Thirdly, if it set out to find 'why our environmental politics isn't working', *Climate Radicals* instead answers Matthew T. Huber's question in *Climate Change as Class War* (2022). Huber asked 'what agent of change could actually deliver the transformations we agree are necessary to address climate change?' If Huber provides an answer in the positive, Abadi provides one in the negative: certainly not the professional-managerial class! In a recent episode of Abadi's podcast, Adam Tooze suggested that the working class materially experiences professional-managerial class domination as more directly oppressive than capitalist exploitation. Whatever the truth of this, it echoes Catherine Liu's argument from *Virtue Hoarders: the Case Against the Professional Managerial Class* (2021). Like Liu, Tooze argues that working class hatred of the PMC has solidified into reactionary anti-authoritarianism, which pro-fossil fuel figures like Trump can exploit. In terms of its proclivity for histrionics, Liu posits that

> the PMC reworks political struggles for policy change and redistribution into individual passion plays … if its politics amount to little more than virtue signalling, it loves nothing more than moral panics to incite its members to ever more pointless forms of pseudo-politics and hypervigilance.

Abadi's *Climate Radicals* certainly fits with Liu's grim assessment, with its focus on the cringeworthy and fruitless antics of a layer of bored-but-stressed elites.

Finally, and connected with the previous point, Abadi's method poses something of a false dilemma. Is our choice really between the children of the German bourgeoisie with their pitiable theatrics or American capitalists demanding all carrots and no sticks? Consider for a moment the campaigns to stop the flow of capital into the Keystone XL pipeline or Australia's East-West Link toll road project. In 2014-15 both movements mobilised thousands of ordinary people in direct confrontation with big polluters; roped in blue collar transit unions to their cause by dovetailing 'bread and butter' issues like well-paid jobs for members with social demands like a tolerable living environment; forced ruling political parties into calculated backdowns; and re-routed tens of billions of investment dollars to socially necessary projects. Are victories like these permanent? Not at all – they're immensely fragile. But if we acknowledge their existence, a tougher agent of change rears its head. And when it does, Abadi's political quietism starts to look increasingly lacklustre.

Chris Dite

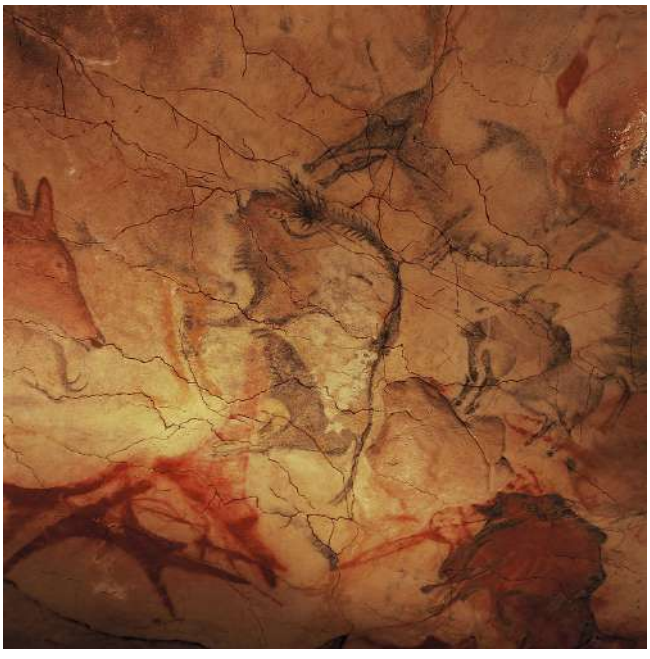
Proletarian tectonics

Maria Chehonadskih, *Alexander Bogdanov and the Politics of Knowledge after the October Revolution* (Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2023). 289pp., £94.99 hb., 978 3 03140 238 8

Revolutions, like earthquakes or volcanoes, can act like dramatic forces that reshape life on a planetary scale. A year after the 1917 October Revolution, Bolshevik philosopher Alexander Bogdanov attended the first conference of *Proletkult* (Proletarian Cultural-Enlightenment Organisations), distributing reproductions of the prehistoric wall paintings in the Altamira Cave — images of steppe bisons, boars and human hands. He insisted that understanding the life experiences of Palaeolithic hunters connected Soviet workers to the past: 'Comrades, we have to understand: we do not only live in a collective of the present, we live in cooperation between generations'. In his writings, Bogdanov marvelled at mediaeval weaponry displayed in a museum: 'On seeing the coats of armor, shields, simple and two-handed swords, a modern man cannot help but be amazed at the long-gone heroic race'. Would a worker in a Leningrad factory be able to wear such a harness? For Bogdanov, communism is not only a task of the present but a collective labour of life uniting comrades across time.

In *Alexander Bogdanov and the Politics of Knowledge after the October Revolution*, Maria Chehonadskih brilliantly reveals how the October Revolution marked a tectonic shift reconfiguring political, social, epistemic,

aesthetic and ecological plates. Revolutionary politics strove to create a new post-humanist environment – a communist earth. Against the longstanding dismissal of Soviet theory as crude, reductive and totalitarian, Chehonadskih's archeology of knowledge reframes the post-revolutionary era as a laboratory for experimenting with new modes of thinking and living collectively. Only now, perhaps, does the full picture – a kind of Soviet cave painting – begin to emerge from the shadows of the past century. In what has already become a seminal introduction to Soviet philosophy, Chehonadskih's book brings lesser-known theories, such as Bogdanov's *tektology* and *empiriomonism*, into contemporary debates about economic planning, systems theory, nonhuman agency and artificial intelligence. She reinterprets the October Revolution as a shift from a human-centred worldview to an 'exposition of processes from different angles, positions, and sides', emphasising more-than-human ways of seeing and thinking.



Inspired by Bogdanov's fascination with the Altamira Cave, her account suggests that revolution was not merely a break with the past, driven by future-directed teleology, but a *metabolic process* of gradually reorganising material structures and patterns of thought. She uses geological metaphors to describe knowledge as skeletal fossils and 'residual sedimentations of the products of exchange between matter and energy'. By excavating and rewiring these energetic exchanges, she reveals an ecosystem of material interrelations between humans and the environment at the heart of the Soviet project. Her meticulous excavation of early Soviet ecology has great urgency amidst today's climate change and fossil-fuelled capitalism. Bogdanov's vision of socialist planning as an intelligent system of equitable distribution is not just an archeological relic; it remains very much alive in current ecosocialist discourse.

Chehonadskih avoids the typical trope in Soviet historiography of contrasting creative thinkers like Bogdanov against a dull backdrop. Rather than treating Soviet theory 'as a lake out of whose dark and muddy waters a researcher may or may not get a very good fish', her book stirs the waters, plunging into the depth of post-revolutionary thought as it emerged from the recursive interplay of avant-garde culture, environmentalism, politics and scientific experimentation. Instead of focusing on exceptional individuals deviating from totalitarian state discourse, she reconstructs an entire ecosystem of Soviet thought. Her approach aligns with post-revolutionary efforts to transform 'the environment as a whole, not a human as a particular unit within it'. The political focus of Soviet theorists of the 1920s, she argues, was to establish a universal proletarian science operating on all scales, from the microscopic to the planetary.

Her book seeks to 'reactivate the epistemological line in the Soviet tradition' buried beneath layers of history, fragments of which have only 'been excavated in order to support particular statements, trends or ideological propositions'. She argues that the ship of post-revolutionary theory, unknown to its builders, can only be reassembled 'retrospectively because it did not exist as a ready-made construction during the first decades of the Soviet experiment'. In doing so, she gathers a lost canon, including thinkers like Andrei Platonov, Nikifor Vilonov, Varvara Stepanova, Anatoly Lunacharsky and Sergei Tretiakov. Opening with a reexamination of Bogdanov, the book situates his philosophy within an intertwined history of Marxism and empiricism ('Empirio-Marxism') in the aftermath of the October Revolution. The introductory section breaks new ground by challenging the reduction of Soviet theory to dialectical materialism repositions Bogdanov's theory of organisation as an environmental paradigm, and dispels persisting myths linking Bogdanov and Platonov to Russian religious mysticism and cosmism. It lucidly traces how different conceptions of ma-

terialism became politically and ideologically explosive after the October Revolution.

Empiricist discourse, especially Bogdanov's empiriomonism, was one creative philosophical project that fell through the cracks of history. Before Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1909) became authoritative in the 1920s, Empirio-Marxism, a fusion of Russian Machism and Marxism, dominated Soviet philosophy. Bogdanov's empiriomonism infused Marx's materialism with an empiricist theory of knowledge, gleaning concepts like 'energy' from modern physics to create a philosophical environmentalism that inspired the artistic avant-garde. Chehonadskih examines how Bogdanov's empiricist philosophy became enemy number one of Marxism-Leninism. His socialist science of organisation, *tektology*, is presented as an epistemological framework that spans political economy, the human body, labour and the environment. Chehonadskih distinguishes tektology from dialectical materialism (*Diamat*), arguing that while Diamat dissolves contradictions in a 'magic of dialectics', tektology explores the relational structures of self-organising systems, offering a distinct conception of system:

> Systems not only progress, they also regress and decay. This decay is not seen as a contradiction which is to be overcome and sublated. It can coexist with progress and stagnation. Dialectical materialism is lineal and flat. It has no topology or volume. It treats the environment as a container of inner drives that follow a predictable pattern of transformation. Tektology considers what articulates parts and wholes and how they interact and mutually act on each other.

Orthodox Diamat sees the individual as shaped by its environment, reacting to external stimuli (e.g., Pavlov's reflexology experiments with dogs). In contrast, Bogdanov views individual and environment as a complex network of recursive processes: 'there are no absolute breaks in the web of life'. Chehonadskih argues that Bogdanov should be recognised as an epistemic precursor to cybernetics and ecology. Rejecting linear, teleological progress, Bogdanov focuses on varying intensities and degradations. Tektology offers an organisational systems theory that transcends mind-body dualism, placing life within a monistic framework. Rich with environmental metaphors like 'dynamic equilibrium, biophysical cooperation, mutualism, and even distribution', tektology was fatally 'tested' in Bogdanov's blood transfusion experiments which cost him his life in 1928.

For Chehonadskih, empiriomonism 'reflects what can be seen and from which angle and how these angles coordinate and resonate in the environmental mapping of processes'. This ties into a vision of planetary communism where socialist principles function at the level of ecosystems. Chehonadskih links Bogdanov's ideas to a specifically *Soviet Anthropocene* which aimed at a proletarian ecology. After the Revolution, socialist society 'has been placed in a wider environment where biophysical and geological entities co-evolve and form symbiotic structures with the human world'. Bogdanov's post-humanist empiriomonism stemmed from 'the discovery that every organism resembles a system … which in itself is an environment for something else' – what Chehonadskih calls an 'ontological environmentalism' entwining matter and mind. In Bogdanov's tektological grid, everything is an active part of a larger network.

In a letter to Bogdanov, Nikifor Vilonov, co-founder of the Capri Party School, argued that a true 'philosophy for the proletariat must connect with the new streams of energy spilled on forests, rivers and fields in the form of woodcutters, carpenters, peasants, etc.'. Chehonadskih highlights Machian environmentalism as a key influence on proletarian ecology, rooted in the factory and railway. Chapter 2, 'Strategic Unity of Marxism and Empiricism', examines Bogdanov's organicist systems theory, where bodies, organisms and the environment mutually shape each other. Empiriomonism transforms nature into a construction site, offering a framework for understanding 'how things organise the human world and how the human world organises things'. Matter is structured into 'series, complexes, and systems', where perspectivism becomes central: 'everything relates, and everything is relative'. Parts of the whole reflect one another, such as 'an affect in consciousness … or an organ in an organism'. All elements together form the environment as a totality of reflexive processes, 'a chaos of elements in the precise meaning of that word.' It is the medium of 'life forms in motion' organised in series like the 'visual, tactile, and acoustic series', connected by *parallelism*. For instance, the series of labour organises the worker's hands, tools, materials and environment into a processual whole. Certain nodal points densely connect complexes, such as 'the human "I"', a lived experience linked to another 'I', forming points of intensity.

Chehonadskih aligns Bogdanov's process ontology with Lev Vygotsky's psychology, with both challenging Lenin's theory of reflection. For Bogdanov, reflection (*otrazhenie*) is 'the chain of feedbacks and interchanges in the structure of experience and life', shaped by the processes of both reflecting and being reflected – everything reflects. Vygotsky's cultural-historical activity theory suggests that thinking reflects bodily affects through the interactivity between body, mind and environment. Vygotsky's enactive view on thinking is revisited in more detail in a new selection of his works edited by Myra Barrs and John Richmond. A clinician at the Moscow Experimental-Defectological Institute, Vygotsky argued that thinking emerges not from the brain alone but through collective social activity. Criticising Pavlov and Bekhterev's reflexology, which reduced subjectivity to conditioned responses, Vygotsky proposed a system of interactions between subjects and their environment. Grounded in Marx's philosophy of *Tätigkeit*, Vygotsky's theory of mediating activity emphasises the dynamic relationship between humans, tools and their social and natural milieu. In *The Heart of the Matter: Ilyenkov, Vygotsky and the Courage of Thought* (2023), David Bakhurst brilliantly reconstructs how Soviet activity theorists such as Evald Ilyenkov viewed transforming nature as 'a semiotic act: by acting on the world, human beings endow their natural environment with meaning'.

Bakhurst suggests that Soviet ecology can be captured in Vygotsky's concept of activity, which transforms an 'inanimate lump of matter' into 'a tool'. In the tool, matter becomes cultural and social – an extended organ of human thinking. As Bakhurst states, 'we have to look beyond the human head'. Activity, inherently anti-Cartesian, gives meaning to the environment. Thinking is collective interactivity: 'through her life-activity the individual puts her very life into the world.' It not the environment that 'produces' the person, but the collective shaping the world through overlapping mediation processes, 'like a peculiar stamp impressed on the substance of nature by social human life-activity'. While Chehonadskih emphasises material structures, Bakhurst highlights the importance of activity (*deiatel'nost'*) in rethinking Soviet ecologies. Activity as a productive ecological episteme is also central to Alex Levant, Kyoko Murakami and Miriam McSweeney's *Activity Theory: An Introduction* (2024). Read alongside Chehonadskih, the volume highlights the role of activity, or forms-in-motion, in socialist life-building.

While Chehonadskih, drawing on Bogdanov, views infrastructures and skeletal forms as the 'embryo of a new collectivised life', activity theory offers a dynamic ecological framework where cognition and agency are inseparable from collective activity rooted in a shared life-world. For Ilyenkov, matter itself is active – matter thinks and thinking matters. This opens new ways of thinking about the environment in non-individualised terms, including through materials and tools. As Bakhurst and Levant et al. convincingly demonstrate, Soviet materialism can enrich posthumanist ecologies by emphasising labour and the material interactivity of human and more-than-human beings. An activity framework might also shift perspectives on Bogdanov, who views the environment as 'a battlefield of collective labour, in which human activity is opposed to the elemental resistance of nature', as Chehonadskih puts it. In his socialist process ontology, nature is not inert matter but self-organising activity.

Chehonadskih masterfully navigates the ambiguity of Bogdanov's proletarian ecology: Empiriomonism envisions a dynamic ecosystem shaped by human activity, yet also ties labour to the exploitation of nature, a theme explored further in his science fiction. In *Red Star* (1908), ecological disaster on Mars and resource exhaustion depict industrialisation extending into space colonisation, driven by coal, oil and a 'grandiose, "systematic" conversion of energy', where natural forces are transformed by 'the forces of the labouring collective'. Machinery, organisms and labour form an energetic metabolism. Chehonadskih reinterprets Bogdanov's notion of *stikhiinost'*, usually translated as 'spontaneity' in Lenin's political theory, as a force ranging from lack of control to nature's negative power. *Stikhiinost'* represents 'a lesser or minimal organisation, the chaos of elements that the environment itself embodies', opposing the creative force of life that enables reorganisation and change.

For Bogdanov, communism is the collective 'development of the plasticity of life' through the organisation of activity via 'labour technic'. His empiriomonism is a proletarian 'ontology of the environment', where living beings adapt to their environment through labour, with all life forms, cells to humans, sensing, reflecting and self-organising. In Bogdanov's energetic metabol-

ism of nature, the human 'I' holds no special status, being simply a higher degree of organisation. His monism views nature as 'an infinite series of complexes … "being reflected" in one another', with the environment as a medium of self-organising activity. In *The Dialectics of Ecology* (2024), John Bellamy Foster has critiqued the 'flat ontology' of posthumanist ecology, which ascribes agency to 'everything from microbes to clouds'. He argues it leaves no space for political action, reducing the world to 'infinite webs of vital assemblages … circulating nomadically on the same ontological plane without essential order or meaning'. Indeed, Bogdanov's tektology, a posthumanist ontological environmentalism, 'does not consider it absurd to connect the cobblestone, the dream and the telegraph signal together' (Chehonadskih), but does this imply a flat ontology? If everything exists in series, what organises those series into an ecosystem?

The third chapter, 'The Science of Organisation', explores how Bogdanov's tektology offers 'a cybernetic understanding of the organism-machine relationship, guiding a Marxist explanation of how living and artificial systems converge and arrange themselves into a mode of production'. Refuting Foster's claim, Bogdanov's system science rejects placing all living things on the same ontological plane. Emphasising the relationality of series, it favours process over dialectics. Unlike Engels's *Dialectics of Nature*, which sees a grain of wheat negating itself in a plant, tektology examines relational processes, such as the 'contact of grain with the activities of soil, … the interaction between living and inorganic activities'. Further, it recognises distinct forms of 'organisedness' – crystals, machines and plants – within an ecosystem. Bogdanov's material collectivism breaks down physiological boundaries, enabling biophysical cooperation between humans, animals and plants to counter the destructive elementality of nature. Chehonadskih cites Soviet biologist Boris Kozo-Polyansky, who reinvented cell theory, emphasising 'the synthesis of organisms into symbiotic systems' as the motor of evolution. Kozo-Polyansky's *Symbiogenesis. A New Principle of Evolution* (1924) gives a vivid image: 'a palm tree peacefully growing by a brook, and a lion, hidden in the bushes … ready to pounce on an antelope'. What makes the palm tree peaceful and the lion violent? Foreshadowing recent research into symbiosis and mututalism, Kozo-Polyansky explains:

> A palm tree is peaceful and passive exactly because it is a symbiotic system; because it contains an entire crowd of tiny green toilers, the chloroplasts. They work and feed it. And a lion feeds itself. But let us imagine that a chloroplast is placed in every one of a lion's cells, and I do not doubt that this lion will then calmly lie next to the palm, and the only other thing it might need would be a little water with mineral salts in it.

As Chehonadskih notes, 'Bogdanov dreams of turning lions into palm trees, … of placing a chloroplast in every lion's cells'. By becoming a plant, the lion evolves into a peaceful comrade of the antelope. This reflects Bogdanov's view of ecosystems as dynamic equilibriums (*podvizhnoe ravnovesie*), where 'material and energy exchange between complexes and their environment' constantly renews itself like a waterfall. Organisms and their milieu engage in recursive interactions, each acting as both mould and material. Bogdanov's blood transfusion experiments aimed to transfer vitality, immunity and physical traits between organisms, ultimately leading to his death from tuberculosis after a contaminated transfusion. Rather than dismissing Bogdanov's pseudoscientific blood experiments, Chehonadskih reinterprets them as promoting 'biophysical cooperation' in line with modern co-evolution theories, which focus on reciprocal interactions and mutualism. Bogdanov's ontological environmentalism stemmed from a neglected tradition of dialectical biology: His Lamarckian views on heredity were part of debates on genetics in the 1920s which paved the way for Lysenko's anti-Mendelian doctrine. Bogdanov, however, was far from being a proto-Lysenkoist. Chehonadskih aligns tektology instead with contemporary ideas of symbiosis, highlighting the reciprocal influence between human evolution and the environment.

Chehonadskih defines Bogdanov's biopolitics as 'technics for the communist use of the body'. The chapter 'Proletarian Monism' examines Soviet life-building (*zhiznestroenie*) as evolving from a metaphor of manual labour to 'an epistemic figure' linking 'revolutionary reconstruction, workerism, and biopolitical constructivism'. Life-building, an inherently ecological concept, 'reached down into the deeper skeletal layers of transport, production, distribution and city planning'. She contrasts Bogdanov's 'world-building activity' with Taylorist labour control and critiques Aleksei Gastev's biomechanical system as fanatically deterministic and reductionist. Like tektology, proletarian art organises ma-

terials into series, collectively shaping the new communist environment: 'The art of walking and talking, of arranging things and the social environment, becomes a common social practice'. The recreation of life, embodied in the Soviet new person, involves mastering biomaterials like breathing, circulation, digestion and reproduction. As Trotsky noted in *Literature and Revolution*, even 'purely physiologic life will become subject to collective experiments'.

The proletarian body, joined with technology and machines, reshapes both itself and its environment, a view central to Proletkult, the radical culture organisation founded by Bogdanov. Proletkult aimed to create socialist collectives free from exploitation, competition and class struggle, envisioning a 'cooperative comradeship of people' where mutual relations and life organisation were consciously created. Proletarian art, like tektology, sought to promote collectivism through labouring bodies, integrating art into everyday life. In 1918, Proletkult's press organ, *Gorn* (Furnace), declared that 'the proletariat will carry art into the streets', taking art from museums to factories. Theorists like Boris Arvatov criticised bourgeois art as 'soilless', advocating for art rooted in proletarian monism. Chehonadskih shows how this environmentalist vision influenced knowledge production, such as the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, which aimed to create a new science from the point of view of the working class.

Soviet life-building was a revolutionary remaking of the environment. Material structures embodied this process, with Sergei Tretiakov calling for art to engage with 'the life of the material itself'. Close to Bogdanov's tektology, socialist art emphasised tectonics, which Aleksei Gan described as 'eruptions emanating from the core of the earth'. Both envisioned communism as a force inscribed into the planet's history. Tectonics, like drifting plates or volcanic eruptions, operates with the 'plasticity of form'. Unlike French structuralism, Gan's notion of structure is material, organic and plastic, echoing Bogdanov's view of organisation as life's organic skeleton. Chehonadskih envisions proletarian culture as a 'socio-environmental network' in which things (*veshch*) become comrades, free from alienated labour. Proletarian literature shifts from the traditional novel to a 'conveyor belt' where 'forests, bread, coal, iron and the factory' become main characters, embodying class relations and collective life. Sergei Tretiakov called for children to write biographies of the objects in their pockets, embracing monism where multiple perspectives are used to dissolve fragmentation. Monist strategies are also employed in works by Eisenstein, Rodchenko and Platonov, with a shared interest in unusual angles, multiple viewpoints and overlapping perspectives. The view of the labouring body is anti-Ptolemaic – the individual worker is not a sun, but a common planet in a communist cosmos.

In the recently translated *Mimesis: The Literature of the Soviet Avant-Garde*, Valery Podoroga shows how Rodchenko's angle-technique creates a 'fleshless eye' that sees beyond human perspective, echoing Vertov's 'kino-eye' concept. Podoroga's notion of the 'techno-environment' blurs human-machine boundaries, presenting humans as part of a socialist world shared with factories and locomotives. His ecology of technology highlights 'our own artificiality as living beings', contributing to current debates on AI. Chehonadskih, drawing on Podoroga, argues that Vertov's mechanical eye moves through the 'molecular movements of time, space and matter', navigating the cracks of socialist construction. This multiplicity of perspective eventually solidified into Stalin's absolute gaze. Closely analysing Rodchenko's photo series on the White Sea-Baltic Canal construction by Gulag prisoners, she unveils how avant-garde life-building gave way to Stalinism. While Podoroga identifies subversive potential in 'negative mimesis' (imitating oppressive language), Chehonadskih states that the communist gaze ultimately abolished itself under Stalinist surveillance.

The sixth chapter, 'The Encyclopedia of Poor Life in Platonov's Proletarian Literature', offers a brilliant reading of Platonov's work through the lens of Bogdanov's tektology and posthumanist ecology. In Platonov's proletarian cosmos, humans, plants, machines, and even a 'working-class bear' and 'class-conscious horse' collaborate. *The Foundation Pit* features a 'bear-blacksmith' who works long shifts and despises kulaks. What matters, Chehonadskih notes, is not whether the bear is human or animal but 'what the bear does in the smithy'. Platonov's barren landscapes are raw material for a more-than-human 'labour of life' where 'poor life' emerges from 'earth, dirt and seeds'. Chehonadskih contrasts Bogdanov's focus on the 'built environment of industrial society' with Platonov's broader, posthumanist vision of planetary socialism. Platonov extends 'comradeship to

animals, plants and the earth', seeing the environment as 'a collective body'. For Platonov, literature must 'bear the trace of life and labour', capturing revolutionary realities as they unfold: 'A hungry peasant, the disappeared proletariat or a death after an unsuccessful blood transfusion are slips in the discourse and traces of concrete life'.

Podoroga, on the other hand, reads Platonov's novels as a battle between nature and machine, with interconnected elements hardwired in a textual machine. In *Chevengur*, the revolutionary machine is a system of working parts: 'Rosa Luxemburg's "grave" – Revolution – Horse (named 'Natural Force') – Rider (cavalryman Kopenkin) – Steppe'. A machine is 'society's material unconscious' where the human form evolves into a machinic being. In this posthumanist take on revolution, the machine not only reworks the human but also blurs the boundary between nature and technology, positioning itself as part of the ecosystem. Platonov's cosmos is a desolate space, filled with 'abandoned villages, dry riverbeds, black wounds of ravines'. His universe teems with revolutionary machines: organic, poor, desiring, reproductive, panoptic, human, locomotive … In this world, humans are 'machine-beasts', taming technology by turning machines into natural beings. The machinisation of nature creates a 'human-less' new nature. The empty steppe becomes the stage for a 'grandiose machinic reorganisation of nature' through a 'cosmic *Megamachine*, a collective Body for each and for all', ultimately erasing the 'evil of bourgeois individuation'.

This final metabolism marks the disappearance of the human, where dust and new nature prevail. Humanity will 'stop the movement of the planets, change the trajectory of comets, transform the environment, the conditions of labour' and its own nature. As Podoroga asks, 'what is Revolution, if not the process of creating a new reality with a fantastic megamachine?' Platonov's machines recover energy lost in the struggle with nature, with literature acting as an 'electromagnetic resonator' that converts sunlight into energy. He believed 'the greatest energy lies at the heart of matter'. For Platonov, 'machines are our poetry and the work of machines is the beginning of proletarian poetry, which is itself an uprising of humanity against the universe'. Podoroga sees revolution as an optic rupture, a 'catastrophe of perception', with communism as 'a new form of universal organisation of matter'. Platonov's planetary vision, in Podoroga's eyes, is encapsulated in his story 'The Descendants of the Sun' (1920s), where the lone watchman of a deserted earth witnesses the arrival of ancient time as glaciers move south and birch trees grow toward South Asia.

Podoroga suggests that 'Platonov's characters cannot live as individual bodies, but only as part of complex conglomerations, colonies, masses, where a particular

body breathes the breath of other bodies and gets energy for life or loses it thanks to a multitude of other bodies'. Chehonadskih sharpy criticises his interpretation for dissolving perspectivism into some sort of 'Deleuzian immanent materialism'. Rather than simply observing 'the chronicles of revolutionary events in an objective manner', Platonov 'actually organises a proletarian point of view on the social totality'. For Platonov, she insists, people are never merely a colony or multitude: 'Platonov zooms in to the conglomerates and observes a subject and a singularity in it … in Platonov's novels, oppressed others have found … an idea of philosophical thinking that could only have arisen in the revolutionary period'. The poor make themselves, she claims, against their environment. Platonov's ecology for the proletariat, she argues, can only be fully understood through the lens of Bogdanovian perspectivism:

> The proletarian point of view becomes visible as soon as we consider the embodiment of labour in the exploitation of humans, animals and nature, as soon as we find the traces it leaves on bodies and minds. The proletarian point of view in Platonov coexists with a bourgeois and normative perspective, so much so that the same subject in his text can be considered from different observing points.

She argues that while tektology is subjectless, focusing solely on 'the systems of equilibrium and degrees of organisedness', Bogdanov's politics remain 'subject-oriented'. The proletarian ecology he developed after the Revolution strove for 'a new form of comradely relation' aligning 'with the definition of a social system as a complex unity of things and people'. Rather than dissolving the individual into a faceless collective, Chehonadskih sees Platonov, too, as a philosopher of proletarian subjectivation: 'the process of "becoming a subject" is difficult and confusing, and it is also not clear what it means to think in the way that the subject has to think'. Chehonadskih's brilliant book unravels a forgotten epistemic thread emerging from the material collectivism of the 1920s, one that favours mutualism, perspectivism and comradely cooperation over self-interest and individuality.

Her book is a remarkable contribution not only to the study of early Soviet philosophy but also to ecological theory. It might offer a blueprint for both political action in response to our planetary climate crisis and new ways of thinking and organising knowledge. In the Soviet counter-canon she excavates, thinking is conceptualised as collective and material world-building rather than individual consciousness. This approach reflects a uniquely ecological understanding of cognition, where thinking entwines with activity, and the body with the environment. Feelings and ideas are no longer abstract but somatised within the body, located in the head, throat, stomach, chest and the sexual organs: 'Everyone has an entire imperialism encamped down below', as Platonov aptly put it. From the perspective of feeling, thinking, acting, labouring collectives, political philosophy shifts from analysing hegemony to developing new capacities for sharing and strengthening the weak. An ecology for the proletariat demands an equitable distribution of resources among all the poor in the environment – humans, plants, machines and working-class bears. With Bogdanov in mind, admiring heavy mediaeval armour in a museum, the time to bear the weight of the past may have finally come.

Isabel Jacobs

Knowledge without knowing

Alenka Zupančič, *Disavowal* (Cambridge/Hoboken: Polity Press, 2024). 162pp. £35.oo hb., £9.99 pb., 978 1 50956 119 3 hb., 978 1 50956 120 9 pb.

In 1962, J.G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* gave us an account of the counterproductive tendency of knowledge. When the novel's protagonists are faced with the reality of the climate disaster – that the drowned, scorched Europe will continue to become even more inhospitable – their admission of this destruction paradoxically *inhibits* any effective reaction. As both Kerans and his team become increasingly confronted with their slim chances