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Silence and Alterity in Russia after Stalin, 1955-1975

by

Anastasia Ioanna Kayiatos

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Slavic Languages and Literatures

and the Designated Emphasis

in

Women, Gender and Sexuality

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Eric Naiman, Co-Chair

Professor Mel Y. Chen, Co-Chair

Professor Olga Matich

Professor Alexei Yurchak

Fall 2012

Abstract

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Taking as its theme the unsayable and the unsaid in post-Stalin Russia, this interdisciplinary dissertation pushes scholars to see more of the Soviet experience than the usual ‘totalitarianism’ lens would allow. Its six chapters apply pressure to the cold war repressive hypothesis that casts the whispering citizens of Stalin’s Russia as restored to speech during Khrushchev’s cultural thaw only to be muted once more in the late sixties by political stagnation. The prevalence of this view in Russian cultural studies and national collective memory has rendered it rather difficult to write about late socialism until recently, when scholars started to take a multisensory approach to the Soviet past—not only listening to the verbal narratives of the era (whether official or dissenting), but also looking at the dynamic tensions between socialist speech and the socialist body. To counter the commonplace of Soviet history that makes quiet consonant with submission or complicity, this study attends instead to the manners in which Soviet subjects opted for silence to speak truth to power, as with the Aesopian gestural language of avant-garde pantomimists. It also pursues the wily ways that subjects presumed or produced as unspeaking or unspeakable—including the deaf-mute, the racial primitive, the sexual deviant, and the illiterate criminal—performed the silences imputed to them to say something else and, so doing, improvised interesting and unexpected scripts for late socialism.

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INTRODUCTION.
HOW TO DO THINGS WITHOUT WORDS IN LATE SOCIALISM

*“There is no such thing as silence.
There is always something happening that makes a sound.”*
—John Cage

AFTER STALIN: THE SILENT GENERATION FINDS A VOICE (AND A BODY)

Behind the closed doors of the Twentieth Party Congress in February 1956, Nikita Khrushchev, First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, delivered what would soon become known as his “Secret Speech” [*Sekretnyi doklad*], otherwise entitled, “On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences” [*O kul'te lichnosti i ego posledstviakh*]. This late-night, four-hour lecture, recited to roughly 1,400 stunned delegates on the last day of the Congress, denounced the preceding decades of rule by terror and repression, and championed the need for the Party, and with it, the Soviet people to speak out about the inexpressible excesses of the Stalinist past. The secrecy of this speech proved a misnomer after a very short time, as “Khrushchev’s report would soon become anything but secret for tens of millions in the Soviet Union and hundreds of million around the world.”¹ It was almost instantly made available in Soviet Russia, a little later, in other countries of the Eastern Bloc, and not too long after, appeared in abridged translation abroad in the *New York Times*. To set the dramatic stage with a little more detail: “the Central Committee Presidium decidedly shortly after the congress to share the text of the speech with all party and Komosomol members, government workers, and foreign communist officials” in February.² Then in early March, a redaction was read aloud to other *apparatchiki* and government officials. Without formal invitation, non-party members also dropped into these closed readings, held at universities and other trespassable institutions, and eavesdropped on the state’s confessions, now compressed down to two and a half hours of secrets. Finally, an abridged version was transcribed for public dissemination and published in *Pravda* on July 2, 1956.

Having liberated language, so to speak, the Secret Speech kicked off the post-Stalinist era with a loud bang of cultural liberalization known poetically in its time as ‘the thaw’ [*otpepel*]. Its guiding trope of ‘glasnost’ or rhetorical openness described a dramatic rupture with the silent past of Stalinist violence. To assist this historical split, a broad program of ‘de-Stalinization’ was proclaimed, and premised on the return of fluent political speech to the people, and the possibility of talking back to the terror of the previous regime. “Khrushchev’s words ‘canceled out everything,’”³ according to one

¹ Vladimir Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 60-61. In ways that matter to the ensuing argument, it must be remarked that Khrushchev redacted his revelations at the Secret Speech to suit his political interests. Zubok compiles an abbreviated list of Stalinist excesses and genocidal omissions in his book (60).

² Ibid. For an extended picture of the popular reaction, see *ibid.*, 60-87; and Steven V. Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw: Experience and Memory in Moscow's Arbat* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 55-57.

³ Quoted by Zubok, *Zhivago's Children*, 61.

party apparatchik of the “silent generation,” that is, the age cohort which had been “socialized under a leader who soon fell from grace and out-talked those who had not been subjected to the Stalinist blanket of silence.”⁴ Moreover, “his language of glasnost encompassed not only the obligation of those in power to tell the truth to those beneath them, but also the right of those at the bottom of society to tell the truth to those above. He presented Stalin as a dictator who had silenced any such grassroots criticism and replaced so-called ‘popular control’ with authoritarian, top-down decrees.”⁵

The confessional example set by the Secret Speech was duly heeded by Soviet citizens of all strata as an incitement to discourse. As one historian pithily put it, “Soon after Stalin’s death, voices spoke out.”⁶ The ability to speak out was especially pointed for members of the intellectual classes, for the “the [Stalinist] regime demanded individual approval of terror from each and every member of the Soviet intelligentsia, whether in the form of ‘indignant’ speeches at rallies or a signature under collective letters published in Soviet media.”⁷ In the words of officially lauded author, Il’ia Erenburg (1891-1967), whose 1954 novel of the same name supplied the vernal metaphor of the moment,

People had been silent or whispered, but suddenly, they spoke up, not glancing around in fear, not eyeing the telephone as if it were a dangerous enemy. They were speaking simply, as one human being to another, with the kindness and tenderness that have always resided in the character of our people.

Люди молчали или шептались, и вдруг они заговорили—не опираясь испуганно по сторонам, не глядя на телефон, как на опасного врага, заворили просто, по-человечески, с той добротой и совестью, которые всегда лежали в характере нашего народа.

In his reminiscences about the thaw, penned under the next conservative administration, Erenburg waxed nostalgic over the promise of that watershed event and its immediate aftermath. He palpated the zeitgeist of the late fifties from the point of view of his ‘silent generation,’ perceiving in the new season of post-Stalinism a lush interlude of birth and renewal, when you could always “hear [the] cries” of the young, “discordant and dear, like the chirping of a bird...All this occurred at the very onset of April,” with all its Christian connotations, “in the days of the rupture [*perelom*], when, on one side of the street, it was cold and empty...and on the other, there was sun, spring.”⁸) The older

⁴ Juliane Fürst, *Stalin’s Last Generation: Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 18.

⁵ Cynthia Hooper, “What Can and Cannot Be Said: Between the Stalinist Past and New Soviet Future,” *Slavonic and East European Review* 86.2 (2008): 306–27, at 321.

⁶ Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 124.

⁷ Zubok, *Zhivago’s Children*, 7.

⁸ Il’ia Erenburg, *Liudi, gody, zhizni: Knigi chervertaia, piataia, shestaia, iz novykh stikhov* (Moscow: “Khudozhestvennaia literatura,” 1967), 750. This change in the climate was apparent on the other side of the cold war divide, as well. “As a young American observer, who spent a year living and studying with Moscow students, has put it, ‘young Russia talks back’ now.” Quoted in Gleb Struve, “Developments on the Soviet Literary Scene.” In *The Soviet Union under Brezhnev and Kosygin*, edited by John W. Strong (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1971), 156-175.

generation seemed to Erenburg no longer cowed into bovine silence, once the brand of their tacit compliance or, at worst, complicity; nor did the next generation of Soviet youth slouch into conformism with the repressive status quo that might have been their birthright.

In effect, the newfound freedom of the tongue refashioned the supine subject of Stalinism into a social form specific to late socialism. The post-Stalin person, by contrast to his stooping predecessor, stood up straight, puffed up his diaphragm and bellowed out bold words “at the top of his voice” [*vo ves' golos*], to use the raucous modernist idiom of Vladimir Maiakovskii (1893-1930), a poet who did just as much in the mythic heydays of Leninism. City squares and sports arenas lent themselves to collective effusions about the return to public speech in the wake of the Secret Speech. The era bore witness to the revitalization of the Romantic cult of the poet, as “young poets became idols of open-air poetry readings, a genre of mass entertainment from the 1920s revived in 1956 with the founding of poetry days that could fill Moscow stadium with ten to fifteen thousand listeners,”⁹ often patterning their lyrical personae after Maiakovskii’s model. Evgenii Evtushenko (b. 1933), “the premiere lyrical poet of the thaw,”¹⁰ commanded audiences of this impressive scale by appealing to the public’s extant desire for slogans and oratory. His poems were composed with vocalization in mind, and required being throatily read aloud to a crowd rather than hushingly at home alone.¹¹ Thus, per Petr Vail’ and Aleksandr Genis, authors of the definitive cultural study of the sixties, Khrushchev and Evtushenko were “compadres and coauthors” [*soratniki i soavtory*].¹² While Evtushenko may have been the premier lyricist, “Khrushchev was the most important and authentic poet of the epoch. And his script was assembled by Evgenii Evtushenko.”¹³ Khrushchev’s Secret Speech, they posit, paralleled poetry readings of the era; its mode of transmission demonstrates as much. Similarly created with an ear to orality, it modeled how to speak on behalf of the suddenly voluble Soviet people, and provided a trickle-down exercise in late-socialist speech therapy or mass pedagogy according to the new paradigm of political vocality.

Khrushchev revoiced his commitment to transparent discourse at the Twenty-Second Party Congress in 1961 and, commenting on the impact of the Secret Speech in the intervening years, commended “the Party [for] boldly [having] faced the difficulties” posed by its unsparing and ultimately public self-critique. “Honestly and frankly it told the people the whole truth, being deeply convinced that the people would appreciate its line,” he affirmed. “Nor was the Party mistaken. Our advance to communism has gathered speed,” and, thanks to the loosening of official lips, “Our carriage is more erect, our breathing freer, and our vision clearer.”¹⁴ Taking this political pomp *prima facie*, vision had indeed become clearer for the Party, perhaps to the point of clairvoyant absurdity, as the uncanny exchange between the General Secretary and a psychic medium, Dora Lazurkina, on the last day of the Congress suggests. Lazurkina testified to having

⁹ Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*, 127.

¹⁰ Petr Vail’ and Aleksandr Genis, *60-e: Mir sovetskogo cheloveka*, 3rd ed. (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2001), 20; 22.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ N. Khrushchov [*sic*], *An Account to the Party and the People: Report of the CC. C.P.S.U. to the 22nd Congress of the Party October 17, 1961* (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing Houses, 1961), 111.

“[taken] counsel with [Ilich]” the night before, at which time the immortal voice of Lenin broke its decades-long silence and uttered unto her, “It is unpleasant for me to be beside Stalin, who brought such misfortune to the Party.”¹⁵ Khrushchev was moved by this prophecy to translate his predecessor’s profane corpse out of the Kremlin’s hallowed walls, literalizing the post-Stalin break with the past; just as his lyrical collaborator, Evtushenko, was moved to make his own poetic prophecies about the post-Stalin future, on whose proximal horizon he predicted the return of Stalinist-style repression and the resurrection of a new cult of personality. Evtushenko’s gothic ode on this occasion, “The Heirs of Stalin” [*Nasledniki Stalina*, 1962], was published in *Pravda* at Khrushchev’s own behest.¹⁶ It is set in the eerie still of the mausoleum, wherein the lyrical hero confronts the terrifying remains of history.

Mute was the marble.
 Mutely glimmered the glass.
 Mute stood the soldiers on guard,
 Bronzed by the breeze...
 Slowly the coffin floated,
 Grazing the fixed bayonets.
 He [Stalin] also was mute
 -- He also!
 Mute and dread.
 Grimly clenching his embalmed fists,
 Only pretending to be dead,
 He spied from inside.

Безмолвствовал мрамор.
 Безмолвно мерцало стекло.
 Безмолвно стоял караул,
 на ветру бронзовея...
 Гроб медленно плыл,
 задевая краями штыки.
 Он тоже безмолвным был -
 тоже! -
 но грозно безмолвным.
 Угрюмо сжимая
 набальзамированные кулаки,
 в нем к щели глазами приник
 человек, притворившийся мертвым.¹⁷

The poem’s meek protagonist, a distant descendent of Evgenii from Aleksandr Pushkin’s *Bronze Horsemen* [*Mednyi vsadnik*, 1833]—if there’s something to make of metallurgic

¹⁵ Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (Harvard University Press, 1983), 258-59.

¹⁶ Khrushchev’s priorities for glasnost publication prompted his push for the publication of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* [*Odin den’ Ivana Denisovicha*] the next year.

¹⁷ Evgenii Evtushenko, "Nasledniki Stalina." *Pravda* (October 11, 1962); translated in George Reavey, *The Poetry of Yevgeny Yevtushenko, 1953-1965* (New York: October House, 1965), 161-165.

allusion—imagines the reanimation of the Generalissimus’s statuesque body, and with it, the repressive measures that attended his tenure. He fantasizes Stalin on the telephone within his coffin, conducting a séance with his co-conspirators from beyond the grave. But unlike the tempest-tossed Evgenii, Evtushenko’s poetic voice is too strong to be drowned out by the silences of the past. It is his civic duty to speak out against the crowning menace of political muteness, “while the heirs of Stalin/ are still alive on this earth” [*Pokuda nasledniki Stalina zhivy eshche na zemle*].

The oral and oracular quality of “The Heirs of Stalin” draws on a *topos* as old as Russian poetry itself. As Iurii Lotman has observed, “the notion of the poet as prophet...graced by some higher authority is established very early on in eighteenth-century literature.”¹⁸ While the collocation of poet and prophet is hardly unique or new to modern Russia, the Russian prophetic mode nonetheless distinguishes itself from other traditions in its peculiar merger of religious vocation and civic responsibility to speak out, even when engaged by unorthodox poets. The Russian poet must navigate both divine and earthly terrains, translating in his hybrid tongue between God, tsar or state, and the people under their twin dominion. Wilhelm Küchelbecker presides over such an epistemological marriage in his civic ode, *The Prophecy* [*Prorochestvo*, 1822], as he envisions a republican God endowing the poet with daemonic “fire and power to awaken people” to revolution, and enjoins him to “rise up, [as their] singer, prophet of Freedom!”¹⁹ [*No to l' tebe ia plamen' dal i silu vozdvigat' narody? - Vosstan', pevets, prorok Svobody!*] And the poet, “in exile and in prison, [proclaims] the word of God” [*i v ssylke, i v temnitse, Glagol gospoden' vozveshchu*], “will not keep silent about [His] words!” [*slov tvoikh ne umolchu!*]. Küchelbecker revisited this poetic vision in 1824, on the eve of the Decembrist uprising in which he participated, though this time the “I” with which he spoke was his own. “As a son of the fatherland” [*kak syn otechestva*],²⁰ he assigned himself “the obligation of boldly speaking the truth” [*ob'iazannostiiu smelo vyskazat' istinu*],²¹ undeterred in this divine vocation even as earthly law demanded the poet bite his tongue—as was actually the case for Küchelbecker, following the failed protest against the tsar in 1826. The rebels’ violent silencing by the state occasioned Pushkin’s visceral rendition of a poet’s tongue being ripped out in “The Prophet” [*Prorok*, 1826].²²

¹⁸ Iurii Lotman quoted in Harsha Ram, *The Imperial Sublime: A Russian Poetics of Empire* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 55.

¹⁹ V.N. Kiukhel'beker, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. I, pp. 158-161. The English translation is taken from William E. Brown, *A History of Russian Literature of the Romantic Period, Volume 2* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1986), 17.

²⁰ This epithet would have resonated with Küchelbecker’s contemporary audience, since “Son of the Fatherland” [*Syn otechestva*] was also the name of the radical journal to which he and the other Decembrists regularly contributed in the first decades of its total run, which spanned the years from 1812-1852.

²¹ V.K. Kiukhel'beker, “O napravlenii nashei poezii, osobenno liricheskoi, v poslednee desiatiletie.” In *Puteshestvie. Dnevnik. Stat'i*, edited by N.V. Koroleva, V.D. Rak (Leningrad: “Nauka,” 1979 [1824]), 453.

²² While “written in the aftermath of the Decembrist uprising and often read as an elliptical commentary on the Decembrist cause,” its message about muteness is actually equivocal; see Ram, *Imperial Sublime*, 163. Pamela Davidson has countered this notion of Pushkin’s hybrid identity as poet and prophet, contending instead that Pushkin commingles these two personalities only in order to bring their irreconcilable differences into relief. Davidson, “The Moral Dimension of the Prophetic Ideal: Pushkin and His Readers,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 61, No. 3 (Autumn, 2002), pp. 490-518.

In this patriotic line of Romanticism, the primary responsibility of the poet—a synecdoche for the entire intelligentsia, prosaists included—is to speak for the people as its collective conscience, embodying the *vox populi* in his lone person. Especially when the “people are silent” [*narod bezmulstvuet*], in Pushkin’s famous turn of phrase, then the poet, “by heaven blessed, their chosen herald,” must “be a citizen! serving art” [*Bud’ grazhdanin! sluzha iskusstvu*], as Nikolai Nekrasov (1821-1878) instructs in “Poet and Citizen” [*Poet i grazhdanin*, 1855].²³ This Russian tradition of the poet as prophet and citizen sits at the bedrock of Bolshevik ideology as well as the avant-garde of the revolutionary era, among whose poets the Party recruited its mouthpieces. Like his Romantic forebears, Maiakovskii, for one, christened himself an oracle of revolution, and issued the people his immodest command: “Listen! Preaching, Dashing and groaning, Is today’s brazen-lipped Zarathustra!” [*Slushaite! Propoveduet, mechas’ i stenia, segodniashnego dnia krikoguby Zaratustra!*] (*Oblaka v shtanakh*, 1914-1915)]. Having metamorphosed into “nothing more than a mouth” [*odni sploshnye guby!*] as far back as 1914-15, Maiakovskii was embraced by Lenin and Trotsky, and later lauded as “the greatest poet of our epoch” by no less authority than Stalin himself, and in the very year that the lippy futurist took his own life out of political Weltschmerz, squandering a valuable voice of his generation.²⁴

THE END OF GLASNOST: POLITICAL LARYNGITIS AND THE STUTTERING SEVENTIES

In contrast to Maiakovskii’s vexed revolutionary resonance, “my voice was inaudible” [*neslyshen moi golos*], despaired Evtushenko in his 1963 poem, “Long Cries” [*Dolgie kriki*], penned a mere two years after the Secret Speech, and only one after *The Heirs of Stalin*. By fits and starts, in short cycles of thaws and freezes [*zamorozki*], a new era of repression descended upon the Soviet people in the late sixties, just as the thaw’s own Cassandra had predicted, and literati were forced into silence or obscurity or samizdat.²⁵ The ouster of the Party’s “over-sharing” General Secretary Khrushchev in

From his position of great cultural authority, the formalist critic Boris Eikhenbaum made the case for connecting “The Prophet” immediately with the Decembrist uprising in history, and literarily, linking it up to a cycle of eleven poems about the role of the poet composed by Pushkin between 1826-1828. For more on Eikhenbaum’s argument for reading this group of poems as a cycle, consult Carol Joyce Any, *Boris Eikhenbaum: Voices of A Russian Formalist* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 22.

²³ Indeed, in the absence of a public sphere in the Western sense, the poets make up whatever civil society tsarist Russia could boast. They were at once its exemplary citizens and its most consistent exiles, truer to Platonic form. Both of these aspects of the poet’s relationship to institutional power shaped the Russian and later Soviet language of silence with which this dissertation engages. For more on the bourgeois public sphere, see Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991). And for more on Soviet Russia’s unique riff on the public sphere in an anti-bourgeois context, see Juliane Fürst, “Friends in Private, Friends in Public.” In *Borders of Socialism: Spheres of Soviet Russia*, edited by Lewis H. Siegelbaum (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). Fürst conceives of the Soviet public sphere in sixties Russian culture primarily as an imaginative *topos* or ideational construct, suggesting the closer connection in the Russian case to the lyrical or poetic traditions than is true for its Western counterpart.

²⁴ Roman Jakobson, “On the Generation That Squandered Its Poets.” In *Language in Literature*, edited by Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1987), 273-300.

²⁵ I deliberately resisted elaborating on samizdat in this introduction, not to deny the tremendous importance of unofficial literature to post-Stalin Soviet culture—quite the contrary. But I do believe that the recurrent foregrounding of samizdat has foreclosed other conversations about culture in this era. This

1964 signaled the end of the de-Stalinization campaign in politics, while completing a conservative turn in the arts in 1966, with the trial and conviction of two samizdat authors, Andrei Siniavskii and Iulii Daniel (aka Abram Tertz and Nikolai Arzhak, respectively), for anti-Soviet activity. (The ideologically “awkward voice”²⁶ of the former co-defendant, Siniavskii-Tertz, features in the fifth and sixth chapters of this dissertation.) The global outcry about their censorship and sentencing was soon subsumed under the rumble of Russian tanks, careening across Wenceslas Square in spectacular preface to the Soviet takeover of mass communication outlets in Prague.²⁷ At this crucial historical juncture, Alexander Dubcek, the Czech Party Secretary turned poet of a sort, addressed his people on the airwaves. But in lieu of the weighty words of a leader calm in a time of crisis came “those awful long pauses when [Dubcek] seemed unable to breathe, when he gasped for air before a whole nation glued to its radios. At least those pauses would remain,” writes Milan Kundera in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, for “those pauses contained all the horror that had befallen their country,”²⁸ puncturing through to historical truth with silent punctuations.

Thus the lyrical idealism of the sixties, with its musical Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia, and its youthful chirping in the Russian spring of Erenburg’s imagination, were drowned out in a dirge of collective resignation. Indeed, if the socialist sixties had “spoke[n] in words [that] could be heard,” then the stagnant seventies muffled these murmurs of political promise as the times “took a turn toward silence: a new generation—along with their disenchanting fathers—accustomed itself to a different means of existence, preferring to consume culture either silently or in solitude.”²⁹ This paradigmatic shift in political sound reverberated on the emotional level of Soviet society,

move may seem counterintuitive inasmuch as I bracket the timeframe of the dissertation, not with the death of Stalin or the Secret Speech on one end, and the death of Brezhnev on the other. Rather 1955-1975 fits the temporal frame of “free Russian literature” devised by literary scholar Iurii Mal’tsev in his seminal book on samizdat. *Vol’naia russkaia literatura* (Posev: Frankfurt, 1976) The birth of Soviet samizdat is often pinned to the appearance of Boris Pasternak’s *Doktor Zhivago* in 1957, which “opens a new page in the history of Russian literature,” and tears it into “two antagonistic cultures—official and underground” (9, 5). My dissertation writes against this notion of rupture or dichotomy, which is often read as an identical dividing line between censorship and free speech, politics and poetry. Since there is no dearth of scholarship about samizdat, I hope that, by moving it out of the analytic spotlight, other narratives of silence and speech will come into view on the stage of post-Stalin history.

²⁶ Max Hayward, “Awkward Voices in Russia.” *London Times* 1, no. February 1 (1966): 11.

²⁷ On the centrality of radio vocalicity to the political developments in “normalizing” Prague, or “stagnating” Russia, see Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2010). On the role of radio in Soviet ideology more broadly, see Iurii Murashov, “Sovetskii etos i radiofikatsiia pis’ma.” *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 86 (2007): 47-63. Finally, for a creative approach to the importance of the airwaves in the post-Stalin era, consult *Moscow is Speaking* [Govorit Moskva, 1962], co-defendant Daniel-Arzhak’s *roman à thèse* about the fatally performative power of official speech in Soviet Russia. This controversial novella was one of the primary reasons behind the samizdat author standing trial in 1966.

²⁸ Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, translated by Michael Henry Heim (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 72.

Those pauses contained the truth that could not be uttered insofar as “only in broken speech is the form of disfluency consonant with the chaos of the world’s content. Stutterers are truth-tellers. Everyone else is lying.” This maxim is (st)uttered by Jeremy Zorn, the speech-impaired protagonist of David Shield’s novel *Dead Languages*; quoted in Francine du Plessix Gray, “The Paralysis of Stuttering,” *New York Review of Books* (April 26, 2012):32-34, at 34.

²⁹ Vail’ and Genis, *60-e*, 296-97.

as “those who entered public life during the post-Stalinist thaw of the late 1950s and early 1960s,” the *shestidesiatniki* or ‘sixtniks,’ “were [the] romantic and optimistic”³⁰ children of the revolution, “of the Twentieth and Twenty-second congresses of the CPSU,” as another fresh-faced stadium poet of the period christened his epochal peers. In the mirror held up by Andrei Voznesenskii (1933-2010), this was “the generation that [saw] itself in the image of the revolutionary twenties, the traditions of Leninism,” that is, the earlier era of glasnost,³¹ before the next one inaugurated by Mikhail Gorbachev in the mid-nineteen-eighties. Sandwiched sadly between these two rosy-colored cohorts were the middle “children of ‘stagnation.’” These historical unfortunates were born under the bad sign of the Twenty-third Congress in 1966, at which Mikhail Sholokhov, the newly minted Nobel laureate, Stalin Prize winner, and general darling of the socialist-realist Writers’ Union, came down crushingly against unofficial and samizdat literature. The stagnation generation, “skeptical, ironic, and disbelieving, . . . matured during the times of the Immortal Generalissimus Brezhnev,” in a newly repressive period, “when the sixtniks fell silent or joined the establishment, and entered public life during glasnost’ with their critique of the thaw,”³² when Gorbachev put a stop to “half a century of virtual silence.”³³

“This familiar picture of post-Stalinism as a time of growing cynicism and distrust in the authorities” underwrites the Soviet speech-to-silence narrative Svetlana Boym recapitulates in her aptly titled book on Soviet culture, *Common Places*.³⁴ Her perspective echoes in Mikhail Epshtein’s poetic metaphor of stagnation as a cultural speech impediment. In the post-thaw period, he writes, “language (iazyk),” also “the tongue,” “is ashamed of its chattiness and seeks to hide deeper inside the oral cavity, even if at the cost of stuttering, lisping,” like Dubcek in his compromised radio monologue. “Language has come up with so many monstrosities in the twentieth century, it has told so many deadly lies, that now it wants to forget itself and go to sleep—though of course in the form of dozing-off speech.”³⁵

Against the soporific drone of ideology, the trademark slur of stagnation’s Generalissimus, a few dissident voices bellowed out on behalf of the people and their poets, like Pavel Litvinov (b. 1940), an exemplary dissident whose rebellious spark was ignited in 1966 and came to full flame with the Soviet invasion of Prague. In his public letter of protest against the Siniavskii-Daniel trial, Litvinov appealed to the generational-repression theme of the glasnost genre.

³⁰ Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 25.

³¹ A Polish radio interview with Evtushenko quoted in Zubok, *Zhivago’s Children*, 213. Evtushenko and other preeminent personalities of the thaw are credited with having said the same thing about their Party Congress paternity, thus suggesting it was a cliché of self-conception during and after the era.

³² Boym, *Common Places*, 25.

³³ Leonid Onikov, “Glasnost’ i demokratiia,” *Pravda* (June 19, 1988); quoted in Brian McNair, “Glasnost and Restructuring in the Soviet Media,” *Media, Culture, and Society* 11 (1989): 327-349, at 327.

³⁴ Polly Jones, Reviews of Iurii Aksutin, *Khrushchevskaia ottepel’ i obshchestvennye nastroyeniia v SSSR v 1953–1964 gg.* and Arlen Blium, *Kak eto delalos’ v Leningrade: Tsenzura v gody ottepli, zastoia i perestroika, 1953–1991. Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 8.3 (2007): 695-704.

³⁵ Mikhail Epstein, “After the Future: On the New Consciousness in Literature.” In *Late Soviet Culture: From Perestroika to Novostroika*, edited by Thomas Lahusen and Gene Kuperman (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993): 257-288, at 273.

Our grandfathers and fathers were shot. They died in concentration camps. They knew all the horrors of the Stalinist reaction. We realize how terrible it is to live when all around there is silence and fear. Therefore the thinking generation of the 'Sixties calls upon all honest people to support the two courageous individuals and sign your letter. Those who remain silent will be guilty before their conscience and before Russia.³⁶

As one of the “voices of glasnost” under Gorbachev—that is, the *next* glasnost in the 1980s—reflected on the repressive seventies,

Along with the majority of the Russian intelligentsia, I was mired in the shit during those years. Even those of us who did not personally persecute or harm anyone, and who sincerely wanted changes in the country, bear a heavy responsibility for having been silent. Unlike people like [the dissident activists] Andrei Sakharov, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, and Roy Medvedev, we did not openly or actively fight against what was happening our country. Therefore, we—and I include myself—must repent for our responsibility.³⁷

Those who did not demand “glasnost, honest and complete glasnost” of the state, as Solzhenitsyn did in his “Open letter to the Secretariat of the Writers’ Union of the Russian Federation”³⁸ of 1969, and those who did not model transparent speech in their own everyday relationship to the regime, whether or not they were “mired in the shit,” are guilty before history. Within this oppositional discourse, silence bore the stigma of guilt or dishonesty; it became synonymous with lying, while speech itself was equated with truth.

In a slightly later manifesto of mature dissidence, Czech activist Vaclav Havel makes recourse to the same set of rhetorical tropes to paint a damning portrait of the powerless, a class of political actors who, in his opinion, contribute to their own domination—whether or not they put any stock in the “post-totalitarian” system that oppresses them—so long as they “at least tolerate [it] in silence.” In other words, “they must live within a lie.” The silence of the everyday socialist citizen, incarnated in Havel’s legendary greengrocer, is tantamount to a form of ideological submission that is *not* irresistible. The greengrocer and his kin “need not accept the lie” of ideology, advises Havel. They need “[not] live by the lie,” to paraphrase Solzhenitsyn before him. As long as they repeat the suspect slogans of the Party-state, put up its placards in the windows of their fruit-and-vegetable shops, and publicly affirm their loyalty, even when in bad faith, the people perpetuate their own powerlessness by not speaking about it openly. By breaking the silent spell of ideology, they perform acts that Havel considers, on the contrary, “an articulated expression of living within the truth,” of “serving truth, consistently, purposefully, and articulately.” In the face of utter hopelessness, it is still

³⁶ Quoted in Struve, “Developments on the Soviet Literary Scene,” 173.

³⁷ Afanas’ev quoted in *Voices of Glasnost: Interviews with Gorbachev’s Reformers*, 1st ed, edited by Stephen F. Cohen and Katrina Vanden Heuvel (New York: Norton, 1989), 100.

³⁸ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, “Otrkytoe pis’mo sekretariatus Soiuza pisaetelei RSFSR,” *Sobranie dokumentov samizdata*, vol. 4 no. 297 (1969); quoted in Serguei Oushakine, “The Terrifying Mimicry of Samizdat,” *Public Culture* 13.2 (2001): 191-214, at 193.

necessary to serve truth in this way, to shout out, as in this representative “open letter to the Soviet government” from the mid-1970s: “I understand it pretty well,” its author laments, “my letter... will result in nothing, and yet I see it as my duty to stop lying and stop being silent.”³⁹

Such impaired professions of political reticence, and impassioned pleas for the people to breach their silence, betray the axiomatic status of speech in glasnost discourse. It is the ethical responsibility of every Soviet person to speak, and not just the moral mantle borne alone by the poet in his social or ontological separateness. Though the poet-prophet occupies the rarefied end of the spectrum of social speaking, his extreme example demonstrates the general centrality of vocality to citizenship or civic identity in modern Russian society, not to speak of Western civilization in the longer *durée*. The idea that speech is the sine qua non of citizenship has roots as old as democracy itself, tracing back to classical antiquity. In *The Politics*, Aristotle defines man’s privileged position as a “political animal” in terms of “the power of speech,” which nature, in its insistent purposefulness, “endowed man alone among the animals.” The hierarchy of being Aristotle lays out is based on this distinction between animal “voice”—the noise of instinct without intention, of sensory feeling without emotional insight—and “speech,” the substrate of morality, which “serves to indicate what is useful and what is harmful, and so also what is just and unjust.”⁴⁰ When one endowed by creation with speech refuses this power, and with it the ethical responsibility of humanity, his or her silence becomes significant as an expression of political apathy or complicity.

The categories of politics and the voice are deeply co-implicated in Russian culture at the most basic level of the language, as well. From the Old Church Slavic *glas* and later Russian *golos*, meaning ‘voice,’ comes *golosovat*, or the verb ‘to vote.’ Anthropologist of silence, Konstantin Bogdanov, extends this etymological link by calibrating stages in individual vocal development to moments of civic maturity. He points out that the old Russian word for “young” [*iunyi*], like the Latin *in fans*, connotes prelingualism, and the “adolescent” [*otrok*] likewise lacks the capacity to speak in a public or civic sense, “this entire etymology reflecting not so much physiological as social muteness.”⁴¹ (At the same time, social speech cannot be divorced from the developmental forms in which it is embodied, an implication I pursue in my second chapter.) Bogdanov’s conclusion that, “only a sovereign [*polnopravnyi*] member of society can speak with full rights [*polnopravno govorit*],”⁴² squares with the denotative definitions of “voice” that appear in Vladimir Dal’s encyclopedic dictionary of the Russian language from the early 1860s. Beside its literal or physiological valences, “voice” means “opinion, power, influence,” in contrast to “a person without voice,” who is “insignificant, impotent, or precarious, not independent.” [*Mnenie, vlast’, vlianie. Eto chelovek bez golosa, nichtozhnyi, bessilnyi, ili shatkii, nesamostoiatel’nyi.*]⁴³ “The social

³⁹ Yelena Andronova, “Otrkytoe pis’mo sovetskomo pravitel’stvu” (1977); quoted in Oushakine, “Terrifying Mimicry,” 210.

⁴⁰ Aristotle, *The Politics*, translated by T.A. Sinclair and revised by Trevor J. Saunders. 2nd ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 60.

⁴¹ Konstantin Bogdanov, “Glukhonemota: Utopiia spaseniia.” In *Russkie utopii*, edited by V.E. Bagno (St. Petersburg: Kanun, 1995): 238-280, at 242-3.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 242.

⁴³ V.I. Dal’, “Golos,” *Tolkovyi slovar’ zhivogo velikorusskogo iazyka* (St. Petersburg, 1863-1866); online slovari.yandex.ru/~книги/Толковый%20словарь%20Даля/ГОЛОС/

intelligibility and the ‘identity’ of a member of society exists in language,” or in the tongue [*v iazyke*], “and according to language,” or the tongue [*po iazyku*], Bogdanov surmises, before parenthetically returning us to a portrait of political exclusion in the style of Pushkin’s prophet: “the cruel and already directly literal illustration” of this conflation is “punishment by means of physically depriving the criminal of his tongue—ripping it out.”⁴⁴

And the inverse—installing a human tongue in the apolitical animal’s maw—is civic intervention of a divine order. Thus, as they undertook the godly mission of materializing a radically “new person” [*novyi chelovek*] out of the impuissant subjects of tsarist autocracy, the Bolsheviks began “preach[ing] the power of political language”⁴⁵ in the immediate aftermath of the revolution. They “sought to impart [ideological] consciousness in great measure by linguistic means: through practices of reading, writing, and oral and written self-presentation.”⁴⁶ Historian Stephen Kotkin has coined the name “speaking Bolshevik” for this complex operation by means of which Soviet subjectivity was achieved through language; this concept is at the tip of the linguistic turn taken by Soviet cultural studies in the past two decades. Communist politics turned on this equation of voicelessness with civic extraneity, and the axiom that “the illiterate person stands outside of politics,”⁴⁷ in the eternal words of Vladimir Lenin, the true god of glasnost and the *voix de Dieu* in Evtushenko’s prophetic poem. (To the credit of Bogdanov’s claim, in Lenin’s case, the social or political quality of voice proves so potent, it can considerably outpace the physiological life of its speaker.⁴⁸) “The Bolsheviks were verbal imperialists,”⁴⁹ according to one linguistically-attuned historian, and they sought, ironically, to liberate the Soviet people through language. A winged phrase from the early literacy campaign says this much—“We are not slaves, slaves are mute.” [*My ne raby, raby nemy.*]⁵⁰ The muteness of slaves, the silence of political passivity, are all well-trodden if negative topoi in the discourse of glasnost, which is, in a sense, the culmination point in this vocal logic of civic life. Sharing a root with the Russian “voice,” “to exercise glasnost means to become a subject of public speech or, to put it different, to conduct one’s activities in the form of publicly available discourse.”⁵¹

REPRESSIVE HYPOTHESIS À LA RUSSE: GLASNOST AS POLITICAL SPEECH GENRE

“It is sometimes asked what the limits of glasnost are.”
—Mikhail Gorbachev, May 1987

⁴⁴ Bogdanov, “Glukhonemota,” 242.

⁴⁵ Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on my Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 19.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

⁴⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, 23.

⁴⁸ For more on this strange topic, see Alexei Yurchak’s forthcoming *qui parle* article, “If Lenin Were Alive, He Would Know What to Do: The Naked Life of the Leader”; and Katherine Verdery, *The Political Life of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

⁴⁹ Hellbeck, *Revolution*, 19.

⁵⁰ Bogdanov, “Glukhonemota,” 242.

⁵¹ Oushakine, “Terrifying Mimicry,” 192.

The cycle of repression and permissiveness or openness, silence and speech, lies and truth, start in again with each new articulation of glasnost. We can track these terms through twentieth-century Russia in a simple schematic: tsarism—silence/repression, Leninism—speech/glasnost, Stalinism—silence, Khrushchev’s thaw—speech, Brezhnev’s stagnation—silence, Gorbachev perestroika and glasnost—speech. Indeed, this narrative of cultural alternation is the way Russia historically writes its history as a cycle of cataclysms. In their canonical essay on national cosmology, "The Role of Dual Models in the Dynamics of Russian Culture," structuralists Iurii Lotman and Boris Uspenskii profile the national past as predicated on an “explosive” or “eschatological” logic, whereby each new cultural stage comes into being by violently and vocally breaking with its predecessor. The result of this kind of thinking is a “binary logic of opposition” (which may belong as much to Russian idea as it does to structuralism), “the specific feature” of which is a “fundamental polarity [...expressed] in the dual character of its structure. The basic cultural values... are arranged in a bipolar value field divided by a sharp line and without any neutral axiological zone.”⁵² This line delimits the “old” and evil from the “new” and good on a moralized temporal axis. National progress, then, is approached iconoclastically, “not as a continuation but as an eschatological replacement of everything.”⁵³ (“Khrushchev’s words ‘canceled out everything...’”⁵⁴) The national discourse “always tries to radically annihilate the past. The past is regarded...as the source of error that must be completely destroyed,”⁵⁵ even though, so doing, it recapitulates in its pattern some part of the past it simultaneously disavows.

The original socialist notion of glasnost and all that follow fit this formula to a tee. The raw material for permissible speech comprises, in Lenin’s reckoning, “everything negative which remains from the old structure and has become manifest for one reason or another in the construction of the new.”⁵⁶ Thus, rather than an absolute rupture with the recent past, the “glasnost campaign” is better understood as a persistent genre of political speech in Russia that speaks about a break but actually carries on a prerevolutionary historical tradition “following a major change of direction in the party leadership [...before] the new political trend has been consolidated.”⁵⁷ Historical break, the genre’s

⁵² Iu. M. Lotman and B.A. Uspenskii. "The Role of Dual Models in the Dynamics of Russian Culture" (Up to the End of the Eighteenth Century)." In *The Semiotics of Russian Culture*, edited by Ann Shukhman (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1984), 4.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁴ Quoted by Zubok, *Zhivago's Children*, 61.

⁵⁵ Tim McDaniel, *The Agony of the Russian Idea* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 17.

⁵⁶ Onikov quoted in McNair, “Glasnost and Restructuring,” 329. Lenin’s name was singularly exempt from the critical side of glasnost. When this prevailing silence around Lenin was first punctured in the later years of Gorbachev’s glasnost, a discursive shift took place, per Alexei Yurchak, which at once symptomized and conditioned the collapse of the Soviet Union as a symbolic project. See Yurchak, “A Parasite from Outer Space: How Sergei Kurekhin Proved That Lenin Was a Mushroom,” *Slavic Review* 70.2 (Summer 2011): 307-333.

⁵⁷ Brian McNair, “Glasnost and Restructuring in the Soviet Media,” *Media, Culture, and Society* 11 (1989): 327-349, at 344-45. Observing this cyclicity, McNair reaches the “logical conclusion” that “glasnost is a temporary phenomenon, to be allowed at some point in the future by a return to neo-Stalinist orthodoxy.”

Its socialist invocation has a prerevolutionary history. Lenin’s first articulations of the principle arguably reach back as far as the reactionary tracts he authored in 1900 and 1902, which would be installed at the canonical center of the Bolshevik project (335). McNair points to a “statement of support for socialist pluralism” for the prefiguration of glasnost’ rhetoric in Lenin’s ‘Declaration of the *Iskra Board*’ for the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party. Others trace the origin story of Leninist glasnost’ to a barely

primary trope, is then itself a form of poetic continuity; and the silence broken by the new era of glasnost might be said to constitute a form of speech, since “silence and speech have a common object” around which they come into being together.⁵⁸ Another key aspect of the genre seems to stipulate that each invocation of glasnost’ gains legitimacy only by asserting its sui generis status, often as a return to Leninist norms. As a discourse of dramatic political rupture, its efficacy rests on effacing the fact of its historical rootedness from which, at the same, it draws its popular resonance through repetition.⁵⁹ And, though glasnost’ claims its specificity as a socialist policy, used to free up the speech of *Soviet* politicians and poets in particular, the discourse predictably precedes it, having gained initial traction as a trope of liberalization in the mid-nineteenth century, during the reign of Tsar Nikolai I (1825-1855), in the first glimmerings of Russian poetry’s golden age.⁶⁰

Isaiah Berlin detects the same dialectic as I have outlined, and describes the workings of “the silence in Russian culture” in an essay by that name authored in 1957, at the optimistic onset of the Khrushchev cultural thaw. What is characteristic of Russia’s Soviet experience in the twentieth century is precisely this back-and-forth between periods of repression (thesis) and openness (antithesis), he asserts, a system that precedes the revolution but is perfected under Stalinism. This is a national idea, specific to Russia in opposition to the West: “those who were defeated in [any] internal Soviet controversies were liable from the very beginning of the regime—even before the official beginning of the terror—to be at best silenced, at worst punished or executed.”⁶¹ Such consummate silencing under Stalin resulted in “a long blank page in the history of Russian culture. Between 1932 and, say, 1945 or indeed 1955,” a disputably arbitrary date also observed by this dissertation’s temporal scope. “It would not be too much to say,” Berlin concludes, that “scarcely any idea or piece of critical writing of high intrinsic

later date of 1902, in *What is to be Done?* According to one Soviet scholar, this is where he “first posed the question of glasnost as an indicator of democracy.” Aleksandr Sovokin, “Glasnost i demokratiia,” *Pravda* (June 19, 1988).

⁵⁸ Mikhail Epshtein, “Slovo i molchanie v russkoi kul’ture,” *Zvezda* 10 (2005), 202-222; online magazines.russ.ru/zvezda/2005/10/ep12.html.

⁵⁹ In other words, Gorbachev’s glasnost’ of 1985 was not the first return to the original campaign, nor was Khrushchev’s in 1956, nor even was Lenin’s in the revolutionary and even prerevolutionary period, and yet each campaign and its mouthpiece lays claim to originality.

⁶⁰ In the time of transition between Nikolai, a trumpeter of transparency, and his heavy-handed antecedent, Tsar Alexander I (1801-1825), Aleksandr Pushkin composed the historical drama *Boris Gudonov* (1824-1826). Written in exile and under the strictest surveillance of the tsar, the piece was not published until 1831, and did not receive the censor’s approval for performance for another thirty-five years; thus its creation and reception was imprinted by two repressive regimes, despite that the latter framed itself in the language of glasnost. Fittingly, the subject of *Boris Godunov*, in the standard Soviet interpretation, is the standoff between the cruel tsar and the people who, at the end of the play, “are silent” [*narod bezmolstviet*], as this introduction had already alluded. For a more complicated and conflicted interpretation of the play which, pays relevant attention to the generic specificity of the work as a drama, that is, in its original design to be delivered out loud, see Stephanie Sandler, *Distant Pleasures: Alexander Pushkin and the Writing of Exile* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989).

⁶¹ Isaiah Berlin, “The Silence in Russian Culture,” *Foreign Affairs*, 36.1 (October 1957): 1-24, at 10. For more on “repression, persecution, and death” in the Soviet theater as a consequence of aesthetic disagreement with the Stalinist regime, see Nikolai A. Gorchakov, *The Theater in Soviet Russia*, translated by Edgar Lehrman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 356-365.

value was published in Russian, and hardly any work of art” during that time.⁶² (As one historian holds, under Stalin, “writers and poets seemed to have forgotten how to think and write freely. Artists could not express their true feelings on canvas or onstage.”⁶³) But Berlin retreats a bit in his absolutism, adding that even in the pre-Stalinist period of revolutionary modernism, Lenin presided over “the subverting of the old order and [the] keeping of the new one,” and the destruction of the old was lamented only by “a few indignant voices abroad, [while] inside the Soviet Union” it met only “silence and total submission.”⁶⁴

This cyclical tale of progress and rupture—perceived from within as a teleology of silence to speech specific to the Russian national story—is really a repressive hypothesis of a less Romantic variety. By this term, I invoke the theory of discourse developed by Michel Foucault to talk about sex. He famously starts off the first volume of the *History of Sexuality* by ventriloquizing the Western commonplace that sexuality went silent in the seventeenth century, culminating in the consummate prudery of the Victorians. (I try to mimic the rhythm of his argument in my own opening, by presenting first the commonplace, then its complication.) Foucault plays the devil’s advocate on this count, asserting to the contrary of reigning common sense that this era witnessed the *proliferation* of discourses on sexuality instead. Rather than repression, there is an “institutional incitement to speak about it.”⁶⁵ Therein lies the logical contradiction: “modern societies [. . . did not consign] sex to a shadow existence,” but “dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as *the secret*.”⁶⁶ From this discourse of silence derives the “speaker’s benefit,” that is, the subversive significance endowed by the repressive hypothesis on the “transgressive” act of speaking about sex.

In the Russian case, the repressive hypothesis is about repression itself. It is a *repression repressive hypothesis*, if you will permit the redoubling, bound to the binary thinking of Russian culture (after Lotman and Uspenskii), as well as cold war or totalitarian understandings of the Soviet Union. To reiterate, discourses proliferate in Russia about discourses proliferating. . . *or not*. Everyone speaks about speaking. . . *or not*. The secret is speech, or, in the post-Stalin period, the Secret Speech, which stands in for the “permissive moment”⁶⁷ of liberation that follows every epoch of repression. Scholars of Russia and Russians themselves talk a lot in binary terms about how they cannot talk at these times. But “there is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say,”⁶⁸ rather, in such discussions, the speaker’s benefit prevails with peerless force on the subject of the post-Stalin, post-repression period. Though the “speakers” of glasnost describe silence in unilateral terms, to contravene with a quote from Foucault, “there is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses.”⁶⁹ Thus there exists a robust lexicon in Russian to speak about not speaking. There are so many words in the language for

⁶² Berlin, “Silence in Russian Culture,” 13-14.

⁶³ Zubok, *Zhivago's Children*, 16.

⁶⁴ Berlin, “Silence in Russian Culture,” 14.

⁶⁵ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 17.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁶⁷ Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality and its Discontents: Meanings, Myths, & Modern Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1985).

⁶⁸ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 27.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

silence, ineffability, inexpression, and so on, with so many gradations, applications, connotations, poetic and institutional genealogies—some fraction of which I explore in this dissertation. Taking a cue from Foucault I “try to determine the different ways of not saying”⁷⁰ that have been deployed in the long history of Soviet alterity, while also attending to the styles of “not saying” that characterize the enterprise of alteritist historiography itself. I question the silence-to-speech story of progress that subtends the glasnost genre. And, counter to its central tenets, I insist that speech is not necessarily good or liberating in the “permissive moment,” nor is silence singularly evil, oppressive or all-pervasive in “repressive” periods as the genre presumes.

THE LIMITS OF GLASNOST: SILENCE THAT SPEAKS, SPEECH THAT SECRETES

Even speech that purports to tell all still leaves some things unsaid, revealing and disclosing information or ‘truth’ in a double operation that dissembles as self-identical discourse. Honoring its oxymoronic moniker, the Secret Speech most of all secretes as it speaks, loosening the collective tongue at the same time that it clamps it down on permissible discourse. This paradox is particularly vexed where the repressive narrative of history—the one that constrains “what can and cannot be said” about the past—comes into contact with the fact of real repression, which must be spoken about under the aegis of glasnost. To illustrate this point, I poach an example from historian Cynthia Hooper, which speaks directly to the question of repression and repressed speech. Hooper examines the case of rehabilitated gulag returnees, who were conscripted to give public testimony about their repression under Stalin at the Twenty-second Party Congress. Their task was thus to explode the silence surrounding a previously unbroachable theme. At the same time, their personal accounts were tethered to an implicit script that demanded the speaker to denounce Stalin but stay close to the Party in its present configuration. In such a way, these narratives were constrained and “invariably contained an element of self-censorship.”⁷¹ That consequence of this constrained-confessional dynamic, in Hooper’s estimation, was that inclusion in civic life became contingent not on speech but on the silent “[acceptance of] the terms of an unspoken ‘Khrushchevian deal,’” which stipulated that these speaking subjects be “‘very careful not to talk about the past’ once they had been welcomed back” into the fold of free society.⁷² Ultimately, Hooper determines that de-Stalinization actually kept in place the practices of the previous era it critiqued, of “truth and deception,” even as the Kremlin gave lip service to a revolution in “truth-telling.” This dual operation of “concealment and duplicity” “linked fresh productions of glasnost’ to the same past practices” it repudiated, and so, “the Khrushchev era failed to introduce a sharp break with [the] past.”⁷³ Something more insidious took place instead: this campaign of rhetorical openness produced its opposite: “congratulatory closure,”⁷⁴ ensnaring its subjects in a false form of free speech.

And more than that—it was not just the rehabilitated and re-voiced *nomenklatura* whose words were hemmed in by silent proscriptions from the party—but

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Hooper, “What Can and Cannot Be Said,” 321.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 306; 327.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 314.

the party's political opponents, the Soviet dissidents, likewise suffered as "prisoners of glasnost."⁷⁵ This surprising contention about the discursive similitude between the state and its resisters has been sussed out by Serguei Oushakine, an anthropologist of late socialism, who pursues a comparative glasnost analysis in order to understand why the dissident movement, so significant in its day, would vanish quickly into the mist the exact moment the state dissolved. He reasons this happened because the dissidents inhabited the same metaphorical frame as the 'totalitarian state,' reproducing its power and their dependence by "[reproducing its...] already existing rhetorical tools."⁷⁶ The full scope of Oushakine's argument about "the terrifying mimicry of samizdat" proves pertinent to multiple episodes in my dissertation, but at present, I mean foremost to mark my agreement with his observation that the rhetoric of glasnost impacted on the way politics were spoken about in the immediate present of the cold war. At the same time, I want to extend his conclusion to encompass the constraints placed on how we speak about the period retrospectively. If the dissidents and the state were prisoners of glasnost in the past, then we face a double hostage crisis in the present tense, so long as the history of late socialism is held captive to this pat narrative of verbal emancipation.

"Openness must have its limits," after all, as "central leaders" of the Khrushchev era concurred, while they simultaneously "worked to silence debate on exactly what the nature of those limits should be."⁷⁷ And as he resumed "the unfinished business" of glasnost in the 1980s, Gorbachev reprised this elusive language to say just as much, or, more accurately, to say *not that much*, adding that, "it is sometimes asked what the limits of glasnost are."⁷⁸ Though these queries about rhetoric are intended rhetorically—note the incuriosity that transmutes the open-ended question into simple constative utterance—we might nevertheless say "yes" to their insincere invitation to debate, a posit in reply: *The limits of glasnost were (and are) interpretive*. Dissembling as dialogic, it is in fact a hermetic hermeneutic, open only to "congratulatory closure,"⁷⁹ which "[reduces] the multiplicity of codes used in [a] text [to a] monotony of its content,"⁸⁰ as these thematically apt examples attest. The glasnost genre is coextensive with the larger conceptual universe built on the "dual model," which promotes thinking in reductive binaries across the board, including, "oppression and resistance, repression and freedom, the state and the people, official economy and second economy, official culture and counterculture, totalitarian language and counterlanguage, public self and private self, truth and lie, reality and dissimulation, morality and corruption..."⁸¹ (I borrow this litany of dichotomies from Alexei Yurchak's likeminded critique.) So long as glasnost is invoked uncritically—whether by its proper name or through its repertoire of tropes—so

⁷⁵ Oushakine, "Terrifying Mimicry," 196.

⁷⁶ Ibid. With the idea of "metaphorical framing," I allude to the work of political linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

⁷⁷ Hooper, "What Can and Cannot Be Said," 307.

⁷⁸ Gorbachev's made this remark to a very different end in May 1987; cited in Brian McNair, *Glasnost, Perestroika, and the Soviet Media* (London: Routledge, 1991), 74.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 314.

⁸⁰ Oushakine pairs his insights on political discourse with those of Lev Loseff on Aesopian speech in aesthetic contexts, in *ibid.*, 203-4; see Loseff, *On the Beneficence of Censorship: Aesopian Language in Modern Russian Literature* (Munich: Otto Sagner, 1984).

⁸¹ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything was Forever until it was No More* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 5.

will its invisible horizons be reinscribed in historiography; its “domain of ‘speakability’”⁸² reproduced; and, most salient in the present analysis, the silences inhering in its eponymous eras will persist, just as the periods of silent repression that grant these eras external coherence will remain beyond the pale of proper history.

The tenacity of glasnost-logic partly elucidates why no one really wrote about the second half of the Soviet century until recently. It offers some conceptual framework for comprehending why “historians [still] write about postwar communism in Europe as if it ended in the early 1960s,”⁸³ and why, looking back a little bit, “in the first decade after the opening of the Soviet archives, scholars’ focus— both east and west of where the ‘iron curtain’ once hung,” was trained mostly on the Stalinist 1930s. “In contrast, the postwar, and post-Stalin, years seemed relatively virgin territory.”⁸⁴ As if in imitation of Evtushenko’s apprehensive hero, academic research has been mostly locked in the mausoleum *cum* archive of Stalinist terror, all the while, as one critical historian poetically put it, “Stalin’s empty plinth” speaks back “to the glaring absence of scholarship on late communism.”⁸⁵

Beyond this narrative dependency, the post-Stalin period has been hard to historicize because many members of the liberal intelligentsia were reluctant to relinquish the era to the past, in other words, to “other” it as a political project no longer continuous with the present one.⁸⁶ Indeed, “for many scholars, the thaw was about the greatest of liberal values: free speech.”⁸⁷ But, while “free speech” has remained a crucial value in politics and academia in the intervening years, this binary idealism dated to the cold war has diminished in emotional immediacy as it receded on the epistemic horizon, enabling a new generation of scholars, many graduate students among them, to reapproach the post-Stalin period with critical distance since the late 1990s.⁸⁸ Though the methods of this cohort are diverse and divergent, its members “have in common... an acute sense of the

⁸² Oushakine, “Terrifying Mimicry,” 207.

⁸³ Bren, *Greengrocer*, 3. On the other side of the coin, the silence in academic literature dealing with the Soviet Union after the 1960s mirrors the hesitation of historical subjects of the post-thaw period themselves. “By the early 1960s, writers were trying to make sense of the country’s troubled past without crossing inadvertently into the realm of ‘what could not be said.’” Miriam Dobson, “The Post-Stalin Era: De-Stalinization, Daily Life, and Dissent,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 12, 4 (Fall 2011), 905–24, at 909.

⁸⁴ Dobson, “The Post-Stalin Era,” 905.

⁸⁵ Bren, *Greengrocer*, 3.

⁸⁶ My conception of history *as* alterity comes from Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, translated by Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

⁸⁷ Stephen V. Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev’s Thaw: Experience and Memory in Moscow’s Arbat* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 8. Indeed, when considering the gaps in Soviet historiography, it is impossible to dismiss the complicated nostalgic attachment of the liberal intelligentsia to the reformist possibilities of the thaw, what one historian has called, after Habermas’s romance with the Western Enlightenment, “the unfinished business” of the sixties. Denis Kozlov, “Writing about the Thaw in Post-Soviet Russia,” *Russian Studies in History*, 49.4 (Spring 2011), 3-17.

Many of the documents that describe the post-Stalin era are fittingly elegiac first-hand accounts, penned by intellectuals who hoped in the Gorbachev era to suture the break with Leninist and then Khrushchevian glasnost, as a way of healing socialist utopianism itself. The next wave of emotionally invested writing about the era underwent a “skeptical shift,” per Kozlov, when Russians “disenchanted” with the Soviet project and hesitant to hail its reformability became reticent, so as not to seem hoodwinked by history.

⁸⁸ Dobson, “The Post-Stalin Era,” 905.

increasing impossibility of writing this past in the way the preceding generation did, and the urge to write it nonetheless.”⁸⁹

Innovative research in this vein interrogates the taken-for-granted truth of glasnost, and interrupts the overarching “rupture narrative” of national identity discerned by Lotman and Uspenskii, by stressing continuities in culture over binary breaks. In its trademark moves, this intellectual movement deracinates entrenched ways of reading Russian society as devoid of resistance under the successive “cults of personality,” while symmetrically unsettling the mythic “cult of optimism” that surrounds Khrushchev’s secretariat. Representative in these respects is the recent book by Stephen V. Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev’s Thaw* (2008). Bittner makes a self-conscious contribution to new “work on postwar Stalinism,” by “[challenging] the abruptness of the 1953 caesura” in two ways. Firstly, he traces trends in cultural liberalization back before the thaw. And secondly, he dulls the “sharp juxtapositions of the Khrushchev and Brezhnev periods,” that cast “the Brezhnev government [as] Stalinist,” while lauding Khrushchev’s tenure as unilaterally liberatory.⁹⁰ As a consequence of these conclusions by Bittner, Hooper, and others, it is no longer compelling for scholars to see the thaw as simply “the antipode of its predecessor” age; nor can the case be made for clinging to “blanket assertions about the thaw as an era of liberalization, unique from what came before and after.”⁹¹

With this emphasis on *continuity* over time, recent histories of late socialism correspondingly apply the analytic skills honed by their colleagues in the study of earlier eras, especially the Stalinist 1930s, to the decades following 1953.⁹² They follow the larger linguistic turn undertaken by Slavic scholarship, by extending its characteristic questions about the role of verbliness and orality in the construction of Soviet subjectivity.⁹³ They ask, for instance, how “citizens who had, in Stephen Kotkin’s terms, started to ‘speak Bolshevik’” during the Stalinist era managed to “negotiate the sudden shifts in rhetoric introduced when Khrushchev attacked the ‘cult of personality?’”⁹⁴ These chronologically dexterous historians also reach across the disciplinary divide and dip into the anthropologist’s toolbox, often drawing inspiration from Alexei Yurchak’s 2006 monograph on the last Soviet generation, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*. This book builds a unique critical apparatus for the study of late socialist Russia based on the theory of linguistic performativity first outlined by J.L. Austin in *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), and later elaborated by deconstructionist and feminist scholars,

⁸⁹ Véronique Garros, Natalia Kornevskaya, and Thomas Lahusen, *Intimacy and Terror: The Soviet Diaries of the 1930s* (New York: New Press, 1993), xi.

⁹⁰ Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev’s Thaw*, 10. Other historians, like Hooper, Polly Jones, and Arlen Blum, make the related claim that the tactics of liberation, rehabilitation, and the relaxation of censorship that nominally comprised the de-Stalinization campaign were actually productive remediations of Stalinism’s negative style of repression.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 9; 11. Bittner cites Marc Junge, *Strakh pered proshlym: reabilitatsiia N.I. Bukharina ot Khrushcheva do Gorbacheva* (Moscow, 2003), 263-270.

⁹² Dobson, “The Post-Stalin Era,” 905. I feel compelled to comment on the anti-axiomatic nature of this paradigm shift to history as continuity when the discipline usually deals with *change over time*.

⁹³ Namely, they take up “questions of identity, subjectivity, and language” (922). Some major touchstones for Soviet history of this linguistic cast include Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Igal Halfin, *Terror in My Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); and Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on my Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁹⁴ Dobson, “The Post-Stalin Era,” 905.

like Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler. Yurchak advises Slavists to steer their ears toward the unspoken sides of post-Stalin speech, so as to detect the internal split between constative utterance and performative effect that allowed socialist actors some wiggle room to “lead creative and imaginary lives.”⁹⁵

Before I embark on a reading of the inverse scenario—how socialist subjects were able to do things *without* words—I want quickly to address the oft-made accusation, voiced earlier by Isaiah Berlin, that *there were no words* worth reading to come out of Russia during periods of totalitarian repression. Berlin is not alone in this belief that state censorship silenced true literature from the early 1930s through the mid-1950s, permitting only talentless graphomaniacs and careerist hacks to publish for three artistically barren decades. This opinion, which has indubitably influenced the teaching of Russian literature in the Anglo-American university, is a direct offshoot of glasnost thinking. The “white spot on the map of Soviet history”⁹⁶ identified by revisionist historians in recent years turns out to overlay the same “long blank page in the history of Russian culture” that Berlin bemoans as an aficionado of the humanistic arts. Although this attitude about Soviet cultural dearth has been attributed by Yurchak “to a particular dissident ideology of the 1970s which [holds] that ‘nothing good can appear in an [official] Soviet journal,’”⁹⁷ it seems this idea dates back much earlier, even before Berlin’s 1957 pronouncement, perhaps all the way back to the beginning of Bolshevik ideology, with its spectacular pairing of poetry and propaganda, art and ideology, “literature and revolution.”⁹⁸

The point I want to make about this opinion is not only that it is reductive and repressive in its own right, but also that it is wrong. It errs first in its elitism, by implying that “real” art is strictly the purview of the avant-garde, such that repression of the avant-garde makes for a totally empty aesthetic landscape. And secondly, “in one absolutely crucial respect,” it misrecognizes repression by missing out on the recently unearthed fact that “access to information and freedom of speech [...in] the post-1953 era was as ‘totalitarian’ as Stalinism,” and maybe even more severe, since official publication rates dropped after Stalin’s death while state censorship increased in the frequency of its application and further diffused in its institutional implementation.⁹⁹ Rather than retracing the insurmountable split between the savage decades of Stalinism and the comparatively “[vegetarian] Khrushchev and Brezhnev years,”¹⁰⁰ this scholarly study discovers a striking continuity that sticks “the silence in Russian culture” together over time, to toy a little with Berlin’s title. Ultimately, there is no easy correlation between the

⁹⁵ Yurchak, *Everything was Forever*, 6.

⁹⁶ Fürst, *Stalin’s Last Generation*, 20.

⁹⁷ Yurchak, *Everything was Forever*, 6.

⁹⁸ My transparent intention is to invoke the title of Leon Trotsky’s manifesto of artistic and political revolution, *Literatura i revoliutsiia* (1925). I also want to add my own crudely Marxist two cents here, and insist that there is no art without ideology, though some art is more deliberate in this respect, socialist realism offering an obvious case in point.

⁹⁹ Polly Jones, Reviews of Arlen Blium, *Kak eto delalos’ v Leningrade: Tsenzura v gody ottepli, zastoia i perestroika, 1953–1991*. *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 8.3 (2007): 695-704, at 696; Arlen Blium, *Kak eto delalos’ v Leningrade: Tsenzura v gody ottepli, zastoia i perestroika, 1953–1991* (St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2005), 45. But even as censorship “swelled after 1953,” the topic of censorship became publicly unbroachable by the Party. Arbitrations over “sayability” proved especially sensitive when the literature in question concerned political repression or the gulag experience.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

quantitative repression of speech and the qualitative description of a period as “repressive”—a conclusion that confuses the boundaries by which the Soviet century has been canonically carved up into discrete epochs. The impurity of both historical categories, repressive and permissive alike, gives us more grounds for reappraising the rupture narrative, which shaped the politics of the Soviet period as much as it preconditions the way we retell it today in the academy, not to speak of the restraints it places on the rubric of “contemporary Russian literature” in the college classroom.

POETIC VOCALITIES, POLITICAL REALITIES: THE MUTE REMAINS OF THE PAST

“The art of our time is noisy with appeals for silence.”
--Susan Sontag, “Aesthetics of Silence”

If we concede that silence in the form of state “censorship has been a more or less constant feature of Russian history”¹⁰¹ since its inception, then cultural historians and literary scholars should be asking how artists, poets, and everyday Soviet people responded to these institutional and ideological impediments to speech. Yes, censorship silenced poetry and the sister arts throughout Russian modernity, but modern poets, in turn, cherished silence, elevating the inarticulate to the plane of immanent truth, particularly with respect to emotional or spiritual experience. Thus, alongside the political imperative on the poet-citizen to speak the truth for the people, the Russian poet was also bound by a competing set of expectations to keep quiet for his own sake. This poetic discourse, as I will refer to it hereafter, provides a counternarrative to the civic one. Although the two share roots in Romanticism, the poetic discourse regards silence—not speech—as the site of truth.¹⁰²

An early example of this poetic genealogy is found in *The Inexpressible (A Fragment)* [*Nevyrazimoe (Otryvok)*, 1819, published in 1827] by Vasilii Zhukovskii (1783-1852), which has been called “the locus classicus of Russian Romantic ineffability.”¹⁰³ Before its first stanza starts, the title already doubles the poem’s insistence on the insufficiency of language to capture immanent experience. The poem’s fragmentary status belies the fragmentary nature of all language, which always fails to express some “inexpressible” excess. This places a constitutive paradox on poetic speech which plays out over the course of the piece and culminates in a question about the poet’s very vocation. Zhukovskii queries of “the presence of the creator in the creation,--- what language is there for them? The soul soars toward the mountain, all that is immeasurable is concentrated into a single sigh, and only silence speaks understandably.” [*Sie prisuststvie sozdatelia v sozdan'e - Kakoi dlia nikh iazyk? Gore dusha letit, Vse neob'iatnoe v edinyi vzdokh tesnitsia, I lish' v molchanie poniatno govorit.*]¹⁰⁴ Ascribing inexpressibility the status of the sacred, “the Romantics made it possible to use poetry to elevate new objects of discourse by asserting their ineffability,” and, at the same time, “the ineffability of poetry’s object elevated the endeavor of poetry itself,” even while

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Michael Powelstock, *Becoming Mikhail Lermontov: The Ironies of Romantic Individualism in Nicholas I's Russia* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 124.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ V.A. Zhukovskii, *Sobranie sochinenii v 4-kh tomakh*, (Moscow: Goslitizdat, 1959), tom 1.

acceding to the inadequacy of language.¹⁰⁵ While Zhukovskii's inexpressible is the common postlapsarian predicament of humankind, Mikhail Lermontov solipsized silence as a function of his "unique self" with its "private authenticity." For this reason, "lamentations regarding 'inexpressibility' or 'ineffability' ... accompanied nearly all of Lermontov's early lyric effusions."¹⁰⁶ This poetic conflictedness between silence and speech haunts subsequent generations of lyricists, like Afanasii Fet, as when he intones in 1887, "how impoverished our language is! I want but I cannot communicate..." [*Kak beden nash iazyk! - Khochu i ne mogu ne peredat'...*]

It is Fedor Tiutchev (1803-1873) who comes down most emphatically on the side of silence in *Silentium!* (1830). Beginning and ending with loud exclamations, the lyrical voice exhorts its listener to preserve the mystery of personal experience by being quiet.

Be silent, hide, and conceal
 Your feelings and dreams –
 Let them, in the depths of your soul
 Rise and set
 Silently, like stars in the night, -
 Admire them – and keep silent.

Молчи, скрывайся и таи
 И чувства и мечты свои -
 Пускай в душевной глубине
 Встают и заходят оне
 Безмолвно, как звезды в ночи,-
 Любуйся ими - и молчи.

The poem urges a deep retreat into the egotistical sublime, a narcissistic subsumption of the unspeaking universe into the unuttered and therefore unalienated 'I.' The silence of the self thus harmonizes with the silence of creation itself, rather than struggling against nature's expansiveness by whittling it down into finite words, as in Zhukovskii's distressing scene. While the aggressive punctuation and imperative mode of Tiutchev's poem seems to violate its taciturn message, the strategic apostrophe of its address might be said to maintain it—calling into being a subject at the very instant the subject refuses to say 'I.' This 'I' never appears on the positive side of speech in *Silentium!*, and yet the poem is doubtless an affirmative reworking of the negative capacities of language. As Tiutchev resolves apophatically, presenting something of a liar's paradox to his listener, "The thought spoken is a lie." [*Mysl' izrechennaia est' lozh'*].

When speech fails, truth prevails, and when speech succeeds, truth recedes. This is the quantitative and reversible proposition of poetic Romanticism—"the worse [a thought] is spoken, the more truthful it is."¹⁰⁷ An "ontological stammer,"¹⁰⁸ as Susan

¹⁰⁵ Powelstock, *Becoming Mikhail Lermontov*, 124.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 125; 123.

¹⁰⁷ Konstantin Bogdanov, *Ocherki po antropologii molchaniia: Homo tacens* (St. Petersburg: Izdatelstvo Russkogo Khristianskogo gumanitarnogo instituta, 1998), 260. Bogdanov extrapolates thematically and syntactically from Tiutchev's winged phrase; it reads: "*Chem khuzhe ona izrechena, -- tem pravdivee ona est'*."

¹⁰⁸ Sontag Susan, "The Aesthetics of Silence." In *Styles of Radical Will* (New York: Anchor, 1969), 3–34.

Sontag deduces of post-war poetry (and Dubcek, the poet-prophet of Czech radio, puts into practice), the more spectacularly language fails, the more the tongue trips, skips, exhausts itself in articulation, the more accurately it expresses its failure to ever fully express. Silence is a spiritual privilege and “blessed is he who, keeping quiet, [is] a poet” [*blazhen, kto molcha byl poet*], to quote Pushkin.¹⁰⁹ Quietude ensures the emotional sovereignty of the lyrical ego, shutting out the “external noise” [*naruzhnyi shum*] “that will deafen” [*oglushit*] the subtle sounds of self-contemplation, interrupting the poet’s act of monastic gnosis and absconding with the fruits of his “[mute] alterity” [*nemota inobytiia*].¹¹⁰ So “Be silent!” [*Molchi!*] Tiutchev instructs in his poem of 1830. And “be silent!” [*molchi!*] Pushkin’s poet beseeches the “senseless crowd” [*bessmyslennyi narod*] a couple of years before, in “The Poet and the Crowd” [*Poet i tolpa*, 1828]. In the same cycle of vocational verses, Pushkin pushes the poet to “live alone” [*zhivi odin*] and relinquish “the love of the people” [*ne dorozhi liuboviiu narodnoi*], whose fleeting praise approximates the external *shum* Tiutchev struggled against in *Silentium!*, a noise which ultimately merges into the audible “judgment of the fool and the laughter of the cold crowd” [*sud gluptsya i smekh tolpy kholodnoi*].¹¹¹ Reading these poems in tandem, Tiutchev’s tender imperative combines in a Romantic embrace with the exasperated exclamation of Pushkin’s lyrical hero barking at the blathering rabble. Between their shared *molchi*, the poet’s muteness meets the deafness of the crowd,¹¹² and poetic silence reduplicates and becomes redundant in earth existence.

This is how the poet moves from redundancy to transcendence despite the constitutive impossibility of his profession. “If the social quotidian is ‘doomed’ to the word, then overcoming the everyday means overcoming the word, exiting from the sphere of hearing and voice into the sphere of existence not governed by them.”¹¹³ It is as if Anton Chekhov heeded the sage counsel Pushkin dispensed “to the poet” [*Poetu*] in 1830 when he conceived Konstantin Treplev, the unreliably reticent protagonist of his late nineteenth-century play, *The Seagull* [*Chaika*, 1895]. Following Chekhov’s stage directions, Treplev devotes two full minutes to “silently rip[ping] up his manuscript and toss[ing] it under the desk, then unlock[ing] the right door” before he finally “exits” in a

¹⁰⁹ Aleksandr Pushkin, “Razgovor knigoprodavtsa s poetom” (1824). In *A.S. Pushkin. Sobranie sochinenii v 10 tomakh* (Moscow: Gosizdat “Khudozhestvennaia literaturny,” 1960), tom 9, 30.

¹¹⁰ Bogdanov, *Ocherki*, 250. For more on the religious dimension of Russian silence, see Mariia Virolainen, *Rech’ i molchanie: siuzhety i mify russkoi slovesnosti* (St. Peterburg: Amfora, 2003).

In Osip Mandel’shtam’s sequel to Tiutchev’s *Silentium!*, Mandel’shtam’s silence preserves the poet’s connection with all being. In this, he comes closer to Zhukovskii in his acmeist conception of the ineffable than he does to Tiutchev, since the closed mouth of the latter completes a feedback loop with the lyrical ego that cuts it off from co-experience with the world. The distinction in their muteness is also a temporal one. Whereas Tiutchev sees his speechlessness as a melancholic regression from social language back to a narcissistically sublime space of inexpressible feeling, Mandel’shtam’s rendition is originary: silence as a “primeval” bond between the I and all being.

¹¹¹ “The motif of the uncomprehending crowd and the poet as voice of truth first surfaces in the 1822 poem to V.F. Raevskii (‘Ty prav, moi drug’) and continued to haunt Pushkin as a lyrical situation in fragments ... although it no longer figures as the subject of completed individual poems.” Andrew Kahn, *Pushkin’s Lyric Intelligence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 196.

¹¹² Here I allude to the poetic fragment Pushkin scribbled on a loose sheaf of paper in 1833, which begins “The crowd [is] deaf” [*Tolpa glukhaia*]. Pushkin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 618.

¹¹³ Bogdanov, “Glukhonemota,” 227-228.

quintessentially symbolist manner.¹¹⁴ Treplev tears up the pages of his experimental symbolist drama to symbolize his own internal tear as a poet, between an ontological or divinely ordained need to speak, and a simultaneous awareness of the insufficiency of words for rendering the poet's spiritually enriched reality.

Indeed, after the Romantics, the Russian Symbolists believed in the parallel existence of another, silent order—a prelapsarian [*predslovesnoe*] place, unlike the fallen reality of modern verblat, wherein words themselves were consubstantial with the world. Paraphrasing the philosophy of Vyacheslav Ivanov, an eminent spokesman for the movement, this other order was “a state in which man could still read in the world the language of creation itself; a state before Babel when language, given to man directly by God, was an absolutely certain and transparent sign for things because it resembled them.”¹¹⁵ The Symbolist poet essayed to reconstitute these primary signs in his poetry, drawing on what scholar Gerald Pirog names “another discourse that is more fundamental, more primal, a discourse that ultimately derives its Truth in a Reality which transcends language itself, that is, in God.”¹¹⁶ Modern man could no longer access the words that once contained the kernels of Being itself; so the Symbolist compensated by choreographing an experience of this language in poetry, gesturing to the noumenal realm through his transcendental signifier or symbol-word, a kind of linguistic shell for an irreducible and inarticulable reality which Ivanov termed “the holy language of silence,” and Aleksandr Blok, another leading symbolist, gave the name “the unsayable” [*neskazuemoe*].

As the movement matured, Blok strained under his heavenly mission to say the unsayable. He anguished over the impossibility of coarticulating the original language and the material world, a union enfleshed in Symbolist cosmology as the world soul [*mirovaia dusha*], Eternal Feminine, or Divine Sophia. For Blok, the poetic act of capturing her in language simultaneously destroyed her at “precisely the moment when the ‘radiant maiden is given a name, when she is fixed, or encoded in the human language that she vanishes. In her place remains a lifeless mannequin lacking the essence which was intuited at a time before words,”¹¹⁷ a once-mighty being fallen into mute body, like Blok's “Kleopatra” of 1907. “She lies inside a coffin of glass, / She's neither dead nor living, / While people whisper endlessly / Immodest words about her,”¹¹⁸ akin to the fickle crowd around Pushkin's taciturn poet. Blok's “I” reacts to her muteness with his own, announcing “I fell silent” [*zamolk*], so “[he] looks” [*smotriuu*] instead of speaking and sees, mistakenly at first, that

she is not listening.
But then her breast heaves slightly...
And now I hear her quiet words:

¹¹⁴ “*V prodolzhenie dvukh minut molcha rvet vse svoi rukopisi i brosaet pod stol, potom otpiraet pravuiu dver' i ukhodit.*” A.P. Chekhov. “Chaika.” In *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v 30-ti tomakh*. Moscow: “Nauka,” 1986 [1895].

¹¹⁵ Gerald Pirog, “The Language of Love and the Limits of Language,” *Aleksandr Blok Centennial Conference*, edited by Walter N. Vickery (Columbus, OH: Slavica Publishers, 1984), 224.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 230.

¹¹⁸ *Ona lezhit v grobu stekliannom, / I ne mertva i ne zhiva, / A liudi shepchut neustanno / O nei besstydneye slova.*

-"Back then I used to call forth storms.
And now I'll call forth burning
Tears from a drunken poet,
And laughter from a drunken whore."¹¹⁹

Она не слышит.
Но грудь колышется едва
И за прозрачной тканью дышит...
И слышу тихие слова:
«Тогда я исторгала грозы.
Теперь исторгну жгучей всех
У пьяного поэта – слезы,
У пьяной проститутки – смех».

In Blok's "Kleopatra," we find a curious antecedent for Evtushenko's "Heirs of Stalin," another lyrical incident in which the disillusioned poet interfaces with the dead autocrat, and finds he is unable to fulfill his transcendent function, whether of a spiritual or political mandate. Thus the different discourses of Romantic silence come full circle and connect, claiming in unison prophetic and sometimes theurgic powers for themselves. Taken in its entirety, the Russian relationship to silence in the twentieth-century is a hybrid of both civic and spiritual discourses, which add up to "a political interpretation of silence as a mystical search for the unity of these two forms of silence."¹²⁰ When these supposedly opposed *topoi* converge, the consequence is the simultaneous transvaluation of silence in both respects, yielding a uniquely Russian situation of inexpression. *One may be silenced while speaking the truth, but silence itself grants access to a higher truth, converting the punishment into a spiritual gift, the political curse into a poetic blessing.* This dissertation takes on both conceptual lines of silence, disentangling them to the extent that it is possible, while also pursuing the productive points of their inextricability, where personal and political, bodily and spiritual silences, converge into one complex symphony of ineffable feeling.

SILENCE AND ALTERITY: A BREAKDOWN OF WHAT'S TO COME

So far, both the political and poetic examples of silence I have plucked from Russian culture tend to terminate in the isolation of the "I" in question, which ends up embedded in a form of muteness [that] means most of all social non-participation" [*nepodkliuchennost'*].¹²¹ This squares with the predictions of Konstantin Bogdanov, who reads muteness as the "apartness [*obosoblennost'*] of the social person who does not, for

¹¹⁹ Zamolk. *Smotriu. Ona ne slyshit./ No grud' kolyshetsia edva/ I za prozrachnoi tkan'iu dyshit.../I slyshu tikhie slova:/ - Togda ia istorgala grozy./Teper' istorgnu zhguchei vsekh/ U p'ianogo poeta – slezy, / U p'ianoi prostitutki – smekh.*

¹²⁰ Mikhail Epstein, "Slovo i molchanie v russkoi kul'ture." *Zvezda* 10 (2005), 202-222. Here I concur with Epstein's discernment of two views of Russian culture according to this speech-silence binary. On one side, he finds, "it is a silent culture," bashful and equivocating; on the other, it is "extremely talkative," and "both of these views are correct" since silence and speech are not opposed categories but co-constitutive of Russian culture and literature especially as a social-aesthetic phenomenon.

¹²¹ Bogdanov, "Glukhonemota," 243-4.

whatever reason, speak as others speak: does not speak generally, yet or already” [voobshche, eshche ili uzhe].¹²² Muteness means alterity, in Bogdanov’s reckoning; it is the symbol or the symptom of some essential “outsiderness” [outsaiderstvo] of the subject with respect to “normal” members of society.”¹²³ He holds this hypothesis to be true as much on the metaphorical as on the material plane, and collapses the semantic multivalence of deaf-muteness [glukhonemota] down to a singularity that bears down with special force on actual “deaf-mute” people in history. (I explore the consequences of this collapse in the first through fourth chapters of this dissertation.) Obviously, something does not add up in this simple arithmetic of silent experience Bogdanov lays out. His calculations are off here more than elsewhere, considering that speech- and hearing-impaired people coalesced as communities in the late tsarist and Soviet epochs of Russian history by virtue of their very alterity. And just as often they were kept apart from each by the oralist and audist pressures of dominant culture, that is, the alienation of deaf-muteness sooner transpired for reasons of social discrimination rather than ones of spiritual or existential deviation or deficiency.

I mention this not to split hairs with Bogdanov’s thesis, but rather to shatter the monolithic discourse of muteness in Soviet culture in this instance, as a warm-up exercise for what I hope to work out throughout the dissertation. To the same end, I set up these conflicting and converging tropes of silence in order to point out how hard it is to write a different history, or a history difference, so long as the same stories stick. For how can we hear other voices from the past if we presume there are whole stretches of history when all of society is silent? Alternately, how can we attend to the silences of alterity in those epochs when all of society swells into a single chorus of open speech? And finally, how can we attune ourselves to the different notes hit on the scale of not saying, and learn to discern the subtle shifts in pitch when muteness comes to mean one thing and not another?

With this conceptual preface in place, I take up these themes of the unsayable and the unsaid as the main stuff in my analysis of post-Stalin Russian art and society. I continue to pursue the shifting styles and stakes of silence in Soviet culture of the 1950s-1970s in the pages that ensue, in order to hypothesize how the “modal citizen”¹²⁴ and the “social body” of socialist ideology are reconfigured after Stalinism in and through emergent forms of political and aesthetic discourse. My motivating question for this enterprise sounds uncannily like the one posed earlier by Miriam Dobson about socialist speech after the Secret Speech. I find that full Soviet subjectivity became contingent on full speech, or “speaking Bolshevik,” in new ways; and the Party-state actively undertook the production of perfectly-speaking citizens specific to this era, a task I term the state project of mimesis, which, I argue, was sustained through a diffuse regime of compulsory

¹²² Ibid., 243-4.

¹²³ Ibid., 245.

¹²⁴ “The social body is the standard—presupposed but invisible—until a nonstandard body makes an appearance. Then the standard becomes immediately apparent, as the inflexible structures of furniture, rooms, and streets reveal their intolerance for anyone unlike the people for whom they were built.” Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 85. Siebers’ social body belongs to what queer theorist Lauren Berlant has called the “modal citizen,” that is, the possessor of “a given symbolic national body [that] signifies as normal. . . [about whose representativeness] hardly anyone asks critical questions.” Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), *passim*.

vocality. And, most urgently, I contend that the story of this state project was written on the bodies of the Soviet Union's silent and silenced citizens.

In the six chapters that follow, I complicate the staid historical trope at the heart of the glasnost narrative that makes quiet consonant with complicity or political docility. As I detail above, the prevalence of this view in Russian cultural studies and national collective memory has rendered it rather difficult to write about late socialism until recently, when scholars started to think in more complex terms about the discursive construction of Soviet subjectivity and reality. At the same time, the field transcended the "antisomatic bias"¹²⁵ typical of earlier Russian historiography, and started to take a multisensory approach to the Soviet past. In synch with these strands of emergent research, I too "look in all the wrong places"¹²⁶ of the past, and here I underscore the activity of looking over listening. Echoing the essence of this idea, I examine the "vocal versus the gestural"¹²⁷ in Soviet performance, and listen not only to the verbal narratives of these eras (whether official or dissenting), but also observe the dynamic tensions between socialist speech and the socialist body, with its "parallel somatic narratives"¹²⁸ and intricate immanent experiences.

In order to move beyond the prevailing interpretive paradigms of late-socialist historiography and cultural studies that I have recapitulated here, I pay mind to the manners in which unofficial Soviet artists used their silent bodies to speak truth to power, participating in a kind of counter-conduct which I see as particularly concordant with their social and historical coordinates. I base my findings on archival research, participant interview, and textual analysis of original historical artifacts, and hope that these materials and the surprising interpretations they inspire make a distinct contribution to the field of post-Stalin cultural studies by contouring a model of subjectivity as attentive to the formal aspects as to the corporeal effects of Soviet discourse. Speaking about silence, and foregrounding history's sidelined personae, I push scholars to see more of Soviet culture than the usual repressive or 'totalitarianism' lens would allow.

While pointed in its focus, this project is actually instructive for the field as a whole: *precisely* because alterity of the embodied varieties I explore herein has been framed as silent and therefore inaccessible to analysis, its historicization compels scholars to read Soviet culture's visual and visceral cues over and against the verbal ones which, when analyzed in isolation, often obscure fuller pictures of the past. (Indeed, the need to heed the visual and nonvocal dimensions of the socialist past proves especially pressing for sexual minorities, whose history is supposed to have been enshrouded in silence since the 1930s, when the anti-sodomy statute was enacted.) Pitting the senses against each other, I ask: If social deviance or difference was unable to speak for itself in a voice that could be heard by Soviet history, how was it nonetheless visible in art and everyday life, such that subjects and subcultures could coalesce around the unspeakable terms of their

¹²⁵ On the new systematic scrutiny of the Soviet body as a repository of public memory, see Robert Edelman, "Party Games: The Central Committee and Soviet Sports," *Russian Studies in History* 49.2 (Fall 2010): 3–5, at 4. See also Alexei Yuchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

¹²⁶ Bren names this silence the "nothingness" of the late-socialist period, and holds this "nothing" narrative responsible for obstructing critical inquiry; *Greengrocer*, 3-6.

¹²⁷ Serguei A. Oushakine, "Laughter Under Socialism: Exposing the Ocular in Soviet Jocularities," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 70.2 (Summer 2011): 247-255, at 253.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

identities? To answer this question, I turn to silent gesture in stage performance and film, and envision a curious archive in quietude by prioritizing the very qualities of the gestural—ephemerality and effaceability—that have perhaps prevented alternative histories of this kind from materializing, while allowing their subjects to lead ‘livable lives,’ as critical theorists say today, and sometimes more than merely livable ones—enjoyable ones, too.

Chapter One, *Sooner Speaking than Silent, Sooner Silent than Mute: Soviet Deaf Theater and Pantomime after Stalin*, focuses on the simultaneous repopularization of theatrical pantomime, a dramatic form that thematizes absent speech, with the reinvigoration of the clinical-pedagogical discipline of defectology, which attempts to cure “deaf-mutes” of their silence. My analysis of avant-garde pantomime derives in large part from the theory and practice of Aleksandr Rumnev (1899-1965), a famed modernist dancer in his day who in the latter part of his life founded and directed a pantomime program and student studio at the state cinematography institute. (Rumnev makes cameo appearances throughout the dissertation, and plays a key role in the third chapter, which fleshes out his posthumous bequeathal to other silent and alteritist actors during the post-Stalin period.) The significance of speechlessness among avant-garde mimes depended on a distinction between the intentional and the incidental, between potent silence and “defective” muteness. This performative distinction comes into greatest relief at this time at the deaf Theater of Mimicry and Gesture (established in 1962), the first theater of the deaf in the world. This troupe adopted a ventriloquist style of performance, wherein deaf actors onstage mouthed the words to “conversational” plays, supplied acousmatically by audiologist-emcees seated in the front of the audience. I posit a connection between the phenomena of pantomime, defectology, and deaf theater in their shared anxieties about the possibility of “perfect” speech, and reckon with the requisite role of the “defective” in the spectacular enactment of Soviet vocal norms. With the help of queer and postcolonial theories of performativity, this section concludes by silhouetting the late-Soviet mimetic self against the “defective” mimic man, and intimating the subversive promises of silent deaf theater that sit at the center of the third and fourth chapters.

The second chapter, *Pantomimes of Race and Power: Can the Soviet Subaltern Speak?*, follows up on the political utility of failed socialist speakers and speech acts to show how silence “stuck” to certain bodies, producing and affirming their a/partness from Soviet society. It examines a silent pantomime performance by Rumnev’s troupe called *Africa* [*Afrika*, 1962], alongside other cultural artifacts produced by the artistic avant-garde and deaf subcultures in the 1960s and 70s that dramatize “blackness.” I do this in order to limn the labile relationships between racialization and speechlessness in Russian discourse. I argue that, while advocating an official stance of anti-racism, Soviet ideology nonetheless tacitly relied on the racist presumption that third-world subjects were linguistic primitives, positioned prior to (political) speech in the developmental narrative of Marxism-Leninism. This justified a paternalistic approach to the newly decolonized nations of Africa, sites of extreme consequence in the Cold War at the moment of renewed Soviet internationalism. It also placed postcolonial subjects into a slippery analogic relationship with other linguistic “primitives,” namely, the “deaf-mute” of the communist world. Close reading a comic from the official deaf journal at the conclusion of the chapter, I detour to a discussion of sex and gender near the end, and

more finely inflect the connections made by Soviet ideology, not only between race and speech, but also between the oral and the moral, between linguistic and bodily mastery.

Some artists creatively redeployed the social fact of their silencing by the state to their own ends, and turned to pantomime as an art of resistance. This was the case, I argue, with Evgenii Kharitonov (1941-1981), a protégé of Rumnev and pantomime theorist in his own right, whose official occupation as a defectologically-trained but unimpaired director of “deaf-mute” theater and whose underground career as a self-described “unpublishable” author of gay artistic texts sits at the confluence of many “silent” phenomena explored in the dissertation. Despite that Kharitonov has been canonized as a seminal figure in late-socialist gay and literary culture, no full-length critical work about him exists yet. Thus I devote my third and fourth chapters to an holistic examination of his oeuvre in an effort to reframe Kharitonov from being a biographically homosexual subject of gay and lesbian studies to a proleptic queer theorist in his own right, speaking from the impossible perspective of the “vanished ‘second world’”¹²⁹ to an intellectual field that has historically emanated in large part from the “first” and only recently from the “third.” Reading contemporary formations of queerness back into Kharitonov’s cultural milieu is a self-conscious act of anachronism that nestles performative plasticity at the center of queer theorizing; and, as such, merits my explicit commentary.

In the first of these two chapters, *Un-Straightening the Soviet Body: The Queer Phenomenology of Unspeakability*, I place Soviet performance theory into productive conversation with contemporary strands of Western queer theory through a close reading of the doctoral dissertation on ‘plastic’ pantomime Kharitonov defended at the state cinematography institute in 1972. I contend that Kharitonov embedded in his account of pantomimic or plastic movement a phenomenology of silenced/silent experience that anticipates contemporary discussions of queer phenomenology. Extrapolating from Sarah Ahmed’s notion of the “straightening device,” a social tool used to keep embodied subjects aligned with heteronormativity, I submit that plastic pantomime operated as an “unstraightening device,” allowing Soviet bodies to subtly slant away from party line on sex and gender. At the same time, inasmuch as Kharitonov’s theory was informed by his work with the deaf theater, his dissertation reveals the audist or oralist assumptions about the body made by queer theory today, while suggesting new ways that deaf or disability performance studies might think about engage with phenomenology in the future.

Chapter four, *Silent Plasticity, Stagnant History: Re-Enchanting the Everyday in the Soviet Seventies* imagines Kharitonov’s theory of plasticity in practice by reconstructing *Enchanted Island*, the speechless pantomime play he staged at Moscow’s theater of the deaf from 1972 to the end of the decade. Since the archives themselves are silent about this performance, I draw on the oral (or, more properly, “manual”) histories I collected with the deaf actors, as well as Kharitonov’s retroactively composed “libretto,” to argue that *Enchanted Island* allowed queerness and deafness to speak as silence against the compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory vocality of post-Stalinist society. The play achieved this effect through plastic movements that simultaneously structured positions of queer and deaf spectatorship in the audience, while onstage smuggling in

¹²⁹ Madina Tlostanova names this epistemological position in her virtual manuscript, “Towards a Decolonization of Thinking and Knowledge: a Few Reflections from the World of Imperial Difference (2009).

signs of queer desire and gender trouble through pantomime's semantic uncertainty. In this sense, his engagement with deaf-mute actors was more suffused with a queer kinship in silent deflection than with the anxieties of a porously oralist and heterosexist culture. Most importantly, I apprehend in the play a queer ritual of re-enchantment with Soviet reality, a vital event during the disaffected epoch of political stagnation, that created an aperture through which socially marginalized actors could set their sights on other, better worlds as much conditioned by as transcendent of the Party's prescriptive picture of the "radiant future." The cumulative intention of this chapter is to conscript Kharitonov onto the side of utopia in current debates about queer history, temporality and political fantasy.

The final chapters also come packaged as a 'box set' with the shared heading, *What is Socialist Unrealism?* Together they apply a cumulative pressure to the prescribed aesthetic of socialist realism insofar as it was instrumentalized in the state project of mimesis, extracting an immanent critique on the issue, as their citational title suggests, from the samizdat classic, *What is Socialist Realism* [*Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realizm*, ca. 1959]. This cheeky philological tract was written under the pseudonym Abram Tertz by the aesthetic and political criminal Andrei Siniavskii (1935-1997, I place in productive conversation with the transcripts and press coverage of his trial for anti-Soviet activity in 1966. I strive thereby to engage the multiple iterations of silence and disruptive speech supplied by Siniavskii-Tertz's life, such as his subjection to state censorship via prosecution and imprisonment in the Gulag; and by his literature, including the formalist poetics he employed to estrange his experience of Soviet ideological language to a point of linguistic collapse as he wrote from the perspective of a literal and metaphorical alien.

The first installment of *What is Socialist Unrealism*, subtitled *Silence, Alterity, and the Soviet Symbolic*, reposes Tertz's eponymous question back to his book, and follows up with a few of its own related queries. Namely, what does it mean to be a real subject, a speaking subject, within the official system of representation? And what does it mean to be unreal by these same standards, to be silenced as an 'other'? How does representational exclusion impact on lived experience? These secondary questions about silence and alterity animate the concluding chapter of the dissertation, subtitled *Queer Negativity and Camp in the Camp*. They are provoked by another of the author's texts, the academic lecture he delivered to an audience of Western intellectuals convened in Geneva, Switzerland in 1975 for a conference on "Solitude and Communication." Siniavskii's self-consciously Russo-Soviet contribution, called "'I' and 'They': On Extreme Forms of Communication in Conditions of Isolation" [*Ia' i 'oni': O krainykh formakh obshcheniia v usloviakh odinochestva*], describes the gruesome gestures of self-mutilation, christened "self-eating" [*samoedstvo*] by Siniavskii, enacted by the Gulag's most abject inmates, a class of "unpeople" [*neliudi*] in his appellation, who, for their presumed perversity, lack access to the Soviet symbolic. I pay particular attention to the way that fixed notions of sexuality and gender circumscribe their claims on Soviet subjectivity and speech, as Siniavskii himself observed throughout his body of work, and as many works in the camp canon by such authors as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Evgeniia Ginzburg, and Anatolii Marchenko confirm. I consider the ways in which these 'queer' or 'negative' actors embraced their interpellation by the state as 'unreal,' and harnessed the creative potential of this call through carnivalesque grotesquerie and acts of 'camp camp,' a generic category I introduce at the end of the chapter.

These ‘unreal’ subjects allow Siniavskii to reimagine the category of embodied humanity beyond the extant paradigms associated with the Soviet East (which resided, I stress, squarely within the Western humanist tradition). In this way, Siniavskii’s critiques anticipated interventions into humanistic discourse made by queer, feminist, and decolonial scholars today who similarly solicit the reopening of the foreclosed space of ‘the real’ in order to rethink what counts as human. Siniavskii’s gesture of proleptic theorization is exciting but not wholly exceptional. Indeed, as I hope to convey across the length of the dissertation, Soviet figures—whether scholars, artists, actors, or ‘everyday people’—left behind an extravagant critical legacy that we risk consigning to oblivion by sticking to a repressive story of socialist history. At those moments when political repression is supposed to leave behind only a boringly “blank page” in the book of world culture (to borrow the metaphor from Isaiah Berlin again) interesting things are still being inscribed in the historical record with silent strokes and invisible ink. I hope that my giving voice to some of these unspeaking and unspeakable people from the Soviet Union by listening to their ‘talking bodies’ will complicate the kinds of questions that scholars can ask more broadly about subjectivity, alterity, and social representation more broadly. In the pages to come, I offer my own modest but unsilent gesture toward restoring the resonance of the silent ‘Second World’ as a valid thing to think with.

CHAPTER ONE.
SOONER SPEAKING THAN SILENT, SOONER SILENT THAN MUTE:
SOVIET DEAF THEATER AND PANTOMIME AFTER STALIN

In the Soviet Union work itself is given a voice. To present it verbally is part of a man's ability to perform the work.
—Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”¹

In the gallery of mutilations and deprivations, however, the mutes have a special place.
—Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*²



A television documentary on speech therapy is visible on the screen. A logopedist (speech-defect scientist) coaches a young man to overcome his stutter through hypnosis. “You will speak loudly and clearly, freely and easily, unafraid of your voice and your speech,” she instructs. [*Ty budesh govorit’ gromko i chetko, svobodno i legko, ne boias’*

1. Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” [1935] in Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner, eds., *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 48–78, at 58.

2. Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976 [reprint 1995]), at 56.

svoei rechi i svoego golosa] The boy hesitates but finally musters the words: “I can speak” [*Ja mogu govorit’*]. Thus Andrei Tarkovsky begins *Zerkalo* [Mirror], his poetic film (pictured above) about personal memory and cultural trauma (conceived in 1964 and released in 1974).³ The symbolism of this scene was impossible for Tarkovsky’s Soviet intelligentsia audience to miss. The stutterer coming to speech allegorized the artist coming to free expression in Russia after Stalin, struggling to adapt to alternating intervals of liberating “thaw” and oppressive “freeze,” fluency and silence, in the period of de-Stalinization that Nikita Khrushchev’s secret speech at the 20th Party Congress of 1956 set into motion. The crisis of the solo stutterer’s speech in the film stood in for the larger emerging crisis of how to represent socialist reality, a world that once had been captured solely by socialist realism—that is, until Khrushchev deprived Stalinism of its status as real socialism and thus invalidated the basis of socialist realism.

The politically loosened period that ensued witnessed a flourishing of experimentation in aesthetic forms that sought to stage and transcend previous experiences of suppression under the Soviet state. The “renaissance of pantomime as a self-sufficient art” [*vozhrozeniiu pantomimy kak samostoitel’nogo iskusstva*], as one of its preeminent practitioners, Aleksandr Rumnev (1899–1965), called it, concisely exemplified this cultural impulse.⁴ After decades of official discredit during Stalin’s tenure, the art form took a cue from Marcel Marceau’s 1961 visit to Moscow. Soon pantomime was holding Soviet audiences spellbound everywhere (in the hyperbolic words of one witness), and scores of barely rehearsed silent actors flocked to the capital’s newly opened dramatic departments, studios, and theaters that specialized in pantomime.⁵

The reemergence of pantomime symbolized a loosening of the state’s hold on artistic speech. Formerly, pantomime had been dismissed as formalist in its failure to conform to the requirements of realist representation; its plots could too easily turn opaque and transform chronological narrative into a series of abstracted gestures.⁶ As a result, many of the reviews of nonverbal plays suggested an anxious position vis-à-vis realism and its supposedly transparent language. Pantomime was ripe for accusations of political ambiguity. The state was never sure whether to interpret it as a degraded translation of verifiable spoken language or a devious undermining of official rhetoric. According to one mime, it was a “protest against totalitarianism” [*protest protiv totalitarizma*] a physical expression of “Aesopian speech” founded on the principle that

3. Andrei Tarkovsky, *Zerkalo* (Moscow: Mosfilm, 1974). For a history of the film, see Natasha Synessios, “Mirror”: *The Film Companion* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001), 10–40. This translation of *Mirror* dialogue is from Vida T. Johnson and Graham Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 116.

4. Aleksandr Rumnev, *O pantomime: Teatr, kino* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1964), 241. All translations from the Russian are my own unless otherwise indicated. I use familiar spellings for well-known names and Library of Congress transliteration of Cyrillic in all other cases.

5. B. Emel’ianov, “Videli li vy pantomimu?” *Teatr 2* (February 1963): 71–81, at 71. Marceau’s visit made ripples in the literature of theater as well. Rumnev devoted chapters to him in his pantomime books, *O pantomime* and *Pantomima i ee vozmozhnosti* (Moscow: Izd-vo “Znanie,” 1966). See also Elena Markova, *Marsel’ Marso* (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1975); and Marcel Marceau, “Mimodrama—dikhanie poezii,” *Teatr 3* (1960): 190–1.

6. Rumnev, *O pantomime*, 240.

“freedom of the body meant freedom of the soul” [*svoboda tela est' svoboda dushi*].⁷ For this reason, even as they allowed it, party members remained suspicious (and rightly so) that hidden, rebellious meaning inhered in the movements of soundless bodies.

Contemporary theater outside Russia was no stranger to silence. Many avant-garde playwrights were extending the genre's more familiar flirtations with wordlessness—the supplementary stage direction, the inaudible whisper, the pregnant pause—into a new postverbal terrain. Dramatists such as Antonin Artaud, Eugène Ionesco, and Samuel Beckett mobilized the figure of the deaf-mute and her taciturn cousins and turned simultaneously toward silent performance and pantomime to signify their “revolting against the tyranny of words” and shopworn ideological slogans. Only by means of the truer, more immediate language of gesture, they reasoned, might theatrical expression be revitalized.⁸ An apt example is found in the play *Mother Courage and Her Children*, written by Bertolt Brecht in 1939 and staged in Moscow in 1964, which featured the eponymous heroine's traumatized daughter, Kattrin, who went mute after witnessing the brutality of war.⁹ These Western artists inherited a symbolist suspicion of language; but at midcentury, in the shadow of modernity's consummate violences, they labored under a different creative imperative to do things without words. They understood silence as the proper response to recent world history and deemed negative testimony the only ethical alternative to narrating the horrors of the not-so-distant past.¹⁰

Though Russian mimes tended not to offer (or more accurately, were not able to offer) such solemn characterizations of their theatrical practice to the public, we can easily sense their apprehensions about the aesthetic language available to them. They shared an unease about language and an ideological exhaustion with Soviet society at large in the wake of Stalinism, a political style that had staked its legitimacy and sustained its terror in and through speech.¹¹ A Soviet citizen could risk his or her profession if not life by voicing the wrong political opinion, telling a joke that was questionable, refusing to inform on comrades or family members, or writing against the grain of socialist realism, whether defiantly or unwittingly.

7. Author's interview with Il'ia Rutberg, 20 July 2009. On Aesopian speech, see Lev Loseff, *On the Beneficence of Censorship: Aesopian Language in Modern Russian Literature* (Munich: Otto Sagner, 1984).

8. Robert W. Corrigan, “The Theater in Search of a Fix,” *Tulane Drama Review* 5.4 (June 1961): 21–35, at 29.

9. Brecht's *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder* premiered in Moscow with Yurii Liubimov's production at the Taganka Theater in April 1964, after Brecht's return to the Eastern bloc from America. Brecht's status as a socialist persona grata put Soviet dissidents and apolitical avant-garde artists in a quandary: they admired his aesthetic nonconformism, but they disavowed the state's approval of his ideology. The play was published in Russian as *Mamasha kurazh i ee deti: Khronika iz vremen tridtsatiletnei voiny*, trans. S. Apt (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1957).

10. On silence in the postwar West, see Nicoletta Simborowski, *Secrets and Puzzles: Silence and the Unsaid in Contemporary Italian Writing* (Oxford: Legenda, 2003).

11. Part of this unease was a seemingly contradictory verbal explosion, especially in the case of camp literature after the publication of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* in 1962 at Khrushchev's behest. Artists wanted to talk, but they were unsure of the terms of their speech. For this reason, many popular pieces published or performed in this period wrestled with the question of what form and purpose the everyday and poetic language of post-Stalinism could assume.

This being said, it is a common storyline of cold war historiography that the citizens of the Soviet Union suffered in silence under Stalin's totalitarianism and recovered from their reticence only after his death and the ensuing power struggle came to a close in the mid-1950s. Under the embarrassingly loquacious leadership of the new party secretary Khrushchev, the Soviet people were finally (relatively) free to speak and exploded in a collective verbal effervescence that would shortly be stamped out again in the era of stagnation—or so the story goes. This narrative, which is so obviously structured on a repressive hypothesis, remains particularly incurious about how silence—intentional or otherwise—operated in the midst of a supposedly effusive culture. Pantomime is one point at which this tidy ideological tale begins to unravel.

In the discussion that follows I explore some pockets of quietude in the post-Stalinist Soviet Union during the 1950s to the 1970s. I look at how artistic speech was politically impeded and how politically impeded speech was artistically represented in Russian culture during this time by focusing on silence in two related phenomena: the repopularization of theatrical pantomime, a dramatic form that thematizes absent speech, and the reinvigoration of the clinical-pedagogical discipline of “defectology” (*defectologiya*), which studies speech pathology and attempts to cure “deaf-mutes”¹² of their silence. I posit a connection between these two cultural developments in their shared expression of collective anxieties about the possibility of Soviet subjectivity premised on “perfect” speech. Because the political power of silence was constructed in tandem with Russian norms regarding vocality, I find that its cultural resonance should be sought in dialogue with a history of defectology, a history of a compulsory coming to voice.

My argument attempts to unlock a set of ideological distinctions in modes of speechlessness that were present in the Soviet context, for which binarisms of intentional–incidental, unnatural–natural, meaningful–meaningless, artistic–unartistic, and able–disabled were key. I apply pressure to the opposition between silence and muteness as it was foregrounded in pantomime and as it informed broader ideological formations in the Soviet Union. In these spaces, silence was a speech act, “significant rather than accidental” whether it was coerced or willed, and as such, it was “an eminently political act.”¹³ Artists may have chosen silence as a tactic of evasion or resistance, or it may have been chosen for them by the state. In contrast, muteness was regarded by artists and experts as a biological pathology and therefore outside the realm of intention; they saw it as a style of speechlessness without aesthetic or political significance. “Muteness occurs as a consequence of deafness” [*nemota nastupaet kak sledstvie glukhoty*], explained defectologists, which made deafness “a problem because of the way it inhibits speech.”¹⁴ I reject the inevitable equations of deafness with silence and

12. I use the problematic term “deaf-mute” in this article because this still-used compound word makes more explicit the connections that exist in Russian between defectology and cultural production (“mute” was the word used to describe silent film, a prime pantomimic genre) and those that bind disability and racism or anxiety about alterity (“mute” etymologically invokes the idea of foreignness). See also n. 14.

13. Philip Herdina, “The Manufacture of Silence (or How to Stop People Doing Things with Words),” in *Semantics of Silences in Linguistics and Literature*, ed. Gudrun M. Grabher and Ulrike Jeßner (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1996), 29.

14. For the supposedly inevitable link between hearing loss and speech loss in the Soviet context, see N. Tumasheva, “Sovety roditeliam: Vozvrashenie slukha,” *Zhizn' glukhikh* 2 (1958): 18. (Hereafter *Zhizn'*

muteness with impotence, not only because the Soviet deaf could often speak and were even trained to participate in spoken conversation by their oralist education but also (and especially) because the state and its actors as well as its defectors—to convey their own communicative efficacy—actively had to produce the notion that the “defective” population lacked a voice. I hope to upset these presumptions about silence and speech through which the normative subject of late socialism was forged.

Before I proceed, a word on terminology is necessary. Throughout this paper I employ language with which I do not necessarily identify. I ask that you please picture scare-quotes forming around each of these utterances (as they typographically fade away); but also understand the conceptual labor their retention accomplishes in my paper. For example, even as I recognize its ableist/oralist presumptions of perfectly embodied speech, I say “deaf-mute” because it makes more explicit connections that exist in Russian between Defectology and cultural production (insofar as “mute” was the name of silent film, a prime pantomimic genre); and those that bind disability and racism or anxiety about alterity (mute’s etymology links back to ideas of foreignness). More than that, the frequent appearance in Russian of this compound word, “deaf-mute,” points to the culturally common conflation of two distinct categories of “defect,” and in so doing illustrates the audiological axiom: “hearing loss is a problem because of the way it inhibits speech.”¹⁵ I disavow this statement that I nonetheless let strategically circulate in my paper, just as I deny that deafness is silence and Sign Language is not speech.

“Defect” and “defective” are obviously other such words whose problematization later on will organize part of the paper’s conceptual apparatus. Among my multiple ambitions for these terms, I hope to disaggregate them from the cluster of homonyms that crop up in texts about disability in the West (often around the question of eugenics). While those words pose related questions and some even have interconnected histories, the “defects” and “defectives” I discuss here are inextricably bound up with “actually

glukhikh [Deaf Life] will be abbreviated as ZG.) Brenda Jo Brueggemann supplies the audiological axiom in *Lend Me Your Ear: Rhetorical Constructions of Deafness* (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1999), 115. On the topic of “silence as deafness,” consult Christopher Krentz, *Writing Deafness: The Hearing Line in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 67–78.

¹⁵ Brenda Jo Brueggemann, *Lend Me Your Ear: Rhetorical Constructions of Deafness* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1999), 115. I draw on Brueggemann’s book to make that claim that rhetoric presumes perfect embodiment.

There are of course other words that might be problematized in this paper beside those that I list in the brief disclaimer. Thankfully, this work is fastidiously done by disability scholars, to whose interventions I can point for fuller discussions of the politics of terminology. I direct the reader to Matthew Kohrman’s contribution, for one, in challenging the implications of “impairment” in *Bodies of Difference: Experiences of Disability and Institutional Advocacy in the Making of Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). Unfortunately, I could not come up with a substitute that accomplished the same distinction between the two sets of cultural participants that organizes my argument.

I should also note that I do not make the typographic distinction between the miniscule deaf (meaning those with an “impairment”) and the magiscule (to demarcate Deaf culture and linguistic community) on the grounds that it is oftentimes too difficult to disambiguate the subjects signified by these two terms.

existing socialism” and it is important that they remain suspended in this ideological tangle.¹⁶

SOONER SILENT THAN MUTE”: THE PANTOMIME OF THE UNIMPAIRED

Ekaterina Furtseva (1910–74), the politically fickle minister of culture who presided over part of the artistic explosion of the thaw, was so smitten with Marcel Marceau that she invited him to Moscow in the early 1960s to create a school of pantomime in the French style for the Soviet Union. Marceau declined, quipping cleverly that he “did not want to create ‘Marcism’ in Russia,”¹⁷ in other words, he did not want pantomime to become a new dogma in the land of ideological zealotry. Even without Marceau’s assistance, Soviet mimes, true to Marxist form, insisted on inventing their own nationally and historically specific aesthetics.

A brief list of the leading post-Stalin pantomime troupes and theaters in Moscow and Leningrad includes the first national studio, Lensovet, under Rudol’f Slavskii, which spawned the clown-mime theater Litsedei [Actors/Hypocrites] and the still-popular theater of Viacheslav Polunin; the Experimental Theater-Studio of Pantomime, or EKTEMIM, under the direction of Rumnev; Nash Dom [Our House], the student theater of Moscow State University led by Aliks Axel’rod, Mark Rozovskii, and Il’ia Rutberg (the latter directs the world’s only academic department of pantomime today); the student theater of the I. V. Kurchatov Institute of Atomic Energy; and the Moscow Theater of Plastic Drama OKTAEDR [Octahedron] under the direction of Gedrus Matskiavichus.¹⁸ Pantomime owes its reappearance to the first annual International Pantomime Competition at the 1957 International Youth Festival in Moscow, and it was from the outset a young and multinational movement. It flourished among fledging actors in the Baltic theater scene, such as Robert Ligers’s Riga Pantomime and the Lithuanian Modris Tenison’s troupe. It also thrived in other non-Russian republics and satellite states, such as the well-respected companies of Amiran Shalikashvili in Tbilisi, Georgia; Henryk Tomaszewski in Wrocław, Poland; Vladimir Kolesov’s studio Rukh of Minsk, Belarus; and Ladislav Fialka’s Pantomime on the Balustrade of Prague, Czechoslovakia.

A typical troupe consisted of a small collective of professionally trained, predominantly male actors, often clad in black leotards (occasionally accented by a thematic or period detail, depending on the play). The content of their performances varied greatly, but a representative sample might entail a short narrative scene dramatized through stylized gestures and based on a literary text, the miming of an enduring existential question that had contemporary ideological relevance, or a response to topical political issues enacted in the “poster” genre (e.g., anticolonial rebellion in Africa,

¹⁶ For other manifestations of the “defective,” consult the anthology, *defects: Engendering the Modern Body*, edited by Helen Deutsch and Felicity Nussbaum. In their introduction, they define defect as: “both a cultural trope and a material condition that indelibly affected peoples lives” in the England and France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

¹⁷ Author’s interview with Il’ia Rutberg, 20 July 2009.

¹⁸ Emel’ianov, 71.

popular upheavals in Chile, or the embourgeoisement of Komsomol morality). These wordless plays were frequently (but not necessarily) accompanied by a musical score.

Silent Soviet actors at this time posited a socialist genealogy for post-Stalinist dramatic practice. They traced their dramatic roots to earlier experiments in revolutionary theater, thereby deflecting assumptions that their art merely mimicked the popular mimicry of the West.¹⁹ They recuperated the commedia dell'arte character Pierrot as the quintessential proletarian figure and proclaimed Charlie Chaplin as his successor for the cinematic age.²⁰ To summarize Rumnev's position, pantomime was not a recent bourgeois innovation but one of the oldest, most national, and most democratic forms of performance. Rumnev regarded it as a last bastion of the early humanist folk art of the public square that had had a long history of silently speaking truth to power under oppressive regimes of the past and had been remediated in the socialist era.²¹

Not only was pantomime *not* bourgeois in its modern iteration, Soviet pantomimists asserted, but it was and had always been the dramatic mode of the oppressed—or rather the tool of the vanguard to speak on behalf of the voiceless subaltern. In this sense, it enacted the ultimate socialist-realist goal of effecting in its viewer the evolutionary move from revolutionary spontaneity to consciousness; that is, socialist progress not through the “[resolution of] class conflict” but through the transition in the socialist individual and in the collective from “sporadic, uncoordinated, even anarchic” to “controlled, disciplined, and . . . politically aware” activity.²² Because of pantomime's consciousness-raising capabilities, its practitioners aligned its objectives with socialist history more generally. To put it in an appropriately sloganized way, pantomimic ontogeny recapitulated political phylogeny.

Critics applauded pantomime as practiced by Rumnev's renowned Experimental Theater-Studio of Pantomime and its sister studios for its aesthetic innovations and aspirations as a global art form on two counts: as a specifically socialist *Gesamtkunstwerk* that married the skills of spoken theater with the expressive techniques of the body (gymnastics, acrobatics, clowning, etc.)²³ and as a universally meaningful mode of artistic communication, a truly democratic art that could be understood across geopolitical boundaries by anybody with an able body. As Rumnev remarked about EKTEMIM:

With its art, *sooner silent than mute*, the theater wants to answer the ethical and aesthetic demands of the broadest circle of viewers independent of ethnic, geographical, or social barriers. It dreams about the creation of pantomimes, *consonant with the socialist epoch, reflecting the ideology of the simple people*, their everyday actions, feelings and thoughts, concerns and interest, their labor, their interactions, their hopes, their dreams; the theater is determined to stand in

19. F. Povago, “EKTEMIM,” *Molodaia gvardiia* 10 (1962): 273–87.

20. Il'ia Rutberg, *Pantomima: Dvizhenie i obraz* (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rosiia, 1981), 21.

21. Rumnev, *O pantomime*, 12–16.

22. Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, 3d ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 15.

23. See Povago; Emel'ianov.

the lines of the active struggles for the assurance of fairness, honor, peace, and friendship on earth.²⁴

Своим искусством, скорее молчаливым, чем немым, театр хочет отвечать этическим и эстетическим потребностям самого широкого круга зрителей независимо от этнических, географических или социальных барьеров. Он мечтает о создании пантомим, созвучных социалистической эпохе, отражающих идеологию простых людей, их повседневные действия, чувства и мысли, заботы и интересы, их труд, их взаимоотношения, их надежды, их мечты; театр намерен стоять в рядах активных борцов за утверждение на земле справедливости, честности, мира и дружбы.

To Rumnev, pantomime succeeded as a universal language because it used “mimicry” and “gesture” to reach an “emotional culmination” that was inaccessible to oral speech alone. Meaning was immanent in the pantomiming body, and silence restored an original completeness to the communicative act that language (in its increasingly degraded state) lacked. The silence of avant-garde artists was thus a form of speech as political deflection whose recognizability as such relied on foregrounding *the ability to choose* silence—to be “sooner silent than mute.” In the worst case, these able actors ran the risk that deliberate silence might be misread as a failure of communicative intention—that is, as the political impotence that had been the lot of many artists under the previous regime.

The risk silent Soviet actors assumed routes back to a more fundamental threat of failure in pantomimic communication—that the mime might not make the signifier (the body) adequate for what was being signified.²⁵ In other words, the artistic message can fail if the mime’s body fails first. Il’ia Rutberg of Moscow State’s Our House studio supplies an illustrative scenario of failed pantomime for our consideration.

Let’s imagine a pantomime in which there is no stylization of movement, where everyone walks as usual, wears a hat as usual, and generally does everything as usual. Only they don’t speak.

And why don’t they speak?

To that simple question we have no answer.

Silent action, in which all of the characters act as they do in life, only they are silent or explain themselves with signs, will look strange, unnatural, will remind us of the world of deaf-mutes or of television with the sound turned off.

Thus it happens in bad, impotent pantomime.²⁶

24. Rumnev, *O pantomime*, 155–6, my emphasis.

25. José Gil, *Metamorphoses of the Body*, trans. Stephen Muecke (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 107.

26. Il’ia Rutberg, *Pantomima: Opyty v mimodrame* (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1977), 10.

Давайте мысленно представим себе пантомиму, где нет никакой стилизации движения, где все ходят, как обычно, надевают шляпу, как обычно, и вообще все делают, как обычно.

Только не говорят.

А почему не говорят

На этот простой вопрос мы не сможем дать ответа.

Молчаливое действо, где все герои будут вести себя, как в жизни, но только молчать или изъясняться знаками, будет выглядеть странным, неестественным, будет напоминать собой или мир глухонемых, или телевизор с выключенным звуком.

Так и происходит в плохой, беспомощной пантомиме.

The inadequate mime in this case is, to reverse Rumnev's handy phrase, sooner mute than silent; his speechlessness looks "strange, unnatural," incapable. His artistic impotence reminds us of the deaf-mute. So does the deaf-mute remind us of the bad mime? And what does the deaf-mute look like when miming badly? Where would deaf-muteness end and bad miming begin? The mute body, it seems, is already too overdetermined with meaning to become a vessel of transparent communication in the symbolic economy of pantomime. The body language of the mute mime does not transcend speech but unsuccessfully tries to approximate it and in so doing reveals its inadequacy or "unnatural" lack. As Aleksandr Tairov put it, "No, pantomime is not a presentation for deaf-mutes, where gestures take the place of words; pantomime is a presentation on the order of spiritual denuding, wherein words expire and in their stead is born authentic stage activity."²⁷ According to this binary logic, in the context of post-Stalinist culture, silence is political, muteness is pathological. And indeed, speechlessness as pathology was simultaneously reemerging in Russia as a subject of institutional study: defectology.

PATHOLOGICAL SILENCE AND DEFECTIVE PERFORMANCE

As part of a broader revival of disciplines that the state had deemed ideologically suspect under Stalin, the field of defectology reappeared at this time. Defectology is roughly the Russian equivalent of American "special education," a departmental umbrella for subfields of pedagogical and rehabilitative study concerned primarily with cognitive disability and sensory impairment, such as surdopedagogy (deaf education), and logopedagogy (speech therapy). Subdivisions of defectology deal with the social-scientific problem of impeded speech; it is an expert clinical field designed to manage the silence of individuals as a treatable problem that is closely tied to sociocultural phenomena. In contrast to the Western "medical model" of disability—which is typically conceived against the social model in what some disability scholars and activists

²⁷ Aleksandr Tairov, *O teatre* (Moscow: BTO, 1970), 91.

recognize as a false dichotomy—the Soviet clinic understood defect as both: as a biological expression of socioeconomic conditions, or, if you prefer, as a socioeconomic model of pathology. This model gave rise to a different idea of “cure,” one that was ostensibly concerned with fixing the individual *as part* of the social collective.²⁸ Like those in the field of disability studies who work to challenge the medical model of late-capitalist Anglo-American formations of disability or deafness, I hope my discussion of the specifically Soviet construction of individual “defect” will show how different ideologies (here capitalist and socialist) are crafted around different notions of ideal embodiment and productive citizenship. I retain the word “defect” and substantivize it as “defective” to describe the object of defectology; so too does linguist and cultural analyst Irina Sandomirskaja, who notes that “the discipline under such a fearful name [developed] the ideas of educating a new Soviet human subject out of a ‘defective’ child (another fearful term).”²⁹ Like Sandomirskaja, then, I use the terms of this expert discourse with extreme apprehension while recognizing the “fearful” things it reveals about Soviet ideology.

The most well-established branch of defectology, deaf education, was standardized by the revolutionary government before it was quashed under Stalin in the 1930s.³⁰ As with its pre-Stalinist predecessor, the new wave of surdopedagogy that began in the late 1950s strove to mainstream the deaf child into proper adulthood as a productive citizen within the hearing world. Soviet deaf education at this time was based on the “[dominance of] the written/spoken language, mainly . . . the spoken language”: classes were conducted orally, and the mark of the successful student was vocality.³¹ This generation of audiologists favored mirror exercises, which taught the deaf child to “read

28. The Anglo-American medical model is characterized by its search for a cure for disability. That said, while the Western clinic may have given lip service to the goal of a cure, the incurability of disability and defect guaranteed the perpetuity of the institution and the expert professions invested in treating it. James W. Trent, *Inventing the Feeble Mind: A History of Mental Retardation in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

29. Irina Sandomirskaja, “The How-To of Bare Life: A Story of O.,” *Documenta Magazines* 1–3 (2007); online at <URL><http://magazines.documenta.de/frontend/article.php?IdLanguage=1&NrArticle=660> (accessed 24 February 2009).

30. Defectology was institutionalized and practiced most famously in Soviet Russia by Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934), whose death coincided with the temporary death of the discipline. For an in-depth picture of the dramatic succumbing of defectology to the political pressures of high Stalinism at the end of the 1930s, see Jane E. Knox and Carol Stevens, “Vygotsky and Soviet Russian Defectology: An Introduction,” in *The Fundamentals of Defectology (Abnormal Psychology and Learning Disabilities)*, vol. 2 of *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky*, ed. R. W. Rieber and A. S. Carton (New York: Plenum Press, 1993), 6–10. During this period, Vygotsky and some of his colleagues came under attack, the research journal *Voprosy defektologii* [Questions of Defectology] ceased publication, and many defectology departments shut down. These are just a few telling examples of the effects of the party’s campaign against defectology during the period 1930–6. For more on the earlier years of defectology, consult Susan Burch’s excellent survey of deaf education and culture: “Transcending Revolutions: The Tsars, the Soviets, and Deaf Culture,” *Journal of Social History* 34.2 (2000): 393–401. On defectology during and after the Stalin years, see Galina Zaitseva, Michael Pursglove, and Susan Gregory, “Vygotsky, Sign Language, and the Education of Deaf Pupils,” *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education* 4.1 (1999): 9–14.

31. Zaitseva et al., 12–13.

lips and speak intelligibly.”³² They taught deaf students to supplement oral speech only by gently gesticulating a sign language that was patterned after spoken Russian (finger spelling or “gesture”) and to avoid the grammatically distinct (or “strong”) sign language that the Russian deaf community used and comprehended most easily.³³ Like the pantomiming actor, the clinician trained his speaking/hearing-impaired pupil in “mimicry” (facial movement) and “gesture” (sign).

Official mainstreaming produced a predictable set of ambivalent effects—a phenomenon Susan Burch has elsewhere dubbed “the irony of acculturation”³⁴—whereby the assimilationist agenda of deaf education made possible the emergence of a Soviet deaf cultural identity that was further nourished by state-sponsored subcultural institutions.³⁵ (Indeed, future deaf-rights advocates emerged from the ranks of defectologists.) Soviet deaf culture enjoyed something like a “golden age” at this time, especially in its long-standing tradition of theatrical performance. Avant-garde acting troupes drew heavily from and in some cases collaborated with their deaf-mute peers, whose everyday signing they perceived to be a close cousin of dramatic pantomime. Foremost among these groups was the Moscow Theater of Mimicry and Gesture (TMG)

32. In the imperative form, this is the title of a monthly *ZG* column from the 1960s.

33. On the subject of “gentle gesticulation,” consult ongoing debates in *ZG* about whether Soviet deaf citizens should use strong gestural language or whether it is too “vulgar” and unaesthetic a mode of communication to take place in public. See also the following article and subsequent issues of *ZG*: I. Geil’man, “Kul’tura mimiki—poniatie emkoe,” *ZG* 3 (1967): 20–1. In e-mail correspondence with me (16–17 March 2009), Michael Pursglove noted that during the Soviet period, “signed Russian (*kal’kiruiushchii iazyk*—[Galina] Zaitseva’s term) is based on the grammar of the written/spoken language and is mainly used by hard-of-hearing people, by *pozдноoglokhshie* [the late-deafened] and the (of course hearing) interpreters on TV and elsewhere. Profoundly deaf people have great problems in understanding it. RSL [Russian Sign Language], with its quite different grammar from written/spoken Russian, was always used by profoundly deaf people outside classes and (as it were illegally) in class. . . . The term [RSL] did not arise until about 1990, devised by [Zaitseva]. . . . Many Russian Deaf people don’t realise the gift they have, a fully-fledged language in its own right, these days termed *Rossiiskii* [Russian national rather than ethnic Russian]) *zhestovyi iazyk*, and Russian TV inflicts ‘Signed Russian’ (*kal’kiruiushchii iazyk*) on them, which they don’t understand.”

34. Susan Burch, *Signs of Resistance: American Deaf Cultural History, 1900 to World War II* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2002), 7, 168.

35. The degree to which deaf-mutes possessed a collective consciousness as a cultural and political group, what in the American context would be considered a “minority identity,” requires further investigation. Susan Burch has argued that the unique position of deaf Soviets under Stalin allowed them a style of ideological freedom that was not enjoyed by any other population, such that they were able to offer critiques of the state at the height of the purges. That freedom, of course, can only be considered partial when one takes into account the mass arrests and executions of Russian Sign Language users in 1937 based on Stalin’s suspicion that the deaf were conducting an oppositional conspiracy in sign. Even so, the deaf towns and workers’ faculties would surely have contributed to a sense of cultural particularity among their members. See Burch, “Transcending Revolutions”; and Elena Silianova, “Russian Deaf Towns,” in *The Deaf Way II Reader: Perspectives from the Second International Conference on Deaf Culture*, ed. Harvey Goodstein (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2007), 189–92.

Still, as Pursglove has commented apropos of the approach of the postcommunist Moscow Bilingual School for the Deaf, many deaf Russians have a limited idea of what Russian deaf culture entails. Indeed, as a consequence of deaf theatrical participation during the Soviet period, “many, for example, believe that ‘deaf culture’ means clowns and mimes and not much more.” E-mail correspondence with Michael Pursglove, 17 March 2009.

of the All-Russian Society of the Deaf (ASD). TMG became the world's "first modern deaf professional theater with a full-time company" in 1962."³⁶ Before and especially after that, amateur deaf theaters thrived under the auspices of local deaf organizations. Dramatic participation thus brought national and even international visibility to a population that had been either unattended or violently undermined in preceding decades. With the professionalization of TMG, it became apparent that defectives were not just the passive objects of the state's clinical gaze but were active agents of Soviet cultural production.

Still, deaf culture, set off by the stigma of defect, was not suddenly and holistically embraced by the nondeaf or nondisabled members of Soviet society who appropriated its artistic forms. The onus of social integration was on the deaf community, as evidenced by the oralism of defectology. There is little or no mention of deaf pantomime in the historical monographs or contemporary theater journal articles on the subject of pantomime, despite the fact that its practice remained comparatively unbroken during the period when nondeaf pantomime was not permitted. Perhaps more problematic than this omission is the fact that, from the postwar period through the 1970s, deaf actors were mostly segregated from their unimpaired counterparts behind a wall of sound. The privilege of pure silence in performance was entrusted only to nondeaf (and sometimes mixed) troupes, and all-deaf troupes adopted a "ventriloquist" style whereby they mouthed verbal scripts accompanied by a speaking "translator" or "actor-announcer" for the hearing audience. Rather than representing the new freedom from "totalitarian" artistic oppression, as did the silent pantomime of the theater of unimpaired actors, this "lip-syncing" style risked connoting the opposite. Indeed, American actors from the National Theater of the Deaf read the Russian method as closer to puppetry than to pantomime, a loaded interpretation in the context of the cold war.³⁷

This approach was intended for an "outside" audience; it was directed first to a nondeaf or nonsigning viewer and consequently prioritized speech over sign. The signing in such performances "is forced to conform to the rhythms and pacing of speech." Inside productions, on the other hand, "privileged the theatrical experience of Deaf spectators, prioritizing [sign language] translation of the text and asking the spoken performance to submit to the demands of its visual counterpart."³⁸ TMG directed its energies "outside" on multiple counts. In fact, "the majority of the deaf audience poorly understood [their] plays" because they supplemented vocal speech with a weak sign language that was "foreign to the deaf audience" [*chuzhim dlia glukhikh zritelei*] and differed from the "language used by the deaf in their everyday interaction" [*zhestovyi iazyk spektaklia—ne*

36. Stephen C. Baldwin, *Pictures in the Air: The Story of the National Theater of the Deaf* (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1993), 65. The history of TMG and deaf theater is available on the TMG Web site at <URL><http://deaf-art.ru/history.html>.

37. See *ibid.*, 66. Similar impressions are recounted by Bernard Bragg, an NTF star whose popularity in Russia preceded his performances with TMG in the 1970s.

38. Jessica Berson, "Performing Deaf Identity: Toward a Continuum of Deaf Performance," in *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance*, ed. Carrie Sandahl and Philip Auslander (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2005), 51.

tot iazyk, kotorym pol'zuiutsia glukhie v mezhlichnostnom obshchenii].³⁹ What sign language did appear was misconstrued by the hearing audience as an approximation of pantomime, despite the fact that TMG could boast but one silent pantomime in the troupe's entire repertoire in the early 1960s.⁴⁰ For the most part they revived dramatic classics by Shakespeare and Schiller—a tendency for which the ASD monthly magazine *Deaf Life* castigated them because of its lack of topicality and artistic freshness.

Though deaf theater adhered to the scripts of conversational drama, distinguishing itself mostly by its unique performance technique, the discussion of one exemplary play and the history of its reception imparts a clearer picture of deaf theater as such. TMG's *Twelfth Night* premiered in the opening season and was staged more than two hundred times out of the theater's roughly two thousand productions up to 1972.⁴¹ Domestic and international audiences in the early to mid-1960s were impressed with the deaf rendition of Shakespeare's comedy, especially as the actors captured the wit of the original without pronouncing a single word onstage.⁴² But offstage, in the first row, actor-announcers faithfully recited the script, providing a soundtrack to which the deaf actors lip-synced and signed.⁴³ By the late 1960s and early 1970s, critics were losing patience with TMG's repetitive repertory, singling out *Twelfth Night* for special censure.⁴⁴ This play, like other Shakespearean pieces, was not only out of touch, they argued, but its excessive dialogue made it an ill fit for the theater of the deaf. One member of the *Twelfth Night* audience suggested that “the announcer's text here was wholly unnecessary” and that the deaf theater would do better to rely on sign and pantomime alone.⁴⁵

If the plays themselves were stale and out of sync with the socialist times, a main source of fascination for the hearing audience was watching the deaf actors synchronize their mouths with the acousmatic voices (those “heard without [their sources] being seen”)⁴⁶ and, to quote one critic, making “every play become a ‘talkie’” to achieve the “total impression” of “the actors themselves speaking, just as in a dubbed film”—a

39. Galina Zaitseva, “O zhestovom iakyke teatra glukhikh (nabliudeniia i razmyshleniia),” in idem, *Zhest i slovo: Nauchnye i metodicheskie stat'i* (Moscow: n.p., 2006), 341-45, at 341, 343.

40. Dmitrii Brudnyi, “Mimika i zhest,” *Teatr* 11 (November 1971): 37-43, at 38.

41. L. Leonid, TMG director, quoted in *V edinom stroiu* 10 (1972): 20-1.

42. See the laudatory reviews of *Twelfth Night*: “Shekspir 'zazvuchal,’” *ZG* 8 (1963): 13; and E. Vartanian, “Glukhie sredi slyshashchikh,” *ZG* 11 (1967): 28.

43. The 1965 Soviet film *Dvoe* [The Couple], a love story between a deaf-mute girl, Natasha, and her unimpaired musician-admirer, Sergei, features a “ventriloquist” performance by TMG of the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet*. The camerawork instructively breaks down the components of ventriloquist performance for the unimpaired viewer. First, Romeo, with his back turned to the audience, signs to Juliet in the balcony. Subsequent shots frame Juliet in close-up facing the camera, her articulations synced to the speech of the female actor-announcer. The camera next cuts to this actor-announcer as she sits in the first row with the male actor-announcer, each with microphone in one hand, script in the other. The final shots focus on the actors' quickly signing hands and the shadows produced on the set by their motion.

44. L. Polonskii, “Otvetsvennost' pered vremenem,” *ZG* 12 (1968): 10; and A. Korotkov's review of TMG, originally printed in *ZG* 8 (1971): 14-15, reprinted in V. Palennyi and V. Skripov, “Teatr mimiki i zhesta,” in idem, *Istoriia Vserossiskogo obshchestva glukhikh* [History of the All-Russian Society of the Deaf], vol. 2 (Moscow: VOG, forthcoming).

45. N. Balashova, “Kogda zanaves podniat,” *ZG* 10 (1971): 19. Balashova was the editor-in-chief of the journal *Teatral'naia zhizn'* [Theater Life].

46. Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 18.



An advertisement for the Theatre of Mimicry and Gesture's 1964 production of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, directed by L. Kalinovskii and V. Shcheglov. *Zhizn' glukhikh* [Deaf Life] 11 (1964): back cover. Two stage photographs taken by A. Motylev of the Theatre of Mimicry and Gesture's opening-season production of *Twelfth Night*: (top) Viola and Antonio; (bottom, left to right) Feste, Aguecheek, and Sir Toby Belch. *Zhizn' glukhikh* [Deaf Life] 8 (1963): 13.

metaphor the deaf press also used [*kazhdyi spektak' stanovitsia govoriashchim...Polnoe vpechatlenie, budto govoriat sami aktery, kak eto proiskhodit v dublirovannom fil'me*].⁴⁷ Reviewers were obsessed with the spectacle of deaf actors finding their rhythm and projecting the successful illusion that they could hear. One reviewer wrote: “Seated in the auditorium, one cannot even imagine what difficult work it is for these actors who cannot hear music but sing and dance by force of their inherent inborn rhythm and plasticity.” [*Sidiashchie v zritel'nom zale dazhe ne predstavliaiut sebe, kakim tiazhelym trudom vse eto dostaetsia akteram, kotorye, ne slysha muzyki, poiut i tantsuiut v silu prisushchego im prirodnogo ritma i plastichnosti.*]⁴⁸ He was particularly impressed by a musical play about the theater in which a young (hearing) girl learns to sing and dance, because of which, the commentator noted, it became impossible to remember that the actress playing the part could not herself hear: she had undetectably performed nondefective subjectivity.⁴⁹ This focus on synchronicity came at the expense of intelligibility for the deaf community. As one deaf activist hypothesized, the use of strong sign in a TMG play would have “immediately destroyed the synchronicity of the play of the deaf actor and the actor-announcer, [who was] singing couplets (naturally for the hearing audience). And it is exactly this synchronicity that the theater so aims for . . . how can that be?”⁵⁰ [*No eto srazu narushit sinkhronnost' igry glukhogo aktera i artista-diktora, poiushchego kuplety (estestvenno, dlia slyshashchikh zritelei). A imenno k etoi sinkhronnosti stol' stremitsia teatr...Kak tut byt'?*] If not designed for the entertainment of and comprehension by deaf audiences, what was the goal of this theater?

In effect, deaf stage performance functioned as an extension of surdopedagogical practice—that is, a defectological technique of the self, or a “deformance,” to borrow Susan M. Schweik’s term for “dramaturgies of impairment adjustment involving the carefully orchestrated and paternalistic public exposure of the [defective] . . . always about to be reformed.”⁵¹ Indeed, from its inception defectology employed drama as a form of therapy to remedy belated language acquisition or fix incorrect speech.⁵² Beyond

47. Brudnyi, 39. As one ASD publication put it, “The soundless speech of the [deaf] performers was dubbed with great mastery by the actor-announcers.” I. A. Isaev, *V stroiu edinom: Kollektivnyi sbornik* (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1988), 56. Dubbing, the common practice for foreign-language films in Soviet Russia, formed part of the country’s complex oralism. Since subtitles made movies more accessible to a nonhearing audience, *ZG* included reviews of subtitled films in the late 1950s and 1960s. See S. Shapovalov, “Fil’m y est’, no . . . my ikh ne vidim,” *ZG* 4 (1959): 14.

48. Brudnyi, 38.

49. Ibid. In *Dvoe*, Natasha is embarrassed by her inability to synchronize gymnastic exercises with the rhythm of the hearing pianist’s accompaniment during rehearsal, so she throws her boyfriend out of the practice hall to be alone with her “defect.” The July 1965 issue of *ZG* contains a plot synopsis and reviews supplied by deaf readers, who find the film interesting even as they criticize the female lead’s muteness as unbelievable.

50. Zaitseva, 344.

51. Susan M. Schweik, *The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2009), 47.

52. Vygotsky promoted this cross-pollination from the outset by making actors the subject of his psychological essays and using the tools of dramatic practice in his work in abnormal child psychology. Neva Virginia Cramer, “Literacy as a Performing Art: A Phenomenological Study of Oral Dramatic

its clinical application, theater, like state cinema, offered one of “the most tangible [incarnations] of the [Soviet] civilizing process” as a “[technique] for disciplining the body, giving the real body of the actor to the utopian project of a new ‘social-biological type’ of Soviet man.”⁵³ Drama demonstrated models of corporal and oral movement to be emulated by the Soviet citizen, defective and nondefective alike.

But deaf-mute theater bared the device of artistic performance as political pedagogy, since spectacles performed by defectological subjects rehearsed and exhibited the clinical demands for perfectly embodied speech—for “speaking intelligibly and lip reading” flawlessly—behind which hovered the imperative to pass as unimpaired. To this end, reviews of TMG always included an extended passage of (self-)criticism (TMG actors and directors often wrote reviews of their own performances), pointing out the imperfections of enunciation and “unintelligible articulation” [*nevniatnaia artikuliatsiia*] of the performers.⁵⁴ This was true for both mainstream theater journals of the hearing world (such as *Teatr* [Theater]) and periodicals devoted to deaf culture and defectology (such as *Zhizn’ glukhikh* [Deaf Life]).⁵⁵ As a case in point, for the Lenin Jubilee of 1970, TMG staged a thirty-year-old play depicting the new Soviet man, but one critic writing for *Deaf Life* asserted that both the actors and the director fell short of the dramatic ideal in their “superfluous bustling” and incomprehensible mimicry, on account of which they could not convey “revolutionary intellect and conviction.”⁵⁶ But pages before this artistic critique, the reader of *Deaf Life* encountered an article authored by the audiological consultant to the theatrical troupe, in which he described correct “actorly speech” [*akterskaia rech’*] and prescribed it as exemplary for the theatergoing speech-impaired subject.⁵⁷ Attendant to this, the daily training of TMG actors entailed afternoon meetings with the logopedist to practice “oral acoustic speech” [*ustnoi zvukovoi rech’iu*].⁵⁸ Vocality and its visual complements required perfection because, in the words of one deaf director, “the theater [was] one of the most powerful means of communist education” [*teatrom, kak odnim iz moguchikh sredstv kommunisticheskogo vospitaniia*] for the “popular masses” [*narodnye massy*] which included, of course, the deaf.⁵⁹

If defective performers always had room for improvement, the unsung hero of deaf-mute theater was the actor-announcer, the ventriloquist to the deaf dummy, a

Reading” (Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University, 2003); online at http://etd.lsu.edu/docs/available/etd-0127103-211254/.../Cramer_dis.pdf (accessed 1 February 2010).

53. Oksana Bulgakova, *Fabrika zhestov* (Moscow: NLO, 2005), 206.

54. L. Polonskii, “Spektakl’, sozvuchnyi vremeni,” *ZG* 8 (1970): 8-9, at 9.

55. Consider this TMG actor’s self-appraisal two years into the studio’s revival: “We are looking for new expressive colors of the language of gesture, and our mimicry is far from perfected”; V. Karychev, “Teatr v puti,” *ZG* 1 (1967): 18-19, at 19.

56. The negative review continues: the troupe cannot send up the improper bourgeois ideals of the play’s antagonists because of the “unintelligible articulation of the performers, whose manual alphabet and signs are unclear. There is a lot that even the deaf viewer does not understand.” Polonskii, “Spektakl’, sozvuchnyi vremeni,” 9.

57. *Deaf Life* also recommended film as a form of oralist pedagogy that taught facial mimicry and pronunciation. M. Khvatsev, “Kino uchit proiznosheniui,” *ZG* 12 (1958): 23.

58. A. Kalugina, “Oni budut akterami: V teatral’noi studii,” *ZG* 9 (1959): 22.

59. L. Soboleva, “Zametki o rezhissure,” *ZG* 7 (1962): 16–17.

virtuoso orator whose mastery of dubbing would often do double service when it was divided among multiple lip-syncing performers onstage at once. The actor-announcer assumed the audiologist's role in the auditorium by supplying perfect speech for the actors to mouth. And in a lesser sense, so did the hearing audience, encouraged as it was to stare and scrutinize the fidelity of the actor's body to the announcer's voice.

The theatrical performance and within it the performance of political subjectivity—that is, performance and performativity—are the very things at stake in these spectacular enactments of positive and negative speech. The defective female actor, like the gender illusionist in Judith Butler's seminal essays, reveals (or, when she is successful, obscures) how normative identities are “instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*” that over time are made to appear natural in their seemingly seamless continuity.⁶⁰ When the defective performer found her rhythm and danced or synchronized her body with the disembodied voice of the hearing announcer, she temporarily inhabited ideal Soviet subjectivity through this *trompe l'oeil*. When she slipped, visually stuttered, or fell out of verbal or physical sequence, she became defective again to the viewer. Compelled to perform perfect speech (by the audience, the audiologist, the theater director, et al.), the deaf-mute actor was deprived of the ability to represent the very “defect” that foreclosed her entry into the Soviet Union's “normal” symbolic order. She performed her failure in the very act of trying to overcome it. This demand that deaf actors pass as nondefective and enact “authentic” speech was compounded by the already-tainted status of theatrical speech (per J. L. Austin) as parasitic upon proper speech, excluded from the latter and instead “linked with the perverted, the artificial, the unnatural, the abnormal, the decadent, the effete, the diseased”—and, I add here, the defective.⁶¹ The very defect of drama meant that defectives could never truly *perform* ideal Soviet identity, or that in performing the ideal they would disappear.

The pantomime of the unimpaired artist unconsciously rested on this arrangement; his or her silence was buffered by the assumption that his or her own speaking self was completely achieved, as the foil of the failed mime/deaf-mute reveals. Unimpaired mimes believed the tools of their art included and exceeded the techniques of conventional conversational theater. This excess came into greatest relief against the perceived somatic-cum-artistic deficiency of mute actors, who, it follows, were always engaged in a *de facto* pantomime, since proper conversational drama was never an option for them. (Likewise, although unimpaired theater's homonymic systems of mimicry and gesture were the supplements of an always inadequate spoken language in the speaking/hearing world, they were surely not regarded as commensurate with the modes of communication used by deaf actors, theatrical and otherwise.) In effect, the hearing actor required the scene of defective speech in order to be meaningfully silent himself, so that his silence was understood not as mute pathology but as artistic and political metaphor.

60. Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theater Journal* 40.4 (December 1988): 519, emphasis in original.

61. Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick paraphrase J. L. Austin in their introduction to idem, eds., *Performativity and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 1–18, at 5.

THE COLONIALITY OF LANGUAGE: MIMICRY AND THE DEAF SELF

The metaphorization of disability by the nondisabled is a transhistorically and transculturally prolific practice that has already been thoroughly documented by those who work in the field of disability studies.⁶² In this specific case, objectifying deaf-muteness, emptying the category of lived particularity for the sake of an ableist trope, rendered Soviet defective subjects unable to represent themselves. The imperative for mute actors to speak (so that others might be silent) was but one instantiation of what some Western scholars of deafness characterize as the broader oralist colonization of the deaf community in cultural as well as “economic, welfare, [and] linguistic” terms.⁶³ Harlan L. Lane has most prominently asserted that there was a connection between oralist oppression and racist colonialism, observing that audist or hearing-centric society and its audiological establishment subjected the deaf individual to paternalist ethnocentrism and correspondingly subjected the deaf body to colonization by the state.⁶⁴ His proposition merits consideration here because the Soviet Union produced its defective citizens with methods like those used by the colonial state.

Of course, as Mark Sherry advises, “neither disability nor [colonialism] should be understood simply as a metaphor for the other experience.”⁶⁵ Nor is it my intention to collapse the distinction between their associated oppressions—especially since some Soviet pantomimes refuse to lend themselves to such lazy analogic thinking.⁶⁶ Avoiding Lane’s logic of substitution, I take seriously the claim that oralism is a form of cultural domination that reifies uneven power relations through hierarchies of language and speech. These hierarchies, moreover, are epistemologically and experientially entangled with the scaffolding of colonialist configurations of power based on race. (Homi K. Bhabha, for one, points to the linguistic and specifically aural cast of constructions of national self and colonial other.)⁶⁷ Underscoring these overlaps but refusing their integration, I use the term “colonial” to refer to the linked but partial workings of a

62. See David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

63. Paddy Ladd, “Colonialism and Resistance: A Brief History of Deafhood,” in *Open Your Eyes: Deaf Studies Talking*, ed. H-Dirksen L. Bauman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 42–79, at 42.

64. Harlan L. Lane, *The Mask of Benevolence: Disabling the Deaf Community* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 43–5.

65. Mark Sherry, “(Post)colonising Disability,” *Wagadu* 4 (Summer 2007): 10–22, at 10.

66. Though there is insufficient space to treat this collocation of colonial logics here, a chapter of my forthcoming dissertation is devoted to the labile relationship between processes of racialization and productions of “speechlessness” in the post-Stalinist imaginary. I examine silent performances of racial subjectivity, particularly pantomimes of the early 1960s, such as Rumnev’s *Africa* and Slavskii’s *The Sun Rises over Africa*.

67. Homi K. Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse” and “Sly Civility,” in idem, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 121–31 and 132–44, respectively. In *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), Henry Louis Gates Jr. explores how racist Enlightenment philosophies of language, writing, and orality were used to justify colonialism and slavery.

particular logic of differential power predicated on certain ideals of linguistic subjectivity.

In a tentative linguistic-colonial paradigm, the oppression of the Russian deaf community was achieved with a familiar set of strategies employed by the oppressor group: “the physical subjugation of a disempowered people, the imposition of alien language and mores, and the regulation of education in behalf of the colonizer’s goals.”⁶⁸ Spelled out more explicitly in the field of pedagogy, this meant in the American as well as the Soviet school “the incarceration of deaf children in institutions, the denial of [deaf sign language] as a language, the imposition of medical aids . . . , mainstreaming in education, punishment of deaf children for manual signing.”⁶⁹ These oralist practices put a “civilizing burden” on the defectological specialist to bring the “intellectually deficient” deaf student to “true [spoken] language” and thereby return him or her to society. When that failed, hearing educators blamed the deaf students themselves for their inability to become educated in audist schools. “Their pupils [were] intellectually deficient, the educators claim[ed], because they lack[ed] true language.”⁷⁰ In such a way deaf students in the Soviet Union were constructed as irredeemably defective, yet were paradoxically compelled to continue correcting their incorrigible deficiency lest they remain unfit for the communist future.⁷¹ Galina Zaitseva, a leading deaf activist in post-Soviet Russia until her death in 2005, believed that “sign language was completely absent from Soviet surdopedagogy for many years” [*problema zhestovoi rechi kak by vovse ushla iz sovetskoi surdopedagogiki na dolgie gody*] because of “the racist ideas of the ignorant Communist leader” [*rasistskie idei kommunisticheskogo lidera-nevezhdy*], Joseph Stalin, along with the oralist state during and after his tenure, which “took a great toll on the whole field of Deaf education and the study of sign language in the former Soviet Union . . . the consequences of [which] have not been overcome completely even today” [*prinesli ogromnyi uron vsemu delu obucheniia glukhikh i izuchenii zhestovogo iazyka v byvshem Sovetskom Soiuze. K sozhaleniiu, posledstviia etikh idei ne preodoleny polnost’iu i segodnia*].⁷²

Drawing on the work of deaf scholar and activist Paddy Ladd, we might detect the Russian deaf theater actor’s internalization of his colonization by the dominant hearing culture in his adoption of the ventriloquist technique. Herein “[t]he Deaf gaze is clearly [directed] outward toward majority culture, indicating an inability to conceive of their own lives as valid cultural material for art.”⁷³ Zaitseva believed this to hold true for the Russian stage as well; she contended that the artistic choices the deaf theater made reflected the enduring cultural colonization of the Russian deaf community.

68. Lane, 31.

69. Michael Davidson, “Hearing Things: The Scandal of Speech in Deaf Performance,” in *Signing the Body Poetic: Essays on American Sign Language Literature*, ed. H-Dirksen L. Bauman, Jennifer L. Nelson, and Heidi M. Rose (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 216–34, at 217.

70. Lane, 27.

71. I have culled this characterization of the deaf-mute as anomalous and out of historical sync from V. I. Lubovskii, “Defektologiia,” in *Bol’shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, ed. A. Prokhorov (Moscow: Sovetskaia entsiklopediia, 1970).

72. Zaitseva, “Istoriia Glukhikh: Predmet i ob’ekt,” in *Zhest i slovo*, 442–47, at 444.

73. Ladd, 50.

For many years deaf people were compelled (by parents and pedagogues) to satisfy certain standards established by the hearing (the mastery of oral speech and so on). Anxious about their deafness, experiencing the feeling of their own inferiority, deaf people for a long time assumed that their lives did not deserve to be the object of theatrical art.⁷⁴

Долгие годы глухие люди побуждались (родителями, педагогами) к достижению определенных стандартов, устанавливаемых слышащими (овладению устной речью и т.п.). Стесняясь своей глухоты, испытывая чувство собственной неполноценности, глухие долгое время полагали, что их жизнь недостойна быть объектом театрального искусства.

More than this, we have seen how deaf dramatic activity was an instrument in the defectologist's arsenal, designed to fix the sick speech of the defective or, if we permit the metaphor, to "civilize" the inferior or "barbarian" subject of audist colonialism.

Deaf theater, in other words, was a form of "colonial mimicry: a performance of everyday life in which colonized persons adopt . . . the culture of their colonizers,"⁷⁵ which is motivated, as Bhabha tells us, by "the [colonizer's] desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.*"⁷⁶ I appreciate Bhabha's choice of words here because it brings into better focus the significant difference between the two modalities of miming at issue in my analysis: the unimpaired pantomimist, who presumes him or herself a full mimetic subject; and the defective mimic, whose presence is a semblance that is inappropriate and partial. (Bhabha neatly captures this binary in "the difference between being English and being Anglicized.")⁷⁷ The deaf-mute actor as colonial mime in the post-Stalinist scenario is enjoined to "speak" even though his speech is always marked as imperfect and not his own. This is the function of deformance as "the gift that keeps on giving deformity, perpetuating the model of the deformed object as a permanent other, even as he or she is to be continually subject to reform."⁷⁸ The failure of the "deformer" as a full Soviet subject is thus strategically ensured and indeed constitutive of his defective subjectivity, thereby reinforcing audist distributions of political power within Soviet society.

This conclusion raises these questions: Beyond the consolidation of audist hegemony, who benefited from maintaining a population of "almost the same, but not

74. Zaitseva, "Osnovnye problemy teatra glukhikh," in *Zhest i slovo*, 346-55, at 349.

75. Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 233.

76. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man," 122, emphasis in the original. In her relevant essay, Irina Sandomirskaja casts "the deaf-blind child . . . as opposed to the ideal human being as she appears in the discourse of Soviet normalization . . . as an almost-the-same or as a not-yet-the same." "Skin to Skin: Language in the Soviet Education of Deaf-Blind Children, the 1920s and 1930s," *Studies in Eastern European Thought* 60.4 (December 2008): 321-37, at 331.

77. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man," 128.

78. Schweik, 47.

quite” subjects incessantly engaged in their own self-correction? Why did the Soviet state need its defective citizens?

PERFECT SPEECH, PERFECT STATE

In the “highly bureaucratized society” of socialist Russia, where “submission to ‘normality’ was raised to the principle of government,”⁷⁹ “normal” subjectivity was socially and politically conferred through state-sanctioned speech—what historian Stephen Kotkin has famously called “speaking Bolshevik.” In this sense, the Soviet Union was an imagined linguistic community of speakers as well as readers, constituted across ethnic difference through performative utterance and comprising a new race of same-speaking Soviet persons: *Homo Sovieticus*. One had to “speak Bolshevik”—that is, “[adopt] the official method of speaking about [oneself] . . . as if one believed” in order to make legible his or her citizenship within Soviet civilization.⁸⁰ Though official language would take a turn toward the purely pro forma in the post-Stalinist period, as anthropologist Alexei Yurchak has convincingly argued, the imperative to properly “do” Soviet identity through state-approved performative speech acts remained resolutely in place and even intensified in some respects.⁸¹ The post-Stalinist state focused on the form over the content of speech—a shift with important consequences for the defective speaker, whose shortcoming was explicitly construed as a matter of form. The defective offered an embodied example of speaking/doing Soviet identity wrongly, by virtue of which he or she served as a negative model of speaking Bolshevik for everyone else.

Before continuing, I call attention to my intervention in the use of the concept of “speaking Bolshevik,” which to date has been primarily relegated to a discussion of how newly christened Soviet nationals became Soviet by *writing* themselves into the official symbolic system. “Speaking Bolshevik” was a verbal endeavor and thus also a vocal one. Countless rhetorical primers support this position, such as *Iskusstvo lektora* ([The Art of the Lecturer], 1959), an official handbook that was hardly original or singular in its argument, whose global approach to embodied speaking addresses the formal qualities (including sound) and social consequences of public oratory. The book is interesting because of its overt prescription of a certain standard style or “norm” of physical–oral comportment for effective Soviet speech and because of its emphasis on “the external side of speech”; “euphony and pronunciation,” which it construed as of “great importance in lecture, propagandistic work”; and Soviet life more broadly.⁸²

Perfected speech, the book puts forth, is a politically correct act that makes apparent the synchronicity of the lecturer’s abilities with the sympathies of the audience.

79. Sandomirskaja, “Skin to Skin,” 331.

80. Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 217, 220.

81. Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

82. El’ia Mordukhovich Fal’kovich, *Iskusstvo lektora* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1960). Deaf institutions also emphasized the centrality of “lecture work” to the building of communism; see A. Korotkov, “O formakh politicheskoi raboty,” *ZG* 1 (1961): 6.

When the speaker does not engage his or her listeners, the lecturer is urged to work fastidiously on his or her speech imperfections by means of vocal exercises that might just as easily be drawn from an audiologist's textbook as a linguistic or rhetorical guide. (One finds, for instance, instructions on how to articulate, intelligibly and aesthetically, various vowel and consonant clusters.)⁸³ In this way, *The Art of the Lecturer* [Iskusstvo lektoŕa] reveals how any imperfect speaker was seen as "defective" to some degree, constructed as a potential or partial subject of defectological pedagogy. Moreover, it makes clear that what is at stake in oral defectiveness is the efficacy of the Soviet project in and between the individual bodies of the socialist collective—the ability of the individual speaker to be a politically coherent actor and the ability of the political actor to align him- or herself with the collective of socialist listeners. As the epilogue forcefully proclaims:

The lecturer fulfills a lofty humanistic and patriotic mission. He carries the great truth into the thick of the people—the truth of Marxism–Leninism. He summons people to labor and to heroic deeds in the name of the people. . . .⁸⁴

Лектор выполняет высокую гуманистическую и патриотическую миссию. Он несет в гущу народа великую правду—правду марксизма-ленинизма. Он зовет людей на труд и на подвиги во имя народа.

The primer ends with a task extended to its reader on the cusp of speaking: "The virtuous Soviet lecturer [remembers . . .] that he is entrusted with the noblest task—to develop, cultivate, inspire man—the builder of the new communist society."⁸⁵

Perfecting one's voice was but part of the grander political project of perfecting embodiment in the Soviet context—especially during and after Stalinism, with the addition of sound to film, the ascendance of radio, and the introduction of television. The vocal was arguably *more* important than the visual during the 1930s, when "hearing, thanks to radio, [dominated] over sight: the ear [dictated] to the eye what it should see."⁸⁶ The post-Stalin period, on the other hand, was characterized less by the competition between or dialectical struggle of sensory-stimulating media than by their instantaneous synchronization. Late Soviet television seamlessly stitched together sound and image for its viewers, whereas a rather leery crowd of cultural critics watched on as the aural and visual components of cinema came together in the 1930s. According to film scholar Lilya Kaganovsky, the Russian Formalists in particular bristled against "the new technology of synchronized sound." They feared it would shift "the site for the production of meaning" by "doing away with [the spectator's] 'internal speech,'" or unspoken thought, "and putting in its place a voice that issued directly from the screen," thereby "[hailing] the

83. Fal'kovich, 211.

84. *Ibid.*, 259-260.

85. *Ibid.*, 259-260.

86. Iurii Murashov, "Sovetskii etos i radiofikatsiia pis'ma," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 86 (2007): 47–63, at 59.

spectator directly, casting the Soviet subject in the role of its addressee.”⁸⁷ Outer speech, the speech of ideology “linked to the authoritarian voice of Soviet realism,” drowned out inner speech, eliminating the possibility that the inner speech of the individual and the outer speech of the state would not coincide.⁸⁸ The complete Soviet subject was all surface and spoke only in an external, audible voice; in so doing he or she demonstrated total synchronicity with society. Internal artistic speech, conceptualized but not vocalized, like pantomime or deaf sign language onstage, threatened to throw this one-to-one ratio of thought and utterance, individual and society, off kilter.

Returning to deaf-mute actors, we find that, paradoxically, defectives constituted at once the worst *and* the best Soviet citizens under late socialism.⁸⁹ Even as they embodied the “bad example” of “speaking Bolshevik” described above, and though they formally failed the test of “external speech,” defectives also exhibited the ideal response toward their imperfect political subjectivity: one of ongoing self-correction. In this, the activity of a minority of defectives allegorized the task of existential reform that *all* Soviet citizens faced as they remodeled themselves into a new style of socialist being—a task for which the state deployed the clinic for defectives and the cinema and theater for defective *and* “normal” society. In this we can construct a chiasmic model of defectivity as simultaneously universalist and minoritarian.⁹⁰ *All* socialist citizens are to some degree defective and must correct their speech and movement; there is also a minority of defectives—the speaking and hearing impaired—who require clinical attention to do the same.

This collective transformation of individuals was the motor for Marxist–Leninist history. Soviet man was supposed to evolve in lockstep with socialist society’s evolution to communism, which, once perfected, would allow the state to wither away. The fewer defects there were and the more perfect the Soviet man was, the fewer defects there would be in the system and the closer to perfect communism Soviet society would come. After Stalin, this approach to perfection was fast-tracked; in 1961, Khrushchev

87. Lilya Kaganovsky, “The Voice of Technology and the End of Soviet Silent Film: Grigorii Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg’s *Alone*,” *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 1.3 (2007): 265–81, at 268, 265.

88. Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology, and the Body: A Cultural Study* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 233. As Yurchak has shown, the “external” aspect of an individual’s speech act (its form) continued to be in tension with its “internal” or performative force in the post-Stalinist period. This distinction does not imply the “dissimulating subject” (Yurchak, 17) of cold war historiography who was privately dissenting while outwardly complicit; indeed, it need not presume that a socialist subject exists prior to discourse at all. Instead, the loosening relationship between form and content enabled a subject to “speak Bolshevik” while making “minute internal displacements” in meaning (Yurchak, 28).

89. Susan Burch has suggested that the Russian deaf person constituted the “ideal Soviet citizen,” what she called “the silent citizen,” who was eager to work (having not previously had the opportunity before the Revolution), who flooded into industrializing cities, and who was excited by the prospects of more systematic and geographically centralized education. Furthermore, the Soviet state counted on the greater “loyalty to the government [of the deaf] than ethnic minorities” because the deaf were not in touch with (by radio, for instance) and so could not have their politic beliefs “adulterated by deaf America.” Author’s telephone conversation with Susan Burch (April 14, 2009).

90. Tobin Siebers constructs a similarly chiasmic model of disability in *Disability Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2008).

announced at the 22nd Party Congress that Soviet citizens had finally made the historical leap from socialism to communism. The macrological social and political perfection of Soviet society would, of course, refract into the individual bodies and minds of its composite members. The new party program adopted at that congress ambitiously announced that “at the current stage of building communist society . . . the possibilities steadily increase of cultivating the new man, who harmoniously combines in himself spiritual wealth, moral purity and *physical perfection*” [*na sovremennom etape stroitel'stva kommunisticheskogo obshchestva...neuklonno vozrastaiut vozmozhnosti vospitaniia novogo cheloveka, garmonicheski sochetaiushchego v sebe dukhovnoe bogatsvo, moral'niu chistotu i fizicheskoe sovershenstvo*].⁹¹ While the state, from the start, had certainly expressed utopian hopes for fit-bodied citizens—demanding corporal “readiness for work, defense of the Motherland from external threat, rehabilitation and comprehensive physical development”—it had never before used the language of “perfection,” which would become standard fare thereafter. This rhetorical shift attested to the formation of a new ideal of Soviet citizen.⁹²

Thus it matters that the word “defect” referred to people as well as to the products of imperfect labor that the state was also trying to eradicate. Tellingly, official campaigns against both kinds of defect were framed in a language of temporality or tempo and rhythm: whether that meant keeping time with choreography in a musical production or keeping pace with socialist production in quantity and quality.⁹³ In official deaf clinical and cultural discourse, the bivalency of *defekt*—a term that disrupts a Russian text by its foreign origin (as Lenin himself remarked)—reveals the inextricability of two scales of self-correction: one on the level of the individual, another on the level of the population. Many issues of *Deaf Life*, for instance, focus on the small-scale amending of speech and hearing defects among individual deaf workers and then describe, through textual and visual supplements, the deaf proletarian class at work in factories eliminating defects in socialist production—a “systemic” problem against which the party routinely crusaded in the late 1950s through the early 1970s. Defective bodies make defective goods, the aggregate magazine implies. And with the post-Stalin shift in emphasis from quantity to quality in manufacturing, from hard to soft industry, from factory to consumer, the defective product threatened the socialist home and correspondingly needed to be removed from the domestic sphere in miniature as well as from the domestic economy at large.

We are now equipped to contend with the following questions: How can the state’s professed desire for perfected citizens be reconciled with its continual production of defective ones? And if the state was truly interested in seeing only ideal bodies, why should defective actors be asked to make a spectacle of their flaws through performances

91. Kommunisticheskaia partiia Sovetskogo soiuz, *Programma Kommunisticheskoi partii Sovetskogo soiuz: Priniata XXII s'ezdom KPSS* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1974), quoted in M. M. Bogen, “Fizicheskoe sovershenstvo kak osnovnoe poniatie teorii fizicheskoi kul'tury,” *Teoriia i praktika fizicheskoi kul'tury* 5 (1997): 18–20, my emphasis; online at <URL><http://lib.sportedu.ru/press/tpfk/1997N5/p18-20.htm><EN>.

92. Bogen, my emphasis.

93. The rhythm of work was a recurrent topic in *Deaf Life*, as in this article about the deaf factory: “Ritm sorevnovaniia / Ritm sozidaniia [The Rhythm of Competition / The Rhythm of Creation],” *ZG* 2 (1967): 1.

of colonial mimicry? In response, I conclude that while defectives at times depended on state support to survive, so too did the Soviet state depend on its defectives. As we have come to understand, defect marked the site of intervention on the part of the party-state. The persistent presence and incremental overcoming of defects in production and in persons was the incentive for the state to intensify goals for national labor and individual self-correction. By visibly demonstrating the failure of certain bodies—even under declared communism—the party and its apparatus could claim its relevance and, more than that, its indispensability in upholding the interests of the Soviet people. Defect was, in effect, what the state required to justify its own continued existence as the Soviet Union inched increasingly closer toward a *stateless* communist utopia.

Audible speech best testified to this beneficial relationship between party-state and citizen. For this reason, both silence and muteness, even in their difference, provoked suspicion, and silent and mute subjects alike were compelled to channel the collective “external voice” of Soviet ideology. “Ventriloquism” prevailed, but with unintended consequences. By attempting to extract the semblance of speech from deaf-mute actors, the Soviet state accessed a perverse representation of its own desire to shape the speech of its citizens. While this total ventriloquism contributed to the outward normalization of late-Soviet language, it also opened up space for the emergence of counterhegemonic practices. I end my essay on this positive note of resistance.

SUBVERSIVE DIVERSIONS OF DEFECTIVE SILENCE

So far I have recounted a top-down story of the experience of “defective” individuals under the Soviet state and the discipline of defectology. By its telling, I hope I have demonstrated how the technology of the state and the technology of the self were explicitly one, not for the perfection of the individual for or by the state but for the perfection of the collective in concert with the perfection of the state. In this approach I included deaf institutions, like the ASD magazine *Deaf Life* and TMG, the theater of the deaf, which provided a forum for cultural expression but whose survival was contingent on an apparently close alignment with the party-state by means of “speaking Bolshevik.”

Of course, with the performative turn in state-sanctioned speech after Stalin (as Yurchak has described it), Soviet citizens were increasingly “speaking Bolshevik” without identifying with the constative aspect of their speech. Often enough mouthing the party line could partially liberate an individual from living in strict accordance with it. There is no reason not to number deaf actors among the ranks of the politically nimble. Moreover, recalling Bhabha’s depiction of mimicry as a “double articulation” that is capable of encoding both political repression and performative subversion when it “problematizes the signs of . . . cultural priority,” we have reason to suspect that so-called defectives did not always enact perfect compliance with their official representation.⁹⁴

Such hunches about deaf ideological and artistic dissent are borne out by *Deaf Life*, which contained occasional traces of contestation both within the deaf community and between the deaf and hearing or professional communities over the way deaf people

94. Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” 122, 125.

portrayed themselves in society and the way they were portrayed to nondeaf members of society. Polemics in the periodical over the aesthetics of mimicry and gesture in a predominantly hearing public sphere testified to the existence of a Soviet deaf culture that was heterogeneous and critically active. More tellingly, the magazine became a space for spirited debate over the shape of deaf drama in the late 1950s and 1960s (coincident with the establishment of TMG). Readers of all backgrounds chimed in, encouraged by TMG's director to regard themselves as "full-fledged builders of the theater" [*polnopravnyimi stroiteliami teatra*] and of communism generally (echoing the party's new "Moral Code for the Builders of Communism").⁹⁵ Several even voiced hesitation about the ventriloquist style. "This mechanical transmission of the text" had "gotten old," they complained; it "shackle[d] the performer [and] deafen[ed] the artistry in him" [*mekhanicheskaiia peredacha teksta skovyvaet ispolnitelia, i zaglushaet v nem tvorchestvo*].⁹⁶

Collectively, readers advocated "new forms in the theatrical art of the deaf-mute" [*novykh form v teatral'nom iskusstve glukhonemykh*] that would attend to the specificity of deaf experience.⁹⁷ There was no obvious consensus on what this thing—variously called a "theater of silence" [*teatr tishiny*] or the "art of eloquent quiet" [*iskusstvo krasnorechivogo molchaniia*—] would be.⁹⁸ Some argued for "big" or formally "pure pantomime" or some combination of pantomime and the tools of silent film, alternately assimilating or disowning the influence of Marcel Marceau.⁹⁹ Deaf and nondeaf contributors alike opined that the hearing impaired were "half-mime" anyway, "pantomimists by nature" because mimicry and pantomime were of a piece. Significantly, others dissented.¹⁰⁰ Putting this questionable equation aside, we should still identify the implications of swapping ventriloquism for the pantomime that characterized prewar deaf theater, as happened on multiple occasions in the 1970s.¹⁰¹

As Jacques Derrida has pointed out, part of the mime's appeal lies in his or her unique positioning with respect to the performative nature of identity, enabling him or her

95. L. Kalinovskii, "K vershinam iskusstva," *ZG* 9 (1963): 21.

96. I. Sapozhnikov, "Za novye formy," *ZG* 2 (1958): 23.

97. N. Gorbunov, "Tvorcheskoe sodruzhestvo," *ZG* 8 (1958): 20.

98. T. Smolenskaia, "Teatr tishiny," *ZG* 2 (1958): 23.

99. N. Rakitskaia, "Bol'shaia pantomima," *ZG* 10 (1958): 15; V. Sugarin, "Odnako nadezhdy ne opravdalis," *ZG* 3 (1959): 15; N. Ezer Dagmarova, "Pervyi opyt na novom poprishche," *ZG* 10 (1958): 15. For positive and negative evaluations of Marceau, see Smolenskaia, 23; and A. Platov, "Zametki pristrastnogo zritelia," *ZG* 5 (1960): 16.

100. Promoters of the deaf-mime thesis include T. Smolenskaia, "Ia uchus' na volshebника," *ZG* 10 (1964): 15; and B. Grishin, "Na tvorcheskie poiski: Mysli o pantomime," *ZG* 12 (1962): 19. Others, such as Platov, refused the notion that the deaf were more artistically blessed than the hearing.

101. This direction of deaf theater was embedded in one of TMG's opening-year acts: *Zhili liudi* [There Lived People], based on Maxim Gorky's story "Starukha Izergil'" [The Old Woman Izergil']. Again in 1972, a "pure" pantomime called *Ocharovannyi ostrov* [Enchanted Island] was scripted and staged by Evgenii Kharitonov, who was a protégé of Rumnev, the founder of his own School of Nontraditional Stage Behavior, and an underground gay author. This culturally complicated performance, at the confluence of queer, deaf, and avant-garde circles, receives greater attention in my dissertation. Finally, TMG's award-winning production of *Kaprichos* [Los Caprichos] in 1977 about the deaf artist Francisco Goya intimates the promise of a proud deaf theater.

to expose the precariousness of the templatic self, of which his or own self is alleged to be a failed or faded copy.¹⁰² The mime who does not imitate the “reality” of the mimetic subject (here, the speaking/hearing Soviet ideal) or who imitates the ideal but with a difference is capable of interrupting “all of the temporal and spatial distinctions upon which mimetic doctrine has been constructed: imitated and imitator, referent and sign, signified and signifier.”¹⁰³ In these instances, “we are faced then with mimicry imitating nothing; faced, so to speak, with a double that doubles no simple, a double that nothing anticipates.”¹⁰⁴ What results is something akin to Tobin Siebers’s “embodiment as mimesis,” an approach to representation as a political and aesthetic problem that does not reduce the body to an effect of discourse but lets the body stand for its own irreducibility.¹⁰⁵

This impulse stands behind the dream of a sui generis theater *of the deaf for the deaf*, one that would not, in the words of one reader, try to make “everything on the stage ‘the same as it is with the hearing’” [*chtoby u nikh na stsene [ne] bylo [vsego], kak u slyshashchikh*].¹⁰⁶ Such a performance style operates against the “defective” theater by disavowing the contradictory desire of the deaf actor to copy something he or she can never be. Furthermore, it refuses to apprehend the deaf actor as an already inferior original by rejecting the conception of the mute as a natural mime.

The post-Stalinist pantomime debates opened a space for cultural contestation that partly pushed late and post-Soviet deaf movements to rethink “stage speak,” recognize Russian Sign as a full language, and promote a bilingual manual–oral approach to education. In their search for a “new form,” deaf subjects chipped away at the complex oralism at the core of late-Soviet ideology and of surdopedagogy as one of its most potent expressions. In so doing, they disrupted compulsory mimesis as a project of state power. Deaf theater offered more than a mere venue for the correction of dumb and docile bodies; it provided the backdrop against which a multiplicity of subject positions, some of which were robustly proud and resistant, emerged among those unspeaking/unspeakable others who occasionally refused to sing and dance to the rhythm of socialist revolution.

102. Peggy Kamuf, Introduction to Jacques Derrida, “From ‘The Double Session’ in *Dissemination*,” excerpts in *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 169–99..

103. *Ibid.*, 170.

104. *Ibid.*

105. Siebers, 2.

106. Grishin, 19.

CHAPTER TWO.
PANTOMIMES OF RACE AND POWER:
CAN THE SOVIET SUBALTERN SPEAK?

“They cannot represent themselves. They must be represented.”
—Karl Marx

In May 2010, Tito Romalio, a “black-skinned” [*chernokozhyi*] character actor known for his work in Soviet cinema of the fifties, sixties and seventies, was fatally beaten on the streets of Saint Petersburg. As a figure of some note, his death received coverage in major Russian and Anglophone media outlets, and contributed to a mounting discussion about race in post-Soviet Russia that crescendoed in subsequent months following the seemingly sudden eruption of racist violence in a country made peacefully multicultural by decades of socialist internationalism. Then president Dmitrii Medvedev’s acknowledgement of the rise of ultranationalist sentiment and its attendant instances of racially motivated attacks broke a long silence in Russia culture. Likewise it broke with many well-rehearsed narratives about Russia’s status as a non-racist nation—in effect, a pantomime of racelessness. The earlier reluctance to relinquish this silence stems from the Soviet history of stated anti-racism, finessed in the period in which Romalio achieved symbolic stardom, and in honor of which many view today’s violence as a *sui generis* phenomenon of the post-Soviet period.¹

This second chapter interrogates the silences surrounding race in the Russian context by examining the role of silence itself in constructions of alterity under late-socialism, especially for “others” marked and marginalized by linked categories of bodily difference, like race and also, I posit, deafness or disability.² At the same time, it considers the role of “full” speech or achieved vocality in the fabrication of ideal Soviet subjectivity, which was often uncritically collapsed into white-Russianness. In the following pages, I look at the silent pantomime performance, *Africa* [*Afrika*, 1962], alongside other cultural artifacts produced by Russia’s artistic avant-garde and deaf subcultures in the 1950s through 1970s, particularly ones that dramatize “darkness” and “blackness,” and observe these more recent cultural texts in situ, too, by noting their location in a longer genealogy of Russian and Soviet representations of race. I maneuver through this uneven archive with the steady purpose of puzzling out how specifically

¹ My sentiments are more closely aligned with those of historian Jelani Cobb of Spellman College who believes that “[calling] these things racial attacks kind of oversimplifies them...race was part of this, but it also was in some ways a reaction to what many young Russians feel is their loss of prestige in the world...the argument is that the Soviet Union spent so much time and energy and resources trying to inspire revolutions in the so-called Third World, and they gave so much money to the African continent that they had none left for themselves. And there’s a kind of post-Cold War resentment toward, you know, the Africans who are there as almost a symbol of Russia’s declining status in the world.” David Greene (Reporter), “First Black Elected Official Defies Racism In Russia.” On Robert Siegel (Host), *All Things Considered*. National Public Radio (September 24).

² Though this is a very contested point, I have chosen to include deafness or deaf-muteness under the rubric of disability given that the Soviet state classified deafness as a form of “invalidity” [*invalidnost’*]. To wit, there are consistently articles included in *Deaf Life* [*Zhizn’ glukhikh*] magazine about “invalid” social welfare and state support.

Soviet productions of race turned on the question of silence, and how the silence of speechlessness was in turn inflected by figurations of race as well as gender and sexuality. By tracing visual representations of racial difference, I begin to envision Soviet whiteness and to reckon with the social fact of racism in a nominally anti-racist society. As a side-effect, this representational genealogy aids our recognizing some of the roots of racial tension in Russia right before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Without getting too ahead of my argument here, the primary point I make in this chapter is that, despite the Party's stance of anti-racism and anti-imperialism (which was often assumed synonymous with the popular one), Soviet ideology nonetheless relied on the colonialist presumption that third-world subjects were linguistic "primitives," positioned prior to (political) speech in the developmental narrative of Marxism-Leninism. Not only did this justify a paternalistic approach to the newly decolonized nations of Africa, (what other scholars have called a socialist "civilizing mission"), but it also placed these subjects into a slippery supplementary relationship with other linguistic "primitives," namely, the "deaf-mute" [*glukhonemye*]. These unspeaking figures (re)tested the ability of the Soviet state to teach its subjects how to "speak Bolshevik"—a pedagogical obsession of the revolutionary government as it made "new people" through an ideological language that was also supposedly new, but which in fact relied on the same colonial metaphors that resurface in the post-Stalin period.

I approach the silence of race from four different angles in my argument, which I enumerate in order of their appearance in the chapter: 1) aesthetic: the performance of racial difference in silent pantomime and other less verbal and low forms of cultural production, like cartoons and children's theater; 2) political: the silence of racism in Soviet rhetoric--as what happens *over there*, in the capitalist countries or *kapstrany*; 3) figurative: the representation of racial others in Russian culture as alingual or silent; and 4) analogic: the subsumption of race into other categories of "silent" being, that is, the connection between blackness and "deaf-muteness" as Marxist-Leninist caricatures of pre-political subjectivity. I detour to a discussion of gender near the end of the chapter, and extract the connections made by Soviet ideology between the oral and the moral, that is, linguistic and erotic or bodily mastery.

A discussion of "race" in the post-Stalinist past is necessary to any thorough survey of Soviet pantomime, considering, for instance, the inclusion of *Africa* in the repertoire of Rumnev's studio, not to mention the pantomimes and dramatic plays in other theaters that share a basic plot. This performance may seem a negligible curiosity in our day but, I contend, it may have actually been representative for Russia in Rumnev's. For this reason, it should also be significant in our retroactive appraisal of the era, if we are to fully understand how pantomime participated in and gave shape in turn to the surrounding cultural and political milieu. While my primary material demands this approach, I see a conversation about race as critical to Slavic studies more generally, particularly as the applicability of critical race theory to cold-war Russia remains the subject of heated debate among scholars of the former second world, whose positions pro and contra appear to intensify the further their research travels to and from the edges of the erstwhile "affirmative action empire."³ Scholars reluctant to take up the question of

³ Here I mean to drop the name of Terry Martin's relevant and groundbreaking monograph on the topic, *Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001). Martin and Francine Hirsch engage closely with the official policy of nation-

race point to its stated irrelevance to the Soviet context, which operated nominally under a nationalities policy instead of abiding the de jure and de facto forms of racial discrimination that characterized twentieth-century American experience by contrast. To crudely reduce the argument lodged by scholars of this conservative stripe (whose position surprisingly echoes party line on the color line), race is an issue only for first and third world analysis, pertinent primarily in the study of places on the capitalist or (post) colonialist map. These “authors [who equivocate] on whether race was a relevant category in Stalinist USSR” and, by extension, the post-Stalinist USSR, “[treat] racial politics as ‘an aberration of accident’ that departed from Leninist ideals.” It ought to strike our ears as odd that otherwise shrewd interpreters of “actually existing socialism” should be so literal in matters of race, clinging closely to the letter of ideology while disregarding historical realities that do not square with these philosophical ideals. Such an idealist approach to the past would seem antithetical to the enterprise of critical historiography altogether.

When talk of race is replaced by the Stalinist state by terms like “ethnicity” or “nationality,” old racial logics do not fully disappear, nor are their symbolic systems instantaneously deracinated from the collective consciousness. As historian Yuri Slezkine has argued, “details shift in Soviet racial ideologies, not dismissing them but anchoring them to shifts in politics”; race and racism are often displaced onto historical agents inimical to the Soviet cause, he proposes, like Nazi Germany or the capitalist U.S. “Even when official Stalinist discourse minimized ‘race,’” obliterating it as a concept in Soviet reality, “literary genres played freely with racializing criteria.”⁴ And even politics that erased race from its language may not have purged it from its practice. As anthropologist Alaina Lemon insists, “an absence of explicit racial ideologies in official Soviet texts does not tell us whether or not policymakers had ‘no concept’ of race in other settings or genres.”

Between these extremes of marked silence and unmarked elaboration, a discursive configuration in constant flux, blackness comes into being as a “racial form” in the Soviet Union. Here I employ Colleen Lye’s language for the process by which a complex and capacious racial subject takes shape “across a variety of registers” and gives rise to a spectrum of political or “social movements.” I trace black form in the present analysis within artistic texts that explicitly address blackness, and in the relationship of these texts “to other developments, be they economic, political, sociological, intellectual, or cultural—and whether they belong under the recognizable heading” of black history “or other kinds of history.”⁵ After Lye’s pattern, I “conceive of the [black] subject as the

building among the Soviet Union’s multiethnic union of republics. See Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Cornell University Press, 2005). Though I am curious about how this official nationalities policy squares off with race, I cede to their expertise on this subject, and turn more pointedly to “race,” since it has received less attention alongside and even because of the predominance of the discourse of “nationality.” For a dedicated debate about the rubric of race in Slavic studies, see the “Discussion of Eric D. Weitz’s ‘Racial Politics without the Concept of Race: Reevaluating Soviet Ethnic and National Purges,’” in which the eponymous author is engaged by Francine Hirsch, Amir Weiner, and Alaina Lemon in *Slavic Review*, 61.1 (Spring 2002).

⁴ Alaina Lemon, “Without a ‘Concept’? Race as Discursive Practice,” *Slavic Review* 61.1 (Spring 2002): 54-61.

⁵ Colleen Lye, *America’s Asia: Racial Form and American Literature, 1893-1945* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005), pp. 5-9. See also Colleen Lye, “Racial Form,” *Representations* 104.1 (Fall 2008): 92-101.

product of articulation between the links between two or more of these textual categories,” and find “variation in the modes of articulation between these links [that] discloses its historicity.” Applying this cross-sectional approach to Russian constructions of blackness allows me to reckon with the internal incoherence of the form, as Soviet blackness in practice elides not only ethnic and national disparities within “black African” (a term I hesitatingly employ to echo the language of the era even as I deconstruct its logic), but also diasporic differences between black Africans and African Americans.

My intervention is thus mindful of both notions of race and racelessness and mixes the two together for a thicker description of cultural alterity in Soviet Russia. Indeed, the specificity of second-world constructions of difference is to be found in its hybridity, I believe, in the simultaneous circulation of two ostensibly opposed positions on the same subject. On the one hand, there is the party rhetoric of “nationality” and “ethnicity” in a political-historical register. On the other, there are vernacular and “vestigial” or prerevolutionary ideas about race as a biological category bound up with the European Enlightenment and its twinned interests in empirical science and colonial conquest—this is the suppressed genealogy I try to bring into focus. This chapter attempts to apprehend the racial form of blackness at once in its absence as a fixed “concept” in Soviet ideology *and* in its presence as a flexible set of “racializing criteria” in Russian culture at its high and low ends.

THE FIRST SILENCE: SOVIET PANTOMIME AND THE STAGING OF RACE

Before diving into an analysis of Soviet representations of race on the silent stage I want to underscore some of the primary points made about pantomime in the preceding chapter. Most pressingly, I pick back up on the idea that “self-sufficient” pantomime returned to Russian culture after Stalin as a specifically socialist art form, whose contemporary incarnation, its practitioners declared, was directly calibrated to the country’s current stage in the Marxist-Leninist model of historical development. At the same time as I revisit these ideas, my transition from the first to second chapter is marked by a consequential shift in my understanding of pantomimic silence—from a political liability within socialism (for its capacity to smuggle in dissent as a somatic dialect of Aesopian language), to a political asset for Soviet internationalism—something very much on the minds of Muscovites in the late 1950s, the period when pantomime was given new life all over the world. My aim in reframing silence is to answer the following question: Why does pantomime avail itself so readily to representations of race? Or rather, to pose the question from the angle at which Rumnev asked something similar: Why is race a fitting theme for mute performance? How does it abide by what he calls “the logic of mute action” [*logiku nemogo deistviia*], a term I elaborate anon?⁶

To refresh the reader’s memory, Aleksandr Rumnev was a protagonist in the last chapter for his having resuscitated pantomime in the post-Stalin period. He established a “plastic culture” [*plasticheskaia kul’tura*] program at the State Cinematography Institute in Moscow [VGIK], and ushered a new cohort of young mimes into existence at his Experimental Theater-Studio of Pantomime, or EKTEMIM for short. (A uniquely talented alumnus of the studio, Evgenii Kharitonov, is featured in the third and fourth

⁶ A. Rumnev, *O pantomime: teatr, kino* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1964), 219.

chapters of this dissertation, an analytic gesture which I hope mimics the generous influence of the older mime.) Rumnev devoted himself not only to the practice and pedagogy of pantomime in the classroom and studio, but also to the academic investigation of pantomime as an immanent art, authoring several volumes on the subject and regularly contributing articles about pantomime to prominent Soviet theater journals. In these works, he routinely expressed his regret that pantomime was too often mistaken for a hybrid or derivative genre somewhere between dancing and acting. Too rarely did it receive attention for its specificity as a mode of performance, an omission Rumnev redresses throughout his writing.

Rumnev makes a hard sell for the silent art, citing universality as first among pantomime's distinctions. This feature was a function of its *faktura*, if you will, its "language of gestures [being] intelligible to everyone. This is explained by another indispensable quality of pantomime—its internationalism, its accessibility and intelligibility to an audience in any country of the world."⁷ The relevance of the nonverbal art was thus not lost on Rumnev, who applauded "the 'all-expressiveness' [*vsevyrazahiushee*] of the art of pantomime [for giving] significant proof of its internationalism over the course of the last few years,"⁸ that is, during the late fifties and early sixties, as he composed his monograph, *On Pantomime* [*O pantomime*, 1964]. The world tours of famous French mimes like Marcel Marceau and Jean-Louis Barrault brought this evidence closer to home as both alit in the Soviet capital in the late 1950s. But the most compelling evidence was on display "at the Moscow Festival of Youth and Students in 1957," where "the world's first pantomime competition was put on, and collectives from several countries took part in it."⁹ Outside of the Festival, the USSR played host to itinerant troupes of "Chinese, Indian, and Korean artistes, among whom pantomime is one of the national forms of theater," Rumnev educates his Russian reader, which "impacted on the mutual understanding of our countries and enriched our presentation about their cultures," he concludes, in the openhearted idiom of the pantomime's international brotherhood.¹⁰ The youth festival no doubt occasioned the non-artistic use of pantomime among its many, multilingual attendants, as they must have resorted to reading one another's body language in attempting communication across culture and political economy. For these reasons and others less evident to the reader right now, I return to this feted 1957 event later in the chapter, to explore its convergence of questions of pantomime or silent expression, race, and, less predictably, deafness.

While pantomime was considered quintessentially contemporary by modern mimes, it was also perceived as a primordial impulse or instinct intrinsic to the human condition at its core. Rumnev believed so unswervingly in the essentialist nature of mimetic gesture, that he thought it possible to recapitulate the history of humankind simply by retracing pantomime's silent steps through time and across space.

We encounter it in the games and customs of the Western and the Eastern peoples. We find it in the dances, games, and customs of the Slavs. Among the aboriginal tribes the rituals and religious ceremonies cannot proceed without

⁷ Ibid., 13.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

pantomime, and are very rarely expressed without its means. The pantomime of antiquity was conceived in the people among the crowd on the street, reaching its meridian in Rome in the cesarean epoch; from the people's theater came the pantomime plays of the Italian comedians; the farcical and circus pantomimes matched the appetites of the democratic auditorium...¹¹

Мы встречаемся с нею в играх и обрядах как западных, так и восточных народов, мы находим ее в плясках, играх и обрядах славян. У первобытных племен ритуальные и религиозные церемонии не обходились без пантомимы, а нередко полностью выражались ее средствами. В народе, среди уличной толпы зародилась античная пантомима, достигшая своего расцвета в Риме эпохи цезарей; из народного театра вышли пьесы-пантомимы итальянских комедиантов; балаганные и цирковые пантомимы равнялись на вкусы демократической аудитории...

...and so on. Rumnev continues his narration up to the present moment, and pantomime, like a generic Zelig, pops up at all the watersheds of populism in the history of Western civilization—a Eurocentric tic this analysis treats. “The democraticness of pantomime is based on the fact that it has popular roots,”¹² he avers, and that it is lodged at the base of drama as a universally human endeavor.

Rooted in the popular or the human, pantomime is at the root of what it means to be a human, per Rumnev. Indeed, he regards the mimetic impulse as uniquely anthropic—the human urge to ape nature elevates the human above ape, in that primal scene of both scientific and pantomimic Darwinism. Like language, of which pantomime is perhaps a first intimation, mute action is motivated by a desire to communicate and then create community out of these associative acts, which are always in poetic excess of reality as it is given, and the world which animal instinct leaves intact. Human consciousness, by contrast, *acts on* the world, while the animal only *acts in* it. Herein I invoke the vocal terms by which Aristotle sorted out the instinctual cries of the animal from the ethical speech of man, an evolutionary distinction that makes man the lone political creature. Despite its silence, through pantomime human consciousness similarly sets itself apart from the world, transcending the reality it takes as its point of imaginative departure, by means of pantomime's “associative connection of poetic thought with real reality [*real'noi deistvitel'nost'iu*],” which “is all too often much grander than the precise representation [*vosproisvedenie*] of reality.”¹³

On the whole, pantomime does not just evolve as a dramatic form, it dramatizes evolution on an individual and universal scale in appropriately dialectical fashion. The progress of the genre in history is co-constitutively hitched to the level of consciousness in its actors, as well as the social stage on which they act. From its inception as a kind of embodied totemism, in which prehistoric or primitive people imitate the animals in their world (from which they are hitherto hardly undifferentiated), it then moves on to more intricate forms of impersonation, until, in “the evolutionary process of theatrical

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 218.

forms...word and movement [are united].”¹⁴ After the advent of verbal performance, pantomime abides by a different “logic of mute action.”¹⁵ Henceforth silence is in its absence is marked as a significant abstention from speech.

Rumnev plays up this telic aspect of pantomime. As an art form, it symbolizes human striving, and “comes out of the goal-directedness of its conception, the belief of its actors, and the authenticity of [their] experience” in the historical-materialist sense. To comprehend this premise, “it suffices to think of Indian frescoes, Iranian miniatures, Negro or Mexican sculpture, or the icon art of ancient Russia, which is better known to us,” Rumnev advises. “The artists who created this art meticulously guarded the tradition of conventionality [*uslovnosti*]: they believed that precisely these conventional [*uslovnnye*] forms were the most perfect for the expression of their feelings and thoughts.” But before moving on to the content of “conventional” form, it is necessary to elucidate what is meant by “conventionality.” This form first sprouted theatrical legs in Stanislavskii’s Moscow Art Theatre, when Vsevolod Meierhol’d began working there in the first decade of the twentieth century. The latter was thinking up a “new theater”—an *uslovnnyi* theater, in the sense of stylization—to topple the dominant dramatic aesthetic of naturalism. Conventionality would demote psychological interiority, and play up the plasticity of the actor’s body instead, an idea that developed into the director’s trademark biomechanics.¹⁶ In order to obviate the confusion over “convention” in the chapter, I leave the term untranslated or include the transliteration alongside my English rendering.

Silence seems strange in the naturalist theater, owing to its “straightforward” plot and presentation, and its intrusion “inevitably elicits the question, but why aren’t the actors speaking? And the more animated [*zhivzennee*] the mute acting, the more verisimilar it is, the more that kind of question seems legitimate.”¹⁷ When transferred to the “conventional” realm of pantomime, that question appears too aporetic to answer. But muteness cannot go unmotivated to Rumnev’s mind—neither in the ‘talkie’ naturalist theater (where silence is a marked aberration), nor in speechless pantomime (where silence is the rule). To “escape these contradictions,” Rumnev explains of his own studio’s experiments, “we tried in each separate instance, for each pantomime, to come up with a particular technique, which allows the actors to play realistically, but in a way that justifies the convention [*uslovnost’*] of mute action.”¹⁸ (Suggestively, a cartoon of the *Africa* pantomime appears on the bottom corner of the page in the book where this assertion is made; see Figure 3 at the end of the chapter.) “Justifying the logic of mute action, an *uslovnnyi* technique, which is organically immanent in the art of pantomime, may lead” to staging decisions about moving or music “that makes the silence of the actors more appropriate [*umestnym*].”¹⁹ These techniques may vary from one pantomime to the next, along with the plots, modes of embodiment” [*sredstva ikh voploshcheniia*], and degree of stylization in a given production. (Rumnev isolates the “abstract leotard in *Africa* to illustrate this last point.) Yet these plays are “united by a general principle”

¹⁴ Ibid., 218.

¹⁵ Ibid., 218.

¹⁶ Eugenio Barba, “Meyerhold: The Grotesque; That is, Biomechanics.” A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer. Eds., Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese. Trans. Richard Fowler. (London: Routledge, 1991): 150-157, at 150.

¹⁷ Rumnev, *O pantomime*, 219

¹⁸ Ibid., 219.

¹⁹ Ibid., 218..

supporting all socialist art, and characterizing the “Soviet school of pantomime” in particular: “ideological correctness [*ideinost*] and the truthfulness of feelings within conventionality [*uslovnosti*].”²⁰

On the Soviet stage, silence was thus a strategic mode of stylized ideology or socialist politicking through art, but one that made certain salient presumptions about its actors and its audience in their differential relationships to language. It is these other, divisive aspects of pantomime I want to draw out now, homing in on the internal heterogeneity of pantomime’s practice that may have outwardly signified as sameness. In other words, I pay less attention to the continuities of the art as a universal form (its selling point to socialist internationalism in Rumnev’s pitch). I focus instead on the disjunctures in its content in an internationalist context, insofar as the gaps between (external) form and (internal) content index the space of developmental difference between cultures, which is also a matter of consciousness in the Marxist sense. I tease out the tension, then, between pantomime’s universalism and its particularism, its essential humanness and its historicity. “The logic of mute action” obviously entails something different in a discussion of “primitive” man versus mature socialist, and within socialism, between speaking and “deaf-mute” subjects; the difference is one of “evolution,” or social and economic development on a world-historical scale.

And so something funny happens when pantomime crosses these evolutionary or developmental lines. This traversal introduces a friction between mimetic content and form for which Rumnev feels compelled to offer a philosophical account.

Trying to find reasons that contribute to the rise of the art of pantomime, it would be most accurate to surmise that, at the underpinning of its history, pantomime flourishes when it is populist, when it is nourished by the juices of the earth, when it *answers the ethical and aesthetic demands of the simple people, reflecting their ideology, their feelings and thoughts, their everyday actions, concerns, and interests.*²¹

Пытаясь найти причины, содействующие подъему искусства пантомимы, правильнее всего было бы предположить на основании ее истории, что пантомима расцветает тогда, когда она народна, когда она питается соками земли, когда она отвечает этическим и эстетическим требованиям простых людей, отражая из идеологию, их чувства и мысли, их повседневные действия, заботы и интересы.

Rumnev is so keen on conveying this point about the simple people, he repeats it at the beginning and near the end of the book, even reduplicating his marked language (which I have marked with italics). This passage will be familiar to readers of the first chapter, but it takes on new relevance in the present setting, and so bears reiterating.

With its art, sooner silent than mute, the theater wants to *answer the ethical and aesthetic demands* of the broadest circle of viewers independent of ethnic, geographical or social barriers. It dreams about the creation of pantomimes,

²⁰ Ibid., 219.

²¹ Rumnev, *O pantomime*, 15 (my emphasis).

consonant with the socialist epoch, *reflecting the ideology of the simple people, their everyday actions, feelings and thoughts, concerns and interest, their labor, their interactions, their hopes, their dreams*; the theater is determined to stand in the lines of the active struggles for the assurance of fairness, honor, peace and friendship on earth.²²

Своим искусством, скорее молчаливым, чем немым, театр хочет отвечать этическим и эстетическим потребностям самого широкого круга зрителей независимо от этнических, географических или социальных барьеров. Он мечтает о создании пантомим, созвучных социалистической эпохе, отражающих идеологию простых людей, их повседневные действия, чувства и мысли, заботы и интересы, их труд, их взаимоотношения, их надежды, их мечты; театр намерен стоять в рядах активных борцов за утверждение на земле справедливости, честности, мира и дружбы.

But what exactly does Rumnev mean by “simple people”? How canny can the simple people be about their historical location, such that they are able to enact their ideology in a passion play of political consciousness? Indeed, how can the spectators tell from the outward appearance of a speechless performance that the actors engage pantomime at one stage of historical development and not another—especially if pantomime’s coherence as a transhistorical genre presumes its formal continuity over time? More to the point, how sure can the audience of a simple pantomime be that the actors onstage are sooner silent than mute (to re-emphasize the operative terms of the last chapter)? That they are sooner civilized than primitive? That the logic of mute action onstage is a matter of conscious decision-making by masterful actors and not an exigency of linguistic immaturity?

Keeping in mind these distinctions between silence and muteness; civility and simplicity; mastery and incapacity; maturity and childishness; I want to move on to describe one play in particular: Rumnev’s *Afrika*, a 1962 “pantomime-poster in one act” featuring the actors of EKTEMIM as a silent, all white corps de ballet clad in black leotards and white loin cloths, bound together by invisible chains. (See group-stills from the studio rehearsal, Figures 1. and 2.) The single page of stage directions included in Rumnev’s 1964 monograph *On Pantomime* is broken down into five schematic actions, suggestive of a comic strip or an illustrated broadside. (1.) “The dance of the blacks”²³

²² Ibid., 155-6 (my emphasis).

²³ Ibid., 234. In dealing with Russia’s differently-loaded racial terminology, I have decided to translate “negr” as “Negro” in this paper. My decision is based, on the one hand, on a desire to disaggregate its usage from “black” [*chernyi*], the key term in the pantomime play, “Africa,” and related racial lexicon, like “black-skinned” [*chernokozhii*]. (This word does not appear in the primary documents examined herein, despite its contemporaneous appearance elsewhere as an ostensibly scientific—and therefore “objective”—descriptor.) The selection of English equivalents was fraught, of course, insofar as “negr” has had a rather different history from the Anglo-American “Negro.” Kate Baldwin traces its rhetorical trajectory in “The Russian Routes of Claude McKay’s Internationalism,” in *Africa in Russia, Russia in Africa: Three Centuries of Encounters*, edited by Maxim Matusevich, 88-96. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2006, 88-96. On the other hand, I think it important to separate what “black” signifies in Anglo-American usage from its meaning in Russian; in the latter case, “black” has acquired associations with Caucasians as a derogatory term with special charge in the post-Soviet context. Consult the following literature on Caucasian blackness: Meredith Roman, “Making Caucasians Black: Moscow since the Fall of Communism and the Racialization of Non-Russians.” *The Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politic* 18, no. 2

[*tanets chernykh*] ...the dance of simple, naïve, good people,” is stopped by the sounds of (2.) an approaching white man, armed and in a white suit of the kind that “Europeans wore in the colonies.” He is “affably greeted” by the blacks. At first concealing his intentions, he suddenly punches them in the jaw and points his gun. They scatter in fear and then fall into line for (3.) “the scene of forced labor,” which culminates when some faint from exhaustion, sending the colonizer into a fit. The fourth movement begins with “the [sudden] secret conspiracy of the blacks,” and ends with the expulsion of the colonizer from their midst. In the final pose (5.), “the pause,” “the blacks look around at each other: they are free.

Quietly and slowly the melody of the original dance” sounds and gets increasingly louder, as the blacks fall out of line and resume their original dance. They dance to the edge of the stage, where they “raise their fists as a symbol of freedom and fraternity.” Explains Rumnev, “the movements of the blacks and their rhythms are based on the dance rhythms of the Negroes of Central Africa,” and accompanied by a musical montage featuring the work of Brazilian composer Oscar Lorenzo Fernandez, most likely, “Jongo (Negro Dance).” The contemporary Russian composer Sergei Prokofiev contributes the contrapuntal sounds of this montage (perhaps the “The Dance of the Knights” from *Romeo and Juliet*, for its air of armed puissance). Since Rumnev introduces a homology between the music and its accompanying image in the case of the Negro dance, the inclusion of Prokofiev’s classical music (as the pinnacle of a Western cultural form) aligns the figure of the white colonizer with Russia, introducing a strange tension between socialist form and capitalist content on the acoustic level of the a verbal performance. “In all,” Rumnev concludes, “the pantomime reflects the recent events in Africa, when the black continent gained independence and ended colonialism in many territories.”²⁴

THE SECOND SILENCE: RACELESSNESS IN THE SOVIET UNION

Africa the play aptly demonstrated the relevance of pantomime to post-Stalin socialism, insofar as Africa the continent played a central role in expanding the Communist sphere of influence under Khrushchev’s program of renewed socialist internationalism (articulated as early as the “Secret Speech”). The Soviet Union lent moral and fiscal support to third-world liberation movements, positioning itself as brotherly “benefactor of the newly liberated countries,”²⁵ and invited a second wave of African immigration to Moscow’s Patrice Lumumba Peoples’ Friendship University, established in 1960 “with a stated objective of training the cadres of third world specialists.”²⁶ The question of Africa and its broader implications for race relations

(2002): 1-27; Jeff Sahadeo, “Soviet ‘Blacks’ and Place making in Leningrad and Moscow,” *Slavic Review* 71.2 (Summer 2012): 331-358

²⁴ Rumnev, *O pantomime*, 234.

²⁵ Charles Quist-Adade, “The African Russians: Children of the Cold War.” In *Africa in Russia, Russia in Africa: Three Centuries of Encounters*, edited by Maxim Matusevich, Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007), 153-73, at 154.

²⁶ Maxim Matusevich, *An Exotic Subversive: Africa, Africans, and Blackness in Soviet Popular Culture and Imagination*. Washington, D.C.: IREX [International Research Exchanges Board], 2008. I underscore here that, even as third-worlders were invited to live under socialism, “Soviet leadership was careful to avoid having a large population of Africans making Russia a permanent home, a situation that might lead to

formed a key strategy in Cold War politics.²⁷ Economic and social racism were legacies of Western imperialism and capitalist exploitation, a history from which socialist Russia could claim its conspicuous absence. Africa's backwardness [*ostalost'*] was also blamed on the West, while any positive developments were ascribed to the "modernizing effects of a Soviet 'civilizing mission,' e.g., the construction of Soviet-assisted projects in a 'socialist-oriented country.'" ²⁸ Racism, consequently, was located *over there*, in the capitalist countries (particularly in the U.S), but not in the Soviet Union.²⁹

The rhetorical repression of race conformed to the overarching color-scheme of cold war discourse, where, in the words of one Soviet Russian, "for many years" of party rule, "only two colours [were] present in our propaganda—black and white. Black for them, white for us. Moreover, these colours never mingled,"³⁰ nor could they, if a stark line of contrast was to be cut between socialism and capitalism. "When we came to talk about ourselves or our friends, we whitewashed... Unless we ourselves noted a problem in the fraternal countries, it didn't exist."³¹ But when it came to ideological enemies, when "speaking, for example, about the USA, we liberally smeared everything with the colour black."³² Indeed, (the) black face was not only the poster child for Soviet anti-racism and anti-imperialism, but it also offered a pat indictment of all that was wrong with America, whose crude cast of characters were shrouded in the darkness of bad ideology when shuttled through the Soviet system of representations. White "Americans were depicted in two ways," either besooted "as poor, unemployed, gaunt, unshaven people in rags," or dignified in the somber hues of "tuxedos and top hats, with fat cigars in their mouths." But there was also "a third category—hopeless Negroes, all of them victims of the Ku Klux Klan."³³

Blackness acquired the status of "'ontological symbol' [as] the quintessential signifier of what oppression means in the United States,"³⁴ affixing the history of racism to the US, while effectively fixing the victimized Negro in the time before the civil rights movement. It also traveled on the tides of socialist internationalism as a floating signifier for white domination; such representations froze the black face as a terrible or stolid mask in the fleeting scene of colonial subjection. The insurmountability of such images in the mind's eye of the white Soviet explains the reaction of one reporter at the 1957 Youth

the racial tensions similar to those experienced in most Western countries" (Quist-Adade, "The African Russians," 155).

²⁷ "As the terms of the ideological Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union jelled, racism in the United States and other Western capitalist societies became one of the chief propaganda weapons in the Soviet Union's arsenal." Jodi Melamed, "The Spirit of Neoliberalism: From Racial Liberalism to Neoliberal Multiculturalism," *Social Text* 89, vol. 24, No. 4 (Winter 2006), 4.

²⁸ Quist-Adade, "The African Russians," 167.

²⁹ As Meredith Roman writes, employing a tantalizingly theatrical metaphor: "Racism was officially non-existent and that which existed at the popular level was never systematically reinforced by the state. This was especially the case in Moscow, which officials used as the stage from which to project this image to the world as the one society that had discovered the cure for racial prejudice" ("Pigmentocracy").

³⁰ Quoted in Vladimir Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 333-334.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ This taxonomy is laid out by a white Russian jazz musician of the surname Kozlov in *ibid.*, 159.

³⁴ Black theologian James Cone paraphrased in bell hooks, "Loving Blackness as Political Resistance." In *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992), 9-20, at 11.

Festival after watching a dance number by an African troupe (nationality unspecified), in what was, “as far as we know, the first very close encounter with the classical country [*stranoi*] of colonial exploitation.” (Note the “classic” condensation of the African continent into a single county, despite the programmatic foregrounding of “nationality” over “race” in domestic discourse.) The performance of the African artists “served not so much as an introduction to [their] art or even to their mores and customs so much as a meeting with their people. And here we saw exactly what we wanted to see... The enormous potential forces of the masses of the black continent, not yet exhausted, but lying dormant in the shackles of its reserve, ready to realize itself in its location at the boiling point.”³⁵

At this time, the Soviet-Russian explains in a fittingly epidermal metaphor, “we plastered the façade with zeal as if we were concerned with the fate of socialism, and we didn’t think that the make-up put on an inflamed skin would produce a still more serious condition,”³⁶ and serious not just for Soviet Russia, but for those fraternal countries who looked to the USSR to steer them away from the capitalist-imperialist foes. In revolutionary Cuba, for instance, a locus of romantic fantasy for the generation of the sixties,³⁷ where local politics were made in the image and likeness of the Marxism-Leninism, a similar rhetoric of internal racelessness—external racism obtained. The extant inequities of race were ascribed to the capitalist-imperialist order that preceded the installment of socialism in 1959. In a recognizable pattern, Cuban socialist society distinguishes itself by rejecting these exploitative political-economic arrangements, and thereby, according to its official rhetoric, leaving racism behind as well. Racism *and* race are said to be a thing of the past in Cuba, and critique of actually existing racism is rendered impossible in a “raceless,” postcolonial, anticolonial society. It is no longer a social issue but a cultural one, relocated beyond the country’s borders. This paradox yields “the hyperconsciousness of race and its negation,” allowing “old prejudices within the vanguard and in the populace [to be] left unchecked,” in the assessment of anthropologist Jafari Allen, while “the legacies of slavery and the pre-revolutionary era [remain] evident in the contemporary lived experiences of the entire population,” and are “extant in the rhetoric of so-called inclusion that finds blacks to be bestial, insolent, hypersexual objects.”³⁸ Socialist Cuba, Allen concludes, in an evocatively ableist

³⁵ Iu. Iuzovskii, “Eti piatnadsat’ dnei v Moskve,” *Teatr* 10 (1957), 173.

³⁶ Quoted in Zubok, *Zhivago’s Children*, 333-334.

³⁷ Like Rumnev’s Africa, but at a much later stage of historical development, Cuba became a spatialized metaphor for revolution, a fantasy field in which the Soviet Union played out its own past. It was, to quote Vail’ and Genis, a “wondrous reality” [*chudesnaia real’nost*] or “surrealist continent” [*surrealisticheskii kontinent*] where the revolutionary romanticism of early Bolshevism met the colonial exoticism that Bolshevik ideology proscribed. Petr Vail’ and Aleksandr Genis, *60-e: Mir Sovetskogo Cheloveka, 3rd Ed.* Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2001), 44. “The powerful creative impulse of social upheaval linked up with the romantic appeal of the far seas.” In this impassioned if imprecise mythos, the Spanish language of the island reminded Russians of the most Romantic period of the Soviet past—the Spanish Civil War—enhanced by the secondary associations with Ernest Hemingway and even Don Quixote. The film by Afrophilic poet, Evgenii Evtushenko, called “Soy Kuba!” dramatizes this romantic relationship between second-world nations. “The Cuban revolution easily became a metaphor of the October revolution” just as the African slave uprising in the pantomime play metaphorized an earlier stage of the world-historical story (*ibid.*, 45).

³⁸ Jafari Allen, *¡Venceremos? The Erotics of Black Self-Making in Cuba* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 54.

metaphor, “seems to have been struck not only (color) blind but also dumb—silencing race and thereby reinscribing racial terror.”³⁹

Africa the pantomime staged this sort of silencing history for socialist audiences to animate their indignation with capitalism; sympathy for the subaltern; and relief at their non-complicity in such systems of global oppression. The Moscow show conveniently offered another spectacle in the audience as confirmation. As one reviewer of EKTEMIM observed:

At one of the concerts there were Negro students in the audience. Knowing Russian poorly, they could not express their feelings in words. But in pantomime there are no words. And when the pantomime-poster *1960 in Africa* was on the stage, the representatives of the “black continent” gave a stormy standing ovation.

На одном из концертов среди зрителей оказались студенты негры. Плохо зная русский язык, они не могли выразить словами свои чувства. Но ведь и в пантомиме не было слов. И когда на сцене показали пантомиму-плакат «1960-й год Африки», представители «черного континента» устроили бурную овацию.⁴⁰

Out of this journalist’s write-up, and indeed the play itself, also slips the “obscene message” of Soviet attitudes toward black Africa. I borrow this term from Slavoj Žižek, who contends that “explicit ideological statements...[are] always supported by their shadowy double, by an obscene, publicly unacknowledged, between-the-lines message.”⁴¹ In the ensuing pages, I hope to show how Soviet statements of equality were actually subtended by the “obscene message” of a racial hierarchy predicated on speech ability; and as such, were not so apart from the Enlightenment ideas about race underpinning Western colonialism, whose disavowal, we have seen, constituted the distinctness of Soviet socialism as a humanistic alternative to capitalism.

THE THIRD SILENCE: SUBLINGUAL SUB-SAHARAN OR THE SOVIET SUBALTERN CANNOT SPEAK

For starters, we can locate this “obscene message” within the cyclical structure of the play. It begins and ends with the same music and dance of “simple, naïve” Africans, interrupted only by a shimmer of revolutionary spontaneity, thereby situating its subjects in the “eternal present” of colonization. Rumnev patterns this primitive dance on that of the “Negroes of Central Africa,” “primitive” [*pervobytnykh*] or “backward” [*ostalykh*] people, he notes in his book, among whom pantomime is still practiced “in our day,” as

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ V. Pirogov, “Bez Slov.” *Teatral'naia zhizn'*, no. December (1962), 31.

During the collapse of the USSR, “in the media, the very word —Africa—was often supplanted by *cherny kontinent* (black continent), the place of danger and wasted opportunities, and a proverbial black hole devouring scant Soviet resources.” Maxim Matusevich, “Probing the Limits of Internationalism: African Students Confront Soviet Ritual,” *Anthropology of East Europe Review*. 27(2): Fall 2009, 31.

⁴¹ Slavoj Žižek. “Multiculturalism, or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism.” In *The Universal Exception: Selected Writings* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 151-183.

“ethnographic material testifies.”⁴² This is a consequential detail for Rumnev, who, like a good socialist, sees theatrical form as a superstructural index of a people’s stage of historical development.⁴³ Though these Soviet actors enact Africanness through pantomime, the pantomime of actual Africans—represented by the expressive dance and final fist pump—slides into ethnographic inevitability. Something similar happens with the audience members. Lacking a (socialist) language by which to describe their experience (emotional, aesthetic, political), the Negro spectators are reduced to their own pantomime: vigorous applause substitutes verbal response.

This scenario calls up a set of questions: How is the Soviet spectator interpellated into this scene of black in revolt against white? How is the whiteness of the Soviet spectator and the Soviet actor implicated therein? Further, how are the desired propaganda-effects of *Africa*, as an agitational poster, inflected by racial difference? Since a lasting ontological shift does not happen to the “Africans,” who display an impulse toward socialism but lack the evolutionary credentials to sustain it, the action onstage requires an audience member already endowed with revolutionary consciousness to impart meaning on the mutiny, to provide it with a historical script, and to extrapolate his own helper role vis-à-vis the proto-socialist primitive. This scene establishes a dynamic of mastery and tutelage between white Soviet and black African subjects. In other words, it says: decolonized Africans can develop a revolutionary consciousness, but they cannot be a revolutionary class without a vanguard socialist power like the Soviet Union to coach them. Recall that this is the mission of Soviet pantomime as Rumnev articulated it: to reflect the hopes and support the struggles of the world’s “simple people” through artistic representation.⁴⁴ Just as the play envisions white viewers, so it necessitates white actors to create this point of spectatorial insertion.⁴⁵

Africa stages the scene of speechlessness which Gayatri Spivak has famously queried in her essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” “Ventriloquism of the speaking subaltern,” she writes, “is the left intellectual’s stock-in-trade.”⁴⁶ In interrogating “the [very] possibility of speaking of (or for) the subaltern,” Spivak lays emphasis on the difference elided by the left intellectual between prepositions “of” and “for”; between representation (in hyphenated form) of the subaltern and representation for the subaltern; between tropological portrait and political proxy. The left intellectual professes (falsely) to do away with the second term, claiming no longer to “speak for the oppressed group,” while elevating his own theory to the level of action. This move motivates Spivak’s next question: “Are those who act and *struggle* mute, as opposed to those who think and *speak*?”⁴⁷ Both representation (falsely renounced) and re-representation operate by a logic

⁴² Rumnev, *O pantomime*, 20.

⁴³ «Пантомима является, по всей вероятности, наиболее древней формой театра, из которой впоследствии развивалась драма. Об этом свидетельствуют и этнографические материалы, и описания путешественников, и в особенности сравнительное изучение тех зрелищ, которые по сей день бытуют в разных точках земного шара у народов, стоящих на различных ступенях культурного развития» (ibid., 19).

⁴⁴ Ibid., 155-6.

⁴⁵ For a similarly cast ethnographic gaze in the cinematic “jungle picture,” see Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, *Captive Bodies: Postcolonial Subjectivity in Cinema* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), 3.

⁴⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” In *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1995 [1985]), pp. 28-37, at 28.

⁴⁷ Ibid. (her emphasis).

of substitution, by which the left intellectual imputes an internally undifferentiated voice to a collective subaltern subject that is, in effect, never able to speak for or of itself. This scenario begets those “unfortunate marionettes” of history: “the much-invoked oppressed subject...speaking, acting, and knowing...that [here, socialist] development is best for her.”⁴⁸

The theory of pantomime articulated by Rumnev situates itself ambivalently between (disavowed) proxy and portrait. At once, the theater is theory promoted to praxis, “determined to stand in the lines of the active struggles.”⁴⁹ Not “speaking for” but with the subaltern, socialist pantomime becomes struggle itself. At the same time, it represents and represents, as it “dreams about the creation of pantomimes, consonant with the socialist epoch, reflecting the ideology of the simple people.” Here the theater represents a homogenous category of “simple people”—“Africa” is a portrait of the subaltern; and it “speaks for” the “simple people,” by “reflecting”—but not embodying—their singular ideology. Responding to Spivak’s second question, “those who act and struggle” are indeed mute—silent onstage (in portrait), silent offstage (according to Soviet ethnography), and silent in the audience, too (when they appear as Sovietized proxy). *Africa* re-presents the subaltern in order to authorize the representation of the subaltern. The three applauding but otherwise silent (that is, non-Russophone) African students in the audience are cited by the Soviet press as confirmation that the “black continent” is in solidarity with socialism. As in the earlier instance of African dancers at the youth festival, such re-presentations of blackness by the left intellectual boil all black symbols down to “the boiling point,” liquidating the ability of subaltern subjects to speak for themselves in more complex ways against the black-and-white politics of the day. Thus, to give Spivak the last word, “the banality of the leftist intellectuals’ lists of self-knowing, politically canny subalterns stands revealed; representing them, the intellectuals represent themselves as transparent.”⁵⁰

The flattening of subaltern speech and the corresponding one-dimensionality of recognizably black roles in Soviet representation may partly be ascribed in this case to the genre in which *Africa* was staged. The agitational poster or *agit-plakat* style of performance was innovated by the dramatist Sergei Tret’iakov in the experimental twenties and thirties, a period in Soviet history when “the artists of the avant-garde” were busy drumming up socialist sentiment with “an extraordinary range of ‘agitational’ posters, designs for decorating agit-prop trains and trams and other materials to be used in the battle against capitalism, against illiteracy and for the progress of the Revolution.”⁵¹ These propagandistic displays addressed the most pressing topics in politics at home and abroad, and provided their audiences with the proper ideological line on all the hot-button issues. Among the Bolsheviks’ multimedia tactics, the graphic poster was prioritized, and became a ubiquitous feature of the revolutionary landscape in Moscow, as Walter Benjamin recorded in his diary about the trip.⁵² The theatrical *agit-plakat* extended the agitational activity of the era from the street to the stage, and brought

⁴⁸ Ibid., 29.

⁴⁹ Rumnev, *O Pantomime*, 155.

⁵⁰ Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak,” 28.

⁵¹ Catalog for the exhibition, “Art of the Avant-Garde in Russia: Selections from the George Costakis Collection.” *Agitatsionno-massovoe iskusstvo* (Moscow, Izdatelstvo iskusstvo, 1971), 96.

⁵² Walter Benjamin, *Moscow Diary*, ed. Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: 1986), 49-50, 60-61, 64.

it to life with real bodies, whose shorthanded stories could expand in time and meaning over the course of a given scene. Tretiakov innovated the hybrid genre by poaching pithy poster copy to use as titles for the individual episodes in his agitprop play, *Earth Rampant* [*Zeml'ia dybom*, 1921]. A sample of these compactly evocative headings include, “Down with War,” “All Power to the Soviets,” and “The Black International.”

The poster as a graphic medium, and to some extent, as a dramatic mode, reflected the “Bolshevik’s privileging of the eye in the task of political education,”⁵³ according to sociologist Victoria E. Bonnell, who pioneered the analysis of socialist poster art. Two-dimensional posters were tasked with simultaneously inventing a visual code that would legitimate the revolutionary state, and ensuring that “these images [belonged] to a visual language that would be comprehensible to the population at large,” “that could easily be ‘read’ by the people,” that is, the simple people, who were mostly illiterate. (See Figure 4. for a paper-poster representation of colonized blackness from the era of Rumnev’s pantomime.) Thus allegory and conceptual iconography were rejected as aspects of an elite bourgeois aesthetics in favor of “a new set of images that were ‘simple, close to and comprehensible to the spectator to whom the poster is directed,’” and therefore deliberately anti-bourgeois.⁵⁴ Iconography could not be nuanced nor demand the spectator’s intense concentration, even when protracted in stage action, to guarantee that the intended message got across. In order to eliminate the possibility that simple people would misread visual cues, posters had to be supplemented verbally. This was of utmost importance to Tret’iakov, who “found poster phrases analogous to textual posters” (and not image-based ones), and devised a special form of “semaphoric speech” to “directly affect the audience through [the agitational poster’s] verbal signals,”⁵⁵ thereby “guid[ing] it toward heightened revolutionary consciousness and enlightened collective action.”⁵⁶ In this sense, though the poster genre emphasized visual imagery, it actually confirmed the supremacy of verbal language, when articulated in a conscious Marxist idiom by a canny political actor. In a word, silent blackness required white subtitles.

INFANTILIZING BLACKNESS: BLACK CHILDREN IN THE WHITE CHILDREN’S THEATER

Africa the play is but one in a broader set of cultural symbols of this era affiliating blackness with silence, evolutionary with linguistic primitivism. Such depictions of black Africans relied on the logic that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, and translated Marxist-Leninist stages of historical development into the span of a single human life. To illustrate this principle in its relevance to Rumnev’s play: primitive communism, an early phase of historical development, finds a correlate in human childhood; a people living under primitive communism would be, by association, childlike. This move had a politically strategic function. By infantilizing non-Russian peoples, Russia could

⁵³ Victoria E. Bonnell, “The Representation of Politics and the Politics of Representation,” (Review of N.I. Baburina, *Sovetskii politicheskii plakat, 1917-1980. Iz kolleksii Gosudarstvennoi biblioteki SSSR imeni V.I. Lenina*), *Russian Review* 47.3 (July, 1988): 315-322, at 315.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 320.

⁵⁵ Sergei Tret’iakov, *Slyshish’, Moskva?!*, 191-192; quoted in Natasha Kolchevska, “From Agitation to Factography: The Play of Sergej Tret’jakov,” *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 31.3 (Autumn, 1987), pp. 388-403.

⁵⁶ Natasha Kolchevska, “From Agitation to Factography: The Play of Sergej Tret’jakov,” *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 31.3 (Autumn, 1987), pp. 388-403, at 390.

recalibrate its fraternal⁵⁷ role in the “friendship of peoples” from equal to “big brother or ‘first among equals,’” as Meredith Roman puts it, or even “paternalistic,” as Maxim Matusевич and others write.⁵⁸

Here the Latin etymology perhaps inadvertently comes to bear on these figurations of Third World subjects as infants, those “incapable of speech” (which, as I pointed out in the introduction, finds a rough etymological parallel in Russian).⁵⁹ Soviet culture recurrently produced (motion) pictures with infant black characters incapable of fluent speech.⁶⁰ In these scenarios, inability to speak Russian is equated with speechlessness. Eminent examples from Russian cinema include the musical comedy, *Circus* (1936) and the sea adventure, *Maksimka* (1952). “In both films,” Matusевич observes, “Africa is typically presented in the image of a black child, cute and vulnerable and in dire need of protection” by Russia as “savior of non-white races.”⁶¹ “Soviet cartoons, films, and children’s literature” depict Africans “as docile and ready to please, but also gullible and prone to seek pleasure rather than work.” This stereotype reached its apogee in a 1970 cartoon with the “carefree” Africans from the island “Chunga Changa.”⁶² Such representations implied the necessity for socialist ideology to intercede and motivate individual labor and cultural progress. (See appended images of *Circus*, *Maksimka*, and “Chunga Changans.”) Though the carefree and work-free Chunga-Changans do not speak but sing,⁶³ they return for other reasons toward the end of this analysis.

Aware of this infantilizing tendency, one has the sinking suspicion that the audience members at the production of *Africa* were planted by the pantomime studio, or perhaps dreamt up by the Russian journalist, insofar as the felicitous uptake of this racial performative depends on the African’s authentication of his inability to speak and his attendant authorization of the Soviet to speak for him. The former is achieved when the fist pump of the Africans onstage is affirmatively mirrored in the round of Africans’ applause from the floor. The latter is effected in the triangulation between the hybrid white-black Soviet in African drag onstage, and the white Soviet and black African in the audience. In this lies the potential of another obscene message from the other side of the

⁵⁷ Quist-Adade, “The African Russians,” 154.

⁵⁸ Meredith Roman, “Pigmentocracy.” *Washington Profile* online

<<http://www.washprofile.org/ru/node/8066>> (2001); Maxim Matusевич, “An Exotic Subversive: Africa, Africans, and the Soviet Everyday.” *Race and Class* 49, no. 4 (2008): 57-81.

⁵⁹ Christopher Krentz calls up this etymology in *Writing Deafness: The Hearing Line in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007). The Russian analog is explicated in Konstantin Bogdanov, *Ocherki po antropologii molchaniia: homo tacens* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel’stvo russkogo khristianskogo gumanitarnogo instituta, 1998).

⁶⁰ This tendency to infantilize the black other was not a phenomenon specific to the Soviet period of Russian history: “Russian art of tsarist times portrayed blacks not only as servants, but as infantile and diminutive” (Quist-Adade, “The African Russians,” 164). That being said, the implications of this style of representation shifted under Soviet programs that explicitly rejected imperialist formations of race and biological racism in favor of “historicizing” nationalities policy.

⁶¹ Matusевич, “An Exotic Subversive.”

⁶² Maxim Matusевич, “Black in the USSR: Africans, African-Americans, and the Soviet Society.” *Transitions* 100 (2009): 56-75.

⁶³ Andrei Voznesenskii provided another post-Stalinist picture of singing but not-speaking blacks in his 1961 poem, “The Negroes Sing” [*Poiut negry*]. Raquel Greene glosses Voznesenskii’s fascination with the trope of blackness in “Representation of Africans and African-Russians in Russian literature and culture over the last four centuries,” *Black European Studies* (2005).

performance of *Africa*—that the audience members might not have responded to the play in the ways described by the Soviet journalist. African students coming to the Soviet Union in the 1960s were to wit not pro-Soviet Marxists like the “black pilgrims of the 1920s-1930s,” the first wave of African and African-American visitors.⁶⁴ In fact, they rejected and rebelled against the actually existing socialism they encountered, even petitioning against the “crude racism” of white Soviets and refusing to participate in state rituals, making the African presence in Russia, in Matusevich’s coinage, “exotic subversive.”⁶⁵

As a corollary to the first “obscene message,” it bears remarking on the double performance of race in Soviet Russia. On the one hand, the state dramatized its anti-racism on and off the stage: “under communism, Moscow . . . was used as a stage from which to project the image of the Soviet Union as the country which had discovered the cure for racism.”⁶⁶ In this way, actual Africans and African-Americans who visited the Soviet Union were preceded by the one-dimensional archetypes of blackness envisioned on two-dimensional posters and in the three dimensions of poster-plays—as silent victims of capitalism and imperialism, or silent recipients of socialist beneficence. On the other hand, the racially-marked subjects, whose presence in the USSR was contingent on the state’s performance of anti-racism, propped up the official drama by playing the part: “being an African in the Soviet Union also meant that one performed foreignness on a day-to-day basis” and, in this scenario, performed ideological support . . . despite that “African students in Moscow articulate[d] ideas manifestly out-of-sync with Soviet sensibilities.”⁶⁷

Though I could locate no such “exotic subversive” protests of Rumnev’s performance, Soviet history of racial/racist pantomime offers examples that counter the scene of black consent. In 1924, with children’s author Sergei Rozanov, Natal’ia Sats, later founder of the Moscow Children’s Musical Theater in 1965, cowrote a show for the Comintern School which was aimed at six to eight year-olds. (Sats was very particular about age-appropriate art.⁶⁸) The play was called “The Negro Boy and the Monkey” [*Negritenok i obez’iana*]. It was wildly popular in its day, reliably selling out, and totaling more than a thousand performances in the first six years of its decade-long premier run.⁶⁹ Its significance in the scope of Soviet theater cannot be overstated: when Party members saw it in 1936, it moved them to establish the Central Children’s Theater on Sverdlov Square beside the Bolshoi Theater.⁷⁰ The play traveled to other republics and beyond the Soviet Union, and was “revived [in] 1973 in the same Moscow children’s theater in which it premiered.”⁷¹ The original score supplied by avant-garde composer

⁶⁴ Maxim Matusevich, “Probing the Limits of Internationalism: African Students Confront Soviet Ritual,” *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, 27.2 (Fall 2009), 22.

⁶⁵ *ibid.* See also Matusevich, “An Exotic Subversive: Africa, Africans and the Soviet Everyday,” *Race & Class*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (2008), 57-81.

⁶⁶ Roman, “Making Caucasians Black,” 1.

⁶⁷ Maxim Matusevich, “Testing the Limits of Soviet Internationalism: African Students in the Soviet Union,” In *Race, Ethnicity, and the Cold War: A Global Perspective*, edited by Philip Muehlenbeck (Vanderbilt University Press, 2012), 171.

⁶⁸ Victor Victorov, *The Natalia Sats Children’s Musical Theater* (Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 1986), 120.

⁶⁹ Natal’ia Sats, *Sketches from My Life* (Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 1979), 112.

⁷⁰ Victorov, *The Natalia Sats Children’s Musical Theater*, 34.

⁷¹ Larry Sitsky, “Leonid A. Polovinkin: The Partial Avant-Gardist.” In *Music of the Repressed Avant-Garde, 1900-1929* (Westport, CN. : Greenwood Press, 1994). 112. There were other “Negro boys” beside

Leonid Polovinkin (1894-1949) was his “best known” musical offering.⁷² Today the play is remembered for its formal innovation, combining live action with animation projected onto the stage.⁷³

Sats devoted a good portion of text to the play in her autobiography, *Sketches of My Life* [*Novelly moei zhizni*]. She describes the plot and scenery in detail in the passage below:

...A corner of the jungle, with lianas hanging, birds flying, elephants wandering about. A cartoon is projected onto a flat to the right, showing a thicket where our actors playing African children are hiding. They are lying in ambush, waiting for more animals to appear. At a signal from Nagua, the children start banging their tom-toms. The frightened animals scamper away (cartoon here). Nagua shoots at the hindmost doe but misses and starts in hot pursuit. A panorama of the forest in motion: Nagua is chasing the doe. At a certain moment, the actress playing Nagua disappears and the action is continued in the cartoon.⁷⁴

...уголов в лесной чаще, перевитой лианами, летают птицы, гуляют слоны. На станке справа мультипликацией проецируются заросли, там как бы «прячутся» наши артисты, играющие негритянских ребят. Они выжидают, когда соберется побольше зверей в этом лесном уголке. И вот по сигналу Нагуа негритята начинают бить в шумовые инструменты. Перепуганные звери (киномультипликация) обращаются в бегство. Нагуа прицепился в отставшую лань—промах, лань побежала, Нагуа за ней; теперь панорама леса в движении: за ланью бежит Нагуа. В определенный момент актриса, играющая роль Нагуа, как бы «перешла» на киномультипликат.⁷⁵

This idyllic scene is interrupted when a white man kidnaps the monkey Yirka, who saves Nagua the Negro Boy’s life. The Soviet-issued English-language promotional material for the musical theater tells us that “the youngsters greatly enjoy the story of [the] friendship”⁷⁶ between Yirka and Nagua—a parable of race for the Soviet Union that, unsurprisingly, resolves itself at the circus—a topos whose centrality in representations of race we will discuss later is curiously persistent. “[The children] eagerly follow...Nagua’s adventures in search of his simian friend and the boy’s arrival in Moscow; and they are glad to find out that the working class Negro is a friend of Soviet children.”⁷⁷ This is, of course, the official message of the play as an instrument of

Nagua at the Moscow Musical Children’s Theater, where “the young ones met with their old friends,” including “the Negro Boy Maksimka.” «Мальши встретились со своими старыми знакомыми ... негритенок Максимка (в одноименных произведениях М. Р. Раухвергера, Э. С. Колмановского. Б. М. Терентьева)...» <<http://muzypedia.ru/index-189.htm>>

⁷² Ibid., 111.

⁷³ The cartoon artists were the couples: N. and O. Khodataev and V. and Z. Brumberg.

⁷⁴ Sats, *Novelly moei zhizni*, 112. “Now why is the substitution imperceptible and quite unimportant?... because the costume, characteristic movements and habits with which the actress and director have endowed Nagua are identical in the scenic and cartoon interpretation.”

⁷⁵ Sats, *Novelly moei zhizni*, 162.

⁷⁶ E.S. Mikulina, et al., *The Moscow Theater for Children* (Moscow: Iskra Revolutii Publishers, 1934), 30.

propagandistic pedagogy rather than pure entertainment. As Natal'ia Sats herself said about the mission of the Children's Theater, "We must use the theatre to educate builders and fighters, not spectators."⁷⁸

With its groundbreaking use of cartoon, *The Negro Boy and the Monkey* appropriately caricatures the Africa about which it seeks to edify its young viewers. Its imagery is more evocative than verisimilar, as we have seen, condensing the continental geography into a single space wherein the tropical jungle gives way to lush forest and finally to arid desert. Despite this noncorrespondence to topographical truth, the crew still hoped for the correspondence of form to content in the production. As in *Africa*, *The Negro Boy and the Monkey* matched musical accompaniment to visual narrative. Sats pictured "the story and the staging simultaneously," and, in her estimation, Polovinkin succeeded in inflating the script's "verbal characterizations" into "three [dimensions]" with his score.⁷⁹ For all its forays into the aesthetically experimental, *The Negro Boy and the Monkey* was a favorite; moreover, it managed to produce something of a reality-effect among its young Soviet audiences who mistook the characters for potential pen-pals and friends. "[A] play with dance and song, circus interludes, [and] animated cartoons," it "always draws a full house. And long after they have gone home the kids remember 'Auntie Natasha' (Natalia Satz) and the Nice Negro Girl and send them letters and drawings and stories of how they play at 'Negro Boy and the Monkey.'"⁸⁰

So far we have not spoken of the play's central persona: "the Nice Negro Girl" in the English rendition, or the "Nice Negro Woman" or "Female" [*Dobraia Negra*] in the original Russian. The "running comment by the Nice Negro Girl"⁸¹ alone prevented the performance from sliding into strictly silent acting. Sats had "conceived the play 'The Negro Boy and the Monkey' as pantomime, dancing, wholly musical. Only the 'person at the proscenium'—the Nice Negro Girl—was given a few words" to say.⁸² Pantomime is the sister art of cartoon, according to eminent Russian mime, Il'ia Rutberg. It may also be a performance genre uniquely disposed to representing race in the Soviet case. Of course, the Negro Girl stops *The Negro Boy* short of pure pantomime. But what about her merits the qualifier "nice" or "kind" [*dobraia*], and not the boy? Why did Soviet children write to her and Auntie Natasha rather than Yirka and Nagua, the ostensible stars of the show? Was it she whom African American actor Paul Robeson admired when he saw the performance in 1935?⁸³ Was it to her nominal kindness that Langston Hughes alluded when he expressed his regret at having not been able to secure a seat at one of Sats's typically sold-out productions? So striking a cultural moment was cut by the play that Hughes was moved to remark on it in his autobiography, *I Wonder as I Wander*. The

⁷⁸ Quoted in Gene Sosin, "Art for Marx's Sake," *Theatre Arts* (February, 1950), 31.

⁷⁹ Sats, *Novelly moei zhizni*, 111-113.

⁸⁰ E.S. Mikulina, et al., *The Moscow Theater for Children* (Moscow: Iskra Revolutii Publishers, 1934), 32.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Sats, *Novelly moei zhizni*, 163. «Спектакль «Негритенок и обезьяна» я задумала как пантомимно-танцевальный, целиком музыкальный. Немногие слова были только у «человека пронацениума» -- Добрай Негры.»

⁸³ "Paul Robeson, the well-known Negro singer recently visited the Moscow Children's Theater and saw a performance of "The Negro Boy and the Monkey." He had a long conversation with the director of the theater, Natalia I. Satz, Honored Artist of the Republic who gave an account of the mass work of the theater. Before leaving, Robeson made an entry in the visitor's book in which he expressed his admiration at the splendid performance of the play." "Paul Robeson's Visits Children's Theater," *Moscow Daily News* (January 4, 1935), 1.

“handsome little Negro boy,” he writes, “was presented most sympathetically, I was told.”⁸⁴ Without too much prevarication, I want to point out the ambivalence of his final clause: “I was told.” Here Hughes eschews the authority of the eye-witness, and instead defers to the deeply-ideologized report of Soviet observers to describe the scene.

Meanwhile, non-Soviet observers, specifically the black students at the Moscow Comintern School, did not like what they saw. Before incorporating their voices into the chorus of reviewers, I want to describe more directly *what* exactly they were seeing. Nagua, for one, hardly looked the part of “the working class Negro,” “friend of Soviet children,” as the English-language material alleged.⁸⁵ Instead, he appeared in blackface and full “African” body paint or dark stockings, wearing only a loincloth patterned with Lascaux-like cave paintings around his waist. His ears were weighted down with gold hoops. And his artificially nappy black hair was adorned with feathers sprouting from his crown, a costume detail which refers more readily to visual stereotypes of the Native American than the black African. The promotional picture of Nagua shows him crouched down, with hands gesticulating like his monkey familiar, Yirka—an image to which I will momentarily return.

The Nice Negro Girl was costumed in a more contemporary if inexplicably eccentric style. Her aproned polka-dot dress, with ruffled sleeves, collar, and skirt hem, seemed a clownish play on antebellum fashion. Her face was painted black with additional white accenting around the eyebrows. She wore a black body stocking that peeked out from her short sleeves and extended to her wrists. Her nappy wig was parted in the center and smoothed down the sides of her head, exploding in frizzy curls at her ears. The top of her head was festooned with an oversized flower. Achieving this effect of racial drag was no small feat. As the English material explains, “the stage directress has lots to worry about up to the very last day before a ‘first night.’ A real good make-up is needed in order to change a blonde-haired actress like Vakhonina into a Negro girl.”⁸⁶ In addition to the practical problems such a metamorphosis inevitably poses for the make-up artist, one imagines the ideological difficulty of regressing the mature socialist actress back to a condition of (racialized) primitivism. In effect, this bit of theatrical magic reverses the Soviet Union’s developmental mission in the decolonized countries of the third world. The gender of “little Negro” impersonator is also significant here, insofar as a crucial component of the socialist program for universal equality, into which official anti-racism figured hugely, was equality of the sexes, a pared-down feminism that made possible such structural equivalences between boy and girl (or woman), black and white, Russian and African, and so on. But equality seems too generous a term for the logic of metamorphosis by which the theater posed false and even problematic equivalences between distinct styles of culturally-historically embodied being. Consider the uncomfortable spill down the evolutionary ladder the theater takes in its own self-description: “[Our] dancers are often called upon to impersonate rabbits and frogs, grasshoppers and butterflies, dandelions and daisies. In the *Little Black Boy and the Monkey* they dance as African children.”⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Langston Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander: An Autobiographical Journey* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1986 [1956]), 200-201. I am grateful to Meredith Roman for pointing me to this passage.

⁸⁵ Mikulina, et al., *The Moscow Theater for Children*, 30.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁸⁷ Victor Victorov, *The Natalia Sats Children's Musical Theater* (Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 1986), 113.

The Little Negro Boy and the Monkey reappeared on the stage of the Children's Theater in 1973, now in a "new choreographic and musical version" or "ballet-pantomime." Leningrad composer, Sergei Banevich, had made the performance more fascinating for its fidgety audience with a new score and song-and-dance numbers. This alteration to the play interestingly invited more gender play, as "mostly travesty dancers are used—men and women of short stature and slender build." The actress who reprised the Nagua role in the 1970s and 80s revival of the play, Tatiana Glukhova, was a white female soprano, and, according to one Russian reviewer, "a 'ready-made' Little Red Riding Hood [or] Snow-White."⁸⁸ She appeared in young boy blackface for *The Negro Boy and the Monkey* (now called "The Little Black Boy" in the Soviet English-language publications), and for one of the two productions of *Maksimka* put on by the children's company. Both stagings cast white women in the title role of the "little negro boy" with a proper name. "There were two Maksimkas in the theatre," the state press boasts its abundance. At the same time, it reveals the poverty of its racial imagination, since the two actresses each embodied one of the two available stereotypes of blackness available in the Soviet economy of representations. "One of [the Maksimkas], Tatiana Glukhova—played him as a small, oppressed being, whom life batters about before his fate takes a sharp turn through his meeting with the Russian sailors. The other Maksimka (Lydia Kutilova)—is a little savage, half child, half animal, in whom the influence of the sailors awakens a feeling of protest, and he begins to fight for his destiny."⁸⁹ *The Negro Boy* encompassed both stereotypes, and played them against each other along gendered lines: the savage if quasi-ethnographic appearance of Nagua shared a stage with the Nice Negro Girl, whose depiction drew on the mammies and Sambos of the racist American imaginary. This familiar iconography was apparently easier for Soviet audiences to identify with, since it cited the more economically proximate reality of the industrializing West (and also, of course, because this variety of racist imagery circulated in popular representations of black Africans and African-Americans in the Soviet press).

Putting aside the emotional shorthand of racial stereotyping, the primary reason that the white children sooner sent their letters to the Negro Girl than Boy was, quite simply, because she could read them. After all, she had the sole speaking part in the play, and was presumably the only literate one among the cast beside the playwright, Sats. The photograph captioning in the promotional materials demonstrates that the production crew was aware of the import of the Girl's speaking singularity in what would otherwise be a pantomime show.⁹⁰ To the rhetorical question—Why will there be no talking on the stage?—they replied:

⁸⁸ Ibid., 101. Though it can only be a coincidence, the actress's surname [*Glukhova*] shares a semantic field with deafness [*glukhota*].

⁸⁹ Ibid., 55.

In both roles, blackness becomes a signifier for oppression by a dominant society, which produces, in turn, a revolutionary or oppositional consciousness in the black figure. This attitude combines the pre-revolutionary identification of Russian peasants with African-American slaves, and the sympathy of the white intelligentsia with both; with a more modern intelligentsia or avant-garde self-conception as persecuted by the state in the way that African Americans are by white slave traders and owners; and finally a modernist predilection for the primitive, a theme profoundly plumbed Michael Mitsuo Kunichika, "The penchant for the primitive: Archaeology, ethnography, and the aesthetics of Russian modernism." (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2007).

⁹⁰ Despite a general reluctance surrounding spoken language, an oral script for the Nice Negro Girl was introduced into the production "after the premiere of *The Little Black Boy and the Monkey*" as an entirely

Why should there be? You [wouldn't] understand Negro language anyway. But the Nice Negro Girl [will] explain everything to you. She speaks Russian, and can [speak Negro languages] too. So after the show you should write a letter to the [Nice Negro] Girl and tell her how you liked "The Negro Boy and the Monkey."⁹¹

But as it turns out, there were people in the play's audience at the purely pantomimed production who could understand "Negro languages," but who could not understand why the Negro Boy had to be scripted as alingual. Black students wrote to the Comintern leaders, demanding that Nagua be given the power of speech—that he be made to speak Hausa or Bantu—as opposed to just emitting sounds like a monkey.⁹² These students recorded their "bitter *dissatisfaction* with...the disgraceful characterization given the [Negroes] in the Theatre..." in a series of "Resolutions in Connection with [the] Derogatory Portrayal of Negroes in the Cultural Institutions of the Soviet Union."⁹³ They called for "the total elimination of such portrayals of the [Negroes] from their cultural institutions...forever."⁹⁴

Their main grievance was the depiction of the Negro Boy not just as a friend of the monkey, but *as* a monkey himself—a likeness cemented in speechlessness, as noted above, and also in physical correspondence. The students were appalled that, even as "correct and respectable information about the true character and physiognomy of the [Negroes]" was "obtainable in [the Soviet] Union,"

the [Negroes in the play] were depicted in the most degrading manner (painting them to appear [not] unlike real monkeys, an act which is now-a-days becoming extinct even in capitalist countries, thereby causing the [Negroes] who were present to feel that the people of the Soviet Union also think about the [Negroes] in a chauvinistic trend of mind.⁹⁵

dialogueless play. "The introduction of spoken language into the fabric of the performance [was seen] as a personal defeat. 'There's nothing bad about it,' objected Natalia Sats. 'We are addressing children some of whom don't even know how to read yet, and we must not feel embarrassed about using such methods in order to reach the child.' Experiment is experiment! The use of oral commentary came to be accepted as a customary feature of ballet productions for children." Victorov, *The Natalia Sats Children's Musical Theater*, 114.

⁹¹ Because the photograph captioning was cut off by reproduction, I could only guess at certain words, included in the quotation in brackets. It is very possible that the Nice Negro Girl was described as being able to translate between Russian and, not Negro languages, but monkey talk. Mikulina, et al., *The Moscow Theater for Children*, 31.

⁹² This discussion is found in the letter that the students addressed to Comintern leaders at the request of Dmitri Manuilsky, secretary of the Executive Committee of the Comintern, dated January 29, 1933. The document is located in the Eastern University's fond (RGASPI f. 532, op. 1, d. 441, ll. 15-19. I am extremely thankful to Meredith Roman for alerting me to this instance of resisting Soviet representations of blackness as primitivism.

⁹³ "Resolutions in Connection with Derogatory Portrayal of Negroes in the Cultural Institutions of the Soviet Union," quoted in Woodford McClellan, "Africans and Black Americans in the Comintern Schools, 1925-1934," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 26.2 (1993), 389.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 389.

⁹⁵ McClellan, "Africans and Black Americans," 389.

A silhouette of the monkey and Negro Boy dancing in the African jungle from the animation sequence presents the two rather unambiguously as twins in appearance and posture. This correspondence compels us to pose the inverse question, phrased here in the words of queer of color scholar Mel Y. Chen, “Is the monkey ‘black,’ I mean racialized as black?” Does it “[refer] to a history of associations of simianness with Africans, during colonial periods most certainly, in slave legacies, and as well in contemporary popular racist imagination in the United States” and also, we append, the Soviet Union?⁹⁶

The Negro Boy and the Monkey’s deliberately cartoonish departure from realist theater did not mitigate its unintended and indirect material consequences for thinking about race and animality in the Russian context. Soviet reviewers were impressed by the seriousness with which the white Soviet child received the play; these adults were enamored by the way the children mistook the actors playing human parts for real people, and the actors playing animal parts for real animals. Sats illustrates the second mimetic effect of her play with an anecdote. A woman and her daughter show up for the performance only to discover that all of the tickets have been sold. What’s more, the girl has already seen the show. So the mother proposes a trip to the zoo instead to see, in her words, “a real monkey.” To this, the girl replies: “There,” at the zoo, “it’s not real. Here it’s real...”⁹⁷

On the other side of the stage door, Sats always delivered an introduction before the performance of *The Little Black Boy and the Monkey* that supports this confusion:

Peering through the curtain, she turned to the audience with the question: ‘Do you know what’s behind this curtain?’ ..the ‘right’ answer would come: ‘The stage,’ ‘The theatre,’ ‘The show,’ ‘Actors’ ... ‘Not at all, all of you are wrong. It is Africa! Yes, yes, real Africa with tropical forests, wild beasts, and African youngsters!’ ... ‘Auntie Natasha’ with a few words had transported them into the legendary, beckoning Africa.⁹⁸

The students refer to a history with long legs of representing blacks as monkeys. For instance, early travel literature depicted black Africans as “lascivious, apelike sexual appetite...[going] so far as to lead black women to copulate with apes.” For an extended discussion of this connections, see Sander Gilman, “Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late 19th-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature,” *Critical Inquiry*, 12 (1985): 212.

⁹⁶ Mel Y. Chen, “The Monkey Reads Queerly.” Manuscript (Berkeley: University of California, 2009).

⁹⁷ V. Ashmarin, “Zdes’—nastoiashchee,” in *Desiat’ let sredi deti* (Moscow: 1928), 10-11. Cited in Natal’ia Sats, *Novelly moei zhizni*, 165.

The lateral evolutionary link between blackness and simianness was already cemented by pre-revolutionary race science, which was in active conversation with race science in the so-called bourgeois countries. Russian scholars of race took as a starting point of their ethnographic inquiry the fact “that the negro comes nearer to animals (monkeys) than to representatives of other races,” on mostly somatic and some linguistic terms. Interestingly, the most concentrated locus of “Negro animality [*zhivotnost*]” on the body was the hand, the length of which “approached that of a chimpanzee or an orangutan.” D.N. Anuchin, “Negry,” *Brokgauz i Efron*, t. xx. (St. Petersburg, 1897), quoted in V.B. Avdeeva, ed. *Russkaia rasovaia teoriia do 1917 goda*, no.2 (Moscow: 2004), pp. 199-200.

⁹⁸ Kabalevsky quoted in Victorov, *The Natalia Sats Children’s Musical Theater*, 28.

The point Sats wants to make with the anecdote about the credulous little girl and in her own pitch for dramatic mimeticism is obvious: the monkeys in her theater are more real than real monkeys. But Sats misses the obscene subtext of this scenario; indeed, she is necessarily shielded from it by her faith in Soviet ideology. The realest monkey of all for the child educated about alterity through this kind of art is the Negro boy himself.

And the primeval Africa of the children's theater, with its animalized youngsters and "wild beasts" (is there much of a difference in the performance after all?) is the real Africa, having nothing to do with the place of righteous anticolonial revolution and canny political action in the twentieth-century that the adult pantomime caricatures. (Indeed, "Africa" circulates as a capacious concept-space encompassing all blackness, regardless of actual geography, including African-American blackness.) The theater was quite successful in conflating cartoonish representation and the complicated reality of race in the minds of its child spectators. "[With vitality] and great interest [they] responded to the story about the friendship of the little African boy, Nagua, with the monkey, and reacted strongly to the mysterious tropical African forest full of strange noises [and] lethal hidden dangers."⁹⁹ Their empathy crudely activated, the children "imagined themselves in a poor African village, got to know its inhabitants, witnessed the ancient festival rituals," until, "unexpectedly, this idyllic world of innocent human joys is attacked by the world of evil and violence spreading cruelty and greed—these were the white conquerors, the slave dealers from across the ocean." The child spectators rejoice again when "Nagua finds himself on a Soviet ship, and in the Soviet Union," a socialist update of Maksimka's prerevolutionary story, and, "after long wanderings, the two friends meet again—the monkey is appearing in a foreign circus company." The cries of *Circus's* African American child echo in this scene's obscene-subtextual analogy between black boy and monkey. But unlike the conclusion of *Circus*, which incorporates the black boy into the big, multiethnic Soviet family, "[this] ballet ends with Nagua and the monkey returning to their native land."¹⁰⁰

In the same way that the adult pantomime *Africa* fails to resolve the promise of progress it extends to prehistorical people nestled in the innocence of their jungle-idyll, the children's play seals off its plot in a chronological-geographical loop. The proper response of the Soviet child to this closure of African experience is an evolution in his or her own political subjectivity: first moved by spontaneous emotion, the little socialist-in-training comes to revolutionary consciousness by the play's end, and demands that Nagua and his dark-skinned colonized kin remain in the Soviet Union. This is what happened when Paul Robeson went to see the play during its first run. "At the intermission, a little boy rushed up to Robeson, hugged him around the knees, and begged him to stay in the Soviet Union - 'You will be happy here with us.'¹⁰¹ In other words, do not go back to the jungle and its sequential savageries of uncivilized black existence and white colonial slavery. Leave behind your idyll, which is ever-imperiled by imperialism. Leave your ancient, tribal customs back in Africa. You can no longer be an ahistorical monkey now that you have entered political life through the theatrical portal of the Soviet Union.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 32.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Martin Duberman, *Re/Membering Langston* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 188. Of Robeson's supremely surprising response, Duberman writes, "Not surprisingly, Essie wrote the Van Vechtens that 'We both love it here, and are profoundly interested in what they are doing.'"

This is the racist mythology that the black students were trying hard to dispel with their letters and resolutions. It is one which mistakes the Negro with the monkey (or conflates the two); believes African languages are no more sophisticated than simian grunts; and understands the mark of civility, of Soviet civilization in particular, as speaking fluent Russian—a successful project of enlightenment embodied in the Nice Negro Girl narrator. This was the kind of popular racism circulating on the streets of Moscow in the Soviet era—seeping up to the level of ideology in this play—that inspired white Russians to ask black Africans if they lived in the jungle as monkeys, without houses, “[cohabiting] with snakes and lions.”¹⁰² And on the cusp of post-communism, it motivated the beating and murder of a black Nigerian student “on grounds [of] being a monkey,”¹⁰³ and quite possibly the murder of Romalio more recently.

The makers of Soviet children’s taste recurrently represented Africa in the eternal presence of the colonial moment, as uniformly premodern in an otherwise developed or at least post-primitive world, a conceptual image best captured on the walls of the Children’s Theater.¹⁰⁴ The mural painted by N. Holts is a somewhat distorted map of the world, in which each continent is decorated with and identified by a set of cultural associations and stereotypes. Holts imagines his Africa much like children’s author, Kornei Chukovskii did in *Doctor Aibolit* and *Barmalei*, early Soviet poems adapted to screen multiple times during the post-Stalin period: for the fourth time by Mosfil’m in 1967 and again in 1973 and 1984. The most literal citation of Chukovskii comes in the guise of a “big, mean crocodile” on the shores of western, formerly French, equatorial Africa, clutching a black child in his jaws.¹⁰⁵ The rest of the continent is sparse: a pair of elephants (one being ridden by an arrow-launching African), a pair of zebras, a pair of flamingoes, a camel, an ostrich, a pelican and a rhinoceros, pepper the length of the landscape. A monkey, larger than the crocodile and even the elephant, appears at the Cape of Good Hope. A palm-munching giraffe extends his neck along the entire eastern coast of Africa. The preponderance of exotic fauna recalls Chukovskii’s warning: “Little kids,/ No matter what you do,/ Don’t even think of/ Going to Africa for walks./ Africa is dangerous/ Africa is horrible...”¹⁰⁶ The meager human presence is confined to the upper right corner of the continent (the erstwhile colony of Anglo Egyptian Sudan), where crudely-drawn, dark-brown figures in alternating yellow and red loincloths dance in a circle outside of one elevated hut in a compound of five, their activity confirming the conception of the theater’s balletmaster, Olga Tarasova, of all the staged movement of *The Negro Boy and the Monkey* “in the form of games. Everything was choreographed as game playing: the games of the African youngsters noted for their agility...”¹⁰⁷

The most striking aspect of this figuration of Africa arises by putting the continent in the context of its surrounding world. The Middle East, for instance, is a barren desert partially obscured by the tops of the African palm trees. A literal bridge to civilization spans the divide between the uppermost points of Africa, what would be Morocco and Algeria, and the European continent, on which ordered rows of bushy trees grow and

¹⁰² Quist-Adade, “African Russians,” 166.

¹⁰³ Matusevich, “Probing the Limits,” 30

¹⁰⁴ Victorov, *The Natalia Sats Children’s Musical Theater*, photo insert.

¹⁰⁵ Chukovsky’s poem “Barmalei”: “In Africa big/ mean crocodiles/ are going to bite you.” [В Африке большие/ Злые крокодилы/ Будут вас кусать]

¹⁰⁶ “Barmalei,” in Kornei Chukovskii, *Doktor Aibolit* (Moscow: Detskaia literatura, 1961).

¹⁰⁷ Victorov, *The Natalia Sats Children’s Musical Theater*, 113.

large architectural formations, inclusive of castles and church spires, loom. This is the Old World, separated from the New by smoky industrial haze and swirling waters on which a cargo-laden steamship drifts deliberately toward the crowded port of New York at the feet of the high-rises of the city's towering skyline. The mural thus maps time onto space, with each continent corresponding to a particular economic phase in the Marxist historical development. In this schema, Africa is unevolved, frozen in edenic time.

This image is legitimately edifying in Sats's opinion because "the spectator is not attending a geography lesson, but the theatre."¹⁰⁸ What matters in this specific pedagogic context is not cartographic accuracy, not the map's success as a representation of 'real reality.' As with pantomime in Rumnev's approach, the children's theater transcends "ethnic, geographical or social barriers." Rather, to continue poaching and repurposing Rumnev's terms, it favors reflections of ideology which are "consonant with the socialist epoch," a temporal-spatial perspective that is not universally experienced, and therefore does not yield a world map of objective proportions. Instead it appears as what Anne McClintock calls "anachronistic space," a colonial trope of the Victorian era, according to which, "colonized people...do not inhabit history proper but exist in a permanently anterior time within the geographic space of the modern empire as anachronistic humans, atavistic, irrational, bereft of human agency--the living embodiment of the archaic 'primitive.'"¹⁰⁹

Out of synch with the socialist epoch, these primitives are invited onto the stage of internationalism only as living relics in a traveling ethnographic exhibition, as curious natives from "an economy other than work," where time is arrested outside of Marxism-Leninism's teleology.¹¹⁰ In their indigenous environment, these primitives "spend their time celebrating, in pure expression that neither preserves anything nor accrues profit, in a present, eternal time *off*, a pure excess," which "effectively transforms [ethnographic difference] into a festive theater."¹¹¹ The only goods such people do produce, the only surplus of their lack of labor, is "an *aestheticization of the primitive*,"¹¹² whose fascination is found in comparative framing as a passage—the Middle Passage, more precisely—"from primitive prehistory, bereft of language and light, through the epic stages of colonialism, postcolonialism, and enlightened hybridity," in the socialist epoch. "Leaving the exhibit" of civilized evolution, and glimpsing the mural from right to left, "history is traversed backward. As in colonial discourse, the movement forward in space is backward in time: from erect, verbal consciousness and hybrid freedom....down through the historic stages of decreasing stature to the shambling, tongueless zone of the precolonial, from speech to silence, light to dark."¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ In the full version of Natalia Sats' personal notes on topography in the play, she complains: "I don't like the conception of the city. These are abstract modern houses. They don't suggest a recognizable Moscow. I don't care that you represented Kalinin Prospekt realistically. The spectator is not attending a geography lesson, but the theatre. I want a theatrical conception of the city's image" (ibid., 138).

¹⁰⁹ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 30.

¹¹⁰ Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*. Translated by Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 227.

¹¹¹ Ibid. (emphasis his).

¹¹² Ibid. (emphasis his).

¹¹³ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 12.

THE FOURTH SILENCE: THE RACIALIZATION OF MUTENESS

These cultural texts about blackness show how the (in)ability to speak was racialized in the Soviet imaginary—albeit we might have arrived at this conclusion by traveling not to “the dark continent” but through the non-Russian Soviet republics in the post-war period instead.¹¹⁴ Like their symbolic cousins from *Circus* and *Chunga Changa*, the black subaltern of *Africa* cannot speak; they are functionally mute rather than aesthetically silent (to combine the concepts of Spivak and Rumnev). Silence belongs to the fully articulate white Russian play-acting at blackness, whose ability to opt out of speaking affirms his superiority in the great chain of socialist being. This conjunction of “ethnocentrism and logocentrism” was not singular to the Soviet progress narrative but, as Henry Louis Gates, Jr. has pointed out, was central to the “grand march of the intellect” of the European Enlightenment, which “[attempted] to deprive the black human being of even the potential to create art, to imagine a world and to figure it.”¹¹⁵ According to Kwame Anthony Appiah, in the colonial context, “language here is, of course, a synecdoche” for civilization.¹¹⁶ This association makes for a reversible logic of substitution, wherein race is read through speech, while speech and speechlessness or sublingualism is read through race.

But it may not be necessary to go to these lengths to prove that muteness is racialized as non-Russian since etymology does it for us on its own. Recall that *nemets*, the word for German, derives from *nemoi*, or “mute,” and that “this derivation reflects the ethnocentric, prejudicial attitude of early Eastern Slavs who, upon encountering their German neighbors...found them to be lacking even the basic gift of ‘normal,’ human (i.e., Russian) speech.”¹¹⁷ In his book on *Soviet Civilization*, Andrei Sinyavsky provides an even less sparing etymology as it is pockmarked by Russian chauvinism and national xenophobia. “‘Ours’” or *nash* “can only mean Russians. Whereas the German spirit is alien, inhuman. The Russian word for Germans (*nemtsy*) has the same root as the word dumb (*nemy*): the Germans are those who can’t speak Russian, ‘nonpersons,’ sometimes evil spirits.”¹¹⁸ In other words, to speak the unintelligible language of the other is tantamount to not speaking at all, or not being able to speak. And in turn, to not speak at all is tantamount to being ethnically or racially other.

To see how this bears out in more modern circumstances, we need only reflect how “The Miracle Worker” [*Sotvorivshaia chudo*] was presented in Russia. This bio-drama by William Gibson about the deaf-mute-blind American, Helen Keller, was

¹¹⁴ For the status of Russian nationalism in the post-Stalin Soviet Union, see Yitzhak M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000.

¹¹⁵ Henry Louis Gates, Jr. “Criticism in the Jungle.” In *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Routledge, 1990), 7.

¹¹⁶ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 55.

¹¹⁷ John Spiegel, *Dimensions of laughter in Crime and Punishment* (London: Susquehanna University Press, 2000), 122. The word expressed a “long-standing anti-German sentiment” that survived the early Eastern Slavs into the modern era. As “in a footnote to ‘Christmas Eve,’ Gogol writes: ‘Among us everyone who comes from a foreign country is called *nemets* [German]; even if he is a Frenchman, a Hungarian, or a Swede—he is still a German.’” Quoted in Elena M. Katz, *Neither with Them, Nor without Them: The Russian Writer and the Jew in the Age of Realism* (Syracuse University Press, 2008), 66.

¹¹⁸ Andrei Sinyavsky, *Soviet Civilization: A Cultural History* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1990), 260.

incredibly popular in post-Stalin Soviet theaters and ran regularly for decades starting in 1963. One particular production begins with Helen pantomiming to the strains of “Asiatic” melodies, the music intended to evoke her animality, primitivism and isolation from the world of rational humanity.¹¹⁹ According to Soviet theater critics, an evolutionary Bildungsroman forms the arch of the play, as “the young governess [Anne Sullivan] awakens in Helen the deafened rudiments of speech—the main thing that distinguishes man from animal.”¹²⁰ Helen’s disabilities are overdetermined here: at once her literal deafness is a symbol of “the moral deafness of that part of America”; it is equated with the racist mentality of whites in the Jim Crow South.¹²¹ At the same time, the discrimination she faces as a deaf-mute is an analogy for the racism experienced by black Africans under American slavery. In sum, to be deaf means to be both raced and racist.

Soviet defectology or “special education” hands us the first part of the equation, having defined the deaf-mute who used only his “primitive language” of signs as not yet acculturated into socialist society.¹²² To wit, the Soviet Union’s own Helen Keller equivalent, Olga Skorokhodova, a deaf-mute-blind woman and winner of the Stalin prize, articulated her own transformation into a “model Soviet woman” out of “‘half animal half plant’ (she liked to cite this formula to stress the progress she had made since)” as a process of “humanization” (her word) through defectological education.¹²³ “In spite of the lack of hearing,” like Keller, Skorokhodova “was trained to use her vocal cords without being able to control her own speaking otherwise than by touching her throat with her hand to make sure that the passage of air was taking place.”¹²⁴ Through the air passage then, a middle passage for the mute is molded, making a similar traversal as the ethnographic exhibition space maps out, from a dark zone of “tongueless” silence into the light foyer of freedom and linguistic consciousness.

¹¹⁹ Il’iani Ilianova, “U nas na gastroliakh” (review of the play from the Theater Archive in Moscow).

¹²⁰ Mosgorspravka: Otdel gazetnykh vyrezok. *Rostov-na-donu Komsomolets* (20 July 1965). Reviews consistently emphasize how Hellen Keller is a humanist project, how teacher elevates this little animal creature [*zver’*, *zverenyshche*, *zhivotnoe sushchestvovanie*] into a human being.

¹²¹ V. Gradov, “Muzhestvo na kazhdyi den’,” *Molodaia gvardiia* (Perm’), 19 July 1970.

¹²² Correspondingly, “the primary focus of deaf education [was therefore] on the return of speech.” The founding father of defectology, Lev Vygotsky, feared that sign language alone would close the deaf child off in a very narrow and confining world with only those who know the ‘primitive language.’” Though he later abandoned this idea, it remained entrenched in Soviet defectological theory and practice until perestroika. Jane E. Knox and Carol Stevens, “Vygotsky and Soviet Russian Defectology: An Introduction,” in *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky*. Vol. 2: *The Fundamentals of Defectology (abnormal psychology and learning disabilities)*. Edited by R.W. Rieber and A.S. Carton (New York: Plenum Press, 1993), 18. A.R. Luria and L.S. Vygotsky, *Ape, Primitive Man, and Child: Essays in the History of Behavior*. Translated by Evelyn Rossiter (Orlando, FL: Paul M. Deustch Press, Inc., 1992), especially the essay “The Connection Between Thought and the Development of Language in Primitive Society,” 62-70.

The characterization of the deaf-mute as anomalous and out of historical synch is culled from V.I. Lubovskii, “Defectologiya,” *Bol’shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, 1970-1981 edition (Moscow: “Sovetskaia entsiklopediia,” 1970). < <http://bse.sci-lib.com/article024749.html> > (accessed April, 2009).

¹²³ Irina Sandomirskaja, “The How-To of Bare Life: A Story of O.,” *Documenta Magazines* 1–3 (2007); online at <URL><http://magazines.documenta.de/frontend/article.php?IdLanguage=1&NrArticle=660> (accessed 24 February 2009).

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

Along with the “[relatively] primitive peoples” of the world, the deaf-mute remained at “a lower level,” at “the starting point for the historical development of human behavior.”¹²⁵ Both primitive individuals and primitive peoples were not outside of but prior to socialist language. The reciprocal exoticisms, that allowed ethnic alterity to stand in for sensory “defect” and vice versa, placed both “others” on the same lowly rung of the socialist evolutionary ladder, which was really a hierarchy of animacy with speech as its operative factor. The Soviet “view of deaf-mutes as inferior in the mental development of members of society was an incontestable fact already at the end of the nineteenth century” in Russia, when scholars ascertained that the “mental level of deaf-mutes was so low,” that, “from the heights of official science, the deaf-mute was equated with the monkey,” an “historical comparison in the clinical literature” grounded in an evolutionary logic, that, furthermore, equated “the deaf-mute with others to whom words or concepts were unknown, including children, representative of ‘primitive’ tribes, and so on.”¹²⁶ Defectology undertook to “return [the deaf-mute] to speech,”¹²⁷ make the ahistorical monkey-child a “new man,” and thereby synch him up with the Marxist-Leninist present.¹²⁸ Coming to revolutionary consciousness as an achieved socialist subject meant “speaking Bolshevik” at the top of one’s voice—*vo ves’ golos*, as Mayakovsky put it—a promise extended to linguistically and racially “primitive” peoples alike as the “comrades of posterity.”¹²⁹

I gloss the racialization of silence in “The Miracle Worker,” and the alignment of racial and linguistic primitivity in defectology, so that we might understand what kinds of overdetermined discourses of muteness were encountered by the deaf-mute her or

¹²⁵ A.R. Luria and L.S. Vygotsky, *Ape, Primitive Man, and Child: Essays in the History of Behavior*. Translated by Evelyn Rossiter (Orlando, FL: Paul M. Deustch Press, Inc., 1992), 42. See also the essay “The Connection Between Thought and the Development of Language in Primitive Society” in the same collection (ibid., 62-70).

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¹²⁶ Konstantin Bogdanov, *Ocherki po antropologii molchaniia*, 117-118.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Post-Stalin pantomime used the African slave and the deaf-mute to signify primitive stages of man’s cultural and ontological development overcome by the progress of History. Additionally, post-Stalin pantomime of the unimpaired appropriated blackness, as it did deaf-muteness, as a metaphor for “the oppression of creative artists under the Soviet regime.” Raquel Greene, “Representation of Africans and African-Russians in Russian literature and culture over the last four centuries,” *Black European Studies* (Mäinz, Germany, 2005).

¹²⁹ Note that Mayakovsky’s “comrades of posterity” [товарищи потомки] were muted by the “agitprop stuck in [their] teeth” [агитпроп в зубах навяз]. Vladimir Mayakovsky, “At the Top of My Voice/Во весь голос,” *The Bedbug and Selected Poetry*. Translated by Max Hayward and George Reavey (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press), 221-235.

This circumstance receives a darkly parodic treatment in Boris Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago* [*Doktor Zhivago*, 1957]. The ears of the novel’s sensitive hero are acoustically accosted on a train from the East by a deaf-mute, Maxim Aristarkhovich Klintsov-Pogorevshikh, who has been taught to speak by leading defectologists (Zhivago guesses them by institutional name). His speech is anarchic and senseless, a phonetic parallel to the “savageries” of revolution and war to which the good doctor has just borne witness. For the only dedicated treatment of the book’s deaf mute, as far as I can tell, see I.P. Smirnov, “Glukhonemoi demon (ob odnom avtosharzhe B.L. Pasternaka v romane 'Doktor Zhivago'),” (St. Petersburg, Russia: Institut russkoi literatury. Trudi Otdela drevnerusskoi literatury, 1996), 176-185.

himself. We have seen how deaf-mute subjectivity formed in a matrix of race, and now I offer a final, curious cultural artifact that may explain how deaf-mute subjectivity formed in a matrix of racism. I do so by analyzing a strange but symptomatic artifact of late-socialist culture, which condenses into a single illustrated anecdote all the operative terms of this argument, namely, race, silence, and historical consciousness. Entitled “In Africa Ice Cream Is Also Cold” [*V Afrike morozhenoe tozhe kholodnoe*], this is an anachronistic piece, written in 1970 about an event from 1957. I came upon it by chance, while flipping through issues of *Deaf Life* [*Zhizn’ glukhikh*], the official publication of the All-Russian Society of the Deaf [*Vserossiiskoe obshchestvo glukhikh*], formerly known as *Deaf-Mute Life* [*Zhizn’ glukhonemykh*] from its founding in 1933 until its name change in 1957 (the momentous year in which the comic’s action is set).

The story goes like this: an African man comes to Moscow for the World Youth Festival. It’s a hot day and he decides to buy some ice cream from a street vendor, using the one Russian word he knows: “Eskimo.” Having forgotten his wallet at the hotel, the Russians, in an excessive show of generosity, treat him to more Eskimos than he can handle. As the “mountain of ice cream” begins to melt in his hands, he realizes he can give it out to the Russian children on the street. A crowd gathers around this friendly display. At the comic’s close, the black man repeats the title of the story in English until a Russian girl translates for us: “In Africa ice cream is also cold.” (Along with the comic [Figure 12.], a full translation of the Russian comic is available at the end of the chapter, offered by the author who also speaks English...)

On its surface, this is a transparent parable about racial equality and cultural sameness, endorsed by official ideology, and effected through language and symbolism. The ice cream is positioned in a larger, zeugmatic semantic field of hot and cold. On the literal valence of meaning, we learn that: the ice cream is cold,¹³⁰ and the sun is hot. The cold ice cream starts to melt under the hot Moscow sun. On the metaphorical level, we find that Muscovites are warm, they “warmly [meet] with the youth of the whole world,” despite the international context of Cold War. The implication that the “youth of the world” might be met with otherwise, that is, coldly, figures crucially into Cold War rhetoric. In full, the comic creates a touching tableau of multiculturalism which demonstrates how the coldness of racial relations in the Cold War melts under the warmth of the sun of Soviet internationalism.

The Eskimo—not the African—is the center of racial meaning in this scene. We might ask *why* this is the only word the African knows in Russian—whether he knows it first as the name of an ice cream bar or of a mythic igloo-dwelling people. Furthermore, why does the African speak English and not an African language, as the African children present at *The Negro Boy and the Monkey* queried incredulously? In any case, the Russian child may have associated this image of the imperial Other overwhelmed by Eskimos in the socialist metropole with Starik Khottabych, the Soviet version of Aladdin’s genie, born of children’s author Lazar Lagin’s pen in 1937, and turned into a movie in 1956.¹³¹ In this loaded allusion, it is important to note that Khottabich eats his “mountain of ice cream” while learning to read Russian at the circus. The power of this

¹³⁰ The text opts for “morozhenoe,” a substantive adjective derived from the verb “to freeze,” over “plombir,” a less etymologically suggestive noun for “ice cream.”

¹³¹ Lazar Lagin, *Starik Khottabych*. The following chapters feature the Eskimo ice cream bar: XVII. Starik Khottabych i Sidorelli and XXVI. Opiat’ Eskimo.

allegory to domesticate cultural difference derives from the wholesomeness of its symbolism. The anecdote tells us: “ice cream is cold everywhere”; what it means is: “the world is the same all over”; or, to go beneath the chocolate coating to the vanilla center, it implies: “we’re all white under the surface” (or, as Ellochka the Cannibal quips in the twenties’ classic, *Twelve Chairs* [*Dvenadtsat’ stul’ev*, 1928], “You’re all white at the back! (joke).”¹³² And since we are all equal under the skin, we can all be part of one big Communist family. Thus this “interesting event” or “funny adventure,” whichever you prefer, transpires on Gorky Street, one of the radial roads leading back to the city center at Red Square.

But this equality is tenuous, since it depends on the charity of the white Russian adults. The African, without a wallet (and perhaps without a pocket in which to place it in his traditional costume, presumably non-factory-produced), cannot taste the sweetness at the center of the Soviet Union without financial support. This detail corresponds to the paternalist thesis that Roman, Matusevich and others argue inheres in the relationship between the Second and Third Worlds in the era of decolonization during the late 50s and 60s, when “Soviet leaders proclaimed that the USSR was offering humanitarian and ‘fraternal’ assistance to eliminate the dire consequences of colonial rule and save the peoples of the newly liberated countries from neocolonialism.”¹³³

Still, the white adults only participate in this scene as subsidizers and spectators. They smile while the transactions—of ice cream and language—occur between the Negro and the children. Here, the visual aid is instructive: the African man crouches down to fit into the final, claustrophobic comic panel with the Soviet kids. His stooping does not represent condescension but instead an innocent, even infantile kindness. Any inequality of adolescent African over Soviet children is reversed by the accompanying text and the final punchline, which, I contend, is not the title but the story’s last line: “She knew English.”

The second or extra punchline, “She knew English,” reveals the obscene subtext of the story: this is a parable about racial difference. At its end, though the anecdote manages to consume the excessive ice cream, it exudes excessive meaning, meaning from which the African is excluded. The Eskimo’s egalitarian coldness gives way to the little girl’s linguistic superiority. Ultimately, the scene of signification takes on prime importance, such that the ice cream itself seems superfluous or ridiculous. Moreover, one

¹³² See Chapter 12 of Il’f and Petrov’s famous farce. Of the very finite phrases the cannibal Ellochka is able to say, this is the fourteenth: “*U vas vsia spina belaia (shutka).*”

For a provocatively pertinent discussion of the discourse of sweetness, socialism, and race, see Jafari Allen, *Venceremos? The Erotics of Black Self-Making in Cuba* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 43-51. Working through Fernando Ortiz’s “canonical book,” *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (1995), Allen contends that, in order to support the racial rhetoric that subtended the socialist revolution in Cuba of 1959, “Africans had to have their culture ‘crushed’” like white sugar, “enough to yield consumable sweetness” for the sake of the Eurocentric logic of the state. (48)

¹³³ Quist-Adade, “African Russians,” 154. On the Soviet–African encounter, see Constantin Katsakioris, “L’Union soviétique et les intellectuels africains: l’internationalisme, panafricanisme et négritude pendant les années de la décolonisation, 1955–1964,” *Cahiers du monde russe* 47, 1–2 (2006): 15–32; and Julie Hessler, “Death of an African Student in Moscow: Race, Politics, and the Cold War,” *Cahiers du monde russe* 47, 1–2 (2006): 33–64. On contacts with the “socialist countries” of Eastern Europe, see Anne Gorsuch, “Time Travelers: Soviet Tourists to Eastern Europe,” In *Turizm: The Russian and East European Tourist under Capitalism and Socialism*, edited by Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P. Koenker (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 205–26.

feels the defeat of the slim content of the phrase whose translation has taken a whole passage to narrate. Why should it require a translator to relate this truism? The fact of ice cream's coldness is an especially tautological proposition in Russian, since the noun used here is a substantive adjective derived from the verb "to freeze." It turns out that this is all the African has to offer intellectually: not much.

He asks for ice cream with a single word and a simple sign: holding up a finger to signify "one," he is rewarded with not one but a whole "mountain of ice cream" bars. This racial pantomime is a necessity, a supplement for muteness and an approximation of language on the part of the black African. It implicitly contrasts with the pantomime in presumed excess of language, as practiced by Rumnev's white actors impersonating African subjects. In the "ice cream" play, sign and context can only do so much. The Negro fails in his attempt to speak abstractly, to say that "ice cream is also cold in Africa." There is no pantomime that could guarantee the transmission of this message. As a deficient speaker, his entry into mutual meaning-making relies on the multilingual little girl, who rescues the story from silent slapstick and transforms it into a parable about political and linguistic hierarchy. Ultimately, it is not the African's subjectivity or the intersubjective participation that matters here—it is the Russians' success at mastering the event, despite the ostensibly shared pleasures of communication and dessert sharing all around. Without the little girl's verbal dexterity, which at once infantilizes and emasculates the Negro, he is fated to eternally repeat this phrase, rendering the structure of the "ice cream" play isomorphic with *Africa*. The white girl and the Russian comic communicate to the racially-marked hero: "Though you may intuit its righteousness, you cannot make sense of communism, so we will give you the language with which to do so." In both cultural productions, the final act of transport happens outside of the "limited" Negro consciousness.

THE SOVIET EROTICS OF RACE: A COMMUNIST (M)ORALITY PLAY

We can't leave the little girl in the comic strip alone just yet, since the gender of this encounter reveals another of the comic's obscene subtexts. This scene, as we earlier established, is one of linguistic mastery, exercised by the little white girl over the black adult male. Its success, however, is subtended by the threat of the little girl's loss of control—over her language, over herself, over her desires. This shadow encounter emerges retrospectively at the historical remove provided by the comic's 1970 publication, thirteen years after the World Youth Festival which, as one Russian participant reminisces,

brought together the youth of all five continents, but in special favor was black Africa. To the Negroes of Ghana, Ethiopia, Liberia (countries that had only then been liberated from colonial dependence) aspired journalists, to these [Negroes] rushed Muscovite girls and the 'savage ones' like us in an *international explosion* [порыв].¹³⁴

¹³⁴ "Фестиваль собрал молодежь со всех пяти континентов, но в особом фаворе была черная Африка. К неграм из Ганы, Эфиопии, Либерии (тогда эти страны только что освободились от колониальной зависимости) устремлялись журналисты, к ним в интернациональном порыве

This “spasm” of internationalism described above—something like socialist *jouissance*—posed a special risk to the comrade who mistook Marxism’s definitive desire to have the other politically with a desire to have the other physically (or who derived physical pleasure from the consummation of political desire).

With no chronological leap, nor any cartoon conversion required, an analogous meeting between white Soviet female and black African male played out in real life at the Youth Festival and then again on the pages of the Soviet press. In an article entitled, “These Fifteen Days in Moscow” [*Eti piatnadstat’ dnei v Moskve*], published in the October 1957 issue of the popular journal *Theater* [*Teatr*], a Soviet reporter acquaints his reader with “one Negro guest” [*odnogo negritianskogo gostia*] from Africa, who is scrutinizing a painting by Il’ia Repin in the Tretyakov Gallery. “The female interpreter had started heatedly explaining to [the guest] what kind of painting was before him, what it depicted, who painted it. And the guest, touched by her attention, all the same stopped her with a delicate movement of his hand: he wanted to make sense of it himself.”¹³⁵ At this moment, the linguistic mastery of the white Russian young woman, a grown-up version of the comic’s little girl, is deauthorized by a surprisingly effective (and racialized) use of sign language. But such an inversion is only temporary. “When [the journal’s] photo-correspondent pointed his camera” at the African art-enthusiast, “the female interpreter potently [*vlastno*] raised her hand,” reasserting control over the encounter. “‘Enough!! He has already been photographed today!!’ she decreed.” (The double doubling-up of exclamation points belongs to the impassioned Soviet original.)

The image that accompanies the article copy (Figure 13.) belies the success of the female interpreter’s sign language. Against her decree, the disembodied male journalist and the similarly effaced male photographer have the last word in this exchange, having produced the verbal and visual portrait of the African which she forbids as he is looking at a portrait in the gallery. Unlike his cartoon cousin, this “Negro guest” in the capital city is dressed in a sharp mod suit, replete with pocket-square, and a white button-down dress shirt bisected by a dark skinny tie. His concentrated stare is partially screened by a pair of oversized T-shades. In a word, this is not the national costume of the tribal African seen in the “ice cream” illustration. Beyond its immanent hipness, the fashionable attire of the African shows off the shabbiness of Soviet dress, or Russian ‘national costume,’ if you will, as modeled by the white young man to the left of the picture’s focal figure. Evidently aspiring to the same degree of sartorial formality, the Soviet suit seems ill-fitting, drooping at the shoulders and loose in the sleeves, hanging improperly like a blazer borrowed from a father’s closet by a young boy. The reader’s attention already clued into the gentle gesticulation and refined ability to signify of the African student, we note how he rests his black hands confidently in his front pants pocket, his right arm in a cavalier Akimbo. Meanwhile, the bearing of the young white man offers a frenetic

спешили московские девушки и «дикари» вроде нас.” *Ogonek*, December 27, 1997 (my emphasis).
<http://www.ogoniok.com/archive/1997/4510/27-12-19/>

I call attention to the way the speaker plays with the word “dikari” (savage or wild ones). This quote captures the fear—differentially affecting Soviet girls—that hierarchies of civilization and primitivity were reversed in the carnivalesque atmosphere of the Youth Festival.

¹³⁵ Iu. Iuzovskii, “Eti piatnadsat’ dnei v Moskve,” *Teatr* 10 (1957); reprinted in his *O teatre i drama*, t. 2 (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1982), 172.

counterpoint; his long and lilywhite fingers are interlaced mid-fidget and thrust forward at the midriff of a white dress shirt.

Despite the subtle difference in their black and white looks, both men look in the same direction in the gallery, peering intently outside the frame of the black-and-white picture and at a framed picture on the wall, one presumes. (Of course, such a forward-facing stare is freighted with meaning in Soviet iconography, most canonically associated with Lenin's confident gaze at the radiant communist future.) The vectors of their masculine vision exclude the white female interpreter, who appears to the right of her foreign patron, her body and eyes turned rapturously toward him and away from the implied painting. (A slash of black between two white figures, the African man is a Soviet ice-cream sandwich in reverse.) The trio stands before Repin's portrait of "The Zaporozhian Cossacks Writing a Letter to the Turkish Sultan" [*Zaporozhtsy pishut pis'mo turetskomu sultanu*, 1880-1891], in which the subjects of representation are putting into crude words their refusal to submit to imperial rule, in effect, representing their desire not to be represented this way. The museum interestingly echoes this scene, by staging another "delicate" battle over the terms of representation, to use the interpreter's idiom, over what is being depicted and who is depicting it, and, to embellish, *for* (or *to*) whom.

With its trademark confusion of prepositions, and concomitant slippage between portrait and proxy, this is the classic scene of subalternity—the intellectual ventriloquist show of the international left speaking on behalf of the silent simple people in colonized spaces. Deferring to Spivak's formulation, we might ask whether the white Soviets in this scene speak *for* their "Negro guest," as his literal interpreters, or whether they speak *of* him, and, in a sense, beyond him, inserting his silence into their system of meaning? To wit, the African man never gets to open his mouth in this article, although his unarticulated thoughts are twice given voice by the white female interpreter (even "powerfully" pantomimed by her), and by the male reporter, an interpreter in his own right, whose reading of the mute guest's desires conflict with and ultimately undercut hers.

This assertion of raced and gendered authority reaches its apogee in the reporter's final summation of their interaction. Of the white female interpreter, he observes how, "She jealously guarded the guest, watching over him like her own personal property." This offhand accusation of ownership suggests Soviet betrayal or ideological infidelity on two counts. Firstly, the young Soviet woman has violated the basic premise of socialist collectivity, its categorical rejection of private property, and so she aligns her vision with bourgeois capitalism. And secondly, to make matters much worse, she sympathizes with the colonial history of slavery, by taking a black adult from colonial Africa and making him into "her own personal property" or chattel. Having casually indemnified the female interpreter, the Russian reporter leaves her off with a last backhanded compliment. "She was the sweetest, although not the smartest, of female interpreters I have seen in my life."¹³⁶ And this is the danger posed by socialist femininity with which the comic also deals: that the white Soviet girl's sweetness will exceed her intelligence, that she will enjoy devouring her exotic ice cream sandwich so much that she spoils the ideological dinner laid out for her and her female comrades at the table of communist internationalism.

¹³⁶ Iuzovskii, "Eti piatnadtsat' dnei v Moskve," 172.

Even before 1957, the Party regarded Soviet girl-citizens as predisposed to this confusion of ideological with individual passions, and it “[greatly feared] youth, and particularly female, sexuality, as a force that could not be overcome, controlled or fully harnessed for the service of the state.”¹³⁷ The sexuality of Soviet girls had to be managed because, “it was feared that girls, once seduced, would become like their bourgeois counterparts to the West and engage in uncomradely behavior and unrestrained hedonistic desire,” thereby “endanger[ing] the future of the Soviet project and its fight against the capitalist west.”¹³⁸ In this sense, the Youth Festival employed the moral maturity of the individual Soviet girl as a measure of mature socialism. If the festival was a test of self-control, the so-called children of the festival [*deti festivalia*], those biracial babies born to white Russian mothers in the subsequent months, offered irrefutable evidence of female moral failure. “The [festival’s] rumour mills purveyed...tales of mass couplings and mass consequences: not a few trysts, but parklands paved with amorous couples, not one biracial child, but a cohort.”¹³⁹ According to one Soviet historian of gender, the “biracial baby [stood] as a mark not of racial tolerance, but of sexual ‘looseness’... something rather more negative and shameful than the celebratory vision” of internationalism promoted in official socialist ideology.¹⁴⁰

The Hipsters [Stiliagi, 2009], a cinematic sample of Ostalgie for the post-Stalin period, exploits this favorite cliché of the festival, as the white hipster heroine gives birth at the film’s finale to a black baby boy. Needless to say, the African father is nowhere to be found following his fifteen-day stint in the Soviet Union, freeing the hipster girl up from a second act in her one-woman show of second-world hospitality, and allowing the white Russian girl and boy to consummate their union under the sign of tried-and-true internationalism. *Hipster*’s heroes are the tropological progeny of the white American-Soviet couple from *The Circus*, the aforementioned Stalinist musical which also takes as

¹³⁷ Ann Livschiz, "Battling 'Unhealthy Relations:' Soviet Youth Sexuality as a Political Problem", *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 21 (2008), 397.

¹³⁸ R. Danielle Egan and Gail L. Hawkes, “Imperiled and Perilous: Exploring the History of Childhood Sexuality,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 21, no. 4 (2008): 355-67. Relevantly, Egan and Hawkes emphasize “the use of sexual reputation as a ‘set of social and linguistic strategies to control girls.’”

¹³⁹ Kristin Roth-Ey, “‘Loose Girls’ on the Loose?: Sex, Propaganda and the 1957 Youth Festival,” in *Women in the Khrushchev Era*. Ed. Melanie Ilic, Susan E. Reid and Lynne Atwood (New York: Palgrave, 2004).

¹⁴⁰ Roth-Ey, “‘Loose Girls’ on the Loose,” 86.

On the political function of “love” in the language of post-Stalin internationalism, see Cristofer Scarboro, *The Late Socialist Good Life in Bulgaria: Meaning and Living in a Permanent Present Tense* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 77. Scarboro explains that, “this internationalist consciousness was to be a fundamental component of the new socialist humanist subject expressed as the love of the socialist world and of the Soviet Union as first among equals within this geography. Love was the most commonly used explanation for the connection between the two nations, Russia and Bulgaria in this case, “one born out of past aid of the Russian empire and the Soviet Union in liberating Bulgaria alternately from the Ottoman Empire... and monarcho-fascism during the Second World War. It was a powerful emotive love often only explainable by Party officials in the hyperbolic words of poets and metaphor.” On the other end of the argument, he concludes that, “love, and the acts of building socialism that resulted were the ultimate expression of this new consciousness.” In other words, socialist humanism was fueled by love and produced love in turn. “These bonds of affection were at least as important as the concrete results of mutual assistance that were often the official rationale for the meetings [between socialist nations]. Love and brotherly affection were always represented as the ultimate cause and result of mutual assistance between socialist countries. Delegations worked surrounded by love” (79).

its plot conceit the collective adoption of a white woman's biracial bastard son by representatives from all the united republics in the Ur-scene of Soviet multiculturalism. In all of these texts, blackness remains mute, infantile, and instrumental to white socialist subjectivity, but wholly undeveloped on its own.¹⁴¹

Anxieties about sexuality meet with ones about race in the comic sequence and the contemporary film and are likewise captured in the multivalent myth of the "dark continent," a phrase that circulated in Western colonial *and* in anti-colonial Soviet discourses. According to Matusevich, it appeared with greater frequency in a modified form as "the black continent" in the Soviet press as the rhetoric of racial equality decreased, especially during the collapse of the USSR, when it was used as a synonym for Africa as "the place of danger and wasted opportunities, and a proverbial black hole devouring scant Soviet resources."¹⁴² Though its overtly racist connotations may have come to the fore only in the 1980s, the term appears to have traveled a lot in earlier Soviet propaganda, even then smuggling in some ambivalence about the state's anti-racist message.¹⁴³ The status of the "black" or "dark continent" as a double entendre is not

¹⁴¹ The threat of linguistic nonmastery embedded in the Soviet girl's libidinal susceptibility to the seductive babble of the primitive other, to borrow de Certeau's terminology, is a complex expression of a more simple phobia: that Soviet performativity might fail. While the girl is allowed by ideology, even encouraged in the language of internationalism, to love the other, she cannot couple with him, nor can she marry him. So long as he remains illiterate by Soviet standards, their union would be as believable as marriage with a monkey. This consummate picture of performative failure offered by J.L. Austin in *How to do Things with out Words* has been brilliantly worked through by Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012). To be sure, stiliagi were often portrayed by the Soviet press as monkeys, parrots, and other jungle animals typically associated with the African jungle.

Though there is insufficient space to analyze the film *Circus* any further, which has, to its credit, garnered considerable critical attention, it is worthwhile noting the way that the film's twinned concerns of race and sexuality underwrite the scene of seduction and linguistic mastery animated in the deaf cartoon. I bring it up again here because the dynamics of disclosing and revealing the black baby throughout the film by the baby's white mother, an expatriate American learning to "speak Bolshevik." The arch of the story offers a kind of supertitle or metacommentary to the Soviet silent film of race more broadly.

Furthermore, the instrumentality of black infantilism to white Soviet heterosexuality might be interestingly interpreted as a form of narrative prosthesis as Robert McRuer describes with respect to disability in his queer-crip intervention, "As Good as it Gets: Queer Theory and Critical Disability," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* (2003) 9(1-2): 79-105.

Finally, Aleksandr Tairov's staging of *Negr*, a retitled revolutionary adaptation of Eugene O'Neill's play, *The Hairy Ape/All God's Chillun Got Wings*, provides another cultural intertext, in which a white woman acts alongside an African, dramatizing the seduction of the Russian avant-garde by 'the primitive.'

¹⁴² Maxim Matusevich, "Probing the Limits of Internationalism: African Students Confront Soviet Ritual," *Anthropology of East Europe Review*. 27(2): Fall 2009, 31.

¹⁴³ For instance, in the small collection of race-conscious texts examined herein, it crops up in the final line of Rumnev's script, when he summarizes how his "pantomime reflects the recent events in Africa, when the black continent gained independence and ended colonialism in many territories"; as well as in a review of Rumnev's performance, which observes that, "[when] the pantomime-poster *1960 in Africa* was on the stage, the representatives of the "black continent" gave a stormy standing ovation" (Pirogov, "Bez Slov," 31). In *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism* (Duke University Press, 2003), Ranjana Khanna finds another "dark continent" lurking in twentieth-century Marxist practice, of which the Soviet Union might be said to be the concentrically darkest spot. She cites Louis Althusser's essay, "Contradiction and Overdetermination," in which he criticizes all socialist theorists save Antonio Gramsci for not "[following] up on the explorations of Marx and Engels' in order to understand how 'superstructures are overdetermined by a multitude of factors, and do not have their sole origins in the economic base. As if haunted by the 'dark continent' himself," Khanna continues, "Althusser wrote of this undertheorization thus: 'Like the

surprising in view of its rhetorical origins: “Africa grew ‘dark’” in the nineteenth century so that “Victorian explorers, missionaries, and scientists [could flood] it with [the] light” of Western civilization, whether by continuing or by abolishing slavery.¹⁴⁴ The combined wisdom of colonialists and abolitionists held that both “slavery and savagery [disrupted] Africa’s chances for civilization and salvation.”¹⁴⁵ Situated in a similar paradox in Soviet discourse—as a prop in racist and anti-racist propaganda alike—both usages supported the characterization of Africa as a civilizationally untouched land of noble savages in need of socialist salvation.

But two sites of exotic inscrutability are collocated in the single image of the “dark continent.” As Mary Ann Doane reminds us, Freud famously borrowed the phrase “to describe female sexuality as ‘an unexplored territory, an enigmatic, unknowable place concealed from the theoretical gaze and hence the epistemological power of the psychoanalyst.’ Here the ‘dark origins’ of the primitive converge with female sexuality as . . . a marker for a displaced racial otherness.”¹⁴⁶ The trope “[condenses] motifs linking the white woman and the colonialist’s notion of ‘blackness,’” and coarticulates racial and sexual difference as points of mutual inarticulability.¹⁴⁷ All the more, in the multiethnic space of the Soviet capital city, this discourse deepened the blackness of black Africans and African Americans, while comparatively whitening Soviet “blacks” [*chernye*], that is, people from the Soviet republics of the Caucasus and Central Asia, the former subjects of the Russian empire.¹⁴⁸ These ersatz Soviet “blacks” were beholden to the same exotic-erotic attraction to *black* blacks as white Soviet women were. In an exemplary anecdote of the “vivid first impression of Moscow” that “Africans’ presence provided,” one “Elmira Nasirova [recalled] her mother’s worries that she would fall for the first African she met.”¹⁴⁹

The ice-cream anecdote weaves these threads together in its implicit concern for the morality of the white girl around the black man-child at the Youth Festival. The hypersexuality of blackness, a potent node in the Western racist imaginary, hovers less palpably over the encounter than the lack of libidinal command of the white female over

map of Africa before the great explorations, this theory remains a realm sketched in outline, with its great mountain chains and rivers but often unknown in detail beyond a few well-known regions. Who has *really* attempted to follow up the explorations of Marx and Engels?” Ranjana Khanna, *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Louis Althusser, “Contradiction and Overdetermination.” In *For Marx* (New York: Verso, 1996), 87-128.

¹⁴⁴ Patrick Brantlinger, “Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent.” In *Race, Writing, and Difference*, edited by Jr. Henry Louis Gates (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 185.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹⁴⁶ David Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 230 fn12.

¹⁴⁷ “The dark continent trope indicates the existence of an intricate historical articulation of the categories of racial difference and sexual difference. In it, there is an extraordinary condensation of motifs linking the white woman and the colonialist’s notion of ‘blackness.’” Mary Ann Doane, “Dark Continents: Epistemologies of Racial and Sexual Difference in Psychoanalysis and the Cinema.” In *Visual Culture: The Reader*, edited by Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 448.

¹⁴⁸ “Africans, overwhelmingly students, allowed southern or eastern Soviet migrants a sense of relative comfort; though darker skinner or darker haired than the host population, the migrants were generally less so than sub-Saharan Africans, and citizens to boot.” Jeff Sahadeo, “Soviet ‘Blacks’ and Place making in Leningrad and Moscow,” *Slavic Review* 71.2 (Summer 2012), pp. 331-358, at 342.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

her own desires, over which the thrill of the exotic exerted an additionally irresistible force, as Soviet experts reasoned.¹⁵⁰ (And yet, it is still there in the associations of African pantomime, which Rumnev reads as an *ars amandi*,¹⁵¹ typically performed around a phallic fetish object of exaggerated proportions—here the surfeit of chocolate-coated ice creams bars. Note how the two white girls on the level with the crouching African’s crotch each hold a black bar in their hand.) If only, unlike the hysterical Dora, these women could speak their sex; if only these African men, against the Soviet stereotype of speechless primitivism, could speak theirs. Both, however, remain beyond the reach of language.

This was the crux of a conflicted internationalism, which exhorted native socialists to embrace the rest of the world metaphorically and at a distance but never bodily nor in intimate proximity. In a word, Soviet citizens were allowed to like delegates from the “friendly nations” but not to “like-like” them. As the less than celebratory reception of “children of the festival” by white Soviet society revealed, “in both official and non-official [Soviet] space...the presence of foreigners,” conceived as non-Russians, “[was thought to upset] the balance of the social and moral order: ‘Sovietness’ [was] threatened by ‘foreignness.’”¹⁵² Though racially-other bodies posed this threat, it was Russian bodies, gendered female, who improperly responded to it. The

¹⁵⁰ Without pantomime as a universal language to facilitate communication across culture divides, another international language of the body comes into play: the language of love. Sexuality steps in beyond pantomime: if the African can only say “Eskimo” and sign “one,” how else could the curious Soviet girl entertain her international guest from a friendly nation for the rest of the day? Sex! A Russian commentator on the post-Stalin times “attributes interracial sex to ‘ordinary female curiosity’ about ‘the anatomy and physiology of healthy men with unusual skin tones and strangely shaped eyes’ and claims that [Komsomol brigade] patrols were particularly harsh with the Soviet women involved.” Anatolii Rubinov, *Intimnaia Zhizn’ Moskvyy : Xx Vek Glazami Ochevidtsev* (Moscow: Ekonomika, 1991), 224; quoted in Kristin Roth-Ey, “‘Loose Girls’ on the Loose?: Sex, Propaganda and the 1957 Youth Festival.” In *Women in the Khrushchev Era*, edited by Melanie Ilic, Susan E. Reid and Lynne Attwood (New York: Palgrave, 2004): 75-95, at 93.

¹⁵¹ Among agricultural peoples pantomime “bore a phallic character, insofar as the phallus was deified as a symbol of fruitfulness. One might propose that the phallic customs, accompanying these dances, with comical scenes and pantomimes, gave a germinating jolt to comedy...Dances, inseparable from pantomime among primitive peoples, frequently bore in these cases a sharply sexual character (for instance, the dances of the Negroes of Central Africa, which later spread to the North, where there is said to be influence on Algerian belly-dancing... these dances, connected to the customs of marriage, may be called choreographic *ars amandi*.” Rumnev, *O pantomime*, 23. Rumnev’s Soviet ideas are buttressed by prerevolutionary race science. The entry for “Negroes” [*Negry*] in the Brokgaus and Efron encyclopedia of 1897 notes the precociousness of negroes in “physical and sexual development,” compared with Europeans. D.N. Anuchin, “Negry,” *Brokgauz i Efron*, t. xx. (St. Petersburg, 1897); quoted in V.B. Avdeeva, ed. *Russkaia rasovaia teoriia do 1917 goda*, no.2 (Moscow: 2004).

The staging of *Porgy and Bess* by American actors in Moscow in 1955 may have reinforced notions of black hypersexuality in the Soviet imaginary. Of the thirty thousand Soviet spectators at the Moscow show, “most of them were scandalized and astonished by the unabashed eroticism of the production. During the scene when Crown attempts to rape Bess, ‘he grips her to him, gropes her buttocks, her breast; and end with Bess raping him—she rips off his shirt, wraps her arms around him and writhes, sizzles like bacon in a skillet.’ At that moment ‘areas of audience suffered something like a blackout.’” Vladimir Zubok, *Zhivago’s Children*, 96. For contemporary American reportage on the steamy performance that forced white Russians into a blackout, see Truman Capote, “*Porgy and Bess* in Russia: The Muses are Heard,” *The New Yorker* (October 27, 1956), and the response to Capote’s response by Mark Slonim, “Ivan and *Porgy*,” *The New York Times* (December 2, 1958).

¹⁵² Roth-Ey, “‘Loose Girls’ on the Loose,” 90.

comic, I assert, seeks to resolve this dilemma of desire by restaging the encounter with the exotic/erotic other as a fantasy of moral and oral mastery for the white Soviet girl self. Language is the only thing that is consummated in this scene and the threat of difference is licked up like so many “Eskimo” ice cream bars. To paraphrase bell hooks, the other has effectively been eaten.¹⁵³

COLDNESS, COLONIALITY, AND THE COLD WAR: EATING ICE CREAM WITH THE OTHER

Having evaluated the larger implications of the ice cream comic, I pause now on a single moment in this scene, otherwise swallowed up in a passing clause, a shimmering affect whose trace is quickly eaten up: “Suddenly the Negro saw children walking down the street. He quickly approached them. The children were surprised at first, having seen before them a Negro with ice cream in his hands. But then everyone understood.”¹⁵⁴ How might this scene have ended without the ice cream—that universal object, cold on any continent, which makes translation and mutual understanding possible? How would this scene have been made meaningful? How would it have been understood if the children had just seen a Negro standing before them?

Sitting in the second before “everyone understood,” I offer up another text which enacts the same scenario of a Negro standing before a child, this time without the Rosetta Stone of ice cream. The black man “[confronting] the white gaze,” the black man “[meeting] the white man’s eyes”¹⁵⁵ is played and replayed in Frantz Fanon’s essay, “The Fact of Blackness” and in his book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, such that we might mark this as the primal scene of colonial encounter. Fanon writes:

“Look, a Negro! *Maman*, a Negro!”

¹⁵³ hooks writes that, “mass culture is the contemporary location that both publicly declares and perpetuates the idea that there is pleasure to be found in the acknowledgement and enjoyment of racial difference.” The other can be eaten, according to bell hooks, because “the commodification of Otherness has been so successful [that the Other] is offered as a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling. Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture...The ‘real fun’ is to be had by bringing to the surface all those ‘nasty’ unconscious fantasies and longings about contact with the Other embedded in the secret (not so secret) deep structure of white supremacy. In many ways, it is a contemporary revival of interest in the ‘primitive,’ with a distinctly postmodern slant.” bell hooks, “Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance.” In *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords* edited by Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas Kellner (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2006): 366-80, at 366. Though Soviet society was certainly not a commodity culture in the Western sense, we can still sense in this comic the objectification of the Other, that is, the association of subjective alterity with particular objects. Here the “Eskimo” is consumed in place of the racial Other, a delicate choreography between Soviet self and racial Other, by means of which the latter might be consumed passively rather than consuming actively, thereby re-inscribing the status quo of racial hierarchy (ibid., 367). This scene, this movement of racial displacement, dramatizes a response to the question posed by performance studies scholar, Robin Bernstein, who asks: “How do people dance with things to construct race?” Robin Bernstein, “Dances with Things: Material Culture and the Performance of Race,” *Social Text*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (December 2009): 67-94, at 67.

¹⁵⁴ F.A. Bobkov, “V Afrike Morozhenoe Tozhe Kholodnoe.” *Zhizn' glukhikh* 8 (1970).

¹⁵⁵ Fanon, Frantz, “The Fact of Blackness.” In *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader*, edited by Les Back and John Solomos (New York: Routledge, 2000 [1952]), 90.

“Ssh! You’ll make him angry. Don’t pay attention to him, monsieur, he doesn’t realize you’re just as civilized as we are.”

My body was returned to me spread-eagled, disjointed, redone, draped in mourning on this white winter’s day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is wicked, the Negro is ugly; look a Negro; the Negro is trembling, the Negro is trembling because he’s cold, the small boy is trembling because he’s afraid of the Negro, the Negro is trembling with cold, the cold that chills the bones, the lovely little boy is trembling because he thinks the Negro is trembling with rage, the little white boy runs to his mother’s arms: “*Maman*, the Negro’s going to eat me.”¹⁵⁶

What is the fear of the white child coming face to face with the black man? The white child is afraid the black man will devour him, and this fear, at the base of racism, says Fanon, is based on the barbarism of the black man as a cannibal. Because the black man is a cannibal, he is savage. Because the white man is not, he is civilized. The white man’s civility allows him to recognize the distinction; his iterative fear justifies it. “Face to face with white men, the Negro has a past to legitimate, a vengeance to exact: face to face with the Negro, the contemporary white man feels the need to recall the times of cannibalism.”¹⁵⁷ Fanon as Negro defers the threat of devouring by making himself into an object. “Disoriented, incapable of confronting the Other, the white man, who had no scruples about imprisoning me, I transported myself on that particular day far, very far, from my self, and gave myself up as an object.”¹⁵⁸ The Negro made into an object to be consumed, no longer a subject that devours, the coldness dissipates.

Such is the chilling stuff of the colonial encounter in the West. How does the same scene play out in the anti-colonialist space of Soviet Moscow? The coldness inheres in the Soviet scene, too, I contend, but it has already been externalized, contained in the contiguous object: “the mountain of ice cream” in the Negro’s hands. The cannibal is also here, hidden in the etymology of the “Eskimo”: the “*samo-ed*” or self-eater. Offering the ice cream to the white children to be devoured in his place, the Negro neutralizes the threat of his eating the children. He eats the ice cream—the symbol of himself—with them instead. The flash of surprise in the children’s eyes is quickly subsumed by a sense of mutual understanding. The racist fear is literally incorporated, taken into the bodies of the white children: the coldness consumed, the ice cream eaten. As the black man becomes innocuous through a cannibalistic gesture, the white children “eat the other.” Deferring again to bell hooks, one witnesses a kind of “consumption” in this scene “wherein whatever difference the Other inhabits is eradicated, *via* exchange, by a consumer cannibalism that not only displaces the Other but denies the significance of that Other’s history through a process of decontextualization.” This cultural consumption “enables the voice of the non-white Other to be heard...even as it denies the specificity of that voice, or as it recoups it for its own use.”¹⁵⁹

SYMBOLIC RACISM: FOR THOSE WHO ARE BEGINNING TO READ...

¹⁵⁶ Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove, 1991), 93.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 192.

¹⁵⁹ bell hooks, “Eating the Other,” 31.

But in order to fully reckon with this image, we need to look beyond the black man, white girl, and black-and-white ice cream bar in the story to the frame of reading. We must consider its conditions of its reception, that is, the interaction between the immanent message of the anecdote and the way in which the designated reader is hailed by the text. As the graphic outside the comic's literal frame makes clear, the "ice cream" story is intended "for those who are beginning to read" [*tem, kto nachinaet chitat'*], for school-age children, evidently white ones, a detail that corroborates this chapter's position that racial pedagogy intervened at an early age in the individual Soviet life. This comic sits at the anxious point where "real" infantilism comes into contact with its conceptual double, where the white child separates from the black man-child.

It is consequential that the story was destined for the deaf child in particular, appearing on the last page of *Deaf Life* [*Zhizn' glukhikh*], the Russian magazine for and by the deaf.¹⁶⁰ The subjectivity of the deaf child (or the infantilized deaf adult learning to read) is constituted in response to the narrative of the African who, not speaking the language, must sign. For the deaf child, this comic then operates as a parable both about race *and* about the inadequacy of non-oral communication. Relying on the slippery analogy between racial alterity and deaf-muteness, the comic discredits sign by racializing speechlessness. It places a surplus on the side of the deaf child who would submit to the authority of spoken Russian, who would learn to read the Russian of the non-deaf world with the help of this racist teaching tool. And indeed, teaching the mute to talk and thereby assimilate into mainstream (speaking) society was the supreme goal of Soviet deaf education. Sign language was banned for many years; according to Russia's leading deaf activist, as a function of "the racist ideas of the ignorant Communist leader," Joseph Stalin, and the oralist state during and after his tenure, which "took a great toll on "the whole field of Deaf education and the study of sign language in the former Soviet Union," "the consequences of which have not been completely overcome even today."¹⁶¹

The pantomime, the comic, and the cartoons on which I have commented all imply a hierarchy of full speech qua full humanity, wherein both speech and humanity are racialized categories. The internal relatedness of these texts about blackness, and the continued relevance of their obscene message for post-socialist Russia, which lacks the sugarcoating of anti-racist Soviet rhetoric, is confirmed by the most contemporary image in this article's assemblage (Figure 14.): an Eskimo ice cream wrapper from today's Russia with a Chunga-Changan "chocolate boy" on it, smiling toothily like the Soviet-era Sambos who preceded him.¹⁶² The unfortunate tenacity of this image bears out Patricia J.

¹⁶⁰ Though there is insufficient space to develop this idea here, we might consider the coincidence that this "defective" text, which fails to meet the generic expectations of the anecdote in its excessive punchline, is intended for the "defective" subject of surdopedagogy, a subfield of defectology.

¹⁶¹ Galina Zaitseva, "Istoriia Glukhikh: predmet i ob'ekt," *Ist Moscow Symposium on the History of the Deaf* (12 September 1996), published in the online journal, "Biulleten' Kommunikatsiia," accessed <http://vm.iatp.by/bul/N5V8/history.html> on March 3, 2009.

¹⁶² The "chocolate boy" [*shokoladnyi mal'chik*] Eskimo is pictured on the ice cream company's website: <<http://www.chelny-holod.ru/catalogue-ice-eskimo.htm>>. While it would require too great a detour from the track of the chapter, it is worth positing that the possibility that post-Soviet Eskimo's marketing inspiration may have uncanny roots in revolutionary avant-garde culture. The "chocolate kid" could be a very distant descendant of The Chocolate Kiddies [*Shokoladnaia rebiata*], a traveling jazz group from America that made its way to the USSR in the twenties, to be immortalized in the silent Dziga Vertov film, *A Sixth Part of the World* [*Shestaia chast' mira*, 1926], whose intertitles film scholar Yuri Tsivian has

Williams's conclusions in the pertinent essay, "The Pantomime of Race." Williams cautions that the "scripted denial [of the import of race]," as in the case of the Soviet deflection of race and racism outside its borders, "ultimately [allows] visual images to remain in the realm of the unspoken, the unsaid filled by stereotypes and self-identifying illusion, the [hierarchy of race] circulating unchallenged."¹⁶³

THE DARK SUBJECTS OF SOVIET ENLIGHTENMENT: RACIAL LOGICS AND IDEOLOGICAL ANIMACIES

In summation, the relationship between blackness and deafness (understood in the Soviet system as speechless) entails more than the mere reversible analogy, *blackness is mute and muteness is black*. Rather, the terms correspond with one another structurally, co-occupying a location in Soviet ideology. Insofar as Marxism-Leninism stadializes development, both black and deaf-mute subjects are perceived as immature, not apace with the socialist present (as subjects or social groups). Their absent or deficient speech is the superstructural evidence of that immaturity. They are seen as representing earlier versions of the historical subject who will grow into an ideal socialist, literate, articulate, ideologically minded, and not a slave to capitalism or imperialism—the one who will learn to "speak Bolshevik." Until that political rite of passage, they belong to the undifferentiated mass of "simple people," for whom, as Rumnev explains, pantomime is the lingua franca.

The transformation from a simple person into a socialist person is thus a story of historical evolution, of passage through the graduated phases of political-economic development as a society. Achieving political consciousness out of revolutionary spontaneity (such as the blacks of the pantomime nearly do) was a feat facilitated by literacy. This comes on no less authority than that of Vladimir Lenin, who asserted that, "the illiterate person stands outside of politics," that "without literacy, there can be no politics," nor can there be any "talk of political enlightenment."¹⁶⁴ Learning to speak in this over-determined way, with both grammatical and ideological intelligibility, was a task on which all Soviet subjectivity turned, tantamount to entry into the realm of politics, developing consciousness as a political actor and not a simple pawn in the historical process (or outside of history, as the case may be).

rendered into a modernist poem worthy of parsing and putting into conversation with the other primary materials of this chapter. "I see/the colonies/the capital/the colonies/the slaves/the capital/the slaves/from the negroes/for the fun of it/it makes "The Chocolate Kiddies"/capital/the toys/the guns/hatred/cramps/on the verge of historical perishing/capital/is having fun..." and so on (Tsivian offered a five-minute sample). Tsivian, *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties* (Gemona, Udine : Le Giornate del cinema muto, 2004), 187.

¹⁶³ Patricia J. Williams, "The Pantomime of Race." In *Seeing a Color-Blind Future: The Paradox of Race* (New York: Noonday Press, 1998), pp. 17-30, at 18.

¹⁶⁴ Quoted in Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on my Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 23. In Lenin's on words and the original Russian Mayakovsky so admired: "Относительно второго врага — безграмотности — я могу сказать, что, пока у нас есть в стране такое явление, как безграмотность, о политическом просвещении слишком трудно говорить. Это не есть политическая задача, это есть условие, без которого о политике говорить нельзя. Безграмотный человек стоит вне политики, его сначала надо научить азбуке. Без этого не может быть политики, без этого есть только слухи, сплетни, сказки, предрассудки, но не политика." V.I. Lenin, "Novaia ekonomicheskaiia politika i zadachi politprosvetov," In *Polnoe Sobranie*, 1956 [1921]), 172.

Every citizen had to learn to speak Bolshevik at the beginning, which meant for the “simple people” of the revolutionary era learning to read and write first. Often these acts were consolidated into a single process—conquering functional illiteracy and ideological backwardness; either way, their desired effects were supposed contiguous. For this reason, from the moment they assumed power, the Bolsheviks undertook “the mobilization of literate people” [*mobilizatsii gramotnykh*] and the “liquidation of illiteracy” [*likvidatsiia bezgramotnosti*], and Lenin immediately decreed that all people from eight to fifty years old learn to read and write in their own language.¹⁶⁵ The long-term results of this targeted education campaign were miraculous: the rate of adult literacy in Russia jumped from the pitiable proportion of under 40% in 1920 to nearly 100% by the 1950s.¹⁶⁶

Of the practical strategies employed by the state, Andrei Siniavskii supplies “an interesting detail” in his book on *Soviet Civilization*: “in the first Soviet schools for children or adults, one of the first lessons written on the slate was ‘We are not slaves. The slaves are not us.’” This phrase, one of the most popular ideological slogans of the revolutionary era,¹⁶⁷ appeared in an abecedarian for nascent socialists, entitled *Down with Illiteracy: An Alphabet Book for Adults (Doloi negramtnost’: Bukvar’ dlia vzroslykh, 1919* [Figure 15.]).¹⁶⁸ Importantly, it is a verbal palindrome in the Russian original: *My ne raby, raby ne my*. “We are not slaves, slaves we are not.” But the second clause, *raby nemy*, is also a *double entendre*, meaning both “slaves we are not” and “slaves are mute.” The pun is only possible in spoken language (and diminished in ambivalence in written Russian), making it a socialist inside joke based on Derridean *différance*, which requires the reader to operate in two linguistic modes simultaneously, using both eyes and ears to get the last laugh at illiteracy.¹⁶⁹

This was a skill-set the new state was game to provide, given that it staked its popular legitimacy on the successful transmission of its ideological message to the broad masses, peasants and lumpenproletariat, whose plights as “simple people” it pledged to uplift through edification qua electrification. Therein lied “the power of the Communist appeal,” which “cannot be overestimated”: it “promised that those who had been slaves in

¹⁶⁵ In the immediately post-revolution period, Lenin issued the governmental decrees, one “On the Mobilization of Literate People” [*O mobilizatsii gramotnykh*] in 1918, and another “On eradication of illiteracy among the population of RSFSR” [*O likvidatsii bezgramotnosti sredi naseleniia RSFSR*] in 1919. The latter tactic known by its stump-name of “Likbez.” Nina Nar, “The Campaign Against Illiteracy and Semiliteracy in the Ukraine, Transcaucasus, and Northern Caucasus, 1922-1941.” In *Soviet Education*, edited by George Louis Kline (New York: Columbia University Press: 1957), 140.

¹⁶⁶ Hellbeck, *Revolution on my Mind*, 23; and Lenore Grenoble, *Language Policy in the Soviet Union* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003).

¹⁶⁷ N.K. Kozlova, *Uproshchenie -- znak epokhi!* Ph.D. dissertation. Institute Philosophy AN SSSR, 1990. No . 7, pp. 11-21.

¹⁶⁸ Quoted by Konstantin Bogdanov, “Glukhonemota: Utopiia spaseniia.” In *Russkie utopii*, edited by V.E. Bagno (St. Petersburg, Kanun, 1995), 238-280, at 242.

¹⁶⁹ The ideological rhetoric around illiteracy drew on different registers of ability, and was based on the same multimodality as the clever slogan, though of a negative sort. While getting the joke about mute slaves depended on being able to see and hear the sentence, exclusion from the socialist punchline about illiteracy meant neither speaking nor seeing. Illiteracy, here likened to muteness, was also considered a form of blindness, per the iconography of the anti-illiteracy campaign, as the copy on a widely disseminated poster of 1918 makes clear: “The illiterate person is the same as the blind person: misfortune and unhappiness awaits him everywhere.” [*Negramotnyi tot-zhe slepoi: vsiudu ego zhdu neudachi i neschast'ia*].

the past could remold themselves into exemplary members of humanity.”¹⁷⁰ The literacy campaign brought social change down to the level of the individual by giving voice to the mute slave of the old order. The mute slave, in turn, had to put stock in the revolutionary idea that “by spelling out these phrases” in the socialist alphabet-book, “one could break the chains of slavery.”¹⁷¹ Such is the logic of “speaking Bolshevik,” as Stephen V. Kotkin elaborates his influential theory. Becoming a legible subject at the dawn of Soviet civilization involved a “process of social identification that demanded mastery of a certain vocabulary, or official language,”¹⁷² in written, oral, and conceptual registers. Thus “publicly expressing loyalty by knowing how to ‘speak Bolshevik’ became an overriding concern” in Soviet society.

While functional and ideological literacy were entwined endeavors, they were not equal in import to the emergent state. One could be “simply functionally ‘illiterate,’” like a certain Marfa, a notoriously unskilled locomotive driver, whose lessons in the language of Soviet ideology Kotkin recounts. An ignorance more profound than merely being unalphabetic, this Marfa “did not know, nor apparently did her husband, how to live and ‘speak Bolshevik,’ the obligatory language for self-identification and as such, the barometer of one’s political allegiance to the cause.”¹⁷³ The couple’s consciousness remained uncultivated in these other terms, insofar as revolutionary language in the communist context revealed “the very shape of consciousness,” in Leon Trotsky’s words.¹⁷⁴ As a counter to this couple, Kotkin culls from the archives some written correspondence by another “new person,” a Tatar, whose letters cause the historian to speculate “perhaps he was learning still learning to speak Russian; he was certainly learning to ‘speak Bolshevik.’”¹⁷⁵ In broken Russian but fluent Bolshevik, the Tatar testifies to his double redemption by the Soviet civilizing mission. In the letter writer’s own words, “I am a Tatar. Before October... we weren’t even considered people.”¹⁷⁶ Overcoming his illiteracy, he enters political life, and is effectively reborn in the revolutionary moment, from mute Tatar animality to speaking Soviet humanity. (Here I draw on Skorokhodova’s vocabulary of socialist grace.) The Tartar may not have actually written the letter that bears his name as a signatory, Kotkin suspects; but he no less inscribes himself into history as an active subject by ventriloquizing Soviet ideology. He

¹⁷⁰ Hellbeck, *Revolution on my Mind*, 14.

¹⁷¹ Andrei Sinyavsky, *Soviet Civilization: A Cultural History* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1990), 145. As Siniavskii, ever the shrewd critic of Soviet civilization, observes, this slogan bears another obscene subtext or anti-ideological implication. In his opinion, the literacy campaign produced of the newly literate proletariat a “self-satisfied slave.” “This slave not only does not feel his slavery, but sees himself as the freest man there is, and dreams of converting workers of the world, suffering in capitalist chains, to the same state” (128). Thus functional-cum-ideological literacy campaigns gave birth to a “standardized man,” who was, per Siniavskii “the backbone of [Soviet] civilization. He represents this new breed, mass-minted by the Soviet State and society. His spiritual, moral, and even intellectual profile places him immeasurably lower than the most unenlightened muzhik. In exchange for the good qualities found in simple people, he has acquired impudence, familiarity and arrogance, as well as a habit of judging and explaining everything in the most primitive terms. This is a savage who thinks that he knows it all, that he is the pearl of creation” (146-47).

¹⁷² Stephen V. Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 220.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Trotsky quoted in Hellbeck, *Revolution on my Mind*, 19.

¹⁷⁵ Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 222.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid..

is politically animated by an outside agent (the appointed letter writer) until he masters reading, writing and speaking Bolshevik on his own.

In his investigation of Soviet subjectivity through Stalinist-era diary writing, inspired by Kotkin's work, Jochen Hellbeck offers the related life-story of Stepan Podlubnyi, a dekulakized Ukrainian peasant, who was sharpening his tongue to speak Bolshevik and Russian at the same time. "On the most elementary level, the diary helped Podlubnyi master the Russian language, which—given his Ukrainian background---had been taught to him only as a foreign language." The many grammatical and orthographic errors in the original text attest to this. But despite these mistakes in written Russian, "on a deeper level, however, the diary served Podlubnyi in learning yet another language: the Soviet language, a language revolving around labor activism, discipline, social use, and devotion to the state order."¹⁷⁷ Podlubnyi narrates the arc of his change as "a struggle between 'old' and 'new' elements in society, 'backward' and 'progressive,' darkness and light."¹⁷⁸

From the first-hand accounts selected by these historians to illustrate the process of becoming Soviet by learning to speak Bolshevik, a complex logic of linguistic racialization reveals itself. At the most fundamental level, the literacy project appears to have been raced in its reliance on the same set of colonialist tropes that underwrote deaf education and third-world paternalism. The prevalence of this rhetoric, in the presence of the extreme violence of the revolutionary years, "evoked the spirit of the Enlightenment," and "betrayed the self-understanding of the Communist party" as colonialist; it saw itself "as a bearer of light whose mission was to bring education and technology to Russia's 'dark' masses."¹⁷⁹ The literacy campaign was a gentler dimension of the "internal colonization" of the country,¹⁸⁰ making the Bolsheviks, in the opinion of one historian, "verbal imperialists," who wielded language like an ideological rifle in their battle to civilize the "backward people" they had newly knighted as Soviet citizens.¹⁸¹

A remediated form of enlightened Eurocentrism, Soviet anti-imperialism aligned its symbolic sympathies more closely with the white man in the pith helmet than the "dancing blacks" in Rumnev's *pantomime à thèse*. Indeed, the intractable whiteness of internationalism intensified in the USSR during and after the Second World War, as white-Russianness and Soviet identity slid into increasing synonymy for the sake of patriotic support. To be sure, even before the war, this racial conflation already inhered in the tales of the Tatar and the Ukrainian learning to speak Russian and Bolshevik in the same breath. But it became more explicit in the high-Stalinist era, when the state backpedalled on its official nationalities policy, which had been deliberately scripted to militate against white Russian hegemony in the equitable union of multiethnic republics.

As Soviet Russocentrism racialized socialism as white, so the desire to speak Bolshevik was racialized as black. This epistemologically loaded color-coding allowed the metaphorical movement of the speaking subject from blackness to whiteness.

¹⁷⁷ Jochen Hellbeck, "Self-Realization in the Stalinist System: Two Soviet Diaries of the 1930s," *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practices*, edited by David L. Hoffman and Yanni Kotsonis (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 221-242, at p. 228.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 227.

¹⁷⁹ "The transformation of old Russia into the USSR" was viewed as tantamount to "the discovery of a new continent." Hellbeck, *Revolution on my Mind*, 21.

¹⁸⁰ Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 35.

¹⁸¹ Hellbeck, *Revolution on my Mind*, 19.

Learning Russian – a racial and ideological language – one transported him or herself out of the darkness of illiteracy and into the white light of Leninist electrification, into political life and historical time. Socialism’s “new people” were born out of “simple people” who had been abducted from the over-determined dark continent and spirited away on the proverbial steamship of modernity by the (white Russian) sailors of mature socialism—much like Maksimka but nothing like Nagua or his monkey-friend, Yirka. This color-scheme seems then not an overlay of Stalinism but an insidious ingredient of socialism from its inception. Already in the revolutionary era, while illiteracy is being liquidated, it stows away on the poetic boat Mayakovsky builds in his 1927 futurist piece, “To Our Youth” [*Nashemu iunoshestvu*]. (Note both the childish age and exclusive pronoun of the poem’s apostrophe.) “Young comrades,” he exhorts, “keep eyes on Moscow/ train ears/ to Russian consonants, vowels.” ... “Why,/ were I a black man/ whom old age hoars, / still, / eager and uncomplaining,/ I’d sit/ and learn Russian/ if only because/ it/ was spoken/ by Lenin.”¹⁸² Though the poem’s content confirms the limits of the Soviet color palette, my reformatting of the original modernist typography regrettably suppresses the way the poem visually progresses, as so many other things in this chapter, according to the logic of the step-ladder.

These early years of Soviet rule bore witness as the “simple people” were animated into political life through revolutionary language and “unceasing agitation.”¹⁸³ The Party targeted the lumpen in particular for revolutionary development, regarding them as “the most potent and effective forces for bringing about positive change in Russia,” “those broad, illiterate peasant masses (the ‘spontaneous’), who had not been corrupted by Westernized education or by working for the autocratic state and could therefore express that pure, gut ‘rage’ of the Russians” so necessary to the Soviet project.¹⁸⁴ Learning to speak Bolshevik, they lifted themselves up from dark spontaneity to radiant consciousness, the latter a paradigm of political subjectivity that stressed “self-mastery and the individual will.” According to Jochen Hellbeck, it was “only after a prolonged historical phase of mobilization and disciplinary violence,” an accelerated Soviet take on colonialism, that the “scenario of self-activation” could be achieved on the macrological level of society, such that “consciousness was no longer simply imposed on backward people” by the Party. But instead “it had begun to unfold from within, animating Soviet citizens in ever greater numbers and deeper measure.”¹⁸⁵

As I bring this chapter to a close, I underscore this recurrent connection between animation and agitation, and point to the literalness of this link in Soviet-Russian representations of racial subjects. In short, I believe there is a reason that, in the case of blackness, scenes of socialist animation so often resort to cartoon animation and other low genres and disputably crude forms of depiction, like comics, public broadsides,

¹⁸² Quoted in William J. Maxwell, *New Negro, Old Left: African-American Writing and Communism between the Wars* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 63. Here is the original Russian: “Товарищи юноши,/ взгляд — на Москву,/ на русский вострите уши!/ Да будь я/ и негром преклонных годов,/и то,/ без унынья и лени,/ я русский бы выучил/ только за то,/ что им/ разговаривал Ленин.” Vladimir Maiakovskii, “Nashemu iunoshestvu (‘Na sotni estrad brosaet menia...’).” In *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 13 vols. (Moscow: Gosizdat ‘khudozhnaia literatura’, 1958), vol. 8, pp. 14-18.

¹⁸³ Hellbeck, *Revolution on my Mind*, 23.

¹⁸⁴ Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 22.

¹⁸⁵ Hellbeck, *Revolution on my Mind*, 21.

children's theater, and poster-pantomimes. Racialized subjects were animated and given a voice in this story, at the same time, I argue, this act of ideological 'envocalization' or ventriloquism was already raced (in advance of the subjects it agitated), insofar as Soviet speech was comprehended by a colonialist logic.

In thinking of animation this way, as a political-aesthetic assemblage, I defer to critical-race feminist Sianne Ngai, who defines it as "the process by which these involuntary corporeal expressions of feeling come to exert a politicizing force," similarly laminating "'animation' and the 'agitation' that subtends our concept of the political agitator."¹⁸⁶ As I do in this chapter, Ngai's book *Ugly Feelings* dives into a large pool of cultural texts that deal with "ideologemes of racialized animatedness," whose aggregate examination brings "animation" up to the surface as the "rhetorical figure and the general process of activating or giving life to inert matter."¹⁸⁷ She turns her attention to the *other* cold war context in her analysis, and mines Harriet Beecher's Stowe's sentimental fiction, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), for its rich depictions of racial animacy. Ngai sizes up a scene from the novel in which a "negro" body is shown jovially dancing and clapping, not unlike the cartoon Chunga-Changans and Rumnev's "African" mimes in the moment before they are beset by the white colonizer. Here and elsewhere in the book, Ngai finds that "animation turns the exaggeratedly expressive body into a spectacle...[of the] African-American subject made to move physically in response to lyrical, poetic, or imagistic language."¹⁸⁸ In a more sophisticated show of "excessive responsiveness" by a black subject to white discourse, the title character is overtaken by "a kind of ventriloquism," as "language from an outside source"—"the language of Scripture"— "'drop[s] from his lips' without [Tom's] conscious volition." This instance of animation, Ngai concludes, "involves likening [the racialized body] to an instrument, porous and pliable, for the vocalization of others,"¹⁸⁹ much in the way that poetic apostrophe is "a form of ventriloquism, in which a speaker 'throws voice...into the addressee, turning its silence into a mute responsiveness.'"¹⁹⁰

This description of emotional ventriloquism and "mute responsiveness" should remind readers of the dissertation as much of Rumnev's pantomime and the related texts about race I interrogate in this chapter, as it does the lip-synching deaf actors who starred in the previous one. The simple people becoming literate socialists, like the cadres of decolonized Africans studying communism in the USSR, the mute performers in the Moscow theater of the deaf, and the deaf children starting to read—all of these subjects undergo a rite of passage in political consciousness as they learn to speak Russian and its ideological dialect of Bolshevik. Until they were able to self-activate as agents of history, these actors were compelled to rely on the state's captioning of their silent pantomimes and cartoons of revolutionary spontaneity on the cusp on consciousness.

¹⁸⁶ Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 96.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.* The embedded quotation comes from Barbara Johnson, "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion," in *idem. A World of Difference* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 185.

Figure 1. and Figure 2. Group stills from the pantomime production *Africa* [Afrika, 1962], staged by the student theater EKTEMIM at the All-Soviet Cinematography Institute [Vsesoiuznyi institut kinematografii or VGIK].



Figure 3. Illustration of the *Africa* pantomime from Aleksandr Rumnev’s book, *On Pantomime: Theater, Film* [O pantomime: teatr, kino] (Moscow: 1964).



Figure 4. Soviet agitational poster condemning colonialism, printed in *Krokodil* (ca. 1960), reading: “The peoples of Africa will rein in the colonizers!”

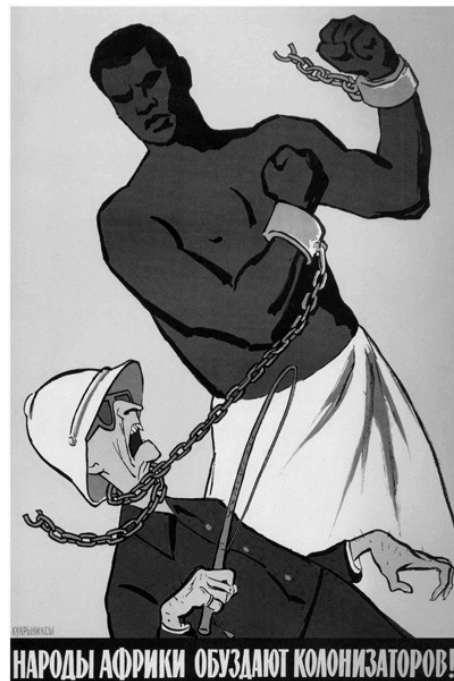


Figure 5. Still from the Stalinist musical comedy, *The Circus* [*Tsirk*, 1930], directed by Grigorii Aleksandrov.



Figure 6. Still from *Maksimka*, the filmic adaptation of K. Stanyukovich's novel, later reprised on the stage of Natal'ia's Sats's Children's Theater.



Figure 7. The Chunga-Changa islanders from the 1970 cartoon, "The Little Cutter" [Katerok].



Figure 8. Group-still from *The Negro Boy and the Monkey*.



Figure 9. and **Figure 10.** The eponymous protagonists, Nagua and Yirka, from the Children's Theater's original production, *The Negro Boy and the Monkey* [Negritenok i obez'iana].

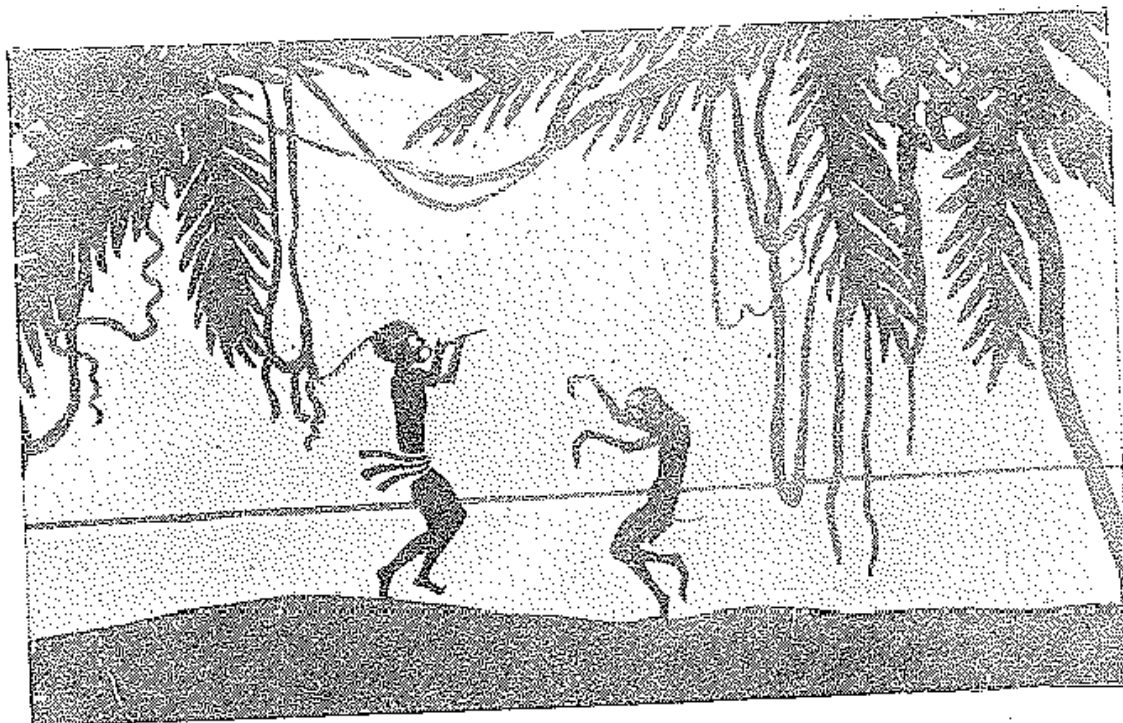


Figure 11. The Nice Negro Girl from *The Negro Boy and the Monkey*.



Figure 12. The illustrated anecdote, "In Africa Ice Cream is Also Cold."

[V Afrike morozhenoe tozhe kholodnoe.],
published in *Deaf Life* [Zhizn' glukhikh], 1970.

В АФРИКЕ МОРОЖЕНОЕ ТОЖЕ ХОЛОДНОЕ

Много интересных случаев и смешных приключений было на фестивале молодежи в Москве в 1957 году. Кто был тогда в столице, тот видел, как тепло встречали москвичи молодежь всего мира.

Однажды на улице Горького негр из Африки решил купить мороженое.

— Эскимо! — сказал он и показал один палец. Больше слов по-русски он не знал. После этого негр полез в карман за деньгами. И вдруг он покраснел: оказалось, что кошелек он забыл в гостинице.



И тогда девушки и юноши, женщины и мужчины — все, кто стоял в очереди, стали покупать мороженое и угощать им иностранного гостя.

Через минуту в руках у негра оказалась гора мороженого. Теперь он уже не знал, что ему делать с мороженым. А тут еще жаркое солнце. Мороженое стало таять.

Что же делать? Кругом все улыбались,

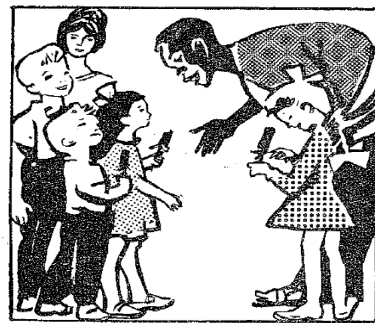


а чем помочь, не знали. И вдруг негр увидел идущих по улице детей. Он быстро подошел к ним.

Ребята сначала удивились, увидев перед собой негра с мороженым в руках. Но потом все поняли. Около них собралось много народу. Взрослые улыбались, а ребята ели вкусное мороженое и слушали, как негр много раз повторял что-то по-английски.

— А что он говорит? — спросил один мальчик.

— В Африке мороженое тоже холодное... — сказала девушка: она знала английский язык.



Отдел ведет Ф. А. БОБНОВ

Рисунки И. МАЛЫТА

29

Translation of the Comic

F.A. Bobkov, "V Afrike morozhenoe tozhe kholodnoe," *Zhizn' glukikh* [Deaf Life], 8 (August 1970), 28.

In Africa Ice Cream is Also Cold (for those beginning to read)

There were a lot of interesting incidents and funny adventures at the Youth Festival in Moscow in 1957. Whoever was then in the capital saw how warmly Muscovites met with the youth of the whole world.

Once on Gorky Street a Negro from Africa decided to buy ice cream.

"Eskimo!" he said and displayed one finger. He did not know any other words in Russian. After that the Negro reached into his pocket for money. And suddenly he blushed: it seemed he had forgotten his wallet in the hotel. [Drawing 1.]

So then the girls and boys, women and men, everyone who was standing in line began to buy ice cream and treat the foreign guest to it.

After a minute there was a mountain of ice cream in the Negro's hands. And he did not know what to do with all this ice cream. The sun was hot here. The ice cream was starting to melt.

What was he to do? Everyone around him was smiling, [Drawing 2.]

but no one knew how to help him. Then suddenly the Negro saw children walking down the street. He quickly approached them.

The kids were surprised at first, having seen in front of them a Negro with ice cream in his hands. But then everyone understood. A crowd gathered round them. The adults were smiling, and the children were eating delicious ice cream and listening to the Negro say something over and over again in English.

"What is he saying?" asked one boy.

"In Africa ice cream is also cold...", said the girl. She knew English. [Drawing 3.]

Figure 13. A picture of a black African student at the Moscow Youth Festival in 1957, appreciating art with his white Soviet escorts, published that year in the journal *Theater*.



Figure 14. The “chocolate boy” [shokoladni mal’chik] Eskimo ice cream bar, an obvious cousin of “The Little Cutter”’s Chunga-Changans.



Figure 15. “We are not slaves, slaves we are not.” A page from the illiteracy campaign, originally published in the instructional text, *Doloi negrammatnost’!*

РСФСР

Добавление к букварю „Долой неграмотность“ таблица I.

мы не рабы



мы не рабы мы не бары
 не рабы мы не бары мы
 ра-бы ба-ры ра-ба ба-ба
 баба не раба

Беседа:
 Предложите обучающимся рассмотреть таблицу и подумать о словечках, которые на ней выписаны. Почему мы не хотим быть неграмотными? Хотим ли мы учиться в детстве? Как научиться обращаться? Почему? Хотим ли работать? Хотим ли мы быть свободными без грамоты? Как выразиться о неграмотном человеке? Почему грамота помогает нам свободней жить и работать? Беседа может быть построена и по другим вопросам, но главное, чтобы на беседе был положительный вывод: мы не рабы, мы не бары, и чтобы этот вывод был основой и побуждением ликвидировать неграмотность.

Методические указания к ведению урока:
Учите читать только целыми словами.
 Обязательны для каждого ученика шесть специальных упражнений: читать слова мы, не рабы, бары (и выделенные буквы). Когда на беседе дан этот вывод: „мы не рабы“, учитель говорит: кто и как выделит каждое слово и выделит буквы, которые выделены у нас. Затем он предлагает найти выделенные слова (рабы) среди выписанных на таблице в букваре и среди выписанных слов и слогов, чтобы выделенные слова выделены, проговорились и т. д.
 Когда выделены слова слогов, ученики предлагают прочитать вторые строки, и тем ученикам, которые сразу в переставленном виде прочитают, дать достаточную похвалу и предложить самим выделенные слова.
 Первой задачей является умение выделенных 4-х слов: мы, не рабы, бары.

Учите читать по слогам.
 Затем переходят к разделению слов на слоги. Учитель берет первую часть выделенного слова (рабы) — слоги „ра“, проговаривает их, предлагает им не читать устно и выделит еще слова (бары). Вторую выделенную часть выделенных 2-х слогов „ба“ и „ба“ и слогов не „раба, баба“.
 Затем прочитывают вторую фразу, выделенными выделенными. Другими словами без печатных цифр.

„мы“ № 2419 Тираж 100.000. П. С. С. Москва № 18

ГОСУДАРСТВЕННЫЙ ИНСТИТУТ
 МЕТОДИКИ ШКОЛ

CHAPTER THREE.
UN-STRAIGHTENING THE SOVIET BODY:
THE QUEER PHENOMENOLOGY OF UNSPEAKABILITY

“I got into writing because I wouldn’t have been any good at standing up straight.”
—Evgenii Kharitonov¹

“A normal, beautiful woman [needs] a symmetrical man.”
—Andrei Sinyavsky²



Figure 1. Interior Wall.

“The wall in the Moscow apartment of Kharitonov on Iartsevskaja St.
At the bottom is the alphabet of the deaf-mute.”³

¹ Evgenii Kharitonov, *Under House Arrest*. Trans. Arch Tait (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1998), 154.

² Andrei Sinyavsky, “Pkhentz,” in *The Portable Twentieth-Century Russian Reader*. Ed. Clarence Brown. Trans. Manya Harari (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 488.

³ Photo by Ravil’ Deushev. From the archive of A.Ia. Deriev (Novosibirsk)”

<http://www.vavilon.ru/metatext/risk2/haritonov.html> . Accessed 2/09/10. Caption reproduced along with the photograph from their original website.

Стена в московской квартире Харитонова на Ярцевской улице. Внизу - азбука глухонемых. Фото Равиля Деушева. Из архива А.Я.Дериева (Новосибирск)

KHARITONOV INSIDE AND OUT

From the very outset, this chapter comes up against a wall: the one (pictured on the preceding page) in the two-bedroom apartment 57 on the fifth floor of the second corpus of Iartsevskaiia Street number 24 in Moscow, where the Soviet Union's arguably only gay author,⁴ Evgenii Kharitonov (1941-1981), once lived. It is fitting to begin *inside* with Kharitonov since the expense of his writing openly and *intimately* on homosexual themes in the late 1960s and 70s was, as he put it, unublishability.⁵ In other words, he came out of the closet to go right back into the drawer. Though Kharitonov never lived to see a line of his poetry or prose in print (certainly not in official publications, but also not in samizdat), he composed ceaselessly and urgently until his tragically cinematic death at not yet forty years old: carrying the barely-finished manuscript of *Under House Arrest* [*Pod domashnim arestom*] down the Moscow boulevard named for the national poet Aleksandr Pushkin, Kharitonov collapsed on the ground of a heart attack and the loose pages of his life's work were caught up and dispersed by a passing breeze. His gay writing, it would seem, was destined never to transgress the boundaries of private life, locked under house arrest along with the author.

Kharitonov's public record proves equally curious and unrepeatable. Born in 1941 in Novosibirsk, Russia, he moved to Moscow during Khrushchev's cultural thaw to become first a student under Aleksandr Rumnev, then an instructor of pantomime in his own right at the All-Russian State Institute of Cinematography (VGIK). A founding member of Rumnev's Experimental Theater-Studio of Pantomime [*Eksperimental'nyi teatr-studiia pantomimy*] or EKTEMIM, "Zhenya Kharitonov voluntarily assumed the responsibility of directing the theater before it existed,"⁶ beginning roughly in 1961 and ending in 1965 with Rumnev's death. At VGIK, Kharitonov completed his first degree in 1964, taught a course in "Actorly Craft and Pantomime" [*Akterskoe masterstvo i pantomima*] from 1967-1969, and defended his dissertation on pantomime in 1972 to earn a doctoral degree in the study of art [*iskusstvovedenie*].

Later, in the so-called epoch of Stagnation, Kharitonov founded the "School of Nontraditional Stage Behavior" [*Shkola netraditsionnogo tsenicheskogo povedeniia*] at the "Moskvorech'e" State Institute of Culture. From the Seventies until his early death, he choreographed for the rock group, Last Chance [*Poslednyi shans*], and occasionally for films, including the dance of Elena Koreneva to the Bulat Okudzhava song, "Love" [*Liubov*] in the 1974 Andrei Konchalovskii film *Romance for Lovers* [*Romans o vliublennykh*].⁷ He made his own celluloid cameo in the type-cast role of "The Poet" in

⁴ See Iaroslav Mogutin, "Katorzhnik na nive bukvy." In *Slezy na tsvetakh*, tom 1. Iaroslav Mogutin, ed. (Moscow: Glagol, 1993). He quotes Dmitrii Prigov, "he was the first to write openly on homosexual themes," and use a correspondingly specific lexicon that had not existed in the age of his predecessors [Kuzmin and Dobychchev]. "Он первый стал писать откровенно на гомосексуальные темы", используя при этом соответствующую, порою - очень специфическую, лексику, не существовавшую еще во времена его предшественников.

⁵ Evgenii Kharitonov, "Nepечатnye pisateli," in *Slezy na tsvetakh*, tom 1, 266-7.

⁶ Женя Харитонов в добровольных началах взял на себя обязанности директора еще не существующего театра. F. Povago, "EKTEMIM," *Molodaia gvardiia*, 10 (1962), 273-287.

⁷ The author thanks Kevin Moss for alerting her to this more obscure moment of Kharitonov's eclectic creative activity in a personal email from December 4, 2009.

Day of Icarus [*Den' Ikara*, 1966]⁸, directed by M. Roshal' and included in the 1968 children's film-almanac, *Awakening* [*Probuzhdenie*]. He worked on the other side of the children's film camera, too, composing humorous verses for an instructional cartoon on the rules of the road (1974-75), and an original creative script for an unrealized animation project, "My Dog's Kitty Cat" [*Koshechka moei sobaki*, 1976].⁹ Kharitonov adapted V. Odoevskii's "Godorok v tabakerke" (1834) into an absurdist children's "talkie pantomime" [*ozuvchennaia pantomima*] with the onomatopoetic title, "Dzyn'." Finished on June 29, 1981, "Dzyn'" is allegedly the last thing he wrote, by means of which he hoped to "outsmart the censor" [*perekhitrit's tsensuru*], possibly encrypting a "gay?" [*goluboe?*] subtext into the experimental children's format.¹⁰ (This was a credible tactic for circumventing censorship, given the precedent of turning to children's literature established by other politically-struggling Soviet authors.¹¹)

In the midst of this eclectic and incessant creative activity, Kharitonov remained a scholar and studied defectology, or Soviet "special education," and speech pathology in the Psychology Department of Moscow State University. His training thus positioned him ambivalently between the two approaches to silence that this dissertation has engaged so far. At once his affiliation with unimpaired pantomime implied an interest in muteness as metaphor. At the same time, as a defectologist and logopedic theorist, he belonged to a pair of professions that regarded silence as a pathological fact. These two silences spoke to a third and fourth in Kharitonov's experience as an unpublishable author and gay man. His official occupation directing plays with the "deaf-mute" cast of Moscow Theater of Mimicry and Gesture fruitfully fused many of these silences, I will argue, placing his work with hearing and speech-impaired actors in quiet conversation with his underground gay writing.

⁸ Kharitonov met his good friend Elena Gulyga (1947-2008) on the set; she played his partner, "The Poetess," in the film short. Kharitonov, *Pod domashnim arestom*. Gleb Morev, ed. (Moscow: Glagol, 2005), 509.

⁹ See "[Stikhi dlia mul'tifilm'a o pravilakh dorozhnogo dvizheniia]" in Kharitonov, *Pod domashnim arestom*, 2005: 394, 541-2. Since the film was never made and Kharitonov's original script was lost, Morev includes the verses remembered by A. Deriev and published originally in *Mitin zhurnal* (1998), no. 56. Kharitonov composed these lines at the request of one of his former VGIK pantomime students, A. Ziablikova, who also solicited "Koshechka moei sobaki" (*Pod domashnim arestom*, 395-398, 542).

¹⁰ He took on this Odoevskii adaptation per the suggestion of E. Kozlovskii and N. Klimontovich. "Poetess" co-star and close friend, Lena Gulyga, recalls how Kharitonov hoped his stab at children's literature would make it past the state censors, and Gleb Morev, in his commentary, suggests that the childish aspect of the piece might exist alongside its queer quality. Kharitonov, "Dzyn'," in *Pod domashnim arestom*, 404-434, 543-545. "Dzyn'" was written shortly before Kharitonov died and published in tamizdat journals shortly after (*Chasy*, no. 3 [1981]; and *Graal'*, no. 10 [1983]).

¹¹ In the Soviet period, "gifted poets and writers had preserved their talents and their independence by going underground, writing children's literature," like Daniil Kharmis and other members of the Oberiu, Nikolai Zabolotskii, and Andrei Platonov, "and doing translations...many had kept on writing without the hope of publication." Deming Brown, *The last years of Soviet Russian literature: prose fiction, 1975-1991* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 11.



Figure 2. Exterior walls of 24-2 Iartsevskaja Street.¹²

This is how the present chapter attempts to scale its second wall, the one continuously erected in the critical literature on Kharitonov bifurcating his life into private and public, underground and official, literary and theatrical parts. The latter is usually sacrificed to the former in these biographies, elevating his personal writing as a true vocation and leaving the publicly esteemed Kharitonov of the theater and the classroom out in the cold. Indeed, his career in avant-garde and deaf pantomime and his involvement with the deaf community through defectology are typically dismissed out of hand as any other late-Soviet sinecure for the *intelligent* writer or artist, like the cable-laying job barely held down by Venedikt Erofeev’s loosely-autobiographical hero in *Moscow to the End of the Line* [*Moskva-Petushki*, 1969]. Writing off Kharitonov’s participation in pantomime as inevitable (an eminently unsupportable proposition in itself) confirms an entrenched tendency in cold-war historiography: to split the socialist subject into dissimulating public self and authentic private personality.¹³ The critical neglect of Kharitonov’s public activity, and the corresponding concentration of attention on his “closet” stories,¹⁴ reifies this commonly-held hunch that the Soviet state repressed

¹² The division of Kharitonov’s life into public-closeted, private-gay, is complicated even in this picture of the exterior of his home. It was published by Gleb Morev on his private Facebook page in April 2010. I am grateful to a mutual friend of Morev’s and fellow fan of Kharitonov for passing this along. In the spirit of the dissertation’s fascination with the paradoxical genre of secret speech, I preserve the anonymity of my social-media intermediary.

¹³ This notion of the split subject of socialism with a public face and a private self has only recently begun to be uprooted, most notably by Alexei Yurchak in *Everything was Forever until It Was No More* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2006), 4-7.

¹⁴ As a consequence of this hegemonic narrative of total invisibility, Kharitonov’s masterful short story about a painfully closeted gay man from Moscow, called “The Oven” [*Dukhovka*], receives the most attention in critical literature. This hermeneutic tic tell us less about Kharitonov’s priorities and more about the Anglo-American scholars who love him, since the location of the “closet” as a homosexual site in Russian culture is a faux pas; (post) socialism had a distinct architecture of erotic agency. Moreover, political—not sexual identity—was the true secret trapped in the binaries described in Sedgwick’s

all expressions of true identity, especially sexual identity, and all the more sexual identity of the non-normative variety.

That this narrative held sway over the gay author's critical reception has everything to do with the conditions of his initial and posthumous publication in 1993 by Russia's first gay publishing house, Aleksandr Shatalov's Glagol. The occasion sparked a passionate controversy among the post-Soviet intelligentsia, who deliberated over whether Kharitonov could be included in both the national literary canon and the nascent gay canon at once.¹⁵ This debate drew out the perceived tensions between literature as a lofty pursuit and (homo) sexuality as mired in the earthly and ideologized everyday; a binary opposition pitting the spiritually transcendent inside of an artist against the contingencies of his outward embodied life.¹⁶ Some insisted that his professed homosexuality was mere ornament or aesthetic affectation, disincarnating his artistic self for the sake of transcendence. Others attempted to salvage his dramatic legacy by sanitizing it of the sexuality spelled out explicitly in his poetry and prose. Still others regarded his homosexuality as an ontological condition, contributing to rather than competing with his artistic identity. Though these turf-wars over Kharitonov did not conclude in consensus over his canonical belonging, critics of all camps did seem to tacitly agree on a couple of points: 1) that the bodily dimension of same-sex love should remain an unspeakable theme in national literature; and 2) that Kharitonov's public career had little to do with either his homosexuality or his private writing.

The flames of the controversy around Kharitonov's publication were fanned by the larger political conflagration of presumably private sexuality going public in post-Soviet Russia. This moment witnessed the emergence of a western-style gay and lesbian (though mostly gay) liberation movement, when, according to one sociologist of "queer" Russia, gays were "coming out in all sorts of public ways" and "taking up more and more space in the public sphere."¹⁷ At the same time, this same sociologist "[did] not see Stonewall in Russia's future"; and another observed that "the conditions of gay life" in Russia in the "early 1990s seemed remarkably similar to the situation described in accounts of gay life in America in about the 1940s and 1950s," that is, pre-Stonewall,

Epistemology of the Closet (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990). See Kevin Moss, "The Underground Closet: Political and Sexual Dissidence in East European Culture." In *Post-Communism and the Body Politic*. Ellen E. Berry, ed. (New York: New York University Press, 1995).

¹⁵ See Evgenii Bershtein and Anastasia Kayiatos, "The Literary Reputation of Evgenii Kharitonov: Homosexuality as Ontological Taint," manuscript (2001).

Kharitonov's acceptance in the national canon remains tenuous today, and even local to Anglo-American academic formations of late and post-Soviet literature. On the Russian side, this is likely a result of some combination of everyday and institutional homophobias whose effects run deeper than those of the Stalinist anti-sodomy statute, which was repealed in 1993.

¹⁶ This tension might be expressed another way, as one between literature as a transcendent activity and byt, that is, the stuff of the everyday that gets in the way of transcendence. The impulse to purify literature as a lofty pursuit of byt has had implications for the acceptance not only of sexual-dissident authors, but also "women's prose" [zhenskaia proza]. Thus I use only the masculine pronoun when discussing the artist as an intelligentsia type. For more on the fraught position of women's prose in the Russian canon, see Benjamin M. Sutcliffe, *The Prose of Life: Russian Women Writers from Khrushchev to Putin* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009).

¹⁷ Laurie Essig, *Queer in Russia: A Story of Sex, Self and Other* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), xi-xii.

when “the very concept of being ‘out’ was simply inconceivable.”¹⁸ Unlike the rest of post-socialist Russians, subscribers to this school of thought reasoned, the country’s “gays [were] still in a cold war,”¹⁹ and trapped in the total silence that had surrounded sexual alterity under so-called totalitarianism. Claiming Kharitonov’s private life as part of “Russia’s hidden gay history”²⁰ was a gesture of political defiance, of publicly cobbling together a gay past inscribed in inside-spaces, like the wall of 24 Iarstevskaia. For seven-and-a-half Soviet decades homosexuality had been stuck inside—in private homes and lonely psyches—and would probably be for another seventy-five years, as early gay activist Roman Kalinin prophesied.²¹

But I’m not so sure that’s how it all works. The logic of Kalinin and the American sociologists is problematic first for its easy imposition of Western formations of private and public on socialist space and subjectivity;²² and also for its unchallenged assumption that gay visibility looks the same and gay speech sounds the same all around the globe.²³ The “from-Stonewall-diffusion-fantasy” described above,²⁴ shared by Russian activists and their American allies alike, effaces the real traces of queer presence in proper Soviet history. At the bottom of this mode of political thinking is the belief that the “history of homosexuality”²⁵ in Russia can never coincide with Soviet history proper, since Soviet Russia could only *be* by eradicating homosexuality. This is not a paranoid premise—indeed Maxim Gorky famously declared that “if you eliminate homosexuality fascism will disappear”—but it misses the most important point: when the story of the Soviet Union is told, so too are the stories of its sexual citizens. *Soviet history is also the history of homosexuality*. The history of the state and the history of the people do not cleave neatly in two, nor do the citizens of the Soviet Union themselves. This chapter will force both these pat presumptions to crisis in the one person of Kharitonov, and insist instead

¹⁸ Daniel P. Schuller, *Gay Life in the Former USSR: Fraternity without Community: Issues in Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 6.

¹⁹ Dexter Filkins, “Gays still in a cold war: Russian activists say new era, American give [sic] them hope,” *Miami Herald* (1992).

²⁰ Simon Karlinsky, “Russia’s Hidden Gay History.” In *Out of the Blue*. Kevin Moss, ed. (San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1993).

²¹ Roman Kalinin quoted in Masha Gessen, “Moscow Activists Push for Gay Glasnost,” *The Advocate* (18 December 1990): 5.

²² Like Silvano Santiago in his sharp-witted preface to the collection, *Queer Globalizations*, I second the sense of uneasiness surrounding the premise that American-style visibility is best for queers transnationally. Inspired by Santiago, I challenge the supremacy that Western-centric queer studies have attributed Western formations of private and public (homo/sexual) space. Santiago, “The Wily Homosexual.” In *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism*, eds. Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé and Martin F. Manalansan, IV (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

²³ The universalist presumptions of “gay” already accomplish this cultural reduction in a word. For starters, consult Dennis Altman, *Global Sex* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Jon Binnie, *The globalization of sexuality* (London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif., SAGE, 2004); and for the Russian case in particular, Brian James Baer, “Russian Gays/Western Gaze: Mapping (Homo)Sexual Desire in Post-Soviet Russia,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 8.4 (2002) 499-521.

²⁴ Martin Manalansan observed this phenomenon that Paola Bacchetta cleverly christened the “from-Stonewall-diffusion-fantasy.” Martin Manalansan, “In the Shadows of Stonewall: Examining Gay Transnational Politics and the Diasporic Dilemma.” In *The Politics of Culture in the Capital*, eds. L. Lowe and D. Lloyd (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); and Paola Bacchetta, “Rescaling Transnational ‘Queerdom’: Lesbian and ‘Lesbian’ Identitary-Positionalities in Dehli in the 1980s,” *Antipode* (2002)

²⁵ David M. Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2002).

that no definitive border separated his private gay writing from his public theater career, his intimate biography from the fate of the state. The Soviet Union, I will argue, never successfully expunged from its symbolic economy all opportunities for the expression of difference more generally, or sexual difference more particularly. I point to pantomime as one site for gay (and queer) expression.



Figure 3. “Evgenii Kharitonov on the balcony of his apartment. 28 or 29 April 1981.”²⁶

KHARITONOV BETWEEN, AMIDST AND BEYOND

This photograph taken in the last year of his life shows Kharitonov indulging his only *real vice*²⁷—smoking—as he stands instructively on the balcony of 24 Iartsevskaiia Street. Sandwiched *between* apartment walls in the liminal space of the threshold,²⁸ his ambivalent footing in the picture mimics the irresolvably midway position between public and private that Kharitonov struck in his mature-socialist life. The enclosed openness of his position as an artist and gay man—*out* and *in* at once—lets him breathe freely in certain company, even as his lungs draw in the toxicity of the cigarette. At the same time, he is free from sharing the spiritually stale air after which his stealth counterparts gasp in a closet whose epistemology Eve Sedgwick famously describes for the West. Instead, Kharitonov on his balcony embodies an “epistemology of the vestibule,” that “liminal, semipublic space” beyond the space-time of the heterosexual family home which, it is safe to assume, surrounds him on all sides of the apartment

²⁶ “Евгений Харитонов на балконе своей квартиры. 28 или 29 апреля 1981 г. Фото Равиля Деушева. Из архива А.Я.Дериева (Новосибирск).” <http://www.vavilon.ru/metatext/risk2/haritonov.html> accessed on 8 April 2010. From the online journal, *RISK: Al'manakh*, ed. 2 (Moscow: ARGO-RISK, 1996).

²⁷ His status as an abstemious “golden boy” was a point of pride featured in his piece “A Russian who Does Not Drink” [*Nepiushchii russkii*].

²⁸ Though this observation exceeds the scope of the chapter, it is worth suggesting that Kharitonov’s betweenness has a lot to do with the threshold situation described by Mikhail Bakhtin in *The Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. Caryl Emerson, trans. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984 [1929]).

building. In the vestibule, the balcony, the waiting room and other such undecideable and in-between spaces, “alternative forms of sociability” emerge, says Heather Love; “[communities] of subjects defined through indecision and delay” or “beautiful deferral,” a mutual touching/feeling backward for the modern and modernist²⁹ (that preempts the rush headlong toward the radiant communist future or headfirst to the contemporaneous gay liberation of the first world).

Rather than marginalizing him, this maneuvering placed Kharitonov at the very center of the Soviet experience. With the help of the author’s own words, his posthumous anthologizer, Iaroslav Mogutin, explains this in the latter’s introduction to the first edition of Kharitonov’s collected works:

It is precisely this Kharitonovian position—“I amidst [*sredi*] people, culture, and the state”—that was his main distinction from the prevailing mentalities of the intelligentsia at the time. Amidst [*sredi*] people, amidst [*sredi*] culture, amidst [*sredi*] the state where “amidst” [*sredi*] may be specified as “in the center” [*v tsentre*], but by no means as “on the side” [*v storone*].³⁰

Counterintuitively, this preposition *sredi*, meaning “amidst” or “among,” that Kharitonov has chosen to describe himself locates him at once “in the center” [*v tsentre*] and in the *vnye* or “beyond” of post-Stalin Soviet culture. Living *vnye*, a concept coined by anthropologist Alexei Yurchak, means creating and inhabiting “deterritorialized milieus”: locations neither wholly in nor wholly outside official culture; neither overtly siding with Party ideology, nor rejecting it outright as political dissidents did,³¹ and as Kharitonov decidedly did not. From the impossible position of a sexual criminal, he felt a crushing debt to the Soviet state. To live with it and in or amidst it required extreme plasticity on Kharitonov’s part, an art of moving in betweenness whose cultivation was the supreme purpose of pantomime, which I chase after in this and the subsequent chapter.

What about Kharitonov as an historical subject has motivated us to marshal this preponderance of prepositions? Perhaps it is, as Kate Thomas captures it, “the prepositional quality of the queer and, indeed, the queer qualities of the preposition,” by

²⁹ Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2007), 64. By this turn-of-phrase, I mean to invoke not only the title of Love’s work, to whose notions of queer modernity and backward feeling I defer explicitly here and elsewhere in the chapter. I also more obliquely invoke Eve Sedgwick’s collection of essays, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003). In this collection of essays, Sedgwick explores the queer relationships between phenomenology, affect, performance and performativity—conceptual threads I myself hope to interweave in the ensuing pages.

³⁰ Именно эта харитоновская позиция - "Я" среди людей, культуры и государства" - была главным его отличием от преобладавших в то время интеллигентских умонастроений. Среди людей, среди культуры, среди государства, где "среди" можно расценить как "в центре", но ни коим образом - "в стороне"... Mogutin does a good job illustrating Kharitonov’s complicated and contradictory relationship to Soviet power, Iaroslav Mogutin, “Katorzhnik na nive bukvy.” In Kharitonov, *Slezy na tsvetakh*, tom 1. Iaroslav Mogutin, ed. (Moscow: Glagol, 1993). In the present chapter, it suffices to note how Kharitonov worked with the system, exploiting its ambivalences and slipping queer messages through its cracks.

³¹ As Sergei Oushakine has shown, the outright rejection of the state and Party line by political dissidents merely reified the existing dynamic of power-resistance in a dynamic of “terrifying mimicry.” On the contrary, the deterritorialized milieu and the strategy of living *vnye*, of both depending on and departing from the Party-state at the same time, disrupts the binary dynamic reinforced by the dissident movement. Sergei Oushakine. "The Terrifying Mimicry of Samizdat," *Public Culture* 13.2 (2001): 191-241.

which she points to the way “prepositions denote relative positions” of the kind queer theorists have attempted to emphasize in being historical: “queer identities and practices derive intellectual force from being perpetually and shiftingly relational rather than teleological.”³² Still, across time, something of a transitive obliquity obtains in the inconstant object of queer studies: “What, in the nineteenth century, J. K. Huysmans termed ‘against the grain,’ Foucault called ‘slantwise’; for Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Judith Butler, queer positions are those that lie ‘across,’ or ‘beside,’ social and sexual hegemonic planes. These prepositions [induce] critical modes” that shift incessantly in tandem with them, and stir the “search for new prepositions, vocabularies, and critical methods that creatively resist delimiting narratives of origin and telos.”³³

In its “semantic flexibility—its weird ability to touch almost everything,” queer acquires a tactile and tactical traction: “despite its uptake into any number of banal and commoditized contexts, the word still maintains its ability to move, to stay outside, and to object to the world as it is given.”³⁴ And this can happen precisely because queer (as theory and epistemology) has become the posterior side of sex; it has “[moved] away from both evidentiary claims about same-sex desire and acts, and also from a focus on gay and lesbian people.”³⁵ Like smoking, queer theory is best practiced postcoitally: “after sex,” says Neville Hoad, suggestively.³⁶ Perhaps this is what it means to stand on the balcony of a *khrushchevka* and drag on a Soviet fag as Kharitonov does in the now over-determined portrait that starts this section: “to stay outside,” like Love says, and at the same time, be split inside in the Yurchakian sense of *vnye*; to be in “the before” of modern gay identity (whatever that is) and also “the after” of sex as Hoad has it. As much as possible, the present analysis will try to place Kharitonov’s queer theory of bodily flexibility in relation to queer’s “semantic flexibility,” its prepositional flittings between in and out, before and after—those qualities that make it a resilient methodology and even lifestyle sooner than a set of static theoretical precepts.

For Kharitonov plasticity was a political-cum-existential strategy as well as an epistemology and orientation to the world that could be activated by re- or de-orienting the body in physical space. Pantomime as a practice of plasticity possesses this capacity for dehabitualizing movement to disorient the body, and the phenomenological exploration of plasticity in pantomime is the primary thread of Kharitonov’s dissertation. Though his theory deals explicitly with pantomime, he hints that it has applications well beyond the stage and studio. By moving the body in ways to which it has not grown accustomed or automatized, the “plastic ‘I’” opens itself up (dissolving the fictive difference between inner and outer) and onto the experience of new sensations to become an “affective” subject,³⁷ receptive to its surroundings and to other bodies in ways that

³² On the prepositional quality of the queer, see Kate Thomas, “Post Sex: On Being Too Slow, Too Stupid, Too Soon,” in *After Sex? On Writing Since Queer Theory*. Janet Halley and Andrew Parker, eds. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 66-75 at pp. 70-71.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Heather Love, “Queers _____ This,” in *After Sex? On Writing Since Queer Theory*. Janet Halley and Andrew Parker, Eds. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 180-191 at 182.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Neville Hoad, “Queer Theory Addiction,” in *After Sex? On Writing Since Queer Theory*. Janet Halley and Andrew Parker, Eds. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 130-191.

³⁷ Here I mean “affective” less in the psychological and more in the Deleuzian sense as “a capacity of *acting* and *suffering* that constitutes all bodies in general as well as the different parts of a singular body.”

cannot be *known* or *named* in advance. Characterized by its uncharacterizability—that is, its malleability, adaptability and receptivity—plasticity resists codification and is best construed as method, approach, or angle. In his dissertation, Kharitonov indefinitely (and beautifully) defers a definition of plasticity as such and instead continually elaborates its qualities and capacities. More than that, his plasticity was opposed to codes themselves, foremost among them, language.

Ultimately, I argue that the plastic thesis at the heart of Kharitonov’s pantomime theory, in its refusal of spoken language, privileges and even prioritizes forms of subjectivity considered unspeakable (homosexuality) or unspeaking (deaf-muteness) in the late-socialist context, not only allowing for subtle expressions of dissent from Soviet norms of citizenship contained in the “rhetorical body”; but also reopening a space in the unsaid for enchantment and utopian dreaming during the disaffected era of Stagnation. In order to substantiate these claims, it will be necessary, in the first place, to describe how queerness qua sexual difference was “silenced” in the Soviet Union, and how pantomime offered opportunities to “speak” queerness-as-silence, thus functioning as what I call an “unstraightening device.”

Secondly, the relationship between queerness and deafness-as-silence cannot be taken for granted nor easily imputed to Kharitonov’s biography. I will flesh out the connection between “silenced” and “silent” subjectivities in what I find to be a fused queer-deaf phenomenology embedded in Kharitonov’s dissertation on pantomime. This theory obviously informed and was likely formed by his collaboration with the deaf Theater of Mimicry and Gesture on the stage production of Kharitonov’s pantomime, *Enchanted Island*, the full exploration of which will come in the subsequent chapter. My hope is that this will have implications at once for future scholarship on Kharitonov’s body of work and for studies of the body in general, into which I would like to insert Kharitonov as a proleptic queer theorist himself. This will also mean gently bending Russian formalists into conversations they have not typically had with gender³⁸ and, I hasten to add, sexuality studies, despite that the body and the erotic were key examples in the theory of estrangement.

Paola Marrati, “Time and Affects: Deleuze on Gender and Sexual Difference,” *Australian Feminist Studies*, 21: 51 (2006), 313-325 at 315, her emphasis. As I delve more deeply into the terms of Kharitonov’s theory of plasticity, the terms “acting” and “suffering” that Marrati has highlighted here will become important as the two grammatical voices [*zalogi*] of pantomime: active [*deistvitel’nyi*] and passive [*stradatel’nyi*], from the Russian root for suffering or affliction.

³⁸ Apart from his essay, “the place of gender in Russian Formalist theory has remained an almost entirely unexplored topic.” Eric Naiman, “Shklovsky’s Dog and Mulvey’s Pleasure: The Secret Life of Defamiliarization,” *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (Autumn, 1998), 333-352, at 338. Naiman argues that the theory of defamiliarization is patriarchal and misogynist. I will argue for its queer—and not gay—reappropriation; although a gay reappropriation—in its unbroken masculinism—might more readily confirm Naiman’s thesis about formalist misogyny which perhaps takes for granted, along with Laura Mulvey’s theory of film spectatorship, the given or essentialness of gender (even when in drag). In pantomimic performance there is no one-to-one ratio between visual signifier and gendered signified; in fact, there is no internal consistency to a character’s play of gender on Kharitonov’s stage, and certainly no way for an audience member to apprehend gender as a stable and abiding sign.

ORIENTING DISORIENTATION IN THIS CHAPTER

This chapter takes as its primary task mapping the transmission of emotions between moving bodies through pantomime, particularly in the queer mimetic practice and theory of Kharitonov. It retains the dissertation's wider focus on silence after Stalin, and continues to elaborate on the possibilities of pantomime as an art of resistance uniquely capable of coalescing Soviet counterpublics by evading the dangers of verbalized or vocalized activities of dissent. As I earlier establish, this was the distinct privilege of non-deaf mimes, whose silent kinetics were taken up as political messages by like-minded theatergoers only against the perceived apoliticality of deaf-mute dramatic motion. The deaf-mute actors *had to* speak so that non-deaf actors *could be* meaningfully quiet. Perhaps counterintuitively, for both parties, silence on stage symbolized freedom.

In the ensuing pages, I analyze the theory of pantomime put forth by the doctoral dissertation in film-acting Kharitonov filed in 1972, which develops, I argue, an innovative aesthetics and phenomenology based on queer-deaf subjectivity. This reconfigured conception of pantomime allows for the silent art's reappropriation by queer and deaf actors to creative ends. Kharitonov was writing his dissertation coextensively with an original pantomime "libretto" (in his catachrestic designation) for the play, *Enchanted Island* [*Ocharovannyi ostrov*], first staged also in 1972 with the deaf Theater of Mimicry and Gesture. The sketching out of Kharitonov's pantomime theory will establish the parameters of the search I conduct in the subsequent chapter on this queer-deaf collaboration for signs of resistance to the Soviet state and disidentification with audist or hearing-centric and (hetero)normative society. It will also allow us to grasp how pantomime was a tool of queer world-making, even as we note here how the difference of deafness was partially subsumed into sexual alterity. Though Kharitonov's own "nontraditional orientation" toward other male bodies could not be spelled out on stage, I will make the case that queerness is nonetheless visible in this pantomimic play—in the story, the movement, and the corporeal genealogies his actors trace with their plastic choreography, which are literally inscribed in his dissertation and recharted more overtly in my "meta-dissertative" chapter about it.

Moreover, I will contend that pantomime is a queer art even without Kharitonov. This will require a fresh definition of the queer for this context, one which captures at once the qualities of a perceived *object* as queer, or at least participating in a sensibility that might be considered as such, on the one hand; and the perceiving *subject* as queer or as perceiving *queerly*, on the other. Still more significant will be the interaction of subject and object, subject and subject: queerness reconstrued as a dynamic of interrelationship, an angle of approach between two bodies and their surroundings, a style of kinesthetics, an integral posture or posing *with*—a productive preposition for both the space and time of relationships, which is seen at work in Chapter Four. In his dissertation on pantomime, Kharitonov advances both a program of queer aesthetics and a phenomenological profile of queer subjectivity that slips outside of the purview of theatrical performance, first into Kharitonov's prose and then into the uncircumscribed performance of everyday life under late socialism. The picture of embodied, emotional and experiential selfhood Kharitonov silhouettes in his theory decidedly departs from the discursive or speaking style of subjectivity inscribed within state ideology, as outlined

earlier in my dissertation and fleshed out more fully here (as a bodily form) in its capacity as a normative foil.

To summarize, the chapter will arrive sequentially at the following conclusions. Though queerness qua sexual difference was silenced in the Soviet Union, pantomime offered a space in the Soviet symbolic economy to “speak” queerness as silence and thus functioned as an “unstraightening device” (a term I address shortly). Kharitonov’s semiotic theory of pantomime—based on the “unstraightened” movements of an unspeaking body--doubly signifies as a phenomenology of queer-deaf experience. Finally, the subject of his queer-deaf phenomenology quietly dissents from Soviet norms of citizenship contained in the “rhetorical body” or “Bolshevik-speaking subject,” the negative foil of this dissertation, whom Kharitonov identifies in his own dissertation as the “speaking I.”

In this socialist context, my use of the term *queer* will strive to make strange, in the formalist sense, the things I use it to qualify. In addition to preserving the strangeness of its sound for Soviet space—especially since it *does* sound so strange to the Russian ear as the clumsy contemporary borrowing, *kvir*--I hope also that in my application the word resonates as at once archaic and au courant. Though *queer* is assuredly laden with a different set of cultural associations in the current political moment, I hesitate to abandon the idea that the bodies to which the term earlier attached are radically different from the ones to which it does today. Or rather, I propose, *it is* the cultural production of these bodies as radically different that made them seem *queer* in the first place. Outside of the dissertation, I allow myself to be seduced, for instance, by the canny correspondence between today’s *queer* and the “strange people” [*strannye narod*]--who might just as readily be rendered “queer folk” in translation--those men having sex with men, who populate the section of Eduard Kuznetsov’s gulag memoirs included in Vladimir Kozlovskii’s late-Soviet compendium of Russian “homosexual-subcultural” materials.³⁹ Though *queer* here is not synonymous with our contemporary Western notion, it certainly suggests some affinities with the Soviet case.

Once these stages of the argument have been rehearsed, my hope is that an understanding emerges of Kharitonov’s continued participation in pantomime, plastic choreography, and what he called the “non-speaking world” as central to his creative corpus. Outside the dissertation, this conclusion forces the reevaluation of Kharitonov’s poetry and prose as performative in two senses: as enacting the same disidentificatory subjectivity his pantomime theory articulates and his play stages; and as indissolubly linked to his theatrical or performance career. There is no obvious motive for Kharitonov to have ended up in pantomime, I believe. On the contrary, he pursued it actively and with creative intention. His early and sustained involvement with this silent drama and the ‘silent’ community of the deaf theater fundamentally shaped his art and his life in profound ways. Not least of all, pantomime provided a safe space in which Kharitonov could dream up and act out his queer desires—topics taken up in the pages that follow.

³⁹ Vladimir Kozlovskii. *Argo russkoi gomoseksual’noi subkul’tury: materialy k izucheniiu* (Benson, VT: Chalidze, 1986). Eduard Kuznetsov, *Mordovskii marafon* (Jerusalem: Knigotovarishchestvo “Moscow-Jerusalem, 1979). Edward Kuznetsov. *Prison Diaries*. Trans. Howard Spier. (London: Vallentine, Mitchell, 1975 [original Russian 1973]).

WITH ONLY WALLS BETWEEN US...

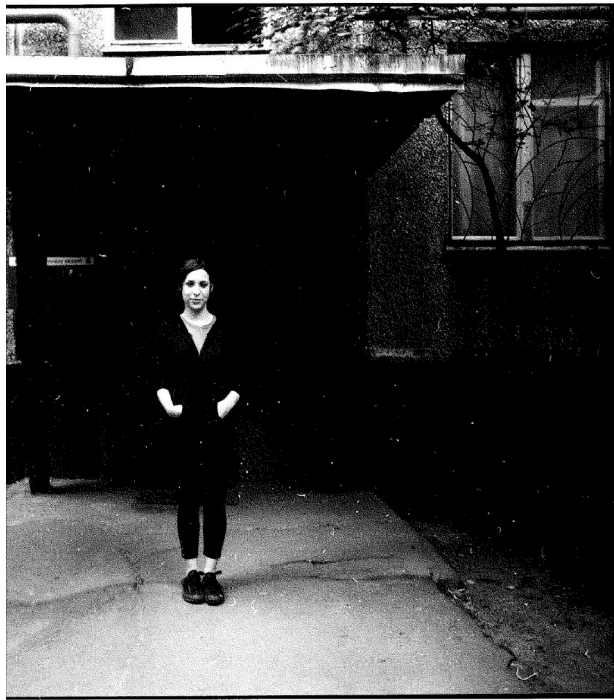


Figure 4. Me at the first entry to Kharitonov's soon-to-be-demolished *khrushchevka*.

Here is a picture of the author standing outside of the apartment at 24 Iartsevskaiia in the summer of 2009, taken by a photographer and installation-artist friend, Oleg Koshelets, who lives nearby the apartment and in the overlapping vicinity of the newly erected metro station, Molodezhnaia. Oleg warns that this may be the last summer to snap a photograph of this place since the city planners of now capitalist Moscow—not the communist leader Gorbachev—are going to tear down this wall, along with the walls of the many *khrushchevki* hastily built with poor-quality materials in the post-Stalin period to resolve socialist Russia's longstanding "housing problem" [kvartirnyi vopros].⁴⁰ "Whether metaphorically understood or *concrete*, built socialism was decaying," Thomas Lahusen opines pessimistically, "or, if you wish, 'in ruins,' from the very beginning of its existence."⁴¹ Another imminent example of socialism-in-ruins, the apartment Oleg shares with his wife and design-partner Dasha will also go. In fact, as one Russian newspaper reports, "all 'five-story *khrushchevki*' will be demolished before the year

⁴⁰ Party Secretary Nikita Khrushchev announced in 1957 that every Soviet family would receive its own apartment.

⁴¹ Thomas Lahusen, "Decay or Endurance? The Ruins of Socialism," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (Winter, 2006): 736-746, at 744 (his emphasis).

2010.”⁴² When these walls are destroyed, when “these concrete ruins of socialism [in which people still live]”⁴³ finally crumble, we risk losing the complex histories embedded in them and inscribed on their surfaces—surfaces like this wall, whose eclectic images only gesture to stories not found in the official archives and not part of the “vanished empire’s” vast but incomplete institutional memory.

“When an era crumbles, 'History breaks down into images, not into stories,’” philosopher Susan Buck-Morss reminds us as she places the words of Walter Benjamin into the post-Soviet context.⁴⁴ Images of queer life under socialism in particular, like these ones that lined the interior of a private dwelling, belong to a story secreted but not dissolved by post-cold war history: at once kept outside of public annals but perhaps still present in the confidential records of the state police. Since they were photographically documented, the decorations on this wall may have been peeled off, painted or papered over. Without access to the inside of the private apartment, it is impossible to say. No house-museum is slated to be built in this abject architecture to honor the late figure of note—well-known in narrow circles, as the Russians say—who once lived here, loved here, wrote here, moved in fantastic and everyday ways here, for whom this wall guarded a mystery encrypted in a special visual code.

When this apartment is finally torn down, another edifice will protect these images and preserve their secret content for posterity: that is, a certain kind of historical imagination. Here I refuse Lahusen’s pessimistic assumption about the Soviet case in favor of locating in socialism unexpected spaces for queer utopian dreaming. Against his chronicle of an always-already collective crumbling, I see the ruins of Russian prerevolutionary and socialist history as the conditions of a series of small-scale building projects, ones in which the lonely queer subject, a consummate *bricoleur*, is endlessly engaged. Cobbling together multicolored fragments of the past, she fashions for herself a fleeting home on the outskirts of a culture of monochromatic normativity. He buttresses these ephemeral structures of memory with body and his soul, movement and emotions, and an untenable kind of intensity. This chapter searches for the structures of feeling that scaffolded late-socialist queer experience. It considers how criminally-queer and culturally-excluded bodies hooked themselves into the affective histories that they were actively creating in the moment or reactivating in their movement.

“To Dance the Dance of Impossible Love”: **UNSPEAKABLE SUBJECTS IN THE SILENT ARCHIVE**

In this and the next chapter of my dissertation, I write about Kharitonov’s own doctoral dissertation, which, thankfully, has been preserved and reproduced in its entirety in the 1993 and 2005 collections of his work issued by the gay publishing house, Glagol. Though the 2005 reprint includes Kharitonov’s own notations that several

⁴² Resin, “Vse 'khrushchevki-piatietazhki' budut sneseny k 2010 godu,” *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 10 November 2005; quoted in Thomas Lahusen, “Decay or Endurance? The Ruins of Socialism,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (Winter, 2006): 736-746.

⁴³ Ibid. According to Lahusen, “these concrete ruins of socialism [in which people continue to live]” have been fetishized by scholars who work in what Lahusen cynically calls the ‘nostalgia’ industry, they are the last lost objects introverted by leftist intellectuals still mourning the death of (actually existing) socialism.

⁴⁴ Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002), 68.

original pantomime librettos are included as appendices to the dissertation, they are not there.⁴⁵ I did find these missing librettos in the “real” archives in Moscow in 2010, but even they appear to be a partial selection from his complete corpus. To compliment the author-actor’s own texts, reminisces about Kharitonov by his colleagues and contemporaries are gathered in the second volume of his collected works, and provide interesting albeit similarly scant insight into his career as a pantomime director. With annoying typicality, these recollectors of the underground culture frame this work—his legitimate career—as mere façade for its legitimacy. Or else they see it as a passing fancy of his early adulthood that gave way to his more serious vocation of writing. Likewise, there is little remaining of the pantomime production that Kharitonov directed at the deaf theater (which I explore at length in Chapter Four). Writing about Kharitonov’s performance career, for all its on-the-levelness with official history, was actually quite hard for me to do in the absence of an archive in the usual sense. What is lost—the unscripted rehearsals, the improvised “razminki” (or warm up exercises), the material scenes of performance and reception—is lost forever, it seems, turned to dust by the powers-that-be to make way for its new constructions, in a fate that matches Kharitonov’s own demolished home.

In a way, this scenario of silence in time forces an elegant isomorphism between an improper archive and its improper subject. The ephemerality of queer pantomime as a fading and mostly forgotten smudge on the pages of Soviet cultural history, is, in a sense, to be expected. And this expectation of ephemera tells a story of its own as an exemplum of what queer theorist and performance studies scholar Jose Esteban Munoz calls “queer evidence,” a type of artifact (or its very absence) which requires a “hermeneutics of residue” to read.⁴⁶ “Queerness,” contends Munoz,

has an especially vexed relationship to evidence. Historically, evidence of queerness has been used to penalize and discipline queer desires, connections, and acts. When the historian of queer experience attempts to document a queer past, there is often a gatekeeper, representing a straight present, who will labor to invalidate the historical fact of queer lives—present, past, and future. Queerness is rarely complemented by evidence, or at least by traditional understandings of the term.⁴⁷

The gatekeepers of Soviet gay experience were especially vigilant. State-centralized and officially heteronormative practices of representation and archiving render rather arduous the retrieval of Russian queer ephemera today from the ruins of Soviet high culture as well as from the late-socialist quotidian. (Though, if they are ever made accessible, the rosters kept by the KGB of the capital’s “pederasts”—however such an identification was

⁴⁵ In a personal email correspondence between the author and Aleksandr Shatalov, the founder of Glagol, Shatalov explained that the 1993 and 2005 editions of Kharitonov’s writing include the copy of the dissertation that was in Kharitonov’s mother’s possession. The copy of the dissertation located in the Lenin Library in Moscow had other libretti, though it seems not all of the ones in Kharitonov’s repertoire, based on the personal accounts of his performances.

⁴⁶ Jose Esteban Munoz, “Gesture, Ephemera, and Queer Feeling: Approaching Kevin Aviance.” In *Dancing Desires: Choreographic Sexualities On and Off the Stage*, ed. Jane C. Desmond (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 423; 441.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 423.

determined—would likely attest to the existence of a vibrant if small homosexual subculture.)

This difficulty is compounded by the fact that, on the one hand, many straight Soviet citizens did not know how to read queer signs, had never come face-to-face with something calling itself “homosexuality,” and correspondingly could not record their own second-hand impressions of its presence. And, on the other, Soviet sexual others were hardly in a position to organize politically or seek cultural visibility, given the persistence of everyday and institutional homophobia; the tolerance for homophobic violence; the active life of the Stalinist anti-sodomy statute in the post-Stalin period (until its repeal in 1993); the psychiatric persecution of lesbian-identified women; and so on. Official deaf archival practice likewise slipped into an unmarked and homogeneous heterosexuality, circumscribing the kinds of revelations of queer trace that might have occurred in the case of *Enchanted Island*.

Thus the seeker of Russian queer residue from the socialist era finds herself brushing against a set of crucial questions: How could queer lives have been lived in a political culture that denied the very existence of sexual alterity, sometimes actively expunging it? That lacked the language to describe it? And even if some clever queers managed to carve out clandestine lives for themselves, carefully covering up their tracks to elude the surveillance of the secret police and comrade-citizens, how then could someone searching at a cultural and historical remove ever hope to discover the footprints of such definitively hidden experiences? Of lives whose survivability was contingent on at least partial effacement?

Against the odds, Munoz instructs the queer historian to sift for the fleeting clues to sexual dissidence in the way the body moves (or, in our case, moved). He arrives at this insight by narrating his own biomechanical biography: isolating a moment of queer self-discovery, an outspoken cousin made apparent to him that his airy gait was less-than-masculine. From then on, a young Munoz studied the way ‘real’ men walked “and applied this to [his] own body”; he “tried to ape the movements of heterosexuality,” though not always successfully.⁴⁸ “These atomized and particular movements,” he concludes, “the tilt of an ankle in very high heels, the swish of a hand that pats a face with imaginary makeup,” these “tell tales of historical becoming.” When all else is “lost to the evidentiary logic of heterosexuality,” “gestures transmit ephemeral knowledge of lost queer histories and possibilities within a phobic majoritarian public sphere.”⁴⁹ As I earlier establish in the first chapter, and will again in this and the next ones, the state had its own canon of sanctioned movement in the Soviet Union, one with ableist and oralist orientations that bore down with differential force on the bodies of “defective” subjects. In the ensuing section, I hope to show how these heterosexist regulations on movement came to (de)form or be (un)formed by certain late-socialist bodies in time and space.⁵⁰ And, furthermore, with the help of Kharitonov’s dissertation on plasticity and his pantomime librettos, I catalogue another corporeal idiom, and track perceptible or self-

⁴⁸ Ibid., 427.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 441; 426.

⁵⁰ As Munoz writes of fellow anthropologist, Paul Siegel shows “not only the social significance of queer dance but the various ways in which a repressive state apparatus counters queer movements both literal and symbolic” (ibid., 424-5).

conscious departures from the dominant code of comportment that secrete clues of queer presence.

But how to glimpse the ephemeral gestures made by intentionally obscure actors halfway across the world and a half-century ago? As though obviating the aporia at the heart of queer historiography, Kharitonov's pantomime scripts catalogue phrases of body language that may have transmitted a piece of the Soviet queer experience. Perhaps precisely because dance is located, says Marcia Siegel, "at the vanishing point," because it "disappears in the very act of materializing," paraphrases Munoz, it may be a privileged style of queer aesthetics qua communication.⁵¹ Munoz continues: "Queer dance is hard to catch, and it is meant to be hard to catch—it is supposed to slip through the fingers and comprehension of those who would use knowledge against us."⁵²

Kharitonov himself understood ephemera to be the stuff of queer art, life and love. This is the position he explicitly takes up in his gay manifesto, "The Leaflet" [*Listovka*]: that a flimsy relationship to time endows a special urgent quality to what he calls "flowery" existence.

But we, the Flowers, have ephemeral unions, tied neither by fruits nor by responsibilities. Living every hour in expectation of a new meeting, we, the shallowest people, to our graves play records with songs of love and look around with nervous eyes in expectation of ever newer young people like you. But the best flower of our shallow people is called like no other to dance the dance of impossible love and to sing of it sweetly.⁵³

Soviet queer movements may have been very "hard to catch" in the proper archival sense (especially given the fraught nature of documentation as potential fodder for political dossier); but, to draw on the dialectic distinction Diana Taylor makes, perhaps not so as a matter of repertoire. By the latter, she has in mind the "nonarchival system of transfer,"⁵⁴ the unrecordable and unrecorded iterations of movement—whether in everyday life or performance event—which "operate as valued sites of knowledge making and transmission."⁵⁵ In lieu of the traditional archive and the state-historical document, forms of knowledge-making and storing not always accessible to the queer subject, this chapter draws on the repertoires of motion and emotion that pool into genealogies of affect and performance (two operative terms of this analysis), which are transmitted by the touching and feeling together of queer bodies in and across time and space. Queer forms of touching are at once utterly historical just as they enact attempts

⁵¹ Marcia Siegel, *At the Vanishing Point: A Critic Looks at Dance* (New York: Saturday Review Press, 1972); Munoz, "Gesture, Ephemera, and Queer Feeling," 441.

⁵² Munoz, "Gesture, Ephemera, and Queer Feeling," 441.

⁵³ Kharitonov, "Listovka." In *Pod domashnim arestom*, 313.

У нас же, у Цветов, союзы мимолетны, не связаны ни плодами ни обязательствами. Живя ежечасно в ожидании новых встреч, мы, самые пустые люди, до гроба крутим пластинки с песнями о любви и смотрим нервными глазами по сторонам в ожидании новых и новых юных вас. Но лучший цвет нашего пустого народа как никто призван танцевать танец невозможной любви и сладко о ней спеть.

⁵⁴ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), xvii.

⁵⁵ Deborah Paredez, Review of Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, *Modern Drama* 48.3 (2005) 615-617.

to transcend the limitations of history. The ensuing section considers historically-queer movements under late-socialism, in order to contextualize Kharitonov's attempts to bend and transcend history through movement.

DANCING *VNYE*: SEXUAL DISIDENTIFICATION AND DETERRITORIALIZED SPACE

In order to frame the personal and emotional stakes of Kharitonov's pantomimic practice, it will be necessary to flesh out the "queer" culture of post-Stalin Russia in which he was creating. I will be brief as there is already a handful of scholarly works on the subject that offer a fuller picture than the present inquiry allows.⁵⁶ In the first place, I must preliminarily flag my use of "queer" here, given its ahistoricity and non-indigeneity to Kharitonov's Moscow. I employ it elsewhere strategically, as a kind of analytic trick that keeps the terms of alterity more open than "homosexual," for example; and that speaks of sensibilities, orientations, and relationships sooner than identities. (In this and subsequent chapters, we will witness how forms of difference interpenetrated and displaced one another.) To speak specifically of something called the "homosexual subculture" of late Soviet Moscow—as one of its self-professed participants and sociological observers more strictly delimits it—we might say that it was characterized by the constant threat of violence and secured by a conspiracy of silence. While many Soviet citizens enjoyed a relaxed relationship to the state under the post-Stalin political regimes of Nikita Khrushchev, Leonid Brezhnev, et al., the reverse held true for homosexuals or "blues" (as they lovingly labeled themselves), who were imprisoned with greater frequency and lesser leniency for violating the anti-sodomy statute put into place under Stalin in 1934: Article 121.⁵⁷ A blue community persisted in the face of escalated repression and cohered in part around the capital's theatrical culture. Its survival was staked on a degree of discretion outside of known circles, and on the familiarity of its members with a special "jargon" (largely derived from prison slang) and a mutually-intelligible code of comportment—a pantomime of desire, if you will.

The public or official life of the late-Soviet homosexual was often protected by passing. This might be achieved with a sham marriage between a blue and a "pink," that is, a gay and lesbian-identified pair.⁵⁸ Such acts of straight masquerade may have prevented one's name from showing up on the so-called "pink lists" of sexual minoritarians maintained by the KGB. Kharitonov, for his part, was not fortunate enough to escape the surveillance of the secret police, and shortly before his own death he was

⁵⁶ For an introduction to the theme of same-sex love in late-Soviet Russia see Laurie Essig, *Queer in Russia: A Story of Sex, Self, and Other* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Masha Gessen, *The Rights of Lesbian and Gay Men in the Russian Federation* (San Francisco: IGLHRC, 1994); Igor Kon, "Sexual Minorities," in *Sex and Russian Society*. Edited by Igor Kon and James Riordan (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993); Vladimir Kozlovskii, *Argo russkoi gomoseksual'noi subkul'tury: materialy k izucheniiu* (Benson, VT: Chalidze Publications, 1986); and David Tuller, *Cracks in the Iron Closet: Travels in Gay and Lesbian Russia* (Boston: Faber & Faber, 1996). It ought to be noted that most of these works give little attention to the status of homosexuality and homosexual culture in the fifties through eighties.

⁵⁷ Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 237-244.

⁵⁸ Kozlovskii, *Argo russkoi gomoseksual'noi subkul'tury: Materialy k izucheniiu* (Benson, Vt.: Chalidze Publications, 1986), 211.

tailed and interrogated after the murder of a gay friend. Moreover, Kharitonov was well aware that his explicit engagement with homosexual motifs in his self-described “unpublishable” writing hindered his work from circulating even among the artistic dissidents of the literary underground. I lay emphasis on silence, passing, invisibility, and unspeakability as queer *topoi*, as items of personal interest and places of creative exploration for Kharitonov in his prosaic, poetic, and dramatic pieces; and underscore the overlap of these themes with those described in the case of ‘deaf-mutes’ or ‘defectives’, a theme investigated in the subsequent chapter on *Enchanted Island*.

Since queerness could never occupy an overt space in Soviet culture given its prosecutable status, it materialized in other less official sites. The pantomime studio-theater, I argue, belongs to that class of cultural locations in late-socialism that anthropologist Alexei Yurchak has dubbed the “deterritorialized milieu.” Living “vnye” [beyond], in a deterritorialized milieu, one “remains relatively ‘invisible’”⁵⁹ to the system while subtly eroding its structures. “[These] styles of living [vnye] generated multiple new temporalities, spatialities, social relations, and meanings that were not necessarily anticipated or controlled by the state, although they were fully made possible by it.”⁶⁰ Even within the system, the person living vnye “is not tuned into a certain semantic field of meaning... [he replaces] Soviet political and social concerns with a quite different set of concerns that allowed one to lead a creative and imaginative life.”⁶¹

Amateur theaters, for instance, supported infrastructurally by the state but sneakily able to support non-state sanctioned ideas, easily qualify as deterritorialized milieus. Theatre in general enjoyed an ambivalent relationship to the state in the post-Stalinist period, during which time, “political ideology and the Party came to be questioned and not merely echoed, but the presence of Party and ideology on stage continued unabated.”⁶² Nimble political maneuvering was thus effected by interventions into dramatic form: rather than continuing to use the “conventional symbolic denotations of stage design, music, props, and actor’s movements canonized through the socialist-realist interpretation of Stanislavsky, theaters began to reinvent stage devices, often inspired by literature’s open range of meanings.”⁶³ Directors reanimated unconventional kinetic routines from vaudeville and the circus, both pantomimic genres.⁶⁴ Less Party-minded messages were smuggled in through Aesopian speech, a complex language of allusions that intelligent audiences trained in throughout the Soviet period.⁶⁵

Independent dramatic works “never managed to move to a permanent stage,” but nevertheless constituted “one of the most significant forms of the city’s artistic and

⁵⁹ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything was Forever until It was No More*, 132.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 128.

⁶¹ Ibid., 132.

⁶² Victor Borovsky, “Russian theatre in Russian culture,” *A History of Russian Theatre*. Ed. Robert Leach and Victor Borovsky (New York: Cambridge University, 1999), 115.

⁶³ Ibid., 164.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ “By the late 1960s and 1970s, Soviet audiences were coming to the theatre to hear ‘truths’ unavailable in the press or other media. The metaphoric *mise-en-scène*, Aesopic dialogue and actors’ asides were avidly sought and caught by an alert public. The gap widened between what was really going on and what was officially acknowledged to be going on...” Anatoly Smeliansky, *The Russian Theatre After Stalin* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), vi.

intellectual life.”⁶⁶ Their temporariness, even ephemerality, let them play a carnivalesque role in the maintenance of Soviet society. “These ‘independent works’ with a right to be shown to a narrow circle had been deliberately instituted by the authorities: they had agreed to this relaxation so that people could ‘let off steam’ from time to time...”⁶⁷ Though the Party permitted these spectacles only in order to preserve the system for the long *durée*, they ultimately enabled slight displacements in Soviet culture, the accumulation of which was able to subvert the system from within in a matter of decades. In the present tense, they facilitated the formation of a style of semi-private sociality associated with late-socialism: the public of *svoi*—meaning “‘us,’ ‘ours,’ or ‘those who belong to our circle,’” a term with “no exact equivalent in English”—“differed from those represented in authoritative discourse as the ‘Soviet people,’” and yet it was not made of adamantly anti-Soviet people either.⁶⁸ Rostov journalist Ludmila Freidlin writing about the Soviet “studio theater movement” of the 1970s explains how, “in the milieu [*v srede*] of the studio artists prevailed its own [*svoe*] idea about how stage art should be, its own [*svoi*] idols, its own [*svoia*] aesthetic, finally – its own public [*svoia publika*]. The directors, artists, actors and viewers composed one milieu [*odnu sredu*].”⁶⁹ As today’s nostalgic blogs on pantomime testify, this sphere of theatrical activity may have even prioritized the experimental art-form secondarily to the consolidation of its *svoi*. To Vladimir Tsekh of Iurii Popov’s Rostov studio, “pantomime was hooey. Most important to me were the human relationships. Our life and sociality [*obshchenie*] backstage were the most important of all to me.” Lev Palii of the same group agrees: “You weren’t the only one. Our relationships were also the most important to me. Our personal relationships [*lichnie otnosheniia*] were the connection in the theater.”⁷⁰ Both the art-form and its immanent social-formation, I argue, were crucial to pantomime as a means of affective world-making.

Embedded within the deterritorialized spaces of Soviet theater culture were even less visible *svoi*, sexual socialities whose members had managed to slide themselves through the cracks of Soviet culture twice over, and whose language of allusions had to be still more spryly dissimulating and multivalent. Already partially deterritorialized, the performing arts allowed for more slippery expressions of sexuality on and off stage.

⁶⁶ Elena Markova, *Off Nevsky Prospekt: St Petersburg’s theatre studios in the 1980s and 1990s*. Trans. Kate Cook (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998), 4.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything was Forever*, 103. For more on late-Soviet private culture, the “company” [*kompaniia*], and socialities of ‘svoi’, see Boym, *Common Places*; and Juliane Fürst, “Friends in Private, Friends in Public,” *Borders of Socialism: Spheres of Soviet Russia*. Edited by Lewis H. Siegelbaum (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

⁶⁹ “Середина 70-х годов была временем ярчайшего художественного всплеска... Здесь (в среде студийцев) бытовало свое представление о том, каким должно быть сценическое искусство, свои кумиры, своя эстетика, наконец - своя публика. Режиссеры, художники, артисты и зрители составляли одну среду, по преимуществу студенческую. Все они были дети недавней, еще не остывшей оттепели. Никто еще не успел перепугаться...” Ludmila Freidlin, *Teatr s glavnogo vkhoda* (Rostov-na-Donu: ZAO “Kniga,” 2009).

⁷⁰ community.livejournal.com/rostov_80_90/110402.htm I have relied extensively on contemporary Russian weblogs in crafting a history of Soviet pantomime, given the extent to which the unofficial (and even, to some degree, the official) history of this artform remains to be written. I offer this dissertation as a modest contribution to that project, and underscore the urgency of this undertaking given that, to put it indelicately, many of its practitioners are elderly and dying.

Theater people made up most of Kharitonov's "homosexual milieu" [*gomoseksual'naia sreda*], for example⁷¹; and one of the main cruising drags of the day was located on Theater Square by the Bol'shoi in Moscow.⁷² Still, quasi-visible homosexuality remained an inviolable taboo within the straight *svoi* of the surrounding theater culture, not to speak of Soviet society at large.

Historically, (homo)sexuality moved more freely within Russian choreographic circles. Classical ballet has always been readily queerable in this context, perhaps because, as Kharitonov hypothesizes of his flowery brethren, "our genius flourished...in [this] emptiest and most pretentious of the arts--ballet. It is obvious that it was created by us."⁷³ Richard Dyer, contemporary queer culture scholar, concurs: "gay men have been balletomanes for everything from the fact of ballet's extreme escapism from an uncongenial world to its display of the male physique, and to its reputation as an area of employment in which gay men could be open and safe."⁷⁴ Kharitonov's and Dyer's equation of the dancing male body with homosexuality has relevantly Russian roots.⁷⁵ Even in the nineteenth century, "upper-class *tetki*" cruised "the ballet performances of the Mariinskii Theater" in St. Petersburg for dates.⁷⁶ But it was Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes (1909-1929) that notoriously bound up the desire of its director and lead dancer, his one-time partner, Vaslav Nijinsky, with the queerness of its aesthetics. According to one ballet scholar, "Diaghilev not only reintroduced the male dancer to the ballet stages of London, Paris, New York, and other leading Western cities but thereby established a sophisticated gay audience for ballet [...and] made ballet into a forum that in effect created and supported the idea of the artistic homosexual man and defined a homosexual aesthetic sensibility."⁷⁷

Soviet censors sanitized balletic performance in ensuing decades. But during the still experimental New Economic Policy of the 1920s, there was "a private arts circle [in

⁷¹ Theater was also a gay space for Kharitonov's Soviet homosexual predecessor, Mikhail Kuzmin, as the following lyrical passage demonstrates. "Passageways, corridors, dressing-rooms,/ A winding staircase, half-dark;/ Conversations, stubborn arguments,/ Over doors are curtains hiding nothing. [...] You will arrive quite unexpectedly,/ Stamping through the corridor resoundingly--/ Oh, the depths of meaning attached/ To your walk, to your smile, to your gaze!/ How delightful to be embraced in sight of all. Mikhail Kuzmin, "At the Theatre," Trans. Michael Green. *Out of the Blue: Russia's Hidden Gay Literature*. Ed. Kevin Moss (San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1997), 101.

⁷² Laurie Essig, *Queer in Russia: A Story of Sex, Self and Other* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 88.

⁷³ Kharitonov, "Listovka," 312. «наш гений процвел, например, в самом пустом кисейном искусстве - в балете. Ясно, что нами он и создан. Танец ли это буквально и всякий шлягер, или любое другое искусство, когда в основе лежит услада.»

⁷⁴ Richard Dyer, *Only Entertainment* (London: Routledge, 1992), 43. Quoted in Ramsay Burt, "Dissolving in Pleasure: The Threat of the Queer Male Dancing Body." In *Dancing Desires: Choreographic Sexualities On and Off the Stage*, ed. Jane C. Desmond (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 209-241, at 214.

⁷⁵ "Available evidence suggests that the association between male dance and homosexuality arose only in the early twentieth century with Diaghilev." Ramsay Burt, "Dissolving in Pleasure: The Threat of the Queer Male Dancing Body," *Dancing Desires: Choreographic Sexualities On and Off the Stage*, ed. Jane C. Desmond (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 209-241, at 213.

⁷⁶ Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia*, 31-2.

⁷⁷ Ramsay Burt, "Dissolving in Pleasure," 213. Burt draws on Lynne Garafola's argument that ballet created a specifically gay audience via the English dandy in Ballets Russes performances. Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 362-65.

Moscow named *Antinoi* (Antinous)] devoted to the appreciation of ‘male beauty’... which [staged] readings of consciously homosexual poetry, recitals of music by ‘our own’ composers, and even an all-male ballet.”⁷⁸ Under Stalin and after, ballet remained a safe haven for two controversial ‘formalisms’: pantomime and gay sexuality. The post-Stalin period had its famous Rudolf Nureyev (1938-1993), “the first male dancer since Nijinsky to bring a sense of mystery to his performances, a sense of the ambivalent, of the sexually ambidextrous,” perhaps an air of queer enchantment.⁷⁹ The remarks of a fellow classmate at the Kirov ballet academy help us appreciate how revolutionary Nureyev’s moves were. He recalls that,

At that time, it was almost impossible for audiences and even critics to cope with any expression of [sex] onstage. Most people simply put it out of their minds. The rest had no adequate vocabulary to discuss what they saw. Sexuality on the stage was something you did not write about or talk about. Any sign of it was taken as some sort of pathology and denounced as a form of anarchism.⁸⁰

Nureyev brought the same plasticity of his stage moves to his actively homosexual private life, which has been credited perhaps tendentiously with his primary motivation for defecting from the Soviet Union to the West at the height of the Cold War in 1961. (Of note, before he left, “the most notorious cruising ground in Leningrad was the public gardens near the Kirov.”⁸¹) Since his gay friends were mostly “local artists and intellectuals who met more often in private apartments than public,” it is not surprising that many of his unquestioningly heterosexual colleagues in the Kirov never guessed at his “nontraditional orientation” (to use the Russian euphemism). Elena Tchernichova, the stereotypical Soviet ingénue on matters of sex, had “absolutely no idea that Nureyev was homosexual... The thought never even entered my head,” she explains.⁸²

But even those who did not know what went on behind closed curtains were scandalized by the gender transgressions of Nureyev’s onstage costume and choreography, his penchant for performing not only in tights (a novelty that has since become standard-fare), but for dancing the woman’s variations for certain canonical ballets. The fact that movement was—and still is—gendered in performance, and that informed audience members could read gender identity and disidentity into movement, will have important consequences for Kharitonov’s pantomime. In the meantime, it is enough for us to note that ballet functioned as something of a shibboleth for homosexuality in Russia during Kharitonov’s day, so that the Leningrad poet, Gennadii Trifonov, who spent four years in prison for sodomy in the 1970s, could communicate a queer message simply by naming a novella *The Two Ballets of George Ballanchine*.⁸³⁸⁴

⁷⁸ Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia*, 47.

⁷⁹ Otis Stuart, *Perpetual Motion: The Public and Private Lives of Rudolf Nureyev* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 101.

⁸⁰ A classmate of Nureyev, Aleksandr Minz, originally quoted in David Daniel, “Nureyev Observed,” *Christopher Street*, August 1976, p. 19-21; quoted by Otis Stuart, *Perpetual Motion*, 62.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 94.

⁸³ George Ballanchine (1904-1983) was a Georgian-Russian Petersburg-born dancer who acted as balletmaster in Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes, before relocating to the United States, where he is best known for his pioneering work with the New York City Ballet.

Indeed, not just in post-Stalin Russia, but “for most of the twentieth century, particularly in countries where homosexuality was a prosecutable offense, ballet’s escapism was the principal means for the expression of gay identities...Most pre-1960 ballets...are double-coded—signifying homosexuality to those who know the code but apparently innocent to those who do not (or choose not to recognize it).”⁸⁵ Though “pantomime as a self-sufficient art”⁸⁶ refused connections to classical ballet, it is still necessary to situate it in the overlap between two audiences and artistic circles—theater and dance—that were already deterritorialized in their own right. Pantomime actively drew from the expressive repertoires of illicit speech honed in post-Stalin theater (smuggled in through double entendre and ironic gesticulation) and illicit sexuality cultivated in post-Stalin ballet (smuggled in through double-coded movement and costumes which left nothing to the imagination).

Avant-garde pantomime, lingering in the tension between official support and subcultural disidentification, was also able to accommodate articulations of love and sexuality, sexual identity and affect that other areas of Soviet mass culture could not. As opposed to conversational dramatic forms, the silent theater opened up a semantic space for sexual feeling as one on a spectrum of passionate positions. As renowned mime Il’ia Rutberg explains, “Pantomime is not in the area of experience [*perezhivanie*],” the Stanislavskian concept at the core of acting in the realist verbal theater. On the contrary, he continues, “it is the area of passions. But passions in life and on the stage give birth to a new language. Passions purify movement, distilling in them the most important thing.”⁸⁷ Thus mime-directors from the late-socialist period, like Rutberg and Kharitonov,⁷ routinely made recourse to the phrases “I love you” [*ia liubliu tebia*] or the less object-determined “I love” [*liubliu*] as ideal exercises for translation into body language. In one of his pantomime monographs, Rutberg includes a pictorial catalog of expressive facial and bodily postures based on the system of Delsarte; many of these postures convey tenderness and adoration.

Practitioners of the corporeally cryptic art were aware of pantomime’s romantic, erotic and even homoerotic potential. At the same time, so was the state, which checked this freedom of nonexplicit erotic expression. In an exemplary instance, during a performance by the Leningrad mime Nikolai Nikitin, “the curtain closed in the middle of

⁸⁴ On his first encounter with Nureyev: “I lived on Sadovaia Street and was returning home past Ka’kinyi Garden. I look and see two of the most beautiful boys. One is in a uniform, from Suvorov; the other in jeans (no one had jeans back then), was Nureyev. And they were kissing astonishingly. I stopped. Nureyev turned and asked me: “Do you like this?” I answered, “it’s amazing!” And they we met in London when my book *Two Ballets of George Balanchine* came out. He recognized me, and we chatted. He gave me his book with the inscription: To one victim of the regime from another.” In his own words (and my translation), Gennadii Trifonov, “Konets gomoseksualizma,” *Sobaka* 66 (June 2006). Accessed on 7 April 2010 at <http://www.sobaka.ru/index.php?path=magazine/article/more/554&photoId=24>.

⁸⁵ Ramsay Burt, “Dissolving in Pleasure,” 214.

⁸⁶ This is Aleksandr Rumnev’s distinction between pantomime as a subordinate art within other arts (i.e. a pantomime scene in a ballet or a pantomime sequence in a clowning or acrobatic act) and pantomime in its own right (of the kind that he and Kharitonov performed). This distinction is reiterated by other theorists of pantomime, including Kharitonov, and also Il’ia Rutberg, to name a few.

⁸⁷ Пантомима – это не область переживаний, это область страстей. А страсти и в жизни, и на сцене рождают новый язык, страсти очищают движение, выделяя в нем самое главное
Rutberg in “*Chto takoe pantomima?*” 2007. “Kul’turnoi sloi” (Arkhivnyi televizionnyi nomer peredachi No. 35334), November 26. <http://lentatv.ru/35334>.

an act. Charges of shamanism, avant-gardism and eroticism followed.” The party’s clamping down on eroticism stemmed, in the opinion of one Russian observer, from the “conformism, fear before the incomprehensible, and envy on the part of theatrical specialists, critics and censors [which] led to unpleasantness and the harassment of Nikolai Nikitin and his studio.”⁸⁸

And just as the state was hip to the ways that sexuality could manifest onstage, its censors could also pick up on signs of sexual difference and homosexuality, even ones that eluded an unreflexive heterosexual audience. On a later occasion during the era of glasnost’, the director Roman Viktiuk, now known to audiences as openly gay, staged a performance of Jean Genet’s *The Maids* [*Les bonnes*, Fr. *Sluzhanki*, Russ.] in which “bare-chested men in skirts and heavy makeup play the women... The Soviet censor originally read queerness into men playing women and tried to ban the show.”⁸⁹ (Viktiuk skirted the censors by insisting the travesty merely complied with the playwright’s instructions.) Thus, as Birgit Beumers asserts, sexual role-reversal and gender-play were crucial to the formation of a gay dramatic genre.⁹⁰ The local audience accepted the apparent performance of gender transgression and, for those who recognized it, the implications of homoeros did not pose a problem so long as it was in the service of “high art,” and especially so long as it remained oblique and visually unconsummated, according to an American sociologist of queer Russia. Love but not lovemaking was admissible onstage, while the literal figuration of lust between actors of the same gender was perceived as pornographic rather than aesthetic by the party and the popular audience alike.

The pantomimic stage was, unfortunately, less open-minded about gender, and rather infrequently featured females. Larisa Kuznetsova of Iurii Popov’s studio in Rostov-na-Donu and its lone female player for a large part of the Seventies, describes a common situation of gender segregation. “Iura [Iurii Popov] really was not keen on admitting girls into his studio. He took me on the condition that I behave like a man.”⁹¹

⁸⁸ “Жил-был мим. Его звали Николай Никитин.” Accessed at <http://www.derevo.org/common/rus/words/now/archive/2006/nikitin1.html> on 1.21.2010.

Конформизм, страх перед непонятным, и зависть привели к неприятию и травле Николая Никитина и его студии со стороны театральных специалистов, критиков и цензуры. На одном из показов занавес закрылся посреди действия. Последовали обвинения в шаманизме, авангардизме и эротизме.

⁸⁹ Laurie Essig, “Publicly Queer: Representations of Queer Subjects and Subjectivities in the Absence of Identity,” *Consuming Russia: Popular Culture, Sex, and Society since Gorbachev*. Adele Marie Barker, ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 294.

⁹⁰ Like Essig, Birgit Beumers describes the appearance of overt (homo)sexuality on the Soviet stage during the late and post-Soviet periods. Though I cannot support Beumers’ thesis—that sexual themes are not treated by dramatists as real in themselves but as part of Russian hyperreality; nor can I concede to her application of Western postmodern theory on late-capitalist society to account for a specifically (post) socialist experience. Against Beumers, I would argue that these representations of gender as performance (sometimes at a double or even triple remove) have real—not *hyperreal* or simulated—effects on the way gender and sexuality were imagined by Russians in the late 1980s and early 90s. I would also insist on the extension of her emphasis on travesty and drag to encompass pre-Glasnost’ proto-gay theater in the work of Kharitonov and possibly others. Beumers, “The ‘blue’ stage: homosexuality in Russian theatre and drama of the 1990s,” in *Gender and Sexuality in Russian Civilisation*. Peter Barta, ed. (London: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2001), 295-309.

⁹¹ Юра не очень охотно принимал в свою студию девушек, меня взял с условием, что я буду себя жестко по-мужски вести.

Furthermore, Popov expressed fears that heterosexual “procreancy of the body,” to employ Plato’s turn-of-phrase symposiastic distinction (opposing the pederastic procreancy of the spirit),⁹² would ruin Kuznetsova’s figure for the silent stage. “Iura did not want me to get married and when he saw me pregnant, he nearly passed out. He was afraid that I would lose my form.”⁹³ Thus we find that the pantomime body was gendered male or at least manly; studios like Popov’s refused the specificity of feminine form and demanded that female bodies pass as masculine in their shape and capacities for plasticity. This compulsory masculinity invited certain kinds of spectatorship, while foreclosing others.

In the first show put on by Popov’s studio, which was based on Marcel Marceau’s “Life of Man” [*Zhizn’ cheloveka*], Kuznetsova was stuck backstage doing lighting, illuminating the beautiful bodies of “only boys, [the] five of them [who] took part in the play,” who were dressed in white make-shift leotards that left little to the audience’s imagination.⁹⁴ Needless to say, such costumes were not sold in the Soviet department store and were made in-house, presumably by the female members. According to Kuznetsova, “we made costumes [thusly]: we bought men’s underwear, sewed on long-johns, sometimes we even used sleeves from jerseys to make leotards. The costumes were terribly impoverished, but from afar they looked good.”⁹⁵ They “looked good” on particular bodies, on the modal body of pantomimic practice which, I suspect, was white and male, and, quite possibly queer.

The leotard and the less formfitting jumper were featured in the conversational theater of the era as well. In Yuri Liubimov’s revolutionary production of *Hamlet* at the Taganka Theater in 1971, Vladimir Vysotsky wore a similarly minimalist costume: the black woolen jumper. Anatoly Smeliansky, a leading theater critic, explains that “Vysotsky’s jumper was a sign of the generation of the sixties. The sixties men regarded jumpers not only as a democratic uniform suitable for *real men*, but as a signal for distinguishing ‘one of us’ [*svoi*] from ‘one of them’ [*chuzhoi*],”⁹⁶ in other words, as the badge of a particular deterritorialized milieu. (In the previous chapter, I investigate how the black leotard is made to signify blackness in the 1962 poster-play *Africa*; here I suggest that the white leotard refers to the white body. Both black and white are meant to stand in for “nude” skin, and to reveal the contours of the skin as a matter of fact and fabric, contributing to the perception of pantomime as erotic.)⁹⁷

⁹² With this in mind, we might hear resonances of Platonic homoeros in the notion of pantomime as psychic parthenogenesis (ones that will be amplified later in this chapter), in which a new language is born from meditating on beautiful, young, and quasi-nude male bodies. This situation of philosophic contemplation, what Plato called “procreancy of the spirit” in the *Symposium*, is inherently queer: opposed to heterosexual procreation, and denied those men who would look to female bodies to sate their too-earthly appetite for beautiful things but not the Beautiful itself.

⁹³ Юра не хотел, чтобы я выходила замуж, а когда увидел меня беременной, чуть в обморок не упал. Боялся, что я потеряю форму. Would a footnote to Irigaray be too pedantic or theory-happy?

⁹⁴ В спектакле принимали участие только мальчики, пять человек.

⁹⁵ Я вам расскажу, как мы делали костюмы: покупали мужское нижнее белье, ушивали кальсоны, иногда в качестве трико использовали даже рукава от фуфаяк. Костюмы были ужасно убогие, но издалека они смотрелись.

⁹⁶ Anatoly Smeliansky, *The Russian Theatre After Stalin*, 95 (emphasis mine).

⁹⁷ On the distinction between nudity and nakedness in visual art, see Nikolai Evreinov, *Nagota na stsene* (St. Petersburg, Morskogo ministerstva, 1911) for performance or stage art; and Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956) for painting or graphic art.

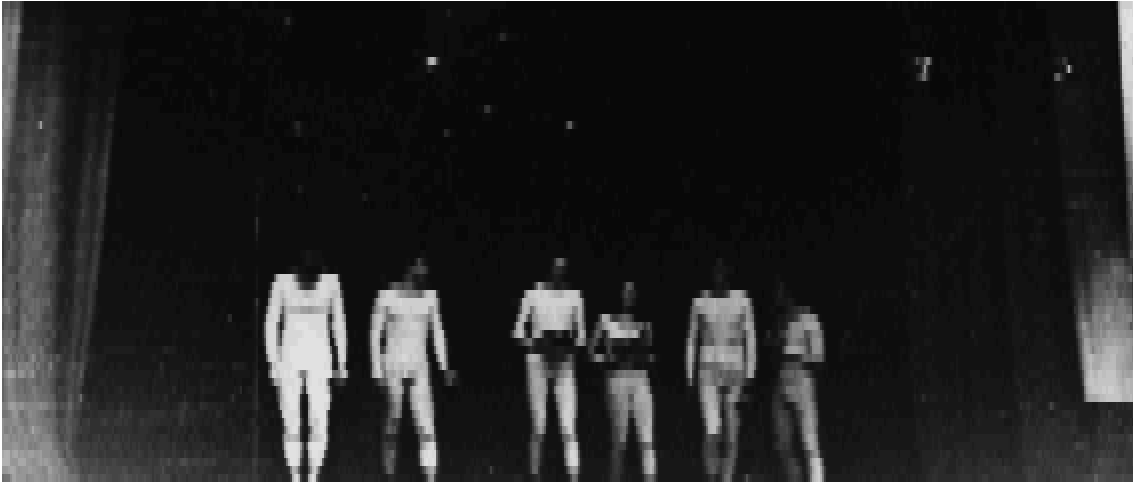


Figure 5. Iurii Popov’s Theater-Studio of Pantomime, ca. 1970s.
After the play, *The Column* [*Kolonna*]. (Kuznetsova is third from right.)

By calling attention to the queerness of the pantomimic body, I am by no means imputing a sexual identity or set of acts to the male/masculine subject on the stage. Instead, in the first place, I intend to call attention to the gender transgressive behavior required of female actors (as Kuznetsova complains above), and male actors in certain travesty performances, including Kharitonov’s *Enchanted Island*. I am also suggesting, like Nureyev’s classmate, that the visibility of any sexuality betokens a slippage, an unhealthy or non-normative excess, in the Soviet Union’s heavily-regulated and erotically-neuter economy of the body. Most of all, I hope to describe a queer position of spectatorship, one which need not presume the presence of a person with same-sex desires in the auditorium but rather describes a way of looking that might be taken up by anyone who looks. Exemplary in this respect are the comments of Mark Rozovskii from the recent documentary, *What is Pantomime?* [*Chto takoe pantomima?*]. Rozovskii is the much-acclaimed artistic director of the Moscow theater “U nikitskikh vorot” today, with mime experience as an actor in the student-theater Our House of Moscow State University during the 1960s.

There were beautiful women [in pantomime], but there were also beautiful men. Grigor’ev and Garik Gots [of the Leningrad pantomime ensemble]— these are two very beautiful bodies. I am a man of traditional [sexual] orientation, but these people in their leotards evoked in me a genuine admiration of their extraordinary bodies. Of course, any one of the pantomime actresses was very erotic— pantomime is a very sensual art. It is an enchanting art of imagery.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Были красавицы-девушки, но были и красавцы-мужчины. Григорьев и Гарик Гоц – это два очень красивых тела. Я человек традиционной ориентации, но эти люди в трико вызывали у меня подлинное восхищение своими необыкновенными телами. Конечно, любая из артисток пантомимы была очень эротична, пантомима – очень чувственное искусство. Это чарующее искусство образности. “*Chto takoe pantomima?*” 2007. “Kul’turnoi sloi” (Arkhivnyi televizionnyi nomer peredachi No. 35334), November 26. <http://lentatv.ru/35334>.

Pantomime thus chisels a crack in the Soviet Union's violently heteronormative visual economy through which a queer subject position can form out of queer ways of looking. In this space if not others, it is permissible for the male viewer to appreciate male beauty, the eroticism of the male body in movement, because pantomime, an eminently sensual art, opens up the range of sensual experience to its audience. Within the context of pantomime, Rozovskii's comments go unpunished; but beyond it, for the sake of spectators not necessarily affiliated with his avant-garde *svoi*, Rozovskii must offer a disclaimer about his "traditional orientation" before admitting to being more fascinated by beautiful male bodies than female ones. His own inclinations appear to adapt to the queerly slanted bodies on the silent stage; he twists himself, perverting his perspective, in order to see what (and whom) he usually does not. The world that he glimpses this way is full of wonder: a queerly enchanted island of imagery.

**KHARITONOV'S DISSERTATION:
THE SIGNS AND SENSATIONS OF SILENT ENCHANTMENT**

"dance provides a privileged arena for the bodily enactment of sexuality's semiotics and should thus be positioned at the center, not the periphery, of sexuality studies."
--Jane C. Desmond⁹⁹

In 1972, Kharitonov completed his dissertation, *Pantomime in the Teaching of Film-Acting* [*Pantomima v obuchenii kinoaktera*] in partial fulfillment of a doctoral degree in theater-acting at the All-Russian State Institute of Cinematography (VGIK), where he studied in the Sixties under Aleksandr Rumnev, and later taught classes on the "Actor's Studio and Pantomime" [*Akterskogo masterstva i pantomima*]. Most likely he was working on his dissertation at the same time as he was writing his original pantomime libretto, *Enchanted Island* [*Ocharovannyi ostrov*], definitely the same year he first staged it with the deaf Theater of Mimicry and Gesture. It is apparent that the two pieces—one academic, the other artistic—were dynamically dialoguing with one another: he illustrates points of his pantomimic theory with episodes from the play. In turn, the play instantiates his pantomimic theory, although less overtly.

As one Doctor of Philology, a member of Kharitonov's dissertation committee, lauded, "the problems posed in Kharitonov's work far exceed the parameters of the theme indicated in the title."¹⁰⁰ And as Mikhail Romm, the esteemed Soviet film director and dissertation chair, affirmed, "the title of the dissertation is much too modest for its actual content: in essence it is a theory of pantomime." Heaping on another round of praise, I propose that Kharitonov's dissertation accomplishes even more than these VGIK professors can recognize. In his exploration of silent performance art, Kharitonov devised a queer phenomenology by another name. There is much to be gained by reading Kharitonov's contribution alongside more recent forays into queer phenomenology, such as the one done by British philosopher, Sara Ahmed, in her eponymous work of 2006.

⁹⁹ Jane C. Desmond, "Introduction: Making the Invisible Visible: Staging Sexualities through Dance." In *Dancing Desires: Choreographic Sexualities On and Off the Stage*, ed. Jane C. Desmond (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), pp. 3-32, at 3.

¹⁰⁰ Kharitonov, *Pod domashnim arestom*, ed. Gleb Morev.

By putting these two texts together, it may become apparent which facets of queer (but not homosexual) experience are translatable between contemporary Western and former Soviet spaces. Additionally, Kharitonov's work on queer *and* deaf-mute phenomenology allow us to see how the work of Ahmed and her interlocutors would benefit from including a deaf and disability studies perspective, retooling her notion of the "straightening device" to think more expansively about the socially embodied subject.

PART I. SEMIOTICS

Still forward-thinking today, Kharitonov's scholarly work on pantomime was obviously cutting-edge for its own day, for re-introducing and elaborating a sophisticated theory on a renascent avant-garde art form. Additionally, his semiotic analysis of pantomime as a nonverbal sign system proved an innovative approach, applauded by his dissertation committee, especially Viacheslav Vsevolodovich Ivanov (b. 1929, son of the mystical Russian symbolist poet). Ivanov was impressed by Kharitonov's "original conception of pantomime, founded on a profound study of contemporary and classical literature, on the question and works of aesthetics and semiotics."¹⁰¹ In the early 1960s, Ivanov was one of the co-founders of the Moscow-Tartu School of Semiotics led by Iurii Lotman. The school, like pantomime, "expressed the spirit of its age."¹⁰² Both pantomime as Kharitonov practiced it and semiotics as Ivanov applied it aimed at recovering the mystical or mythic substratum of everyday experience, the enchantment of phenomenal life that, lamented Max Weber, modern life had sadly shed. The rigor of the Moscow-Tartu school's meticulous structuralism disguised an intellectual plasticity that found its physical correlate in the pantomimic body. In essence, semiotics was born at the moment and in the same spirit as pantomime was reborn in the post-Stalin Soviet Union. So how did Kharitonov's intervention into bodily semiotics through the exploration of pantomime compare with the work being done by his adviser and the cohort of Moscow-Tartu semioticians?

Outside of pantomime, and athletic or physical-therapeutic settings, the field of semiotics was emerging as a primary site in which Soviet scholars could think seriously about movement and its social significance. Ivanov and other Soviet semioticians took an interest in the communicative function of non- or extralinguistic phenomena in culture. At the 1962 Symposium for the Structural Study of Sign Systems, Ivanov was one of several presenters whose work appeared under the rubric "Nonlinguistic Systems of Communication" in the published conference proceedings.¹⁰³ Some of Ivanov's colleagues delivered a paper, cited by Kharitonov in his dissertation, on "Gestural Communication and Its Place among Other Systems of Human Communication [*obshcheniia*],"¹⁰⁴ in which they delimited meaningful movement from

¹⁰¹ V.V. Ivanov's dissertation review is included in the commentary section of Kharitonov, *Pod domashnim arestom*, ed. Gleb Morev.

¹⁰² B.M. Gasparov, "Tartuskaia shkola 1960-x godov kak semioticheskii fenomen." In *I.M. Lotman i tartusko-moskovskaia semioticheskaia shkola* (Moscow: 1994), 279-294, p. 279.

¹⁰³ Ivanov's presentation on "nonlinguistic systems of communication" was on "An Analysis of Akhazian Folk Games." He gave other talks at this Symposium, including one on rhythmic construction in balladic poetry.

¹⁰⁴ Z.M. Volotskaia, T.M. Nikolaeva, D.M. Segal, and T.V. Tsiv'ian, "Zhestovaia kommunikatsiia i ee mesto sredi drugikh system chelovecheskogo obshcheniia," *Simpozium po strukturnomu izucheniiu*

noncommunicative locomotory ‘noise,’ by which was meant movement motivated by reasons of biology or labor. They understood movements of this kind to be strictly functional and therefore excluded from considerations as embodied semiotics. (In contrast, Kharitonov insisted on inherent or internalized symbolism in the forms of laboring and functional bodies.) These early semioticians explored communicative behavior in various nonlinguistic codes, foremost among them kinetic; plastic; musical; and tactile. “We are interested,” they wrote, “in how motional [*dvigatel’naia*] communication distinguishes itself from so-called plastic communication (painting, sculpture) by the elements of the message encrypted in a kinetic code unfolding in time.” We should note, pantomime combines the motional and the plastic. Like the dissident mimes who used their bodies to Aesopian ends, semioticians similarly understood silent movement as potentially multivalent. Bodily behavior, they contended, “is constructed in such a way that it (by virtue of the multiplicity of the communicative apparatus [the body]) can transmit one at the same time as many messages, coding the one (or the many) messages with one or many codes.”¹⁰⁵

Though it is only of limited concern to us here, these scholars apply Jakobsonian categories of (verbal) language’s communicative functions to describe varieties and contexts of gestural communication. For the most part, they are interested in the gestures that accompany oral-linguistic communication; they do, however, comment in several places on the status of gesture qua communication independent of speech. In “normal, unimpeded intercourse,” or “in a typical dialogue, the main burden of phatic and conative functions is laid on kinetic communication; whereas “with the impediment (or impossibility) of speech communication (noise in the connection channel, ignorance of the linguistic code, disturbance of the aphasic variety) kinetic communication...acquires a referential and metalinguistic function.”¹⁰⁶ More simply, gesture becomes predominantly referential in the case of nonverbal communication, “in the case of the total impossibility or prohibition on the use of natural language,” as with “the systems of gestural communication used by the deaf mute”¹⁰⁷; or when one interlocutor is ignorant of the code, that is, when there is no common code between interlocutors. In these instances, gesture is too busy being referential to be aesthetic. This supports our earlier thesis that deaf gesture is perceived as deficit; sign is construed as a form of linguistic compensation, and verbal speech remains the unchallenged norm or ideal, uniquely capable of fulfilling all of the communicative functions.

Interestingly, these scholars deliberate at length on the status of pantomime as a nonlingual sign system. We might even boldly propose that the thinking-through of pantomime is a foundational moment for Soviet structuralism and semiotics. The art form poses the constitutive question of the field: how does culture communicate without words? For these interpreters of meaningful movement, pantomime offers a compelling

znakovykh system: Tezisy dokladov. (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo “Akademiia nauk SSSR”: Institut slavianovedeniia, 1962), 65-78,

¹⁰⁵ [Поведение] может быть устроено так, что посылающий одновременно (в силу многомерности коммуникативного аппарата) может передавать как одно, так и несколько сообщений, кодируя это (или эти) сообщения либо одним, либо несколькими кодами (*ibid.*, 67).

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

¹⁰⁷ The other situations of “unnatural” language include: “intertribal sign languages of North American Indians, the systems of gestural communication used by the deaf mute, and the sign languages of the monastic orders in medieval Europe” (69).

case study since gesture here is sovereign: “freighted with the greatest aesthetic burden...it falls to gesture to execute the whole complicated complex of communicative functions” in the Jakobsonian paradigm: referential, conative, phatic, metalingual, emotive, and, most importantly aesthetic or poetic. They continue: “most important [to pantomime] from the aesthetic point of view is the problem of the ‘semantic key,’” the means by which a movement or set of movements is marked off from the motional noise as distinctly meaning-bearing. “The thing is, the simple display of a sequence of physical actions,” even when the actor is acting with a poetic model in mind,

cannot communicate to the viewer the adequate aesthetic feeling. In order to make pantomime not just comprehensible to the viewer—that is sufficiently difficult in itself—but to introduce a poetic function into its action, the actor must locate one or several gestures in a series which are distinct from the others, one which would be the key to mystic insight [*postizheniiu*] into the hidden aesthetic significance of the entire pantomime. It turns out, every time a gesture of this sort is located it is a creative act.¹⁰⁸

We ought to note here that even these spiritually disinclined structuralists lapse into mysticism when it comes to pantomime. When successful, they suggest, the embodied act of pantomimic communication is capable of transmuting the mundane into the metaphysical, of “[poetically reproducing] ordinary human motions...as a means for the poetic transformation of the world.”¹⁰⁹

Even still, despite that pantomime, unlike “deaf-mute” sign language, is capable of transcending the purely referential to become a wholly “creative act,” these semioticians remain skeptical about its actually doing so, particularly when abstract meaning or emotion is at stake.

Evidently, here it is necessary to admit the limitedness of the modeling capacities of this kind of art. It turns out it is possible to create a dictionary of gestures which would correspond to abstract concepts, like love, anger, thought, freedom, and so on...[but] gestures, the units of the dictionary, are not identical with the words of human language, since the single means of forming more complex units is in collocating gestures in a sequence. Consequently, the possibilities of this sort of sign language to create aesthetic values will be very limited.¹¹⁰

Such a restricted pantomime would assign the individual movement a single linguistic meaning so that each gesture would represent an abstract word in one-to-one ratio. The mime’s body acts here as a verbal rebus, his gestural language would be at a triple remove from reality, constituting a tertiary modeling system in semiotic terms. The movement in this style of pantomime is metaphoric or symbolic: each gesture represents a single semantic unit (a “pantomeme”) whereas a metonymic pantomime such as

¹⁰⁸ Volotskaia, et al., 76.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. Though there is insufficient space to explore the distinction, I must remark on the difference between restricted pantomime of the readily symbolic variety as advocated by Delsarte and his Russian epigone, Sergei Volkonsky, and the sort of pantomimic grammar that Kharitonov envisioned.

Kharitonov attempted is asymbolic. Metaphoric pantomime fails “to adequately transmit human feelings [*chuvstva*]” in both a referential and a sympathetic sense. The viewer neither understands the emotions of the mime, nor does he co-experience them. In order for pantomime to be affectively adequate, it must “find its specific way of correlating the sign and the world, a way which would not make recourse to the mediation of language.” As we shall see, this is the goal of Kharitonov’s unique brand of pantomimic movement.

Kharitonov was aware of this structuralist inclination toward pantomime, and of the work being done by his adviser on the semiotics of aesthetic movement. In his dissertation, he cites the 1967 article, “Film Language [*Iazyk kino*],” in which Ivanov argues that the dominant sign system of film, the language of action, is primary; it both precedes and enables verbal language even in non-aesthetic contexts. “The first language which we learn in very early infancy,” according to Ivanov, “is precisely the language of action [*Iazyk deistviia*]. If we did not know this language, then we could not learn verbal language.”¹¹¹ Kharitonov builds on this notion in the second half of his dissertation, which is a focused analysis of the syntagmatic, pragmatic, and metapragmatic aspects of pantomime as a language of action. The actor or mimetic “I” is formed within the sign-system of pantomime, thus he “experiences the sign system” as naturalized, “without reflection, unconsciously.” For the viewer, the staged gesture or sign is similarly taken as “symptom” rather than symbol¹¹²; the mime-sign does not point to something beyond itself but instead signifies its very self.

In order to get at aesthetic movement pragmatically, Kharitonov, like Ivanov, resorts to analogizing actional with verbal language (despite the latter’s contingent, secondary relationship to the former). Pantomime is like verbal language in that both are internally unified by a poetics and a canon. “A linguistic canon is realized in harmony, proper pronunciation, the principle of selection for phonetic combinations according to which the phonetic picture [*kartina*] of a given language is organized.”¹¹³ As aural principles comprise the poetics of a given (spoken) language, the pantomimic canon is defined by the poetics of plasticity.¹¹⁴ Notably, Kharitonov describes a verbal canon based on perfection and harmony, whereas the plastic body of his pantomime canon is asymmetrical and compositionally askew.

The present analysis loops back around later on to describe the pantomimic body and its epistemological implications in more detail. First a few more words are necessary to structure our understanding of this semiotic theory of pantomime. Kharitonov identifies as the syntagms (the smallest units) of plastic language “the individual spatial moment; the canonical [*body*] position; and the arrangement of the body in space in relation to another body.”¹¹⁵ In pantomime even—and especially—the unconscious

¹¹¹ V.V. Ivanov, “Iazyk kino,” *Inostrannaia literatura* 6 (June 1967): 262-267 at 263.

«Первый язык, который мы выучиваем в самом раннем детстве, это именно язык действий. Если бы мы не знали этого языка, то мы бы не смогли обучиться н языку словесному.» Twice in this five-page article Ivanov points out the newness of semiotics as a field. He also notes the presence of Roland Barthes at the symposium, linking the work of Soviet and French structuralists.

¹¹² Evgenii Vladimirovich Kharitonov, “Pantomima v obuchenii kinoaktera.” Ph.D. dissertation (Moscow: VGIK, 1972); reprinted in Kharitonov, *Pod domashnim arestom*. Gleb Morev, ed. (Moscow: Glagol, 2005).460.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 454.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 460-1.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 466.

emotional response in its bodily manifestation constitutes an image, a syntagm in the pantomimic lexicon. Two or more syntagms are linked by whatever alternates them in the course of a composition: either a metric, rhythmic or time-based change (as in non-narrative dance or regularly versified poetry); or shifts in accented movement with no regard for numerical regularity (as in prose). This latter style, rhythmically irregular, ordered by inflected movement, corresponds to Kharitonov's preferred variety of pantomime. In order for a composition to be dynamic, its syntagms must be heterogeneous, e.g. the coming together of gestures from different bodily canons; bodily positions assumed in different sequences; or some kind of qualitative differences among the performance's participants.¹¹⁶ Kharitonov does not reserve the participatory role for animate actors; he extends it to "characters as well as objects, spatial relations, [and] costumes," all of them count as "the sign-material of this system" based on their "ability to play out, to manifest the sensible [*chuvstvitel'nye*] properties of the sign."¹¹⁷ As we talk later about the plastic "I" and its affective body, we will also consider this system in its integrity: how the body occupies space and employs material objects to meaningfully extend itself into that space by externalizing its immanent sensations [*chuvstva*].

PART II. PHENOMENOLOGY: SPEAKING SUBJECTIVITY AND MUTE EMBODIMENT

Though Kharitonov initiates part two of his analysis of pantomime with the analogy of verbal language and movement as sign-systems, he devotes the latter half of the section to complicating and even foreclosing this equation. The gestures of the plastic body, the syntagms of which the pantomimic message (the performance) is composed, finally cannot be compared to words since words exist at an insurmountable remove from the material world or the abstract phenomena to which they refer. Conversely, embodied movement is immediate, uniting signifier and signified or restoring them to a primal unity. What are the consequences of the nonlingual nature of pantomimic communication on the plastic consciousness formed within this sign-system? How is meaning made differently within this system (as opposed to the verbal system)? What epistemology is encoded within the plastic sign system, and what ontology does it assume or produce in its actors? Lastly, how is meaning processed differently by the individual consciousness in the semiotic universe of pantomime?

As it turns out, just as verbal and plastic languages are irreconcilable, so are verbal and plastic selves decidedly different. Normative, non-pantomimic consciousness—what I will here refer to as the speaking, discursive or verbal "I" (Kharitonov's *govoriashchii*)—organizes experience logically and in linear fashion, that is, he strings events together according to causality, and constructs visual sentences obeying rules of grammatical order. This discursive self imbues all movement with rational meaning, and strives to make sense of what he sees rather than simply sensually experiencing it. If for the plastic self--his antipode in Kharitonov's paradigm—touch is the dominant sensory modality, the speaking "I" is defined primarily through sound and hearing. Translation between these two personalities will take place visually, through the

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 466.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 469.

objectivization and spectacularization of the emotional or haptic experience of the plastic self for the sake of the speaking viewer. I return to this point later on.

In general, the speaking self does not have access to immediate experience, since his interaction with the world and with others in it will always be mediated through a language of symbols, words, and gestures derived from or replacing words. Kharitonov remarks on the constructed quality of language (versus notions of human consciousness as naturally verbal): “People’s thoughts and feelings are expressed in real life with speech [*rech’iu*], that is, symbols at some point specially invented.”¹¹⁸ As his connection to others occurs in verbal dialogue, the speaking “I” will be aligned aesthetically with conversational [*slovesnaia*] drama rather than pantomime. Cut off from his animate and inanimate milieu, the speaking self is singular and does not extend into space. His emotional experience is likewise confined in a discrete corpus, making his body non-affective and sensitively uncommunicative. He is, to put it plainly, a Cartesian cogito. His “I” is located in his head, the seat of reason (he is always “adjudicating rationally”); and his humanity is lodged in his mouth, the site of speech. His gestures are orderly and constrained, disciplined in the repetition of ritual, through practices of everyday etiquette, and by the drilling of military service. His body moves only with purpose, plot and economy, ever oriented toward a *telos*.¹¹⁹ This eminent (re) productiveness lines up with his straightness or heterosexuality. He is, in a word, the embodiment of normative Soviet subjectivity.

The pantomimic “I” Kharitonov proposes is the queer antithesis of the normative speaking self described above. It is phenomenological rather than rational, deriving knowledge from the experience of the body in the material world and not the secondary or logical processing of first-order experience. “In pantomime,” Kharitonov explains, “the character’s physical self-sensation [*fizicheskoe samooshchushchenie*] is the only thing he experiences.”¹²⁰ He “senses the self as a body.”¹²¹ Linked directly to the world, the plastic subject has a different relationship to verbal language, which feels alien and unnecessary to his essence. It follows that “pantomimic personalities do not know speech and communicate only by means of an originary [*pervichnyi*] nonsymbolic, nonabstracted language”—the Real to the speaking self’s Symbolic, comprised of “mimicry, movements, illustrative actions.”¹²² This gestural language has no relationship to the symbolic language of the speaking “I”; it is not, for instance, its anemic or derivate double, nor the approximation of conventional speech by a lesser intellect (as sign language was presumed to be parasitic in this way upon spoken language). Indeed, plastic language gives rise to a wholly other “I”:

The character of our pantomime knows no words. And not knowing words, he cannot know the gestures that replace words. His elevated physical expressivity compensates for this. He communicates with other characters and his material surroundings by means of reflexive bodily reactions and actions. In these circumstances, the actor

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 442.

¹¹⁹ Though there is insufficient space to deal with it here, the notion that the normative Soviet self, the ideal or “positive hero” of socialist realism, is a teleological subject will be taken up more fully in the final chapter on Andrei Siniavskii.

¹²⁰ Kharitonov, “Pantomima,” 441.

¹²¹ Ibid., 443.

¹²² Ibid., 442; 444.

naturally senses his “I” as a body, with a natural center of coordination at the place of his solar plexus.¹²³

The “I” of Kharitonov’s pantomime has neither words nor verbally-referent gestures at his disposal. Instead he has only the irreducible movements of the body as an extension of emotion into space. Unlike the Cartesian speaking subject, the spirit or cogito and body of the plastic self are cohabitative.

His consciousness not contained in the rational brain but radiating from the pelvis, the plastic “I” communicates through the “language of physical sensation [chuvstva]” or feeling, and the “language of action,” (perhaps the one whose foreknowledge by the actor Ivanov identifies as cinema’s condition of possibility), which outwardly manifests emotion as action and operates mostly in the haptic mode. “Pantomime of this sort is a drama of organic silence.”¹²⁴ By this, Kharitonov does not mean a protracted silence in a performance (like the famous “mute scene” at the end of Nikolai Gogol’s *Inspector General [Revizor, 1836]*), nor does he have in mind the wordless *études* in the first semester of theatrical training at his alma mater, VGIK. Rather, he attends to the ways in which “the unusual circumstances of pantomime stir personalities to plastically pregnant, expressive, eccentric actionality [*deistvovanie*].”¹²⁵

Though speech is the most recognized communicative paradigm of extradramatic life, the “language of plasticity exists in real life,” too, and is the emulsifying substance of sociality, in Kharitonov’s estimation. For the individual, embodied plasticity is experienced as “language on a sensual, material [*chustvennom predmetnom*] level of consciousness (or even generally before consciousness, simply a movement of material objects communicating to one another).”¹²⁶ Such a conception of verbal language and speech in relation to consciousness or the rational “I” implies that there are alternative and even more authentic ways to be a subject in the world: affectively or sensitively, for instance—ways in which, I will argue, Kharitonov is particularly invested, and ways which make Soviet queer and deaf existences viable.

Since the role that reason plays for the speaking personality is occupied for the plastic one by affect and sensual experience, the performance styles corresponding to each figure are qualitatively disparate. The speaking “I” flourishes in the kinds of causal, plot-driven conversational dramas that coalesce into Aristotelean unities. The plastic “I,” on the other hand, is fully actualized in a process-oriented, non-narrative aesthetic context, wherein plot is replaced by the shifting interplay of motional and emotional states over time: in a word, pantomime. (In Kharitonovian pantomime, sensations and emotions are equivalent to actions in their bodily excess and atmospheric potentiality; whereas in Marceauvian symbolic pantomime, a hieroglyphic motion represents single

¹²³ Персонаж нашей пантомимы не знает слова. Но не зная слова, он не может знать и жестов, заменяющих слово, это компенсируется его повышенной физической выразительностью. Он общается с другими персонажами и предметной средой посредством рефлекторных телесных реакций и действий. В этих условиях актер естественно ощущает свое «я» как тело, с природным центром координации в месте солнечного сплетения. (ibid., 441).

¹²⁴ Пантомима такого рода—это драма органического молчания (ibid., 459).

¹²⁵ Ibid., 459.

¹²⁶ Это язык [пластики] на чувственном предметном уровне сознания (или даже вообще до сознания, просто движение материальных объектов, сообщающих его друг другу. (442)

emotion only in finite sequence.)¹²⁷ Unable to communicate verbally, the heightened expressivity of the pantomiming actor is not a formal conceit but a “natural emotional manifestation.”¹²⁸ “Pantomime needs to be defined,” declares Kharitonov, “as the concreteness of actions and emotional conditions of a character educed in expressive movement.”¹²⁹ The phenomenological nature of the pantomimic self shapes a new style of embodied versus discursive sociality. Whereas in conversational drama [*razgovornaia drama*] the actor realizes his role in his association [*obshchenie*] with other characters by means of dramatic dialogue, in “plastic drama” the actions are realized “naturally” [*estestvenno*] in nonverbal associations: the physical interactions and bodily reactions of the characters,” which should be regarded as dialogue in the context of pantomime, “that is, as a language by which the characters associate with one another.”¹³⁰

There are two personalities involved in the single pantomimic exchange—the plastic “I” on the stage whose movements the speaking “I” in the audience attempts to imbue with meaning. Two epistemologies are thus negotiated between two sign-systems with their polar ontological positions: the self-sentiment [*samooshchushchenie*] of the silent actor and the rational perception of the speaking viewer. Kharitonov parses the exchange as follows: “The actor in a pantomime plays exclusively on the sensible, plastic level, no matter what interactions the plot of the pantomime proposes to him. But the rational [*ratsional’nom*] viewer, always [processes his perception] on an everyday rational [*rassudochnyi*] level, returning the pantomimic personalities to the nonsensual, rational [*rassudochnyi*] meaning of their actions.”¹³¹ The speaking “I” has been historically conditioned to expect reason with his stage realism. “In theories of the actor’s art it is precisely coldness and rationality which are usually connected to acting,” and “the verbal theater demands the reasonableness [*rassudochnost’*] of its actor’s play,” as in French Enlightenment drama, in which the characters voice the reason of their actions in monologues. Conversely, in pantomime, “the actor’s escalated sensation of his own body...and the unmediated revelation of himself in movement...assert his unburdenedness by [these] reflexes of reason [*rassudka*].” (448)

The pantomimic actor, it turns out, “cannot mediate his experience of a play with rational judgment,”¹³² for just as there are two modalities of understanding pantomimic action, so are there two orders of movement that correspond respectively to their actors and interpreters. In reverse order, they are the “gestures of the speaking world” (ones belonging to the realms of ritual and etiquette, like curtseying); and those immediate and nonsymbolic gestures of plastic language particular to pantomime. The gestures of the

¹²⁷ Ibid., 452.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 440.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 439.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 442. I have chosen to translate *obshchenie* as association in order to preserve the root ‘soc-,’ the retention of which I hope will allow the transition between pantomime’s providing an individual’s embodied means of “association” to pantomime as a mode of embodied sociability.

¹³¹ Ibid., 443.

¹³² Ibid., 459. Interestingly, this excluded Brechtian alienation from Kharitonov’s conception of pantomime. By extension, we should rule out the role of formalist estrangement here, too. The idea is that the pantomimic “I” is prelapsarian, exists in a state wherein the word and the world are one and meaning is still immanent in movement. The A-effect or verbal estrangement are necessary only insofar as the actor resides in a world where meaning is already at a remove, where the everyday has been formalized and naturalized to such a degree that unmediated experience of it has been rendered practically impossible. Of course, estrangement remains possible for the speaking “I” who encounters this other order of gesture.

speaking world have long ago effaced their etymology, and the emotional or embodied contexts which shaped their content. They have lost their internal form or affective motivations and become empty, superficial signs.¹³³ Those personalities who manage to preserve the embodied content of gestural language are pantomimic, and perhaps, as Kharitonov describes them, neither hearing nor speaking, that is, functionally deaf mute.

Ultimately, the “rational” way of reading pantomimic action belongs to the “speaking world” [*govoriashchii mir*] of the audience.¹³⁴ The division of the performance space into a mute stage and a speaking auditorium reminds one of the real circumstances in which Kharitonov’s original pantomime play, *Enchanted Island*, was put on: at the Theater of Mimicry and Gesture, Moscow’s theater of the deaf (discussed at length in the previous and subsequent chapters), which catered primarily to a hearing/speaking audience. Given that Kharitonov crafted his radical theory of phenomenological subjectivity while working with the deaf theater, indeed, while composing this play, it is tempting to read a kind of canny deafness into these moments of his dissertation. (It is entirely plausible, for example, that the operative term “speaking world” would have been part of Soviet deaf parlance then the way “Deaf World” is today in American signing communities.)

Kharitonov respected his deaf actors as connoisseurs of silence, experts in expressing emotion by non-verbal means—a skill he perceived as shared with the Soviet gay subculture, whose social existence relied on an elaborate system of unspoken semiotics and bodily signs. Consequently, Kharitonov mystified the “natural silence” of deaf-mutes as a form of ontological distinction coterminous with that of queer silence. This was of course a problematic but also a positive approach that might nonetheless have allowed for a style of affirmative deaf identity to coalesce in ways that defective conversational theater did not. Needless to say, it is troubling for the way it presumes that speechlessness is the contiguous condition of hearing impairment, and that non-verbal speech does not count as language, such that expression by means other than the mouth is cast as primitive, even prelapsarian. Like the manualist school of early American deaf education, Kharitonov cherished signs as “an original language of mankind,” “a language closer to God and nature than speech, uncorrupted and pure, more honest because more direct as a means of emotional expression.”¹³⁵ I repurpose this romantic rendition of Sign Language here insofar as it seems a direct quotation from Kharitonov’s manual for pantomimic acting. In this work, he laid emphasis on the silent actor’s emotional authenticity, a task at which the “naturally” non-speaking—as opposed to the speaking subject playing at silence—was especially adept.¹³⁶ He regarded

¹³³ Here I point to the work of prerevolutionary linguist, A.A. Potebnia, on “internal form” [*vnutrennaia forma*] in *Mysl’ i iazyk* [Thought and Language], Kharkov: 1892).

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 443.

¹³⁵ Douglas C. Baynton, *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign against Sign Language* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 9.

¹³⁶ This notion that the hearing and speech impaired were somehow better suited for expressive theatrical and cinematic genres is not unique to Kharitonov. Preeminent dramaturg Peter Brooks quips something along the same lines: “The mute role is remarkably prevalent in melodrama. Mutes correspond first of all to a repeated use of extreme physical conditions to represent extreme moral and emotional conditions: as well as mutes, there are blind men, paralytics, invalids of various sorts whose very physical presence evokes the extremism and hyperbole of ethical conflict and manichaestic struggle. In the gallery of mutilations and deprivations, however, the mutes have a special place. One is tempted to speculate that the different kinds of drama have their corresponding sense deprivations: for tragedy, blindness, since tragedy

pantomime as something other than an imperfect parrotry of a major spoken tongue. Instead it was for him a first-order language in its own right, self-reflexive, integral and untranslatable into words, more resonant in “broken” than symmetrical bodies, connected immediately to the higher reality of living emotion.¹³⁷

If Kharitonov’s text offered a rejoinder here to Rumnev’s pantomimic formula, we find the former favored his actors “sooner mute than silent.” Yet the way Kharitonov recuperated and eventually queered defective quietude was by esteeming both deaf and gay actors as outside of rational subjectivity—a location that he favored but that nonetheless risked reifying this Enlightenment hierarchy in its inverted state. At the same time, Kharitonov’s dissertation, and even his nonacademic queer writing, seems so focused on unseating rational subjectivity as the supreme mode of being, that we would err in interpreting as a slight the nonidentification of the deaf actor with reason. Instead, I urge us to consider how Kharitonov esteems gestural language as uniquely capable of communicating emotional knowledge, and furthermore, as nonderivative of spoken/written language. This last proposal potentially bespeaks Kharitonov’s special understanding of deaf sign language as a “true language” in the (problematic) linguistic sense. Perhaps he would have been picked this idea up while working in Moscow State University’s Defectology department, which was gradually radicalizing in the direction of deaf pride during the later Soviet period.

QUEER PHENOMENOLOGY AND DEAF DE-STRAIGHTENING DEVICES

Before shifting in the next chapter to an interpretation of the play itself and of the actual instance of queer-deaf collaboration in its performance run, let us continue to scrutinize the sharp distinction Kharitonov draws between a normative speaking self and an alternative plastic self. This will enable us to explore more extensively later on how the plastic self reads as both queer and deaf. In the section of his dissertation entitled, “The Self Sentiment of the Actor in Pantomime (2.4),” Kharitonov reintroduces his ontological dichotomy, in fact, barely rephrasing his position from the earlier cited passage (441).

The ‘I’ with whom the character of speech activity acts, who is endowed with speech but then acts quietly differs in principle from the ‘I’ of the character who acts in those activities where the possibility of speech is generally excluded.

If the ‘I’ in the first instance contains in himself a physical self-sentiment, sufficiently mediated by the judgments of reason, then the ‘I’ of the second instance has a sharpened sense of himself as a body, and of experiences only of bodily interaction with other bodies and objects. His center is located, that is to say, not in his head, but

is about insight and illumination; for comedy, deafness, since comedy is concerned with problems in communication, misunderstandings and their consequences; and for melodrama, muteness, since melodrama is about expression.” Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), 56-7.

Other scholars like John S. Schuchman have explored the non-metaphorical presence of deaf actors in the performing arts. For instance, see John S. Schuchman, *Hollywood Speaks: Deafness and the Film Entertainment Industry* (University of Illinois Press, 1999).

¹³⁷ Kharitonov, “Pantomima,” 441.

in his solar plexus; any action begins from here. This ‘I’ naturally excludes gesticulations replacing words, for he does not know any words.¹³⁸

It is striking that Kharitonov here draws a distinction in consciousness between speaking and plastic, and not along the more obvious binaries of speaking—nonspeaking, speaking—silent, or speaking—mute. This contraposition he selects does not immobilize the speaking subject against his alter. Rather, the unlikely binary, speaking—plastic, calls attention to the ways in which, in order for certain identities to be constructed recognizably as “speaking,” certain styles of movement must be foreclosed. And since, as Kharitonov demonstrates throughout his dissertation, movements are manifestations of emotions and constitute interrelationships between objects, bodies, surroundings, and selves, the foreclosure of a particular style of movement amounts to the making impossible of certain kinds of sociability. (At the very least, Kharitonov conveys that a divide of language separates these two kinds of selves, and that any communication between these orders of individual and collective consciousness must happen by means of translation.) The relationship between movement and emotional connection, communication and community, lie at the quiet heart of Kharitonov’s pantomime theory as a philosophy or subtle manifesto of new relational possibilities. Reading the dissertation through this prism, it becomes apparent that Kharitonov’s nomination of plastic (rather than silent or mute) as speaking’s other allows him to forge unexpected connections between various groups lacking access to normative speech, embodiment, or inter-bodily behavior.

So who is the normative speaking self? What is normative embodiment? And what does normative bodily behavior look like? The identification of such a character and class of movement is neither the primary nor explicit goal of Kharitonov’s dissertation, and yet, as he identifies the two styles of self—speaking and plastic—and the peculiar ways in which these selves are kinetically expressed—he does end up offering something akin to a queer analysis of normativity. His sympathies, of course, lie with the plastic body and its new canon of bodily movement, and so the normative speaking “I” remains a mostly shadowy figure in the text. Yet Kharitonov continuously gestures toward the obviousness and omnipresence of this figure in the performing arts and Soviet society more broadly. The normative body is introduced negatively, for instance, when we discover its range of activity is comparatively constrained vis-à-vis the unpredictable if not infinite motional possibilities of the pantomiming body. The speaking self or non-plastic “I” appears in other iterations in the dissertation as the laboring body or the body at work, that is, the quintessential socialist body. This productive self is an everyday body, conditioned through ritual gesture, residing in public space with the maximum efficiency afforded by standing up straight and not touching other bodies, relating to other bodies “straightly.” (In some ways, it bears resemblance to

¹³⁸ «Я», с которым выступает персонаж речевого действия, -- где он наделен речью и тогда, когда действует молча, -- и «я» персонажа, выступающего в таком действии, где возможность речи исключена вообще, различаются в принципе.

Если «я» в первом случае включает в себя физическое самоощущение, достаточно опосредованное установлениями рассудка, то «я» во втором случае есть обостренное ощущение себя как тела, переживание только телесных взаимодействий с другими телами и предметами. Центр его находится, так сказать, не в голове, а в солнечном сплетении; от него начинается любое чувство. Это «я» естественно исключает жестикуляцию, заменяющую слова, ибо не знает слова (*ibid.*, 474).

what disability studies scholar Tobin Siebers calls the “social body.”¹³⁹) The straightness and symmetry of the normative body, opines Kharitonov, is wholly unnatural: it visually symbolizes the successful internalization of the norms of bodily comportment secured through physical and social discipline. (Likewise, Ahmed supplies, “straightness [is] about becoming rather than being...the subject ‘becomes straight’ as an effect of work.”)¹⁴⁰ And just as rigid bodies have been disciplined into physical normativity, so have they in turn been conditioned to normative affect.

We follow Kharitonov’s logic to the point where the straight body becomes a symbol; and almost to where the plastic body reveals itself to be irreducible. Kharitonov locates in symbolically perfect posture a compulsory straightness that, I argue, is related to, and has spatial implications for what radical feminist Adrienne Rich calls compulsory heterosexuality. In its natural state, the body is not internally straight, nor does it incline toward other bodies straight-wise. Despite that “the body is by nature inclined to dynamic contraposition, the majority of everyday situations does not allow it to realize itself in regard [to the realization of bodily affects].”¹⁴¹ Becoming an “everyday” self thus means submitting one’s body to a set of social-aesthetic norms which preempt certain kinds of affective experience. This normative “category of [bodily] positioning,”

*deliberately does not allow the body to extend itself into its naturally dynamic contraposition; the positioning according to which the body symbolizes something with itself, manifests a certain image not issuing immediately from the nature of bodily movement. Thus the requirement of disciplinary straightening out – especially turned out shoulders, chest forward, chin up, frontal hand cues – this brings the body to symmetry, as if symbolizing the simplest and clearest appearance of order. [This] has been associated with the presentation of good manners—the body frame straight to the utmost, ideally as if tight-laced in a corset, elbows turned inward, rigidly immobile hips, chin highly raised—this symbolizes certain class-based concepts of virtue. Such positionings in relationship to bodily behavior occur not only in situations connected to necessity or the fulfillment of obligation, but also in situations of everyday life. They are already a certain aesthetic norm.*¹⁴²

Dominant orders of corporal movement try to untwist the body into an “aesthetic norm” of symmetry; they act, in Sara Ahmed’s phrase, as “straightening devices,” which establish an embodied “relationship between the normative and the vertical axis.”¹⁴³ I pair Ahmed’s recent analysis of the social body with Kharitonov’s insights as I believe they are mutually illuminating. Ahmed accounts for “the vertical axis [as] itself an effect of being ‘in line,’ when the line taken by the body corresponds with other lines that are already given. The vertical line is hence normative; it is shaped by the repetition of bodily and social actions over time... Things as well as bodies appear ‘the right way up’ when

¹³⁹ Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

¹⁴⁰ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 79.

¹⁴¹ «То есть тело по природе склонно к динамическому противоподвижению, большинство обыденных ситуаций не дает ему развернуться в этом качестве [реализации телесных аффектов]» (ibid., 463; my emphasis).

¹⁴² Ibid., 463 (my emphasis).

¹⁴³ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 66.

they are ‘in line,’ which makes any moment in which phenomenal space does ‘line up’ seem rather ‘queer.’”¹⁴⁴ Ahmed observes the emotional effects of limiting movement. “Compulsory heterosexuality,” she contends, “shapes what bodies can do. Bodies take the shapes of norms that are repeated over time and with force. Through repeating some gestures and not others, or through being orientated in some directions and not others, bodies become contorted. For Ahmed, as with Kharitonov before her, the circumscription of movement and the social determination of bodily orientation has emotional ramifications, “enabl[ing] some actions *only insofar as they restrict the capacity for other kinds of action*” and feeling that depart from these norms.¹⁴⁵

Since the body, Kharitonov avers, is naturally plastic and inherently contrappostal, we might also see it as oriented perversely or queerly in space. In the Indo-European etymology, “queer is, after all, a spatial term, which then gets translated into a sexual term, a term for a twisted sexuality that does not follow a ‘straight line,’ a sexuality that is bent and crooked.”¹⁴⁶ The Russian terms of the Soviet era (rough analogs for the Anglo-American “queer” here in the absence of such subcultural self-appellations)—perversion [*izvrashchenie*] or deviation [*otklonenie*—encode similar semantics of twisting, deviating, or veering away from the straight and narrow. In the Soviet context, one’s bodily orientation in space as straight—symmetrical, upright, ‘in line’—coincides with an ideological-erotic orientation as straight.¹⁴⁷ Kharitonov notes this in the above discussion of regimes of comportment: the absolute verticality of the straight figure is actively produced as the social norm despite the body’s own queer intentions. Physical erectness operates as a symbol of moral rectitude. Thus the epigraph from Andrei Siniavskii’s short story, “Pkhents,” about a queer sort of Soviet who is actually a hunchbacked alien makes intuitive sense: “a normal, beautiful woman needs a symmetrical man.” (I evaluate this fantastic tale vis-à-vis queer gesture in the gulag in Chapter Six.)

To these everyday “straightening devices” pantomime offers an antidote. Retroactively infusing Kharitonov’s theory with Ahmed’s vocabulary, we might rechristen it an “unstraightening device” (or even “de-straightening” device, given the derivative status of straightness in both of its valence.) Its plastic physicality can claim none of the economy or productivity of the body belonging to its speaking antipode. The movements of the plastic self are formal, not functional, atelic, ornamental. And the repertoire of nonproductive, nonreproductive, or useless mimetic positions is specially positioned “for the realization of bodily affect.”¹⁴⁸ Opening up the body onto its organic plasticity liberates the individual—on and off the stage—to experience emotions and sensations that are squeezed out by everyday body norms and slip beyond the

¹⁴⁴ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 66.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 91 (her emphasis). There are, of course, less negative forms of bodily contortion in the plastic sense. In our interview, Ritta Zhelezova emphasized Kharitonov’s ability to fold himself up into a human pretzel [*krendel’*].

¹⁴⁶ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 67.

¹⁴⁷ Ironically, the Russian queer slang for heterosexual in the Soviet and post-Soviet period is “natural.” The reader of Kharitonov’s dissertation might chuckle here, given the author’s desire to prove that straightness—as a spatial or sexual orientation—is anything but!

¹⁴⁸ Kharitonov, “Pantomima,” 463.

circumscriptions of verbal speech. Contrapuntal movement, excluded from the everyday, is thus sublated—not earthly but otherworldly.¹⁴⁹



Figure 6. Slanting Queerly: Iurii Popov’s Theater-Studio of Pantomime, ca. 1970s.
From the left: Lev Palii, Iurii Popov, Vladimir Shkrylev.

Pantomimic practice is a way of embodying the world queerly, or even incarnating a queer world through choreographies of alternative embodiment. To this end of queer world-making, Kharitonov devises a special “canon of dynamic contraposition” [*kanon dinamicheskogo protivopostanovleniia*],¹⁵⁰ a category of motion for “the body that does not require words,”¹⁵¹ which features countermovement, isometrics, imbalance, disequilibrium (“in the physical and emotional sense”¹⁵²), asymmetry and slant. This style of nonvocal embodiment “[positions] the corpus, the legs, the arms, the head,” differently than mundane norms of comportment and conventional dramatic or balletic movement require.¹⁵³ (In fact, Kharitonov stresses that pantomime’s plastic canon directly opposes the bodily canon of classical ballet—a distinction which is lost on those who would conflate self-sufficient pantomime with pantomime as a subset of balletic movement.) The “natural” laws of plasticity mobilize the body against the false and deforming ideal of corporeal harmony. Pantomime aspires “to manifest countermovement in the body.”¹⁵⁴

The only constant rule of pantomimic movement is that the body is obliged to violate all of the forms of the normative canon: when straightness is called for,

¹⁴⁹ That is, to elaborate a specifically Russian distinction with extreme relevance for the Russian homosexual tradition: queer plasticity is not part of *byt* but of *bytie*. See Brian James Baer, *Other Russias*.

¹⁵⁰ Kharitonov, “Pantomima,” 462.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 453.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 444.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 454.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 461.

Kharitonov insists on curves, angles, awkwardness and unlikely inclinations. For this reason, whenever Kharitonov writes “skewed,” “slanted,” “deviant” and “asymmetrical,” I encourage the reader to experiment with a proleptically queer-theory reading of Kharitonov’s text by mentally substituting “queer” as a multivalent moniker for nonstraight bodily orientations. The following extended excerpt provides an occasion ripe for this exercise in reading pantomime queerly.

In our canon, the corpus is, as a rule, askew-- the spinal column is at an acute angle to the pelvis. When it is straight (the general force of the body is directed either upwards or downwards), it is counterposed by the slant of the pelvic bone, of the shoulder girdle and head. The head, as a rule, is inclined [otklonena – deviated] to the side opposite the direction of the spine. In the case the head makes a straight line with the body frame [korpus], it is turned in relation to the body frame along the spinal axis. The shoulder girdle, as a rule, does not make a straight line, does not support the shoulders in a level static position in relation to one another (one shoulder may be thrust forward, the other in place, one may be higher than the other). One hip, as a rule, is lower than the other and in this or another measure is ahead (the weight is not evenly distributed on both legs). The hands, as a rule, are not symmetrical. The bend of the elbow is not the same for both hands at the same time. (It may be the same when the elbows are holding a different direction.) The legs are not turned out. The arch of the foot is not extended, that is to say, the direction of the foot is not counterpoised to the direction of the calf and so on. Symmetry is what is excluded from our canon. If some paired parts of the body seems sometimes in symmetrical relationships with one another, partial symmetry disrupts the direction of other paired parts.”¹⁵⁵

If the verticality of the spine and the symmetry of the other body parts vectoring from it are the visible effect of physical and social “alignment,”¹⁵⁶ then Kharitonov reverses this violent orthopedic process, restoring the body to its immanent queerness and polymorphous plasticity.

The normative canon forces the body against its intrinsic desires to be oriented in particular ways. So doing, it works against the fulfillment of bodily desires more properly, preventing the experience of the full-range of sensual pleasure. When the body is allowed to collapse into its unconditioned contrapposto, the “first position” (to abuse a balletism) of the queer canon and the body’s preferred resting stance,¹⁵⁷ pleasure becomes a possibility again—and not just for the plastic actor: the contrapposto reminds the nonplastic viewer of these embodied possibilities. In the following passage, Kharitonov reflects on the static postures and dynamic progressions that engender sensual pleasure.

Here the following happened: the body made itself manifest also in the movements of contrapposto with a profoundly dislocated center of gravity, but it

¹⁵⁵ В нашем каноне корпус, как правило, перекошен (ibid., 462; my emphasis).

¹⁵⁶ “The vertical line as an effect of this process of alignment” (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 66).

¹⁵⁷ Of the contrapposto, Kharitonov notes how “this simple position opposes the parts of the body in their resting position” (“Pantomima,” 461).

was not active, goal-oriented movement...the body, as it were, was wallowing in a certain condition; characteristic were the pendulate corpus, the limpened heavy hands, not finding one's footing, searching for it, half-bent knees, unsteady staggering gait, sliding on the floor, trying to lift oneself, support oneself, trying to make a dash toward the object, veering away from it. This autochthonous means of play interests us as containing the most profound possibility for pleasure, catharsis, for actor and audience.¹⁵⁸

Like Kharitonov, Ramsay Burt detects such possibilities for pleasure in the queer dancing body, as it “[attacks] the notion of a rational unitary heterosexual subject [and] invents new fragmentary and dissolving subject positions from which to experience a radically revised imagination of the body’s capacity for pleasure.”¹⁵⁹ What counts as queerness here, to paraphrase Foucault’s oft-cited comments on homosexuality, “is not a form of desire but something desirable”; an “historic occasion to reopen affective and relational virtualities, not so much through the intrinsic qualities of the homosexual but because the ‘slantwise’ position of the latter, as it were, the diagonal lines he can lay out in the social fabric and allow these virtualities to come to light.”¹⁶⁰

Against social and institutional pressures, the silent mime aspires toward asymmetry—“to give [the body] the kind of slant that would bring the direction of movement of one part of the body into contraposition with the direction of another,”¹⁶¹ and additionally facilitate its coming into slantwise relationship with other bodies. The plastic body thus assumes a queer posture in two senses: in its internally counterpoised angles and also in its improper interactions with others. The actors in Kharitonov’s style of pantomime un-align themselves, moving in ways that are “profoundly asymmetrical” – in contradistinction to the deliberate arrangement of bodies in classical balletic formations. “The aesthetic meaning of the asymmetric formation is understood,” Kharitonov declares: “total symmetry is the most abstracted, nonsensual [*nечувствennyi*] (‘cold’) kind of order—static equilibrium.”¹⁶² Compulsory symmetry, to which the body of the speaking self is inured, precludes the enjoyment of other selves as partners in the co-production of emotional and sensual experience; whereas the point of pantomimic performance is to create the “conditions for interaction and play.”¹⁶³ “For [plastic] actors, the task is to sense the self [*lichnost*] as a body in pantomime,” and to sense it as a synthetic body composed of all of the other bodies—animate and inanimate—which are interacting on stage.¹⁶⁴ Meaningless and noncommunicative in their isolation, individual bodies come together to form an integral corpus and personality. “One actor senses himself as the control center, the body frame, and the others sense themselves as the corresponding hands, left and right.”¹⁶⁵ This interrelationality is the only way for the

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 477.

¹⁵⁹ Burt, “Dissolving in Pleasure,” 222.

¹⁶⁰ Michel Foucault, “Friendship as a Way of Life.” In *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (New York: The New Press, 1997): 135-140, at 136-7.

¹⁶¹ Kharitonov, “Pantomima,” 461.

¹⁶² «Эстетический смысл ассиметричного построения понятий: полная симметрия есть самый отвлеченный, нечувствительный («холодный») вид порядка, статическое равновесие» (ibid., 465).

¹⁶³ Ibid., 450

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 443

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 443.

plastic actor to move away from the normative world's hegemony of words, and be "returned to the language of physical sensations, which he receives from another personality, object, element, to which he responds with a felicitous or infelicitous action."¹⁶⁶ Pantomime is thus more than a performance style: it is an eminently relational subjectivity, a mode of association, and a sociality.

The "simple movement of material objects [is] a language, a means of association."¹⁶⁷ Because the entirety of the pantomimic personality's behavior is determined in the context of interactions, there is no sense of self outside of a relationship with another person or with the material world (a position of interdependency that squares with the essentially socialist ethics of mutual reliance and care at the core of disability studies). When a plastic person is not touched by or not touching someone or something, he resides in an unconscious state, as if "in a deep sleep, coma, or death."¹⁶⁸ In other words, when this self stops interacting, it ceases to exist. The pantomimic 'I' is only by being *with*. And this infinite receptivity to and permeability by the other makes pantomime's sensual self a sexual self as well. According to French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, on whose theories Ahmed bases much of her own: "the sexual body is one that shows the orientation of the body as an 'object that is *sensitive* to all the rest,' a body that feels the nearness of the objects with which it coexists."¹⁶⁹ The body oriented queerly to other bodies is affective and also affectively oriented to these other bodies as queer.¹⁷⁰

The plastic body of pantomime is definitively interrelational *and* extensional. The normative speaking self is not so lucky, constrained as it is in affect, association, and space. In this respect, it would seem Kharitonov's queer phenomenology complements the model postulated by Ahmed. In the normative world, she tells us, "the body 'straightens' its view in order to extend into space."¹⁷¹ Repeated acts of lining up construct "the bodily horizon" as normative, and normatively configure the space that surrounds it.¹⁷² The necessity of this repetition in the production of straightness is what makes "compulsory heterosexuality [a] form of [repetitive strain injury]."¹⁷³ In effect, "spaces become straight" through this repetition, "which allows straight bodies to extend into them."¹⁷⁴

Kharitonov, meanwhile, describes a different field of action than Ahmed. Here, in the always-already queer terrain of pantomime, the body unstraightens in order to extend itself.¹⁷⁵ Because it is free to incline toward the various objects of its choosing,

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 442.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 444.

¹⁶⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty internally quoted by Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, page 67.

¹⁷⁰ In her monographic rescue mission of "bodies that matter" from generations of Judith Butler misreaders, Gayle Salamon describes material subjectivity—for all subjects, not just trans ones—as necessarily interrelational and, as such, inherently sexual. Salamon, *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality* (Columbia University Press, 2010).

¹⁷¹ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 66.

¹⁷² Ibid., 66 (her emphasis); 91.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 91 (her emphasis).

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 92.

¹⁷⁵ Meanwhile, in the straight spaces of the everyday, the straight body, despite its definitively disciplined and constrained posture, extends. The scene of *Enchanted Island* with the invisible man dramatizes both aspects of this phenomenon: on the straight street, the invisible man, a queer figure, is stepped on, shoved

the nonstraight body “fits” into this performative space, which privileges queer departures from imposed lines of desire. “All of these dynamic contrapositions in the body and between bodies are assisted by the objects and planes situated on different levels (one leg on a step – the slant of the pelvis and so on, an object in the hand – the slant of the shoulder and so on).”¹⁷⁶ Queer space is homologous with the queer body: skewed planes appear for the skewed subject. The plastic body thus extends into space and is an extension of this space, and pantomimic meaning is made in the dynamic and indiscrete interaction between subjects and surroundings—and this is a pleasurable event.¹⁷⁷

Yet the pleasure in plasticity multiplies not merely because the subject reemplots or reorients its body in social space, but because Kharitonov’s method fundamentally challenges the sensory coordinates by which that mapping takes place. In this, his pantomime theory as a quasi-phenomenology of silenced/silent experience reveals the limitations of Ahmed’s argument in its incidentally ableist assumptions about the queer body. Hers is still a body-made-subject, following Judith Butler, by interpellation through a hearing-speaking symbolic. The subject becomes queer by veering away from a hail that is heard but unheeded.¹⁷⁸ In contrast, Kharitonov’s bodies are “queer” before the call of the symbolic which never actually resounds in the plastic world. Recall that, his theory centers on “the ‘I’ of a character acting in the kind of [silent] performance that generally excludes the possibility of speech,” whose defining feature is its phenomenological consciousness, its “heightened sensation of itself as a body, and [its] experience only of bodily interaction with other bodies and objects.”¹⁷⁹ Such a figure is set against the “speaking ‘I,’” which knows the world, its ego, and others on very different, and very verbal terms; in a word, through symbolic mediation. By imagining the possibility of a subject outside of an audist symbolic, Kharitonov subtly demonstrates the sensitivity of his thinking to the way in which embodied modalities of communication impact dramatic style in particular, and embodied, material experience more broadly.

These postulates, furthermore, make for unwitting affinities between his work with silent and deaf theater and more recent deaf-studies interventions into performance that similarly consider how space is experienced uniquely by subjects with spatial languages, like sign. Deaf theater scholar Kanta Kochhar-Lindgren, for instance, proposes how “deafness curtails the oral dimension of communicative exchange and promotes a phenomenology of speaking from other spaces of the body” that become “vibrant transmitters of meaning, nodes of sensory and perceptual quotation of a fully material way of being in the world. This bodily stance unfolds in a field of action as a performative embrace of a phenomenologically primordial hearing and response” which ask the audience to “hear [with the third ear in] the absence of apparent meaning.”¹⁸⁰

aside, and forced out of the motional frame. He flees the heterosexual public sphere into a private home, where he is free to explore the full-range of his plasticity.

¹⁷⁶ Kharitonov, “Pantomima,” 465.

¹⁷⁷ The properties of a given space become available only in playing out a pantomimic script, when a body steps through space in an affected way, with decelerated or difficult strides, it suggests some kind of elemental obstacle by virtue of the “new quality of bodily behavior” (ibid., 470).

¹⁷⁸ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 15.

¹⁷⁹ Kharitonov, “Pantomima,” 474.

¹⁸⁰ Kanta Kochhar-Lindgren, *Hearing Difference: The Third Ear in Experimental, Deaf, and Multicultural Theater* (Washington D.C.: Gallaudet University, 2006), 15; 17.

Likewise, in her self-admitted manifesto, Carrie Sandahl urges us to “consider how certain disability conditions alter human relationships to space” and how, unknowingly echoing Kharitonov, “disabled bodies also challenge certain aesthetic values of space, namely symmetry.”¹⁸¹ The combined wisdom of these queer-crip scholars, Kharitonov included, complicates our understanding of the way straightening devices compel not only heterosexuality but also able-bodiedness and even vocality, insofar as resonant speech extends the body in space in particular but noninevitable ways.

Acting of the averbal variety makes no hard-and-fast distinctions among degrees of vocality or animacy—concepts which the second chapter argues are mutually imbricated. All objects within the field of plastic action, provided they allow for the extension of the wordless body, come alive compositionally in the composite totality of their interaction. In order to participate, they need only satisfy the single stipulation of pantomimic space: “[positioning the characters] in surroundings [that dispose] them to bodily”—and not verbal—“reactions and activities.”¹⁸² Just as pantomimic subjects functionally die the moment they stop interrelating, so pantomimic objects lack significance in their isolation; they are meaningful only in terms of their interactions with bodies, contributions to the formation of new bodily behaviors, and participation in an indivisible living ecology.¹⁸³ The pantomimic subject becomes a subject among subjects of play, an object among objects. A great phenomenological deprioritization or leveling out results, enabling the emergence of inanimate intimacies and intimate inanimacies between all the phenomenal bodies on stage.¹⁸⁴ The plastic body is “ecstatic” and “excessive” in this way, characterized by emotional spillage beyond the discrete boundaries of the self and into the material milieu which is in turn emotionally saturated.¹⁸⁵ Kharitonov christens this unity “the affective body.”¹⁸⁶

THE QUEER VOICE OF QUIET BODIES

And as the soul, as it were, demands a song, so the body demands a dance.
Evgenii Kharitonov¹⁸⁷

An emotional grammar guides the behavior of the plastic body, which Kharitonov, reassuming his semiotic stance, partitions into the two “voices”—an irony only in English grammar—characteristic of spoken/written language: the active and the passive [*deistvitel'nyi* and *stradatel'nyi zalog*]. Each voice is expressed in its own repertoire of silent motion and thematic realm of activity. Illustrated concretely, the active voice “is the body in sporty movement (in light athletics, in gymnastics) or in the process of work, where big and beautiful coordination appears (on the order of chopping wood or scything); that is, in action completed according to its own initiative,” realizing

¹⁸¹ Carrie Sandahl, “Considering Disability: Disability Phenomenology’s Role in Revolutionizing Theatrical Space,” *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* (Spring 2002), 17-32, at 27-28.

¹⁸² Kharitonov, “Pantomima,” 466.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 467.

¹⁸⁴ For an extended discussion of queer (in) animacies, consult Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

¹⁸⁵ Kharitonov, “Pantomima,” 447.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 456.

¹⁸⁷ И как душа, так сказать, требует песни, так тело требует танца. *Ibid.*, 456.

its internal teleology, like Aristotle's acorn becoming oak.¹⁸⁸ This kinesthetic style is gendered male, racialized an unmarked white (Russian), and enacted by the rational subject we have already encountered in the "speaking world."

Activity and passivity describe not only dynamic genres but also power dynamics. A body in the passive voice, crushed "under someone else's influence," alternately struggles for self-liberation, evidenced in "a spasticity of movement, in jostling about"; or it droops under the weight of the other, succumbing to "the languor of sensation [*chuvstvo*], manifested in heavied hands and gait, in the swaying of the corpus."¹⁸⁹ Simultaneously depressive and hysterical, this type of motility provides "the opportunity to experience tragic sensation [*chuvstvo*]" or feeling and is generally assigned to female roles—unsurprisingly, given the stereotype of unstable psychologies.¹⁹⁰ Passivity is symptomatic of tragedy in particular and affect in general. Often "the examples of expressive movement and positions of the body in the moment of experiencing affect [are] in the passive voice" in pantomime.¹⁹¹ In filmic and mundane movement, on the other hand, governed more rigidly as they are by norms of static gender and dynamic embodiment, passivity appears less frequently. This is because "the passive voice of bodily behavior...departs in much greater measure from activity and manifests in affect," making it "more difficult to encounter *in real life in the restrained, unaffected* [*ne-afektivirovannom*] *behavior of a person today*."¹⁹² If everyday norms temper the rational (male) subject against passivity's emotional permeability, certain bodies are more susceptible. "There may be moments," Kharitonov qualifies, "of openly experiencing feelings [*chuvstva*] in especially impulsive people (predominantly among Southerners¹⁹³ and in the behavior of women)." That said, "generally ecstatic displays are a rarity in everyday plasticity" where a masculine stoic activity reigns. As if to underscore his own exclusion from the class of properly moving hence properly gendered Soviet subjects, Kharitonov waxes poetic here: "as the soul demands song, so the body demands dance. And as the body demands its emotions are given release in affective movement, so the viewer demands to see this release and co-experience [*soperezhivat*] it."¹⁹⁴ With this slight but supple rhetorical gesture, Kharitonov succeeds in queering the audience and performers (mainly male) of pantomime, in essence, feminizing all participants with affect.

Outside of pantomimic practice, there is a history of associating queerness and passivity in the Russian and Soviet contexts. The bent body is also the gulag bottom, the 'degraded' partner or *opushchennyi*, whose name—literally, "the one who has been put down"—connotes as much a spatial as an affective relationship. The Soviet male "prison hierarchy [positioned] the passive homosexual [or bottom] at the very bottom (those men

¹⁸⁸ Kharitonov, "Pantomima," 454-45.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 454.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 454-55.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 456.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 456 (my emphasis).

¹⁹³ By another, derogatory name in the Russian context, Southerners are "black." See Jeff Sahadeo, "Soviet 'Blacks' and Place Making in Leningrad and Moscow." *Slavic Review* 71, no. 2 (Summer) (2012): 331-58.

¹⁹⁴ Kharitonov, "Pantomima," 456.

who played the active, penetrating role were usually not considered homosexuals).”¹⁹⁵ In labor camp literature, one of the few places where homo/sexuality visibly circulated in Soviet culture,

we find stories of seduction, threats, abuse and gang rape that force inmates into the passive homosexual role – a role one cannot change afterwards, destines one forever for sexual slavery, beatings and humiliation... We find images of effeminate men, at times doing the dirtiest work and at times enjoying the food and protection of their “owners” – the active homosexuals. We find long lists of nicknames used for passive homosexuals – from shortened female names to “girls,” “bitches”, and other nicknames that mark their subordinate status.¹⁹⁶

Much of the argot of the Russian homosexual subculture evolved out of camp and criminal jargon.¹⁹⁷ In confinement or on the street among cognoscenti, one might meet with the word *baba*, literally “old peasant woman,” with the figurative connotations of “passive male homosexual,” “passive homosexual partner in prison,” or “effeminate male homosexual.” As *aktivnaia baba*, literally “active old woman,” it applies to a “lesbian fulfilling masculine functions” or a “masculine woman.”¹⁹⁸ (Note that, even when an active masculine role is assumed by a same-sex-loving woman the passivity of her gender cannot be overcome.) Passivity is thus a way of being oriented in space toward one’s own body—as passive gender; and being oriented to the bodies of others—as passive sexuality.^a

Passively orienting oneself to the sensual world has also been queered in the Russian religious imagination. Here it is helpful to recall that the Russian word for “passive” in the grammatical sense—*stradatel’nyi*—shares a root with *stradat’*, a verb with religious overtones meaning “to suffer” or “to be afflicted.” In the prerevolutionary Silver Age of Russian culture, the writings of eccentric journalist Vasilii Rozanov (1856-1919), especially his *People of the Moonlight: Metaphysics of Christianity* [*Liudi lunnogo sveta: metafiziki khristianstva*, 1911], were central to enshrouding the homosexual in an aura of supreme spirituality, the luminosity of which did not diminish even in the post-Soviet period.¹⁹⁹ “[T]hose who are in some way or other anomalous in sex, anomalous to a greater or lesser degree, those who cannot lead a normal family life, who cannot marry in the normal way”—those who have veered off the straight line of reproductive heteronormativity, we might say today—these people “have formed the

¹⁹⁵ Adi Kuntsman, “‘Beyond the Borders of the Human’: Same-Sex Memoirs in the Gulag Literature,” draft (May, 2007), p. 2; later published as Adi Kuntsman, “‘With a Shade of Disgust’: Affective Politics of Sexuality and Class in Memoirs of the Stalinist Gulag,” *Slavic Review* 68, No 2 (summer 2009)

¹⁹⁶ Kuntsman, “Beyond the Borders,” 6; see also Adi Kuntsman, “Between Gulags and Pride Parades,” *GLQ* 14.2-3: 263-287.

¹⁹⁷ See Kozlovskii, *Argo russkoi gomoseksual’noi subkul’tury* for an extensive glossary and sustained exploration of the contact zone between homosexual and criminal subcultures.

¹⁹⁸ Ivan Saburoff, “Towards a Russian Gay Lexicon,” *kultura* 2 (2008) *How Should We Read Queer Russia?*, pp. 10-11, at 10.

^a For relevant definitions of passivity, see Dan Healey, “Active, Passive, and Russian: The National Idea in Gay Men’s Pornography,” *The Russian Review* 69.2 (April 2010), 210-230.

¹⁹⁹ For the fate of this spiritual homosexual discourse in the Soviet and post-Soviet period, see Evgenii Bershtein and Anastasia Kayiatos, “Homosexuality as Ontological Taint,” (under review at *Slavic Review*); include AAASS presentation citation.

whole of [the] asceticism” at the heart of Christianity, he contends.²⁰⁰ Rozanov rendered these spiritual sodomites (his words) “as essentially passive creatures, lacking the active energy required for heroism.”²⁰¹ The same note of kenoticism stuck to the Russian mythology of Oscar Wilde, who was canonized in the tsarist Fin de Siècle through *De Profundis* as a suffering saint, more so the penitent ascetic and less the Aesthete author of *Dorian Gray*.²⁰²

Working in a virtual vacuum of queer representation in the Soviet period, Kharitonov drew on the prerevolutionary personae of Wilde and Rozanov in order to fashion himself in the image of a sexually and metaphysically struggling writer. Evidence that this queer self-fashioning carried over into his stage practice is found in Kharitonov’s esteem for self-directed, obliquely transitive, and ethereal plasticity over the (re) productive and earthly movement of everyday normativity. That is, in his theatrical and well as his literary undertakings, he privileged *bytie* over *byt*, the spiritual over the terrestrial term of this foundational binary of Russian cultural identity, like his Symbolist forebears who “used *byt* to designate the reign of stagnation and routine, of daily transience without transcendence, whether spiritual, artistic or revolutionary.”²⁰³ Throughout his oeuvre and particularly in his unpublished gay manifesto, “The Leaflet,” Kharitonov reserved “the first place in paradise and a divine kiss” for his queer “flowers,” characterized by their endless flitting about in search of “ephemeral unions” and by their weakness for the “playful and impractical” in “all art with sensual pleasure as its basis.” He uprooted his flowers from *byt*, whereas “everything pious, normal, bearded, everything that is presented as a model on earth,” everything smugly swaddled in “the warmth of the family... free from the daily search for love,” he relegated to the domain of the everyday, the space of the “literal,” the “crude,” and the “straight” [*priamomu*].²⁰⁴

At the same time as the silent theater revival, the cinema of Sergei Paradzhanov (1924-1990) similarly luxuriated in the visual poetry of languishing bodies, and so Kharitonov holds up Paradzhanov’s *Color of Pomegranates* [*Tsvet granata*, 1969] as exemplary for its “endless movements of the body in the passive voice.” His interest is piqued by the film, he confesses, “not only because the characters do not speak... but also because their behavior is structured according to the logic of a dance... a dance of yearning,” motivated by the curious fact that the actress playing the male lead, the Armenian boy-poet Sayat Nova, also plays his female beloved, the princess.²⁰⁵ (457) Thus the story’s arc of desire loops back onto itself, like Narcissus gazing longingly at his own reflection, to invoke the dissertation’s own metaphor. To be sure, it is a queer

²⁰⁰ “...liudei, tak ili inache anomal’nykh v pole, v bol’shei ili v men’shei stepeni anomal’nykh, ne mogushchikh vesti normal’nuu semeinuiu zhizn’, ne mogushchikh normal’no supruzhestvovat’, -- i obrazovali ves’ asketizm...” Vasilii Rozanov, *Liudi liunnago sveta: metafizika khristianstva* (Saint Petersburg: Druzhba narodov, 1990), 177.

²⁰¹ Brian James Baer, “Texts, Contexts, Subtexts: Reading Queerness in Contemporary Russian Culture,” *kultura 2* (2008) *How Should We Read Queer Russia?*, pp. 3-7, at 5-6.

²⁰² Evgenii Bershtein, “The Russian Myth of Oscar Wilde,” *Self and Story in Russian Literature*. Laura Engelstein and Stephanie Sandler, eds. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000),

²⁰³ Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994): 30.

²⁰⁴ Kharitonov, “The Leaflet” (trans. Kevin Moss). In *Out of the Blue: Russia’s Hidden Gay Literature, An Anthology*, ed. Kevin Moss (San Francisco, Gay Sunshine Press, 1997).

²⁰⁵ Kharitonov, “Pantomima,” 457.

desire—of passivity for itself—and it makes perfect sense to Kharitonov (“of course,” he exclaims, an actress plays both roles). This double passivity means that everything the poet does is a “dance and not an ordinary action... His movements cannot be called active because he does not finish them, and they are not directed toward anything. It is only a certain exit of the body into movement,” the kind of perpetual motion,²⁰⁶ Kharitonov cautions, that cannot sustain itself without plot.

Seeing as plot was the primary element of Soviet “party-minded” art preventing a literary, filmic, or theatrical piece from earning the pejorative appellation of “formalist,” Kharitonov’s is a pointed comment here. *The Color of Pomegranates*, like Paradzhanov’s other films, met with great resistance from the state-run studio Goskino for its abstraction, subjectivity, and formalism.²⁰⁷ It was the last film that Paradzhanov put out until 1984. The fifteen-year hiatus between its completion and the release of his next film was tainted by professional blacklisting, political persecution, and Paradzhanov’s eventual incarceration in late 1973 in a labor camp for charges of spreading venereal disease, propagating pornography and perpetrating homosexual rape. Kharitonov, writing his dissertation in 1972, might have been aware at the time of the KGB harassment of his queer contemporary. He may even have recognized in the filmmaker a shared sexual orientation. Either way, it is clear he felt they shared an aesthetic orientation that included queer plays with binary gender.

EMBODIED GENEALOGY, QUEER CITATIONALITY

Passivity thus functioned as a form of queer citationality in Kharitonov’s dramatic theory and practice. Throughout his dissertation he drops the names of other artists who play with gender and sexual identification and who themselves were known as “sexual deviants” in their day. One such instance dwells on the spells of passive masculinity in Sergei Eisenstein’s *Ivan the Terrible* [*Ivan grozny*, 1944; 1958]. “It is revealing,” Kharitonov nods to his initiate reader, “that we meet with this example of the passive voice of natural dance precisely in Eisenstein, who loved ecstatic displays of human behavior and even studied their theories.”²⁰⁸ On another occasion, Kharitonov lip-syncs to a Thomas Mann quotation about emotion’s exhibitionist nature and essential struggle with secrecy that culminates in what might be described as an exhortation to come out of the affective closet. Mann writes, “feeling by its nature does not want to be hidden, it

²⁰⁶ By this phrase, I mean to point to the interview with Sergei Paradzhanov by the same name, which was published in a Russian-language Soviet film journal and in the American film press: Sergei Paradzhanov, “Vechnoe dvizhenie,” *Iskusstvo kino* (1966); “Perpetual Motion,” *Film Comment* (Fall 1968).

²⁰⁷ For a catalog of the directors other unfortunate brushes with Soviet creative control, see James Steffen, “From *Sayat Nova* to *The Color of Pomegranates*: notes on the production and censorship of Parajanov’s film,” *Armenian Review*, 47.3-4 (1995), 105-147.

²⁰⁸ Kharitonov, “Pantomima,” 456. Fascinating work has been and is being done on Eisenstein’s unique constructions of gender and sexuality. I look forward to Evgenii Bershtein’s publications of recent conference work on “Eisenstein, Sexuality, and Decadence,” and, in a queerer register, “Sergei Eisenstein between Decadence and Marxism: The Motif of Saint Sebastian in the Soviet Director’s Films, Drawings, and Writings.” Also of interest is David Gillespie, “Sergei Eisenstein and the articulation of masculinity,” *New Zealand Slavonic Journal* (2008). Gillespie works with ideas put forth by specialist in Soviet gesture and Eisenstein’s life and works, Oksana Bulgakowa, with whom I have been very fortunate to be in continued conversation about these topics.

tries to show itself, to announce itself, ‘Out with you!’ as we say, before the whole world... External expressiveness is proper to people of feeling...²⁰⁹

Though these intertextual episodes are undoubtedly illustrative of pantomimic principles, Kharitonov’s citationality does other conceptual labor. It simultaneously belongs to what queer scholar Christopher Nealon calls that “simple but enduring lesbian and gay practice of listing famous homosexuals from history—a gesture of genealogical claiming” performed “most famously by Oscar Wilde in his rehearsal, at his 1895 trial, of all the illustrious historical adherents to ‘the love that dare not speak its name.’”²¹⁰

Nealon reads these lists as “a gesture of political defiance... designed to combat a homophobic belief in the lonely singularity of gay men and lesbians” over time and across space.²¹¹ In the Russian tradition, even Rozanov’s mystical treatise doubles as a directory of male lovers of male beauty through the ages. In his book *Foundlings*, Nealon explores the way the list operates in individual works of pre-Stonewall art as “affect-genealogies,” which attempt to create a queer community in the past while anticipating a set of sympathetic readers in the future.²¹² The roster of flowery forebears Kharitonov puts forth is his stab at “feeling historical.” (It is also a resistant response to the KGB’s pink lists.) And the “affect-genealogy” he creates is just that, a queer lineage of “people of feeling,” whose unrestrainable effusiveness seeps into embodied life.

In addition to the literal citationality of Kharitonov’s bibliography, there is another kind at work in his dissertation: performativity as a citational practice. We have already encountered this Butlerian concept in the first chapter on deaf theater. It suffices at present to highlight only its newly pertinent aspects, namely, how bodies materialize intelligibly by citing norms of gendered embodiment, and how individual bodies become inscriptional sites for collective histories. Explains Butler in *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter*, the “illusion of an abiding gendered self”²¹³ is produced through the “regularized and constrained repetition of norms” at a quotidian level.²¹⁴ While these bodily reiterations sediment into the effect of normative gender, they also open up “gaps and fissures in that citational process—the ways in which repetition both repeats the same and differs and defers from it—[which] mark the multiple sites on/in which the contestation of regulatory norms occurs.”²¹⁵ Queer theologian Amy Hollywood pries open Butler’s primarily linguistic theory of subject formation to encompass kinds of materiality not conditioned by discourse, like “ritual acts and bodily practices... modes of walking, standing, and sitting, sleeping and eating, giving birth, nursing, healing, etc.,” those acts which fall under the heading of *habitus* as elaborated by Marcel Mauss and Pierre Bourdieu. Summarized by Butler,

²⁰⁹ Mann quoted in Kharitonov, “Pantomima,” 448. Original: T. Mann, *Iosif i ego brat’ia*, t. I. (Moscow: “Khudozhestvennaia literatura,” 1968), 107.

²¹⁰ Chris Nealon, *Foundlings* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 5-6.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² *Ibid.*, 16

²¹³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 140.

²¹⁴ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 95.

²¹⁵ Amy Hollywood, “Performativity, Citationality, Ritualization,” in *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler*. Ellen T. Amour and Susan M. St. Ville, eds. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 252. See Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 10.

bodily *habitus* constitutes a tacit form of performativity, a citational chain lived and believed at the level of the body. The *habitus* is not only a site for the reproduction of the belief in the reality of a given social field...but it also generates *dispositions* which “incline” the social subject to act in relative conformity with the ostensibly objective demands of the field.²¹⁶

In the scope of the queer-deaf phenomenology we have teased out between Kharitonov and Ahmed, we should keep in mind Butler’s propitious spatialization of *habitus* as a social disposition and an inclination, with the actor’s implicit potential to not “line up” or to queerly angle herself toward social demands for conformity. Though, in Hollywood’s opinion, Butler never fully integrates *habitus* into her update of performativity in *Excitable Speech* (1997), ultimately reducing it too to the effect of language, we should travel further in the direction of Butler’s efforts in this analysis, by thinking through the ways in which the inarticulable movements of Kharitonov’s pantomime acknowledge and transcend late-Soviet *habitus* as a “tacit form of performativity.” Here we can consider how alternate, anti-normative practices of bodily citation occur in those gaps and fissures, yielding a practice we might call “queer citationality.” Into this we would fold the traditions of bodily deviation imminently identified in Kharitonov’s oeuvre, as well as the habit of “deviant” list-making that Nealon regards as crucial to queer world-making.

These “affect-genealogies,” themselves an instance of queer citationality (insofar as each list is inherently intertextual in its reference to the ones that preceded it), find a nonverbal analog in the “performance-genealogies” that Joseph Roach describes. By this, Roach has more in mind than mere dramatic traditions or canonical histories of theater; the term

also [attends] to ‘counter-memories,’ or the disparities between history as it is discursively transmitted and memory as it is publicly enacted by the bodies that bear its consequences...Performance genealogies draw on the idea of *expressive movements as mnemonic reserves*, including patterned movements made and remembered by bodies, residual movements retained implicitly in images or words (*or in the silences between them*)...²¹⁷

Not only does the body remember socially-constructed movement and with it the social movements other politicized bodies have enacted; but memory itself is “[transmitted and transformed] through movement.” Roach dubs the mutuality between memory and movement the “kinesthetic imagination,” and extends its field of operation beyond the stage to “the performance of everyday life, consolidated by deeply ingrained habits and reinforced by paradigmatic systems of behavioral memory such as law and custom.”²¹⁸ (This concept resembles Butler’s citationality at this point, but perhaps it gets at the body in the way that Hollywood had hoped would happen but did not with *habitus* in *Excitable Speech*.) Like Butler, Roach points out the resistant possibilities inherent in the

²¹⁶ Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, 155 (her italics, my underline as emphasis).

²¹⁷ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 26, my emphasis.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

kinesthetic imagination, since it “is not only an impetus and method for the restoration of behavior but also a means of its imaginative expansion through...extensions of the range of bodily movements and puissances...”²¹⁹ Because the kinesthetic imagination relies on the historical sedimentation of norms and their equally historical (if not archival) violations, it is possible for subjects to experience “kinesthetic nostalgia” for “movements and gestures [that descend] like heirlooms through theatrical families.”²²⁰ The ensuing section of the chapter will seek to inhabit Kharitonov’s kinesthetic imagination, to feel his kinesthetic nostalgia for dormant but yet incarnatable forms, and thereby to trace his affect and performance genealogies through pantomime and dance.

Scholars less interested in how dance “feels historical” have looked at movement not so much as a form of embodying sympathy over temporal stretches but over spatial ones, most importantly, in the space between the stage and the auditorium seat, between the performer and the spectator. In the 1930s, American dance critic John Martin developed a theory of “sympathetic muscle memory” or “muscular sympathy” with a “psychic accompaniment called metakinesis,” which held that for “you,” the viewer of a particular movement,

instantaneously, through a sympathetic muscular memory, you associate the movement with its purpose...Through kinesthetic sympathy you respond to the impulse of the dancer which has expressed itself by means of a series of movements. Movement, then, is the link between the dancer’s intention and your perception of it.²²¹

In Martin’s reception theory, “body speaks to body, conveying ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ in an unmediated way.”²²² Ramsay Burt has recently retooled Martin’s model of dance as an embodied interaction. For Burt’s spectator, a performer may induce a “visceral response” and may “inspire a sense of recognition that draws on the spectator’s muscle memory and experience.” But “this imaginative sympathy,” Burt qualifies, “comes from a recognition of commonality—of what I as an embodied spectator have in common with the dancing body—and it not only draws on my experience but adds to it.”²²³ That moving bodies can condition a scene of mutual recognition, that they can smuggle in hidden histories of affect and bodily acts within them, will prove indispensable premises in the case of Kharitonov, whose plastic performances, I suspect, served to connect him to a severed gay past, while also merging him viscerally (but not verbally) to gay members of his audience in the present.

Staging this corporeal commonality to create, in effect, a queer counterpublic, is enabled by the nature of dance as a staging ground for sexuality. In her introduction to the anthology *Dancing Desires*, Jane C. Desmond understands dance (in a vocabulary now familiar to us) as a “kinesthetics of sexuality,”²²⁴ which we might keep with her analysis in re-titling a kinesthetics of queer sexuality, or a queer kinesthetics, since

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid., 82.

²²¹ This direct quotation from Martin appears in Burt, “Dissolving in Pleasure,” 218.

²²² Burt, “Dissolving in Pleasure,” 218.

²²³ Ibid., 220.

²²⁴ Jane C. Desmond, “Introduction: Making the Invisible Visible,” 7.

dancing always “[steps] outside the heteronormative” to “[‘queer’] masculinity.”²²⁵ In Desmond’s admittedly semiotic approach,

Dancing becomes a way of staging sexuality and a relationship to the audience that exceeds a simple heterosexual model. Dancing facilitates this staging not only because of the historically specific links between body, movement, and sex, and the performers’ manipulation of those signifiers, but because the nonverbal realm is marked as one of interior expressivity, and thus often popularly regarded as revelatory of deeper emotions...²²⁶

(As a complement to Desmond’s position, Burt imagines the transformative effects of the spectator’s visceral response on “[redefining and contesting] the individual’s knowledge of the limits of gendered behavior and of sexuality.”²²⁷) In the same collection of essays, Jonathan Boellen delves directly into this concept of “queer kinesthesia,” of “queer as movement,” and queer desire as a choreography.²²⁸ More specifically, he cruises the dance-floors of lesbian and gay clubs in contemporary Australia in order to locate the ways that amateur dance practices “rearticulate the regulation of gender by denaturalizing the link between morphology and kinesthesia and queerly engendering a body’s capacity to move...”²²⁹ In other words, Boellen looks at how the gendered bodies of dancers move against the grain of the movement norms that apply to their assigned or assumed genders. In such a way, gender and sex, and gender and sexuality, are disarticulated, thereby “kinesthetically queering the performance of gender.”²³⁰ Since such criss-crossings of gendered desire crop up throughout Kharitonov’s pantomime, *Enchanted Island*, we will take up Boellen’s invitation later to “an analysis of desire that is predicated not on the logic of morphological difference but on a choreography of kinesthetic engagement.”²³¹

As a final conceptual digression before attending again to the primary material, I want to propose that dance’s potency as a kind of “kinesthetic imagination” capable of intervening in conventional narratives of embodied existence and gender difference stems from the social fact that *noticeable gesture is always already queer* in a loose sense. To wit, queerness is very often read through a gesture. Straightness, on the other hand, seems never to gesticulate (even if we know this to be untrue). As we earlier observed, becoming straight means adopting a specific set of gestural norms that allows a subject to pass, to deflect attention from himself and remain publicly unmarked. Only gestures that interrupt the visual field by not falling into place in the social field are in this sense queer (or crip, in the way Rosemarie Garland-Thomson regards disability as the direction of the normate’s stare).²³² Gesture is thus a disciplinary regime and “gestural socialization” or

²²⁵ Ibid., 16.

²²⁶ Ibid., 6.

²²⁷ Burt, “Dissolving in Pleasure,” 220.

²²⁸ Jonathan Bollen, “Queer Kinesthesia: Performativity on the Dance Floor.” In *Dancing Desires: Choreographic Sexualities On and Off the Stage*, ed. Jane C. Desmond (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), pp. 285-314, at 285.

²²⁹ Ibid., 308.

²³⁰ Ibid., 309-310.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Staring: How We Look* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2009).

“the internalization of gestural proscriptions”²³³ is sometimes a painful part of early identity formation, especially for queer children, as Munoz’s opening salvo in “Ephemera as Evidence” attests. To gesture gender the wrong way is to flaunt the fragility of its cultural construction, to use the body to signify its resistance to these proscriptions.²³⁴ In the non-heteronormative space of dance, if we follow Desmond, and pantomime, as I will lead us to concede, queer emotions not permitted in everyday body language and psychic life are sublimated into artful movement.²³⁵ Thus, to quote Munoz, the “[queer] body in motion...rapidly deploys the signs, the gestures, of queer communication, survival, and self-making.”²³⁶

Gesture is also a crucial ingredient in queer world-making. In the absence of an audible public culture, queer body speaks to body (and also to medicine and the law). In his analysis of pre-Stonewall New York, George Chauncey proposes that, before 1930s anti-homosexual legislation was in place, gayness was assessed through “the performance of gesture,” and not so much determined by sexual object choice.²³⁷ This ladenness of gendered gesture corresponds to the inversion model of homosexuality, which arguably characterized the prerevolutionary and early Soviet period in Russia. Thus Rozanov exclaims in *People of the Moonlight*, “the gaze of the homosexual is different!/ His handshake is different!/ His smile is completely different! His habits, manners, everything, absolutely everything, is new!”²³⁸ Between 1861 and 1941, estimates historian Dan Healey, Russian queens made themselves known by flamboyantly

²³³ David Gere, “29 Effeminate Gestures: Choreographer Joe Goode and the Heroism of Effeminacy.” In *Dancing Desires: Choreographic Sexualities On and Off the Stage*, ed. Jane C. Desmond (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), pp. 349-381, at 350; 365-366.

²³⁴ Nothing flaunts this fragility like the gesture of the effeminate man. “The effeminate pose is a symbol [of] unsteadiness. For to pose effeminately is to perform against the grain. And to perform against the grain is to exist in a state of radical consciousness. And to exist in a state of radical consciousness is to resist the determinism of gender naturalism. And to resist the determinism of gender naturalism is to realize that there is not one set of imperatives governing the woman and yet another the man. And to realize that not one set of imperatives governs the woman and yet another the man is to know that gender is culturally determined. And to know that gender is culturally determined is to be freed from the slavery of gender. Thus the effeminate man doubles as a cultural abolitionist whose goal is nothing less than to set us free from the tyranny of gender.” Gere, “29 Effeminate Gestures,” 371-2.

²³⁵ According to Munoz, queer dancer Kevian Aviance “uses gestures that permit the dancers to see and experience the feelings they do not permit themselves to let in. He and the gestures he performs are beacons for all the emotions the throng is not allowed to feel” (“Gesture, Ephemera, and Queer Feeling,” 438).

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 434.

²³⁷ Chauncey’s argument is summarized in Susan Manning, “Looking from a Different Place: Gay Spectatorship of American Modern Dance.” In *Dancing Desires: Choreographic Sexualities On and Off the Stage*, ed. Jane C. Desmond (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), pp. 403-414. In *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay World* (New York: BasicBooks, 1994), Chauncey records the following germane observations of one man about gay culture in 1930s New York: “the most striking feature [of homosexuals] would be the fact that although they represent and are dressed as one sex they act and impersonate the opposite sex...by gesture, voice inflection, manner or mode of speech, or walk, and in general [they] impersonate all of the other characteristics of a female that they can possibly assume” (55).

²³⁸ Vasilii Rozanov, *People of the Lunar Light* (excerpt).” In *Out of the Blue*, 148.

“effeminate gesture and dress.”²³⁹ Though their masculine counterparts never consolidated a specific stereotype or semiosis, the *tetki* or “aunties” cruised the arcades of Petersburg and the *polovoi rynok* or “sex market,” casting a lascivious glance at lower-class rentboys, or pantomiming their desires with a “set of signals”—“visible to initiates” only—that “did not change after 1917.”²⁴⁰ It is precisely this effeminacy of bodily behavior, associated with aristocratic class pretensions and so wholly at odds with state socialism, which prompted the promulgation of an anti-sodomy law in the Soviet Union in 1934. As Healey asserts, “a disreputable and illegal masculinity was constructed around the subculture of the *tetka*, and his supposedly abnormal ‘use’ of the male body. The Soviet closet was born” at this time,²⁴¹ and it painfully persisted thereafter in Kharitonov’s prose writing.

His most known work, the 1969 short story, “The Oven” [*Dukhovka*], is a classic example of the closet genre. The story is spun in the breathless first person of a Muscovite intellectual in his late twenties vacationing at a dacha resort outside the capital city. There he grows enamored of Misha, the teenage object of his unrequited affection who remains oblivious to the narrator’s amorous designs on him even at the very end. The boy’s ignorance arises from the narrator’s endless strategizing: how to dissimulate the outward manifestations of his desire? This gestural obsession has prompted Vitaly Chernetsky to see in Kharitonov’s hero “a semiotic behavior *par excellence*...like a spy working on an enemy territory, the narrator is constantly engaged in the consumption, production, and evaluation of signs.”²⁴² In a pertinent passage, the narrator confides to the reader, his suffocating cohabitant in the story’s emotional oven, “you can’t give in to temptation to ask Misha with the affectionate smile of an older man, your arm around his shoulder,” what certain words in the teenage slang mean—“right away you’d be a man from a different circle, like this you’re an equal, with all the advantages of friendship on an equal footing.”²⁴³ Tellingly, at the provincial dance where “boys [are] jumping around with boys,” the narrator grows most anxious that he will give himself away through gesture. Declining to dance with Misha, he is introduced to Slava the Jew, an unattached man of the narrator’s age, whom the latter suspects “by his manner” of traveling in a “circle closer to [his].” When the narrator next encounters Slava, he is with his friend Shurik, with whom he lives cozily in a two-man tent, and who admits euphemistically to

²³⁹ Dan Healey, “The Disappearance of the Russian Queen, or How the Soviet Closet Was Born. *Russian Masculinities in History and Culture*. Ed. By Barbara Evans Clements, Rebecca Friedman, and Dan Healey. (Basingtoke: Palgrave 2002): 152-171.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 157-8.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 166.

²⁴² Vitaly Chernetsky, “The End of House Arrest: Gays and Writing in Contemporary Russia” (manuscript); later reworked and republished as a chapter in Chernetsky, *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures: Russia and Ukraine in the Context of Globalization* (Montreal: McGill—Queen’s University Press, 2007).

²⁴³. У них жаргон: путевый -- хороший; жена -- девочка, с которой спал; шкура -- пиджак; нельзя поддаваться соблазну спросить Мишу с ласковой улыбкой старшего человека, обняв за плечи, что значит жена или поролся -- сразу человек из другого общества, а так равный со всеми преимуществами знакомства на равных. Kharitonov, *Slezy na tsvetakh* (t. 2): 23

being “like that.” “Oh my god,” says the narrator, “I understand it all. Even his voice is like that.”²⁴⁴

Alongside this informal lexicon of queer vocal and body language, which Russian queens were forced to repress under and after Stalin, another formal repertoire of gender-plastic gesture was forming. Kharitonov places this other physical vocabulary, the Canon of Dynamic Contraposition (institutionally unfeasible under Stalin), at the center of his pantomimic practice. By bringing these moves back to the stage in the Sixties and Seventies, Kharitonov reanimates the symbolist body of the Russian Silver Age, the queer dancing body (Aleksandr Rumnev), and the body naked if not yet erotic (Isadora Duncan). Many of the names that Kharitonov rehabilitates in his performance theory were themselves unutterable as sources of inspiration for several decades; those that remained sayable under Stalin had had their reputations sanitized and bolshevized. In effect modernist genealogies and queer genealogies were embedded in the same historically disappeared body. Because the kinesthetic fluidity of the modernist era was so bound up with the gender and sexual fluidity of modernist artists, it appears that Kharitonov taps into an affect and performance genealogy all in one go—in a gesture we might call, after Joseph Roach, “kinesthetic nostalgia.” Off the pages of his dissertation, Kharitonov’s dancers traced these genealogical lines along their skin, let them pulse in their pelvises and radiate outwards to the tips of their fingers.

After Kharitonov’s affect genealogies, it is possible to trace back the canon of dynamic contraposition (CDC) to Grecian antiquity, and the canon of Polykleitos (specifically to his treatise and the sculpture of Doryphoros, the spear-bearer, a reproduction of which was in the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow during the Soviet era, where it remains to this day).



Figure 7. and Figure 8. A patinated cast of the Doryphoros of Polykleitos and a plaster cast of Michelangelo’s David in the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow.

It is important to note here the homoerotic appropriation of ancient Greece by the group of Victorian Hellenists in which Oscar Wilde took part, and whose literary and art-critical work was quite influential for Russian modernists and Kharitonov after them.

²⁴⁴ A slightly modified translation of Yevgeny Kharitonov, “The Oven.” Kevin Moss, trans. In *Out of the Blue: Russia’s Hidden Gay Literature*, Kevin Moss, ed. (San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1997), 208. The Russian original reads: О Боже мой, так вот он кто. И по голосу видно.

Polykleitos's sculpture shares a figural posture and physical space in the Pushkin Museum with Michelangelo's David. Rozanov comments on the spiritual sodomy of Michelangelo, and Kharitonov explicitly names him as a predominant practitioner of the CDC.

More interestingly, another plastic actor working contemporaneously with Kharitonov, Gedrius Matskiavichius, staged a rather homoerotic pantomime based on an imagined relationship of desire between Michelangelo and his David, something like a queer rendition of the Galatea myth. By reanimating antiquity's canon of dynamic contraposition, pantomime reproduced a pederastic morphology of the male body that countered the straight ideals of Soviet society, while making possible the expression of queer subjectivity and enactment of queer specularity.



Figure 9. Scene from the play *Overcoming* [*Preodolenie*]. The Moscow Theater of Plastic Drama. Created in 1973. Head director: Gedrius Matskiavichius. Photograph by S.T.F. Rybchinskii taken on 1 July 1983.²⁴⁵

THE MODERNIST BODY AND PLASTICITY'S CORPOREAL CORPUS: FROM DUNCAN THROUGH RUMNEV TO KHARITONOV AND BEYOND

Since Kharitonov's pantomime was a form of nonverbal citationality, we are right to wonder: What might a quiet queer *foot-note* look like? A head-note? A hip-note? To figure this out, we follow the lines of descent Kharitonov tracks through a school of "natural dance" [*estestvennyi tanets*] he has cobbled together retroactively. In the ensuing pages, we will track it back to one nodal point on the dancer's body.

In the textual body and literal footnotes of his dissertation, Kharitonov leads us backwards to François Delsarte (1811-1871) and Isadora Duncan (1877-1927); to the Delsartean-Dalcrozean dancer Sergei Volkonskii (1860-1937), Russia's original plastic actor and the author of "On the Natural Laws of Plasticity [*O estestvennykh zakonakh*

²⁴⁵ <http://visualrian.ru/images/item/504911> Archive no.: DP83-1811. For more words and images from this Theater of Plastic Drama, see the newly released filial biography and collection of colleagues' reminiscences in E. Matskiavichius, *Preodolenie* (Moscow: Ripol Klassik, 2010).

plastiki, 1914] and *The Expressive Human* [*Vyrazitel'nyi chelovek*, 1920]; to Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940); Charlie Chaplin (1889-1977); early Goskino and the Factory of Eccentric Actors [FEKS]; to Aleksandr Tairov (1885-1950) of Moscow's Chamber Theater [*Kamennyi teatr*] in 1914-1949 and its early star, the same Aleksandr Rumnev (1899-1965), who, unlike many of his avant-garde coevals, would survive Stalin's persecutions to reinvigorate pantomime for the very classes at VGIK that Kharitonov took. This performance-genealogy positions the modernist body and doubles as a queer list of the kind Nealon describes, on account of which it bears reciting below in full (noting that the dissertation makes such lists throughout):

The canon of these schools was conceived as a natural unbound plasticity. Movement emanates from the solar plexus [*solnechnoe spletenie*], the shoulders are not specially aligned, the feet and knees are not turned out, the hips tucked in, the waist not pulled in. For example, the type of plasticity introduced by Isadora Duncan: this canon came from the iconography of antiquity with its contrapposto (that is, the natural coordination, the counterpoising of moving parts of the body); in this way, antiquity is taken not as one of the possible styles, but as the general basis of movement, as an expression of unbound sensation or feeling. There were still other schools and systems (the system of Delsarte, the biomechanism of Meyerhold), that likewise opposed the conventional plasticity of classical ballet. They provided the material for special choreography and for the education of theatrical and cinematic actors. It was precisely on this material that the students of the Goskino school and FEKS were educated. In Aleksandr Rumnev's classes, the students of VGIK also studied plasticity of this sort (Rumnev himself performed and staged expressionistic and eccentric dances in the 1920s).²⁴⁶

The "iconography of antiquity" returns us to one of the chapter's initiating images: the tunicked Grecian woman inscribed at the center of Kharitonov's apartment wall. Fittingly, the same figure stands at the center of his theory of movement: he most identifies the "natural dance" of his own practice with that of the American dancer Isadora Duncan (1877-1927). (In his dissertation, Kharitonov draws from Russian translations of Duncan's *Dance of the Future* [*Tanets budushchego*, 1907] and *My Life* [*Moia zhizn'*, 1930].) Duncan dipped in and out of tsarist and revolutionary Russia many times between 1904 and 1924,²⁴⁷ inspiring a generation of "plastic" [*plastichki*] and "barefoot" followers [*bosonozhki*]; and making quite a splash among modernist authors like Andrei Bely, Fyodor Sologub, Vasilii Rozanov and Sergei Esenin, the latter a lyrical poet whom she took as a husband in 1922. These Symbolist artists were seduced by Duncan as the "living statue" and "incarnation of ancient myth." She, as they, was engaged in the invention of a "new artistic language,"²⁴⁸ which would restore man's access to a prelapsarian world of plentiful meaning. The neoclassical body of Duncan's

²⁴⁶ Kharitonov, "Pantomima," 454-55.

²⁴⁷ Duncan toured in Russia in 1904-05; 1907-09; 1911-14; 1917; and 1921-1924. T.S. Kasatkina, ed. *Aisodora: Gastrol'i v Rossii* (Moscow: "Arist. Rezzhiser. Teatr.," 1992).

²⁴⁸ Nicole Misler, "Chelovek plasticheskii": *Katalog vystavki 21 fevralia – 30 apreliia 2000 g.* Ministerstvo kul'tury Rossiiskoi Federatsii Gosudarstvennyi tsentral'nyi muzei im. A.A. Bakhrushina (Moscow: 2000), 4.

dance had to be liberated from the strictures of society, literally uncorseted and effectively nude in performance, in order to physically access the authentic stirrings of the soul without mediation, linguistic or otherwise. Thus her choreographies were also feminist interventions into the cultural construction of the female body. Like Kharitonov, her dance advanced a vision of gender plasticity. He, as she, believed that freeing the body from morphological norms would allow one to experience emotional life beyond the confines of social convention.²⁴⁹ In other words, moving freely would mean feeling freely.

Duncan's dance offered Kharitonov so much more than a model of stylized movement: it presented a whole spiritual philosophy emanating from the body, and from one of the body's most intimate centers, too – the abdomen. This model of visceral subjectivity, as we have discussed, countered the man of reason so esteemed by Russian positivism and Soviet ideology as extensions of the Western Enlightenment.²⁵⁰ Duncan essentially enflashed the soul by locating its “temporal home” in the “solar plexus.”²⁵¹ So doing, she shifted the site of the self in keeping with the priorities of modernism: plucking the Cartesian cogito from the cephalic brain, she transplanted spirit into the “abdominal brain”²⁵² and thereby formed a sensual Delsartean subject. In the role of mystic seeker, she kept “patient vigil,” as the imperfect tense of the following passage attests. She allowed the solar plexus to reveal itself to her in what some scholars have pinpointed as the primal scene of modern dance: “For hours I would stand quite still, my two hands folded between my breasts, covering the solar plexus... I was seeking and finally discovered the central spring of all movement.”²⁵³ The solar plexus of Duncan's day was a dense discursive point on the modern(ist) body, where pseudo-scientific theories of the embodied brain were bound up with Hatha yogic chakras and further entangled with Nietzschean notions of self-will.²⁵⁴ Suggestively positioned at the body's

²⁴⁹ Kharitonov underscores Duncan's emphasis on emotional authenticity here, and how this emphasis prevented her from leaving behind an immutable primer of bodily movement: “Duncan “[objected] to the antique, nonsymbolic understanding of the body. But insofar as Duncan considered dance exclusively the work of intuition [*naitiia*], and didn't believe in the possibility of ready-made forms, fixed feeling [*chuvstvo*] such that the correct [*pravil'noe*] realization of them would have been a provocation of the very feeling, she specially did not establish systems of movement, by which plasticity of this sort might be taught from then onwards,” (Kharitonov, “Pantomima,” 464-5).

²⁵⁰ Apropos, Ronald G. Davis, founder of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, and student of Etienne Decroux, regarded the mimetic philosophy of his French mentor as proposing a pre-Cartesian notion of selfhood. R.G. Davis, *The San Francisco Mime Troupe: The First Ten Years* (Palo Alto, CA: Ramparts Press, 1975), PAGE.

²⁵¹ Isadora Duncan, Sheldon Cheney, and John Milton and Ruth Neils Ward Collection. *The Art of the Dance* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1977), 48.

²⁵² Theron Q. Dumont, *The Solar Plexus or Abdominal Brain* (Chicago: Advanced Thought Publishing Co., 1920). Interestingly, Dumont was the penname of protein-diet guru William Atkinson. This, his French alter ego, was supposed to be a specialist in memory, magnetism and self-will. Kharitonov referred to this as the muscular apparatus [*myshechnyi apparat*] versus the cognitive apparatus; Sasha Samoilov defined this terminology for me during our interview on June 8-9, 2010. I explain the way this apparatus gets activated in my discussion of plastic walking in Chapter Four.

²⁵³ Isadora Duncan, *My Life* (New York: Liveright, 1927), 75; quoted in Mark Franko, *Dancing Modernism/Performing Politics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 1.

²⁵⁴ “Duncan's soul is physically part of the body. One needs to cultivate the body for the soul to be free. Divinity is to be found within the body. Perhaps if Duncan had used the words “will” or “self” instead of “soul” there would be less question of her Modernism. In the section of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* titled “On the Despisers of the Body,” Friedrich Nietzsche writes, “Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother,

midsection, the solar plexus sits at the ostensible intersection between spirituality and sexuality, bringing together, as much fin-de-siècle mysticism essayed, the religious and the (homo) erotic. Kharitonov returns to the solar plexus as a somatic repository for cultural memory in order to resurrect the plastic possibilities of gender and sexuality that lived and died with the modernist body. By making impulse-movement issue once again from the solar plexus, he performed an “historically dense queer gesture,” in Munoz’s phrasing, “a gesture whose significance and connotive queer force is dense with antinormative meanings.”²⁵⁵

Kharitonov’s mentor (and one of the primary mimes in the other chapters), Aleksandr Rumnev, had himself known Duncan in the earliest years of his stage career and the last of hers. He wrote an essay about their intimate acquaintance called “The Past Passes By Before Me.”²⁵⁶ It is likely he recollected their interactions to the students in his pantomime class at VGIK in the early 1960s, so that the Duncan Kharitonov writes about, we might surmise, is one filtered through Rumnev’s reminiscences. Rumnev met the American dancer when she was a sad old queen, and he, still a young and nubile one (as he remembers it, at least). His first encounter with Duncan occurred when, on the fourth anniversary of the October Revolution during her 1921 Soviet tour, she gave a show in Moscow into which he snuck with only “youthful enthusiasm” as his ticket.²⁵⁷ He was disheartened to witness how a culturally conservative audience failed to properly appreciate what she was doing. Instead, perhaps predictably,

many were shocked by her appearance: the transparent chiton²⁵⁸ on a woman, no longer young and without a brassiere, violated the customary Muscovite conception of elegance. Her plastic maneuvering was sooner pantomime than dance, and seemed insufficiently convincing for people cultivated on the balletic classic with virtuoso technique. The simplicity of her devices evoked confusion in many.²⁵⁹

Rumnev, on the other hand, recognizing her epistemic significance, repeatedly appropriates Duncan’s choreography for his own history of pantomime. She danced, he tells us, “mimetically, plastically reflecting the mood and the rhythm of the musical play. Several of her dances were, generally speaking, sooner pantomimes.” At least in her

there stands a mighty ruler, an unknown sage – whose name is self. In your body he dwells; he is your body.” Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Baltimore, MD: Penguins Books, 1969), 146. It is interesting to note that Nietzsche’s “self” is related to “will,” which in the Hindu yogic tradition resides in the solar plexus, and the solar plexus is where Duncan locates the soul.” Karen Uminski, “Isadora Duncan and Modernism.” Accessed at http://www.thegoddessdancing.com/isadora_duncan.htm on April 1, 2010.

²⁵⁵ Munoz, *Dancing Desire*, 442.

²⁵⁶ Aleksandr Rumnev, “Minuvshee prokhodit predno mnoiu.” In *Aisedora: Gastrol'i v Rossii*. T.S. Kasatnika, ed. (Moscow: Arist. Rezhisser. Teatr., 1992), 355-368.

²⁵⁷ In 1921, Duncan had come to revolutionary Russia to teach children how to dance freely and thereby become free socialist “new people.” Rumnev, “Minuvshee,” 357.

²⁵⁸ A chiton [*khiton*, Russ.] is a sleeveless shirt worn by Greek men and women in the fourth through eighth centuries B.C.

²⁵⁹ Многих шокировал ее вид – прозрачный хитон на немолодой женщине с отсутствием бюстгальтера нарушал привычные московские представления об изящном. Ее пластические средства близкие скорее к пантомиме, чем к танцу, показались недостаточно убедительными для людей, воспитанных на балетной классике с ее виртуозной техникой. Простота приемов во многих вызвала недоумение (Rumnev, “Minuvshee,” 356).

Russian years, he opines, “Duncan, undoubtedly, was not so much a dancer as a great mimetic actress.”²⁶⁰

Two weeks after her performance, she had the chance to see him play the role of Pierrot in the pantomime *The Veil of P'eretta* [*Pokryvalo P'eretty*]. After the show, she flattered him about his work, and they became fast friends. Duncan spent night and day with her Russian “Pierrot,” as she affectionately dubbed him. Together they gossiped like girlfriends about their art, their lovers and family, and the tragic loss of Duncan’s two children in a car accident. Rumnev was totally intoxicated by her off the stage: “everything about her was interesting,” he cooed. On the stage, she similarly never failed to enchant him. He found “the strength of her art [in] its profound humanity, and her gesture sometimes acquired a magical power” in his eyes.²⁶¹

Though he was so smitten with his forty-year-old “Aisedora” in all her “profound humanity,” Rumnev was unsparing in his remarks about her physical appearance. He thought her lumpy, with “massive feet,” “fat knees” and a disproportionately little head (356). In order to make her already imperfect beauty a little less faded, he took to doing her makeup before her shows.²⁶² His attitude anticipates a point I make at greater length elsewhere in the chapter: that pantomime and its concentric sphere of plastic performance art were not so welcoming to women or to expressions of femininity performed by women (though Kharitonov’s play may interrupt this dynamic of gay gynophobia²⁶³).

²⁶⁰ Часто она танцевала совершенно не сходя с места и только отбивала ногою такт, мимически и пластически отражая настроение и ритм музыкальной пьесы. Некоторые танцы были, вообще, скорее пантомимами.... В этот свой «московский» период Дункан, несомненно, была не столько танцовщицей, сколько великой мимической актрисой. (ibid., 360).

²⁶¹ Сила ее искусства была в глубокой человечности, и жест ее иногда приобретал магическую силу (ibid., 360).

²⁶² This routine began when, as usual, “she went on stage in a transparent chiton, without a bra and without makeup” at the Bol’shoi Theater (ibid., 362). In the essay’s longest descriptive passage, Rumnev evocatively recounts how he convinced Duncan to start wearing makeup. “The absence of makeup she explained by saying that everything must be on the stage as it is in life. By the way, in life she wore heavy makeup, but not enough for the stage. I managed to convince her to make herself up especially for the stage, and I gifted her a box of makeup, which, in those days, was not so easy to get. But she did not know how to put it on herself for her next concert. An hour before it began I was in her dressing room. Like a proper makeup artist, I applied foundation. I rouged her cheeks a little. I pulled down her eyes and put shadow on them. I powdered her face. She stood up and walked over to the big vanity. Then she walked a little farther away. She was in raptures. And really, her face had become surprisingly fresh, sweet, and young—“as it was twenty years ago,” she said to me. She asked that I always do her makeup from that time forward or at least teach her this art that she had disavowed on account of her Quaker principles, which had given several critics occasion to call her “the dancing governess.” I made her up two or three times. Then, when her concert coincided with my play, I taught her to make herself up. Thus I succeeded in foundering one of her principles” (ibid., 362).

I reproduce this passage, in the first place, because it is a pleasure to read: it is evident Rumnev relishes talking on the topic, and his narration betrays a certain campy cattiness, as when he comments on her everyday pancake and slips in his surprise at the possibility of Duncan ever looking fresh again, or when he delights in making her American morals bend a bit to his desires. There is a queer kind of intimacy, to be sure. (It calls up well-rehearsed representations of the old, once-famous diva with her young escort-cum-“beard”; think Doris Duke and Bernard Lafferty or Varjak and Mrs. Failenson in *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* in the American case; and Alla Pugacheva and Filip Kirkorov in the Russian.) As a final aside, we should highlight Rumnev’s own love of makeup, which, outside of the theatrical context, would certainly have read as queer.

²⁶³ On gay gynophobia, see John Champagne, “Dancing Queen? Feminist and Gay Male Spectatorship in Three Recent Films from Australia,” *Film Criticism*, Vol. 21, 1997.

Pantomime was really about the beauty of the male and not the female body. Rumnev's repulsion by what he perceived as Duncan's abject physicality is countered only by his obsession with his own youthful male beauty. As scholar of Russian plasticity Nicoletta Misler notes, "the assertion that the ballet artist 'dances only for himself and therefore his experiences are the experiences of Narcissus,' seems to ideally apply to Rumnev, who was overflowing with an awareness of his own beauty."²⁶⁴ Duncan similarly admired his physique. Once when they were casually spending time together, she entreated him to dance the faun in Tannhäuser, so he shed his own clothes, slipped into her transparent chiton, and pranced about for her amusement.²⁶⁵

Like Duncan and many Russian modernist dramatists (especially Nikolai Evreinov), Rumnev believed in the necessity of the naked body [*obnazhennoe telo*] onstage as a foundational principle of modern dance. Baring the body, one bared its device: the public was able to see how the "living mechanism of movement" worked at the musculoskeletal level.²⁶⁶ "We danced naked," Rumnev recollects, "barefoot, in brocaded briefs with abstract ornamentation and brocaded hats resembling skullcaps; and we considered the naked body the best costume for dance. Sometimes artists sketched us,"²⁶⁷ and sometimes they photographed Rumnev and his young male choreographic cohort. Says Misler, "the photographs of the near naked body of Rumnev... played an important role in defining the lines of the body in movement" for the era, and so, beginning in 1925, his image, as it was rendered in artistic photograph and drawing, appeared all over the exhibition of the Choreographic Laboratory, the state academy of art in Moscow.²⁶⁸ Stories of the ethereal elegance of his youth, the indelible traces of which still lingered in his older incarnation, moved Kharitonov to remark that, "Rumnev's beauty was of the airy-fairy kind, stylized in makeup and in costume, in his expressionistic dances (elongated proportions, highly raised eyebrows, dolefully turned down corners of his mouth, this smile from something sweet that had once happened but would never return...)." ²⁶⁹ We will let smolder a little longer the meaning behind Rumnev's smile, preserving the suggestiveness introduced by Kharitonov's ellipsis for now.

²⁶⁴ Nicoletta Misler, "Chelovek plasticheskii," 14.

Утверждение... что балетный артист 'танцует только самого себя, а потому его переживания – это переживания Нарцисса, смотрящего на свое отражение', кажется, идеально подходит к Рунневу, который переполнен сознанием собственной красоты.

²⁶⁵ Rumnev, "Minuvshee," 360.

²⁶⁶ Misler, "Chelovek plasticheskii," 14.

²⁶⁷ Rumnev, "Minuvshee," 364.

Мы танцевали голые, босиком, в парчовых плавках с абстрактным орнаментом и парчовых шапочках, похожих на тюбетейки, и считали, что обнаженное тело является наилучшим костюмом для танцев. Иногда художники разрисовывали нас...

²⁶⁸ Фотографии почти полностью обнаженного тела Руннева указывают на то, что геометрические и стилизованные «лоскутки» Эрдмана играли важную роль для определения линий тела в движении. Misler, "Chelovek plasticheskii," 14.

²⁶⁹ Руннев был красив вычурной красотой, стилизованной в гриме и в костюме, в его экспрессионистских танцах (вытянутые пропорции, высоко поднятые брови, скорбно опущенные углы рта, эта улыбка о чем-то сладком, что прошло и никогда не вернется...)," Evgenii Kharitonov, "Stenogramma vystupitel'noi rechi Evgeniia Kharitonova, proiznesennoi 11 fevralia 1980g. v TsDRI na vechere, posviashchennomu pamiati Aleksandra Aleksandrovicha Rumneva." In *Pod domashnim arestom*. Ed. Gleb Morev (Moscow: Glagol, 2005).



Figure 10. and **Figure 11.** Rumnev a bit older but still a dandy;
from the 1954 film *Anna na shee*.

Instead we will sit with the sadness in Duncan's droopy stare. As Rumnev tells her story, she, like a proper pantomime artist, was forever in pursuit of an invisible or impossible love object: the peasant poet, Sergei Esenin (1895-1925), to whom she was very briefly married (May 1923 - May 1924). (Desperately unrequited love, incidentally, is a leitmotif of Kharitonov's eclectic corpus—a coincidence to which we will come back.) Dwelling at insensitive length, Rumnev recounts Duncan's Russian years as a story of failed heterosexuality, a theme which pairs provocatively with his own successful homosexuality, and even more successful self-love. He calls to mind, for instance, running into her in Paris in 1923 at the premier of *Phèdre* at the Champs-Elysées Theater, right after Esenin had just inexplicably abandoned her for Salzburg. Rumnev supplies another anecdote in which Esenin fled from a mansion party thrown in Duncan's honor. It was the dead of Moscow winter, and she rushed after him through the streets without so much as an overcoat on. Searching frantically, Duncan and Rumnev finally discover Esenin hiding out in the home of another woman. In general, it seemed to Rumnev that Esenin did not value her endless love very much. And she, "cast off by the man she worshipped...was in boundless melancholy and despair."²⁷⁰



Figure 12 (right). A German *carte de visite* of Isadora Duncan in a classical pose.²⁷¹
Figure 13 (left). Daughter Irma, Isadora and Sergei Esenin, 1922.²⁷²

²⁷⁰ Rumnev, "Minuvshee," 367.

²⁷¹ <http://idvm.narod.ru/images/1059.jpg>, accessed 5 April 2010.

It might be pertinent to make mention here of Esenin's own bisexuality. He carried on a two-year relationship (1915-1917) with his poet mentor: the unabashedly homosexual Nikolai Kluyev (1887-1937). At this time, the two poets "lived together as lovers and wrote about it in their poetry." In the opinion of Simon Karlinsky, the first Slavist to recuperate Russia's "hidden gay history," "Esenin could write meaningful love poetry only when it was addressed to other men."²⁷³ Less than two years after finally departing from Duncan (they were never officially divorced, though he remarried a fifth time in 1925), Esenin addressed his final poem-cum-suicide note to a man with whom he had just spent the night. This aspect of his biography was suppressed in the Soviet years. "Because Esenin's poetry was an object of a veritable cult in the last decades of the Soviet system," that is, during Kharitonov's era, "all reference to his homosexuality, in his poetry and in memoirs about him were banned."²⁷⁴ Still, members of the intelligentsia would surely have known this about him, specializing as they did in preserving the non-Party minded points of literary history. Yet, as Karlinsky wrote in the late 1990s, most Russians remain unaware or unwilling to acknowledge this about the great Silver Age poet. Given his investment in creating queer affect and artist genealogies, we can assume Kharitonov would have known and cared. Perhaps he viewed Esenin as one of many links in a 'queer' history leading up to him, bonding Duncan and Rumnev, Rumnev and Oscar Wilde (we will soon see), in a chain of tragic love.

Ultimately, Rumnev would come to see Duncan's work as a necessary but "anachronistic" moment in avant-garde movement, while he and his cohort were inaugurating a "new generation of choreography."²⁷⁵ Rumnev and his contemporaries continued to "turn the rules of ballet 'inside out'" in new ways.²⁷⁶ This second-wave of modernist dance flourished in the Twenties but was frozen by the Stalinist Thirties. Rumnev reanimated it in the post-Stalinist period for "a new circle of people, a new generation."²⁷⁷ (Though "the old people [of Kharitonov's day] remembered [Rumnev's] young fame at the Kamernyi Theater and in avant-garde dance."²⁷⁸) When he was a young man studying plasticity at the state cinematography institute, Kharitonov venerated Rumnev as something of a living relic: "He was of the breed of moderne from the Twenties," Kharitonov eulogized at the memorial evening for Rumnev in 1980, shortly before the author's own death but long after his mentor's passing in 1965.²⁷⁹ He felt the specialness of what his teacher was doing (much like Rumnev uniquely admired Duncan). "What was played in his theater at that time did not play anywhere else," Kharitonov observed. More than that, he sensed how historical continuity was embedded

²⁷² Неизвестный автор. Ирма Дункан, Айседора Дункан, Сергей Есенин, 1922. Российский государственный архив литературы и искусства

²⁷³ Karlinsky, "Russia's Hidden Gay History," in *Out of the Blue*, 24.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.,

²⁷⁵ Rumnev, "Minuvshee," 364.

²⁷⁶ Mislner, "Chelovek plasticheskii," 10.

²⁷⁷ Evgenii Kharitonov, "Stenogramma vystupitel'noi rechi Evgeniia Kharitonova, proiznesennoi 11 fevralia 1980g. v TsDRI na vechere, posviashchennomu pamiati Aleksandra Aleksandrovicha Rumneva." In *Pod domashnim arestom*. Ed. Gleb Morev (Moscow: Glagol, 2005), 485-495, at 489.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 494.

in Rumnev's kinesthetic imagination. "This was something that had come down to us intact from the Kamernyi Theater and theatrical decadence."²⁸⁰

Rumnev and the other male dancers of the era's loosely-assembled plastic school, which included Kas'ian Goleizovskii and Lev Lukin, all shared an "ectstatic body," in Mislner's words.²⁸¹ And ecstasy and erotics went hand in hand in the early revolutionary dance. "Goleizovskii," for one, "[incarnated] in his creations the theme of exquisite erotica. Daniil Demutskii (1893-1954), his most tender interpreter...[softened] the dancer's pose of embracing, which the choreographer displayed in his productions an openness which, all the same, stepped over the bounds of art."²⁸² In his own dance, Mislner continues, "Rumnev [exemplified] this theory"; but he also "[attempted] to abandon the theme—doubly dangerous to him on account of his homosexuality-- of the body as the palette, material, and instrument of movement; and [he concentrated] very strictly on gesture itself." There were, it seems, consequences to Rumnev's performative queerness and public celebration of male beauty. While his homosexuality went unpunished by the law, it nevertheless negatively inflected his reception as a performer. Mislner contends that his "homosexuality infected the assessments of his choreography,"²⁸³ and offers an exemplary review from 1926 as evidence that critics read Rumnev's dance queerly and, consequently, in an unfavorable light.²⁸⁴ The artist "moderne" lived under the shadow of the same Stalinist anti-sodomy statute that later blackened Kharitonov's experience. The latter acknowledged this with a euphemism still uncharacteristically bold for the late Soviet context. Respectfully addressing his late mentor by name and patronymic, Kharitonov testifies that "Aleksandr Aleksandrovich lived longer [than Meyerhold and others] – in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, and we caught him when he was old, having survived much and gone grey from the Oscar-Wildean statute that applied to him."²⁸⁵

Perhaps for this reason, Kharitonov confers on Rumnev the same "remarkable divine kiss on the forehead"²⁸⁶ with which he decorates the spiritually-privileged queer flowers in his pseudo-modernist manifesto, "The Leaflet." And like a flower of the Kharitonov genus, Rumnev was especially sensitive to beauty. He introduced, for instance, a new conception of plastic beauty with his pantomimic dance, which Kharitonov took up, altered, and expanded in his own right. To Rumnev's mind,

²⁸⁰ То, что игралось у него, в то время не игралось нигде, это было что-то уцелевшее и дошедшее до нас от Камерного театра и театрального декаданса (ibid., 490).

²⁸¹ Mislner, "Chelovek plasticheskii," 10.

²⁸² Ibid. В 1920-е годы Голейсовский воплощает в своем творчестве тему изысканной эротики. Даниил Демуцкий (1893-1954), наиболее чуткий ее интерпретатор, с помощью своего объектива смягчает танцевальную позу объятия, которое хореограф представляет в своих постановках с откровенностью, все же выходящей за рамки искусства.

²⁸³ Ibid. «Румнев, чья гомосексуальность отразилась на суждениях о его хореографии, как исполнитель работал для обоих постановщиков до того как начал осуществлять свои собственные замыслы, в которых создал свой собственный язык мимики и жеста.»

²⁸⁴ M. Ulitskaia, "Po khoreograficheskim kontsertam," *Sovetskaia isskustvo* (1926), No. 8-9: 59-60.

²⁸⁵ Kharitonov, "Stenogramma," 491. [Александр Александрович прожил дальше – и тридцатые, и сороковые, и пятидесятые годы, и мы застали его старым, много чего пережившим и посевшим по положенной ему оscarуайльдовской статье.] Of note, Rumnev uses Wilde as a mouthpiece for his own catty appraisal of Duncan's physical appearance, thus identifying himself with the suffering English dandy through an instance of queer citationality. Rumnev, "Minuvshee," 357.

²⁸⁶ У него был заметней Божий поцелуй на лбу (ibid., 495).

“plasticity has as its goal the incarnation of beauty in the human body, bringing it up to that point of perfection when it becomes capable not only of perceiving but also of expressing beauty.”²⁸⁷ This beauty, as we have seen, is of an expressly male variety, found in the forms of the male body or in the contemplation of them.

Just as Rumnev fell under the spell of Duncan, so was he capable of summoning the magical force of gesture to spin a web of queer enchantment around his young followers, who were then encountering

A new wave [*polosa*] of art [that had] arrived (after the 20th and 22nd Congresses [of the Communist Party in 1956 and 1961 respectively], where there was an intonation of reticence, subtext, problem, idea, civicness, social sharpness, sedition within known limits; but where there was neither the presence nor any suggestion of such a sweet enchantment of art [*ocharovaniia iskusstva*]). Neither to Efremov nor to Mikhail Il'ich Romm do the words "enchantment by art" apply. And so the young consciously turned to art, where there was precisely this subtext, sharpness, and civicness, but did not find them in Rumnev's art.²⁸⁸

Instead of shrewd politics, they found subtle artistry, and developed something of cult devoted to his Rumnev at VGIK. “We were charmed [*ocharovanny*] by his art. To act in his plays seemed to us such a pleasure,” Kharitonov reminisces.²⁸⁹ Elsewhere he reiterates, “we so admired the theater of Rumnev, in its dear, simplehearted, childish aspect, at the heart of which was mostly play and pleasure, play with inspiring musical accompaniment, the sweetness of the stories he presented, their effortlessness, erotica...”²⁹⁰ This is Kharitonov’s ellipsis again, trailing off perhaps where the other left off—with the promise of some secret sweetness, one we now come to recognize as erotic and which we will call a “queer enchantment,” in order to connect it to the affective field surrounding Kharitonov’s pantomime *Enchanted Island*. Indeed, I hypothesize, Kharitonov here invites us to read the play’s sorcerer [*charodei*] as a Rumnev figure, captivating in his movement, able to wave the wand of his lissome body and conjure another world of queer feeling and embodiment into existence.

²⁸⁷ Румнев разовьет свою собственную теорию, где сделает попытку покинуть вдвойне опасную для него, по причине его гомосексуальности, тему тела как палитры, материала и инструмента движения, и сосредоточится сугубо на самом жесте.

«Пластика имеет своей целью воплощение красоты в человеческом теле, доведение его до той степени совершенства, когда оно становится способным не только к восприятию, но и к выражению красоты.» (Misler, 11); Rumnev quoted in Morev, 552; quoted from Misler, 10-11.

²⁸⁸ Kharitonov, “Stenogramma,” 490.

В искусстве пошла новая полоса (после XX и XXII съездов), где была сдержанная интонация, подтекст, проблема, мысль, гражданственность, социальная острота, крамола в известных пределах, но где не могло быть и не предполагалось такого милого очарования искусства. Ни к Ефремову, ни к Михаилу Ильчу Ромму не подходит слова «очарование искусством». А ведь молодые сознательно тянулись к искусству, где как раз подтекст, острота и гражданственность, и в румневском художестве им этого не доставало.

²⁸⁹ Мы были очарованны его искусством. Играть в его пьесах нам казалось таким удовольствием, с которым не сравнятся никакие съемки. Kharitonov, “Stenogramma,” 490.

²⁹⁰ Нам так нравился театр Румнева, в его милом, простодушном, детском виде, в основе которого были игра и удовольствия, игра под вдохновляющую музыку, сладость представляемых историй, их непринужденность, эротика...» Ibid., 489-90.



Figure 14. The Cult of Rumnev: with his students at VGIK, ca. 1959.

Almost everyone in Kharitonov’s class fell under “the spell [*obaianie*] of Rumnev’s things”—almost, but not all.²⁹¹ “Thus one could be charmed [*ocharovyvt'sia*] by Rumnev's things, or the charm [*ocharovanie*] may not have had an effect on you.”²⁹² Those who dissented did so for reasons of their intellectual commonness [*raznochinskie pozitsii*], concludes Kharitonov, and their corresponding desires for art to be morally uncomplicated. Thus the cult of Rumnev, formed in the late 1950s, cleaved and crumbled in the early 60s, in keeping with Khrushchev’s own denunciation of the “cult of personality” as a socialist formation, albeit belatedly. And just as Rumnev overcame Duncan, so Kharitonov stepped beyond his queer mentor. One of the main points of his departure from the earlier tradition of plasticity Rumnev helped to establish was that, “the gesture of Rumnev, the faithful follower of Volkonskii, replaces the word”²⁹³; for Kharitonov, as we have seen, gesture does not replace word but is instead irreducible, bearing no necessary connection to words as such.

QUEER HISTORIOGRAPHY AS PLEXUS

“From the décor of the room where Kharitonov slept, I, a person of the provinces, was totally stunned by the drawings on the wall.”
—Oleg Dark²⁹⁴

“This is the beauty and terror, perhaps, of queer community, constituted by nothing more than the connectedness (even across time) of singular lives that unveil and contest normativity.”
—Carolyn Dinshaw²⁹⁵

²⁹¹ Ibid., 491.

²⁹² Ibid., 494. Так вот, румневскими вещами можно было или очаровываться, или очарование их на вас не действовало. Но нельзя было их разбирать с разночинских позиций.

²⁹³ Румнев рассматривает его хореографию как красноречивую последовательность жестов, и возможно поэтому каждая отдельная поза этого артиста, увекованная фотографиями, является квинтэссенцией выразительности. Жест у Румнева, верного последователя Волконского, заменяет слово. Mislner, «*Chelovek plasticheskii*,» 11.

²⁹⁴ Олег Дарк: Из обстановки комнаты, где спал Женя, меня, провинциала, совершенно поразила разрисованная стена.

In the penultimate arc of this chapter, we no longer look *at* Kharitonov but backward *with* him, through his eyes, by turning back towards our original image: the small subsection of apartment wall. Three lines cut vertically across the frame, implying a certain textural depth by the varying degrees of dark in the shadowy creases. This, coupled with the grainy quality of the photograph itself, makes one want to run a hand down the wall, to palpate its paper, with a touch perhaps going “against the grain” in the literal and Huysmanian sense. The image offers a slice of life in miniature, a tiny anatomy of intimacy, and invites one to peer in at its arbitrary edges with the kind of speculative curiosity a realist narrator might visit upon the interiors of a nineteenth-century society novel. The figures on the wall, however, belong to a different time and a different genre: they are more at home in a decadent setting, less the style of an aspiring doctor Bazarov and more that of a degenerate des Esseintes or mystic Symbolist poet.

At the center of the wall cut-out, a seemingly Grecian woman in profile stands slantwise with no evident support save for the third and deepest vertical line etched in the wall. Her head bends forward, what looks to be her right hand folds upward to rest on her heart, and her left arm dangles down at the side. Her lower limbs are angled in the opposite manner: the right foot arches, the knee bent, forming a bow shape against the straightness of her left leg, which tapers into flexed foot and pointed toe. With her loose tunic, curly cropped hair, and easy stylized pose, the drawing recalls the pioneering modern dancer Isadora Duncan. Behind her stands a beautiful Greek warrior; slightly shorter and broader, his physique is athletic. With a toned, bare arm he reaches to the actual bow and arrows on his right side. Between these epic props, his insistent forward gaze, and the contrapposto of his sculptural body, he could be an ideal beauty from the canon of Polykleitos.

A large folk-decorative dove hovers between the Duncan lookalike and a pair of quasi-Egyptian male nudes in hieroglyphic profile, one stacked atop the other. The upper figure is chopped off at the waist by the frame of the photograph, but the bottom half of his body is shown bent at the knees, bent at the waist, hands resting on his standing lap. In contrast, the lower figure is rather erect. From heel to head, his body traces a near perfectly vertical line parallel with the one impressed in the wall beside him. But, like the slouching Duncan, the upright Egyptian is frozen in motion: he raises a curved left leg at the hip and an angular right arm at the elbow. Though these three figures emerge from different orders of scale, their feet align in such a way that it appears the poised Egyptian is leading a moving procession in the air with Duncan behind him, and the Polykleitian warrior bringing up the rear. These human figures are suspended above a thick band of hands comprising, as the caption supplies, “the alphabet of the deaf-mute”—what in more sensitive hands would be called the Russian manual or sign alphabet—the import of which this chapter angles toward explaining in anticipation of the next.

One could establish tentative conceptual connections between all of the images in this graphic cluster: the man and woman alike are drawn from Western classical antiquity; the Egyptian hieroglyphics and the manual signs are arguably both ideograms; and so on. There seems to be a logic to the arcane visual language with which Kharitonov spruced up the drab walls of his Soviet apartment. These wall-figures have continually scratched at the surface of my analysis, arriving at chapter’s end in some sort

²⁹⁵ Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 138.

of visibly meaningful relationship with one another, and especially, within Kharitonov's life and oeuvre. In effect, they illustrate an evolution of movement leading up to him, or, in the opposite direction, a line of locomotory inheritance to which he claims himself heir: from the full body hieroglyphs of Eastern antiquity to the more local and localized manual signs of Russian contemporaneity. These bodies, that Kharitonov has plucked from different points in time to line up untidily with one another in the eternal present of the picture we see, do not sit well together in 'real' linear time. Their unlikely collocation, his promiscuity with proper history, these are traces of queer survival strategies, ways in which Kharitonov crafted for himself a queer identity and aesthetic legacy as a silent artist and an artist silenced by the homophobic Soviet state.

I dwell on the physical arrangement of these bodies and body parts on the wall, their individual postures and their inclinations toward and away from one another, since the issue of orientation--especially when slanted, skewed, or even, I have argued, queered--was a central question for Kharitonov's theory of pantomime, with its concentric but unnamed theory of queer-deaf phenomenology. His work posed a set of problems that this chapter has modestly taken up, and that are of persistent interest to the queer theorist, namely: How are bodies oriented toward one another--in time, space, history and desire? How do they move with one another and make meaning together? How are they felt? How is that feeling communicated? What are the conditions in which the messages of the affective body can be taken up? Whose body is an affective one? What kinds of art can affective bodies make together? And finally, by what affective threads does the artistic text entangle [*spletat*] bodies across time and space?

Just as Kharitonov knotted together the strands of his queer-kinetic genealogy at the solar plexus [*solnechnoe spletenie*], so I take up his labor of entanglement or plexus [*spletenie*] as the mode of past-making this dissertation practices. At this queer plexus I attempt to systematize and share with readers the gut feeling Kharitonov gives to me personally. Though I do not do this elsewhere in my dissertation, I have decided to install myself on the surface here since this chapter in many ways instantiates my own desire to move from the outside in, to penetrate fantastically to the interior of 24 Iartsevskaiia and find this wall and its two-dimensional embellishments intact. And more than its wall, I secretly wish to find the one that it sheltered, so that I might walk over to him, hand him the many pages of text he has inspired me to write over the last decade, and offer a living rebuttal to the quintessential artist's fear he recurrently voiced: "no one will ever seriously write about my work..." This moving from outside in thus marks a shift in space and in tone, as I transmute in this concluding passage from the discarnate intellectual who narrates the bulk of the dissertation, to the embodied admirer who is moved in profound and visceral ways by the art she describes. Repositioning myself here within the edges of my analysis, I hope to show how my desires deeply suffuse the preceding pages as I attempt to do, in effect, the very thing I am analyzing: to hook myself queerly into an affective history which I am actively cobbling together as I write about the writer who has most touched my life—Evgenii Kharitonov.

This haptic style of queer historiography is what Carolyn Dinshaw performs on and palpates in the pre- and postmodern alteritist communities that populate her monograph, *Getting Medieval*. "I touch on the texts," she explains, "whose work displays across its variety a consistent impulse to make contact, even finally a desire for bodies to

touch across time.”²⁹⁶ Dinshaw duplicates with a difference Kharitonov’s melancholic methods of bodily and bibliographic touching “through the citation, in another, later life, by yet another body” with an impossible but signal hope of resurrecting the past.²⁹⁷ Touch proves *only* a metaphor for Dinshaw, whose retrospective heart pumps the blood of contingency, partial connection, and metonymic linkage against “mimetic approaches to history, in which the past is mirror or it is nothing at all.”²⁹⁸ In sync with this dissertation’s general suspicion of mimesis, Dinshaw decries the mimetic past for its relentlessly “unifying work” of memory, for “[knowing] in advance (and not ‘simply’ after the fact)” the names of history’s “speakable subjects,” for repeatedly forgetting its silent ones and reproducing these amnesiac others as “left out.”²⁹⁹

But, Dinshaw stipulates, “if tactile contact between historian and past bodies is a metaphor, . . . corporeal responses to the historical phenomena about which [one] writes are not.”³⁰⁰ The queer historian is physically jolted by a recognition of herself at the point of difference with her subject—a queer disjunctiveness— “in which relation and relatedness do not unfold through mirroring. . .but are constituted through a ‘connectedness (even across time) of singular lives that unveil and contest normativity.’”³⁰¹ This shudder of partial recognition means queer historiography is a “sensible (i.e., sensation-al)” way to know the past, phenomenologically, through the gut symmetries and somatic intensities Dinshaw discerns in her own historiographic subjects, like “Foucault in the archive, feeling a physical response to the documents he reads and concerned that he cannot reconstitute that intensity in an analysis.”³⁰² Foucault’s vibration is a portal-experience for Dinshaw, who, in turn, “sense[s] a vibration when [she reads] of Foucault in the archive;”³⁰³ or “seek[s] to make a partial connection (not a full identification) with [Roland Barthes]” by means of his “desire—which [she calls] queer, like [hers]—for partial, affective connection, for community, for even a touch across time.”

Barthes becomes a queer object of historical desire for Dinshaw because he understands that “the whole historical enterprise. . .is somatic.”³⁰⁴ In his preface to *Sade/Fourier/Loyola*, he divines part of “the pleasure of the Text [. . .in] the amicable return of the author” who is not “a biographical hero,” “who leaves his text and comes into our life [without] unity.” This notoriously dead author “is a mere plural of ‘charms,’ the site of a few tenuous details. . .a discontinuous chant of amiabilities,” in a word, not a person but a body.³⁰⁵ Reading myself into Dinshaw reading Barthes reading his triumvirate of dead authors, it is hard not to be haunted by the specter of Kharitonov, mortally trembling at the new typewriter in his sparse Muscovite flat, struggling to muster turns of phrases transcendent enough for an audience he knew could never be

²⁹⁶ Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval* 3.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

²⁹⁸ Ann Pellegrini, “Touching the Past; or, Hanging Chad,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Volume 10, Number 2, April 2001, pp. 185-194 at 185.

²⁹⁹ Pellegrini, “Touching the Past,” 187; 188.

³⁰⁰ Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 47.

³⁰¹ Pellegrini, “Touching the Past,” 190; embedded quotation from Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 138.

³⁰² Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 15.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 142.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

³⁰⁵ Roland Barthes, “Preface,” *Sade/Fourier/Loyola* (New York: Hill & Wang), 8-9.

nearby in time or space, but instead always beautifully deferred. I feel a surge in my own solar plexus when Barthes, by accidental metaphor, evokes the scene of Kharitonov's death, with its wind-strewn manuscript pages: "for if... the Text," Barthes hypothesizes, "destroyer of all subject, contains a subject to love, that subject is dispersed, somewhat like the ashes we strew into the wind after death." And in a final turn, as if privy to Kharitonov's private worries about unpublishability, about consignment to silence and unspeakability, Barthes offers: "were I a writer, and dead, how would I love it if my life, through the pains of some friendly and detached biographer, were to reduce itself to a few details... whose distinction and mobility might go beyond the fate and come to touch, like Epicurean atoms, some future body, destined to the same dispersion..." Here Barthes's body recedes and my own materiality is restored to consciousness. I feel my body, "friendly and detached," no-longer-future, my back curled over the computer so my fingers can tap "a few details, a few preferences, a few inflections" of Kharitonov's vita down in negative rejoinder to his agonized inquiry: "will anyone ever analyze my work?"

In the end, who can say with any precision what animates our affections for historical figures so unlike us? Sharing neither national, genealogical, nor chronological coordinates, there is nothing inevitable in my connection to Kharitonov. His native language was not mine, though I have spent a decade trying to master Russian in order to effortlessly inhabit his world of words and silences. He was not writing for me (indeed he died less than two years after I was born), or even for anyone "like me," if his literary work—done for the drawer—can be said to have had a readership in mind. And yet I feel with him a deep and abiding if ultimately inexplicable entanglement. I am in thrall to a kind of queer enchantment he casts over me across generation, gender, geography; an emotional mood I have detected in Kharitonov's own disposition as a dancer. For Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick this enchantment is produced by queer as a practice: "[attaching] intently to a few cultural objects... whose meaning [seems] mysterious, excessive, oblique in relation to the codes most readily available to us... We [need] for there to be sites where meanings [don't] line up tidily with each other, and we learn to invest these sites with fascination and love."³⁰⁶ Following another crooked line (what has been the guiding geometry of this chapter), hunched over my computer, transcribing the lines from Kharitonov's posthumously published manuscript into my own dissertation document, I sense in the arch of *my* back *his* spine curving over the Soviet typewriter whose keys so intrigued him. ("This is new—using a typewriter instead of a notebook... A machine-gun instead of stillness. Silence one moment, machine-gun the next."³⁰⁷) I move *with* him because I am moved *by* him, our bodies imaginatively laminated together by feeling—my feeling connected by feeling what he must have felt, my feeling backward to a Kharitonov I can never know. Thus I slant toward him, quietly, queerly. This chapter is my stab at "feeling historical" alongside him, of letting his body pulse through my bent back, his words speak to and through my words, his silences stud the beats between my breaths as I sit at my desk and write all this about him.

³⁰⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), 3 (emphasis mine).

³⁰⁷ Yevgeny Kharitonov, "In the Cold, Higher Sense," *Under House Arrest*, Arch Tait, trans. (London: Serpent's Tail, 1998), 188.

CHAPTER FOUR.
SILENT PLASTICITY, STAGNANT HISTORY:
RE-ENCHANTING THE EVERYDAY IN THE SOVIET NINETEEN-SEVENTIES

THE DISENCHANTMENT OF THE SECOND WORLD

On December 28, 1972, the speechless pantomime *Enchanted Island* [*Ocharovannyi ostrov*] debuted at the deaf Theater of Mimicry and Gesture in Moscow, Russia. Directed by the gay actor and author Evgenii Kharitonov (1941-1981) and staged a total of sixty-six times before its closing night on March 31, 1980, the play has never been performed anywhere else or ever again. In the loose terms of its plot, *Enchanted Island* floats “philosophically”¹ between Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* and Shakespeare’s *Tempest* (whose eighteenth-century adaptation shares a title with the Soviet play). It is broken up into three acts in which a jealous Prosperian sorcerer magically shape-shifts a pair of shipwrecked lovers into all manners of being, all the while the lovers remain resolute in their insatiable search for one another’s touch. Some of the fantastic aspects assumed by the actors include a touching trio of palm trees; an invisible man and a married couple; a military commander, his cross-dressed maid, and a lovelorn cavalryman; a cave-dwelling Cyclops, his companion monkey, and their marooned human captive.

The spectacle was strange by late-Soviet standards, and met with mixed reviews, if the theater guestbook and the actors’ recollections are a good indication amongst the scant archival traces. Many audience members punningly applauded the play’s ability to enchant, as in the following typical if uninspired inscription by a boarding school collective in March 1973: “Thank you for the enchanting play of the actors, the marvelous plasticity, the bewitchment.” Others bristled at the brazenness of nearly naked bodies moving in such unexpected ways and to no apparent end. One actress recounted how, “a babushka comes in, looks around, says ‘Shameful! Naked people!’ and walks out. ‘What’s the use?’”² Another entry in the same vein reads,

Twelve of us came to watch your pantomime, eight left during the intermission. What is it? What’s it about? What’s the use? The actors exhibit movement with their bodies very well, but what’s the use, what’s it about? To whom are you addressing such a spectacle? Maybe this sort of thing is fashionable in Moscow but no one where I’m from would like it. I consider this show harmful and the evening lost. With indignation, Orlov, Trainer [and] Severskii, Economist.

In this chapter, I take up the gauntlet thrown down by the scandalized babushka, physical trainer and socialist economist to answer their common indignant query: what’s the use of *Enchanted Island* and, extrapolating, what’s the use of enchantment? I ask after the inexplicable link between enchantment and plasticity that Orlov and Severskii sense but cannot name.

¹ Interview with Nadezhda Ivankovskaia, May 27, 2010.

² Interview with Tat’iana Koval’skaia, May 31, 2010.



Figure 1. The cast of *Enchanted Island* in the dressing room of the Theater of Mimicry and Gesture (left to right): Ivan Lesnikov, Boris Gorevoi, Ritta Zhelezova, Boris Basin, and Gennadii Skachkov.

This last query is provoked as much by the play as it is by Max Weber's famous nostalgic pronouncement in 1918 that "the increasing intellectualization and rationalization" of the West, and the growth of the modern state had resulted, in his mind and Friedrich Schiller's phrasing, in the "*disenchantment of the world.*" Gone are "the mysterious incalculable forces that come into play"; man's marvel at the unalienated phenomenal realm; those "ultimate and most sublime values" that once inhered in "public life"; that "pulsating [something] that corresponds to the prophetic *pneuma*, which in former times swept through the great communities like a firebrand, welding them together."³ Most grievable of modernity's collateral casualties, the ineluctable march progress had induced the more intimate side-effect of "disenchant[ing] and denud[ing] man's bearing of its] mystical but inwardly genuine plasticity."⁴

Weber's words prove pertinent to the present analysis not least of all as they anticipate the operative terms of the Soviet pantomime, but also, on a metatextual level, because they continue to define the terms of debate about modernity's disenchantment to this day, and, most importantly, because the enchanted event I offer for consideration now transpired in a culture so supremely 'scientified,' it might be said to bring Weber's bleak forecast to its fullest fruition. I am referring to the epoch of Soviet history retroactively known as "stagnation" [*epokha zastoia*], which corresponds to Leonid Brezhnev's conservative tenure as Communist Party Secretary from 1965-1985. In 1968, near the start of this dismal chronological stretch, the Russian tanks rolled into Prague and over utopia, killing it for a third and final time after its partial revivification by the Khrushchev cultural thaw and the aborted de-Stalinization efforts of the sixties.⁵ At this

³ Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays In Sociology*. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 129-156, at 155.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 139; 155.

⁵ Thomas Lahusen, "Review: Russian Literary Resistance Reconsidered: An Attempt of Friendly Slander," *The Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (Winter, 1994), pp. 677-681 at p. 679.

point, per Jürgen Habermas, “every glimmer of hope for the future had vanished”⁶ and the crushing political pessimism⁷ of the epoch of stagnation was setting in.



Figure 2. Bored Backstage: The play’s lovers Marta Grakhova and Anatolii Malov affect Stagnation-style ennui.

Soviet society—not to speak of the international left—entered a period of “widespread political disenchantment,”⁸ saturating everyday experience with a heavy mood of skepticism, irony,⁹ hopelessness and exhaustion. (Evgenii Kharitonov writes of a friend: “I am tired today because I was tired yesterday and tired yesterday because I was tired the day before.”¹⁰). “Stagnation,” rather than corresponding to a strict periodization describes this structure of feeling instead as it separated off from the previous era’s affect. (I defer to Raymond Williams’s concept here of “practices and patterns [that] are lived and experienced as a whole, [in a culture] in any particular period,” with tangible and intangible properties, “meanings and values as they are

⁶ Jürgen Habermas, “More Humility, Fewer Illusions,”—A Talk between Adam Michnik and Jürgen Habermas, *The New York Review of Books* vol. 1. XLI, No.6 [March 24, 1994]: 24.

⁷ This period was populated by the “pessimistic citizen” per Soviet historian Lewis Siegelbaum, “1973: The Pessimistic Citizen,” website *Seventeen Moments in Soviet History*, accessed online at <http://www.soviethistory.org/index.php?page=subject&SubjectID=1973pessimism&Year=1973&navi=byYear> on December 21, 2010.

⁸ Jeff Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 287.

⁹ Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythology of Everyday Life in Russia*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 25. “Whereas the sixtniks [shestidesiatniki] were romantic and optimistic, the octoderasts, the children of ‘stagnation,’ are skeptical, ironic, and disbelieving...They matured during the times of the Immortal Generalissimus Brezhnev, when the sixtniks fell silent...”

¹⁰ Evgenii Kharitonov, “Slezy ob ubitom i zadushennom.” In *Pod domashnim arestom*. Gleb Morev, ed. (Moscow: Glagol, 2005), 232.

actively lived and felt...., elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships.”¹¹)

As cold war historians concur, the name Stagnation diagnoses the state of the late-Soviet state, when its arteries had gelled into immovable gerontocracy, making inward plasticity of the personal and social orders unthinkable. Of course, “the moment we think of the world as disenchanted,” Dipesh Chakrabarty warns, “we set limits to the ways the past can be narrated.”¹² That contemporary scholars of socialism still cling to a dismal picture of those days self-fulfills the prophecy of our own historical moment. On account of its deliberate disenchanting during and after the cold war, the era is lost on us today as little more than totalitarian “nothingness,”¹³ the faint gasp of a failed alternative to the triumphant capitalist modernity in which we now all live.

Instrumentalizing the status of Kharitonov’s play as silent and lost, of a piece with a political period for which scholars are similarly a loss to describe, this analysis breaks the usual totalitarian silence surrounding Stagnation. It conjures up a counternarrative of late-Soviet enchantment—not to the exclusion of bureaucracy but because of it, not in sync with the Party-state’s ideal but with an unlikely dreamworld forged for a flickering instant by socialism’s silent others: the queer and the deaf, the unspeakable and the unspeaking, respectively. These subjects (or subject-positioned) featured in the preceding chapter are more fully fleshed out here, moving from the text of pantomime theory to the body of pantomime performance. Moving from theory to practice as I try to capture this strangely enchanted tale, I am nonetheless tripped up right away by the aporia at the heart of alterist historiography, as Weber and Chakrabarty predict. If, as they allege, disenchantment is itself an effect of academic thinking, which in turn sets the limits to scholarly description, how can we possibly “render this enchanted world into our disenchanted prose”?¹⁴ What then is the relationship between disenchantment and silence? And how can we narrate the enchantment of the past when it only appears to us as silence in the present?

To retrieve the misplaced plasticity of Soviet modernity, I turn self-consciously to Soviet ‘plastic culture’ itself, the silent performance style in which the speechless pantomime *Enchanted Island* was staged. Sexual alterity was silenced legally and socially in Kharitonov’s Moscow of the Sixties and Seventies. At this time, the deaf community, on the contrary, was not allowed to be silent, and suffered under an institutional imperative on Soviet citizens to speak (orally), the training for which occurred in the defectological classroom and carried over into deaf dramatic practice. In this context of compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory vocality, *Enchanted Island* allowed queerness and deafness to *speak as silence* through plastic movements that structured a position of queer-deaf spectatorship in the audience; while orienting the actor’s body onstage according to the lived specificities of queer and deaf experience.

Pantomime, in this instance, operated as a tactic of survival and subversion, affirmative-identity formation, and world-making (or re-making) for “sexual-deviants”

¹¹ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 132.

¹² Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 89.

¹³ Paulina Bren. *The Greengrocer and His TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2010), 6.

¹⁴ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 77

and “vocal-defectives.” Punning on the title, I consider the play a *ritual of re-enchantment* in its capacity to transform everyday attitudes, and invest the everyday (or “byt”) with positive creative value in itself. Part of this value, I argue, derives from the location of this pantomime in semi-official space, the state-supported deaf theater, for its convergence of multiple counterpublics who were able to embody—however ephemerally—a different way of being, as much conditioned by as transcendent of the Party’s prescriptive picture of the “radiant future.” The contingency of this location (or “wobble room,” to put it more colloquially and in closer alignment with the play’s own kinetics) makes it “plastic,” in my opinion, an avuncular antecedent to the “queer” that has been hedgily described in contemporary Western theory. The concept of plasticity in Kharitonov’s writing and stage practice, contoured here and in Chapter Three, is wary (like “queer”) of circumscription and definitional stability; this openness allows me to lay emphasis on the coalitional nature of the plastic/queer by contemplating the distinct utopian possibilities that emerge within and between spaces of alterity.¹⁵

I posit the queer-crip utopia of the play over and against the top-down utopia of Soviet socialism; and assert their organization according to disparate temporal logics. Unlike an official paradise always put off till tomorrow that mortgaged the now for the next generation of communist children,¹⁶ *Enchanted Island* directed its energies at a chronologically dense present tense, assuming what queer medievalist Carolyn Dinshaw envisions as “a *postdisenchanted temporal perspective*, one that opens up to an expansive now but...is shaped by a critique of teleological linearity...[that] rejects the necessity of revealed truth at the end of time or as the meaning of all time,”¹⁷ such as the one contained in the Communist *telos*. (The question of children and futurity are the cornerstone concepts of the coming two chapters on the camp.) The play and my belated documentation of it convey the “queer desire for history” and desire for a queer history Dinshaw describes; that is, “a history that is not straight,” which “requires ‘the rewiring of the senses’”¹⁸ to apprehend fully. The strategies Dinshaw deploys for doing time queerly figure crucially into the ensuing pages, wherein the canonical body of history

¹⁵ Carla Freccero appreciates queer for its “relative undefinability, its strategic usefulness as a term that in many situations can be said to elude definition. It is a term that, here, does have something to do with a critique of literary critical and historical presumptions of sexual and gender (hetero)normativity, in cultural contexts and textual subjectivities. It also has something to do with the sexual identities and positionalities, as well as the subjectivities, that have come to be called lesbian, gay, and transgender, but also perverse and narcissistic—that is, queer. At times, *queer* continues to exploit its productive indeterminacy as a word used to designate that which is odd, strange, aslant...ultimately, if [Freccero’s] book can be said to have a position on *queer*, it would be to urge resistance to its hypostatization, reification into nominal status as a designating entity, an identity, a thing, and to allow it to continue its outlaw work as a verb and sometimes an adjective.” Carla Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 5.

¹⁶ «Преодоление трудностей, причем любых, и необязательно бытовых, было лейтмотивом того времени и воспринималось как норма жизни. В советской идеологии настоящее ценилось гораздо меньше светлого будущего или героического прошлого. Настоящее нужно было «проскочить», перебороть, перетерпеть—ради будущего счастья детей и всего человечества. Идеологическое пренебрежение к настоящему и повседневному так или иначе отзывалось в интеллигентских представлениях о жизни.» Mariia Dubnova and Arkadii Dubnov, *Tanki v Prage, Dzhokonda v Moskve: azart i styd semidesiatykh* (Moscow: Vremia, 2007), 8.

¹⁷ Carolyn Dinshaw, Lee Edelman, Roderick A. Ferguson, Carla Freccero, Elizabeth Freeman, Judith Halberstam, Annamarie Jagose, Christopher Nealon, and Nguyen Tan Hoang, “Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion.” *GLQ* 13.2-3 (2007): 177-195 (my emphasis).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

(pun intended) is bent; the phenomenological priorities of “straight” scholarship are reshuffled (with the help of both critical queer and deaf/disability theories); we reinvest ourselves in the magical present of the past; and, so doing, reinhabit *hopefully* the staggering “political depression”¹⁹ of stagnation—the structure of feeling that suffused the time and place I consider and, in different ways, the time and place in which my considering occurs. This kind of “queer historical awareness” of the past’s multiplicity, encourages Dinshaw, enables us “to begin to imagine collective possibilities for a post-disenchanted—that is to say, queer—future.”²⁰

This is the tack performance studies scholar José Esteban Muñoz takes in *Cruising Utopia*, and which I take to heart herein: queerness as an “ideality” that has never existed, cannot properly exist, but “can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future.”²¹ Queer utopian thinking demands this kind of thick temporality, then, to re-conjure the shimmering potentiality nestled in *what has come* before for the sake of *what might come* (or *what we might make come*) before us anon and anew. This strategy of re-enchantment—reassessing the past to spellbind the present—is a queer gesture, patterned after Kharitonov’s gestures in their temporal and embodied instantiations. It is at once a backward and anticipatory affective modality, historical but not strictly historicizing,²² that angles slantwise onto the straight archive to suss out its silent stories: performances of subjectivity and sociality that brush against, in Muñoz’s evocative expression, the “stultifying temporal logic of a broken down present,”²³ and, so doing, slip outside the normative historicist’s (straight) line of view.

SILENT ARCHIVE, ENCHANTED REPERTOIRE

Because kernels of queer utopia inhere in the unlikeliest of places, a different sort of historiographic praxis is necessary, both in terms methodological and geographical, one that escapes the paradox of academic writing identified by Dipesh Chakrabarty of “render[ing] this enchanted world into our disenchanted prose.”²⁴ This chapter heeds the calls of elsewhere and otherwise by applying its unorthodox tools of excavation (about which more shortly) to a time and place, it bears noting, often eclipsed by contemporary queer theory: the nowhere-nowadays of the former Second World during the overwritten episteme of the cold war. By revisiting, I remind gesture to capture both Slavists and scholars of queer studies. It is all the more urgent, I think, to double-back to the scene of

¹⁹ I borrow the definition of “political depression” from the Chicago Feel Tank: “the sense that customary forms of political response, including direct action and critical analysis, are no longer working either to change the world or to make us feel better,” but that negative affects are nonetheless capable of generating utopian “sites of publicity and community formation.” Ann Cvetkovich, “Public Feelings,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106 (2007): 459- 468, at460.

²⁰ Carolyn Dinshaw, “Temporalities,” in *Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature: Middle English*. Paul Strohm, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 107-123 at p. 122.

²¹ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University, 2009), 1.

²² The distinction between the historical and strictly historicist I cull from Dinshaw, Chris Nealon and Roderick Ferguson in conversation. Dinshaw et al., “Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion.” *GLQ* 13.2-3 (2007): 177-195.

²³ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University, 2009), 12.

²⁴ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 77.

Soviet socialism since its retroactive framing as a failed experiment has contributed to the “dwindling force of utopia” in the contemporary political imaginary and correspondingly rendered “almost inconceivable” the consideration of “anything that looks vaguely different from [the] neoliberal project.”²⁵ Perhaps queer theory’s relative neglect of this vanished world symptomatizes its own genesis within the chronotope of neoliberalism, whose geographic and temporal inequities are in part reproduced as the invisible horizon of the literature.²⁶ This chapter offers a modest corrective, then: though it does not set as a primary object of analysis the here-and-now as such, it does take a cue from Muñoz and Kharitonov by mining the then-and-there for tactics of alternative world-making deployed by yesterday’s marginalized actors that might be creatively repurposed today in the service of a queer tomorrow. The re-envisioning of “vanished” worlds by means of what Carla Freccero has termed “fantasmatic historiography,” especially those worlds whose very vanishing diminished the force of utopia in the first place, seems an indispensable component of the queer hermeneutic project, one which supports this intervention into the Second World generally and into its archivally invisible minority cultures more particularly.

Amidst these layers of historical silence, I lay out the stakes of capturing a seemingly vanished event²⁷ from a vanished world by querying where we look for traces; and what the absence of a proper archive means for queer and deaf actors. This is the first move I make, and thereafter I proceed through and to enchantment in four movements—audience, event, theory and affect—to retrieve the momentary and, counter-intuitively, lingering effects of *Enchanted Island* as late-Soviet ephemera. As I do more extensively in the previous chapter, I align my intervention with the work of Muñoz here, too, and conceive of ephemera as archive and disappearance as queer evidence (as well as the ontology of performance, as Peggy Phelan famously introduced). I adapt my manner of reading the past from surface to depth, channeling my analysis inward to a case in which queerness persists less on the top of official history and more in the silences that

²⁵ While I was revising a draft of this chapter, the BBC radio program “Thinking Allowed” broadcast an episode devoted to the question of utopia. Show host Laurie Taylor spoke with Russell Jacoby, Professor of History at UCLA; Ash Amin, Professor of Social and Spatial Theory at Durham University; and Barbara Graziosi, Professor of at Classics at Durham, all of whom had participated in “Futures,” the lecture series on utopia organized by Durham’s Institute of Advanced Study. The guests engaged many of subthemes taken up by this chapter. Namely, Jacoby accounted for the “historical determinants” of actualized (nominally) utopian projects--Nazism and Stalinism--which are wrongly conflated with utopian thinking as a whole and have contributed to the “dwindling force of utopia” in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Amin noted how the attendant hegemony of market philosophy has rendered “almost inconceivable” the consideration of “anything that looks vaguely different from [the] neoliberal project.” Finally, the guests commented on the yoked dangers posed to utopian imagination and the possibility of enchantment as an essential ingredient of human experience. Laurie Taylor, “Utopia,” *Thinking Allowed*. BBC 4 (29 December 2010). <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00wr9q0>>.

²⁶ For a brief but stringent indictment of queer theory’s ethnocentrism, consult: Silvano Santiago, “The Wily Homosexual.” In *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism*, eds. Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé and Martin F. Manalansan, IV (New York: New York University Press, 2002). Though other essays in the *Queer Globalizations* anthology touch on the ways in which different political economies differentially shape queer theory, there is still tremendous work to be done here.

²⁷ This proposition writes against Peggy Phelan’s assertion that the ontology of performance is disappearance, and Marcia Siegel, who locates dance “at the vanishing point,” since it “disappears in the very act of materializing.” Siegel, *At the Vanishing Point: A Critic Looks at Dance* (New York: Saturday Review Press, 1973).

subtend it. This proves a particularly useful strategy in the context of a political culture like that of the late Soviet Union where the very existence of sexual alterity was denied even as homosexual acts were criminalized—a paradox to which Kharitonov himself was hip—which meant that the viability of queer lives became contingent on the effacement of their written traces.

But when all queerness seems swallowed up in the heteronormativity of mimetic history, the historian of alterity advisedly turns away from the archive and towards the body, to watch the way its movement reveals sediments of deviant sexual and gender performance. (I use the term “queer” capaciously for this case, as a somewhat promiscuous signifier loosely affiliating all such deviations from the dominant sex-gender system as they, in turn, map interestingly back onto other bodily differences like deafness, rather than naming only practitioners of homo-sex.) I must touch back on this other body of knowledge to ground my analysis, since I am tasked with imagining the world of the play itself, just as the plastic actors of *Enchanted Island* imagined and embodied other worlds. No recordings of the production exist—despite its eight-year run of sixty-six shows, the otherwise reliable cataloging of the deaf theater’s repertoire, and the more-or-less persistent presence of non-deaf pantomime in theater journals of the time. Though the practice and appreciation of pantomime was confined to avant-garde artistic circles and the unofficial intelligentsia, the deaf Theater of Mimicry and Gesture was by comparison popular with a broader Muscovite audience, particularly insofar as its repertoire clung more closely to the official dramatic canon, making the absence of documentation less readily explicable.

To compensate for what I present as a telling lacuna in cultural memory, one predicted in the previous chapter, a crucial part of my project in Chapter Four is descriptive. I construct my argument in part by attempting to reconstruct the *Enchanted Island* by means of the play’s twelve-page “libretto” (arguably written *after* the premiere),²⁸ and the dissertation on pantomime that Kharitonov defended at the State Institute of Cinematography in 1972, the artifact around which the last section pivoted. To gauge the public’s reception and reconstitute the horizon of Stagnation-era expectations, I read the responses inscribed in the theater’s guestbook (sixteen in all). I also supplement the written record with interviews I conducted with those deaf actors who were still alive in the summer of 2010, who are now in their 60s and 70s; whose health is now failing (the last I term I flag for future consideration); and who brought to our interviews the photographs of the play and sketches for costuming that they preserved in their personal collections, which embellish the ensuing pages of my dissertation.²⁹ All the same, these interviews, even when visually supplemented, still feel partial. Suffering

²⁸ “Libretto” is Kharitonov’s catachrestic name for the narrative description of the silent play’s action. Gennadii Mitrofanov, the play’s male lead, insisted that the libretto was an afterthought (Interview May 26, 2010). This is consequential insofar as it underscores the importance of open-endedness, process, and improvisation at the intended expense of narrative, with the teleological implications of plot.

²⁹ There are few photographs and no film recordings of the performance; no reviews of it in the otherwise prolific theater journals of the day; and no information about the play or its director in the central state theater archives. There are less than 10 seconds of rehearsal without Kharitonov in the film about the Theater of Mimicry and Gesture, tantalizingly entitled *Enchanted Island*. The director, Vladimir Levin, explained to me that he borrowed Kharitonov’s title for his film because the theater itself was a special pocket in official culture, its own “enchanted island” in the land of the Soviets (Interview May 28, 2010).

a loss in translation between spoken and signed Russian, sooner manual than oral history, they cannot account for a certain bodily surplus so essential to the event.

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An awareness of this inarticulable excess actually assists scholars who strive “to get back to the repressed speech” of the silent sorcerer, in whose apposite person Michel de Certeau embodies historical alterity.³⁰ To escape the paradox of “speak[ing] about a so-called ineffable experience which therefore cannot be spoken about” he recommends reading for “the ‘other’ traces” the sorcerer embeds in the “normalizing” discourses that mediate his speech through a “succession of silences... still marked by what they have eliminated, in order to be established as [the norm].”³¹ The babushka is a good place for us to start then, as her grumblings give away *Enchanted Island*’s more obvious departures from the dominant cultural script: the near-naked actors, the apparent pointlessness of a production more concerned with bodily plasticity than politically edifying plot.

At the same time, she lets slip her thwarted expectations for an evening at the Theater of Mimicry and Gesture, the first professional theater of the deaf in the world, wherein vocal speech—not sign language or silence—was the norm. The theater was famous for doing the classics of the ‘conversational’ canon, like Shakespeare and Schiller, in its trademark ventriloquist style, to which I devote my first chapter, but which warrants a quick reminder now. Deaf actors onstage lip-synced to voices supplied by emcees, often audiologists by profession, who sat inconspicuously in the front row of the house. When done successfully, the consummate effect resembled a dubbed film. Thus forbidden from being silent, the Soviet deaf were subject to what I have elsewhere called ‘compulsory vocality’: an institutional imperative to demonstrate the ways in which the state imparted its silent citizens with the vocal language that would integrate them into the speaking collective.³² As the explicit beneficiaries of state support and oralist “rehabilitation,” deaf actors were compelled to meticulously track their cultural progress under the Communist Party. Thus the ventriloquist style of the post-Stalin deaf theater dispersed official oralism from the stage and the classroom into other spaces like the archive, wherein “talkie” plays were more rigorously preserved for posterity than the few silent pantomimes like *Enchanted Island* that survive in personal if not institutional memories.³³ Ultimately, the deaf archive was doubly bound by this compulsory vocality and the compulsory heterosexuality that saturated Soviet culture in equal measure.

³⁰ Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*. Tom Conley, trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 251.

³¹ Ibid.

³² I describe the ideology of compulsory vocality, its institutionalization in oralist deaf pedagogy, and its implications for deaf cultural production, especially in the “talking” theater in “Sooner Speaking than Silent, Sooner Silent than Mute: Soviet Deaf Theater and Pantomime after Stalin,” *Theatre Survey*, 51.1 (May 2010): 5-31.

³³ After the theater’s golden age in the 1960s, the gaps in its archive grew: the deficit economy contracted the state’s subsidy of deaf cultural infrastructure in the 70s; much of the collection was consumed in a fire in the 80s; and the collapse of communism in 1991 totally decimated the state-theater’s budget. Interview with Nadezhda Ivankovskaia (May 27, 2010). There were a couple of other pantomime plays in TMG’s repertoire. Among those performed consistently, *Kaprichos* (1977), an original stage adaptation of Francisco Goya’s aquatint series, occupies a uniquely significant space in the archive, an exception

The “rara avis” in a mostly verbal repertoire, *Enchanted Island*’s refusal of speech alienated viewers who needed the meaning of the play spelled out for them in words that could literally be heard, who happened on the pantomime “accidentally,” hoping to see the deaf speak as a feat of socialist progress but at a loss when they encountered an entirely different scene.³⁴ But the very ambiguity of silence that appalled the babushka and the body trainer’s party of twelve attracted another set of theatergoers. Cutting across social lines of age, profession, and aural ability,³⁵ the play appealed only to those with avant-garde sensibilities, since “not everyone [was] able to understand [Kharitonov].” Those who “got” the play loved it: it was trumpeted as a new direction for the deaf theater, a sui generis event in Soviet aesthetics, with no precedent or equivalent in Moscow, not to speak of the rest of the USSR. “Not totally understood in its time,” it was an aesthetic menace to the communist hardliners of the older generation,³⁶ who regarded it as a show of beautiful senselessness.

The privilege of comprehension fell only to “the chosen”³⁷ few, in the appraisal of one actress—an elite cluster of counterpublics, whose eccentric members converged on the occasion of the gay director’s collaboration with the deaf troupe. Along with the deaf community and its allies, the play’s audience comprised the unofficial intelligentsia; the capital’s self-proclaimed apolitical counterculture or “beau monde”: aristocratic society, [mostly] hippies, artists, people of the artistic underground” (Koval’skaia and Petukhova 2010); and the stealth homosexual subculture, with which Kharitonov aligned himself in his own underground writing.³⁸ Their curious commingling was made possible by pantomime’s cultivation *vnye*, a concept coined by anthropologist Alexei Yurchak, which I more fully explore in the preceding chapter. To refresh the reader’s memory, *vnye* denotes a social space peculiar to late-socialism that fits neatly neither in nor outside officialdom but instead enjoys an ambivalent situation of support from and slight subversion of the state.³⁹ As at Moskvorech’e, the state house of culture where Kharitonov gave little girls lessons in his strange brand of movement, these milieus

explained by the play’s extremely positive reception at international pantomime festivals, which evidenced a different kind of progress made by the deaf under state socialism.

From the guestbook at the Theater of Mimicry and Gesture, I discovered that *Enchanted Island* was not only unpreserved for posterity, but unadvertised even when it was performed. Its production of few material traces explains in part its absence in the archive (guestbook entry of March 25, 1973).

³⁴ Interviews with Ritta Zhelezova and Tat’iana Koval’skaia on May 26 and 31, 2010, respectively.

³⁵ The guestbook entry of March 25, 1973 notes the presence of people from all “different ages and professions,” and the fact of the audience comprising “deaf, hard-of-hearing and hearing viewers.”

³⁶ Interview with Ivan Lesnikov (June 4, 2010).

³⁷ Interview with Ivankovskaia (2010).

³⁸ For more on the “homosexual subculture,” see Vladimir Kozlovskii. *Argo russkoi gomoseksual’noi subkul’tury: materialy k izucheniiu* (Benson, VT: Chalidze, 1986).

³⁹ See Victor Borovsky, “Russian theatre in Russian culture,” *A History of Russian Theatre*. Ed. Robert Leach and Victor Borovsky (New York: Cambridge University, 1999); and Anatoly Smeliansky, *The Russian Theatre After Stalin* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).



Figure 3. In a consummately *vnye* scenario, Kharitonov teaches a group of girl students how to move queerly, all under the stern and larger-than-life face of Lenin (upper right).⁴⁰

housed alternative cultures with “a quite different set of concerns” apart from the state, which evidenced the “creative and imaginative life”⁴¹ its occupants shared in the semi-private sociality of like-minded people known as *svoi*.⁴² Going over and against the state's expressed purposes for official space, deterritorialized milieus showed off the inward plasticity of a system supposed to be unbending.

The performing arts were generally in the zone of *vnye* at this time, and the internally slack regulation of the deaf theater in particular allowed for the efflorescence of its experimentalism. This was a point of attraction for unaffiliated directors like Kharitonov, who also drew on the techniques of silent expression from Aesopian drama and the unsanctioned eroticism of Russian ballet after Rudolf Nureyev in order to smuggle in non-Party-minded meaning. Fittingly, in this socially flexible setting, Kharitonov practiced a style of pantomime called ‘plasticity’ or the ‘plastic culture of the actor’ [*plasticheskaia kul'tura aktera*] which he had inherited from the modernist era by way of his undergraduate mentor at VGIK, Aleksandr Rumnev (1899-1965)—a lineage I detail in the third chapter. Kharitonov took and later taught Rumnev’s curriculum in “The Plastic Culture of the Actor” [*Plasticheskaia kul'tura aktera*] in the late 1950s and early 1960s at VGIK.

⁴⁰ This image comes from the personal collection of Aida Ziablikova, Kharitonov’s former pupil turned peer in the capital’s alternative arts scene. She remains deeply in love with him today.

⁴¹ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until it was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 132. Though, following Yurchak, all late-Soviet spaces were potentially deterritorialized to the extent that the constative dimension of any socialist speech act—no matter where the site of utterance—was labile. That said, this potential for subversive resignification was capitalized upon with comparative frequency in the cultural spaces this chapter describes. I am grateful to Serguei Oushakine for reasoning through this with me.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 103.

In the 1920s, Rumnev was at the helm of “a new generation of choreograph[ers]” who intended their ecstatic celebration of the male physique as erotic and even homoerotic. Though this subtext remained tacit, Rumnev’s style of movement became too risky to remain a public spectacle in the Stalinist era,⁴³ with the rising rhetoric against sexual deviance and the introduction of an anti-sodomy statute in 1933 that criminalized the “abnormal ‘use’ of the male body” by effeminate homosexuals.⁴⁴ The public policing of private sexual activity at this time was predicated on the legibility of an emergent gay body, its self-revelation through a repertoire of gender-transgressing gestures, which were readily on display at the modernist theater; silence simultaneously disappeared *and* sustained performances of sexual alterity throughout socialism.

By reinvigorating Rumnev’s gestures, Kharitonov reactivated modernism’s revolutionary gender and sexual imaginaries. In its silent double-coding, plastic culture was able to accommodate articulations of love and sexuality, sexual identity and affect that other areas of Soviet culture could not. And since homosexuality could never occupy an overt space in the Soviet Union’s violently heteronormative visual economy, queer *svoi* materialized in these less official sites while positions of queer spectatorship— independent of the sexual orientation of the spectator—emerged alongside. In other words, in one possible cathectic configuration, male viewers were granted temporary permission from pantomime as an “enchanting” and “sensual art” to appreciate the beauty of other male bodies.⁴⁵ The ‘shamefully naked’ cast of *Enchanted Island* went further than their strictly male predecessors by so blurring gender boundaries that the lines of erotic looking their bare bodies encouraged may have confused and even queerly crossed the eyes of the audience. The co-ed actors heightened this heady effect by donning identical cherubic wigs and matching fishnet body stockings. Decidedly Soviet in their fabrication (which I detail later), but more than likely conceived with fin-de-siècle excess in mind, these costumes were shot through with stagnation’s mythic investment in prerevolutionary modernism as a period that pulsed with precisely the sexual possibility that contemporary society lacked.⁴⁶ Most significantly, the persistent practice of plasticity meant that, though homosexuality was silenced as such, sexual alterity was never wholly inexpressible, even in the Soviet Union’s highly regulated economy of signs.

⁴³ Nicoletta Misler, “*Chelovek plasticheskii*”: *Katalog vystavki 21 fevralia – 30 apreliia 2000 g.* Moscow: Ministerstvo kul’tury Rossiiskoi Federatsii Gosudarstvennyi tsentral’nyi muzei im. A.A. Bakhrushina, 2000).

⁴⁴ Dan Healey, “The Disappearance of the Russian Queen, or How the Soviet Closet was Born.” In *Russian Masculinities in History and Culture*. Barbara Evans Clements, Rebecca Friedman and Dan Healey, eds. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 152-171, at 166.

⁴⁵ Exemplary in this respect are the comments of Mark Rozovskii from the recent documentary, *What is Pantomime?* “There were beautiful women [in pantomime], but there were also beautiful men. Grigor’ev and Garik Gots [of the Leningrad pantomime ensemble]— these are two very beautiful bodies. I am a man of traditional [sexual] orientation, but these people in their leotards evoked in me a genuine admiration of their extraordinary bodies. Of course, any one of the pantomime actresses was very erotic—pantomime is a very sensual art. It is an enchanting art of imagery.” Notice the anxious metonymic slippage from beautiful men to bodies, to the praise of female beauty and double disavowal of homosexuality; finally, any homoerotic feeling is displaced from content onto form: it is pantomime’s fault that a man of “traditional orientation” might be enchanted by the male physique. “Chto takoe pantomima?” *Kul’turnoi sloi* (Arkhivnyi televizionnyi nomer peredachi No. 35334), November 26 2007; <http://lentatv.ru/35334>.

⁴⁶ For possible sartorial allusions to pre-revolutionary costume consult the “Body Art” chapter in John E. Bowlt, *Moscow & St. Petersburg 1900-1920: Art, Life & Culture* (New York, Vendome Press, 2009).

PLASTIC PEOPLE ON AN ENCHANTED ISLAND

In front of an audience aware of its own flights from normative society, *Enchanted Island* reveled in the forms of alterity it found by defamiliarizing social and bodily norms. Its inceptive conceit of transubstantiation is motivated by the sorcerer's "[curiosity] to see beings created differently than he."⁴⁷ And in a complementary move, the palm trees of the first act rejoice at their first encounter, interlace their leaves and pull close in imitation of the human dancers in the cabaret where they are potted, since "neither [had] ever seen another of [its] kind."⁴⁸ Here and elsewhere, the play plays with mimicry and mimesis, as its characters confront the limits of emulation and embrace their similarity in difference. Supernatural beings become human, humans try on contradictory identities, crossing lines of gender, age, social class and so on. In and out of turn, they morph into inanimate objects, plants, then animals and back again. With an emphasis on the constancy of feeling in the face of physical non-identity, the play implies that there is neither an ideal style of body, nor any necessary connection between embodiment and emotional ties. Lonesome personalities like the palms come together in love to claim positive space in the play's visual field by forcing themselves into public view and defiantly finding beauty in their emergent and communing images.



Figure 4. Marta Grakhova and Tat'iana Petukhova sway together as a pair of lovelorn palm trees.

This message is most potent in the pantomime with the "invisible man," who languishes in solitude on a crowded street because he is silent, so no one can hear him, and invisible, so "no one can see him or know about his life."⁴⁹ Avoiding the kicks of

⁴⁷ Kharitonov, "Ocharovannyi ostrov," 377.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 379.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 380.

callous passers-by, the invisible man retreats inside the home of a married couple, who primp before the mirror as he enters. They step away, and the invisible man gingerly approaches in their stead, expecting to see his own reflection, but “dolefully draws away” when he does not.⁵⁰ A series of slapstick plot twists ensues, by the end of which the invisible man, covered head-to-toe in paint, places himself once more before the mirror, this time to scrutinize his own image “with awe” and “great happiness.”⁵¹ The woman after whom he chases in most other scenes flies away in her airplane-body, leaving him to lovingly contemplate his own self and body while the heterosexual subplot goes unconsummated. At its conclusion, this scene offers a position of spectatorship for audience members who see their own experience of social invisibility reflected on stage (which was, incidentally, how Kharitonov conceived of the existential distinction of his sodomitic “flowers” in the Soviet Union),⁵² who can enjoy the fantastic reversal of society’s castigating gaze; and for whom the looking glass has been an historically fraught locus, as with the deaf actors, whose childhood mirror-images would have been constantly accompanied by the defectologist mouthing perfect vocal speech for imitation by the ‘mute’ patient-pupil.



Figures 5. – 7. Deaf children logged countless hours before the mirror with defectologists, who trained them in the oralist techniques of vocalization, facial mimicry and gesticulation.⁵³

This subversive effect is not incidental but central, for Kharitonov places what he calls the “plastic I”—a silent other to the “speaking I”—at the heart of the pantomime theory he develops in his dissertation, defended the same year *Enchanted Island* debuted. (It seems no accident then that he produced his silent play in the deaf theater. Though silence there was not inevitable, given the deaf theater’s predominantly “ventriloquist” performing style, plasticity was a point of pride for the troupe.) His thinking shares a curious genealogy with the position on plasticity put forth by the early Soviet state. For reasons of obvious political utility, revolutionary scientists insisted that human nature could be made to fit the single mold of Marxist history endorsed by the Party—a hypothesis whose proving provided the basis for the entire “Soviet pedagogical

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² “Soviet Russia pretends we do not exist, and its Criminal Code decrees that our flower-like existence is against the Law, because the more visible we are, the nearer is the End of the World.” Yevgeny Kharitonov, “The Leaflet.” In *Out of the Blue*. Kevin Moss, ed. (San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1993).

⁵³ Reprinted from *Zhizn' glukhikh* [Deaf Life] 1 (1965) with permission.

establishment” thereafter.⁵⁴ On the bent backs of society’s “moral defectives,” that is, those “who might not otherwise be seen as hopeful material for the fulfillment of the social-educational ideal,”⁵⁵ these experiments gave shape to socialism by shaping what the socialist body could *and could not* do. The state physically drilled the plasticity out of its defectives, as their newly “proper military bearing” attested. No longer “slouching against the table or wall,” the modeled socialist man “[held] himself erect with ease and freedom, without feeling the need of props of any sort.”⁵⁶ When a subject stayed plastic, it flailed and failed to step in time with the forward march of Marxist progress. Plasticity was only an asset to the Party’s Pygmalion tale so long as it congealed into historical inevitability at some point, after which time, all traces of personal suppleness and social disorientation had to get lost. Indeed, “the active silencing of the past and a learned ‘forgetting’ were necessary for the production of [the] new [Soviet] identity,”⁵⁷ whose form was only fixed for the communist future by locking out the many other positions promised by man’s inwardly genuine plasticity. The state aimed with these experiments to use the subjective body’s inherent “ability to orient [its] self” in a “rationally organized and effective” collective body, in which “everything...assumes the form of discipline”: “[its] face..., its voice, its beauty, its mobility, its conviction.”⁵⁸ But not all bodies could line up with the Party line, nor did they all want to.

By his own admission, Kharitonov became an unpublishably queer writer because “a life of standing up straight and physical culture would not have worked out” for him.⁵⁹ This personal detail partly explains the striking ontological distinction he draws in his dissertation between plasticity and speech (rather than the readier binaries of speech and muteness, or plasticity and rigidity). Given the association of plasticity with historical exclusion, it makes sense that the plastic ‘I’ Kharitonov contours against a culturally-dominant speaking self has neither words nor verbally referent gestures at its disposal, and so communicates through “the immediate language of physical feelings or sensations,” best expressed by “losing equilibrium in the physical and emotional sense.”⁶⁰ By favoring ineffable experience over intelligible speech, Kharitonov privileges personalities and socialities considered in late socialism to be unspeakable (like homosexuality) or unspeaking (like deafness). In the context of the deaf theater, this reprioritization allows for subtle expressions of dissent from Soviet models of citizenship contained in the normative rhetorical body—the one created by properly “speaking Bolshevik”—while also carving out apertures in the unsaid dimension of everyday experience for utopian feeling beyond what he calls the “speaking world.”

EVERYDAY (RE) ENCHANTMENTS

⁵⁴ Sergeui Alex. Oushakine, “The Flexible and the Pliant: Organisms of Soviet Modernity.” *Cultural Anthropology* 19.3 (2004): 392-428, at 411.

⁵⁵ Anton Makarenko, *The Road to Life: An Epic of Education* (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1951 [1935]), 51.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 343-4.

⁵⁷ Oushakine, “The Flexible and the Pliant,” 413-14.

⁵⁸ Anton Makarenko, *Learning to Live: Flags on the Battlements*. Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1953 [1938], 245-6; 255.

⁵⁹ Kharitonov, *Pod domashnim arestom*, 295.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 441.

The everyday or *byt* (hereafter unitalicized) forms a dense ideational node in Soviet politics and Russian thought writ large, particularly, explains Svetlana Boym, in “the opposition between *byt*, everyday existence (everyday routine and *stagnation*), and *bytie* (spiritual being)...[T]he early revolutionaries [...], used] *byt* to designate the reign of *stagnation* and routine, of daily transience without transcendence, whether spiritual artistic or revolutionary,”⁶¹ and launched an attack on staid styles of quotidian life.⁶² Sympathetic with these political actors, the artistic avant-garde felt its attempts to reinvent everyday existence inexorably stymied by *byt* itself, moving Roman Jakobson, for one, to denounce *byt* as “the stabilizing force of an immutable present, overlaid... by a *stagnating slime*, which stifles life in its tight, hard mold.”⁶³ Even as subsequent shifts in Soviet political attitude toward *byt* transpired—from the late-Stalinist return to a cozy, quasi-bourgeois ideal⁶⁴ to the Khrushchev regime’s concentration on the domestic sphere and soft good production—the everyday remained freighted down with a decidedly negative epistemological baggage. During the Thaw and Stagnation, the term circulated even more pointedly as a “codeword” for the corrosive realm of femininity and family, according to literary scholar Benjamin Sutcliffe; and *byt*’s status as “an ontological dead zone” consolidated around its “banality, reduced scope, [and] ateleological time,”⁶⁵ that is, qualities definitionally at odds with the grand aspirations of Communist Party utopians. Between Jakobson’s contemporaneous and symptomatic appraisal, and Boym’s retrospective culturological view, *byt* emerges as stagnation itself, doubly inert, it follows, during the epoch of Stagnation, when the utopian dream is finally mired beyond the point of extraction in the deficiency of the everyday.

A thorn in the side of Soviet social engineering,⁶⁶ *byt* was at once the prime target of ‘ideological correction’ and an unmatched source of “so many deviations from [the socialist] utopian construct.”⁶⁷ In part, *byt* was thought to frustrate the loftier aspirations of *bytie* for its boundedness to the body, to a nagging “*telesnost*”⁶⁸ or corporeality, that was, paradoxically, perceived equivalent to “immobility and a threat to meaning.”⁶⁹ This equation of *byt* with the immobile body misses the slipperiness of everyday movements between materiality and transcendence, the inherent “utopian rebelliousness”⁷⁰ of *byt* that this chapter seeks to recover in the culture of S/stagnation. (Scholars have recently

⁶¹ Svetlana Boym, *Common Places*, 29 (my emphasis).

⁶² *Ibid.*, 29.

⁶³ Roman Jakobson, “On the Generation That Squandered Its Poets,” in *Language in Literature*, ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1987), pp. 273-300, at 277.

⁶⁴ On the return to cozy *byt* and the “embourgeoisement” of late-Stalinist culture in the post-war forties and early fifties, see Vera S. Dunham, *In Stalin’s Time: Middle Class Values in Soviet Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

⁶⁵ Benjamin Sutcliffe, *Engendering Byt: Russian Women Writers and Narratives of Everyday Life, 1962-2001*, Ph.D. Dissertation. (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh: 2004), 32.

⁶⁶ Writes Sutcliffe, “the quotidian [is thought to frustrate] meaningful human endeavors,” and is “be a barrier to *bytie*.” *The Prose of Life: Russian Women Writers from Khrushchev to Putin* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 8.

⁶⁷ Boym, *Common Places*, 33.

⁶⁸ Sutcliffe, *Prose of Life*, 5. Sutcliffe notes that “the gap between *byt* and *bytie* reiterates the Eastern Orthodox separation of body and soul ” (8), rather than the (Western) Cartesian dualism, though they are deceptively isomorphic.

⁶⁹ Sutcliffe, *Prose of Life*, 9.

⁷⁰ Sutcliffe paraphrasing Maurice Blanchot’s ideas about the everyday in *Prose of Life*, 9.

undertaken to rehabilitate byt, rechristened “prosaics,” as a site of protest against the “semiotic totalitarianism” of a society’s *grands récits*.⁷¹) Precisely by means of stagnant bodies in motion, Kharitonov’s pantomime mobilizes enchantment in everyday ways.

The concept of enchantment I derive from Kharitonov’s theory and stage practice converges with those put forth by other contemporary scholars writing against Weber’s dismal depiction of the twentieth century. For social scientists Richard Jenkins and Jane Bennett, (re) enchantment is an effect of everyday, embodied experience that simultaneously exceeds it—corporeal, quotidian, and then some. Jenkins contends that, “Enchantment conjures up, and is rooted in, understandings and experiences of the world in which there is more to life than the material, the visible or the explainable,” and “in which the quotidian norms and routines of linear time and space are only part of the story.”⁷²

Similarly, in her monograph on enchantment, Bennett places special stock in quotidian practice as productive of wonder, arguing that, “To be enchanted is to be struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives amid the familiar and the everyday.”⁷³ Her book actively catalogues ways that the (post) modern pulses with potentiality for affective-cum-ethical reworkings of cynicism and “cold” rationality. “Enchantment does coexist with despair,” she concedes, but “somehow it remains an existential actuality. Enchantment of existence, that energizing and unsettling sense of the great and incredible fact of existence, reflects a stubborn attachment to life that most bodies seem to possess.” The rootedness of enchantment in everyday bodies is crucial for Bennett, who proposes this fleeting state as a phenomenological category. At once, enchantment creates the “background sense of being that informs daily life,”⁷⁴ including the space in which bodies move. At the same time, everyday bodies act on this background, activate its enchanted potentiality, by moving differently, performing the kind of reordering (“unstraightening,” dis/re-orienting) of time, space and sociality that Jenkins describes above. In a vocabulary combining Russian formalism with Deleuzian postmodernism, Bennett loosely locates enchantment in “a making strange, or ‘deterritorialization’ of bodily experience, a disruption of the usual habits of posture, movement, facial expression, voice, etc.” Enchantment, she explains, entails “twist[ing] and tweak[ing] those usual habits.”⁷⁵

The kinds of enchanting tactics Bennett discerns in the everyday body were the crux of Kharitonov’s pantomime as a de-straightening device, as the actors of the deaf theater remember it. What they named his uniquely “everyday plasticity” [*bytovaia plastika*] drew out the bodily rhythms of byt in space and time, and, so doing, transvalued byt into aesthetic experience in its own right, rather than its obstacle or opposite. This is what sharply distinguished his plastic method from the kind of over-stylized and highly codified “pure pantomime” [*chistaia pantomima*] practiced by Marcel Marceau and his

⁷¹ Morson, “Prosaics in Anna Karenina,” *Tolstoy Studies Journal*, 1.1 (1988): 10.

⁷² Richard Jenkins, “Disenchantment, Enchantment and Re-Enchantment: Max Weber at the Millennium,” *Max Weber Studies* 1 (2000), pp. 11-32, at 29.

⁷³ Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossing, and Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 4.

⁷⁴ Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, 159-160.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

Russian epigones (including Il'ya Rutberg and TMG's own Gennadii Mitrofanov).⁷⁶ Kharitonov's was "not pantomime," the actors insisted, "but habitual [*obychnoe*], quotidian [*bytovoe*] activity. Without words. With the eyes, with movements."⁷⁷ "Quotidian [*bytovoe*], simply natural, as in life, not excessive. Simple. A man walks out, for instance. Ah! I despair. In [other] pantomime it's excessive [*chereschur*]. The internal is communicated through the eyes here. Everything through expression [*vyrazhenie*]. Naturally. Enchantment and then disenchantment [*Ocharovanie, a potom razocharovanie*]."⁷⁸

Under his open-ended direction, the actors of *Enchanted Island* made strange the most basic of their bodily habits, two of which—walking and waiting—will occupy the focus of the coming paragraphs. Kharitonov entreated them to manipulate the time and space of these movements, protract the period and the scale of their enactment and experience, in order to render visible the otherwise unnoticed kinetics of *byt*. This was crucial to his approach, inasmuch as *byt* otherwise remains under the perceptual radar; as Soviet semiotician Iurii Lotman surmises:

Byt is the ordinary flow of life in its real and practical forms. It is the things that surround us, our habits and everyday behavior. *Byt* surrounds us like air and, like air, is only noticed when it is spoiled or in short supply. We notice the peculiarities of others' *byt*, but our own escapes us—we are inclined to consider it "just life," the natural norm of practical existence. *Byt* is thus always located in the realm of practice; it is above all the world of things.⁷⁹

To summarize, *byt* is the world of matter, made up of bodies and objects; it is also the process of materialization, I will argue (with recourse to Judith Butler), through which bodies come to achieve the appearance of "ordinary flow" and look like "just life" by citing "habits and everyday behavior" apprehended as "the natural norm" in Russian society. *Byt*'s seeming fluidity belies an easy disruptibility and predisposal to spoilage at different times and between different people on which Lotman remarks. Thus its naturalness is a semblance, its normativity precarious, and derived through the force of diffuse repetition. Like Butler's performative, *byt* is the aggregate of "ritualized repetition[s]" that "not only produce but also regulate various bodily beings."⁸⁰

EVERYDAY PLASTICITY / BENDING BODILY IMAGINARIES

⁷⁶ This distinction was made at my first interview with Nadezhda Ivankovskaia and reiterated at every subsequent interview, both in sign and physical demonstration. Though the deaf actors were rightfully at a loss for signs when I interviewed them about their *plastika* (I say rightfully inasmuch as *plastika* of this type does not aspire to one-to-one verbal conversion), they did demonstrate the difference between theirs and other schools of movement, noting, at the same time, that *plastika* varies from one performer to the next. Scholars of deaf theater and culture more generally have attempted to describe the specificity of deaf *plastika*—and in some cases, *plastika* as the specificity [*spetsifika*] of deaf stage practice, per Ivankovskaia especially.

⁷⁷ Interview with Tat'iana Koval'skaia.

⁷⁸ Interview with Koval'skaia and Tat'iana Petukhova.

⁷⁹ Iurii Lotman, *Besedy o russkoi kul'ture: byt i traditsii russkogo dvorianstva (XVIII-nachalo XIX veka)*. St. Petersburg: Iskusstvo-SPB, 1994), 10.

⁸⁰ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), x.

The unstated consequence of Kharitonov's everyday plasticity is to disrupt the normative bodily practices that make up byt, and thereby act on both the shape (or morphology) of the "natural" body "ordinary" byt contours, as well as the shape of byt itself. By means of this methodology of disruption and defamiliarization, new forms of embodied subjectivity (or "personality," in Kharitonov's vocabulary), new rituals of embodiment, become available to the plastic actor in the scope of a resultantly expanded "morphological imaginary." Though morphological imaginary is a psychoanalytic term I borrow from Butler, I hope to demonstrate its utility to a verbal exegesis of Kharitonov's silent method. In my quick distillation, Butler posits in *Bodies that Matter* that, "the materiality of the body is not to be taken for granted, for in some sense it is acquired, constituted, through the development of morphology."⁸¹ By this, she means that the body's disambiguation (or "phantasmatic partitioning") into discrete parts invested with certain hierarchized significance is not inevitable or necessarily desirable for many subjects as it stands, but culturally constructed and, as such, incrementally transmutable. She undertakes a feminist reassessment of the Lacanian scheme of the body, in which the phallus/Phallus occupies the ambivalent position of "[signifying] the penis" *and* signifying signification itself. This logic that collapses the penis and phallus (phallogocentrism) is not particular to Lacan but underwrites the dominant heterosexual order.

Butler reminds her reader of "the very plasticity of the phallus" that Lacan inconsistently glosses over, "the way it exceeds the structural place to which it has been consigned by the Lacanian scheme, the way in which that structure, to remain a structure, has to be reiterated and, as reiterable, becomes open to variation and plasticity."⁸² Its dependence on reiteration "opens [it up] to resignification" and "subversive repetition,"⁸³ the possibility of which she illustrates through the figure of the lesbian phallus. "To speak of the lesbian phallus," to attach signifying power to another part of the body, "is simply to promote an alternative *imaginary* to a hegemonic imaginary and to show, through that assertion, the ways in which the hegemonic imaginary constitutes itself through the naturalization of an exclusionary heterosexual morphology."⁸⁴ Though the lesbian phallus offers an especially potent challenge to normative masculinist morphology, Butler urges us to "consider that 'having' the phallus can be symbolized by an arm, a tongue, a hand (or two), a knee, a thigh, a pelvic bone,"⁸⁵ and so on, all of which force the resignification of the body and the attendant reconstitution of embodied subjectivity.

Kharitonov's stage practice seizes upon and makes primary the very plasticity that Butler detects as always latent in normative morphology. Like Butler after him, he is interested in alternative imaginaries of the body, new topographies of pleasure and signifying power in its parts—most obviously, by relocating the site of spectacular meaning-making from the mouth to other corporeal locations like the hands, the eyes, the

⁸¹ Judith Butler, "The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary," in *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 57-91 at 69.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 89.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 89-90.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 88. The special force of the lesbian phallus lies in its pointed challenge to Lacan's conflation of having and being in the case of the male phallus.

solar plexus, and so on. By de-forming the normative body, he anticipates the emergence of novel, non-templatic subjectivities. As Alexander Samoilo, his protégé from the conceptual rock group Last Chance [*Poslednii shans*] (and the self-appointed guardian of Kharitonov's performance archive), explained to me, "the goal of Zhenya's directing was to form not only the identity [*lichnost'*] of the actor [in his role] but his identity as a person [*chelovek*]." ⁸⁶ (The translation of *lichnost'* as "identity" here is catachrestic, since Kharitonov's exercises stress the inherent fluidity of conceptions of self, achieved, incidentally, through bodily fluidity; this *lichnost'* is decidedly not self-identical over time and space but temporally inconsistent and spatially indiscrete, continuous with other selves in their materiality.) In its collective realization, this proposition is fundamentally utopian: moving the body differently, reshaping its materiality, opens up shared and unforeseen morphological imaginaries. The cumulative result is not insignificant either: the stagnant everyday, with its staid and insensate identities, is reinvigorated, experienced in its immediacy, as a plastic world re-populated with plastic people and things.

In order to get to this goal of undoing automatized forms of selfhood, actors participated in warm-up exercises [*razminka*] designed to "shut off [rational] consciousness." As soon as that happens, according to "one of Zhenya's postulates," "your body begins to intimate the incredible possibilities of its organism...we already won't have a single template or complex or standard. We have the emergence of new forms and new qualities of capability--of the organism of the actor and the director, and generally of a new theater." ⁸⁷ Samoilo offered me the following example, telling in its simplicity, more precisely, its intervention into the simplest, most basic forms of mundane movement. "We have in our head a certain template of movement," he began. "We have a template of a situation. [But] as soon as we begin to depart from the standards that we have in our head, we begin to create. For instance, Zhenya had us do this one exercise. [impersonating Kharitonov:] 'You have to do one hundred different kinds of walking styles [*pokhodok*].' " After a while of walking in different ways, from the most personally-habitual to the experimental, "the brain [*mozg*] stops working...and then the muscular apparatus begins to work. That is a fantastic thing!" ⁸⁸ Walking, the *bytovoe* movement par excellence, so easily cast to the wayside of consciousness, has the

⁸⁶ Цель его режиссуры была формировать не только личность как актер но и личность (как человек). Interview with Aleksandr Samoilo (June 8-9, 2010). Here "identity" is a poor substitute for the Russian *lichnost'*, even one that contradicts the conceptual thrust of Kharitonov's exercise, which was to undo extant ideas of identity, and replace them with fluid notions of material, non-discrete selfhood or subjectivity, we might say, making use of the lexicon of Western postmodernism.

⁸⁷ Как только выключаешь свое сознание твое тело начинает подсказывать неименованные возможности своего организма. Чем мы занимались? Мы занимались отключением анализа со стороны головы. И как только это отключается, у нас уже не будет ни одного шаблона ни одного комплекса, ни одного стандарта. У нас будет возникновение новых форм и нового качества возможности актера организма и режиссера и вообще нового театра. Вот это один из постулатов Жени. ... Interview with Aleksandr Samoilo (June 8-9, 2010).

⁸⁸ У нас в голове есть некий шаблон движения. У нас шаблон развогной речи. У нас шаблон ситуации. Как только мы начинаем уходить от стандартов которые у нас в голове, мы начинаем творить. И например, мы делаем...такие у Жени было упражнение. Надо эти сделаете мне сто походов разных. Первая походка -- как мы ходим. Вторая -- такая. Человек, благодаря этому, уже мозг не работает. Первый десять подходов... У тебя начинаешь вспоминать делай такие делай такие... а потом начинается работать мышечный аппарат. Вот это фантастическая вещь. Interview with Aleksandr Samoilo (June 8-9, 2010).

ability in this instance to invert Jakobson's axiom: making by a *destabilizing* force of a *highly* mutable present that *liberates* life (and living things) *from* its *loose plasticity*.



Figure 8. Grakhova cross-dressed (as much as possible in these costumes) as a military commander with male soldiers in tow.

Walking differently alters the way we see the world, as Viktor Shklovskii notes, at the same time that it manifests a different worldview, as Russian-gesture specialist Oksana Bulgakowa asserts. “Soviet walking [becomes] more liberated in the fifties,” and “[releases] tension” in the sixties and afterward. In particular, “the liberation of the youthful body is perceived as an alternative to mass behavior and demonstrates that body language can free the body from the prescribed social standards.” Even still, in the culturally-corporeally laxer period of post-Stalinism, walking Soviet “bodies bear witness to the process of civilization; they are a result of upbringing and training. The backs are straight and balanced. People don’t waddle or shuffle their feet.”⁸⁹ As the actors demonstrated for me, shuffling, waddling, and off-balance movement were at the core of their plastic repertoire. Recognizing these norms, the members of Kharitonov’s studios embodied them in such exaggeration, that they were able to break with them and ultimately assume unexpected and excessive shapes with their bodies that forced “the ordinary flow of life” to veer from its usual course, bringing new objects into view and thereby bringing into being a new worldview.⁹⁰ It seems no coincidence that

⁸⁹ Oksana Bulgakowa, *Factory of Gestures: Body Language in Film* (Palo Alto: PPMedia and Stanford Humanities Lab, 2008).

⁹⁰ For a consideration of the ways what we apprehend constitutes our worldview, at the same time as it reveals our epistemological orientation to the world, see Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

Kharitonov's plasticity acts on everyday gait given the significance of stride to queer semiotics, an issue I touch on by means of Munoz's walking body in the preceding chapter.

WAITING FOR: THE LINE

One of the most imperceptible but pervasive aspects of byt through which a distinctly socialist subject took shape was the "temporal order" unique to socialism, with a "[notion] of person and activity proper to it,"⁹¹ that anthropologist Katherine Verdery interestingly adumbrates in the concept of "étatization." The state "seized time" through "the [socialist] body, the site of many possible uses of time, only some of which [could] be actualized."⁹² This seizure was felt acutely in the seventies, at which point, she quotes Mikhail Gorbachev, "the country began to lose momentum...Elements of stagnation... began to appear...A kind of 'braking mechanism' affect[ed] social and economic development...The inertia of extensive economic development was leading to an economic deadlock and stagnation."⁹³ "Time was implicated in this scarcity" of goods, and socialist bodies were caught up in co-constituted "economies of shortage,"⁹⁴ the combined consequence of which was the "astounding immobilization of bodies that stopped the time contained in them, rendered them impotent, subtracted them from other activities by filling up all their time with a few basic activities,"⁹⁵ foremost among them--waiting in line. In the "chronotope of the line,"⁹⁶ typified by *intransience* without transcendence (to paraphrase Boym), "bodies were transfixed, suspended in a void that obviated all projects and plans but the most flexible and spontaneous."⁹⁷

Peremptorily frustrating forms of sociability unsanctioned by the state at the foundation of "people's self-conceptions," from the familial to the overtly political, the line simultaneously gave rise to new and plastic permutations of bodies in time and space together, which in turn occasioned new and adaptive styles of socialist subjectivity. Acquiescence to étatization was, after all, but one possible response. Citizens could also resist the state seizure of time in thought and in practice by "withdrawing for purposes other than those proposed from above."⁹⁸ As Vladimir Sorokin's novel *The Queue [Ochered]*, 1982-1983] makes clear, this could happen through the very act of waiting, wherein the line as an impediment to the future fulfillment of desire could be reconceived in the minds of socialist actors as something desirable in itself. It could be a "waiting *with* rather than waiting *for*. A waiting without the anxiety of forward movement, without projection."⁹⁹

⁹¹Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 37.

⁹²Ibid., 40.

⁹³Mikhail Gorbachev quoted in *ibid.*, 36.

⁹⁴Ibid., 42-3. Without recourse to Verdery, Benjamin Sutcliffe also comes to the same concept of the "shortage of time," for women especially, in the post-Soviet period (Sutcliffe, *Engendering Byt*, 41).

⁹⁵Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?*, 46.

⁹⁶Sutcliffe, *Engendering Byt*, 42.

⁹⁷Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?*, 49.

⁹⁸Ibid., 41.

⁹⁹Lynda Hart, *Of All the Nerve: Deb Margolin Solo* (London: Cassell, 1999), 8. Here I steal Hart's pronouncement on Margolin's movement. For more on Soviet waiting, see Mikhail Epstein's essay, "Russo-Soviet Topoi" in *The Landscape of Stalinism: The Art and Ideology of Public Space*, 277-206.

Since the sine qua non of the line is its teleological linearity, its directedness at a definite goal, the attainment of which swallows up as subordinate the activity of waiting, then to think of the time in line as other than lost, and prioritize the act of lingering a little longer, is to engage with a different construction of temporality altogether. Looping the line back onto itself in a circle/circuit of desire for the present opens up it up to moments of enchantment. As Jenkins relevantly conjectures, “if one of the defining aspects of disenchantment was the rationalization of space and time into straight lines, enchantment and re-enchantment represent its subversion.”¹⁰⁰ This palpating of possibility undercuts Verdery’s dismal reading of the scene. “As [socialist] bodies were forced to make histories not of their choosing” through étatisation, she surmises, “they experienced daily the illegitimacy of the state to whose purposes their bodies were bent,”¹⁰¹ and for whose sake their bodies bent away from each other in “[attenuated] sociability.” In Kharitonov’s more hopeful play, those same bodies bent back toward each other, elongating their limbs *slowly* to create enchanting scenarios of sociability the state could never have predicted so as to prevent.

Against the state’s “hurry up and wait,” *Enchanted Island* followed a reverse tempo of wait and decelerate, guided by the plastic principle that naturalized, mundane movement, when slowed, makes itself an object of contemplation, by means of which the immanent experience of materiality is restored to the moving actor. Viktor Shklovskii articulated something like this formalist-cum-phenomenological proposition about the function of artistic deferral specifically (but not exclusively) in literature with the following, well-fitting metaphor: “Art is not a march set to music, but rather a walking dance to be experienced or, more accurately, a movement of the body, whose very essence it is to be experienced through the senses.”¹⁰² According to Shklovskii, the prosaic text and the prose of life “fades and does not leave even a first impression” because one’s engagement with the everyday and its objects is “automatized” or “habitualized,” forcing the objects of our perception to “[fade] away,” making “life [fade] into nothingness, as if [it] had never been.”¹⁰³ This is the purpose of art (like a walking dance): “to return sensation to our limbs, to make us feel objects, to make a stone feel stony,” which requires a “long and ‘laborious’... perceptual process,” possessed of “a purpose all its own [which] ought to be extended to the fullest.”¹⁰⁴ The end result of art’s “lingering” on everyday bodies and objects is a renewed connection of the perceiving subject to its own sensate materiality and to the material world holistically, an awareness of one’s “continuity” with the object.¹⁰⁵

Epshtein particularizes Soviet spatiality by its “striking interrelationship between the rarefaction [*razrezheniie*] and condensation [*sgushcheniie*]” in terms that are applicable to the island’s time-space continuum (279).

¹⁰⁰Richard Jenkins, “Disenchantment, Enchantment and Re-Enchantment: Max Weber at the Millennium,” *Max Weber Studies* 1 (2000), pp. 11-32, at 24.

¹⁰¹ Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?*, 56.

¹⁰² “искусство... конечно, не марш под музыку, а танец-ходьба, которая ощущается, точнее-- движение, построенное только для того, чтобы оно ощущалось.” Viktor Shklovskii, *O teorii prozy* (Moscow: Izdat. “Federatsiia,” 1929), 33. English from Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*. Translated by Benjamin Scher (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), 22.

¹⁰³ Ibid.,

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. Poetry accomplishes this as a “decelerated, crooked” [*заторможенной, кривой*] form of speech.

¹⁰⁵ Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, 12.



Figure 9. All swallowed up in fishnet, it is difficult to distinguish between the scenery of the stage and the gendered bodies of the actors performing on it; left to right, Gennadii Mitrofanov, Anatolii Malov, and Tati'ana Petukhova.

In Kharitonov's hands, the gesture that would only occupy a moment of "real life"--a "reaction of astonishment before beauty," for instance--"is extended and amplified"¹⁰⁶ [*prodlena i ukрупnena*] on the stage as part of a methodology of "prosaic plasticity" [*povsednevnaia plastika*],¹⁰⁷ intended antidotally to the "gesture of the speaking world." "This [latter] kind of gesture"--formed through *habitus* and custom, e.g., curtsying--"has an effaced etymology, comprising its sensible content, ... long ago eviscerated in its everyday employment as a formal gesture of etiquette. It is precisely this effaced etymology, this bodily content [*telesnoe sodержanie*], which must return in [the case of pantomime] to a like gesture."¹⁰⁸ Slackened speed, Kharitonov reckons, dehabitualizes everyday movement and replenishes its capacity for immediate sensation, affective and phenomenological; whereas "non-immediacy, non-deceleration, and unreflectiveness weigh the pantomime actor down in pent-up feeling [*chuvstva*]."¹⁰⁹ Deceleration of the everyday offered the plastic subject of *Enchanted Island* a chance not only to re-experience itself in the world, but also to relish that experience, and relate to it with renewed wonder. (Bennett arrives at the same conclusion, contending that, "One of the

¹⁰⁶ Kharitonov, "Pantomima," 446.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 448.

¹⁰⁸ У такого жеста есть стершая этимология, составляющая его чувственное содержание, разумеется, давно выхолощенное в обыденном употреблении как формальный жест...Именно эта стершая этимология, это телесное содержание и должно возвращаться в нашем случае подобному жесту. (ibid.,444).

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 448

ways that enchantment works is by slowing down or speeding up the usual tempo of something, as when dancers' movements are temporarily frozen...¹¹⁰)

Dense with sense in its bivalency (emotional and proprioceptive), the activity of waiting avails itself to Kharitonov's prosaic plasticity; it produces "endless movements of the body in the passive voice," "a measured dance of languor [*razmerenyi tanets tomleniia*]," "an infinity of languor [*beskonechnost' tomleniia*]" even, because, unlike "ordinary action," its motions are "unfinished," "not directed at anything" but "a certain exit of the body into movement."¹¹¹ The attention to embodied action in the "plastic world," then, shifts to the present process of its enactment rather than its future objective. As a result, the durative non-event of pining can become an aesthetic end in itself. By retuning attention and emotional tonality, something like ritual waiting (as what happened in Stagnation's symbolic lines) is reconfigured as a ritual of re-enchantment. Typically, ritual waiting, as Barry Schwarz describes it, "serves [to] underscore the social distance between those who wait and whoever is responsible for the waiting."¹¹² In this revised scenario of deceleration and deferral, waiting does not attenuate sociability but instead intensifies intimate interactions between waiting subjects and their objects. "Perhaps in these moments of communal, almost loving rest, when the flesh stops and the soul pauses, we come together, at attention and relieved, to feel utopia. In these moments," muses Jill Dolan, "we feel the simultaneity of time; we revel in the 'now.'"¹¹³

WAITING *WITH*: THE LADIES

Though tableaux of beautiful boredom and lazy extemporizing abound in *Enchanted Island*, I examine the brothel scene as exemplary of the aesthetics of waiting. This scene merits our attention inasmuch as it does *not* appear in the retroactively written libretto, but was sufficiently memorable for the actors to motivate multiple re-dramatizations during our interviews. Kharitonov may have strategically omitted this section, though it is hard to say, given that the circumstances surrounding the script's post factum composition have not been recorded. That said, one can safely conclude that the positive depiction of prostitution would have gone against the grain of the dominant socialist aesthetic of the time, even at this epochal point of its moral and formal lightening up.¹¹⁴

A moment of the brothel episode was documented in a personal photograph that its subjects shared with me, in which Tat'iana Koval'skaia, Tat'iana Petukhova, and Ritta

¹¹⁰ Bennett, *Enchantment of Modern Life*, 127.

¹¹¹ Kharitonov, "Pantomima," 457. These are the qualities of gesture Kharitonov admired in the nearly silent films of Sergei Paradzhanov. See Chapter 3 for a more explicit commentary on the connection between their plastic aesthetics.

¹¹² Barry Schwarz, *Queuing and Waiting: Studies in the Social Organization of Access and Delay* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 102.

¹¹³ Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*, 59.

¹¹⁴ Though it is outside the scope of the present analysis, the central place of the fallen woman and the redeemed prostitute in Russian literature and culture have been discussed extensively. For seminal treatments of the subject, see Olga Matich, "A Typology of the Fallen Woman in Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature," *American Contributions to the Ninth International Congress of Slavists (Kieve, 1983)*, vol. 2 (*Literature, Poetics, History*), ed. Paul Debreczeny (Columbus, OH: Slavica, 1983), 325-43; and Laurie Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters: Prostitutes and Their Regulation in Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

Zhelezova are pictured, posing like the Three Graces (or three muses of practice, memory and song) of classical mythology.¹¹⁵ Over their fishnet body suits, the trio of barefoot women has draped fabric in the style of chiton skirts, with provocatively plummeting waistlines that bunch into rosettes well below their bellybuttons. (These costumes update the pseudo-classical aesthetic of Isadora Duncan’s barefoot dancers [*bosonozhki*], with decidedly au courant and even avant-garde features, like the fishnets and wigs, which uncannily invoke contemporaneous Anglo-American glam-rock attire).



Figure 10. Sex Public: Tat’iana Koval’skaia, Tat’iana Petukhova and Ritta Zhelezova sensuously pine in the play’s “public house” of prostitution.

Koval’skaia appears at the right of the photo, her arms extended loosely upwards to frame her face at its side and below the chin, her wrists limp and fingers daintily splayed. She rests her weight on her straightened right leg, supporting the extension of her flexed left foot, so that her body forms a subtle, supple contrappostic “s,” characteristic of Kharitonov’s asymmetrical style.¹¹⁶ Her neck is extended, swanlike, and chin is tilted upwards in hazy reverie. Her eyebrows offer an emotional complement, cinched slightly to suggest a delicate sorrow. Petukhova’s posture echoes Koval’skaia’s in structure but not sentiment: her neck presses tightly to her shoulders, and her arms, like Koval’skaia’s are bent to frame her face, but her wrists angle sharply and the composite picture exudes not ease of movement but internal tension. Seated beside Petukhova, on the farthest right of the photograph (and, presumably, stage), Zhelezova sits upon a short wooden stool. Her lips are parted in silent song, as she strums on a prop guitar, which, ensheathed in the same mesh that covers its player, is sooner an extension of her body than the object on which it acts. The translucent skirt has fallen off her thighs, which she bares brazenly to the pelvic bone.

Koval’skaia, the scene’s supreme pinner, provided me with the most vivid description of the brothel or “public house” [*publichnyi dom*]:

¹¹⁵Their postures bear a striking resemblance to the sixteenth century painting of the Graces by Lucas the Elder.

¹¹⁶For the significance of the contrapposto to Kharitonov’s plasticity consult the previous chapter.

A well-to-do lover arrives. And there we are, someone is playing the guitar, Zhelezova. And I am re-adjusting myself so as to attract him. Then waiting [*ozhidanie*]. He arrives. He looks us over a bit, picks one. We are seated with our backs to the audience. Suddenly we hear someone arrive. We look in his direction, then turn around, re-adjust ourselves, preen ourselves. He doesn't pick us, but another woman. He drags her along. No matter whom he picks, we express "She lucked out!"...And once again we do this.

She resumes the original gestures of expectation. Neither Koval'skaia nor the other actresses could recall what ensued afterward, how the scene culminated or concluded. The emphasis, it seems, was placed on the imperfect act of waiting, rather than the terminal event of woman-selection. This gestural scene had earlier precedent in rehearsal *razminka*, wherein Kharitonov taught TMG's actors "how the body breaks, how to fall, how to lose equilibrium"¹¹⁷—in the physical *and* emotional sense (he qualifies in his dissertation on pantomime).

By elevating the unending process of expectation to art, the scene shifts its priorities from the vertical exchange between man/consumer and woman/commodity to the horizontal relations between waiting women, from the heterosexual/heterosexist to the homosocial/sororal; its temporal priorities are likewise oriented to the synchronous (over the diachronous), the durative and simultaneous present over the propulsive past-future of narrative. The scene in the brothel focuses not on the act of heterosexual copulation (the objective which is always implied if impossible to show) and instead on the intimate and emotionally-rich ritual of women waiting together, which thereby reassigns value to an otherwise invisible but pervasive activity (the quintessential quality of *byt*). Waiting acquires its own intimacy in femininity, which makes sense in light of the social fact that waiting spaces comprised the chronotope of feminine *byt*,¹¹⁸ as Sutcliffe asserts, with the crucial caveat in this case that waiting is not a wasteful endeavor (the absence of activity), nor a vortex of unproductivity, especially of the creative kind. Instead, like the infinite improvisations on walking styles, waiting is highly productive of its own diverse emotional and motional repertoire.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Tati'ana Koval'skaia (May 31, 2010).

¹¹⁸ For an in-depth treatment of the key topoi of women's *byt*, see Sutcliffe, *Engendering Byt*. Primary locales clustered under the feminine chronotope of waiting include the hospital waiting room and the line for scarce goods. These sororal waiting rooms of late socialism, to which we might also append the hair salon, were sites of affirmative emotional exchange, especially in anticipation of physical transformation. This affective dimension imbued the line with a kind of everyday magic that made it worth waiting because of the way the wait opened up possibilities for alternative forms of intimacy and sociability between women. "During the period of stagnation, [when] the acquisition of cosmetics became an important basic part of Soviet women's lives; conversations conducted in lines outside the perfume store fulfilled a key role in their emotional well-being; and a visit to the hair parlor constituted the supreme moment of women's self-expression, even when, as often happened, they were forced to wait for hours unless they had the necessary 'pull' with the specific hairdresser who for double the price would take them out of turn." Nadezhda Azhigikhina and Helena Goscilo, "Getting Under Their Skin: The Beauty Salon in Russian Women's Lives." In *Russia Women Culture*. Helena Goscilo and Beth Holmgren, eds. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 94-124, at 100. For pieces of women's prose that dramatizes the enchanting qualities of the queue and other spaces of expectancy, see I. Grekova, "Damskii master," *Novyi mir* 11 (1963): 89-120; and Ruf' Zernova, "Lius'kina sud'ba." In *Nemye zvonki* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1974 [1970]).

While it might seem a stretch to read straight sex work as a queer opening in the Soviet social fabric, it becomes a more probable proposition when taking into account the no-place that sexual difference and the sex trade occupied under the socialist regime; though both phenomena persisted in fact, neither was admitted into the letter of ideology.¹¹⁹ Thus the artful staging of a “public house” in a state-supported theater before what we have already identified as a convergence of counterpublics assumes a subversive significance. Such potential inheres in any public representation of sex, Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner put forth, inasmuch as “intimate life is the endlessly cited elsewhere of political public discourse.”¹²⁰ Though this queer theory duo is concerned with “the spectacular demonization of any represented sex”¹²¹ in 1990s America, a like style of “sexophobia in action”¹²² (a phrase introduced by a preeminent Russian sociologist of sex) holds sway in the Soviet Union during the 1970s. The “sex in public” of the first revolutionary decade, documented by Eric Naiman in a book by the same name, went private in the subsequent years of increasing political-rhetorical conservatism under and after Stalin.

Euphemizing sex, making it publicly unspeakable and excising it from official discourse, consolidates the hegemony of the heteronormative, “makes sex seem irrelevant or merely personal,” “‘sex in public’ [appear] like matter out of place,”¹²³ and ultimately “block[s] the building of nonnormative or explicit public sexual cultures.”¹²⁴ Berlant and Warner call these cultures “organized around sex, but not necessarily sex acts in the usual sense”¹²⁵ *sex publics* and not “communities” or “identities” since they “[change the very] possibilities of identity, intelligibility, publics, culture, and sex that appear when the heterosexual couple is no longer the referent or the privileged example of sexual culture.”¹²⁶ By going public, “sex opens a wedge to the transformation of those social norms that require only its static intelligibility”¹²⁷ as privatized heterosexuality, and, further, shows up heteronormativity’s abiding fiction that “the intimate relations of private personhood [are] the realm of sexuality itself” and are *not* “publicly mediated.”¹²⁸ Sex publics and sex in public play vital roles in the “queer project” Berlant and Warner imagine as a “world-making project,” a utopian vision for a “queer world [as] a space of entrances, exits, unsystematized lines of acquaintance,” like the Stagnation-era queue, “projected horizons, typifying examples, alternate routes, blockages, incommensurate

¹¹⁹ The linkage between prostitution and homosexuality was more literal in the pre-revolutionary era, as historian Dan Healey has documented, when a gay subculture coalesced in the semi-public space of the urban bathhouse that were appropriated by the state as totally public spaces following the revolution. Dan Healey, “Masculine Purity and ‘Gentlemen’s Mischief’: Sexual Exchange and Prostitution between Russian Men, 1861-1941,” *Slavic Review*, 60 (2001), pp. 233-65.

¹²⁰ Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, “Sex in Public.” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 24.2 Intimacy (1998): 547-566, at 553.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 550

¹²² Igor Kon, *The Sexual Revolution in Russia: From the Age of the Czars to Today* (New York: The Free Press, 1995).

¹²³ Berlant and Warner, “Sex in Public,” 558.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 553.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 547.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 548.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 553

geographies”; that “bear[s] no necessary relation”¹²⁹ to the conventions of heterosexuality; and “support[s] forms of affective, erotic, and personal living that are public in the sense of accessible, available to memory, and sustained through collective activity.”¹³⁰ These spectacular forms of alternative intimacy, such as those invigorated by the ladies of *Enchanted Island*’s “public house,” carve “paths through publicity [that lead] to the production of nonheteronormative bodily contexts,”¹³¹ just as Kharitonov strove to accomplish with his queer plasticity.

SOCIALISM’S MAGICAL OBJECTS (“JUST IN CASE”)

But it was not only through bodily contexts that the material of the Soviet everyday was refigured as resistant in the play. Byt, Lotman reminds us, “is located in the realm of practice,” but “is above all the world of things.”¹³² Thus we might re-characterize byt as a complex of dynamic exchanges between material bodies and material objects. Socialist things were in short supply during Stagnation, an economic fact earlier discussed, that was matched by temporal dearth, especially for the Soviet woman, who lived on “pledged time” (in the language of Henri Lefebvre) to “wait in line to purchase often scarce food and goods,”¹³³ the scarcity of which was to some degree inbuilt in the socialist market, “making objects rare and insufficiently accessible.”¹³⁴ Complementing actual scarcity, socialist citizens were expected to consume with restraint, since the state, in its vexed relationship to byt, discouraged “excessive attention to daily life and things.”¹³⁵ The composite effect of this strategy was the opposite: “the impossibility of straightforwardly acquiring an object made that object more desirable,”¹³⁶ a conceit for fantasies of ownership and an impetus for new intimacies: “‘proxy’ relations between the thing and the future owner,”¹³⁷ often cultivated along a not so straight-and-narrow vector of association. Such were the qualities that distinguished socialist materialism from other economic formations--“idiosyncrasies of Soviet shopping,”¹³⁸ if you like—an hydraulic system of goods in short supply, desire in surplus, piped through a paradoxical top-down rhetoric of corralling consumer demand.

As desire accumulated in anticipation, the Soviet object, once acquired, was bound to disappoint. “Many Soviet-produced goods had functional or symbolic defects designed into them,”¹³⁹ Ekaterina Gerasimova and Sof’ia Chuikina claim, on account of which citizens had to get involved in the “everyday economy”¹⁴⁰ through a set of

¹²⁹Ibid., 558.

¹³⁰Ibid., 562.

¹³¹Ibid., 565.

¹³²Iurii Lotman, *Besedy o russkoi kul'ture: byt i traditsii russkogo dvorianstva (XVIII-nachalo XIX veka)*. St. Petersburg: Iskusstvo-SPB, 1994), p. 10; quoted in and translated by Sutcliffe, 8.

¹³³ Sutcliffe dissertation 2004: 47.

¹³⁴ Olga Gurova, *Prodolzhitel'nost' zhizni veschei v sovetskoii kul'ture: zametki po sociologii nizhnego bel'ia*,” *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, no. 34 (2004): 78-84.

¹³⁵ Ekaterina Gerasimova and Sofia Chuikina, “Obshchestvo remonta,” *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, no. 34 (2004), 62.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 66.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 64.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 59.

“techniques” for “relating to things,” both home-spun and promoted by the state in what they classify as a “repair society.”¹⁴¹ In its broad construal, repair encompasses such modes of acting on the object as “fixing the item, adapting it to a secondary use, using it as material from which to make something else, redefining its symbolic status, changing the context in which it is utilized, and the like.” “Permanent repair [was] a form of creativity and lifestyle,”¹⁴² and each repurposing of an object was an act of creative resignification accomplished by *Homo Sovieticus* in her role as *Homo faber*.

In this sense, the lack inherent in a socialist thing doubled as an excess in the form of an invitation to its user, entangling the subject and object in a curious interaction particular to repair culture--what one scholar has relevantly called the “Soviets’ enchantment with the deficient object.”¹⁴³ At its broken extreme of *brak* (a Russian word with the comically dual connotations of “defective product” and “heterosexual marriage”), the object could still enchant.¹⁴⁴ As Susan E. Reid explains, “the personal investment in adapting and maintaining [objects] invested [them] with an almost animist spirit... [that transcended] any rationalist relation with things.”¹⁴⁵ Objects in this scenario ought sooner be conceived of as domestic partners, uneasily separated from the subjects who impressed their unique personalities on them, and who likely bequeathed a second (third, fourth, and so on) life to them. The transformation was mutual, of course, as the subject assumed a plastic response to the pliability of the object--“a ‘thing’ whose properties have yet to be defined”¹⁴⁶ to which the former was bound by an act of “faith” in the “infinite functional potential” of the thing.¹⁴⁷

This situation inadvertently approximates the mutualism between Soviet consumer and commodity that constructivist artists like Aleksandr Rodchenko envisioned in the early revolutionary years: “an utopian, cloudless existence between people and things,” wherein “an item “[acquires] anthropomorphic contours and become[s] a comrade.”¹⁴⁸ And, we might boldly extrapolate, its user becomes a creator, for its “innovative attitude toward things and, indeed, toward life itself.”¹⁴⁹ The Soviet Union’s deficient stuff called for a kind of constant improvisation that lent the everyday an alchemical air.¹⁵⁰ Socialist objects were charmed because they could become anything; socialist subjects were magical because they could make anything out of these charmed objects. Akin to the magician-protagonist of Kharitonov’s play who sets the plot in motion by transforming the lover-heroes from scene to scene, Soviet citizens were

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 61.

¹⁴² Ibid., 61; 70.

¹⁴³ Galina Orlova, “Apologiya strannoi veshchi: Malen'kie khitrosti' sovetskogo cheloveka,” *Ne prikosnovennyi zapas*, no. 34 (2004): 78.

¹⁴⁴ For more on the enchanted offerings of the inefficient workforce in the 1970s, see Anna Fishzon’s clever deconstruction of Cheburashka, the busted and beloved ‘queero’ of Soviet *shkol'niki*. “It’s Not Bad to be Blue’: Queer Aesthetics in Late-Soviet Animation.” Paper presented at the 42nd National Convention of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES): Los Angeles, CA: November 19, 2010.

¹⁴⁵ Susan E. Reid, “Consumption and Everyday Culture After Stalin,” *Russian Studies in History*, vol. 48, no. 1 (Summer 2009), pp. 3-9 at p. 8.

¹⁴⁶ Ekaterina Degot’, “From Goods to Comrades” [Ot tovara k tovarishchu], quoted by Orlova (75)

¹⁴⁷ Gerasimova and Chuikina, 69.

¹⁴⁸ Orlova, “Apologiya strannoi veshchi,” 79.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 85-86.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 81

sorcerers of byt, bringing about an endless series of miniature metamorphoses in the material world.

A kind of magical thinking inhered in the spaces between sorcerer subject and elusive enchanted object, one well encapsulated in the phrase “just in case.” The Russian for this way of thinking, *avos’*, is a conditional particle of contemporary colloquial speech with historical legs planted firmly in the Russian fairytale.¹⁵¹ It means “in the hope of incidental good fortune” or, more succinctly, “maybe” in a particularly Russian intonation, according to nineteenth-century lexicographer Vladimir Dal’, who proposed its etymology as an affective-spatiotemporal indicator of the hopeful here-and-now.¹⁵² Situated in “the close connection of the semantics of the future tense and the semantics of the possible,”¹⁵³ *avos’* expresses a resilient faith in the midst of vicissitude. In concrete example, if a line for a short-supply good appears, one waits even without knowing “where to put what is bought or how to use it” *just in case* it comes in handy some day.¹⁵⁴ Soviet people lived in this *just-in-case*, “on dreams of a future prosperity [...by] preparing in the present” in this way.¹⁵⁵ The ambivalent attitude *avos’* strikes, between cynical contingency and optimistic certitude (tilting in favor of the latter), was experienced keenly in Stagnation, “an epoch of cruelest deficit,” when, more than ever, “[one] always had to be on the ready,”¹⁵⁶ ever equipped for quotidian improvisation.

The existential indomitability of *avos’* was embodied in the *avos’ka*, a conjurer’s bag for a more abundant tomorrow. (Popular Soviet actor Arkadii Raikin claimed to have coined the name in a comic monologue in 1935, punning, “Here’s my maybe-bag. Maybe I’ll get something into it...”¹⁵⁷) Susan Reid sees in the *avos’ka* a synecdoche for late-Soviet female experience. Women pulled this physically permutable fishnet sack from their pockets or purses whenever a line materialized; in such a way, it stood for scarcity, insatiety, and the cunning required by Soviet actors to somehow meet their needs and desires from day-to-day.¹⁵⁸ In its “elasticity,” the *avos’ka* also represented a rupture in time (as it suddenly expanded into the protraction of waiting) and the creation of space *ex nihilo*. “The *avos’ka* gives hope”¹⁵⁹ (to quote a contemporary marketing campaign) by knitting holes through which the Soviet subject could breathe in a stifling

¹⁵¹ RT rt.com <http://russiopedia.rt.com/of-russian-origin/avoska/>

¹⁵² E.L. Berezovich, *Iazyk i traditsionnaia kul’tura: Etnolingvisticheskie issledovaniia* (Moscow: Indrik, 2007), 339.

¹⁵³ *ibid.*, 337.

¹⁵⁴ Gerasimov and Chukina, “Obshchestvo remota,” 66.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Elena Kosova, Igor’ Masunin, Igor’ Belogurov, “Bozvrashchenie sovetsoi avos’ki,” *RIA Novosti*; accessed online at the disability news website: <http://www.dislife.ru/flow/theme/9757/> on December 27, 2010. In today’s Russia, the blind sew and the deaf dye *avos’ki* for commercial sale.

¹⁵⁷ «А это авоська. Авось-ка я что-нибудь в ней принесу...» RT rt.com <http://russiopedia.rt.com/of-russian-origin/avoska/>

¹⁵⁸ Susan E. Reid, “Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev.” *Slavic Review* 61.2 (Summer, 2002): 211-252.

¹⁵⁹ “Памятные датки “Авоська” – значит надежда.» *Литературная газета* accessed at http://www.lgz.ru/archives/html_arch/lgz212005/Polosy/16_8.htm on December 20, 2010. Though *avos’ki* were woven inextricably into the late Soviet experience, visual pun intended, and correspondingly disappeared with the collapse and introduction of the capitalist market in the early 1990s, they are experiencing a renaissance as the global economy goes green. Post-socialist businessmen are capitalizing on *avos’ka*’s affective associations in their twenty-first century slogan aimed at repopularizing the net bags: “Авоська дарит надежду.” <http://avoski.org> accessed online on December 27, 2010.

social and political atmosphere. “Empty, waiting to be filled,” it permitted extreme plasticity of movement and morphology, its latent form always corresponding to an unpredictable but eagerly anticipated content. The magic bag bespoke a refusal of socialist actors to accept the shape of the present as it was handed to them while they continued to cling to the possibilities of a crowning and expansive everyday. The shape to be assumed by the utopian future implied in this practice, much like the *avos’ka* itself, could not be determined in advance, at the same time that it could not be left out of one’s wishful pocket every morning.

The wardrobe of the deaf theater, Svetlana Statseva, fabricated fishnet costumes from *avos’ki* of all colors for the entire cast of *Enchanted Island*. Fortunately, Ivan Lesnikov (who played the role of the Vulcan in the second act) had preserved in his personal collection and brought to our meeting the watercolor-and-pencil sketches [*eskizy*] which Statseva and Nikolai Epov, the theater’s art director and also her husband, had drafted together. In addition to these sketches, *avos’ki*, at times accented by a swath of cloth or a character-specific cap or other prop, are visible in the many black-and-white photographs that the actors presented me. Before each show, Statseva stitched the actors by hand into their gossamer garments, consisting of cobweb-bodysuits over slightly less suggestive bikinis, also handmade. Statseva’s costumes were remarkably innovative for their time and place. (Fishnet stockings were *not* sold at Soviet apparel stores, to be sure.) At the same time, they partook of a widespread and gender-inflected technique in their fabrication. Sewing was a feminine pastime of resurgent popularity in the post-Stalin period, the status of which fluctuated between a “do-it-yourself [survival strategy]” to a “chosen leisure [pursuit]” in moments of market prosperity.¹⁶⁰ Given the denigration of *byt* in the eyes of Russian culture-makers, it is not surprising that needlework was not accorded the prestige of high art over folk craft or utilitarian undertaking, because of which we might point to the elevation of the artfully sewn from everyday survivalism to avant-garde stage as accomplishing a kind of aesthetic reclassification. Even in its less professional or spectacular instantiations, “amateur needlework was a way not only for a woman to make new things with her own hands but also to create original, unique objects that corresponded to individual demands, which, following Michel de Certeau, we may call the ‘chance offerings of the moment.’”¹⁶¹

The winging it of needlework was a product not only of the fleeting availability of materials, but of the spontaneity of necessity; in other words, one could not predict the precise moment when the need to darn would dawn. This extemporaneity, an expression of the contingent logic of *avos’*, was fully realized in one staging of *Enchanted Island*. In an anecdote related by Nadezhda Ivankovskaia (her first name fittingly translates as “hope”), Statseva ran out of time to outfit the actors before a performance, and they all “stood around [backstage], in horror that the [theater’s] Artistic Council [Khudsovet] would find out” how they were nearly forced to go on in the nude. On the recording of our conversation, Ivankovskaia gulps up the end of her story in a giggling fit that testifies to the little titillations derived from going off script in a highly scripted society.

Falling behind, as Statseva did, acting to no apparent end, and even, in a sense,

¹⁶⁰ Reid synthesizing Gurova’s argument, “Consumption and Everyday Culture After Stalin,” 7.

¹⁶¹ Olga Gurova, “Prodolzhitel’nost’ Zhizni Veschei V Sovetskoi Kul’ture: Zametki Po Sociologii Gnizhnego Bel’ia.” *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* 34 (2004): 78-84; Quoting Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 37.

failing, hollowed out pockets of pleasure for some Soviet actors, like Ivankovskaia, in which a general erotics of waiting presided (hinted above by Sorokin's line as a space of flirtation). In this context, costuming was of consequence for it induced a *slowing down to be savored* before and during the performance. As Ivankovskaia explained, obviously post-paroxysm, when I re-pressed the sartorial issue:

You understand, we were all so thin...of course, of course, of course, beautiful! Slender! And when we were dressed in these costumes, precisely *these* costumes, it was yet another expression of Kharitonov's philosophical concept. The costumes played a big role here, too... Precisely *these* sewn costumes, they underscored our plastic movements and turned out as if in tandem with them.¹⁶²

Though Ivankovskaia is vague on this count, "Kharitonov's philosophical concept" encompasses the many manifestations of plasticity cooperating in the play, not just the motional but the morphological imaginativeness of the Soviet subject; the pliability of the socialist object in its assumption of unlimited functions and forms, the *avos'ka* a compelling case in point; and the slippery matrix of material bodies--people and props acting in "tandem" with Statseva's costumes which, in their own right, stitch over the usual points of distinction and disarticulation between subject and object. Specifically, the otherwise discrete bodies of Zhelezova and her guitar are made continuous in their mutual fishnetting. More generally, that humans should fill the shopping bag as any other thing crumbles the taken-for-granted hierarchy of animacy.

Outside the play, *avos'ki* were for the most part relegated to the wrists of queuing women-citizens, emblemizing their physical submission to the *étatization* of time. The play ironically flips this symbolism. Transferred to other body parts (indeed refusing the synecdochic division of the body into parts), these see-through sacks transmute into markers of temporal subversion and defiant sexuality; not restrained desire but its excess; not subdued civic activity but transgressive sex in public, with its inherent touch of utopianism. Rather than embodying the insatiability of desire in the Soviet Union, *avos'ki* become sites of desire themselves in *Enchanted Island*, and even signify an overabundance in being stretched to their elastic limits with a surplus of supple flesh. Slipping the nearly bare deaf body into barely-there fishnets correspondingly inserted the deaf subject into the slot of overt sexual object, a significant flourish given the cross-cultural tendency toward desexualizing the disabled.¹⁶³ More than that, this instance of sex in public, underwear as outerwear, re-eroticizes a Soviet everyday willfully stripped

¹⁶² Interview with Nadezhda Ivankovskaia, May 31, 2010 (her emphasis). Но, понимаете, мы все были худенькие...конечно, конечно, красота! Все худие во фотографии. Стройные. И когда мы были одеты в этих костюмах, именно в этих костюмах, было еще выражение философского понятия по Харитонову. Костюмы тоже играли здесь большую роль..Это было бы совершенно не то. Именно вот эти вязаные костюмы, они как бы подчеркивали наши пластические движения, и получалось как бы тандем.

¹⁶³For more on the "cultural assumptions about the asexuality of people with disabilities, assumptions that themselves support and emerge out of the systems of compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness," see Alison Kafer, *Compulsory Bodies Reflections on Heterosexuality and Able-bodiedness*, *Journal of Women's History* 15.3 (2003), pp. 77-89 at 82.

of its sexual significance.¹⁶⁴ (After a visit to the *Enchanted Island*, how could one ever look at a queuing babushka with an *avos'ka* in her hand the same way?) It may be that Statseva was making do with whatever props the theater could muster in the midst of shortage; but she was also, no matter her intention, world-making as well: making sex spectacular, exposing the secret life of socialism's objects to public scrutiny, blurring the very lines of public and private, confusing subject and object, and in such a way, arousing the alternative worlds at the threshold of consciousness in the present one.



Figure 11. Tat'iana Koval'skaia and Gennadii Mitrofanov, (“So slender!”) in their kaleidoscopically-colored *avos'ki* costumes. Mitrofanov hands the swaying actress a flower *just in case...*

METAMORPHOSIS AND MYTHIC CONSCIOUSNESS

Kharitonov's plasticity, the alternative universe he imagines pantomime will actualize, his enchanted island, if you will, comes into being by means of a plastic principle that (dis) orders the body, emotional experience, and the order of that experience, as well. His rejection of language entails a corresponding rejection of narrative. The linear storyline of the speaking I's conversational drama gives way on the pantomimic stage to a rearrangeable “chain of physical occurrences,” mostly transformations or reincarnations of characters, that demonstrate “the plasticity of the course of events itself.” Of course, the principle mechanism by which the play enables other worlds to come into view is metamorphosis. The transformations [*pererozhdeniia*] of the actors' bodies, bracketing off each act into separate scenes, provide the only reliable structural device in an otherwise polymorphous and unpredictable performance.

¹⁶⁴ For a fuller explication of the import of costuming in pantomime and plastic culture see previous chapter.

If Kharitonov's play has a plot, it consists of the sorcerer's transubstantiations of the lovers, which inaugurate a mythical moment inassimilable to the narrative time that encircles the island. This includes the story outside the pantomime: the heterosexual lovers' tale, the events before they wash ashore and after they are 'saved.' Otherwise straightness as bodily orientation or social relation has no role in enchantment and is banished by the sorcerer from his domain. Similarly, the transformations this magical other effects in the lovers elude our expectations; they are not lasting, cumulative, or complete. This much the viewer would have grasped—the centrality of continuous physical and corresponding psychic change undergone by the actors—even if bewildered by the seemingly non-indexical shape-shifting going on onstage. At any point, one might guess at the temporariness of a transformation, its imminent reversal or remediation by the end of the scene or between a given one and its successor.



Figure 12. Koval'skaia assumes the beguiling guise of a kangaroo-woman at the end of the pantomime's first "transformation."

Supernatural beings become human; humans try on identities ostensibly at odds with their essences, crossing lines of gender, age, social function, class, and so on; these differentiated humans in turn (and out of turn) become machinic, inanimate objects, plants or animals and back again. In that hybridization, metamorphosis and "metamorphing creatures enact the very possibility of change,"¹⁶⁵ they enable enchantment as a "somatic event." According to Jane Bennett, these forms of migration between states "enchant for the same reason that moving one's body in space can carry one away": for the pleasure of "bodily freedom" offered by "free movements," analogous with, she slips in suggestively, a child "jumping like a kangaroo"—or like *the* kangaroo played by Tat'iana Koval'skaia at the end of the first transformation, who jumps onstage to playfully nibble the last living stalk of a palm tree lying prone on the ground before

¹⁶⁵ Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, 17.

jumping away again. The palm tree wilts of a broken heart and, though dead at the end of this scene, is already rejuvenated and transmuted at the start of the next. The ability of metamorphosis “to extend the limits of one’s current embodiment; to escape the confines of biography, culture, training; [and] to expand the horizon of the conceivable,”¹⁶⁶ is precisely what makes Kharitonov’s island enchanted. No form can be taken on its face, and no single morphological imaginary holds sway over the island’s swaying bodies. The play reveals self-identity to be a fiction necessary for the speaking world but superfluous for plasticity.

This formal freedom (marked not by the absence of forms but their playful instability and interchangeability) yields a kind of nonconceptual awareness, conditioned by silent practice, per Kharitonov, which he names the “mythical consciousness of [plastic] pantomime.”¹⁶⁷ For this purpose, mythology, fairytale, and folklore, it follows, supply Kharitonov with the fodder for the pantomime exercises he organized in the student theater of VGIK and the deaf theater and rehearsal spaces of TMG. He appended the librettos for these *études* to his doctoral dissertation, carefully prefacing them with the caveat that, although inspired by basic narrative forms, the plastic incarnation of a myth could not “exactly reproduce” its “narrative progression” lest it make for the kind of “verbally intelligible plot” [*osmyslennyi v slove siuzhet*] that contradicts pantomime’s nonsymbolic nature. Instead “a pantomime libretto [could use] plot positions” from narrative provided that it “[established] a new compositional connection between them”—reshuffled, recombined, compressed or protracted in time—“in order to achieve a wholly plastic story, sticking together solely through plastic motivations.”¹⁶⁸

The anathema of narrative to pantomime, with the implications of pantomime’s temporal non-linearity, separates off insuperably plastic from rational-speaking consciousness (in Kharitonov’s terms). “Inasmuch as the mythological anthropomorphic consciousness of pantomime in principle differs from that consciousness in the confines of which we might create novels,” he explains, “there cannot be a translation of a novel into pantomime by its very essence.”¹⁶⁹ A pantomime adaptation of *Crime and Punishment* is possible, he claims, but cannot be structured according to shifts in plot so much as changes in emotional and characterological tonalities. More than that, the play must end the moment the hero confesses his guilt, since “consciousness of breaking human law is in principle an ethical, verbal act,” and therefore beyond the purview of pantomime and beyond the ken of the plastic subject—who exists, we might say with help of Lacan, prior to the Law of the Father, prior to the possibility of criminal transgression; and, if we return to Butler, in a state before a singular morphological imaginary has coalesced. The individual body has not been segmented into the discrete parts that characterize the modern subject; nor has the world been broken down into non-extensive bodies; nor society atomized into alienated actors.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 19.

¹⁶⁷ Kharitonov, “Pantomima,” 478.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 478. The concept of narrative progression [*siuzhetnyi khod*] in folklore and other mythic narrative forms (to which Kharitonov opposes his disordered plastic performance), is implicitly culled from the formalist Vladimir Propp’s *Morphology of the Folk Tale*. It appears on the list of works consulted in the dissertation. Engaging with Propp’s structural analysis of the fairytale, Kharitonov toys with yet another notion of morphology. “Стрежневой способ, без которого не может быть организована ни одна пантомима нашего понимания, -- пластичность самого хода событий” (476).

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 478.

This generic distinction of pantomime versus novel, mythic versus modern modes of consciousness, might better be re-construed as enchanted versus disenchanting worlds, with the help again of Weber, for whom the advent of disenchantment coincides with the appearance in classical antiquity of the abstract concept, “one of the great tools of all scientific knowledge,” which contributes to the loss of man’s inward plasticity by partitioning the once holistic world (from which he was indivisible aspect) into knowable, nameable and therefore masterable categories.¹⁷⁰ Weber understands the rise of the concept as a unilateral process and historical turning point on the way to the modern, hence enchantment and disenchantment are stadal headings for him; whereas other thinkers, Kharitonov among them, trust in the necessary and persistent expressions of nonconceptual consciousness in the midst of a mostly disenchanting modern world.

George Kalamaras, author of *Reclaiming the Tacit Dimension* and contemporary proponent of silent pedagogy (not unlike Kharitonov), speaks alternately of “nonconceptual awareness that practices of silence yield” as “an experience of simultaneity and a complete identification with the process of the universe”; “an experience of unitary consciousness constituted, paradoxically, of diversity” that is “outside the realm of discursive language”; a “mythic moment” that is “not a transcendental state but rather one that is even further inside experience than the effect conceptual thought alone can yield;”¹⁷¹ and, finally, a “mythic perception of ‘wholeness’ [that] yields a simultaneity of experience.”¹⁷² He sees a synonym for this experience in Ernst Cassirer’s “mythic consciousness”—note the telling homonymity with Kharitonov’s term and his concept of plasticity. This is Cassirer’s “‘complex state’” as distinct from “our analytical attitude” in the modern West, “and similar to Weberian enchantment in that the “separate elements [of the cosmos] are not [separately] given [to the mind], but have to be originally and gradually derived from the whole,”¹⁷³ so that the “self is never separate from the consciousness of things.”¹⁷⁴ Jenkins paints enchantment in the same hues, as a “dream of the totality of life” which “the philosophies and principles of Reason or rationality cannot by definition dream,” “and in which the collective sum of sociability and belonging is elusively greater than its individual parts.”¹⁷⁵

With neither the shape of individual bodies nor the shape of things to come determined in beforehand—a situation of radical morphological instability—the actors of the plastic stage became subjects-in-process, along with the spectators, who upon entering the theater space, submitted themselves to the logic of a performance that resisted verbal translation, much like the deaf theater of the third ear. As my brief but appropriately unsatisfying summary of the play attests, the plot and its personae are so obscure as to be impractical for the audience to accurately guess at, rendering it functionally abstract. To wit, as a director, Kharitonov did not explain the plot of his play in its episodic or holistic structure to the deaf actors themselves during rehearsal or the run of the show. Instead, following a special plastic warm-up exercise [*razminka*], he

¹⁷⁰ Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” 141.

¹⁷¹ George Kalamaras, *Reclaiming the Tacit Dimension* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 124.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 128.

¹⁷³ Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, 13.

¹⁷⁴ Kalamaras, *Reclaiming the Tacit Dimension*, 125.

¹⁷⁵ Jenkins, “Disenchantment, Enchantment and Re-Enchantment,” 29.

asked them to improvise movement on emotional cues. As one actress reminisced, “there were no scripts, no lines, only plastic movement.”¹⁷⁶ And outside of TMG, it was often the case in the improvisations Kharitonov initiated that the loose narrative content attempted by the actors on stage was totally lost on its audience, even as the emotional gist was conveyed in sufficient degree for such exercises to be considered successful.¹⁷⁷ And this is how Kharitonov’s relatively plotless play as an expression of the overall improvisational quality of his plasticity poses a subtle affront to the super-teleological sensibilities of Soviet doxa and the forgone conclusion of communist utopia: in place of progress, we get endless progression; instead of *telos*, dispersed potentiality; in lieu of unilinear futurity, he and the charmed cast give us inextricably thick presence.

The transmission of a message on the literal level was thus not the purpose of the performance. Indeed, its spell would have been broken by a viewer attempting to decode the actors’ apparently non-indexical if actually multivalent metamorphoses. (In one illustrative instance, a maid pretends to be the bird in a cuckoo clock who pretends to be a military commander who pretends to be inebriated, and so on). Rather, the play aimed at transmitting the affect embedded in the actors’ movement to the audience, thereby activating the collective fantasy and capacity for co-feeling of those who assembled into the ad hoc counterpublic of queer-deaf pantomime. The deautomatized movements of the actors’ bodies focused the auditorium’s energy on immanent experience to restore a deeper sense of the world, a fleeting condition that Erica Fischer-Lichte calls enchantment; and Jill Dolan describes as the utopia in performance for its transport of a “magical” *communitas* out of the fixity of the everyday and into “the no-place we can reach only through *feeling*, together,” and only glimpse “before the security of articulation.”¹⁷⁸ The utopian performative, like Kharitonov’s play, lets the actors and audience “try on other ways to be human,” and so doing, “[unhinges] politics and feeling from obviousness to engage the audience imaginatively with what might be.”¹⁷⁹

Enchanted Island aspired to this sense of connectedness, entrancing its audience in the mythic consciousness of *communitas*, in which “audiences or participants feel themselves become part of a whole in an organic, nearly spiritual way.”¹⁸⁰ Uniting actors and audience in a consummate but non-totalitarian universe, inwardly and outwardly plastic, the play actualized a moment of “intersubjective illumination.”¹⁸¹ In this, the play’s impulses correspond to the second kind of art Kharitonov outlines in the tiny aesthetic treatise he embeds in the piece “Teardrops on the Flowers” [*Slezy na tsvetakh*]. To a rational, restrained art, whose intricacies require introspection and solitary contemplation, he juxtaposes another visceral, extroverted and ecstatic form:

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Nadezhda Ivankovskaia (May 31, 2010).

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Sasha Samoilov (June 9, 2010).

¹⁷⁸ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A new aesthetics*. Translated by Saskya Iris Jain (New York: Routledge, 2008). Fischer-Lichte’s “enchantment” resembles but is not identical to the Russian Formalist notion of “estrangement.” Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 65-66. Dolan borrows the magic of *communitas* from Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), 47-48.

¹⁷⁹ Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*, 153; 100.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 11

¹⁸¹ Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), 48.

There is a kind of art...that is a gasp! a song! somehow like ah! and all of it, somehow as if in one fell swoop – and that is talent... that talent is ah. Talent seizes you and bears you aloft on its wings.

This [art] – oh! this one tears you from where you are and summons you to battle or to love...under its force you either stop your ears or say, "ah, take me!"...this one—oh! this kind you commit to memory by ear and pound out the rhythm on yourself, hey, that really says it all! and you join together...

This kind [of art] enralls you in its orbit, infects you, wrests tears from your eyes, forces you to dance and sing together. It is directed at and calls to people...it tears people from their place, forces their hearts to beat faster...it penetrates you, seizes, pierces, drags you along...¹⁸²

The play, as this other kind of art, pushed back to the surface of modern social life the “pulsating [something]” that Weber palpated before the dawn of disenchantment, then “[sweeping] through the great communities like a firebrand, welding them together.”¹⁸³ For Rita Felski, this throbbing receptivity to the other is the erotic mark of enchantment, “a phenomenology of immersion” wherein witnesses to an aesthetic event “[feel] fully subsumed within an imagined world,” and let themselves be “sucked in, swept up, [and] spirited away” by a present made “voluptuous” in its “sensuous and somatic” plenitude.¹⁸⁴

The enchanting excess to which these scholars all gesture seems to be a property of silent gesture itself. According to Carrie Noland, the gesturing body—and not the speaking one—goes beyond its own “communicative or instrumental” intentions to generate sensations “not-yet-marked, not-yet-meaningful,” that enable social “experimentation [and] subversion.”¹⁸⁵ It stands to reason that (a) truly utopian movement would not attempt to match or mime dominant cultural meanings but instead curve beyond them toward a horizon of “new movements, new meanings.”¹⁸⁶ In these new movements, “it is possible to detect impulses that are not yet organized as movements,” “historical moment[s] that [are] not yet fully articulated,”¹⁸⁷ rooted not in identity but dynamic relation among society’s slouching outcasts and moral defectives. This is what Robert McRuer, following Roderick Ferguson, advocates as the gestural

¹⁸² Бывает художество...выдох! песня! как-то так ах! и всё, как-то так одним махом, -- и вот это талант... то талант это ах. Талант подхватывает вас и несёт на крыльях. Там – о! там оно вас срывает с места и зовёт с собой в бой или в любовь...там почти что зажимать уши под ея напором, или сказать – а, бери меня! ... там – о! там со слуха запоминать и хлопать по себе кулаком, ай, как ты всё так сказал! и присоединиться...А там что-то тебя захватившее в круг, заражающее, исторгающее слёзы, заставляющее танцевать и петь вместе. То обращено и вызывает к людям...то срывает людей с места, заставляет биться сильнее сердце...там оно само в вас проникает, хватает, пронзает и тащит с собой... Evgenii Kharitonov, “Slezy na tsvetakh.” In *Pod domashnim arestom*. Gled Morev, ed. (Moscow: Glagol, 2005), 298-299.

¹⁸³ Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” 155.

¹⁸⁴ Rita Felski, *The Uses of Literature* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 53;76.

¹⁸⁵ Carrie Noland, *Agency and Embodiment: Performing Gestures/Producing Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 195.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁸⁷ Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). 12.

politics of crip theory, a critical stance between queer and disability studies this essay sympathetically strikes. Whereas identity politics “centers on a model or representative identity [...] to be emulated,” “a gestural politics is always focused on social relations in all their contradiction, complexity, and most importantly, intersectionality.”¹⁸⁸ Queer-crip practitioners of gestural politics—as I take the enchanted islanders supremely to be—“point away from themselves and [toward...] the heterogeneity of the social.”¹⁸⁹ Crooking their backs into critiques of the present, they point out its flaws with real fingers and beckon a new and enchanting world into being.

QUEER UTOPIA

Rituals of re-enchantment performed a vital function for socialist actors in the Soviet Union during Stagnation, as the disparity between the political utopia achieved in Party rhetoric and the lived realities of actually existing socialism widened undeniably. This disillusioned era was especially dark for those already thrust to the margins of official culture, including sex and gender dissenters, who were punished with greater frequency than before, and for whom envisioning an alternative universe became a matter of life or death, freedom or indignity.¹⁹⁰ In the unpublished (and “unpublishable”) piece, “Tears for One Strangled and Dead,” Kharitonov chronicles his own dispiriting everyday encounters with the state and secret police: consistent harassment and too familiar trips for him and his homosexual friends to Lubyanka, the KGB headquarters in Moscow, for interrogation; accompanying anal cavity searches to verify violation of the anti-sodomy statute.¹⁹¹ The frequency of these interactions, he laments, forces the reconfiguration of his regular relationships, such that even having a pet (no less a beloved person) becomes an impossibility. Given the fraught status of day-to-day survival, it makes sense that Kharitonov’s play intervenes on the level of mundane movement to achieve its utopian effects.

For his part, “Kharitonov was tethered double-tight to [...this] epoch of Soviet paradise eternally lost.”¹⁹² And the play, unique as it was, proved just as much a product of its time and place. At the same time, it was, according to one friend,

the happiest moment in Zhenya’s life...when the curtain went up and the mute actors exited onto the stage to take a bow once, twice, three times. And the public called out the author and director, and he came out in a bow, stood among his deaf mimes, and together with them rushed the footlights.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁸ Robert McRuer, “Crip Theory.” *AG Queer Studies—Jenseits der Geschlechtergrenzen* (2010); <http://agqueerstudies.de/robert-mcruer-crip-theory/>.

¹⁸⁹ Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 143.

¹⁹⁰ Dan Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 239.

¹⁹¹ Evgenii Kharitonov, “Slezy ob ubitom i zadushennom,” *Pod domashnim arestom*. Gleb Morev, ed. (Moscow: Glagol, 2005), 226-229.

¹⁹² Iaroslav Mogutin, “Katorzhnik na nive bukvy: Ot sostavitelia.” In Evgenii Kharitonov, *Slezy na tsvetakh*, tom 1 (Moscow: Glagol, 1993), 11.

¹⁹³ L. Ivanova quoted in Kharitonov, *Pod domashnim arestom*, 541.

Against “the stultifying temporal logic of [the] broken-down present,”¹⁹⁴ *Enchanted Island* offered a swell of hope and a window onto a utopia queer in its radical indeterminacy.

This radical indeterminacy--plasticity, I will insist—is how I think of the queer quality of Kharitonov’s life and work, as it opposed stable and abiding categories of embodiment, identity, experience and ideology (like the ones that may have been too easily pinned on him after the fact: gay, dissident, and so on). José Muñoz approaches queerness this way in *Cruising Utopia*, his variation on Dolan’s theme: it is an “ideality” that has never existed, cannot exist, but “can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future.”¹⁹⁵ Queer utopia, as Muñoz writes it and I repeat here, is “not exclusively about gay and lesbian sexuality,” though those make up some small part of it; rather it comes into being by “[embracing] experimental modes of love, sex, and relationality.”¹⁹⁶ Put otherwise, “queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world.” As Muñoz exhorts, so long as the present stultifies even some of us, “we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds.”¹⁹⁷

Muñoz unwittingly names, I believe, the theurgic intentions of Kharitonov’s theatrical *and* literary art: in his dramatic practice, to move beyond the status quo of the “speaking world” and enliven a plastic one of emotional plentitude; and in his underground writing, to signal a queer world of spiritual force off-limits to “all the devout, normal and bearded, all who are held up on earth as an example.”¹⁹⁸ So long as expressions of this emotional and spiritual intensity are “mocked and transformed by the coarse, direct common sense of the common people into a term of abuse,” so long as they insist on literality instead of immanence and, so doing, suppress the sensation of queer enchantment, “silly boys... will not give into the weakness of falling in love with themselves,” and the “subversive thought” that “[we] are all homosexuals” will not openly circulate and “hasten the end of the world.”¹⁹⁹ Kharitonov’s apocalypticism here, sometimes misread as anti-social—“a lofty asceticism or the aesthetic of decay,” as he puts it—requires reviewing in the light of utopia. The “end of the world” is really the end of *a* world (a detail arguably concealed by the absence of articles in Russian), the demise of a certain, violently delimited style of the social. Queer apocalypse, the complement to queer utopia, is an optimistic investment in those forms of emotional and embodied connection that have been proscribed and pathologized in the present (heteronormative) order.

It has been my intention to conscript Kharitonov onto the side of utopia in the contemporary queer-theory debate against the so-called anti-social, anti-relational or anti-futurity thesis. This is, I believe--and I think Muñoz and other queer utopists would, too-

¹⁹⁴ Jose Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University, 2009), 12.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁹⁶ Kharitonov, “Listovka,” 136.

¹⁹⁷ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ Kharitonov, “Listovka,” 136.

-where he belongs.²⁰⁰ Still this conscription deserves explicit commentary, since it necessitates I read contemporary notions of queerness back into Kharitonov's cultural milieu, a "willful perversion of notions of temporal propriety" that places performative plasticity of the Kharitonovian order at the center of queer theorizing. Furthermore, this move mandates I read Kharitonov and his theory of plasticity as "proleptically [anticipating] queer theory and queer modernity," to draw on the bold moves of Carla Freccero's deconstructive historiography.²⁰¹ My projection of queerness "backward to the period and forward from it," in Freccero's phrasing, shares an impulse with Muñoz, who looks to the "then and there" of pre-Stonewall formations and formulations of intimacy and relationality as "anticipatory illuminations," experienced as a "surplus of both affect and meaning," that might be mined for hope and "a feeling of futurity in the face of what so many of us experience as a 'negating present.'"²⁰²

This move suits Kharitonov, who similarly traced backward with his body to the plastic culture from a "queerer" era of modernism with its cherished myth of sexual utopia in order to sustain his fantasies in the face of Stagnation. In this spirit, I regard Kharitonov's concept of "plastic" as doing the same conceptual labor *avant la lettre* as the "queer" in queer theory--of critiquing fixed identity positions by aspiring to a "multiplicity of possible shifting identities."²⁰³ (This is Lisa Duggan's reanimation of queer as a restless hermeneutic in the face of the stagnant identities around which gay and lesbian studies and politics were and continue to be organized.) All the more, I encourage the reading of queerness *back* into Kharitonov's texts, especially *in anticipation* of his posthumous publication in the 1990s, enabled by and in service to the inchoate gay identitarian politics and commercial culture of post-Soviet Russia with which his ideas about alterity have so little in common. Being true to Kharitonov, we should sooner call him "queer" and let him slip out of our nominal grasp into the unspeakability of plastic subjectivity.

²⁰⁰ Edelman and Bersani, "Forum: Conference Debates" "The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory" from the MLA Annual Convention in 2005, *PMLA*, 121.3 (May 2006), 819-828.

Biographically, though a mostly silent, subtle man, Kharitonov brought unlikely circles of people into overlap; the deaf artists, for instance, came to his flat to mix with his friends in the hippie beau-monde, and everyone whom I interviewed, man or woman, deaf or hearing, had fallen in love with him one way or another, many of the women, deaf and non-deaf, well aware that Kharitonov preferred men.

²⁰¹ Carla Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 3.

On the topic of queer anti-empiricist historiography, Muñoz cites "Judith Halberstam's work on queer [temporality...], Carla Freccero's notion of fantasmatic historiography, Elizabeth Freeman's theory of temporal drag, Carolyn Dinshaw's approach to 'touching the past,' Gayatri Gopinath's theorizing of the time and place of queer diaspora as an 'impossible desire,' and Jill Dolan's work on the utopian in performance." Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 17. See also "Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion." *GLQ* 13.2-3 (2007): 177-195.

²⁰² Muñoz, "Response" on *Social Text* website (19 June 2010)

<http://www.socialtextjournal.org/periscope/2010/06/response.php>; accessed October 4, 2010

²⁰³ Lisa Duggan, "Queering the State," *Social Text*, No. 39 (Summer, 1994), pp. 1-14, at 12. Duggan makes this point of mobilizing "queer" as a critique of and corrective to "gay and lesbian" identity politics in her earlier essay, "Making It Perfectly Queer," (1992). "Gay" and "queer" exist in a vexed dialectic: in many ways, they are eminently related; in others, they work at crosses purposes and even directly against each other. Queer is re-appropriated by gay and lesbian scholars in the 1990s, changing the name and nature of the field, in order to defamiliarize gay and lesbian as congealed categories of identity. See also Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal*.

Leaning silently in toward their sympathetic audience, the charmed “losers”²⁰⁴ of mature socialism—as one of my interviewees referred to the Soviet Union’s moral deviants and vocal defectives—turned their backs on the official future that promised no place for them. At the same time, they ensured their silence in official history by cultivating an anachronistic culture of plasticity that the state had already consigned to oblivion. Plastic actors swerved in bold directions away from the Party line, in ways that were “harmful” to the status quo, as Orlov the state trainer observed. Under Kharitonov’s gentle hand, these enchanted islanders dared to lose equilibrium and go limp in the historical sense. Reorienting, and even disorienting, their bodies in time and space, they embodied hopeful alternatives to their disenchanting present, and, in a consummate utopian gesture, “[reoriented their] affective relation to the future.”²⁰⁵



Figure 13. Petukhova and Zhelezova fling queer feeling from the stage out to their enchanted audience.

The sinuous paths these actors traced out of S/stagnation with their bodies lead me back to the original query I borrowed from the bothered babushka and her hardline communist comrades at the outset of the chapter: What’s the use of *Enchanted Island*? I take the liberty now to tease out their subtext and ask again: What’s the use of an enchanted fairy tale? And, more specifically, a fairy tale about failure brought to life by a bunch of losers? In the same decade that Kharitonov’s pantomime enjoyed a long if spotty run at the deaf theater, the field of folkloristics grappled with these questions (all, of course, except the last nasty one). Fairy tales were found to be indispensable tools of normative development, which used enchantment to train a child’s unconscious mind how “better able to master life” and “the real world” that peaked out at the storybook’s edges.²⁰⁶ But as one awakens from a dream, so a once-wondrous child grows up into the proper adulthood for which the fairy tale has prepared him or her. The moral of this story is that enchantment loses out to linear progress narratives, whether subjective or social.

²⁰⁴ Interview with Aleksandr Samoïlov, 2010.

²⁰⁵ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 162.

²⁰⁶ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Vintage, 1977 [1976]), 63.

But the actors of *Enchanted Island* are such plastic substance as dreams are made on; they refuse to rouse from their revels if it means growing up straight and not slanting sideways toward each other, or ceasing to dream of magical worlds they might still inhabit, even if holding onto fantasy means losing out to history. Their failed fairy tale elevates losing and lack of mastery to “a queer art of failure,” “which quietly loses,” even gets lost in its silence, “and in losing it imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being.”²⁰⁷ Kharitonov extended such sweet promises to his fellow fantasists of queerer futures, in whose third ears he whispered a dreamy clarion call: “Let us be one and create a new culture of our own; and fall asleep in each other’s arms.”²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ J. Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 86.

²⁰⁸ Kharitonov 2005, 284

CHAPTER FIVE.
WHAT IS SOCIALIST UNREALISM? (PART ONE):
SILENCE, ALTERITY, AND THE SOVIET SYMBOLIC

*“Absolute realism is by no means the correct form of perception.
It is simply the function of a certain form of social structure.”*
— Sergei Eisenstein

In its holistic intent, this dissertation has attempted to describe how certain actors, a term taken at once literally and philosophically, have dramatized and destabilized the norms that made up the Soviet subject as a psychic, somatic, and social assemblage. In thematizing alterity, it has approached the symbolic center of the social/ist order from the shadowy outskirts and quickly shifting sidelines. While sharing with the preceding chapters a focus on nonnormative or marginal social actors, this final section expands the way we understand ‘performances of subjectivity,’ to encompass forms of im-personation on the wrong side of the proscenium, in nontheatrical space, where, it will become apparent, the same conditions of signification that enable or disable subjective existence still obtained, but were brought into such crisis that they revealed the terms of their very operation. More simply put, by being about subjectivity at its barest—bare life, in the words of one contemporary philosopher—the extreme performances of subjectivity described in this chapter and the next bare the device by which one secured a tenuous hold on his or her consensual status as Soviet human or *homo Sovieticus* in the late-socialist symbolic. Thus this last section marks the culmination point of the dissertation’s overarching argument about silent alterity and the semiotics of social difference within the Soviet Union during the post-Stalin period.

In concrete terms, the conclusion derives an immanent theory of silence-as-speech for marginal Soviet subjects by reading through a set of thematically-continuous texts by politically repressed Russian author, Andrei Siniavskii, pseudonym Abram Tertz (1925-1997), and several key intertexts by other authors. The interpretation that follows focuses mostly on one short, generically distinct work Siniavskii wrote after he was released from Soviet prison and emigrated to Europe, called “‘I’ and ‘They’: On Extreme Forms of Communication in Conditions of Isolation” [*‘Ia’ i ‘oni’: O krainikh formakh obshcheniia v usloviakh odinochestva*] (1975). This text compactly combines the larger and persistent concerns of the dissertation, namely, silence, alterity, gesture, and theatricality. Herein Siniavskii enumerates a handful of sometimes masochistic styles of self-mutilation that the gulag’s most (sexually) abject subjects enacted on themselves in spectacular protest, in order to assert their ‘I’ to an/other within a symbolic order that sustained itself on the active suppression of such figures. By means of these extreme forms of self-expression, the camp’s ‘unpeople’ or *neliudi*, in Siniavskii’s fantastic appellation, silently asserted their subjectivity through violent gesture against the political unintelligibility of their speech, in effect (dis) figuring themselves into the Soviet symbolic. More than this, Siniavskii speaks about these gruesome gestures—perceived by his political and intellectual peers as evidence of the nonhumanity of the camp’s criminal inmates—not only as instances of signification with real semantic weight, but as art of an extreme if unexceptional, and even exemplary, variety in the scope of human experience.

Before turning to the camp, I extract a working definition of “unpeople” or “unreal” people from *What is Socialist Realism* [*Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realizm*, 1959], the politico-philological tract that Siniavskii circulated in samizdat under the pseudonym Abram Tertz, which inculpated him along with his fantastic fiction and ultimately sent him to prison to observe these acts. I turn back to the camp at the end of the chapter and throughout the next, and, keeping in tune with Tertzian irony, while honoring the dark humor that sometimes suffused such performances of self-harm, I summarily propose the aesthetic category of ‘camp camp’ as a name for the cheekily bleak tactics by which these ‘queer’ actors expropriated their bodies away from a fatal state for the purpose of personal resistance, or, more properly, for a mode of resistance that made the ‘personal’ possible in the first place. My aims in this critical enterprise are aligned with Siniavskii’s own, I contend to bring into perspective styles of ethical-political engagement that exceed the staid cold-war binary of the state versus the dissident in pursuit of human rights protection; to challenge the universality of that very “human” around which rights and visibility are made an imaginative possibility and moral imperative; and, finally, to point out the “inappropriate” and ironic ways these symbolic and actual outsiders were able to disrupt the larger social logics by which their own humanity was attenuated. By returning to this critically marginal but conceptually revelatory text in Siniavskii’s oeuvre, I hope to ‘rescue’ it from the anemically humanist reading that has been its errant fate, and suggest instead a post-humanist interpretation, that expands the ethical scope of his intervention.

As I do this, I hope to call the reader’s attention to the collusion of aesthetic and political philosophies of realism and humanism, which Siniavskii makes himself, and in conjunction with Bakhtinian ethical-aesthetic criticism on which his own work is founded. This post-humanist impulse runs throughout Siniavskii’s body of work, even through the pieces that got him thrown in the gulag in the first place, especially, I will show, the clever philological tract, *What is Socialist Realism?* and the fantastic short story, “Pkhents” (ca. 1957¹). These texts reason through the ideological process by which one becomes a (reasonable) human in the Soviet Union (or fails to), a theme brought into meaningful relief in other pre-incarceration pieces, like “At the Circus” [*V tsirke*, ca. 1957-1961] and “The Trial Begins” [*Sud idet*, 1959]; both feature episodes at the circus and zoo, that is, generic spaces in which the boundaries between humanity and animality or inhumanity are validated and violated, offering potential analogies with the prison-camp as a crisis-site in which the same categorical distinctions are made. Moreover, they often begin by bringing the norm of the Soviet family into crisis and thereby catalyzing the breakdown of the social order altogether, especially the fantastic tales, “Pkhents,” and the novella, *The Trial Begins*, to which I devote the second chapter in this pair.

“I’ AND ‘THEY’ AND US: CONTEXTS OF COMMUNICATION AND ISOLATION

Andrei Siniavskii first presented “‘I’ and ‘They’: On Extreme Forms of Communication in Situations of Isolation,” as the penultimate paper at the 25th

¹ Because Siniavskii-Tertz’s writing circulated in samizdat long before official publication, the dates associated with the individual works are approximate. I rely on Catharine Nepomnyashchy’s calculations in *Abram Tertz and the Poetics of Crime* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), *passim*.

International Conference of Geneva² (“XXVes Rencontres internationales de Genève) on “Isolation and Communication” (Solitude et communication). During the six days of the convention, September 1-6, 1975, one of five preeminent, otherwise Western scholars: the French social scientist Georges Balandier, Swiss Heideggerian psychoanalyst Medard Boss³, French humanist poet Max-Pol Fouchet, and then University of Geneva professor, George Steiner, presented individual papers on the organizing theme, and then participated in interviews on the subsequent day with a small cohort of scholar-discussants, immediately prior to the next presentation. On Wednesday, September 4, Siniavskii delivered his lecture in Russian and Slavist Georges Nivat interpreted it into French—the language in which the paper was originally published alongside the rest of the conference proceedings, including the extended interview with Siniavskii over which Jean Starobinski presided on September 5. The day before Siniavskii’s presentation, Steiner gave his own talk on “interior language.” The interview with Steiner was conducted on the same day as Siniavskii’s presentation, offering, perhaps, a less apparent conceptual frame for the reception of “I” and “They.” Notably, Steiner had just published *After Babel* that year, though his earlier book, *Language and Silence* (1967), was likely more attuned to Siniavskii’s pet-subject.

Despite the potential topical coincidence, Siniavskii was aware of his role as Russian *rara avis* among the collection of continental intellectuals who presented in Switzerland with him that week. The conference’s convoking theme of “Communication and Loneliness”—or “Obshchenie i odinochestvo,” as he translated the title into Russian for himself and his belated Russophone readers—struck Siniavskii as coolly over-conceptualized and regrettably “abstract” [*dovol’no abstraktno*]. “I was incapable of assessing this theme abstractly [*Rassuzhdat’ na etu temu otvlechenno ia ne sumel*],” he reflected.

That is, on the one hand, “communication,” and on the other, “isolation” (a Western problematic): each of us experiences this. Over the course of the symposium there were wonderful presentations – about the means of connection in contemporary society (radio, television, etc.). One very deep and interesting talk about language was delivered. But for me, as a bystander, I wanted to interrupt the very “isolation” linking our communication by posing the question in a slightly different way. And this is just what I did. As someone who has departed from Russia, within the confines of the chosen theme, it was absolutely necessary for me to depart from the language in which they were speaking. Thus came into being the text I now offer for the consideration of listeners and readers.

Дескать, с одной стороны — "общение", а с другой стороны — "одинокчество" (проблематика Запада): каждый из нас все это переживает. В

² Andrei Siniavskii, George Steiner, Georges Balandier, Medard Boss, et al. *Solitude Et Communication: Textes Des Conférences et des Entretiens Organisés par les Vingt-Cinquièmes Rencontres Internationales De Genève, Histoire et Société D'aujourd'hui*. Neuchâtel: Ed. de la Baconnière 1976 [1975]; online www.rencontres-int-geneve.ch/volumes_pdf/rig25.pdf.

³ Though the independent intellectual contributions of Medard Boss lie outside the purview of the present analysis, it should be noted that his psychoanalytic practice similarly strove to reconceptualize the human-subject beyond the Western humanist paradigm, as Siniavskii sought to do in his own artistic and scholarly efforts.

ходе симпозиума были зачитаны прекрасные доклады — о средствах связи в современном обществе (радио, телевидение и т. д.). Был прочитан очень глубокий и интересный доклад — о языке. Мне же — стороннему человеку — захотелось перебить это "одиначество", связанное с "общением" между всеми нами, несколько иной постановкой вопроса, что я и сделал. Как выходящу из России, в пределах избранной темы мне было необходимо выйти из языка, на котором говорят. Так и получился текст, предложенный вниманию слушателей и читателей.⁴

For all its stated purposefulness, a loaded word in Siniavskii's lexicon, this preface is deceptively slippery, and in the end asks more questions than it answers. To start with, what was the special urgency Siniavskii sensed as the sole—or solitary—Soviet subject in this Western context? What stirred him to adjust the terms and stakes of the surrounding discussion for his own intervention? Was it the burden of representation he must have felt, as a potential mouthpiece for all of socialist Russia, especially given the political exigencies of the peaking cold war? Is this what he had in mind when he called himself a “bystander,” a “marginal” or “sidelined person” [*storonnemu cheloveku*] at the event? Such an experience of outsidership in this Western context is obviously compounded by Siniavskii's status as *persona non grata* in the Soviet East at the same time, a “refugee from Russia” [*vykhodtu iz Rossii*], in his own self-conscious appellation. What are the connections between one's departure or expulsion from the social order [*vykhodtsu iz Rossii*] and departure from language [*vyiti iz iazyka*] in this context?

And what about “isolation” makes it a distinctly Western problematic, especially if, as he alleges, it is a universal experience? (Is this last qualification but a generous rhetorical gesture, an olive branch for his clueless co-presenters, or is it instead a legitimate underscoring of common humanity to override the ideological divide between them?) Perhaps Siniavskii is pointing to the finer distinction between “communication” and “isolation” as Western? Is this binary so false and furthermore frivolous, that it only has traction outside of ‘totalitarian’ Russia, in wealthy Western countries where scholars can wax blissfully unawares about communication qua entertainment technology (radio, TV), as Soviet citizens vanish into the crude and violent silence of the labor camp? Is Siniavskii's irrepressible interruption a rally against the reigning superficiality of the conference, upon whose lone moment of depth he is moved to remark? (And was this uniquely “deep” talk the one Steiner delivered on the previous day?) Is it, after all, in a valley of vapidness that Siniavskii finds himself the profound bystander, isolated in sociability [*obshchenie*], alienated from the language in which everyone else speaking? Is it “I” and “they” all over again? One imagines here Sinyavsky slashing through the posh little picture of Western humanism on display in the center of *What is Socialist Realism*. “It is fine to be gentle, to drink tea with preserves, to plant flowers and cultivate love, nonresistance to evil, and other philanthropies. But whom did they save and what did

⁴ Abram Tertz (Andrei Siniavskii), “Literaturnyi protsess v Rossii,” *Kontinent*, no. 1 (1974): 143-80; The Literary Process in Russia.” In *Kontinent 1: The Alternative Voice of Russia and Eastern Europe*, edited by Vladimir Maximov and translated by Michael Glenny (Garden City, NY: Anchor-Doubleday, 1976), 77-118, at 81. The translation belongs to Glenny, unless I note otherwise.

they change in this world, these ancient virgins of both sexes, these egoists of humanism who bought themselves a cozy corner in the heavenly almshouses?”⁵

The seeds of deep philosophical tension Siniavskii unearths in this short opening salvo are sown throughout the essay that ensues, and crop up in the larger context of the conference and later critical reception of the piece as a printed work. In a desperate effort to avoid the problem of isolation Siniavskii disavows as decidedly Western, critics reveal a recurrent inability to sit with the very radical singularity the essay engages. As one panelist chimes in,

Here’s what I want to ask Andrei Sinyavsky: now that he has been released from the Soviet camps, does he consider himself to be in solidarity with all the men of the confined world, whether on the political right or left, does he still feel imprisoned so long as any man or woman in the world is still in prison?

The reflex of Siniavskii’s listeners and readers to reach out to an/other (who looks surprisingly like the self) against the odds and insist on the indomitable possibility of communication in all circumstances might be called “mimetic presentism,” an analog to the idea of mimetic historicism I describe by way of Carolyn Dinshaw in Chapter Three.⁶ Such a presentist gesture effaces the specificity of the scene Siniavskii is at pains to preserve, wherein the lone human being is severed from a default faith in enlightenment humanism, so comfortingly common and supra-ideological, and a more profound faith in the promise of language to encompass the whole of human experience. The very need for shared meaning and human connection, itself a quintessentially ideological compulsion for universality over particularity, marks the unacknowledged horizon of most critical readings of Siniavskii’s essay, which this last chapter seeks to overcome even in the face of extreme philosophical dis-ease. It’s true -- silence and alterity were salient features of Russia’s social landscape after Stalin, of the then-and-there of the Soviet Union’s thaw and stagnation periods, but they are also a part of the contemporaneous and contemporary West, of the then and now of here as much as there. In Siniavskii’s own twisting turn-of-phrase, “we all experience all of this” [*kazhdyi iz nas vse eto perezhivaet*].

SINIAVSKII/TERTZ: AN UN/PERSONAL STORY

“And we were not interested in sacrificing ourselves for a cause. Blissfully ignorant of the fact that we represented the Soviet human-rights movement in its gestation stage, we

⁵ Abram Tertz [Andrei Sinyavsky], *The Trial Begins and On Socialist Realism*. Trans. Max Hayward (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). English translations of Tertz’s text come from this edition unless otherwise noted. For the Russian original, I refer to the online version, which is also the definitive edition of the samizdat “classic.” Abram Tertz [Andrei Siniavskii], *Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realizm. Antologiya samizdata* (1957); online <http://antology.igrunov.ru/authors/synyavsky/1059651903.html>.

⁶ See Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 34. For more on the supra-ideological need for nonalterity and relation at all costs, see Michael Cobb, *Single: Arguments for the Uncoupled* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

were basking in the Khrushchev liberalization, discovering what it means to be human.”⁷
—Lyudmilla Alexeyeva, *The Thaw Generation*

Before moving on to an interpretation of the ‘meat’ of Siniavskii’s text, I want to situate its conditions of composition against the broader biographical and historical backdrops of Soviet literary and political life at the time. So doing, I hope to impart a sense of the special urgency with which Siniavskii wrote, while bringing into relief the larger reasons why Siniavskii might have attached subtle charges of superficiality to Western attitudes about speech, silence, and society. (If they have any literary analog, Siniavskii’s gentle criticism reminds one of the kindly but deflating portrait of Western progressivism Milan Kundera paints in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* [*Nesnesitelná lehkost bytí*, 1984], a book relevantly set in socialist Czechoslovakia after the Prague Spring of 1968. Kundera embodies this quasi-utopian worldview in Franz, the Swiss lover of expatriate Czech artist Sabina. Franz believes firmly in the Grand March of the European Enlightenment. For her ability to confront the fundamental kitsch of Franz’s unfaltering humanism, and, moreover, do this with a delicious irony supposedly particular to Slavic cultures, Sabina comes off as the novel’s most sympathetic hero.)

To offer an unfairly brief synopsis of his remarkable experience as a rebellious ‘child of the revolution,’ Andrei Donatovich Siniavskii was born in 1925 and raised in Soviet Russia, where he became an esteemed literary philologist under his own name, and an underground author under the pseudonym Abram Tertz. In 1965, he was arrested with friend and fellow samizdat writer, Yulii Daniel. The two were put on show-trial for “anti-Soviet activity”—an event that many regard as the end of the era of cultural liberalism inaugurated by Khrushchev’s thaw [*ottepel’*] in the mid-1950s. (The year before the arrests, Khrushchev himself had been ousted by bureaucratic conspiracy, as a consequence of which Leonid Brezhnev was installed as General Secretary of the Communist Party for the 1960s-1980s, during the relatively repressive years that came to be known as ‘stagnation’ [*zastoi*].) The Siniavskii-Daniel trial [*protsess Siniavskogo i Danielia*] was politically momentous for multiple reasons. It was the first time Soviet authors had been prosecuted precisely for writing anti-Soviet literature, and not on other grounds; previously they had been arrested and simply disappeared without due procedure. And in an unprecedented sign of protest, both Siniavskii and Daniel pled not guilty. (Siniavskii put forth the ultimate philologist defense: that the author and his heroes were not one and the same.) Finally--though this would only become apparent after the fact--the highly publicized trial gave rise to the Soviet dissident movement, which created a sustained spectacle of anti-communist sentiment for citizens within the USSR and, significantly, abroad in the US until the fall.

Despite the international controversy the trial caused as it ran its course, and the bad press for the socialist camp of the cold war it quickly accrued and brought to culmination, Siniavskii was found guilty on February 14, 1966, and sentenced to seven years in prison. He was released five years later, and, two years after that, in 1971, he left the Soviet Union once and for all. He moved to France with his wife, Mariia Rozanova, and their child. For the rest of his life, the criminalized author remained a remote but active participant in the unofficial Russian literary scene, founding the tamizdat journal

⁷ Ludmilla Alexeyeva and Paul Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation: Coming of Age in the Post-Stalin Era* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1990), 97.

Sintaksis. He was also a visible activist in the displaced dissident movement of Paris, which put in contact the capital's Russian émigré and disenchanting French leftist circles.⁸ He died in Paris in 1997.

In the years following his arrest and incarceration, as the dissident movement was most actively recording such abuses of Soviet power, Siniavskii saw the prison and labor camp as sitting dead center in the unofficial Russian literature of the day. . . . and of Russia life more generally. As he wrote from within its confines, "the camp is the center of Russia. From any distance it is the center."⁹ [*Lager'—tsentr Rossii. V liubom udalenii—tsentr.*] More than anything, the camp was the primary topos of impermissible literature.

Let us now examine the subject matter of these manuscripts. We shall not be far wrong if we say that the major topics are prison and labor camps. The themes which inspire the Russian writer today are not stories about collective farms, or factories, not love stories or even the pangs of youth, but how people are imprisoned, where they are sent into exile, and exactly how (interesting topic, you must admit) they shoot you in the back of the neck. The labor camp is now the central, the dominant theme of literature. In a short space of time we have succeeded by stealth, by quiet burrowing away, in composing a hitherto unique, unheard-of series of novels, stories, poems, and memoirs around the motif of penal servitude. Dostoevsky's *Notes from the House of the Dead* is *vieux jeu*; all Russia is now howling about the House of the Dead through the megaphone of literature.¹⁰

Теперь посмотрим - о чем пишут больше всего в этих рукописях? Вряд ли мы ошибемся, если скажем: о тюрьмах и о лагерях. Не над колхозной, промышленной, не над любовной и не над молодежной даже тематикой болеет сейчас больше всего душою русский писатель, а на тему - как сажают, куда ссылают, каким образом (интересно же!..) стреляют в затылок. Лагерная тема сейчас - ведущая и центральная. За короткий срок мы тайком, тихой сапой, сумели создать еще невиданную, небывалую в истории серию романов, повестей, поэм, мемуаров на каторжную мелодию. Куда там "Записки из Мертвого дома"! Сейчас вся Россия воет Мертвым домом в литературную трубу.

As Siniavskii glibly comments, such stories about "how people are imprisoned, where they are sent into exile, and exactly how (interesting topic, you must admit) they shoot you in the back of the neck. . . . We'd sooner die of starvation than stop writing about the

⁸ As an interesting consequence of this overlap in Parisian political-intellectual communities during the 1970s, Michel Foucault makes recourse to Siniavskii's Gogol' book in the former's lectures about counterconduct at the Collège de France. Foucault also records Siniavskii's attendance at an anti-Brezhnev rally in Paris in June 1977 at the Récamier Theater. Consult the lecture delivered on February 15, 1978 in *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78*. Edited by Michel Snellart. Translated by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 161n64.

⁹ Abram Tertz (Andrei Siniavskii). "Golos iz khora." In *Sobranie sochinenii v 2 tomakh*, t. 1 (Moscow: Start, 1991), 630.

¹⁰ Tertz, "Literary Process," 81.

bullet in the back of the neck.”¹¹ Yet, for all the centrality of the camp, this “center disappeared (Where did it get off to?),”¹² and absconded with the significance of its inhabitants, within the Soviet Union and throughout the world.

When the West (where all these books are ultimately being published with scholarly commentary) was listening to you cry wolf, it was naturally thrown into ecstasy and astonishment. You stayed silent and stayed silent, you endured and endured, and sometimes even glorified the regime, but now! Now! When practically no one is being sentenced—you start reading the burial service over the regime and hinder us from trading with it! How many dissidents are there, anyway, in your multimillion population? You can count them on the fingers of one hand. And isn't there a limit to what can be written on a single topic?”¹³

Когда Запад (где все эти книги в конце концов издаются с научными комментариями) прислушивается к этому волчьему вою, он, естественно, приходит в экстаз и в изумление: молчали-молчали, терпели-терпели и даже, случалось, славили, а теперь, теперь! когда никого почти не сажают, вы поете отходную и мешаете нам торговать?! Сколько вас - на весь многомиллионный народ - диссидентов? - раз, два и обчелся. И сколько можно писать про одно и то же?

Thus Siniavskii ventriloquized the baffled Western reader of Russian prison literature. As camp literature was consumed in the West, its reception confirmed what this dissertation has termed the cold war repressive hypothesis, which predominates in the dissident-centric or Western totalitarian accounts of the post-Stalin period. Characteristically, Siniavskii infuses this Western anti-Soviet voice with a pointed personal irony, given that he himself had just been imprisoned. To be sure, these loaded locations had already formed a frequent backdrop to Siniavskii's writing before and after he 'sat' out his sentence. And he does indeed implicate himself in this literary obsession by means of a well-placed detail: the final image of the bullet in the back of the neck conjures up the conclusion of his pre-trial short story, “In the Circus” [*V tsirke*], whose inmate-protagonist performs a *salto mortale* over the prison fence, only to be shot down by the guards midair, landing face-down and dead, but finally free. As if prefiguring the bodily extremes of “I” and “They,” Siniavskii emphasizes, “We'd sooner die of starvation than stop writing about the bullet in the back of the neck.”¹⁴ But starvation itself was an act of subversive artistry, to which Siniavskii devotes his attention in “I” and “They,” and to which this chapter now turns to face in the following section.

“I” AND “THEY” AND US: WHAT’S IN A NAME?

¹¹ Ibid., 81-2.

¹² Tertz, *Golos iz khora*, 664. “Центр исчез (куда подевался центр?)” In Siniavskii's question, one hears the final epistemological query from the end of Nikolai Gogol's *Dead Souls* [*Mertvye dushi*, 1842]: Русь, куда же несешься ты?

¹³ Tertz, “Literary Process,” 81.

¹⁴ Ibid., 81-2.

“I’m expressing with my full capabilities, and now I’m living in correctional facilities.”
— N.w.A., “Express Yourself”

Siniavskii begins his speech at the Geneva conference with a strange anecdote, which, he alleges should simplify the more difficult material that follows.

I begin, for simplicity, with an anecdote. In the women’s dormitory for factory workers, where there are eight to twelve cots to a room, Klava contemplatively says to her friend Nina, “You know, Nina, just now I was sitting here alone and all of a sudden Vaska ran in, jumped me, humped me, and ran out... Sinking into thought, she asks, “and what did he want to say by all that?!..” This is funny and awkward, but if we approach such an episode seriously, then really the rapist Vas’ka by his unexpected, unmotivated action, more accurately, by his silent and simultaneously eloquent gesture, wanted to express something, to say something.

Начну, для простоты, с анекдота. В женском общежитии, для работниц, где восемь или двенадцать коек в комнате, Клава задумчиво говорит своей подруге Нине: - Ты знаешь, Нина! Сейчас, когда я сидела здесь одна, вдруг прибежал Васька, опрокинул меня - употребил - и убежал...
Задумываясь: - И что он всем этим хотел сказать?!..
Это смешно и неловко. Но если подойти к подобному эпизоду серьезно, то насильник Васька действительно своим неожиданным, немотивированным поступком, точнее -своим молчаливым и вместе с тем красноречивым жестом - что-то хотел выразить, сказать.¹⁵

Though my extended analysis of this short piece will veer quite far from its curious opening salvo, I urge readers to keep in mind the fact that this story of heterosexual rape frames the rest of Siniavskii’s speech, and punctuates (or punctures) it throughout. Indeed, this is the first of no less than three analogic leaps that Siniavskii makes, which are worthy of examination independently and interdependently. The relationship of each rhetorical move to the next proves consequential to this analysis, I emphasize, and in the argument Siniavskii himself puts forth.

Returning to the structure of his paper, Siniavskii springboards off this anecdote, the meaning of which is muddy even to the very people involved in the silent exchange.

¹⁵ Andrei Siniavskii, “‘Ia’ i ‘oni’: O krainikh formakh obshcheniia v usloviakh odinochestva.” Reprinted in Abram Tertz, *Puteshestvie na chernuiu rechku i drugie proizvedeniia. Stat’i. Esse.* (Moscow: “Zakharov,” 1999): 240-253. All translations of this text are mine. Page numbers from this edition will be cited parenthetically within the main body of the chapter, whereas citations from the French-language conference proceedings, including the opening remarks and the question-and-answer session conducted with Siniavskii on the following day of his lecture, will appear only in footnotes. All translations are mine. Andrei Siniavskii, « MOI » ET « EUX » (Sur quelques formes extrêmes de la communication dans des conditions de solitude) In *Solitude Et Communication: Textes Des Conférences et des Entretiens Organisés par les Vingt-Cinquièmes Rencontres Internationales De Genève*, 165-183. The question and answer session is found in the same collection, “Quatrième entretien public présidé par M. Jean Starobinski,” 184-204.

He takes their confused query as the point of entry into the rest of the essay. What is the significance of a seemingly unmotivated, unpredictable, silent and violent gesture? Siniavskii lays out the stakes of his intervention with Klava's question, which addresses the relationship between the subject, speech, and reality on a macrological level—sociality as such [*obshchenie kak takovoe*]—but, more particularly, how this communicative triangle maps onto specific extreme circumstances. Although, as Vas'ka's act of sexual aggression demonstrates, all human attempts at communication are extreme, absurd, and, by logical extension, founded on an originary and gendered violence. "When our most impassioned and imploring speeches do not penetrate [*pronimaiut*] reality, or when we find words insufficient or simply lack them, then we resort to gestures, to actions, in order to say something." [Когда ее, действительность, не понимают наши самые пылкие и убедительные речи или когда нам недостает, у нас нет этих слов, мы переходим на жесты, на действия, чтобы что-то сказать.] Assuming an almost Stanislavskiiian position, Siniavskii asserts that gesture picks up the emotional slack when verbal speech fails; in so saying, he effectively transforms the zone of the camp [*zona zaklucheniia*] into a zone of silence [*zona molchaniia*], to employ the famed director's own dramatic term (which, by the way, is not unsuited to Siniavskii's argument as it soon takes a turn toward the theatrical itself). The camp subject is confined in the prisonhouse of language. Yet his move to gesture emerges out of a desire to speak so supremely desperate, so at war with words themselves, that the speechless subject's anger at language infects the acts it occasions. "Thus a quarrel [*spor*] grows into a row [*draku*], and this row turns out to be the displacement of a dialogue." [Так, спор, случается, перерастает в драку, и эта драка оказывается замещением диалога...]

Even this sentence is swallowed into the silence of ellipsis, and thereby seems to bury the fundamental violence of language in a grammatical gap. To go down this rabbit-hole, Siniavskii suggests, would require retelling the entire history of humanity, insofar as "the whole life of man and society is for the most part but an attempt to explain oneself to those nearby."¹⁶ This revelation is shocking in its severity and suddenness, but Siniavskii does not dwell. Putting on a stoic and scholarly mien, he quickly delimits the scope of his conference paper from "all of human history" to the "extreme forms of communication in conditions of isolation," a linguistico-anthropological phenomenon with which he has first-hand experience having done 'fieldwork' in the prison and the camp. From this uniquely "extreme" location, Siniavskii promises to produce more global commentary on the nature of the human, the human in relation to the symbolic, the individual with respect to society [*lichnost'iu s obshchetvom*], the "'I' and the 'they'" (241). (Perhaps assisting our comprehension of the Vas'ka anecdote, this may be why Siniavskii and his codefendant were put on trial for "regarding Soviet society as 'the rape of individuality'" [*nasilie nad lichnost'iu*].¹⁷) But the breeziness with which Siniavskii observes this constitutive violence and subsumes its horror into dispassionate scholarly discourse belies the way it subtly underlies the entire presentation. With this brusque deflection, he slides the dark side of all human language, its constitutive violence, to the very core of his analysis, in the first place, but more disturbingly, to the whole of

¹⁶ On the philosophic problem of the neighbor see Slavoj Žižek, "Smashing the Neighbor's Face." In *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology* edited by Slavoj Žižek, Eric L. Santner and Kenneth Reinhar (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

¹⁷ Iurii Mal'tsev, *Vol'naiia russkaia literatura, 1955-1975* (Frankfurt: Posev, 1975).

human experience with/in the symbolic order, within society as a symbolic formation, or sociality as such. A case study of the prison may bring into relief the brutality of the symbolic on the subject, but the whole of social experience is forged in this same crucible of symbolic violence.

Extending an anticipatory apology to the reader of delicate sensibilities, Siniavskii proceeds to body forth a series of “inappropriate, scary and disgusting” examples of the bodily “jargon” of campmates, ones which have been well-documented in personal memoirs but perhaps not yet properly understood. [Но дело в том, как осмыслить, как понять эти факты (241)]. I include this procedural section of his presentation here, but break it down into smaller units to better grapple with the complex argument he makes with such agility. His opening gambit is strictly semiotic: he introduces a genre of prison ‘speech,’ profiles its ‘typical’ speaker, and provides a paradigmatic subset of this style of ‘speech.’

I will first refer to a rather wide-spread custom among prisoners with consecutive or life sentences to carry out on themselves all manners of monstrous, unnatural manipulations in the form of swallowing spoons and other hard objects of prison life; in the form of implementing the so-called “anchor,” which is driven into the sexual member, or the drinking of one’s own blood, the eating of one’s own meat. (241)

Сошлюсь, во-первых, на довольно распространенный обычай среди повторно и бессрочно сидящих заключенных проделывать над собой всевозможные чудовищные, противоестественные манипуляции — в виде глотания ложек и других твердых предметов тюремного обихода, в виде снаряжения так называемого “якоря”, который загоняется в член, или питья собственной крови, поедания собственного мяса.

Having flexed his philologist muscle with a bit of generic categorizing, Siniavskii then puts forth the prevailing interpretation of these speech acts, setting up a gentle polemic with its promoters.

This “self-eating” is most easily explained as perversion, psychopathy, and writes off such subjects into the ranks of the inferior, of the repeating human face of waste. Sometimes, even in our camp literature, a contemptuous appraisal of this sort slips out. That is to say, these people are non-people, driven by the system to this animal and even subanimal existence. Which prompts the question: what is to be done with them?” Destroy them once more? Isolate them anew? (241)

Это «самоедство» проще всего объяснить извращением, психопатией и списать подобных субъектов в разряд неполноценного, потерявшего человеческий облик отребья. Иногда - даже в нашей лагерной литературе - проскальзывает этого рода высокомерная оценка. Дескать, те люди - нелюди, доведенные системой до животного и ниже животного состояния. И спрашивается: что с такими делать? - неужто опять истреблять? наново изолировать?!

The initial gentility of his address, first in the apologizing, and here in his euphemistic accusation (“such superior opinions slip out,” as if passively, through the agency of the writing alone and not the writer), strikes a false note alongside the urgency and severity of his subject matter, which seeps into the extreme terms of his speech—the superlativity of his punctuation, the force of his lexical repetitions, the proliferation of verbal intensifiers, and so on. There is simply no way to be delicate or diminutive about what he is about to describe, and so he stops trying. His assault on this perilously superior estimation of the self-harming prisoner rings out with such exasperation, one is reminded how easily a verbal tiff can turn into actual fisticuffs, to use Siniavskii’s expression, how short the distance really is between fighting words and the real violence that language perpetrates or papers over.¹⁸

For his part, Siniavskii cannot keep down his contempt at the contemptuous, disgust at those who are disgusted—even *you*, he gasps, *even you who have been deprived of your own humanity would deprive others of theirs, call them animals, less than animals, consign them to social confinement or execution for a second time!* Siniavskii deepens the intertextual dimension of his dispute with his simple semantic reclassification of the word, “*samoedstvo*,” whose figurative connotation of corrosive self-critique (akin to “*samokritika*”) he takes literally to mean the act of corroding one’s own material or embodied self. Forming his word, “*samoedstvo*,” in parallel with “*liudoedstvo*,” or cannibalism, Siniavskii also points literate audiences to specific passages in the emergent camp canon in which political or intelligentsia memoirists describe the anthropophagic tendencies of the same self-eating prison caste against whom they stake their own humanity: the common criminals, *blatari*, *urkas*, *vory* or thieves. *You accuse them of eating others, but listen now to how they consume themselves.*¹⁹ In the final section of his procedural opening, Siniavskii refuses to join this most dangerous game.

I cannot agree with this opinion, particularly because I have encountered and conversed with such people and can be convinced that the majority of them are not beasts, not degenerates and not insane, but totally normal people, and, moreover, occasionally endowed with extraordinary intellect and talent. And thus confronted with these facts I permit myself to pose the naïve question that the aforementioned Klava did on the occasion of Vaska’s strange behavior: “So what did he want to say with all that? (241)

¹⁸ The performative violence of verbal speech has been theorized from a post-structuralist, feminist perspective in Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

¹⁹ In her self-chronicle, Evgeniia Ginzburg brings up not only cannibalism as a way of separating herself off from the “unpeople” of the camp, but also concludes the piece “Paradise under the Microscope” [*Rai pod mikroskopom*] with an affirmation of her own pronominal being; she achieves a “you” at the end. “It was a terrible day, dear. But don’t despair. Yes, an animal lives in the human. But ultimately it cannot overcome the human. It was the first time he called me ‘you’ [informal, *ty*].” [— Это был страшный день, дорогая. Но не отчаивайтесь. Да, зверь живет в человеке. Но окончательно победить человека он не может. Впервые он назвал меня на «ты».] E.S. Ginzburg, *Krutoi marshrut: Khronika vremen kul'ta lichnosti*, t. 2, edited by L. Kopelev and R. Orlova (Riga: Kursiv, 1989), 61-69, at 69; accessed online at <<http://www.sakharov-center.ru/asfcd/auth/?t=page&num=12552>>

Я не могу согласиться с этим мнением - в частности, потому, что встречался и разговаривал с подобными людьми и мог убедиться, что в большинстве это совсем не звери, не выродки и не сумасшедшие, в вполне нормальные люди, притом порой наделенные незаурядным умом и талантом. И потому перед этими фактами я разрешаю себе поставить наивный вопрос, заданный вышеназванной Клавой по поводу странного поведения Васьки: «А что он всем этим хотел сказать?»».

Thus he loops back to his initial anecdote, which was then, in his words, “funny and awkward,” and, remarkably, introduced for the sake of a simplicity [*dlia prostoty*] that now feels like a red herring. If before it was “awkward,” then now it sits in an incredibly uncomfortable relationship with the graphic descriptions that ensue: a patriarchal or phallic violation of another’s bodily integrity as the analog for violence a person does to his own body. Though Siniavskii suppresses the internal dissonance of this metaphor, as do the few commentators on his piece—I take it up to the surface of my analysis.

In part, my motivation to do so emerges from the explanatory and pedagogical importance Siniavskii himself attached to the anecdote as a genre. His former student of at Moscow State University remembers how central the lowbrow or comic quip was to Siniavskii’s aesthetic and philosophic thinking as early as the 1950s.

To the felicities of a brilliant style, which often detract from the underlying thought, [Siniavskii] preferred a homely image or even a parable which struck one at first as a humorous aside, a good-natured way of making fun of things; but, on second thought, one realized that the image, the joke, was a shortcut to understanding the subject, grasping its true significance; after that it would never be forgotten, and would become the starting point of one’s ideas.²⁰

Anecdotes as Siniavskii appreciated them are examples of “low theory,” Judith Jack Halberstam’s name for a kind of counterknowledge or “theoretical model that flies below the radar, that is assembled from eccentric [and accessible] texts and examples that refuses to confirm the hierarchies of knowing that maintain the *high* in high theory.”²¹ Unlike high or realist art, the folk genre of the anecdote, along with the criminal song or *blatnaia pesnia*, unlocked certain unspeakable and repressed truths about Soviet reality, Siniavskii reasoned.²² He admired these illegitimate speech genres as wily ways of working around “the bans on the written and printed word” that characterized “Soviet Russia” in the post-Stalin decades. More than its circumvention of official censorship, its Aesopian aspect, the anecdote transcends the very limits of verbal expression and social norms, in Siniavskii’s opinion. “What does this spoken word [the anecdote] do? In a broad sense, it goes beyond language’s border, beyond that which is received by society as the norm...these anecdotes are the ultimate development of the Soviet language. Their

²⁰ J. Bonamour quoted in Richard Lourie, *Letters to the Future: An Approach to Sinyavsky-Tertz* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), 17.

²¹ Judith Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011) 16.

²² Siniavskii speaks very briefly of the criminal song as a form of ‘silent’ speech or self-eating in “I” and “They,” and devotes an essay unto itself to the *blatnaia pesnia*. See and See Andrei Siniavskii, “Otchestvo. Blatnaia Pesnia. O zhanre russkii shanson,” *Sintaksis*, No. 9 (1972); reprinted in Abram Tertz, *Puteshestvie na chernuiu rechku i drugie proizvedeniia. Stat’i. Esse.* (Moscow: “Zakharov,” 1999).

spice is in the word, but taken to its truly comic extreme.”²³ This chapter then plays pupil to Siniavskii, the Soviet Sphinx, and mines his opening anecdote for its cultural meaning and meaningful comedy. Though the black humor of “‘I’ and ‘They’” falls by the wayside for a while, it returns to deliver the shocking blow of a blue punchline in the chapter that comes after this one.

For now it is necessary to enumerate the multiple arguments Siniavskii is making by means of this anecdote and opening. What are the stakes of his intervention? With what implicit issues, in what allusive polemics, is he engaging here? Siniavskii repurposes the punchline of the anecdote to ask the following sets of questions, as I understand them. (1) Who gets to speak as an “I” in late-socialism and how? How does the communicative act confer social identity or political intelligibility on the speaker, the “I,” without the promise of an interlocutor, or “you” (in plural and singular, formal and familiar forms)? What are the perils of entry into the symbolic order? In other words, what does one give up to become an “I”? And is this sacrifice a desirable thing?

(2) Who does not get an “I”? And how do the titular conditions of extremity and isolation impact on this process, especially as it is set in a culture of collectivity and consent? What alternative forms of signifying are available to the unintelligible “I”? For instance, how does the body of the subject speak back to the symbolic order that dispossesses it? What are the dangers and limitations of breaking into the symbolic or stealing in through the back door like a criminal, so to speak? For those not guaranteed an “I,” criminals whose speech is illicit and unintelligible, how are they still recognizable as real or human subjects? Indeed, how are speech and humanity connected categories of social organization and socialist reality?

(3) To the ‘I’ that bears witness, how does this bystander undertake a ‘translation’ without overtaking the unintelligible subject who performs them? Who masters the meaning of the communicative act on behalf of such socially unreal speakers? More to the point, what are the consequences of rendering intelligible the silent and seemingly incomprehensible speech of the Soviet Union’s others? What are the ethical and aesthetic risks we run when we venture even a partial translation of their alien gestures that does some work toward folding them back into political life, as this dissertation modestly seeks to do? And what happens when we refuse to render these radically unrecognizable performances of subjectivity intelligible or significant on their own terms?

At the core of his polemic, Siniavskii offers a corrective to existing accounts of these same unrecognizable actors, with which he finds himself ethically dissatisfied. In contrast to these interpretations that dissimulate as refusals to interpret, Siniavskii

²³ Sinyavsky, *Soviet Civilization: A Cultural History*, translated by Joanne Turnbull (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1990), 223. On the role of the anecdote in late-Soviet unofficial life, see Abram Tertz, “Anekdot v anekdote,” *Sintaksis*, No. 6 (1979), reprinted in *Puteshestvie na chernuiu rechku i drugie proizvedeniia. Stat’i. Esse*. (Moscow: “Zakharov,” 1999); Chapter 7 of Alexei Yurchak’s book, *Everything was Forever until it was No More* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 273-281; and Jane Gallop, *Anecdotal Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002). For the relationship of humor to heteronormativity, see Sigmund Freud, *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious* (New York: Penguin, 2002 [1905]).

Admittedly missing in the present analysis is an acknowledgment of the potential othering of woman in jokes like this – which go back in the Russian philological tradition to Shklovskii. Returning to this point where the neat meaning the anecdote, its take-home message for Siniavskii, doesn’t fit with the anecdote’s potential messiness in narrative and ethical terms.

ascribes the deauthorized speaker a “voice.” His self-appointed role as translator dignifies their bestial acts as human communication and, more than that, acts of creativity that restore the humanity of the creator (who self-destructs in the act of self-affirmation), while elevating his animalistic act to the status of art. The essay’s central metaphor of self-eating is not to be subsumed into samizdat. In fact, I contend, to do so is to lose sight of its reason for existing. Its subjects, these unrecognized or unrecognizable people in literal pain, are squeezed out of the Soviet symbolic not only by the state (they certainly do not qualify as *ideinye* positive heroes), but also by those who binarily oppose the state—the dissident activists, underground authors, and *intelligentnye* gulag memoirists, who scribble passionately to hold onto their own humanity despite the dehumanizing conditions of the camp, who are logically compelled, in a sense, to distance themselves from these common criminals, write them off as crazy incorrigibles, so that their claims against the repressive state can stick. It is as if they are saying, *these (un) people* belong here—I understand what criminality is – but *I* am here only because the totalitarian state cannot countenance critical thinking amongst its citizens.

This line of thinking prevails to varying degrees in the two primary intertexts of Siniavskii’s essay: (1) Anatolii Marchenko’s first prison memoir, *My Testimony* [*Moi pokazaniia*, samizdat, 1969], especially the chapter on ‘self-mutilation’ [*chlenovreditel’stvo*]; and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s politically explosive encyclopedia of camp life, *Gulag Archipelago, 1918-1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation* [*Arhipelag GULAG*, 1974], particularly the third chapter on interrogation torture techniques, which, like Siniavskii’s paper, asks about the limits of the ‘I’ in the face of the deliberate frustration of a ‘we.’²⁴ When he is not dismissing them as unworthy of attention or representation in the first place – “we are not going to investigate the successive waves of habitual criminals (*ugolovniki*) and nonpolitical offenders (*bytoviki*)”²⁵ —Solzhenitsyn is very keen in calling these unspeakable subjects up in order to separate them off from himself and his fellow political prisoners, and to police that tenuous boundary between species that is not spatialized in the zone. The convict prisoner is not his comrade in misery in the camp, as the political humanistically hopes, but a worse torturer than the prison guard.

Solzhenitsyn dramatizes an exemplary scene, in which the political prisoner is disabused of his presumption that he and the con have a common humanity. (Thus there is great injustice in that, by Solzhenitsyn’s calculations, ‘thieves’ and common criminals are spared the torture endured by the prisoner of conscience.²⁶) On the heels of his torturous interrogation among equals, that is, other Article 58ers, the political is initially optimistic about the company he will keep in confinement. He thinks to himself, “even if your cellmates have been totally different from you in development and experience, and even if you have quarreled with them, and even if they have *squealed on you*, they have all belonged to that same ordinary, sinful, everyday humanity among which you have spent your whole life.” All this shifts in the convoy, when the political has his “first

²⁴ Throughout this and the next chapter, I modify Thomas P. Whitney’s English translation of Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918-1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation I-II*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1973). 47. The Russian original has been accessed electronically from the following edition: *Arhipelag Gulag*. Paris: YMCA-Press, 1973; online <lib.ru/PROZA/SOLZHENITSYN/gulag.txt>. See pp. 111 and 123 in the Whitney translation for more on the loneliness of the accused.

²⁵ Solzhenitsyn, *Gulag Archipelago*, 33.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 505.

devastating encounter”²⁷ with the common criminal, with whom he has never interacted in his life, and who reveals himself to be the political’s most fundamental other.

When you were jammed into a Stolypin compartment you expected that here, too, you would encounter only colleagues in misfortune. All your enemies and oppressors remained on *the other side* of the bars, and you certainly did not expect to find them on *this* side. And suddenly you lift your eyes to the square recess in the middle bunk, to the only sky above you, and up there you see three or four—oh, no, not faces! They aren't monkey muzzles either, because monkey muzzles have something of the image and likeness in them! You see cruel, loathsome snouts up there, wearing expressions of greed and mockery. Each of them looks at you like a spider gloating over a fly. Their web is that grating which imprisons you—and you have been had!!

Вталкиваясь в столыпинское купе ты и здесь ожидаешь встретить только товарищей по несчастью. Все твои враги и угнетатели остались по *ту* сторону решетки, с *этой* ты их не ждешь. И вдруг ты поднимаешь голову к квадратной прорези в средней полке, к этому единственному небу над тобой -- и видишь там три-четыре -- нет, не лица! нет, не обезьяньих морды, у обезьян хоть чем-то должна быть похожа на образ! -- ты видишь жестокие гадкие хари с выражением жадности и насмешки. Каждый смотрит на тебя как паук, нависший над мухой. Их паутина -- эта решетка, и ты попался!

Not human, not animal, not even unevolved monkeys these archnids are more abject than Solzhenitsyn can imagine. Indeed, their unreality renders them difficult to represent at all. They resist Solzhenitsyn's prosopopoetic urges: lacking human countenances, they cannot countenance his verbal descriptions. (The facelessness of these criminal acquires significance among the styles of self-eating Siniavskii lays out later: if they haven't human faces, what matter how they decorate the 'living space' [*zhivoe mesto*] on their heads with words?) Instead of abiding the author's attempts at mimetic figuration, they initiate Solzhenitsyn's scramble for a single metaphor that fits, which multiplies into a frantic chain of insufficient figurations. All the metaphors he marshalls are admittedly inadequate, amounting in the end to a series of metonymic approximations.²⁸ *They are like this, except they are not; they are like this, and this, and this, and so on, and yet they are really unlike any of them.*

²⁷ Ibid., 500.

²⁸ That this happens on a convoy makes sense, since this kind of constant transference from one metaphorical vehicle to the next perfectly captures the inadequacy of language to signify the world, as Paul de Man explains. (He picks up on the bus transfer, “transport,” in French, to do this deconstructive work. “For what could be more perverse or corruptive for a metaphor aspiring to transcendental totality than remaining stuck in an enumeration that never goes anywhere? If number can only be conquered by another number, if identity becomes enumeration, then there is no conquest at all, since the state purpose of the passage to infinity was, like in Pascal, to restore the one, to escape the tyranny of number dint of infinite multiplication.” Paul de Man, “Anthropomorphism and Trope in Lyric.” In *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 19.

To the reader of Russian prison literature in its longer durée, Solzhenitsyn's criminal spider conjures up the human-archnid hybrid that skulked through Fedor Dostoevskii's *Notes from the House of the Dead* [*Zapiski iz mertvogo doma*, 1862]: "Sometimes I imagine I see before me a gigantic, monstrous spider of human proportion..." [*Mne inogda prestavlialos', chto ia vizhu pered soboi ogromnogo, ispolinskogo pauka, s cheloveka velichinoiu...*] I cite this passage from Siniavskii's own essay about "Dostoevskii and the Penal Colony"²⁹ ["Dostoveskii i katorga," 1981], which he uses to illustrate the position, contra Solzhenitsyn, to which he lays claim as his own in "'I' and 'They'" and his other camp writing. "If you take a step, the human being turns into an animal, into an insect," Siniavskii paraphrases Dostoevskii; but still further steps reveal the childish innocence and sublime beauty of the same formerly inhuman face, in the face of "alien and at times [*podchas*] antagonistic people," of murderers, thieves, and real criminal types, whom Dostoevskii would come to see, counterintuitively, as "the best people" [*luchshie liudi*]. While amidst the most acrid salt of the earth in prison, Dostoevskii delved fully into the "human theme" [*tema cheloveka*], and discovered, not the inhumanity of man, but humanity without measure [*u cheloveka – net izmerenii*]. For him, the human named not an identity, but a process, an incessantly metamorphosing figure that therefore resisted easy categorization or typification. So saying, Dostoevskii overturns the mimetic claim of the "type" [*tip*], the very cornerstone of realist literature, criticism, and philosophical discussion dominating his prerevolutionary day.

Pace Dostoevskii, with his limitless human or always (d) evolving human subject, Solzhenitsyn relies on the definition and self-identity of the human to cordon himself off conceptually from the criminal-insect who invades his actual space in the camp—*he sits on the same side of the prison bars!*--and his existential space in strands of prison writing like *Notes from the House of the Dead*. The very boundaries between man and animal abolished by Dostoevskii are essential for Solzhenitsyn to effect the decisive split between the political and the common criminal. This cruel dichotomy allows the latter to give lip service in *Gulag Archipelago*, on the one hand, to "investigating [those forgotten people] who fell within the broad definition of insects," as Lenin offered them up for purging in 1918, at the same time as Solzhenitsyn refuses but a few pages later to "investigate the successive waves of habitual criminals and nonpolitical offenders," or prisoners of "the simpler kind," that is, non-intelligentsia, who "wrote no memoirs."³⁰ Not having access to discourse themselves, Solzhenitsyn declines to waste his own words on these averbal animals, whose experience of language, he insists, is supremely perverse.

They squinch up their lips, as if they intend to bite you from one side. They hiss when they speak, enjoying that hissing more than the vowel and consonant sounds of speech—and the only thing about their speech that resembles the Russian language is the endings of verbs and nouns. It is gibberish.

²⁹ Andrei Siniavskii, "Dostoevskii i katorga," *Sintaksis*, No. 9 (1981).

³⁰ Solzhenitsyn, *Gulag Archipelago*, 27-28; 33; 25. Solzhenitsyn explains how the system of labor camps came about in response to Lenin's early formulation of a socialist hygiene project of insect extermination or purging, articulated as early as 1918: he "proclaimed the common, united purpose of 'purging the Russian land of all kinds of harmful insects' (27).

Они кривят рты, будто собираются куснуть тебя избоку, они при разговоре шипят, наслаждаясь этим шипением больше, чем гласными и согласными звуками речи -- и сама речь их только окончаниями глаголов и существительных напоминает русскую, она -- тарбарщина.

On the same side of the prison bars, these beastly *blatari* bite at the sides of their political cellmates with their words, feigning human speech which is nothing more than vocalized violence aimed at their politically righteous cellmates. Like animals who bite for the sake of biting (to preview a point made by Siniavskii-Tertz, which I call upon later in the chapter), these criminals speak only for the sake of speaking, for the pure sensual pleasure of producing certain abject sounds in their animal maws, revealing, moreover, a sick obsession with form over content, with means over end, with autotelic act or unintelligible gesture over social signification or purpose-oriented deed. This perverse relationship to speech places convict criminals on the edges of the symbolic, where, to expand Solzhenitsyn's metaphor, they wait in stealth for the unassuming political fly to catch his wings in the same web of inhumanity. Solzhenitsyn localizes the violence of language in these inhuman individuals, and preserves the sanctity of speech for the politicals, whereas for Siniavskii, all language is a violent violation of the real. The prioritization of content over form, the mistaking of symbolic systems with the reality they describe, is the real violence.

Thus these convict-spiders compel the breakdown of the political prisoner's humanity by sheer proximity, attacking most aggressively that *sine qua non* of moral human identity since Aristotle: speech. Destabilizing language for themselves first, then for the literate political who would attempt to understand his gibberish-spewing cellmate, such "strange gorilloids" [*strannye gorilloidi*] unmoor any chance at meaning-making or human communication more broadly. This is true for verbal speech as it is for silent gesture, as Solzhenitsyn depicts in the following hypothetical scenario. To his relief, the political sees a cross strung around a prisoner's neck, and accordingly believes him to be a believer, that is, until the criminal jabs his supposedly cross-forming fingers into his Christian neighbor's eyes, with a "gesture [...that] says, 'I'll gouge out your eyes, crowbait!'" And this one gesture, Solzhenitsyn deduces, "covers their entire philosophy and faith! If they are capable of crushing your eyeballs like worms, what is there on you or belonging to you that they'll spare? The little cross dangles there and your still uncrushed eyes watch this wildest of masquerades, and your whole system of reckoning goes awry."³¹ From the gesture that signifies but says nothing, or worse still, dissimulates as its opposite, "in one moment," in a single brief encounter with your new criminal neighbor, Solzhenitsyn warns,

³¹ "Вдруг с одной такой шеи свесится -- крестик! да, алюминиевый крестик на веревочке. Ты поражен и немного облегчен: среди них верующие, как трогательно; так ничего страшного не произойдет. Но именно этот "верующий" вдруг погибает в крест и в веру (ругаются они отчасти по-русски) и сует два пальца тычком, рогатинкой, прямо тебе в глаза -- не угрожая, а вот начиная сейчас выкалывать. В этом жесте "глаза выколо, падло!" -- вся философия их и вера! Если уж глаз твой они способны раздавить как слизняка -- так что на тебе и при тебе они пощадят? Болтается крестик, ты смотришь еще не выдвинутыми глазами на этот дичайший маскарад, и теряешь систему отсчета: кто из вас уже сошел с ума? кто еще сходит?"

all the customs and habits of human intercourse you have lived with all your life have broken down. In your previous life, particularly before your arrest but even to some degree afterward, even to some degree during interrogation, too, you spoke *words* to other people and they answered you in *words*. And those words produced actions. One might persuade, or refuse, or come to some agreement. You recall various human relationships—a request, an order, an expression of gratitude. But what has overtaken you here is beyond all these words and beyond all these relationships. An emissary of the ugly snout descends, most often a vicious boy whose impudence and rudeness are thrice despicable... [You can explain nothing] in words [to him], nor deny, nor prohibit or plead with that evil little skunk or those foul snouts above. They are not people. This has become clear to you in one moment. The only thing to be done with them is to *beat* them, to beat them without wasting any time flapping your tongue.³²

В один миг трещат и ломаются все привычки людского общения, с которыми ты прожил жизнь. Во всей твоей прошлой жизни -- особенно до ареста, но даже и после ареста, но даже отчасти и на следствии -- ты говорил другим людям *слова*, и они отвечали тебе *словами*, и эти слова производили действие, можно было или убедить, или отклонить, или согласиться. Ты помнишь разные людские отношения -- просьбу, приказ, благодарность, -- но то, что застигло тебя здесь -- вне этих слов и вне этих отношений. Посланником харь спускается вниз кто-то, чаще всего плюгавенький малолетка, чья развязность и наглость омерзительнее втройне... Ни этому маленькому злему хорьку, ни тем харям наверху нельзя ничего объяснить словами, ни отказать, ни запретить, ни выпроситься! Они -- не люди, это объяснилось тебе в одну минуту. Можно только -- *бить*! Не ожидая, не тратя времени на шевеление языка -- *бить*! -- или этого ребенка, или тех крупных тварей наверху.³³

“Who are they? Where do they come from?” [*Kto oni? Otkuda?*] Solzhenitsyn demands, stirred to exasperation by his own narrative. What do they want from you? Why do they do what they do? And here we hear Siniavskii, *What do they mean to say by all that?* By all that inhuman speaking and inscrutable gesturing? By showing one thing (a cross), and meaning another (irreverence)? By confusing all the normal orders of human meaning and morality? And what are we supposed to do with these unpeople who inflict such violence on the social order? Solzhenitsyn has a fast and unflinching answer to the last question: we can only do one thing—do violence to them! [*Mozhno tol'ko—bit'!*]

This is the ethical crux of Siniavskii's critical polemic in “‘I’ and ‘They,’” which divides the canon of the gulag genre more generally. In one camp of camp literature, there are writers like Solzhenitsyn who deny the common criminal a common humanity and reduce them to the status of unreal. Writers of this sort hate criminals, Siniavskii declares at the onset of his essay. But this animus is mutual, according to Anatolii Marchenko: just as writers usually detest all cons, and refuse to include them in their

³² Solzhenitsyn, *Gulag Archipelago*, 501-502.

³³ In the Russian, see “Часть вторая. Вечное движение. Глава 1. Корабли Архипелага,” *Arkhipelag GULag*; online http://antisoviet.narod.ru/Solz/gulag_v1016.html#016

selective representations of reality, so “cons usually detest all writers,” reasons Marchenko, on the grounds of this very exclusion. “How many times have they read in books or newspapers about ‘reforming criminals with honest labor’ or the stern but just reforming governor? But where does anyone ever write about our starvation, about the brutal tyranny that drives so many cons to suicide?”³⁴ This unethical omission is precisely what Siniavskii seeks to redress in his paper to the Geneva conference. In the first place, he rejects Solzhenitsyn’s appropriative act of interpretation, when the latter extracts an entire philosophy and faith from his (mis) recognition of a single gesture by a single criminal. Rather than taking Solzhenitsyn’s instantaneous assessment as truth, Siniavskii resists the eminent knowability of the convict’s total meaning, and instead asks, as Marchenko will, what did he mean to say by all that? At the same time, he acknowledges the limits to his own attempts at interpretation, and any attempt at interpretation for that matter, since any expression of the subject in speech yields an inexpressible, irreducible remainder.

SINIAVSKIIAN UNPEOPLE AND TERTZIAN POST-HUMANISM

*“no liberalism can extend itself to the point of self-annihilation
...first axiology. Then ethics.”³⁵
—Kirill Medvedev*

Given how explicitly in this and other post-incarceration pieces Siniavskii interrogates the epistemological enmity between the *intelligent* writer and the illiterate criminal, aligning himself more closely with the latter and thereby confounding the clear-cut distinction between these categories, it is shocking how reliably the critical commentary on “‘I’ and ‘They’” collapses these inimical identities into an analogy that re-subordinates the criminal within the same social hierarchy Siniavskii disavows. Interpretations of this stripe often strip Siniavskii’s argument down to a mere passing mention of prisoners in service to an impassioned plea on behalf of the politically-imperiled samizdat author. To be sure, Siniavskii himself intimates but abbreviates such a connection, qualifying it as “distant” [*otdalennaia sviaz*]. Even in the scope of expansive and otherwise unimpeachable scholarship on Siniavskii, this misreading recurs. Catherine Nepomnyashchy, for instance, contends that this text “expresses the desperate situation of the writer in an authoritarian state—and, to an extent—of all writers—confronted by a hostile and unreceptive readership by analogy with the breakdown of language between

³⁴ Anatoly Marchenko, *My Testimony* [*Moi pokazaniia*], translated by Michael Scammell (New York : E. P. Dutton, 1969 [1st ed.]), 375. For English renditions of Marchenko’s text, I defer to Scammell’s translation of an abridged version of *My Testimony*. In some cases, I have modified this translation; in others, I have provided my own where Scammell’s is not available (as is not infrequently the case in supremely graphic or ‘gay’ instances). For the Russian of *Moi Pokazaniia*, I rely on the samizdat original (ca. 1967) curated by Mark Barbakadze, on his invaluable website of unofficial texts from the Soviet era, “Antologiiia samizdata.” *Moi pokazaniia* is located online at <<http://Antology.Igrunov.Ru/Authors/March/Pokazania.Html>>.

³⁵ Dmitry Kuzmin quoted in Kirill Medvedev, “Dmitry Kuzmin: Russian Poetry Today,” translated by Keith Gessen and Cory Merrill, *n + 1*, 13 (Winter 2012): 29-54, at 44.

authorities and prisoners in camps.”³⁶ Significantly, she does not attend at all to the initial analog, the anecdote about rape, which animates Siniavskii’s entire presentation. While she is accurate in acknowledging the link, she overplays its importance: the illiterate prisoners in Siniavskii’s paper are reduced in her estimation to vehiculating a metaphor of political oppression for which the true subject, the metaphorical tenor, are authors like Siniavskii himself. Moreover, her metaphorical displacement is totalizing in its language, as these specific prisoners stand in for “all writers,” including Solzhenitsyn and his ilk. This kind of interpretation eclipses the many minutes of painful elaboration Siniavskii has undertaken as mere preface to a more urgent remark about the situation of the writer in an oppressive regime. It presumes that Siniavskii has entered into such graphic descriptions for primarily self-important purposes: to make an extreme point about the criminality of literature, belittling his barely-there subjects to a bit part in the symbolic drama of Soviet modernity, as mere metaphorical screen onto which the author projects his own elevated experience as an intellectual-political-dissident. By displacing forms of direct bodily violence for “ideological violence,” Nepomnyashchy’s position squares with “the tolerant liberal attitude” that Slavoj Žižek sees as “[predominating] today,”³⁷ one with apparent roots in the liberal attitude of Soviet dissidents.

Though an analogy undoubtedly exists, the first term of the analogy — the bodily art of self-mutilating prisoners, disproportionately elaborated — cannot be subsumed, as Nepomnyashchy and other commentators have done. This critical reading of Siniavskii’s reading of these prisoners—but decidedly not Siniavskii’s reading of these prisoners—is “reliant on structures of similitude and displacement,” that is, on the poetic props of political analogy, which enact a secondary or “epistemic violence” on the subjects whose real or immediate pain is the subject of Siniavskii’s speech. Paraphrasing Anjali Arondekar, whose suspicion with political analogy I share: “Does the invocation of a [criminal] mark a similarity that renders irrelevant the specificities of the local”³⁸--a local that Siniavskii is at pains from the beginning of the essay to preserve? “To succumb to any easy comparison between” prisoner and author, one which Siniavskii, the alleged analogician, explicitly diminishes, “is to collapse the differential [logics] at work, to give in to a simple ‘them versus us’ narrative.”³⁹ And indeed, this hermeneutic move replaces the operative pronoun of Siniavskii’s argument with a new “they” – no longer prisoners against the state, his prisoners are posed again against the authors he invokes at the essay’s opening.

Though the terms of the analogy she interrogates are different, I draw on the format of Arondekar’s argument to pose a pointed question back to Siniavskii’s misled critics: What are the elisions that must be carried out in order to so metaphorize the criminal?⁴⁰ What kinds of questions, so pivotal to Siniavskii’s project, become unaskable in this

³⁶ Catharine Nepomnyashchy, *Abram Tertz and the Poetics of Crime* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 231. In another symptomatic interpretation of this kind, the literal wall at which desperate criminals shout for the sake of their psychic survival in the face of their physical extinction transmutes into a metaphorical Berlin wall that hems in the socially marginalized or unofficial author: “Siniavskii’s frustration at the wall of non-comprehension that divides writer and society from one another.” Eugenie Markesinis, Ph.d. Dissertation: *Andrei Siniavskii: A Hero of His Time?* London: University College, 2010).

³⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008), 10.

³⁸ Arondekar, “Border/Line Sex,” 238.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 238.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 237. Arondekar asks about the metaphorical homosexual in human rights discourse.

approach to his paper? By localizing its sphere of effects to the fraught plight of the author at odds with normative society and the totalitarian state, these critics lose the capacity to ask the question Siniavskii does: who can speak from the place of the human? No matter of mere rhetoric, this kind of “analogic conflation” has violent sequelae for the bodies that do the (dis) figuring here. Rather than link up the experiences of the criminalized writer and the (un) real criminal, the structure of analogy prevents their ever touching, cordoning them off into “parallel political formations,” and reinscribing the “irreconcilable separation” between both sides; the criminal and the political are segregated anew, in keeping with the discriminatory position propagated by Solzhenitsyn and other gulag authors in his anti-convict camp.⁴¹ In short, the very crux of Siniavskii’s ethical argument vanishes.

When these readings seize upon the unsustainable analogy without minding the initial figures on whom the comparison is based—perhaps willfully turning away from such gruesome scenes of subjection—they sanitize Siniavskii’s point and prioritize the artist over the criminal. Moreover, they miss the crucial human calculus Siniavskii lays bare in his reading of gulag literature: mocking an anti-Soviet Western reader, he asks in exasperation, why is everyone in Russia writing about the camp when “*practically no one* [is being] imprisoned”? In order to rescue the criminal from his status as “no one,” from his relegation beyond the borders of the representable human, to that epistemological pale to which the political prisoner must exile *this* most proximal other in order to keep his own humanity intact on the same side of the prison bars, I impel us to preserve the first term of Siniavskii’s discussion. In lieu of analogics, I embrace Arondekar’s proposal to perform a “Spivakian ‘transactional reading’ that articulates the analogical imperative as a ‘site of the displacement of function between sign systems.’ Within such transactional readings,” Arondekar explains, “the linking,” in our case, between the differentially oppressive positions of criminal and political prisoners, “becomes a dynamic dilation of difference, even as it speaks the language of similarity and kinship. Such a reading elaborates the very act of analogy as an active transaction between oppositions, even as it puts these oppositions into question, in ‘the breaking and relinking of the [signifying] chain.’”⁴² As Siniavskii does, we need to read the relationship between the criminal and the political not as parallel but as continuous subject-formations, whose connection, however distant, reveals something larger about the way power bears down on a variety of human bodies, and how these bodies in turn respond to that pressure. In his words, “It is worth our while to try to catch in these facts [of convict self-harm] not only a thick description of the camp quotidian life and local color, but also some kind of universally human stimuli” [*Stoit, odnako, popytat’sia ulovit’ v etikh faktakh ne tol’ko sugubo mestnyi, lagernyi, dikii byt i kolorit, no i kakie-to obshchechelovecheskie stimuli... (248)*].

I try to redirect these analogies into intersections that make the criminal and political touch. I do this by insisting that these categories remain contiguous—as they did in Siniavskii’s self-identification—instead of collapsing them metaphorically and thereby re-negating the criminal out of (figurative or fathomable) existence. Such analogic readings smooth over the unruly contradictions on which both Western-

⁴¹ Ibid., 236.

⁴² Ibid., 240. Arondekar derives her notion of the transactional reading from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography.” In *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, ed. Ranajit Guha. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985): 330-363, at 333-337.

supported dissident humanism as much as Soviet state ideology were based, a seeming contradiction I later address. The Russian thrall to Western humanism remains as firmly with us today as it did during the cold war, and continues to constrain the way we are able to critically assess Siniavskii's work as part of Soviet history writ large. Articulating this charge on behalf of a larger cohort of contemporary Soviet historians, Anna Krylova, for one, has "criticized the hangover of Cold War thinking that left American scholarship still searching for a 'liberal subject' ready to rebel against the Soviet system."⁴³ Siniavskii strained against this liberal impulse even earlier, when Western scholars and politicians were freshly intoxicated with the cold war, getting drunker on each incident of spectacular Russian dissent from the Soviet system. The inebriation was symbiotic, says Siniavskii, as "dissidents openly appealed to Western democracy, unafraid of playing into the hands of 'world imperialism.' And for its part, the West was fairly receptive..."⁴⁴ And, as Richard Pevear reminds us, Sinyavskii himself was conscripted into sympathy with Western liberalism in exactly this way—"convicted largely on the basis of Western reviews" which insisted that his work was a blanket rebellion of the lone artist against the totalitarian monolith. This reading required that Western eyes look on Siniavskii with a kind of cold-war tunnel vision, per Pevear, seeing only a political dissident and not a creative writer, rejecting Siniavskii's epistemological complexity in much the same way that his Soviet prosecutors did. This flattening made him a ready pawn of ideology in the black-and-white chess match of the day. "Western publishers marketed the writings of 'Abram Tertz' as daring criticisms of the Soviet regime" to satisfy the "craving" of the Western capitalist camp for literary "evidence that the Soviet 'experiment' [was] not working out."⁴⁵ Such tendentious interpretations took the plea for "freedom" from the "fetters" of the socialist state as the *raison d'être* of all unofficial Soviet art.

Needless to say, the universal desirability of that distinctly liberal style of "freedom" was not interrogated by its Soviet aspirants or Western promoters at the time, nor is it today, for the most part. For political subjects of this stripe, the inalienable rights of the autonomous individual emerge in the political field on unassailable terms, as "that which we cannot not want."⁴⁶ But Siniavskii speaks from precisely this impossible perspective of one who does not want what cannot not be wanted—permitting a quadruple negation pertinent to the paper I am analyzing. Throughout his writing as Siniavskii and Tertz, the multiform author has only questions to ply to a concept of freedom that poses itself as unquestionable. "When Western writers deplore our lack of freedom of speech, their starting point is their belief in the freedom of the individual."⁴⁷ But this freedom for Western liberals "who have accepted the spirit of individualism, with its free elections, free enterprise, free choice, and free press,"⁴⁸ is deeply conservative; freedom in this context is always a choice between two things whose

⁴³ Miriam Dobson, "The Post-Stalin Era De-Stalinization, Daily Life, and Dissent," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 12, 4 (Fall 2011): 905–24. See Anna Krylova, "The Tenacious Liberal Subject in Soviet Studies," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian & Eurasian History* 1, no. 1 (2000): 19–46.

⁴⁴ Sinyavsky, *Soviet Civilization*, 68.

⁴⁵ Richard Pevear, "Sinyavsky in Two Worlds," *The Hudson Review* 25.3 (Autumn, 1972): 375–402, at 384.

⁴⁶ Wendy Brown borrows Spivak's language to describe the irresistibility of liberal subjectivity in "Suffering the Paradoxes of Rights." In *Left Legalism/Left Critique*, edited by Wendy Brown and Janet E Halley (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 420–434.

⁴⁷ Tertz, *What is Socialist Realism*; quoted in *ibid.*, 390.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

respective selection changes nothing, since both sides reside squarely within the same political frame. Permitting himself a religious metaphor for a moment, Siniavskii-Tertz concludes that “even the most liberal god offers only one freedom of choice: to believe or not to believe,” a binary option that cannot displace the theological axis of the world.⁴⁹ For these profound limitations, liberal humanism has little to offer the world, and even less to alter it with. In Siniavskii’s opinion, boldly put, “Western ideas about the renunciation of [Soviet state force] have no appeal to me. My reply to liberal critics is: What have all your humane old dodderers achieved?”⁵⁰

Turning now to the more recent (and more local) interventions made by Saba Mahmood, a feminist anthropologist of the Middle East at UC Berkeley, we can hear Siniavskii’s questions of nearly half a century ago resound still with scholars who brush uncomfortably against the limits of liberal humanism within the humanities. According to Mahmood, contemporary accounts of resistance outside of the West continue to rely on the same notion of freedom or “agency” that she and Siniavskii eschew, “understood as the capacity to realize one’s own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles (whether individual or collective).”⁵¹ For Mahmood, this means that “the humanist desire for autonomy and self-expression constitute the substrate, the slumbering ember that can spark to flame in the form of an act of resistance when conditions permit.” This promethean fantasy of liberal politics “seldom problematize[s...] the universality of the desire—central for liberal and progressive thought, and presupposed by the concept of resistance it authorizes—to be free...”⁵² Mahmood aims to find not one but “multiple modalities of agency” in the ‘fundamentalist’ subjects of her research, and thus “redress the profound inability within current feminist political thought to envision valuable forms of human flourishing outside the bounds of a liberal progressive imaginary.”⁵³ In the scope of humanism, such illiberal subjects fall outside “a certain grid of civilizational progress organized by such keywords as ‘democracy,’ ‘freedom,’ and ‘humanity,’” terms which “have come to superintend the figure of the monster.”⁵⁴

In direct conversation with Mahmood, and uncanny synchronicity with Siniavskii, Judith Jack Halberstam tries to “flesh out a [critique] of agency” in the limited sense Mahmood describes, in order to pursue a post-liberal “politics that exceeds the social conditions of its enunciation.” Halberstam stirs humanist scholars to move beyond humanism, and “track [other forms of agency] through territories of silence, stubbornness, self-abnegation, and sacrifice [to find...] subjects who cannot speak, who refuse to speak; subjects who unravel, who refuse to cohere; subject who refuse ‘being’ where being has

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Sinyavsky in *On Trial: The Soviet State Versus “Abram Tertz” and “Nikolai Arzhak,”* edited and translated by Max Hayward (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 87. The final plea was transcribed and circulated in samizdat in *Belaia kniga (The White Book,* a partial record of the Siniavskii-Daniel’ trial with supplementary documents). Aleksandr Ginzburg, *Belaia Kniga po delu Siniavskogo i Daniela, Moskva 1966* (Frankfurt: Posev, 1967). The punitive action taken against it compilers was known as the “Trial of Four” [*protsess chetyrekh*].

⁵¹ Saba Mahmood, “Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on The Egyptian Islamic Revival.” *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 2 (2001): 202-326.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 155.

⁵⁴ Jasbir K. Puar and Amit Rai. “Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots.” *Social Text* 20.3 (2002): 117-48.

already been defined in terms of a self-activating, self-knowing, liberal subject.”⁵⁵ Halberstam’s feminist critique is cut from the same cloth as Siniavskii’s dissident one, based as they both are on a kind of negativity or refusal of the false choice that Western liberalism presents the political subject of “for” or “against,” compliance or resistance. Instead Halberstam “[proposes] that feminists refuse the choices as offered—freedom in liberal terms or death—in order to think about a shadow archive of resistance, one that does not speak in the language of action and momentum but instead articulates itself in terms of evacuation, refusal, passivity, unbecoming, unbeing.”⁵⁶ Uncannily, Halberstam’s hunt leads her down a tenebrous lane alongside Siniavskii. From the repertoire of “quiet masochistic gestures” in sixties and seventies performance art she engages, Halberstam poses a question I sense in Siniavskii’s presentation on Soviet prisoners as well: “Can we think of this refusal of self as an antiliberal act, a revolutionary statement of pure opposition that does not rely upon the liberal gesture of defiance but accesses another lexicon of power and speaks another language of refusal?”⁵⁷

In this sense, Siniavskii’s critiques of socialism anticipated interventions into liberal humanistic discourse made by scholars in the West today, who similarly solicit the reopening of the foreclosed space of ‘the real’ in order to rethink what counts as human, or even dispense with the ethical category of the human altogether. There are some subjects, Siniavskii forces his audience of like-minds and social equals to admit, with whom we refuse identity in order to retain our own, whose humanity we cannot acknowledge (within the confines of humanism’s human) without jeopardizing our own. By forcing an unflinching encounter with these subjects, those ‘nonpeople’ who embrace their interpellation by the state and the social order as ‘unreal,’ Siniavskii harnesses the creative potential of this call for reimagining the category of embodied humanity beyond the extant paradigms of the Soviet East, which resided, I stress, squarely within the Western humanist tradition.⁵⁸

WHAT IS SOCIALIST REALISM? OR HOW THE MASTER PHALLUS FILLS US WITH PURPOSE

“Zakharov now knew their strength and was able to confront them fearlessly with the great political demand summed up in the words: ‘Be real people!’”
– A.S. Makarenko, *Learning to Live*⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Halberstam, *Queer Art*, 126.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁵⁸ Susan Buck-Morss has shrewdly observed the shared philosophical lineage of the Western capitalist and Eastern socialist projects of modernity. She writes, “the great Cold War enemies, while having been truly dangerous to each other, appear as in fact close relatives. Their common descent from the French Revolution (which Lenin constantly stressed, but with the understanding that since October 1917 only his own regime was the legitimate heir) means that they shared the paradox inherent in the juxtaposition of those two concepts...”: of democratic rule by the people, and sovereignty of the regime. Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 14.

⁵⁹ A.S. Makarenko, *Learning to Live: Flags on the Battlements* (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1953 [1938]), 198.

Channeling the Velvetine Rabbit now, I want to ask some basic questions that will enable the rest of the analysis, namely: What is “real”? What endows one with reality as a subject, and accords a person a place in the system of representations that calls itself “realist”? And, alternately, what excludes one from realism, from “reality” as it is represented? What discounts certain selves as “unreal,” as “unpeople” [*neliudi*]? To comprehend the acts of Siniavskii’s subjects, whose status as ‘real humans’ is radically contingent, I turn to the author’s earlier, pseudonymous examination of realism and reality, *What is Socialist Realism?* [*Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realizm?*]. By approaching these questions through a philological lens, Siniavskii-Tertz posits the centrality of dominant discursive regimes to the construction of reality. To anticipate the psychoanalytics of my own argument here, he reveals socialist realism as the finest distillation of the Soviet symbolic, the primary instrument in the arsenal of the state project of mimesis, and the form of speech through which one is conferred ‘human’ or ‘real’ status. (Hereafter I will refer to Tertz as the author of this piece, or Siniavskii-Tertz as co-authors, to underscore an assessment he himself or ‘themselves’ makes about the internal non-identity of the Soviet symbolic.)

So what is the answer to Tertz’s eponymous question? What is socialist realism? For an opening gambit, patterned after the KGB man in Tertz’s *Goodnight!* [*Spokoinoi noch!*], I quote the Bylaws of the Soviet Writers’ Union, which define it thusly.

Socialist realism, being the basic method of Soviet literature and literary criticism, demands from the artist the truthful, historically concrete depiction of reality in its revolutionary development. At the same time, truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic depiction of reality must be combined with the task of ideologically remolding and educating the working people in the spirit of socialism.

Социалистический реализм, являлась основным методом советской художественной литературы и литературной критики, требует от художника правдивого, исторически-конкретного изображения действительности в ее революционном развитии. Причём правдивость и историческая конкретность художественного изображения действительности должны сочетаться с задачей идейной переделки и воспитания в духе социализма.⁶⁰

To summarize, socialist realism is both mimetic, in that it alleges to render reality as it is, and performative, in that it remolds that same reality through representing it as it ought to be, a unique generic phenomenon that Katerina Clark has distinguished as its “dual modality.”⁶¹ Tertz captures this constitutive duality or paradox, in the following phrase: “Socialist realism starts from an ideal image to which it adapts the living reality.”⁶²

⁶⁰ Andrei Zhdanov at the first All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in Moscow, August 1934; codified in the Writers’ Union Constitution thereafter.

⁶¹ Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

⁶² Abram Tertz [Andrei Sinyavsky], *The Trial Begins and On Socialist Realism*. translated by Max Hayward (UC Berkeley Press, 1984), 200. Despite the frequent liberties Hayward takes with Tertz’s Russian text when rendering it in English, I have decided to maintain this version in my essay, since his mistranslation, “Purpose with a capital P,” which does not depart conceptually from the original argument, makes possible analogies with other theories (also translated) in which the “capital P” (and other magiscule

Indeed, as I hope to show, socialist realism, serving as the master narrative of Soviet socialism, forms the system's Ur-performative; it is *the* text which must always be cited in order for Soviet bodies to come into intelligibility qua reality, as socialism's realest and realist people.

The transcendent meaning around which this social and symbolic order coalesces, Tertz assesses, is lodged in the very language of realism's official doctrine.

The gist of this formula--'the truthful, historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary development'--is founded on the concept of Purpose with a capital P. The Purpose is an all-embracing ideal, toward which truthfully represented reality ascends in an undeviating revolutionary movement. To direct this movement towards its end and to help the reader approach it more closely by transforming his consciousness--this is the Purpose of socialist realism, the most purposeful art of our time. The Purpose is Communism, known in its early stage as socialism...Our art, like our culture and our society, is teleological through and through. It is subject to a higher destiny, from which it gains its title of nobility. In the final reckoning we live only to speed the coming of Communism" (150)

В основе этой формулы — «правдивое, исторически-конкретное изображение действительности в ее революционном развитии» — лежит понятие цели, того всеохватывающего идеала, по направлению к которому неуклонно и революционно развивается правдиво изображаемая действительность. Запечатлеть движение к цели и способствовать приближению цели, переделывая сознание читателя в соответствии с этой целью, — такова цель социалистического реализма — самого целенаправленного искусства современности. Цель — коммунизм, известный в юном возрасте под именем социализма...Как вся наша культура, как все наше общество, искусство наше — насквозь телеологично. Оно подчинено высшему назначению и этим облагорожено. Все мы живем в конечном счете лишь для того, чтобы побыстрее наступил Коммунизм.

The Purpose thus imbues meaning on everything, and everything emerges into meaning only through the citation of the eternally-deferred Purpose. "All our actions, thoughts, and longings [are subordinated] to that sole Purpose," avows Tertz, not so much hyperbolizing as cannily commenting on the way the symbolic works. He embroiders on this point, which is also the quilting point of the ideology he describes. "The specific teleology of Marxist thought consists in leading *all* concepts and objects to the Purpose, referring them all to the Purpose, and defining them all through the Purpose" (159). In other words, the Purpose or "Tsel" is that which unifies the symbolic field, what Lacanians (or Lefortians) would call a "master signifier." All movement, like all meaning, radiates toward the Purpose, figured as the radiant future of Communism, the ultimate object of all desire within/for the social order (187), which is [the most] beautiful and splendid" thing imaginable (153). Socialist realism is the language or representational system that best articulates society's common longing for the "Communist ideal" (153),

letters) makes a big difference, specifically psychoanalytic notions of the penis and Phallus, and so on. Hereafter all quotations from this edition will appear parenthetically within the main text of the chapter.

and it depicts this collective fantasy or fiction as an achieved truth (employing a partial and impatient future anterior). “The wish [for Communism or Purpose] is the reality, because it must be. Our life is beautiful not only because we want it to be but also because it must be so: it has no choice” (206).

The Purpose or *Tsel'*--perhaps more accurately translated as *telos*--transvaluates the past as relentlessly hurtling toward a sublime and singular version of the future. Time in its totality is reshaped around the Purpose; it becomes, in effect, purpose-shaped [*tselesobrazno*]. With the introduction of Marxism, explains Tertz, suddenly the “sphere of universal history...turned into mankind’s march toward Communism. At once everything fell into place. An iron necessity and a strict hierarchical order harnessed the flow of centuries“ (155). The realist’s temporal task is thus three-fold in its attempts at totality: “While representing the present, he hears the march of history, and gazes into the future” (149). [Изображая настоящее, он слышит ход истории, заглядывает в будущее.] In fact, the realist writer reads back into history evidence of past progress toward Communism, a task made more difficult the more distant from contemporaneity he travels. In which case, he must “merely anticipate somewhat and give these events the Purpose that they did not have yet. And so leaders of the past...though they did not know the word ‘Communism,’ still know quite well that our future will be brilliant. They never cease to celebrate this future...” (170-1).

Future leaders of socialism follow suit in fetishizing the future, though now more than ever before they embody the Communist reality principle, and do so with profound self-consciousness. Their role is pastoral: to shepherd the people to the Purpose, to authorize acts and words in the present on behalf of its proleptic realization. It is the “the Party,” in particular, “that leads us to the Purpose in accordance with all the rules of Marxism-Leninism, the Party that lives and works in constant contact with God. And so we have in it and its leader the wisest and most experienced guide...He is our Commander, our Ruler, our High Priest” (166). To return to Lacan, he is the Father and he has the Phallus. “The Party and its leader [know] best what kind of art we need,” what kind of art conforms to the (phallic) shape of the Purpose, and who is most fit to populate that purposeful art as people pregnant with Purpose themselves.⁶³ The (socialist) realism of a work, its *tselesobraznost'* or fidelity to the ideal, corresponds directly to the degree of purposefulness in its hero, who is but an individual image or *obrazets* of the *Tsel'*, in Tertz’s estimation.

And within that most realist artwork, “as soon as the literary character becomes fully purposeful and conscious of his purposefulness, he can enter that privileged cast which is universally respected and called ‘positive’ heroes” (172). “A peak of humanity from whose height the future can be seen,” as one realist author sang his star-protagonist’s praises, the positive hero’s basic qualities coincide with those enumerated

⁶³ In *The Soviet Novel*, Katerina Clark describes the positive hero as “good-looking, serious, stern and calm, proud and brave, with a light in the eyes, yet also open and full of an infectious human warmth and of intelligence and goodness.” Also: simple, gentle, determined but not intelligent (60-1). His existence co-extends with socialist reality, and he is eminently at home in the imminent communist utopia that he constructs. He sees everything in black and white, divides the world into binaries, and cannot brook any metaphysical, political or moral ambiguity. “Everything that is not God is the Devil,” according to Gorky; everything that is not for us is against us. One of his primary characteristics is conflictlessness [*bezkonfliktnost'*], and a consequence of this is his utter lack of psychological complexity and interiority. He is a man not of thought but action.

in the bylaws: *ideinost'* or Party mindedness, bravery, strength of will, patriotism, readiness to self-sacrifice, and most importantly, the “clarity and straightness [*priamota*] with which he sees the Purpose and strives toward it.”⁶⁴ He is that propulsive movement of the socialist order. As with society at large, the Purpose imparts a precision on his actions, and a moral clarity freeing him from secrecy or doubt, in essence, erasing any potential for disparity between exterior action and psychological interiority (the latter a pre-Purpose defect from which he is blissfully liberated). After their authors, such heroes take a cue from the Party leaders who speak for the People, and also “speak with slow solemnity, grandiose gestures” (208), and, significantly, zero ambiguity. Insofar as his whole positive being fits concentrically within the Purpose, every utterance of the realist hero, at its barest, refers back to the indisputable rightness of the Purpose. “They were made for precisely this, in order to actualize the image of Purposefulness in the world, in any event, whether or not it is so disposed.” [*Oni dlia togo i sozdany, chtoby pri vsiakom udobnom i neudobnom sluchae iavliat' miru obrazets tselesoobraznosti.*]

WHAT IS SOCIALIST UNREALISM?

FANTASTIC NEGATIVITY AND ABJECTION FROM THE SOVIET SYMBOLIC

“They do not live – they exist. (*Prisoners in the camp.*)”
—Abram Tertz (*Andrei Siniavskii*)⁶⁵

Prescriptively unconflicted [*bezkonfliktnyi*] with the Communist ideal, in perfect harmony with the organizing logic of the socialist social order, positive heroes are the realist of the real, the realest of the real, the realest of the realist. They are the most purposeful of all people, and the People toward whom all human history is evolving. And so it only makes sense that the closer the Soviet Union is to Communism, the greater positive heroes proliferate in socialist realist literature and in socialist reality, which is marked by an increasing unanimity of the citizenry in the collective pursuit of Purpose. “This great harmony,” Tertz adds tongue-in-cheekily, “is the final Purpose of Creation, this beautiful absence of conflict is the future of socialist realism.”

⁶⁴ As I have pointed out in other chapters of the dissertation, socialism has an affinity toward straightness, and nowhere is that compulsory geometry more superbly embodied than in the ideologically upstanding socialist realist positive hero. Consider, in the first place, the spatiality smuggled in by his name, *polozhitel'nyi*. As Tertz depicts him in *What is Socialist Realism*, socialism's hero assumes a straight angle onto all things, including language: straight talk, straight body, straight mind, straight orientation, straight movement, purposeful dynamics, straight to the communist goal. He is nothing if not unilinear and erect; as Tertz describes “the linearity of the positive hero. Only people who are pitilessly straight and hard as swords, only they pierce through.” [Прямолинейность положительного героя. Только люди безжалостно прямые и твердые, как мечи — только они пробьют.] The single directedness of the positive hero toward the Purpose, the socialist goal, the telos, makes everything line up for him as a social-historical inevitability. Deferring to Sara Ahmed's queer phenomenological argument here, we see how the vertical axis obtains for the positive hero, how his “*priamota*” and “*priamolineinost*” of purpose, political and sexual orientations, makes him a decidedly unqueer figure, whose straightness suggests a kind of heteronormative reproductivity for the sake of the Soviet family.

⁶⁵ Они не живут они существуют. (Заключенные в лагере). Abram Tertz, *Golos iz khora* (London: Izdatel'stvo Stenvalli, 1973).

True, we differ from each other in age, sex, and nationality, and even intelligence. But whoever follows the Party line knows that these are heterogeneities within a homogeneity, differences of opinion within a single opinion, conflicts within a basic absence of conflict. We have one aim--Communism; one philosophy--Marxism; one art--socialist realism... 'It is this unanimity that makes us strong and superior to all other people in the world, who are internally torn and socially isolated through their differences of opinion.'»

Разумеется, мы отличаемся друг от друга возрастными, половыми, национальными и даже умственными особенностями. Но всякому, кто придерживается линии партии, должно быть ясно, что все это — разнообразие в пределах единообразия, разногласия в рамках единогласия, конфликты в бесконфликтности. У нас одна цель - коммунизм, одна философия - марксизм, одно искусство - социалистический реализм... «И этим единомыслием мы сильны, и в нем наше преимущество перед всеми людьми мира, разорванными, разобщенными разномыслием...»

Thus there is no space for philosophic multiplicity, no room for tragic irony in socialist realism. Because Marx and Lenin have eliminated the existential angst of History, no matter how the individual hero may suffer, Communism always triumphs at the end, and a happy ending [*schastlivym finalom*] is always guaranteed. “And [how] can we say that the universal happiness, promised for the Communist future, is evil?” (154)?” [*I razve mozhem my skazat', chto vseobshchee schast'e, obeshchannoe v kommunisticheskom budushchem,--eto plokho?*] And how could it be anything but happy, as Soviet communism, Siniavskii is quick to comment, abides by a Christian logic of typology, of interpreting the events of the Old Testament as prefiguring the New--a prolepticism that, notes Maggie Nelson, provides its believers such a sense of "relief: instead of tumbling forth on a floating planet, which may or may not be an anomaly in the universe, its affairs driven by the twin whims of chance and will, we can imagine ourselves living a dress rehearsal for a foreshadowed revelation." We can imagine ourselves “ascend[ing] in an undeviating revolutionary movement”⁶⁶ toward the apogee of history. Grand narratives of this variety are driven by a "tendency to skip over the visible world, or worse than skip over it, to *devour* it," says Nelson, "dispensing with...people whose presence on the earth strikes others as an inconvenience."⁶⁷ In order to fuel its perpetual approach to revelation, history happily eats these inconvenient others, otherwise these others eat themselves.

The tension between the promotion of a beautiful future embodied in communist children and the abjection of ‘ugly’ adults, if you like, from the present, is neatly encapsulated in the person of Feliks Derzhinsky, president of the Cheka, the “real ideal [or] moral model” of the communists, per Siniavskii. Despite his role as the regime’s preeminent executioner, for all the blood he shed, Derzhinsky “adored children.” As he wrote in a letter to his sister, quoted by Siniavskii in *Soviet Civilization*, “I don’t know why it is that I love children more than anyone else...” (127). “This seems incredible,”

⁶⁶ Tertz, *Socialist Realism*, 150.

⁶⁷ Maggie Nelson, *The Art of Cruelty: A Reckoning* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2011), 134-5. Consider that Valerii Tarsis describes the inmates of the psikhushka in post-Stalin Russia as “inconvenient citizens” [*neblagonadezhnykh grazhdan*]. Tarsis, *Palata № 7* (samizdat, 1965); online http://antology.igrunov.ru/authors/tarsis/palata_7.html.

Siniavskii interjects, that “someone who loves children more than anyone else, even a mother, becomes an executioner. But revolutionary ethics are based on such reversals. The purest and most loving person should be the first to kill. He sees this as his sacrifice for children. And children are our future, communism.”⁶⁸ And Derzhinsky is no exception but the rule of the pedophilic executioner; as one character observes in *The Trial Begins*, “Do you notice how fervently the custodian of State security boosts his offspring? All jailers are fond of children, I’ve noticed.”⁶⁹

This eternally extended promise of happiness in the future was frequently figured through the next generation of communists. The “official presentation” of achieved communism was thus a “children’s paradise” [*detskii rai*], “paradise for children” [*raia dlia detei*], or “place of special grace [*blazhenstva*] for children.”⁷⁰ In the present tense, this trope of posterity renders negative critique impossible, or, alternately, renders the (subject) position of critique negative, arithmetically opposed to the realest embodiment of socialist realism, the positive hero. Of course, “true faith is not compatible with tolerance,” Tertz explains (156). And so, as “it rises before us,” in all its phallic glory, “the sole Purpose of all Creation, as splendid as eternal life and as compulsory as death [we] fling ourselves toward it, breaking all barriers and rejecting anything that might hamper our frantic course,” (160)--anything, or, as Tertz later points out, anyone. Though they are secreted by a purposeful symbolic system that alleges to universalism, there *are* socialist personae non grata for whom the march to the future is not so felicitous. As it turns out, the “all-encompassing Purpose” has its human limits, which, in turn, delimit realism, and with it the real that realism mimes and remolds. This is the truth that realism cannot admit to itself: the gap between the People (with a capital P) in whose interest all purposeful activity is authorized, and the people as such. It is the implicit objective of realist representation to this shaggy human remainder, as it promotes the myth that the interests of the state and the people are beautifully harmonious. In Tertz’s opinion, “it is necessary to remember that the interests of the people and the interests of the state (which are fully coincident from the point of view of the state) have nothing other in mind than the penetrating and all-encompassing communism.” [*Neobkhodimo pomnit’, chto pod interesami naroda i interesami gosudarstva (polnost’iu sovpadaushchimi s tochki zreniia gosudarstva) imeetsia v vidu ne chto inoe, kak vse tot zhe i vse pronikaiushchii i vsepogloshchaiushchii kommunizm.*] The objective of *What is Socialist Realism?* then is to show the violent partiality of socialist realism as a description of reality, as totalitarian mimesis, or mimetic totalitarianism.

But Tertz queries at the very onset of *Socialist Realism*, can there really be such a thing as socialist realism? The same scene provocatively replays in Tertz’s post-camp fantastic memoir: while executing a search of his father’s apartment in 1951, the secret police uncover Siniavskii’s student notebooks, which quote “the official definition of socialist realism.” The KGB-man—not the young Siniavskii—asks the inadmissible but

⁶⁸ Sinyavsky, *Soviet Civilization*, 127. Interestingly, the Khrushchev thaw did not affect Soviet children, who were imprisoned by the conservatism of Stalinist textbooks, institutions, discourses. They still lived in a fantastic world of a special variety: “The Soviet fairytale destroyed the miracle, making it identical with progress” (Vail and Genis, 60-e, 97).

⁶⁹ Abram Tertz, *The Trial Begins and On Socialist Realism*, translated by George Dennis (Berkeley: University of California Press), 28.

⁷⁰ Katriona Kelli [Catriona Kelly], “Sovetskii soiuz—raia dlia detei?” (RGGU), paper presented at ‘L’URSS: un paradis perdu?’, Université de Paris-IV, Sorbonne, Paris, 15 November 2006).

always implicit follow-up question to this canonical formulation: “In other words, according to you there is another, unofficial definition of socialist realism...?”⁷¹ In other words, how can realism have a qualifier? Such a formulation posits all of reality as socialist, socialism as universal, and makes the universal subject (the real, mimetic or human subject) the proletarian positive hero. The subjects consigned to socialist non-existence are those deprived of the Purpose—not humans, but subhumans, animals, even subanimals or insects, ahistorical, acting without intention, operating in an imperfective versus perfective aspect. Whereas for the purposeful creature, the realist or real person, “every conscious action is purpose-oriented,” then these others, these

Animals are not characterized by such long-range intentions. They are moved by instincts, outpacing our dreams and calculations. They bite because they bite, and not for the purpose of biting off. They don’t think about tomorrow, wealth, or God. They live without placing any complex tasks before themselves.

Животным не свойственны столь отдаленные замыслы. Их выручают инстинкты, опережающие наши мечты и расчеты. Животные кусают, потому что кусают, а не с целью укусить. Они не думают о завтрашнем дне, о богатстве, о Боге. Они живут, не выдвигая перед собой никаких сложных задач.

Their actions are just repetitive, and do not lead to anything, least of all the fulfillment of a goal. The animals that bite for the pure pleasure of biting should remind us of Solzhenitsyn’s criminals, who speak for the perverse satisfaction of producing speech, without any aspirations to intelligible language or human communication. Since animals are the only creatures that act without purpose, the purposeless person or *bestsel’nyi chelovek* is a contradiction in terms; he is marked as the point of unthinkability in socialist realism, a monstrous outside to the system’s sublime mimeticism.

The pre-socialist realist literature suffered from its unsuccessful search for Purpose undertaken by the quintessentially “negative figure,” the superfluous man [*lishnii chelovek*], whose name already figures social extraneity (192) but not yet unspeakability. When “it became obvious to everybody that there were no heroes without Purpose, but only heroes who were for or against the Purpose,” the superfluous man lost his tenuous place in the symbolic field. Defined by indefiniteness [*neopredelennost’*], his infinite contradiction and conflictedness, his lack of definite direction or goal, he is all talk and thought, no action, impotent socially and sexually. Not only is he fated not to

⁷¹ Abram Tertz, *Spokoinoi nochi: Roman* (Paris, 1984), 237; quoted in Donald Fanger and Gordon Cohen, *Dissidence, Diffidence, and Russian Literary Tradition: The Lonely Dialogue of Abram Tertz*, Final Report to the National Council for Soviet and East European Research. (New York: Columbia University, 1987). Roman Jakobson, on the contrary, believed realism to proliferate in its meanings, always relative to the reader, who considered a work corroborated or contradicted her experience. Still, realism is not so capacious a term as to be meaningless from Jakobson’s point of view. “No, not everything” can be called realism. “No one will call Hoffman’s fantastic tales realistic. But does this not indicate that there is somehow a single meaning in the word, ‘realism,’ that there is, after all, some common denominator? My answer is... We cannot equate with impunity the various meanings of the word ‘realism’ just as we cannot, unless we wish to be called mad, equate a hair lock with a padlock.” Roman Jakobson, “On Realism in Art.” In *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, edited by Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1971 [1921]): 38-46, at 45. I develop this point further in the following chapter.

reproduce in realist literature--to wit, his patricide by the proto-positive hero crowns the origin story of socialist realism itself--but, while he populated the nineteenth-century novel, he failed to repopulate it: "judging by the literature of the time...no children were born for a while"(186). He upsets the positive hero's easy and Manichean world, and so, says Sinyavsky, twentieth-century Russian literature is rent by the insurmountable rift or "mutual incompatibility of positive hero [with the] superfluous man."⁷² The birth of the positive hero is only possible, reasons Sinyavsky, with the death of the pre-Revolutionary tradition of the superfluous man, that shadowy double, doubting, effeminate, melancholy, faithless, in a frenzied search after an ideal to imbue his existence with higher meaning.

That said, the superfluous person is not the same as the purposeless animal, or that impossible collocation, the purposeless person. Purposeless himself, he does not abandon the hunt for some higher meaning or transcendent principle. He remains nominally "personned," a visible point on the negative side of the same grid of intelligibility inhabited by the positive hero. The superfluous person, whose latter day late-socialist incarnation is soonest the political dissident, is, in a Foucauldian framework, a person to be corrected. As Tertz acknowledges, positive heroes are only too happy to "[re-educate] the few remaining dissidents into unanimity" (176). This lends the Soviet social order a particular Foucauldian tinge, as its power operates diffusely through all of the population's human bodies:

[Soviet power] is a prison cum school, a school for defective or problem children, where the education goes hand in hand with punishment and incarceration, themselves a method of education. Soviet civilization in miniature is thus a camp, also known as a 'corrective labor colony.' For the camp's aim is not just to hold criminals behind the barbed wire, but to amend them. This by two means: labor, in accordance with the famous Marxist thesis that labor is what made the monkey a man; and moralistic, ideological pressure exerted on the criminals by the authorities (the 'new men').⁷³

The purposeless person, in contrast, is incorrigible, and, reasons Tertz in light of recent history, "destined for destruction" [*podlezhit unichtozheniiu*]. "And those who suffer from superfluous dissidence, we punish severely, extracting them from life and literature." [*a tekh, kto stradaet islishnim inakomysliem, my surovo nakazyvaem, izyamaia iz zhizni i literatury*, 176.] That is, these incorrigibles cannot exist in literature, as they cannot exist in life. They are not realist, not real, not people [*neliudi*]. The social order can only sustain itself on a Purpose with a popular mandate, can only maintain the fantasy of collectivity, the collective fiction, by suppressing these unpeople, by making them disappear at the edges of mimeticism.

In other words, in order for socialist realism to prevail as reality, certain undesirable or unreal others have to fall off. Tertz tidily formulates the aporia at the heart of this realist art--the difference between what is (the people as such) and what ought to

⁷² See the chapter entitled, "Subversion from Within: *What Is Socialist Realism and The Trial Begins*," in Catharine Nepomnyashchy, *Abram Tertz and the Poetics of Crime* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 41-82.

⁷³ Sinyavsky, *Soviet Civilization*, 114.

be (the total coincidence of the People with the State, the people without a remainder)--in the following passionate passage of his aesthetic-*cum*-ethical tract:

So that prisons should vanish forever, we built new prisons. So that all frontiers should fall, we surrounded ourselves with a Chinese Wall. So that work should become a rest and a pleasure, we introduced forced labor. So that not one drop of blood would be shed, we killed and killed and killed. (162)

Чтобы навсегда исчезли тюрьмы, мы понастроили новые тюрьмы. Чтобы пали границы между государствами, мы окружили себя китайской стеной. Чтобы труд в будущем стал отдыхом и удовольствием, мы ввели каторжные работы. Чтобы не пролилось больше ни единой капли крови, мы убивали, убивали и убивали.

As Susan Buck-Morss writes, indicting both Western democratic and Soviet socialist modernities, “when democratic sovereignty confronts the people with all the violence that it monopolizes as the legitimate embodiment of the people it is in fact attesting to its nonidentity with the people.”⁷⁴ It is only a short distance in the symbolic from the excrescent to the excremental (both embedded in the Kristevan notion of abjection), from purposeless excess to the system’s dumping grounds.⁷⁵ To recall Siniavskii’s opening remarks in “‘I’ and ‘They,’” such subjects “[written off...] into the category of the inferior, the recurrent human image of waste. . . . these people are non-people, driven by the system to this animal or subanimal existence. And one may ask: what is there to do with them?” (241). To answer that question, we might attempt a more inclusive version of what Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn called in his *Gulag Archipelago*, “a history of our sewage disposal system,” in which the unrecorded stories of un-*intelligent* “insects”⁷⁶ purged for the common good of building communism might circulate a first or second time. The gulag itself is an excrescent place for the excrement of the system to go. It is this other, penumbral story of socialist unrealism--to which Solzhenitsyn alludes but which he never properly attempts--this, I argue, is the purpose (with a little “p”) of Siniavskii’s essay, and his oeuvre, in general (especially *Golos iz khora*).

Since unreal subjects are excluded from recognition within the Soviet symbolic, and assuredly have no place in the verbal/vocal regimes of socialism, predicated as it was on 'speaking Bolshevik,' Siniavskii resorts to silence and nonverbal gesture to narrate the lives of nonpeople. They can't speak, and so, in trying to recognize their humanity, he can't ask them to. This is a conservationist move on Siniavskii's part, which can be

⁷⁴ Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 5.

⁷⁵ Writing of another social order, with its own problem of human waste, Herbert Aptheker makes the relevant point that, “the ultimate logic of this is crematoria; if people are themselves constituting the pollution and inferior people in particular, then crematoria becomes really vast sewage projects. So only one may understand those who attended the ovens and concocted and conducted the entire enterprise; those ‘wasted’ . . . are not really, not fully people.” Herbert Aptheker, *Racism, Imperialism, and Peace* (Minneapolis, MN: MEP Publications, 1987), 144.

⁷⁶ Solzhenitsyn, *Gulag Archipelago*. 47. In *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Milan Kundera employs the same scatological metaphor: “we can regard the gulag as a septic tank used by totalitarian kitsch to dispose of its refuse” (252).

explained with recourse to Judith Butler's work on nonbinary gender. She writes, "if subjects speak at the borders of discursive possibility they risk being cast into the realm of the unspeakable... If the subject speaks impossibly, speaks in ways that cannot be regarded as speech or as the speech of a subject, then that speech is discounted and the viability of the subject called into question."⁷⁷ To make a case for the intelligibility of speech that is otherwise dismissed out-of-hand as evidence of inhumanity is a bold move with big consequences for Siniavskii, since unrepresentability, unspeakability, unrealism of this kind, as Tertz persuades us, carries a living-death sentence. With this socialist existence figured under the sign of a ban, a connection is handily established between Tertz's purposeless people, Siniavskii's human waste or unpeople, and the *homines sacer* of Giorgio Agamben's political philosophy, as Alexander Etkind has compellingly proven for the author's post-incarceration literary criticism.⁷⁸

These silent acts of the system's sacrificial subjects are unintelligible but not insignificant. At the same time, they cannot be apprehended within the surrounding symbolic order. Thus they provoke questions from those witnesses who are near but not like their perpetrators, sending these curious but symbolically-separate observers into an interpretive cul-de-sac. The conclusion at which they arrive, in Siniavskii's summation, is that the meaning or logic of these acts cannot be known since the acts themselves are illogical (rather than self-consciously abiding a different logic or rejecting logic altogether). Instead of intention or purpose, they communicate symptom or "perversion." Like the untranscendent animal, the unevolving monkey, these unpeople commit monstrous acts because they are monsters. Their existences are all means without end or higher goal. This atelic quality, theorized by Agamben in the work to whose title I just alluded, *Means without End*, is what characterizes "the realm of gestures," that is, the purview of purposeless or "bare life," where the *homo sacer* resides. In this realm, "nothing is being produced or acted, rather something is being endured or supported. The gesture, in other words, opens the sphere of *ethos* as the more proper sphere of that which is human,"⁷⁹ to "an ethics beyond the law and normativity."⁸⁰ Sliding Agamben's and Butler's concepts of precarity into a somewhat uncomfortable embrace, gesture becomes the final discursive possibility of the bare subject on the border of political life and speech.

And now, for the sake of Slavistics, I want to intimate a link between the "enduring" that Agamben's naked political subject is doing, and the enduring or durative "experiencing" [*perezhivanie*] done by Russian Formalists, who reconfigure art against its own mediality, as a movement of experience closer to an otherwise unreachable real. Here I have in mind Viktor Shklovskii's formula of defamiliarization from *The Theory of Prose*, as phenomenologically reinterpreted in Chapter Three. Several scholars have suggested the formalistic gist of Agambenian gesture as "an exhibition, a process of making visible, a revelation device." It is, in effect, the political device that bares bare life, "and what makes it visible is the *medium*, the *milieu* of human beings... not [only]

⁷⁷ Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 126.

⁷⁸ Alexander Etkind, "Sedlo Siniavskogo: Lagernaia kritika v kul'turnoi istorii sovetskogo perioda," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 101 (2010).

⁷⁹ Giorgio Agamben, "Notes on Gesture," *Means without End: Notes on Politics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 57.

⁸⁰ Colby Dickinson, *Agamben and Theology*, (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 114.

the medium that human beings are *in*, but equally [the] medium that human being *is*.’ It is what survives after the constructed image of the ‘human being’ that the anthropological machinery created has been rendered inoperative.” It is the human remainder, whose excision or suppression makes the social order sensible. For, admonishes Agamben, when the narrowly “constructed” anthropological image fades from view, as it can so easily in the camp, “only the basic, even enigmatic, gesture is presented through the visual image before us, revealing something of us beyond the limits of expression.” The gesture of the political subject *sous rature* “is then a mark of profanation, an experience of mediality as the ethical dimension of human beings.”⁸¹

Gesture, to reiterate, is means without end for Agamben, pure mediality without telos, which preserves the creaturely being in the ontotheologically exclusive construction of the human being, who is endowed with transcendent purpose or anima. In advocating a regressive return to pure gestuality, Agamben seeks a new form of being, a new creaturely construction of humanity, which is decidedly non-mimetic in its radical inclusion of those aspects of the human that modernity has deemed inhuman and animal, a kind of conceptual dynamite to man’s anthropological definition. The ethics of gestural recognition is no less than the “reconciliation of humanity with its animality,”⁸² which enables escape from the modern state’s project of mimesis—something not specific to the Soviet case. This allows us, in Agamben’s words, to “avoid mirroring those treacherous political projects of the last century which sought to ‘heal’ the very same fracture through the complete exclusion of its perceived ‘animality,’ the genocidal actions taken toward those persons who had been marked as forms of ‘bare life.’”⁸³ Ultimately, Agamben recuperates gesture, not as a supplement to the supposedly self-adequate symbolic of liberal humanism or Western modernity more broadly, but as the something outside those systems that grant it internal coherence. Not unlike Siniavskii half a century before him, Agamben sounds the call for “a new form of politics or politics in its purest form, as a ‘means without ends’ which thereby avoids becoming a mimetically scripted attempt at forming some sort of totalitarian schema, whether that be a political or theological configuration of a sovereign form.”⁸⁴

Thinkers sympathetic to Agamben’s thesis have also sensed the political promise of gesture, situating it more specifically, to cite Carrie Noland, within “the moment of negativity” that “resides within the performance of gesture,” “an unpredictable force of nonidentity in mimesis countering the signifying potential of the conventional sign.”⁸⁵ Now returning more fully to our symbolic schema, gesture, for this negative, extramimetic excess “cannot be reduced to a purely semiotic (meaning-making) activity”—as for Agamben, it is means without end, and for Siniavskii, act without

⁸¹ Ibid., 114-5. For more on gesture in the works of Agamben, see Deborah Levitt, “Notes on Media and Biopolitics: ‘Notes on Gesture.’” In Clemens, Heron, and Murray, eds., *The Work of Giorgio Agamben*, 202; Samuel Weber, “Going Along for the Ride: Violence and Gesture: Agamben Reading Benjamin Reading Kafka Reading Cervantes,” *The Germanic Review* 81:1(2006), 65-83; Anthony Curtis Adler, “The Intermedial Gesture: Agamben and Kommerell,” *Angelaki* 12: 3 (2007), 57-64; Alastair Morgan, “A Figure of Annihilated Human Existence’: Agamben and Adorno on Getsure,” *Law Critique* 20 (2009), 299-307.

⁸² Dickinson, *Agamben and Theology*, 120.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Carrie Noland, “Introduction.” In Carrie Noland and Sally Ann Ness, eds. *Migrations of Gesture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008) xiii.

Purpose. It sits on that slippery borderline between bodies and the symbolic system that violently subjects them. Gesture is revolutionary, continues Noland, because it “realizes... a cathexis without semantic content,” or, in socialist terms, a desire that is not for the Communist ideal, that conveys, beyond its potentially conventional meanings, “an energetic charge or ‘vitality affect’ that overflows with the meaning transmitted” by “[actually] living bodies charged with eros, affect, and corporeal materiality.. It is while gesturing... that a body displays most clearly the extent to which it remains ‘at war with itself *as a sign.*’”⁸⁶

The vitality affect of these violently gesturing bodies is what I am attempting to preserve in my argument, which angles against the troublingly persistent misprision of Siniavskii’s essay upon which I earlier commented. Critics consistently regard the corporeal undoing of these convicts as an allegory for the hopelessly repressed Russian author in the late-Soviet era—a selective interpretation whose content and consequences I interrogate throughout the chapter. For the time being, I stress that Siniavskii’s catalog of negative gestures by nonmimetic subjects is a matter of ethics on a more sweeping scale, made all the more urgent by the status of these silent gestures as self-harm, or, in his term, “self-eating” (*samoedstvo*). So if not an extended metaphor for the very real political repression of writers and other artists in the Soviet Union, what are the stakes of Siniavskii’s intervention? To stick with Agamben for a second longer, Siniavskii’s essay attempts an exegesis of the gesture of the other, which is also a gesture toward the other, in effect, that refuses to consecrate the boundary separating the isolated ‘I’ from the normative ‘they.’ Such a reading grants these grand gestures the status of performance, the potency of performativity, of performing a rupture or break within the disciplinary discourses that call these others into subjectivity through trauma.

SELF-EATING: UN-COMMUNIST PATTERNS OF CONSUMPTION

“*Conscientious labor for the good of society: he who does not work, neither shall he eat.*”
—Communist Party of the Soviet Union,
The Moral Code for the Builder of Communism⁸⁷

“*The one who can consume the other will.*”
—Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*⁸⁸

“*Communism is all-penetrating and all-consuming.*”
—Abram Tertz, *What is Socialist Realism?*

⁸⁶ Catherine Cyssau, *Au lieu du geste* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995), 3; quoted Noland, “Introduction” to *Migrations of Gesture*, xiii-xiv.

⁸⁷ The second tenet of “The Moral Code for the Builder of Communism,” introduced at the Twenty-first Communist Party Congress in 1961: “Conscientious labor for the good of society: he who does not work, neither shall he eat.” [*Dobrosovestnyi trud na blago obshchestvo: kto ne rabotaet, tot ne est.*]

⁸⁸ “The one who can will consume the other.” [*Kto kogo smozhet, tot togo i glozhet.*] Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn invokes this law of the labor camp in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, translated by Ralph Parker (New York: Penguin, 1998 [1962]). I use this translation for all English quotations, and use the virtual library version of the original, “Odin Den’ Ivana Denisovicha.” *Novyi mir* 11 (1962): online at <lib.ru/PROZA/SOLZHENICYN/ivandenisych.txt>.

In order to illustrate the general principle of self-eating, Siniavskii supplies an exemplary narrative. “Picture a person,” he exhorts his listeners, “who has already been in prison alternately with the camp for many years — ten, fifteen, twenty (and before him there is no light except that of the new sentence). Moreover, this person, belonging to the criminal milieu, doesn’t read any kind of book and doesn’t think about anything sublime at all.”⁸⁹ With remarkable economy, Siniavskii sketches out the life of a camper that departs in important ways from the biographic template laid out in the intelligentsia memoirs with which the educated Western reader would have been familiar. *This person is not like you, nor is he like me*, he tells his Genevan audience. Incurious and illiterate, the self-eater has no lofty means of transcending the baseness of his situation through poetry or art, as the intelligent or political prisoner reports doing. (For instance, Evgeniia Ginzburg, mother of Soviet youth prosaist, Vasilii Aksenov; and Anna Larina, wife of ill-fated left-opponent, Nikolai Bukharin write of reciting modernist poetry in their solitary prison cells in order to hold onto their sanity and humanity.⁹⁰)

These members of the criminal milieu are outside of literature and language, even negated by it, as the many negative particles in the Russian suggest [*nikakikh knizhek ne chitaet i ne o chem takom vozvyshennom ne myslit.*] And outside of language they find themselves in the dark, on the underside of a socialist enlightenment whose progress, this dissertation has argued, is directly calibrated with speech or vocality. Moreover, as residents of the zone, these prisoners exist outside of political life and historical time. This situation of temporal suspension characterizes camp literature generally, with its paradoxical chronotope of continual progression throughout the day without progress from day to day. Solzhenitsyn structures *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* [*Odin den’ Ivana Denisovicha*, 1962], the Ur-text of the gulag canon, around this temporal tension. While subject to the tight schedule of labor, “No zek ever saw a clock or a watch. What use were they to him anyway?”⁹¹ Occupying only the dark space of his barracks at night, Ivan Denisovich thinks about this question of time, which has become unthinkable in the camp, tied to notions of freedom that are located outside of the chronotope of confinement.

Shukhov gazed at the ceiling in silence. Now he didn’t know either whether he wanted freedom or not. At first he’d longed for it. Every night he’d counted the days of his stretch—how many had passed, how many were coming. And then he’d grown bored with counting. And then it became clear that men like him would never be allowed to return home, that they’d be exiled. And whether his life would be any better than here—who could tell?⁹²

⁸⁹ “Представим человека, который много лет - десять, пятнадцать, двадцать (и впереди ему ничего не светит, кроме нового срока) - сидит в тюрьме, вперемежку с лагерем. Притом человек этот, принадлежащий к уголовной среде, никаких книжек не читает и ни о чем таком возвышенном не мыслит.”

⁹⁰ See Anna Larina’s memoirs of the gulag and her larger experience of Soviet political life from the revolutionary era to the late-Soviet period, *Nezabyvaemoe* (Moscow: 1989); or in English, *This I Cannot Forget: The Memoirs of Nikolai Bukharin’s Widow*, translated by Gary Kern (New York : W.W. Norton, 1993).

⁹¹ Solzhenitsyn, *One Day*, 131.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 136.

Шухов молча смотрел в потолок. Уж сам он не знал, хотел он воли или нет. Поначалу-то очень хотел и каждый вечер считал, сколько дней от срока прошло, сколько осталось. А потом надоело. А потом проясняться стало, что домой таких не пускают, гонят в ссылку. И где ему будет житуха лучше -- тут ли, там -- неведомо.

Siniavskii conveys this dark feeling of extratemporality in his non-fictional narrative by sentencing the self-eater to prison and camp for a seemingly endless series of sentences. He rattles off a list of term lengths, each oppressive in itself, which threaten to crush the subject in their sheer accretion.

In the chiaroscuro of camp life, “nothing shines before [the prisoner] except the next term” [*vperedī emu nichego ne svetit, krome novogo stroka*]. He is sequestered to the shadows of communism’s radiant future [*svetloe budushchee*] by Soviet power [*Sovetskaia vlast’*]. In his other writing of roughly the same period, Siniavskii underscores the relationship between the logocentric power of the Soviet regime, which “has rested and rests to this day on the backs of three words, three whales,” at the top of which is “Soviet power” [*Sovetskaia vlast’*], as it connects the state directly to the light of the world:

The important thing is the word “Soviet”—a good word and packed with meaning. [Some of the most significant associations and undertones of “Soviet” in Russian are:

1. *Soviet*→*svet* [“light” or “world”]
svet→*svetly* [“bright, radiant, pure”]
 2. *Soviet*→*svoi* [“our own”]
svoi→*svoyak* [“brother-in-law” or “close friend”]
- In other words, “Soviet”=*ours*, which means *good*.

Главное - слово-то больно хорошее и со смыслом: "совет" - "свет" "светлый" - "свой" - "свойский" "свояк" - "советский". То есть - наш, то есть - добрый.

Even when those who have most suffered from the state’s excesses denounce “Communists” by name, “they will stoutly defend ‘Soviet power.’ And that is not some sophisticated political argument as to which is preferable—‘the Soviets’ or ‘the Party,’” Siniavskii qualifies. “It is simply an opposition based on the *sound* of words,”⁹³ based on the incantatory or performative force of Soviet power, which is sustained by its subjects’ unflinching belief in vocalization as verisimilitude: *Soviet power must be right for us because it sounds right to us*. In quasi-Biblical syllogism, it is the Word, the true light of the world. But this official effulgence is the lie laid bare by the prisoner’s body. Says Siniavskii, “people cannot burn with revolutionary fervor forever in the name of bright

⁹³ Tertz, “The Literary Process”; the Russian original reads: “До сей поры случаются казусы, когда мужик (или баба) кроет почем зря “коммунистов”, но защищает при этом “советскую власть”. И это не какие-нибудь политические интриги на предмет, что предпочтительнее “советы” или “партия”. Это просто звучание и столкновение слов: а кому нужны ваши коммунисты, когда у нас в запасе своя советская власть?! Мы все здесь свои - и чужим тут делать нечего.”

ideals. Their life depends on the present, not on some radiant future.”⁹⁴ The camp imperils the tenuous present. Thus the self-eater

is driven to such extreme desperation, to the extreme degree of human misery, alienation. He has nothing in or under his hands except his very body over which he can still exercise control. He is on the brink, but he is not yet dead and he has not gone crazy.

доведен до степени отчаяния, до крайней степени человеческой нищеты, отщепенства. У него ничего нет в руках и под руками, кроме собственного тела, которым он еще может распоряжаться. Он находится на грани, но он еще не умер и не сошел с ума.

In “I’ and ‘They,’” Siniavskii encounters the self-eater at an existential impasse, in what Russians might call an exitless situation [*bezvykhodnaia situatsiia*]. His prisoner teeters at the edge of the Soviet symbolic; we can still perceive his humanity, but only if we strain our eyes, and not for much longer. The little hope one can hold out for Siniavskii’s subject is contained in the ambivalent temporal particle, *eshche*, anticipatory and retrospective, meaning “not yet” and “still.” The prisoner has nothing but his body *still* under control, but he is *not yet* dead and *not yet* mad; these are the only other outcomes for a person in this extreme position.⁹⁵ Yet *eshche* reminds us that this is a waiting game soon decided; it is only a matter of time before the prisoner loses his life or his sanity.

In this sense, the zek has lived up to a certain human limit. The proliferation of the prefix *do*, meaning “up to” or “until,” bespeaks this position, alongside other terms of spatial or existential extremity: *on doveden...do stepeni*, *do krainei stepeni*; *nakhoditsia na grani*, and so on. His existence is defined by having arrived at an crossroads: he is a *dokhodiaga*, a well-traveled term in Siniavskii’s post-incarceration body of work, according to Alexander Etkind, who suggests its status as a Russian equivalent of Agamben’s homo sacer. These synonymous personalities eke out a “bare life” or “naked existence” [*golaia zhizn’* or *goloe bytie*], “stripped of the opposition between body and spirit, life and death,” shadowy and spectral, vampiric and monstrous, in its being at the borders. In his philological writing on Gogol’ from within the gulag, Siniavskii connects the precarity of the prerevolutionary author to his less-than-literary contemporary companions. As Etkind explains, “we have read about such people” as Siniavskii’s Gogol’; “in the camps they are called *dokhodiagi*... The *dokhodiaga* Gogol’ preserved the intensity of his spiritual life amidst bodily death. In these exceptional circumstances bare life on the border of death becomes productive. But its fruits are unusual. Most often monstrous.”⁹⁶ They may take the form that Siniavskii describes in “I’ and ‘They,’” of the

⁹⁴ Sinyavsky, *Soviet Civilization*, 173.

⁹⁵ Siniavskii preempts the accusation of psychopathy he pinpoints in the opening. Though, while recognizing the political efficacy of “sanity” when pleading one’s own case in court, or advocating for others who will not have their last word before their accusers, one wonders about Siniavskii’s commitment to sanity as such, given his promotion of fantasy, madness, and uncanny deviation from social norms. (One must consider that the Soviet anti-psychiatry movement peaks in the subsequent year, with the establishment of the Moscow Helsinki Group.)

⁹⁶ “Sedlo Siniavskogo: Lagernaia kritika v kul’turnoi istorii sovetskogo perioda.” *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 101 (2010): online <<http://magazines.russ.ru/nlo/2010/101/et22.html>>.

“monstrous, unnatural manipulations” [*chudovishchnye, protivostestvennye manipulatsii*] undertaken by those in circumstances of impoverishment [*nishchety*] and exclusion [*otshchepenstva*], rather than elevation or sublimity [*vozvyshenie*], which Siniavskii remarks right away is off-limits to the prisoner (but implicitly the purview of the political). Indeed, in the epistemology of the gulag, “the active, substantive category of the ‘monstrous’ [*chudovishchnogo*]... is the antithesis of the sublime [*vozvyshehnogo*]. The metaphorical is sublime, the literal [*bukval’noe*] is monstrous. If the sublime separates reality into different levels, then the monstrous merges them.”⁹⁷ Self-eating, auto-vampirism and other monstrous manipulations by the prisoner, manifest the monstrosity of his experience on the very material of his body.

Such acts emerge as an “active” and creative third path for the (un) person driven to the brink, a kind of negative transcendence for the illiterate character who cannot go the lofty route of the *intelligent*. Without poetry to redeem him, he turns himself into art, a sacrifice that is also salvific and even Lazarus-like, a self-destruction that bears strange “fruits” of creation. Such acts constitute the crisis-art of the *dokhodiaga*, “connected to the necessity of approaching some kind of borderlands of life, in order to potentially overstep them and thereby create something [*sviazn s neobkhodimost’iu doiti do kakikh-to granits zhizni, a to i perestupit’ granitsy, s tem, chtoby chto-to sozdat*]. Instances of self-eating perform the same function as anecdotes for Siniavskii, that “hinge on the materialization of metaphors hidden in the language”—when “a figurative expression is taken literally, materially, exposing the illogic, the absurdity, [then] the dead word, the cliché, comes back to life through its materialization.”⁹⁸ Besides, goads Siniavskii in “‘I and ‘They,’” now invoking a plural “you”:

What would you advise [the prisoner] to do in order to prove that he is still alive, sensible, and has possession over something? He uses, in this case, his body (he has nothing more left), in order to cross over to some kind of last, total language and say in it to society the following, for example: “You have taken everything from me—freedom, life, the earth and the sky. But this is my body—it is mine, it is my property. I am the master of this domain!..” (242)

Что ему прикажете делать, чтобы доказать, что он еще жив, разумен и кое-чем еще владеет? Он пользуется - в этом случае - своим телом (больше у него ничего не осталось), для того чтобы перейти на какой-то последний, тотальный язык и сказать на нем обществу примерно следующее: «Вы отняли у меня все - свободу, жизнь, землю и небо. Но вот это тело - оно мое, это моя собственность, Я здесь хозяин!..».

In the final turn of this section, the parts of speech that have so far spatialized or moved the *dokhodiaga* along now deliver him to a transition point or crossroads, endemic to his “transitional condition” [*perekhodnom sostoianii*] between life and death. He is compelled to exit his existential impasse and go either to the madhouse or cemetery, or else “cross over” [*pereiti*] from the liminal space of unspeakability between binaries “to some last, total language” contained in his own body.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Sinyavsky, *Soviet Civilization*, 150.

This symbolic difference dividing the dissident and the criminal, their differential access to significant speech, is how the state sorts out the person-to-be-corrected from the incorrigible. Elsewhere Siniavskii elucidates this distinction as it impacts on camp life: the “system of coercion [in the camp] devotes all its energy” to extracting speech from the dissident, in the form of “confession and repentance,” making him “assume the full responsibility for his words and actions.”⁹⁹ This joint performance corroborates the significance of the dissident’s speech, and, in turn, the symbolic or verbal power on which the state rests, even as the confession has no legal consequence for either party. “The principle, however, applies only to dissidents and prisoners of conscience—in other words, those who are persecuted for their opinions, ideas, and words. Confessions and repentance are not demanded of thieves, murderers, delinquents, or embezzlers. For them, the State limits itself to the corpus delicti.”¹⁰⁰ For the State, we might even suggest, the body of these thieves, murderers, delinquents, and embezzlers is the corpus delicti itself.

Such a subject presumed self-identical with its own materiality commits two cardinal sins against the thoroughly symbolized regime: its non-symbolic being marks a primary violation, compounded by the nonverbal significance with which it imbues its body in silent protest of that regime. With no claim on the collective inheritance of a radiant communist future, the thief poaches the only property [*sobstvennost'*] he can get his hands on in a propertyless society: his own body.¹⁰¹ He steals it from the state, effectively expropriating an “I” from socialism’s inclusive “we,”¹⁰² the plural actor who becomes the “you” of the prisoner’s oppositional apostrophe. Really, all such a subject can “do to prove [it] exists” is to take up space, to extend itself in those dimensions, since taking up time is decidedly not an option. (*Vpederi emu nichego ne svetit*—still he performs *pered vsem svetom*).

At times this speech, not spoken and not even cognized, is involuntarily constructed on the order of a performance, which is played out before the guard, the command, the other prisoners who are sitting in the same cell, or, more abstractly, before the whole world. “Self-eating” becomes a form of theatrical acting and spectacle.¹⁰³ (242)

⁹⁹ Ibid., 236-237.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 236-237.

¹⁰¹ Siniavskii describes the “misappropriation of ‘socialist property’” as the cardinal Soviet sin in *Soviet Civilization*, 182-3.

¹⁰² On the politics of Soviet pronouns, see V.N. Voloshinov’s scholarly treatment of inclusive and exclusive forms of “we” and Evgenii Zamiatin’s dystopian novel of 1926, *We [My]*. V.N. Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (New York: Seminar Press, 1973).

Apostrophe, according to Lauren Berlant, is always about the ‘I’: “Apostrophe is not only the condition of love but an ideal of self-encounter. Can the addressee make more of it than you can, she you who waits for the sentence of your existence to finish and, inevitably, to miss its mark? For the addressee, you are willing to make provisional clarities. For the addressee, you are willing to perform an openness that’s an optimistic brokenness. If you’re lucky, you’re a topos in your own world, although without the apostrophic phantom you cannot exist in the world. ” See the entry, “The Book of Love is sad and boring, no one can lift the damn thing...” on Berlant’s blog, *Supervalent Thought* (June 3, 2012); online <http://supervalenthought.com/2012/06/03/the-book-of-love-is-sad-and-boring-no-one-can-lift-the-damn-thing/>.

¹⁰³ Tertz talks about taking up humanity and space in *Golos iz khora* (71): В итоге: не люди -- просторы. Не характеры –пространства, поля. Границы человека стираются в прикосновении к бесконечному. Преодоление биографического метода и жанра. Сквозь биографию! Каждый человек—сквозь.

Подчас речь эта, не сказанная и даже не осознанная, невольно строится наподобие своеобразного спектакля, который разыгрывается перед охраной, перед начальством, перед сидящими здесь же в камере другими арестантами, либо - более отвлеченно - перед всем светом. «Самоедство» становится формой театрального действия и зрелища. (244-5)

If the Soviet symbolic aligns itself along the temporal axis of teleology, then the prisoner exists at this zero point on its grid of intelligibility, at which time and space intersect. By taking up physical space in this spectacular way, the self-eater occupies the only coordinate available to him in the social order, meanwhile making a violent show for those who police the borders of that order with violence. The self-eater does this without recourse to speech since the time of speaking is constitutively denied such an actor. Like the plastic person of previous chapters, the self-eater has only a silent body with which to speak the anti-historical truth of itself. Staging a theatrical performance of resilient subjectivity that simultaneously consumes him, the self-eater unfigures or disfigures itself into the symbolic order, and comes into recognition for a brief but unsustainable instant as a very mortal “I” outside of the inclusive and immortal “we.”

THE HUNGER STRIKE: NOT-PEOPLE NOT EATING

"In fact, they were revolts, at the level of the body, against the very body of the prison."
--Michel Foucault, *Discipline/Punish*¹⁰⁴

The basic premise of *samoedstvo* is that the physical or empirical “I” evanesces or eviscerates itself as the symbolic “I” emerges into view. “A person feels himself to be disappearing into the narrow confines of the walls, and out of this grows the demand for communication and activity.” [Человек ощущает себя исчезающим в тесном окружении стен, и от этого его потребность в общении и активность в языке возрастает.] This inverse relationship between real and symbolic existence is rendered most visible in the spectacularly vanishing body of the individual hunger striker. In the case of the hunger striker, the symbolic “I” derives its vitality from its urgent proximity to death. It is a form of being-toward-death or, in Siniavskii’s words, “is a symbol of death put on display as a banner for the prison authorities, by which the [striker] marks...his non-desire to participate in the system of relations that are proposed to him, and declines the hateful form of communication the regime has imposed on him.”¹⁰⁵ In other words, in refusing food and approaching his own death, the striker embraces the social death a certain organization of the social has foisted upon him. By this, I mean that the unreal unpeople already suffer symbolic death in the social, what Orlando Patterson calls “social death”: “alienation from all other human attachments, subjection to random and unrecorded acts of torture, and general dishonor as inhuman. Social death is

¹⁰⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline/Punish* (New York: Vintage, 1979). 30.

¹⁰⁵ Голодовка - символ смерти, выставленный напоказ, как знамя, тюремному начальству, которым человек знаменует ... свое нежелание участвовать в системе предложенных ему отношений и отказывается от навязанной ему режимом ненавистной формы общения.

registered on the level of personal interaction and experience, and also institutionally, as a systemic function.”¹⁰⁶ As Siniavskii explains,

Most of all, what a hunger strike is as symbolic language permits us to understand the strange and very individual facts of when a person declines to eat in general and forevermore, and, all the same, converts his last vestige of life into a scream at society, at humanity, at the sky. These facts are little known in the West, but in the Soviet camps one often meets with them, even though, I repeat, they are extremely rare, even exceptional.

Лучше всего, что такое голодовка как символический язык, дают понять нам странные и очень индивидуальные факты, когда человек вообще, навсегда отказывается от еды и тем самым весь остаток жизни обращает в вопль к обществу, к человечеству, к небу. Эти факты мало известны на Западе, но в советских лагерях с ними встречаешься, хотя, повторяю, крайне редко, в виде исключения.

Siniavskii distinguishes these solo performances of protest from the kinds of collective actions that had started to happen in the post-Stalin era. In the former case, the very extraction of a self is the point of the protest. An ‘I’ cannot come into being in a collective action because the ‘I’ of self-eating is already excluded from the collective, outside of the inclusive ‘we.’

That being said, there are perhaps slight poetic correspondences between some of these solo acts of self-eating in Siniavskii’s camp and the mass rebellion of 1962 at the locomotive factory in Novochoerkassk.¹⁰⁷ When Khrushchev hiked the price of sausage meat, the starving workers of Novochoerkassk went on general strike, summing up their dissatisfaction in the grim sarcastic slogan, “Use Khrushchev for meat!” [*Khrushcheva na miaso!*] It seems fair to assume these protesters did not put their starving bodies on the line together in order to keep starving; their message was not the medium, as in self-eating. Moreover, the size of their strike and discernibility of their demands make it easier to see the story of the Novochoerkassk rebellion as a form of political protest, unlike the profound intimacy and presumed asystematicity of self-eating. In order to truly apprehend the individual hunger strike, Siniavskii, counsels,

in its content, moreover its unique content, which is internally psychological, we must understand that it is not simply a widespread means of achieving certain rights or concessions (as with a collective strike), but where more terrible, intoned for the world to hear, as a symbol. (249)

вглядеться в ее содержание, притом содержание уникальное, внутренне

¹⁰⁶ Patrick Anderson, *So Much Wasted: Hunger, Performance, and the Morbidity of Resistance* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 136-7.

¹⁰⁷ On Novochoerkassk and other collective uprisings of the post-Stalin period, see Vladimir A. Kozlov, *Mass Uprisings in the USSR: Protest and Rebellion in the Post-Stalin Years* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 2002); Samuel H. Baron, *Bloody Saturday in the Soviet Union: Novochoerkassk, 1962* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001). Though the labor stoppage starved the workers, they were not on a hunger strike in the sense Siniavskii describes.

психологическое, то можно понять, что это не просто распространенный способ добиться каких-то прав и поправок (вроде забастовки), а куда более грозный, провозглашенный во всеулышание - символ.

Such singular acts have a logic unto themselves, but, "even though such instances recur, each separate episode speaks for itself" [*I khotia sluchai povtoraiutsia, kazhdyi ot del'nyi epizod govorit sam za sebia* (247)].¹⁰⁸

Siniavskii's examples of subjects who come into being by their undoing might contribute to an archive of anorexia, broadly construed as refusal to eat (for more than cosmetic purposes), such as performance studies scholar Patrick Anderson constructs in his book, *So Much Wasted*. Anderson offers a handy summation of what happens in the scene of self-eating and "self-starvation [as staging] the event of subjectivation: the production of political subjectivity in the contexts of subordination to larger institutional and ideological domains." "The function of anorexia" and the broader category Anderson designates 'self-starvation,' "is founded upon profoundly embodied, intensely spectacular, and inherently intersubjective exchanges between and among anorectics and others...anorexia derives, concentrates, and facilitates its clinical and cultural power *as a performance*" insofar as it is "durational," that is, iterative in the Butlerian sense of the performative. As "an embodiment of predetermined modes of resistance to a given set of alimentary norms," it is social subversion incarnate; and as it "is defined by spectacularity."¹⁰⁹ When practiced by the *dokhodiagi* of the Soviet gulag, the bare life of the labor camp, "self-starvation reveals death to be at the core of what it means to forge subjectivity in the context of [this] specific political world."¹¹⁰

In a chapter on the "Hunger Strike" from Anatolii Marchenko's 1969 gulag memoir, two of the author's cellmates stopped eating simultaneously and, though it is protocol to keep self-starvers apart from one another, they are not isolated. Because the camp already abides by a "strict regime" of "genuine starvation," these strikers start out with a dangerous somatic deficit. In Marchenko's words, "from the very first day of a hunger strike such a wasted organism begins to feed off itself" (134). Strikers are literally self-eaters. Hovering between life and death, Marchenko depicts his self-eating cellmate as "a living skeleton dressed up in the regulation clothing of a prisoner," left "half-dead in an empty cell,"¹¹¹ a consummate *dokhodiaga*. (Siniavskii also remarks upon the physiological fact of the starver's body shutting down and dying piece-by-piece, as its organs halt their functioning and its muscles atrophy into inutility.) This fantastic condition precludes its own realist representation, Marchenko finds. "To describe what he looked like is impossible."¹¹² In such a state, the unbecoming subject constitutively

¹⁰⁸ For a very different Russian relationship to liminal existence, see Olga Matich *Erotic Utopia the Decadent Imagination in Russia's Fin-De-Siecle*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005. Matich describes this morbid fascination as a Decadent attitude, which derives aesthetic value from life by protecting the experience of being on the verge of death, what Matich names a kind of decadent immortality.

¹⁰⁹ Anderson, *So Much Wasted*, 38-9.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹¹ Marchenko, *My Testimony*, 135-136. "He had called off his hunger strike: you can starve and starve, but you can never persuade anyone in authority even to listen to your complaint, nor to go into it for you...Nor do they let you die" (137).

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 137.

opposes the state-mandate on aesthetic mimesis. He does not look like the state's lacquered picture of a univocal populace, whose interests "are fully coincident [with the state's] from the point of view of the state."¹¹³ He does not look like anything that finite language could comprehend; there are no words for him, socialist or otherwise.

But these acts of deathly undoing are founded on a strongly opposed desire to register the aliveness of their actors. On the one hand, such instances of self-eating by not eating refuse the "they" that has consigned self-eaters to social death--to what Maggie Nelson names the act of being "devoured" by typological history, unreality or non-existence, and deprived a place in the symbolic, that is, an "I" from which to speak as a viable, valuable human. (At the start of the lecture, Siniavskii alludes to this destructive dynamic as the struggle between the individual [*lichnost'*] and society.) At the same time, such socially dead or anti-social acts rely on a "they" to bear witness to the "I" that performs—whether the protectors of the society, or society itself, "the whole world." In this, self-eaters express a profound and desperate desire for the social. They embody a form of being-toward-death that is also a stab at being-toward-the-other or being-with, as Siniavskii outlines above:

Embarking on a hunger strike, a person effectively rends himself out of the living connection with the world, with 'them,' and exits into isolation, under the shadow of death, symbolically and also factually to the degree that he demonstratively refuses food. At the same time, it is apparent that this break from communication is a special kind of communication, all the more intensified in its semantic and communicative relationship, albeit with a minus sign. (248)

Начиная голодовку, человек как бы обрывает жизненную связь с миром, с «ними», и уходит в одиночество, под сень смерти, символически да и фактически отчасти представленной отказом от еды. И вместе с тем, очевидно, этот разрыв в общении есть особая разновидность общения, притом повышенная в семантическом и коммуникативном отношении, хотя и с минусовым знаком.

These acts, Siniavskii repeats, are a "form of supremely expressive, aggressive, and at the same time supremely communicative speech," and "not simply a break with people," nor the calculated "refusal of the listener and the viewer." On the contrary, "however strange it may seem, the rupture in communication" effected by silent self-eating "simultaneously results in the reemergence of a language that has risen in its communicative significance precisely to the degree of its dissociation [and] separateness."¹¹⁴ Indeed, this is the paradoxical relationship of the starving self to the society in which he starves: at once he reaches out to the other with his extreme act, makes a last, desperate appeal for someone to see him, maybe feed him. At the same time, the self-starver turns away from the world

¹¹³ Tertz, *Socialist Realism*; the Russian reads: "полностью совпадающими с точки зрения государства."

¹¹⁴ The original text: "то в общем можно характеризовать как форму повышенно экспрессивной, агрессивной и вместе с тем повышенно коммуникативной речи. Ведь это не просто разрыв с людьми, отказ от слушателя и от зрителя. Как это ни странно, обрыв коммуникаций влечет порою к пробуждению возросшего в своей коммуникативной значимости языка, возросшего именно в силу разобщения, отъединенное."

and more deeply into himself, until he is consummately isolated in his own nontranscendent form.

“[P]leading, from the deepest bodily core, for something or someone else,”¹¹⁵ the silent solo striker wants a witness to his self, whose social reality is otherwise uncertain. The Russian-born philosopher Alexandre Kojève referred to this “preoccupation with the symbolic effect of objectification” as the basic “anthropogenetic Desire” of the human for recognition as a subject, a status that can only be conferred on the self externally by other subjects within the same social field. “As Kojève explains, in order not to be illusory,” in order to confirm “‘the subjective certainty’ of being a [hu]man,” [... ‘the value that [man] attributes to himself. . . must reveal an objective reality—i.e., an entity that is valid and exists not only for itself, but also for realities other than itself. . . .’”¹¹⁶ The transformation of the self into an object capable of recognition by the other as a “real person,” in the terms of this analysis, requires the subject to objectify itself, to be “outside of himself,” in Kojève’s vocabulary. Sergeui Oushakine compares this situation of symbolic (dis) location to the concept coined by Kojève’s Soviet contemporary, Mikhail Bakhtin, of *vnenakhodimost’*; typically translated as “outsidedness,” Oushakine renders it alternatively as “being-located-from-outside” or “being-beyond-locatedness,”¹¹⁷ disputably providing a better name for the negative space where Siniavskii’s *dokhodiagi* teeter “on the edge” [*na grani*] of existence.

Though all humans experience this desire for recognition as the baseline of their subjective being, not all feel the need to be seen as non-illusory with the same sense of urgency as Siniavskii’s fantastic ‘unpeople.’ Moreover, not all self-objectifying subjects perform under the suspicion that they are always already fantastic or unreal. This suspicion of illusionism infects the verbal monologue Siniavskii supplies for the silent self-eater. Like a pretender-prestidigitator about to pull a rabbit out of his hat, the incredibly disappearing prisoner declares that he has nothing in his hands, nothing under them, and perhaps, nothing up his sleeves either, as he attempts an impossible spectacle—to make the purposeless person magically appear on the stage of Soviet history. “But before us,” Siniavskii insists, no matter how unbelievable these acts, what we are witnessing “is not simply hocus pocus [*fokus*], not simply showing off,” or “*pont*,” he says in *déclassé* camp slang” (244). On the contrary, such fantastic acts in the camp make sense in sync with the fantastic Soviet reality that takes the camp as its epistemological center. Stalin put this version of reality into place to satisfy “his love for turning metaphors into reality” [*ego liubov’ k realizatsii metafor*], effectively

blurring the lines between reality and fantasy. Stalin had brought into play (possibly without suspecting it) the magic powers contained in the language, and Russian society, ever susceptible to a graphic perception of words. . . submitted to the terrifying illusion of living in a world of miracles, sorcery, perfidy, and

¹¹⁵ Anderson, *So Much Wasted*, 138-9.

¹¹⁶ Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on Phenomenology of Spirit* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969 [1939]), 11; quoted in Sergeui Alex. Oushakine, “The Flexible and the Pliant: Organisms of Soviet Modernity,” *Cultural Anthropology* 19.3 (2004): 392-428, at 398.

Given that she is also working within a Hegelian framework, it makes sense that Judith Butler uses the language of recognition to describe the situation in which what she calls ‘unreal’ and ‘fantastic’ subjects make claims on a given social reality. See Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

¹¹⁷ Oushakine, “The Flexible and the Pliant,” 398.

artifice. These were visibly in control of reality and, as they sent shivers down everyone's spine, they produced a certain intense, theatrical pleasure.¹¹⁸

[стирая] грань между действительностью и вымыслом. Сталин включил (возможно, не подозревая о том) магические силы, заключенные в языке, и русское общество, падкое всегда на образное восприятие слова... поддалось этой жуткой иллюзии жить в мире чудес, колдовства, вероломства, искусства, которые у всех на глазах правят реальностью и, подирая морозом по коже, доставляют какое-то острое зрелищное наслаждение.

Pursuing this reading of Soviet society as a magic act in the midst of a metaphorical variety show, as Mikhail Bulgakov novelized in *Master and Margarita*, then the gulag system is a circus with many tents, the main attraction in Siniavskii's depictions of socialist reality.¹¹⁹ Under the big top of the state, the small feats of a single actor may at first glance seem decorative or mystifying displays, while actually having high political stakes, as Tertz shows in the short story, "At the Circus" [*V tsirke*]. The young protagonist of this piece, Kostia, commits his life to the criminal art of magic, or the magical crime of art—both phrases are faithful to Tertz's message—after seeing a "magician-manipulator" [*fokusnik-manipuliator*] aptly named "The Manipulator," ply his trade among the other "monstrous" performing "bodies" under the circus tent and then out on the street. Kostia takes to heart the weighty advice the Manipulator imparts to his young apprentice. "And you must," the elder illusionist instructs, "you absolutely must show them something: some sort of *salto mortale* or a surprising magic trick [*fokus*], or simply find and utter a certain word—the only one in your life after which the world will turn on its head and cross over in the blink of an eye into a supernatural situation."¹²⁰ At the denouement of the tale, Kostia is stuck: sentenced to twenty years of confinement and the confiscation of all of his "property, moveable and immoveable" [*imushchestva, dvizhimogo i nedvizhimogo*]. And at the culminating moment in the camp, with nothing in his hands and nothing under them, he finally performs his life-defying and death-embracing trick.

Kostia espied a space filled with electric light and kilometers of wire extending under the dome of a worldwide circus. And the further he flew from the original point of departure, the happier and more excited his soul became. A feeling close to inspiration seized him, as each nerve played and frolicked, and, having frolicked, laid in wait of an influx of that outside and whole-souled supernatural

¹¹⁸ Tertz, "The Literary Process," 93.

¹¹⁹ Though there is not sufficient space to fully pursue the connection in the present analysis, it is worthwhile to note the relationship between the "freaky" acts of self-eating Siniavskii describes, their circus-like quality, and disability studies interventions into the freakshow or sideshow of the circus for subjects similarly abjected from normative symbolic orders. For instance, see the apropos anthology edited by Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

¹²⁰ The Russian reads: "И ты должен, непременно должен что-то им показать: сальто-мортале какое-нибудь, или удивительный фокус, или просто найти и высказать какое-то слово — единственное в жизни, — после которого весь мир встанет вверх дном и перейдет во мгновение ока в сверхъестественное состояние."

power, which tossed you into the air in a mighty bound, the highest and the lightest in his lightweight life. Still nearer and nearer... Thus he was being flung... now he was showing them... Kostia leapt, spun, and having done the long-awaited *salto*, fell to the earth face down, shot through the head...

Косте виднелось пространство, залитое электрическим светом с километрами растянутой проволоки под куполом всемирного цирка. И чем дальше он улетал от первоначальной точки разбега, тем радостнее и тревожнее делалось у него на душе. Им овладело чувство близкое вдохновению, когда каждая жилка играет и резвится и, резвясь, поджидает прилива той посторонней и великодушной сверхъестественной силы, которая кинет тебя на воздух в могущественном прыжке, самом высоком и самом легком в твоей легковесной жизни. Все ближе, ближе... Вот сейчас кинет... сейчас он им покажет... Костя прыгнул, перевернулся и, сделал долгожданное сальто, упал на землю лицом, простреленной головою вперед.

This is the cost of feeling alive for the self that is figured as death to the dominant social order. Facing a future in which nothing shines for him [*vperedi emu nichego ne svetit*], Kostia is shot dead in the head [*prostrelennoi golovoii vpered*]. But for the fleeting instant before he disappears, he snatches his body away from the state and takes up space in the symbolic field, flinging himself at the electrifying edges of the social order. In order to complete this artistic act, which at once occasions his unique ‘I’ at the same time that it undoes his existence as such, Kostia must step out of line from the usual camp “formation of those, like him, who had been injured by fate, [...who] held their hands behind their backs in a symbol of lost will and extreme obedience.”¹²¹ There are more than mere lexical connections linking Kostia with the nonfictional if equally fantastic characters of “‘I’ and ‘They,’” who also perform magic tricks, con games and other criminal and monstrous manipulations that enface and efface them in one fell swoop.

Returning to Siniavskii’s non-fiction piece, the author fleshes out his abstract principle of self-starvation as self-eating in the personal story of a certain Nikolai, a seasoned veteran of the camp (248-49). Upon his release from a third consecutive term of confinement as a political dissident, Nikolai is arrested again for speaking out against the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. At this point, he is unfortunately familiar with the judicial process and its inevitable outcome, and so, this fourth time, he opts for silent, civil disobedience: he refuses to sign a single incriminating document when he is arrested, and decides to abstain not just from speech but food before his trial, declaring a hunger strike on the first day of his incarceration. Having already served eighteen years, the better part of his life, he is sentenced to seven years of hard labor and finally commits suicide. Siniavskii classifies Nikolai’s entire experience as a case of self-eating: a series of last-resort styles of speech when actual words have little effect on the political reality of the socially-dead subject. For the sake of his Western listener, with his modest awareness of the “facts” of Soviet camp life, Siniavskii “pose[s] the question:

¹²¹ “В строю таких же, как он, обиженных судьбою людей, Костя шел не спеша на работу в одно прекрасное утро. Они держали руки сложенными за спиной в знак потерянной воли и вынужденной покорности.”

Where is there language here? And where is there more than language here? When [Nikolai] was silent? When he declared his hunger strike? When he hung himself or when he pronounced his unintelligible words in court? More likely, all of this was a traversal [*perekhod*] from one language into another (maybe one of them might work). And maybe his muteness, his silence at the trial and investigation were the fullest and most substantive conversations with “them.” (250)

Так вот, зададимся вопросом: где здесь язык? И где здесь больше языка? - когда он молчал? когда он объявил голодовку? когда он вешался или когда он произносил суду свои внятные слова? Вероятнее, все это было переходом с одного языка на другой (может быть, хоть один подействует). И, возможно, его немота, его молчание на суде и следствии были наиболее полным и содержательным разговором с «ними»...

The hunger strike lies along a continuum of practices of silence-as-speech or extreme communicative acts that “[depart] from the language” of the dominant order. (In this they have a “distant connection” with Siniavskii’s own “departure from the language” of the conference, breaking with the expectations of a given speech genre, or forgoing speech altogether.) Some of the extralinguistic phenomena Siniavskii names in his paper among these silent acts are indisputably semiotic and even verbal, so we can be confident in supposing Siniavskii is not being narrowly literal in his construal of language in its presence or absence.

This personal narrative of total negation motivates Siniavskii to move from the material or literal to the metaphorical dimension of self-eating, from the monstrous to the sublime, in the author’s aesthetic categories.

But there is another means of “hunger strike,” “hunger strike” in an allegorical sense, no less, however, effective as a means of communication, of the last communication in conditions of isolation. It is silence. Silence, taken up as the single reaction to the morbid order surrounding you. It happens that an arrestant... completely stops speaking with the command, answering questions and generally pronouncing a word, even as he continues to go to work and fulfill all the orders, except the one — to open his mouth when he is asked. To the silence of the walls, the person answers with silence.

Но есть и другой способ «голодовки», «голодовки» в иносказательном смысле, не менее, однако, действенный как средство общения в условиях одиночества. Это - молчание. Молчание, принятое как единственная реакция на окружающий тебя, убивающий порядок. Бывает, арестант (опять-таки беру неординарные примеры) начисто перестает разговаривать с начальством, отвечать на вопросы и вообще произносить слова, хотя он продолжает ходить на работу и выполнять все команды, кроме одной - открывать рот, когда тебя спрашивают. На безмолвие стен человек отвечает – безмолвием.

In his trademark dialogic manner, Siniavskii interrupts his own train of thought with the internalized voice of Western dissent:

You may raise the objection to me: And what kind of communication does silence entail? What kind of language is silence? Insofar as I am exploring all of these ‘departures from language’ precisely as language, at times lacking, it is true, the usual structure of speech and instead filling this void with other hyperbolized capacities of speech... (249)

Мне, возможно, возразят: а какое же значение заключает в себе молчание? Какой же это язык - молчание? Поскольку я рассматриваю все эти «выходы из языка» именно как язык, лишенный, правда, подчас обычной речевой структуры, но зато восполняющий этот пробел другими гиперболизированными способностями языка...

So what is the moment of traversal [*perekhod*], of crossing or carrying over, of making the body into the material sign of the self for which it stands? Where is the language here, and where is there more than language? How are words or other immaterial signifiers used to faithfully describe such “departures from language,” such expressions of the self that exceed the very limits of expression? How are instances in which the subject disarticulates itself into existence articulated? What crumbs does the self-eater leave of itself for its literate neighbor to read back into the historical record? What is the nature of this “total language,” and how can we who reside on the side of meaning—whether official or oppositional—ever hope to translate these definitively unspeakable acts into a digestible (anti) political gesture? How to narrate the unspeakable act that one cannot endure him or herself, only witness at its nearest as a neighbor? How to speak for the silent self-eater at the precise point of his isolation or singularity as a self? And what are the ethics of such an act of translation from the other’s silent body to the text that is taken over by “us” or “them”?¹²²

Deprived of an actual voice, the prisoner transforms his body into voice by miming the violence of the state. Placing the silent performance of self-seating in conversation with the styles of silent performance I investigate in earlier chapters, I defer to Elaine Scarry, who imagines torture as staged in a state theater of pain. As she explains, “a large part of the mime of power emerges out of the opposition between body and voice [that characterizes...] the prisoner’s experience...for the prisoner, the body and its pain are overwhelmingly present and voice, world and self are absent.”¹²³ Thus the intention of torture is to strip its object of its voice, to make it silent and unsignifying. “The

¹²² Patrick Anderson poses a related set of queries: “How to write *toward* disappearance without imposing unity of meaning or form on a set of practices that defy the logic of self-preservation underwriting conventional impressions of the production of subjectivity?...[If] self-starvation is not only a powerful cultural practice, but also its own representational form, how to translate between it and this text?” Anderson, *So Much Wasted*, 28.

¹²³ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 45. Scarry is interested in an impaired body which is tortured in order to extract speech from the subject, much like the dissident Siniavskii profiles in *Soviet Civilization*. By contrast, the unperson is not asked to speak in the Soviet camp, per Siniavskii’s reckoning, and yet he is also prevented from being silent; such a response to everyday tortures endured in the camp is scarier to the state than any sort of oppositional or scurrilous speech.

torturers are producing a mime in which the one annihilated shifts to being the agent of his own annihilation.” Self-eating is a form of resistance insofar as it reverses the intended result of torture. It reunites the body with the voice, in effect, making the embodied voice speak in the place of the insulted and injured subject. In this, there is more than objectifying silence, and there is more than language--there is a silence that speaks. “[T]his mime, though itself a lie, mimes something real and already present in the physical pain; it is a visible counterpart to an invisible but intensely felt aspect of pain,” which, argues Scarry, always exceeds the limits of articulate speech.¹²⁴ Thus the most recuperative gesture a person can perform for the prisoner’s sake is “to restore to each person tortured his or her voice, to use language to let pain give an accurate account of itself, to present regimes that torture with... a deluge of voices speaking on behalf of, voices speaking in the voice of, the person silenced, these acts that return to the prisoner his most elemental political ground as well as his psychic content and density.”¹²⁵ This, I think, names Siniavskii’s intention in “‘I’ and ‘They,’” and also gets at the generic choice behind Tertz’s unconventional camp memoir, *A Voice from the Chorus* [*Golos iz khora*, 1973], in which the author’s words add a single strain to an indivisible and overpowering cacophony of criminal voices.

[If the people are categorically silent, a la Pushkin, then Siniavskii humbly enjoins them into a conductorless choral symphony... fn. Stites... Revolutionary Dreams...]

This capacity of silence to mean more than words can say, to exceed the symbolic and communicate a pain that reinstates the real of the prisoner’s experience against the presumption of his unreality, is menacing to the state and the social order, from Siniavskii’s point of view.

this refusal to speak, the ban on language with ‘them’ (and sometimes with the whole world), by the way, the prevailing authorities perceive this for some reason with special sensitivity and urgency. To approximate, according to the formulation: “He doesn’t consider us to be people?!” Worse than hunger strikes, scarier than suicide, silence is insulting. Silence compels suspicion about something evil which words cannot convey...” [ellipsis in original]

этот отказ говорить, запрет на язык с «ними» (а иногда и со всем миром), между прочим, власть предержавшие воспринимают почему-то особенно чувствительно, особенно актуально. Примерно - по формуле: «он не считает нас за людей?!...». Хуже голодовок, страшнее самоубийства, молчание - оскорбляет. Молчание заставляет подозревать о чем-то таком недобром, что и словами не передашь...

In the same unintelligibility that defines the nonperson’s existence lies the greatest threat to the intelligible order. (It is as if Tertz’s hunchbacked alien of “Pkhentz” were screaming, “I am more normal! I am more beautiful!”) That the injured might do the injuring; that the violated might be violent; that the unreal might produce real effects; that from outside of its domain, the symbolic might be shaken up, its authority challenged—in all of this there is more than language, since language is precisely the means by which the

¹²⁴ Ibid., 47.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 50.

nonperson is excluded and rendered unreal.

By refusing to communicate with its prisoners, the state assumes that silence is synonymous with compliance, whence the dissident demand for the docile citizen to speak out and shout about his discontent. In Solzhenitsyn's stirring phrase, "You really can and you really ought to cry out! So why did I keep silent?"¹²⁶ Of course, this view of silence "as a sign of consent [*znak soglasii*]," in Siniavskii's turn of phrase, emanates from the perspective of an unspeaking subject with a place in the political and access to vocality. Whereas in the exceptional case of the self-eater, "in this case," qualifies Siniavskii, "[silence] is the sign of final, total non-acceptance, contempt, unwillingness to acknowledge the self-same for the self-same. Confinement in language as a sign of negation." [*V dannom sluchae ono—znak okonchatel'nogo, total'nogo nepriiatiia, prezreniia, nezhelaniia priznat' sebepodnykh za sebepodobnykh. Zamknutost' v iazykekak znak otrizaniia.*] Confinement in camp obscures the unreal subject's more primary confinement in language, which Siniavskii's criminals subversively lay bare by self-eating. Their performances are "revolts," then, "at the level of the body, against the very body of the prison"¹²⁷ literally, and literarily, at the prisonhouse of language.

Another form of mimesis takes place in these solitary protests. Another, nonrepresentational pantomime of power is acted out by these unrepresentable subjects, these unpeople whose very being is defined by its resistance to state-defined realism. When, in Marchenko's experience, a "prison officer informs [the hunger strikers] that what they consider to be 'inhuman cruelty' is really 'in conformity with the regulations,'" ¹²⁸ we see these regulations for what they really are: tools to maintain the symbolic inhumanity of the inmates, inhuman measures for non-humans. By embodying the symbolic violence that is the condition of their existence, these self-eaters gesture with the totality of their embodied selves to an unspeakable truth. It is not they who are monsters, not their actions that are monstrous, but those of the state.

The refusal to speak by the 'unhuman' hunger-striker is actually a response to the state's initial inhumane refusal to communicate with him. Marchenko shows how these lines of communication are visibly closed off. "One day, as a mark of protest, a con decides to go on hunger strike, so he writes out an official complaint (to the camp governor, the Central Committee, Khrushchev—it is all the same who to, it has absolutely no significance; it's simply that a hunger strike 'doesn't count' without an official complaint, even if you starve to death anyway) and refuses to take more food." A few days go by unremarked, then, after as many as ten to twelve days, "they start to feed you artificially, through a pipe. It is useless to resist, for whatever you do they twist your arms behind your back and handcuff you. This procedure is carried out in the camps even more brutally than in the remand prison—by the time you've been 'force-fed' once or twice you are often minus your teeth" and often

they try to make [the artificial feeding] as hot as possible, for they know that this is a sure way of ruining your stomach. Very few men are able to sustain a hunger

¹²⁶ Solzhenitsyn, *Gulag Archipelago*, 16-17.

¹²⁷ Michel Foucault, *Discipline/Punish*, 30. Such a revolt against the prison by the bodies it confines is not the same thing as what happened on the dramatic scale of the Vorkuta camp uprising of 1953, though this protest will become important at the end of this analysis.

¹²⁸ Marchenko, *My Testimony*, 138.

strike for long and get their own way...the main thing is, though, that it's completely useless. In every instance the answer is exactly the same as to all other complaints... "Your protest is unjustified, call off your hunger strike. Whatever you do, we won't let you die... When you go free from here you are welcome to die."¹²⁹

In the case of this and other hunger strikers, the guards "beg[in] to feed [the prisoner] artificially," and "the artificial feeding itself [is] turned into a daily torture."¹³⁰ This scene actualizes in material terms Siniavskii's assertion that, "of course, the Soviet State has never given a citizen the total possibility of living for himself; it demands that he live for it, for the State."¹³¹

This is a kind of biopolitical mimesis or socialist realism with an "ironic" twist by which the state makes visible the otherwise imperceptible operations of power in and through the bodies of its subjects. In the relevant words of Allen Feldman, "The performance of the hunger strike would stage the abuse and violence of the Other in the eviscerated flesh of the dying protester. The penal imperative to incorporate the panoptic presence of the other as a form of compliance and subjugation would itself be subjected to deflating mimesis and a final ironic reversal."¹³² As Anderson writes about the more recent hunger strikes at Guantanamo Bay by prisoners similarly deprived the protection of human rights (as "enemy combatants"), "it is precisely through the refusal to recognize the power of hunger striking that the state produces its own power, not in taking the lives of marginalized subjects, but paradoxically enforcing their continued survival. This refusal manifests as both a carceral and a clinical practice by camp officials," and demonstrates how "the sovereignty of the state, defined as the right to control who *must* live and who *may* die, is radically founded."¹³³ "The feeding tube takes on resilient

¹²⁹ Ibid., 70. The exception to this rule is the secret hunger strike, which, Siniavskii seems to agree, is tantamount to a suicide attempt. The secret hunger strike is entirely involuted in its singular aspirations toward death. Its intimacy is total, and makes a self for the self, but not for society. Marchenko tells a story of this sort about Mad'iar, a 'pederast' whom he introduces earlier in the memoirs as a possible Fly analog, quaffing from the ever-leaking veins of the camp's old-hand convict and notorious queer hero, Vorkuta. Having described the queer vampiric scene between Mad'iar and Vorkuta, of symbiotic, life-sustaining cannibalism, Marchenko transitions into a more solemn discussion of Mad'iar's total abstention from sustenance. "This same Mad'iar decided to go on a secret hunger strike. The secret hunger strike is even more terrifying than the one that is customary, declarative. Evidently, he had enough of everything on earth, and he really wanted to die. He didn't make any kind of announcement, didn't refuse food, took his ration, his thin broth for lunch. But didn't eat anything, gave everything on the sly to his cellmates. This continued for more than a week. And all this time, as everyone else, he was required to [go to work], on a walk, didn't have the right to lay down during the day. All this time I saw him every day on his walk, saw how he was literally turning into a shadow. How he made it up the stairs, I can't understand! Even we could only make it by clinging to the walls. One time, we were taken for our usual stroll. Mad'iar was walking behind me. Suddenly I felt a little tug at my back, and he came crashing forward on the concrete steps of the stairwell and stayed there on his back. The guards hurried us, chased us past him. He lay there, like a dead man, with his eyes wide-open and glazed over. On another day, we found out from the seventy-ninth that Mad'iar was alive, and was dragged over to us once again in the cell. There he continued his hunger strike, no longer keeping it a secret, but declaring it."

¹³⁰ Marchenko, *My Testimony*, 137.

¹³¹ Sinyavsky, *Soviet Civilization*, 174.

¹³² Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 236.

¹³³ Anderson, *So Much Wasted*, 26-27,

significance as the means through which the state attempts to exert its sovereignty over ‘bare life.’”¹³⁴ Connected to the state apparatus by this prosthetic esophagus-cum-ideological umbilicus, the subversive effect of self-eating is swallowed back up by the state. Yet during that moment of spectacular starvation, in the interlude before the feeding tube is forcibly introduced into the throat by an emissary of the state, some essential truth without quotation marks emanates from the body of the hunger-striker.

Violence done to the unreal subject, first ‘objectively,’ by the state and then by subject itself, cannot be captured by realist description, especially not socialist realism. In rendering the experience of the camp, “realistic prose fails,”¹³⁵ Siniavskii, Marchenko, and even Solzhenitsyn discover, but “this impossibility is an enabling possibility,” says Slavoj Zizek.¹³⁶ Take the poetry Anna Akhmatova composed about the camp; it is “not a realistic description of the situation,” but “description without place,” akin to the concept of *vnenekhadimost*’; that is,

not a description which locates its contents in a historical space and time, but a description which creates, as the background of the phenomena it describes, an inexistent (virtual) space of its own, so that what appears in it is not an appearance sustained by the depth of reality behind it, but a decontextualized appearance, an appearance which fully coincides with real being.¹³⁷

“Such an artistic description,” continues Zizek, sooner real than realist, “‘is not a sign for something that lies outside its form.’ Rather, it extracts from the confused reality of its own inner form...[by evoking the way [totalitarian] terror affects subjectivity.”¹³⁸ These self-eating nonpeople should actually be “considered the only real people”¹³⁹ precisely because they engage in unreal acts, and thereby gesture violently toward the truths that state-enforced realism cannot name, even as they bubble up incessantly beneath the unbroken surface of socialism’s ‘harmonious’ reality.

THE MUSEUM OF SWALLOWED OBJECTS:

*“If you play with fire, you can burn your fingers,”
as Khrushchev warned writers with his customary bluntness.”
—Abram Tertz, “The Literary Process in Russia”*

Though it is perhaps the physiological opposite of not eating, Siniavskii’s other primary example of self-eating involves the actual eating of spoons and other objects. When the potency of starvation as protest disappears down the feeding tube, then the prisoner takes control of what will (or will not) be shoved down his throat by the state.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 27.

¹³⁵ Slavoj Zizek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008), 4.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 5.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 5-6.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 6.

¹³⁹ Andrei Siniavskii and Catharine Nepomnyashchy. "An Interview with Andrei Sinyavsky." *Formations* 6.1 (Spring 1991): 6-23, at 18.

Indeed, spoon swallowing is the most basic example of self-eating Siniavskii offers, from which he deduces the logic of self-eating as a communicative act. This is “the simplest case of [playing] with fire,” per Siniavskii, “when a prisoner, driven to the brink” (note here how Siniavskii’s language syncs up with Anderson’s), “to the absence of language, swallows a spoon or something of this sort.” [Простейший случай подобной игры с огнем - это когда заключенный, доведенный до крайности, до отсутствия языка, проглатывает ложку или что-нибудь в этом роде.] As with Kostia’s *salto mortale*, this act is designed to counteract the illusoriness of its performer. “It’s understood, as with every *artiste*, relying on his spectacular [*effektnyi*] theatrical trick to be crowned by a well-received finale, he hopes that the swallowed spoon will then be extracted from him by means of surgical intervention.” [Понятно, как всякий артист, рассчитывающий, что его эффектный, театральный трюк увенчается благоприятным финалом, он надеется, что проглоченную ложку из него потом извлекут путем хирургического вмешательства.] Siniavskii calls attention here to the multivalence of self-eating, whose practical purpose obtains alongside its intense symbolism. Marchenko similarly reminds us that foreign objects are ingested in order to have immediate effects on the everyday reality of the unreal subject in the camp. It is not, then, swallowing for the sake of swallowing, as the purposeless animal does. At the same time, these acts are not oriented toward some far-flung collective future. Rather, they are desperately realist gestures, of the kind described above. They are directed at the most proximate horizon of an imperiled ‘I’ in the most material and least idealist ways, as Marchenko elucidates below.

Some men can’t bear the inhuman conditions and the hunger and end up by mutilating themselves: they hope they will be taken to hospital and will escape, if only for a week, the bare boards and stinking cell, and will be given more human nourishment. While I was in the cooler, two of the cons acted as followed: they broke the handles off their spoons and swallowed them; then, after stamping on the bowls of these spoons to flatten them, they swallowed these too. But even this wasn’t enough—they broke the pane of glass in the windows and by the time the warders had succeeded in swallowing several pieces of glass. They were taken away and I never saw them again.¹⁴⁰

Such gestures have limited potency as shows of solitary protest. As in the case of forcibly finished hunger strikes, the state brackets off the theatricality of object-swallowing, rendering it invisible by sending its actors and their props behind the scenes. Siniavskii notes parenthetically that “prison guards who have gotten sick of these kinds of demonstrations no longer rush the medical assistance” to their ailing performers. [тюремное начальство, которому надоели подобные демонстрации, не торопится с медицинской помощью]. Instead, the prison administration repurposes the bodies of its prisoners to its own advantage, allowing them to “carry such experiments to a lethal outcome, for the edification of the other inmates.” [и порою доводит опыт до летального - в назидание другим арестантам.] Indeed, the risk of self-eating is that the subject who takes a stab at damaging its own bodily integrity in order to achieve some symbolic presence or visibility will totally vanish in the end.

Though there is a degree of showmanship in the prisoner’s making an object

¹⁴⁰ Marchenko, *My Testimony*, 69.

disappear, having nothing in his hands, nothing under them, we would be wrong to read this act as pure gimmick and, further, wrong to read gimmicks of this degree of grotesquerie as pointless in themselves. On the contrary, amends Siniavskii, spoon-swallowing is a sophisticated art form, and

the artist who swallows a spoon risks a lot, and he enters into that risk in order to represent [*izobrazit*'], in exaggerated-parodic form, the fact that he is hungry and that he has reached the limits of his depletion, if in symbolic form he eats an iron spoon! One must not think he ate the spoon literally from hunger. But it is necessary to understand that he can no longer stand the reigning silence and he professes this openly with his act of protest" (244).

Проглатывающий ложку артист многим рискует, и он идет на этот риск для того, чтобы в утрированно-пародийной форме изобразить, как он голоден и насколько он дошел до конца в своем истощении, если в виде символа съедает железную ложку! Не нужно думать, что он съел эту ложку буквально с голоду. Но необходимо понять, что он больше не может терпеть царящего молчания и об этом заявляет в открытую своим противоестественным действием.

More than the other oft-devoured-objects, the swallowing of a spoon is a complex act of communication--not only because it relates a message through wordless gesture, swapping personal for state silence, in effect; but also because it reveals how all language operates through acts of substitution and signification. (In lieu of a spoon, one is tempted to substitute Ferdinand de Saussure's tree here.) The spoon comprises a linguistic unity between signifier and signified; in the criminal's improper handling, the eating instrument moves the communicative act from immanence, materiality or literalism (eating the spoon out of real, physiological hunger) to metaphor or symbolism (eating the spoon, a symbol of eating, in order to call attention to the real hunger of the body). Eating the thing with which one eats, this act is also tautological: "confinement in language as a sign of negation."

Never-minding its multiple capacities for signification in Siniavskii's paper, or its other symbolic functions beyond the camp,¹⁴¹ the simple spoon carries a lot of semantic

¹⁴¹ My argument is informed by, but does not directly engaged with, the psychoanalytic argument advanced by Sigmund Freud and Jean Laplanche that the developing subject's refusal of the spoon grants it psychic coherence, while cementing its relation to the healthy social order. See Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death and Psychoanalysis*, translated by Jeffrey Mehlman (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 14; 48. "The primal scene of eating, when Mommy and Daddy offer spoons of food to the child, initiates the role of the social in subjective development: the satisfaction of instinctual need, 'whose paradigm is hunger,' becomes psychically manifest as intersubjective." (Anderson, *So Much Wasted*, 20) In other words, 'healthy' subjectivity is premised on the coordination of one's individual hunger with the instincts of the social. When the baby grabs the spoon, it separates itself off from its m/other; this is an act of "self-preservation" in the social order. But what happens when the mother never offers a spoon? Or shoves the spoon down the baby's throat? Feeling its integrity as a subject imperiled by the mother's smothering and aggressive spoon-feeding, the child's refusal of her proffered spoon, its aggressive appropriation of the object, is one that maintains the boundaries between itself as a subject, while affirming the mother's status as an object. Cordelia Schmidt-Hellerau, "Fighting with Spoons: On Caretaking Rivalry between Mothers and Daughters," *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* 26.1 (2006): 32-55. By taking the spoon in so completely, the self-eater performs and "exaggerated and parodic" imitation of the subject's total dependency on the state.

weight and material significance in gulag life. So much of the social is invested in the spoon, and so much of the human contained in the act of consumption. For these coupled reasons, the convicts' thrice-daily meals take on quasi-religious significance in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. By observing the ritual of eating with a degree of civility incongruent with the rest of camp reality, Solzhenitsyn's eponymous hero finds his human dignity restored; the spoon is the instrument of that restoration. Consider the following scene: "He drew up his right knee to his stomach, pulled his spoon ('Ust izhma 1944)," "his little baby," "from under his boot top, removed his hat, put it in his left armpit, and ran his spoon under the edge of kasha. This is a moment that demands complete concentration, as you remove some of the scanty kasha from the bottom of the bowl, put it carefully into your mouth and swirl it around there with your tongue."¹⁴² Eating slowly with his spoon, in an act of phenomenological estrangement in the formalist style, Shukhov is pulled back to the presence of his own body. Gaining a sense of himself in space, "that bowl of soup [...] becomes] dearer than freedom" for Shukhov, a liberal concept made all the more abstract to him compared to the very tangibility of food, which feels "dearer than life itself, past, present, and future."¹⁴³ Thus the spoon is both an instrument and icon of survival and artistry. Shukhov creates his own spoon of iron, and inscribes it with the details of his life in camp; it encompasses both his artistic urge and his autobiography, well beyond the utilitarian function of the object. When a fellow *zek* brings Shukhov aluminum wire, informing him, that the wire "is good for making spoons," we can detect an unspoken intimacy forming between the two prisoners, a kind of illiberal freedom of the spirit found in creation. And when the camper entreats Ivan Denisovich, "teach me how to cast them," we recognize the complexity of this scene as a survivalist exchange between a couple of convicts and a conversation about their craft between a pair of artists whose medium is their survival.¹⁴⁴

Ingesting these *objets d'art* is equally an act of artistry, Siniavskii tells us. The body of the swallower becomes a piece of art in the process, a canvas of its unique camp experience, signed with the prisoner's proper name like the handle of his spoon.¹⁴⁵ In his

¹⁴² Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, translated by Ralph Parker (New York: Penguin, 1998), 63.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁴⁵ In another episode from *My Testimony* of cutting off an ear and eating a chess set, Marchenko relates the story of "a young Balt" who came to his cellblock "from the psychiatric ward. I'd met him earlier, when I was in the hospital for the first time. Then he had cut off his ear. They healed his wound and moved him to the psychiatric ward. And now, when he only had a couple of months remaining until his freedom, he had cut off the second ear, swallowed a spoon, and pieces of pipe." Two months after they operated on his stomach, he came back to the hospital. "He had swallowed chess figures, the whole set, white and black, all but two knights. He had only forty days left till his release. I don't know whether he was disturbed or not. I spoke with him often, and he gave off the impression of a totally normal person [*vpolne normal'nogo cheloveka*]¹⁴⁵—in any case, much more normal than many of the zeks in the zone who were considered healthy. This Balt was the son of a priest, a literate, well-educated boy. He even read a lot in the hospital." When the operation was performed, one of Marchenko's mates in the hospital requested the chess pieces that had been retrieved from the Balt boy's stomach. "He and I preserved this museum piece. It was impossible to play with the set anyway: it was short two knights." Even in the camp, there is always the possibility for play, and for campiness itself. In another section of the memoirs, the same 'boy' from the Baltics "tattoos himself all over while in the intensified regime on the face and chest with 'the usual slogans': Slave of the CPSU and so on. The officials cut out his tattoos quickly. Also in intensified he swallowed several rusty nails, two spoons and some pieces of barbed wire... He's operated on, and,

chapter devoted to “self-mutilators” [*chlenovrediteli*], Marchenko takes a stroll through the gulag gallery of body artistry, “the prison hospital,” where “there [are] plenty of mutilated prisoners there: some with ripped-open stomachs, some who had sprinkled powdered glass in their eyes and some who had swallowed assorted objects—spoons, toothbrushes, wire... Wounds sewn up with thread, two lines of buttons stitched to the bare skin, these were such trifles [*melochi*] that hardly anybody ever paid attention to them.”¹⁴⁶ As artists of this sort proliferated in the camp, “the surgeon in the prison hospital had a rich practice,” which featured “opening up stomachs” as its “most frequent job.” This moves Marchenko to the distasteful speculation that, “if there had been a museum of objects taken out of stomachs [*muzei dobytykh iz zheludka veshchei*], it would surely have been the most astonishing [*udivitel’naia*] collection in the world.”¹⁴⁷ Also astonishing is Marchenko’s comic and frivolous tone, which seems so affectively inappropriate to the grim fact of self-mutilation. One sooner expects the kind of reaction that the camp nurse qua curatorial assistant of the museum of swallowed objects received, when she recounted for her professional peers outside the zone the strange contents she had extracted from the stomachs of her patients—“spoons, nails, chess sets, glass.” The other nurses “determined that she was abnormal [*nenormal’naia*], that she was psychologically disturbed [*u nee rasstorennaiia psikhika*], they were even a little afraid of her [*pobaivalis’*].”¹⁴⁸ In supplying a realistic description of the facts to which she bore witness, the nurse herself had made a ‘departure from language.’ By telling the truth of camp reality, in “all the savagery, all the fantasticness of this circumstance, all the unnaturalness of these stories, which were customary to the [campers],” she risked her own reality and sacrificed her intelligibility among other ‘normal’ socialist subjects. To do all this, and shamelessly inject a streak of dark humor is something else entirely—a form of exaggerated parody or ‘camp camp,’ which I explore in the concluding chapter.

If swallowed objects have the status of art or museum piece, then the clever selection and handling post-ingestion of the object bears the unique imprimatur of the artist. In such a way, an individual is carved out of his stomach. One of the most striking episodes of this kind in Marchenko’s memoirs involves a certain Subbotin, a homosexual

“immediately after his operation, he had hardly come round, he tore off his bandages and split open the seam on his stomach.” They had to sew him back up again.

¹⁴⁶ Marchenko, *My Testimony*, 142. The Russian reads: “в тюремную больницу — там полно заключенных «членовредителей»: и со вспоротыми животами, и засыпавших себе глаза стеклянным порошком, и наглотававшихся разных предметов — ложек, зубных щеток, проволоки... Зашитые ниткой раны, пуговицы в два ряда, пришитые к голому телу, — это уж такие мелочи, на которые и внимания никто не обращает.”

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.* “В тюремной больнице у хирурга богатая практика; чаще всего ему приходится вскрывать желудок, и если бы существовал музей добытых из желудка вещей, — это была бы, наверное, самая удивительная коллекция на свете.”

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* “Все это обычные, будничные истории, к ним привыкли и эски, и врачи, и начальство. Но вот одна из наших медсестер (сестры у нас были вольные) поехала в отпуск в дом отдыха. Она там не говорила своим соседкам, что работает в лагере, говорила, что просто медсестра в больнице. Но она рассказывала им, как это водится на отдыхе, всякие случаи из своей практики — у одного больного из желудка вынули ложки, у другого гвозди, шахматы, стекло... И после этих ее рассказов соседки по дому отдыха решили, что она ненормальная, что у нее расстроенная психика, ее даже побаивались. После отпуска она рассказала об этом нам — мы вечерами собирались поболтать в процедурной. И после ее рассказа мы вдруг по-иному увидели все, что нас окружает, — всю дикость, всю фантастичность этой обстановки, всю неестественность этих обычных для нас историй, этой больницы за колючей проволокой, под охраной автоматчиков на вышках.”

[*pederast*] at Vladimirka,” where “homosexuals were few in number but everybody knew them.” An enterprising criminal con, Subbotin embarks on a letter writing campaign, and his written words prove surprisingly effective. He is received by the Supreme Soviet, Brezhnev’s advisors, and in the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union by Khrushchev. Once there, he swallows a whole set of Party dominoes, but the infirmary doctors refuse to operate on Subbotin’s stomach. The pieces—all twenty-eight of them—must come out on their own. Subbotin keeps a tally on the prison wall as the pieces reemerge. During this time, Marchenko and Subbotin go for a walk together in their cellblock, encountering another con along the way, by the name of Valerii. Slapping himself on the stomach, as if parodying a pregnant woman, Subbotin cajoles Valerii into listening to the rumblings of his rebellious internal play with the Party. “What do you have in there?” Valerii asks, “Do-mi-no,” Subbotin replies, protracting his syllables with perverse pleasure, and perhaps word-playing with the notion of internal domination [*dominatsiia*] taken literally.¹⁴⁹ Despite his “assiduous” counting, four pieces never turn up. “After several days of languishing expectation he threw up his hands: if they remain in his stomach, then they weren’t bothering him, but if they came out, then screw ‘em!” [*esli ostalis’ v zhivote, to lish’ by ne meshali, a esli vyshli, to i chert s nimi!*]

Decidedly not occupied by a communist baby, nor filled any longer with pieces of the Party (having excreted most of them), the criminal belly is nonetheless pregnant with significance in this episode of Marchenko’s memoirs, as it is throughout Siniavskii-Tertz’s oeuvre. Guts make up the supreme seat of empathy and co-feeling in his creative nonfiction, wherein conventionally humanist compassion spills messily outward to encompass other forms of life beyond the anemic human. The alien protagonist of Tertz’s fantastic tale, “Pkhentz,” for instance, speaks with this kind of universal empathy when he shakes his head with dismay at

the sadism of [human] cookery. Would-be chickens are eaten in liquid form. The innards of pigs are stuffed with their own flesh. A gut that’s swallowed itself garnished with stillborn chickens—what else, when you think of it, is scrambled egg with sausage? Wheat is treated more unmercifully still: they cut it beat it, crush it to dust... What about preparing a man to the same recipe?¹⁵⁰

садизм кулинарии. Будущих цыплят поедают в жидком виде. Свиные внутренности набиваются собственным мясом. Кишка, проглотившая себя и облитая куриными выкидышами,— вот что такое на самом деле яичница с колбасой. Еще безжалостней покупают с пшеницей: режут, бьют, растирают в пыль... А что если человека приготовить тем же порядком?

To resurrect an old idiom, Tertz and his extraterrestrial, Andrei Kazimirovich, “have bowels for”¹⁵¹ all beings capable of suffering, even those living specimens whose

¹⁴⁹ I thank Eric Naiman proposing Subbotin was pulling a clever gastrointestinal-etymological trick here.

¹⁵⁰ Andrei Sinyavsky, “Pkhentz.” In *The Portable Twentieth-Century Russian Reader*, edited by Clarence Brown (New York: Penguin, 1993): 481-506, at 487. Unless otherwise noted, the English translations of this short story come from this edition.

¹⁵¹ Jad Abumrad and Robert Krulwich, “Guts,” *Radiolab* (April, 2012); online <http://www.radiolab.org/2012/apr/02/>

consciousness is so alien to our own, we can never know with any certainty how (or if) they feel.¹⁵² When this turn of phrase was better traveled, it was supposed that “natural benevolence and compassion” were lodged in the lower intestines. Against the reigning “Hobbesian egoism” of his day, one seminarian scholar found, “the constitution and frame of our nature disposeth to [natural affection],’; we cannot but feel this ‘when our bowels are touched with a sensible pain at the view of any calamitous object; when our fancies are disturbed at the report of any disaster befalling a man; when the sight of a tragedy wringeth compassion and tears from us...’”¹⁵³ There is a ubiquity of “bowel imagery” in the Bible, too,¹⁵⁴ and later exegetic texts “singled out [the bowels of all things] for special spiritual purposes.” Aware all the while that this curious location of compassion in the person “arouses perplexity if not aversion in most of us,” there was a “poetically and morally powerful” effect to be gained from “the notion that the viscera can be the vehicle of virtue [and...] of mercy.”¹⁵⁵

Andrei Kazimirovich’s more-than-humane culinary revelation may strike our ears as misguided or even naïve, but it actually gets to the meat of Siniavskii’s agenda at Geneva. In the question-and-answer session that followed his talk, one scholar in attendance could not agree with “idealizing that which is monstrous. The monstrous and the horrible, as sources of art or poetry? Maybe, in certain exceptional cases. But they remain no less monstrous or horrible. And it is against the monstrous and the horrible that the elite must continue to struggle.” Another listener, more attuned to Siniavskii’s message, asked hesitantly whether the intention of the talk was to move those who hear about “this horror to say, not that this means justifies the end, but that ‘This is wonderful, this is admirable, and, at the most basic, there is something deeply human in that out of horror something sublime can still gush forth.’”¹⁵⁶ This second interlocutor, I think, is onto something. Though Siniavskii makes thin apologies for the graphic visual

¹⁵² Alongside Siniavskii’s wheat stalk, we might see Martin Buber’s tree, from the latter’s philosophical exploration of alterity, which shares with Siniavskii more than a similarly prominal name. In Buber’s tree, the ‘I’ stands face to face with the insuperable unknowability of the other, in its ‘non-human’ form. Writes Buber, “It confronts me bodily and has to deal with me as I must deal with it—only differently. One should not try to dilute the meaning of the relation: relation is reciprocity. In the tree, the plant, in nature and life in its most capacious understanding, “we find here not the deed of posture of an individual being but a reciprocity of being itself—a reciprocity that has nothing except being... What matters in this sphere is that we should do justice with an open mind to the actuality that opens up before us.” Martin Buber, *I and Thou [Ich und Du]*, translated by Walter Kaufman (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970 [1937]), 173.

¹⁵³ Norman S. Fiering, “Irresistible Compassion: An Aspect of Eighteenth-Century Sympathy and Humanitarianism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Apr. - Jun., 1976): 195-218, at 201. As she thinks on the violent exclusions of certain creatures from narrow constructions of the human, Mary Wollstonecraft uses this phrase in the ninth chapter, “Of The Pernicious Effects Which Arise From The Unnatural Distinctions Established In Society,” in her formative feminist treatise on the *Vindication on the Rights of Women*. She writes, “and when a question of humanity is agitated, he may dip a sop in the milk of human kindness...”

¹⁵⁴ John Durham Peters, “Bowels of Mercy,” *BYU Studies*, 38.4 (1999): 27-41, at 27. In a non-theological context, Jennifer M. Barker has investigated the affective modalities of viscera in *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 120-144. She looks at the way a “meaty sequence” in film makes the viewer present to the present, and, by “remind[ing] us as embodied viewers of our carnal, visceral embeddedness in time itself,” reconnects us at once to vitality and mortality, to death and (sexual) desire (144).

¹⁵⁵ Peters, “Bowels of Mercy,” 27.

¹⁵⁶ Siniavskii et al., *Solitude et communication*.

descriptions of grotesque bodily acts that overwhelm his lecture, his failure to hold back the deluge of details is done with more than shock value in mind. By bypassing the brain, Siniavskii makes a beeline to the bellies of his audience, appealing directly to the virtues of their viscera in the older, pre-humanist style. He stages a silent, inter-intestinal dialogue, speaking from gut to gut. By *not* sanitizing these stories of starvation, self-evisceration, and the improper ingestion of ‘calamitous objects’ in the camp, Siniavskii forces the intact stomachs of his listeners to churn in turn. His speech elicits from them a kind of kinesthetic empathy (as discussed in a much different context in Chapter Three of this dissertation), that connects the disembodied “elite” listener back to his own corporeality, which then becomes a conduit for feelings of common humanity to travel down to the lowly convict criminal, otherwise written off as disgusting, abnormal, and ultimately unreal.

This chapter ends intentionally on the image of indiscrete innards, with alien objects secreted out of the queer camp body and into plain view of socialist reality. My path travels along the digestive track laid out by Tertz, who halts his own tract, *What is Socialist Realism*, on the peristaltic guts of God, in all their glorious intestinal and cerebral convulsions, roiling with the promise of a real realism based in

a phantasmagoric art, with hypotheses instead of a Purpose, an art in which the grotesque will replace realistic description of ordinary life. Such an art would correspond to the spirit of our time. May the fantastic imagery of Hoffman and Dostoevski, of Goya, Chagall, and Mayakovski (the most socialist realist of all), and of many other realists and nonrealists teach us how to be truthful with the aid of the absurd and the fantastic. Having lost our faith, we have not lost our enthusiasm about the metamorphoses of God that take place before our very eyes, the miraculous transformations of His entrails and His cerebral convolutions. We don’t know where to go; but, realizing that there is nothing to be done about it, we start to think, to set riddles, to make assumptions. May we thus invent something marvelous? Perhaps; but it will no longer be socialist realism.¹⁵⁷

искусство фантасмагорическое, с гипотезами вместо цели и гротеском взамен бытописания. Оно наиболее полно отвечает духу современности. Пусть утрированные образы Гофмана, Достоевского, Гойи, Шагала и самого социалистического реалиста Маяковского и многих других реалистов и не реалистов научат нас, как быть правдивыми с помощью нелепой фантазии. Утрачивая веру, мы не утратили восторга перед происходящими на наших глазах метаморфозами бога, перед чудовищной перистальтикой его кишок - мозговых извилин. Мы не знаем, куда идти, но, поняв, что делать нечего, начинаем думать, строить догадки, предполагать. Может быть, мы придумаем что-нибудь удивительное. Но это уже не будет социалистическим реализмом.

To imagine God’s guts is the true act of dissent from socialist realism, of thinking outside the kitsch of communism’s totalizing vision, veering off the course of its crushing teleology, existing without its Purpose with a capital P. The narrator of Milan Kundera’s

¹⁵⁷ Tertz, *Socialist Realism*, 218-9.

Unbearable Lightness of Being conjures the same “sacrilegious” image of God in his childhood: “if He had a mouth, He had to eat. And if He ate, He had intestines.”¹⁵⁸ The implications of this “divine intestine” are frightening for the child, who “grasped the incompatibility of God and shit,” “a more onerous theological problem than is evil.” Socialist realism, like Western humanism, is grounded in an “aesthetic ideal of the categorical agreement with being,” what Kundera calls kitsch, meaning, “the absolute denial of shit, in both the literal and figurative senses of the world; kitsch excludes everything from its purview which is essentially unacceptable in human existence,”¹⁵⁹ everything, and, as we added earlier, everyone, especially the unpeople or nonhumans of the Soviet gulag, that “septic tank used by totalitarian kitsch to dispose of its refuse.”¹⁶⁰

Tertz ties these sacred intestines directly to the lower material bodily stratum located by Mikhail Bakhtin at the cosmological center of pre-Enlightenment low culture and its corresponding aesthetic, “grotesque realism.” This aesthetic category was also, one critique points out, “a point-by-point inversion of categories used in the thirties,” as Bakhtin was writing, “to define Socialist Realism,” and its narrow canonical prescriptions for the novel and all other forms of art “proposed by the Soviet government.”¹⁶¹ Bakhtin celebrated the powers of the grotesque and the monstrous to rip open constrictive representations of reality, as contained in socialist realism and enlightened Western humanism. And Siniavskii too, while conceding to his squeamish humanist conference mates that, “yes...the monstrous, and monstrous art, [may be a] result of...the end of humanity,” but this construction of humanity is already deadening to those who are monsters in relation to it. Monsters represent the outside, the extra-symbolic. Like God’s guts, they pulse with the possibility of something more.

monsters have always testified to still something else, especially in the Middle Ages. If one looks closely, there is something positive in the monster. It’s not just the underside of the beautiful. It is a certain expression of the beautiful...The beautiful and the ugly meet somewhere, the monstrous and the grotesque are simply ways of expressing beauty, extreme beauty. Therefore we cannot simply unequivocally interpret these monsters as a negative moment within the positive of the beautiful.

Insofar as the reality of the camp is fantastic and grotesque, and its most degraded inhabitants are monsters, it becomes the only possible topos in which Siniavskii “perceive[s] the possibility of realism.”¹⁶² In the monstrous thief and criminal queer, Siniavskii sees the full truth of socialist life outside quotation marks; “only thieves [are]

¹⁵⁸ Kundera, *Unbearable Lightness*, 248. Though I have yet to locate it in Tolstoy’s massive and meticulously catalogued oeuvre, I thank Eric Naiman for sharing with me an anecdote from his teaching notes about the author’s experience writing fables for peasant children. He was helped by his children in the project, including his six-year old son, Ilya, who composed the following: “A boy once asked, “Does God have to go to the bathroom?”” God punished him for asking this question, and the boy had to go to the bathroom every day for the rest of his life.

¹⁵⁹ Kundera, *Unbearable Lightness*, 248.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 252.

¹⁶¹ Krystyna Pomorska, “Prologue,” in Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, translated by Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), xvii.

¹⁶² Siniavskii and Nepomnyashchy, “Interview,” 17.

real people,” he concludes.¹⁶³ Rather than denying their humanity for its non-coincidence with socialism’s system of representations, Siniavskii reappraises these excrescent actors as the most real, the sole personae in whom the possibility of mimesis still inheres. This suggestion, a hypothesis without purpose, threatens the identity of the whole system of socialist realism with the excessive and excremental truth of the human.

Such an expansive view of the subject encompasses both the godly and the grotesque, the scabrous, scatological and sublime. Indeed, in Bakhtin’s estimation, this human “excrement represents bodies and matter that are . . . the most suitable substance for the degrading that is also exalted,” in which is embedded a “regenerating and renewing element,” lost to “Europe’s literary consciousness” after the advent of Enlightenment humanism.¹⁶⁴ Opposed to this “abstract and moral” cosmology is “a system of grotesque degrading, similar to the tossing of excrement and the drenching in urine. It is a gay funeral,” rife with images like Tertz’s disemboweled deity, and other representations of “[the material bodily lower stratum that] are closely linked to laughter.”¹⁶⁵ Such “scatological images in various forms,” explains Bakhtin, “nearly always accompany the gay monsters created by laughter in order to replace the terror that has been defeated. For these reasons, too, these images are indissolubly linked with the underworld.”¹⁶⁶

The final chapter of the dissertation engages with precisely these gay monsters of the (criminal) underworld, as they appear in Siniavskii-Tertz’s oeuvre and personal experience. It will continue to confront the coprophilic characters who are cut from the same cloth, those who are enraptured by the creative and subversive capacities of their own bowels, like the homosexual Subbotin or socialism’s grotesque God. I alter the angle of my approach toward them in the coming pages, and ask not just why such personae are considered fantastic or unreal, but why that irreality routinely links up with the supposedly perverse sexual activity of these subjects. In other words, I ask why self-eaters are so completely identified with the impropriety of their object-choices, whether we are talking intestines or libidos, things swallowed or penetrated. Consequently, the interpretation on which the present chapter embarked will journey with Subbotin’s dominoes down from the mouth through the intestines and out the anus, to the lower material bodily stratum, making pit-stops at other taboo parts, pausing finally on the socialist-realist penis, and its symbolic counterpart, the Phallus. Sex, it seems, is the realest and most unrealist aspect of late socialism, and thus spread wide open for personal and political fantasy.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 18.

¹⁶⁴ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 152.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 151. For more on this connection between the gutsy and the godly, see Keith Livers, “Scatology and Eschatology: The Recovery of the Flesh in Andrei Platonov’s Happy Moscow,” *Slavic Review* vol. 59, no. 1 (2000): 154–182.

¹⁶⁶ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 151.

CHAPTER SIX.
WHAT IS SOCIALIST UNREALISM? (PART TWO):
QUEER NEGATIVITY AND CAMP IN THE CAMP

It is not hard for scholars of Soviet culture to conjure up the good subject of communist party fantasy—the positive hero populating the radiant future, who combines with comrades in a healthy collective to speak Bolshevik with effortless unanimity. But such a shining utopia could only come into focus in the present by shoving certain incorrigible subjects to the shadowy edges of society. Who were these dark others of the Soviet ideal, the negative foils to the positive hero, the bad or unreal subjects of late socialism? What about their bodies, minds, and mouths rendered them inassimilable to political posterity? And how did good socialist subjects derive a positive communal identity by depriving these abject others of their symbolic legitimacy, ideological intelligibility and, ultimately, claims on full humanity? This last chapter, which I offer by way of a partial conclusion to the entire dissertation, ends with hypotheses instead of solutions to these accursed questions. It expends its critical energies on these abject others of late socialism whose speech was somehow silenced by ideology. At the same time, it listens for these speechless subjects to speak back in silent and often unobvious ways to the ideologies that excluded them, sometimes even expressing pride in the exceptional insights onto socialist society their excrescent positions made uniquely possible.

My argument builds on the conceptual groundwork laid in the previous chapter, in which I deduced the social and symbolic category of “socialist unrealism” from the definition of socialist realism supplied by Andrei Siniavskii (pseudonym Abram Tertz) in his instructive samizdat treatise on the subject, *What is Socialist Realism*. This understanding of socialist unrealism, with its concomitant category of unreal subjectivity or unpersonhood, allowed me to grapple preliminarily with the significance of the negative actions performed by socialist “unpeople” [*neliudi*] in the Soviet gulag, whose self-eating [*samoedstvo*] Siniavskii examines in the 1975 conference paper, “‘I’ and ‘They’: On Extreme Forms of Communication in Situations of Isolation.” The present chapter continues to investigate self-eating as an obscure form of communication and protest in its own right and in distinction from the political strategies of the highly-visible Soviet dissident movement. It homes in on the homeliness of these acts, and indulges an attraction to their visceral and symbolic repulsiveness, which, I argue, renders them inassimilable to tidy cold-war tales of Soviet state oppression from the top down and popular resistance from the ground up. The nasty affect that surrounds unreal people or unpeople and their negative performances of subjectivity rises to the top of my analysis, especially toward the end of the chapter, as I consider what kinds of emotional and moral responses Siniavskii hopes to elicit from his listeners at the conference in Geneva, his slightly belated Soviet-Russian readers, and us, an unexpected contemporary audience comprising mostly Anglo-American and Russian scholars in the humanities.

Against socialist realism’s compulsory positivity, this chapter plays up the negativity of the unreal, and puts Siniavskii’s insights into political negativity in conversation with some unforeseeably consonant contemporary literature on the subject. So doing, I hope to underscore, as I strive to do throughout the dissertation, the ways in which Soviet thinkers have actually anticipated some of the turns taken by the Western

humanities more broadly, particularly in the realm of critical theory, at the end of and after the cold war. These compelling confluences in critical thought, between the Soviet East and the post-Soviet West, will be lost on us if we persist in construing Soviet cultural production in binary and obsolete terms--as either wholly ideologized communist propaganda, dated to its day, or a simplistic reaction to official discourse, whose relevance outside of the Soviet Union is bracketed by the chronological length of the Soviet Union itself, only useful so long as the state exists to be opposed. In the remaining pages, I hope to showcase the continued vitality of Siniavskii's theory as theory, and not just dusty political artifact. I place his words and silences in generative if anachronistic dialogue with critical theorists today, especially with queer theorists, whose interventions are propelled by what I identify as Siniavskii's primary concern: highlighting the norms of a given social 'reality,' considering how those norms are embodied and lived through, and then encouraging the radical transgression of these 'realist' norms for the sake of new and more inclusive political fantasies. Grave acts of self-eating are one genre of symbolic transgression taken up by the unreal. So too is 'camp camp,' a performative term I elaborate at the end of the chapter, by which I aim to more fully think through the effects of consolidating socialist and queer aesthetic theories and artistic practices (loosely defined) into a single, complex theory of political unrealism and silent alterity.

**WHY NEGATIVITY? WHY QUEER? WHY QUEER NEGATIVITY?
PART ONE: WHY NEGATIVITY?**

In order to deeply reckon with the unreal or fantastic figures of the Soviet social order, I turn to queer theory, and namely, the sometimes psychoanalytic theories of queer negativity that have been dividing the discipline of late between advocates of this, the asocial thesis, and the rival utopianism, with which the analysis of the fourth chapter aligned its affective sympathies. These arguments are not truly incompatible, but rather stadial, in my opinion, constituting consecutive steps in a unified or dialectic process of reimagining the current order of things--first apocalyptic, then world-building. I apply the analytic of 'queer negativity' to Siniavskii's texts for no less than three reasons, which I now explicitly enumerate in this and the next two sections

This question about negativity has begun to answer itself through Siniavskii in the preceding chapter. As I flesh out a response more fully in this one, the first quality to which I turn my attention is *negativity as a name for the perversity of the actions of unpeople or self-eaters*. Most fundamentally, my interpretation seizes on a streak of negativity in these self-abnegating actions that Siniavskii himself named with no uncertainty, which bears repeating now: "Confinement in language as a sign of negation." "The break with communication or sociality" [*v obshchenii*] enacted by these convicts, he assesses, "is a special type of sociality, albeit elevated in its semantic and communicative relationship, although with a minus sign." [*Etot razyrv v obshchenii est' osobaia raznovidnost' obshcheniia, pritom povyshennaia v semanticheskoi i kommunikativnoi otnoshenii, khotia i s minusovym znakom.*] Subversion in this style defies ready-made rationales or causalities based on social convention. The hunger strikes studied in the last chapter, for example, when undertaken by the individual actor, did not correspond to "the traditional, sanctioned time of custom," nor were they "widespread means of achieving

certain rights,” but instead “terrifying” and oblique “symbol[s],” last, lonely “scream[s] at society, at humanity, at the sky.”

This distinction is crucial for Siniavskii, who slices off self-eating from the protest style of the Soviet dissident movement. The latter is a systematic contestation with the state in the language of the state, in what has been called a “terrifying mimicry” of official discourse. On the other hand, to return to the soloist’s hunger strike, it is

a symbol of death, put out on display as a banner for the prison command, with which the person replaces once again for the last time his unwillingness to participate in the system of relationships proposed to him and he declines from the hateful form of communication the regime has imposed on him. Embarking on a hunger strike, a person effectively rends himself out of the living connection with the world, with ‘them,’ and exits into isolation, under the shadow of death, symbolically and also factually to the degree that he demonstratively refuses food. (248)

Голодовка - символ смерти, выставленный напоказ, как знамя, тюремному начальству, которым человек знаменует - опять-таки в последний раз - свое нежелание участвовать в системе предложенных ему отношений и отказывается от навязанной ему режимом ненавистной формы общения. Начиная голодовку, человек как бы обрывает жизненную связь с миром, с «ними», и уходит в одиночество, под сень смерти, символически да и фактически отчасти представленной отказом от еды.

Such a style of communicative protest is strange--or, if you’ll allow the synonymic provocation, queer--insofar as it departs from the dominant mode of opposition to state power that typified the period, occupying the place of greatest political intelligibility in its cold-war day, as well as in the post-socialist historical imagination, of the kind that would strive, to reinstate his words here, “[to achieve] certain rights or concessions.” I am pointing, of course, to the same Soviet dissident movement to which Siniavskii’s own trial gave a spectacular start in the mid-1960s. “On 5 December 1965—the day of the official celebration of the twenty-ninth anniversary of the Soviet Constitution— about two hundred people gathered in downtown Moscow with signs bearing two slogans, the first referring to the imprisonment of two samizdat writers: ‘We demand an open trial for Sinyavsky and Daniel!’ and ‘Respect the Soviet Constitution!’”¹ As its participants remember, this protest was a first expression on Soviet soil of the international human rights movement then coming into its own in the West against the inhumane excesses of the Soviet state.² Soviet dissidence revolved implicitly around the same universal subject of liberal humanism that organized these Western discourses: a rational bearer of inviolable rights, which most often assumed the shape of a political criminal in Soviet actuality and oppositional rhetoric. This chapter continues to unravel that rhetoric by

¹ Sergei Alex. Oushakine, “The Terrifying Mimicry of Samizdat,” *Public Culture* 13.2 (2001): 191-214, at 197.

² Lyudmila Alexeyeva, an eyewitness to the event, calls it “the first demonstration in the history of the Soviet regime that was accompanied by human rights slogans.” *The Thaw Generation: Coming of Age in the Post-Stalin Era* (Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990).

tugging at the subtle thread in Siniavskii's body of work, a not-so-subtle point made by Mikhail Bakhtin, about the collusion of realism and humanism, as regimes of knowledge that give lip service to universality, while dealing in violent particularization and exclusion.

But while Soviet dissidents made explicit appeals to the anti-Soviet West on these common philosophical grounds, they gave "very Soviet expression [to] their political disagreement" with the state, and were ultimately "very [dependent] on the regime with which they were struggling" for the rhetorical terms of their debate.³ In effect, by clinging to the constitution from the outset, even appealing to its anniversary as the movement's founding benediction, and by demanding the state honor its citizens' legal rights, the dissidents became "subject[s] of public speech...through the publicly available discourse" of the state. They thus "chose a strategy of identification with the dominant symbolic regime," "rather than positioning [themselves] outside of or underneath it," since submitting to the "existing discursive conventions" of the Communist Party secured their status as canny political actors. On the spectrum of resistance, we find, "at one end is organized protest, explicit moments and movements of dissent that are easily recognizable as 'political' by western lights," e.g. the dissident movement. At the dim limits of this spectrum, in fact, on another line entirely, are actions more like self-eating, "gestures of tacit refusal and iconoclasm, gestures that sullenly and silently contest the forms of an existing hegemony. And far from being a mere reflection-or a reflex expression--of historical consciousness, these acts are a practical means of *producing* it."⁴ Rather than reinscribing the political grid, self-eaters introduce chaos into the system.

In this sense, self-nominated dissidents are not the Soviet 'others' whom this study of alterity otherwise takes as its subjects. Not only were they *not* exempt from the state project of mimesis—that performative process at the center of this dissertation's analysis by which proper Soviet citizens came to be through normative forms of envoiced discursivity, that is, by speaking Bolshevik literally, intelligibly and out loud, even if oppositionally. Instead they were ensnared with the state in that frustrating Foucauldian tango of power and protest, actively reifying the dominant symbolic order by resisting it, reproducing its future from the other side in an endless discursive dance Serguei Oushakine has dubbed "terrifying mimicry" or "mimetic resistance." Owing to their "ontological proximity to the regime they chose to mirror," the dissidents remained "imprisoned" in the "domain of [Soviet] speakability," resistant to the regime in mimetic ways, as real or recognizable political subjects, but never resistant to the terms of Soviet mimesis or political realism itself. The dissidents, by upholding the Law rather than questioning its authority, remain beholden to it as subjects, firmly ensconced in the Soviet Symbolic, even staging ceremonies of recommitment with every public outcry for constitutionality. If the party supporters and dissidents alike reinforce the law through identification with it, albeit on ostensibly opposing sides—through forms of beautiful and terrifying mimicry respectively (to infuse Oushakine's language with Kantian sublimity) — then, says Butler, only disidentification has the capacity to exceed this ideological framework from within, and "rearticulate the very terms of symbolic legitimacy and

³ Oushakine, "Terrifying Mimicry," 196.

⁴ Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

intelligibility” that sustain it.⁵ To give Siniavskii the last word on the limits of binary-thinking from the “last word” [*poslednoe slovo*] at his trial: “The question arises: What is propaganda and what is literature? The viewpoint of the prosecution is that literature is a form of propaganda, and that there are only two kinds of propaganda: pro-Soviet or anti-Soviet. If literature is simply un-Soviet, it means that it is anti-Soviet. I cannot accept this.”⁶ This analysis is fueled by Siniavskii’s frustration, and applies his questions to an expanded field of political speech.

PART TWO OF THREE: WHY QUEER?

In contrast to this mode of legible and therefore legitimate resistance performed by mimetic Soviet subjects, Siniavskii shows us another queer kind of protest in his camp examples—a form of defiance so fundamentally other, it registers as silence or nonspeech, and makes no concessions to the discursive conventions that bind ‘real’ political dissidents into Soviet ‘reality.’ These other acts are unintelligible as protest, says Siniavskii, not only because of their symbolic excrescence, but also because they are undertaken by unreal subjects. That is, they are *negative because of the perversity of their performers*, figures who have been systematically excluded from the social order—“recidivists and prisoners sentenced to life” [*povtorno i bessrochno sidiashchikh zakliuchennykh*], in Siniavskii’s words, whose protest by way of “monstrous, unnatural manipulations” [*chudovishchnye protivostestvennye manipuliatsii*] are too “simply taken for perversion or psychopathy, [writing] off such subjects into the category of inferior, forgotten, the human face of waste” [*proshche vsego ob’iasnit’ izvrashcheniem, psikhopatiei i spisat’ podobnykh sub’ektov v razriad nepolnotsennogo, povteriashego cheloveshkii oblik otreb’ia*].⁷

Because their monstrous acts are not organized by the Purpose—that principle imparting significance on everything, even and especially when it is refused—the desires motivating these monstrous acts are necessarily inscrutable and perverse. Indeed, according to Foucault, the act whose motivation lacks “rational intelligibility” is the trademark of the modern monster.⁸ The search for the monster’s irrational motive—now relegated to the realm of the instinctual—conditions the institutionalization of psychiatry as a discipline: its “notion of degeneration provides a way of isolating, covering, and cutting out a zone of social danger while simultaneously giving it a pathological status as illness.”⁹ In light of this, it makes sense that, in Siniavskii’s assessment, those who regard

⁵ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 3.

⁶ “Final Plea by Andrei Sinyavsky.” In *On Trial: The Soviet State Versus "Abram Tertz" and "Nikolai Arzhak,"* edited by Max Hayward (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 146.

⁷ Andrei Siniavskii, “‘Ia’ i ‘oni’: O krainikh formakh obshcheniia v usloviakh odinochestva.” Reprinted in Abram Tertz, *Puteshestvie na chernuiu rechku i drugie proizvedeniia. Stat’i. Esse.* (Moscow: “Zakharov,” 1999): 240-253.

⁸ Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974-1975* (New York: Picador 2003), 89. Though all of *Abnormal* addresses the issue of modern monstrosity, the lectures delivered on on January 20 and February 5, 1975 bears special relevance to the themes of this chapter, particularly what Foucault puts forth after posing the relevant rhetorical question: “What is a criminal after all? A criminal is someone who breaks the [social] pact, who breaks it from time to time whenever he needs or wants to, when his interests dictates, when in a moment of violence or blindness the motive [*raison*] of his interest prevails despite the most elementary rational calculation” (94).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 120.

convict self-eaters as monsters dismiss their acts as “psychopathy”; to reiterate, they are irrational acts because they are performed by irrational actors, and, as such, do not deserve the efforts of our interpretation.

In this sense, motivation and desire operate in the social order as ontology. To desire perversely is to be perverse to one’s subjective core. Kevin Moss makes an argument along these lines when he contends that—in contrast to the West, where all things point to the truth of sex¹⁰—sex in the Soviet east is always an index of ideology as the truth of identity. Deviant desire is but one expression of a broadly deviant political personality,¹¹ or a generally perverse relationship to the social order as a set of symbolic and real relations it coalesces. The breakdown of communication or language is the most basic example of the total systemic collapse these monstrous actors instigate; this is the inceptive question of Siniavskii’s essay about self-eating, and the most prominent feature of Solzhenitsyn’s disparaging portraits of non-political prisoners. In the opinion of the latter, these inhuman cons evacuate all meaning from that “everyday humanity among which you have spent your whole life.”¹² All the categories of social experience are contaminated or corroded by contact with the convict. This symbolic confusion is the conceptual *raison d’être* of the monster, writes Judith Jack Halberstam; its appearance in the cultural field always manifests “a category crisis,” which “[makes] strange the categories of beauty, humanity, and identity that we [cling] to.”¹³ The monsters of the camp in this case throw the known world into crisis (note that the camp itself is let off the hook as a corollary of this logic) by using the material of their bodies to reorganize material reality in the wrong way.

The pathological pleasure these unpeople derive from the material dimensions of speech—which they pronounce against the grain of the human voice, against the aims of normal communication--bespeaks their generally perverse relationship to material experience. As their tongues fork to form the sibilant sounds of deliberate insignificance, so they split off from the social conventions that circumscribe bodily comportment and morphology more broadly. (On this count, such actors may be construed as sexually and gender queer in a contemporary sense.) To wit, one Polish political prisoner of the Soviet camp describes his disgust at “the complete lack of inhibition on the part of the *urkas*,

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, "Introduction." In *Herculine Barbine, Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a 19th Century Hermaphrodite* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick extends Foucault’s position that the truth is in sex to speak specifically to the repression of homosexuality; the (secret) truth reached by all hermeneutic exercises in Western knowledge is homosexuality, thus the title of the work in which she makes this argument: *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

¹¹ Kevin Moss, “The Underground Closet: Political and Sexual Dissidence in East European Culture.” In *Genders 22: Postcommunism and the Body Politic*, edited by Ellen E. Berry (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 229-251.

¹² Throughout this chapter (and the last), I use and sometimes modify Thomas P. Whitney’s English translation of Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918-1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation I-II*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 50. The Russian original has been accessed electronically from the following edition: *Arkhipelag Gulag*. Paris: YMCA-Press, 1973; online <lib.ru/PROZA/SOLZHENICYN/gulag.txt>.

¹³ Judith Jack Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monster* (Durham, NC: Duke, 1995), 6.

who would openly carry out all natural functions, including onanism.”¹⁴ Maria Ioffe, a famous Bolshevik-wife and female prisoner of note, is similarly repulsed by the way “the thieves made love openly, walked naked around the barracks, and had no feelings for one another.”¹⁵ Based on this monochromatic tableau, Ioffe concludes that, “Only their bodies were alive.”¹⁶ A preeminent memoirist and prisoner from the intelligentsia caste, Evgeniia Ginzburg suffers under the tyranny of the thief’s body as Ioffe does. In gendered parallel to Solzhenitsyn’s primal scene, Ginzburg recalls her own traumatic introduction to the thieves’ underworld upon her arrival at the camp. Comprising a motley crew of “murderers, sadists, [and those] adept at every kind of sexual perversion,” these thieves, “without wasting any time [set] about terrorizing and bullying the ‘ladies.’”¹⁷ If the terrorist enjoys any discernible desire in this instance—or, put in terms truer to Ginzburg’s depiction, if the terrorist’s desire is discriminating at all, directed at any particular object—it is to destroy our way of life and abscond with our enjoyment.¹⁸

Subjecting the normal campmates to their public displays of perversity, and upending the everyday order of things, the common criminal is thus a terrorist throwing a sex bomb at the symbolic—in short, a sexual terrorist. In its one monstrous (un) person, the criminal embodies all three sides of modern abnormality, laid out for us by Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai on the basis of Michel Foucault’s formulations: monster, terrorist, and fag.¹⁹ Just as the thief is differentiated from the political in the Soviet labor camp, so the incorrigible monster is “to be differentiated from the individual to be corrected on the basis of whether power operates on it or through it...the absolute power that produces and quarantines the monster finds its dispersal in [the] techniques of normalization and discipline”²⁰ that bind the correctable person into the symbolic field of power. In other words, in this Foucauldian framework, the former is cordoned beyond the borders of rehabilitation: power operates *on* it. The latter might be disciplined into ideological salubrity: power operates *in* the correctable person’s body. By locating “monstrosity within a broader history of sexuality,” which is tantamount to a history of power in this paradigm, Puar and Rai insist on the close link between the construction of “the monstrous terrorist and the discourse of heteronormativity,” as a consequence of which, “monsters and abnormal have always also been sexual deviants.”²¹

¹⁴ Antoni Ekart quoted in Anne Applebaum, “Introduction.” *Russian Criminal Tattoo Encyclopaedia Volume II*, edited by Alexei Plutser-Sarno (London: Fuel Publishing, 2011): 16-25, at 19.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Maria Ioffe, *Odna noch': povest' o pravde* (New York: Khronika, 1978); quoted in *ibid.*, 19.

¹⁷ Evgeniia Ginzburg, *Into the Whirlwind*; quoted in *ibid.*, 17.

¹⁸ “We always impute to the ‘other’ an excessive enjoyment; s/he wants to steal our enjoyment (by ruining our way of life) and/or has access to some secret, perverse enjoyment. In short, what really bothers us about the ‘other’ is the peculiar way it organizes its enjoyment: precisely the surplus, the ‘excess’ that pertains to it—the smell of their food, their ‘noisy’ songs and dances, their strange manners, their attitude to work.” Slavoj Žižek, “Eastern Europe’s Republics of Gilead,” *New Left Review*, 1/183 (September-October 1990), 162.

¹⁹ Jasbir K. Puar and Amit S. Rai also remind us that Foucault “position[s] the onanist as the third of the abnormal” in *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1. Puar and Rai, “Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots,” *Social Text* 20.3 *Special Issue: 911—A Public Emergency?* (Fall 2002):117-48.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

As the expression of ideological desire, sex becomes the diacritic of difference, the thing that makes possible and maintains the precarious ontological distinction between political criminal and common thief. In this scenario, heterosexuality becomes synonymous with humanity; it serves as somatic proof of the political prisoner's ontological normalcy vis-à-vis the irrationality, "perversity" or "psychopathy" of the thief. Gay historian Dan Healey has observed this line of thinking at work in camp literature of the post-Stalin period: "educated Gulag victims constructed their experience in memoirs to draw crucial distinctions between themselves and persons supposedly justly imprisoned for 'genuine crimes,'"²² making sexual subjectivity the axis of disaggregation. The greatest horror of the gulag is its ability to collapse these categorical distinctions on which the moral order outside the camp also rests. As Ginzburg laments, "it is difficult to track how the person, worn out by the inhuman and brutal life [of the camp], slowly loses familiar concepts of good and evil, or the thinkable and unthinkable."²³ The breakdown of the social order takes sexual form, imperiling the humanity of the political or the *intelligent*, and threatening the coherence of the human altogether. The camp must be cast as a state of sexual exception in these memoirs. "Otherwise," to channel Ginzburg's incredulity, "how can we explain those babies in the 'children's home,' whose mother is a doctor of philosophy and whose father is a well known thief?"²⁴

Thus the political prisoner leverages his or her heteronormativity and, attached to this, humanity, against the queerness qua unreality of the criminal. As anthropologist Adi Kuntsman has convincingly argued, one of the primary tropes by means of which the political legitimates not only his or her claims to political righteousness but also to humanity despite the dehumanizing conditions of the camp is through the sexual abjection of the criminal. Exploring the "connection between same-sex relations, criminality and non-humanness" in camp literature, Kuntsman confirms Healey's hypothesis and extrapolates it to account for the whole camp population. "The political prisoners in [camp] memoirs are repeatedly and consistently heterosexualised; while descriptions of the criminal inmates – the *blatnye* – contain many references to same-sex relations. Gulag memoir literature, in other words, creates the division into the heterosexual 'politicals' and the homosexual 'criminals.'"²⁵ And further, Kuntsman calls attention to the affective dimension of such texts, which abound in expressions of "disgust towards camp homosexuals and lesbians [that] maintain and protect classed boundaries through notions of monstrosity and non-humanness." At the same time, says Ioffe, the criminals themselves "[have] no feelings." Siniavskii's paper compels the

²² Dan Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2001), 236.

²³ Evgeniia Ginzburg, *Krutoi Marshut*, Vol. 2 (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1979), chapter 11.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Adi Kuntsman, "'Beyond the Borders of the Human': Same-Sex Memoirs in the Gulag Literature," uncirculating typeset manuscript (May 2007), 2. See also by Kuntsman, "'With a Shade of Disgust': Affective Politics of Sexuality and Class in Memoirs of the Stalinist Gulag," *Slavic Review* 68, no. 2 (2009); "Shadows of the Past: Memoirs of the GULag and Contemporary Homophobia," *kultura* (2008): 8-10; and Kuntsman, "Between Gulags and Pride Parades," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian & Gay Studies* 14, no. 2/3 (2008). In his present research, Dan Healey is occupied with questions at the queer-camp intersection, and I look forward to including his imminent insights in the reworking of this dissertation into a monograph manuscript.

delicate humanist listener to sit with that difficult feeling of disgust long enough for it to ferment into a form of respect for the convict-other that does not hinge on identity.

Kuntsman's postulations about class-based abjection are repeatedly borne out by camp literature, even at its most tolerant end. In the following passage from *My Testimony*, Marchenko devotes a subsection of his chapter on "Love" to a pink-list of known gulag 'pederasts,' and goes so far as to call out their proper names in some cases.

Almost all the regular criminals practice it across the board, disregarding the fact that homosexuality is punishable by law. If they catch you for this business, you can get another term added to your sentence, but they don't sentence everyone for it. I remember when I was in Karaganda in Stepny, they corralled all the homosexuals among us, who were known and had been caught for it, into a single barrack for one hundred eighty people, trying in such a way to separate them from the rest. One hundred eighty people, and those are only the ones who got caught, and only the ones who played the woman part in the couple... Everyone despised [them]...

Этим занимаются почти поголовно все бытовики, несмотря на то, что гомосексуализм преследуется по закону. Поймают за этим делом — могут дать новый срок; но ведь всех не посадят. Помню, когда я был в Караганде, в Степном, у нас там всех гомосексуалистов — известных, пойманных на этом — согнали в один барак на сто восемьдесят человек, пытаюсь таким образом отделить их от остальных. Сто восемьдесят человек — это только пойманных и только тех, кто в паре шел за женщину [... Их] все презирали...

As he goes on, Marchenko struggles to heterosexualize the political, by ironing out the logical contradictions of the homosexual-political, and rejecting the common homosexual-criminal out of hand. "In general," he surmises, "homosexuality [*gomoseksualizm*] penetrates the political camps, as well, among the criminals who turn up there... In political camps there are few homosexuals [*pederastov*]. They are few and far in between. The prisoners know them better than the guards, and they try not to associate with them. I knew some homosexuals [*pederastov*]... They are all the scummiest of the scum [*podonki iz podonkov*], cynics, shit-talkers."²⁶

Varlam Shalamov engages in the same act of social sanitation when he speaks about sodomy in the camp, but he goes still further. Employing totalizing language, he

²⁶ Anatolii Marchenko, *My Testimony* [*Moi pokazaniia*], translated by Michael Scammell (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1969). For English renditions of Marchenko's text, I defer to Scammell's translation of an abridged version of *My Testimony*. In some cases, I have modified this translation; in others, I have provided my own where Scammell's is not available (as is not infrequently the case in supremely graphic or 'gay' instances). For the Russian of *Moi Pokazaniia*, I rely on the samizdat original (ca. 1967) curated by Mark Barbakadze, on his invaluable website of unofficial texts from the Soviet era, "Antologiia samizdata." *Moi pokazaniia* is located online at <<http://Antology.Igrunov.Ru/Authors/March/Pokazania.Html>>. "Вообще, гомосексуализм проникает и в политические лагеря — вместе с попадающими сюда уголовниками. ... в политических лагерях передастов мало, они все наперечет, заключенные знают их лучше, чем начальство, и стараются не общаться с ними. Я знал нескольких педерастов... Это все были подонки из подонков, циники, матерщинники." Interestingly, this list of criminal homosexuals in the camp in the chapter on "Love" is not available in the abridged text on the website of the gulag organization, *Memorial*.

equates criminality with sexual abjection, which is based not the baseness of humanity but its radical absence.

Blatari [gangsters, criminals] are all pederasts. Each of them in the camp is surrounded by young people with swollen and muddy eyes – “Zoikas,” “Man’kas,” “Verkas,” whom the *blatar’* is feeding and with whom he sleeps. One doesn’t want to believe in the possibility that such circumstances are so mundane because they are so monstrous. But this is everyday life... It is difficult, of course, to imagine that a human being can think of something like this, but *blatari* have nothing human in them.

Блатари все – педерасты. Возле каждого видного блатаря вьются в лагере молодые люди с набухшими мутными глазами: «Зойки», «Маньки», «Верки» – которых блатарь подкармливает и с которыми он спит... В возможность обыденности подобных случаев не хотят верить из-за их чудовищности. Но это – быт... Трудно, конечно, представить, что человеку может прийти в голову такое. Но в блатаре и нет ничего человеческого.

In this sense the queerness of the *blatar’* is double, connoting, in the first place, his abject homosexuality vis-à-vis the heteronormativity of the political prisoner (whose sex acts never violate the invisible laws of the social order). The criminal is queer, in the second place, insofar as he or she—and sometimes “it”²⁷—is capable of all manner of imponderable perversities.²⁸ (In fact, one of the most salient marks of criminal perversity is the ability to sexualize everything, to find pleasure even in pain, whether in his or her own body, or in the body of the political, as Solzhenitsyn asserts.) Thus when speaking of the queerness of these unpeople, their sexual activity is only one of many possible expressions of social alterity or unreality. It does not mean that the same-sex erotics of ‘degraded’ convicts constitutes a sexual identity in the Western sense, nor that Siniavskii himself was a ‘bugger’ by practice or a homosexual by social definition; he does not need to be in order to substantiate a queer reading of the social symbolics of sex.²⁹

²⁷ Inmates who engaged in same-sex activity in the women’s camp were called by the gender-neuter pronoun, ‘it’ [*ono*] (Healey, *Homosexuality in Revolutionary Russia*, 236).

²⁸ Thus scholars of culture continue to mobilize the masochism of the common convict to account for these seemingly inexplicable acts. In the 1960s, “the practice of self mutilation was equally widespread” (alongside the increase in tattooing), “except that now it took even more extreme forms. Prisoners swallowed spoons, glass, nails, barbed wire. They cut themselves with knives, cut off their fingers or ears. Sometimes these stages forms of self-torture were protests, and sometimes they were attempts to break the monotony, to get into a hospital and get better rations. Some of the prisoners were simply masochists, ‘in a permanent state of depression from one bloodletting to the next,’ as one prisoner wrote” (Applebaum, “Introduction,” 25).

²⁹ Other scholars have cautioned against the lazy collapse of his characters’ sexual deviance with the author’s own, though their words of warning come off as phobic of homosexuality or psychoanalysis, or both. “The sexual themes which recur in Sinyavsky’s writings are not to be identified in the cruder sense of that word with the author, that is, they are, of course, his problems, but not *his* problem. In fact, the sexual theme is not isolated from the rest of his personality and his search for self-definition; rather, it is simply one variation of it, one manifestation. It is dangerous and irresponsible to drop a phrase like ‘latent homosexuality,’ as did one critic, without further elaboration—this is watered-down Freudianism of the worst sort, and the effort to identify a man with a neurosis is simple tyranny, a trick that has not been overlooked by the Soviet regime. Further, it should be remembered that Sinyavsky is treating themes which

In fact, sex is never *just* sex in these texts. To wit, camp memoirists rarely if ever provide descriptions of the act itself. At the same, even in its absence, sex is ever-present in depictions of the criminal, suffusing everything he or she does with a base-line perversity, terrifying in its incomprehensibility. Sexuality circulates in these stories as the primary signifier of the criminal's inassimilability into the normal social order. For Shalamov, the queer *blatar*' bumps up against the limits of thinkability; for Ginzburg, this unthinkable sex is but the backdrop of the "theater of horror"³⁰ that is the camp's criminal milieu, wherein she finds herself the lone political prisoner. She scans the sickening scene of pan-sexuality and arrests her audience's eyes on one particularly repugnant image. "Here is a disgusting little goggle-eyed toad, Zoika the lesbian. With her there three so-called studs." She surmises that, "these humanoids live a fantastic life,"³¹ which has nothing to do with the real life led by non-criminals outside the zone, and, to the degree that is possible, inside as well. The camp imperils normal human relations, like love and sex, among "women from the intelligentsia, imprisoned because of political accusations." This is not the case for criminals, as "criminals are beyond the borders of the human." So thoroughly disgusted with their hypersexual self-presentation to her in prison, Ginzburg refuses to re-present them in her memoirs, decreeing, "I do not want to describe their orgies, although I suffered enough, having been their captive witness."³² As far as she is concerned, the act of description itself constitutes a secondary suffering, from which she graciously spares the reader.

In "I' and 'They'" Siniavskii employs a visualization technique that is similar in form but opposed in function. Whereas Ginzburg curtains off the reader's from direct confrontation with the horrors she has endured as a voyeur, Siniavskii reduces his role as mediator of these unspeakable scenes. Indeed, this very bearing witness to the stomach-turning spectacle of bodily-debased humanoids is exactly what Siniavskii demands of his civilized Swiss audience in 1975, as he undertakes the task of representation that Ginzburg self-consciously declines. As high-minded members of the international intelligentsia, these people may not want to hear such disgusting descriptions of lowly camp life, which puts sex at its excessively fleshy center. One surmises as much when Siniavskii makes marked concessions to what he supposes are the genteel sensibilities of his fellow conference-goers, only to quickly contradict himself with the flood of gruesome scenes of self-eating that ensue. No matter how delicately he begins, his true intention, I would wager, is to shock his Western listeners into feeling something for these humanoids, and thereby put abstract humanism to the test. This can only work once he has made the audience aware of its own sensibilities as desensitized, its aesthetics as anesthetic, safely distanced from the ugly suffering of others. (It is for this reason, I imagine, that he sees the other presentations about bourgeois media as superficial, even

he has already defined as containing both personal and social implications, and since he follows his own prescription and mixes political and erotic symbols, one must be very cautious in abstracting specific conclusions. In fact, only lately have psychiatrists begun to realize that individual problems may be related to collective illnesses just as well as to neuroses and traumas. In a society which severely restricts individual initiative, there is bound to be some reflection of the resulting frustration in the individual and his relations with other human beings." Richard Lourie, *Letters to the Future: An Approach to Sinyavsky-Tertz* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), 110.

³⁰ Ginzburg, *Krutoi Marshut*, vol. 2, 114.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 113.

³² *Ibid.*, 42.

bad faith approaches to the question of human solitude and communication.) Siniavskii makes his listeners captive witnesses to scenes from which they would rather avert their eyes, or have their eyes averted for them by the likes of a Ginzburg or Solzhenitsyn, or, better still, have such intense scenes of human embodiment safely converted into simulacra by postmodern technologies like TV. If the “autogenetic” humanist “being is entirely self-contained,” it must be disembodied, that is, “impervious to the senses,” acting only on reason, according to Susan Buck-Morss. “In abandoning its senses it, of course, gives up sex.”³³ To the extent that he is able, Siniavskii does away with these multiple mediations by which the humanist subject seals itself off from the blood, sperm, and guts of the human condition, whose messy indiscretion makes possible the vital and visceral connections at the basis of all attempts at communication.

Thus, Siniavskii sees shock as the ethical mantle that the post-humanist writer must take up if he is worth his salt. “It would not be proper to speak in a family or human circle the way a writer writes” about such things. By his definition, “the literary language is a language of openness, which induces shame and fear. It is a language of direct confrontations with reality on ultimate issues, when it says to it (reality): ‘Come with me, or I’ll cut you!’ Reality, naturally, does not believe the writer and replies: I’ve seen your sort. But it hasn’t,”³⁴ it hasn’t seen this fantastic “sort” outside of “reality” narrowly constituted to exclude certain distasteful or disgusting truths. “That the savor, the sense, the ideal of being a writer has nothing to do whatever with “telling the truth”...but has to do with planting that so-called “truth” across the tracks of the “lie” which is universally, legally, and publicly accepted as truth.” [*Chto samyi vkus, i smysl, i ideal pisatel'stva sostoit vovse ne v tom, chtoby 'pravdu skazat'...no v tom, chtoby etu tak nazyvaemuiu pravdu polozhit' poperek vseobshchei, uzakonennoi i priznannoi publichno za istinu 'lzhi'.*] Ethical writing is an act of impossible identification, obligating the author

thus to assume, as a duty, the role of “criminal,” “lawbreaker,” “renegade,” “degenerate,” or (what an apt new word they have invented!) an “ideological saboteur.” Every self-respecting writer of any significance is a saboteur (hell—no dynamite!) and as he surveys the horizon wondering what to write about, more

³³ Susan Buck-Morss, “Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered,” *October*, Vol. 62. (Autumn, 1992): 3-41, at 8. Moreover, becoming insensate or anesthetized to modern experience, one must also renounce “the sense-sensitive penis,” on the grounds of its uncontrollability, so that the subject may “then confidently claim to be the phallus.” Such a being castrated from the world, “an asensual, anaesthetic protuberance,” claims Buck-Morss, is “modern man.” The role of castration, and the difference between the penis and the phallus, the physical self and the symbolic subject, becomes consequential later in the chapter. For more on the asensual, anesthetic modern subject’s fear of receptivity, and how that fear props up the modern symbolic and the aesthetic order of the phallus, see pp. 10-11.

³⁴ Abram Tertz (Andrei Siniavskii), “Literaturnyi protsess v Rossii,” *Kontinent*, no. 1 (1974): 143-80; online at <<http://www.antology.sfilatov.ru/work/proizv.php?idpr=0080014>>. Unless noted otherwise, I use Michael Glenny’s translation for the English text: Abram Tertz, “The Literary Process in Russia.” In *Kontinent 1: The Alternative Voice of Russia and Eastern Europe*, edited by Vladimir Maximov and translated by Michael Glenny (Garden City, NY: Anchor-Doubleday, 1976), 77-118, at 81. Так, как пишет писатель, разговаривать в семейном, в человеческом кругу не пристало. Литературный язык — это язык откровенностей, от которых становится стыдно и страшно, язык прямых объяснений с действительностью по окончательному счету, когда ей (действительности) говоришь: «пойдем со мной! не то зарежу!»... Действительность, естественно, не верит писателю и отвечает: видали мы таких! Но таких она еще не видала.

often than not he will choose some forbidden topic, be it the labor of the camp, prison, the Jews, the KGB, or (what else is there that's forbidden?)—sex.

следовательно, взять на себя роль и должность "уголовника", "преступника", "отщепенца", "выродка" или (какое новое подходящее слово ввели!) "идеологического диверсанта". Всякий сколько-нибудь значительный, уважающий себя писатель - диверсант (ах! нет динамита!), и, озирая горизонт и раздумывая, о чем бы таком ему написать, - он избирает чаще всего запретную тему, будь то лагерь, тюрьма, евреи, КГБ или (что бы еще такое найти запретное?) - секс.³⁵

Foremost among forbidden themes, sex is excluded from the realm of the representable; it thus becomes fantastic. Siniavskii does as much with his authorial moniker, Abram Tertz, which he filches from Jewish folklore for its heroic associations with criminality.³⁶

In its unreality and extraneity to prophylactic constructions of the "truth," sex is able to stand in for the unreal people of whom Siniavskii speaks, whose whole being, in turn, is equated with sexual abjection, and consigned to "the borders of discursive possibility," to borrow a pertinent epithet from Judith Butler. Sex is threatening because it opens up both the body and the symbolic, penetrating "reality" with unspeakable foreign objects. And while sex as such does not crop up in Siniavskii's examples of self-eating, it does appear at the start of his essay, in the exegetic anecdote about rape. In Siniavskii's essay, rape is really about one's painful receptivity to the other, about having one's "reality" shattered by something it cannot comprehend in itself. Most consequentially, it elicits a question in the self whose world has been torn asunder by the violent assertion of the other's radically unrecognizable desires; one asks, just as Klava turns to Nina, "what does he mean to say by all that?"

PART THREE (THE LAST IN THE SERIES): WHY QUEER NEGATIVITY?

Finally, I consider both the perversity of the actors and the perversity of the acts at once. Merging the first and second fields of queerness and negativity together, I interpret these unintelligible actions through the anti-social analytic outlined in some lines of contemporary queer theory, which, handily, come equipped with a category of 'queer negativity' from which to begin. This requires me now to establish quickly, and then work recursively through a post-Freudian psychoanalytic framework for the remainder of the argument, which I promise, will deliver by the chapter's end an appropriately priapic pay-off (for all the reader's patience with my post-modernism). The queer and psychoanalytic scholars on whose work I will primarily rely include Kaja Silverman, Judith Butler, Judith Jack Halberstam, Leo Bersani, and, lastly, Lee Edelman, with whom I will start. Ultimately I defer to Edelman and his comrades in queer anti-communitarianism to supplement the Soviet texts, since the former force to the surface of

³⁵ Tertz, "Literary Process," 174-75.

³⁶ For more on Tertz's folksy criminality, see Olga Matich, "Exile as Existence: Russian Literature in Emigration." In *For SK: In Celebration of the Life and Career of Simon Karlinsky*, edited by Michael S. Flier and Robert P. Hughes (Oakland: Berkeley Slavic Specialties, 1994). And for more on the fascination and identification with the criminal, see Eduard Limonov, *Po t'iurmam* (Moscow: Ad Marginem, 2004).

their analyses an issue that remains unarticulated in the Soviet pieces, namely, why Siniavskii's and Marchenko's self-mutilators are routinely cast in the role of sexually abject? We might ask not why the men who mutilate themselves in the camp happen to be perverts and pederasts, per se, but instead, why must they be? What is the symbolic function or collective fiction sustained through this continuous symbolic coupling? In a word, why are *neliudi* queer? And why ought these queerly self-eating subjects be celebrated for willfully embracing the negativity that is their *asocialist* birthright and ideological *disinheritance*?

Let me start with the latter queer anti-socialist by saying, despite the sociohistorical disparities of their biographies, Edelman actually shares a common set of concerns with Siniavskii about the symbolic: both are interested, if we stretch Siniavskii's vocabulary to cover Edelman too, in how the Purpose organizing a given social reality is represented [*izobrazhen*] as both real and total, and how that social reality figures its subjects on the inside and edges or outside of the symbolic order. Edelman situates his writing, like Sinyavskii, "at a moment when the poor and the powerless find their voices ventriloquized by the institutions that enforce their subordination."³⁷ His intervention is not to speak for them (again), but to speak to their absence from the realm of representation, and summarily point out the subversive potential their exclusion entails. Politics, per Edelman, is "the register of the speaking subject and the order of the law, [...] a framework within which we experience social reality"; it is not the struggles that occur within it, but the combined effect of those internal competitions that comprise the unrealizable fantasy of a social "order" or "organization" based on the stable identity of its subjects and itself.³⁸ All politics, no matter how partisan, are actually monosemic, whether oppositional or Party-line, insofar as they are all subordinated to the higher principle of the Symbolic. In a second clause that could easily capture communist utopia with a crucial tweak in tone, Edelman expands this point: "Politics in the Symbolic is always therefore a politics of the Symbolic, operating in the name and in the direction of a constantly anticipated future reality, [for which] then the telos [would], in fantasy, put an end to these deferrals..."³⁹ Politics names the endlessly deferred desire for an endlessly anticipated future, a fantasy which imparts backward meaning to the past; it is the "translation [of this desire] into a narrative, for its teleological determination." In Tertz's term, the political is the purposeful.

In a politics that insists on reproducing the future from either side, "the Child [is] the preeminent emblem of the motivating end, though one endlessly postponed, of every political vision *as a vision of futurity*..."⁴⁰ Like Siniavskii's *tsel'*, Edelman's Child "remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention"; it "is impossible to refuse" the child within the political qua symbolic field.⁴¹ In fact, the child derives its social force by compelling collective submission to "reproductive futurism: [the] terms that impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such,"⁴² safely "[authorizing] every discursive stance to

³⁷ Lee Edelman, "Ever After: History, Negativity, and the Social." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106, no. 3 (2007): 469-76, at 469.

³⁸ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 7.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴² *Ibid.*, NF, 3

compete in the register of the political except that stance construed...as extra-, post-, or a-political insofar as it directs its negativity at the framing of politics as such."⁴³ (Tertz calls this the possibility of competing opinions within consensus, and Freud, the narcissism of small differences.)

There are, needless to say, some social actors who do not share the social daydream of an infantile future, who spectacularly refuse the child, who find a place on the "other side of politics: the 'side' where narrative realization and derealization overlap... the 'side' outside all political sides" (like those in Sinyavsky's paradigm who do not position their existence with respect to the Purpose).⁴⁴ Such a filicidal position cannot be thought within the symbolic as anything other than "the limit point of ontology, [the] constitutive exclusion that registers the no, the not, the negation in being."⁴⁵ Moreover, since politics is always S/symbolic, and therefore the purview of the speaking, purposeful self, the end of politics coincides with the limits of the S/symbolic, silent and unspeakable. If such a limit-figure can be perceived, it is only visible in its spectrality; if it can be contemplated at all, then only for the sake of its inscrutability. "Whatever the body or bodies that find themselves chosen to flesh out [this symbolic impossibility], [the] antisocial force absorbs the repudiated negativity without which community is never imagined, let alone brought into being."⁴⁶ These are the un-significant bodies, "figure[s] of nonreproductivity," and "the system's ironic incoherence,"⁴⁷ who reside in the symbolically barren "limit point of knowledge," "the locus of negativity"⁴⁸ where Edelman sets up shop for his radical project of queer negativity. He claims this no-place outside the domain demarcated as 'politics,' subordinated to the future, and circumscribed by the Child, in the name—or unnameability—of the queer.

Thus queerness for Edelman (and for the author of this dissertation) describes not an identity in the Foucauldian sense (like homosexual or gay today), and not desire, to invoke Foucault again, but something to be desired. Like gender in Donna Haraway's formula, it is almost a relation, but it is a negative one: an anti-relation, a no-place with respect to the Symbolic, the sign of an unrepresentable refusal. Queerness stands in "the place of the social order's death drive: a place, to be sure, of abjection expressed in the stigma, sometimes fatal, that follows from reading the figure literally."⁴⁹ Cropped out of the monochromatic pictures the political claims to be mimetic, queerness stabs at the canvas of the social order like a punctum, exerting a pressure "both alien and internal to the logic of the Symbolic." To a representational or realist portrait, it adds the stain of abstraction, a figure of unfigurability, that reminds the spectator he is staring at a rendition of reality and not the Real as such. Here Edelman's conceptual brushstrokes bleed together with Siniavskii's: queerness is the former's name for social unreality--or the socialist unrealism of the latter--"the negativity opposed to every form of social

⁴³ Edelman, "Ever After," 471.

⁴⁴ Edelman, *No Future*, 7.

⁴⁵ Lee Edelman, "Against Survival: Queerness in a Time That's Out of Joint Lee Edelman," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 62.2 (2011): 148-169, at 149.

⁴⁶ Lee Edelman, "Ever After," 470-1.

⁴⁷ Lee Edelman, "Antagonism, Negativity, and the Subject of Queer Theory," *PMLA* 121.3 (May 2006): 821-823, at 822.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Edelman, *No Future*, 4

viability,”⁵⁰ that exposes the violent lie of political mimesis. Edelman goes on: queerness is “an impossible excess haunting reality, an irrepressible remainder that the subject cannot separate itself from,” the “‘anatomical complement,’ an excessive ‘unreal’ remainder,” a “surplus [...] that] remains spectral, ‘unreal,’ or impossible insofar as it insists outside the logic of meaning that, nonetheless, produces it.”⁵¹

This situation of social morbidity, of exclusion from symbolic “reality,” uniquely disposes queer subjects to disrupt the very symbolic logic that figures them under erasure. “The efficacy of queerness,” says Edelman, “lies in its resistance to a Symbolic reality that only ever invests us as subjects insofar as we invest ourselves in it...as reality itself.”⁵² Operating from this unreality, owning it before bemoaning it, “the queer dispossesses the social order of the ground on which it rests: a faith in the consistent reality of the social—and by extension, of the social subject.” Neither are any more real than the other, even if one figures, or takes on the form of the real. By glomming onto form for its own sake, as something untranscendent, impregnable by purpose (and, if pregnant, then abortable), queer unpeople are capable of resisting realism by gesturing to the Real, embodying its deathly excess and embracing it. This is its ethical kamikaze mission, an act of self-eating that also explodes the stomach of the social, that makes its intestines spill out, like the Gargantuan God at the end of Tertz’s essay, with a violence that is also revitalizing, that rends the social subject into its real (not realist) non-identity. This is true opposition of a nonmimetic variety, terrifying for other, very apparent reasons—neither for nor against but other, in Siniavskii’s words; neither statist nor dissident but something else; neither warden nor political but common criminal.⁵³

In suggestive quasi-communist language, Edelman exhorts queer subjects to submit to “an alternative to the party line, which every party endorses, in taking a side outside the logic of reproductive futurism,” since queers,” that is, “all so stigmatized for failures to comply with heteronormative mandates,” “might embrace their figural association with its end,”⁵⁴ might “intervene in the reproduction of such a reality,” and even “[figure] that reality’s abortion...”⁵⁵ As Edelman envisions this necrophilic orgy—the kind from which Ginzburg turns away—defiant queers confront the ‘fact’ of their social unreality head-on, and rather than beg for pardon and (rear) entry into the political realm, flash the symbolic Father a fig and tell Him and His precious Child of the Future to fuck off—I am not embellishing here. Edelman says as much himself, in language just as blue, in what has become one of the most cited moments of queer theory today. He intones inimitably:

Queers must respond to the violent force of such constant provocations not only by insisting on our equal right to the social order’s prerogatives, not only by avowing our capacity to promote that order’s coherence and integrity, but also by

⁵⁰ Ibid., 9.

⁵¹ Ibid., 10.

⁵² Ibid., 18.

⁵³ As he summarized his own thesis for a talk called, “Against Survival. Queerness in a Time that’s Out of Joint” at ICI Berlin (May 2009): “the queerness of non-identity provokes repeated attempts to redeem it by turning it into something pragmatic and comprehensible, like political action or collective practice.” Full talk synopsis available on the institute’s website: < <http://www.ici-berlin.org/de/past/74/>>.

⁵⁴ Edelman, *No Future*, 17.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 6-7.

saying explicitly what Law and the Pope and the whole of the Symbolic order for which they stand hear anyway in each and every expression or manifestation of queer sexuality: Fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we're collectively terrorized; fuck Annie; fuck the waif from *Les Mis*; fuck the poor, innocent kid on the Net; fuck Laws both with capital *ls* and with small; fuck the whole network of Symbolic relations and the future that serves as its prop.⁵⁶

We might adapt this rant to late-socialist reality and use Siniavskii's language to say something similar if particular to the Soviet state and the Communist Party and the whole of the Symbolic order for which they stand: Fuck socialism and the Purpose in whose name we're collectivized and terrorized as a collective; fuck Pavlik Morozov; fuck the young pioneers; fuck the Komsomol; fuck the Soviet Constitution and the criminal codex both with capital *cs* and with small; fuck the whole network of Symbolic relations and the radiant future that serves as its prop.⁵⁷ The reality of the socialist order, as with any other, is, of course, a fantasy. Thus, in the scope of Siniavskii's argument, we might say a narrative style that attempts to mimetically describe the social order qua reality (the 'truth' about itself that it circulates as all-encompassing) would be a fantastic realism, as Tertz concludes. This mimicking, of course, would call attention to the status of the social as symbolic, a subversive act, like queer theory, "insist[ing] on its connection to the vicissitudes of the sign," figuring a refusal of the social's Real, or the socialist realist, as Siniavskii's self-eating prisoners do. This analysis seizes upon their queerness in the Edelmanian sense, their status as the Soviet Union's most monstrous, unrehabilitatable for their essential inhumanity in humanity's narrow construction.

FANTASTIC SELF-EATERS IN SINIAVSKII-TERTZ'S CRIMINAL FICTION

If we allow queerness the "form of figuring [reality's] abortion," then we can see this sort of negativity already appearing in Siniavskii-Tertz's pre-incarceration writing, especially in Tertz's novella, *The Trial Begins* [*Sud idet*], which presciently ends when a writer is sentenced to hard labor in the gulag. It begins relevantly, as well, with a discussion of the abortion performed by a Jewish gynecologist, a "born enemy of socialism...with an inborn love of treachery."⁵⁸ The topic is broached by Globov, a self-styled "positive hero," who, in keeping with socialist-realist prescriptions, "defines the world in relation to the striving toward communism."⁵⁹ (His surname itself hints at this global totality.) Despite the ideological incorrectness of most of its main characters, Tertz's story cements a syllogistic relationship between communism, heterosexuality, and

⁵⁶ Ibid., 29.

⁵⁷ Ibid. Of course, fucking the communist child is precisely what the capitalist wrecker wants to do; consider Andrei Platonov's Zhachev, that "cripple of capitalism," who lusts after the nubile young pioneer girls in *The Foundation Pit* [*Kotlovan* (1929-30)].

⁵⁸ Abram Tertz [Andrei Sinyavsky], *The Trial Begins* and *On Socialist Realism*. George Dennis, Trans. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 9. Though there is insufficient space to discuss the instances in which Siniavskii destabilizes Soviet heteronormativity in his entire body of work, it is worth pointing to another pronominal piece, "You and I" [*Ty i ia*], included in *The Fantastic Tales*, which starts out on the silver anniversary of a deeply problematic marriage.

⁵⁹ Catharine Nepomnyashchy, *Abram Tertz and the Poetics of Crime* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 52.

reproductive futurism. As though the questions were synonymous, one character tries to tempt another into infidelity by asking, “Do you believe in Communism?...do you love your husband?” He later playfully takes the adulterous addressee to task for violating a fundamental precept of Purpose-driven politics: “it wasn’t out of love of country and of Communism that you married your husband, was it?”⁶⁰ When not discussing marriage, the characters’ “conversation [is] indeed concerned with children.” On the occasion of a small dinner party, the guests toast the birth of a daughter, speculate about the pregnancies of their other friends, and then “pair off children as yet unconceived!”⁶¹ “Let’s drink,” Globov proposes, regurgitating the political clichés of the day, “to all our children and to happy family life.” A second toast sparks a quasi-Platonic disquisition on the nature of the socialist family.

What is a family man? A family man is a man to be relied on by his friends, his colleagues, and the State. A man who surrounds himself with children is bound to be a good citizen. He thinks about his family, his future, his heirs; he is firmly rooted in his country’s soil. He is entirely in the public eye. I personally am in favor of large families. I come from one myself.”⁶²

Что такое человек семейный? Это - серьезный человек, и в дружбе, и в работе, и в государственном смысле - надежный. Кто детьми обзаводится, тот хороший гражданин. Он о семье думает, о будущем, о потомках, на земле укорениться желает. Он весь на виду... Я лично сторонник многодетной семьи. Сам из такой вышел.

The toaster counts his siblings off on his fingers, identifying each by the patriotic work in which he or she is engaged—military colonel, director of a Far-East fishing combine, doctoral student at the state university in Leningrad. “And yet,” to Globov’s Party-minded dismay, “there are some people who preach childless marriages.” He calls their attention to yesterday’s newspaper, in which was printed “a whole feature on Neo-Malthusianism,” whose mere mention compels “the guests [to look] down at their plates,

⁶⁰ Tertz, *The Trial Begins*, 12; 16.

⁶¹ Ibid., 29. Another, hypothetical scene of toasting to heterosexual futurity appears in *What is Socialist Realism*, as a means of distinguishing the unruly Russian from the severe socialist he is to become after the revolution. Such reformed people “do not curse, they do not fight, they do not drink themselves senseless the way the Russian people used to do. And if they take a drink at a wedding table covered with exquisite foods, it is only as an accompaniment of toasts: ...’let us congratulate the young couple. May they be happy and embellish earth by their presence.’...”May they honor their parents!’ ‘May they have healthy children!’ ‘And not injure the glory of the kolkhoz!’” (ibid., 209-10). Thus the trinity of the socialist symbolic is reaffirmed: heterosexuality, reproductivity, Communist futurity.

⁶² Ibid., 29. The discussion of Malthusianism in Tertz’s book forms an interesting connection to the criminal short story of his codefendant Yuly Daniel (samizdat handle, Nikolai Arzhak), called “The Man from MINAP” [*Chelovek iz MINAPa*]. This comic piece concerns a hyperreproductive Komsomol member, who need only fantasize about Karl Marx’s face to impregnate his sexual partner with a boy-child, or Klara Zetkind for a girl. His prolific reproduction compensates for the failure of the Soviet ‘middleclass’ to make their own babies in the numbers envisioned in the imaginary census counts of the communist future. Iulii Daniel, *Ruki. Chelovek iz MINAPa. Rasskazy* (Washington: Filipov, 1962).

guessing that the conversation was about abortion”; such a shameful subject sullies the “Splendid Future” by its mere contemplation.⁶³

But in his typically subversive fashion, Siniavskii-Tertz takes up the tropes of socialist discourse only to destabilize its most sacred tenets. Globov, takes the case against the abortionist in *The Trial Begins*, and “begins by prosecuting what he considers to be the murder of a child, but ends by himself becoming a child murderer.”⁶⁴ No matter how in favor of the socialist family or in defense of the coming communist child such characters profess to be, they all arrive at the same ideological deadend by the conclusion of the book, brought there by the constitutive contradictions of their convictions, to whose limits they now point on their purposeless fingers (which are no longer being used to take precocious headcounts of communist paradise).

Actively negative characters of a similarly queer stripe abound in the short stories Siniavskii circulated together in samizdat as “The Fantastic Tales” [*Fantasticheskie povesti*, 1961], a collection whose title alone announces its nonbelonging to the realm of socialist realism. The collection’s centerpiece, untranslatably titled “Pkhents,” refuses to reproduce the Purpose of socialism in even more extreme terms than *The Trial Begins*. Narrated from the estranged position of a hermaphroditic alien, the story dramatizes a decidedly queer style of Soviet negativity.⁶⁵ The hero refuses marriage, women, children, humanity, intelligible speech, social intelligibility, and ultimately life, that is, he embraces the death drive already implicit in its radically-other form. (I use the male pronoun since the genderqueer alien does to describe himself in human language.) He is a sinthomosexual in Edelman’s terms, who abides by a mantra that Edelman’s exemplary sinthomosexual, Ebenezer Scrooge, might appreciate: “How I wish that nobody loved me!” [*Kak by mne khotelos’, chtoby menia nikto ne liubil!*] Unfortunately for him, this alien, called Andrei Kazimirovich among the Soviet humans, is called upon again and again to perform his rejection of heterosexuality and reproductive futurity. He finds himself repeatedly interpellated into a typical domestic scene by his female flatmate, Veronika. She wants to observe the rituals of Soviet family or spousal life with him, eating dinner and sipping tea together, and though Andrei would like nothing more than to opt out of this cruel farce of conjugal bliss, he cannot say ‘no’ to her if he is to keep passing as a normal human, a proper socialist, a legal Soviet citizen. “It was out of my hands to refuse the girl,” he says of the pitfalls of heterosexual-passing as a human survival strategy. “She’s the only one in the apartment who treats me decently. It’s a pity that her sympathy has a sexual basis.”⁶⁶

⁶³ Tertz, *The Trial Begins*, 29.

⁶⁴ Nepomnyashchy, *Poetics of Crime*, 61.

⁶⁵ The unconscious connection in Russian culture between the hunchback and non-heterosexuality may have surfaced in post-Soviet screenings of the American film *Brokeback Mountain*, which was renamed in Russian “Gorbataia gora,” or “Hunchback Mountain.”

⁶⁶ For the English I rely on Andrei. “Pkhentz.” In *The Portable Twentieth-Century Russian Reader*, edited by Clarence Brown (New York: Penguin Books, 1993): 481-506, at 486. The Russian comes from both artificial and virtual editions (the text is consistent across format): Abram Tertz, *Fantasticheski mir Abrama Tertsia* (New York: Mezhdunarodnoe literaturnoe sodruzhestvo, 1967); and the “noncommercial online library” «ImWerden» at <<http://imwerden.de/cat/modules.php?name=books&pa=showbook&pid=1594>>. “Дома было обычно. Едва я вошел к себе, появилась Вероника. Она, потупив глаза, предложила вместе поужинать. Мне было не с руки отказывать этой девушке. Она единственная из всей квартиры относится ко мне сносно. Жаль, что ее сочувствие зиждется на сексуальной основе. Сегодня я окончательно мог в том убедиться.”

By assuming the human form of a hunchback, Andrei Kazimirovich hopes to cut compulsory heterosexuality off at the pass. But Veronika explicitly tests the efficacy of this disguise, pressing him about his apparent loneliness in an attempt to cure her own. “Did you ever have any friends...or children...or a woman you loved?” she pries. “You are all the friends I need,” Andrei answers cautiously. “And as for women, you can see for yourself: I’m old and hump-backed. Old and hump-backed,’ [he] repeat[s] with ruthless insistence.”⁶⁷ Andrei picks a body deliberately at odds with socialist ideals. His strategic repulsiveness, a manifest opting out of the heterosexual norm, is made more apparent when he lists the other asocial personae he considers assuming before settling on a disfiguring hunch.

To avoid trouble I thought of pretending to be an alcoholic. Or a criminal. Or perhaps better still a person bereft of reason, or a pederast, finally? But I was afraid that any one of these roles would lend my person a dangerous fascination. All I could do was to dwell on my hump, my age, my wretched salary, my humble job as a book-keeper, and all the time it took up, to insist that only a woman with a hump would be right for me, whereas a normal, beautiful woman needed a symmetrical man. (487-8).

Чтобы избежать беды, я был готов прикинуться алкоголиком. Или преступником. А, может, лучше умалишенным, педерастом наконец? Но я боялся: каждое из этих качеств могло придать моей особе опасный, интригующий блеск. Мне оставалось акцентировать мой горб, возраст и мизерную зарплату, мою тихую профессию счетовода, отнимающую массу времени, и что такому, как я, горбуну под стать соответствующая горбунья, а нормальной красивой женщине нужен симметричный мужчина.

Veronika ultimately finds a husband who is straight: an actor from the Stanislavsky Theater, who is perhaps better trained to play a role in the drama of Soviet heteronormativity. Once successfully wed, Veronika is “purged” of personality, for her part; her eyes turn lackluster, no longer glowing with “love and resentment,” they dim into “[serenity and indifference].”⁶⁸ Socialist marriage does not come off in a good light when reflected in Andrei’s many alien eyes.

While he accounts for Veronika’s motives and his own asociality in the above passage, that is, his constant swerving away from women with straight spines, Andrei never actually pursues intimacy with a humpbacked woman, but instead another hunchbacked man. His crooked counterpart, who goes by the human name of Leopold Sergeevich, is with Andrei from the start of the story. Their first encounter occurs at the laundromat, where the narrator alien inspects Leopold’s tainted underthings. We already

⁶⁷ Tertz, “Pkhentz,” 482; the Russian original reads: — У вас были друзья,.. дети,.. любимая женщина?.. — Друзей мне заменяете вы, — начал я осторожно. — А что касается женщин, то вы же видите: я стар и горбат. Стар и горбат, — повторил я с неумолимой настойчивостью.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 503. Long-haul readers of this dissertation will remember this as the epigraph to Chapter Three dedicated to Kharitonov’s queer moves, and the irreconcilability of bent bodies to the rigid ideals of Soviet subjectivity; thus the redoubled punchline of Veronika’s marrying a straight or “*natural*” mate from the naturalist theater (as opposed to the *uslovnyi* theater discussed in the first chapter about plastic culture).

glimpse socialist excrescence in the excremental traces of Leopold's presumed alienness. And then "for six weeks [he has] his eye on this gracefully vaulted person who [is] so unlike a human being."⁶⁹ Andrei believes Leopold is only passing as a person, and is actually non-person like him: literally alien, figuratively queer.

Among many other allegories, the text supports a sexual reading of this sort, not least of all because Andrei pursues his male object obsessively, submitting his every gesture to a frantic semiotic analysis characteristic of what Harold Beaver has defined as "homosexual perception." "The homosexual is beset by signs," per Beaver, "by the urge to interpret whatever transpires, or fails to transpire, between himself and every chance acquaintance." Like Tertz's alien, the sexual minoritarian "is a prodigious consumer of signs – of hidden meanings, hidden systems, hidden potentiality. Exclusion from the common code impels the frenzied quest: in the momentary glimpse, the scrambled figure, the sporadic gesture, the chance encounter, the reverse image, the sudden slippage, the lowered guard."⁷⁰ The possibility of being discovered for his true self, as Andrei discovers Leopold, hovers over the alien with the threat of violence throughout the story. And like the homosexual in a virulently homophobic society, Andrei fears approaching Leopold, lest he become an object of suspicion himself. "I did not pursue him," he grieves to the reader, "in order not to attract others' [alien] attention." [*Ia ne posledoval za nim, chtoby ne privlekat' chuzhoe vnimanie.*] He resigns himself to the terrorism of heteronormativity, which strikes on the street as well as at home, as "finally, it came to [Veronika] to spy on him, intercepting him on the way to the bathroom." [*Nakonets, ei vzdumalos' shpionit' za mnoi, podsteregaia po puti v vannuiu.*]

While Andrei suffers under such intense scrutiny, Veronika volunteers her body for total surveillance. In "Pkhents'"s most famous and evidently queerest scene, Veronika brazenly exposes to Andrei exactly "what he refused" when he said no to her aggressively heterosexual advances. [*Glian'te, Andrei Kazimirovich,--ot chego vy otkazalis'!*] Though sex is a mostly unfamiliar topic for him—and unfamiliar, I will show—Andrei has glimpsed the male form before, both in an anatomy textbook fifteen years earlier, and then again "in Gorky Park, [when] he had the opportunity to watch young boys bathing in the river."⁷¹ He relates this experience of bodily humanity with a calm colored by satisfaction. Whereas he does not mind bare boy bodies, and disputably enjoys them, the alien is utterly estranged from the parts of a woman that define her gender, as the formalistic estrangement of his description demonstrates. This gynophobic passage lends the text a decidedly gay tone. Having "never seen a naked woman in the flesh and at such close quarters" before, Andrei finds it "I repeat-horrible...her whole

⁶⁹ Ibid., 491.

⁷⁰ Harold Beaver, "Homosexual Signs (In Memory of Roland Barthes)." In *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*. Edited by Fabio Cleto (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 164.

The specter of heterosexual violence in "Pkhents" finds a vague parallel in Kharitonov's story, "The Oven," which has at its elliptical center a murder; the murder's means and ends are a constant conversation topic between adult gay man and straight teenage boy and his gang of high-school buddies. The motivation of the murder is never fully explained, thus the morbid fascination for the dacha dwellers.

⁷¹ Tertz, "Pkhentz," 489. "Лет пятнадцать назад мне довелось познакомиться с учебником по анатомии. Желая быть в курсе дел, я внимательно изучил все картинки и диаграммы. Затем в Парке культуры и отдыха имени Горького я имел возможность наблюдать купающихся в реке мальчишек. Но видеть живьем раздетую женщину, да еще на близком расстоянии, мне раньше не приходилось. Повторяю, это — ужасно."

body was of the same unnatural whiteness as her neck, face, and hands. A pair of white breasts dangled in front. At first I took them for secondary arms, amputated above the elbow.” Rather than highlighting for him the beauty of femininity, that thing the socialist male must desire for the sake of socialist futurity, Andrei is horrified to see nothing “female” there so much as “an old man’s face, unshaving and baring its teeth,”⁷² threatening castration as the cost of entering Veronika personally, or normative society symbolically. By his own queer admission, “[Veronika] had offered to me the best, from the human point of view, that she had in her arsenal, and instead of it, [he takes] a walk,” leaving behind him, in his militaristic metaphor, “the site of that genital apparatus which shoots out ready-made infants like a catapult.” [*Ona predlozhila samoe luchshee, s chelovecheskoi tochki zreniia, chto u nee v zapase imelos’, a ia vmesto etogo poshel guliat’...*] It turns out that he can refuse her and the heteronormative, child-bearing order for which she stands, but not without paying a high existential price.

It is hard not to be struck by the (intended) strangeness of this rendition of the female reproductive organ as a violent “apparatus,” a most personal catapult shooting out pre-fab babies for the sake of the socialist Purpose. In the present academic moment, we might place the “apparatus” in a Foucauldian framework of biopower, as a discursive-institutional formation of the heteronormative state.⁷³ We might also keep contemporary to “Pkhents,” and connect it to the official definition provided by *Pravda* in 1953, which defines the “Soviet State Apparatus” as a “mighty instrument” wedding the Communist Party to the Soviet people in the “sacred” and “historic task” of “building a communist society.”⁷⁴

The Soviet state apparatus in the deep sense of the word, J. V. Stalin stated, consists of the Soviets plus the organizations of all non-Party and Party groups with millions of members which link the Soviets with the very “core” of the masses, which merge

⁷² “я решил воспользоваться моментом и заглянул туда, где — как написано в учебнике — помещается детородный аппарат, выстреливающий наподобие катапульты уже готовых младенцев.”

⁷³ Foucault provides the following, multipronged definition for “apparatus” (*dispositif*): “firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements. Secondly, what I am trying to identify in this apparatus is precisely the nature of the connection that can exist between these heterogeneous elements. Thus, a particular discourse can figure at one time as the programme of an institution, and at another it can function as a means of justifying or masking a practice which itself remains silent, or as a secondary re-interpretation of this practice, opening out for it a new field of rationality. In short, between these elements, whether discursive or non-discursive, there is a sort of interplay of shifts of position and modifications of function, which can also vary very widely. Thirdly, I understand by the term “apparatus” a sort of—shall we say—formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an urgent need. The apparatus thus has a dominant strategic function. This may have been, for example, the assimilation of a floating population found to be burdensome for an essentially mercantilist economy: there was a strategic imperative acting here as the matrix for an apparatus which gradually undertook the control or subjection of madness, sexual illness and neurosis.” Michel Foucault, “The Confession of the Flesh (Interview).” In *Power/Knowledge Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, edited by Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980 [1977]), 194-228. This interview was conducted by a round-table of historians.

⁷⁴ K. Ivanov. “On the Soviet State Apparatus,” *Pravda* (April 26, 1953); online <http://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/13832513>

the state apparatus with the multimillioned masses and which destroy step by step anything resembling a barrier between the state apparatus and the people.⁷⁵

Such a 'utopian' marriage of the people with the state apparatus (sutured together in the socialist baby-maker) is consummated in a kind of violence of which the child, in "Pkhents"'s reckoning, is both the beneficiary and happy brandisher. The kid is the gatekeeper to the communist future, a rabid enforcer of human heteronormativity in the present, frustrating the queer commingling of two hunchbacked non-people when Andrei finally drums up the courage to "come out" to Leopold. Having made his way past Leopold's sickeningly over-scented wife, and their single-headed Cerberus in the *kommunalka* corridor, "at great risk," Andrei reports, he "found there a small child armed with a sabre. When he saw us he asked for berries and sugar and set up a yell, wriggling and pulling faces" for want of sweets. "'Stop whining, or this man will eat you,'" his mother admonishes her warmongering infant. [*Budesh' kaniuchit—diadia tebia s'est.*] "To please my hostess," Andrei sasses, "I said jokingly that for soup I drank children's blood, warmed-up. The child was quiet at once. He dropped his sabre and cowered in the far corner. He didn't take his eyes off me. They were full of animal terror."⁷⁶

Having alienated both the wife and the child of his inhuman kin, Andrei "takes a big risk," by his own measure, and reaches out to touch Leopold, just as Veronika reaches out to him, in a gesture that conveys his desperate desire for intimacy and recognition in mutual alterity. He utters the unpronounceable title of the story, "Pkhents, Pkhents," a shibboleth of his alien culture, but it falls on deaf ears. Leopold rebuffs him on these symbolic and sexual grounds, denigrating a bodily difference they ostensibly share up to this point in the plot. "'How dare you tell me who I am?'" the too-human hunchback demands, "Spoiling my relations with the landlady, and then insulting me as well! Go and find yourself a gorgeous woman like that...and then you can discuss my physical defects. You're more of hunchback than I am! You're more disgusting. Monster! Hunchback! Wretched cripple!"⁷⁷ At this moment, Andrei recoils in matching horror, when the warmth of the other's hunch gives away his humanity. "There could be no doubt about it. I had mistaken my man. He was a normal human, the most normal of humans, hunchback or not."⁷⁸ Thus, "in a flash," all of Andrei's queer semiotics come to naught as, to quote Beaver again, "meanings [are] disclosed; mysteries wrenched out and betrayed."⁷⁹ Andrei's painful revelation of his extreme isolation in the *socialist* order is compounded by another attack of symbolic violence on the queer alien. "Behind him," as he flees the family home, "the child prance[s] about, threatening [Andrei] with his sabre. 'Let

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Tertz, "Pkhentz"; in the original: "Чтобы сделать хозяйке приятное, я сказал шутливо, что пью вместо супа подогретую детскую кровь. Ребенок моментально стих, бросил саблю и забился в дальний угол, не сводя с меня глаз, полных звериного страха."

⁷⁷ Ibid., 495. "— Как вы смеете,— говорит,— мне указывать, кто я такой? Испортить мои отношения с хозяйкой, да еще грубить! Да вы найдите,— говорит,— сначала такую роскошную женщину, а потом рассуждайте о моем физическом недостатке. Вы — горбатее меня. Слышите? Вы — еще гнуснее. Урод! Горбун! Калека несчастный!"

⁷⁸ Ibid., 496. "Сомнений быть не могло. Я обознался. Это был человек, самый нормальный человек, хоть и горбатый."

⁷⁹ Harold Beaver. 2002. "Homosexual Signs (In Memory of Roland Barthes)." In *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*. Edited by Fabio Cleto (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), 164.

Leopold alone!’ he shout[s]. ‘Hey you! Let Leopold alone! My mommy loves him. He’s my daddy, he’s my Leopold, not yours!’”⁸⁰ The promise of queer connection is foreclosed completely: the queer alien realienated as reproductive heterosexuality is restored as the human norm in the story and Soviet society.

Without an interlocutor in his native alien tongue, Andrei concedes to his total immersion “in [that] hateful and indispensable human language,” whose perimeters are violently policed by the swashbuckling child in whose name it is spoken. (Such a situation corresponds to the plight of the queer vis-à-vis the symbolic order in Edelman’s paradigm.) In order to live on himself, as a legible human being, Andrei must also speak it, even if in bad faith; or, as he does on his deathbed, moan it “louder and louder,” like a child and for the sake of the child. ““Mama, mama, mama,’ [he] groan[s], imitating the intonation of a tearful child and hoping to awaken the pity of anybody who heard...[as he] call[s] for help” from within a social order that can only sustain him by suppressing his difference—a sacrifice to which he cannily resigns himself for the two painful hours of his expiration. “I vowed that if I lived I would keep my secret to the end, and not let this last vestige of my homeland, this beautiful body, fall into the hands of my enemies for them to rend and mock.”⁸¹

In Catharine Nepomnyashchy’s reading, “this fantastic body... stands outside the law, has no legal status but to undermine the narrator’s claim to a lawful identity, to brand him a criminal.”⁸² His criminality is, in essence, his alterity. At times he entertains this “tricky question” of his illicit existence: “why shouldn’t I, after all, legalize my position? Why have I spent thirty years pretending to be somebody else, like a criminal?”⁸³ But the answer is already embedded in his bodily being—it is impossible to account for his alien self in human language, to put himself on the side of the law, since he is insuperably outside of the symbolic order, defying the very categories of human classification, not to speak of the classification of human itself (“not human, not beast, and maybe most closely inclined—of all that you [humans] have to offer—to the plant kingdom”).⁸⁴ Even if he tried to explain his inhuman condition, “despite all [the] general attention to [his] humble person” he would invariably attract in such an attempt, “no one would understand anything.” In the alien’s own words, which might just as easily be applied to the “inhuman” criminals of “‘I’ and ‘They,’” “How can they understand me when I myself in their language can in no way express my unhuman essence [*beschlovechnuiu sushchnost’*]?”⁸⁵ At such moments of communicative strain, when the

⁸⁰ Tertz, “Pkhentz,” 496. “Позади, .. скакал ребенок, угрожая саблей. — Пусти Леопольда! — кричал он. — Эй ты! Пусти Леопольда! Его моя мама любит. Он — мой папа, мой, а не твой Леопольд!”

⁸¹ Ibid., 502-3. “Тогда я застонал, сначала тихо, потом громче, ненавистным и неизбежным человеческим языком. «Мама, мама, мама», — стонал я, подражая интонации плачущего ребенка — в расчете пробудить жалость в том, кто бы меня услышал. И призывая на помощь в течение двух часов, я поклялся, если только выживу, сохранить до конца свою тайну и не дать в руки врагам на растерзание и глумление последний клочок моей родины — мое прекрасное тело.”

⁸² Nepomnyashchy, *Poetics of Crime*, 71.

⁸³ Tertz, “Pkhentz,” 497. “Иногда задаю себе один коварный вопрос: почему бы мне в конце концов не легализовать свое положение? Зачем тридцать лет, как преступник, я выдавал себя за другого?

⁸⁴ не человек, не зверь, и, пожалуй, склонен скорее всего — из того, что у вас имеется,— к растительному царству.”

⁸⁵ Ibid., 499. “Но при всем этом общенародном внимании к моей скромной особе никто ничего не поймет. Как же понять меня им, если сам я на их языке никак не могу выразить свою

Symbolic erupts into a display of its own insufficiency, like Andrei, we can “make some headway with metaphors, but when it comes to the main thing, fall silent [*smolkaiu*].” This silence is the most significant, since it negatively circumscribes the definition of the human subject, as Tertz allegorizes with his alien here, and Siniavskii explicitly demonstrates with the prisoners of his Geneva paper.

Even the native speaker of human language breaks down into symptomatic insensibility when forcing a new form of being to fit the limited shape of the recognizably human or “real” subject. (This sense, to some extent, rhymes with the infirm nurse’s experience of temporary unintelligibility in the last chapter, when telling her hospital colleagues about the objects she had extracted from her patients’ stomachs.) In her ineluctable endeavor to compliment Andrei’s perceived humanity, Veronika’s broken speech resembles the fundamental brokenness of humanistic discourse, based as it is on a feeling of moral superiority over social cast-offs, whose abjection is affirmed in the very form of hierarchical thinking. (Leopold’s impassioned putdown of his partner in humpbacked misery is a concise illustration of this hierarchical logic, albeit untempered by Veronika’s charity.)

“You know, Andrei Kazimirovich, I really did love you. I realized that I loved you—how shall I put it out—out of pity...Pity for a lonely, crippled human being, I hope you will forgive my frankness. But I loved you so much...didn’t notice...physical blemishes...You seemed to me to be the most beautiful (hu) man on earth, Andrei Kazimirovich...the most...human. And when you laughed at me so cruelly...make an end of myself...I loved...not hiding from you...worthy (hu) man...Again I fell for...human...as a human...humanness...like a human to a human...”

— Я ведь на самом деле любила вас, Андрей Казимирович. Мне понятно: это была любовь — как бы вам объяснить? — любовь из жалости... Жалость к одинокому искалеченному человеку, простите за откровенность. Но я пожалела вас настолько... не замечать... физические изъяны... Вы мне казались, Андрей Казимирович, самым красивым человеком на земле... самого... человека. И когда вы так жестоко посмеялись... Покончить с собой... Любила... не скрывая, скажу... достойный человек... Опять полюбила... А теперь даже благодарна... Полюбила... Человека... Человеческим... Человечность... как человек человеку...

The contemporary reader would have been able to complete Veronika’s half-sentence automatically here—“man is to man”— by conjuring up the picture of the perfect communist family from an official propaganda poster that became omnipresent following the 1961 Congress of the Communist Party. A father reaches out toward the viewer with open arms in the center of the image. A mother rests her hand confidently on her husband’s left shoulder. And at his right, a respectful young man casts his hand skyward, mimicking the inevitable ascent of “good” citizens to communist paradise. Beside them appears the slogan of the Moral Code for the Builders of Communism [*Moral’nyi kodeks*

бесчеловечную сущность. Все верчусь вокруг да около и метафорами пробавляюсь, а как дойдет дело до главного — смолкаю.”

stroitel'ia kommunizma], approved by the Congress that year. “Humane relations and mutual respect among people: man is to man a friend, comrade and brother!”⁸⁶ [*Gumannye otnosheniia i vzaimnoe uvazhenie mezhdru liud'mi: chelovek cheloveku—drug, tovarishch i brat!*] Soviet people are so “united,” in the political clichés of the day, “by the single great goal [*tsel'iu*] of struggling for communism... And how can it be otherwise?”⁸⁷ “To be humane [*gumannym*]” in this sense “means to love man [*cheloveka*], to respect and care about him, to believe him. But not to have abstract feelings for man ‘in general.’”⁸⁸ By handing her whole self over for literal love among comrades, Veronika is the model of communist morality. But Andrei, in her words, “[does not] accept [her] love, refuse[s] it,” and refuses thereby to embody the hetero-familial ideal that measures one’s success as a human. “You are simply evil, not good. You are a very bad (hu) man, Andrei Kazimirovich [*Vy ochen' plokhoi chelovek*].”⁸⁹

Without a doubt, “Pkhents”’s hero fails to conform bodily or morally to the ideal communist (hu) man. He does not figure anything recognizable; he is certainly not well defined [*opredelennyi*] by the Purpose or purpose-shaped [*tselosoobraznyi*], like realism’s positive hero. On the contrary, he is the very form of unfiguring itself, of excess and “indefiniteness” [*neopredelennost'*], in the language of *What is Socialist Realism*: a wild image [*dikoobraz*] or monster whose unnamability makes the act of naming go crazy for the other characters whom he encounters: “Freak! Hunchback! Unhappy cripple!” “Abnormal, ugly mongrel!” [*Urod! Gorbun! Kaleka neschastnyi!...Akh, kakoi nenormal'nyi, kakoi nekrasivyi ubliudok!*] His uncategorizable body marks the ends of the social-symbolic order, the limits of language’s mimetic function, the no-man’s-land for realist representation. He is unintelligible and incredible as a subject, fantastic even to the faithful builders of communism. “Tell this sad story to whomever you like,” he instructs of his experience, “they won’t believe it, they won’t believe it for

⁸⁶ “Человек человеку — друг, товарищ и брат. Из программы Коммунистической партии Советского Союза, принятой XXII съездом КПСС (1961).” The Moral Code for the Builders of Communism made more explicit than ever that building communism was a moral enterprise which inhered in the builder—not just the project—itsself; a healthy body was the physical evidence of a healthy communist mind and spirit.

⁸⁷ I.A. Trutnev, author of many works on Soviet humanism of the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras, and his coauthor, N.M. Khodarkov, offer an explication of this slogan in the context of late-socialist morality. “Советские люди, являясь друзьями, товарищами и братьями между собой, объединены единой великой целью борьбы за коммунизм. И где бы ни находился наш труженик, он всюду ощущает близость своих товарищей-единомышленников, с ними он делится радостями и заботами, от них получает поддержку. Разве может быть иначе? Ведь в нашей стране нет причин, порождающих рознь и вражду между людьми. Все советские люди равны перед законом, имеют одинаковые права, закрепленные Конституцией. Отсутствует у нас частная собственность, эксплуатация человека человеком, нет и антагонистических классов. В нашей стране на смену старой формуле волчьей, буржуазной морали «*Homo homini lupus est* — Человек человеку — волк» пришел новый принцип: «Человек человеку — друг, товарищ и брат». Именно это характеризует взаимоотношения советских людей и становится законом их отношений.” From the more extensive work on morality and social relations in the late-Soviet era, entitled *On the Family and Marriage*. Igor’ Alekseevich Trutnev and Naum Mikhailovich Khodakov, *O sem'e i brake*, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Medtsina, 1968).

⁸⁸ “Быть гуманным — это любить человека, уважать и заботиться о нем, верить ему. Но это не отвлеченные чувства к человеку «вообще». Мы не признаем «всеобщей любви», нам чужда мораль, провозглашающая тезис: «Все люди братья», мы против проповеди «всепрощения» и «всеобщего братства».” Ibid.

⁸⁹ The original reads: “За что вы меня ненавидите? — спросила она.— Что я вам сделала? Вы сами не приняли моей любви, отказались от жалости... Вы просто злой, нехороший, вы очень плохой человек, Андрей Казимирович.”

anything... They will consider me a madman, a fantast, and moreover they could place me on trial: a false passport, forgery of signatures and seals, and other illegal acts.” Anticipated in the alien’s predictions about his own mishandling are the later misreadings of Siniavskii’s self-eaters, whose acts are consigned to fantasy, inhumanity, psychopathology, criminality, and perversion.

Having lost the safety of Veronika’s solidarity, the hope to place in Leopold’s kindred inhumanity, and all but traces of the alien language by which he is better able to signify the reality of himself, Andrei’s existential options are few at the finale of the story. Rather than continue to violently disfigure his spine and his speech so as to dissimulate as a socialist human a little longer, he decides it “better [to] put up with living alone and incognito”⁹⁰ henceforth. He gives himself over to death, an event he senses will happen soon, given his precarious status as a legal alien and ontological criminal, and, less abstractly, his abstention from the water he requires in inhuman quantities in order to survive. Thus he goes on a literal hunger strike by giving up actual sustenance (indeed his body atrophies from disuse and desiccation like a hunger striker); and a figurative one, by giving up language as the stuff of social sustenance. He elects to “abandon human society” altogether, “and, freeing himself of human disguise and human language, to live out the final summer before immolating himself.”⁹¹ “Not one human thought will [he] have, nor one word in another’s language”⁹² [*ni odnoi chelovecheskoi mysli, ni odnogo slova na chuzhom narechii*] before consuming himself in flames, in a last, spectacular act of self-assertion, which no one, he reasons, will be there to witness. He resolves to himself (and, retroactively, to the reader of a manuscript he will also burn by the story’s end), “When the first frosts [*zamorozki*] begin, and I see that the time is ripe—just one match will be enough. There will be nothing left of me.”⁹³ In this instance of “playing with fire” [*igri s ognem*], an apropos phrase I take from “I” and “They,” Andrei embraces the fatality

⁹⁰ Tertz, “Pkhentz,” 506; the Russian is: “Звуками человеческой речи лишь приблизительно можно передать их конструкцию. И если обступят лингвисты и спросят, что это такое, я скажу только: ГОГРЫ ТУЖЕРОСКИП и разведу руками. Нет, уж лучше буду влачить одинокое инкогнито. Раз появился такой специфический, так и существуй незаметно. И незаметно умри.”

⁹¹ Nepomnyashchy, *Poetics of Crime*, 74.

⁹² Tertz, “Pkhentz,” 505. Refusing the descriptive powers of discourse to name the subject—I am not a human but “Pkhents”—risks an initial illegibility that works in the same ambivalent way as the incomprehensible cries of the hysteric—as a “discourse of protest,” Dora’s “refusal to be used,” which is ultimately destined to fail in its unintelligibility as such. In Jane Gallop’s summation, because it is imaginary, the language of the hysteric cannot completely destroy the family. It can nonetheless rip a hole in the social order. In her words, “the symbolic’s failure to socialize its repressed others” and the “emergence of the repressed histories of these others” reminds us of that earlier act of rupture, and the possibilities of it tearing again. (177) But for the moment before it fails, argues Helene Cixous, “hysteria represents an effective ‘language’ of female resistance in a social order that renders direct expression nearly impossible for women.” The same might be argued for the subversive utility of Siniavskii’s hysterical self-eaters, who direct expression, he argues, is an impossibility in the socialist order. David Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 175.

⁹³ Tertz, “Pkhentz,” 506. “А как начнутся заморозки и пойму, что время пришло, — одной спички хватит. Ничего не останется.” The word “*zamorozki*” is loaded in the late-Soviet context, used to describe the periods of political freeze that alternated with liberalization during Khrushchev’s tenure and shortly after under Brezhnev. Siniavskii’s own trial would mark the final freeze that brought the thaw [*ottepel’*] to a decisive close. This additional, disputably Aesopian significance of the word lends the sentence an ominous sense of foreboding, even an apocalyptic or revolutionary air. What world will be burned down once this political moment arrives?

already imputed to him by the state and normative society; opting out of ‘their’ symbolic order is the same as a death wish. Even though, he hypothesizes, state institutions will strive to master his body through its expert discourses, no one will believe the truth of his being, alien as it is to hateful human language. And so this fictional alien, like the criminal non-person of Siniavskii’s nonfictional essay, relinquishes the integrity of his physical self in order to achieve psychic or symbolic integrity as an ‘I.’ In effect, to claim an ‘I’ in a language that does not do violence to the very difference that the deviant’s body bespeaks means violently transforming that body of difference into a sign that is equal to the self. Compactly put, the psychic integrity of a self based on bodily difference is only achieved in the contexts Siniavskii describes by violating that very same ontologized body.

This is a radical indictment of the Soviet state and dominant culture as violently intolerant, for which Siniavskii was called to account in court. In his “last word,” in court, the defendant turned to the same story that got him in trouble in the first place, not to get him out of his political jam, one imagines, but to get to a point outside of politics altogether. In his own, allegorical words:

In my unpublished story, “Phkents,” there is a sentence that I feel I can apply to myself: “Just think, if I am simply different from others, they have to start cursing me.” Well, I am different. But I do not regard myself as an enemy; I am a Soviet man... In this fantastic, electrified atmosphere, who is ‘different’ may be regarded as an enemy... Most of all, I do not see why enemies have to be invented, why monsters have to be piled on monsters...⁹⁴

Perceived as a monster by the Soviet state, Siniavskii identifies with the hermaphroditic alien protagonist of his samizdat short story. “I am not oppositional. I am other. [*Ja ne protiv, ia – drugoi*]. To be oppositional means to be situated on the same plane, to think on the same plane. To be oppositional means to be the same only with the reversed sign.”⁹⁵ Put otherwise, Siniavskii declares himself not to be a political opponent of the Soviet regime—not a dissident in the narrow political sense—for such an identity would still contain him within the symbolic order, and confirm its identity without remainder, taking the “self-same for the self-same,” as self-eaters refuse to do.

Rather, akin to Edelman’s queer, Siniavskii is alien to, or outside of, the social order as it is, even as his alienation is a purpose of this very order. (He summed up his Soviet experience for his Swiss listeners, by informing them, “I myself am a kind of waste, spat out by the Soviet camp.”⁹⁶) Thus, when the court concerns itself with the etiology of his monstrosity, he snaps back with a question the self-contained Symbolic

⁹⁴ “Final Plea by Andrei Sinyavsky,” in *On Trial: The Soviet State Versus “Abram Tertz” and “Nikolai Arzhak,”* edited and translated by Max Hayward (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 147-184.

⁹⁵ “На своем последнем слове Синявский сказал: я не против, я — другой. Быть против, значит находиться на том же уровне, мыслить в том же плане, быть против — значит быть тем же, но только с обратным знаком.” Iurii Mal’tsev, *Vol’naia russkaia literatura, 1955-1975* (Frankfurt: Posev, 1976), 69.

⁹⁶ “*Je suis moi-même une sorte de déchet, recraché par le camp soviétique.*” Siniavskii et al., Siniavskii on September 5, 1975, in Siniavskii, George Steiner, Georges Balandier, Medard Boss, et al. *Solitude Et Communication: Textes Des Conférences et des Entretiens Organisés par les Vingt-Cinquièmes Rencontres Internationales De Genève, Histoire et Société D’aujourd’hui.* Neuchâtel: Ed. de la Baconnière 1976 [1975].

cannot answer of itself. “Where then did we come from, Daniel and I,” he demands, we freaks whose very existence is inexplicable in your hateful language. “We must have been dropped by parachute from America and immediately begun to wreak havoc. Had the prosecution not pondered the question of our origin?”⁹⁷ His codefendant forces the court to contemplate the aporia of socialism’s symbolic order again: “As Sinyavsky rightly asked: ‘Where are we supposed to have materialized from, we two werewolves and vampires; do they think we fell from the sky?’”⁹⁸ “Speaking of vampires,” Siniavskii suggests that, “perhaps every self-respecting author is by nature a vampire.”⁹⁹ As Alexander Etkind has argued, the vampire is a central metaphor in Siniavskii’s writing, standing in for the writer himself, as well as popular personage in camp life,¹⁰⁰ who, to Siniavskii’s mind, poses the problem of origins in both places.¹⁰¹ How can a culture premised on perfect harmony between citizen and state produce the same others it excludes? Who are these ideological Draculas, sucking out the life source of the socialist system?

A brief but effective invective article published simultaneously with the trial in an official journal followed suit in casting Siniavskii and Daniel in the role of little monsters, denouncing them by beastly names, diagnosing them with the same hypertrophied or pathological sense of selfhood [*lichnost*] that set them against the good of Soviet society [*obshchestvo*]. They are the eponymous “heirs of Smerdiakov,” sufferers of a specifically Russian spiritual affliction called “Smerdiakovshchina,” an “impossible” or scientifically inexplicable “phenomenon,” as Dostoevskii introduced it in *The Brothers Karamazov*--“a kind of corporeal-cum-moral monstrosity” [*urodstvo*], which predominates among prisoners in the hard labor camp, especially, the patricides.¹⁰² The anti-Oedipal quality of

⁹⁷ Siniavskii, “Final Plea,” 141-2.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Abram Tertz [Andrei Siniavskii], *Puteshestvie na Chernuiu rechku i drugie proizvedeniia. Stat'i. Esse*. (Moscow: “Zakharov,” 1999): 449-50.

¹⁰⁰ “There is no doubt that scary stories generally, and stories about vampires particularly were popular in the camps (in Shalamov’s story, ‘The Snake Charmer,’ a writer by the name of Platonov entertains his barrack with the story of Dracula.” My translation of Alexander Etkind, “Sedlo Siniavskogo: Lagernaia kritika v kulturnoi istorii sovetskogo perioda,” *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 101 (2010). See V. Shalamov, “Zaklinatel’ zmei,” *Kolymskie rasskazi* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2008), p. 79. On the vampirism of the Soviet state, especially with respect to the gulag, see Alexander Etkind, “Sedlo Siniavskogo,” NLO. On the queer erotics of bloodsucking between Siniavskii and Pushkin, one of his gulag muses alongside Gogol, see Stephanie Sandler, “Sex, Death and Nation in Strolls with Pushkin Controversy,” *Slavic Review* 51.2 (Summer, 1992), 294-308.

¹⁰¹ In his other writing, Siniavskii speculates about the origins of criminality in Soviet culture. Indeed, it is precisely by the displacement of pre-revolutionary types by the socialist social order that turns human beings into dust, that accounts for the popular remainder that leaves a person politically naked, a *dokhodiaga* or homo sacer. Illiterate criminals are come from the peasant stock left over from collectivization, and the violent destratification of Russian society by the Soviet state. “The people were no longer people but masses, human dust. This dust naturally churned up criminals: people who had lost their social niche, their place in the sun, their land. Socialism brought about society’s desocialization. Man, deprived of his roots and his ties, deprived of what gave his life meaning, found himself naked; he became a rogue and a marauder whose only friends belonged to the same underworld based on an upside down morality, based on the ‘thief’s law.’” Sinyavsky, *Soviet Civilization*, 184. On the queer heredity of the vampire, see Judith Jack Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monster* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995).

¹⁰² «Такая зверская бесчувственность, разумеется, невозможна. Это феномен; тут какой-нибудь недостаток сложения, какое-нибудь телесное и нравственное уродство, еще не известное

queer monstrosity, which will be recast as a subversive strategy for unreal actors later in the chapter, was not limited to patricide. Indeed, in the 1966 speech before the 23rd Party Congress, the preeminent socialist realist author Mikhail Sholokhov, then serving on the Presidium of the Soviet Writers' Union, strongly felt that the Soviet Union was one big family [*ogromnaia sem'ia*], and every family, he added, has its freak [*uroda*] who raises his twisted hand against the symbolic mother and the motherland. By this, matricidal metaphor, Sholokhov meant to indict the criminal artist generally, and not-so-subtextually point a finger at Siniavskii and Daniel, who were then on trial.

We call our Soviet motherland [*rodina*] “mother” [*mater'iu*]. We are all members of one enormous family. How then should we react to the comportment of those chairmen who would encroach upon what we hold most dear? With bitterness Russian popular wisdom establishes that “There is no family without a freak.” [*V sem'e ne bez uroda*] But not all abnormality is alike. [*No ved' urodstvo urodstvu rozn'*]...There's nothing more blasphemous or sickening than slandering one's own mother, scurrilously insulting her, raising a hand to her! (Stormy, continuous applause.)¹⁰³

Мы называем нашу советскую Родину матерью. Все мы – члены одной огромной семьи. Как же можем мы реагировать на поведение предателей, покусившихся на самое дорогое для нас? С горечью констатирует русская народная мудрость: «В семье не без урода», Но ведь уродство уродству рознь. Думаю, что любому понятно: ничего нет более кошунственного и омерзительного, чем оболгать свою мать, гнусно оскорбить ее, поднять на нее руку! (Бурные, продолжительные аплодисменты).

To Sholokhov's charge, to the accusations of the state, Siniavskii answers back with a defiant affirmation: I am all these horrible things-- a freak, a black sheep, a patricide, a parasite, a vampire, a Frankenstein's monster of the socialist state's own creation.

According to contemporary ‘monster theorists,’ the incidental inheritors of Siniavskii's opinions, “the monster is not merely an other; it is one category through which a multiform power operates” within expert discourses that use “monstrosity as a screen for otherness,” and “are always [involving monstrosity] in circuits of normalizing power as well.” Moreover, because “the monster is part of the West's family of abnormal”—or, in the group portrait Sholokhov paints, the socialist family of abnormal--family, heredity, elusive gender¹⁰⁴, and “sexuality always haunt its figuration.”¹⁰⁵ I will continue to underscore throughout the chapter, the ways sexuality

науке, а не просто преступление.» Fedor Mikhailovich Dostoevskii, "Zapiski iz mertvogo doma." In *Sobranie sochinenii v 15 tomakh*, t. 3 (Leningrad: Nauka, 1988 [1862]); online <http://ilibrary.ru/text/61/index.html>.

¹⁰³ Mikhail Sholokhov, "Rech' Na Xxiii S'ezde Kpss (1966)." In *Sobranie Sochinenii V Vos'mi Tomakh*, T. 8 (Moscow: Pravda, 1975), 420.

¹⁰⁴ Susan Stryker, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian & Gay Studies* (1994): 237-54, at 237. Stryker turns to Peter Brooks's psychoanalytic reading of *Frankenstein* as an early feminist “dissent from the nineteenth-century realist literary tradition,” in which the category of monstrosity comes in large part out of a confusion of binary gender categories at the core of Enlightenment epistemology.

¹⁰⁵ Puar and Rai, “Monster, Terrorist, Fag,” 241.

stands in for alterity or monstrosity in the Soviet symbolic, and specifically how queerness comes to designate the point of ideological deviation.

Inhabiting the space of monstrosity by which the state interpellates him, Siniavskii calls attention to the problematic construction of socialism's grid of human intelligibility. "Pkhents"'s inhuman narrator risks illegibility in these terms, as does Siniavskii himself in court, and again his self-eaters in the camp, when they speak from the space of the socialist non-human, phantasm, fantasist, or freak. But what does it mean to embrace this monstrosity, to wave one's freak flag high on socialist soil? To say to the state's piling up of monsters, pile more! As Susan Stryker does in her transsexual monster-manifesto: "words like 'creature,' 'monster,' and 'unnatural' need to be reclaimed" by those so named. "By embracing and accepting them, even piling one on top of another, we may dispel their ability to harm us."¹⁰⁶ "I" and "They" seizes on this sort of queer monstrosity with special intensity, and mobilizes the Soviet Union's biggest freaks, its unrealest people, to do damage to the reproductive organs of the social order, and foreclose the exclusive future swaddled up like a baby in the blanket of realism. According to Judith Butler, "when the unreal lays claim to reality or enters into its domain," like this, as it happens in Siniavskii's literary and empirical experiences, "[prevailing norms...] can become rattled, display their instability, and become open to resignification."¹⁰⁷ This is precisely what Andrei does, when he reorganizes the Soviet status quo around his exceptional self. "I am more beautiful! I am more normal!" [*Ia krasivee vas i normal'nee!*], he declares to those who dismiss him for his difference. Like Butler, Siniavskii-Tertz and his extraterrestrial protagonist are guided by the belief that, "to posit possibilities beyond the norm or, indeed, a different future for the norm itself, is part of the work of fantasy when we understand fantasy as taking the body as a point of departure for an articulation that is not always constrained by the body as it is."¹⁰⁸ In words that unwittingly hit through history like a belated speech for the defense of Siniavskii and Daniel, Butler avers that, "the foreclosure of fantasy—through censorship, degradation, or other means—is one strategy for providing for the social death of persons. Fantasy is not the opposite of reality," she echoes Siniavskii's aesthetic theory while uncannily depicting his political plight; "it is what reality forecloses and, as a result, it defines the limits of reality, constituting it as a constitutive outside."

THE HUMAN HAS DISAPPEARED: QUEER NEW YEAR'S WITH THE FLY

"You say 'I' and you are proud of this word. But greater than this—although you will not believe it—is your body and its great intelligence, which does not say 'I' but performs 'I.'"
—Nietzsche, "On Despisers of the Body"¹⁰⁹

"Without an element of cruelty at the root of every spectacle, the theater is not possible...it is through the skin that metaphysics must be made to re-enter our minds."
—Antonin Artaud, *Theatre of Cruelty* (1932)

¹⁰⁶ Stryker, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein," 241.

¹⁰⁷ Judith Butler, "Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy," *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 27-8.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁰⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Baltimore, MD: Penguins Books, 1969), 62.

I'll start with an example that illustrates the queerness of these scenes Siniavskii has selected, this one rather touching if not sentimental in the usual style. Then I will dip into the darker moments of his piece, which illuminate the negativity and thanatologic underside of these acts, and thereby highlight the utility of Edelman's approach to this historical material. As earlier, Siniavskii involves the listener in the re-production of this scene, compelling his or her imaginative participation, and thus personal proximity to the repulsive, which is otherwise safely distanced in time and space. "Imagine this situation," with a "former convict criminal" [*staryi zek-ugolovnik*], that is a thief whose stay is extended by the camp administration by formally promoting him to political. Such changes were entirely nominal, according to Marchenko-- "in everything else, they were dyed-in-the-wool criminals, corrupted, disorderly and completely senseless."¹¹⁰ Siniavskii resumes: "having made it through the fire, water and bronze pipes, [this convict is] sick, consumptive, and his stomach [has been] carved in half," a common consequence of surgery to remove swallowed objects [*proshedshii ogon', vodu i mednye trubny, bol'noi, chakhotchnyi, s vyrezannym napolovinu zheludkom*]. Though ostensibly nonfictional, this thief already seems as if he stepped out of Tertz's *Fantastic Tales*. Like the alien in "Pkhents," he has played with fire and been burnt by a system that painfully contorts his body and leaves him in shabby existential shape, with the "understanding that he will hardly make it to freedom" [*ponimaiushchii, chto emu edva li dotianut' do voli*]. Unlike Andrei Kazimirovich, however, the criminal inmate is not resigned to fatal isolation: "he sits in a prison cell with another prisoner, whom he protects and before whom he even poses a little" [*sidit v tiuremnoi kamere vdvoem s drugim zakliuchennym, kotorogo on opekaet i pered kotorym nemnogo poziruet*]. Recognizing the right of the unperson to name himself in his own language, especially within his own slice of reality, Siniavskii "call[s] the second one by his camp nickname — 'Fly,' which he earned for his diminutive size and exceptional fidgetiness" [*Nazovem vtorogo po ego lagernomu prozvishchu — 'Mukha', poluchennomu za krokhotnyi rost i iskliuchitel'nuu podvizhnost'*].

Between Dostoevskii, Lenin, and Solzhenitsyn, we are now well aware of the import that insects and other creaturely pests acquired as figures of socialist humanity, as it was endangered or evacuated by camp life. In his own hard labor experience, where he mixed with real criminals to truly humanistic ends, Dostoevskii discovered an existential continuum combining insect and man in the face of a single being, unfinalizable in its ethical proportions. Solzhenitsyn cynically countered this vision, too, and, rather than expanding his comprehension of humanity while serving out his sentence, he charges the criminal with having brought humanity down to a level of base 'insectuousness.' "Every [convict] looks at you like a spider gloating over a fly. Their web is that grating which imprisons you—and you have been had!" [*Kazhdyi smotrit na tebia kak pauk, navisshii nad mukhoi. Ikh pautina—eta reshetka, i ty popalsia!*].¹¹¹ Solzhenitsyn's spider goes soft in the scene of self-eating Siniavskii supplies. Neither crushing nor cruel, his prisoner even poses a little before his fluttering cellmate, displaying his very *human* vulnerability and desire for connection with another being.

The human and the fly thus co-emerge in Siniavskii's moving narration. "Fly" is

¹¹⁰ Marchenko, *My Testimony*, 198.

¹¹¹ Solzhenitsyn, *Gulag Archipelago*, 500.

a man [*Mukha*—*muzhchina*] and, at the same time, in these circumstances, he is the beloved woman and wife [*vozliublennaia i zhenai*] of the older, former thief. Briefly put, they are a married couple, a family.”¹¹² [*Koroche govoria -- supruzheskaia para, semia.*] By narrating the scene in this way, code-switching between the semiotics of ‘normal’ Soviet society and the queer exigencies of the camp, Siniavskii flaunts the existence of another symbolic order, another “set of relations,” another field of feeling. He foregrounds the affection in the Fly’s nickname, and downplays the social degradation encoded in his insectness and castrated romantic role. As discussed in the third chapter, the passive partner in the male same-sex relations of the camp is the most degraded personage in all of Soviet society. Indeed, the *opushchennye*, literally, “the ones who have been put down,” are the sodomitic bottoms “at the very bottom” of “the prison hierarchy,” not to speak of the social hierarchy outside of prison. “Those who in the pair played the part of the woman” [*kto v pare shel v zhenshchinu*] were segregated into special barracks in the camp, and “despised by everyone.” [*ikh vse prezirali*].¹¹³ They “embody the monstrous”¹¹⁴ and elicit only disgust, except in Siniavskii’s kindly depiction. Calling his life (sentence) partner “Fly,” the old thief tenderly interpellates a ‘you’ into being alongside his own tenuous ‘I.’

This queer take on domesticity, helpfully subtitled into intelligibility by Siniavskii, illustrates the radical resignification that has to happen in the camp, wherein a thief is a political prisoner, a human is a fly, a man is a wife, and those most hated can become objects of love. And love is a very hard thing to come by in the camp, according to Marchenko, “the majority of criminals eke out their entire sentences—five, ten, fifteen, twenty five years—without any kind of love, neither paper nor actual,” which explains for him why “in the regular camps, homosexuality flourishes among the criminals.” [*bol’shinstvo zakliuhennykh ves’ srok—piat’, desiat’, piatnadtsat’, dvadstat’ piat’ let—zhivut bezo viaskoi liubvi, i bez bumazhnoi, i bez nastoiashchei. Iz-za etogo v bytovykh lageriakh, sredi ugovnikov protsvetaet gomoseksualizm.*] Marchenko’s remarks miss the mark by eliding the difference between sex and love, situational homosexuality and deep intimacy between the two men of this scene.

A criminal sodomitic couple in the camp is a happy Soviet husband and wife, who observe the rituals of everyday life together, like any other ‘normal’ family would do. Thus, when “New Year’s is upon them,” the old con dismays that “they have no way of celebrating,” and nothing to celebrate with.

There is only the cell that they share and the “Fly” before them. The only thing that the older one has to offer as a celebration, as a performance, as a treat, is his own body. Thus, in a stylish gesture, he orders of himself wine with ice cream. Once more, excuse me for the unpleasant details, but it is impossible to avoid them. He takes an iron prison mug and instead of cream he introduces his sperm into it. Then he opens his vein and pours wine over the ice cream. And they both

¹¹² “Soviet and post-Soviet prison psychiatrists report the formation of ‘homosexual families’ among women prisoners with a certain degree of reluctant appreciation” (Healey, *Homosexual Desire*, 237). See also Kozlovskii on queer family arrangements outside of the zone; *Argo russkoi gomoseksual’noi subkul’tury: Materialy k izucheniiu* (Benson, Vt.: Chalidze Publications, 1986).

¹¹³ Marchenko, *My Testimony*.

¹¹⁴ From Adi Kuntsman, “Beyond the Borders of the Human,” manuscript; see also Kuntsman, “Between Gulags and Pride Parades,” 2-3.

celebrate the holiday, celebrate New Year's.

Наступает Новый год. А отметить Новый год — нечем. Вся та же камера на двоих, и та же 'Муха' перед глазами. Единственное, чем старший располагает для праздника, для спектакля, для угощения, это — его же тело. Тогда он самому себе — шикарным жестом — заказывает вино с мороженым. Еще раз прошу извинить меня за неприятные подробности, но без них не обойтись. Он берет железную тюремную кружку и вместо крема вводит туда сперму. Затем вскрывает себе вену и заливает мороженное вином. И оба — с праздником, с Новым годом. (242-3)

Given what Siniavskii says of the bleak chronotope of camp life, where “nothing shines ahead in the future” of the self-eater, it seems reasonable to ask why this queer couple would bother with joyful festivities. Why celebrate the New Year when the time of the camp is interminable? To what could they look forward aside from more hardship, sickness, separation, body-and-soul crushing labor, and finally death? Futurity, after all, is the purview of the communist child, who will certainly not be born of the fruitless union between the old con and his effeminate Fly. What kind of new culture can they carve out of their extreme conditions?

If part of the imperative on the realist writer in envisioning the future now is to create the perfect, purposeful Soviet family and reproduce the Soviet child, then this is a myth Siniavskii ‘not propagate or reproduce. In lieu of this, he points to “myth-making” [*mifotvorchestvo*] out of the queer family of the camp inmates on one exemplary occasion, which he narrates in a nontranscendent present tense.

I dare to ask: what is that? And I dare to answer: art. Art and more than that - in a certain sense, myth-making, rising, perhaps, unconsciously to some kind of ritual gesture (blood and sperm as the basis of life), only turned inside out in the form of a caricatured, cruel farce. (243)

Осмелюсь спросить: что это такое? И осмелюсь ответить: искусство. Искусство и более того — в некотором роде мифотворчество, восходящее, возможно, бессознательно к каким-то ритуальным жестам (кровь и сперма как первооснова жизни), только вывернутое наизнанку в виде карикатурного, жуткого фарса. (243)

The New Year, for all its secularity in Soviet society, is but a denominated and deferred celebration of Christmas, which this nontraditional family honors in a very private ceremony. Siniavskii's scene of bloodletting functions here as a kind of non-hierarchical communion, or quasi-religious ritual, with a queer camp Christ offering his body and his blood. (As Marchenko's memoirs testify, vein-slitting was a common occurrence among desperate criminals in the camp, though it was typically undertaken as a solitary act.¹¹⁵)

¹¹⁵ Speaking of the radical solitude associated with self-mutilation of this sort in *My Testimony*, Marchenko adds that, “when a con slits his veins or swallows barbed wire, or sprinkles ground glass in his eyes, his cell-mates don't usually intervene. Every man is free to dispose of himself and his life as best he can and

The self-eater's is a tender offering of himself to be eaten by another, an act of eating that "[transforms] the very border between self and other...in the very intimacy of the encounter," and in "the intensity of eating," which "undermines the possibility of any assimilation [is undermined]" and abolishes any "abstract duties or demands which keep others at a distance."¹¹⁶ The blood and arguably the sperm mimic the Eucharist¹¹⁷ in the painfully abridged language of the gulag. The symbolism is "turned inside out" by subjects outside the Symbolic--*drink this blood, it is my wine*—and a reverse transubstantiation is performed, as the old con's flesh becomes Word, his 'I' to the Fly's 'you.' This is the most ethical shape subjectivity can take on in "the world of relation," Martin Buber believed, when "man becomes an I through a You," by passing through 'you,' or being consumed in "an action of the whole being [which] must approach passivity," which cannot take the inherently limiting form of language, but "must be spoken only with one's whole being."¹¹⁸

By sacrificing parts of his body to his young lover, the hardened, old con makes of himself a Last Supper and consecrates the supremely unsacred space of their coexistence. Such a gesture is unimaginable if we put stock in Solzhenitsyn's reading of the criminals' "entire philosophy and faith," according to which any expression of reverence by these godless creatures is always a cruel ruse designed to ensnare the soulful political prisoner into a spidery web. But is that the caricatured, cruel farce to which Siniavskii points at the end of his tender description? Indeed, where is there cruelty in this display of kindness? And what is the role of caricature and cruel farce, of exaggerated and parodic forms of performance or camp theatricality, to displace the dominant myth and its symbology? Siniavskii further dissects this scene of loving self-dissection.

It may be that this prisoner on New Year's Eve made of his very self ice cream and wine, created this spectacle before his beloved "Fly," and at the same time before all of "them," moreover "they" (beyond the guards and command) are already to some degree as if his an emanation of himself, transferred beyond him, into the prison wall, and acting in this monodrama in the role of enemy-spectator. The penal circumstance allows for this projection, this passage of our 'I' into the 'they.' A man senses himself to be disappearing into the cramped surrounding walls, and from this his need for communication and activity in language increases. Instead of beating his head against the wall, he takes to talking to the

in whatever way he wishes, every man has the right to put an end to his sufferings if he is unable to bear them any longer" (69).

¹¹⁶ Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey, eds. "Introduction," *Thinking through the Skin*, idem. (London: Routledge, 2001), 11.

¹¹⁷ The similarity between this scene of blood, semen, and sodomy, in the Soviet camp, and the scandalous writings of fin-de-siècle journalist Vasilii Rozanov could not have been lost on Siniavskii, who married Rozanov's daughter, Mariia Rozanova, and devoted his own philological energies toward the interpretation of his father-in-law/literary predecessor's texts. In particular, one is reminded of Rozanov's provocative comment that he used his own semen as ink. See A.D. Siniavskii, *Opavshie list'ia V.V. Rozanova* (Paris: Sintaksis, 1982). For a deeper discussion of this seminally decadent metaphor, see Olga Matich, *Erotic Utopia the Decadent Imagination in Russia's Fin-De-Siecle*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005.

¹¹⁸ Martin Buber, *I and Thou [Ich und Du]*, translated by Walter Kaufman (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970 [1937]), 62, 80.

walls as his own personal membrane and puts on before them a performance of a most nightmarish and conceptually aggressive nature: “And so you surround me? You hold me? You are silent? Well, listen here to what I will tell you!”

Возможно, тот заключенный, что из самого себя под Новый год произвел мороженое с вином, творил это зрелище и перед возлюбленной «Мухой», и одновременно перед всеми «ними», причем «они» (помимо охраны и начальников) являлись уже в какой-то мере как бы собственной его эманацией, переведенной вовне, в тюремные стены, и выступающей в этой монодраме в образе враждебного зрителя. Тюремная обстановка способствует проекции, переходу нашего «я» в «они». Человек ощущает себя исчезающим в тесном окружении стен, и от этого его потребность в общении и активность в языке возрастает. Вместо того чтобы биться в стены головой, он принимается разговаривать со стенами как с собственной оболочкой и ставит перед ними спектакль кошмарного и мысленного агрессивного свойства: «Вот вы меня окружили? вы держите меня? вы молчите? так послушайте теперь, что я вам скажу!».

In this renarration, Siniavskii starkly alters his reading of the scene, shifting its tone from tenderness to aggression, festivity to futility; its orientation from passive to active; its ritual function from mystical communion to social and symbolic isolation; its status as a speech act from embodied conversation with a living, breathing interlocutor to the desperate monologue of a dying self with its projection of a hostile and unreceptive (collective) other. The cruelty crops up then in the jagged transition Siniavskii makes between the intimate I-you tableau, which is not without its theatricality, and the dramatic appearance, however illusory, of a hateful audience, which silently encircles and surveys the would-be ‘I’--now without ‘you,’ without its Fly--and threatens the speaker with symbolic extinction. The cruelty of this performance then is lodged in the Law and in language itself, in its ever-present capacity to shove the speaker against the walls of the Symbolic; its authority to refuse to recognize the one who speaks and then screams in desperation; and its tendency, especially in “conditions of extreme isolation” such as Siniavskii describes, to exploit the vulnerability of the subject who cedes its whole being in order to enter into the world of relations as the ‘you’ of another’s ‘I.’

Though the precarity of this situation is compounded in the prison after “many years of isolation and conflict with the whole world,” it by no means belongs exclusively to the camp as a state of exception. Indeed, in this and the other grotesque acts he enumerates, Siniavskii is searching for the basic conditions that make subjectivity and sociability possible. The New Year’s scene manifests the means by which two ‘speakers’ agree upon symbolic substitution to communicate and connect. Proceeding by a logic of substitution—man for woman, blood for wine, camp for church, criminal queer couple for socialist family, and so on—it allegorizes the process of signification itself, how signs come to mean through consensus and felicitous reception, or fail when the speaker or his message are misrecognized and refused. Language fails frequently enough in everyday life outside the camp, in verbal exchanges in ‘normal contexts,’ which end in non-consensus of a less perceptible and sometimes insidious variety. Indeed,

even in normal situations it is difficult for people to agree with each other, when one and the same words sound differently in the ear of one and the ear of the other, when, the meaning of ‘freedom’ or ‘democracy’ is understood at once in contradictory, polar ways, and this contradiction incurs killing in the name of conviction, the perpetuation of this meaning or symbol, but certainly not that one. (243)

И в нормальных условиях бывает трудно договориться с другими людьми, если даже одни и те же расхожие слова в ушах у каждого звучат по-разному, и, что такое “свобода” или “демократия”, понимается порою противоположно, полярно, и это разноречие влечет смертоубийства ради утверждения, увековечения того, а не этого именно смысла или символа.

Siniavskii’s selection of words whose meaning is contested in “normal situations” should strike us as very deliberate (while also potentially have us scratching our heads about the meaning of “normal” here). Placing “freedom” and “democracy,” in scare-quotes, these buzzwords of Western humanism and the Soviet dissident movement, Siniavskii places the official Soviet language under suspicion at the same time, since it “disassembles and mystifies, trying all the while to persuade itself that it is right,” especially in its interpretation of “terms such as ‘democracy,’ ‘humanism,’ ‘human rights,’ or ‘constitution.’” The possibility of all communication between two distinct subjects is thrown into doubt here, and meaningful dialogue across ideological divides, between two totalizing symbolic or political systems, seems totally hopeless. (As in “Pkhents,” language breaks down the moment it attempts to articulate the human.) The problem with closed symbolic orders, with dogma, in a word, is that it seduces into a self-referential “purism” of the sign, mistaking the language of realism for reality itself. Speaking purposefully about (its) Purpose, it fetishizes speech over its effects, so that speech itself is seen as the end of politics and not its means. This is a quality of dogma of any pedigree, and so what Siniavskii says about the Soviet Symbolic can be applied across the board: “The language is used not only as a substitute for reality, but as a substitute for language. The language as a means of communication among people has been turned into a system of incantations supposed to remake the world.”¹¹⁹ Neither Siniavskii nor I would deny the effects of discourse to shape the ‘real world.’ Instead, I think he points here to the violence that is authorized and obscured by (political) language when we mistake figurality for materiality, when we take the quotation marks off both the “I” and the “they,” and use language as if it were not always already a catechism, if we do not, as Siniavskii’s self-eaters do in the camp, and as Siniavskii himself does at the conference, make a departure from language.

Ultimately, all speech acts are fated to fail in reaching true consensus and reproducing reality as shared. And while the ineluctability of language may be exacerbated by the extreme conditions of camp life, the camp’s frustration of communication may also be liberating, in that it unfetters the subject from the usual chains of signification in order to flow into still unmapped or unmapped planes of meanings, relations, and emotions. Such fantastic departures from language into something else—silence, gesture, communion, the Real—reveal that the symbolic and social orders have

¹¹⁹ Sinyavsky, *Soviet Civilization*, 210.

congealed in ways that are neither inevitable nor irreversible. They might be made fluid once more, allowing us to reinvent ‘reality’ as we know it, reconfigure the ‘real person’ who experiences this reality, and propose a more capacious version of the human which can accommodate the most creaturely in us, including the most diminutive of flies.

Before deserting our fly, we might detour for a moment to one of the most searing co-articulations of humanity and ‘insectality’ in the post-Stalin period, made by Iurii Galanskov, a poet, historian, and human rights activist, whom the state sent to prisons, camps, and psychiatric hospitals as a means of immobilizing his dissent. In 1961, he recited the poem, “Human Manifesto” [*Chelocheskii manifest*, alt. trans. “The Manifesto of Man”], during the poetry readings on Mayakovsky Square in Moscow. With three other ‘conspirators,’ he protested the Siniavskii-Daniel trial and compiled the proceedings for public review into *The White Book* [*Belaia Kniga*, 1967].¹²⁰ For this act of protest, he himself was prosecuted in the notorious Trial of Four [*Protsess chertyrekh*, 1967], and sentenced to seven years hard labor in the camp, where his life was cut short by an untreated stomach illness in 1972. As his poetic and political life intertwined with Siniavskii’s, so do the sentiments and metaphors of his manifesto, which proclaims that, “the human has disappeared; destroyed like a fly.” [*Chelovek ischez./Nichtozhnyi, kak mukha.*]

The lyrical ‘I’ of the poem ponders how it is possible to become human again, despite “the rotten prison of the state” [*gniluiu tiur’ma gosudarstva*], amidst this “terrible life, like a prison built on bones!” [*zhizn’ strashna, kak tiur’ma, vodvignutaia na kostiakh!*]. How is it possible to radiate [*siat’*] again as an individual against the dark “silence of the night” [*v nochnoi tishi*]? Like the self-eaters, he searches for a “they” whose politics can be held accountable for crushing the people into bovine conformism and mutual cannibalism, but whose dream might still be salvaged. “Where are they, who are needed to throttle the throat of the cannon, slice out the ulcers with the battle-consecrated knife of rebellion? Where are they? Where are they? Where are they?” [*Gde oni—te, kto nuzhny, chtoby gorlo pushek zazhat’, chtoby vyrezat’ iazvy voinysviashchennym nozhom miatezha. Gde oni? Gde oni? Gde oni?*] Though ‘they’ might not exist at all [*ili ikh vovse net?*], the lyrical hero will not abandon his human ‘I.’ “Go[ing] out onto the Square, into the city’s ear, [he] hammer[s] out a cry of desperation.” “It is I, calling for truth and revolt, no longer willing to serve, breaking your black fetters, which are woven of lies! It is I, shackled by the law, I am shouting the Manifesto of Man.” [*Eto—ia, prizvyaiushchii k pravde i buntu, ne zhelaiushchii bol’she sluzhit’, rvy vashi chernye puty, sotkannye iz lzhi! Eto—ia, zakonom zakovannyi, krichu Chelovecheskii manifest.*] “Having gotten a gun and press[ing] it firmly to [his] head” [*pistolet dostav, prizhmu ego krepko k visku*], this emergent ‘I’ turns state violence against himself. Still, he will not feast on the other fallen soldiers of the socialist necropolis. He will not feed off a dead society, “not eat carrion, like everyone else. [He] will not disembowel on demand, the fruits on the graves. [He does] not need your bread kneaded in tears.” [*Ne stanu pitat’sia padal’iu—kak vse. Ne stanu kishkam na potrebu plody na mogilakh srezat’. Ne nuzhno mne vashogo khleba, zameshannogo na slezakh.*] He will offer up his own body, like Christ, to be pecked apart by crows on the cross. [*I pust’ mne voron vyklevyvaet na mramore tela krest.*] Putting Galanskov’s poem in conversation with

¹²⁰ Aleksandr Ginzburg, *Belaia kniga po delu Siniavskogo i Daniela Moskva 1966* (Frankfurt: Posev, 1967).

Siniavskii, I propose we see “‘I’ and ‘They’” as an “unhuman manifesto” in its own right, a rejoinder in a different genre, delivered less than three years after the poet’s death. Both documents are indictments of the ‘they,’¹²¹ declamations of the ‘I,’ and reclamations of the humanity in the ‘insectuously’ debased self of late socialism.

Sparing no one from their trenchant critiques in their human and unhuman declarations, Galanskov and Siniavskii deploy the most disgusting and visceral images, and go straight for the gut of their distanced listeners, which they wrench with horror and despair at the murderous order of things. The stomach-turning consequences of Siniavskii’s essay was long-lasting, it turns out. In the accounts of those who heard this story first-hand from him, it was impossible not to be affected on a gut level. Such is the claim of Sergei Khmel’nitskii, Siniavskii’s former Moscow associate, and the agent provocateur who set up him up to be persecuted and prosecuted as an anti-Soviet author.¹²² “Over the years, when he was already a fellow at the Institute of World Literature,” from 1952-1965, “A.D. [Andrei Donatovich Siniavskii] narrated a story to me about some hardened human, an old hand of the camp. I still haven’t recovered from this story,” Khmel’nitskii records his horror.

It was about a couple of male thieves who lived in the camps in a spousal way, so to speak. And they appreciated an elegant style of life, which they understood on their own terms. In the scope of this lifestyle, an especially refined gift which a gentleman gives a woman is ice cream with wine. Getting a hold of it in the camp is complicated, and so, as a substitute, the thief-husband [*blatar’-muzh*] filled a jar with his own sperm, then sliced his hand open and let his blood out into an urn. And he served up this special treat to his thief-wife [*blatariu-zhene*]. A.D. relayed this abomination aloud at a high volume. And not that long ago, that is, after very many years, I found this same story among A.D.’s newly released essays. Only now the author alludes to his own camp experience and hints that he saw this all

¹²¹ Galanskov’s and Siniavskii’s ‘they’ might be said to have a kind of Heideggerian heft. Heidegger’s “they” [Das Man], roughly a personified equivalent of Louis Althusser’s definition of ideology, is “a homogeneous bloc of other subjects with whom we are expected to identify, with whom we are meant to accede, and through whom we are compelled to recognize ourselves.” (Anderson, *So Much Wasted*, 14) The existence of ‘the They’ is known to us through, for example, linguistic conventions and social norms. Heidegger states that, “The “they” prescribes one’s state-of-mind, and determines what and how one ‘sees’” an authority that has no particular source. In a non-moral sense Heidegger contrasts “the authentic self” (my owned self) with “the they self” (“my un-owned self”). A self emerges from the ‘I’ through a process Anderson calls “individuation,” which “comes to [the subject] as both a detachment from the ‘empty speech of *they* and a reorientation to the potential we have to care for ourselves and to care for others.” (16)

¹²² Sergei Khmel’nitskii, “Iz chreva kitova,” *Zametki po evreiskoi istorii*, No. 44 (July 19, 2004); online <http://berkovich-zametki.com/Nomer44>. Originally published with preface by Aleksandr Voronel’ in the Israeli journal *22*, No. 48 (1986); and then again in *Kontinent*, No. 71 (1992). As Aleksandr Voronel’ writes in the preface to this piece, “the poet S. Khmel’nitskii, along with Siniavskii and Daniel, was a participant in the narrow circle out of which issued the underground literature, and the Daniel (Nikolai Arzhak) story “Atonement” is dedicated to him. At the Siniavskii-Daniel trial, Sergei was a witness, thought the protocol language of /The White Book/ does not at all reflect the real significance of his testimony to society and perhaps to the KGB.” As other memoirists of this era attest, Khmel’nitskii was an agent provocateur who had infiltrated the literary underground in order to destroy its key actors. For more on Khmel’nitskii, see V. Kabo, *The Road to Australia [Doroga v Avstraliuu]* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1998), especially the chapter, “A hero of our time: Interlude,” which sets up the next section on Kabo’s camp experience—ostensibly arranged by the same agent provocateur who set Siniavskii and Daniel up.

but with his own eyes. It is, of course, more faith for the witness. But all of this I doubt: did A.D. compose this apocryphal story [*byval'shchinu*] himself?¹²³

Years later, Khmel'nitskii still reels from merely having heard Siniavskii's tale of camp vampirism—about that there seems to be no doubt. More dubious is his motivation for digging up this anecdote from the dusty annals of dissident history, in order to introduce incredulity about its status as mimetic or documentary truth. Khmel'nitskii is likely attempting, however fecklessly, to cast aspersions on the author, a man of infinitely more esteem, and, perhaps thereby redeem his own shady name and comparative insignificance. Tabling this too-obvious question of cultural reputation, we might ask less about Khmel'nitskii's personal desires and more about the historical repercussions he hoped would result from the rumor that the queer New Year's scene was fabricated by Siniavskii-Tertz, just another fantastic fruit of the author's perverse imagination?

To get correspondingly incredulous, we might ask why these allegations from an unreliable person are of any consequence anyway? Why should we take seriously these secondary charges against Siniavskii for having taken artistic license with Soviet life, having turned political 'reality' into personal fantasy, having fictionalized the horrors of history to his own aesthetic ends? Without conceding that any history can be true in any total way, we might still consider the implications of Khmel'nitskii's challenge. If Siniavski did fabricate this story, then he did so for analytic and aesthetic reasons, to present all of the defining features of self-eating in a single, satisfyingly dense display. As I see them, these features include, (1) the imagination of impossible forms of love and intimacy, or intimacy among impossible 'people'; (2) the corruption or carnivalesque inversion of the normal or straight Soviet family; (3) the discovery of hope and vitality amidst the most ruinous conditions of camp life; (4) the conversion of the insensible or silent body into a meaningful speech act with its own sui generis semiotics; (5) the recognition of the sacred character of these acts, which are nothing short of the bases for a new belief system, built not around the "rotten prison of the state," but the most blasphemous subject and abject bodily experiences; (6) the elevation of these supposedly instinctual or animalistic acts to the self-conscious gestures of the artist; and (7) their reclassification from the status of exception to one of exemplariness or paradigm, that is to say, these impulses are not inhuman, but on the contrary, of the most human kind at the root of the most basic aspirations toward language, communication, and social communion. These properties are fleshed out in the episodes of self-eating that follow.

THE ANCHOR: (DIS) MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

*"In an act of self-mutilation gesture replaces language.
What cannot be said in words becomes the language of blood and pain."*

¹²³ Sergei Khmel'nitskii, "Iz chreva kitova," *Zametki po evreiskoi istorii*, No. 44 (July 19, 2004); online <<http://berkovich-zametki.com/Nomer44>> . For what it's worth, this scene is the sole example of self-eating to appear in Siniavskii's paper without having a direct analog in Marchenko's memoirs. Based on my own reading of this and other camp memoirs which include sections on self-mutilation, I believe he composed it by *bricolage*, that is, by amalgamating key moments and motifs from multiple sources into the one story he presents in "'I' and 'They.'"

There is no more potent demonstration of how the queer cast-offs of the Soviet symbolic spectacularly refuse to reproduce the socialist future than when they remove their reproductive parts in the act called the anchor [*iakor*']. Siniavskii details the painful procedure:

Desecration of one's sexual parts — nailing one's scrotum to a wooden plank, the use of the 'anchor,' and so on — these are also means of demonstration on the theme of the end of life, the last argument of a man, that he is no longer strong enough to endure this concentrated pressure and that the organs which nature gave to him are no longer necessary to him, that he spits on them and with them spits on life and on the society that stuck him in this cage. What else is there for him to argue with? (244-5)

Кстати сказать, надругательство над своими половыми частями - прибавление мошонки гвоздем к деревянным нарам, употребление «якоря» и так далее - это тоже способ манифестации на тему окончания жизни, последний аргумент мужчины, что он больше не в силах выносить это концентрированное давление и подаренные природой органы ему более не нужны, что он плюет на них и вместе с ними плюет на жизнь и на общество, засадившее его в эту клетку. Чем же ему еще аргументировать?..

Here the reader of Tertz's *Fantastic Tales* may rightly be reminded of the alien protagonist of "Pkhents," whose many purposeless phallic arms must be painfully secreted and resultantly shrivel up in order for him to fit into Soviet society. Like the self-castrating convicts, the pervasive pedophobia of "Pkhents" conveys the same anti-social/anti-socialist message: Fuck the (communist) child. Fuck the (radiant) future. After Edelman, we can answer Siniavskii's rhetorical question quite confidently: by doing damage to his reproductive organs, the anchor-dropper forecloses futurity in the sign of a radical negativity. He mounts a queer contestation with the political par excellence, shouting a paradoxically silent "fuck you" to the future, to the child, to an organ that is never fully his anyway, since it is always already conscripted to serve the state and the Party which alleges to act on his behalf to secure that future.

Extending our psychoanalytic analysis, we see that society is "phallocratic... inasmuch as social relationships as a whole are constructed according to a hierarchy which reveals the transcendence of the great signifier," the phallus. "[E]verything is organized according to a pyramidal mode," which places the phallus at its peak. "The body gathers round the phallus like society around the chief."¹²⁵ But the phallus only has

¹²⁴ Kim Hewitt, *Mutilating the Body: Identity in Blood and Ink* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1997), 58. Quoted in Jane Kilby, "Carved in Skin: Bearing Witness to Self Harm." In *Thinking Through the Skin*, edited by Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey (London, New York: Routledge, 2001):124-142, at 125.

¹²⁵ Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, translated by Daniella Dangoor (London: Allison, 1978), 82. The official culture was phallocratic as much as the dissident, it seems. "Unofficial culture was 'overtly phallocratic,' according to Tat'iana Mamonova," one of the most outspoken of the "Soviet dissident feminists in Leningrad who contested the hegemony of one or both of the 'establishment' dissident

power we imaginatively grant it, and the symbolic only keeps us in thrall so long as we submit to it, so long as we abide by the fantasy of singular futurity it impels. “The phallus remains empowering and empowered precisely because of its mythic quality—because it is deified and, despite its symbolization and discursivity, reified within the mythography of masculine power and centralization.”¹²⁶ The foremost way the phallus sustains itself as sign of the dominant fiction of a culture – the ‘reality’ produced by socialist realism here– [is by positing] an “exemplary masculinity to which the male subjects will not measure up.”¹²⁷ Having the Purpose means having a penis ever-perky for the master signifier, the Party-phallus; this purposeful penis is what makes one real in socialism, a socialist realist. The purposeful penis is the one that produces, that makes little purposeful (purpose-filled) pioneers to populate the radiant future.

Worshipping at the altar of the transcendent Phallus is not enough to ensure one a place in the social fantasy. Drawing on Lacan, Kaja Silverman explains that symbolic castration is the universal condition of entering into the social order, becoming an ‘I’ or a subject of the symbolic. “In acceding to language,” Silverman asserts, “the subject forfeits all existential reality, and forgoes any future possibility of ‘wholeness.’”¹²⁸ This was the fate of writers who submitted to laws governing the representation of Soviet reality in the hopes of publication, says Siniavskii— “[thousands of them had to be...] castrated—a task undertaken for several decades by the founders and stormy petrels of Soviet literature.”¹²⁹ Castration here is “[not] the physical absence of a penis, but as a precondition of subject formation and the individual’s entry into language (the symbolic order).”¹³⁰ The cost of entering the symbolic order, of attaining an ‘I’ is a question Siniavskii poses in unison with these queer psychoanalysts. Indeed, the quotation marks with which he surrounds the “I” and “They” in the paper’s title already throw the relationship of language to reality into immediate crisis, and marks subjectivity as a catachresis with high stakes. To willfully amputate that member produces ambivalent effects: on the one hand, such an act literalizes a commitment to a dominant social order, spectacularizes that cost, but so doing, undermines it, exposes the tacit violence around which the social order coalesces, its collective fiction, which perpetrates a violence so consummate that it can only be countered by a self-inflicted wound that strives to repossess the self for itself.

It is worth noting then, that Marchenko classifies these acts not as “self-eating” [*samoedstvo*] but as “self-harm” [*chlenovreditel'stvo*], a compound Russian word with

groups—the male-dominated world of unofficial culture in Leningrad and democratic dissidence.” Ann Komaromi, “Samizdat and Soviet Dissident Publics,” *Slavic Review* 71.1 (Spring 2012), pp. 70-90, at 86.

¹²⁶ Gregory W. Bredbeck, “B/O-Barthes’s Text/O’Hara’s Trick,” *PMLA* 108.2 (March 1993): 268-282, at 280.

¹²⁷ Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man Was Unmade* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh, 2008), 8-9.

¹²⁸ Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 4.

¹²⁹ Tertz, “The Literary Process in Russia,” 78-9. In order to write against this castration, writers, it seems, fashion a symbolic phallus for themselves out of samizdat. Thus, immediately after Sinyavsky makes this pronouncement about castration, he remarks on how, “when they discovered a woman of my acquaintance, going to Russia from the West, was carrying a copy of *Doctor Zhivago* in her suitcase, she was immediately put into a gynecological chair and subject to a medical examination to find out whether she might be carrying any more banned novels.” Though Sinyavsky stops here, the implication in the scope of this morphological argument is that, rather than being filled up with Soviet purpose, she has instead stuffed her most intimate ‘vault’ with anti-Soviet material.

¹³⁰ Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man was Unmade*, 8-9.

compound semantics in the destabilized symbolic system of the gulag, the first and most straightforward among them, harm done to one's own person, self-mutilation. Harming one's member also operates as an appropriate sexual innuendo, that is, harm done to one's penis by acts including but not limited to the anchor. Finally, within the collectivist symbolism of the Soviet Union, harming one's self also implies harming oneself as a member of the collective, and, concomitantly, harming the penis, frustrating the fulfillment of the future in the figure of the Child, harms the phallic logic that binds this collective together toward communism. Rejecting the law of the father, the 'anchorite' refuses to become a father himself.¹³¹ To recall Sholokhov's speech against Siniavskii and Daniel, "we are all members of one big family," [*Vse my—chleny odnoi ogromnoi sem'i*], and harm to one's own member marks one as the "freak" [*uroda*], the monster who raises a hand against his own mother and motherland.

Silverman lays this Lacanian groundwork in order to make the case for modes of masculinity that deviate from the "phallic standard," and pose "a tacit challenge not only to conventional male subjectivity, but to the whole of our 'world'," "[calling] sexual difference into question, and beyond that 'reality' itself."¹³² Leo Bersani sees the gay man through a similar lens, as "becoming a threat to the political status quo when he refuses masculine mastery, rejects relation altogether and settles for a 'non-suicidal disappearance of the subject.'"¹³³ Judith Butler sympathizes but goes still further in her reckoning with the symbolic by rejecting "the view that would posit the phallus as the primary or originary moment of desire, such that all desire either extends through identification or mimetic reflection of the paternal signifier." She advocates instead "efforts to disseminate the phallus" as a form of "subversive resignification."¹³⁴ Indeed there is no inevitability in the phallus serving as master signifier, just as there is no necessity to the configuration of the social order as it is, organized around this phallus that slips too easily into synonymy with the penis.

The inarticulable logic of the anchor performs this radical decoupling of the penis from the phallus. Literal castration is phallic divestiture in a tragic key. Symbolic castration actualized, such a gesture argues--if the link between the phallus and the penis enable *this* reality, I want neither of them. I opt out of the social order this sign authorizes in the name of reality and futurity. A disfiguration that figures that deliberate departure as a form of canny resistance, the anchor is an "assault on the apparatus of figuration,"¹³⁵ like the negative queer tactics Edelman has in mind, a way of "[doing] violence to the primary violence that deprives me of my body, the violence of representation, naming,

¹³¹ See Aspasia Stephanou, "Baptism of Blood: Bodies Performing for the Law," *Journal for Cultural Research* 15.4 (October 2011), pp. 409-426. For Renata Salecl, "these masochistic rituals are examples of père-version, evidence of a veering towards the father. Through the staging and imitation of castration rituals, the perverts "mock castration. At the same time this very staging is also an attempt to find a law which would complete castration." Such attempts towards the father demonstrate an appeal to the symbolic authority that has been impeached by the postmodern assault on paternal authorities." Salecl, "Cut in the Body: From Clitoriodectomy to Body Art." In *Thinking through the Skin*, edited by Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey (London: Routledge, 2001), 21-35, at 31.

¹³² Silverman, *Male Subjectivity*, 3.

¹³³ Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 99; Halberstam, *Queer Art*, 150. Bersani's unmaking amounts to a "willingness to be penetrated" (151).

¹³⁴ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 136.

¹³⁵ Steven Connor, "Mortification." In *Thinking through the Skin*, edited by Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey (London: Routledge, 2001): 36-51, at 45.

abstraction, the alienation of the body into significance.”¹³⁶ The state authors these acts, in effect, though the convict’s hand carries them out on himself. “Although socially silent, self-harm appears here as a language that articulates past trauma by repeating it in the present of pain...speaking the past by re-enacting it with a difference: matching pain for trauma.”¹³⁷ It is thus a form of overidentifying the body with the founding violence of its symbolic interpellation, an extreme or aggressive mimesis that turns realism into its grotesque antithesis, by taking symbolic castration too literally, forcing the Law to honor its own letter. At the same time, self-harm has resistant implications as “a project of re-articulating, if not disrupting, these processes of [political] animation [...that] reworks the conditions of possibility for the subject at the limits of language.”¹³⁸

In this schema, the anchor manifests in the most painful and literal way the traumatic cost of subjection; inclusion in the phallographic symbolic is always a masochistic act. But acts of spectacular castration, masochistic performances of emasculation, are symbolically subversive; they represent “the attempt to deconstruct the very notion of identity that oedipalization tries to render inflexible.”¹³⁹ The anchor undoes the connection between “language and phallic power” that the subject’s entrance into the oedipalized symbolic necessitate.¹⁴⁰ Masochism is a “demonstration [that] allows for a deconstructive critique of social institutions that perpetuate masochism in everyday life,” especially domesticity, with heterosexuality as its organizational form, “foundational—heterosexual partnership, which is presumed to be the basis of all domestic scenarios,” the “institution, after which most social institutions are patterned.”¹⁴¹

The anchor-nailing gulag inmates of Siniavskii’s essay are not unlike Bob Flanagan, the late-twentieth-century American supermasochist performer with cystic fibrosis who became famous as “that guy who nailed his penis to a board,”¹⁴²—they both “put into play the multifaceted message ‘fuck the future.’”¹⁴³ According to queer-crip theorist Robert McRuer, Flanagan’s BDSM performances stage a perverse overidentification with the metaphorical identity imputed to his sick body, in which the physical sickness of cystic fibrosis is collapsed into the moral malady of his sadomasochism. McRuer mobilizes Flanagan to figure ‘the transgressive’ aesthetic of bodily difference which disrupts the social order and unsettles the rhetoric of realism upon which it rests, as a normalizing strategy of political economy. But this disruption of realism and the social order it circumscribes is at once hurtful (pleasantly so, says the masochist), and hopeful; it makes conceivable a more capacious version of livability down the line for others. Predicts McRuer, “in a moment of danger and noncompliance,

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Kilby, “Carved in Skin,” 125.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 127.

¹³⁹ Kathy O’Dell, *Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art, and the 1970s* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 36.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 35.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 42.

¹⁴² Carrie Sandahl, “Bob Flanagan: Taking It Like A Man.” *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 15.1 (2000): 97-103, at 97. For a sympathetically queer-crip interpretation of Flanagan’s anchor, see Kateřina Kolářová, “Performing the Pain: Opening the (Crip) Body for (Queer) Pleasures.” *Review of Disability Studies. International Journal*. 6. 3. (2010): 44-52.

¹⁴³ Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 183.

however, ‘some future person’ or collectivity might detect in [Flanagan’s] sick message the seemingly incomprehensible way to survive, and survive well, at the margins of time, space, and representation (they might, in fact, detect that surviving well can paradoxically mean surviving sick).”¹⁴⁴ This seeming incomprehensibility is essential, for masochism resists interpretive mastery, flinging onlookers into a “[frantic] search for any easy explanation that will allow them to have no part in it.”¹⁴⁵

Halberstam, another queer anti-futurist, has attended to this masochistic conundrum regarding the illegibility of real political refusal, of the refusal of the real that symbolic politics consecrate. In her most recent book on queer failure, Halberstam “advocate[s the] complete dismantling of self” in its consummate materiality, among those politically misconstrued actors she calls “shadow feminists,” whose self-eating gestures “issue not from a doing but from an undoing” grounded in “negation, refusal, passivity, absence, and silence.” “Speak[ing] in a language of self-destruction, masochism, and antisocial femininity,” these shadowy figures refuse to “[reproduce relationships] to patriarchal forms of power,” such as those that support states like the socialist one now under consideration.¹⁴⁶ But the ineffable nature of these “quiet masochistic gestures,” the “smashing” and “cutting gestures” she collects, makes Halberstam wonder whether it is even possible to apprehend bodily “politics that [exceed] the social conditions of [their] enunciation.” Emanating from the limit of logic, she queries if one can “think of this refusal of self as an antiliberal act, a revolutionary statement of pure opposition that does not rely upon the liberal gesture of defiance but accesses another lexicon of power and speaks another language of refusal?”¹⁴⁷ This is the question that dogs Siniavskii during his conference presentation, and that continues to hover over the critical interpretations of this piece, which must humanize the self-eater or silent refusenik in the narrowest of (liberal humanist) terms. But “by operating on his own body, the [self-harmer...] refuses humanism’s contract...”¹⁴⁸

Though isolated acts of self-mutilation stud Marchenko’s memoirs throughout, he devotes a special eponymous chapter to this theme, in which he tells “one out of a number of similar stories,” as Siniavskii declares in his own essay, “from which it differs only in its originality” [*ot drugikh ona otlichaetsia razve chto izobretatel’nost’iu*]. In this sense, Marchenko stitches in the thread of style, of personal imprimatur or uniqueness, which Siniavskii picks up in his essay. In the question of uniqueness Marchenko embeds a notion of artistry or aesthetics, of some surplus to the act that Siniavskii places at the center of his essay, an embroidery upon Marchenko’s theme. This is crucial because it intimates the limits of translating such antisymbolic acts into coherent language. Marchenko, like Halberstam, brushes up against the boundaries of his own access to unreality.

One of my cellmates, Sergei K., was driven to such total desperation by the futility of any kind of protest against starvation, abuses of power, and injustice, that he decided that, no matter what it took, he would maim himself. He got a

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ O’Dell, *Contract with the Skin*, 77.

¹⁴⁶ Halberstam, *Queer Art*, 124.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 139.

¹⁴⁸ Hewitt, *Mutilating the Body*, 106.

hold of some pieces of pipe somewhere, fashioned them into a hook, and fastened them to some wood (he tied them together with thread from his unraveled socks). A bit earlier he came by a pair of nails, which he hid in his pocket during searches. One nail, the smaller of the two, he beat with a tureen into a food bowl—he beat it in very quietly, trying not to clank it, so that the wardens wouldn’t hear. With this nail he attached the wood to the hook...[The other cellmates] bustled around Sergei, but there was nothing for them to do: the nail was deeply embedded in the bench, and Sergei was just sitting there in his birthday suit nailed down by the balls.

Один из моих сокамерников, Сергей К., доведенный до совершенного отчаяния безнадежностью любых протестов против голода, произвола, несправедливости, решил во что бы то ни стало изувечить себя. Он подобрал где-то кусочек проволоки, сделал из нее крючок и привязал к нему леску (сплел ее из ниток, распустив свои носки). Еще раньше он принес два гвоздя и прятал их в кармане от обысков. Один гвоздь, поменьше, он вдавил миской в кормушку — вдавил тихо-тихо, стараясь не звякнуть, чтобы не услышали надзиратели. К этому гвоздю он привязал леску с крючком...Они засуетились вокруг Сергея, но ничего не могли поделать: гвоздь глубоко засел в скамейке, а Сергей так и сидел, в чем мать родила, пригвожденный за мошонку.

Marchenko emphasizes not only how the singularity of this act confers an irreducibility on its actor, the memoirist and fellow inmate also stresses his role as one of bearing witness: the unique event “happened right before my eyes in the spring of 1963...we, the rest of the cons in the cell, watched him in silence. I don’t know who was feeling what while this was going on, but to interfere, as I have already said, is out of the question: every man has the right to dispose of himself and his life in any way he wants to.”¹⁴⁹

THE BARE LIFE OF ‘LIVING LETTERS’: FACIAL TATTOOS IN THE CAMP

*Мы не рабы, рабы немые.
We are not slaves, slaves are mute.*¹⁵⁰

*“No, you are slaves! Slaves! Your behavior shows it.”
—Nikita Khrushchev, March 1963*¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Marchenko, *My Testimony*, 140; in Russian: “Мы, остальные заключенные в камере, молча наблюдали за ним — не знаю, кто и какие чувства при этом испытывал, но вмешиваться, я уже говорил, не полагается, каждый вправе распорядиться собой и своей жизнью, как он хочет.”

¹⁵⁰ The phrase is taken from the first Soviet abecedarius, “Down with illiteracy: An alphabet book for adults” (1919); quoted by Konstantin Bogdanov, “Glukhonemota: Utopiia spaseniia,” in *Russkie utopii*. V.E. Bagno, ed. (SPb: Kanun, 1995): 238-280, at 242. It becomes significant again to the argument advanced in Chapter Two of this dissertation, when I take the idea of slavery more at its historical word.

¹⁵¹ Khrushchev berates the “beatnik” poet Andrei Voznesensky with these words at a meeting of young artists in the Kremlin in March 1963, quoted in Vladimir Zubok, *Zhivago’s Children: the Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2009), 214.

In addition to these artistic spectacles of the kind with the fly and the anchor, Siniavskii offers “other, more, let us say, conscious [soznatel’nye], intellectual forms of graphic agitation,” which “consist in a person needling into his forehead anti-state inscriptions, e.g. ‘Slave of the CPSU [Rab KPSS],’ ‘Slave of the KGB,’ ‘Slave of Khrushchev’ (such inscriptions circulated during Khrushchev’s time).”¹⁵² Already, by calling these agitations “conscious” [soznatel’nye], Siniavskii toys with the operative terms of the master discourse, invoking the movement from revolutionary spontaneity to political consciousness [stikhiinost’ to soznatel’nost’] performed by the positive hero of the socialist realist novel.¹⁵³ So doing, he has, with a wink, introduced these socialist outcasts into the Soviet symbolic at its very center, as its most achieved actors, in direct conversation with the leader, the Law, the Communist Father. But, Khrushchev, he explains,

in response to these *attempts to speak point blank with him*, issued a *secret* order to execute these writers with neither trial nor investigation. The state simply did not know what more to do with them, with these people, who had turned themselves into proclamations, indelible and unvanishing on their foreheads, on their brows, the furious speech of human to humankind.

Хрущев, говорят, в ответ на эти попытки объясниться с ним напрямки отдал секретный приказ подобных писателей без суда и следствия расстреливать. Не знаю насчет приказа, но знаю, что людей, которые вытатуировали на своем лице эти *живые письма*, - расстреляли. Государство просто не знало, что делать дальше с ними, с этими людьми, обратившими себя в несмыслимую прокламацию, в незатухающую на лбу, на челе, яростную речь человека к человечеству.

(One is reminded of Khrushchev at the exhibition of abstract art on Manege Square. “Since Khrushchev had never seen abstract art, he thought he was looking at unfinished works. ‘Where are the human faces’ he asked in confusion. He was told that abstractionists hate the faces of our Soviet people.”¹⁵⁴) Such non-representational and nonrepresentable subjects are socialist signification incarnate, living letters [*zhivyye*

¹⁵² Marchenko, *My Testimony*, 94. “The most common of all, tattooed in big letters across the forehead, was: ‘Khrushchev’s slave’ or ‘Slave of the CPSU’ (Communist Party of the Soviet Union). (“Другие, более, так сказать, сознательные, интеллектуальные формы наглядной агитации состоят в том, что человек накалывает себе на лоб антигосударственную надпись, вроде: «Раб КПСС», «Раб КГБ», «Раб Хрущева» (подобные надписи имели хождение во времена Хрущева)”. . . Позднее я встречал очень много эзков с подобными изречениями, наколотыми на лицах. Чаще всего крупными буквами через весь лоб. «Раб Хрущева», «Раб КПСС».

¹⁵³ Katerina Clark describes this movement in *The Soviet Novel*. Because, to reiterate, socialist ontology recapitulates phylogeny, the Soviet man, under achieved socialism, would have effected this transition at this stage in historical development. Society as a whole remained spontaneous in the years of revolutionary and civil struggle, but not afterward, not once Stalin pronounced the period of socialist building completed in 1936. This was all the more true once Khrushchev announced that the Soviet Union was enjoying not just socialism, but communism in its initial stage of construction.

¹⁵⁴ Yevgeny Yevtushenko, “Introduction,” Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. Trans. Ralph Parker (New York: Penguin, 1998), xvi.

pis'mena], monstrous confluences of the material with the message, addressed to the state from its many extremes—symbolic, social and often, in the case of the gulag archipelago, geographic.

Their tattoos make a mock appeal to the Party, however protestant or provisional, for entry into the Soviet symbolic, by mimicking the forms through which *realist* socialist subjects take shape. In *What is Socialist Realism* Siniavskii envisions the performative process by which the positive hero produces and re-produces socialism by endlessly citing the Purpose, rendering him constitutionally incapable of any kind of negativity, no matter how extreme the circumstances he faces are. The positive hero's "positive traits," those signifiers of the supreme Purpose, "are written on his forehead and resound in every word" he utters.¹⁵⁵ [*Ni pri kakikh usloviakh, dazhe dlia pol'zy dela, polozhiten'yi geroi ne smee kazat'sia otritsatel'nym...oni [polozhitenye svoistva] napisany u nego na lbu i zvuchat v kazhdom slove.*] Herein "the skin is assumed to be a sign of the subject's interiority," as well as a [reflection of] the truth of the other [that gives] us access to the other's being,"¹⁵⁶ an effortless spectacle in the case of the prescriptively unconflicted positive hero. By spelling out their negativity on their foreheads and letting it be heard not in every word but in the absence of their speech, these tattoo artists hyperbolically mime the homology between form and content, surface and depth, by which positive socialist subjectivity is produced. In effect, they stage the grotesque literalization of a master discourse that demands the collapse of ideological interiority into its external traces, but they do so from the 'dark side' of the socialist social order, and so doing invert that decisive symbolic order between form and content.¹⁵⁷ Whereas in the first, positive/realist instance, form is a function of transcendent content, in the second, negative/unreal case, content is particularized and subsumed into form.

Thus, to express their sense of being at odds with Soviet power [*sovetskaia vlast'*], or being odd within it, these tattoo artists overidentified with it to hinder socialist "power [from reproducing] itself," or, to get queer about it, to halt socialist reproductive futurity. As Slavoj Žižek defines such styles of subtle and sublated protest, "overidentifying with the explicit power discourse...taking power discourse at its (public) word, acting as if it really means what it explicitly says (and promises)—can be the most effective way of disturbing its smooth functioning."¹⁵⁸ Overidentification of both comic and necrotic (or necrorealist) varieties that exploited the regime's excessive veneration of form proved especially effective under late socialism, according to anthropologists Alexei Yurchak and Dominic Boyer. "Faced with the fact that authoritative discourse was already constantly over-formalizing itself to the point of caricature, overidentification sent a more potent critical signal (one articulated in the language of form itself) than any revelatory

¹⁵⁵ Tertz, *Socialist Realism*.

¹⁵⁶ Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey, eds. *Thinking through the Skin* (London: Routledge, 2001).

¹⁵⁷ The relationship between form and content was explicitly central to socialist realist doctrine as it mapped onto the different territories of the USSR, wherein socialist realism was "national in form, socialist in content." This aesthetic slogan meant that form was potentially mutable but content remained constant and transcendent. Such a logic at its barest underwrites the scene I describe above, in which a focus on form particularizes a content that otherwise alleges itself to be universal and unchanging.

¹⁵⁸ Žižek in Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony and Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (New York, 2000), 218, 220 (emphasis in the original).

exposé or gesture of ironic diminishment could have.”¹⁵⁹ By contouring their acts to the match the “[form of] authoritative discourse,”¹⁶⁰ these agents of overidentification made their protests harder to apprehend as such, especially in contrast with the dissident movement’s obvious mimeticism or “overt form of oppositional discourse,”¹⁶¹ which could be “easily identified and isolated by the [Soviet] state” for the sake of “discipline.”¹⁶² Often unrecognizable within the regime as self-conscious expressions of political dissatisfaction, these acts and their enactors also went unseen outside of the Soviet Union, by the humanist political bodies whose self-stated objective was to record egregious violations of human rights by official institutions like the gulag and *psikhushka* of the sort that drove Soviet citizens to desperate extremes like these. *These (un) people showed just how crazy and criminal they were, and demonstrated how much they deserved to be locked up. This is state mimesis gone mad...*

In this way, tattooed blatari overidentify with the process of positive subjection in the socialist (realist) order, that is, the one that occasions their negative location. At the same time, they overidentify with the process of their negative abjection in these instances of “performative self-stigmatization,” in which the actor embodies the unspoken terms on which he enters the social order by conscripting “the body [to announce these] invisible” conditions while “the wearer remains vocally silent”¹⁶³ (not unlike gay men living with HIV/AIDS in America during the 1980s and 1990s, who used facial tattoos to sear their abject seropositive status on their faces).¹⁶⁴ Self-stigmatizing a-socialites single *themselves* out twice over, this second time, by their own hand and not the hand of the state (as certain tattoos literally depict). Mortification thus recapitulates and represents the violence of the state; it materializes “the violent touch of the law, which demands to be written directly on the body, rather than merely being applied to it...”¹⁶⁵ But if, according to Jay Prosser, stigmatization “begins catachrestically on the surface of the body... literalising on the body and signifying in the symbolic, the subject’s social difference,” connecting “cutaneous referent and social sign,” then “this catachresis [can be] reversed when skin-disordered subjects write out their skin in autobiographies,” what Prosser names ‘dermographia’ or ‘skin autobiographies,’ into which we might also insert these self-abjecting tattoos.¹⁶⁶

¹⁵⁹ Alexei Yurchak and Dominic Boyer, “American Stib: Or, what late-socialist aesthetics of parody reveal about contemporary political culture in the West,” *Cultural Anthropology*, v. 25, n. 2, May 2010.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Dan Brouwer, “The Precarious Visibility Politics of Self-Stigmatization: The Case of HIV/AIDS Tattoos,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 18 (1998), 114-136, at 115. In response to William F. Buckley’s policy proposal of 1986 that people with HIV/AIDS have their seropositive status visibly branded on their bodies, queer activists took up his gauntlet and got tattoos on themselves: the words “HIV” or “HIV positive,” the biohazard symbol, the Nazi pink triangle for homosexual, and the ACT-UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) slogan “Silence = Death.”

¹⁶⁴ These self-stigmatizing tattoos by Soviet slave labor link up with a longer history of stigma in the West, as Erving Goffman describes: “signs were cut or burnt into the body and advertised that the bearer was a slave, a criminal, or a traitor—a blemished person, ritually polluted, to be avoided.” Erving Goffman, *Stigma; Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 11.

¹⁶⁵ Connor, “Mortification,” 36-51.

¹⁶⁶ Jay Prosser, “Skin Memories,” In *Thinking Through the Skin*, edited by Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey (London, New York: Routledge, 2001): 53-68, at 55; 57-8.

This style of state mimicry is aggressive, not unlike the anchor, but even more and exceedingly so. The anchor speaks in a private language, as an autotelic, finite form of self-inflicted violence, a last stab at communication with the state that does not require the state's response. The facial tattoo, on the other hand, spells out the collective fiction in the state's own language, flaunting its founding paradox at the site of its ideological suture: if communism freed workers from wage slavery, then who are these slaves of the socialist state? If communism aspires to universality, expanding its definition of the universal human, then who are these subhuman subjects within the Soviet Union's own borders? To paraphrase Tertz of *Socialist Realism*, if the Party wanted prisons to vanish forever, why did it build more prisons? If it wanted work to become a rest and a pleasure, why did it introduce forced labor? If it did not want one more drop of blood to be shed, why did it kill and kill and kill? And to leave Siniavskii the last word from his own "last word" at trial, "I do not see why enemies have to be invented, why monsters have to be piled on monsters..."¹⁶⁷ This is precisely what happened to these necessary monsters of the socialist system: already consigned to bare life, but now baring the device of this political ban, they had to disappear. To reiterate Siniavskii's framing question about practitioners of *samoedstvo*, these "non-people, driven by the system to this animal existence": "What is there to do with them? Must they be annihilated again? Isolated anew?!" (241). The actions of Khrushchev suggests that, yes, they must, especially since the socialist abject, like the positive hero, is fated to be reproduced over and over again in tandem with the social order. And so, Siniavskii laments, "a secret order was read at the special regime camps to shoot all the tattooists of this sort, who came, as a rule, from that element of criminals who despaired at their freedom upon release from the camp." Though, "surprisingly," before the trend went into decline, "the execution of these first 'signatories' [*podpisantov*] initially elicited a new wave of equally criminal signatures in response."¹⁶⁸

The fate of these resilient resisters, who recurrently in-corporate the cost of the collective fiction in their own bodies, strikes a blow to Siniavskii's gut: "What I am recounting is infinitely sad" [*To, o chem ia zdes' rasskazyvaiu, beskonechno pechal'no*], he says, punctuating the paper with pathos, and carving out a "gumannoe mesto," or "humane place," for those who have carved out all the "zhivoe mesto," or "living place," on their faces. By speaking of the *gumannoe mesto* here, I mean to bring into play Boris Eikhenbaum's formalist interpretation of Nikolai Gogol's "The Overcoat" [*Kak sdelana shinel' Gogolia*, 1919]. In his essay, Eikhenbaum discerns a special second of plain-spoken humanism in an otherwise surreal and highly stylized story about Akakii Akakievich Bashmachkin, the scatological copy clerk who demands that his daily tormentors recognize the humanity he shares with them. In this rare moment of desperation, Akakii cries out, "I am your brother" [*Ia brat tvoi*]. Against the regnant, ethical reading of this scene, Eikhenbaum "sees neither human tragedy nor social protest but instead the folksy stylistic footprint that Russians call *skaz*"; in other words, not ethos

¹⁶⁷ Siniavskii, "Final Plea," in *On Trial*, 147-148

¹⁶⁸ "Тайный приказ о расстреле всех подобных татуировщиков, комплектовавшихся, как правило, из среды отчаявшихся в свободе, в выходе на волю уголовников, был зачитан по спецлагерям."

or politics but style alone, and a degraded form of speech to boot.¹⁶⁹ Eikhenbaum thus reroutes the humanist desire for a universal condition through particularizing form: as it turns out, the humane place [*gumannoe mesto*] is not the human place [*chelovecheskoe mesto*] after all. By folding Siniavskii's feelings into this formalist analysis, I cast no aspersions on the sincerity with which he affirms the Akakiesque appeals of these prisoners in their silent "human speech to humankind" [*rech' cheloveka k chelovechestvu*]. Rather I intend to underscore Siniavskii's own point about the non-identity between the formal category of the "human"--that abstract figure of (socialist) humanism who is formed through and then filled with Purpose--and the actual, embodied human, who fits no ready form, as "Pkhents'"s protagonist protests.

'THE COMMUNISTS ARE BUTCHERS': INDIVIDUAL INSCRIPTIONS AND STATE EXCISIONS

Siniavskii culled these and other examples of bodily protest by criminal prisoners from the gulag memoirs of Anatolii Marchenko, *My Testimony* [*Moi pokazaniia*, 1969] which offers abundant examples of tattooing, most often in the prison convoy and transit prisons, in the special regime camp and the cooler. These are spaces on (and in) which Solzhenitsyn dislikes dwelling. Why bother stopping his narration at the transit prison, he wonders--it is boring, senseless and full of halfbreeds. He starts his chapter on the convoys in this reluctant key.

Just as all transit prisons are pointless, talk about transit prisons is pointless, and, in all probability, this chapter, too, will turn out to be the same: one doesn't know what to take hold of first, what particular thing to talk about, what to lead off with. And the more people that are crowded into transit prisons, the more pointless it all becomes... But here I note that I am again beginning to repeat myself. And this will be boring to write, and boring to read, because the reader already knows everything that is going to happen ahead of time...¹⁷⁰

But while Solzhenitsyn is bored before he even begins with the transit prison, regarding it as but a busy and insensible backdrop for boilerplate, Marchenko beholds a location rife with opportunities for creative criminals. As if playing the part of transit-prison warder, Marchenko "check[s] for any inscriptions on the walls. During the whole of this time [in the convoy] the prisoners all have to stand with their caps off," as the skin on their bodies needs inspection along with the walls, since both surfaces lend themselves readily to illicit inscription.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Caryl Emerson, "Literary Theory in the 1920s: Four Options and a Practicum," in *A History of Russian Literary Theory and Criticism: The Soviet Age and Beyond*. Eds. Evgeny Dobrenko, Galin Tihanov (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011): 64-89, at 83.

¹⁷⁰ Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Gulag Archipelago*, 538. "Но вот я замечаю, что сейчас начну повторяться, что скучно будет писать и скучно будет читать, потому что читатель уже знает все наперед."

¹⁷¹ Marchenko, *My Testimony*, 67. On the subject of wall inscriptions, Carrie Noland places her bet on graffiti as a form of agentic gesture or bodily resistance; "kinesthetic experience" like this, "produced by acts of embodied gesturing, places pressure on the conditioning a body receives, encouraging variations in performance that account for larger innovations in cultural practice that cannot otherwise be explained." Carrie Noland. *Agency and Embodiment: Performing Gestures/Producing Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 2-3.

Marchenko is so bewitched by these tattoos, that he even provides tentative rationales as to why *blatari* undertake these acts, at once imaginative and unimaginable. Surprisingly, however, Siniavskii drains Marchenko's anecdotes of their complex irony and irreverent wit as he transplants them into his conference paper—an emotional extraction that seems tonally at odds with his oeuvre, which is nothing if not irreverent and ironic (a detail that will cycle back into significance in this argument). Per Marchenko, the “[con] in the cooler and the prison” resorts to writing indelibly on his own body for two related reasons. The first is somewhat strategic, if also a malignant metastasis of Soviet bureaucracy. Hoping to secure a transfer to a different camp, the “criminal con” quickly finds his official written complaints prove ineffectual.¹⁷² In short, he lacks the capacity to communicate with the state through its conventional language on paper, so he resorts to another writing surface: his body. Formal language in its usual aspect fails to reshape his material reality, so the convict moves his speech off the paper to his person.

Marchenko puts forth a second, ethnographic explanation: the tattooed prisoner “has brought his own forms of protest with him from the underworld, together with its customs and point of view.”¹⁷³ Such an explanation is, of course, no explanation at all. Rather than attempting to understand the motivations of the criminal's monstrous actions, these actions are referred back to a criminal ontology that remains forever off-limits to ‘normal’ logic. Marchenko's passing remark here re-marks the common criminal with the indelible stain of his abjection from the ‘normal’ social order. Made of needle, boot, urine and ash, and applied in a process Marchenko rather intricately recounts,¹⁷⁴ the tattoo itself visually confirms that abjection a second time, transmuting it from merely symbolic to material and enfolded.

In linking the common criminals' inexplicability with their social excrescence, Marchenko, untattooed himself, speaks here as an “unmarked subject,” a position of enunciation that “represents itself as the universal and unmarked standard, a ubiquitous norm from which all else and all others are viewed as a regrettable deviation.”¹⁷⁵ For a moment in the memoirs, though, Marchenko is able to imaginatively exceed his position in the symbolic order, and understand affectively if not rationally the act that deviates from it. Indeed, such an identification with abjection, by its very definition, cannot be comprehended by the social order that establishes itself through this exclusion. To accomplish this, Marchenko must sympathize with the plight of the eternal prisoner, a psychic task he undertakes through not-so-seamless dialogism.

But it wasn't the technique so much as the very idea of such activity that astonished me. What did these unfortunates want? Why and to what end did they

¹⁷² Marchenko, *My Testimony*, 91.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ The process of tattooing itself, and all the more, the requisite materials, confirm the abject status of the camp's criminal underworld, whose members (no pun intended) Marchenko describes through the eyes of a dispassionate ethnographer. “But how do cons in the cooler and in prison contrive to tattoo themselves? How do they get the needles and ink? I have often seen it done, both in special regime camps, in transit camps and in Vladimir prison. They take a nail out of their boots or pick up a scrap of wire in the exercise yard, sharpen it on a stone—and there's your needle. Then to make the ink they set fire to a piece of the black rubber sole from their boots and mix the ash with urine” (Marchenko, *My Testimony*, 94).

¹⁷⁵ Eng, *Racial Castration*, 138.

deform themselves for life? For to do that meant to brand yourself forever, to brand your whole life, it meant you felt yourself to be, in the words of the song, ‘an eternal convict,’ if you disfigured your face in such a way. Or, say, cut off an ear. Why? But sometimes, in moments of helpless despair, I too caught myself thinking: my God, if only I could do something—hurl a piece of my body into the faces of my torturers! Why? At such moments the question doesn’t arise.¹⁷⁶

Но гораздо больше, чем техника, меня поражала сама идея такого деяния. Чего хотят эти несчастные? Зачем, ради чего уродуют себя на всю жизнь? Ведь это надо навсегда поставить крест на себе, на своей жизни, почувствовать себя, как поется в песне, «навечным арестантом», чтобы обезобразить свое лицо. Или вот ухо отрезал. Зачем? Но иногда, в минуты бессильного отчаяния, я и сам ловил себя на мысли: ах, сделать бы что-нибудь! Кинуть бы в лицо мучителям кусок своего тела! Зачем? — Об этом в такие минуты не спрашиваешь.

Extracting himself indefinitely from the social (ist) order Marchenko knew outside of the zone, which formed and continues to form his ‘non-criminal’ identity within it, these unimaginable acts suddenly seem imaginable, and not by another person, but by a penumbral version of himself. Of course, his identification with abjection is incomplete, a half-gesture: beginning with ‘distantiating’ language (“these unfortunates,” among which he does *not* number), he approaches an attenuated identification “in moments of helpless despair,” but Marchenko ultimately draws back from this hypothetical scene, as its author but not its actor. And while the inexplicable acts he enumerates now peek out at the edge of recognition, they nevertheless remain beyond the pale of articulation, and are preserved in the text as silent prompts from abject, unspeaking subjects, to a series of unanswerable questions posed back at them from within the symbolic order that excludes them: “What did these unfortunates want? Why and to what end did they deform themselves for life?...Why?...Why?”¹⁷⁷ In other words, *what did they mean to say by all that?*

To answer his own question, Marchenko give us Mus and Mazai, a pair of homosexual [*pederasty*] criminal cons whose sentences have been extended as ‘political.’ On their foreheads and cheeks were tattooed the phrases, “‘Communists are butchers,’¹⁷⁸ and “‘Communists drink the blood of the people.’” [*Kommunisty – palachi*”,

¹⁷⁶ Marchenko, *My Testimony* 94. And in the preface, he makes a similar admission. “When I was locked up in Vladimir Prison I was often seized by despair. Hunger, illness, and above all helplessness, the sheer impossibility of struggling against evil, provoked me to the point where I was ready to hurl myself upon my jailers with the sole aim of being killed. Or to put an end to myself in some other way. Or to maim myself as I had seen others do” (1).

¹⁷⁷ Along a similar line of questioning, Renata Salecl sees in practices of self-mutilation that “cut the skin [different] answers to the same question: ‘What is the place of the subject in contemporary society?’” “How does the subject identify with the symbolic order, what is “its relation to the so-called big Other, that is, the symbolic structure?” She sees in practically equivalent postmodern practices in the West “an attempt to make the skin the locus of the real...in Lacanian terms,” to point to some place outside the symbolic Salecl, “Cut in the Body,” 10; 21.

¹⁷⁸ In *The Trial Begins*, Tertz makes an indirect analogy between Stalin and “a butcher hacking at carcasses and chopping ice” (23). “Но здесь, вблизи, это был мясник, что рубит туши и колет лед, выхаркивая с каждым ударом отрывистое густое дыханье.”

“*Kommunisty p’iut krov’ naroda*”.] Later [Marchenkos meets] many zeks with similar inscriptions tattooed on their faces, most often in big letters across the forehead. Slave of Khrushchev,’ ‘Slave of the CPSU.’” [‘*Rab Khrushcheva*’, ‘*Rab KPSS*’.]¹⁷⁹ By recording the symbolic violence of the state on that most human locus, the face, these tattoos are acts of absolute mimesis, total identifications of the abject body with its symbolic banishing. The fact that they are accomplished on the skin is significant, since the “the skin border is already rendered animate by social and political discourses,” such that inscribing a counter-discourse on that same surface transforms it into “a project of re-articulating, if not disrupting, these processes of animation.”¹⁸⁰

Thus, beyond the primary potency of the tattoo as protest in the literal sense, in the very anti-Soviet statement of the tattoo itself; and secondarily, as reappropriations by the prisoner of the pain that is otherwise inflicted by the state; these facial inscriptions introduced a third form of subverting the state authority, this one the most violent in its effects. When the state comes face-to-face with these rebellious faces, it finds itself forced to respond in kind, literally, to the silent charges of its figurative butchering by actually butchering its accusers. In fact, it was common practice, well-documented in camp literature, to hack off the inked skin on the faces of these tattooed unpeople in primitive procedures that left the skin meaty and raw. Marchenko recalls, such crude “operations for the extirpation of tattoos,” especially the case of one

con who had been operated on three times. . . . The first time they cut out a strip of skin from his forehead with the usual sort of inscription in such cases: “Khrushchev’s Slave.” The skin was then cobbled back together with rough stitches. He was released and again tattooed his forehead: “Slave of the USSR.” Again he was taken to the hospital and operated on. And again, for a third time, he covered his whole forehead with “Slave of the CPSU.” This tattoo was also cut out at the hospital and now, after three operations, the skin was so tightly stretched across his forehead that he could no longer close his eyes. We called him “The Stare” (or Always-Watching).¹⁸¹

одного зэка, которого трижды оперировали таким образом. В первый раз вырезали со лба полоску с обычной для таких случаев надписью: «Раб Хрущева». Кожу на лбу стянули грубым швом. Когда зажило, он снова наколол на лбу: «Раб СССР». Снова положили в больницу, снова сделали операцию. Кожа у него на лбу была так стянута, что он не мог закрывать глаза, мы его называли «всегдасмотрящим»...

In this scene, the power differential between the state and its prisoners, while apparently intact and even reinforced, actually shifts ever so slightly in the favor of the latter. To the accusations that they are butchers, Khrushchev, the Party, the Soviet Union--the Purpose

¹⁷⁹ Marchenko, *My Testimony*, 94. Я увидел двух бывших уголовников, ныне политических, одного по кличке Муса, другой — Мазай. У них на лбу, на щеках было вытатуировано: «Коммунисты — палачи», «Коммунисты пьют кровь народа». Позднее я встречал очень много зэков с подобными изречениями, наколотыми на лицах. Чаще всего крупными буквами через весь лоб. «Раб Хрущева», «Раб КПСС».

¹⁸⁰ Kilby, “Carved in Skin,” 127.

¹⁸¹ Marchenko, *My Testimony*, 142-3 (slightly modified translation).

in its manifold embodied forms--butcher their accusers, adding a second round of material violence to the figurative forms to which the prisoners are already subjected. Their tattooed charges incite the guards to make manifest the power with which the state and the Soviet symbolic order has vested in them; they must match actual with symbolic force. So doing, these emissaries of the state visibly corroborate the unspeakable truths contained in the criminal inscriptions. And further, by validating the reality that these unreal subjects experience, the camp authorities momentarily shine a light on the existence of another darker set of truths, that defract the rays of the single 'radiant' one of collective fantasy. From their shadowy perches at the furthest outposts of the symbolic, these resistant subjects stare back, are in fact "always staring," matching the oppressive panopticism of the state with their own insolent gazes—the surveyor becomes the surveyed.¹⁸²

Marchenko encounters the most extreme case of criminal self-inscription in the special regime camp. There he meets Nikolai Shcherbakov, whose radical appearance nearly causes the young prisoner to collapse from shock. "There wasn't a blank"—literally, "living"—"place on his whole face" [*Na ego litse ne bylo zhivogo mesta*]. Nikolai plasters his skin all over with slogans of protest for all to read.

On one cheek he had 'Lenin was a butcher' and on the other it continued: 'Millions are suffering because of him.' Under his eyes was 'Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Voroshilov¹⁸³ are butchers.' On his pale, skinny neck a hand had been tattooed in black ink. It was gripping his throat and on the back of the hand were the letters CPSU, while the middle finger, ending on his Adam's apple, was labeled KGB."¹⁸⁴

На одной щеке: «Ленин палач». На другой продолжение: «Из-за него страдают миллионы». Под глазами: «Хрущев, Брежнев, Ворошилов — палачи». На худой и бледной шее черной тушью вытатуирована рука, сжимающая его горло, и на кисти буквы «КПСС», а на большом пальце, упирившемся в кадык, — «КГБ».

Such inscriptions name and depict the violence of the state on the violated body itself. The prisoner reappropriates the act of subjection to the symbolic law for the sake of his own radical or limit agency. This style of protest, literally written on the body, is shocking to the 'normal' or non-criminal personality, who may dismiss these expressions of dissent as "perversion" or "psychopathy," as Siniavskii warns. For his part, Marchenko requires convincing that there is something meaningful to Shcherbakov's many tattoos. When he finally spends time with him, Marchenko decides that his painted friend is "a

¹⁸² "The face is both what is written on the face, and the faciality of the skin itself, the availability of the skin to bear inscriptions. It seemed not to be enough to remove the features of the face; the faciality of the face had to bear the brunt of the annihilating attack. But the stripping away of the features seems to reveal, even to be designed to reveal, the invariant ground of faciality, the face beneath the face, the unfigurable support of figurality." Connor, "Mortification," 44.

¹⁸³ Shcherbakov has in his mind—or on his head, more accurately—Kliment Voroshilov (1881-1969). Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union under Khrushchev (1953-1960), he played a key role in 'repressing' military personnel during Stalin's Great Terror of the late 1930s.

¹⁸⁴ Marchenko, *My Testimony*, 92.

normal person” after all, “not a psycho, as I’d originally thought,” who reads a lot, is well-informed, and shares a cell with two other totally-tattooed convicts, the aforementioned pair of “pederasts.”¹⁸⁵ The revelation of Shcherbakov’s intelligence and intentionality is crucial for Marchenko, who gains a respect for these radical gestures as canny forms of political protest, dermatographia as political autobiography, in which Marchenko eventually plays a small, supporting role. In an incident that would become “well-known to all cons in Mordovia,” in September 1961, Shcherbakov tattooed his own ear with the phrase, “As a gift to the 22nd Congress of the CPSU.” Then using a razor blade supplied by Marchenko himself, Shcherbakov amputated his ear and hurled it through the bars of his cell to the prison warder, shouting “Here’s a present for the 22nd Party Congress!”¹⁸⁶

THE TYRANNY OF THE TEAR: HOW MUST IT FEEL TO BE “HUMAN”?

“*Live not by the lie!*”
—Alexander Solzhenitsyn

“*Insincerity is not necessarily a lie.*”
—Vladimir Pomerantsev, “*On Sincerity in Literature*”

“*Mundus vult decepti. The World winks at dishonesty.*”
—Martin Buber, *I and Thou*

Though this tableau is shot through with the high pathos of human desperation, it is nonetheless impossible to dismiss the dark humor inhering in such an act. It is sad, we think, certainly so, but also, we hate to admit aloud, it is very funny. We should feel like horrible human beings for having been titillated even for a moment, but, thank goodness, once that self-conscious feeling of guilt arrives, it swallows up the nasty comedic excess and exonerates us for having ever laughed. *No, no, that is not funny. There is nothing funny about the gulag.* But Marchenko gainsays this moralizing attitude at the end of his anecdote, doubling our discomfort as readers at an actual and affective distance from the scene. “In time,” he recounts from inside the camp, “I grew used to those faces and bodies smothered with decorations and inscriptions, and was able to laugh at the newcomers when they almost collapsed at the sight of them, just as I had on arrival: ‘Just you wait awhile and you’ll see worse than that!’”¹⁸⁷

Siniavskii left out Shcherbakov with his rebellious body parts and other stories of this ilk as he mined Marchenko’s mini-narratives for the moving scholarly source

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 93. Я убедился, что он нормальный человек, не псих, как я было подумал сначала. Это был неглупый парень, он довольно много читал, знал по газетам все новости. В одной с ним камере сидел Мазай и педераст Мика, оба с наколками на лицах!

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. А к вечеру из камеры в камеру пошел слух: Щербаков отрезал себе ухо. Позднее мы узнали подробности. На ухе он сделал наколку: «В подарок 22-му съезду КПСС». Видимо, наколку он сделал раньше, чем отрезал ухо, — иначе истек бы кровью, пока накалывал. Потом, совершив ампутацию, стал стучать в дверь, и, когда надзиратель открыл наружную сплошную дверь, Щербаков выбросил ему сквозь решетку свое ухо с теми же словами: «В подарок двадцать второму съезду!»

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 94.

material of “‘I’ and ‘They.’” Perhaps he did this for practical considerations, like the time and space constraints of his conference presentation, or, more plausibly, he did so because these stories break with the solemn tenor struck by all his other examples, whose brutality becomes poignant only in its affective purity, in its total banishing of contradictory or complex emotional modes, especially the comic or satiric. (Though Siniavskii does hint at the importance of play in these instances, his evidence and mostly sober tone infinitely defer the fruition of that promise.) Not just Siniavskii’s credibility, but the credibility of human rights discourse in general, I contend, depends on the circumscription of its affective range. One can only speak about the atrocities of totalitarianism--the Nazi concentration camp and the Soviet gulag system--with a stony or tear-stained face, but certainly not with a wink, a smirk, or a wry smile.

Because of this my earlier gloss of the conference context seems a little hasty, for it was located at the implicit and explicit center of Western humanism in the twentieth century, especially from the point of view of the Soviet prisoner. Geneva was a place of humanist legend in the gulag, according to Siniavskii.

Switzerland for us is something like the following fantasy: There is a country called Switzerland. An ideal country. And there is only one prison in this country... And after several years there are no more prisoners, and [the prison] raises a white flag to signify that it is empty, although there is a prison director and guards--all paid for by the state, everything is as it should be: the symbol of the prison is there, but no one is held in that state. Well, we dream of the prison with its white flag. People should always have an ideal country in their minds. It is touching that this country is Switzerland for the Soviet convict, even if it’s not reality.

It matters then that Siniavskii delivered this lecture in Geneva, the geographic synecdoche for universal human rights, the birthplace of the ‘human’ as a transcendent category to be protected by supranational bodies against local outbreaks of violence by the modern state. In the fantasy space of Geneva, the Soviet paradox of popular mandate—so that there will be no more prisons, we built more prisons—is wishfully resolved. Such topics are too serious to speak about with anything but sincerity, even if that sincerity is made possible only by suppressing certain distasteful truths, of convincing oneself that collective fantasy is full of reality, while the prison itself is empty.

The affective constraints on human rights discourse slide into easy synonymy with the solicitation for ‘sincerity’ in post-Stalin art made by the liberal intelligentsia at the same time, most pithily put forth by the legal investigator, Vladimir Pomerantsev. Russian literature of the earnest variety “makes an appeal to personal experience (childhood; romantic and sexual encounters; family life) to the exclusion of social and political experience, justifying this by appealing to its authenticity (personal, emotional, et cetera).”¹⁸⁸ While demanding an end to the “lacquering of reality” [*lakirovka deistvitel’nosti*] that characterized socialist realist representations of Soviet life, the rubric of sincerity remains on the same symbolic ground as the state, whose official literature champions “high-sounding words and bombastic phrases,” “virtue,” and “solemn eloquence,” and “[imposes] the passion for solemnity” and its “pompous simplicity of

¹⁸⁸ Medvedev, “The Writer in Russia.”

style” on its citizens.¹⁸⁹ Its citizens in turn, are to be remolded in the shape of realism’s unidimensional heroes, “allegorical figures and personified abstractions [who] invade [the] literature,” and make “[us] speak with slow solemnity and grand gestures.”¹⁹⁰ As such, sincerity does not alter the official construction of reality; it only redirects our attention within it, away from the political and toward the personal dimensions of experience hemmed in by the same symbolic order. It is in this sense, “imprisoned” in the same “domain of [Soviet] speakability,” a solemn form of “mimetic resistance” as discussed earlier in the chapter. Authoritative discourse with a human face, sincerity still clings to the notion that there is one knowable truth, one verifiable reality which we all inhabit, which might be expressed in a language of authenticity, whether modest or magnificent in scale, to which we all have equal access.¹⁹¹

It is this unshakeable solemnity of which we should be suspect, and the possibility that the language of sincerity can accurately comprehend everyone’s reality in its vast complexity. The reduction of reality’s complexity to identity, univocality, and pure positivity is “kitsch,” in Milan Kundera’s lexicon, “the categorical agreement of being” that characterizes not just Communism but all of politics as both Kundera and Edelman conceive it. “Kitsch is the aesthetic ideal of all politicians and political parties and movements,” and totalitarian kitsch is distinct only in that a single, uncontested party has the corner on it. Under the banner of blissful tautology—“Long live life!”—it hermetically seals itself off from hermeneutic inquiry, from critique, disagreement or doubt. The logic of the political-symbolic-kitsch is monologic: “anything that infringes on kitsch,” anything that disagrees with being as such, “must be banished for life,” or *for the sake of life*. Under the ban of kitschy positivity is “every display of individualism--in Siniavskii’s tropes, every struggle of the individual with society [*lichnost’s obshchestvom*], every tussle of ‘I’ and ‘they,’” every Kostia “at the circus” who steps out of line in the camp work brigade. Such expressions of the self are verboten, Kundera avers, “because a deviation from the collective is a spit in the eye of the smiling brotherhood,” an incursion or “obstacle” in the Grand March, all of whose roads lead back to Geneva in the novel. An Ur-“fantasy” of Western modernity, or the aggregate “political kitsch” of humanism, “joining leftists of all times and tendencies,” the “Grand March is a splendid march on the road to brotherhood, equality, justice, happiness; it goes on and on, obstacles notwithstanding, for obstacles there must be if the march is to be the Grand March.”¹⁹² As Kundera’s list of things that encroach on kitsch carries on, it starts to sync up with Edelman’s qualifications of queerness: also slated for expulsion from political life is “every doubt (because anyone who starts doubting details will end by doubting life itself); all irony (because in the realm of kitsch everything must taken quite

¹⁸⁹ Tertz, *Socialist Realism*, 200; 203; 207-8.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 208.

¹⁹¹ Indeed, “sincerity” was a crucial instrument of state authority. Alexander Etkind foregrounds the importance of “sincerity” in confessions produced at Soviet show trials and by means of state torture and interrogation techniques. “The most welcome confessions were those where the content had not been induced or predicted by the torturer and his superiors. One can argue that pain was inflicted in order to produce “subjective,” “sincere,” even “free” confessions. One cannot argue, however, that these are the same “sincerity” and “freedom” that we, modern people, understand by these terms.” Alexander Etkind, “Soviet Subjectivity: Torture for the Sake of Salvation?” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 6, 1 (Winter), 171-186, at 180.

¹⁹² Kundera, *Unbearable Lightness*, 257.

seriously); and the mother who abandons her family or the man who prefers men to women, thereby calling into question the holy decree 'Be fruitful and multiply.'"¹⁹³ Functioning like the Child of the Edelman's Futurch, "Kitsch is a folding screen set up to curtain off death."¹⁹⁴ And all that is shittily metaphysical or anti-kitsch coincides with the queer-- corrosively ironic, death-drive embracing, child-refusing, and, well, queer, both sexually and symbolically.

"In the realm of kitsch, the dictatorship of the heart reigns supreme." And the Child holds court, ruling with a velvet kid glove cast in iron (or more likely, steel, after Stalin), under a tyranny of the tear or, rather, of two tears, "[flowing] in quick succession. The first tear says: How nice to see children running on the grass!" The second tear, like the positive hero, moves from spontaneity to consciousness. It "says: How nice to be moved, together with all mankind, by children running on the grass! It is the second tear," dripping with Thränenfreude,¹⁹⁵ "that makes kitsch kitsch."¹⁹⁶ This demagogic scene of "compassion's compulsion"¹⁹⁷ is the group show that accompanies sincerity's solo performance; both dramatize the categorical agreement with being, "the base of kitsch," that makes "the brotherhood of man on earth" possible.¹⁹⁸ In other words, the collective fantasy of humanism can only be sustained, and we can only march grandly together to the empty prison in Geneva in the name of all humankind, provided that we are all moved unanimously by our human emotions for other humans. "The feeling induced by kitsch must be the kind the multitudes can share. Kitsch may not, therefore, depend on an unusual situation..."¹⁹⁹ Those 'unusuals,' who deviate from the path of our steady progress, who stand with death and disagree with being, who spit in the humanist's face and poke the political in the eye from the sidelines, these others are obstacles; unmoved themselves, they must be moved out of History's way.

In the context of Communist kitsch, Siniavskii articulated his own skepticism about professions of sincerity in official speech, which were most often the sign of a "blanket lie."²⁰⁰ As a consequence of this association, "people have stopped trusting the language. The more solemn an announcement," he explained, "the less believable it is," especially when it comes to certain "foreign terms such as 'democracy,' 'humanism,' 'human rights,' or 'constitution.'"²⁰¹ On their face, these statements do not depose the political desirability of sincerity, nor do they make the more radical call for insincerity, which, even Pomerantsev permits, does not necessarily entail a lie. [*Neiskrennost'--eto ne obia zatel'no lozh'*]²⁰² Insincerity, inauthenticity, artificiality, "even posing a little," to recall the old con and his Fly, introduce the revolutionary notion that there be something

¹⁹³ Ibid., 252.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 253.

¹⁹⁵ A prime example of Thränenfreude is to be found in the satisfyingly lachrymose response that Rousseau's *Nouvelle Heloise* evoked among its German Sturm und Drang readers who otherwise professed an emotional imperviousness to French literature of the day. J.M. Coetzee, "Storm over Young Goethe," *New York Review of Books* (April 26, 2012), 21.

¹⁹⁶ Kundera, *Unbearable Lightness*, 251.

¹⁹⁷ Lee Edelman, "Compassion's Compulsion." In *Compassion: The Cultural Politics of an Emotion*, edited by Lauren Berlant (London and New York: Routledge), 159-186.

¹⁹⁸ Milan Kundera, *Unbearable Lightness of Being*, 251.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Sinyavsky, *Soviet Civilization*, 210-11.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 209.

²⁰² Vladimir Pomerantsev, "Ob iskrennosti v literature," *Novyi Mir* (December 1953).

more, something left out, wedged between the symbols we use to describe reality and reality as such. Irony and insincerity introduce wiggle room into the symbolic that makes humanism squirm in turn. For how can the humanist live by these words without personal conviction and faith in consensus? The Grand March cannot go on without sincerity, Kundera explains, because “the identity of kitsch,” the quintessentially leftist “kitsch of the Grand March,” “comes not from a political strategy but from images, metaphors, and vocabulary,” which insist on their internal identity.²⁰³ “People who struggle against what we call totalitarian regimes cannot function with queries and doubts. They, too, need certainties and simple truths to make the multitudes understand, to provoke collective tears.”²⁰⁴

Though he is moved to demonstrable despair during at Geneva, this linguistic slipperiness has escorted Siniavskii’s speech from the start, from the instant he begins with an incongruously light-hearted anecdote about rape, which, he alleges, will clarify the moral argument about gulag self-mutilation he is about to make. *What did Vas’ka the rapist mean to say by all this?* he asks. This question winks at a missing intertext, by alluding to Marchenko’s question about the tattooed men in his memoirs, *What did they want to say by all this?* But one sooner wonders what Siniavskii means to say by all this, when he reposes the question to the gulag masochists, who then become the “distant” cousins of the criminalized author. By the time the analogy arrives at the author, with whom most critics start and stop, the outlandishness of the anecdote has been overstepped as an obstacle or corralled back in line with the Grand March of humanism. The ludic complexity of the argument is drained out by such a reading, and the essay’s metaphorical layers are flattened into an unambivalent plea for the oppressed intellectual. Such readings misrecognize the trickster’s wry wink for the twitch of the liberal subject’s eye as it wells with a first impromptu tear, and then a second, ‘meta-emotional’ one of self-satisfaction. “Yet the difference,” the “thick” distinction, to draw on Clifford Geertz, “between a twitch and a wink is vast.”²⁰⁵

If we can still remember the opening anecdote, after being bombarded with so many traumatic images we would prefer to repress, then it introduces an element of play that stains the rest of the essay, destabilizing the sustained seriousness, self-conscious gravitas, and sincere expressions of regret that are to come. What kind of moral compass can a joke about rape—always presumed to be in bad taste—set in place after all? What feelings does it (dis) orient by the end of Siniavskii’s winding explication? Have we really regained our footing on humanism’s higher ground? Or are we instead unsteadied by the irony that suffuses the entire text from the moment that first *unsimple untruth* is told? In other words, are we truly compelled to experience compassion in such unilinear terms and cry in unison? Or are we let loose from the moral order to laugh at these ‘cruel farces’ and ‘exaggerated parodic forms’ of camp signification? And if so, what does that say about us humans? About the recognizable category of humanity altogether?

Laughter about the camp from outside is unpardonable, but laughter within the camp is itself a sign of inhumanity. It evidences the dehumanizing effects of the camp on the certifiable ‘people,’ like the dissidents and political prisoners. And when the ‘unpeople’ do it, it only confirms their moral monstrosity. Like Solzhenitsyn, we do not

²⁰³ Kundera, *Unbearable Lightness*, 261.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 254.

²⁰⁵ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (BasicBooks, 1973), 6.

recognize ourselves in the ‘cruel farces’ of connection put on by spidery criminals who exploit our capacity for human compassion. Paradoxically, that capacity for compassion is what disconnects the ‘people’ from the ‘unpeople,’ who do not deserve sympathy as equals. When to the tender tear of the political the criminal reacts with a cruel smirk, he forecloses contact on these terms. And when he harms not his human other, but his own monstrous self in such a disgusting manner, the *humanist* first cringes with disgust, and then snuffles with pity for the tragic fallenness of mankind in modernity. As one conference attendee grieved, such acts are an “expression of the great void of which man is increasingly aware, and which is, in my opinion, both the cause and the consequence of the resignation of man... Faced with this emptiness, man, as in the camps Siniavskii has described, creates monstrous creatures, and is engaged in the real devastation of the human individual.” She redirects Siniavskii’s question—not what did the self-eater want to say by all this—but how could he say it? Answering his question with her own, she asks: “Can we make fun of everyone forever, and first yourself, out of sheer desperation?”²⁰⁶

Therein lies the conundrum of humanism, the insurmountable obstacle of the Grand March: how to proceed in the name of all humanity when we cannot recognize all human beings as such, when they do such inexplicably inhumane or monstrous things? When these beings claim the category of the monster as their own name, how then can we campaign in the name of the human for them? What can we say on behalf of their humanity when such expressions of radical alterity only induce our silence? And if we do not, are we not demanding, as socialist realism does, as so-called totalitarians do, that humanity is an unconflicted category, that it allows only heterogeneity within homogeneity, as Siniavskii says, a difference of opinion only within a single opinion? The impulse to silence and excise the irreducible difference of the human by liberal ideology is, after all, what gives rise to the gulag and the concentration camp in the first place.

By suppressing these smirking subjects and denying the ‘ugly’ humanity contained in their cruel comedy, a secondary violence is committed against the self-eating convicts. We lock them up in the Genevan fantasy of a prison without prisoners (perhaps nestling them invisibly in the special barracks for sex/gender-offenders, as Marchenko encountered at Belomorkanal). We exile them to a camp in which no one is being confined, and expel them from literature on the camp. We sentence them again to social death and symbolic unintelligibility. In such a way, in Siniavskii’s words, we “waste them once more,” and “isolate them anew,” destroying them before they have a chance to destroy our beautiful dreams of future harmony with their “destructive laughter.”²⁰⁷ In their terroristic insistence on unity, of subsuming all possible meanings to the Purpose, lining up all bodies single file for the Grand March, socialist realism and liberal humanism make irony, insincerity, and self-contradiction impossible. In such political formations, it is not so hard to hold pity in one’s heart for these fallen creatures, since pity, a kindly kind of disgust, is ultimately egotistical, and founded here on the

²⁰⁶ Murielle Werner-Gagnebin quoted in the question and answer session on September 5, 1975; transcribed in *Solitude Et Communication: Textes Des Conférences et des Entretiens Organisés par les Vingt-Cinquièmes Rencontres Internationales De Genève*, Histoire et Société D'aujourd'hui (Neuchâtel: Ed. de la Baconnière 1976).

²⁰⁷ Tertz, *Socialist Realism*.

suppression of the other's agency. It is as if to say, in a most phallocratic or dogmatic way, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." A harder, less godly thought to hold in one's heart or head—or, better yet, guts—is the fact that these radically unrecognizable acts belong to humanity all the same, to a category of "human without measure," a la Dostoevskii, to one that contains the creaturely, after Agamben, that is simultaneously spider and fly. And hardest of all is to let that gut feeling form into a belly laugh with the caustic *blatar*, to bust a gut in humanism's straight face, and thereby bust open the guts of god, as Tertz goads us to do.

This contradictory picture of the human is just what Siniavskii is after in his conference paper—a search in the many styles of self-eating for "a certain unity based on the principle of their difference outside the common language and on the basis of their absolute despair and of the absolute end to man, and at the same time on the basis of life and language." Unsurprisingly, the test Siniavskii laid out for himself of bringing these binary opposites into harmonious singularity "was negative," by his own reckoning. "I have failed to unite them all in one theory," he confessed, "and yet I insisted on this unity." The point of his ineluctable exercise in non-Marxian dialectics, "the great task," is *not* its end or tidy resolution, but the *means* itself as an end--the very repetitive gesture of positing hypotheses is the point. Knowing that one theory will never contain the human in its conflicted multiplicity, we nevertheless, like Siniavskii, "search for this connection, a human unity," all the same. "We do not have the right to reject these terrible examples I've given as outside of language, outside of the human and outside of our communication. And that is why I have connected them, connected them on purpose," in their apparent inassimilability, "with what is most sublime."

Siniavskii pursues connection precisely where it seems least plausible, and not for the self-satisfying "exigency of explanation, or of interpretation of I don't know what kinds of new possibilities of language, but rather a moral exigency," which entails the recuperation of play in the camp, in all its unlikelihood. Yes, "sometimes there is play at the camp," but play "understood in a more profound, loftier way, perhaps, as more than life," more than "art," as those inarticulable but "colossal potentialities that exist precisely at the periphery of life and art." As such, play is not strictly the provenance of the liberated, overstimulated, postmodern West, while tragedy is the sad lot of the Soviet East, Siniavskii explains; such assignments are overly simplistic and lazily ideological. To wit, it may be tragic when someone in the West opens his veins, and, on the contrary, "in the camp this [same act] can become a very base form of play [which] isn't always tragic... At the camp perhaps it's a thief who does it for the tenth time, with the regularity of a game." And our moral exigency as witnesses to these monstrous games of history in the wake of humanism is to see them not only as a tragedy but as farce, too.

QUEER NEGATIVITY AND CAMP IN THE CAMP

"Belsen was a gas."
—Sid Vicious²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸ Such a repugnant pun, an obvious instance of epatage by the Sex Pistols' Sid Vicious, is designed to trigger our humanist humor gag reflex. Here I also mean to remind us of the unpalatable pieces of subcultural history—the collusion of punks and Nazism, of homosexuality and fascism, for instance—that have to be included for the full story of sexual alterity to be told. On the relationship between gay male

“What are you laughing at, scum?”
—Abram Tertz, *What is Socialist Realism?*

In the concluding section of the paper, I want to productively protract that affective gap in which the witness to these cruel comedic scenes of lowly camp life squirms for a moment, and, starting with Nikolai Shcherbakov’s crass impersonation of a gulag-bound Van Gogh, I will theorize their aesthetic-cum-ethical qualities under the new generic heading I am proposing of “camp camp.” My intention in introducing this repetitive term is to tap into the uncomfortable tension already embedded in “camp” as an English-language homonym.²⁰⁹ By insisting on the simultaneity of “camp” meanings, I hope to reckon with the risible that perhaps always inheres in the tragic or the traumatic (if only as pure potentiality).²¹⁰ As a noun with a history, The Camp unanimously occupies the highest order of moral solemnity in postmodernity; it is that thing about which we *cannot joke* (as good humanist subjects). In stark contrast, the queer camp aesthetic is a postmodern style or stance that *cannot not joke* about everything. In other words, holding nothing sacred, queer camp offers everything up to perverse resignification, inserting an amoral equals sign between all things (as signs). If the

aesthetics and state racism, see the fifth chapter, "'The Killer in Me Is the Killer in You': Homosexuality and Fascism," in Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure*, 147-172.

²⁰⁹ The radical theoretical potential of confusing these terms first dawned on me at a meeting of the Mellon Discovery Fellows at the Townsend Center in 2007. One student, notorious for not doing the reading but nonetheless aggressively engaging every guest professor in Q&A, posed a tortuous question to Christopher Nealon about concentration camps in the Holocaust to Nealon’s article about queer camp in late-capitalist experimental poetry in New York. No one interrupted the loquacious student but rather let him ramble to a conclusion (which I, unfortunately, don’t recall). On the one hand, I’d wager we were all stunned into silence by this unthinkable conflation, which, it suddenly became apparent, is actually always latent and ‘thinkable’ in English. On the other, I suspect our interests were less ethical and more self-serving: we were too curious to see how far he would stick his foot in his mouth. In a sense, this student was performing the culturally requisite solemnity surrounding the camp. Perhaps he felt compelled to speak, to say something, to cry out, as Solzhenitsyn admonishes Soviet society for its conspiracy of silence that enabled the gulag. At the same time, by so doing, the student ended up embodying camp in Sontagian terms, with his earnest overinvestment in socially-coded sentiment. Having not read the article, his comments suggested pure fascination with form. Christopher Nealon, "Camp Messianism, or, the Hopes of Poetry in Late-Late Capitalism," *American Literature* 76:3 (September 2004), 579-602.

²¹⁰ This is a problem we live with today: how to reconcile historical trauma and risibility? *Life is Beautiful* suggests a certain form of canned sentimental family comedy is possible to imagine in the camp, as a testament to the indomitability of the human spirit, but I’m sure audience reactions would have been very different (not to mention MPFAA ratings), had Roberto Benigni used his penis as a prop in the style of dark satire of oppressive ideology that Marchenko’s subjects performed, as I will shortly discuss. One might also think of laughter after 9/11. "Letterman articulated his anxiety about performing: 'I wasn't sure that I should be doing a television show, because for 20 years we've been in the city making fun of everything. . . . So to come to this circumstance that is so desperately sad*and I don't trust my judgment'" . . . Opening his first post-9/11 show, Conan O'Brien assessed the task of comedy after 9/11 and echoed the comments of Letterman. "I've made a career of getting in way over my head," O'Brien said, adding that he had "never, ever felt more unsure or more at a loss than I do tonight. I will not lie to you. I*I*I don't exactly know how we're going to do this, but we're going to try to do it" . . . And so on, in Paul Achter, "Comedy in Unfunny Times: News Parody and Carnival After 9/11," *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, Volume 25, Issue 3 (2008): 274-303. See also Giseline Kuipers, "Where Was King Kong When We Needed Him?" Public Discourse, Digital Disaster Jokes, and the Functions of Laughter after 9/11," *The Journal of American Culture* Volume 28.1 (March 2005): 70–84.

concentration or labor camp circulates only as a signifier of totalitarianism, it does so as a totalitarian signifier, in the sense of semiotic totalitarianism Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson extract from their reading of Mikhail Bakhtin. Coupling Bakhtin and Freud, they define this symbolic phenomenon as “the assumption that everything has a meaning relating to the seamless whole,” which Bakhtin himself called theoreticism or monologism. “The kind of thinking is totalitarian in its assumption that it can, in principle, explain the totality of things; it is semiotic...in its approach to all apparent accidents as signs of an underlying order to which the given system has the key.”²¹¹

Camp aesthetics, on the other hand, revolve around what Bakhtin’s theory of the carnivalesque knows as the “gay relativity” of all values, or, for our purposes, the queer negativity. While giving lip service to sincerity, it spectacularly refuses the collective humanist compunction to speak from the heart and speaks instead from the crotch, warming not the cockles of the heart but--to preview the next obscene scene--the cock in the hand. As with the ironic, insincere, and the queer, camp cannot handle straight relationships. Grinding against the monologism of official or authoritative discourse, camp is a “transgressive reinscription” of the law that “presuppos[es] a radical impurity in all identity, not excluding the transgressor’s.” Like Madeleine at the zoo, to rhetorical purism and moral puritanism it says, ‘poo poo.’ “It knows too the impurity of transgressive desire, and most of all perhaps the impurity of dominant forms of identity... The very impurity which the radical humanist seeks to transcend, only despairingly to discover at the centre of his or her being—this impurity, for the fantasies of transgressive reinscription, is not the ground of its failure but the material upon which it works.”²¹²

By following the realist letter to its logical extreme, camp performances of camp put under the limelight the limits of so-called totalizing systems. In such a way, camp “undermines the categories which exclude it, and does so,” as with self-eating, “through parody and mimicry. But not from the outside.” From the inside, ‘confined in language,’ to quote Siniavskii, in actual confinement in the camp, the invisible center of Russia. Camp goes straight to the center, and “undermines the depth model of identity from inside, being a kind of parody and mimicry which hollows out from within, making depth recede into its surfaces” spectacularly, and to “excess: depth is undermined by being taken to and beyond its own limits.”²¹³ In camp acts of overidentification performances of emotional depth engender their insincere opposites: compassion becomes cruelty, humane kindness smacks of saccharine artificiality, and solemnity starts to look as posed and impassive as a sociopath.

That antidote to dogmatism and unflinching faith in any *grand récit*, “insincerity [is] an essential ingredient of camp.”²¹⁴ Still, for all its apparent flippancy, camp has real political consequences as a weapon of the weak or “strategic and disarming use of humor,” which comically “accomplishes important cultural critique while at the same time providing cover from, and enabling the avoidance itself of, scenarios of direct

²¹¹ Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 28.

²¹² Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 324-5.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 310-11.

²¹⁴ Esther Newton, *Margaret Mead Made Me Gay: Personal Essays, Public Ideas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 42.

confrontation with phobic or reactionary ideologies.”²¹⁵ Sassing back at dominant culture with a lascivious smirk, camp should be taken seriously as a social and aesthetic practice, not least of all for its historical role in resistance movements, by no means sequestered to the gay cabaret. As theorists and practitioners of the artful art have demonstrated again and again, it travels from seedy queer bar to righteous riot on the street, sometimes in one fell swoop, as with the drag camp antics of the 1969 Stonewall Rebellion in New York.

All this said, I don’t think we can effortlessly transplant queer camp to the labor camp without commentary. This is not just a clever play on words with nothing at stake, neither trivializing nor glib assessment of harsh gulag reality for the sake of a good, over-sustained pun. On the contrary, I am struck by the crucial specificity of this collocation, which hinges on an internal paradox in affective terms. The emotional sure-footedness we experience within either one of the two operative definitions of ‘camp’ here buckles between the binaries of its bivalency: sincerity—insincerity, authenticity—artificiality, gravitas—levity, straight (facedness)—queer (defacedness), tragedy—play, despair—and excess, to cite Siniavskii’s terms in the last two dyads.

It also pivots on the appearance of a false contradiction between the poles of the cold war, between so-called totalitarianism in the Soviet Union, aligned with the bleaker side of the binaries, and capitalist Western culture, with its opposite. This superficial ideological divide maps out distinct terrains of agency and affect. As Siniavskii retorts, when his interlocutors bring up Western Body and Action Art, there is no neat or necessary correlation between tragedy, play, or political economy in the examples of self-eating and body mutilation they discuss. It is not simply that the Soviet subject, the self-eater, has been made so docile by an oppressive state that he harms himself out of despair at his unfreedom. Nor that the Western subject, the postmodern performance artist, is so unilaterally liberated that he modifies his body as an indulgent act of unconstrained agency. On the contrary, individual motivations and experiences of self-harm may be reversed between East and West, and more probably coexist along a continuum of urgent art and endangered life. With admirable diplomacy, Siniavskii brushes off these ideological oversimplifications to interrupt the cold-war epistemology that precedes his presentation at Geneva: “we are here to understand each other and not to put the Orient and the Occident in confrontation,” he insists.

Camp camp, I suggest, is useful insofar as the above political script has so much sway over the reception of Siniavskii and the story of the self-eaters he introduces. If we overdetermine Soviet subjectivity by tragedy, then we vacate levity and irony as categories of experience for the subject, and make camping it up in the camp impossible, unintelligible, and unintentional when done by the uncanny criminal queer. When camp poses are voluntarily assumed in the forced labor camp, a place defined as its subjective and affective opposite, it needs to be named in order to be seen, to become thinkable in the first place. So what are the impetus, effects, and stakes of merging these seemingly unrelated or even antithetical terms? The stuttering classification of ‘camp camp,’ I hope, allows us to envision alternative narratives about the camp, to repeat them with a difference like the term itself, and free them up from confinement in the semiotic-totalitarian framings of so-called totalitarianism at the site of its most potent distillation.

²¹⁵ José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 119.

The formal and functional specificities of Soviet camp camp, I propose, comes from the possibilities for scandalous resignification that occur in acts of overidentification with official discourse, as discussed in the case of Siniavskii's tattoo-artists. Overidentification in late-Soviet society was a rhetorical result of what Yurchak and Boyer term "the hypernormal investment in form itself,"²¹⁶ that is, the congealing of the formal aspect of sanctioned speech, with the corollary consequences that the constative dimension of language was diminished and the performative aspect played up to potentially subversive ends. To restate a cornerstone idea of this dissertation, which draws directly on Yurchak's book, *Everything was Forever until it was No More*, ventriloquizing the Party-line partly liberated Soviet citizens from living by its letter; formalism was a mode of social freedom or maneuverability within the stagnant structures of late socialism. But overidentification, in its insincerity, was dismissed by "authorized dissidents" as "unethical" parody, too closely tied to "the unethical character of the regime...it is imitating."²¹⁷ Such accusations miss the mark, say Yurchak and Boyer, because, unlike the "oppositional discourse" of the dissident movement, which was "easily identified and isolated" by the state, overidentifying parody "was more difficult" to find and discipline on account of "its formal resemblance to authoritative discourse."²¹⁸

Siniavskii makes related observations about the paraphilia of form in bureaucratic language, which he viewed as "a word divorced from its original meaning," in a sense, naming the primal scene of castration by which a Soviet subject enters the symbolic order. "It is an emasculated language in which words do not denote things but symbols or conventions, accepted by the State but often without any relation to reality."²¹⁹ Because Soviet reality is thoroughly discursive in this way, "the meaning of these official locutions is immaterial, it's their formal aspect that counts. Even without understanding the words, the people know which language to use with a superior, and not to stint. Because the bureaucratic lexicon and phraseology are all-powerful in the new society,"²²⁰ its "purism" or sincerity has to be defended by the Soviet press against the dangers of "colloquial speech," and "oriented directly or indirectly, toward the official strictly standardized language of the bureaucracy." In this manner, the socialist symbolic aspires to closed circuitry, with a purism not just hygienic but "hypocritical" in nature, "since its principle aim is to hide the truth. Hence the plethora of euphemisms,"²²¹ Siniavskii explains. But euphemisms, however useful for state dissembling, are also the bread and butter of subversive speech, and campy or queer poetics in particular, a principle I will soon invigorate with another camp anecdote.

In this combined overidentification of the queer and asocial varieties, the playfully excessive mimesis of camp camp can be found. Its performers are only too willing to manhandle the master signifiers of socialism, to pepper their speech inappropriately with 'state-sponsored' euphemisms and political shibboleths until they

²¹⁶ Alexei Yurchak and Dominic Boyer, "American Stio: Or, what late-socialist aesthetics of parody reveal about contemporary political culture in the West," *Cultural Anthropology* 25.2 (May 2010): 179-221, at 184.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Sinyavsky, *Soviet Civilization*, 203.

²²⁰ Ibid., 204.

²²¹ Ibid., 208.

transmute into the “spicy word” Siniavskii describes. The incidents that erupt at the conceptual intersection of camp and the camp interrupt the politics of the symbolic as usual. I urge us to take ‘camp camp’ seriously to spite itself, if not for its form and content (or lack thereof), then for its effects.

VORKUTA AND (HIS) KHRUSHCHEV: DIFFERENT STROKES FOR DIFFERENT FOLKS

“*The state must never take steps that can evoke an ironic attitude among its citizens*”
—Fazil Iskander, 1989

Though the episode with Shcherbakov’s ear neatly encapsulates the kind of gallows humor which, I urge us to imagine, did happen more than once in the gulag, and though Shcherbakov shares a cell with two other totally-tattooed ‘homosexuals,’ his self-castrating present to the Party may not seem so readily queer to doubters of this argument, and so I devote my attention in the final section of this paper to the most supreme example of the camp camp genre I encountered while reading *My Testimony*. I will focus on the protagonist of this anecdote—not a positive hero but a negative queer—whose antics, strewn by Marchenko throughout his memoirs, very probably provided the fodder for many of Siniavskii’s illustrations of self-eating in “‘I’ and ‘They.’” (In some cases it seems Siniavskii has directly lifted them from Marchenko, and at others, he appears to have embellished them or fused them with others.)

Among the extensive cast of characters in *My Testimony*, many of them famous, many of them ‘queer,’ Nikolai Kovalev, nicknamed Vorkuta, emerges as the memoirs’ protagonist—a renegade folk hero, wily trickster, and “the most famous homosexual in all the zone” during Marchenko’s term at Belomorkanal.²²² Marchenko fears and respects Vorkuta and his mate in Cell no. 79, Sergei Oranskii, as “real criminals, depraved, scandalous, senseless unpeople.” [*Eto nastoiashchie ugovniki, razvrashchennye, skandal’nye, bessmyslennye liudishki.*] Like Tertz’s gutsy god in *What Is Socialist Realism*, “Sergei used to slit open his stomach and let his innards spill out, and also used to swallow all sorts of rubbish.” [*Sergei vsparyval zhivot i vypuskal kishki, glotal vsiakuiu drian’.*] A pair of virtuoso self-eaters, the two were always opening up their veins, like the old con for his Fly on New Year’s, though with greater frequency and less ceremony than Siniavskii’s tender subjects. Having grown accustomed to such grotesque displays, Marchenko and the others in Cell no. 79 knew to avert their eyes when a fellow prisoner did something to himself—they neither wanted to see nor interfere. One exceptional occasion of bloodletting inspired curiosity (and perhaps the aforementioned episode in Siniavskii’s paper). A starving prisoner secures Vorkuta’s permission to collect his blood in a bowl—“Why not, why shouldn’t I? I shall lose it all the same?” Vorkuta reasons—and so the supplicant does as allowed, greedily sopping up the “bloody soup” [*krovavyi*

²²² This is not unlike the criminal-trickster myth surrounding Siniavskii’s literary alter ego, Abram Tertz. Though this condensed draft cannot reasonably grow another analytic leg, it bears remarking on the resemblance between Siniavskii’s Tertz, Marchenko’s Vorkuta and the signifyin(g) monkey of African-American folk culture described by Henry Louis Gates, Jr in *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

sup] with a crust of bread while painting his lips and beard red. “Blood will flow all the same, so it’s better not to lose it.” [*Vse ravno krov’ l’etsia, ne propadat’ zhe ei.*]

Like Shcherbakov, Vorkuta engaged in “conscious” [*soznatel’nye*] forms of self-eating, and was covered in tattoos, “totally written all over, without a blank space [*lit., alive place*] on his face or his body.” [*Vorkuta ves’ razrisovan, zhivogo mesta net ni la litse, ni na tele.*] During their short stay together, Marchenko witnesses Vorkuta turn himself into a human palimpsest, a barely-living record of the state’s exertion of force on its subjects, inscribed on the ‘unliving’ location of his forehead. He watches as Vorkuta flays his face into “bloody ribbons” [*krovavye kloch’ia*], while prepping the flesh for a new anti-Soviet tattoo. In nauseating detail, the reader hears how Vorkuta “smears his forehead with a thick layer of potassium permanganate,” swiped from the medical unit’s dispensary, and how the chemical “corrodes away the scars” already on Vorkuta’s forehead, turning the skin “tumescent, black, and burnt,” until, after a few days, “the abscessed skin peels off and a new scar starts to grow. The tattoos are gone, and the only thing left [on the face] is a big, monstrous scar [*bezobraznyi shram*].”²²³ Vorkuta favors this homegrown method for tattoo removal over the operations performed at the infirmary, since the medical staff eschews anesthesia as a prevention-tactic.

Moreover, the state procedure aims to make the formerly-inscribed face look unremarkable [*nezametnym*], as if it had never been tattooed—an appearance Vorkuta does *not* want. He makes this nondesire known to his cellmates, who respond with comic incredulity:

We laughed: “If you want it to be less noticeable, you’d have to be born again.” [Vorkuta] nonetheless removed this and other inscriptions from his face. The scars [*shramy*] made him so monstrous, that it was scary to look at him. Neither time, nor the sun helped out: even after three years it was hard to call his face the face of a human.”

Мы смеялись: — Тебе, чтобы незаметнее было, надо заново родиться. Он все-таки свел с лица и другие надписи. Шрамы изуродовали его так, что смотреть страшно. Ни время, ни солнце не помогло: даже через три года его лицо трудно было назвать лицом человека.²²⁴

After each removal, Vorkuta applies a new tattoo to the barely rejuvenated skin of his forehead. And, almost like other tattooists, his anti-Soviet façade compels the state to play butcher, and hack off the offending flesh. Left alive, unlike the first wave of tattooed criminals, he cannot be left alone as a human advertisement against socialism. But unlike the others in his self-branding cohort, Vorkuta takes on himself the task of the state in a perverse performance of self-discipline. He insists on preserving the initial inscription *sous rature*, and accumulating on his skin the traces of each successive violation. His

²²³ From *Moi pokazaniia*: Тогда он густо засыпает лоб марганцовкой — специально для этого выдается в санчасти. Марганцовка разъедает раны, и Воркута корчится и вопит от боли. На другой день лоб у него, припухший, черный, обожженный марганцовкой, начинает нарывать. Зато через некоторое время кожа на месте нарыва облезает, рана зарастает новой. Наколки уже нет, остается только большой безобразный шрам.

²²⁴ Marchenko, *My Testimony*, 198-99.

reiterative act is a style of deconstructive or negative writing—what Siniavskii calls a “departure from language” that marks its point of exit, and what Edelman describes as a symbol “lodged within, though barred from, symbolization.”²²⁵ Writing *sous rature* reminds us of the insufficiency of the initial sign, and of the system of signification altogether. “Since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since the word is necessary, it remains legible.”²²⁶ This gesture yields a semantic surplus on the body that goes beyond the symbolic order; it is “the subject's ‘anatomical complement,’ an excessive, ‘unreal’ remainder” that invisibly brands Vorkuta as an unreal subject before he brands himself again and again. “This surplus, compelling the Symbolic to enact a perpetual repetition, remains spectral, ‘unreal,’ or impossible insofar as it insists outside the logic of meaning that, nonetheless, produces it.” At the same time, since each transgressive inscription demands its erasure, this resistant repetition reveals the precariousness of the symbolic, interrupting the illusion of seamless integrity it endlessly labors to produce.

Thus the “force of repetition in language” that excludes the unreal subject in the first place is also “the paradoxical condition by which a certain agency [...] is derived.”²²⁷ Carving and re-carving “Slave of the USSR,” “Slave of Khrushchev,” and other terms of enslavement into his forehead visually transforms Vorkuta into the unperson he is already presumed to be. He is no longer human but “formless” [*bezobraznyi*], a faceless figure of disfiguration and non-identity. “Acceding to this figural identification with the undoing of identity, which is also to say with the disarticulation of social and Symbolic form,” Vorkuta embraces the “political self-destruction” that his queerness figures. At the same time, this “political self-destruction [...] is the only act that counts as one” within the Symbolic: “the act of resisting enslavement to the future in the name of having a life.”²²⁸ And “‘they,’ the defenders of futurity,”—here Edelman's as much as Siniavskii's ‘they’—“buzzed by negating [queer] negativity, are themselves, however unknowingly, its secret agents too, reacting, in the name of the future, in the name of humanity, in the name of life, to the threat of the death drive” that Vorkuta and his unpersonably queer kin “figure with the violent rush of a jouissance.”²²⁹ The abject pleasure or reverse buzz Vorkuta educes from corroding his own face functions like the “corrosive force of queer irony,” eating away at the thin skin of the Soviet symbolic like so much potassium permanganate.²³⁰

The “corrosive irony” of the queer, which feels like a cruel farce in the last example, takes a turn for light campiness in the next Vorkuta anecdote Marchenko narrates. Having set Vorkuta apart among the homosexuals [*pederast*] he comes to know in camp, foremost amidst the “scummiest of the scummy, the cynics, and shit-talkers,” Marchenko elaborates on the last point about the *parole* of criminal queers.

Incidentally, in scurrility they were rivaled only by the wardens and the staff of the camp, and it remains undecided which one beat out the other. One time Vorkuta entered into a competition of this kind with our censor. Vorkuta was

²²⁵ Edelman, *No Future*, 22.

²²⁶ Gayatri Spivak, “Translator’s Preface” in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997 [1967]), xiv.

²²⁷ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 124

²²⁸ Edelman, *No Future*, 30.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 154.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

waiting in line for a package and cursing up a blue streak! The censor, evidently, decided to show that he wasn't born yesterday [*lit., he doesn't slurp up cabbage soup with a bast shoe*], that he also knew a thing or two, and he shot back with an even bluer reply. Vorkuta [could fuck] God, his soul, his mother, the censor said. Listening to this from the sidelines—I was also waiting on a package—was at once funny and wild.

Впрочем, в сквернословии с ними могли соревноваться надзиратели и служащие лагеря, и неизвестно, кто кого обогнал бы. Раз Воркута вступил в такое соревнование с нашим цензором. Воркута стоял в очереди за бандеролью и вот как загнет в три этажа! Цензор, видно, решил показать, что тоже не лаптем щи хлебает тоже кое-что умеет — и отозвался еще похлеще. Воркута — в Бога, в душу, в мать; цензор так же. Слушать это со стороны — я тоже стоял за бандеролью — было и смешно, и дико..

When Vorkuta gets in a swearing contest or *mat* match with the censor, he flips the usual script with his flip use of foul language. Rather than imitating the lofty and inviolate speech of the Party, he fools its camp representative into lowering himself to the level of criminal jargon, where the two clash in a cockfight over form. Though “the people know which language to use with a superior, and not to stint,”²³¹ says Siniavskii, this is clearly a case when the social order’s usual hierarchy is collapsed and its structuring laws transgressed. Waiting in line, Vorkuta steps out of line and then ‘goes up three flights of stairs,’ to monstrously literalize a metaphor [*stoial v ocheredi...i zagnet v tri etazha!*]. Like Kostia in “At the Circus,” he breaks from the requisite camp “formation of those, like him, who had been injured by fate, [...who] held their hands behind their backs in a symbol of lost will and extreme obedience.”²³²

Ultimately, symbolic authority must be reclaimed by the camp’s authority over language, and so the censor tries to gain control back of the conversation by means of the most censurable words. So doing, he unwittingly produces a parody of phallic mastery by violating the very terms of his authority. Additionally, as a straight agent of the state, he accidentally affirms an affinity between Vorkuta’s brazenly queer desires and the compulsory straightness of the Soviet Union. Now called upon to reassert the primacy of reproductive heterosexuality, the state censor reproduces it in a degraded context and derivative version—a secondary form or failed mimicry of the homosexual act it now follows. In this scene of queer-symbolic undoing, Vorkuta casually strikes an “oppositional political stance exempt from the imperative to reproduce the politics of signification (the politics aimed at closing the gap opened up by the signifier itself), which can only return us, by way of the Child, to the politics of reproduction.”²³³

The obscene back-and-forth with the camp censor is a direct response to the formal purism of official language. It is exactly this thorough censoring of everyday speech that

²³¹ Sinyavsky, *Soviet Civilization*, 204.

²³² On the social symbolism of the line in Soviet culture, see Chapter Four of this dissertation; and Mikhail Epshtein’s essay, “Ochered’,” in *Vse esse v dvukh tomakh* (Ekaterinburg: U-Faktoriia, 2005).

²³³ Edelman, *No Future*, 27. To the extent that the line physically instantiates the teleological or evolutionary impulse, in Epshtein’s opinion, it instills in waiting bodies a singular purpose, and orients them in a singular direction toward obtaining that object-goal.

endows Vorkuta's rhetorical violations with their special potency. (Apropos, this is the power into which the samizdat author also tapped, and for which he or she suffered silence and imprisonment, as in the case of Siniavskii himself.) For its reliance on euphemisms, Siniavskii underscores, which are designed to make muddy the realities it ostensibly describes, official "language is used not only as a substitute for reality, but as a substitute for language."²³⁴ And therein lies the possibility of its subversion: the intentional slipperiness of state speech—its potential for semantic nonidentity, its openness to interpretation, and its loose relationship with reality—is at odds with the demands of socialist realist discourse to convey "concretely" the singular truth of the Purpose. If "Soviet language dissembles and mystifies" to fix the fantasy of a certain social order, so too might its most wily and socially-unanchored subjects, whose "funny and wild" words might unmoor political monologism.

Indeed, the interplay between scurrilous language [*nepristoinii iazyk*] and euphemism reveals the relativism of realism as a mode of mimetically representing life, according to Roman Jakobson (who postulates that the perceived realisticness of 'objective' realism is always evaluated subjectively, against the 'truth' of one's unique experience). If realism in pictorial arts is difficult, then verbal verisimilitude is impossible per Jakobson, insofar as language is fundamentally figural in nature. "Everyday language" is heightened in its figurativeness, "[using] euphemisms, including polite formulae, words named through periphrasis, hinted at, put down conditionally" [*formul vezhливости, slov, nazyvaiushchikh obiniakom, namekaiushchikh, uslovno postavlennykh*] to talk around subjects for the sake of social convention, especially in the case of sex and the body. (Andrei Kazimirovich discovers this much about Soviet speech from his alienated position in "Pkhents.") Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick likewise looks at gaps in speech, like periphrasis and preterition (the naming of an absence that conjures up just as it excludes), in her theory of queer poetics in realist literature: authors talk about homosexuality at a queer angle but never say it straight on.

Between Soviet purism and homophobic euphemism, camp makes its move by exploiting 'realist' language's double remove from reality in its (sexual) alterity. Its practitioners take advantage of the arbitrariness of the sign, what Jakobson thinks of as the conditional positioning of words [*uslovno postavlennykh*], especially in the case of euphemism, of signs that do not signify straightly (even for signs) but point prudishly toward that thing they are too shy to say. Ideological purism combined with heterosexual conservatism in language occasions opportunities to redirect every bashful sign back to its opposite, to spotlight some unspeakable taboo, swapping out semantic prudery for its lewd inverse in sexual innuendo. Anything that will not or cannot be articulated openly has a secret (homo) sexual meaning which turns the heterosexual symbolic against itself. And the more santicimoniously language pledges its purity, the more intensely the camp camper desires to seduce it into its own undoing. The perverted word in the camp, and the inherent pervertability of all words, by extension, operates like Siniavskii's anecdote, by "[going] beyond language's border, beyond that which is received by society as the norm." At the same time it exceeds Soviet language, this excess is also "the ultimate development of the Soviet language," which takes itself so seriously. It adds "spice" to an

²³⁴ Sinyavsky, *Soviet Civilization*, 270.

insistently bland symbolic, as euphemism turns innuendo, and is “taken to its truly comic extreme.”²³⁵

Whereas speakers of state discourse usually carefully guard the borders of the symbolic, those confined in the camp, conversely, are known to converse with openness beyond the borders of the offensive. This is especially the case, Marchenko concludes, for active or phallic sodomites, the ones who “fulfilled the male roles” [*ispolnil rol' muzhchin*] in male homosexual couplings. They “became heroes” [*khodili v geroiakh*] in the camp, not least of all for their flaunting of linguistic and social propriety, by

boasting about their manly strength and their ‘conquests’ not only before each other, but even before the camp authorities. I once heard how Vorkuta, the most famous homosexual in the zone, was standing around with one brigade leader, and telling him about another guy on the brigade (who walked by just then): how nice it would be to use him, say, this way and that way. They were both licking their lips with satisfaction from the details. And this was going on not in the regular camp but in the political one...

хвастаясь своей мужской силой и своими «победами» не только друг перед другом, но даже и перед начальством. Я слышал однажды, как Воркута, известный всей зоне передаст, стоя вместе с одним начальником отряда, говорил ему про другого отрядника (тот как раз проходил мимо): неплохо бы, мол, его употребить так-то и так-то; оба при этом с удовольствием смаковали подробности. Это уже было не в уголовном лагере, а в политическом...

Vorkuta steps up the lewdness at least another three levels in this scene, for now not only does he embrace the camp authority into his degraded system of signs, but he incorporates him into his sexual fantasy of embracing another male camper, as well. This is no longer an obscene competition between censor and censurable, but a criminal ‘conquest’ over the phallic order of the relentlessly heterosexualized political camp. Vorkuta and the brigade leader collude in a queer fantasy of anality. The excessive pleasure they share, which can be measured in synchronous droplets of salacious saliva, is purely symbolic--not with the material act of sex but with its verbal descriptions. It is the product of a collective fantasy taken to be reality, as if the mere rhetorical penetration of the material body that passes by were one and the same thing. This scene of shared homosexual fantasy between criminal queer and camp brigadier substantiates Jakobson’s assertion that, “when we want our speech to be candid, natural, and expressive, we discard the usual polite etiquette and call things by their real names.”²³⁶ Though language and reality are not to be collapsed into simple identity, the unexpected texture of such coarse speech, as when Vorkuta converses with camp authorities, prompts at least the ears of the unassuming bystander like Marchenko to perk up and pay attention to

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Roman Jakobson, “On Realism in Art.” In *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, edited by Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1971 [1921]), 38-46, at p. 40.

language's perverse capacity to contour a side of reality too nasty to name, and, in its unnameability, too nasty to be reality as it is represented.

Candidness here captures and then elides those unspeakable things—Marchenko is too timid to reproduce the details that make the others' mouths water—but this is not always the case. Where frank language falls flat, euphemism has its uses. Its disinfective effects prevail only where symbolic norms are observed. In such cases, “to call the act [*nazvat' akt*] by its own name sounds brazen,” Jakobson clarifies, employing his own prim ellipsis, “but if in a given milieu strong language [*krepkoe slovechko*] is not a curio [*ne v dikovinku*], a trope or euphemism is stronger and more convincing. Such is the verb *utilizirovat'* [to utilize] of the Russian hussar,”²³⁷ which finds an analog in *upotrebliat'* [to use] in this anecdote.²³⁸ Euphemism and other forms of figurative language in these instances fuel flights of fantasy that get us closer to the reality smoothed over by self-referential realism. In this way, “an unthinkable epithet multiplies the impact of a term” because of its unthinkability [*ottogo-to udesiateriaet deistvennost' termina nemyslimyi epitet*], altering the way language relates to reality, allowing us to perceive the angularity and nonidentity of that relationship, and ultimately revitalizing our perception of the object being named, especially in the case of the improper object that is the calling card of the crooked and the queer. “But as soon as the name has merged with the object it designates, we must, conversely resort to metaphor, allusion or allegory if we wish for a more expressive term. It will sound more impressive, it will be more *striking* when searching for a word to revitalize an object, we pick a far-fetched word, unusual at least in its given application, a word which is forced into service,”²³⁹ aggressive sexual pun intended by me here, not by Jakobson, but this is perhaps not against his intentions either. The end result of this ‘making strange,’ a counterpart poetic move to formalist defamiliarization, is to make the stone feel stony again beneath our stroking fingers, to return to us the touch of reality again. Of course, this is a rather indecent proposal when sex is on the table, when the object to which estranged language puts us in closer contact is the wrong one, which we want neither to see nor to touch.

So what happens when euphemism is taken to its extreme? When figurative language is made to take material account of itself? When the heterosexual norms of phallogocentric fantasy are called into crisis by their perverse incarnation in a consummate act of camp camp? And what are we meant to feel by all that? How are we culturally conditioned to respond to such ‘monstrous’ moments? The final episode with Vorkuta that follows raises these questions and, in lieu of straight, positive, or purposeful answers, discharges a new set of superfluous hypotheses and conditional positions in the symbolic, some of them bent, others on their knees, all of them, absolutely, negatively queer. Without further ado, I give you Vorkuta's grand finale, with Anatolii Marchenko in the role of your faithful emcee.

At the Gorky transit prison we were taken to the bathhouse. Inside the bathhouse in the changing room, sat a duty officer who examined us before we entered the washroom: had anyone tattooed himself on the train? Those with tattoos on their bodies had them copied down—the officer made a list of what and

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid. (modified translation.).

²³⁹ Ibid.

where things were written. Then came Vorkuta's turn (he too was going back to the camp). Well, the officer had enough work for an hour! Vorkuta stood in front of him in his dark blue briefs and slowly turned around before him, showing his chest, then his back. When the list was finished, the officer said:

'That's everything, right? Nothing was skipped?'

'Khrushchev was skipped,' replied Vorkuta.

'Khrushchev? where?'

'Khrushchev on my dick.' (*alt.* Khrushchev can fuck himself.)

'What did you say? Do you want a spell in the cooler?'

'You asked where on me was a tattoo-Khrushchev, and I answered you with the truth, that he's on my dick' (*alt.* he can fuck himself).

'Show me!'

Before the laughter of all the other zeks, Vorkuta dropped his drawers and showed: along the full length of his member in big letters was 'Khrushchev.'

'Handsome, isn't that the truth?' asked Vorkuta with an innocent aspect, stroking his Khrushchev. 'Only missing one thing, poor guy. Furtseva should be here for collective management.'"

The officer, having dropped his head (*alt.* the head), finished his list.²⁴⁰

На Горьковской пересылке нас повели в баню. В бане, еще в раздевалке, перед моечной, сидел дежурный офицер и каждого осматривал: не наколосся ли дорогою? С разрисованных он снимал копию — переписывал, что написано и где, на каком месте. Дошла очередь до Воркуты (он тоже ехал в лагерь). Ну, офицеру хватило работы на час! Воркута стоял перед офицером в синих трусах, поворачивался перед ним то грудью, то спиной. Когда опись была закончена, офицер спросил:

— Все, что ли? Ничего не пропустил?

— Хрущева пропустил, — ответил Воркута.

— Хрущева? Где?

— Хрущева на хуй.

— Что ты сказал?! В карцер захотел?

— Вы спросили, где у меня наколот Хрущев, я вам правду ответил, что на хуй...

— Покажи!

Под хохот всех зэков Воркута спустил трусы и показал: на члене во всю длину крупными буквами «Хрущев».

— Правда, симпатично? — с невинным видом спрашивал Воркута, поглаживая своего Хрущева. — Только скучает один, бедняга. Фурцеву бы ему сюда для коллективного руководства.

Офицер, опустив голову, дополнял опись.

Before digging into a thick description of this scene, I have to ask, how can this not be funny—not only to those readers of Marchenko's manuscript then and today, but to the diegetic readers of Vorkuta's obscene 'supertext,' the other *zeks* clustered around his ideologically incorrect member in some perverse instantiation of socialist collectivity?

²⁴⁰ Marchenko, *My Testimony*.

How can we *not* laugh at this priapic Abbot-and-Costello exchange about the General Secretary of the Communist Party? *Did I miss anything? You missed Khrushchev. Where's Khrushchev? He's on my dick. Whose (on your) dick?* And so on ad absurdio. Assuming Vorkuta's impudent air, I defy listeners not to snicker nastily at this ridiculous tableau of queer resistance or negativity in the Edelmanian sense. But as I pursue a queer camp-camp analysis here, I will not take into consideration Vorkuta's sodomitic track record as gulag 'petukh,' the cock of the walk (to use a functionally bilingual pun) in Marchenko's memoirs. I will also set aside for the moment the extravagant homoeroticism of this scene of sexual dominance and submission, in which the male warder qua state dominatrix demands his male prisoner drop trou and reveal a penis so magnificent it can accommodate the head of the Party on its shaft. Instead, I want to focus on the power dynamics at work in this master-slave dialectic that would make Hegel blush, and note how this anecdote animates the ways the power of the Party-state rests on the infinite activability of this scene of subjection and the total surveillance of its citizens. For this purpose, the warden finds a helpful analog in Althusser's interpellating policeman. When the state shouts, "Hey you!" and then "Show me!" the prisoner as much as the man on the street must comply—whether he is ordered to produce his penis or his papers. But unlike the docile subject of ideology in Althusser's illustration, Vorkuta does not simply heed the hail of the state and turn around guiltily; rather than identifying with this call, Vorkuta campily over- or disidentifies with it.²⁴¹

Such insincere responses to ideological interpellation are what make the "bad subject." This is Althusser's unelaborated term, which Judith Butler seizes upon and expands in her explanation of the queer relationship to the symbolic. When hailed, "the law might not only be refused," as with the official dissidents, "but it might also be ruptured," as it is with Vorkuta here, "forced into a rearticulation that calls into question the monotheistic force of its own unilateral operation." "Where the uniformity of the subject is expected," as in socialist society, "where the behavioral conformity of the subject is commanded," all the more in the camp, "there might be produced the refusal of the law in the form of a parodic inhabiting of conformity that subtly calls into question the legitimacy of the command, a rearticulation of the law against the authority of the one who delivers it."²⁴² Though Siniavskii leaves this scene out of his essay, the "exaggerated-parodic form" [*utirovanno-parodinoi forme*] of self-eating as a "cruel farce" comes to the fore here more than in the other, joyless (or less jouissance-laden) examples he culls from Marchenko. What is striking about this interaction is that Vorkuta remains firmly within the law, obeys every order issued by the guard, and even goes beyond the minimum of compliance with official mandate by offering up *all* of his body for inspection, including the places where state panopticism²⁴³ does not reach and official discourse fears to tread, like "Pkhents"'s Veronika--albeit to the crucial exclusion of hopeful procreancy in this case.

²⁴¹ José Esteban Muñoz considers camp the "disidentificatory practice" par excellence in *Disidentifications*, 119.

²⁴² Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 122.

²⁴³ Like Frankenstein's monster, he "accomplishes [his] resistance [to definition by a phallicized scopophilia] by mastering language in order to claim a position as a speaking subject and enact verbally the very subjectivity denied it in the specular realm" (Stryker, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein," 241).

Vorkuta deploys the “signifying strategy of camp” in the cooler, which entails the camper’s overidentification with the sign that ultimately “collapse[s] the depth of field and sign,” the difference between phallus and penis, “ [and questions] the reserve of truth heterosexual language implies, to make the sign ‘mean’ primarily in the present tense.”²⁴⁴ This tense, after all, is the domain of the unreal, who are displaced by teleological history and devoured by the Child of the future. Such a form-focused strategy of defiance befits the queer subject deprived of purposeful content. In this scene of twisted interpellation, “the subject who is ‘queered’ into public discourse through homophobic interpellations of various kinds *takes up* or *cites* that very term as the discursive basis for an opposition.” The subversive potential of this citation and resignification of heteronormative discourse is only heightened by the ambivalent backdrop of the bathhouse, that perennial place of “gentleman’s mischief” in Russian culture, even during the Soviet era.²⁴⁵ Herein Vorkuta enacts a queer resignification of language that invokes the heterosexual law of the symbolic in order to spectacularly dispense with it. “This kind of citation [emerges] as *theatrical* to the extent that it *mimes and renders hyperbolic* the discursive convention that it also *reverses*. The hyperbolic gesture is crucial to the exposure of the homophobic ‘law’ that can no longer control the terms of its own abjecting strategies.”²⁴⁶ As an immediate consequence, communicative chaos ensues.

The sincere meaning of Vorkuta’s word becomes impossible to hold down, even when that word is literally held in the hand of the state. Emanating simultaneously from the mouth and the totally-tattooed body, Vorkuta’s criminal utterances remain in an irresolvable tension brought to crisis on his penis. The offending genitals engender a caricature of subjection and symbolic castration. Taking advantage of the warden’s desire for the Phallus, the transcendent source of his authority, Vorkuta makes him beg for it and then flashes his nontranscendent penis instead. This bait-and-switch routine camps up the collective fiction on which the paternal law of the symbolic order is based. Paying attention to the lack or *manque* behind the curtain, the Phallus and penis fantastically come together in this scene. And in the name of the socialist father (or the Lacanian Name of the Father), Vorkuta completes his own *salto mortale*, a queer “repetition and displacement of the phallic economy” enabled by the act of exposure.²⁴⁷ “Heterosexual regimes,” it seems, are never able to fully conceal their operations, nor can they “fully [legislate] or contain their own ideals.”²⁴⁸

To the extent that one’s very ‘I’ is contingent on citing the law, of masochistically submitting to the master signifier, camp or queer parody, as a form of “citational politics [...reworks] abjection into political agency,” that is, mimesis with a difference, camped up in hyperbole, to undo the promise of identification.²⁴⁹ Camp subverts “the dominant, straight discourse of naturalism or realism from which queer subjects are typically

²⁴⁴ Bredbeck, “B/O-Barthes’s Text,” 279.

²⁴⁵ Dan Healey, “Masculine Purity and ‘Gentlemen’s Mischief’: Sexual Exchange and Prostitution Between Russian Men, 1861-1941,” *Slavic Review* 60 (2001): 233-65.

²⁴⁶ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 232. Theatricality is NOT a trivializing term for Butler, who is interested in drag in the context of the AIDS crisis. Theatricality is a form of politicality.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 237.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

excluded.”²⁵⁰ By figuring that exclusion, or showing off the symbolic’s “abjecting strategies,” the camp aesthetic flaunts the contrivedness of “mimetic realism” from the point of view of an unperson in realist drag. Camp camp “comes to life around [the] recognition” of the ‘mythiness’ of mimesis, that the Phallus is not the penis, that signifier and signified are not the same thing.²⁵¹ Vorkuta’s symbolic conflation results then in the “resignifiability of the paternal law.” (In fact, the challenge Vorkuta poses to phallic authority is already encoded in his camp handle, which comes from one of the harshest gulags in the archipelago, a prison shut down in 1953, the Oedipal year of Stalin’s death, following a massive prison strike.²⁵²) This act of artistry has political effects, entailing “a radical signification of the symbolic domain, deviating the citational chain to a more possible future to expand the very meaning of what counts as a [...] body in the world.”²⁵³

In his masterful and mischievous recuperation of Bugs Bunny as a “queer cultural icon,” camping it up in Warner Bros. cartoons, Eric Savoy conjures scenes of cross-species cross-dressing to show how Bugs, “the trickster rabbit,” “[deftly manipulates] semiotic cues within rigidly structured economies of desire” in order to “‘fling some sass back’” or “‘signify upon [his] enemy,’” the fully phallicized hunter, Elmer Fudd.²⁵⁴ In the classic and recurrent example, “Bugs Bunny cross-dresses to refocus Fudd’s desire” from ‘going wabbit hunting’ to wooing the presumably human woman he mistakes Bugs to be. The former “dresses to ‘un-dress’ Fudd,” engaging in a wily strategy of the weak Savoy dubs the “phallic divestiture [of] violent, heterosexist enemies.”²⁵⁵ The success of the transvestite rabbit in encounters like these, which are “organized around an exchange or inversion of the positions of dominance and submission,” depends on the capacity of comedy, and camp comedy in particular, to “[exploit] the gap between phallic ideology and the humiliating inadequacy of the penis,” and thereby “[expose] the laughable inadequacy” of phallic ideology itself.²⁵⁶ Previous to these inversion scenes, Fudd is shown in full possession of the phallus, not just for his blatantly penile anatomy but through the priapic prosthesis of his shotgun, which, does *not* go off at the most fateful moment, revealing Fudd’s impotence/ impotency in these instances. If the phallogocentric symbolic operates by suppressing precisely this disparity between phallus and penis, then moments like these bare the device sustaining the fantasy of the whole social order, its

²⁵⁰ Cathy Griggers, “Thelma and Louise and the Cultural Generation of the New Butch-Femme,” *Film Theory Goes to the Movies*, ed. Jim Collins, Hilary Radner, and Ava Preacher Collins (New York: Routledge, 1993): 129-141, at 132.

²⁵¹ Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence*, 311-2.

²⁵² For more on the uprising at the Vorkuta prison, see Alan Barenberg, “Resistance and the Everyday: Reconsidering the Vorkuta Prisoner Strike of 1953 (Draft).” *10th Annual International Young Researchers Conference: The Gulag in History and Memory*. Havighurst Center of Russian and Post-Soviet Studies (Oxford, OH: Miami University, October 2010). For more on strikes in the gulag archipelago at other camps, see Steven A. Barnes, “In a Manner Befitting Soviet Citizens’: An Uprising in the Post-Stalin Gulag,” *Slavic Review* 64.4 (Winter, 2005), 823-850.

²⁵³ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 19; 22.

²⁵⁴ Eric Savoy, “The Signifying Rabbit,” *Narrative* 3.2 (May 1995), 188-209, at 188, 191-193. Savoy quite convincingly asserts that Elmer Fudd’s entire physique, from (phallic) toe to his little foreskin of a head, “suggests the penile anatomy” (197).

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 196.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 197.

‘high het’ hierarchization, and make possible the queer subversion of the mythic system from within.

Applying the lessons of children’s television to the grave scene of the gulag, it would seem the interaction between Vorkuta, the trickster rooster, and the guard, his loping Fudd equivalent, “is structured by the [same] principle of the floating phallus, a satiric play which undermines the concept of the phallus as the sign of power.”²⁵⁷ In his camp interaction, Vorkuta “represents the potentiality of absolute play,” a direst threat to a social order predicated on its unswerving teleology and totality, its meaningful or significant saturation of all things it encompasses, its self-posturing as inevitable, “atemporal truth.” When Vorkuta and his cotravelers in the prison convoy set the phallus afloat in a sea of ambiguous meaning, they unanchor paternal law and lubricate its citational chain like a slip n’ slide for queer resignification. The symbolic, it seems, was never as rock-hard as those beholden to it had presumed.²⁵⁸

Not only have the warden and the watching campmates been loosed from their usual sites of meaning, but Marchenko is similarly set free by Vorkuta’s épatage and grammatically reproduces the subversive conflation, this time, outside of quotation marks.²⁵⁹ The memoirist makes note of the way the impudent inmate was “stroking his Khrushchev” [*poglazhivaia svoego Khrushcheva*] while talking back with mock sincerity to the state. “Isn’t it nice?” [*Pravda, simpaticjno?*], Vorkuta coyly interrogates his interrogator in a masterful meta-discourse. But how ought one who felicitously identifies with the social order respond to that question, so loaded with double and even triple entendre? The beauty of exactly what is Vorkuta enticing/inciting him to evaluate? Of Khrushchev, the party, the state, all that is signified by the tattoo? Of the tattoo, as a symbol or signifier that connotes commitment to these most ‘beautiful’ things of socialist ideology? Or of the insolent penis itself? As Sue-Ellen Case says of gender play in butch-femme performance, so camp-campers like Vorkuta “[play] on the phallic economy rather than to it”²⁶⁰—though Vorkuta decidedly plays *with* the phallic economy, as well, embodying for all of us, to invoke Nabokov now, how, “Oh, my Khrushchev, we have only words to play with!”

And what unadulterated pleasure Vorkuta takes in playing with words! How ridiculously he liberates official discourse from its intended meaning, cleverly twisting it against its stated P/purpose! Vorkuta’s perverse relationship to language is not, for instance, what Solzhenitsyn has in mind, when he talks of the forked tongue of the thief, that vituperative muscle spitting out spiteful sounds devoid of meaning. Such a sublingual and asocial character has neither the capacity nor desire to communicate content that might convert into human connection. Solzhenitsyn’s thief is consequently

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 204.

²⁵⁸ Or, as Tim Dean puts it, “The symbolic law of reproductive futurism is not as encompassing or determinative as Lacanians [think].” Tim Dean, “The Antisocial Homosexual,” *PMLA* 121.3 (May 2006), 826-828, at 827.

²⁵⁹ In light of the warden’s “*Pokazhi!*” the title *Moi pokazaniia* takes new on a whole new meaning, or “obscene subtext,” in Žizek’s terms. Not only does the whole symbolic economy of Marchenko’s text suddenly acquire a heady semantic non-identity, but, speaking from my own position as analyst of this work, readers are correspondingly seduced by the potential freedom of meaning, a scenario that pits the form and content of the text into affective tension.

²⁶⁰ Sue-Ellen Case, “Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic,” In *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, edited by H. Abelove, M. Barale and D. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 294-306, at 300 (my emphasis).

trapped on the material level of language—within its medium--stuck imitating form and forging a poor impersonation of socialist speaking subjectivity in the process. While Vorkuta also works with the form of language, he manipulates it masterfully to abscond with content, poaching it rather than spurning it, making him a literal and metaphorical thief. His tongue is a tuning fork, finely attuned to the different scales of the Soviet symbolic. His words hit more than the one note of organized dissidence, and are instead double-voiced, ventriloquizing the state discourse while sassing back a subversive response. This dualism (at a minimum) is instrumental to the irony that Vorkuta-the-nonperson strokes out of his Khrushchev. Abusing himself, he abuses the Party with a single flick of the wrist, and discharges the comedy of the state's popular mandate. As one samizdat author phrased it, "the unanimity of which the politicians boasted did indeed exist: the country unanimously abused its leaders, particularly Khrushchev..."²⁶¹ Vorkuta's masturbation crudely materializes that vernacular truth, while implicitly commenting on the masturbatory character of the Communist Party. His ideological gesture refuses to reproduce the Purpose; it is a wasteful act by the human waste in the sewage system of the social. Repurposing waste to symbolic use against the Purpose is what camp does in the camp: it is "a scavenger, scrounging 'history's waste' in order to 'rediscover surplus value from forgotten forms of labor.'"²⁶²

But Vorkuta is not satisfied with his handiwork until he has inserted Ekaterina Furtseva into the Party party on his penis. (Readers of the dissertation will remember her from the first chapter, as the volatile Minister of Culture with an inexplicable affinity for Marcel Marceau.) Furtseva is subject to literal and linguistic manhandling, by virtue of Vorkuta's suggestion that she is the only thing missing from his member, and also etymologically, insofar as the Russian word for "management" or "direction," *rukovodstvo*, includes the root for 'manual' or 'hand,' *ruk*. In a sense, the heterosexuality of Party politics reappears here, but in the queerest of forms—as the Party Secretary and the Minister of Culture fantastically couple on the criminal organ. The joke is on them again and again, but, says Siniavskii, "the Soviet leaders are, of course, a natural target for political jokes...only the joke has kept that unique, spontaneous vigor, which is the hallmark of art and which signifies something more than freedom of speech," a form of freedom in excess of dissident demands. "However much you could suppress the joke (and there was a time when telling jokes could earn you a prison sentence of five or even ten years)," as it did Solzhenitsyn, "it only gathers strength from being suppressed—and not the strength of malice, but of humor and sunshine...in the black darkness" of the "underworld" at the "farthest limits of Russia."²⁶³

²⁶¹ This is how samizdat author Valerii Tarsis states it in his roman à thèse, *Ward No. 7* [*Palata No. 7*, YEAR], an update of Chekhov's *No. 6*, that dramatizes the irrationality of insane asylums within the surrounding madness of the Soviet Union. Valerii Tarsis, *Palata No. 7*, pp. 42-3.

In more topical terms, one might be reminded here of gay journalist Dan Savage's resignification of homophobic senator Rick Santorum as a synonym for the effluvia from anal sex. In this brilliant instance of epatage, Savage abjects the abjecter, whose surname now connotes moral conservatism and its presumed opposite, laminating disembodied heteronormativity and deeply embodied queerness. This provocation repulses moral conservatives on the right, while also keeping queerness defiant and radically different even among LGBT voting contingents of the homonormative variety. For more on homonormativity and contemporary politics, see Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003).

²⁶² Andrew Ross, "Uses of Camp," *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 2:1 (Fall 1988), 1-24.

²⁶³ Tertz, "The Literary Process in Russia," 96-7.

Vorkuta's pun can be fleshed out still further, since he strokes not just the Party leader, made intimately his own with Marchenko's authorial hand, but he handles the party organ at the same time, the newspaper by the name of *Pravda*. His dual deployments of *Pravda/pravda*, move it back and forth between valences, made doubly ambiguous in his oral delivery and its transcription. (*Pravda* is in lowercase and capital letters because of its grammatical position the second time it appears.) «*Ia vam pravdu otvetil, chto na khui...Pravda, simpaticžno?* The first instance plays with the anatomical and symbolic location of reality. It can mean either, «I answered you with the truth, it is on my dick.» or «I answered you «The Truth,» that you can fuck off...» The first iteration imbues his reply with the status of personal veracity, undone by the doubtful sincerity of a cunning criminal. The second variant elevates his impudent speech act to the level of official truth, backed by institutional legitimacy. The next appearance of 'Pravda,' when Vorkuta coyly inquires of the inspector, «The truth, isn't it nice?», reinstates the slipperiness of meaning in his speech. The phrase can alternately mean, «*Pravda*, isn't it nice?» But as the old Soviet joke about the unreliability of official depictions of reality goes, “In *Pravda* there is no truth.”²⁶⁴ Neither variant is credible. Vorkuta exploits this symbolic instability in its own name, unfastening the ties between signifier and signified, making singular form encompass conflicted content, all to campy effect. In his pleasurable repetitions with a difference, Vorkuta's codes work like counter codes, as Beaver describes camp performances of language. “Like a cannibal, it might be charged,” or a self-eater, for Siniavskii, “he exploits all ideas, messages, and roles by orgiastically wasting their content merely for the form, the vicarious fantasy, and then wearing them like a feather, or a foreskin, in his cap.”²⁶⁵

We cannot grasp any one meaning of his message to the exclusion of others, even when, like the inspector, we are staring the message square in the face. Vorkuta's signifyin' penis provokes question after question: What have I missed? Whom have I missed? Where is the missing thing? What else (or who else) is missing? This “what else?” stretches the inspector's interrogation into potential infinity, with no satisfying answer in sight, not even an “and so on” to cauterize the pesky wound Vorkuta stabs into the symbolic. There is no purposeful end to the chain of significations, no metaphor of Purpose to subsume all acts into singular meaning. The inspector's insecurity of interpretation and the paranoid readings he enacts on the bodies of his charges belie the desire for the socialist Symbolic to be ‘self-same,’ in Siniavskii's term. For all his inventory-taking, of cutaneous marks and immanent meaning in the verbal utterance, the convoy guard cannot put a stop to the proliferation of puns. Looking for phallic unity, the guard uncovers but a penis making meaning promiscuous.²⁶⁶

The ‘authorial’ incident with Vorkuta and his party member in Marchenko's memoirs finds a provocative complement in the euphemistic picture of a Party boss

²⁶⁴ Another anecdote comes to mind by means of Vorkuta's provocative invocation of *Pravda*: *V Pravde net izvestii, v Izvestiakh net pravdy* or *V Pravde net pravdy*. Or “In *The Truth*/the truth there is no news.” Or “In *The News*/the news there is no truth.” Or “In *The Truth* there is no truth.” In the post-Stalin period, young journalists hoped to take over *Izvestiia* for the purpose of truth-telling, exclaiming, “Let *Pravda* be the mouthpiece of the party leadership”! (Vladimir Zubov, *Zhivago's Children*, 142).

²⁶⁵ Beaver, “Homosexual Signs,” 161.

²⁶⁶ That is, this train of metonymic meanings can never leap to the level of metaphor (Purpose, in the Soviet case). “In this realm, transfer tickets are of no avail. Within the confines of a system of transportation—or of language as a system of communication—one can transfer from one vehicle to another, but one cannot transfer from being like a vehicle to being like a temple, or a ground.” Paul de Man, “Anthropomorphism and Trope in Lyric.” In *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 251-2).

delivering a speech to a crowd of Soviet intellectuals Siniavskii paints in the essay, “The Literary Process in Russia,” written at roughly the same time as the Geneva conference. He kicks it off with a characteristically insincere lament and solicitation to his audience to pool their affective imagination with his. “I am inclined to feel sorry for those in authority” in the Soviet Union today. “You cannot imagine what physical and mental pain is caused to them by what I call, if you will permit, the ‘literary process.’” In a second step that now feels familiar to us, Siniavskii transitions to concrete visual description studded with explicit allegory. “The Party boss walks up to the rostrum on the stage of history and reads from a piece of paper (he finds it difficult, too!) with a text prepared by his experts: ‘Ladies and gents!..’ [*Khaspada! Liadi i zhantil’mony!*] And all the ladies and gentlemen present (in Russia, anyway) laugh” at the Party boss, an obvious impersonation of Leonid Brezhnev’s thick-tongued slur. (This dialectic detail brings Siniavskii’s Brezhnev into curious correspondence with Solzhenitsyn’s camp criminals, who are both belittled because of the unaesthetic quality of their speech.) As the boorish orator bumbles on, addressing an “audience of damned ‘interlekchuls’ [*yntylykhensii*], he thinks to himself: ‘Ah, you snakes, just you put a foot wrong and it’s the tanks for you!’” He mentally menaces them, with an unsuave allusion to the Soviet invasion of Prague in 1968. “And then he [makes a] great effort, straining to pronounce the meaningless words” of his wooden speech: “‘The arts and ree-elity!’” [*Difstvitial’nyst’ i iskhuistvo!*]

Siniavskii has prepared us for the political-semantic part of this punchline, in his contention that the official language used for representing socialist reality travels in a self-reflexive feedback loop, a linguistic castration that severs any connection to reality as such. To repeat his phrase, “It is an emasculated language in which words do not denote things but symbols or conventions...without any relation to reality.”²⁶⁷

Still, this is not a punchline in the usual sense, since the last phrase of the anecdote is the unscripted, phonetic truth of Party oratory. Brezhnev was notorious for mispronouncing the middle tonic syllable [*kus*] of the Russian word for ‘art’ [*iskusstvo*], and replacing it scandalously with the cuss word for ‘cock’ [*khui*]. Marchenko and Vorkuta, then, have made us receptive to the priapic pun that repeats itself from one Party cabinet to the next, a conflation that is already properly a property of the Soviet Symbolic, located at the site where the penis and phallus are fantastically stitched together. The prefix *is/iz*, meaning ‘emanating’ or ‘coming from,’ ‘originating out of,’ if read as a portmanteau term-- *is/ khui/ stvo* – implies that official art, socialist realism, is that stuff that comes out of the corporeal cock. (The suffix ‘*stvo*’ denotes an abstract noun, something like the English ‘*ness*.’) Once again, as with Vorkuta and his Khrushchev in reverse, when we expect the transcendent signifier or Phallus, we are greeted with the nontranscendent penis instead, faced with the fundamental lack in the supposedly holistic Symbolic. In other words, precisely at the point “art and reality” should seamlessly suture together into identity “on the stage of history,” language laughably calls attention to itself as language, punctures its performance with a tip-off to its own inadequacy with respect to reality or, rather, “ree-elity” [*difstvitial’nyst’*]. The conversion of *iskusstvo* to *iskhuistvo*, of art to onanistic emission, is the inevitable outcome when language that alleges to penetrate reality only penetrates itself, as Siniavskii maintained. This is the

²⁶⁷ Sinyavsky, *Soviet Civilization*, 203.

only kind of symbolic penetration that is possible, in a sense, for “when all society is bound up in a collective body, the sole sexual activity that can occur is masturbation.”²⁶⁸

The obscene rupture of realism and reality causes those caught up in its fantasy to erupt in laughter in turn. But this is no joking matter; there is no room for ironic ambiguity in a symbolic that strives for the illusion of self-identity. All meaning must be redirected to the head of the Purpose, and all affect stroked back into purpose-shaped harmony. Returning to Siniavskii’s narration, we see the Party boss, his identity reconfirmed through physiognomic detail, “sweeping the members of the audience with a glum, black, unblinking eye, [and wagging] his eyebrows to stop their laughing.” This silent but significant gesture strives to close off the ironic gap that opens up when the serious tone of phallic discourse does not coincide with its ridiculous delivery, when authoritative discourse is accented by the impotency of its speaker. “And everyone, having finished laughing, senses what it is in the air and falls silent,” just as socialist realism dictates, according to Tertz in his philological tract. With the hegemony of socialist realism, in imitation of eighteenth-century classicists,

we became severe and serious. This does not mean that we forgot how to laugh; but laughter ceased to be vicious and all-permitting; it acquired a Purpose. It roots out faults, corrects manner, keeps up the brave spirits of youth. It is laughter with a serious face and with a pointing finger: “This is not the way to do things!” It is laughter deprived of its ironic acidity.²⁶⁹

мы сделались серьезны и строги. Это не значит, что мы разучились смеяться, но смех наш перестал быть порочным, вседозволенным и приобрел целенаправленный характер: он искореняет недостатки, исправляет нравы, поддерживает бодрый дух в молодежи. Это смех с серьезным лицом и с указующим перстом: вот так делать нельзя! Это смех, лишенный иронической кислоты.

Ironic laughter is the nonrepresentational or unfigurable excess secreted by a symbolic bent on banishing all ambivalence to its constitutive outside. Yet this caustic subtext bubbles up beneath every spectacle of absolute seriousness, eating acid grooves into the lacquered surface of socialist reality’s representation, as in the conclusion of this anecdote. The intellectuals, “with serious faces listen to a report to the world at large on the new, still surging volume of writing and ever-deeper penetration of writers into real life. Meanwhile [the Party boss] is thinking: ‘Penetrating life indeed! They should be bending over a *baba* and taking her from behind!’”²⁷⁰

At last, propelled by the Party Secretary’s nasty interior monologue, my argument traces its anatomical line to the (rear) end of the state’s personal plumbing system, as promised in the last chapter. The conclusion accomplishes the camp-campiest of tasks in combining the “corrosive force of queer irony” for which Edelman calls, with the “ironic acidity of laughter” lost on socialism’s *realist* subjects. Rather than penetrating life, or

²⁶⁸ Eric Naiman, *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 77.

²⁶⁹ Tertz, *Socialist Realism*, 199-200.

²⁷⁰ Tertz, “The Literary Process,” 96-7.

penetrating a woman from behind, the camp camper, trading in artifice and insincerity, performs a subversive substitution, and penetrates the woman in quotation marks instead, a harried and hated Fly-like figure who only “walks like a woman” [*shel v zhenshchinu*] in the “homosexual pair.” If we follow these gulag flies, these figures of the death drive a little further, we arrive at the rectum that is also a grave, and attend the “gay funeral” celebrated by Mikhail Bakhtin, populated by “gay monsters created by laughter in order to replace the terror that has been defeated.”²⁷¹ This terror is the kind that camp defeats “in ironizing and distancing the regime of realist terror mounted by heterosexist forces,”²⁷² or, in the case of camp camp, the regime of socialist realist terror. The potential of anality, of anal-directed sexuality, to dephallicize the subject, provides a pipeline outside the constipated political-symbolic of realism.

Thus it matters that Vorkuta is cast as the camp’s most famous and aggressive homosexual; outside the phallic order, his presence represents an always hovering threat that the anus not the penis will be the object of desire. This substitution unsettles the ground beneath all knowledge, in Siniavskii’s conception, for “the two elements [of all cognition] connection and distinction” are contained “in the sex act”: “Adam and Eve emerged in amorous embraces and immediately understood the difference: which one was the man and which one was the woman. Having come together, they became distinct from one another; but once distinct, they came together. And thus, having known themselves, they began to get to know everything.”²⁷³ Edelman says something similar from the queer angle: “homosexuality is thought as a threat to the logic of thought itself insofar as it figures the availability of an unthinkable jouissance that would put an end to fantasy—and with it, to futurity—by reducing the assurance of meaning in fantasy’s promise of continuity to the meaningless circulation and repetitions of the drive.” Such a redirection of desire, against the teleological Purpose toward purposeless or wasteful pleasure in the nonreproductive present tense suggests the multiplicity of meaning in a system that supports only one. Loosing transcendent meaning from phallus/penis to the anus, Vorkuta restores “the will to absolute play” that is “eradicate[d]” by “subordinating the anus” in a phallogocentric model of the subject.²⁷⁴ This queer trickster’s “trick—which can be roughly defined as the material site energized by the full symbolic potentiality of homosexual eroticism [anal and penile]—is characterized by a doubleness that the (heterosexual) phallic/penis represses,” thereby “[foregrounding] an originary conditionality that limits of the totality of the phallus.”²⁷⁵ In other words, there is an outside of *this* symbolic order, and Vorkuta’s rectophilic member points the way. He leads this one of many possible “assaults on phallogocentric totality that are built around other material expressions of sexuality.”²⁷⁶

The anal or excremental is the sole escape-hatch out of political kitsch Milan Kundera unearths in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, too. Confined in a German POW camp, “Stalin’s son laid down his life for shit,” the reader learns. He commits

²⁷¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, translated by Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 151.

²⁷² Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence*, 298.

²⁷³ Tertz, *The Trial Begins*, 56.

²⁷⁴ Gregory W. Bredbeck, “B/O-Barthes’s Text/O’Hara’s Trick,” *PMLA* 108.2 (March 1993): 268-282, at 273.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 274.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 273.

suicide as a silent and spectacular refusal of the reasonable request by the other POWs and the camp wardens to stop smearing the latrine walls with his excrement. It seems totally senseless to us, like the other forms of self-eating, “most easily explained as perversion, psychopathy,” the act of an “inferior” subject, “the human face of waste,” to reinstall Siniavskii’s words here. “But a death for shit is not a senseless death,” contravenes Kundera. “The Germans who sacrificed their lives to expand their country’s territory to the east, the Russians who died to extend their country’s power to the west—yes, they died for something idiotic, and their deaths have no meaning or general validity. Amid the general idiocy of the war, the death of Stalin’s son stands out as the sole metaphysical death.”²⁷⁷ Parsing the scene Kundera supplies for us, Stalin son’s anality is a refusal of the phallic father and a disavowal of the supreme Purpose his father’s phallus signifies. If patriotism, or national Purpose, the lachrymose love of futurity that the frolicking child embodies, is that kitschy fantasy that makes us cry in unison and utter unconflictedness, then shit is a queer refusal, a re-foregrounding of the foreclosed anus. It is the only metaphysics outside of a social order that cannot countenance its questioning. Stalin’s fecal son embraces his abjection, befouls everything in the shit with which he has been equated, and, under the threat of violent annihilation, hurls himself onto the electrified fence of a social order that, incidentally, marks off its territory by electricity. (As the slogan goes, “Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country.”)

Parting ways somewhat with Kundera at the electric fence, we might revise his eulogy for Stalin’s son to read: a death for shit is *the most senseless* death in that it embraces total incoherence and flushes narrative logic down the drain. The reader of *Unbearable Lightness* is left wondering, *why did he do what he did?* Like Siniavskii and Marchenko, the witness to Stalin’s son’s suicide asks again, *what did he mean to say by all that? Why? Why?* These irrepressible questions do not diminish the metaphysical import of the act, whose apparent pointlessness makes a different sort of point about sense-making altogether. Speaking of suicides in “I” and “They,” Siniavskii stresses how “senseless [it is] to classify such experience according to its formal characteristics. Deep experience is always integral and concrete—it is unique.” [*Bessmyslenno klassifitsirovat’ etot opyt po formal’nym priznakam. Glubokii opyt vseгда tselosten i konkreten—unikalen.*] At the same such a distinct phenomenon cannot be classified according to its form, its very distinctness cannot be conceived in terms other than its form, as a kind of hyperinvestment in form or “formal overdetermination,” that marks its uniqueness off and prevents it from sliding unremarked back into the chain of signifiers. Though “more often suicides,” Siniavskii continues, “speak not about capitulation” to the social order, “but, as with acts of public immolation, they become a means of saying a sort of supremely loaded and most actual” or real “word to society.” [*I esli vse zhe v etikh usloviakh sluchaiutsia samoubiistva, oni chashche govoriat ne o kapituliatsii, no, podobno aktam publichnogo samosozzheniia, stanoviat’sia sposobom skazat’ obshchestvu kakoe-to samoe veskoe i samoe aktual’noe slovo.*] Like the Indian widows who commit suttee in Gayatri Spivak’s essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” it is impossible to fully access the significance of that “last, total” and “most actual word to society,” on account of its “confinement in language.”

²⁷⁷ Kundera, *Unbearable Lightness*, 245.

But unlike Spivak's subaltern, who acts in concert with silent convention, there is no ready code by which we might make sense of Stalin's son's negative gesture, the silence of which "compels suspicion about something evil which words cannot convey..." [*Molchanie zastavliaet podozrevat' o chem-to takom nedobrom, chto i slovami ne peredash'...*] The infelicitous force of something that words cannot convey is precisely the fact that words cannot convey, not in any true or total way. This proposition returns us to Siniavskii's primary points in "I" and "They": all communication proceeds by suppressing an incommunicable remainder; this is how the symbolic coheres into a unity. But the idea of this coherence is the cruelest farce of all—more maleficent than anything Stalin's son or Siniavskii's self-eaters might imagine. On the contrary, they are the figures of this inexpressible tension, performing the symbolic function Edelman ascribes to queerness, which is, in his words, "a matter of...*embodying* the remainder of the Real internal to the Symbolic order." Excreted in this 'unbearable' instance as shit, the "unnameable remainder" which queers incarnate, wears many nominal masks in the Lacanian frame built up by Edelman, including "the unnameable," the death drive, and enjoyment or *jouissance*, an insufficient translation of the "violent passage beyond the bounds of identity, meaning, and law."²⁷⁸ This queer passage converges with the "[cross-over] to some last total language" Siniavskii sees in self-eating, which blends tragedy and play, pleasure and pain, like *jouissance*. "Reducing *every* signifier to the status of the letter and insisting on access to *jouissance* in place of access to sense," these excrescent subjects muck about in "the meaningless machinery of the signifier," kicking up queer irony that "severs the continuity essential to the very logic of making sense."²⁷⁹ Indeed, queerness is tantamount to irony itself in Edelman's reckoning, as both figures refer to the Symbolic's lack of self-identity.

Thus "the radical threat of irony, which heteronormative culture displaces onto the figure of the queer, is uncannily returned by queers" in such scenes as the ones relayed in this and the last chapter, when that "figuralization" is not resisted but thoroughly taken up through "ceaseless disappropriation[s] of every propriety."²⁸⁰ These acts of negative identification, in turn, defy every humanist endeavor to redeem them.²⁸¹ For a synonymous moral unsalvageability, the shitty suicide extracts symbolic "value" from the same source as queer sexuality, which "demean[s] the seriousness of the efforts to redeem it."²⁸² Against humanism's compulsory compassion and tea-sipping delicacy, the queer self-eater, with consummate uncouthness and shocking insincerity, licks up the "bitter sweetness of self-negation" [*gor'kuiu sladost' samootritsaniiu*] resurrected by Siniavskii-Tertz in *What is Socialist Realism*. The unreal subject of the Symbolic breaks into the cackles of "destructive laughter" [*razrushitel'nogo smekha*] that socialist realism

²⁷⁸ Edelman, *No Future*, 25.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 37; 22; 24.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 24

²⁸¹ "Happy to earn their applause...by putting the puppet of humanism through its passion play once again, [liberal inclusionists and utopians] lead it in a human to the Futurch even while dressed in heretical drag. Delightfully drugged by the harmony, the freedom from harm, that their harmonies promise, they induce us all to nod along, persuaded that we, like their puppet...shall also eventually overcome, for knowledge, understanding, and progress must, in the fullness of time, set us free." Edelman, "Antagonism, Negativity, and the Subject of Queer Theory," 821.

²⁸² Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" *October* 143 (1987): 197-222, at 222.

tries to suffocate with its mandatory solemnity.²⁸³ These are the tastes and sounds of “acid irony,” “the chronic disease” [*khronicheskoi bolezni*] of Russian culture before the revolution, whose symptoms, as diagnosed by the famously superfluous poet, Aleksandr Blok, include “fits of an exhausting laughter which starts with a diabolic mockery and a provocative smile and ends as a rebellion and blasphemy” [*pristupy iznuritel'nogo smekha, kotoryi nachinaetsia s d'iavol'ski-izdevatel'skoi, provokatorskoi ulybki, konchaetsia – buistvom i konshchunstvom*]. When Blok, quoted by Tertz, testifies to “know[ing] men who are ready to choke with laughter when they learn that their mother is dying, that they are starving to death, that their fiancée has betrayed them,” Vorkuta’s inhuman visage materializes before our eyes. “In the face of this accursed irony,” which takes flesh in the accursed faces of Vorkuta’s criminal cohort, “everything is the same to them: good and evil, the blue sky and the stinking pit...”²⁸⁴ [*Ia znaiu liudei, kotorye gotovy zadokhnut'sia ot smekha, soobshchaia, chto umiraet ikh mat', chto oni pogibaiut s golodu, chto izmenila nevesta...Pered litsom prokliatoi ironii – vse ravno dlia nikh: dobro i zlo, iasnoe nebo i voniuchaia iama.*]

This kind of irony triggers “laughter at everything sacred in the world,” [*smekh...nado vsem, chto est' v mire sviatogo*], says Siniavskii. Sounding the death knell to all dogma, a perfect counteractant to Kundera kitsch, it “is the faithful companion of unbelief and doubt [which] vanishes as soon as there appears a faith that does not tolerate sacrilege.” [*Ironiia—neizmennyi sputnik bezverii i somnenniia, ona ischezhaet, kak tol'ko poiavliaetsia vera, ne dopuskaiushchaia konshchunstvo.*]²⁸⁵ For this reason, such acidic irony easily conspires with the queer camp aesthetic in a mutual assault on sacrality and self-serious meaning of any kind. I have called this style of double duplicity “camp camp,” so that I might shine a little light on the dark intensity of irony’s corrosive effects on the Symbolic, particularly as it is performed by society’s most (sexually) abject subjects amidst the most extreme conditions of social isolation. This chapter has aspired then, however paradoxically, to honor the humor of these definitively disrespectful camp-campers, morbid acrobats, masochistic self-eaters, common criminals and thieves, pederasts of both the active and passive varieties, and other prickly, asocial unpersonalities that penetrated the irreality of the Soviet gulag. In such a way, I hope to have written against the sanitized and sanitizing accounts of forced labor camps that consign this grotesque gang to historical impossibility. Consorting not with their noble inmate-neighbors from the Russian intelligentsia, nor with the well-intentioned humanists from the West abroad, my argument has tried to “turn away from the comfort zone of polite exchange” in the same twisting motion as these unpeople--away from the sites where Child-friendly politics transpire in tidy synchronicity with the teleological Symbolic. In lieu of all this, it has sought to “to make a mess, to fuck shit up”²⁸⁶ to no apparent end or preordained Purpose...

²⁸³ Tertz, *Socialist Realism*, 199.

²⁸⁴ Aleksandr Blok, “Ironiia.” In *Sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh* (Moscow: Gos. izdatelstvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1960–63), t. V, 345-349; quoted in *ibid.*, 198-9.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 199.

²⁸⁶ Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure*, 110.

BY WAY OF AN UNCONCLUSION...

Despite that the era I describe in this and the preceding chapters has long since concluded, and even been bracketed off from our epistemic present with the collapse of the Soviet Union some two decades ago, I have chosen to end my dissertation rather abruptly here, cutting myself off as Dostoevskii's narrator does with his Underground Man. "The 'notes' of this paradoxicalist still do not end here, however. He could not contain himself and continued further. But it also seems to us that it is possible to stop here." [*Vprochem, zdes' eshche ne konchaiutsia 'zapiski' etogo paradoksalista. On ne vyderzhal i prodolzhal dalee. No nam tozhe kazhetsia, chto zdes' mozžno i ostanovit'sia.*] Though the tale of things left untold by its very nature could go on forever, I will stop here, in the hopes that my 'unconclusion' flies in the face of whatever expectations preexist the genre of 'dissertation conclusion.' By leaving off without a 'purposeful' end, I take a lesson from Siniavskii-Terz. Instead of purpose, tidily tied up, I offer a set of hypotheses about the kinds of histories that become possible when we glance back at the past as unfinished and even unfinalizable, in the Bakhtinian sense. The notion of 'unfinalizability' was a "lifelong concern"¹ for Bakhtin, crucial not only to the theory of carnivalesque grotesquerie with which this and the last chapter have sympathized, but spanning his entire oeuvre. By unfinalizability [*nezavershennost'*], Bakhtin had in mind a general orientation to being and thinking writ large. He contended that, "nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free."

This open-endedness and multiplicity is as true for the future as it is for the past. And even when we speak about the past, "everything is still in the future and will always be in the future."² And when we speak about another person, when the author speaks for her hero, for instance, the only ethical position she can assume is appreciating the other's unfinalizability. For his part, Bakhtin's "Dostoevsky brings into being not voiceless slaves ... but free people...capable of not agreeing with him and even of rebelling against him," even if such rebellions also go unvoiced. There will always be some excess in the other that cannot be named, some irreducible and unspeakable alterity in history, something left in any narrative that cannot or will not be said. Thus there will always be more books to write about silence in the future. Resisting closure, this dissertation aspires to a similarly ethical relationship to history by conceiving of history itself as a relationship. Instead of advancing an authoritative interpretation of the post-Stalin period, I hope I have furthered a non-totalizing dialogue, or entered into a polyphonic "conversation in progress" with other scholars, not to mention my heroes, many of them unsung, some of them even unsinging.

Since I give Kharitonov the room to rebel against my authorship, I rebel a little against him here, and particularly his proposition—so uncharacteristically unplastic—that there are only "two unlying books being written, the one we are writing, and the one they are writing about us." In these books are embedded another canonical set of binaries:

¹ Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 94.

² Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics: Theory and History of Literature* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 166.

“Two primary questions...: Who is guilty? And what is to be done? And there are two answers to these questions: No one is guilty, and most importantly, there is nothing that needs to be done.”³ [2 *nelzhivyykh knigi pishutsia, my pishem i oni o nas pishut...2 glavykh voprosa v etikh knigakh: kto vinovat? I chto delat’? I 2 zhe na nikh otveta: nikto ne vinovat, a glavnoe, nichego delat’ ne nado.*] If we turn away from these limited variants of the past Kharitonov supplies, and turn instead toward his nonverbal practice, we find methods of movement designed to loosen up the material body in the dance studio which we might also productively apply to the bodies of history we conjure up in our scholar’s cabinets. As the fourth chapter elaborates, Kharitonov was interested in letting go of templates, opening up the subject to new positions and ways of being oriented in space and time. Like Siniavskii-Tertz in his plastic and permissive relationship to language, Kharitonov placed hope in corporeal play as a mode of political fantasy, and a way of holding onto our “enthusiasm for the metamorphoses” of the historic imagination.⁴ Those who leave behind their templates of history, who desert the Janus-faced progress narrative of the Grand March, may experience a heady sense of groundlessness as they walk through the past with awkward or unexpected gaits, as Kharitonov unconditioned his plastic protégés to do. Unlike Marxist-Leninists, standing firmly on their unfaltering answer to the accursed question, “What is to be done?,” we will fall more along the lines of Siniavskii-Tertz’s unsteady, uncertain addressees, who “don’t know where to go; but, realizing that there is nothing to be done about it, we start to think, to set riddles, to make assumptions. May we thus invent something marvelous?”⁵

This gesture of leaving the past and its people open to interpretation directly contravenes what Carolyn Dinshaw calls “mimetic approaches to history”⁶ (as the third chapter explored), in which today’s scholars put on their solipsistic spectacles, and look back at an eminently knowable and closed-off past. Such myopia of the present plays a premature game of Marco Polo at the archives, rattling off the names of history’s “speakable subjects”⁷ from a prefab pool of candidates, without allowing history’s subjects to speak back in a different, unintelligible dialect—or sass back, as the case of camp camp may be, and possibly smack us on the head for all our contemporary presumptuousness. And while this head-thumping can only be metaphorical, given the impossibility of achieving *real* “tactile contact between historian and past bodies”⁸ (whatever we mean when we say “real”...), we ought still let our eyes fall out of focus and rest on bodies that do not match our envisionings of what a Soviet subject should look like; and tune our ears to a different frequency, so that other sounds, some of them

³ Evgenii Kharitonov, “Slezy na tsvetakh.” In *Pod domashnim arestom*, edited by Gleb Morev (Moscow: Glagol, 2005). Miraculously, voice recordings of Kharitonov reading precisely these lines from “Teardrops on the Flowers” have been made available on the Internet. Dmitrii Volchek, “V dvoimom podpol’e,” on Radio Svoboda’s website, www.svobodanews.ru (August 6, 2011).

⁴ Abram Tertz, *The Trial Begins and On Socialist Realism*, translated by Max Hayward and George Dennis (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 218.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁶ Ann Pellegrini, “Touching the Past; or, Hanging Chad,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10.2 (April 2001): 185-194, at 185.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 187; 188.

⁸ Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 47.

utterly silent, might force us to reach a range of experience that otherwise exceeds our expectations for history.

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