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The Eastern European Origins of the Contemporary Activist Humanities: The Tragic Template of Socialist Kantianism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

I use the term 'activist humanities' to describe the currents in the contemporary humanities that engage their explanatory powers to improve the situation of oppressed actors in the cultural field, such as women, people of color or queer people, and in most cases hail from postcolonial and cultural studies and the philosophy of Michel Foucault. However, the most general and established tradition on which all the direct predecessors of the activist humanities depend is so-called Western Marxism, described in more detail in section two; in this chapter I attempt to demonstrate that this style of thinking in fact originated in Eastern Europe at the turn of the twentieth century.

One of the most characteristic features of present-day humanities is the openly left-wing political character of its interpretational practices. The seminal figure of British cultural studies, Stuart Hall, famously called his discipline "politics by other means" (Hall 1990, 12), as it helps constitute socialism amidst the incessant struggles over interpretational sovereignty (Hall 1981, 239). It seems as though no intellectual position could be more distant from the focus on the autonomy of literature and literary studies as professed by the Eastern European originators of literary theory. However, as I seek to demonstrate in this chapter, the emphasis on the autonomy of literature and its study shares a common origin with its apparent opposite, the necessity of commitment; both stances are motivated by the humanities' constant need for legitimacy. At the formative time of literary theory, a foundational pathos dominated in science – an effect of the foundational crisis in mathematics (Robič 2015, 9–30). This explains why representatives of virtually all currents of literary studies gave in to the compulsion to express their attitude toward the most foundationally-oriented philosophies of the age, which claimed to justify the fact of science itself: neo-Kantianism, phenomenology, and neo-positivism. Presently, now that another foundational dispute – that of post-structuralism and deconstruction – has died away, another pathos is arising, one which orients itself toward the ideal of equity or social justice. A shift has taken place: from the Modernist disposition towards the origin of infallible knowledge to purposiveness or instrumentalism; from the origin of knowledge to its goal.

In this chapter I seek to uncover vast resources of instrumentalism within the products of the foundational pathos of the beginning of the twentieth century.

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In doing so, I do not concentrate on instrumentalist elements in formalism and structuralism, such as the principle of the least expenditure of energy, which according to Metallmann (1914) was prototypical for the instrumentalist separation of the truth and the efficacy of attaining it and which was present in formalism and structuralism (Iakubinskii 1919; Jakobson 1962 [1931]; Holenstein 1975, 42). The separation between 'truth' and 'efficacy' characterised Polish interwar structuralism in particular, with the confrontation between purely formal methodology and theory, which relates the formal conceptual networks, examined by methodology for consistency, to historical reality and thus somatises them (see my chapter on structuralism in Poland in this volume). Evidently, an instrumentalist approach may be identified in Jakobson's quest for invariants among variations (Holenstein 1975, 30; Jakobson 1985, 3). In this chapter, instead of dealing with the principle of the least expenditure, I will focus on a different current, one which was perhaps more consequential for contemporary activism and which influenced culture at large as well as the scholarly cultures of Eastern and Central Europe, while openly confessing instrumentalism and political commitment – the movement that Andrzej Walicki (1989) called 'social Kantianism'. In a first step, I will define the notion of social Kantianism and trace its tacit and multifaceted influence on the present-day humanities; then, in step two, I will concentrate on the entanglements of neo-Kantianism and Marxism, which were accommodated by aesthetics in which tragedy was considered the most burning issue. Sections three and four analyse the specificity of the theories of tragedy, which generated the scholarly discourse combining aesthetics with political engagement.

1 A genealogy: The Eastern beginnings of Western Marxism

In his monograph *Stanisław Brzozowski and the Polish Beginnings of 'Western Marxism'* (1989), Andrzej Walicki points out the fact that in Eastern and Central Europe exists a deep-rooted but largely forgotten tradition of what came to be called 'Western Marxism'. The tradition was overlooked both by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1973, 30–58), who coined the term in his *Les Aventures de la dialectique* (1955, *Adventures of the Dialectic)*, while concentrating solely on György Lukács's *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein* (1923, *History and Class Consciousness*, 1967), and Perry Anderson, who popularised the notion in his *Considerations on Western Marxism* (1976).

Western Marxism means, in a nutshell, an anti-dogmatic philosophy of practice; it assumes that all apparent absolute values are products of, and dissolve

into the incessant activity of humans struggling with the environment for survival and expansion (Jacoby 1991). The Western Marxists thus try to circumvent economism, understood as a belief in the overwhelming primacy of economic causes in culture, and tend towards studying forms of subjectivity and combining Marxian inspiration with other approaches (Hegelianism, psychoanalysis, theology, linguistics, phenomenology, etc.). The emphasis on the 'Western' character of the movement implied its 'estrangement' from the Soviet orthodoxy as represented by the Third International and the official philosophy of the Warsaw Pact. Anderson (1976, 15–18) advances the separation thesis to an extreme degree, since he relativizes the birth of Western Marxism to the failure of proletarian revolution, which broke out in Germany, Austria, Hungary and Italy in the wake of World War I. As a result, socialist theory split from working-class practice as the latter arranged itself with capitalism. Besides *History and Class Consciousness*, the current's main thinkers were Korsch, Gramsci, Bloch, Benjamin, the Frankfurt School with Adorno and Horkheimer, etc.

Now, Walicki sets out to prove that the Western mindset could not have emerged without Eastern input; this pertains mainly to the notion of class consciousness perceived as – to use Max Adler's term (Adler 1924) – a "social *a priori*" (*Sozial-Apriori*, see section 2). In contrast to the limiting title of his own work apparently devoted to Brzozowski, Walicki extends the birthplace of Western Marxism to the whole of Central and Eastern Europe and moves the terminus *ante quem* to the turn of the twentieth century. Walicki describes the contacts established in Italy between his hero Brzozowski and the 'God-builders' (*bogostroiteli*) Anatolii Lunacharskii and Aleksandr Bogdanov. Both Brzozowski and the 'God-builders' take cues from, or at least agree with, Antonio Labriola's philosophy of praxis (*filosofia della prassi*) and oppose the allegedly dogmatic Marxism of the Second International, on which Engels supposedly had greater influence than Marx. Moreover, both Russian and Polish Marxists (alongside Brzozowski, Stanisław Krusiński, Edward Abramowski, and Ludwik Krzywicki) combine Marxism with the phenomenalist philosophy of experience (Jean-Jaques Gourd, Ernst Mach, Richard Avenarius), adding a pinch of the Nietzschean pathos of the renewal of the human race. As Walicki argues in his book, Lukács's seminal work on historical consciousness was contingent on the previous Central and Eastern European development, which I will reconstruct shortly (in the later Polish edition, Walicki included letters from Lukács's students Ágnes Heller and Ferenc Fechér, who reinforce his claim; Walicki 2011a, 416–420).

These facts (or conjectures) gain importance considering the impact Lukács's book on class consciousness had not only on Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt School, but on all significant movements of the activist humanities. The proposition is not mine, but Edward Said's. In his essay on "Travelling Theory" (Said

1983), the founder of postcolonial studies traces the impact of Lukács's opposition of 'objectivity' and 'totality', which is experienced or perceived only by the proletariat, on Lucien Goldmann's (1964) concept of the (tragic) vision of the world, Raymond Williams's (2014; 1973) foundation of cultural studies, and the engaged humanities of Fredric Jameson (1981) and Michel Foucault (1972; 1978). They all uncover instrumental powers producing different historical forms of consciousness while at the same time strengthening the revolutionary potential of the subject.

A look at the Polish and Russian social Kantianism of Abramowski, Stanisław Krusiński, Ludwik Krzywicki, Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz, Stanisław Brzozowski, Aleksandr Bogdanov, and Anatolii Lunacharskii will be rewarding in uncovering the genealogy of the currently dominant thought. I will parallel them with the German neo-Kantians in order to lay bare the interdependencies between societal engagement and foundational pathos; this interrelatedness transcends the mere fact that some neo-Kantians, foremost Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp, adhered to socialism, the former even having a substantial impact on Eduard Bernstein's revisionism (Gay 1970; van der Linden 1988). Still, it is not their political views but their constructionist approach to culture that made the present-day humanities possible.

2 Marburg neo-Kantianism and Marxism: Relative *a priori*

Contrary to popular opinion, which holds that of the two German neo-Kantian schools in the narrow sense, the Southwestern School predominantly studied the historical human world, it is the Marburg coterie that can be compared with Eastern European social(ist) Kantianism. By assuming the unity of culture, consisting of coherent domains, the Marburg School's "transcendental method" turns the work of Hermann Cohen and his followers into a "project of offering a systematic philosophy of culture" (Matherne 2015, 212).

According to the Marburg School's founder Hermann Cohen, the transcendental *a priori* is not absolute, but relative to the current best scientific theories or developments in other fields of culture, whose philosophy of legitimacy establishes the adoption of the transcendental method. The "[t]ranscendental method" purports that "experience is given; the task is then to find the conditions of its possibility" (Beiser 2018, 99). These conditions differ, however, according to the kind of experience and since science serves as a model of experience, the latter must be variable.

The historicity of *a priori* in the Marburg School's 'geneticism' produced Natrop's enticing slogans about the object as being not given (*gegeben)* to knowledge, but assigned to it as a task (*aufgegeben)* (Natorp 2015 [1912], 183–184), science being not a *factum*, but a *fieri*, not an accomplishment, but rather an activity (cf. Natorp 1921 [1910], 14) – one undertaken according to method, which originally, like the Greek *metienai*, implied the *pursuit* of an object (Natorp 2015 [1912], 184–187). Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms (Cassirer 1955–1957 [1923/1925/1929]) originates in this search for the unity in the plurality of culture. In contrast, the Southwestern School's Heinrich Rickert, who allegedly discovered a universal, unconditionally valid system of values (Rickert 1924, 118) and strictly differentiated between the value-free sphere of *nature* and the value-related sphere of *culture* (Rickert 1962 [1926], 21), cannot be reconciled with Central and Eastern European social Kantianism precisely because of the assumed universality and absolute character of his divisions, predominantly between nature and culture.

An Eastern European Marxian equivalent to the transcendental method is "*historical* materialism", which Andrzej Walicki defines as the theory of humane self-creation in the process of collective productive work, whereby the current position in this process determines the shape of cognition (Walicki 2011a, 101–107, 368–394; 2011b, 284). Work occupies an equivalent position to the "principle of origin", according to which in Cohen's philosophy consciousness and being coincide (Soboleva 2010, 462). Analogously to Marburg neo-Kantianism's rejection of the thing-in-itself (*Ding an sich*), the chief theoretical adversary of the social(-ist) Kantians is Engels' dialectics of nature. Their activist approach renders obsolete the old distinction between idealism and realism. "Engels moved Marxism to pre-Kantian positions", writes Stanisław Brzozowski (1907b, 156; 1910, 7), whereas "Marx cannot be grasped without Kant; anyone who understands him otherwise understands him wrong" (Brzozowski 1973 [1907], 357; 1910, 170). Specifically, Marx cannot be grasped without the Copernican revolution Kant proposed, i. e. the assumption that it may be that the mind dictated its laws to nature and not that nature reflects itself in a passive mind (Brzozowski 1910, 53–54; on Kant and neo-Kantianism see also Brzozowski 1906). As for the role of Kantian aesthetics, Marx defined non-alienated work in an analogous way to Kant's description of the experience of beauty as "*the free-play of [the worker's]* bodily and mental activity" (Marx 1967 [1867], 264).

While for most thinkers of the period, Kantianism was supposed to supplement socialism with values and ethical ideals (Adler 1925; van der Linden 1988; 1994), Edward Abramowski (1980 [1899]; 2012 [1899]) claims that socialism in its 'essence' is homologous to Kantianism, even where socialism adheres to economic determinism. Both socialism and Kantian philosophy combine natural

science with ethics, determinism with striving for ideals, pure and practical reason, systematic development and revolutionary action. Precisely this dualism of lawful uniformity and revolution forms the essence of socialism and makes socialism compliant with human nature (thought re-invented later by Gouldner 1980, 37). Socialism is humanism. Both realities have a common root in *apperception* connecting the spontaneous, free subject with the law-governed experience of science. I argue that in this reading, Kantianism and socialism manifest a tragic chronotope in which freedom breaks into the regulated domain of universal laws, the singular clashes with the general. The affinity with tragedy partly motivates aesthetics' significance for the Kantianism of incessant 'world-making'.

Marburg's transcendental method likewise 'upgrades' aesthetics because transcendental method requires demonstrating the unity of science and culture at large; at least since Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790, *Critique of Judgement*), aesthetically appealing forms had been exemplary for introducing unity into multiplicity. The most prominent aesthetician of the period, Theodor Lipps, called this principle of aesthetical unity in which the spontaneity of the subject and an outward form coincide 'apperception' (Lipps 1903; 1906). *In Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls* (1912, *Aesthetics of Pure Feeling*), Cohen identifies art's task for culture as the redesigning (*Neugestaltung*) of morals (Cohen 1912, II 76). The influence is reciprocated; art in general, while depicting societal changes, has the capacity for the homogenous methodical reshaping (*homogene methodische Umformung*) of religious and ethical transformations (*Umgestaltungen*). Cohen agrees with Kant that humanity must be transformed into a unified totality, which makes possible a harmony of free wills, yet he introduces an aesthetic element to this ideal: "unlike Kant, Cohen holds that this means that all our institutions must become unified pluralities or totalities" (van der Linden 1994, 7) in the phenomenal world, such as producer cooperatives. Turning Kantianism into socialism foregrounds aesthetics.

Without art's homogenic method (*homogene Methodik*), religion and ethics would most probably remain somewhat formless, mute, lacking self-consciousness, and meaningless to human beings (Cohen 1912, II 83–84). The great revolutions in morals and beliefs turn out to be "by-products, or better, pre-conditions" of poetical creation (Cohen 1912, II 83–84). The circular temporality of this account indicates that the process of aesthetical shaping of the human world pertains mostly to tragedy. Not only does tragedy emerge historically at the time of Athens's transition from mythical imagination to historical and scientific thought, but it brings about, as Cohen suggests, the greatest of all changes – the emergence of an individual as a communal project. The great ethical ideal for the future burst forth for the first time in the genre of tragedy.

Likewise, social Kantianism models the accursed problem of individuality and the collective in a theory of tragedy that rests at the heart of a broader Schillerian project of the aesthetic education of humankind. As is well known, Lunacharskii (1905a, 377) defines the artist as an organiser of free play whose life is intended as and expected to become "concentrated life", whereby the highest form of valuation consists in aesthetic appreciation of the ideal according to which one works on his or her future as an element of a collective (Lunacharskii 1905b). His then companion Bogdanov asserts that art is, at every stage of society's development, the highest form of organisation. Art models the "true solution to old philosophy's accursed problem of freedom and necessity", i. e. the "conscious collective creation, changing the world according to the laws of nature and human design" (Bogdanov 1910, 113). "The specific tragic, inseparable from philosophy" consists in closing the gap between philosophy's unification of experience and societal praxis, which in capitalism remains fragmented (Bogdanov 1913, 262). A decade later, Lukács influentially charges bourgeois consciousness with precisely this fragmentation of experience and cognition, while the proletariat has at its disposal a true unifying vision, the description of which Lukács models on aesthetic apperception. Moreover, Bogdanov's theory of art, specifically of tragedy, as the highest form of organisation, while incorporating and solving the Kantian dualism of freedom and necessity, paved the way for constructivism as the art that does not aim to depict reality, but to change it in the most efficient manner.

Earlier, the Polish social Kantians had projected onto Kant's characterisation of beauty as 'purposiveness without purpose', as an activity whose goal is located within itself, onto the ideal goal of history, which they associated with the liberation of work and the working class. (It was a fit of intuition, as they could not have known Marx's words from *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte aus dem Jahre 1844* [*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*], since they had not been published: "Man produces even when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom" [Marx 1977, 74].) Abramowski claims in his 1898 polemics with Tolstoi that the node binding art and life is leisure, i. e. freedom from the coercion of pursuing practical goals, the right to rest and leisure being his social ideal in contradistinction to more totalitarian Bogdanov, who believed more in the liberation *of* labour through the enhancement of collectivism than in liberation *from* labour. Art – like freedom, Abramowski hoped – would replace today's social environment set for the struggle for survival (Abramowski 2011a [1898], 7–33). Beauty circumvents intellect, which imposes its categories on phenomena owing to pragmatic goals. Thus, beauty amounts to the thing-in-itself, i. e. to that which transcends the intellect. Beauty shows us what the world looks like outside rational thought driven by actual, daily needs (Abramowski 2011a [1898], 27). As such, beauty is the most individualistic ('anarchist') and most

collective experience at once: sabotaging all attempts at institutionalisation, it nevertheless unites people on the most personal level, stripping them of self-interest (Abramowski 2011a [1898], 28). Memory as the 'mother of art' acquires a new meaning in this post-Kantian (and post-Bergsonian) context. No longer do poets, as in Ancient Greece, teach ever-new generations all that is needed in life, but, conversely, the recollection, as an image of reality unfettered from current needs, becomes the archetype of the work of art (Abramowski 2011a [1898], 21–22; 1911b, 167).

Similarly, in Kelles-Krauz (1905), the notions of 'need' and 'recollection' answer for the aesthetic character of history's development and goal. The current suppression of certain needs endows distant epochs in which these very needs were satisfied with an irresistible beauty. Hence the law of revolutionary retrospection: all revolutionary movements borrow their future-shaping ideals from the distant past (Kelles-Krauz 2018 [1897–1898]). In his review of Kelles-Krauz, Abramowski points out that this revolutionary inversion "on the one hand, draws its vital juices from life interests and, on the other, shows their ideal, aesthetic, expression, which inspires and allures minds, while at the same time revealing the present state of affairs to be even more abominable" (Abramowski 2011b [1898], 174). Thus revolutionary retrospection represents socialism as it mirrors the double structure of Kantianism conjoining determination with freedom, needs and ideals. According to Kelles-Krauz, art itself is such an aesthetic ideal, coming from the past to the future: at its inception, art constituted an integral part of humans' practical activities, for example keeping their rhythm, and for the scientific socialists of ripe capitalism art, having assumed the sophisticated and exclusive form of "art for art's sake", serves as a template for combining social determination with individual freedom, without, however, relinquishing the structural complexity of modern society (Kelles-Krauz 1905, 1004–1111). Such an artform to look back on and look forward to is tragedy.

3 The legacy of Faust and Prometheus: Transgression and self-limitation in social Kantianism

Lunacharskii lists three literary, tragic archetypes, whose actions the socialist had better imitate: Faust, Lucifer, and Prometheus. All three symbolise valuation prevalent in the post-Nietzsche aesthetics of the turn of the twentieth century: the advantage of 'activity' over 'passivity', 'change' over 'standstill', 'pride' over

'self-limitation'. Thanks to these qualities, the three tragic figures are able to rebel against the status quo, formulate ideals for the future, and invent technology enabling humans to reach the ideals (Lunacharskii 1905c, 44–46). Their suffering confirms, however, the dominion of the self-limitation in this world in which they must perish; the social Kantians usually express the inevitability of self-limitation in the scientific jargon of the principle of the minimum possible expenditure of energy. The Janus faces of the three tragic figures of Faust, Lucifer, and Prometheus depict the 'double nature' of Kantianism and socialism as a heroic activity *and* suffering under unescapable conditions.

The tragic character of the metamorphoses of 'social *a priori*', symbolised by the three figures, manifest itself especially in the Russian discussion on tragedy between the socialist Kantians and their adversaries, ex-Kantian Marxists turned idealists (Nikolai Berdiaev, Sergei Bulgakov). Both camps deemed tragedy to be a measure of philosophy and the source of moral code (Berdiaev 1907b, 264, 271; Bulgakov 1902). However, they differed substantially with regard to the 'ideal poetics' of such a tragedy. While for Berdiaev (1907a) Maeterlinck's inward tragedy devoid of external action epitomised the essence of the genre and experience, in that it set tragedy in sharp opposition to positivism's optimistic view of the potential worldly solution to all woes, Lunacharskii denied Maeterlinck the right to call himself a 'tragedian' (Lunacharskii 1905d; 1905e). Greek and Elizabethan tragedy imitate actions in the external world – actions, which are not, as Berdiaev would have it, springboards from the earthly, empirical reality to something completely different. While Berdiaev (1907b) claims that tragedy consists in a leap from an empirical aporia into the metaphysical reality, Lunacharskii praises the joy of the 'active tragic' (Lunacharskii 1905d, 197–200), which does not escape the tensions encountered by the subject in experience, but withstands and upholds them in the constant struggle waged with nature in the name of earthly ideals. Lunacharskii's belligerence reveals that his and Bogdanov's socialism actually possesses, as Abramowski would have it, the double structure of Kantianism: Lunacharskii (1905d, 198) speaks explicitly about the fight with Ananke that reins both outside and inside the subject. There exists, consequently, a spontaneous apperception, for which both the psychological 'I' and 'nature' are nothing other than tasks for its spontaneity.

For the socialist world-makers, Faust symbolises the anti-dogmatic, incessant activity of philosophy (Lunacharskii 1905a; 1905f), which, like art, unites people in the enterprise of at once interpreting and changing the world. While for Berdiaev the impossibility of attaining absolute truth triggers the tragedy of knowledge experienced by a human who cannot make do with the ever-changing truth always relative to the struggle for survival (Berdiaev 1907a, 37–39), the social Kantians regard the development of control over nature as the active strug-

gle against evil. Nature, which wants us dead, bestows value on progress and its relative truths. It should be recalled that Marburg progressivism also correlated an ever-changing *a priori* with coping with nature. Russian Nietzschean (or, if you will, Byronian) Marxists describe this coping as a truly tragic and joyful fight with nature in the name of humanity. In Bogdanov's sci-fi novel *Krasnaia zvezda* (1908, *Red Star*; cf. II, Ch. 1, Ch. 4), tragedy functions as the main art form of utopian society, one staging the great fight with nature for resources and survival. This is a game of life and death, in which humanity (the Martians) fights tooth and nail and even considers the deliberate reduction of the birth rate as a defeat. Bogdanov's prefiguration of socialist realism, with its pathos of great construction projects, including even envy-driven sabotage, reintroduces the Hegelian struggle of the state (the organisation) with the telluric forces, at work also – as Abramowski as well as Lunacharskii and Brzozowski would stress – in ourselves, as subjects. It also heralds Andrei Platonov's (2011) first socialist tragedy as a tragedy of the fight for finite resources. The finitude of resources expresses itself in the necessity of self-limitation according to the principle of minimum effort.

The figures of Faust, Lucifer, and Prometheus symbolise the tragic synthesis of 'self-effacement' and 'transgression', without which neither brotherhood nor progress is possible. Conversely, 'self-effacement' conditions the scientific, necessarian character of progress. Again, revolutionary freedom and science combined make up the tragic form and endow the dualist structure of Kant's philosophy with an intuitively accessible form. Only a collective Faust would be able to survive its own rebellion. Not surprisingly, Cohen's neo-Kantianism regards tragedy as an answer to the puzzle of the concurrence of the individual and the community.

4 Cohen's indivi-dual from the spirit of tragic fiction

Free individuality in a just collective – a reconstruction of their conditions of possibility fills the pages of Cohen's *Aesthetics of Pure Feeling* devoted to tragedy (1912). The relationship between freedom and submission, individuality and generality takes on the form of humanity's victory over myth in tragedy and in (the Jewish) religion. The *Urbild* (archetype) of the tragic hero is accordingly Orestes. In *Ethik des reinen Willens* (1904, *Ethics of Pure Will*), Cohen writes that the tragic poets discovered the will, and thus initiated the history of human subjectivity and human freedom. Tragedy was the genre in which theatrical audiences witnessed, for the first time ever, genuine human will. Previously, it seems, there was only the gods' will, or only fate (*Atë*) (Cohen 1904, 105).

That both religion and tragedy myth is evident in that central to them both are guilt and fate. Guilt, as the foundation (*Grund*) of suffering (*Leiden*), is the main theme and motive power of myth, tragedy, and religion (Cohen 1972 [1919], 137). What is characteristic of the pre-tragic and pre-religious notion of guilt is its collective, heritable nature. This, incidentally, resembles Benjamin's famous definition of fate in his essay on Goethe's *Elective Affinities*: the *Schuldzusammenhang des Lebendigen*, a 'guilt-nexus of the living'. Cohen writes:

> The problem of the Oresteia is the problem of tragedy in general. It is the problem of the human individual in its aesthetic, and more specifically, its dramatic version: as unity of human nature, in the body of its kin, with the eternal question mark of the human soul. (Cohen 1912, II 83)

A hero of a tragedy and much more so a person who believes in God are "dual individuals" or simply indivi-*duals*: they are individuals as long as they are not offspring of a house or simply self-sufficient, but enter into "co-relation" (Cohen 1915, 11). The emergence of these indivi-*duals* in tragedy is explained in Cohen's earlier works as a social phenomenon connected with "a revolutionary-democratic turn" of the newly emerged people's assembly (Cohen 1927, I 185). In *Aesthetics of Pure Feeling*, Cohen (1912) speaks of an aesthetic revolution, which according to the present reader is correlated with transcendental, unifying method. Tragedy acquires the status of the highest form of art because of the degree of unification it attains in its content. This unification, in turn, engenders individuality. The new hero of tragedy brings about a new quality of humanity, free and responsible, but the quality would not emerge without the unprecedented unity of action (*Handlung*). This unity for its part is a function of the new relation of the hero, the poet, and the actor, with the spectator. In other words, it is the actor/poet's new relation with the spectator that occasions the unity of action so that the star of new humanity may at last light up. The indivi-*duality* is contingent on its co-relation with others in the work of generating a fictional world (Cohen 1912, I 494; II 61). The history of theatrical conventions in ancient Greece turns out to be a history of the emergence of the individual as relational, dual. In the first place, the choir of goats had to be replaced with a human chorus that could witness action, not only accompany a hero. Only then could the protagonist cease to be an incarnation of Dionysus and become an actor, *Darsteller* or *Schauspieler*, who plays whoever it is necessary to play according to the law of probability of action (Cohen 1912, II 61–62).

The new modern self is an outcome of the new invention of fiction created and upheld by the actor's interaction with the audience. It is in Greek tragedy that the fictional mode, and with it the individual, arises for the first time in the history of humankind.

5 Conclusion: Anti-institutional institutions

Cohen's theory of the institution of Greek tragedy trumps even the social Kantians when it comes to proving that authentic individuality depends on participation in an accurately organised collective combining freedom and lawfulness. Abramowski identifies the concurrence of individual and collective, freedom and law, value and being as a source of analogy between Kantianism and socialism. Theories of tragedy demonstrate that the co-occurrence holds and thus exemplifies the transcendental method and historical materialism. By Cohen's lights, the transcendental method cuts across all apparently irreconcilable parts of Kant's system, as it is used to investigate the validity of theoretical, practical, and aesthetic judgement. The co-occurrence of freedom and lawfulness in tragedy annuls the difference between *a priori* and experience, a code word of which is the oxymoron of 'social *a priori*'.

The Eastern European theory of the 'social *a priori*' enabled both the "phenomenalism" (Hansen-Löve 1978, 183) of early structuralism, which in the ideology of estrangement (*ostranenie*) foregrounded the historically changing construction of precepts, and Lukács's class consciousness and therefore the rapid development of Western Marxism. In social Kantianism, aestheticism and engagement converge. With regard to the predominance of the tragic, the notion that the most bereft, the least fortunate class has the most unified and insightful consciousness of the social whole facilitated the replacement of the historical working class – factory workers – with new kinds of 'proletariats', e. g. people of colour, queer people, 'illegal' migrants, etc. Social Kantianism, driven by its preoccupation with tragedy, ingrafts into the present-day humanities the double interest in tracing ever-changing forms of consciousness *and* in supporting the strokes of freedom within a thoroughly determined universe. The latter task falls to art and aesthetics, whereby the artistic or aesthetic aspect of the very research activity oftentimes takes precedence over all other concerns. At the turn of the twentieth century, theory aestheticized itself in shifting from official German university philosophy, which neo-Kantianism was, and from the official scientific Marxism of the Second Internationale to the semi-official, oftentimes clandestine institutions, such as the party school for workers convened by Bogdanov, Lunacharskii, and Maksim Gor'kii on Capri and in Bologna (Scherrer and Steila 2017; Ghilarducci 2019) or Warsaw's flying university (cited in the chapter on Polish formalism). The clandestine flying university, initially intended for women, began in defiance of the official Russian school system, which banned women, the Polish language, and progressive ideas. The flying university offered four five-year study paths, two of which included aesthetics in their curriculum, taught inter alia by one of the protagonists of the chapter on formalism, Kazimierz Wóycicki. These two paths were

offered by the historico-philological and the sociological faculties (Cywiński 2010 [1971], 58–59). Social aesthetics hark back to Romanticism's interest in self-organisation of communities without state coercion. One of the socialist sociology professors, Wacław Nałkowski, voiced the liaison between an anarchist, anti-state social institution and autonomous art, which all Polish and Russian social Kantians would have agreed on:

> It is about time the activists (*społecznicy*) and supporters of "new art" stopped looking at each other with hostility, and understood that they are pursuing one common evolutionary goal and that only through their union can a force be created that overcomes reaction. This union will give the socialists a deepening of their psychology and the followers of "new art", who are struggling hopelessly, the courage of life, even with clenched teeth, the conviction that life is worth something if it can be sold dearly – if you can die like Samson, pulling the whole building behind it. (Nałkowski quoted in Cywiński 2010 [1971], 80)

Virtually all social Kantians cited in this chapter wrote poems in verse and prose in which they expressed this Luciferian and Promethean, simply tragic will of destruction and creation of new values: Nałkowski penned *Bojownik* (1904, *Militant*), Ludwik Krzywicki *Takimi będą drogi wasze* (1908, *These Will be Your Paths*), Jan Władysław Dawid *O duszy nauczycielstwa* (1912, *On the Soul of Pedagogy*), Abramowski *Poemat śmierci* (1918, *The Poem of Death*). Stanisław Brzozowski and Alexandr Bogdanov, each in his own poetics, produced numerous novels and dramatic fragments. Lunacharskii was also a prolific poet, translator and playwright, the author of the 1918 play *Faust i gorod* (*Faust and the City*). But principally their research praxis, which in the name of enfranchisement united activism and artistic creation, founded a tradition which was then developed by Lukács and whose ramifications can be only appreciated over 100 years later.

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