The 'Creative Bureaucrat': Conflicts in the Production of Soviet Communist Party Discourse

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ABSTRACT

The paper explores the politics of language of the Soviet Communist Party bureaucracy. It argues against the recent conceptualisation of late socialist discourse as basically 'performative', i.e. as a vehicle for action that was virtually independent of its propositional dimension. Contrary to this, it is suggested that if the analysis is broadened to include the process of producing texts (drafts, censored passages, oral discussions, etc.) we see marked concern, and, indeed, conflict over the ideological meaning of the content. The argument is made through detailed analysis of the memoirs of one Party official, Georgii Lukich Smirnov. This case also shows that Party cadres were far from 'faceless' or without feelings. The ideological battles throughout the late Soviet period, which scarred Smirnov, were what led to *perestroika* (reconstruction) and *glasnost'* (transparency) under Gorbachev.

Keywords: ideology, Soviet bureaucracy, 'wooden language', conflict, secrecy, alienation, creativity, socialism

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the social practices of production of Soviet Communist Party discourse during the period of 'late socialism'.[1] Its focus is therefore on the culture, interactions and subjectivities of officials, rather than on the reception of their texts by the general population. By the mid-1950s, the production of texts in laboured officialese had become the *habitus* of generations of bureaucrats. A corpus of ideologically weighted words, phrases and customs of writing were firmly established as the elements of Party discourse (Zemtsov 1991; Corten 1992; Yurchak 2003; Oushakine 2003; Guseinov 2004: 13–44). Russians called this heavy, pompous, and authoritarian language 'wooden' or 'oaken' in distinction from everyday speech. As presented to the public, it appeared monolithic and homogenous. It will be argued here, however, that the process leading up to this appearance was often

conflictual and always tense, and that the battles were over the intended meaning of a text. Perceiving this enables us to question in detail the relation between language and political change in the final years of the Soviet Union.

This position differs in significant ways from that of Alexei Yurchak, who has argued that because the authoritative language 'was hegemonic, unavoidable, and hypernormalised, it was no longer read by its audiences literally, at the level of constative meanings. Therefore, which statements represented "facts", and which did not was relatively unimportant. Instead, Soviet people engaged with authorita-tive language mostly through the performative dimension' (2006: 76). By performative, Yurchak is referring to speech acts and their effects in given contexts, and he gives the example of voting at a party meeting. The act of voting does two things at once: it states one's opinion (the constative dimension) and it carries out the act of 'voting' within a system of rules and consequences (the performative dimension). He argues that the performative came overwhelmingly to predominate as the result of a discursive shift, when, after the death of Stalin, there came to be a near-absence of publicly circulating discourse on ideology.[2] With this shift to a unified yet anonymous 'line', the meanings people gave to texts became unanchored from their propositional dimension. Thus, along with the performative ritualised acts that were meaningful because they were unavoidable, a person could 'become engaged with other creative and unanticipated meanings' that spun off the text in question, a phenomenon he calls 'heteronymous shift' (2003: 80). With *perestroika* (restructuring) in the mid-1980s, this metadiscourse that was already 'lived by everyone' was suddenly articulated in public, bringing about a new discursive shift. 'Soviet late socialism provides a stunning example of how a dynamic and powerful social system can abruptly and unexpectedly unravel when the discursive conditions of its existence are unravelled' (2006: 295–6).

Although this paper agrees with Yurchak in many ways (see also later refer-ences), particularly his masterly analysis of ambiguity and the ways that Soviet people could hold on to socialist values while at the same time creating and inter-preting quite other kinds of reality, it suggests that a different understanding of the relation between language and the unexpected 'unravelling' is attained if we examine the bureaucracy rather than the youth cultures Yurchak describes.[3] It argues, first that the coexistence of 'wooden language' and multiple divergent meanings was present from the first years of Soviet power and was not conse-quent on a post-Stalin discursive shift. Second, although it is true that independent public criticism of Party categories of thinking and policy was virtu-ally blotted out during the Brezhnev era, prior to that, under Khrushchev, the denunciation of Stalin had liberated considerable debate on ideology.[4] Third, while appreciating Yurchak's perceptive analysis of 'performance' by both readers and producers of texts, I would argue that not only such performative manoeuvres but also decisions to take and express an ideological position had great – perhaps greater – political impact.[5] Fourth, throughout 'late socialism' officials sometimes insisted on ideological ideas they believed in (often at danger to themselves) and they distinguished between these and the formalistic produc-

tion of texts. Indeed, it was the life experiences and education of Party cadres that gave impetus to the opening up of debate under Khrushchev and then later to the *glasnost'* (transparency, openness) and *perestroika* that put paid to the Soviet system altogether. These ideas were slogans for political action, they were produced internally to the bureaucracy, and they both predated and were a cause for the discursive shift of the mid-1980s. Finally, I suggest that with reference to the late Soviet system itself, more understanding can be gained by conceptualising 'discourse' as the entire process of production of the language of politics, and not just the final texts presented to the public. In this wider perspective, it can be seen that conflict and argument over propositional substantive meanings were crucial, certainly at the upper echelons and at the bottom coal-face ends of the hierarchy, leaving anonymous copying as the practice mainly of the middle. What if we change our picture of the late Soviet bureaucracy from 'dead hand' to battle-strewn kitchens,[6] where the active proponents of ideas – for stasis as well as change – fought it out?

One reason for the constant discord over official documents in post-Stalin times was that the stakes for individuals were high. Even the supreme leader was potentially vulnerable. If Khrushchev's downfall in 1964 occurred mainly because his hurried reorganisations ran against entrenched interests and established bureaucratic channels (Brown 2007: 2), the very highest officials just below the General Secretary faced further perils. They could inadvertently write something 'wrong' (i.e. not following the line of the current political leader) while at the same time risking rejection of a text for no other reason than internal conflicts between departments. Danger, of punishment, demotion or humiliation, was never far away. One sociological reason for this is that the Party apparatus was what Kenneth Farmer has called a 'non-Weberian bureaucracy'. This was characterised by personal obligation to patrons as the source of duty (rather than pre-existing rules), ad hoc changes in policy, clientelistic appointment to office, and overlapping jurisdiction between parallel agencies over the same tasks (Farmer 1992: 161). This paper will argue, however, that there were also other, more fundamental reasons why the ideological work of Party officials involved constant stress, conflict and negotiation, factors that go back to the multi-functional role of the Party from the very beginning of Soviet rule.

Although Soviet bureaucrats are widely supposed to have inherited many traits from their Tsarist-era predecessors, they are sharply differentiated by the fact that the Communist Party was intended to play a revolutionary ideological role in transforming society. Gogol's satire (in *The Overcoat*, 1970 [1842]) of the lowly official who was happy only in laboriously copying out documents did not in fact altogether lose its relevance in the Soviet Union. But this image of the obedient scribe was wildly different from the idea the early Party officials had of themselves as revolutionaries, a band of brothers at the forefront, embattled, and constantly striving to convince society of the transcendental goals of socialism (Fitzpatrick 1999: 15–23). This self-perception continued after the Party came to govern, but then officials in the new Soviet structure of power faced a conflict

between at least three different conceptions of their activity. The task of ideological leadership of society, involving fast-footed adaptation to external circumstances, was not always compatible with the different idea of the Party as a disciplined and disciplinary body. Nor did it necessarily fit well with a third conception of the Party, which became increasing prominent during 'late socialism', whereby it assumed the function of pragmatic management of the day-to-day affairs of the economy. For all these reasons, this paper will argue that items of Party discourse – resolutions, decrees, speeches, instructions, etc. – could not be produced automatically or mechanically, but had to be the end result of haggling and confrontation. Indeed, it was the misfit, or mutual displacement, of these different conceptions of Party activity that provided the space in which innovative ideas could be generated internally.

To demonstrate these points I focus on the autobiographical writings of Georgii Lukich Smirnov (1993, 1997), a Party official who rose from lowly provincial status to become a bureaucrat in the Ideology Department of the Central Committee (Russian abbreviation, TsK).[7] Smirnov's account provides emphatic support for Mitchell's argument (1990: 546) that distinctively modern forms of power 'have created a peculiar kind of world' and his insistence that such worlds engender complex, flexible and partial, not-univocal or binary, subjectivities (see also Yurchak 2003: 482–5). Smirnov's life story, as I show later, is evidence of the acute, sometimes disabling stress that seems to have been caused by the contradictions in both Party ideals and the internal culture of the Party.

Smirnov's description of his working life suggests that we should broaden the concept of discourse – to include not only the finished products of ideological efforts but also the drafts, unsuccessful working papers, reports sent from below, reactions to local conditions and events, censored passages, oral comments, etc. that consumed most of the officials' time.[8] In this wider context, semantic content, not form, was of the essence. The main disagreements were about meaning in a broad sense – that is, both the multi-layered evocations of particular words (signs, phrases, even single letters) and the overall conceptualisation of policy (e.g. the explanations to be fixed to slogans representing such policy). Policy, especially in the Brezhnev era, involved stasis as well as change. As Yurchak has rightly pointed out (2003: 483–4), 'agentive capacity is entailed not only in those acts that result in (progressive) change but also those that aim towards continuity, stasis and stability'. Ever since the defeat of Trotsky, the stability of the system was integral to the ideology of those who were intent on wielding massive, brutal power. Yet despite the presentation of continuity to the outside world, and despite the danger, there *was* debate inside the Party. Smirnov and officials like him were engaged in battles about the broad reformulation of Soviet ideology after Stalin. He therefore saw the 'creative' (*tvorcheskii*) aspect of his work in the attempt to push through significant changes in the way the USSR conceptualised itself. This was a struggle over the content achieved (or not achieved) in the final key public texts.

Another contradiction was involved here. For having invented, and invested with authority, categories with which to explain society, officials were caught in what I call the 'fettered circularity' of trying to conceptualise change while using these very categories. As shown later, even politicians like Gorbachev were unable to free themselves entirely from the misrecognition caused by this bind. Nevertheless, if we see this contradiction as one internal to the subject – that is the particular kind of subjectivity of Party officials – I will argue that it still could be productive, and, crucially, was not entirely closed as Yurchak suggests (2006: 284). It functioned as the negative against which the new ideas grated and sharpened themselves.

Smirnov was wearied, became ill and disillusioned, and was shunted aside during the later Brezhnev years, when evidently he was defeated by the defenders of the status quo. He was not unaware of the shifting 'meta-textual' meanings attached to official language signs (the phenomenon Yurchak refereed to as 'heteronymous shift'), but rightly or wrongly he did not – or perhaps could not – see this as a crucial problem. Smirnov never travelled outside the socialist bloc as far as we can tell, and he had been taught to mistrust the foreign press. He could not step outside the frame of Marxist dialectical thought, which continued to provide his only resource for ideas of change. For him, and for a large majority of the Soviet population as Guseinov has argued (2004: 22), the Soviet vocabulary was deeply interiorised and it continued to constitute his weapons of action. Later, when Smirnov was invited back into the bureaucracy to prepare speeches for Gorbachev, it was by the same internal confrontational processes that changes in policies and structures were achieved. By the mid-1980s he now stood for some of the conservative ideas, the 'negative' referred to above, in relation to the system-changing proposals of *perestroika*. Nevertheless, it was in the bureaucratic environment of the Central Committee that the reconstruction of the system was initiated. While it is true that 'new forms of life, publics, persons, lifestyles, temporalities, spatialities, imaginary worlds and visions of the future' had emerged in Russia and were largely external to the Party (Yurchak 2006: 295), the evidence is that it was not these that directly brought about the political transformation. That, arguably, was brought about through the hammering out of a victory for certain ideas inside the Party among the cadres. These were mostly *not* new ideas – they had a hidden genealogy going back decades. Nor was the socio-linguistic form they took innovative: *perestroika*, for example, was an officially produced slogan like many others before it. But the ideas now victorious were substantive and had momentous political effect: plural expression of opinion, greater transparency, and the end of rigid top-down control. Yurchak is right (2003: 504) that a new discursive regime came about by the introduction of critical thought into public life in the mid-1980s. I argue, however, that this occurred not as a result of the rendering visible of the logic of heteronymous shift (2003: 504) but because politically consequential ideas buried in decades of setbacks and strife now came to the surface.

Though he saw himself as a progressive and open-minded socialist (see his

interview in Cohen & Heuval 1989: 76–98), Smirnov as an individual was fairly soon left behind by events in the late-1980s. Yakovlev, Gorbachev and others came to give *perestroika* a far more radical meaning than anything Smirnov had envisaged. But all of these people had spent a lifetime as functionaries. The late Soviet 'politician' was in effect not a separate species from the 'cadre', but the one who fought into such a winning position that he (very rarely she) emerged into public gaze. Smirnov hardly emerged above this parapet, and yet for that very reason his life and thoughts are interesting for a study of what the bureau-cratic life was actually like.

SMIRNOV: THE BUREAUCRAT AS AN INDIVIDUAL

Georgi Lukich Smirnov worked almost continuously as a Komsomol and Party official from the late 1930s, through the Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev and Gorbachev eras until 1991. During his life Smirnov held positions at every level, from the lowest provincial sub-rayon Komsomol activist, through the Raikom and Obkom, to deputy head of the elite Propaganda Department attached to the Central Committee in Moscow. However, Smirnov never made it to full Head of the Department, and never moved out into the independent prominence that would entitle him to be called a politician. Basically, he was the archetypal Party bureaucrat, albeit a very distinguished one. Of course, in assessing his materials we have to acknowledge the particularity of this one man's career, to sense his individual character and ambitions, and take into account that he, like anyone else, would naturally give a positive retrospective slant to his life's work.[9] Nevertheless, Smirnov is a wonderful observer of how things were done, and of his own and his colleagues' motivations, and even if we see his writing only as indicating 'this kind of subjectivity was possible' this is an extraordinarily valu-able source.

Smirnov is not an entirely unsuitable example for a collection of articles concerned with nationality issues. He was born in 1922 in a family of Don Cossacks and he was very conscious of their separate culture and traditions – indeed, he insisted on putting 'Cossack' rather than 'Russian' as his ethnicity in his documents, until his teachers at school persuaded him not to. His father was a tailor and his mother, who was more or less illiterate, worked in a variety of jobs, ending up as a dry-cleaner's assistant at an army base. Smirnov's childhood was disturbed and deprived – his father ran off with another woman leaving the family in dire poverty, his mother married again, and the step-father took them backwards and forwards between rural Cossack stations and the small town of Kotel'nikovo. Finally the stepfather left too and Smirnov became a rough village boy, earning food and money any way he could.

One of the keys to understanding Smirnov's attitude to life as a bureaucrat is his schooldays. With his sad, broken family, the school in the Cossack village, and later the one in Kotel'nikovo, became the centre of his life, places of

learning, discovery, and extraordinarily close friendships, some lasting all his life. Inspired by a young woman Pioneer leader, the group of boys and girls did everything together, discussed, put on plays, wrote wall-newspapers, worked in the kolkhoz fields at harvest time. Smirnov went home only to sleep. Nothing in his autobiography is as vivid as his writing about this time, and perhaps this early experience of collectiveness and friendship outside the home, in the warm bosom of the Soviet school, explains something of his lifelong trust in the redeemability of socialist institutions. Perhaps he was trying to re-create in them the idyllic enthusiasm of his youth. At any rate, Smirnov never forgot his homeland of the steppes by the Don, and as a bureaucrat in Moscow he kept going back there on visits. The Cossack villages became like the sounding-board for his 'creative' ideas on the nature of Soviet society.

Smirnov's political life penetrated deep into his subconscious. He relates two dreams in his memoir. When he was still a lowly Komsomol official in the last stages of the war, Smirnov had a conversation with Stalin in his sleep. He clearly remembers Stalin's appearance in this dream, wearing a white jacket and with reddish hair and moustaches. The young Smirnov told Stalin of his dismay that the Party in effect mistrusted 'the people' (*narod*), condemning millions who lived in the German-occupied zones to arrest or second-class citizenship – and of course this included Smirnov's own people from the Don region. And was the Party not mistaken, he went on, to take upon itself all administrative and economic tasks, because when things went wrong the resentment of the people was being directed at the Party alone. Furthermore, our political work was too 'formalistic', especially during elections when no choice of candidates was given. Stalin replied with measured arguments: you have forgotten, Comrade Smirnov, that there is a war going on; this is a time when we should display high vigilance (*u nas dolzhna proyavlyat'sya povyshennaya bditel'nost'*). The war means we cannot execute peaceful forms of democracy. Smirnov woke up without a smile – Stalin's categorical counter arguments had made such an unfor-gettable impression on him. It was in my dreams, he comments, that disturbing critical thoughts had first come to me (1997: 60–61). Smirnov's second recorded dream occurred much later in 1976, when his ideas had been sidelined and he had been yet again passed over for Director of the Department. There had been mysterious phone-calls to Smirnov's supervisor (*kurator*) from Brezhnev yet the post was held vacant for years. 'Why worry about it?' asked his boss. 'You're working, so work!' Smirnov was loaded with routine tasks and exhausted. He fell seriously ill, and while in hospital had a dream. He was riding at night at full gallop, and felt like a wounded person who finds himself falling headlong over a precipice (1997: 137–8). My point here is that the battles and hurts over ideology did not occur only at meetings and debates – they also took place within the self, even in the subconscious. This is evidence of a multiple selfhood, where the subconscious provided the resources for critique – without, however, ever step-ping outside the system's concepts or its language. Smirnov went on being ill and depressed for a number of years, in fact until the advent of Gorbachev, who

immediately chose him as a speechwriter and later an adviser. After a while he was ignored and sidelined again, now for being too much of a communist and socialist. Soon he fell desperately ill again.

So this is one thing it is perhaps possible to say about such bureaucrats in general: they, like other people, inhabited interpenetrating realms of the personal and the impersonal. They interjected the Party official agenda into the home realm, they carried an aura of their emotional needs in the realm of official business. They experienced the contradictions of the political bodily and subjectively.

WHY DID PARTY OFFICIALS THINK 'CREATIVITY' WAS IMPORTANT?

The question is curious because it goes against so many stereotypes of the mechanical formalism of Soviet bureaucracy. Yet from their own writings we know that Party officials thought their best work was 'creative' (*tvorcheskii*) and strove to give an impression of creativeness whenever they could. This was the case, I suggest, because of the peculiar conditions of operation of the Party bureaucrat. The *raison d'être* of the Party was to lead the population, that is, to be ahead of it and transform the people's thinking in its wake. Yet from the very beginning, the official discourse, as Guseinov (2004) and Oushakine (2003) have so ably shown, could not overcome the polysemic character of signification, nor control the responses to it. The Party official was at the sharp end of all this. For him or her more than other people the disjuncture between the dominant symbolic order and those effects and meanings that undercut, misinterpreted, or slipped away beyond it, caused serious anxiety, because the *raison d'être* of the role was to sustain, perform, and in effect *to make* the official order. To do this he was forced in effect to be 'creative'. That is, creative in a sense particular to this society, to weave new and convincing stories and feverishly re-invent rationales within the overall project of socialism.

The re-invention of rationales was necessary if only because epoch-making and unforseen historic events of course occurred during 'late socialism' – the Bay of Pigs incident, the ousting of Khrushchev, the invasion of Czechoslovakia, the Afghan war, to name but a few. Indeed Smirnov's account (1993) of life in the central apparatus begins with the shattering effect on the officials of Khrushchev's 'secret speech' in 1956 denouncing Stalinism (Khrushchev 1959). In the aftermath, the ranks of supposedly homogenous officials took up a variety of sharply different positions in relation to Stalin, perspectives that continued to shape strategic alliances among the bureaucrats for decades afterwards. To understand a discursive regime we need to investigate its particular conditions of existence, how it was put into practice, and the subjective understandings of those implementing it. From this point of view, it is impossible to see the 'late socialist' variant as a uniform system: attitudes to Stalin divided it, just as those to Bukharin and late Lenin had for earlier ranks.

How was 'creativity' conceptualised? Officials seem to have defined it by the achievement of some distinctive, ground-breaking, and if possible *personalised*, input. Within the central apparatus the political inclinations of the leading officials were well known, as were those of their Assistants (*pomoshchniki*) who actually did most of the work.[10] The cumulative decisions of individuals, their blocking of others' proposals, their tactical alliances – all left traces. Sometimes, seemingly faceless bureaucrats invented catch-phrases that reached the final text of a speech,[11] were put into the mouth of politicians, and spread throughout society because they epitomised the values of the moment. An example from the Brezhnev period was *Ekonomika dolzhna byt' ekonomnoi* ('the economy should be economical'). Banal as it sounds, this was in fact a fresh idea, crystallising as it did Brezhnev's reluctant realisation that the planned distributive economy would collapse if the particular units of it could not be persuaded to keep their own accounts in balance (this was the policy called *khozraschet*). The lower officials who coined such successful phrases retained a plaintive shadowy authorship of them through the labyrinth of drafts, and their later reminiscences have taken care to trace such genealogies and provide the officials' names (Pribytkov 1995: 51). The writing style of individual assistants was recognisable (which suggests that officialese was not so monolithic after all) (1995: 54–5). The downside was that a bit (*kusok*) in a speech by Brezhnev, easily traced to its lowly author, might be revealed by a malicious colleague to be dangerously 'revisionist'. Chernyaev[12] (1995: 247–51) describes how in 1972 he authored one such passage, defining 'the working class' in a new more inclusive way, i.e. not only as manual labourers. Such a new definition might have effect on many areas of policy.[13] An ill-wisher dug out a reference to just such a definition in the work of a French 'revisionist' and a row broke out. The Department split into proponents of the status quo and supporters of Chernyaev, who insisted that concepts such as 'working class' must fit the facts of Soviet life (1995: 252). As the conflict spread, Chernyaev faced dismissal from the Party and he vividly describes the fear of ranks of colleagues who lined up against him and dared not look him in the face.

It is important to note that only some elements of the discourse were standardised reports and speeches. Others were resolutions and laws to be implemented in practical life, each of which required giving explanations to the people. An example is the sharp price rise for basic foods introduced by Khrushchev in 1962, which caused widespread consternation and even uprisings in some areas. How do you explain – in ideologically socialist terms – a rise in prices, when their lowering or at least stability was one of the platforms of the planned economy? It was because this kind of activity was so utterly difficult that successful attempts were seen as 'creative'. Of course some bureaucrats were in a stronger position to exercise this creativity than others; and the efforts of lower apparatchiks could be crudely turned back by officials at a higher level. Nevertheless, the frontline character of the work of the lower Party officials – the fact that they were required to address meetings of factory workers, collective farmers, women teachers, etc.

about a host of everyday problems (the milk yields, the piece-work rates, home-
less children, etc.), and fact that these audiences were not in fact always supine –
meant that the 'weaving of stories', thinking on their feet, creating audience
domination, was something they always had to be prepared to do. The tendency
of bureaucracies in general to erect boundaries between themselves and the
outside, thus justifying neglect – 'the social production of indifference', as
Herzfeld puts it (1992) – certainly applied in the Soviet Union but it was in
contradiction with the Party ideal of going out there and being the vanguard in
countless projects.

The bureaucrats recognised some of their work as 'marking time' (*toptat' na
meste*) or merely dutiful (*dezhurnyi*), while other activity was 'creative'. In prin-
ciple we can see that what is defined as creativity has to be in a relation with
negativity or difficulty – that which is not creative. I am not arguing here that all
so-called 'creative' (*tvorcheskii*) Party activity was in fact innovative, only that
the existence of creativity as a cherished Party ideal sometimes produced acts of
vitality, movement, and sincerity, and that these might well grate against the
agents of fixity and obstinacy. It was the small space of this grating or slippage
that enabled the new to appear, as I describe in the next section. In such a height-
ened ideological regime, creative acts – such as the drafting of the crucial speech
that would change the story in a convincing way if only by inserting a seemingly
tiny detail – was a matter of intense anxiety. It was born not only from political
danger and not only out of a jarring with, or overcoming of, colleagues but also
involved a kind of inner conflict with the self – the self who had earlier interi-
orised the rightness and legitimacy of the previous version and now was exposed
as the proponent of something different.

ETHNOGRAPHY OF BUREAUCRATIC LIFE: CONTRADICTIONS AND
DISTANTSIYA

If it was because of the Party's revolutionary-transformative ideals that 'creativ-
ity' was so highly prized, a result of this cachet was that highly placed officials
often tended to resent inventiveness among their subordinates. The 'cultural inti-
macy' (Herzfeld 1997) of the Soviet bureaucrats was an uncomfortable space that
counterposed training in how to perform 'enthusiasm' alongside written and
unwritten rules of strict obedience. In this culture of discordant ideals, 'enthusi-
asm' somehow had to avoid 'spontaneity' (the dreaded accusation of
stikhiinost'), and meanwhile *predannost'* (devotion, faithfulness), the most
valued quality of all, had somehow to be accommodated with probity and a ques-
tioning attitude (Pribytkov 1995: 45–58). Departments differed in the tendencies
that held sway at a particular time. Techniques of forestalling uncomfortable
interventions from below included keeping juniors in ignorance (through mecha-
nisms of control of information) and increasingly the procedure of inventing
from above 'questions' – questions that might, as it were, have come from 'the

people' – and providing prepared 'answers' to be relayed to lower levels. In such ways, the site of bureaucratic 'creativity' was forced upwards to the nodes of propaganda departments of the Union Republics and above all to those of the Central Committee, which had the explicit task of writing the dominant story of the moment.

I would still argue, however, that the attempt to pre-tell the story – that is to anticipate happenings and accidents in terms of an overall history – could never be totally circumscribed as the activity only of the highest echelons. Precisely because there was no open opposition and in order to make the story meaningful and convincing, all officials were required to be interpreters, that is to actively transform one type of knowledge into another. Junior lectors were sent constantly out of Moscow to the lowest levels of organisations in the regions to explain a central policy *na meste* (in the locality). Here, they then had to accomplish the reverse transfer, for their second task was to find out what 'the people' were thinking and relay it upwards. This rough material from 'the people', supplemented with endless reports from the NKVD / KGB and other organs, was taken back and absorbed by departmental directors, in which process the bureaucrats became interpreters of a different kind. The crude material from below, being unarticulated knowledge, was subjected to the activity of ideological work, that is turned into articulated (officialised) knowledge (Choy 1995) and then used to forestall practical difficulties or counter objections that might arise in implementing resolutions. This articulated material was also used to come up with the pre-set 'questions' to which 'answers' could then be given.

Circular though this procedure was, it is in exactly this nexus that we encounter the potential conflict between the Party as innovative leader and the Party as a disciplinary and disciplined body. For the official going down to 'lead' the locality could not entirely ignore the reality of what he found there nor his own role in what to do about it. Local material about exiles, dissenters, mavericks and Party sticklers, if taken up, was passed immediately to the NKVD (KGB), and we know from Smirnov's dream conversation with Stalin what discomforting critical thoughts this gave rise to.

Even the seemingly humdrum task of the 'presentation of information' (*postanovka informatsii*) to the population was fraught with contradictions as recounted by Smirnov when he was a young lector in the Propaganda Department of the TsK. It is worth describing this practice not only to give a feel for the actuality of the times (1960s–70s) but also to convey the frustrating stickiness of the environment junior officials worked in. The 'presentation of information' was counted the most important task of the Propaganda Department. Yet it took place in an atmosphere of extraordinary general secretiveness. All documentation was strictly confidential, not only that marked 'top secret'. Concerning the culture, Pribytkov[14] indeed writes of the 'aureole of inaccessability' of the TsK, the 'feeling of partaking in superior, super and ultra secrets', and the extraordinary harshness of the discipline of information control (1995: 45–46, 53). The 'information' available to lectors was processed.[15] It

came by word of mouth from their Director, backed up by material on paper from
TASS. It was assigned to each person strictly according to their task – let us say,
preparing a lecture on the international situation in Eastern Europe or the indus-
trial productivity figures in Siberia. TASS documents could not be left on a desk
overnight or taken into another room. When one paper was found in a lavatory,
apparently having been used to block a draught, a ChP (red alert) was announced
and (although everyone laughed) the culprit was severely punished. Officials
were not allowed to discuss their tasks with one another, and in an open situation
where they were all present (like the bus taking them to the dacha area) they
avoided talking about work in case one of them inadvertently let out some infor-
mation or opinion. The 'presentation of information' thus consisted of travelling
with a strictly limited amount of pre-interpreted facts to give lectures all over the
country. Because this meagre ration was nevertheless more than the population
got through the Soviet press or radio the audiences used to drink it in eagerly.
Smirnov in his first year gave over eighty presentations and around 16,000
people came to his lectures. He comments that in those days a lector from
Moscow was an 'important figure of the spiritual life' of the country (1993: 368).
The names of masters of the propaganda lecture were well known, and this was
not only because they knew more about what was going on but because of their
personal ability in rhetorical persuasiveness and fast thinking. It was unthinkable
that a lector would reply to some question from the audience, 'I don't know.' Yet
it is just at this point that we see the conflict with Party discipline/control –
because often the unfortunate lector *did not know* and yet he could not refuse to
give the lecture. Smirnov recalls one occasion when he was due to give a speech
in Turkmenistan on international relations and he did not know that Marshal
Zhukov, the famous and beloved war hero, has just been dismissed. Smirnov was
rushed to receive an urgent phone-call from Moscow, because his bosses thought
someone in the audience might have heard the news on foreign radio – the Party
official could on no account be revealed to know less than the audience. Such
contradictions were born by each individual lector. Smirnov notes at another
point, that even though all lectures were carefully prepared, checked, re-written
and vetted word-by-word, they had to be spoken as if without notes, orally.
Lectors were delighted if people came up to congratulate them afterwards on
their abilities in extempore speech or improvisation!

The head of the Propaganda Department at the time (early 1960s) was
Konstantinov, who could speak beautifully – to the point where jealous
colleagues accused him of being a 'lyrical Marxist'. Konstantinov would fly into
a rage at over-use of clichés, and Smirnov remembers him once sharply
denouncing the use of the word 'struggle' *bor'ba* (of the Party). 'Can't you find
another word?' he yelled, and this embarrassed the teachers but delighted the
young lectors who applauded wildly (1993: 368). How come Smirnov remem-
bered such a trivial incident over forty years later? Especially since we know that
phrase 'struggle of the Party' went on being used for decades anyway. Perhaps, if
we agree that all freedom is conditional (conditional on the concepts and circum-

stances that make an action seem free), we could say that what was memorable is that Konstantinov was opening a space for an infinitesimal freedom. This was the freedom not just to imagine (because people could do that anyway) but to *say aloud* that the Party was doing something else than struggling.

There was conflict in the Department about whether to reply to all questions from 'the people', or only some of them. Young lectors were sometimes asked impossible questions like how to disprove Einstein's theory, or why not build Full Communism in the Crimea, protected by the Black Sea fleet, and then learn from this experiment? But their desire to shine made them argue always for the position 'reply to everything'. The senior echelons on the whole countered that not all questions need be answered. The lectors knew they could not just gabble rubbish – there was only one way out, to plead with the senior to give more information. But often they were left in awkward situations. Even Konstantinov could be caught out, as when he gave a speech denouncing 'the revisionist Tito and his clique', not knowing about a forthcoming state visit of Khrushchev to Belgrade. Konstantinov was required to apologise abjectly in public for this and nearly lost his post (Smirnov 1993: 368).

This incident is a reminder that even high bureaucrats were structurally, as it were, exposed. They had no security of tenure, no rights of appeal, were appointed by the *nomenklatura* system (i.e. personally, by people in the relevant section of the Central Committee responsible for personnel appointments), and could easily be dismissed. Reading Smirnov's memoirs one loses count of the times he was moved – up, down, sideways, back to the Don steppes and then back to Moscow. No disaster befell him, but his memoir is laden with the shadows of the fates of his school friends, some of whom were arrested, killed, or died young in despair. Smirnov was aware of political danger, and he thrilled with a kind of foreboding when he first understood that the 'roof' (*krysha*) over his head was made up of volatile top politicians, whereas there was no foundation under his feet. He was shocked into this discovery on a standard occasion of operating with the official discourse. He wrote the draft of a speech quoting a *Pravda* leader. He suspected there was something wrong with the leader, but confidently made the citation, having just been promoted from the Obkom level where anything printed by *Pravda* was unquestionable. Scornful laughter and rude crossing out greeted his draft. Smirnov was told that for workers at the Central Committee *Pravda* was good stuff to argue with, but not at all the truth. 'This was new to me,' he comments, 'and I experienced the spirit of the freedom of thought of the *apparat*' (1993: 369). Another way to put this is that it was the apparatus of the TsK, not *Pravda*, that had to create 'the truth'.

Yet this 'spirit of freedom' was always conditional. Smirnov also describes the alienation of the official produced by the system of discipline. He calls this *distansiya* ('distance') and gives the following example. He had come back from a run-of-the-mill visit to Turkmenistan, and he made a report describing mass theft of socialist property, profanation of ideological work, and kolkhoz chairmen giving collective property away to their relatives. There were even

quasi-demonstrations: some thieves had been imprisoned, and Smirnov observed hundreds of Turkmens sitting outside the Obkom Party office, chewing some kind of narcotic grass, and waiting threateningly for their patron to be freed. He also reported on the oppression of women. The response to Smirnov's report was complete silence. After a similar visit to Kazakhstan, he also received no response when he reported that collective farms were buying cattle from their workers and then selling them to the state as part of their own planned product. Two months later, the Central Committee issued a criticism of this infringement – together with a denunciation of Party officials for not discovering such facts on their visits to the regions. Smirnov dared to object at a Party meeting that he had indeed discovered and reported the facts. But he was called up next day by his boss and told sharply that he should on no account have made such an objection. 'That is how we were taught the concept of *distantsii*,' Smirnov writes (1993, 1997: 85). *Distantsiya*, in other words, produced the subject position of the one who is the object of discipline. In such a position one's product is no longer one's own and its value (along with whether it is silenced, cited, praised or vilified) is determined elsewhere. Nevertheless, this is an example where an invisible clash made evident an alienated space (*distantsiya*) that yet enabled a small birth – for the Central Committee did in the end produce new policies for collective farm procurements.

In 1964, the political position of Smirnov's boss in the Propaganda Department, Il'ichev, became unstable. Il'ichev and the rest of the department prepared a long speech on ideology for Khrushchev. The leader dutifully read it out, wiped his brow, and then said, 'Now let's get down to business!' This was perhaps intended as a joke, Smirnov comments, but only one person laughed. The political bosses, the First Secretaries at the Plenum, took the 'joke' as they had to, i.e. literally, because they were already committed to the idea that the real role of the Party was to manage the economy and retain political control over society. Ideology, and with it the influence of Il'ichev, was becoming almost an irrelevance (Smirnov 1993: 370). What Smirnov bewailed was the instrumental attitude of political leaders from Khrushchev onwards, most of whom who were fundamentally uninterested in ideology. Under Khrushchev, political instruction of Obkom First Secretaries ceased, and under Brezhnev non-Party technical specialists were moved into Party posts. A powerful strand was created in the Party, which was concerned primarily with management and came to look down on ideology. Such disinterest can be correlated with the increased formalism of ideological texts and with the 'pragmatic' model of response to them described by Yurchak. Nevertheless, Smirnov's account is evidence that this was not the only perspective around. He comments about Brezhnevian pragmatism, 'As Marxists we understood that you can't rule the world by ideas, of course, but we deeply believed in the humanitarian reform of socialism' (1993: 371).

Ethnography of Party bureaucrats should point out the co-existence of several language genres in their interactions. In the intimacy of departments, nicknames for bosses behind their backs, private slang, etc. was common. At formal meet-

ings, more proper language was employed, though it was peppered with colloqui-
alisms rarely used outside Party circles.[16] In letters between Communist parties, a
bullying 'Comintern style' was differentiated from the more polite long-winded
style that came to predominate in later periods (Chernyaev 1995: 261).
Competent bureaucrats mastered the full range. At meetings of the Presidium of
the TsK, to judge from stenographic reports, ability in rough repartee was valued,
but the participants would switch in an instant to the kind of speech suitable for
outsiders. For example, when Khrushchev and others were discussing the Soviet
response to Suez, Suslov observed that de Gaulle had 'got it on the nose'
(*shchelknuli po nosu*) and Mikoyan said he must be annoyed with the Americans,
upon which Khrushchev swung into rhetorical mode, declaiming aloud the letter
that should be written to de Gaulle under these circumstances: 'Mr. President, we
are experiencing now the most responsible moment in history … We, with you (I
think we can use such an expression), know what war is … We, Soviet people,
know this to a great degree because we ourselves survived the attack of the
enemy, … etc ' (Fursenko (ed.) 2003: 319). Of course, even such relatively
elevated language would have to be turned into proper officialese by teams of
bureaucrats before the letter could be sent. Soviet practice in this respect differed
little from that in any government, one imagines. However, differentiation of
genres is a different matter from the diverse meanings that can be attributed to
any one type of text, and here the Soviet case was distinctive.

MEANING AND MIMESIS IN THE LANGUAGE OF OFFICIAL TEXTS

Guseinov (2004) argues that official terms in a heavily ideologised political
system have a particular quality: they become the bearers of multiple layers of
parallel meanings, pointing both to ideological desirable and undesirable conno-
tations.[17] Such ideologemes[18] were present from the very beginning of Soviet
government. They continued to be produced both by the Party/state (e.g. the new
term 'people's deputy' (*narodnyi deputat*) which appeared in the 1977
Constitution) and by ordinary people (e.g. the term 'refusenik' (*otkaznik*), which
was widely used among the people but was kept out of official publications until
the 1980s) (2004: 34–5). Guseinov demonstrates how a variety of meanings clus-
tered around such terms, giving the example of the revolutionary phrase 'civil
marriage' (*grazhdanskii brak*). Using a number of oral and written texts from
1917 to early 1920s, he shows that the meanings of 'civil marriage' could include:

a) Main official motivation – 'freeing the family from religious oppression
    and relocating it under the state'
b) Secondary official motivation – 'eliminating the property relations
    associated with traditional marriage'
c) Particular social meaning – 'economic independence'
d) Secondary social meaning – 'escape from patriarchal family oppression'

e) Rebellious everyday meaning – 'abomination' (*skotstvo*) (Guseinov
     2004: 29–31).

Guseinov's schema is useful because it enables us to see that the task of the Party
ideologist was to reach beyond existing everyday connotations of words to estab-
lish 'supertextual' ideological meanings of the (a) and (b) type. Meanwhile the
Party should also exercise some control over the (c) and (d) type meanings
abroad in social life, and hostile meanings of type (e) should be eliminated. Put
this way, it is evident that the task was impossible. A range of meanings was
available to any Soviet person, and indeed it was a characteristic aspect of Soviet
subjectivity to be able to juggle with them.

     Guseinov suggests that the 'wooden' official language was not cut off from
everyday thought and speech. It existed 'within the same general social field as
that within which language bearers exercised their socio-cultural strategies'
(2004: 33). 'For a great majority of the population of the country the wooden
language constituted the single real field of their thoughts and the key formulae
of this language guided their actions' (2004: 22). That is, people quite ordinarily
made use of the signs and expressions (if not whole blocks of text) of the wooden
language *simultaneously with* its various subtexts, allusions and word-plays. An
example of this is the abbreviation for the All-Union Communist Party – *VKP(b*).
This expression was used in everyday speech – an official would say for
example, '… they called me to work for the TsK VKP(b)'. Everyone knew that
(b) stood for 'bolshevik' and few would not have heard ironic substitutes for the
other letters, such as *Vtoroye Krepostnoye Pravo (bol'shevikov)* – the Second
Serfdom (of the Bolsheviks) or *Vsem Kres'yamanm Pogibel' (bolsheviki)* – Ruin
to All Peasants (the bolsheviks) (Guseinov 2004: 49). Even fewer would not have
been subconsciously aware that the letter b stood for one of Russia's key rude
words, *blyad'* (scrubber, prostitute). Even relatively official speeches in the
1960s–70s could play on the association, expecting a burst of laughter. For
example, the rector of the Theatre Studies Institute in Moscow addressed a
meeting of the teaching staff at which he told them they should be present more
frequently among the students at their hostel on Trifonov Street, house 46(b).
And he added, 'But of course there's a lot more than 46 of them there', hoping
that everyone would laugh at his crude joke (Guseinov 2004: 49). This 'play on
letters' is an example of what Yurchak (2003) calls 'heteronymous shift' and
Oushakine (2003) 'crime of substitution'.

     The 'fundamental flaw' of a system that aims to be hegemonic is that it cannot
determine the nature of the subject's response (Oushakine 2003: 428) and
evidently such a flaw existed throughout the Soviet period, as did the tactics of
substitution by the population. Indeed, Guseinov has argued that the mental
habits of play with multiple levels of meaning became so ingrained that they
persisted in Russia after the end of the communist system (2004: 33, 85). We can
therefore clarify that it is not the presence of such shifts and substitutions that was
distinctive of 'late socialism'. On the other hand, one can argue that a regime

constitutes itself discursively by what it excludes, by what cannot publicly be said (Oushakine 2003: 441–4; Humphrey 2005). Perhaps the tightening of forbidden and improper topics under Brezhnev, in effect the stricter limitation of official signifiers, precipitated a corresponding proliferation of understood yet usually unarticulated meanings. The crust of pretence that such alternative values did not exist could only just be maintained, and then only by the increasingly desperate attempts by Glavlit (the main censorship department) to eliminate openly and potentially subversive texts. Yet this was not a new phenomenon.

The implication is that phases of symbolic closedness and relative opening, limitation and relative expansiveness, were the historical conditions of existence of any ideological worker during Soviet times. To write the ideologically strictly limited speeches of the Brezhnev era Smirnov must often have engaged in mimesis – imaginatively assuming the perspective of another (the state, the Party, the Department, the politician he was assisting) and producing it as an item of magical effect, while in some profound sense retaining his own separate values. In principle, mimetic practice would enable him to perform *distantsiya*, that is to act at any moment as a double agent, and over time take up multiple perspectives (Taussig 1993: 37–43; see also Oushakine 2003). But one has to say that Smirnov's memoir does not give the impression of a man who thought of himself as either a magician or a chameleon. He did not engage in irony, nor the absurdist ridicule (called *stiob*) that Yurchak describes as common among urban youth (2006: 259–64). On the contrary, his sense of self seems to have been constituted by the simple assumption that his ideas came from himself and that the words officially available were adequate to express them. This was the language ideology of the bureaucracy. One condition for this in Smirnov's case must have been his lifetime immersion in the culture and language of what for him was an entire universe. Consequently, the arena of standard Soviet genres – from congresses to heated debates, late-night sessions at the dacha, academic lectures and articles, or oral asides at meetings – constituted for him a fully adequate space for expression of ideas. Smirnov was involved in several battles to rescue unorthodox texts and have them published, and we can see in this his ideals of inclusivity and pluralism arising from his work on the freedom of the individual in socialism (1997: 125, 208–9). Yet all this took place as it were in Guseinov's upper and middle semantic categories – Smirnov seems to have ignored the layers of mockery, irony and rude expletives, as did Gorbachev on occasion (Sbornik materialov 1986: 53).

'Naturalising' this more or less official arena as *the* arena for theoretical debate, Smirnov thought it was spoiled only by incessant power combat between officials.[19] He assumed its resources were in principle adequate to conceptualise change. We can draw upon two points about Party traditions of discourse to explain further why he made this assumption. First that *vystupleniye* (public speeches) as performances had dramatic effect, were less stilted and more dialogical in actuality than would appear from their later published form.[20] Second that the bureaucrats' focus on *content* (*sut'*) had the effect that they would disregard

form – to the extent that Smirnov could find something refreshing even in the grey prose of Andropov.

In 1983 Andropov published an article with the archetypically unrevealing title 'The teachings of Karl Marx and some questions of socialist construction in the USSR'. Its prose throughout was wooden in the extreme. To give a brief taste: 'Our work', wrote Andropov, 'being directed at the perfection and reconstruction of the economic mechanism, form, and methods of government has lagged behind the demands presented by the level of material-technical, social and spiritual development achieved by socialist society.'[21] Why did Smirnov see this as a 'breath of fresh air'? (1997: 143). Because what Andropov was *saying* was that Brezhnev's claim to have already achieved 'developed socialism' was wrong, and that it was precisely the worn-out Soviet structure of government that could not cope with the justified demands of an educated and prosperous society. Smirnov cited many other practical suggestions hidden within Andropov's turgid prose, too numerous to be mentioned here, and he draws attention to the use of the key term 'reconstruction' (*perestroika*) already at this early point. Let us look at Smirnov's reasoning, 'Maybe today some of the propositions in this speech would look banal. But the article was not at all propagandistic – it was argued strictly in conformity with Marxist theory and the real situation in the country. It is also true that some of its fundamental positions did not appear openly and were well known from other publications at the time. But against the background of the speeches of Brezhnev and Chernenko, it was received as realistic, brave and sharp' (Smirnov 1997: 145). What Smirnov is telling us is that such speeches had their impact in the context of the bureaucrats' wider world – the knowledge of what had gone before, what was published elsewhere, and what was actually happening in the country.

Smirnov's attitude to Andropov's speech gives an indication of the mindset of the Party ideological worker. Logic and matter-of-fact rightness should win an argument, irrespective of the linguistic form of expression. What had to be done was to get the right ideas out there. So Smirnov argued that Glavlit and the KGB were wrong to imagine they could eliminate dissidence through repression. Expelling people abroad or putting them in a mental hospital was to remove them from society altogether. But *an idea can be overcome only by another idea*, and the realm of ideas was his (Smirnov's) realm. It was therefore a grave mistake of the Party to relegate heterodox thinkers conceptually to an underground and delegate the task of dealing with them only to the Fifth Department of the KGB. Rather, they should be the concern of the Party and the wider social community as a whole. Smirnov was depressed when he put these ideas to his boss M. V. Zimyanin and received the dismissive reply, 'What are you going on about – you want to turn the Party into a discussion club?' (1997: 131–2).

Smirnov, like other Soviet citizens, took the presence of *inakomyslyashchiye* (non-conformist thinkers) for granted and he saw it as his task to convince them (rather than seeing the 'crisis of representation' as such as the issue). Therefore, he tended to see the problem of stagnation first in the unconvincingness of the

claims made by the leadership, which were designed for 'show' (*pokazukha*),[22] and second in the crowded presence of other agencies that prevented his own brilliant and convincing ideas from gaining recognition. Hidden under the fighting for so-called 'purity of ideas' was often nothing but the personal quarrels and idiosyncratic puritan tastes of particular officials. Leading patrons orchestrated groups and whole departments behind them. Smirnov's sector (Propaganda within Agitprop) was frequently overruled by Glavlit (the censorship department), by the Department of Science and Education, and the sectors of Scientific Communism and Historical Materialism of the TsK (1997: 133, 167). Smirnov fiercely resented accusations later, in post-Soviet times, that the Propaganda Department had a monopoly on the production of official texts and therefore was responsible for the oppressive conservatism of the Brezhnev era. On the contrary, he and like-minded progressive officials were the authors of precious ideas whose only problem was that they were stifled by opponents.

'*PERESTROIKA* WAS NOT UNEXPECTED, AND THE MORE SO, NOT A NOVELTY'[23]

Smirnov took the view that the Party, which after all operated in principle through revolutionary dialectics, could not refuse to reconstruct what it had already done. He thought that elements of *perestroika* had been carried out by Stalin and Khrushchev and envisioned by Andropov long before the period popularly known as Perestroika of the mid-1980s (1997: 239). Indeed, he said that '*perestroika* is the continuation of the revolution that began in October 1917' and that it is 'the self-criticism of socialism' (Cohen & Heuvel (ed.) 1989: 80, 86). In this section I show that such a conceptualisation of *perestroika*, rooted as it was within a particular vision of socialism, in the end came to conflict with the volatile plans of Gorbachev and Yakovlev. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that the people who have become known as 'politicians', like Yakovlev and Gorbachev, were bureaucrats for much of their lives. They worked alongside Smirnov. It was in the various 'kitchens' of the Central Committee that the ideas of 1980s *perestroika* were kneaded and chopped into shape.

The ideas had a long genealogy. One of Smirnov's main battles, from his early years, was to persuade the *apparat* of the mistakenness of Stalin's dictum at the 18th Party Congress that there are no contradictions and no class conflicts in socialist society. To argue theoretically that there were such contradictions was a complex matter involving the interpretation of Marxist dialectics and their relation to social progress. Now Smirnov's argument was made on philosophical grounds – after all that was the preserve of the ideology section of the Propaganda department. But his memoir indicates that the emotional force, the reason he felt he *had to* make this dangerous (at the time, 1958) argument was his experience of life in the provinces. The young Smirnov had been sent on plenty of assignments to monitor the execution of Party decrees. On one of these he was

sent to the city of Novocherkassk, which was near his Don homeland, just when the army had bloodily put down an uprising precipitated by price rises under Khrushchev. Smirnov's innovation was to conceptualise the uprising as socialist contradiction, and not dismiss it as instigated by foreign enemies. His resulting paper on actual contradictions was censured by Rosenthal, a well-known professor of dialectics, who argued that contradictions are not antagonistic, saying 'I give comrade Smirnov an "excellent" for his presentation, but I do not agree with him in substance.' The paper was only taken up again when a new boss arrived in the Department, the powerful Il'ichev, who dared to hold a seminar on it, inviting well-known philosophers from academia. The seminar caused a sensation, and was hugely important for the lectors (because its outcome would determine how they might understand such dramatic events and what kind of story they could tell). It was also important for wider social opinion, Smirnov says, because it indicated that Agitprop took seriously what everyone already knew – that there really were contradictions under socialism. The decision after the meeting was that the paper could be published, but only as the personal opinion of the author. It was published in the journal *Kommunist* of Moldavia in 1958, and only later (1963) in the central press (Smirnov 1993: 378).

This episode, with its setbacks and sidelining of innovative interpretations, is just one example in the battle to change accepted ideas in the Party as described by Smirnov. Also during the 1960s, he tried unsuccessfully to have the idea accepted that there were commodities and commodity relations under socialism, and that this would necessitate a revision of the role of money in the economy. More importantly, he also got involved in the ultimately abortive plan of producing a new, radically more humanistic Constitution for the USSR. This project, which is still relatively little known, was initiated by Khrushchev in 1961 and was put on hold by his ousting in 1964. A large group of officials under Ili'chev, which included both conservatives and radicals such as Yakovlev, set to work to move decisively away from the 'Stalinist spirit' of the 1936 Constitution.[24] A revitalisation of Party idealism was in the air, which rubbed along uncomfortably with pragmatic concerns about how to get people to work if sheer compulsion was no longer legitimate. As Smirnov describes it, the concerns of the drafting group were practical: to create firm guarantees against the misuse of power, to prevent the appearance of a cult of personality, and to establish rules for democratic processes. The latter included limited terms for political office, the election by Soviets of their leaders, the election of factory directors, university principals, theatre and publishing directors, collective farm chairmen, etc., and giving enterprises wide powers to plan, produce and distribute their products. The autonomy of the enterprise was already seen as a necessity. *Glasnost'* (transparency), writes Smirnov, is attributed to Gorbachev, but we wrote it into our project in 1962 – we proposed that the work of all Soviets should be open, and not just the sessions, but also the praesidiums, working committees and governing bodies. The media was to have the right of access to information from state organs. Citizens were to have the right to criticise respon-

sible officials and to take them to court over illegal acts (1997: 95–7). Some of these ideas were included later in the 1977 Constitution,[25] but many of the 1960s working group's proposals were excluded, for example that no-one could be arrested without a legal trial and the abolition of the passport system. The draft Constitution was ready at the beginning of 1963, but the leadership 'above' was clearly not ready to accept it. Furthermore, the meteoric rise of Il'ichev and his immense energy was, Smirnov suspected, threatening to many in the Politburo. After Khrushchev was ousted, Ili'chev backed down. Smirnov was talking with him and asked when work on the Constitution would be restarted. 'It's time to throw out your Komsomol habit of asking questions of the leadership, enough of this babyishness,' Il'ichev replied crossly, and Smirnov understood that the project was over (1997: 97–8).

CONTRADICTIONS, BUREAUCRATIC SELFHOOD AND MISRECOGNITION

Smirnov continued to work on 'creative' ideas, and he was to experience the contradictions of the Party official's life ever more acutely as time went on. In the 1960s and 70s he became preoccupied with the issue of how to define the Soviet person (*lichnost'*) and the contours of the individual freedom that he felt was essential to social progress. Depressed and ill when his ideas constantly ran into a stone wall, he was pushed out under Brezhnev to work in academia.[26] But some years later, within two days of Gorbachev's taking power as General Secretary, Smirnov was invited back to take a position as his Assistant. Smirnov was by now wary of the pressures of life in the Secretariat, but he was unable to resist when Gorbachev asked him flatteringly, 'What should a General Secretary do now?' Perhaps at long last he would be able to make a difference. Going to Gorbachev's office to accept the post he burst out, 'We must save socialism!' Gorbachev replied, 'We must save Russia!' For some time Smirnov did not see the significance of this reply (1997: 165).

It was not long before Smirnov ran into trouble with his co-Assistants, Boldin and Yakovlev. Once he spent a whole day and night sweating over a personal letter to Gorbachev, explaining all his deep anxieties about the state of Soviet society and what serious measures needed to be taken. He sent it off, but was dismayed to learn that his letter had been 'amalgamated' with something from Yakovlev. How could it have been amalgamated? Smirnov worried. That must mean censorship operates even here. Furthermore, when he asked to see the version shown to Gorbachev he was told by Boldin first that it had become 'secret', and then that he could not find it (1997: 164). If this episode can be seen as the continuation of the endemic competitiveness among bureaucrats, later incidents indicated that Smirnov was in the last instance ideologically at odds with his colleagues. Yet the signals were not clear to him. Gorbachev appeared to him a man who was easily influenced and could not make up his mind. Smirnov

was put in charge of social policy and submitted a report for the XXVII Congress, but he got flu, was away for two weeks, and was dismayed to hear that his report had been criticised at secret meetings at Gorbachev's dacha. Why? he wondered. In the event, the social policy report was a success at the Congress,[27] but Gorbachev's other advisers were already responding to political currents in Russia that were moving ahead of the Party as a whole. Smirnov opposed Yakovlev on two critical issues: multi-party democracy and privatisation. The first threatened the leading role of the Communist Party, the second socialism itself. This was indeed the kitchen for the preparation of *perestroika*. Looking at this configuration of advisers from outside – though Smirnov did not see it this way – we could perhaps surmise that Smirnov continued to be included in Gorbachev's team precisely to act as a sounding board for the last ditch bastions of the old system, or even as a sacrificial lamb for unpopular decisions.[28]

Aspects of official discourse are not irrelevant in this conflictual situation, for it was the absence of a citation from Marx that brought matters to a head.[29] Gorbachev invited Smirnov, Yakovlev and Boldin to discuss the final version of the report on social policy. Somewhere near the beginning, Smirnov had included a classic citation from Marx: under socialism no-one can give to society anything else than his labour, and nothing should pass into the property of individuals but their needs for personal use (Smirnov's words, 1997: 170). 'What do you think, Lukich,' Gorbachev asked Smirnov in an intimate tone, 'Maybe we should take out this citation? It's well known. What does it give us?' Smirnov replied that the quotation might be well known but it crystallised the principal position of Marxists. The faces of Yakovlev and Boldin were inscrutable. Smirnov under-stood the situation was serious. But what could he do – in the end Gorbachev was the boss. The leader crossed out the citation 'not without pleasure', remarking to Smirnov in hypocritical joking reproach, 'It would have been opportunism to keep that in.' Thus, Smirnov concluded, was one of the possible theoretical hindrances to future privatisation removed (1997: 171).

Smirnov battled on for a time, through the Chernobyl incident and arguments about the 'revolutionary' character of *perestroika*. On many issues he still thought policies were headed in the right direction. He worked on a speech Gorbachev was due to give on the problems of youth, and carried out detailed research and meetings with youth leaders throughout society. Smirnov and other secretaries were working late at Gorbachev's dacha when the leader telephoned. 'Give up,' Gorbachev said brusquely, 'Hand in your draft. You'll never get it finished.' Smirnov was deeply offended as the youth congress was still seven–eight months away. He gave in the draft and feeling exhausted took the leave that was due to him. Just before departing on holiday he called in to the TsK building – he was struck with dizzy spells and felt something burst inside him; catastrophic internal bleeding, he rightly guessed. When he returned after this second severe illness, Gorbachev proposed he leave Central Committee to take up the post of director of the Institute of Marxism–Leninism (1997: 179–80).

It is difficult not to see the specific moments when Smirnov succumbed to

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incapacitating illness as connected to the contradictions he faced as a Party
bureaucrat. On the first occasion he was unsuccessful in trying to accommodate
Soviet ideology to the actual deprived and powerless state of the Soviet indi-
vidual. On the second under Gorbachev, the cherished Party value of faithfulness
(*predannost'*), i.e. faithfulness to the concept of a socialist society, was hurtfully
pushed aside by people he judged to be not fully aware of what they were doing
or the harm they might cause (1997: 241). On both occasions, party discipline,
deeply interiorised, inclined him to submit, repressing his internal protest. There
is no evidence, however, that Smirnov ever saw a connection between his
illnesses and his political predicaments.

This observation leads to the issue of subjectivity and misconstruction.
Operating within the sphere of established discourse led Party ideologists to
engage in a contradictory kind of circularity. The paradox of their situation, and
the reason it led in some cases to such agonised conflict, lies in the predicate of
Party ideology – that there is a truth, we know what it is, and our words can
express it. Even when trying to say something new, speakers in a world where
social categories had already been defined could hardly do anything else than use
them. Thus Khrushchev's epoch-making speech denouncing Stalinism still clung
precisely to the very Stalinist expressions he was trying to unmask when he
called Beria an 'enemy of the Party' and 'an agent of foreign spies' (Khrushchev
1959: 45). Gorbachev's speeches announcing *perestroika* included numerous
quotations from Lenin (Gorbachev 1987: 26), warm accolades for *khozraschet*
(the idea beloved of Brezhnev, Gorbachev 1986: 14) and often started with
exactly the archaic opening formulae of decades earlier (Gorbachev 1988: 3).[30]

In the case of Gorbachev, a perceptive observer remarked that there were two
Gorbachevs – the democrat beloved in Western countries, the creator of a new
European freedom-loving Russia, and the Gorbachev who had been a func-
tionary all his life (see conversation with the historian Aron Gurevich in
Karaulov 1990). The 'second' Gorbachev went to announce the success of *pere-
stroika* in Lithuania. At a party meeting in Vilnius he was criticised by a worker,
who mentioned Lithuanian independence. Gorbachev responded, 'Let me have
the last word. You (addressing the worker) are speaking with an alien voice, some
professor must have told you what to say. I know the working class well, I know
how it lives and breathes.' Was that not strange? Gurevich commented. It took me
back to my early youth, when Party functionaries declared they knew the
working class better than the working class itself, knew what it wanted, and what
it needed and did not need. That kind of thing might still work in Russia, but not
in Lithuania (Karaulov 1990: 412–13). This incident reveals the bind of fettered
circularity, for Gorbachev misread the objector as 'a worker' and did not see he
was speaking as 'a Lithuanian'. In fact Party ideology entailed a systematic
misrecognition of ethnic, national and ethno-cultural politics, since the Marxist
categories were invariably universalist and unifying, and they pushed ethnic
differentiation to the side (under socialism it should be increasingly irrelevant
and invisible). As a result, even when officials were not consciously telling lies

(which they sometimes did), this situation could lead to them giving the appear-ance of lying, because they had failed to free themselves from certain categories that did not correspond to the actuality that confronted them.

This does not mean, however, that the circular categories were empty of meaning, nor that they encompassed all that a given individual was capable of thinking. Rather, they belonged to a 'regime of truth' of a specific time and place, and it was one, as I have stressed earlier, that contained its own depths, possibili-ties for invention, and hidden ideas capable of being resurrected. I have no wish to speculate on the subjectivity of individuals here, but the general point the Gorbachev episode exemplifies is that Party politics itself entailed a splitting and separation out of diverse strands of intentional activity. Some people must have been able to weave and dodge more easily than others, assuming a position loyal to one stance at one moment and shifting themselves out of it at another. The upright Smirnov, as far as we can judge from his mental and physical sufferings, seems to have found the footwork more difficult than someone like the flexible Gorbachev. But both of them were able to use the spaces squeezed out between contradictions in the ideology to invent new interpretations of Soviet society. And both of them were caught out in the end when the Party ideology ceased to be what mattered.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that there were at least three contradictions in the ideals of the Communist Party that gave rise to a general situation in which conflict – between people and within individuals – became the way of life of the bureaucracy. The incompatibility of revolutionary transformation, Party discipline, and practical management of a vast, modernising and complex society was paralleled in the bureaucratic culture by inimical moral claims. Officials were required to be 'loyal' yet 'probing', to show initiative yet be obedient, to be conscientious and honest yet assume a false position if that happened to be the Party line. This situ-ation gave rise among officials, I have suggested, to the phenomenon Smirnov called *distantsiya* – the alienation from one's own ideological product. Yet this 'distance' was not what it might seem. For people outside the bureaucracy, the Soviet mode of power, by its seeming permanence, apparent origin outside local life and its impersonality, may well have taken on an aspect of 'difference', standing outside events, time, community and personhood (Mitchell 1990: 569). The evidence of bureaucrats' memoirs suggests, however, that *distantsiya* did not create this abstract kind of metaphysical separateness for them. Rather, they saw their alienation from some of their official texts as forced on them by higher ranking and/or enemy bureaucrats and their cohorts – in other words by the particular kind of sociality of their world. What was for outsiders 'a system' was for them *personalised*, and hence they experienced it as a dense arena of largely face-to-face encounters where their actions could count. It was in this relational

environment that the Party ideal of 'creativity', which I have suggested was fundamental to the bureaucratic subject, could play its part – giving impetus to a possible innovative productivity engendered by conflict. The collision between opposed positions often resulted in the defeat of new ideas, a stalemate, or their sidelining for many years, as numerous examples in this paper have shown. This tendency was exacerbated by the highly risky and personalised social conditions of bureaucratic life, which encouraged extreme caution. But conflicts could and sometimes did engender what were new ideas in given historical circumstances.

Widening the concept of Soviet official discourse to include various genres, drafts, verbal asides, etc. enables us to see that it was not a smooth homogenous entity, but had a restless and discordant character, such that even the agreed final product was the result of counteraction and disagreement. I have argued that for officials like Smirnov this world of discourse comprised their universe – they did not see beyond it and ignored uncomfortable meanings and interventions from outside. In this world, the 'heteronymous shift' hardly came into it, as bureaucrats were concerned not with imaginative spin-off meanings from texts but with their primary message. Perhaps we should see the dominance of the former in Yurchak's analysis as a result of the particular social circles (metropolitan counter-cultures) of his research. The bureaucracy was quite another, and more weighty, social-political arena.

By taking up a certain position and vocabulary, bureaucrats were frequently led into a hobbled kind of circularity that resulted in misunderstanding of actualities before them. Yet Party officials were not entirely without self-reflection. Even if the openness of the 1990s may have encouraged Smirnov rosily to interpret his earlier career as more enlightened than it actually was (see Note 10), it seems from the detail he provides that we should accept that Smirnov did ponder the implications of the fact that he himself was also a citizen-subject of the policies he advocated for society. His childhood and his frequent visits to his homeland in the Donbass were key resources for his critiques of the prevailing ideology. His interventions, on political rights, abuse of power, the commodity form, social conflict, and the nature of the individual in socialism, went to the heart of the political system. It must have been because he was known to hold certain views that Smirnov was chosen by Gorbachev to be his Assistant. And (at least in their self-portrayals), Smirnov and Chernyaev had integrity – maybe shaky and sometimes betrayed, but it was there, as we see from the incident of the crucial Marx quotation and other episodes where Smirnov could not bring himself to agree with Gorbachev's radicalism.

It has been argued here that the creativity (*tvorchestvo*) of the Party official could have effect, as well as being on many occasions an empty slogan. Creativity and innovation can only take place in a specific situation, one that includes what is *not* creative and *not* new. But the same situation requires that 'stagnation' also must take action to maintain itself. The feverish activity of Glavlit and other organs of censorship – never entirely successful even under Brezhnev – are evidence that this was a battle, not a *fait accompli*. My point here

is that this was not, as is often portrayed, just an opposition between the Party and cynics or dissidents in the population, but fighting that took place inside the bureaucracy too (arguably, more so). The general condition of Party life positively enabled the confrontation and changeability of ideas because there never was only one subject position – not only did the diversity of Party ideology provide for several equally principled positions but endemic power struggles forced them into confrontation. This was the case from the beginning of Soviet government. The 'wooden language', adopted from early on to give the impression of consensus, legitimacy, power and inevitability, was only one part of the technology of secrecy that altogether hid the drafts and other evidence of disagreement. The relative success of this practice of secrecy is one reason why the effects of Gorbachev's *perestroika* were so unexpected in the outside world, both inside Russia and beyond. But inside the bureaucracy it was a different matter, for it was here that the 'secret' matters were cooked up, swatted down, and reinvented. The precursor ideas of *perestroika* and *glasnost'* were written in the 'wooden' language, not in some style of their own. It was not a discursive shift to an external viewpoint, but the fact that an official known to encourage such ideas, Gorbachev, moved out from the bureaucracy into power as the General Secretary, that set in train the loosening of authoritative discourse. And the emergence of Gorbachev as a 'politician', could not have happened were it not for the existence in the Party of many like Smirnov who were aware (at least in their own terms) of what was going on in the world around them, were it not for Gorbachev's own mastery of the arts of bureaucratic warfare, and the long, smouldering existence of critical thinking inside the Party. Most of the 'new' ideas attributed to the *perestroika* era were in fact new ideas produced decades earlier, when they saw a glimmer of daylight, languished and were blotted out, only to resurface in the incessant skirmishes of the Central Committee secretariat.

As this paper has attempted to show, the Party bureaucracy was a way of life, with its own ideals and intimacies, its places, its habits, and its horizons. The woodenness of 'wooden language' was one of its ways of performing the ideal of anonymous collective unanimity, but it could not, and did not, eliminate ideas.

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NOTES

[1]I follow Yurchak (2003: 480) in identifying the period of the mid-1950s to mid-1980s as 'late socialism', that is from the end of Stalinism proper to the *perestroika* introduced by Gorbachev.

[2]In Yurchak's explanation, the knowledge of the 'master' (Stalin), who was located above the system and calibrated his advice against an independent canon, was replaced by a model of 'objective scientific laws' that were not controlled by anyone and therefore did not form an external canon. This meant that there was no longer any external location from which a metadiscourse on ideology could originate. The metadiscourse could therefore no longer exist (2006: 46).

[3]Yurchak in reply to a review by Fitzpatrick (2006) wrote that his aim was not to analyse the causes of the collapse of the Soviet Union but to explain why it was not expected. It is impossible for language ever to account for the real world in full, and that is precisely why alternative realities and internal displacements were part of late socialism yet remained 'invisible' (unaccounted for in language) until the collapse of the Soviet state. The displacement was a product of a particular relationship between authoritative discourse and the forms of social reality for which it could not fully account (see Letters, *London Review Of Books*, 28 (12), 2006).

[4]The term ideology is used here in the sense of beliefs and ideas held 'on behalf of' the Communist Party and the Soviet state (see discussion by Woolard in Schieffelin et al. (ed.) 1998: 5–9). I share the view that people actively have to achieve a 'sharing' of ideology (Silverstein in ibid. 1998: 125).

[5]As Archie Brown writes, 'Such was the importance attached to the ideology, especially as a justification for the monopoly of power of the Communist Party and of its rigidly hierarchical internal structure, that theoretical change had profound political implications' (2007 n.d.: 3).

[6]The word 'kitchen' was used by bureaucrats to refer to departments within the Central Committee apparatus (Pribytkov 1995: 48; Chernyaev 1995: 264).

[7]The Secretariat of the Central Committee, under which Smirnov worked, was second only in power to the Politburo. Until 1988, when Gorbachev reduced the number of Departments, the wider apparatus consisted of twenty or more Department heads, each responsible for a particular area of Soviet life. Within each department were sub-departments. In 1990 the total staffing of the central Party apparatus was 1,940 officials, with a further 1,275 additional lower-ranked secretaries (Stephen White et al. 1990: 180–3).

[8]Hanks (2000: 7–8) discusses the idea of *copresence* in speech settings, suggesting that this implies the mutual orientation of actors who may nevertheless hold different, complementary perspectives. Final bureaucratic texts contain little evidence of such conditions of production and therefore can be easily 'misinterpreted' in the absence of an author. But this is much less likely in the case of the discourse as a whole, for which the reciprocal interpretations of everyday speech settings apply.

[9]Smirnov's memoirs published in 1993 and 1997 are not, however, inhabited by a 'post-socialist' mentality (see also his interview in Cohen & Vanden Heuvel 1989). His memoirs (1997) in particular are a justification of his life's work as a Soviet official; they employ no new language and argue against several of the ideas that erupted onto the scene in the *perestroika* years.

[10]Each Assistant had a suite of his own assistants, as well as a 'great crowd' of other advisers, personal contacts in academia and other spheres of life (Pribytkov 1995: 48–9).

[11]The Soviet speech included the phenomenon of the regular report (*otchetnyi doklad*) which covered all aspects of the Party's work over the past period and its plans for the next period. Such massive speeches when published were the size of a short book, e.g. Brezhnev 1971.

[12]Chernyaev became a high-level adviser to Brezhnev. His memoirs (1995) detail many occasions on which his actions went against his conscience and he claims to have felt

shame for them. However, one suspects in his case a greater degree of retrospective self-justification than with Smirnov, who rarely depicts himself in this way.

[13]True, Chernyaev also says (1995: 257) that the wider definition of the working class was a trifle, and that he stuck to his position mainly for reasons of personal pride. Even so, we can see this quarrel, which split swathes of officials into two sides, as a confrontation between the advocates of new thinking as such, backed by the communist parties of Eastern Europe, and the proponents of Moscow's centralised diktat.

[14]Pribytkov was Assistant to Chernenko, the General Secretary who succeeded Andropov.

[15]Officials well understood the slanted character of 'information' and on occasion, such as the explanations given to the Soviet people about the events in Czechoslovakia in 1968, did not believe it themselves (Chernyaev 1995: 264).

[16]An example is 'harmful *otsebyatina*', ideas of one's own devising, harmful because ideas should be collectively arrived at (Chernyaev 1995: 250–1).

[17]As Hanks points out, in any text what is understood is greater than what is expressed and thus any text is incomplete in respect of its meaning (2000: 12). A heavily ideologised text differs from this in degree, rather than in kind.

[18]This term is used fairly widely in Russian language studies. An *ideologema* is a 'sign or established set of signs, directing participants in communication to the sphere of "what ought to be" – right thinking and irreproachable behaviour – and cautioning them against what is not allowed' (Guseinov 2004: 14).

[19]'The will to power at all costs was what deformed Marxist theory and accounts for the hypertophised place of ideology in society' (Smirnov 1997: 122).

[20]Memories of confrontations, with both speakers and audiences laughing at the pre-programmed character of the occasion and vociferously disagreeing, remained in the bureaucratic memory. Decades later, Khasbulatov cited the following interchange at the 14th Party Congress:

Uglanov: Our further task should consist in the continuation of the centralisation of our organisation from the bottom to the top, in the centralisation of leadership. Under such centralisation should be introduced collective leadership. This is the fundament of all fundaments and the true expression in practice on internal-Party democracy. (Stormy applause.)

Lashevich. Yes, 'stormy applause' is written in here. (Laughter. Voice from the audience: 'Quite right!') But, comrades, it's unthinkable that among us in the Party, in the TsK and the Politburo, there necessarily is agreement on everything. (Applause from the Leningrad delegates. Voice: 'Shut up!') I'll shut up, comrades, don't worry, but first you should hear out some unpleasant observations, and don't get at me. I'm not obliged only to tell you politenesses. Yes, I know that would suit the majority, but it's necessary to be able to be in the minority and go against the flow and tell the truth. (Voice: 'Against the Party, or against the flow'?) Why do you uphold a monopoly on the Party? Have we really worked less than you in the Party? What do you want? We are prepared to submit to the majority. That's not the issue. What do we want? We want real collective leadership – not in words, but in fact. That means that in all disputed questions, and there will be many of them, the minority should be given the possibility of saying what they think and defending it (quoted in Khasbulatov 1989: 137).

Assuredly, such eruptions of direct interaction could have a staged quality to them. Precisely because it was a tradition of Party performance to 'speak one's mind' the appearance of sincere emotion could never be taken for granted. In later periods this tradition was almost entirely removed from Congresses and shifted to Politburo and other sites. One

could also point out that participants at the 14th Congress might well have experienced a hint of dreary familiarity listening to Lashevich's speech, since imprecations against 'politeness' (formalism, bureaucratism) were a staple of Party rhetoric from Lenin onwards (Kasbulatov 1989). Despite all this, it is evident from this excerpt that Party Congresses (and far more so all the arguments and preparations that led up to them) did deal with real political dilemmas. How, after all, should a one-party, maximally centralised, government exercise its claim to be 'collective' and 'democratic'?

[21]*Nasha rabota, napravlennaya na sovershenstvovaniye i perestroiku khozyaistvennogo mekhanizma, form I metodov upravleniya, otstala ot trebovanii, pred'yavlyaemykh dostignutym orovnem material'no-tekhnicheskogo, sotsaial'nogo, dukhonogo razvitiya sovetskogo obshchestva.* Quoted in Smirnov 1997: 144.

[22]Smirnov criticises the 'tired laquering of reality' in the speeches of Brezhnev and Chernenko, such as the claim that Lenin's injunction that the whole population should be involved in socially responsible work had been accomplished. Smirnov comments dryly that a maximum of 60% were so engaged, and even that figure was probably exaggerated (1997: 145).

[23]Smirnov 1997: 239.

[24]The 1936 Constitution 'guaranteed' a wide range of rights to Soviet citizens that they never actually enjoyed.

[25]The 1977 Constitution contained ideas like *glasnost* (transparency) that were not taken seriously at the time, whereas when Gorbachev began using these same ideas there was a rapid correspondence between the increased use of the concept and the reality of more open and diverse publications (Archie Brown, personal communication).

[26]See Smirnov's discussion of 'restructuring the citadel of dogmatism' in Cohen & Heuvel (ed.) 1989: 76–96.

[27]Smirnov angrily notes that his authorship of this section of the report was highjacked by Medvedev (1997: 169).

[28]Support for such an interpretation is provided by a conversation between the historian Aron Gurevich and Andrei Karaulov in which they concurred that Gorbachev kept the arch-conservative Ligachev in the Politburo precisely for such reasons (Karaulov 1990: 411–12).

[29]See Guseinov on the resonance of citations and the absence of citations from Stalin. The obligation to include citations, followed by their abrupt absence, meant that when slightly disguised time-honoured quotations appeared later they could be used as accusations of Stalinism (Guseinov 2004: 130–2).

[30]It is worth pointing out that the weight of 'party spirit' and previously taken positions could suppress the deeper values of conservatives too. Smirnov describes Brezhnev as 'repeating like a spell the words about faithfulness to the line of the 20th and 22nd Party Congresses (i.e. the more progressive line taken under Khrushchev), but in his soul he bowed to Stalin' (1997: 119).

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