A fall down a staircase cost Assen Ignatow his life in early August, 2003. The journal and the profession have lost a prolific scholar and a committed friend who was ready at any time to lend a hand. I allow myself, to begin with, a short personal reminiscence. I was a neophyte to the Sovietological profession, a graduate student in Bochenski’s institute in Fribourg, when, in 1972, Assen Ignatow showed up out of the blue to inquire whether he could wander about the library. Chatting amiably with me in his wonderfully rounded Bulgarian French, as I accompanied him on his tour, he pulled out titles by persons whose names I was only just then beginning to learn – Deborin, Luppol, Lifschitz, Konstantinov... handling the volumes with a mixture of delight and slight amusement, respect and a distant sadness, dropping a comment about the person and her fate along with an aside about the contents of the text in question.

It was the ease with which he spoke about these persons that struck me, the off-the-cuff fluency he exhibited in talking about their times and their ideas, the mixture of personal connection, so to speak, and scholary insight. One remark he made to me was to stick... that Lifschitz was to Soviet aesthetics what Lukacs had become to Marxist aesthetics more generally. I let him know several years later that I was writing a dissertation on Soviet aesthetics.

It was only much later that I came to learn about the ‘life and times’ of Assen Ignatow. The times were marked by his encounter with communism and his life was made all the more difficult for that. Ignatow left his native Bulgaria for political reasons in 1972 having already led an active career as an academic philosopher in the University of Sofia and the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. (His standing as a ‘dissident’ was not at all something that made the rounds, he was not political, but rather stood in spiritual opposition to communism; this was noted when, following the fall of the regime, he was invited to his native Sofia university to receive
the honoris causa!) In the ‘West’, Ignatow first settled in Louvain where he prepared a second doctoral dissertation under the head of Prof. Ijsseling, then head of the Husserl Archive. Heidegger was his subject at the time, though in fact he was continuing to think along lines already laid down in his first Sofia dissertation (the kandidatskaja devoted to the philosophy of history. (Over the years he published several monographs on man and history, including studies on the Marxist as well as Soviet visions of man and history). Academic positions eluded him, however, until in 1990 he received an invitation to join the faculty of the Gustav-Siewerth Akademie (Baden-Württemberg) and the prestigious Bundesinstitut für ostwissenschaftliche und internationale Studien (BIOst), at the time in Cologne, where, in close rapport with Helmut Dahm following the latter’s retirement, he reported on the state of philosophy, sociology and political science throughout the rapidly changing ‘Ostblock’ (the Soviet Union and its remnants in particular).

Thanks to this position in particular, Assen Ignatow was given the extended opportunity to research and write, first of all for the irreplaceable ‘Berichte’ of BIOst, and on that basis for a number of leading periodicals devoted to the Soviet and communist phenomenon. By that time he was well known to readers of Studies in Soviet Thought having been asked in 1980 by Tom Blakeley to join the board of the journal. Indeed, it was in the course of the ’80s that Ignatow produced some of the studies that were to earn him the authority he came to carry as “Bundesberichter” . . . Of these, let me note Aporien der marxistischen Ideologielehre. Zur Kritik der Auffassung der Kultur as “Ideologie” in letzter Instanz (München, 1984) and Psychologie des Kommunismus. Studien zur Mentalität der herrschenden Schicht im kommunistischen Machtbereich (München, 1985). Later, in the nineties, his studies included Die Marxismus Kritik im “Silbernen Zeitalter”. Die russische Diskussion um die Jahrhundertwende (Gutav-Siewerth Akademie, 1996), Selbstauflösung des Humanismus. Die philosophisch-anthropologischen Voraussetzungen für den Zusammenbruch des Kommunismus (BIOst, 1996 – reviewed in SEET by the undersigned). It was in this period, too, that together with Helmut Dahm Ignatow edited the still unique attempt at a general assessment of philosophy in what used to be called ‘Eastern