Gustav Shpet is well known for his strong opinions. He relentlessly searches for objective truth—and truth is only acceptable to him if it represents life (Shpet, *Istoriia kak problema* 53). Mere formalistic thinking is highly suspicious to him (Eismann 219). For all his inclination towards rigorous scientific categorization Shpet always ties theory to practice. Even pure logic is in his view not without subject: the laws of logic are applicable to logical thinking itself. His philosophy is never autotelic; he unremittingly strives to explain the objective phenomena of the world. In his *Outline of the Development of Russian Philosophy* Shpet justifies his own methodological approach and insists on the objective quality of his research: "If I only made observations, reacted impulsively in an act of self-protection on the visible and transferred my 'state of mind' into the book, I would succumb to a subjective moment. But if I step aside and try to look from a distance at the historical surrounding as an objective reality . . . I proceed methodologically correctly" ("Ocherk" 220).

Shpet followed Husserl in his ambition for strict scientific objectivity and fought against psychologism and subjectivism. After his "phenomenological turn" (Haardt, *Husserl* 83), Shpet grew increasingly sceptical towards Kant and especially the Neo-Kantians. The introduction to the second part of *History as a Problem of Logic* begins with a diatribe against Kant's reduction of philosophy to a critique of the human apparatus of cognition. Shpet criticizes Kant's simplistic assumption that all experience is empirical (*Istoriia kak problema* 558-61). He finds rather harsh words for Kant, calling him a "sophist" (550) whose "doctrine is based on falsity" (557). Kant is reproached for his formalistic understanding of philosophy which does not consider "real life." Already in the first part of *History as a Problem of Logic* Shpet had turned down Kant, pointing out his blindness towards the possibility of a philosophy of history. Since all reality for Kant is exclusively empirical, Shpet argues, Kantian philosophy is not able to deal with the given reality, but only with possibilities. The same holds true for the problem of history: Kantian philosophy describes merely the "conditions of the possibility" of interpreting the historical process, but not the process itself (*Istoriia kak problema* 421).
I argue in this paper that Shpet draws in his own philosophy of history on other thinkers (mainly Hegel), with whom he shares a tacit unanimity throughout *History as a Problem of Logic*. However, Shpet's take on the philosophy of history should not be hastily identified with orthodox Hegelianism. Shpet adds significant corrections to Hegel's views on history—he integrates August Cieszkowski's "philosophy of the deed," Herzen's preoccupation with the social dimension of history and Husserl's understanding of history as an objective reality. Finally, Shpet insists, independently of all these thinkers, on a hermeneutic approach to history, which could lend justification to seeing him as an early predecessor of Hayden White (see also Steiner, "Shpet's Philosophy") or Hans-Georg Gadamer (Schmid 269).

Hegel

In Shpet's *opus magnum* on the philosophy of history, one thinker is significantly absent: Hegel. On more than 1000 pages of his book, Shpet dwells at length on Hume, Bacon, Bolingbroke, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, Turgot, d'Alembert, Wolff, Kant, Bernheim, Chladenius, Iselin, Adelung, Schelling, Mill, Wundt, Sigwart, Dilthey, and Rickert. The few approving remarks which Shpet makes about Hegel in the course of his argumentation prove that Shpet omits Hegel neither by negligence nor because he disagreed with him. Why then, we should ask, does Shpet give Hegel a wide berth?

Shpet's taciturnity towards Hegel has to be seen in the context of his own philosophical project and its methodological premises. Shpet wants to establish the philosophy of history as a "rigorous science." Although he embraced Hegel's philosophy of history, he could not find in Hegel the strong ally he needed in his struggle against subjectivism and psychologism. In a short essay written probably around 1914-1916, Shpet formulates his ambivalent stance toward Hegel. He follows Hegel's critique of Kant's "confused" epistemology as formulated in paragraph 10 of Hegel's *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*: "The attempt to perceive before any perception is as absurd as the wise intention of a scholastic to learn to swim before he even goes into the water". But then, while praising Hegel for his good intentions, Shpet goes on to accuse him of not taking his criticism of Kant to its logical end:

Hegel did not listen to Kant and threw himself into the water; but still he was deceived by Kant, because he firmly believed that he will find in the plains of Prussia—after having returned to himself—the treasure of truth. He was at the threshold of the kingdom of ideas; the revelation reached him that he wasn't the legislator, and all that was real became for him penetrated with reason, he saw that the rational (razumnoe) was not a spectre and not an "als ob," but was actually real; yet its reality garbed in flesh bowed to Kant's enthusiasm for the familiar (rodnogo) article of faith (deviza): "Submit!" . . . Hegel threw himself into the water but when he got out he found only himself—the absolute idealism remained a subject-centered philosophy. ("Rabota" 223)
The same reproach is repeated in the draft of a review of I.A. Il'in's 1918 book on Hegel. Hegel appears as a serious philosopher who overcame Kant's fixation on epistemology but who limited himself to a "subjective logic" (Shpet, "Opyt" 287). The only aspect in Hegel's philosophy that Shpet exempts from this critique is Hegel's philosophy of history. Here—according to Shpet—Hegel really jumped into the water and managed not to give in to the temptations of subjectivism. Shpet demanded from history a minimum of rationality, otherwise it would be impossible for the philosophical mind to interpret history at all. Hegel's conceptualization of history could of course supply this much needed rationality.

Hegel advocates a historical optimism—the first part of his lectures on the philosophy of history bears the programmatic title "The Reason in History." For Hegel, history is nothing but the unfolding of spirit in time, and its ultimate goal is freedom. In his view, theory necessarily entails practice. If freedom is known theoretically, then it will also be realized in practice: "The Orientals do not know that the spirit or man as such is free. Because they do not know [this], they are not [free]. They only know that one is free . . . But this one is only a despot, not a man . . . The Greeks and Romans knew that some are free . . . But only the Germanic nations became within Christianity aware that Man as Man is free, that Freedom of the spirit constitutes his innermost nature" (62). In Hegel's conception there are even hints at a possible "end of history"—in European Christianity spirit has come to full consciousness of itself and thus history is completed, and it would be senseless for it to continue its course. A similar, albeit more reserved, strain of optimism can be perceived in Shpet's postrevolutionary works. In the introduction to his Outline of the Development of Russian Philosophy, there is a distinct sense of a historical progress—Shpet explicitly mentions that maybe he would not have written this work without the revolution. Shpet was by no means a Bolshevik, but it is quite possible that he misinterpreted the Russian revolution in Hegelian terms as a decisive stage in the general movement of history towards freedom: "As the revolution itself is an antithesis, an antechamber [leading] to the synthesis, so dusk . . . promises a new daybreak . . . All Weltanschauung, all understanding of life, all 'ideology' have to be principally new. All this being true, it is clear that the revolution is a recapitulation which can be a criterion and a completion in whose light it is entirely acceptable to consider any aspect . . . of our history" ("Ocherk" 221-22). These sentences (published in 1922) were written after the civil war and the consolidation of Lenin's government. Shpet rejects the upheavals of the power struggles, but he accepts the revolution as an antithesis to the deficient tsarist rule. The revolution is seen as a plough that eliminates culture from the Russian soil but makes it at the same time ready to conceive a new seed (Lektorskii 130). Shpet sighs ironically that he wished he was a Marxist: in this case he could have easily adopted the position of a chronicler who looks back on history as following a higher necessity. But Shpet prefers a Hegelian interpretation: history progresses, yet not along entirely predictable lines. Nations have a biography, and this biography is governed by rationality rather than necessity. Already in a letter to Husserl from 10 June 1918, Shpet takes recourse to
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the Hegelian notion that mankind—like man—comes of age: "The madness of the aging mankind seems to be far from coming to an end, and we don't know what the near future will bring" (Husserl 542).

Sphet justifies the revolution by making a very Hegelian distinction between existence and reality. This allows him to see behind the cruel everyday life under the Bolshevist regime a certain historical sense which is allocated on a higher level of reality. Shpet begins with an elaborate explication of Hegel's famous formula "Everything rational is real, and everything real is rational": "If we want to understand the notion of 'reality' we have to keep in mind Hegel's gradation of being on which consciousness dialectically rises from the dim immediate sensual givenness to the last speculative rational givenness of spirit and the absolute . . . In a strict sense real is only the absolute, and in this sense it can be identified with the reason; and it is the exclusive and true reality" ("K voprosu" 123-24). Hegel's concept of a rational reality runs like a red thread through Shpet's philosophical work. Shpet adds several modifications to this basic idea, but Hegel is often implicitly present in his arguments. In his review of Il'in's book on Hegel, Shpet praises Hegel enthusiastically for his conceptualization of reality as the result of history which endows reality with a specific sense. The blind forces of nature would not be able to guarantee a rational reality: "This is Hegel's major achievement: to show reality as historical reality! In his person 'history' won over 'nature'" (Shpet, "Opyt" 294).

Cieszkowski

Altough Shpet defends Hegel's conception of the mutual penetration, indeed the identity, of reason and reality, he obviously did not want to confine himself to an apology of right-Hegelian philosophy of history. It is not by chance that Shpet turned in this situation to the Polish thinker August Cieszkowski who published in 1838—seven years after Hegel's death—a small book written in German under the title Prolegomena zur Historiosophie. Cieszkowski criticizes Hegel's conception of history for dealing exclusively with the past. Against Hegel's thesis that history is coming to an end in the present, Cieszkowski claims that any philosophy of history has to respect the future. Cieszkowski agrees that philosophy has reached its culmination point in Hegel's encyclopaedic system of sciences, but he does not share Hegel's belief that reality will adapt itself automatically to the progress of theory. Cieszkowski calls for a "philosophy of the deed" which will accommodate reality to the insights of philosophy: "The discovery of method is in fact the discovery of the philosopher's stone; now we have to create the miracles which lay in the powers of this stone" (131).

Shpet appreciates Cieszkowskis position as the "only link" (Filosofskoe 79) between Hegel and left Hegelianism: Cieszkowski tried to conceptualize the urgent social problems as a lack of practical rationality, a state which has to be overcome by implementing rationality in everyday reality. Cieszkowski thus corrected Hegel's optimistic view of the power of theoretical thought to unfold automatically in reality.
and maintained that human action has to complement the insights of philosophy. For Cieszkowski, there were very concrete historical reasons for such a correction: the Polish uprising against the Russian occupation in 1830 had just failed, and the Polish intelligentsia was not prepared to accept the status quo as rational. A "philosophy of the deed" could justify the preparations for a new strike against the Russian enemy. This position is very close to Shpet's own modification of Hegelianism. For Shpet, too, the ideal identity of rationality and reality is far from obvious. He conceives of history as an ongoing process with a past, a present and a future: "Historical Reality is—as we said—a continuous movement which was realized, realizes itself and has to be realized. It is not a mechanical movement but a creative one: it creates, embodies and realizes an idea" (Shpet, *Die Hermeneutik* 280). Both Cieszkowski and Shpet assume, against Hegel, that the historical process has not yet come to an end—and prevailing for both is the notion of a future which has to be created according to the rational insights of the present. Shpet underlines the dialectic nature of Cieszkowski's amendment to Hegel's philosophy of history: Cieszkowski formulates a simple and convincing approach to the unsolved problem of the relationship between theory and practice. Action is conceived of as an antithesis to the thesis of philosophical thought—and action and thought together will push mankind towards a new synthesis.

Shpet deals with Cieszkowski in his book on Herzen. The "philosophy of the deed" is presented here as a decisive mediating influence that turned Hegel's philosophy of history into a base for Herzen's *Weltanschauung*. Cieszkowski's transformation of Hegel provided a solution not only for Herzen but also for Shpet himself. Alexandre Koyré states that Shpet "exaggerated Cieszkowski's influence on Herzen" (190). This is likely to be true and may indicate that Shpet does speak here also *pro domo sua*. Cieszkowski is granted a chapter of his own in Shpet's book on Herzen—not so much because Herzen's philosophy of history cannot be understood without Cieszkowski, but because Shpet's own Hegelian conception needs a practical extension which is readily provided by the "philosophy of the deed."

**Herzen**

In his longish essay "Herzen's philosophical Weltanschauung," Shpet tries to free Herzen from the bonds of socialist and Marxist philosophy (Paperno 127). Shpet's new interpretation of Herzen can at the same time be read as an explication of the genealogy of his own thinking: "Herzen was attracted, firstly, by the scientific quality [nauchnost'] of Hegel's philosophy, and, secondly, by the fact that the ultimate goal of this philosophy was reality itself" (Shpet, *Filosofskoe* 12). These two aspects correspond at the same time to the main criteria that Shpet had established for his own critical appreciation of any philosophical system. The early Herzen—Shpet quotes his *Letters about the Inquiry into Nature*—claimed that rationality is omnipresent but sometimes hidden. A person's task consists in the disclosure of the secret rationality in the real world that surrounds him or her. Shpet emphasizes that Herzen
rules out any subjective moment in this process and quotes approvingly from the Letters: "Man does not discover his rationality everywhere because he is rational and projects his rationality onto everything, but on the contrary: he is rational because everything is rational" (Shpet, Filosofskoe 15).

After 1848, Herzen's Hegelianism suffered a severe blow. The failed revolutions and his own family drama led Herzen to a very pragmatic view of historical reality. According to Herzen, history is driven by the will and energy of the individual personality, and not by itself, not by some unalterable laws—be they those of God or Nature. This is a clear departure from Hegelianism, but Shpet nevertheless tries to save Hegel for Herzen: he underlines the Hegelian notion in Herzen's late thinking that every individual has to fulfil a historical task and that the history of nations can be likened to the biographies of individuals (Filosofskoe 38). Shpet makes use of Cieszkowski's skepticism regarding Hegel's trust in the practical power of theory and points to the fact that Herzen had read and approved of Cieszkowski's book on historiosophy (Filosofskoe 76). But still, Shpet insists on the Hegelian nature of Herzen's late conception of the role of the intellectual in society: according to Herzen, man is not completely free in his actions; he is a "continuation of nature" and, like nature, subordinated to the laws of logic. Being himself part of nature, by creating history, man links nature with logic. For Herzen, history does not follow blindly a providential plan; it provides space for human action. History is "improvisation," it is closely linked to human freedom. Shpet thus sees the difference between Hegel and Herzen in Herzen's rejection of Hegel's vision of history moving by design towards freedom—he wants human action to be credited for historical rationality (Filosofskoe 40).

Shpet stresses that teleology is generally suspect for Herzen: if one looks at life under a teleological aspect, the goal is always death. Shpet discovers Herzen's solution of this dilemma in the latter's orientation towards the present. Only the present can justify human endeavor in history: "The last dualism, the dualism between the ideal goal of man and his real behaviour, is being resolved in his own reality in the present which deletes all antinomies and turns all ideal goals of history into real tasks of an actual agenda in all its richness, with the inheritance of the past and the seeds of the future" (Filosofskoe 52). For Shpet, the distance between thought and reality is not only a question of historical creativity. It is above all a question of rationally overcoming all dualisms and bringing them together into a unity: "Herzen understood the task of the epoch as follows: it was about time to remove the last emerging dualism between practice and theory, the antinomy of reality and reason which manifests itself in the fact. If the fact itself shows that our cruel and petty reality is not reasonable, then the task of the epoch lies precisely in the transformation of the theoretical understanding into practical reality, in the creation of a reasonable reality. If it is not reasonable, it has to become reasonable" (Filosofskoe 20). Shpet thus maintains that the task of philosophy is to show that every dualism is a state of alienation. It is by discursive work that the philosopher can resolve all precarious dualisms. The worst dualism is the alleged nonidentity of the objective sense of life and its various possible subjective interpretations: "With the resolution of the prob-
lem about the relation between the universal and the particular we ascertain or, more accurately, once again see the immediate unity between them, that unity in which we live and act. The content of life is animated not only through the significations that we discover in it but also through that inner sense thanks to which there arises in us a feeling of our own place in the world and of everything in it" (*Appearance* 171).

It should be noted that Herzen’s and Shpet’s ideal unity of theory and practice in history is not Hegelian. Hegel asserted that periods of "happiness" are "empty sheets in world history" because they are periods of consent, of lacking opposites (Hegel 92). Furthermore, Herzen and Shpet rule out Hegel’s idea of a teleological historical process: both Russian thinkers maintain that history has to be created by mankind. While they agree with Hegel that there is rationality in the historical process, they part ways with him in believing that it has to be completed by responsible and creative human action. In *Hermeneutics and Its Problems*, Shpet writes: "I do not think that we could learn from [existing] knowledge of the realization of history and its rationality how we should realize history in the future. I even believe the opposite—if we tried to realize history according to this knowledge we would commit an evil deed: we would put an end to our free and unlimited creativity. We would furthermore deprive history of the possibility to realize itself. We would end history" (281).

**Husserl**

Shpet's *History as a Problem of Logic* was written in a phase of growing skepticism towards pure phenomenology. Already in a letter to Husserl from November 23, 1913 Shpet had expressed some reservations about phenomenology: "The magic of phenomenology makes me blind in some directions, but for the time being I do not want to know if this is bad or not!" (Husserl 529). Perhaps as a direct consequence of this self-imposed blindness Shpet praised phenomenology in *Appearance and Sense* (1914) as the basic science for all philosophy:

The corner-stone of the entire edifice of phenomenology is that it firmly establishes a presentativism of everything that exists in all of its species and forms of our consciousness. It strikes a blow equally against both phenomenalism and Kantian dualism . . . One of the greatest contributions of phenomenology is the fact that it transferred the old dispute about universals and particulars, about realism and nominalism, from the sphere of anemic abstractions to the living depths of intuitive experience, which within the entire mental process forms the "beginning" and the "source" of any philosophizing at all. (170)

Later on, Shpet moved away from the pure logic of phenomenology and tried to establish a new basic science which encompasses both semiotics and semasiology. Not only the sign-based constitution of meaning is central to Shpet, but also the connection between the objective reality of life and the inventory of semiotic representations which can be ascribed to historical phenomena. Shpet does not immerse himself into the description of human cognition, which could for him easily present...
a step back to Kantianism; he tries instead to clarify the interconnections between historical events and their interpretation, between the logic of objects and hermeneutics—or as he would have it, between appearance and sense.

Shpet identifies the sign as the missing link between those terms. Only the sign can bridge the gap between subjective thinking and objective reality. Shpet proposes to look at the sign not from the point of view of its function as iconic representation of a thing, but—on the contrary—as a part of reality itself. In an essay with the title "Sign-Signification as a Relation Sui Generis and Its System," probably written between 1921 and 1925, Shpet explains his definition of the sign: "If we look at the sign in its role as an objective go-between, we see that—in spite of its ideal signification—it denominates any item of a given class or of a given extension. Thus it becomes a kind of realization and brings the ideal exemplarily into existence. In this sense it can be said that the sign is nothing else but a historical fact" ("Znak-znachenie" 84).

Most importantly, the sign embodies historical reality. In an essay with the title "History as the Subject of Logic," written in 1917 but published only five years later, Shpet accepts reality only insofar as it can be represented semiotically: "History as a science knows only one source of knowledge: the word [slovo]. The word is the form in which the historian finds the content of reality which is the basis of his scientific knowledge, and the word is the sign from which the historian comes to his subject with its specific content which constitutes the significance or sense of this sign" ("Istoriia, kak predmet" 15-16). History thus must be read as a text. The historian's task consists not only in understanding the text of the historical signs, but in rewriting this text anew. As a consequence, history is basically a philological science (35). Shpet even maintains that the logical structure of history may be demonstrated through fictional examples. The borderline between literature and history is not relevant for a logical analysis of history. Shpet declares that the logical analysis of history has nothing to do with the actual historical process: "History as a science has to do with the word as a sign which interests the historian first of all and almost exclusively in its meaning, i.e. in the content about which the word speaks. It tells the historian about different social events, relations, states, changes etc. But precisely the real content of history does not interest the logician, he is not able to do anything with this kind of content" (23)

Shpet draws attention to the various modes of narration and interpretation that can be applied to historical reality. He calls for a special kind of epistemology for the historical sciences—and this task can only be performed by hermeneutics ("Filosofiiia i istoriia" 437; "Istoriia, kak predmet" 35).

**Shpet's Hermeneutic Dimension**

Shpet adds a hermeneutic dimension to his conceptual synthesis of Hegel, Cieszkowski, Herzen, and Husserl. He appreciates all these predecessors as representatives of a "positive philosophy" as opposed to "negative philosophy," which he con-
demns as blind and empty. In Shpet's understanding, positive philosophy stands in Plato's tradition and is oriented towards an inquiry into the first principles of science ("Filosofia i istoriia" 428-30). According to this positive point of view, following the Platonian concept of *methexis* ("participation"), truth can be perceived in the real world. Negative philosophy refers to Kant and eventually leads to a complete relativism: all knowledge depends on the forms of subjective perception, and objectivity is reduced to mere intersubjectivity (Kuznetsov 202-03). From early on, Shpet rejects this kind of "negativism." Andrei Belyi—in the first decade of the twentieth century himself a follower of Neo-Kantianism—describes in his memoirs Shpet's brave fight: "The Kantians entered the battle in heavy armours and looked from afar like Goliaths; but Shpet came out in the nakedness of scepticism and threw the skittles ball energetically like David: 'trakh'—Goliath's forehead was smashed" (Belyi 277).

Shpet's choice of history as a topic for his dissertation is not just an example of the application of positive philosophy. For Shpet, history is the most important repository of reality and the first source for philosophical analysis: "history is finally the reality which surrounds us, and philosophy has to start with its analysis. Solely in history does this reality present itself in its unconditional and singular [edinstvennoi] fullness—in comparison with history, any other reality has to be considered as 'part' or abstraction" (*Istoriia kak problema* 61; see also "Filosofia i istoriia" 432).

Shpet insists on the presence of reason in reality. The historical reality consists of signs and provides thus an objective significance; Shpet's wording in *History as a Problem of Logic* sounds definitely Hegelian: "The task of positive philosophy lies . . . in the disclosure of the sense of that which exists, of rationality in reality" (56). Shpet also adopts the Hegelian notion that history moves towards freedom. Only this assumption can in his view guarantee that history has an objective sense and is not merely a chaotic heap of individual actions: "The philosophical study of the historical . . . has to concentrate exclusively on the connection and inner unity in the absolute itself or in freedom as the only form of the activity of the absolute. As history would lack unity and wholeness if it consisted only of 'fragments,' of arbitrary individual decisions, so philosophy, too, needs for its creativity an absolute source of unity: freedom" (64).

At this point, Cieszkowski comes into play. Shpet shares Cieszkowski's doubts about Hegel's ideal identity of theory and practice. The most famous formula for this assumption can be found in Hegel's letter to Niethammer of 28 October 1808: "Theoretical work . . . achieves more in the world than practical [work]; if a revolution has only permeated the kingdom of imagination, reality [still] won't be able to withstand" (Hoffmeister 253). Shpet believes just like Cieszkowski that human action—based on the rational analysis of reality—is necessary to push history forward. In this context, Herzen, too, becomes important for Shpet, and for two reasons. On the one hand, Herzen interpreted Russian history in a dialectic way which corresponds very much to Shpet's own view: every stage of history is succeeded by its opposite. Once a system becomes outdated, it is no longer rational and therefore has no longer
any legitimate claim on continuous existence. Revolution on this interpretation is nothing but the reinforcement of the rationality of reality (Zimmermann 6). On the other hand, Herzen insisted on the social nature of history. Not individuals, but the educated public was in his eyes the main actor in the drama of history. Shpet adopts a similar stance: the individual is not a "prisoner in solitary confinement" (History as a Problem 62) but an organic part of a social entity (Fedorova 201).

Because for Shpet reality is given only in signs, the writing of history is an understanding in the second degree: historical documents already represent a certain interpretation of a situation—the historian has to find a common denominator for all interpretations of a given historical event; he has to understand what others have understood. This is why Shpet does not confine himself to a phenomenological solution of his epistemological problem: "History cannot confine itself to 'outsideness' because it starts from the assertion that everything which is given is only a sign. The explanation of this sign is history's only task. Documents and chronicles are signs which ask for an understanding of some actions which themselves are only signs of hidden historical factors . . . History is in its core not a technical but a hermeneutic science" (Istoriia kak problema 63).

Stressing the hermeneutic essence of history, Shpet tries to avoid any subjectivism. The fact that historical evidence is given as a sign does not mean that all results of historiography are compromised by the narrator's subjective point of view. It is of the utmost importance that the title of Shpets investigation is not "History as a problem of hermeneutics": in no way does Shpet in his anti-psychological and anti-subjectivist abandon the link between the sign and the logic of the objects that exist in reality. The understanding of a sign refers to an objective logical order which constitutes life. Shpet's solution of the problem is, again, basically Hegelian. In his book Hermeneutics and Its Problems he writes: "The problem of understanding is nothing but the problem of spirit itself; spirit and understanding correspond to each other, as an object corresponds to the act which is directed at it. … Understanding can be directed exclusively at reason. Spirit as an object of understanding is rational spirit" (279).

It is indicative that Husserl is mentioned only en passant in Shpet's Hermeneutics and Its Problems: Husserl's phenomenology was of use only for the logic of history, not for its hermeneutics. Shpet underlines the figurativeness not only of poetic, but also of scientific language (Haardt, "Shpet, Gustav" 757). Understanding always works through and behind the hidden figurative wording of a sense. The task of a philosophical hermeneutics lies in the explication of the structure of understanding which is directed towards an objective sense. Shpet stresses, however, that the significance of an utterance, a text, or an event does not depend on our thoughts about them (Kuznetsov 205). Shpet insists on a single, objective sense also for the historical interpretation. He warns, though, against identifying thought and the object of thought as Hegel does. For Shpet, the objective sense has to be laid bare in an intentional act that "fills the object with thought and makes it thus thinkable" ("Opyt" 304). However, Shpet overshoots the mark by ruling out the possibility that
hermeneutics could yield more than one sense. Biblical interpretation is for him nothing but a "lie" since it allows for several interpretations: "Hermeneutics has to assume that every given sign has only one signification. The basic lie of biblical hermeneutics consists precisely in accepting the premise of a dual sense in every expression: a human and a God-inspired sense" (Die Hermeneutik 60). In Shpet's study of Humboldt's philosophy of language, a similar assertion can be found:

Only in novels can any possibility be made rational; in reality only the one possibility which realized itself and became reality is rational, because reality itself is the reason [razum] of the one and only of the possible senses which has been realized. The realized reality contains in itself its reason as its ratio, i.e., the notion which explains why it is precisely as it is and nothing else. This last explication [urazumenie] links immediately the concept [poniatie] and its subject in a single valid sense. (Vnutrenniaia 116)

Such a reduction of history to only one—objective and rational—sense testifies to the high standards of logic which Shpet adopted for his own philosophical thinking. But at the same time, Shpet's trust in the semiotic transparency of the historical process led him to an optimistic interpretation of the Russian Revolution which proved fatal for him. In 1922, he was already on Lenin's list of intellectuals to be expelled from the country. Shpet opposed this verdict with his entire determination and was allowed to stay. In hindsight, this permission has to be considered the beginning of his end. Shpet never received a chance to revise his unbending views on the objective sense and the rationality of history; months before he was shot in Tomsk in 1937, he was still busy translating Hegel's Phenomenology.

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