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The Rhetoric of Ritual: The Soviet Sociolect in Ethnolinguistic Perspective

1. In historical writing, the distinctive character of the Soviet era appears as a distinctive set of ideas, situations, and even human types, the latter embodying the realisation of the didactic project to create a new ‘Soviet man’ (*sovetskii chelovek*, during the Brezhnev era renamed in the clumsy phrase *Homo sovieticus*, *homosos*, or *sovok*). But from the philological standpoint what is equally (or: primarily) distinctive is the communicative discourse that served Soviet ideology: new words, new texts, new forms of social interaction (including media forms). The scale of linguistic innovation in the Soviet era is best expressed in the diversity of so-called ‘Sovietisms’ in semantics, in lexis and word formation, and in style – the words and phrases that lend their characteristic colour to texts of a public or political nature.¹ But the role of lexical and semantic innovations that were called for by the novelty and distinctiveness of the political reality looks broader, in historical and cultural retrospect, than the sphere of political ideolect. Studies on the history of the

¹ See, e.g., an author’s preface addressed to young readers: ‘You are holding a book about the words of the Russian language in the Soviet era, words in which there ceaselessly beats the hot pulse of the heroic life of our Soviet Motherland, the very words that are the real heroes of our remarkable and glorious age’ [Shansky 1980: 3].

Russian language in the Soviet era make it obvious that the effect of such innovations was felt on the most varied levels of communicative discourse, transforming not just the formal means of mutual understanding but also the content [Mokienko, Nikitina 1998].¹ Employing Niklas Luhmann's terminology, based on Luhmann's study of the mediating circumstances that facilitate the transformation of an initially 'improbable communication' into one that is credible and socially effective, we can say that in the history of the Russian language the era of the Soviet past was a time when the use of Russian itself – to the end of such improbable/effective communication – underwent both structural changes (word formation) and communicative-semiotic ones (rhetorical and linguistic-cognitive). Twentieth-century Russian cannot be correctly described without taking account of these changes: but it is even more important that the changes should not be confined exclusively to the field of descriptive lexicography ([Essais 1981]; [Weiss 1996]; [Ermakova 1997]).

The language of the first years of Soviet power was flooded with a multitude of neologisms and innovations that had been unknown to the standard language of the nineteenth century. A. M. Selishchev, who compiled in 1927 a substantial list of corresponding examples, compared his contemporaries' linguistic practice to the French of the revolutionary period from 1789 to 1794, but noted a fundamental difference: the French revolutionaries demonstratively rejected the normative expressions of the speech of the previous epoch, while the creators of Soviet speech made no comparably radical break with the language of the Russian intelligentsia in the pre-revolutionary period. Selishchev's book adduces words and linguistic innovations that distinguished the language of the Soviet period from pre-revolutionary language (the extensive dissemination of abbreviations, vulgarisms, lexical and syntactic borrowings from foreign languages, officialese, new morphological formations, changes to the previous meanings of words, etc.). Selishchev suggested (or, perhaps, hoped) that the linguistic practice of his contemporaries was essentially secondary to the linguistic tradition that had taken shape in the nineteenth century [Selishchev 1928]. While attempting to be academically objective, he still let his readers know his own attitude to the innovations that were changing the face of the Russian standard language not only in

¹ In a critical review of this dictionary Erik Khan-Pira notes that the Sovietisms the authors have collected cannot, strictly speaking, be called a language, since they do not yield examples of a unique phonetics and grammar or unique models of word formation [Khan-Pira 1999], but he does not take into account the fact that Sovietisms existed not only as separate words but also as markers of texts, which transformed the conception of the grammatical and syntactical rules of nineteenth-century Russian ([Lenfeldt 2001]; [Protchenko 1985]; [Heller 1979]). For the role of such marking on the level of the rhetorical formation of texts and the meanings they suggest see [Kozlova 1996]; [Romanenko 2003].

morphology but also in stylistics and general semantics (and this was to held against the scholar, who became a victim of repression in 1934).¹ By the middle of the 1930s such changes were most blatantly expressed in the appearance of multitudinous verbal clichés referring, on the one hand, to the ‘authoritative’ position of the political forces standing behind them, and on the other to denotatively diffuse metaphors and semantically indeterminate associations [Selishchev 1928: 24–25].² The slogans and theses of the post-revolutionary period are constructed in accordance with the techniques of oratorical and dialogic speech; communicatively, however, they presuppose not a dialogue, but the listener’s monologic assent. Phrases like ‘Get To It...!’,³ ‘Less Blether, More Action!’, ‘The Five-Year Plan in Four Years!’, and the various toasts in honour of revolutionary heroes composed a rhetoric of Soviet ideology that was (variations over time notwithstanding) essentially monologic right up to the time of the USSR’s breakdown.

The ‘background knowledge’ of any collective is involuntarily predetermined by the phrases and signal-words that are in any case present in its media horizon, but the communicative paradox of such presence in Soviet reality consisted in the unusually aggressive and, as events showed, historical vitality of the words and phrases that look in retrospect like the precedents for Soviet ideology [Levin 1988; Weiss 1995]. In fact, Selishchev himself had demonstrated that the semantics of the corresponding texts could be described more simply using the categories of the communicative and emotional-expressive function of speech than using those of its nominative function. Particularly indicative in this connection are the examples Selishchev adduces where speakers’ failure to understand new terms and phrases does not hinder a contextual use of them as signals of a particular social deixis (a communist is ‘someone who doesn’t believe in God’, a Komsomol member ‘is the same thing as the camunists [*sic*]’, socialism is ‘to live in a new way’, a Soviet is ‘where Soviet people work’, a Soviet official is ‘someone in the government who serves’, etc.), or even fosters such use, which becomes a sign of education, learning, and initiation into a particularly esoteric field of meanings [Selishchev 1928: 53–56, 215, 216].⁴ The emotional and rhetorical attractiveness of the speech of the

¹ Selishchev was condemned as part of the so-called ‘trial of the Slavists’ (‘Russian National Party’) and sentenced to five years in the camps; he was released early in 1937. In 1935 *Pravda* published an article by K. Alaverdov, where Selishchev’s monograph was described as ‘a disgusting slander on the party, our leaders, the Youth League, and the revolution’, and its author as a ‘class enemy’, ‘Black Hundred man’ [i.e. member of the anti-Semitic mobs of the 1900s], and ‘double-dyed anti-Semite’. Selishchev died of cancer in 1942; his book was removed from scholarly circulation for many years.

² See also [Fesenko, Fesenko 1955]; [Zemtsov 1985].

³ Lit. ‘You will give us’ (‘Get to it!’ was a British wartime slogan). [Editor].

⁴ See also [Shafir 1924].

‘other’, noted even by Aristotle (*Poetics* 1458a–1458b; *Rhetoric* 1405a8) appears quite openly in such cases: words and expressions that are largely inaccessible to broad understanding raise the value status of the knowledge they mark, and thus also the status of its bearers. Slogans, appeals, set phrases, and metaphorical epithets such as ‘rotting capitalism’, ‘imperialist plunderers’, etc., to be recognised as important elements in the Soviet sociolect, do not so much mean something in these cases as serve to highlight themselves and the actions of the speakers: their communicative function, in Austin’s terminology, is not constitutive but performative, implying a social rather than a linguistic pragmatics.

The elementary nature of the lexical and syntactic devices aimed at a socio-pragmatic realisation of contextually predictable intentions reveals much that the functioning of Sovietisms shares with other instances of the use of politicised vocabulary under a totalitarian ideology.¹ ‘Totalitarian’ sociolects turn out to have in common a performative aim dictated by the attempt not to name but rather to construct that which is to be named, to confirm the (quasi-)ontological existence of linguistic reality. These sociolects can also be related, given certain reservations, to the language of magical folklore: spells, incantations, and verbal charms, whose aim is directly linked with the very act of uttering them, rather than with their literal contact (which can be deliberately incoherent, as in the magical abracadabras [Bogdanov 1995]).

Observations of ritual language are also significant to the extent that they demonstrate, as John Du Bois has demonstrated, the functional effectiveness of self-evident (evidential) utterances: even when ritual utterances appeal to an authority (and therefore could, in principle, be doubted by their audience), they generally acquire the character of impersonal, faceless, anonymous texts. This is realised with the aid of the particular features of ritual pragmatics, such as the specific complementary relationship between ritual speech and everyday speech, its parallelism (repetitiousness and paraphrasticity), the fact that ritual utterances are broadcast via faceless intermediaries, linguistic limitations (the formalisation and ‘esoterisation’ (the formalisation and ‘esoterisation’ of the utterances) [Du Bois 1986: 313–316].² Political rhetoric reveals similar features, manifested in the appeal to the self-evidence of analytical truths, the impersonal repetition of authoritative utterances (quotation), the argumentative role of ‘posi-

¹ The classic work that lays the foundations for the sociolinguistic comparison of totalitarian discourses is Viktor Klemperer’s *LTI. The Language of the Third Reich* (1947). Questions of ‘totalitarian language’ have been raised on a broad comparative level in Young’s monograph [Young 1991]. See also ([Rzhevsky 1951]; [Hodgkinson 1955]; [Eidlin 1989]; [Hodge, Kress 1993]; [Kupina 1995]).

² See also [Urban 1989; Boyer 1990].

tional personalities' (which free the speaker from subjective intentionality: a politician is evenly good or bad, because he speaks 'on behalf of somebody' and 'in the name of somebody'), etc. ([Capp, Capp 1965]; [Irvine 1982]; [Irvine 1989]). The analogies with ritual and with ceremonial folklore seem all the more justified in that the slogans, greetings, and set phrases of the Soviet sociolect were structurally and functionally linked to occasions that are described as (quasi-)rituals: rallies, party meetings, demonstrations, congresses, etc. ([Lane 1981]; [Urban 1982]; [Riegel 1985]; [Glebkin 1998]).¹

The ritual-studies approach to the study of political institutions cannot, of course, be seen as justified only in its relation to Soviet history. The fruitfulness of employing anthropological (in Russian terms: ethnographical and folkloristic) methods in political science has been actively discussed since the early 1960s, when it became clear that the experience accumulated from the study of traditional society was heuristically useful in trying to understand the constitutive bases of the symbolic values that inspire people to particular social actions. The pioneering work here was Murray Edelman's book *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* [Edelman 1964],² which laid the foundations for a functional comparison of mytho-ritualistic and political symbolism. The study of those aspects of social interaction that relate to language and specifically to speech seems an obvious part of such a comparison, but it is, of course, more fruitful where analogies of content are especially striking between myths and rituals on the one hand and politics on the other. There seems to be no such thing as an ideology of which one could say that it had no 'ritualistic and mythological' or 'folklore' component,³ but it is also clear that these components (if we are to understand them above all familiar and so-called 'precedent' texts, a knowledge of which is one criterion of ideological control and social self-awareness ([Karaulov 1987: 216]; [Kozlova 1996: 161])⁴ are expressed differently in different societies, with a varying degree of communicative insistence.

The propaganda slogans that surrounded the Soviet person on all sides are a striking instance here of how the discourse of communist ideology was ritualised as precedent and thus folklorised, while the

¹ 'Soviet ideology, atheistic in its form and intentions, can be interpreted as religious and mythological. It has its own 'sacred history', its 'eves' in the form of the 'revolutionary events of 1905' (actions that foreshadow and prepare for the 'main' event), its forerunners (the revolutionary democrats of the 19th century), its demiurges and prophets, its saints and martyrs, its rituals, and its cultic calendar' [Neklyudov 2000: 30].

² It should be noted that the English title of Edelman's book cannot be translated literally into Russian: the Eng. *uses* implies both the techniques and the objectives for which these techniques are employed. A similar difficulty faced the German translator [Edelman 1990].

³ See, e.g., an old work with a characteristic title: [Arnold 1937]. Cf. [Kertzer 1988].

⁴ On folklore and folkloristics see [Bogdanov 2001: 47–69].

communicative *meaning* of the familiar Soviet slogans can be described by analogy with the meaning of deictic words (in the most striking form: pronouns and personal forms of the verb): these words point, on the one hand, to themselves, and on the other hand to the distribution of status roles among those participating in the communication (there are (1) those who are speaking, (2) those who are spoken of, and (3) those who are addressed).¹ This distribution is itself important in a communicative, and therefore also a pragmatic connection: a text addressed to a ‘listening’ or ‘reading’ audience realises itself here not in *what* it conveys but in *who* is conveying it and *who* is being addressed. A behavioural instance of the same phenomenon, (quasi-)ritual deixis, is offered by the applause that communicatively ‘syncopated’ speeches by party orators (and it is characteristic that reference to applause – ‘applause’, ‘stormy applause’, ‘prolonged, stormy applause rising to an ovation’, etc. – was obligatory even when such speeches were published).

Analogies from ritual, like any analogies, are of course insufficient on their own to explain those lexical and syntactic features of Soviet speech which are today justly assessed as illiterate, self-contradictory, or simply meaningless; but they do, to a certain extent, clarify the pragmatic aim of the Soviet sociolect as a language that complemented the language(s) of ‘non-ritualistic’ everyday life. Psycholinguistic experiments demonstrate that the reception of any text depends on the social and psychological makeup of the recipient, the situative predispositions (e.g. attitude to the author of the text) that create a kind of model of ‘advance’ interpretation of the information’s meaning [Wertsch 1975]. The rhetorical effect of this dependence was noted by Quintilian, who proposed (following Cicero in the *Brutus*) that human and civic decency was a necessary condition for success in the art of the orator. According to Cicero, the famous orators were above all people of honour and duty, experts not only in eloquence but also in philosophy and literature. Quintilian took the next step: an excellent orator must be a ‘noble man’ or simply a ‘good man’ (*vir bonus*), who excels not only in his eloquence but also in the virtue of his soul, a person who is needed for public and private purposes.² Neither Cicero nor Quintilian suggested, of course, that the stress they placed on the orator’s civic qualities should stop him needing to master the techniques of virtuoso speechmaking, but in the eyes of the audience the demands on an orator were (and remain) to a great extent indifferent to the formal and syllogistic features of oratorical speech. Often (and this is confirmed by

¹ On the communicative semantics of deixis see [Uspensky 2007].

² ‘Oratorem autem instituimus illum perfectum, qui esse nisi vir bonus non potest, ideoque non dicendi modo eximiam in eo facultatem sed omnis animi virtutes exigimus [...] vir ille vere civilis at publicarum privatarumque rerum administrationi accommodatus’ (*Inst. Orat. Prohoemium IX-X*).

the findings of psycholinguistic studies) what is more important is not the speech, but who is giving it; not the qualities of the text, but the reputation of the author. It is also important to consider that the content itself of the text is determined, and changes, in accordance with the concrete ‘perceptual tasks’ that are joined to it. Psycholinguists speak in these cases of the text’s reception strategies and content *images*, which precede and mediate the way the information’s meaning is worked up, and of the functional role of the text in orienting social (including non-communicative) activity ([Laurinati, Vikholemi 1976]; [Leontyev 1979: 20–24]). The particular features of the Soviet sociolect must be described using such an approach, taking account of the symbolic character of those texts and those words – which also reveal ‘content images’ in their reception that cannot be reduced to a linguistic structure of meaning ([Zhuravlyov 1972; Leontyev 1979: 27–28]) in which it finds expression.

2. Students of Soviet society and culture, following George Orwell, have often written about the specific ‘doublethink’ that characterises public consciousness (above all that of the intelligentsia) under a totalitarian regime. It would seem more correct, however, to speak not of ‘doublethink’ but of a specific ‘doubletalk’ or ‘bilingualism’, or even ‘polyglottism’, that marked the linguistic culture of Soviet society. Instances of communicative bilingualism, as stated above, are well-known both from ritual and from, e.g., ecclesiastical tradition, demonstrating a deliberate counterposition of the language of magical and sacred texts to the language of everyday life [Admoni 1994: 94–102].¹ Something similar is observed in Soviet culture, for all its surface secularisation. Stalin’s absurd syllogistics and Brezhnev’s unparseable word-coinings (which quickly became the butt of jokes), for all their intrinsic suggestive effects,² function within a system of linguistic behaviour that can be related to a social pragmatics akin to the pragmatics of ritual.

It seems most linguistically productive to describe the Russian of the Soviet period in terms of communicative polyglottism by studying the vocabulary that Viktor Zaslavsky and Maria Fabris dubbed ‘the vocabulary of inequality’, used to ‘describe the concrete practices and mechanisms of social, political, and economic inequality and stratification in Soviet society’ [Zaslavsky, Fabris 1982: 391]. As these authors show, the special character of the Soviet sociolect is

¹ For a review and the literature see [Keane 1997].

² On Stalin’s language see [Rozina 1991]; [Vaiskopf 2001]. Vaiskopf justly criticises Evgeny Dobrenko, pointing out among other things that the picture of Stalin’s language as a syllogistic curiosity does not answer the question of how it came to be convincing in the eyes of a wide audience [Dobrenko 2001]. Valuable observations on the rhetoric of Stalin’s *History of the C.P.S.U. (B.)*. *Short Course* are available in [Vlasov 2002]. On Brezhnev’s language see [S riot 1985]; [Kertman 2007].

determined to a significant extent by the institutions of censorship which sanctioned a sphere of ideologically recommended topics and, ultimately, ideologically recommended usage. A series of topics that were not suitable for public discussion were discursively ‘crossed out’ from print and official usage for years, establishing certain zones of silence in social communication and also establishing the rhetorical devices that allow one to speak of ‘the emergence in Soviet Russian of something like political diglossia’ [Zaslavsky, Fabris 1982: 395].¹

The lexicographical peculiarities of the Soviet sociolect reflect, of course, not only the censorship but also more profound (chiefly social and psychological) mechanisms of regime control over the word in authoritarian and totalitarian societies. Censorship (not least self-censorship) as an institution of social control is not a cause here, but a consequence of those presuppositions, far from always rational, that make it possible to convince the public that this control itself is justified. The attitude to the text in Soviet society might seem, at first glance, close to a sacralisation of things said and written: the harsh punishment of printing errors in the period of Stalinism, and the belief that ‘manuscripts don’t burn’,² are a consequence of one and the same ritualistic world-experience. Stalin’s attempt to claim the status of a classic in general linguistics is probably also related to the conviction that power over language is also power over what language signifies.³

¹ See also [Venclova 1980]; [Krongauz 1993].

² A famous tag from Mikhail Bulgakov’s *Master and Margarita*. [Editor].

³ On the possible reasons for Stalin’s decision to publish on linguistics see [Philips 1986: 92–94]; [L’Hermitte 1987: 73–75]; [Alpatov 1991: 181–187]; [Alpatov 1993]; [Gray 1993]. Alpatov is sceptical of the idea that Stalin might have been irritated by the ‘little cult of Marr’ as a hindrance to ‘his own big cult’ [Alpatov 1991: 184]. I, however, think this idea is entirely justified: such irritation could have been spurred by the 1949 anniversary celebrations, when the names of Marr and Stalin were linked in publicistic eulogies (in connected with Stalin’s seventieth birthday and the fifteenth anniversary of Marr’s death). See also the articles which opened the issue of *Russkii yazyk v shkole* (1949, No. 6): Academician I.I. Meshchaninov and Prof. G.P. Serdyuchenko, ‘Linguistics in the Stalin era’; Prof. N.S. Chemodanov, ‘J.V. Stalin and Soviet linguistics’; Prof. E.M. Galkina-Fedoruk, ‘N.Ya. Marr: the creator of the new teaching on language’. It is interesting that as early as 1931 the journal *Revolyutsiya i yazyk* (under editor-in-chief M.N. Bochacher, director of the Linguistics Institute at the People’s Commissariat for Education), which was critical of Marr, refused Marr the right to be considered as ‘the founder of Marxism in linguistics’, counterposing to his linguistic works ‘the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and also of Stalin too: all their works as a whole, not just their particular utterances on questions of linguistics’ as ‘an adequate basis for the construction of a real, genuinely Marxist science of language’ [Nashi zadachi 1931: 4]. It is perhaps also of importance in solving this problem that Stalin knew no foreign languages but Russian, although there is evidence that in his youth he had tried to teach himself German and even Esperanto [Trotsky 1990: 402]; [Sto sorok besed 1991: 257]. In the margins of books read by Stalin there occur attempts to translate single words and proper names (not always successfully: under an engraving of Holbach in G. Aleksandrov’s *Filosofskie predshestvenniki marksizma* is written *Pol Henri Holbach* in Stalin’s handwriting). Sometimes, in his reading, Stalin underlines foreign expressions, including Latin ones: for instance, he marks the final phrase in Marx’s *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, ‘*Dixi et salvavi animam meam*’, with a wavy line [Ilizarov 2000]. Stalin’s initiation of the discrediting of Marr might also be read against this background as a sublimation of his failures in practical language-acquisition. (It is worth noting in passing that Stalin, defending the Indo-European theory that Marr had rejected, gives as an advantage of the comparative and historical method that it ‘encourages one to work, to study languages.’)

Stalin's objections to Nikolai Marr's 'Japhethitic theory' rehabilitated not only grammar and traditional comparative philology, but also the priority of 'reliable', systemic and statistical, descriptions of language. Marr's characteristic discussions of the stage dynamics of semantic change gave way to statistical observation of the repeated variation of morphological units [Vinogradov 1952: 48–55]; [Alpatov 1991: 191–209].¹ It is also indicative that one of the main 'theoretical' theses propounded by Stalin in the so-called polemic 'concerning questions of linguistics' was to separate the concept of language from that of ideological superstructure. Against Marr, who had proposed that language was dependent on the basis (productive forces and productive relations), Stalin accorded language a 'dialectical' independence. It is important to note that the same time that although Stalin did reject Marr's linguistic doctrine, their views on language can be considered as being in a certain sense akin.

Marr was convinced that language differentiated meanings that exist before and outside language and which, strictly speaking, are indifferent to how they are differentiated: in speech, in writing, or in something else. This 'something else' Marr found, as is well known, in a phenomenon that could be called mystical if it had not been promulgated in a fashion that relied on Marxism. This was the so-called 'manual language'—a crucial concept for the genetic theory (or, as Marr himself called it, the 'Japhethitic' theory) of language [Marr 1934: 106–109, 118–128].

It is worth assessing the novelty of this concept in the ideological and scholarly situation of the 1920s and 1930s. The concept of a 'manual language' supported the provided support for Marx and Engels's already classic idea of the importance of the hand in human evolution, and it also resolved (or, rather, abolished) one of the fundamental methodological problems of historical and theoretical linguistics — the problem of the dualism of the 'oral' and the 'written'. Marr viewed language as being genetically, and therefore essentially (*ab origine*), a unity of thought, writing, and labour. In today's terminology we might say that Marr understood language roughly as Austin understood the performative: language does not name, it acts.

This idea of the active nature of language, which became a principle for Marr and his followers (I.G. Frank-Kamentsky, O.M. Freudenberg, I.I. Meshchaninov, and, in the last years of his life, D.K. Zelenin), was the foundation for the combinatory anagrams (based on the 'glottogenetic' elements *sal*, *ber*, *yon*, and *rosh*), later

¹ With reference to folkloristics, the defamation of Marr found expression in the triumph of descriptive methods of analysis and a rejection of ideas concerning diachronic dynamism (whether 'in stages' or 'in bursts'), e.g. [Astakhova 1951]. Cf. [Talpa 1937].

to be pronounced absurd. One should note, however, that there are no logical gaps in Marr's argumentation. If language is not a signifying system but an act then the essence of linguistic analysis is the elucidation not of meanings but of functions, including the leading role of predicative rather than nominal parts of speech (it is possible that Marr here somehow projected the ergative structure of Georgian on to Russian [Murashov 2000: 605]). Classical linguistics and Indo-European comparative philology therefore struck him as erroneous not only ideologically (because they failed to consider the role of labour and of the hand in human evolution, and therefore in linguistic evolution too) but also logically (if only because they began from the idea of various language families despite the obvious unity of humanity and thus of 'human' language). Against 'bourgeois' Indo-European philology Marr defended a view of language that – for all its historical and sociological declarations – stressed the anthropological and biological unity of the human race.

The 'manual language' was a language 'spoken' by everyone, by all humanity; it was uniform, and therefore by the very nature of humanity it was 'generally understood'. The ideological function of linguistics thus represented a solution not merely of scientific problems, but also of social ones (which, incidentally, explains the propagandist rhetoric that the Marrists employed to defame Indo-European philology). One of these problems, or rather the intention underlying the very existence of such problems, was that of a strategy not to explain language, but to construct it. In a sense, the Japhethitological linguist was engaged in returning language to its speakers and in making it common to all humanity.

From the very first years of its existence, the Soviet state became an arena for linguistic experiments. The script reform and the creation of Russified alphabets for the various nationalities created the background against which Marr's linguistic theory took shape and found acceptance [Smith 1998]. Even a quarter-century before the revolution, in the dawn of modernism, Academician S.K. Bulich remarked that the 'linguistic' vogue for inventing new languages (Volapük, Esperanto) was hardly coincidental. Bulich wrote: 'The continual appearance of drafts for a universal language does not simply reflect well-known public demands; it may also be a symptom of some future social evolutions that are not yet clear to us' [Bulich 1892: 397]. The public demand, in Bulich's vocabulary, that Marr's theory reflected was the ideological demand to overcome difference. The reconstruction of the primordial language answered this demand by radically abolishing 'bourgeois' differences between cultures, races, and language families. For contemporaries, the linguistic works of Marr and his followers were one more embodiment of linguistic experimentalism (alongside, for instance, the creation of

a uniform graphic system for languages that had not previously had a written form).

The futurological utopias that had inspired the hero of Andrei Platonov's *Happy Moscow* (1936) to live in a room whose walls were adorned with portraits of Lenin, Stalin, and Dr Zamenhof, the inventor of Esperanto, had still not been forgotten in the mid-1930s (although a few years later mere attachment to the Esperantist movement would become adequate reason to be accused of anti-Soviet activity [Lins 1999]). But Marr went further: by announcing universal laws of phonetic, morphological, and grammatical evolution, and by reducing that linguistic evolution itself to combinations of the initial four 'glottogenetic' elements, he transformed the 'language of the past' into the 'language of the future'. The common language reconstructed by the Marrists was both Newspeak and also the ancient past. It is unsurprising, given such a view of language, that it was the Marrist camp from which there came works in which the traditional philological study of mythology was counterposed to the study of *myth* in general, *myth as such*. For Frank-Kamenetsky and Freudenberg, *myth* was just what language was for Marr: not nomination, but deixis—a unity of thought, labour, and writing.

Marr's peculiar messianism, universalism, and near-Romantic (cf. Wilhelm von Humboldt) idea of language as an embodiment of creative energy seem to have been foreign to Stalin, but the latter's theory of linguistic pragmatics (developed with the help of A.S. Chikobava and V.V. Vinogradov) was also not free from romantic and anti-positivist intentions – to justify non-verbal, 'non-textual', 'non-metaphysical', but nonetheless significant, axioms of the social order. By deriving the Russian language from national sources (as opposed to Marr's international ones, but just as fantastical: sources in the 'Kursk-Oryol' dialect),¹ Stalin, like Marr, involuntarily accorded the language of the past (in this case Russian) not only a descriptive, but also a performative significance. In Marr's theory this performative nature had been present with illustrative literalism: the 'manual language', supposedly the origin of human communication, in fact transformed communication itself into something like a surd transition to the pronounceable text. In Stalin's 'theory' human communication became grammatically divisible, but this did not alter the traditional idea of language as a very important criterion of social experimentation.²

¹ Perhaps Stalin's mistake originated in a confusion between the Kursk-Moscow dialect and the name of one of the most bloody engagements of the Second World War, the Kursk-Oryol offensive of 1943 [Borev 1991].

² 'Without a language that it understood by society and is common to its members, society ceases production, collapses, and ceases to exist as society' [Stalin 1950: 19]. For the conclusions drawn from Stalin's postulates by Soviet linguists, see [Voprosy yazykoznaniya 1952]; [Aleksandrov 1952].

Propagandistic, journalistic, and (to a great extent) literary texts of the Soviet era construct an ideologically recommended actuality, which might be dubbed the reality (deixis) of the text and whose significance is in the structure of (quasi-)ritual experience (a significance that it lost, when such experience ceased to be relevant). The existence in many texts of glaring dissonances with Soviet reality ('Life has got better, life has got more fun'; 'The party is the intelligence, honour, and conscience of our era'; 'The whole country, with a feeling of profound satisfaction,...') is thus explained not simply in terms of the authorities' hypocrisy but as a semiotic effect of the co-existence of social reality and the reality of the text, or, in Goethe's terms, the co-existence of Truth and Poetry (which supplements and complicates our ideas of everyday social life).

Here we should consider the peculiarity of Soviet culture to be the ideological insistence and typological repetitiveness of the thought world it created over the space of decades – a space of the Imaginary that seems even today not to have lost its aesthetic attractiveness or its psychological persuasiveness. The retrospective conviction that 'we had a great era' is well-supported by an unacknowledged desire to live in a world of *an eternally repeated text* and (which is the same thing) in the space and time of ritual—because it is ritual that reproduces mythological events to the extent that it becomes these events [Lincoln 1989]; [Baiburin 1993: 201-12]. It is thus no coincidence when researchers who study Soviet culture suggest (or hint) that they are dealing with a ritualised and semiotically self-sufficient culture, whether from the standpoint of content or of methodology.

Following Katerina Clark, who compared the Soviet novel with ritual, we will underline the psycholinguistic basis of the functioning of ritual discourse in traditional cultures: wherever a more or less distinct 'language of ritual' (or 'language of myth') exists, its presence within social reality can be described not in terms of schizophrenic conflict but of phenomenological supplementation [*The Power of Discourse* 2007]. Narratives that claim to replace social reality with the reality of the text ritualise the whole sphere of Soviet public culture, from literature to architecture and operatic music. Evgeny Dobrenko's recent study has clearly shown that the very same narratives link literature, scholarship, and propaganda in the field of political economy [Dobrenko 2007]. In just the same way, in the history (and 'reality') of the U.S.S.R., empty shelves and food queues co-existed with the luxuriously published *Book on Tasty and Healthy Eating*, which described fantastical delicacies and which enjoyed a phenomenal readership (three editions between 1952 and 1954, totalling 1.5 million copies).

3. Instances of social diglossia – mastery of two alternative forms of speech, realised in different social situations – are obvious in cases of bilingualism, where it is common to find a hierarchy of linguistic codes and social roles: thus, nineteenth-century Russian aristocrats used French to converse with one another and Russian in their dealings with the peasantry, while men in Paraguay who spoke both Spanish and Guaran used to use Spanish (the more socially prestigious language) while courting and switch to Guaran once they were married [Rubin 1962]; [Krysin 2000]. Social variation in language codes is less self-evident when a single national language is spoken, but it is still quite frequent [Labov 1966]; [Krysin 1988]. With reference to the social history of Russian, a variation of this kind can be observed in the idea (which had taken shape by the beginning of the twentieth century) of a comparative ‘language standard’, in which the Moscow pronunciation of unaccented *-a* was more prestigious than the dialects employing *okanie*, while the North Russian *tsokanie*, South Russian fricative *g*, palatalised *t* in third-person verbal endings (*poyut*’ instead of *poyut*), etc. [Karinsky 1903]; [Zelenin 1913]; [Shakhmatov 1914]. Within this dynamic, linguistic differences are immediately linked with the sphere of the circulation of ‘symbolic capital’, which – in Bourdieu’s judgement – hierarchises the sphere of social relations: the symbolic status of the speaker is established by *how* s/he speaks, by *whom* s/he addresses, and by *what circumstances* dictate his/her linguistic preferences [Bourdieu 1991].¹ The degree of mutual understanding among participants in communication is everywhere determined by the coincidence of the linguistic subsystems they are using (for instance, the standard language, everyday speech, or a dialect patois), but it is important to emphasise that, even if they are using the most common ‘language standard’ possible, this does not rule out violations of communicative automatism that demand adherence to the rules of what is called speech cooperation [Grice 1975]; [Gordon, Lakoff 1971]. The social prerequisites and preconditions for such cooperation can be assessed from the examples that L.P. Yakubinsky called instances of ‘cliché interaction’, in his famous work *On Dialogic Speech* [1923]. These are cases where failures to grasp the meaning of spoken communication do not hinder the speakers’ mutual understanding, since logical and semantic links turn out to be less important for understanding than situational and emotional ones: similarity of life situation, ‘predictability’ of communicative expectations, inertia of linguistic (especially syntactic) clichés, etc. In an extreme, joking form this kind of ‘understanding’ is nor-

¹ As against Bourdieu, Viktor Zhivov suggests the term ‘linguistic capital’ [Zhivov 2005].

mally depicted as a conversation of the deaf, exchanging sentences about different subjects:

Over here, on the left!
 Your brother's a chef?
 Eh, what, you gone deaf?
 Won't take a kopeck less.
 My hair looks a mess?
 I'm off, all the best.

[Yakubinsky 1986: 45-50]. In these instances the speakers' 'common language' consists of the habit of deictically formalised communication and social-situational valuations, which are more important than the meaning of the speech (or text) in accordance with who is speaking, how they speak, what relationship the speakers have to one another, etc.¹ The public and political rhetoric of the early years of Soviet power offer numerous instances of an analogous 'understanding' between orators and their audiences.

More than that: the tasks of 'language policy', as they were formulated in the late 1920s and early 1930s, can be described as being deliberately comparable to the social and communicative advantages of 'clichéd interaction'. By an irony of method, an authoritative contribution to formulating these tasks was made by the author of the concept of 'clichéd interaction', L.P. Yakubinsky himself, who by the 1930s was a supporter of N.Ya. Marr and an authoritative propagandist of distinctively 'Soviet linguistics' (in 1933-1936 Yakubinsky headed the Leningrad institute of linguistics, subsequently becoming professor, chair of department, and dean at the Leningrad Herzen Pedagogical Institute). In a cycle of works that Yakubinsky published in the journal *Literaturnaya uchoba* – released in 1932 as a separate book, *Studies on language*, co-authored by A. M. Ivanov – he discussed the creation of a 'new linguistic culture' with an emphasis on language policy ('the conscious intervention of the class in the developing language process, its conscious leadership of this process') expressing 'the overall politics of the proletariat as given in the general line of the party'. 'The first condition of success in language policy is to disseminate even elementary knowledge about language among the broad masses, and to provide a good theoretical preparation for the leading activists who will realise the policy' [Ivanov, Yakubinsky

¹ Perhaps one thing that spurred Yakubinsky to formulate the idea of 'clichéd interaction' came from analysing the reception of poetic texts. The main theses of Yakubinsky's first published work were (1) that practical and poetical linguistic thinking coexist, and (2) that there is a 'conscious experience of sounds in poetical thinking', where the meaning of the poem depends on the 'psycho-phonetic' means with which it is expressed. So, in this case, the poet's and the audience's mutual understanding of the content is a kind of 'clichéd interaction' – a situation where shared emotions 'determine' the meaning of the words [Yakubinsky 1986: 163-175].

1932: 38, 39]. Soviet writers and their scientific instructors, specialists in the field of Marxist linguistics, have the duty of organising ‘writers’ practice on a healthy theoretical basis’, the essence of which must be to struggle against ‘the idealistic school of Indo-European linguistics and its offshoot, the formal school in grammar’ and to follow Nikolai Marr’s doctrine ‘on the single glottogonic process developing in stages, conditioned by the class struggle and the movement of society’s developing economic basis’, but, of course, first and foremost to ‘study more carefully the works of the classic writers of Marxism-Leninism, who offer not only completely adequate positions from which the dialectical materialist framework of linguistics can be developed, but also a whole series of concrete remarks on questions of language theory and language policy’ [Ivanov, Yakubinsky 1932: 39, 40].

Yakubinsky and Ivanov’s didacticism is a noteworthy instance of Soviet propaganda’s characteristic logical exaltation of the grounding (*petitio principii*) of the ideology, which is acknowledged as explanatorily ‘adequate’ for social pragmatics.¹ Ideological correctness predetermines the correctness of scholarly discourse, but also the correctness of social action, as soon as the latter is seen as related to ideology (so, for instance, the title of the newspaper *Pravda* [‘The Truth’] automatically means that whatever is printed in it becomes the truth).²

With regard to science and theory there is little new here: no conceptual scheme that is made the basis of a rational choice can be regarded as strictly consistent, if only because it is a precondition [Davidson 1974: 5–20].³ But there is also a difference: in Yakubinsky and Ivanov’s argumentation epistemological points expressed through concepts of ideological precedent – references to the leading role of the party, to class struggle, to the tasks of the proletariat – fulfil the function not only of logical preconditions, but also of a procedure for a supposed ‘proof’ (or, better, arbitrary decision) that has to manifest a *pre-established social practice* and already-familiar conclusions concerning the leading role of the party, class struggle, and the current tasks of the proletariat. The ‘new linguistic culture’ proclaimed by the authors can thus be regarded in principle as one that *already* exists, simply because a corresponding phrase has already been invented for it. Similarly, the same authors construct

¹ In another work of Yakubinsky’s, not included in *Sketches on Language*, the alleged erroneousness of Saussure’s position on the impossibility of ‘organised intervention in the language process on the part of society’ is defended as follows: ‘If Saussure is right, then it appears that Marx’s famous [...] advice to philosophers that they should change the world as well as merely studying it cannot be applied to linguistics’ [Yakubinsky 1986: 73].

² Cf. [Brooks 1994].

³ See also [Mittelstrass 1977].

a definition of what constitutes a ‘distinctively proletarian linguistic culture’ (or, in other words, a ‘proletarian class ideology’):

On the basis of the new class consciousness, the new way of perceiving reality, the new dialectical materialist thinking, the proletariat as a class counterposes itself to the bourgeoisie in the way it uses the general national linguistic material, in its attitude toward this material, in the way it selects from it the facts it needs for concrete objectives, and in a new concretisation of them in its speech practice [Ivanov, Yakubinsky 1932: 121].

It is obvious that a communicatively agreed understanding of this definition can only be reached as a result of ‘click d interaction’, the habit of following the rules of a speech cooperation that predetermines social deixis with easily-recognised verbal signals: ‘the new class consciousness, the new way of perceiving reality, the new dialectical materialist thinking’. The distinctive features of a new sociolect are defined not through nominative characteristics (what is actually new in the new language) but through characteristics of function, expression, and evaluation: it is important whom it serves and what tasks it pursues.

The differences between the old ‘speech method’ and the ‘proletarian style of speech’ is thus rooted not in the specifics of lexical, grammatical, syntactical, and phonetic word-formation (as one might still think, reading Selishchev),¹ but in the bearers of ‘proletarian psychology and ideology’ themselves: ‘the fullest expression of the proletarian style of speech’ should be sought ‘among the leading language workers of the proletariat as a whole, and especially among such workers as have lived in contact with the broad working masses and have, specifically, penetrated deeply into its speech life’. It is also understandable that ‘in the very first instance’ the proletarian style should be sought from Lenin, who ‘was and remains the greatest ideologist and leader of the working class in general’ and who was also ‘consciously creative in the specific field of language’, who ‘forged his linguistic ideology and his proletarian style in constant battles with various bourgeois and sub-bourgeois ideologists in the field of oral and written public speech’, who ‘conducted his linguistic work not in isolation but with the sharpest possible attention to the language processes that were taking place among the working masses themselves’ [Ivanov, Yakubinsky 1932: 122].

¹ Selishchev’s observations can be supplemented, as far as phonology is concerned, with the joky but plausible report of M.L. Gasparov: ‘The brother of the folklorist [Kirill] Chistov pursued a party career, and the brothers ended up using different dialects: the party member started using a fricative *g*’ [Gasparov 2000: 234]. [Translator’s note: the fricative *g* would sound more characteristically ‘proletarian’; cf. broadcasters, politicians, etc., in Britain who adopt features of London English or ‘Estaurine’ (the language of the Thames estuary) (e.g. the ‘Mockney’ glottal stop).]

In general, the content side of the texts that function within the boundaries of the ‘proletarian linguistic ideology’ directly depends not on the nature of the texts but on their ideological affiliation: with ‘advanced language workers’, Lenin, or Stalin, or, for instance, with Trotsky, who had already fallen from grace with the party when the book came out and who had thereby given an obvious demonstration of the erroneousness of his views on language [Ivanov, Yakubinsky 1932: 175–179]. The meaning of the text is seen as contained not in the text itself but in the social situation that accompanies it, in the status roles of the communicators, etc., or in other words *outside* the text itself.

4. The controlled nature of ideological, including scholarly, discourse reveals a paradox in Soviet culture, which is fully expressed in the famous tautologisation of the recognised ‘Soviet’ syllogism (‘Marx’s doctrine is all-powerful because it is true’, ‘The party’s slogans are scientific’, etc.) and also in its lack of equivalence when it comes to content. An utterance requires the understanding not only of what is said but also of what predetermines its correctness or incorrectness. A rhetorical indicator of this ‘non-equivalent tautology’ exists in Lenin’s favoured diaphora—a figure of rhetoric that appeals to an extra-textual differentiation between synonymous utterances, which supposedly establishes that the speaker is right (‘There are compromises and compromises’) [Khazagerov 2002]. It is no coincidence that the party leaders of the 1920s and 1930s, urging ideological transparency, appealed to the audience’s political literacy. A Soviet person, equipped with such literacy, immediately understands things that the clever bourgeois will never grasp. Scholarly authorities agree, among them Nikolai Marr, the creator of the revolutionary ‘Japhethitic theory’:

Cde Lunacharsky, the People’s Commissar for Education, correctly pointed out in his address to the all-union congress of education workers how easily the peasant, in a country with as little culture as Russia, understands the most advanced Soviet ideas – ideas that pose impossible difficulties to the understanding of M. Poincaré, an enlightened intellect belonging to a country of the highest culture. We see the same thing in our own scientific field [i.e. linguistics – KB] [Marr 1933: 194].

In 1926, answering a questionnaire for *Molodaya Gvardiya* magazine, the future VASKhNIL academician and then professor and chair of biology at Yakov M. Sverdlov Communist University, B.M. Zavadovsky, who had written numerous works on problems of ageing and rejuvenation, showered his young readers with similar compliments: ‘Our young people have every right to boast of the extraordinary maturity of their understanding and knowledge of social and historical life, and here, equipped with the Marxist

analysis, they are a match not only for their contemporaries but even for adult representatives of the bourgeois states' [*Molodaya Gvardiya* 1926: 103].

With a view to studies in the field of linguistic pragmatics and neo-rhetoric, the content aspect of how the Marxist sociolect is used recalls above all the devices of linguistic and moral demagogy, when the hearer is influenced not directly but indirectly – through references to moral, ethical, or ideological presuppositions, which render the speech supposedly axiomatic and emotionally convincing ([Nikolaeva 1988]; [Fedosyuk 1992]; [Bulygina, Shmelev 1997]; [Sharifullin 1997]; [Guseinov 1995]. Unlike complete syllogisms, demagogical conclusions tend to be entimemes: 'incomplete' judgements based on omissions of 'self-evident' points, on speech by implication, on tautologising identifications, metaphorical amplification, etc. One of the most characteristic indicators of linguistic demagogy is the reference back to reality and the *argumentum ab evidentibus causis*, the argument from what is self-evident – the abuse of introductory constructions which assume a 'visual' solidarity between the speaker and the audience, and the 'obviousness' of something that does not require proof (in the above quotation, for instance, the 'ease' with which the Soviet peasant and the Soviet scholar understand things that are not understood in the bourgeois West). Another sign of linguistic demagogy is a content substitution of the topic of the conversation (for instance, the translation of scholarly disputes into the field of ideology, or the discussion of some problem in an irrelevant context),¹ and also the argument with reference to a given individual (*argumentum ad hominem*) – insulting the opponent (sometimes with a latent or expressed threat: *argumentum ad baculo*, the 'argument from the stick') in order to avoid discussing the topic in its essence (*ad rem*) [Walton 2002].

The tactics of linguistic manipulation are properly described by linguists in terms of linguistic aggression, linguistic violence, or linguistic expansion: the multiplicity of specifically rhetorical devices that are used to strengthen proofs of speech in these instances are directed not at discussion and at the logic of proof, but at the interiorisation of what is said as something unavoidable or necessary.

5. The particular features of linguistic demagogy in Soviet culture can be explained, to a significant extent, by reference to the preceding

¹ In social psychology these devices have received the general name of the 'rhetoric of association' [Gross 1994: 3-23]. For the history of the concept see [Blümer 1992: 309-313]. A good example of this rhetoric exists in Vasily Shukshin's story 'The Cut', where the hero 'wins' an argument with his opponent by constantly changing the topic of conversation while offensively accusing the opponent of ignorance.

rhetorical tradition – a tradition dominated by the adoption and adaptation of Western European rhetoric. The oratorical culture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries took shape in Russia under the predominant influence of ecclesiastical homiletic and epideictic oratory, rather than of the traditions of conciliar and forensic oratory [Bogdanov 2006: 68-104]. It is also important to consider the notoriously underdeveloped state of ceremonial oratory in Russian culture. The governmental practice of social interaction is represented here with a weightier accent on spatial (proxemic) and behavioural (kinetic) rather than specifically verbal organisation. The valuable observations that Dmitry Zakharine has made on the basis of copious material covering the practice of political representation in Russian and Western European culture from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries provide enough evidence from which to assess the strength, continuity, and inertia of non-verbal stereotypes in social communication to convince one that a ‘logocentric’ study of it is inadequate [Zakharine 2005].¹

The absence of strong traditions of civic rhetoric expressed itself in the history of Russian culture in the predominating influence of rhetorical genres that we might, using G.G. Khazagerov’s useful formulation, call consolidating genres: they are ‘addressed to the like-minded, and do not expect instantaneous reaction in the form of alternatives’. As a counterweight to these there are *confrontational* genres, those that are ‘directed at winning over opponents or persuading neutrals’. Khazagerov suggests that there is a link between this circumstance and the comparative underdevelopment of the doctrine of figures in the Slavonic tradition, while Russian orators nonetheless pay attention to rhetorical tropes [Khazagerov 1994: 65, 66]. The particularities of figurative discourse, which stresses the consolidation of the audience, can be described here as a *monologic* overcoming of communicative conflict. The supposed aim of ‘consensus’ deflects any answering confrontation and ignores possible objections among an audience that is proclaimed to be unanimous. Confrontational rhetorical genres, by contrast, render explicit the possibility of argument and presuppose the possibility of reaching a compromise by means of dialogue and mutual communicative concessions which allow the various sides’ opinions to be summarised and harmonised. In simple terms, consolidating genres are more dictated by the desire to present what is wished for as being what is, while confrontational genres point in the same representation less to what is wished for than to what is necessary and what is possible. So it is no surprise that the tropes and figures that feature in classifications of demagogic rhetoric are mostly linked with mechanisms of non-

¹ See also [Zakharine 2003].

rational action: effects of metaphorisation, use of invective and of value judgements, the esoterisation of special (chiefly ideological and political) vocabulary, etc.

It is important also to note that the use of linguistic-demagogic devices is not necessarily (although it often is) connected with conscious deception of the audience. The modern interpretation of the concept of ‘demagogy’ (and of the related concept of ‘populism’) has moved a long way from its original meaning, which covered no more than artful speech addressed to the people and aiming to persuade them (δημογωγός literally means ‘leader of the people’). Such persuasion can take a variety of rhetorical forms: ancient theorists of rhetoric referred here to logical and formal-discursive devices for organising speech (*inventio* ‘invention’, *dispositio* ‘arrangement’) and to devices for emotional influence (*elocutio* ‘expression’, *memoria* ‘recollection’, *pronuntiatio / actio* ‘pronunciation / gesticulation, mimicry’), which justified — depending on the character of how they were used — contradictory (if not opposite) characteristics of the rhetoric itself.

By a definition that ancient tradition ascribed to the Sicilian orator Corax (sixth century BC), the orator’s aim was ‘not to uncover the truth, but to persuade by means of something plausible (εἰκότως [G. 1])’. According to Plato, the attainment of this aim makes rhetoric no more than an ‘art of deception’, a ‘verbal cunning’, a sophisticated ability to ‘make the great small, the small great, the false true, and the true false’. Aristotle confined rhetoric to the positive intention of finding the best means of argumentation relevant to the circumstances and nature of the concrete topic. The concept of ‘demagogy’, in a certain sense, saved the reputation of rhetoric by taking on itself the negative evaluation of such rhetorical devices as were supposedly directed not at collective reason, good sense, and enlightened knowledge, but at the emotions, prejudices, and instincts of the mob. The centuries-old tradition of condemning such prejudices and instincts does not, however, alter the main thing: the rhetorical and (importantly) the *democratic origin* of the habits of demagogic persuasion. It is no accident that Aristotle, who condemned demagogy as leading to tyranny, nonetheless acknowledged that demagogues themselves obtained power by democratic means, since the public possibility of demagogy itself is predetermined by the institution of democracy, the possibility of public addresses to the masses on behalf of the masses themselves.

In these cases, the democratic ‘defence against demagogy’ turns out to be very symptomatic: demagogy is ‘demonised’ as the importance of institutions to defend the individual and the minority grows. In authoritarian societies this defence is conducted differently: by a propagandist ‘ban’ on demagogy as such [Altunyan 1999]. Soviet

ideology proclaimed this last version of ‘defending’ society from demagogy (and, correspondingly, it reached the apogee of monologic demagogy), consistently maintaining an image of Soviet power as of an absolute foe not only of demagogy, but of rhetoric in general.

The article on rhetoric in the 1935 *Literary Encyclopaedia* cites the characteristic examples of the condemnation of rhetoric in antiquity and summarises them with a thesis relying on the utterances of Lenin: ‘R[hetic] makes a fetish of the word, according it a proper and ultimately a mystical content and an immanent ‘power’. The proletariat does not need means of deception; it does not ‘invent’ truths and it does not make a fetish of forms of expression. ‘There is nothing more opposed to the spirit of Marxism than phrasemongering’ (Lenin)’ [*Literaturnaya entsiklopediya* 1935]. The same encyclopaedia depicts the process of overcoming bourgeois rhetoric as ‘a struggle against ‘hiding’, concealing, and ‘hushing-up’ reality, against illusion and the distortion of real facts and relations by means of rhetorical ‘cunning’: ‘pathetic gases’, ambiguity, abstraction, exclamations, flattery, slander, threats, cajolings, stylistic mimicry, etc., etc.’ [*Literaturnaya entsiklopediya* 1935].¹

6. The distinction between the Soviet culture of, roughly speaking, 1920–1930 and 1940–1950 (‘culture 1’ and ‘culture 2’, in Papernyi’s terms)² does not alter the ‘*pragmacentric*’ aim of the Soviet sociolect. Both ‘culture 1’ and ‘culture 2’ see the triumph of a rhetoric that greatly resembles the rhetorical device of *adynaton*, or the ‘impossible’ (*impossibile* / ἰδύνατον [G.2])—the proven sufficiency of something that is lacking. In Aristotle’s *Poetics* the *adynaton* is described as the creation of illusory plausibility by means of enigmatic speech (‘That which is impossible but plausible has an advantage over that which is possible but improbable’) (*Poet.* 24: 1458a26f., see also 24: 1460a26); Pseudo-Longinus defines it as an extension of the content of a poet utterance (*De subl.* 38, 5). In later rhetoric the same device was brought closer to the concepts of paradox, periphrasis, and hyperbole, which with all their differences all point to something that complicates (or refutes) what is well-known by an appeal not to reality but to something that is imagined and wished for [Manzo 1988].

The particular features of this rhetoric in Soviet culture are linked to the seemingly paradoxical demand for discursive simplicity that was proclaimed as part of Soviet ideology. Beginning in the mid-1920s, ideological recommendations addressed to party orators but also to

¹ For more details see [Gofman 1932].

² Referring to the well-known typology set up in V. Papernyi’s 1983 study *Kultura ‘dva’*, according to which this ‘culture two’ (associated with the epic, the organic, the vertical rather than the horizontal etc.) characterised high Stalinism. [Editor].

writers and to scholars in the humanities constantly referred to ‘simplicity’ and ‘clarity’ of language. Texts by Lenin were especially held up as models of the praiseworthy qualities. Ecstatic praise of the leader’s achievements (in the wake of his death earlier that year) was showcased in the first number of *LEF* (1924), in articles by Eikhenbaum, Yakubinsky, Tynyanov, Kazansky, and Tomashevsky. By the mid-1930s the volume of works dealing with Lenin’s language had grown [Kruchyonikh 1925]; [Finkel 1925]; [Vur 1931]; [Ryt 1936], but the object of study itself had begun to change. Lenin’s rhetoric was still a model (Marietta Shaginyan even writes of Lenin’s language in her ‘novel complex’ *Kik* that ‘You won’t find language like that from anyone else [...] Lenin’s speech is the art of the future’ [Shaginyan 1930: 201]), and at the same time it found its living embodiment in the language of Stalin.

In a certain sense, the ‘theoretical’ basis for this reputation was prepared by Stalin himself. In 1924, in his speech ‘On Lenin’, Stalin pedantically characterised ‘some particular features of Lenin as a person and as a politician’. There are eight such features: simplicity, modesty, logic, combativeness, optimism, party principle, popularity, and genius [Stalin 1924]. Stalin’s speech would be published in 1935 as part of a volume entitled *Lenin, Stalin*, which put forward the image of Stalin the person and Stalin the orator as one who continued the cause of Lenin, who had ‘left’ Stalin even his oratorical qualities [*Lenin, Stalin* 1935]. The idea of Stalin the orator was now supported on the basis of the image that *Stalin himself* had created of Lenin as the founder of Soviet topics and rhetoric [Efimov 1950].¹

Lenin’s appeals (in a note ‘On the purification of the Russian language’) to ‘be able to speak simply and clearly, in a language that is accessible to the masses, decisively casting off the heavy artillery of learned terms and foreign words that have been mugged up ready but that the masses do not yet understand’ [Lenin XIV: 92] were embodied in the triumph of the Soviet ethos, pathos, and logos in Stalin’s language. The ninth volume of the 1935 *Literary Encyclopaedia*, quoting Stalin’s characterisation of Lenin’s oratory (‘an unconquerable power of logic [...], somewhat dry but with solid foundations, which took possession of the audience, gradually electrified them, and finally, as they say, took them all prisoner’), declared that Stalin’s own language was a model ‘of the same thing: maximally logically consistent, well-argued, clear, and simple’ [*Literaturnaya entsiklopediya* 1935].

By the end of the 1930s the speech rules that Stalin had authorised had acquired the strength of immediate pedagogical recommen-

¹ For the normative foundations of Soviet rhetoric see [Romanenko 2003].

dations. In the year 4 school text book *Rodnaya rech* [Our Mother Tongue], Stalin is depicted not only as the leader of the Soviet people, Lenin's comrade-in-arms, the hero of the revolution and the civil war, but also as a pedagogue who required a 'brief, direct, and coherent answer' from his interlocutors. It is also noteworthy that Stalin's interlocutors, however eminent they might have been, definitely needed such instructions: the textbook confides in the pupil that 'usually someone who met [Stalin] for the first time took a long time deciding how to respond to a question, tried to think the answer over good and proper, so as not to look a fool', while Stalin himself (and here the pupils who read the book would of course have had scope for comparisons) 'waited, looking at the ceiling or out of the window'. Stalin would advise such interlocutors: 'Just look straight ahead and say what you think. That's the only thing that's asked of you' [*Rodnaya rech* 1956: 232].

Adults and children were faced equally with the obligations of grammatical clarity, simplicity of speech, and communicative transparency. The 'simplicity' of Stalin's own language thus justifies its seeming 'rudeness', while demonstrating a 'directness' and a 'truthfulness' shorn of ideological ambiguity and social irresponsibility. The main thing for Soviet people was not to resemble in their speech those of whom, in Stalin's words, 'you can't say who they are, whether they're good or bad, brave or a bit cowardly, for the people to the end or for the enemies of the people' [*Rech tovarishcha Stalina* 1938].

The political lexicon of Soviet society in the Stalin era as a whole can be described as a lexicon of demonstratively 'simplified' and deliberately brutal usage of words. Beginning from Lenin's speeches, the language of a distinctively 'Soviet' ideology had taken shape as a language of invective-laden pathos and abuse, but the 1930s can be viewed as the apotheosis of a style that not only justified wild insults against the numerous internal and external enemies of the Soviet people ('spies' snouts', 'fascist-spy filth', 'scoundrels', 'wolves and running dogs of the bourgeoisie', 'scum', 'crazed adventurists', 'rotten traitors', 'bugs', 'evildoers', 'dirt', etc., etc.)¹ but also presupposed a 'philological' explanation for these insults themselves. Authorities can be found without any great effort: one such was Henri Barbusse, whose defence in a letter to his publisher of his right to 'use rude words, for the truth demands it' was eagerly cited by Soviet critics in their memoiristic writings of the late 1930s about the late Stalinist writer [Anisimov 1937].

¹ The examples are taken from one article in *Pravda* for 13 June 1937, entitled 'There is and will be no mercy for spies and traitors to the Motherland'.

The propagandistic announcements of truth and simplicity meant that these two concepts acquired an almost synonymous status in Soviet culture. When Maxim Gorky had a working-class character describe Lenin as being ‘Simple as the truth’, this remark found its way into the ideological lexicon as a piece of folklore [Gorky 1933: 196]. The treatment of simplicity and truth as synonyms, personified by Lenin, admitted no doubt as to its prescriptive force, but its didactic subtext went beyond this. Gorky’s aphorism successfully reproduced an idea that has had a long tradition in ecclesiastical and literary rhetoric in Russia.¹

In Orthodox texts this synonymous relationship corresponds to the translation of the Greek adjective *ἄρθός* [G.3] (‘straight’, ‘uniquely true’, ‘real’) by the words *pravyi* ‘right, just, true’ and *prostoi* ‘simple’ [Fasmer 1971: 352, 380]. A synonym of *pravoslavie* ‘Orthodoxy’ (literally ‘right worship’) is *prostoslavie* (literally ‘simple worship’) [*Slovar russkogo yazyka* 1992: 236]. In the Biblical text the Lord is named the ‘God of truth [*pravda*]’ (Isa. xxx.18).² Compare the following Russian proverbs, given in V.I. Dahl’s dictionary: ‘God is not in strength, but in truth’, ‘God sees the truth’, ‘God helps in the truth’. And, in the Ecclesiastical Slavonic translation of the *Theology* of John the Damascene, God is ‘simple’ (*Yako zhe est Bog prostyi* ‘as God is simple’) [Sreznevsky 1989: 1582]. A true Christian ‘walks in simplicity before God’ (Pandects of Nikon the Montenegrin, twelfth century) [Kolesov 2004: 291], since simplicity also stands for honesty, truthfulness, and an absence of deceitfulness (*ἄπλαστός* [G.4], *ἄπλότης* [G.5]) [Mikhailov 1912: 130]. Lev Tolstoy consistently pursued a didactic correlation between truth and simplicity, following Christian teachings, and one of his most quoted sayings was a phrase from *War and Peace* to the effect that ‘There is no greatness without simplicity, goodness, and truth’ [Tolstoy 1933: 165].

In the 1920s and 1930s, appeals to simplicity became a significant slogan of cultural construction [Kozlova 1990]. Political literacy was directly linked to accessibility of language, writing, and spelling (‘left to the Russian proletarian by his class enemies’ and depriving ‘the toilers of billions of hours spent on senseless work learning how to spell’ [Maltsev 1930: 89]). Proletarian truth was counterposed to bourgeois falsehood on the basis of the comprehensibility of ideological truths: in this regard the revolutionary culture of the 1920s and the culture of the 1940s and 1950s are in principle alike. ‘Cultural simplification’, the creation of a ‘standard proletarian

¹ It is strange that this has not been noticed by authors of works that give an overview of the semantics of the concepts of ‘truth/justice’ [*pravda*] and ‘verity’ [*istina*] in Russian, e.g. [Kegler 1975]; [Arutyunova 1995]; [Stepanov 1997: 318–331]; [Vezhbítska 2005: 472–499].

² cf. the Authorised Version, ‘a God of judgment’ [Trans].

language’, and ‘the rationalisation of oral speech both in politics and in production and technology’ defined more the journalistic pathos of the 1920s and 1930s [Levidov 1923]; [G[us] 1931], but the content did not change for decades, reproducing the predictable philippics against those who tried to ‘complicate’ the properly simple (and therefore also true) Soviet sociolect.

But the desired simplicity was embodied not so much in texts as in the sphere of the Imaginary. The greatness of that ‘simple as truth’ Lenin was explicable, for G.M. Krzhizhanovsky, by the fact that ‘the great truth-seeker, the Russian people, and the great truth-lover Lenin found one another so quickly and became so firmly one another’s own’ [Krzhizhanovsky 1968: 15].

The phrases ‘Lenin’s truth’ and ‘Lenin’s simplicity’ would become with time recognised topoi of Soviet culture: ‘Through Lenin’s truth the Dawn of Communism shone for us in the gloom’ (Sergei Mikhalkov), ‘Labouring youth serves your Leninist truth’ (Lev Oshanin) [*Leisya pesnya* 1954: 9, 11], ‘Our irresistible weapon is Lenin’s unfading truth’ (Mikhail Sholokhov) [Gorbachevich, Khablo 1979: 342]. They were quickly replicated, however, for texts about Stalin. Stalin’s simplicity, like the simplicity of Lenin, is synonymous with truth; but, once again, it does not consist of the simplicity and truthfulness of Stalin’s texts. It is himself. In this sense, the discursive yardstick of Soviet culture reveals itself not in the didactic experience of the text (written or spoken), but, rather, in its subjectivity and functionality. The instance cited above from the *Our Mother Tongue* textbook is indicative here: Stalin wants not so much an answer as a (pre)determined behaviour, and more, in the words of the text itself, is not required of them.

7. In the dichotomy between ‘word’ and ‘deed’, or (which in this case is the same thing) between ‘word and body’, the peculiarities of the Soviet era’s linguistic demagogy are determined by the insistence not upon dialogue but upon an answering ‘bodily act’. In principle, these acts are entirely ritualistic: in the context of sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic research into methods of ‘gaining compliance’, the study of linguistic demagogy is naturally conducted relying on concepts of a behavioural and proxemic nature—like ‘territory’, ‘distance’, ‘initiative’, etc.—that indicate active rather than verbal priorities in social interaction [Dotsenko 1997]; [Issers 1999: 213-246]. Discursive ‘simplicity’ corresponds here to the prescriptive simplicity of social and also of ritual reality, which must distinguish between what is ‘ours’ and what is ‘alien’, what is revolutionary and what is counter-revolutionary, what is Soviet and what is anti-Soviet. Here behaviour is not only more important than linguistic content (given that words can hide the truth as well as expressing it), but in a certain sense it is independent of it. What emerges as more impor-

tant in these cases is the non-linguistic signs of discursive persuasiveness, devices that the old rhetoric described with the terms *pronuntiatio* and *actio*, and also the effectiveness itself of utterances which create in the hearer the sense that they have been adequately argued, by virtue of their visual (or contemplative) and imagistic character (in classical rhetoric such texts were described with the terms *hypotyposis*, ὑποτύπωσις [G.6], or *illustratio*).¹ MacLuhan's conviction that communicative content-richness (or, in Luhmann's terminology, the success of communication) is achieved through choice and variation of media ('The medium is the message') seems limited, when applied to the functional peculiarities of the Soviet sociolect, if only because the effectiveness of language is here linked in principle with the sphere of its mediating and non-verbal persuasiveness – an effect that is well conveyed by the German concept of *Evidenzkraft* ('strength of evidence').

Particular attention is due here to communication theory's basic counterposition between oral and written forms of language. Today we can take it as established that the value characteristics of oral and written means of conveying information vary widely in different cultures, different communities, and different social strata. Without giving cultural and social details of such variation one cannot, as is sometimes attempted, insist on some kind of general valuative dominance within Russian culture of oral means of conveying and preserving information. At the same time, we can suggest that the value status accorded to different media in different cultures does not coincide *in typologically similar social situations*.

One example is the practice, seemingly already established in Russia in the seventeenth century, of conducting diplomatic negotiations orally, which differs sharply from the Western European tradition of exchanging diplomatic notes. Unlike European messengers, Russian ambassadors set out the 'speeches' that had been given them verbally. The voice can be seen here opposing writing as something that alienates the written transmission of information from the writer and the addressee, while the voice in its turn preserves the reliability and intimacy of personal communication. The diplomatic custom of 'sending speeches' was probably not unrelated to the ideologically dominant idea of the normative values of the information itself, revealing a particular meaning and suggestive force depending on how it was transmitted. It is probably no accident that business correspondence too, as numerous petitions of the same period show, demonstrates a fixation of devices that belong to oral address: in

¹ Quint. *Institutio oratoria* VI. 2. 32; VIII. 3. 61-62. See, e.g., the first Russian-language *Rhetoric*, ascribed to Makary: 'Hypotyposis is when a thing is said in such a way that it is seen as if it were present to the eyes' [*Die Makarij-Rhetorik* 1980: 159].

stylistic terms these texts are easier to read aloud than to read silently, and they reveal not just rational arguments but also their authors' emotions [Lyutsidarskaya 2002].

In Soviet culture the role of oral communication should also probably not be reduced to some kind of unambiguous value characteristic, but it should also not be ignored that trust in the suggestive force of the spoken word and in the self-evidence of the content standing behind it was supported by communist propaganda from the very first years after the revolution. The history of this question would draw us too far away, into a consideration of Lunacharsky's organisation, the 'Institute of the Living Word', of the broad popularisation of radio and cinema, of collective agitation in the form of songs and spectacles, etc. ([Goryaeva 2000]; [Gorham 2003]; [Murashov 2006]; [Vassena 2007]). In the present instance what is important is the effect of these events themselves, in strengthening within the public consciousness a comparatively solid idea of ideologically recommended media corresponding to the most reliable, truthful, and socially effective information.

Statements to the effect that the spoken word possesses some particular unmasking force were extensively publicised: party ideologists, and the Soviet literary workers who followed them, frequently counterposed the ambiguity of written texts to the sincerity of oral speech. A written text can confuse the reader; it is harder to do that with the spoken word. The spoken word here is not only capable of unmasking; it itself unmasks.

We will restrict ourselves to one example. In a collection of stories by 1950 Stalin Prize winners, one of the authors – Ivan Timofeevich Belov, a senior workman at the Red Proletarian lathe works – describes his 1938 trip to the U.S.A. as a member of a delegation sent to collect equipment bought for the factory. Visiting the Michigan Tool works, Belov and other Soviet comrades received special badges from the management which they were advised to wear on their lapels and which he thought had been issued 'to mark some important event or other' and given to them in order 'to emphasise [...] their respect for their Soviet guests'. Not so, however: as Belov hurries to admit, his idea 'turned out to be mistaken and naive': 'Soon we found out that [...] workers who saw this 'identifying' badge were not supposed to come up and talk to us' [*Nas vyrastil Stalin* 1950: 115-116]. It is unclear which language the memoirist used to communicate with the American workers (since he started off by not knowing what badge he was wearing on his lapel), but, of course, he was certain that the factory management was justly afraid of the power of the spoken word which the Soviet proletarians might have addressed to their American brothers. Here again, American and European 'diplomatic letters' are counterposed to the Russian custom of 'sending speeches'.

In its extreme expression, class understanding is achieved without words: only immediate contact is necessary. And the attributes of this contact are the self-sufficient spoken word and an equally self-sufficient visual self-evidence. Socially effective communication can express itself without superfluous words, as takes place, for instance, in the final scenes of Grigory Aleksandrov's film *The Circus* (1936), where the heroes – Ivan Martynov (Sergei Stolyarov) and Marion Dixon (Lyubov Orlova), a US star who has just become part of the Soviet paradise – are walking raptly in a gymnastics parade while exchanging remarks that need no commentary: 'Now you understand?' Martynov asks his delighted companion. 'Now I understand!' replies Mary.

The language of such understanding is not, of course a language of words: it is a language of the heart, a habit of politically literate feeling, which gives the Soviet person not only the ability to find a correct orientation but also the experience of independent foresight and correct thought/vision. In the book of stories by Stakhanovites who had won the Stalin Prize, mentioned above, this is exemplified by the labour achievement of the Azerbaijani carpet-weaver Sona Akhmedova, who has made a carpet depicting Stalin in an unprecedentedly short time. Akhmedova's portrait of the leader gives the impression that it was done from the life. Her assertions that she had never seen Stalin and had never even been to Moscow surprise viewers: 'But on that carpet he looks as if he were alive. Look how kindly he's smiling at me, at you, at everyone. No, daughter, you have probably seen our dear father!' But the secret of this miraculous naturalism is simply told: 'I always', admits Akhmedova, 'have the image of Stalin before my eyes, I carry him in my heart' [*Nas vyrastil Stalin* 1950: 81-82]. It is understandable that all doubts retreat in the face of this argument: the heart sees more clearly than the observer's eye.

The role of clichés in Soviet propaganda texts turns out, against the background of this and similar examples, to be far from trivial. On the one hand, as Soviet linguists noted, 'the monolithic character of Soviet society creates a similarity in how the constructive principle is materialised in all our newspapers: central, local, specialist, and other publications are linked not only by a shared political line and a significant shared content but also by identical ambitions in language, design, etc. Changes in the accepted forms of materialisation are associated not with individual newspapers but with changes of 'cultural context' [...] The differences between one and the same newspaper at different times is more important than that between different newspapers at one and the same time [Kostomarov 1971: 251]. On the other hand, the specific content of such differences left no room for doubting the justification for their appearance in ideological practice, since while the idea of such practice itself was

built up from the texts, it referred to the experience of ritual and collective (i.e. mostly active rather than verbal) actions.

These are the circumstances that seem to explain the paradoxical ‘forgetfulness’ of Soviet society with regard to the texts that were placed at the ideological foundations of the society itself: the books and articles of Plekhanov, Trotsky, Bukharin, and many dozens of other socialist theorists. The condemnation of the authors was enough to make their works forgotten: the posthumous condemnation of Stalin himself in 1956 proves it once again. In all these cases we see a curious pattern: Soviet ideology, appealing pedantically to the texts of the classic Marxist-Leninist writers, ended up in historical retrospect as an ideology that – despite its claims – depended less on words than on collective practices and on the thought/visual attributes of social self-awareness. The order of ritual is more important here than the correctness of the utterances that accompany it (prayer offers an analogy here: it is more important to consider oneself a believer than to remember the prayers word for word). Ethnographers and students of religion would be right, in the present instance, if they said there was nothing new in this situation: there are societies that have no sacred texts, but there are no societies without rituals, fetishes, and a collective tradition of ‘thinking in images’.

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