

**FROM MARXISM TO POST-COMMUNISM:  
SOCIALIST DESIRES AND  
EAST EUROPEAN REJECTIONS**

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#529

November 1995

**CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON SOCIAL ORGANIZATION  
WORKING PAPER SERIES**

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ABSTRACT

In this review of the relationship between marxism and East European transformation since 1989, we consider why Eastern Europe is so important to marxism and how marxists have addressed the transformation. We also point to similar analyses of the transformation generated by non-marxists, and review exemplary East European interpretations of marxism to demonstrate that the principal challenge in developing marxism in Eastern Europe lies outside its traditional substantive foci and methodological practices. We propose that in order for marxism to maintain itself as an integrated project without ignoring or dismissing Eastern Europe, it must do more than address questions of class and capitalist formation, problems which can be analyzed in parallel fashion without commitment to the normative aspect of socialism. It must also address directly the region's experience with, and rejection of, "really existing socialism," rather than dismissing these and thereby allowing socialism to function as an ontologically absent but epistemologically structuring desire. In order for marxism to develop in East European studies, we suggest, it must find a way to rearticulate socialism's transcendent project within East European lifeworlds, a task grounded as much in discursive analyses of ideologies and identities as in the political economy of transformation.

## INTRODUCTION

Marxism -- as a theoretical system, political orientation, scholarly tradition, and capitalist counterculture (Bauman 1976, p. 47) -- has had an extremely complicated relationship to the communist-led societies of Eastern Europe.<sup>1</sup> In the wake of 1989, marxist thinkers have been drawn into intense discussion about what the old communist-led system was, why it collapsed so completely and rapidly across Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, and what this means for marxism and socialism. In this essay, we consider the burgeoning engagement of Eastern Europe by marxist scholars, as well as the challenges posed to marxism by East European social and theoretical transformations.

Our review is different from previous efforts in several respects.<sup>2</sup> First, we don't seek to contrast the "realities" of Communist-led societies with core tenets of marxist theory (Hollander 1982, Lenski 1978, Connor 1979). We rather see marxism as a knowledge culture (Somers forthcoming) with an implicit core and fuzzy boundaries, and as such impossible to verify or disprove in toto. Second, and in a related vein, we don't search recent events to find the points of validation or invalidation for an existing marxist project. We assume that marxism is constantly being refashioned in the face of historical and intellectual challenges, and that its future will be determined in part by how marxists

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<sup>1</sup>The organization of scholarship on communist-led societies, as reflected in journals and research centers throughout the Cold War, left a mixed geographical heritage. The Soviet Union and the juridically independent, communist-led East European states were linked in some circumstances (e.g. with the appropriation of federal monies to National Resource Centers for Russian and Eastern European Studies, or the journal *Soviet Studies*) and not in other (e.g. with a division made between the East European committee, located in the American Council for Learned Societies, and the Soviet Union committee, located in the Social Science Research Council). In some circumstances all communist-led societies were thematized together (e.g. in journals such as *Problems of Communism* and *Studies in Comparative Communism*, or in Kornai 1991).

In this essay we focus solely on the European sites of communist collapse. For convenience, we use the term "East European" to indicate the European parts of the Former Soviet Union, as well as the conventional countries of reference. Of course, a case could be made that Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union (FSU) involve very different analytical problems, meriting their separate treatment, but given that these differences are minimized by marxists with their attention to modes of production and property relations, we provisionally treat this region as a relatively homogenous terrain.

<sup>2</sup>Although this builds on Kennedy (1991), where pre-1989 Marxist work on Soviet-type societies is discussed.

interpret 1989,<sup>3</sup> what questions they choose to take from it, and what questions they disregard. In this sense, we take up the challenge Michael Burawoy (1990) presents to consider the relationship between the "internal history" of marxist theory and the "external history" of the recent transformations in Eastern Europe. But unlike Burawoy, one of marxism's major proponents in sociology, we do not write from a marxist position; we attempt rather to be "ridge-riders"<sup>4</sup> between the social transformations of Eastern Europe and the intellectual transformations in marxism occasioned by them. Our main thesis is that marxist sociologists may have to step outside their own tradition in order to interpret and adequately confront the challenge Eastern Europe represents to marxism. We ground this suggestion through a series of linked reviews of recent works, including: 1) marxist sociological responses to change in Eastern Europe emanating from sociology; 2) work on Eastern Europe by non-marxists who appear to occupy a "marxist space" within sociology; and 3) the contributions of thinkers who incorporate elements of the marxist tradition, but radically transform its framework.<sup>5</sup>

In recent theoretical work, marxist sociologists tend to locate Eastern Europe as a major threat to the marxist normative project, yet they seem to evade the topic of Eastern Europe when developing their justifications for continued socialist hopes. In their empirical explorations of change in East European societies, marxist scholars preserve their perspective by pursuing topics which lie in the mainstream of marxist research -- especially those which might selectively reinforce lessons about the links between production and identity, class interests and legislation, etc. -- and by bringing to bear a

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<sup>3</sup>Here, as at several other places in the article, we invoke 1989 as a shorthand for the systemic transformations which began before 1989 and continue through the present.

<sup>4</sup>As was Gouldner (1980), except his ridge was between marxism and sociology.

<sup>5</sup>We must make the obvious apologies regarding the scope of this review. The marxist-linked sociological literature is vast, and a good portion of it, while not addressed to Eastern Europe in particular, has been inflected by a consideration of state socialism's collapse. Thus, we undoubtedly fail to treat certain works that others might have included in such a review.

methodological commitment to uncovering Real processes at work behind the Apparent, or Ideological. However, while marxist thinkers produce a range of useful insights on institutions and politics in Eastern Europe through this approach, similar insights are generated by researchers who have parallel methodological and topical commitments, but who implicitly or explicitly work outside of a marxist normative framework. It is thus difficult to convince audiences outside the marxist tradition of the usefulness of a marxist framework when considering Eastern Europe.

The problem becomes more grave when one considers the overwhelming indifference to, and rejection of, marxist theory within Eastern Europe. Somewhat ironically, this rejection is itself often established and validated through an appeal to the Real (in this case the "real" of "common sense") as opposed to the Ideological (Kennedy 1994a, "Introduction"). Our intent here is not in any sense to reproduce a cold-war standoff, with the "material-historical Real" of marxist theory juxtaposed to the "common-sense Real" of East European rejections of marxism. Rather, we suggest that there are social theorists who have transcended this divide by combining the normative commitment to radical democracy inherent in the contemporary Western marxist project with a willingness to push, topically and methodologically, beyond a traditional marxist approach.

## RESPONDING THEORETICALLY TO 1989

We begin our consideration with attempts to redefine marxist boundaries post-1989 from two thinkers central to the elaboration of marxism within sociology. First, although Erik Olin Wright's work has not focused on Eastern Europe, his influential recent attempts to redefine and reconstruct the marxist project are in part direct responses to East European transformations. His "Class Analysis, History and Emancipation" represents a good point of departure (1993; see also Wright 1992).

Marxist thought, according to Wright, can be mapped out by the relationship among three nodes: 1) class analysis, 2) historical trajectory, and 3) emancipatory potential. A

marxist tenor, he argues, is achieved in any one node through the interpenetration of the other two. For instance, a distinctly marxist class analysis will not simply employ class descriptors, but will implicitly include an idea of historical trajectory (through class antagonism) and a commitment to the normative ideal of a classless society.

For Wright, marxism is currently challenged on two fronts. It is challenged from within by less totalizing visions of marxism and from without by world historical events (most notably the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe) which seem to cast a shadow on socialism's viability. Thus Wright does not specify the contemporary threat to marxism as wholly empirical or wholly theoretical, but suggests that there is an accumulated set of grievances which necessitate a corresponding reconstruction of marxist theory. In the main, this reconstruction is achieved through a loosening of analytical strictures within each of the nodes as classically conceived (and thus an implicit loosening of the interconnections among the three nodes). For instance, instead of an inexorable drive through a series of materially necessitated stages, historical trajectory can be examined through stages of social organization and property relations that interpenetrate, loop back, and move forward at variable rates in variable contexts (1993, pp. 24-25).

In contrast to Wright, who advocates to some extent a controlled disintegration within marxism's core, Michael Burawoy (1990) specifically reasserts the place of an integrated marxist project within sociology. Burawoy contends that each of marxism's core concepts has been tested through confrontation with anomalies, and that these challenges have yielded fruitful rethinkings from within the marxist tradition whenever a balance has been maintained between the internal (analytical) and external (historical) aspects of the problem (790). This is what allows him both to identify an expanding belt of live science (in Lakatos's understanding, Burawoy 1990, pp. 777-778) within marxism, and to skillfully re-cast 1989 as marxism's greatest opportunity to grow as a science.<sup>6</sup> The curiously

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<sup>6</sup>Of course, Burawoy is writing just one year after the collapse. However, since 1984 he had been dealing with issues similar to those embedded in the collapse. This brings, of course, a different question to the

undertreated point of both articles is the threat to marxism inherent specifically in 1989. Both authors identify the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe as a significant challenge for marxists, even marxism's "most profound challenge" (Burawoy, p. 790). In Wright it appears that the East European communist experience most directly threatens marxist projections of socialism's future, first by charting an uneven and unpredicted course of development, and second by casting doubt on the idea that a socialist state can foster efficient production. Similarly, in Burawoy, the events of Eastern Europe cast doubt specifically on the seventh of his core marxist propositions, the proposition that "The bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production" (Marx 1859, in Burawoy 1990, p. 780). And yet both authors firmly wave away this threat to socialist potential through a familiar geographical move: "That socialism could never emerge in backward Russia without revolution in the West was a central tenet of all marxism from Marx to Kautsky and Luxemburg, from Plekhanov to Trotsky and Lenin" (Burawoy, p. 791; echoed clearly in Wright 1993, p. 16).

Further, neither treats Eastern Europe in arguing for the continued viability of what Auerbach terms "socialist optimism" (Auerbach 1992). Wright recoups the viability of all three nodes through the analytic promise of class. Burawoy, meanwhile, engages in what Wright deems marxism's most basic move (Wright 1993, p. 22): he re-focuses the debate on capitalist pessimism: "...Marxism still provides a fecund understanding of capitalism's inherent contradictions and dynamics...[Thus] the longevity of capitalism guarantees the longevity of Marxism" (Burawoy 1990, p. 792).

The reconstructions offered by Burawoy and Wright leave socialism and Eastern Europe in a curious place: the normative commitment to socialist objectives, and a concomitant faith in socialism's viability, are placed at the center of the marxist project, and Eastern Europe is posed as a challenge to that commitment. But in almost Lacanian

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surface, the question of what makes the questions of 1989 particularly urgent; for, as Derrida (1994) notes, there is a certain "toujours deja vu" in the consideration of recent transformations. This must be the subject of another essay.

fashion, our gaze at the central problem is diverted as marxists center on traditional problems of class and capitalism, leaving Eastern Europe's experience with socialism out of focus.

## DEVELOPING MARXISM IN EAST EUROPEAN STUDIES

Perhaps not surprisingly, marxism has customarily approached Eastern Europe best when that area has been rent with strife.<sup>7</sup> It is clear that the tradition has been most interested in the region when there were crises, either of a progressive or regressive kind. After 1989, however, attention to Eastern Europe soared and has remained at a high level.<sup>8</sup>

The extensive discussion of the Yugoslav war of succession illustrates marxism's heightened concern for crisis in Eastern Europe, and Branka Magas's (1992) book on the destruction of Yugoslavia illustrates a marxist approach well. Distinguishing her perspective as marxist, she manages to preserve socialism's viability by identifying the particular contradiction between economic and political decentralization, on the one hand, and the absence of internal party democratization, on the other that led to the nationalist alternative being so strong (pp. 193-229). Bogdan Denitch's (1994) book carries forward many of the same themes as Magas's, but also has the virtue of discussing Denitch's own democratic socialist politics in 1991, and how it was so difficult to organize a democratic left alternative in this context (pp. 177-85).

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<sup>7</sup>Aronson (1995) suggests that communist Eastern Europe served to negatively stabilize the socialist referent: "The very immobility and ponderousness of the Soviet Union counted for something positive in our collective psychic space, allowing us to keep hope alive that a successful socialism might still emerge. It provided a backdrop against which alternatives could be thought about and discussed, including, for some, the hope that other versions of Marxism remained viable" (p. vii).

<sup>8</sup>Even still, it remains curiously absent from some of the most obvious places. Borocz and Smith (1995, pp. 1-16) lament that they could not solicit any articles on changes in Eastern Europe, even though they are the central challenge to the theory. See Borocz (1992) for one major challenge to World Systems theory that has not been seriously taken up.

The postcommunist economic transformations discussed by marxists also clearly articulate with the main forms of analysis and substantive concerns of the tradition. In this genre we find specific rebuttals of the success of privatization strategies and documentation of the social problems and growing inequalities associated with the transformation.

Most of these studies are consonant with Wright's loosely coupled marxism: a marxism less distinct from other perspectives and one more politically open to past sacrileges, particularly the necessity of the market (Nove 1991, Weisskopf 1992, Pierson 1995). But these innovations within marxism are not so compelling outside of it, and thus are unlikely to appear important to those not already committed to the tradition. They don't illuminate East European transformations as much as they refine marxism in such a way as to reduce its distinction. Additionally, those innovations are not so apparently important for marxism in general, if Wright's list of reconstructive achievements is a good operationalization of innovation in the tradition. So, for those interested in explaining East European social transformations, or in innovating marxism, why should marxism be developed in studies of Eastern Europe? Michael Burawoy might make the best case.

Burawoy took a job in a champagne factory in Hungary in 1983 and continues through the present to work in different Hungarian and Russian firms. Two major streams of collaboration have resulted from Burawoy's detailed work on the ground in East European industry. In the first, which culminated in a series of essays produced together with Hungarian sociologist Janos Lukacs (1992), Burawoy explains why the distinction between socialism and capitalism is not quite what the ideologues of the latter proclaim. In later collaborations with Russian colleague Pavel Krotov (e.g., 1993, 1995), Burawoy has emphasized why the transition to capitalism in Russia is so unstable and directed toward merchant rather than bourgeois capitalism.

In *The Radiant Past* Burawoy and Lukacs construct an elegant ideal type of state socialist enterprise. Due to shortages of equipment and materials, the importance of expansion and bargaining in managerial strategies, and employment security, workers

generally have more organizational autonomy in state socialism than in capitalism, including considerable control over their immediate means of production. Exploitation (as in Konrad and Szelenyi 1979) transpires through planners' appropriation of surplus. Critically for state socialism, this appropriation transpires **visibly**, at the point of production. Therefore, ideology acquires a more crucial role in state socialism than in capitalism -- it is responsible for coordinating the efforts of workers to (transparently) engage in their own exploitation.

But participation in state socialism's collective ideological rituals -- the daily practice of "painting socialism" (see Burawoy and Lukacs 1992, Chapter 5) -- fools no one: the great unkept secret within socialist societies is that ideology and reality are worlds apart. And this distance generates the class consciousness which leads to the system's downfall -- the very consciousness which, Burawoy argues, Marx mistakenly assumed to be at the heart of **capitalist** production. Capitalism does not collapse because, while it might engender a critical consciousness, interests generated within production relations lead to the manufacture of consent (see, of course, Burawoy 1979).

In Burawoy's subsequent work on the transformations of postcommunist capitalism in Russia he and Krotov shift more directly to the critique of capitalism and away from the question of socialism's demise. The dominant features of the firm appear to be the same in postcommunist Russia as in communist Hungary: flexible working hours, autonomous work organization, and uneven technology. Middle level management remains weak, and the successful entrepreneur is still one with good connections, albeit this time in a new organizational environment with a withered state and para-statal conglomerates wielding economic power (Burawoy 1992). Rather than fostering an ideal capitalist-type system based on "continual pressure to transform products and work organization in order to maintain profit in a competitive market" (p. 33), the postcommunist scene has actually amplified the control by workers over the shopfloor, and enhanced the significance of managerial connections in determining corporate success (see also Clarke 1992). According

to Burawoy, this analysis of postcommunist relations in production not only serves to deflate capitalism's idealized sense of its own efficiency, but also provides a key to understanding historical change: postcommunist capitalism is merchant capitalism, rather than bourgeois capitalism. The fate of this merchant capitalism depends, of course, on two kinds of forces -- world capital and domestic proletarians -- and in their essay on a regional coal industry, Burawoy and Krotov (1993) address both. If we were to find the significance of Russian workers' mobilization, it would be in this sector (Crowley 1993), but to date, its only significance has been to generate greater state protectionism in alliance with its managers rather than any significant transformative potential. (See Burawoy and Krotov 1995 for a further development of this argument.) This kind of protection is unlikely to lead to any kind of "dependent development", given the weakness of the state itself and that Western capital is channeled through domestic conglomerates. This is all suggestive of the idea that merchant capital will simply continue to reproduce itself, leading to further dependency and underdevelopment.

This essay completes what becomes Burawoy's leitmotif: the reality is different than the ideology, to be discovered in the analysis of relations in and of production; and the celebration of commercial transformations is evidence only of merchant capitalism's development. In his recent programmatic essay, he makes these points but also makes explicit what turns his case studies into something more powerful: his use of analogical comparisons with other epochal transitions to develop more theoretical arguments about the ideological conventions he seeks to critique, and how that might enable subsequently more refined comparisons among postcommunist sites (Burawoy 1995, Chapter 3).

We might note that Burawoy's move to Russia and away from Hungary enables this argument to be more persuasive than it otherwise might have been, for Russia's production relations are less transformed than those of Hungarian and other East Central European firms. Thus Russia becomes the "worst case scenario," allowing our capitalist utopian hopes to be dashed most effectively. But since Russia seems no more hospitable to

socialist alternatives than other sites, perhaps the injunction to study capitalist alternatives is appropriate, and an institutional approach sensible.

#### FOUR ALTERNATIVES: STARK, KORNAI, STANISZKIS, SZELENYI

One might argue that institutional analysis is a perfectly good substitute for marxism, and certainly a good alternative to a neoclassical economics that sometimes dominate the analysis of postcommunism. Substantively speaking, at least, David Stark's work occupies much of the same space any marxist analysis would, with its focus on labor markets (Stark 1986), economic sociology (Stark 1989, 1992), and most recently property forms (Stark in press). But Stark does not identify with marxism.

His institutional approach apparently accepts marxism's notion of colliding ordering principles but he distinguishes the approaches by arguing that tensions cannot be finally consolidated and released, as marxism implies, but rather continue in relative localized stabilizations. He also argues that marxism's approach to complexity is "impoverished", maintaining that the public/private and the socialism/capitalism distinctions are inadequate to understanding East European variety, and that in general it is misleading to understand any system in terms of a single logic. Stark goes on to illustrate his general arguments with a plea to understand East European capitalism as distinctive, based on what he calls "recombinant property", something neither public nor private, based on coordination neither market nor bureaucratic, but designed to enhance flexibility in an environment so uncertain that assets and liabilities are hard to recognize.

Stark's general argument seems to be compatible with the kind of marxism at least Wright (1993) emphasizes. But by ridding the approach of any fundamental distinction between capitalism and socialism, Stark of necessity distances himself from marxism in this age where some elevation of socialism as a continuing problem and positive normative base remains one of marxism's distinctions.

Janos Kornai (1992) offers a different kind of critique of marxism from a neighboring position. Interestingly, of all the thinkers we consider here, Kornai is probably closest to the mature Marx in the sense that he painstakingly argues from a standpoint of necessary historical developments (and devolutions), rather than from a standpoint of normative critique. According to Kornai, there are certain material necessities impelling socialist societies along prototypical stages of development (allowing, of course, for feedback effects and historical variation). These developments are not "historically mandated" as such, but once communist power has been asserted within a state, these stages follow both from objective demands (including world-system constraints) and from the assertion and realization of "natural" self-interests and social desires by party leaders, bureaucrats and workers.

In adopting this approach Kornai produces perhaps the definitive analysis of command-style economy and its decay, one that can easily be appropriated by marxists themselves (e.g., Burawoy and Lukacs 1992; Clarke 1992, p. 9 ff.). But Kornai's analysis is ultimately at odds with a marxist positionality. First and foremost, this is because he does not attempt to evade the "accident" of Russia; rather he treats it as a "recurrent regularity" (p. 373) that socialism has taken root only in the industrial "late arrivers" (p. 373). It is the very backwardness of these societies which allows the basic genetic program of socialism to begin to reproduce itself within their particular historical borders. This idea, of course, both departs from classical marxist theory, which forecasts the growth of socialism in the developed economies, and sets the stage for another departure from more contemporary socialist hopes. For it is Kornai's overall conclusion that the power of "really existing communism" lies in the undivided, ideological party, which itself generates the dominant position of the state and quasi-state ownership, spawning institutional problems such as a surfeit of bureaucratic control, soft budget constraints, plan bargaining, and the chronic shortage economy. Because these occurrences are tightly linked, the superstructure can not reform itself without incurring a revolution. Thus, although he is careful not to forecast too

far into the future of transition, Kornai argues against the feasibility of socialist alternatives, including self-management, finding that they reproduce the same problems of shortage and soft budget constraints as the old system, but without the ideological dominance to control dissent and maintain systemic coherence.

Jadwiga Staniszkis is another East European intellectual whose work occupies a similar space to marxism in her focus on the primacy of property relations and economic conditions, and in her quest for the Real behind the Ideological, for contradictions driving historical change. She is more oriented toward politics and national strategies of development than either Stark or Kornai. In *The Ontology of Socialism* (1992), she develops a property rights paradigm to argue that Real Socialism tends toward crisis because of a lack of responsibility and accountability. The state, while aspiring to represent society and history, cannot rationalize crises, for it is itself ultimately particularist and subjectivist, interested in its own preservation and extension as the prerogative state. And while the state may inspire rebellion, it generates a non-transformative politics of identity, a morally-based social rejectionism that in fact reproduces the system and its redistributive politics. With no internally generated transcendent interests, communism had, according to Staniszkis, no immanent basis of change. Its end was the result of conjuncture and chance.

From Staniszkis (Kennedy 1995) the significance of the capitalist world order as the underlying mechanism of social change becomes obvious. In general, she argues that peripheries must continually adjust developmental strategies to their shifting locations in the world system; even communist-led societies experienced that imperative and devised COMECON as one strategy of development. A subsequent strategy, what she calls "political capitalism," is a means by which an opening to the West and real capitalism is made. Post-communist peripheral capitalism depends on this institutional form to compete with global capitalism (Staniszkis 1995).

Thus, for Staniszkis the conditions of politics are ultimately based on a national economic relationship to the global economy, and consequently her work suggests both methodological and epistemological affinities with world systems theory. But rather than follow the socialist foundations of Wallersteinian world systems analysis, she critiques socialism both as a political-economic and normative system, and follows rather in a Listian tradition (see Szporluk 1988).

Ivan Szelenyi is closest to Wright's marxist sociology (and most unlike the three figures mentioned above) in his steady focus on problems of stratification (here within socialist and post-socialist societies). Szelenyi is clearly best known for his work with Gyorgy Konrad on *Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power* (1979). In the mid 1980s, he recanted the central argument of that work (Szelenyi 1987), finding instead that a class of socialist entrepreneurs or new petty bourgeoisie was being made within state socialism. This argument was developed most fully in a subsequent publication emphasizing the involutory nature of change within state socialism, based on a middle range theory of the Hungarian peasantry's "interrupted embourgeoisment" (Szelenyi 1988).

After communism's collapse, Szelenyi (and Martin 1991) also continue to comment on various class theories of intellectuals, ultimately arguing that intellectuals came to power only to destroy the systemic base of their identity (Szelenyi 1994, p. 7). Their rhetoric of privatization, he suggests, was dangerously distant from the real interests of the masses of workers, who continued to conceive of themselves as employees by the state, and to hold rather social democratic politics. This accounts for the return of the "left" to power in several states of Eastern Europe (Szelenyi, Szelenyi and Poster in press).

Unlike the other thinkers noted above, Szelenyi is firmly associated with the marxist tradition in the West. But why? His class analysis is based on Polanyi more than Marx. His accounts of historical transformation are notably Weberian, with their emphasis on cultural influences and value systems (Szelenyi 1988), and dedication to multiplicity and conjuncture (Szelenyi 1994). But he engages the marxist tradition because of his interest in

inequality and class and their relationship to historical transformations, his reticence to mark his distance from marxism, and because the majority of his critique comes from more culturally oriented than class-based work. (Frentzel-Zagorska and Zagorski 1989, Kennedy 1992). Szelenyi himself identifies with the populist tradition more than with the marxist one (Kennedy 1994b), with his last written reference to socialism's normative desirability coming probably in his call for a socialist civil society in 1979 (Szelenyi 1979). But because populism is not a well developed intellectual approach in North American sociology (Calhoun 1989), such a critical orientation can find its most suitable, and professionally appropriate, home in North America in marxism.

Our point in devoting such extensive attention to thinkers who are not themselves marxist but who fill a "marxist space" of inquiry is to illustrate that, when facing change in Eastern Europe a marxissant methodology or topical concern is by no means assurance of the retention of marxist commitments; sometimes just the opposite. From the point of view of a marxist audience, the points of overlap between, for instance, Burawoy and Kornai, or Wallerstein and Staniszki, might be taken merely as external validity checks. But for audiences interested in Eastern Europe and who lack a normative commitment to the marxist project, the question "Why marxism?" is left oddly hanging, especially when we consider how marxism is regarded in contemporary Eastern Europe.

#### MARXISM'S APPEAL IN EASTERN EUROPE

It is difficult to find socialism as an empirical or positive reference, or marxism as a theoretical tradition, alive in Eastern Europe today. Sometimes marxism is addressed by Eastern Europeans to demonstrate its ideological rigidity and inflexibility (e.g., Mokrzycki 1992, Zybertowicz 1994). More often it is ignored.

Of course marxism is not ignored because East European thinkers don't know it, or because they have not themselves contributed significantly to it. Portions of Polish sociology, for instance, were long informed by marxism and have since departed from it.

Jacek Kuron is embarrassed by his earlier flirtations with marxism (personal communication with Kuron, 1994; see also Kuron and Modzelewski 1966), even though his present politics is based on a critique of the concentration of wealth. While former marxist sociologist Wlodzimerz Wesolowski (1979) remains motivated by a left sympathy his continued work on inequality with its focus on elites is more informed by Weber and Habermas than by Marx (see, e.g., Wesolowski 1990). Witold Morawski, whose early work on self management (Hirszowicz and Morawski 1967) was clearly informed by the young Marx, continues to study self-management but with no particular marxist affinity (1994). These intellectuals have no wish to engage marxism, seeing the affinity with the tradition clearly something to move beyond rather than debate, much less embrace.

There are occasions when marxism is engaged, but these attempts often appear as part of a bygone era, when the Communist Party still "mattered" to marxism. Konrad Weiss felt obliged to address marxism only when asked to discuss the survival of utopias; and though he still identifies as a socialist, he believes marxism could only inevitably degenerate into dystopia (Weiss 1994). In Russia, specifically, which is so often located as both the heart of communism and the heart of communist failure, vibrant academic engagement of marxism is all but dead in any discipline, let alone the field of sociology, which is more pointedly engaged in the project of describing and easing transition to market economy.

Boris Kagarlitsky, a political theorist celebrated in the West as an "authentic Russian marxist" is probably better known outside of Russia than within it.<sup>9</sup> In a fairly recent (1989) publication he makes reference to a new and growing circle of marxists in Russia, whom he believes will eventually serve as key interpreters and critics of the transition, allowing Russia to transcend its own provincialism, but he names no names. The historian Roy Medvedev -- whose pro-socialist framework made him somewhat anomalous

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<sup>9</sup>In a similar vein, we suspect that Burawoy's collaborators, Lukacs and Krotov, are esteemed in their own countries more specifically for the strength of their sociology than for their marxism,

among dissidents in the Soviet Union and continues to make him anomalous among "progressive" theorists in contemporary Russia -- argued in the wake of the August coup that leftist parties would become crucial to the rebuilding of Russian politics (1992). But given the awkward positionality of communists in the Russian political scene, his prescriptions are necessarily more guarded now than in the 70s and 80s (see, e.g., 1981, pp. 203-293).

One important specific work to appear from Russia on the lessons for marxists embedded in 1989 is Alexander Yakovlev's critical manifesto *The Fate of Marxism in Russia* (1993). Although produced by a long-time party theorist as well as one of Gorbachev's closest advisors, the book received virtually no treatment from specifically marxist journals. Reviews that did appear in the wider press tended to treat Yakovlev's theoretical work as a project of secondary importance and tended to criticize the book for its failure to shed insight on Kremlin intrigues under Gorbachev's tenure (Service 1993, Klinghoffer 1994).

Of course, there are easily understandable reasons for Yakovlev's lukewarm reception among Western academics. There is his inclination to employ un-reflexive terminology, as well as his somewhat suspect political position, as a man who indeed critiqued Soviet marxism from the inside, but critiqued it fairly late. The book's own introduction is apologetic vis-a-vis the lack of newness inherent in Yakovlev's rethinking of marxism (see "Prelude" in Yakovlev 1993).

But this sense of lack of newness is an important marker in and of itself: much of what Yakovlev has to say resonates with a taken-for-granted critique of marxism which can be heard widely today in Russia. The central themes Yakovlev invoke include, first, the idea that marxism is ruthlessly future-oriented, and that in its zeal to break with the past, it disrupts basic processes of identity formation; second, that a return to and reconstruction of national history serves as a "natural" ground for positive identity formation; third, that marxists mistakenly believed that, having understood history, they could then control it.

Perhaps Yakovlev's most fundamental theme, and one that resonates widely within Russian society,<sup>10</sup> is the idea that the 1917 revolution represented a break with Russia's path, a "disruption of the evolution of the natural progress of history [that] escalated into a Russian calamity" (p. 7). In this sense, Yakovlev's critique intersects at a certain historical and geographical moment with Western marxists who locate Bolshevik Russia as the site of an evolutionary disruption. But where the idea of disruption allows Western marxists to jettison Russia in order to restore or maintain socialist hope (e.g., Burawoy 1990), for Yakovlev the lesson moves in the opposite direction. He cannot jettison Russia. The lesson for him, as for so many other Russians, is that there must be an abandonment of socialist hope, that this is the way of returning to a state of freedom and "normalcy." Or, as Hollander writes:

Most importantly intellectuals in communist and formerly communist states have fewer illusions about the perfectibility of the social world and human beings than their Western counterparts; they are also freer of an oppressive sense of meaninglessness that often translates into the current forms of political alienation in the West and they are less likely to confuse and conflate the personal and the social realm. Above all, intellectuals in the East are immune to the seductions of political utopias and the temptations of secular religion; this may enable them to pursue an attainable agenda of human improvement and liberation, something that no longer animates many of their Western counterparts (1992, p. 308).

Our suggestion here is not that a moral or sentimental prerogative should be granted to Yakovlev for having felt socialism "on the skin." However we do suggest that there is a problem virtually untouched by marxists of the link between the collapse of socialist hope in Eastern Europe and something "in marxism's bones." At the very least it would seem that there are important, and overlooked, lessons embedded in Eastern Europe around identity, the role of discourse in shaping experience, and the constitutive power of ideology in socialism (and in the rejection of socialism). And here specifically we

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<sup>10</sup>A widely circulated Russian anecdote runs, "Why is the battleship *Avrora* considered the most dangerous weapon in all of history?" "Because it fired one salvo that caused 70 years of devastation."

mean to indicate socialism as a **presence**, even when rejected, and not -- as marxism often understands socialism -- as an unrealized but desired **absence**.

Like Yakovlev, Polish intellectual historian Andrej Walicki "knows" the essence of marxism. Its utopia, he argues (1995) in stark contrast to Wright, "involved the abolition of commodity production and monetary exchange. In other words, it was a vision of a totally marketless economy" (p. 90). Walicki further argues that there is an inherent tension between the marxian conceptions of historical necessity and of freedom, a tension which opens the space for a drive to direct all human economic activities, leading to control by one minority that claims the knowledge and right to steer others (pp. 88-89). This, of course, sounds like any theory of elites, from Mosca to Michels. But through a detailed intellectual history Walicki makes a convincing case that the notions of freedom embedded in marxist thought are themselves culpable for the crisis that was Eastern Europe. While he might thus be dismissed as hopelessly anti-marxist,<sup>11</sup> Walicki's critique should contribute to marxism's reconstruction, especially if the problem of the normative is to be placed at center stage.

## THE NORMATIVE AND POLITICAL

One of the most important engagements of marxism, as Wright, Aronson and others note, is with rethinking the normative. Analytical marxism, and John Roemer's work in particular, are cited by Wright as exceptionally innovative and important contributions to the emancipatory node of marxism (Wright 1993). But although Roemer has made linkages between his own reformulations and the collapse of communism, and asserts that the opportunity costs of shifting to market socialism are lowest in postcommunist economies (1994, pp. 126-27), much of his work has developed independently of analysis of

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<sup>11</sup>And it would be hard to dismiss him as "simply" anti-marxist. He writes for instance: "I treat Marxist communism as an ideology that has compromised itself but that nevertheless deserves to be seen as the most important, however exaggerated and, ultimately, tragically mistaken, reaction to the multiple shortcomings of capitalist societies and the liberal tradition" (1995, p. 9).

Eastern Europe. Unfortunately for Roemer's analytical marxism, Michael Burawoy's (1994) critique of his proposal for market socialism illustrates that without simultaneous work on the empirical/political levels, this kind of normative rethinking is unlikely to produce much helpful in East European studies.

The "other" marxism notably concerned with the normative grounds is critical theory, contemporarily represented most prominently by Jurgen Habermas. But as with Roemer, Eastern Europe has not figured much in his approach. Polish public intellectual Adam Michnik recently challenged Habermas that he had not engaged Stalinism theoretically (Habermas and Michnik 1994), something Habermas acknowledged (p. 10). Indeed, Michnik criticizes much of the left tradition for failing to take more serious consideration of the East European experience. Nevertheless, 1989 did push Habermas to comment on the transformation and its implications for socialist thought.

After reviewing the range of responses to the transformation and its relationship to socialism, Habermas (1990) argues explicitly against the notion that marxism as critique is as exhausted as actual socialism has been. Instead, what needs to be jettisoned are the mistakes in marxism which actually made Stalin's codification of the tradition possible: 1) the focus on labor; 2) the holistic conception of society; 3) an over-concrete conception of conflict and social agencies; 4) the restricted and functionalist analysis of constitutional democracy; and 5) the essentialization of history. Habermas argues against socialism's transformation into an idea or an ethic, however, and reproduces his argument about popular sovereignty based on procedural justice embedded in communicative rationality. And with that, Habermas demonstrates that his prior transformation of the critical perspective anticipated the challenge posed by communism's collapse.

But is this Habermasian perspective useful for doing more than establishing the basis for a dialogue between respected critical intellectuals? Can it guide the analysis of East European transformations?

## DEMOCRACY'S EMANCIPATION AND DISCOURSE'S POWER

The clearest way in which Habermasian problems were introduced into Eastern Europe was through the discourse around "civil society." Civil society was not, however, introduced as a marxist, or even postmarxist, term; Gouldner (1980) and Jean Cohen (1982) remind us just how simply Marx conceived the term. And in fact, many East Europeans were invoking civil society in its Lockean sense, reliant mostly on the celebration of private property and the contract rather than the more democratic potentials of the tradition associated with Montesquieu (Taylor 1990).<sup>12</sup>

Independent of Taylor, Andrew Arato's work in the early 1980s was among the most important to link civil society and critical theory in East European studies. His subsequent work with Jean Cohen (1992), *Civil Society and Political Theory*, is itself inspired by East European transformations. One of the most important subsequent empirical developments in this body of thought is an interpretation of the revolution of 1989 itself, and how this transformation broke with previous understandings of revolution (Arato 1994). Arato points out that those who have led the transformation of Eastern Europe have actively resisted the revolutionary tradition that gave birth to the system against which they have initiated their attempts of system change. The vision that emerges from this kind of anti-revolutionary revolutionary practice is a utopia of the *Rechtstaat*, of a state and society ruled by law.

With this, Arato enables us to see civil society as discourse. He demonstrates that its political focus contributed to the demobilization of civil society after the parliamentary elections in Hungary, and the loss of civil society's emancipatory potential. Indeed, the contradictory expectations of a non-revolutionary revolution lay the foundation for a kind of radical right reaction.

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<sup>12</sup>This distinction could in fact be used to characterize critical intellectuality in the 1980s and anticipate its withering away in the postcommunist one (Kennedy 1990).

Such a project resembles the marxist project in profound ways, for it is both a social analysis and a critical one, based on a sense of historical transformation and emancipatory commitment. It nonetheless suffers from two profound weaknesses: 1) its continued underdevelopment of the political economic foundations of democracy's possibility; and 2) its almost utopian view of subject formation. This first point is familiar in marxist critiques, while the latter is rather nicely developed in the so-called "Slovenian Lacanian School" (Laclau 1989).

Slavoj Zizek and Renata Salecl illustrate rather powerfully both how this "radical contemporary version of the Enlightenment" (Zizek 1989, p. 7) can both supplement and contradict marxist and civil society approaches. For instance, Zizek depends heavily on marxist conceptions of labor power for imagining the central blindspot, or "lack," in ideological notions of freedom (p. 22). But in direct contrast to most marxist assumptions, he departs from the notion that ideology is somehow apart from, and a distortion of, Reality. Instead for this school ideology constitutes Reality, but filling the lack with something that enables action. The Real of Desire is thus not apart from ideology, but in fact ideology constitutes it. By this principle, socialism and its embodiment in a concrete actor like the party can become itself a source of oppression as it assumes the role of the object of desire, whose mastery of history and society resolves all contradiction. In contrast, democracy, as an emancipatory alternative, treats the place of Power as necessarily empty (1989, p. 147); democracy is, in other words, immanent in the constant struggle to maintain a distance between ideology and its surmise (Salecl 1994a, p. 141).

While this approach shares with the civil society literature a commitment to radical democracy, it also is much more skeptical of what the Rechtstaat can accomplish, and of its underlying ideological motifs. In Salecl's analysis of the end to Yugoslavia (Salecl 1994b, Chapter 4), for instance, the significance of any oppositional movement depends on its linkage to other ideological elements. Civil society was a powerful opponent to self management ideology's subordination of the political to the social because it could exploit

admissions of the plurality of self-management interests. But once the possibility of free elections opened up, the significance and meaning of any oppositional movement came to be inscribed in their location in a differently politicized ideological space. The prospects of any movement were determined by their articulation with nationalist politics.

Salecl is careful in her analysis of the Yugoslav War not to indict the East as having an exclusive claim on the politics of intolerance (Salecl 1994b). On the one hand, appeals to the civilized character of Western civil societies deny the "metaracism" underlying their constitution; and on the other, it also distances the Yugoslav conflict into one of enduring tribal hatreds for which the West has no responsibility. This emphasis on ideology also allows us to begin to approach rape as an integral part of the war's character, destroying the fantasy structure and identity of the Bosnian nation and of its individual women. This kind of attack, Salecl argues, is designed to destroy one identity -- a multinational Yugoslav one -- to replace it with another -- a Bosnian Muslim fundamentalism -- which might then "justify" the originating assault.

While this form of critique might be associated with the marxist tradition, its claim to centrality in it, or connection with Burawoy's or Wright's marxisms, is weak at best, for here there is a refusal to elevate the "real" in any recognizably marxist form above ideology and desire. To introduce Zizek and Salecl here in a marxist East European studies is thus to recall those debates in the mid-1980s about Laclau and Mouffe's post-marxist challenge to marxism (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, Mouzelis 1990).

We would only propose here it may be even more important in the field of East European studies than elsewhere for a dialog to occur between approaches rooted in the reality of class and production, and ones that emphasize discourse, ideology and identity in constituting that reality. For in order to order to reaffirm and maintain itself as an integrated project without dismissing or ignoring Eastern Europe, marxism must adequately confront Eastern Europe's experience with, and rejection of, "really existing socialism." If we can elevate the discursive and the ideological to at least a potentially

constitutive moment in the making of historical transformations and class relations, then perhaps we can begin to analyze the cultural possibilities of socialism in the places where it was understood as experienced and real, not desired in its absence.

## CONCLUSIONS

Marxism's emphasis on the Real of class relations in capitalism has traditionally meant that socialism itself is bracketed as an eventual alternative, something inarticulated, though desired. Under communist rule, Eastern Europe might have been considered the fulfillment of that desire, but its conflicts and contradictions made Real Socialism into another alternative -- this time, of course, undesired by most western marxists. Thus, communism's collapse in Eastern Europe enables marxists to return socialism to its ontologically absent if epistemologically structuring position.

This strategy might reproduce marxism in a Western-centered community, especially if East European rejections of marxism are dismissed as false consciousness or the reflection of a particular and therefore limited politics. But with this treatment, not only is the particularism of Western marxism heightened, but the potential for an East European marxist revival is put at risk. After all, it is possible for East Europeans and non-marxist sociologists to recoup marxism's methodological and analytic insights, and to recreate its methodologies, while abandoning its normative and political commitments as hopelessly naive.

While the political economy and historical sociology of Eastern European transformations are clearly important to marxism, and while marxism can and does contribute to their explanation, the principal challenge for marxists in Eastern Europe lies elsewhere. For marxism to develop as a perspective, it must find a way to articulate socialism's transcendent project with the lifeworlds of Eastern Europe, a task which is, we suggest, grounded as much in discursive analyses of ideologies and identities as in the political economy of transformation. Thus, a trek through this somewhat methodologically

and epistemologically estranged terrain may in fact be the route to marxism's recovery of itself in Eastern Europe as an integrated project.

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