

The Lack of Historism: the Leftists' Experience and its Contemporary Meaning

Vlad Navitski, M. Phil., lecturer

European Humanities University, Vilnius, Lithuania

The article is devoted to the historical views of the different branches of the leftists in the last century and a half. But beyond this content a foundational – and constitutional for this paper – interest lies. I tend to show that theoretical stances of the leftists on history not only predetermined their own practice (and, surely were influenced by it), but also are exercised in the worldwide contemporary social and cultural trends, not related to the leftists practice at all. Among them globalization, practices of the multiculturalism/fundamentalism and identity politics should be mentioned in the first place.

Key words: historicity, borders, transcendent order, subjectivity, modernity, temporality, technics

Introduction

In general, the peculiar imitation of the leftists' practices – once specific for them – by the contemporary social trends was explicitly clarified by the leftists themselves (Gilles Dauvé)¹ and by the more moderate researches (Jean Baudrillard). But, to my mind, in order to see what are the reasons or causes of such imitation we have to go further than just to identify this doubling with the cunning of the society of consumption, assuming even previously contradictory practices for its own sake (Baudrillard).² Similarly, we shouldn't stop on the mere statement of this doubling as the ridiculous parallelism (Dauvé).

What we should here is to understand this imitation as the phenomenon bearing the constitutional meaning for the *comprehension of the contemporary social and cultural trends*. And this understanding, I believe, is – not only but mainly – possible, when we pay our attention to the leftists' standpoints on time and history and their perturbation in the mentioned trends. It doesn't mean that contemporary social and cultural processes have been induced and/or conducted by socialists, communists or anarchists. Rather, their points of view on historicity and time demonstrated the styles of thought and practice, which appeared to be significant and constitutional for the contemporary social subjects, involved in the multicultural/fundamentalist trends, identity politics and processes of globalization. The leftists had been true avant-garde – surely, not as the prophets of better society, but rather, as the bearers of the future practices and theories. So, *in order to comprehend ourselves, participating in the modern life, we should understand the leftists' stances to the history and time and see why these stances have become crucial nowadays*.

That is the general exposition of the article. But before it becomes possible to fill this schema with the rough material, some explanations of the methodological kind should be done.

¹ See, for example. “Sans même avoir été réfutés, des pans entiers du gauchisme tombent aux oubliettes. On a l'impression qu'une bonne partie de ce que des minorités anarchistes, conseillistes, situationnistes ou ultra-gauches avaient le plus grand mal à faire entendre voici trente ans, serait aujourd'hui le bien commun de millions de contestataires. En particulier, diverses cibles semblent tellement discréditées que bien peu se donnent désormais la peine de les défendre ou de les attaquer» Dauvé, G. & Nesic, K. (2003). Surely, these considerations are devoted not to just contemporary mobs, but to the masses of malcontents. Though it's true, it still proves our position, as, however, these masses don't identify themselves with the leftists in no way.

² Especially, in „Symbolic exchange and death“: “Here again, the thought of the left merely invents more subtle neo-capitalist formations, where repression becomes diffuse, as surplus value did in another context”. Baudrillard, J. (2006), p. 171.

1. To begin – some methodological notes

1. The very first note considers one of the key term of the article – the *leftists*. To use this word naively as if there's no any problem with its designatum is possible only within the journalistic jargon. When one concerns the leftist parties and movements, which have been existed for the last century and a half, thoroughly, it becomes clear, that there's no such thing as the "leftists". That's why it's important to understand in what sense the term "leftist" is used here.

This theoretical disposition implies a crucial point – to consider the left movements as those, which practice the same epistemology. Epistemology here is understood in a wider sense as the general way of the comprehension of the social reality. It's not a kind of the theoretical standpoint – rather it should be understood in the sense of Kuhn's paradigm. Surely, Kuhn applied his own notion of paradigm only to the scientific schools, explaining the growth of the "normal science". But there's a strong reason why Kuhn is mentioned here – paradigms can determine researches even if there are no explicit rules and norms, which would determine research activities directly.

Not identically, but similarly, we can discern a certain paradigm of the leftists, i.e. a common way of the problematization of the social reality without talking about the leftists as the united front, the real political unity. In other words, a common question doesn't suppose a common answer, but if we would understand what the common question of the leftists was, we would make a real progress in the explanation of the leftists' history and their present state.

But there is one more methodological point to discuss – doesn't such "insight" demonstrate a kind of intellectual violation, the deformation of the historical and social realities, infusion of some "paradigm" which *really* doesn't exist? Well, it doesn't. In fact, whether we add some superfluous layers of meanings to the leftists movements by the concept of paradigm or not, depends on the mode of operation of this concept, i.e. on how we handle it, how we operate it. If we think that there is some "leftists" paradigm which has found its embodiment in the history of the XIX – XXI centuries, as well as the ideal then surely it is too close to the work of the excessive imagination, producing non-existing entities. I'd rather suggest comprehending of the concept of paradigm not in the ontological, but in the methodological terms, that is as the working instrument of the social science. In other words, the concept of the leftists' paradigm or the epistemological foundations of the left political movements is totally the theorists' invention, made in order to grasp the social problematic and to determine the probable directions of the social trends. But the idea constructed as the theoretical invention shouldn't be rejected for that – as if it were a kind of fantasia. The propriety of such invention, and moreover, of its content and the application to social world depend on its explanatory and clarifying potential – in other words it should be assumed "when it works".

2. The question whether the assumption of so-called "left epistemology" is legitimate can be reinforced by the doubts whether this epistemology should be really arranged with the problem of time and history as its central theme. Isn't this problem just a derivative from the economic and political programmes of the left movements?

Surely, such economical and political reduction is workable for the goals of the political sciences. But there's a strong reason to exercise a kind of philosophical approach to this problem – and the reason is to understand ourselves better. And I argue that to investigate the left epistemology is to analyze its views on the problem of history and time.

To prove these theses – of the common leftists' stances and of the primary role of their historicism – we can turn to the classics, namely Karl Manheim's "Ideology and utopia".

It is his view on the relation between thinking and social reality – understood as the *total ideology* – that is extremely important here. Moreover, Manheim applied this relation also to analysis of the leftists' stances – so, it helps much to make our notion of the "left epistemology" more accurate. And – last but not least – the leftists' total ideology is conceived by German thinker in terms of its historical and temporal interests. To prove that let's turn to the book.

For Manheim the crucial task is to show that our social positions predetermine our thinking. But this statement is too abstract and it misleads us due to its quasi-Marxist meaning. For Marx social position can be always reduced to the truth in the last instance – namely, position in the social production, understood in the narrow economical sense as the industry. For Manheim this "truth in the last instance" is the social position itself – it cannot be reduced to any other realities or factors.

Thus, there's no only one reality – the reality of the industry production – to which we can reduce all forms of thought and all ideologies. Any of social subjects occupying its own social positions possesses its own reality or, to be more precise, its own *social* reality. It means, besides all, that there's no any ontological primacy of the social reality, supposedly distributing the positions among the social subjects and determining their thought and ideology. Manheim underlines this by the assertion that the diversity of the political *Weltanschauungen* shouldn't be understood as the quantifiable problem, as if we could compile some single social reality by summing up all the partial world-outlooks.

«Würde die Gespaltenheit der politischen, weltanschaulichen Einsichten *nur* darin bestehen, daß sie jeweils eine andere Seite, ein anderes Stück, andere Inhalte im geschichtlichen Geschehen beleuchten, so wäre eine *summative Synthese* ohne weiteres möglich: man müßte eben die Teilwahrheiten addieren und auf diese Weise zu einer Ganzheit zusammenfügen.

Diese einfache Konzeption einer Synthese ist aber nicht mehr denkbar, wenn man gesehen hat, daß die Standortsgebundenheit parteilicher Einsichten nicht nur auf inhaltliche Elemente sich gründet, sondern sich schon in einer Spaltung der Aspekte, der Problemstellungen bekundet und nicht zuletzt auf einem Auseinandergehen der Denkkategorien und Ordnungsprinzipien beruht».³

Here we see how Manheim transforms the meaning and general role of *thinking* in social life. Now, the social subject's thinking is not just the derivative of the social system either disclosing its truth in the political science or obscuring social reality in the phenomenon of ideology as the false consciousness. ***The categories play the significant role in the forming of the social reality*** – for example, Manheim lay stress on the task not only to show how different social positions stipulate different ways of thinking, but also to explain, why these positions arrange ones' experience with different categories.⁴ It doesn't mean that reasoning in some act of *poiesis* can create reality, but also it doesn't mean already, that processes of thinking are directly predetermined by some objective social structure. Appearance of a social position and development of relevant ideology are simultaneous movements, which should be understood as two sides of one process – namely, politics, which has a very specific meaning in Manheim's thought.

What is important for us here is the Manheim's persuasion that there's no and can't be any social movement, or even social subject without its specific system of thought, consisted not only of particular convictions, beliefs or concepts. Basically, these systems composed by the modes of problem definition, by principles of arrangement (*Ordnungsprinzipien*) and by the general ways of questioning and problematization. All this leads Manheim to speak not in terms of mere thinking itself, but in terms of "thought models" (*Denkmodelle*) or even "styles of thinking" (*Denkstile*), accentuating that uniformity of total ideology – the left one, for example – is stipulated not by the common content of their thought, but by the common ways of comprehension.

Thereby, this reasoning help us to prove and strength our notion of the left epistemology as the general way to understand the social reality, posing the same questions but not leading to the same answers.

3. By that, we've solved a formal problem – to show that the notion "left epistemology" is valid and legitimate. But before to pass to the further discussion, there must be worked out another formal difficulty - viz. why it is argued here that to explain the relation to the problems of history and time is crucial for the understanding of the left ideology.

While solving this problem, there should be clarify the notion of "historism", involved in this article, and that would help us to ground the conviction that historical and temporal matters play the leading role in the constitution of the left epistemology.

The notion of "historism" is derived here from another classic – Popper's writing "*Open society and its enemies*". Though we can't apply his definitions of historism and historicism to the notion of the left epistemology directly, nevertheless, it can be - with needed reserves – appropriate for our study. Let's see, what these reserves are and how they make Poppers' concepts relevant.

In the very beginning of his book Karl Popper poses the notion of historicism, which he considers as one of the constitutional traits of totalitarian thought. The followers of totalitarianism, Popper argues, "assert

³ *Mannheim, K. (1985), p.133.*

⁴ Auch hier ist nicht nur die Tatsache, daß die verschiedenen Standorte verschieden denken, sondern auch die *Ursache*, warum sie im Zeichen verschiedener Kategorien den Erfahrungsstoff ordnen, verstehbar zu machen“. *Ibid.*, p. 236.

that it is the task of science in general to make predictions, or rather, to improve upon our everyday predictions, and to put them upon a more secure basis; and that it is, in particular, the task of the social sciences to furnish us with long-term historical prophecies. They also believed that they have discovered laws of history, which enable them to prophesy the course of historical events". And further, "the various social philosophies which raise claims of this kind, I have grouped together under the name *historicism*".⁵

Next conception – *historism* – is used by Popper while talking about a kind of relativism, conceding all forms of thought, social institutions and cultural practices as stipulated by the historical milieu, particular historical configuration.⁶

The hindrance due to which these notions are inappropriate for the goals of our investigation now has become clear. First of all, Popper points his discourse against the totalitarian thought, which cannot be identified with the left ideologies in no way. Then, it is even more important that *historicism* as well as *historism* – *refers not only and specifically to the attitudes on history, as it may seem considering the very word*. Popper uses these concepts to denote the general style of thinking which find its best manifestation in the stands on history. Bearing in mind that these methodological notes are devoted exactly to the left ideologies and exactly to their historical stances – regarding as some of the constitutional aspects of their *Weltanschauungen* – it can be definitely demonstrated that Poppers' *historism* and *historicism* are not immediately feasible here.

But if we would peer into the discourse of "The open society..." there would appear the strong reasons to involve its ideas into this thesis. It's true that Popper devoted his writing to the critics of totalitarian thought – but at the same time, animadverting *historism* and *historicism* he found three key persons to blame for that: Plato, Hegel and... Marx. Though Popper reveals ambivalent attitudes to Marx, deeply esteeming his strong moral convictions, still he tries to elicit totalitarian traits from Marxism and its adherents.⁷ This deduction grounds the belief that in the left ideologies, at least in their Marxists' versions, their historical stances are the centerpieces which determine all their structure.⁸

But even if that's true, how can we pass the second hindrance, stated above, viz. *historicism* refers to the general style of thinking and not to the standpoints on history specifically? To solve this difficulty becomes possible, if we take into consideration that though *historicism* as well as *historism* touches upon all the order of the totalitarian ideology, *it still affixes to historical and temporal aspects some paradigmatic significance*. The very formation of the totalitarian thought if not depends on then at least reprises its stances on history and time.

These speculations bring us closer to the main question of this chapter – in what sense the term *historism* is used here and with what reverses it can be drawn from the Popper's writhing.

If Popper applies the notions of *historism* and *historicism* to totalitarian thought in general, I suggest speaking of *historism* in respect to the left ideology in particular. But at the same time, Poppers' ideas can be viewed as the grounds, persuading us that to consider leftists from the point of view of their thought order is possible and efficient.

While Popper purports that *historicism/historism* bear definite meaning – of historical essentialism or relativism respectively, I suggest to consider the notion of *historism* in its formal and neutral meaning, i.e. as the standpoints on history and time. But still it is the paradigmatic meaning of these historical and temporal views that is common for Popper's approach and the consideration, exercised in this article.

4. This reasoning can be reinforced by getting Manheim's ideas on this matter involved in present consideration. Indeed, Popper provides the view on totalitarian thought – isn't there then an example of similar approach to the leftists' thought specifically? Popper also implies in the notion of *historism* the general mode of thinking – can't there be found an example when historical and temporal stances gain constitutional significance, not only paradigmatic one?

⁵ Popper, K. (1971), vol.1, p. 3.

⁶ Popper, K. (1971), vol.2, ch. 22-24.

⁷ *Ibid.*, P.228.

⁸ For example: "The most important aspect of the Marx's theory and Marxist ideology consists in that Marxism is a theory of history, put in a claim for prediction of the future with a minute scientific assurance (though as the general outlines)". *Ibid.*, p. 480.

These examples can be found in cited book of Manheim. First of all, he really speaks of the leftists thinking,⁹ understanding it as the left total ideology (which, by the way, Manheim suggests to generalize under the title “socialistic theory”¹⁰). But even more important is his conviction that to apprehend the essence of this particular thinking becomes possible, when we pay attention to the historical and temporal stances of total ideology, including its left version: “**Man** kann die innerste Struktur eines Bewußtseins nirgends so klar erfassen, als wenn man sein Zeitbild von seinen Hoffnungen, Sehnsüchten und Sinnzielen her versteht. Denn von diesen Sinnzielen und Erwartungen aus gliedert es nicht nur sein zukünftiges Geschehen, sondern auch die vergangene Zeit”¹¹.

To present detailed account on Manheim’s thought on the leftists’ standpoints on history and time is the task of the following chapters. Now it is sufficient to say that according to Manheim left ideology demonstrates much more sophisticated approach to history and time than it was declared in the writings of Popper. Due to Marx, the leftist had been tried to occupy “the gold mean”, to use this word, between essentialism of historicism and radical relativism of historism. All our thoughts and ideas therefore become some derivatives of the present moment – hence, this displays the combination of rationalism (as we rationally analyse a situation and calculate its possible outcomes) and intuitivism (as this calculation changes the situation which we are in and make it something completely new and unpredictable). Manheim describes it as the “function of becoming”.¹² And such comprehension of history and thought, demonstrated by the leftists, stipulates all their ideas and conception with the sense-making principle, as well as their practices and activities with theoretical groundings.

It should be repeated once again, that when one talks about the left epistemology (“total ideology” or “thought model”) it doesn’t imply some particular thoughts and ideas, but primarily the way of the comprehension of the rough social and cultural material, some *Ordnungsprinzipien*, which then constitute the production of conceptions and theories.

5. Previous reasoning provide us with all needed theoretical tools to proceed to our principal object – to disclose the essence of leftists’ historism and prove that the same historical stances are exercised in contemporary social and cultural trends. Surely, ***it doesn’t mean that the leftists’ had converted the masses into the socialistic or anarchistic beliefs*** – this similarity between the left epistemology and contemporary views on history and time should – and will – acquire another explanation. It was argued that the very notion of the “left epistemology” is relevant and demonstrates fruitful and efficient examples of its explication. Let’s summarize what we’ve got at the present moment.

Left epistemology refers neither to particular ideas or conceptions nor to explicit, quasi-scientific methodology of thinking. It’s general way of comprehension of social reality with its own specific modes of forming the problems and arrangement of material.

Left epistemology can be described concerning its various aspects, but it can be argued that one of the most efficient method is the analysis of its standpoints on history and time, which bear the constitutional meaning for the leftists’ total ideology in general.

Hence, there can be a conclusion made that historical and temporal aspects of the leftists’ epistemology somehow ordain all the order of the leftists’ epistemology. What are these aspects in their contents, how particularly they arrange the modes of the leftists’ style of thinking are the questions of the following chapters, driving us at the principle task, stated above.

⁹ See the examples above and also: “...diese dann durch die Funktionsmechanismus oder durch die Kategorie der Kausalität zu verbinden, damals den *linksgerichteten Denkweisen* zuzurechnen”. Mannheim, K. (1985), p.236 a theory of history, put in a claim for prediction of the future with a minute scientific assurance (though as the general outlines)”. *Ibid.*, p. 480.

¹⁰ „Bei der Behandlung der sozialistischen Theorie werde diesmal nicht die sozialistische von der kommunistischen getrennt“. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

¹² „Sie besagt, daß man nicht a priori berechnen kann, wie etwas sein soll und sein wird. Nur die Richtung des Werdens liegt in uns. Das stets konkrete Problem kann nur *der nächste Schritt* sein. Das politische Denken hat hier nicht die Aufgabe, ein absolutes Richtigkeitsbild aufzustellen und dann unhistorisch die Wirklichkeit anzurennen. Die Theorie, auch die kommunistische Theorie, ist Funktion des Werdens.“. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

2. Left epistemology and the question of difference

Thanks to that methodological statements, we, as it has been said already, can talk about the leftist as something whole, as something united, while the last century and a half the socialists, communists and anarchists have been hardly more favourable to each other than to their common worst enemies – the “exploiters”. Hence, we can say that in spite of the all encounters and the aggression that the leftist of the different branches have demonstrated to each other, they together exercise the same epistemology, the same *Denkstille*. Now it’s time to answer the question what are the particular features of their style of thinking, how can it be described? Obviously, the answer to this question would be the relevant response to the problem, posed in the beginning of the methodological explanations: “what is the meaning of the leftist thought while comprehending contemporary social trends”?

Though historical and temporal aspects bear the constitutional meaning for the left epistemology, it should yet to be found. Therefore, here successive and consistent reasoning on the *Denkstille* of the leftists is inevitable.

1. To begin with, one can notice that in all left movements can be found the orientation based upon and aimed onto some crucial persuasion, which once was explicitly expressed in Hegel's philosophy, namely the society must become the subject of its own development, or to be more specific it must turn itself to the subject-object identity. Though idealistic, this statement goes into the foundation of all the branches of the leftists – but surely, in their own specific way, without any meta-historical, meta-social and meta-cultural senses.¹³ This thesis was proved in the previous chapter through the analyses of the half and century history of the radical (“left”) movements and organizations – from Bakunin and Marx to Hardt and Negri as so-called alter globalists. By doing that, a very important conclusion appears – for most of the leftists Hegel’s strategy should be turned to the Spinoza’s direction: society must be the commonwealth of the multitude, bearing the principle of their cooperation in themselves and not posing it outside of the social body.

To make ourselves the master of our social and cultural life, to free ourselves from all forms of the transcendent domination and suppression, surely implies the question of power – actually, this constitutes the core of the political programs of the left. The question is “Who possesses the power to determine our lives”? To avoid the exploitation we (“exploited”) should take over the power, which the authorities have and turn ourselves in the bearers of the constitutional power, forming our own life.

Contemporary leftists, as I argue, stick to this program, but alter it in some way, paying much more attention not to the political power mainly but to the wider range of the cultural and social problems – there can be examples of the leftists’ enthusiasm for gender analyses or critics of society of consumption etc. This question of power – biopolitical power, to say this word, i.e. embracing all spheres of the human existence – encounters the question of boundaries. **While we believe that there is some transcendent instance which executes power outside the boundaries, limiting our potentials and actualities, we never infringe this power.** For example, if we believe that gender differences had been established by some laws of nature or by words of the God, we never consider these differences as the matter for our abilities to change them. I.e. the power to establish the gender differences and the boundaries between men’s and women’s is not ours, but lies outside, in some transcendent sphere – natural or divine. Though these metaphors of the outside/inside, outer/inner can seem too abstruse or obscure, it can be argued that they bear constitutional meaning for the left epistemology. Also they are directly connected with the standpoints of the leftists on history and time – but that requires more scrutinizes investigation and will be the next step after reasoning of the differences and boundaries and their place in the left epistemology.

2. Therefore it is necessary here to rise up the question of the limits and borders as they may be seem from the leftists’ perspective: obviously, if the radical movements sought for Spinoza/Hegel ideal, they

¹³ “In der gegenwärtigen Epoche hat die Herrschaft der sachlichen Verhältnisse über die Individuen, die Erdrückung der Individualität durch die Zufälligkeit, ihre schärfste und universellste Form erhalten und damit den existierenden Individuen eine ganz bestimmte Aufgabe gestellt. Sie hat ihnen die Aufgabe gestellt, an die Stelle der Herrschaft der Verhältnisse und der Zufälligkeit über die Individuen die Herrschaft der Individuen über die Zufälligkeit und die Verhältnisse zu setzen“. Marx, K., Engels, F., (1969), p. 424.

inevitably came to the mentioned problem. For if society – and any part of it – determine themselves autonomously, there cannot be neither outer, transcendent principle of governing (such as God, Nature or transcendent Social Reality) nor the territories – geographical, social and cultural – abandoned by society itself. Hence, implementation of the mentioned ideal is impossible without simultaneous historical process, the meaning of which consists in **growing penetrability of the limits and borders**. It goes without saying that the latter should be understood not in the geographical terms only, but mostly in the social, cultural and even anthropological senses. Examples of them can be following:

a) The most important social boundary – from the leftists' perspective – is one between two classes: the bourgeoisie and proletariat. The leftists declare that they – in accordance with some historical laws – aim at the elimination of this boundary by eliminating the very class of the exploiters. But beyond this declaration there can be found an intention, specific to the leftists of all kinds, namely – not to erase this difference completely, but *to make it penetrable*. To prove that, we should take a look at proletariat itself – actually, it's not the social or political class in the strict sense. **When it wins a victory over the bourgeoisie, as the leftists believe, it's not like a class defeats another one – rather it's the attack of the classless multitude on the last class**. I.e. proletariat is determined only negatively as those, who cannot be represented as the whole unity, as the class (it reveals the classical roman meaning of “*prōlētārius*”). This clarification emphasizes the intention of the leftists not to win in the existing framework, but to change this latter by making the differences between the social groups penetrable.

b) The limits, that determine races and genders, have been the most important issues to discuss for the last century – it's enough to recall the 60s with their developed rhetoric going side by side with the political and social changes. But there are also some cultural differences, which are not so crucial as the mentioned above, but which, nevertheless, are symptomatic for the leftists. Let's take the example of the difference between the working hours and leisure: for the capitalist society and the bourgeois culture this boundary is one of the foundational and even constitutional (the famous Weber's research «*Die protestantische Ethik und Geist des Kapitalismus*» should be mentioned here). The leftists of all kinds, on the contrary, link together the promise of the new world and – not essentially, but inevitably – the elimination of the strict difference between the forms of work and, from the other side, the hobbies or leisure. Such elimination must be understood – the leftists continue – as one of the steps to eliminate the exploitation, existing in society.

c) The leftists of any kind haven't got their own anthropology – in fact, to have it would be contradictory possession for radicals. They cannot say what a human being is, but there is indeed to exercise some kind of the anthropology by erasing the strict differences between the humans, on the one hand, and the machines or the animals (people as the conglomerate of the bodies, of the biological individuals), on the other. The example with machines is very important from two standpoints: firstly, it's historically symptomatic – there would be enough to recognize the 20s (as well as the 90s), when combination of a human being and machine was a very popular idea, secondly, it involves the question of techniques as the means of submission of the differences.

3. These examples drive us at the point, where we can make our next step: to implement their own political ideas, to negate the transcendent, outer order of the social reality, the leftists must put their forces against the strict differences – therefore, we must think of the left politics as the ***management of differences***. The importance of this conclusion will become clear, if we would bear in mind that traditionally socialists, communists and anarchists are considered as opposed to only one difference – namely, separating two classes – and, actually, the very notion of difference itself doesn't matter much here. We should left this traditional view behind in order to get the clear idea of what the leftists have been – actually, we can see that throughout all their (as well as ours) history they have had to deal with the differences themselves, to be more accurate – with the strict differences, trying to make them penetrable.

This connection between Spinoza-Hegelian social ideal and, on the other hand, a kind of the politics of difference should be accomplished with synonymous cognitive notion – ***predictability***. I.e. to eliminate any kind of the transcendent order, and therefore – to penetrate the existing difference is possible only if the following condition is met: the things which are beyond the boundaries are not something we are unaware of. Unless it is true, this boundary turns into the strict difference and, hence, limits these unpredictable things as the transcendent ones, which are out of the sphere of immanence.

It leads us to the very important conclusion: the intention to make the differences penetrable is linked to the appropriation of the previously transcendent sphere – appropriation both intellectual (to be aware of) and practical (to handle this sphere). For example, if traditionally gender roles prescribe that it's abnormal for

women to drive, grounding that by an appeal to some natural order, gradually it comes to its end, when more and more people begin to recognize the normality for women to be a driver, and to allow women to exercise such practices.

So, to penetrate the boundary means not only to go beyond it – as when a young woman of the late XIX century tried to enter the university. It also means the spread of the certain kind of knowledge – namely, that one which equals women to men in their right to be educated. Otherwise, such example – even if it's possible – will turn to be the singular case of the heroism and not of the general shift of the educational system and society on the whole. So, it must be clear, that the penetration must have got some cognitive nuances and I suggest to call this dimension of the leftists standpoint as “predictability” – the world must become predictable by comprehending it and this knowledge must spread all over society.

On this stage we've got the theoretical line, which allows us to get the idea, what the essential features of the left movements of all the branches were – even when they clash with each other in their strategies. This line can be described as the following:

- a) negation of the transcendent order;
- b) growing penetrability of the borders;
- c) management of the differences;
- d) predictability of the world;

4. Let's repeat it once again: the implementation of “predictability” doesn't presuppose that the left movements were formed as merely intellectual projects, as if some theorists had invented the line, mentioned above, and then persuaded, hired or deceived the masses to implement these ideas into social reality. On the contrary, *this theoretical framework establishes not the certain political forces, but the outlines of epistemology, within which the political trends could appear then, due to activity of the masses and their leaders.*

The next step, which is required on this stage of the reasoning, is to see the real social phenomena or processes, corresponding to the implementation of the leftists' framework, – and for this role the process of homogenization suits the best. This notion is picked up by me from the writings of Marx and Hardt and Negri, and it refers to the meanings, we've met above – it equals to blending and merging of the social and cultural differences. The manifestation of these processes is, first of all, the deterritorialization as described by Marx – the huge movement of people from the countryside to the cities in the Western Europe of the XIX century. Surely, it means geographical movements, but not mainly: even if people stay in a village, they inevitably break off with the countryside way of life not turning by it into *townsfolk*. Hence, these dwellers had been suspended in the air – but it shouldn't been understood only as the victory of the cities over the village, as the former had been exercised the same processes of breaching the traditional citizenship structure.

For this research it's very important to emphasize that this process of deterritorialization – though, surely, not initialized by the leftists – nevertheless, greeted by them as the positive phenomenon, which should be promoted and supported by all possible means. The specific leftists' understanding of the homogenization is linked to this first image of it – namely, proletarianization of society. The genuine meaning of “*prōlētārius*” has been already mentioned above and it should be recalled once again: it doesn't refer to the growth of the industrial workers in particular, but rather to the increase of the masses of people, who cannot identify themselves with any position within the process of social (re-)production. Proletarians are not the class in the strict sense, because their solidarity is derived not from that they occupy the same position, but due to the fact that they haven't got a social position at all (these ideas can be found in the writings of Jacques Ranciere and similarly in the “*Empire*” by Hardt and Negri). Hence, the proletarians are those who have got only the negative quasi-unity due to the fact that they haven't got the positive, substantial one.

If then the proletarians are those who carry the hopes and beliefs of the leftists, it's not surprising that here we find the strong correlation with the subjects, mentioned above, - the proletarians inevitably, by the definition, bring the dilution of the inner structure of social organism. The penetrability of the boundaries as well as the management of the differences are both the conditions and the consequences of the homogenization, understood as the proletarianization. And it can be argued that this homogenization brings about the permeability not only of the class difference, but also of the other cultural and social differences.

So, it's time to ask by what means the leftists managed to promote such processes. And the answer is if not paradoxical, but yet surprising – these movements hadn't necessarily had to persuade or to force the masses or the peoples to participate in the development of the homogenization. In fact, the latter was one of the most essential features of the modernity – that's why the leftists actually were the avant-garde of the history: *it's not because they brought about the new age for the humankind, but rather they helped to accomplish those*

features, which were essential for their own age, namely, modernity. Surely, to ground this persuasion we should suggest a certain understanding of the modern age – but there are some theoretical trends, which are very close to these ideas. For instance, Marcuse, Horkheimer, Adorno etc. can be mentioned here as the relevant thinkers, who linked the previously existed left trends and revolutions to the implementation of modernity, which, to be accurate, restricted by them to the ideology of the Enlightenment.

There can be another example – the ideas of Amadeo Bordiga, the Italian political leader, public figure and thinker, maybe not well-known but still relevant. He pointed out that all the important left revolutions of the XXth century took place in the countries, where absolute monarchy hadn't been replaced by the constitutional forms of power. The correlation is very clear – the latter promoted the growth of the homogenization (the best example here is the Great Britain), the result of which was the huge number of the proletarians in all senses of this word - therefore these countries were ready for the industrial breakthrough. The absolute monarchies, on the contrary, couldn't let the homogenization happened, as it would be self-destructive for them. And only when the gap between the highly industrialized countries and the backward ones became enormously large the latter tried to initialize industrialization. The communist and socialist revolutions in the XXth century, the anarchists strikes in Russia, Spain etc. were successful as their suggested direct homogenization, which is not restricted by any instances, - yet this was absolutely necessary to overtake the industrialized countries.

3. Differences, technics and history – the leftists' approach

There appears the next stage of our reasoning: to comprehend the history of the leftists one should link their “epistemological” stances to the scientific rationality and the technical industry. It wouldn't be difficult to notice that *the dissimilation of the boundaries and differences becomes possible only owing to rise of the Modern science and technics.* But while this thesis finds no objection, the traditional way of its development seems to be unsatisfied, as it implies the comprehension of the technical industry and science as the machinery. Obviously, all the changes in the modern societies of the last centuries have come through the machinery (railways, military machines, the network of mass media etc.), but not due to them, as it is the appearance of the machinery itself that should be explained. If we comprehend technics as the set of the machines and tools, we would be able to investigate only the permeability of the political and/or geographical boundaries. But to show how and why the cultural and social differences and boundaries have been dissimilated requires more thorough examination of what technics mean.

It seems that the best way to examine technics is the comprehension of it as the exercise of the certain dispositions to the reality. Again, here we come close to the notion of “epistemology”, captured as certain *Denkstille* or *Denkmodelle*. Identically with the previous notes on left epistemology, it should be noticed that some ways of the understanding of the social reality are not derived from it (at least, not only) but also help to form it. This thesis doesn't take us into the world of fantasies, but rather intends to emphasize the active, constructive dimension of our reasoning. At the same time, these technical dispositions are not genuinely just some *theoretical concepts* – they can act very effectively even if they are implicit, and, moreover, even if they are not rationally conceptualized.

Among classical examples of this specific approach to technics were the ideas of frankfurters, mentioned above. But the limitations of their conceptions lie in the fact of their political engagement. By that I don't suggest comprehending their positions as totally insincere, gravitating to the leftists' criticism, leveled against contemporary mode of production. Rather, I tend to show that their positions are very ambiguous – to level criticism against contemporary social trends one should be explicitly aware of what is the position from which the criticism is raised. Concerning Frankfurt school, it slightly becomes clear that their critical position lie nor far from the traditional way of intellectual comprehension, existing in Modern society after the Enlightenment. *Therefore, their critical ideas by the very fact of their existence pose the social institutions of Modern, which are negated by the content of these ideas.* This is the essence of the engagement, mentioned above, - and though it doesn't make the conceptions of the Frankfurt school less evaluable, one can be sure that their thoughts on the Modern technics will demonstrate the tendency to Modern mode of criticism.

For thorough analysis of the technical civilization, I'd prefer to turn to the thinker who were much more than skeptical and critical to the Modern science, but who, paradoxically, presented the exemplary comprehension of its dispositions. It is Heidegger, which analyzes of technique and the Modern science suits very well to the stances, which were demonstrated in this discourse. It may be proved very well that the features of the leftists, which we have discerned earlier, may be traced to the disposition of the technical thinking,

represented by Heidegger – first of all *Gestalt* and *Unternehmen* as the essential features of the modern technique and science.

The dimension, which can be useful here, is the question of time: it can be shown that in order to promote the negation of the transcendent order, penetrability of the boundaries, predictability of the reality and the homogenization of society the leftist had to change their own understanding of the historical time – it would had stop to bring the unpredictable changes. Hence, time should turn to absolutely countable one – Heidegger showed that in this case calculation of time equals to predictability. Identically, in order to find out the laws of nature, the modern science – as Heidegger showed – must turn into the countable one.

Levinas, following in Heidegger's footsteps but going beyond, also provides us with the deep insight in the essence of technics. To comprehend this insight one should give account of the strong impact which Levinas's views on subjectivity did on the matter of technics. That's why, by the way, his theory is so opportune for us – while we try to show that technics is not something external to us, something meant-to-be, but the certain *Denkstille*, our way to look at the things, Levinas points out that the technical worldview is intrinsic for the subjectivity on the whole¹⁴ – it is the principle of its functioning.

In his early work "Time and the Other" Levinas shows, that the subject is not the prior reality – neither in phenomenological, nor in transcendental mode. It is the derivation from the anonymous process of the existence that should be honored by the title of the prime reality. But to say that is to say it in the language that is totally alien for the French philosopher. He avoids the nouns and the substantialistic – to say this word – way of speaking. To say "existence" is to indicate something stable, some thing, while this "primary reality", this "there is..." is before any thing. That's why Levinas prefers his own linguistic invention which sounds "*l'exister*", "the exist".

In this pure acting suddenly the process of hypostasis happens, when the subject appears – why it happens Levinas doesn't know, and in fact doesn't care, as he says "metaphysics knows no physics". But this subject appears not as something independent from "the exist", but as the result of the desire to captivate it, to appropriate this "*l'exister*". When it "there is..." previously anonymous and un-private becomes some object of privatization, the subject appears.

But, Levinas continues, while subject becomes master of its "*l'exister*", it reciprocally becomes its slave a priori: the subject exists only due to its lashing together with "there is...". Hence, the subject is doomed to return permanently to its "the exist" and take care of it, to bear the burden of responsibility of it. We can't be irresponsible, even if we try to, we are doomed to be preoccupied with our existence, and we can't get rid of it, because if we try to, we'll die – it is analytically clear.

But the subject simultaneously tries to live, to be and, on the other hand, to become oblivious and drowsy, feel free from the permanent care of one's existence, or, to put it in the other words, one longs for satisfaction of its desires (because it is what make the existence one's own thing), but at the same time, to satisfy all one's desire is to become dead. Remembering Baudrillard in this response allows us to say, that the subject seeks for the opportunity to be dead and alive at the same time, looks for some *after-life*. One of the tricks, which subject uses here is the matter, which is of the main interest for us here – the technics.

"In the situation of the specific need one must subdue the space, which detaches us from ourselves, overcome it and take the thing, in other words, work by ourselves. In this sense, "he who does not work, neither shall he eat" is an analytical reasoning. In the tools and its production an unrealizable dream is pursued – to erase any distance. In the wide range of the contemporary tools, viz. machines, it is much more striking that they are assigned to annihilate labour, rather than to be the implements – it is the very way that Heidegger restricted his analysis of the technics"¹⁵.

Hence, technics is the tool to annihilate the distance which separates us from the satisfaction of our desires. But this distance can be describe not only in the spatial terms, but in the temporal as well – exactly what Levinas does when he proceeds in his "Time and the Other". Time brings us something unpredictable, threatens our satisfaction and – in the long run – threatens the very principle of the (re)production of subjectivity: it

¹⁴ And we should emphasize: it is namely the Subject of the European modernity that is in the spot here. Levinas himself never speaks in these terms, because of his quasi-phenomenological background. He turns directly to the Subject itself, but the rigorous reading of his texts (esp. "Time and the Other", which is analyzed here) can prove that without any violating of the original meaning Levinas's ideas should be referred exactly to the Modern culture. It is only the spatial limitation of this article that prevent me from the consistent argument on this matter.

¹⁵ Levinas, E. (1987), p. 65.

questions whether we really possess our “I-exister” or it’s just a temporal illusion. Hence, technics – both as the mental disposition and its phenomenological embodiment (i.e. machines) – tries to annihilate time and, following Levinas, otherness, only brought about by time.

Concerning the leftists, all previous reasoning can be summed up in this way – the inclination, which the radicals showed towards the technics, can be explained as the result of their desire to complete the history and establish societies and cultures, built on the manageable differences and borders without any transcendent orders. Levinas just shows why the penetrability of the borders is important for this task and why technics should be mentioned here – the management of the borders correlates with the rush of the subject for the greater sovereignty over its existence and to do it is possible by the means of technics.

Conclusion

And in the end, there the conclusion can be made: the left movements throughout their history hadn’t brought about the new age; rather they helped to fulfil the features, which were essential for the western modernity as such. These features include the strong belief that social and cultural need not and must not be comprehended as governing by any of the transcendent orders – whether Nature or God. In order to deconstruct ideologies and social/cultural bodies, established on the assumption of the priority of the transcendence there must be deconstructed all differences and borders – from the differences between feudal and capitalistic estates to the differences between genders, ages, work and leisure, public and private etc. Finally, history and temporality must be deconstructed – as the foundations for all transcendent orders. So, to complete the historical process wasn’t a goal for the leftists, rather it was the means. Paradoxically, being well aware of the historical matters and issues, leftists in their epistemology (disposition or *Denkstille*) always tried to annihilate temporality as such, to annihilate the unpredictability it brings about. It is this disposition in the leftists’ experience that I characterized as “the lack of historicism”.

Its contemporary meaning now becomes evident: the technics as the means by which the deconstruction of temporality was to be carried out is flourishing nowadays. It’s not only about all those inventions and machines, which surround us in the contemporary culture – from the iPads to the spaceships and satellites. Rather, it concerns the ways we act in this social and cultural world – we long for abolition of all distances, which tell our desires apart from the things to satisfy them. And the main distance is the temporal – hence, today we successfully continue the project once launched by the leftists: to establish society and culture deprived of the unpredictability, realized by time and history.

References

1. Baudrillard, J. (2006) *Symbolic exchange and death*, SAGE, London
2. Dauvé, G. & Nestic, K. (2003), *Solidarités sans perspective & réformisme sans réforme*. Available from URL: <http://troploin0.free.fr/ii/index.php/textes/21-solidarites-sans-perspective-a-reformisme-sans-reforme>, [Accessed 1 June 2010]
3. Levinas, E. (1987) *Time and the Other*, PA: Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh
4. Mannheim, K. (1985) *Ideologie und Utopie*, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt-am-Main
5. Marx, K., Engels, F., (1969) *Werke*, Band 3, Dietz Verlag, Berlin/DDR
6. Popper, K. (1971) *The open society and its enemies*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey

Summary

The article is devoted to the consideration of the paradoxical status of temporality and historicity in the leftists’ ideologies. Using Menheim’s notion of *Denkstille* I show that the leftists demonstrated the certain disposition to temporality, consisted of the set of the practices, aiming at the annihilation of temporality and historicity in social and cultural worlds. It was important for the leftists as it was the only path to the fulfillment of their political program – establishment of the society and culture, free from all modes of transcendence. Such establishment is possible using the power of technics and technologies, which – as argued in the article – should be understood not only as the set of machines, but rather as the set of practices and correlative dispositions. All this reveals the importance of the leftists’ experience of temporality and historicity for the contemporary world – in fact, it is not something opposite to this experience, but, on the contrary, the deeper embodiment of these

principles in social and cultural life. To show that we must pay extra attention how the contemporary social practices urge to deconstruct distance, separating subject's desire and its object.