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1

Late Socialism

AN ETERNAL STATE

Mimicry is a very bad concept, since it relies on binary logic to describe phenomena of an entirely different nature. The crocodile does not reproduce a tree trunk, any more than the chameleon reproduces the colors of its surroundings. The Pink Panther imitates nothing, it reproduces nothing, it paints the world its color, pink on pink.

—GILLES DELEUZE AND FELIX GUATTARI,
*A THOUSAND PLATEAUS: CAPITALISM
AND SCHIZOPHRENIA*¹

An Eternal State

“It had never even occurred to me that in the Soviet Union anything could ever change. Let alone that it could disappear. No one expected it. Neither children, nor adults. There was a complete impression that everything was forever.” So spoke Andrei Makarevich, the famous songwriter and musician,² in a televised interview (1994). In his published memoirs, Makarevich

later remembered that he, like millions of Soviet citizens, had always felt that he lived in an eternal state (*vechnoe gosudarstvo*) (2002, 14). It was not until around 1986 and 1987, when reforms of *perestroika* (reconstruction) were already afoot, that the possibility of the socialist system not lasting forever even entered his mind. Many others have described a similar experience of the profound feeling of the Soviet system's permanence and immutability, and the complete unexpectedness of its collapse. And yet, Makarevich and many Soviet people also quickly discovered another peculiar fact: despite the seeming abruptness of the collapse, they found themselves prepared for it. A peculiar paradox became apparent in those years: although the system's collapse had been unimaginable before it began, it appeared unsurprising when it happened.

When the policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost'* (openness, public discussion) were introduced in 1985, most people did not anticipate that any radical changes would follow. These campaigns were thought to be no different from the endless state-orchestrated campaigns before them: campaigns that came and went, while life went on as usual. However, within a year or two the realization that something unimaginable was taking place began to dawn on the Soviet people. Many speak of having experienced a sudden "break of consciousness" (*perelom soznania*) and "stunning shock" (*sil'neishii shok*) quickly followed by excitement and readiness to participate in the transformation. Although different people experienced that moment differently, the type of experience they describe is similar, and many remember it vividly.

Tonya, a school teacher born in Leningrad in 1966, describes the moment she first realized, around 1987, that "something impossible" (*chto-to nevozmozhnoe*) was taking place: "I was reading on the metro and suddenly experienced an utter shock. I remember that moment very well. . . . I was reading Lev

Razgon's story 'Uninvented' (*Nepridumannoe*),³ just published in *Iunost'* [the literary journal *Youth*]. I could never have imagined that anything even remotely comparable would be published. After that the stream of publications became overwhelming." Inna (born in Leningrad in 1958)⁴ remembers her own "first moment of surprise" (*pervyi moment udivleniia*), which also occurred around 1987 and 1988: "For me perestroika began with the first publication in *Ogonek*⁵ of a few poems by [Nikolai] Gumilev," a poet of the *Akmeist* circle whose poetry had not been published in the Soviet Union since the 1920s.⁶ Inna had already read the poetry in handwritten copies but had never expected it to appear in state publications. It was not the poems that surprised her but their appearance in the press.

The stream of new publications began to rise exponentially, and the practice of reading everything, exchanging texts with friends, and discussing what one had read soon became a national obsession. Between 1987 and 1988, the circulation of most newspapers and literary journals jumped astronomically, as much as tenfold and more in the course of one year.⁷ Often it was impossible to find many of the more popular publications at newsstands because of the speed at which they sold out. In letters to the weekly magazine *Ogonek*, readers complained of having to stand in line at a local kiosk at 5 A.M., two hours before it opened, to have any chance of buying the magazine. Like everyone else, Tonya tried to read as much as possible: "My friend Katia and I started subscribing to monthly literary journals (*tosltie zhurnaly*): *Oktiabr'*, *Nash Sovremennik*, *Novyi Mir*, *Znamia*, *Iunost'*. Everyone tried to subscribe to different journals so they could exchange them with friends and have access to more materials. Everyone around us was doing this. I spent the whole year incessantly reading these publications."

Reading journals, watching live television broadcasts, and talking to friends who were doing the same quickly produced

new language, topics, comparisons, metaphors, and ideas, ultimately leading to a profound change of discourse and consciousness. As a result of this process, in the late 1980s, there was a widespread realization that the state socialism which had seemed so eternal might in fact be coming to an end. Italian literary scholar Vittorio Strada, who spent much time in the Soviet Union before the transformation began, summarized the experience of the fast-forwarded history that he encountered among the Soviet people in the late 1980s: “[N]o one, or almost no one, could imagine that the collapse . . . would happen so soon and so fast. . . . The timing of the end and the way in which it occurred were simply startling” (Strada 1998, 13).

The abrupt change was also quite exciting. Tonya, who had always felt proud of being a Soviet person and never identified with the dissidents, unexpectedly found herself quickly engrossed in the new critical discourse and, in her words, “felt elated” that most people were doing it—“this was all so sudden and unexpected and it completely overtook me.” Tonya remembers reading

Evgeniia Ginzburg’s *Steep Route* (*Krutoi marshrut*),⁸ then Solzhenitsyn, then Vasilii Grossman.⁹ Grossman was the first to imply that Communism could be a form of fascism. This had never occurred to me before. He did not say this openly but simply compared the tortures in the two systems. I remember reading it lying on the sofa in my room and experiencing an intense feeling of a revolution happening all around me. It was stunning. I had a break of consciousness (*perelom soznania*). Then came the books of Vladimir Voinovich. I shared everything with my uncle Slava.

As these and endless other stories about the late 1980s suggest, the system’s collapse had been profoundly unexpected and

unimaginable to many Soviet people until it happened, and yet, it quickly appeared perfectly logical and exciting when it began. Many discovered that, unbeknownst to themselves, they had always been ready for it, that they had always known that life in socialism was shaped through a curious paradox, that the system was always felt to be both stagnating and immutable, fragile and vigorous, bleak and full of promise. These experiences suggest an important set of questions about Soviet socialism: What was the nature of the late Soviet system and way of life that had this paradox at its core? On what kind of internal systemic shifts at the level of discourse, ideology, social relations, and time was this paradox predicated? Furthermore, what was the nature of the production and communication of knowledge in this system, and of the forms in which it was coded, circulated, received, and interpreted? These questions are not about the causes for the collapse but about the conditions that made the collapse possible without making it anticipated. With these questions in mind, this book sets out to explore late socialism—the period that spanned approximately thirty years, between the mid-1950s and the mid-1980s, before the changes of perestroika began, when the system was still being experienced as eternal. This book will investigate this period through the eyes of its last generation, focusing on these people's relations with ideology, discourse, and ritual, and on the multiple unanticipated meanings, communities, relations, identities, interests, and pursuits that these relations allowed to emerge.

Binary Socialism

One of the motivations for writing this book is to question certain problematic assumptions about Soviet socialism, which are implicitly and explicitly reproduced in much academic and

journalistic writing today. These common assumptions include the following: socialism was “bad” and “immoral” or had been experienced as such by Soviet people before the changes of perestroika, and, further, the collapse of Soviet socialism was predicated on this badness and immorality. These assumptions are manifest today in the terminology used to describe that system—for example, in the widespread use of phrases such as “the Soviet regime,” with the myriad assumptions often packed into it—and in the use of binary categories to describe Soviet reality such as oppression and resistance, repression and freedom, the state and the people, official economy and second economy, official culture and counterculture, totalitarian language and counterlanguage, public self and private self, truth and lie, reality and dissimulation, morality and corruption, and so on.¹⁰ These terminologies have occupied a dominant position in the accounts of Soviet socialism produced in the West and, since the end of socialism, in the former Soviet Union as well.

In the most extreme examples of this discourse, Soviet citizens are portrayed as having no agency: in this portrayal, they allegedly subscribed to “communist values” either because they were coerced to do so or because they had no means of reflecting upon them critically. In the late 1980s, Françoise Thom argued that, in the context of ubiquitous ideological language, linguistic “symbols cease[d] to work properly,” making the Soviet Union “a world without meaning, without events and without humanity” (Thom 1989, 156). In the late 1990s, Frank Ellis went further:

“When reason, common sense, and decency are assaulted often enough, then personality is crippled, and human intelligence disintegrates or is warped. The barrier between truth and lies is effectively destroyed. . . . Schooled in such a

climate, fearful and deprived of any intellectual initiative, Homo Sovieticus could never be more than a mouthpiece for the party's ideas and slogans, not so much a human being then, as a receptacle to be emptied and filled as party policy dictated." (Ellis 1998, 208)

Even when granted some agency in accounts of this type, the voices of these subjects are often still unheard due to oppression and fear. For example, John Young describes Soviet citizens as "non-conforming" dissidents, who "counter the deceptions of government by setting forth 'the facts' in contrast to official falsehood" in "conversations with frustrated friends behind closed doors, in sign language devised by family members who suspect the secret police have bugged their apartment, in a manuscript or on a tape recording passed around from person to person" (Young 1991, 226). These are extreme examples; however, they represent a definite trend in conceptualizing Soviet life.¹¹

Binary metaphors are also widespread in retrospective analyses of socialism written inside the former Soviet Union since the "collapse." In such accounts, Soviet culture is divided into the "official" and the "unofficial"—a division that, according to sociologists Uvarova and Rogov, can be traced back to a particular dissident ideology of the 1970s which held that "nothing good could appear in an [official] Soviet journal in principle; and a real text could only be published in an unofficial publication (*samizdat*) or a foreign publication (*tamizdat*)" (1998). Critiquing this division, Uvarova and Rogov propose instead to divide Soviet culture into censored (*podtsenzurnaia*) and uncensored (*nepodtsenzurnaia*). This change of terms helps to highlight the ambivalence of cultural production in the Soviet Union; however, it still reduces Soviet reality to a binary

division between the state (censored) and the society beyond it (uncensored), failing to account for the fact that many of the common cultural phenomena in socialism that were allowed, tolerated, or even promoted within the realm of the officially censored were nevertheless quite distinct from the ideological texts of the Party.

One reason for the persistence of these binary models is the particular “situatedness” (Haraway 1991) of much critical knowledge about Soviet socialism: it has been produced either outside of, or in retrospect to, socialism, in contexts dominated by antisocialist, nonsocialist, or post-socialist political, moral, and cultural agendas and truths. As Rogov demonstrates in his research, diaries from Brezhnev’s period, produced during the 1970s, and memoirs produced retrospectively in the 1990s are not only written in two distinct voices and languages; they also evaluate the everyday realities of Soviet socialism, both implicitly and explicitly, in two different ways. The memoirs not only tend to be much more critical of the socialist system than the diaries, but also to conceive of it and of the author’s place within it in terms that emerged only in retrospect (Rogov 1998).¹² Patrick Seriot has also shown that by the end of perestroika in the late 1980s, it had become politically important, especially for members of the intelligentsia, to emphasize that during socialism there was no “mixing [of] the language of power with their own language” and that their own language was “a free space to be extended through struggle” (Seriot 1992, 205–6). But this story of divided languages was, to a large extent, a retrospective late- and post-perestroika construction.

Furthermore, the term stagnation (*zastoi*), which figures prominently as a tag for the period of Brezhnev’s rule, also emerged only in retrospect, during the time of Gorbachev’s reforms, after Brezhnev’s period had ended and the socialist

system was undergoing its rapid transformation.¹³ In fact, the very conceptualization of the late 1960s and 1970s, when Brezhnev was the party's general secretary, as a certain "period" with concrete historical features, also emerged retrospectively during perestroika. According to Rogov, "The [Soviet] person in the 1970s had a rather vague understanding about the historical coordinates of his epoch, considerably vaguer than became apparent to the same person from the perspective of the late 1980s and 1990s" (1998, 7). The perestroika critical discourse which exposed many unknown facts about the Soviet past and critically articulated many realities that had been implicitly known but unarticulated until then, also contributed to the creation of certain myths about it that were colored by the newly emergent revolutionary ideas and political agendas of the late 1980s. Many binary categories in the accounts of the vanishing system gained their prominence within that revolutionary context.

At the same time, some of the roots of these binary categories go much deeper, originating in the broad "regimes of knowledge" formed under the conditions of the Cold War, when the entity of "the Soviet bloc" had been articulated in opposition to "the West" and as distinct from "the third world." The act of critiquing isolated binaries does not necessarily deconstruct these deeper underlying assumptions behind them. For example, Susan Gal and Gail Kligman provided a crucial critique of many binary divisions that dominate the studies of state socialism, arguing that in these societies "[r]ather than any clear-cut 'us' versus 'them' or 'private' versus 'public,' there was a ubiquitous self-embedding or interweaving of these categories."¹⁴ And yet, they connected this critique with another claim that "[e]veryone was to some extent complicit in the system of patronage, lying, theft, hedging, and duplicity through which the system operated," and that often even "intimates, family members and

friends informed on each other” (Gal and Kligman 2000, 51). The emphasis on such categories as duplicity, lying, and informing on others—which suggest moral quandaries at the core of the people’s relations with the system and with each other—implicitly reproduces an underlying assumption that socialism was based on a complex web of immoralities.

Everyday Realities

The Soviet system produced tremendous suffering, repression, fear, and lack of freedom, all of which are well documented. But focusing only on that side of the system will not take us very far if we want to answer the question posed by this book about the internal paradoxes of life under socialism. What tends to get lost in the binary accounts is the crucial and seemingly paradoxical fact that, for great numbers of Soviet citizens, many of the fundamental values, ideals, and realities of socialist life (such as equality, community, selflessness, altruism, friendship, ethical relations, safety, education, work, creativity, and concern for the future) were of genuine importance, despite the fact that many of their everyday practices routinely transgressed, reinterpreted, or refused certain norms and rules represented in the official ideology of the socialist state. For many, “socialism” as a system of human values and as an everyday reality of “normal life” (*normal’naia zhizn’*)¹⁵ was not necessarily equivalent to “the state” or “ideology”; indeed, living socialism to them often meant something quite different from the official interpretations provided by state rhetoric.

An undeniable constitutive part of today’s phenomenon of “post-Soviet nostalgia,” which is a complex post-Soviet construct,¹⁶ is the longing for the very real humane values, ethics, friendships, and creative possibilities that the reality of socialism afforded—often in spite of the state’s proclaimed goals—and

that were as irreducibly part of the everyday life of socialism as were the feelings of dullness and alienation. A Russian philosopher wrote in 1995 that, from the vantage point of the first post-Soviet years, he had come to recognize that the grayness and fear of Soviet reality had been indivisibly linked with a very real optimism and warmth, with accompanying forms of “human happiness,” “comforts and well-being,” and “cordiality, successes and order” in a “well-furnished common space of living” (Savchuk 1995). A Russian photographer, echoing the same realization, made a “banal confession” that for him personally the “crash of Communism” was also, in retrospect, the crash of something very personal, innocent, and full of hope, of the “passionate sincerity and genuineness” that marked childhood and youth (Vilenskii 1995). A critical examination of such retrospections is essential to an understanding of Soviet socialism. Without understanding the ethical and aesthetic paradoxes that “really existing socialism” acquired in the lives of many of its citizens, and without understanding the creative and positive meanings with which they endowed their socialist lives—sometimes in line with the announced goals of the state, sometimes in spite of them, and sometimes relating to them in ways that did not fit either-or dichotomies—we would fail to understand what kind of social system socialism was and why its sudden transformation was so unimaginable and yet unsurprising to the people living within it.

For the analysis of this seemingly paradoxical mix of the negative and positive values, of alienations and attachments, we need a language that does not reduce the description of socialist reality to dichotomies of the official and the unofficial, the state and the people, and to moral judgments shaped within cold war ideologies. Recent critical discussion of language from postcolonial studies provides some insight relevant to the socialist context.¹⁷ Dipesh Chakrabarty criticizes some postcolonial

historiography for the use of a kind of language that implicitly produces “Europe” as “the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call ‘Indian,’ ‘Chinese,’ ‘Kenyan,’ and so on,” reducing these other histories to “variations on a master narrative that could be called ‘the history of Europe’” (2000, 27). Chakrabarty’s call for a language that would decenter and “provincialize” the “master narrative” of Europe in postcolonial historiography is relevant to the writings on socialism; however, in the case of socialism, especially in Russia, the object of “provincializing” would not just be “Europe” but, more specifically, “Western Europe”¹⁸—a post-Soviet “master narrative” in the history of socialism that implicitly and explicitly reproduces binary categories of the Cold War and of the opposition between “first world” and “second world.”

This book is also an attempt to look for such a language and thereby to reconstruct some ethical and aesthetic complexities of socialist life, as well as the creative, imaginative, and often paradoxical cultural forms that it took. The challenge of such a task is to avoid a priori negative accounts of socialism without falling into the opposite extreme of romanticizing it. By showing the realities of actually existing socialism—where control, coercion, alienation, fear, and moral quandaries were irreducibly mixed with ideals, communal ethics, dignity, creativity, and care for the future—this book attempts to contemplate and re-humanize Soviet socialist life.¹⁹

Lefort’s Paradox

Like Western democracy, Soviet socialism was part of modernity. Foucault stressed that even such “pathological forms” of power as Stalinism and fascism, “in spite of their historical uniqueness . . . are not quite original. They used and extended

mechanisms already present in most other societies . . . [and] used to a large extent the ideas and the devices of our political rationality” (Foucault 1983, 209). As a modern project, Soviet socialism shared the key contradictions of modernity.

One of the central contradictions of socialism is a version of what Claude Lefort called a general paradox within the ideology of modernity: the split between *ideological enunciation* (which reflects the theoretical ideals of the Enlightenment) and *ideological rule* (manifest in the practical concerns of the modern state’s political authority). The paradox, that we will call “Lefort’s paradox,” lies in the fact that ideological rule must be “abstracted from any question concerning its origins,” thus remaining outside of ideological enunciation and, as a result, rendering that enunciation deficient. In other words, to fulfill its political function of reproducing power, the ideological discourse must claim to represent an “objective truth” that exists outside of it; however, the external nature of this “objective truth” renders the ideological discourse inherently lacking in the means to describe it in total, which can ultimately undermine this discourse’s legitimacy and the power that it supports. This inherent contradiction of any version of modern ideology, argues Lefort, can be concealed only by the figure of the “master,” who, by being presented as standing *outside* ideological discourse and possessing *external* knowledge of the objective truth, temporarily conceals the contradiction by allowing it “to appear through himself” (1986, 211–12).²⁰ In other words, modern ideological discourse, based on the utopian ideals of the Enlightenment, gains its legitimacy from an imaginary position that is external to it and will experience a crisis of legitimacy if that imaginary external position is questioned or destroyed.

In the society built on communist ideals, this paradox appeared through the announced objective of achieving the full

liberation of the society and individual (building of communism, creation of the New Man) by means of subsuming that society and individual under full party control. The Soviet citizen was called upon to submit completely to party leadership, to cultivate a collectivist ethic, and repress individualism, while at the same time becoming an enlightened and independent-minded individual who pursues knowledge and is inquisitive and creative.²¹ This Soviet version of Lefort's paradox was not a chance development; it grew out of the very revolutionary project itself. In 1825, Saint-Simon, an early theorist of the political, intellectual, and artistic avant-garde, whose ideas influenced Marx, Lenin, and Russian revolutionaries, wrote that the project of liberating the society required establishing a political and aesthetic avant-garde that would exercise "over society a positive power, a true priestly function . . . marching forcefully in the van of all the intellectual faculties." This avant-garde, wrote Saint-Simon, should address itself "to the imagination and to the sentiments of mankind [and] should therefore always exercise the liveliest and most decisive action." For this purpose the arts and politics should unite under "a common drive and a general idea" (quoted in Egbert 1967, 343).

The conception of a political and artistic avant-garde as a creative force united by one idea for the purposes of leading and perfecting society put this tandem before an enduring paradox: the process of leading and perfecting had to be subsumed under the control of a political program and, at the same time, to be free from control in order to focus on the creative, experimental, and innovating process for the production of a better future (Egbert 1967, 343–46).

In the Russian revolutionary context, this paradox of modern ideology became institutionalized by the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. The new process of cultural production was

supposed to advance radical social ideas and revolutionize consciousness by achieving two relatively incommensurable goals: to practice an experimental, innovative aesthetics that was constantly ready to defy old canons and, at the same time, to subsume these creative experimentations and innovations under the strict control of the vanguard party. Immediately after the revolution, Lenin wrote in a letter to Clara Zetkin that Communists could not sit in idleness allowing the “cultural process” to develop chaotically: they “must strive with clear consciousness to control that entire process in order to form and define its results” (Arnol’dov et al. 1984, 176). Lenin accused members of the Second International of separatism because some of them argued that, having come to power, the proletariat should stop interfering with creative cultural production and experimentation. On the contrary, argued Lenin, the only means of achieving the goal of the ultimate liberation of culture and consciousness in communism was to intensify the party’s management of all spheres of cultural life. A person could not become truly liberated spontaneously; that person had to be educated and cultivated. On Lenin’s insistence, the Bolshevik Party adopted a resolution stressing that all organizations of the *Proletkul’t* (People’s Commissariat of Proletarian Culture) had “an unconditional obligation to regard themselves as strictly subsidiary organs” to the organizations of the *Narkompros* (People’s Commissariat of Enlightenment) (Arnol’dov et al. 1984, 171). In other words, cultural organizations (all forms of intellectual, scientific, and artistic practice) were subsidiary to educational and political organizations, and all forms of cultural production were to be fully supervised by the party. It was that subsidiary position, went the argument, that would allow these organizations to exercise their full creative potential for the building of the new society.

The Soviet state's constant anxiety about publicly justifying state control of cultural production while simultaneously attempting to promote its independence and experimentation reflected this paradox. As late as 1984, a book entitled *Marxist-Leninist Theory of Culture* (*Marksistsko-leninskaia teoriia kul'tury*), authored by a collective of theoreticians of culture from Moscow's Institute of Marxism-Leninism (Arnol'dov et al.), was still defending this point. Some may say—their book begins—that to be truly creative, the work of cultural production in intellectual, scientific, and artistic fields cannot be controlled and directed. The book goes on to argue that although this view is not altogether erroneous, it tells only one side of the story, ignoring the irreducible duality of all cultural production. In fact, the book argues, creative work is always both “a strictly private affair” of a creative individual and a “labor of social utility” that creates “spiritual values” and “socio-moral norms” in society. In the socialist society, both aspects of cultural production are recognized as equally important, since in this society “the formation of the new person goes not spontaneously, but consciously, as a result of a purposeful educational work.” Therefore, in the socialist context, the independence of creativity and the control of creative work by the party are not mutually contradictory but must be pursued simultaneously (Arnol'dov et al. 1984, 162, 163). What is remarkable about the discourse in this book is not the argument itself but that this imaginary dispute needed to be revisited throughout Soviet history, suggesting the enduring tension at socialism's core.

This tension was not limited to scientific and artistic spheres but concerned all discourses and forms of knowledge that were produced and circulated in Soviet society. In the earlier periods of Soviet history, as the following chapters will show, the loud voices of the political, scientific, and artistic avant-garde

concealed this paradox. They located themselves “outside” the field of ideological discourse and from that external position made public comments about and adjustments to that discourse. An explosion of creativity and experimentation marked the early postrevolutionary years but ultimately gave way to the suppression of the intellectual avant-garde and all experimental culture and science and to the introduction of a strict and unified party control.²² This shift was enabled and made to appear logical by the paradox inherent in the very ideology of the revolutionary project.

It was Stalin who now played the role of Lefort’s “master” who stood outside of ideological discourse, making editorial comments about it from that external position and in this way concealing the paradox through himself. This external position enabled the production and wide circulation of a public meta-discourse about all forms of political, artistic, and scientific expression that evaluated them for precision and accuracy against an external canon—the Marxist-Leninist dogma. Stalin’s “external” editorial position vis-à-vis all forms of discourse and knowledge, which provided him with unique access to the external canon against which to evaluate them, was crucial in the emergence of those phenomena that became the trademarks of his regime: his immense political power; the cult of his personality; his personal involvement in editing political speeches, scientific papers, films, and musical compositions; the campaign of purges in party organizations; and the ultimate Great Terror in which millions perished. In the last years of Stalin’s rule, and especially after his death in 1953 and the subsequent denunciation of his cult of personality, that external position vis-à-vis discourse and knowledge vanished. The main result of this development was not the denunciation of a concrete leader, but a major reorganization of the entire discursive regime of

state socialism: a position external to ideological (political, scientific, artistic) discourse, from which a metadiscourse about it could be launched, ceased to exist, and therefore the metadiscourse on ideology disappeared from public circulation (see discussion of this process in chapter 2).

Since there was no longer an external voice that could conceal the Lefort's paradox of Soviet ideology, the incongruence of goals and means that constituted that paradox became unleashed. This change ultimately led to a profound transformation of the structure of all types of Soviet ideological discourse (from the language of ideology to the nature of ideological rituals, practices, and organizations) during late socialism. As a result of that transformation, it became less important to read ideological representations for "literal" (referential) meanings than to reproduce their precise structural forms. This transformation of the discursive regime eventually led to a profound shift within Soviet culture during the late period, opening up spaces of indeterminacy, creativity, and unanticipated meanings in the context of strictly formulaic ideological forms, rituals, and organizations. In this way Lefort's paradox returned to haunt the Soviet system. It enabled a profound internal reinterpretation and displacement of the socialist system, creating a set of contradictory conditions that made the system's implosion seem so unexpected when it began, and at the same time so unsurprising and fast once it had occurred.

Acts and Rituals

During the late Soviet period, the form of ideological representations—documents, speeches, ritualized practices, slogans, posters, monuments, and urban visual propaganda—became increasingly normalized, ubiquitous, and predictable.

This standardization of the form of discourse developed gradually, as a result of the disappearance, in the 1950s, of the external editorial voice that commented on that discourse. With that shift, the form of the ideological representations became fixed and replicated—unchanged from one context to the next. These representations no longer had to be read literally, at least in most contexts, to work perfectly well as elements of the hegemonic representation. This fixed and normalized discursive system was akin to the kind of discourse that Bakhtin terms “authoritative discourse” (*avtoritetnoe slovo*). For Bakhtin, authoritative discourse coheres around a strict external idea or dogma (whether religious, political, or otherwise) and occupies a particular position within the discursive regime of a period. It has two main features. First, because of a special “script” in which it is coded, authoritative discourse is sharply demarcated from all other types of discourse that coexist with it, which means that it does not depend on them, it precedes them, and it cannot be changed by them. Second, all these other types of discourse are organized around it. Their existence depends on being positioned in relation to it, having to refer to it, quote it, praise it, interpret it, apply it, and so forth, but they cannot, for example, interfere with its code and change it. Regardless of whether this demarcated and fixed authoritative discourse is successful in persuading its authors and audiences, they experience it as immutable and therefore unquestionable (Bakhtin 1994, 342–43).²³ To stress that during late socialism the newly normalized Soviet ideological discourse no longer functioned at the level of meaning as a kind of ideology in the usual sense of the word, I will refer to it henceforth as “authoritative discourse.”

The change in the functioning of Soviet ideology during late socialism was reflected in how Soviet citizens participated in ideological rituals and events, as described in many ethnographic

accounts. For example, it is well known that during the period from the 1960s to the 1980s, the overwhelming majority of Soviet people participated in May Day and Revolution Day parades in Soviet cities. The apotheosis of such parades in the cities was the walk across the central square in front of the city's party leaders, who stood on a high platform and waved to the marching masses. People cheered as official slogans blared from the loudspeakers, and the thundering roar of these hundreds of thousands of voices sounded impressive and unanimous. According to Soviet newspapers at the time, these massive events "convincingly demonstrate[d] the unbreakable union of the party and the people. . . ." (*Pravda* May 2, 1981). In practice, however, most people in the parades paid little attention to the slogans, and many were not aware who exactly was depicted on the Politburo portraits they carried.

Most Soviet citizens also regularly participated in various state elections for city or district government positions. These elections usually had a single official candidate and invariably produced a massive vote of support, though in practice the voters were relatively uninterested and/or ignorant as to who they were voting for. Sergei (born in 1962) remembers: "Usually I was not quite sure what type of elections these were, or who the candidate was. I would just go to the local election center, take the ballot with the candidate's name, and put it in the voting box. This was the whole procedure for me. I would forget the name of the candidate a few minutes later. I don't remember ever worrying that I was not more interested or that the elections were 'fake.'" Most young people also regularly attended Komsomol (Communist Union of Youth) meetings at schools, colleges, factories, and other locations. At such meetings, it was not uncommon for people to participate in certain procedures without paying close attention to their literal meanings, such as voting in favor of

resolutions without knowing what they said. This was not always the case, but it was certainly a dominant paradigm. Among small groups, the required Komsomol meetings were often reported without actually being held. Anna (born in 1961) remembers regular Komsomol meetings in her student group (twenty to twenty-five people) in college in the early 1980s, where “the *komsorg* (the meeting’s convener) would often suggest: ‘Maybe we should just write down that we had a discussion and voted in favor of the resolution, without actually having the discussion? I understand that everyone has things to attend to at home.’”

What should we make of these acts of mass participation and support in which people regularly paid little attention to the literal meanings of the ritualized acts and pronouncements in which they participated? Can these acts be described as pure masquerade and dissimulation, practiced in public for the gaze of the state and collective surveillance? This book argues that these acts cannot be reduced in this way, and instead offers a different interpretation. An examination of how these ritualized events and texts operated and what they meant to those enacting them is crucial to an understanding of the inherent paradoxes of late socialism. In most contexts these unanimous acts, gestures, and utterances of support did not refer to the literal meaning of ideological statements, resolutions, and figures, but rather performed a different role. For this analysis, we need first to understand the discursive conditions under which authoritative discourse was produced, circulated, and received in late socialism.

Actors in Masks

One common attempt to explain how ideological texts and rituals function in contexts dominated by unchallengeable authoritative discourse whose meanings are not necessarily read

literally is to assert that citizens act “as if” they support these slogans and rituals in public, while privately believing something different. Underlying this model are theories of mimicry and dissimulation. A recently influential approach to these theories can be found in the work of Peter Sloterdijk. In *Critique of Cynical Reason* Sloterdijk argues that in the contemporary West the success of ideology is based not on Marx’s classic formula of “false consciousness” (“they do not know it, but they are doing it”), but on what he calls “enlightened false consciousness” (“they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it”). According to Sloterdijk, many Western subjects are postmodern cynics who insist on wearing a mask of misrecognition because they know that the ideology of the consumer society is unavoidable, even though they also know perfectly well that this ideology misrepresents social reality (Sloterdijk 1993; Žižek 1991a, 29). This model of acting “as if” echoes James Scott’s (1990) discussion of the discourse of subaltern subjects that proceeds in two distinct transcripts, “official” and “hidden”—one representing a mask, the other the truth behind it. Lisa Wedeen, in a recent analysis of the “authoritarian” rule of President Asad in Syria, draws on Sloterdijk and Scott to argue that the art of publicly acting “as if” they subscribed to ideological claims, without really believing them, allowed common citizens “to keep their actual thought private,” sustaining a “gap . . . between performance and belief” (Wedeen 1999, 82). Slavoj Žižek (1991a) draws on a similar model of acting “as if” to theorize the basis of power in Eastern European state socialism.

In 1978, in the famous essay “The Power of the Powerless,” Václav Havel (1986) constructs a similar model of state socialism in the Eastern Europe of the 1970s. According to Havel, the citizens of socialist Czechoslovakia lived “in lies”: they acted in

public as if they supported ideological slogans and messages even though privately they believed them to be false. This mode of conformism, argues Havel, allowed them to be left alone by the regime and to avoid personal problems—a reasoning Havel found morally reprehensible (1986, 49–51). In the Soviet Russian context, a related model has been developed by Oleg Kharkhordin. Kharkhordin argues that the subject of late Soviet society was a dissimulator who acted differently in two different spheres, the “official public” and the “hidden intimate.” According to that model the dissimulating subject was split: its hidden intimate self was only “available to the gaze of the closest friends or family members but sometimes kept secret even from them” (1999, 357), making it possible to spot these dissimulators only when they “suddenly let their strict self-control go and [broke] their utmost secrecy” (275).

All these models share a crucial problem: although they provide an alternative to the binary division between the recognition and misrecognition of ideology, they do so by producing another problematic binary between “truth” and “falsity,” “reality” and “mask,” “revealing” and “dissimulating.” According to this binary model, such public political acts as voting in favor of an official resolution or displaying a pro-government slogan at a rally should be interpreted “literally”—as declarations of one’s support for the state that are either true (“real” support) or false (“dissimulation” of support).²⁴ Several problematic assumptions about language, knowledge, meaning, and personhood lie at the basis of this understanding. In this view, the only function of language is to refer to the world and to state facts about it. That is why models based on such an understanding divide language into “codes,” such as official, or public, transcript and hidden, or intimate, transcript.²⁵ Knowledge in this view exists before discourse. Discourse reflects knowledge and

does not produce it. Meaning, accordingly, is a psychological state that is fully formed in the mind of the speaker before the act of speaking.²⁶ The speaking person, in these models, is a unified, bounded, sovereign individual who possesses a “unique self-constituted” consciousness (Mitchell 1990, 545) and a “unitary speaking ego” (Hanks 2000, 182), and whose authentic voice can be hidden or revealed.²⁷

The Performative

In hopes of articulating a more nuanced understanding of late socialism and its paradoxes, we need to go beyond these problematic assumptions to examine how people living within that system engaged with, interpreted, and created their reality. The analysis in this book will consider discourse and forms of knowledge that circulated in everyday Soviet life not as divided into spheres or codes that are fixed and bounded, but as processes that are never completely known in advance and that are actively produced and reinterpreted (Haraway 1991, 190–91; Fabian 2001, 24).

Many theories of language focus on its active and processual aspects. For example, Voloshinov stressed that the use of language involves a situated process in which meaning is produced, not simply reflected or communicated (Voloshinov 1986, 86).²⁸ In his critique of the models of language that posit isolated bounded consciousness Bakhtin also pointed out that they ignore the ongoing and agential processes constitutive of the event. Such models, he argued, can only transcribe an event as an accomplished static fact “at the cost of losing those actual creative forces which generated the event at the moment it was still being accomplished (when it was still open), i.e., at the cost of losing the living and in principle nonmerging participants in

the event" (1990, 87). Instead, the productive and dialogic view of language developed by Bakhtin and his colleagues understands the speaking self as "voice" that is never bounded or static but always "dialogized," because speaking implies inhabiting multiple voices that are not "self-enclosed or deaf to one another" but that "hear each other constantly, call back and forth to each other, and are reflected in one another" (1984, 75).²⁹

The productive nature of language is also central to John Austin's analysis of "performatives" and the traditions in the study of language that are related to this approach (1999). Introducing speech act theory, Austin argues that in addition to "constative" utterances that state something (present facts or describe reality, such as "it is cold," "my name is Joe"), language includes a whole class of utterances that *do* something. Such utterances as "Guilty!" (uttered by a judge in a courtroom), "I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth" (at an official launching ceremony), or "I bet you sixpence it will rain tomorrow" perform an action that changes things in social reality instead of describing that reality. Austin calls this class of utterances "performative utterances" or "performatives." Constative utterances convey meaning and can be true or false; performative utterances deliver force and cannot be true or false—instead they can be felicitous or infelicitous.

Austin points out that what makes an utterance a performative is not the intention of the speaker, but rather the accepted conventions surrounding the utterance, which involve the appropriate person uttering the appropriate words in the appropriate circumstances in order to obtain conventional results. If the conventions are not in place, the performative will not succeed regardless of the intention of the speaker (1999, 12–18). Conversely, if the conventions are in place, the performative will succeed regardless of intention. The issue of intention is

central here, in light of our critical assessment of the abovementioned models that posit meaning in discourse as a psychological state that preexists the act of speaking. For example, speech acts such as oaths do not have to be intended, as a psychological state, to be performed. If a person makes an oath in court to tell the truth, though internally planning to conceal the truth, this does not make the execution of the oath any less real or efficacious, nor does it exonerate the person from legal repercussions if the lie is discovered. In other words, the very binding of this speech act within the system of laws, rules, or conventions (making it a recognized oath with consequences) does not depend on whether the speaker intended the words uttered during the oath “for real” or “as if.”³⁰

In a critical reading of speech act theory Derrida pushed further Austin’s point that it is the conventions of a speech act, and not the intention of the speaker, that make a performative successful. The conventionality of a speech act implies that it must be formulated according to a recognized “coded” or “iterable” model—that is, it must function as a citation that is repeatable in an endless number of contexts (Derrida 1977, 191–92). However, the exhaustive knowledge of context cannot be achieved because any context is open to broader description and because contexts in which new citations of the same speech act can appear are potentially infinite (Derrida 1977, 185–86). Because of the citationality of a speech act and the indeterminacy of context, the meaning of any given speech act is never completely determined in advance. Each speech act can break with context in unpredictable ways and achieve effects and mean things that were not intended in advance. This ability of the speech act to break with context, argues Derrida, is a constitutive element of its performative force.³¹ By stressing the structural ability of a conventional formula to be used in unanticipated ways,

Derrida's argument recognizes the possibility for change and unpredictability even within strictly controlled and reproduced norms and conventions. At the same time, by limiting the discussion to the semiotic level of discourse, Derrida downplays the role that external social conventions, institutions, and power relations also play in constituting the performative force of a conventional utterance.

In a different critical reading of performative acts, Pierre Bourdieu (1991) focused precisely on that external dimension, adding a sociological analysis of Austin's "conventions" that are necessary for a successful performance of speech acts. Bourdieu argues that the source of power of conventional speech acts "resides in the institutional conditions of their production and reception" (111) and that their power is "nothing other than the *delegated power* of the spokesperson" (107). Although Bourdieu's focus provides a necessary external perspective on the social and institutional nature of power and the process of its delegation, it still privileges just one side of the performative: it downplays the role of the semiotic nature of discourse in constituting the performative force and consequently downplays the possibility for change in discourse that institutions cannot determine or anticipate in advance.

A synthesis of Derrida's and Bourdieu's critical readings of Austin's theory would allow one to consider both constitutive elements of the performative force of a speech act—the delegated power of external social contexts and institutions and the semiotic power of discourse to produce unpredictable meanings and effects in new contexts. It is precisely because the two elements of the performative force—sociological and semiotic—operate simultaneously that speech acts even in strictly controlled institutionalized contexts can take on meanings and produce effects for which they were not intended. This possibility of an

unanticipated outcome constitutes, Judith Butler argues, “the political promise of the performative, one that positions the performative at the center of a political hegemony” (Butler 1997b, 161). This point is crucial for the following discussion of ideological rituals and utterances and the effects they produce.

Speech Acts and Ritualized Acts

Austin’s and later work on performatives in speech has been influential in a number of fields. It has affected the analysis of various forms of ritualized practice that are not necessarily linguistic and the analysis of how aspects of subjectivity may be produced in such practice. For example, Judith Butler focuses on the ritualized repetition of embodied norms as performative acts—acts that do not simply refer to an *a priori* existing “pure body” but shape that body as sexed, raced, classed, and so forth (1990, 1993).³² Drawing on Derrida’s and Bourdieu’s critical readings of performativity, Butler argues against theories of the subject and meaning according to which the subject is fully given in advance, only to perform the discourse later on. Rather, she asserts, the subject is enabled through discourse, without being completely determined by it:

[A] regularized and constrained repetition of norms is not performed *by* a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal conditions for the subject. This iterability implies that “performance” is not a singular “act” or event, but a ritualized production, and ritual reiteration under and through constraint, under and through force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production, but not, I will insist, determining it fully in advance. (Butler, quoted in Hollywood 2002, 98)

Drawing on Butler's work and theories of the ritual in anthropology and religious studies, Amy Hollywood proposes to broaden the discussion of the performative to various "ritualized acts" that are repeated in different contexts and whose meanings are neither completely known in advance nor determined by the participants' intentions (Hollywood 2002, 113).³³ Catherine Bell further points out that through the repetition of ritualized actions in different contexts, persons are produced and produce themselves as "ritualized agents . . . who have an intrinsic knowledge of these schemes embedded in their bodies, in their sense of reality, and in their understanding of how to act in ways that both maintain and qualify the complex microrelations of power" (Bell 1992, 221).

This view of ritualized acts and speech acts as constitutive of the person is different from the view of these acts as divided between mask (acting "as if") and reality, truth and lie. In the mask/truth models the person is first posited and then is involved in the act of wearing masks or revealing truths. By contrast, most performative theories do not posit the person completely in advance, before the acts—the person is enabled performatively in the repetition of the act.³⁴ As philosopher Aldo Tassi points out, there is no performative person that pre-exists the person wearing a mask: "There is no role that stands 'behind' all our other roles and defines what we 'really' are, no more than there is an act of knowing (a knowing that) that stands 'behind' the acts of knowing and defines the possession of knowledge (knowing how)" (Tassi 1993, 207).

Constative and Performative Dimensions

At the end of his book Austin pointed out that any strict division into constative and performative acts is an abstraction, and "every genuine speech act is both" (1999, 147). Speech acts

should not be seen as either just constative or just performative; rather, concludes Austin, depending on the circumstances, they are more or less constative and more or less performative. Developing this insight I will speak of performative and constative “dimensions” of speech and discourse in general. The relative importance of these dimensions in discourse may change historically.³⁵ The same is true of ritualized acts in a broader sense.

The kind of act that is constituted by the uttering of a conventional formula in a given context cannot be understood by attending merely to the structure of the utterance or to generic elements of the context known in advance. One must attend to the context-in-emergence, the context in which the utterance is being repeated. One must attend to the “actual creative forces that generated the event at the moment it was still being accomplished (when it was still open)” (Bakhtin 1990, 87). In this book, when analyzing speech acts such as slogans, party speeches, and addresses, and ritualized acts such as votes and meetings, we will speak of their coexisting constative and performative dimensions. From the perspective of this coexistence, the act of voting in the conventional context of a meeting does two things at once: it states one’s opinion (the constative dimension) and binds the vote within the system of rules and norms where it is recognized as a legitimate vote (the performative dimension). The unity of the constative and performative dimensions makes the vote what it is: a statement of opinion that is recognized as having consequences in legal, administrative, institutional, and cultural terms.

These two dimensions of discourse do not constitute a new binary. They are not in a binary either-or relationship; rather they are indivisible and mutually productive (as the discussion below shows). For example, the opinion one states when voting may be affected by whether the vote is legally binding with

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