

EDITORIAL

You hold in your hands the first volume of the journal *Contradictions*. We aim to provide a medium for texts that critically engage our history and our current moment, and which do so with intellectual rigor, but which are able to address readers beyond the limits of the academy. We offer our pages to writers who, without sacrificing scholarly focus and precision, react to contemporary social problems and contribute to the development of emancipatory critical thought.

Contradictions will be published in Prague, and we devote a significant portion of the journal to intellectual traditions of our region, known as Central or East-Central Europe. This means bringing these traditions to bear on the present, and it means bringing them into conversation with international discussions of emancipatory social change. We aim to analyze and formulate theoretical tools for grasping the past and present in their contradictory social dynamism, as manifestations of a contradictory social reality. Hence our name – *Contradictions*.

Thanks to the specific historical experience of our region, dominated in the recent past by the regimes of the so-called Eastern Bloc and by the market capitalist regimes that followed them, Central and Eastern Europe provide a distinctive standpoint from which to undertake social critique. The specificity of this East-Central European perspective thus makes it worthwhile to communicate the thought of the region to an international public. We hope in this way to move beyond the simple dichotomy of East vs. West and, in doing so, to go beyond the limits of what is known as “post-communism,” not by ignoring the specificity of this region, but by placing it in global historical context. We are convinced that the problems facing the East and the West are, in the world of globalized capitalism, analogous and interconnected.

Contradictions will be published once a year as a single volume comprised of two issues, one in English and one in Czech and Slovak. The Czech and Slovak issue is intended to cultivate critical discussion within this specific linguistic milieu, and to introduce Czech and Slovak readers to internationally significant intellectual trends. The English issue enables us to communicate in a larger linguistic space, where we bring together local and international debates, and where we introduce English-language readers to previously untranslated, and in some cases relatively unknown, works written in Slovak and in Czech. We hope in the future to add translations from other Central and Eastern European languages, and to offer a point of convergence for critical discussions in and about the region.

Contradictions will publish, above all, 1) articles that delve into the often overlooked or forgotten history of radical left thought in our part of the world, and which assess this legacy's contemporary significance; 2) articles that describe and develop related and parallel traditions of thought originating in other regions, bringing these traditions into conversation with the traditions of East-Central Europe; 3) articles that analyze Soviet-type societies and their troubled relationship with historical and contemporary movements for social emancipation; and 4) articles that critically engage with the ideological assumptions and social conditions of "post-communism."

Two principal motivations underlie the founding of this journal. Both derive from the specific historical conditions under which East-Central European thought has developed.

Our *first* motivation is to address the ways in which critical thought in the region has been shaped and concealed by restricted access to the public sphere. Shifting regimes of censorship and publicity have, at various times, placed publication off limits to an array of traditions and authors, who were compelled to carefully walk the lines between what could and could not be publicly said, and who were sometimes forced to develop their thought entirely out of the public eye. Many of the most compelling ideas developed in the region remained largely unknown. Yet even after the change in regimes beginning in 1989, many of the ideas that had been kept from public went still unnoticed, while many of the ideas that had entered the public sphere before 1989 were discredited by their association with a now-discredited regime. The fact that the regimes of the Eastern Bloc declared themselves to be Marxist led to a general discrediting of Marxism as such and of leftism more generally. As a result, intellectual traditions of emancipatory social critique remained underdeveloped and marginalized after 1989. *Contradictions* returns to these half-forgotten traditions in order to bring them back into public view.

But *Contradictions* is not only a historical project aimed at presenting intellectual traditions of the past. It also aims to develop these traditions further, facing the contemporary problems and contradictions of neoliberalism, that is, of capitalist society in the specific form it took during the period when Communist Party-rule in East-Central Europe ended and a new, more market-oriented economic system came to predominate in the region and in most of the world. This is why – and this is the *second* motivation behind the journal's founding – we devote considerable space to emancipatory theories developed internationally, including Marxism in its multiple varieties. In this region known as "post-communist," where governments in the recent past called themselves Marxist and proclaimed the goal of human emancipation, there is relatively little knowledge of a range of emancipatory social theories that have been extensively developed in other parts of the world.

Our journal's goal, put simply, is to provide a medium through which it may become possible to develop the best traditions of radical emancipatory thought that have been suppressed and repressed in East-Central Europe, and, by critically developing these traditions, to contribute to the development of emancipatory thought on a global scale

– to bring the specific perspective of East-Central Europe into contemporary discussions of radical critical thought, to develop a dialogue between traditions, and to provide a platform for this dialogue.

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At present, most critical thought is channeled into one of two genres of writing: on the one hand, there is academic writing; on the other, there is journalism. The former gives us clearly and cautiously articulated claims, carefully selected evidence, highly formalized arguments, and long discussions of “existing literature.” The latter gives us brief, suggestive, punchy interventions into the discussions of our passing moment. The former leaves little room for creativity of style. But the latter gives little time for elaborating arguments, developing ideas, and moving from momentary commentary toward general insight.

Both genres have their merits. But there is one important kind of writing that fits neatly into neither genre: the theoretical, philosophical essay. We have in mind here the genre of writing that includes most classic works in the modern history of ideas, from Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Discourses* through Walter Benjamin’s “Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” to Karel Kosík’s *Dialectics of the Concrete*. This was once a genre of writing highly cultivated in Central Europe. Yet now, when we look around at existing publications, it strikes us that if a new Václav Havel were to write a contemporary “Power of the Powerless,” he would have almost as much trouble as his predecessor finding a journal to publish his work.

The pages of *Contradictions*, we hope, will help remedy this state of affairs, providing space for theoretical essays of high scholarly value that escape in one way or another the generic constraints of academia. We place these more freely written essays alongside more traditional scholarly articles, together with others that skirt the boundaries between these genres. We offer them all to a critical public both in and out of the academy. Our intellectual project aims both at the development of (largely academic) knowledge and at the informed critique of (largely extra-academic) society.

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The Czech and Slovak issue of *Contradictions* 2017 begins with a piece for discussion entitled “The Post-Communist Consensus and Historical Understanding,” by Petr Andreas, who argues that emotional and moral antipathy toward “communism” has inhibited many people’s ability to *understand* communist discourse, and, thus, to effectively analyze it and (we might add) to criticize it.

Adam Votruba then takes us from the examination of post-communist and “communist” discourse to an alternative conception of social emancipation. In his article “The Basis of Capitalism Is Interest,” he presents the thought of German-Argentine economist Silvio Gesell, whose work on debt and radical monetary reform – both issues of contemporary concern – remains largely unknown to Czech and Slovak readers.

Both of these main articles appear with abstracts in English.

We follow with a Czech translation of György Lukács's essay "What Is Orthodox Marxism?" The translation was first prepared by Lubomír Sochor in 1968–70, but it has remained unpublished until today.

This is followed by a 1993 interview with Karel Kosík by Raúl Fornet-Betancourt and Martin Traine entitled "A Free World Depends on Its Citizens," now translated from German to Czech.

Our series of book reviews includes an extended review essay by Juraj Halas on Michael Heinrich's introduction to the thought of Marx; Martin Vrba on a recent Czech translation of Alain Badiou's *Manifesto for Philosophy*; Martin Nový on Werner Bonefeld's *Critical Theory and the Critique of Political and Economy*; Miloš Caňko on *Texty v oběhu (Texts in Circulation)*, a collection of Czech translations of radical literary theory, edited by Richard Müller and Josef Šebek; and Stanislav Holubec on Czech sociologist Miroslav Petrušek's *Texty z pozostalosti (Posthumous Texts)*.

We conclude the Czech and Slovak issue with an article tracing the history of the term "ideology," especially as it appears in the work of prominent Marxists, written by Petr Kužel, Šimon Svěrák, Roman Rakowski, and Michael Hauser.

The English issue of *Contradictions* 2017 begins with a block of articles on the theme "Marxism after Marxism." Here Wolfgang Fritz Haug takes us through the contradictions and still-unrealized potential contained in the history of Marxism. Nick Nesbitt follows with an attempt to recuperate Marxism from its problematic history of (mis)interpretation. And Daniel Keil addresses a major contemporary school of thought, the so-called "New Materialisms" that have been proposed as an alternative, non-Marxist line of emancipatory critique. Keil points to problematic aspects of the New Materialisms and argues instead for a new interpretation of Marxism that responds to the New Materialisms' criticism.

Our second thematic block, "Hegelianism after Hegelianism," follows directly from the first. Djordje Popović and Eric-John Russell both call for a return to a kind of Hegelian Marxism, or Marxist-inflected Hegelianism, after the critique of Hegelian Marxism carried out by phenomenology and post-structuralism. Popović takes on Heideggerian phenomenology and Heidegger-inspired Marxism, calling for a return to Hegelian speculative thinking as a means for overcoming overly simplistic distinctions between materialism and idealism. Russell focuses especially on the limitations of Marxist interpretations of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* that have taken for their starting point the "Master-Slave Dialectic"; he calls instead for a reading of the *Phenomenology* inspired by György Lukács's concept of reification.

In one final article, Peter Steiner too draws on Lukács's concept of reification, finding in it a tool for understanding unexpected similarities in the thought of literary theorist Viktor Shklovsky and political theorist Carl Schmitt, whose subject matter, style, and political orientations were, at least on the surface of things, diametrically opposed. Both,

however, were given to privileging the singular over ordinary, familiar – in Lukács’s terms reified – reality.

We follow these original articles with two interviews, one with Hungarian philosopher G. M. Tamás, conducted by Lukáš Matoška, and one with radical leftist Czech dissident and former member of the Fourth International Petr Uhl, conducted by Petr Kužel.

Next we publish a translation of Karel Kosík’s 1958 article “Classes and the Real Structure of Society,” an important contribution to the theory of class and of materialism, which has never before appeared in English.

We conclude with two reviews: Joseph Grim Feinberg’s essay on Alexandros Kioupiolis and Giorgos Katsambekis’s volume *Radical Democracy and Collective Movements Today*, and Mark Bergfeld’s critical look at Ilja Trojanow’s novel *Macht und Widerstand*.