, p. 56

morpheme of the “case ending” are [...] a sign, a symptom of its special, “secondary” normative meaning, as it were, of the second derivative in the normative function of the word’.<sup>1</sup> The movement and evolution of the syntagmas guide the life of morphological forms, which, Shpet writes, are ‘as it were, statistical registering summary from an observation of life in the syntax of language. Syntax is exposition; morphology is the index and heading to it’.<sup>2</sup>

Syntactic forms are also of particular interest to Shpet because their ‘relationship as forms to the ideal parts of the verbal structure is not essential or organic but a conventional relationship’. By this he means that a syntagma ‘is a sign, but a sign not only semasiological or nominative, *but also* symptomatic, shall we say’. It ‘appears as a sign of meaning and a thing, and as a sign of *the fact that it is that sign*. It is, as it were, the nomen of the thing and simultaneously nomen nominis’.<sup>3</sup> Syntaxis can even be described as the ‘ontology of the word’, according to Shpet: it ‘studies not only the word as a word about something else, but simply the *word*, that is, the syntax itself is the word about the word, about the word as word, about the word as *wordthing (slovoveshch)*’.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the syntactic forms ‘are produced by the caprice of the language, they form its smile and grimaces’; as forms they are ‘playful, free, mobile and dynamic’. Indeed, these forms also have the power to change logical language into a poetic one.<sup>5</sup> By modifying the logic that binds the ideal content and the syntagma in which it is expressed, one may reach a *sui generis poetical logic*, an analogon of the “logical” — the study of the inner forms of poetic expression’. Shpet writes:

This differential and its relationships are the sphere of new forms [...]. We shall call them, to differentiate between purely logical ones, *inner differential forms of language*. It is as if they are composed in the *game of syntagmas and logical forms between each other*. Logical forms serve as

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1923a, p. 57

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1923a, pp. 59–60.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1923a, p. 56.

<sup>4</sup> Shpet 1923a, p. 61.

<sup>5</sup> Shpet 1923a, p. 65.

the foundational basis of this game, and insofar as in it may be noticed ideal permanency and regularity.<sup>1</sup>

Just like logical words, poetic words are also expressions of an eidetic 'X', an idea (*predmet*) that becomes formulated and finds its meaning in a word. 'The objects of poetics (emancipated from reality) — motives, themes — should possess their material justification and filling, their meaning and content, as objects of science do'. This is the peculiar kind of realism for which Shpet calls in poetic expression: 'In the game of poetic forms full emancipation from *existing* things may be reached. However, [poetic expressions] retain their own *sui generis* logic. And together they retain *sense*, as emancipation from things is not emancipation from sense [...]'. Therefore, with 'transcendental (material) truth and logical truth comes *poetic* truth, as a correspondence of syntagma to the object, albeit really non-existent, fantastical, fictitious, but nevertheless logically formed'.<sup>2</sup>

The realistic expression of the poetic logic takes place in a symbol. Shpet writes that this symbol is not an abstraction but a concrete relationship. Just as the 'logical meaning is the given understood in the present context, so the symbolic meaning is the created and sensible in the created context'. a language lives and evolves especially in its poetic uses, Shpet asserts; 'The sphere of poetic symbolic forms is the sphere of the greatest, tensest, fiery life of the word. It is a thicket bursting with the inexhaustible life creation of the word'.<sup>3</sup> Shpet therefore especially highlights the importance of proper theories of poetic language. According to him 'of particular danger are the experiments to deduce the symbol from "similarity"'. Shpet emphasizes the power of the symbol to express in a concrete, empirical form something which only existed ideally, as a non-real being:

in every symbol the *external* is used to symbolize the *internal*. Through the symbol, the internal is the external, the ideal is the real, a thought

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1923a, p. 66.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1923a, p. 74.

is a thing. Through the symbol the ideal dead void is transformed into living things — these ones, with smells; with colours, sounds, cheerful things. [...] And the journey of that creation [is] precisely from nothing, from the ideal, from the internal, from 0 to 1, to the external, to the real.<sup>1</sup>

For Shpet, to understand a word, to grasp its meaning that is revealed in the never-ending movement of its ideal and empirical opposite sides against each other, ‘it means, rather briefly, concretely, *to live in the world of ideas*’.<sup>2</sup>

In his earlier texts Shpet came to the conclusion that only by adopting a philosophical outlook, by turning our focus from a naively ‘direct experiencing’ of the world to a position where we discern the ways in which we in fact experience the world, can we discover reality in all its richness of forms, colours, nuances and meanings. For Shpet this total reality can be entered by engaging in the shared consciousness that in theory can experience ‘everything’. In turn, this consciousness is by its nature linguistic, that is, logical. The rationality of the word permeates reality and all our experiences of it. Therefore, Shpet concludes, ‘on earth, on the waters and in the sky, all is ruled by the word. *Logic*, that is, the science of the word, is the greatest power on the earth and in the heavens. *Alogism* as a system is mental atheism; an alogist is an empty soul, deprived of the feelings of verbal grace [...]; an alogist is in a progressive paralysis of thought.’<sup>3</sup>

### 4.3.3. Further Development of the Inner Form of the Word

*Esteticheskie fragmenty* was the product of a transition period. From 1921 Shpet moved gradually from the position of an individual thinker to being part of a cultural institution with direct links to the Bolsheviks’

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 1923a, pp. 75–76.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 1923a, p. 102

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1923a, p. 44.

policymaking: the State Academy of Artistic Sciences. Nadezhda Podzemskaia mentions him as belonging to an informal circle whose gatherings can be considered the starting point of the Academy, officially founded in October 1921.<sup>1</sup> In February 1922 a Philosophical Section opened, with Shpet as its director, and in July 1924 he was appointed the vice president of GAKhN.<sup>2</sup> The change can be clearly perceived, for example, in Shpet's publishing activities. After the three volumes of *fragmenty*, the product of the independent publishing house *Kolos*, nearly all his subsequent texts were published by GAKhN.

The third and final volume of *Esteticheskie fragmenty* continued the analysis of the word's structure, but with a focus on its aesthetic aspects. However, Shpet asserts that the previous volume had already outlined the topic, and the third part merely presented its details: 'Every 'i' has been written in. It remains only to add the dots'.<sup>3</sup> Shpet continued developing the theme in the essay '*Problemy sovremennoi estetiki*' ('Problems of Contemporary Aesthetics', 1923), which, according to Tat'iana Shchedrina, was originally intended as the book's fourth volume.<sup>4</sup> There, he approached the question of aesthetics as a philosophical discipline. Attacking the dominant trends of normative and psychological aesthetics, he insisted that the aesthetic object itself (as an expression, '*vyrazhenie*') with its specific ontological qualities, must be brought to the centre of attention. In an especially '*gakhnian*' spirit, the references of Shpet's discussion are found not in the ongoing Russian debates (between, for example, the constructivists and formalists, or the avant-gardists of the LEF group), but in German academic aesthetics. Indeed, as Nikolai Plotnikov suggests, GAKhN strove to profile itself as a 'serious' and 'educated' voice in contemporary artistic debates.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Podzemskaia 2017, pp. 62–63. The other members were Aleksandr Gabrichevskii, Robert Fal'k, Aleksandr Shenshin, Vasiliï Kandinskii, Evsei ('Iusha') Shor and Aleksei Sidorov.

<sup>2</sup> For more on Shpet's position in GAKhN, see e. g. Gidini 2008. Shpet's daughter Marina Shtorkh maintains that in all scientific questions, the vice president was the highest authority of GAKhN (Iakovich 2014, p. 1144).

<sup>3</sup> Shpet 1923b, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Shpet 2007, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Plotnikov 2015a, p. 134; Plotnikov & Podzemskaia 2017, pp. 17–18.

According to Aleksandr Dobrokhotov ‘*Problemy sovremennoy estetiki*’ reflects the rootedness of Shpet’s views — his attention to the hermeneutic and rational aspects of culture, with its ‘inner’ teleology — in classical German aesthetics. Thus, he contends that the latter’s declaration of art as the utmost ‘justification’ (*‘opravdanie’*) of reality and the statement ‘nature can only be legitimized through culture’ are to be explained in terms of German Idealism.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Plotnikov connects Shpet’s understanding of culture primarily with a Hegelian tradition, albeit through Humboldt and Dilthey.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, as I have argued in this dissertation, Shpet’s views on art’s relation to reality can also be motivated by his reading of phenomenology. His claim that culture, as an expressed reality, is more real than reality itself is connected with *Iavlenie i smysl* and ‘*Mudrost’ ili razum?*’, in which the most certain and stable point of connection between the ‘mind’ and the ‘world’ was discovered in the logic that serves as their correlation.

In ‘*Problemy sovremennoi estetiki*’ Shpet asserts that contemporary philosophers (phenomenologists and empiricists alike), had built their arguments on a simplified notion of reality as a natural reality. According to him reality ‘prima facie, is exactly not “natural”, but “social”, “historical”, “cultural”’, even though this had gone unnoticed in the history of philosophy. Thus, Shpet maintains that the philosophers’ skill of interpreting the ‘sociocultural’ aspect of being, that is, the ‘concrete reality’ of social objects, had remained underdeveloped. In his opinion this had also led to serious misunderstandings concerning the aesthetic object. Within the structurally unified cultural reality Shpet now argues that the ontological nature of aesthetic expressions is indeed distinct from social objects such as axes. He writes:

Signs as ‘expressions’ are ‘imitations’, ‘incarnations’, ‘impressions’, etc., of the original spirit. If we make an abstraction of this spirit, we end up with a social object, with a thing — canvas, paper, paints, and

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<sup>1</sup> Dobrokhotov 2017, pp. 134–135.

<sup>2</sup> Plotnikov 2015b, p. 75.

the like, they are tools, but not ‘signs’, not ‘expressions’. Their social value is retained, while the cultural one disappears: Tolstoi’s letters may be used to fire a stove to just as high a temperature as a newspaper or the *Okhrana*’s archives, a Rubens painting may be used as a canvas, and a Stradivarius violin can be used to hide rescinded documents from police searches... And for all that, as a result of such actions the object still does not become ‘natural’, that is, not-spiritual, but naturally self-sufficient, merely acting as a link in the causal-necessary chain and no more.<sup>1</sup>

Nonetheless, much as in the case of the axe, Shpet states that even in art the ‘sign’ we deal with is ‘a sign to which a *sense* corresponds’. As with sociocultural reality more generally, Shpet views ‘word’ as the prototype of the artistic sign.

The problem of the inner form of the word was broadly integrated in the research conducted at GAKhN’s Philosophical Section. As Galin Tihanov notes, several of Shpet’s earlier supporters at the MLC — among them Boris Gornung, Maksim Keningsberg, Aleksei Buslaev and Nikolai Zhinkin — followed him to GAKhN, and even the library of the MLC was transferred there.<sup>2</sup> In June 1923 Shpet organized a special Commission for the study of the question of ‘artistic form’. His presentations on the varied meanings of ‘form’, as well as Humboldt’s concept of the inner form, were followed by his younger colleagues’ papers on, for example, the inner form in Heymann Steinthal’s, Potebnia’s and Marty’s discussions. The presentations were later published in the collection *Khudozhestvennaia forma* (1927). In its introduction Aleksei Tsires asserts that the members of GAKhN, approach their problem through the conception of the inner form ‘[in] opposition to the so-called formalists of the OPOIAZ type’, who tend to restrict their analyses to the ‘outer’ forms of the word.<sup>3</sup>

Yet Shpet’s term was not universally accepted within the Academy. Instead, it came under harsh criticism especially by Boris Iarkho, an MLC

<sup>1</sup> Shpet 2007, p. 319.

<sup>2</sup> Tihanov 2019, p. 86.

<sup>3</sup> Tsires 1927, p. 5.

formalist and the head of GAKhN's Commission for literary translation and the Cabinet for theoretical poetics.<sup>1</sup> In the late autumn of 1924 heated debates took place between Iarkho, Shpet and the supporters of the two on the topic of 'the limits of the study of literature'. Shpet objected to Iarkho's empirical and statistical method, which strove to answer questions such as 'what?', 'where?', 'when?' and 'how many?'. In Shpet's opinion the methodology of literary theory had to be founded on philosophical knowledge. He argued that Iarkho had failed to submit his terminology to a logical analysis and was thus unable to account for the true nature of the poetic word — he treated it just like any other empirical object. Shpet was of course calling for attention for the word's inner forms, while Iarkho 'considered the concept of inner form in both the wider and narrower sense unclear and almost useless for the literary theorist'.<sup>2</sup>

The issue of the inner form led Shpet to the problem of the 'topic' (*siuzhet*) of the literary work of art. This was the 'ideal content' of an artwork: the 'meaning' (*smysl*), 'theme' or 'material' that was articulated in an expression, allowing it to gain a concrete form. Shpet's focus was hardly compatible with Iarkho's formalist principles. The latter asserted that ninety per cent of lyrical texts 'satisfy themselves with hackneyed, banal thoughts', and that poetic art did not require originality on the level of the topic.<sup>3</sup> Shpet's theory of art thus remained arguably conservative due to its focus on the ideal content. Tihanov, for example, suggests that a certain discrepancy can be perceived between his innovative theoretical reflections and the eventual outcomes of practical work, whether in the field of theatre or translation. Shpet's '*noviy realizm*', despite the refined phenomenological foundation, led to artworks that exemplified a rather traditional strand of realism.<sup>4</sup>

Tihanov has also proposed that Shpet's traditionalism be considered part of a wider phenomenon visible across GAKhN's departments. In his opinion the overarching Soviet cultural conservatism

<sup>1</sup> Pil'shchikov 2015, p. 324.

<sup>2</sup> Akimova 2006, pp. 2–3.

<sup>3</sup> Akimova 2006, pp. 3–4.

<sup>4</sup> For more, see Tihanov 2019, pp. 80–85.

that became dominant in the late 1930s could at least partly be traced back to work done at the Academy.<sup>1</sup> From this perspective, the positive reaction that Shpet's *Vnutrenniaia forma slova* elicited from Valentin Asmus, a Soviet philosopher of Abram Deborin's Hegelian neo-Marxist school, is noteworthy. In a review article published in 1927 in *Vestnik Kommunisticheskoi akademii* Asmus applauds Shpet's deep understanding of the linguistic turn which, he argues, was taking place in every sphere of the humanities. In his opinion Shpet's treatment of the word's structure offered an accurate way to analyse cultural dialectics. At the same time, Asmus commends the book for not falling into either of the two leading camps of language theory. He writes:

Metaphysical *idealism* stubbornly and fruitlessly clung to the idea that *language* is a consequence and product of the *active force of the spirit*. The limited *empiricism* of linguistic specialists, on the other hand, came off worst against the theory that thought itself is only a product and consequence of the formative force of language.<sup>2</sup>

Neither school of thought, in Asmus's opinion, had been able to discern the actual correlative relationship between thought and language, and this is where Shpet's work was particularly successful. To him Shpet presented a powerful argument against 'vulgar social naturalism' which reduced the study of social and collective phenomena to an evolutionary analysis of their historical emergence. What Shpet's work offered instead was a description of the independent — dialectical — laws according to which social and cultural phenomena developed. Asmus concludes that it thereby appears 'strange and surprising [...] that Prof. G. G. Shpet does not mention the philosophical trend which *first* came out with severe methodological criticism of naturalism in sociology. *That trend is dialectical materialism*'.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tihanov's lecture, 'Aleksandr Gabrichevskii: literaturoved i iskusstvoved' (27 March 2021), was part of 'GAKhN Displaced', an online conference and exhibition organized on the initiative of Ruhr University Bochum.

<sup>2</sup> Asmus 1927, p. 254.

<sup>3</sup> Asmus 1927, p. 258.

Asmus suspects that Shpet's disregard for dialectical materialism might be explained by his continuous suspension of judgement ('εποχή') concerning 'all kinds of explanative theories'. He cites the second volume of *Esteticheskie fragmenty*, in which Shpet declares that explanative theories 'must be feared like the plague or stupidity'.<sup>1</sup> As Asmus suggests, even in *Vnutrenniaia forma slova* Shpet thus remains Husserlian in his outlook. His continuing phenomenological search for the 'true being' of reality is also reflected in his correspondence with the philosopher Timofei Rainov in late 1927. Rainov expressed his opinion on *Vnutrenniaia forma slova* in his letter to Shpet on 13 November:

I admit that your utterances on inner form often dissatisfied me. That was not because they were uttered badly or wrongly, but precisely because they did not satisfy. You pull back the curtain slightly, show something authentic, significant and stirring. And precisely because it is authentic, one wishes to see more.<sup>2</sup>

According to Rainov, it was as if Shpet had been able to catch a glimpse of something evasive; 'as if something is compelling you and you cannot resist it — in exactly the way one should not look too long at the sun because of the risk of going blind'. What Shpet seemed to Rainov to have glimpsed was the 'reality of the spirit itself' (*dukhovnaia deistvitel'nost' kak takovoi*).<sup>3</sup>

In his answer Shpet admits that Rainov's interpretation was correct. 'The single and main question for me is precisely one of actuality and reality [*deistvitel'nost' i real'nost'*],' he writes, but adds that tackling the question is often anything but simple. Shpet writes:

Whenever I approach that fundamental, *large*, perhaps only topic of philosophy, I invariably feel a kind of fear and even awe: it all seems you are not prepared either outwardly or inwardly for that large, main thing. And so, instead of approaching that big thing and beginning to

<sup>1</sup> Asmus 1927, p. 264; Shpet 1923a, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Shpet 2012, p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

speak about it directly, you step back, mumble something, and then, when you see those mumblings on paper, you lack the strength to cross them out: it seems that you caught something, albeit hazily, out of the corner of your eye, and you want to share even a hint, the mood, something aroused by that ‘something’ with someone else, and thus spur someone else, entice them and, perhaps, make them take a deeper look and say more.<sup>1</sup>

In this sense, as Shpet states, the whole problem of the inner form is indeed merely a ‘path’ leading to his main question.

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<sup>1</sup> Shpet 2012, p. 62.

## CONCLUSION

By the beginning of the 1930s Shpet's philosophy had fallen from grace in the eyes of the Bolsheviks. He was imprisoned in 1935 and executed in Tomsk two years later. Not only Shpet's life but also his intellectual career were callously cut short. After the 1929 purge of GAKhN he lost his academic positions and was banned from all scholarly work except for translations — and even then under ideological supervision. Yet Shpet's oeuvre still opens new perspectives for research, and especially his nuanced work in the field of cultural theory remains to be analysed further in the cultural, social and political context of post-revolutionary Moscow. Shpet's neo-classical aesthetics may indeed hold a significant place in the development of early Soviet culture.

At the same time one is drawn to wonder what would have happened had Shpet followed Husserl's invitation to travel to Freiburg in the early 1920s. The attempts to introduce his phenomenological work to Germany were not restricted to those of Shestov and Husserl. Vladimir Iantsen asserts, for example, that discoveries made in the archives of Evsei Shor — a founding member of GAKhN and the scientific secretary of its Physico-Psychological Section until his emigration in 1922 — suggest that the latter not only attended seminars of both Heidegger and Husserl but also actively discussed Shpet's ongoing phenomenological work. Moreover, their discussion — in which the philosopher Dmitrii Chizhevskii, another student of Husserl's, also participated — appears to have continued at least until 1929. Apparently, it was then suggested that Shpet's text be published in an international journal on phenomenology alongside Gadamer and other former students of Husserl. Chizhevskii, who had received *Vnutrenniaia forma slova* as a present from the author, expresses his strong disappointment with the book. He suggests that they should instead move forward with a German

translation of *Esteticheskie fragmenty*.<sup>1</sup> Alas, this translation did not see daylight.

Shpet's phenomenology should undoubtedly become a topic of further philosophical research. In the present work I have merely presented the historical and intellectual contexts of his meeting with Husserl, and laid out the themes and questions from which a more focused phenomenological analysis might spring. Shpet's work is indeed significant not only for the history of Russian philosophy, but for the history of phenomenology as a universal exercise. What influence — if any — Shpet had on the evolution of Husserl's genetic phenomenology is a question that remains unanswered for now. Meanwhile, the similarities in their approaches to the inherent rationality of experience should certainly be studied in more detail. Concerning Russian philosophy, Shpet's career can function as an opening to new perspectives on the age-old question, 'what is Russian philosophy?' In arguing against any mystifying approaches to this issue, Shpet not only formulated a philosophy that was on a par with some of the most influential contemporary Western thought. His interpretation of Husserl's phenomenology is even more interesting because it was motivated specifically by a Russian intellectual tradition: that of the Moscow metaphysical school of the 1860s. I believe a more encompassing study of this philosophical current, as distinct from the religious tradition of thought, might reveal a history of academic Russian philosophy far richer and more consequential than has previously been thought.

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<sup>1</sup> Iantsen 2006, pp. 357–362.

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