COMMUNICATING CHANGE IN A TRANSFORMING STATE: GLOBALIZATION AND THE POLITICS OF OFFICE COMMUNICATION IN URBAN RUSSIA

by

Susanne M. Cohen

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Doctoral Committee:

      Associate Professor Alaina M. Lemon, Chair
      Professor Judith T. Irvine
      Associate Professor Douglas T. Northrop
      Assistant Professor Krisztina E. Fehervary

Finally, I would like to thank Alex and Jonah. Alex has lived with this project as long as I have and has been an untiring interlocutor and source of support. Jonah is younger than the dissertation, but has greatly enriched the last year plus of writing it with his laughs and cries. I dedicate this dissertation to both of them.

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Chapter 1

**Introduction: Transitioning Communication Skills
and the Russian Economy**

This dissertation describes how business leaders and educators have attempted to

transform Russian office communication skills after the collapse of the Soviet Union. By

examining the discourses, practices, and consequences of projects aiming to transform

office communication, it examines the production of "communication" in Post-Soviet

Russia as a site of transnational ideological struggle. The dissertation argues that the

ability to communicate at the office is not a neutral "skill" that can be objectively trained

and assessed, but instead represents an arena of intense ideological work shaped as much

by transnational processes as by historically and culturally situated practice. Struggles

over appropriate styles of communication in Russian offices, it suggests, are also moral

debates about the ongoing transformations in Russian society and what it means to be a

Post-Soviet office worker, and a Russian more generally, in a sometimes "wild" market

economy embroiled in a larger capitalist system of global economic connections.

As such, this dissertation examines debates over communication in the St.

Petersburg private sector as an entry point into questions of language and globalization.

It critically examines prominent conceptions of all-encompassing neoliberal globalization

and asks what else comes into view when global interactions are approached via the lens

of language and the ideologies that shape it. How, it asks, do ideas about communication

crafted in American business schools travel to Russia, and what happens to them once

they get there? How do these ideologies articulate with more historically sedimented ideologies and practices? And how are these processes shaped both by the political-economic transformations associated with neoliberal globalization and the fall of the Soviet Union and by people's sense of their own shifting positioning in global and local economic structures? One prominent paradigm that has been proposed for studying globalization involves following the thing (Appadurai 1986; Marcus 1995). This dissertation takes the route of following the ideology.[1]

In particular, my analysis highlights the impact of transnationally circulating liberal ideologies of egalitarian communication that are prominent in contemporary American managerial approaches that stress employee empowerment and new, less hierarchical models of workplace organization. These ideologies, which have been heralded as signs of the "new economy" or "the new work order," involve utopian visions of interpersonal communication in which one self interacts on an equal playing field with another self. In the dissertation I examine how these were mobilized, contested, and hybridized with other ideas about proper communication based upon status and gender in different work and training contexts throughout St. Petersburg in the time span ranging from the late socialist period through the Putin era. Ultimately, I aim to counter totalizing accounts of neoliberal globalization by exploring how the impact of these liberal ideologies of egalitarian communication varied widely among institutional sites within a single city.

This dissertation is based on 20 months of fieldwork in St. Petersburg conducted over the course of 2003-2007. The research was multi-sited and conducted in both work settings and educational institutions. My field sites encompassed three private businesses

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[1] This is most akin to the approach that Marcus (1995:108) describes us "follow the metaphor," a.k.a. "trying to trace the social correlates and groundings of associations that are most clearly alive in language use and print or visual media."

established in the country in the post-Soviet era—a factory that was a subsidiary of an American consumer goods multinational, a Russian-owned insurance conglomerate founded with Scandinavian capital, and, to a lesser degree, a Russian-owned supplier of pipe parts[2]—as well as several Russian-owned private educational institutions for office professionals, including managerial training centers and a secretarial school. My research also encompassed analysis of late-socialist-era training texts and oral history interviews with Soviet training pioneers in St. Petersburg and Moscow.

In this introduction, I begin by introducing the main arguments of the dissertation in the context of my field experiences. I then turn to my theoretical approach. After briefly contextualizing this inquiry temporally and geographically in Putin-era St. Petersburg, I conclude with a summary of the chapters of the dissertation.

Communicative Channels and Pathways

I did not head to St. Petersburg intending to study "communication." My original project conception centered on secretarial work. During preliminary research I had heard about the appeal of the profession after the fall of the Soviet Union for women trying to gain entry into the world of private business, many of whom were finding other avenues closed. I wondered about the effects of this path on the women that followed it, especially because popular representations of the profession in Russian contexts seemed to invoke a very different form of subjectivity than that usually heralded as the pathway to "transition," one that turned on sexualized femininity and subordination rather than the usual neoliberal watchwords of self-assertion, innovation, and flexibility. I arrived in St.

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[2] This site does not make a big appearance in the dissertation, in part, because I was not granted permission to conduct participant-observation research there. However, insights that I gained from interviewing the company's employees were invaluable for contextualizing my other observations.

Petersburg at the end of 2003 with plans to examine how secretaries' ambivalent positions as marginal participants in the private business sphere affected their understandings of self and society.

As a first step, I began a stretch of fieldwork at Fokus[3], a secretarial school aimed at women in their twenties and thirties. True to the spirit of participant-observation, I enrolled as a student. Located in a cozy nook of a crumbling St. Petersburg state university, Fokus's curriculum, as is common in Russian educational institutions, was vast. Its five-month program spanned traditional secretarial subjects such as typing and *deloproizvodstvo* (a Russian discipline devoted exclusively to document-preparation) along with subjects, such as English, computers, and economics, which had never been part of secretarial training in the past. What most captured my interest, however, were the classes the school personnel informally called the "image" (*imidzh*) sequence. A secretary with a Fokus education was supposed to be an "entirely new person" who had mastered the finer points of professional appearance, etiquette, and other aspects of verbal and nonverbal interaction. The image sequence involved three different classes targeted to this goal, a class specifically called "Image" that was focused on dress and make-up, an etiquette class, and a voice-training class, amounting to an estimated 100 hours of class time overall. I, along with my fellow students, soon found myself engaging in strange activities that departed markedly from standard lecture formats. We drew pictures of our ideal business suits on paper and practiced wrapping French fries around a fork elegantly during meals in a practicum in the university's cafeteria. We chanted a Russian translation of a section of the *Iliad* in unison with attention to breathing and pronunciation, and practiced giving other members of the class

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[3] A pseudonym.

compliments in a circle in front of the classroom.

According to the school's staff, one of the most important lessons that the school taught its students was the ability to communicate verbally and nonverbally in ways that projected a friendly, feminine, and professional persona. While prior generations of secretaries, they suggested, had lacked these skills, the school staff felt they were of critical importance in the new market environment. The students in my group, however, did not always feel the same way, and often did not consider these lessons as important as others in areas such as document-preparation and computer skills that they saw as providing concrete knowledge and skills that they would need to apply in the workplace. Why then, I wondered, did the school's curriculum invest so much time and energy into these image subjects, especially when most students claimed a basic knowledge in these areas? Why were techniques of verbal and nonverbal self-presentation thought to be so important for aspiring secretaries when the students themselves often had other priorities and other aims? And why were these classes, which I was told had not existed in secretarial training before Perestroika, thought to be so important during the current period of transformation?

Finding access to another site for participant-observation fieldwork after Fokus wasn't easy. I had first set my sights on gaining access to a Russian-owned company, following the advice of the many local scholars and business people that I had consulted who suggested that studying a foreign company in St. Petersburg would tell me little about Russia. However, I wanted to study work by doing work, a difficult prospect to arrange in any setting, and promises to ease my way often evaporated once it came to making those promises a reality. Although I did not always know why this was the case,

I had the sense that to ask for access from those powerful enough to help me was an awkward request both because it was seen as interrupting business as usual, and because, as an American, coming from the country most identified as the international standard for business success, people often assumed I was coming to cast judgment on their business practices. In the end, via the efforts of a family friend in the United States I gained permission to conduct research at an American-headquartered multinational, and decided that the plans to study a Russian company could wait. In August of 2004 I began a second stint of fieldwork at Razorsharp[4], a major U.S. multinational with a factory in St. Petersburg, where I worked on an unpaid basis, mainly in conjunction with the human resources department.

Here, I found myself in a very different environment than I expected after Fokus. Razorsharp St. Petersburg was a recently built factory with a separate office section that was a sleek and functional array of neatly organized cubicles and glass-walled offices. The role of the administrative staff here seemed to differ immensely from the type of jobs discussed at Fokus. (For example, there were few "secretaries" per se, and the one staff member who most resembled a secretary, the director's personal assistant, was more concerned with translating documents from Russian to English for the company's expatriates than with filling out the multitudes of Russian documents we had learned about in *deloproizvodstvo*.) Further—and what I found particularly surprising after my Fokus education—while female staff members did not disregard their appearance all together, they, for the most part, tended to be much too harried by the pressures of a recent expansion to engage often in the beautification rituals that Fokus's teachers insisted were necessary for contemporary business success. I wondered at first if those

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[4] A pseudonym.

who had advised me to concentrate exclusively on Russian companies were correct: Were the universes of Russian and Western companies so different that a Western company located in St. Petersburg had nothing to tell me about Russian concerns?

However, the more time I spent at Razorsharp, the more I realized that the lessons taught in both places weren't so different. In Razorsharp, as at Fokus, the intricacies of communication and interpersonal interaction were a focal point of ideological work, attention, and struggle. Accusations of poor communication practices were a common refrain at company meetings, and hiring practices guided by U.S. headquarters were designed to select those with particular communication skills for managerial positions. In this context, I was often called upon to act like a communication consultant who would assess Razorsharp employees' communication skills and provide suggestions on how they might be improved. (This was a role I had never intended to take, cognizant of previous Russian frustrations with Western advisors who claimed to be experts on local situations they knew little about.[5]) What concerned Razorsharp's factory management was not the office staff's dress or command of etiquette, but the communicative competencies thought to be critical for leading others, demonstrating proper agency on the job, and generally increasing the efficiency of the factory. However, here, as at Fokus, there was a similar sense that the communication style required in the Post-Soviet market economy was substantially different from the style required in the past. In both places, key social actors held that it was critical to correct such communicative deficiencies as quickly as possible in order to achieve personal and organizational success

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[5] See discussions in Holden (1998), Rivkin-Fish (2005), Walck (1995), and Wedel (1999). While I initially responded to these requests, wanting to be of service to the company that was providing me with research access, I gradually distanced myself from them over time as I saw what a politicized issue communication was at the factory. Duchene (2007) has discussed how research access for linguistic anthropologist in new economy settings is often intertwined with requests to intervene in local communication projects.

in the contemporary market economy.

As communication gradually became the focus of my research, and I went on to conduct research in two other workplaces as well as numerous training and educational institutions, I learned that this was a sentiment shared by many others in the city's private business world. In many workplaces and professional training centers, there was an intense focus on how office staff communicated. While the most obvious sign of this was the high premium put on being able to speak fluent English, concerns about communication were not just about competency in a particular code, and encompassed, for example, close attention to how bosses spoke to subordinates, secretaries interacted with clients, and public relations and advertising professionals communicated with wider audiences. They also involved broader concerns about individual Russians' capacities to present themselves to others in ways that would lead to personal business success both at the workplace and when seeking a job. Proper communication was seen as a major factor that separated a top-tier workplace from a lesser one or a new type of institution from one mired in the past, and judgments about who possessed such skills played a critical role in hiring, placement, and promotion decisions.[6] Certainly, communication, at least according to those who cared most about it, was not important to everyone: Office workers complained about brutish bosses unwilling to fund training in communication and related skills, while bosses grimaced that their employees cared about little but their paychecks, including the finer points of social interaction. However, for those that held it as a priority, communicating better at work was seen as a fundamental aspect of participating competently in capitalism, of becoming the kind of employee and creating

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[6] In this way ideologies of proper business communication served a gatekeeping function similar to that of standard language ideologies. See, for instance, Bourdieu (1992), Gumperz (1982), and Lippi-Green (1997).

the kind of workplace that was professional, modern, and respectable in terms of both local moralities and global expectations.

These concerns with Russian communication skills were highly intertwined with the massive transformative efforts associated with what has been called the "transition" to capitalism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. In the atmosphere of triumphalism that prevailed after the collapses of state socialism in the late 1980s and early 1990s, rhetorics of "transition" held that with the death of socialism, the countries of the former Soviet bloc were now well on their way to becoming capitalist market economies with democratic political systems, converging on the natural path already blazed by the West.[7] Few, however wanted to leave this process to chance, and numerous social actors engaged in projects aimed to make this transformation occur through strategic interventions. The most high profile projects aimed at transforming the political and economic spheres through processes such as privatization, decollectivization, and the creation of market and political institutions. However, as numerous ethnographers of postsocialism have documented, transformative efforts did not stop here, and through channels both intended and unintended, reached further and deeper into terrains of values, spaces, cultural practices, and people's subjectivities.

While, as I discuss, there was also considerable interest in communication at work in the Soviet Union prior to 1991, workplace communication skills have been a major target for Post-Soviet transition and transformation. A wide range of reformers, ranging from representatives of the European Union and USAID to multinational corporations and local entrepreneurs, have held that creating new types of managers, in particular, who

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[7] For discussions and critiques of these approaches, as well as ethnographic approaches to transition see, for instance, Berdahl et al. (2000), Burawoy and Verdery (1999), Kennedy (2002), and Verdery (2002).

communicated according to Western standards was an essential step in securing many

other types of change, both in the economic and political arenas.[8] "Improving the quality

of management," stated one United Nations Report on the transition, "is a sine qua non

for the success of economic reform" (1993:1). Such efforts have intersected in various

ways with an intensifying interest in psychology in Russia since Perestroika.[9] Among

these are intensely popular psychological "trainings" (*treningy*), targeted to the general

public and business people alike, which alternately promote personal development

through intense group experiences of open and honest communication and teach specific

and practical communication techniques for managing subordinates, drumming up sales,

and presenting oneself to work colleagues, as well as general strategies for influencing

others and avoiding manipulation.

Communication skills have particularly been a focus of ideological and social work

in Russian workplaces because they are thought to rely on skills that Russians do not

have or are slow in acquiring. In surveys of Western expatriates, for example,

communication has consistently ranked as one of the areas where local managers are

most deficient and in need of more training and development.[10] (Although such

concerns, it is important to note, have not been limited to expatriates.) Explanations have

varied, but have often been structured around difficulties of "transition." Many have seen

communication problems in contemporary Russia as primarily a product of Soviet

socialism. From this standpoint, socialism's reliance on command and control bred a

one-way communication style in which superiors ordered, subordinates followed, and no

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[8] See, for instance, BHEF (1992), Czinkota (1997), Gorlenko and Gilbert (1997), May et al. (2005), Puffer (1992), TACIS-ETF (1997), and UN, ECE (1993). Such concerns have often been expressed in terms of creating managers with a "Western management style."
[9] On this, see also Matza (2009).
[10] See, for instance, Engelhard and Nägele (2003), Longenecker (1994), and Kennedy (2002).

one put much stock in customer service. This argument suggests that post-Soviet Russians are woefully unprepared for capitalism, which requires fundamentally new types of friendly, approachable communication styles that have the power to attract clients and business partners and keep employees who can easily search for a job elsewhere happy and productive. However, there is also a competing explanation that instead puts the blame on a more recent historical period, the 1990s. For these people, contemporary communication problems are more a result of the collapse of socialism and the initial years of capitalism than socialism itself. According to this stance, the "wild capitalism" of the early nineties undid years of respectful, polite behavior under the Soviet system, substituting respectful styles of interaction with rudeness, criminality, and conspicuous consumption based on the thirst for profit.

Not surprisingly, when I professed an interest in Russian corporate communication skills, many of the scholars and communication specialists I spoke to in St. Petersburg advised me to look in the places where they presumed communication was the most deficient and backwards, such as large enterprises founded in the Soviet era, thought to preserve the worst of the past, and small, shady Post-Soviet businesses, thought to be one of the biggest problems of the present. These places, I was told, especially by people who were themselves invested in reform, showed what Russian communication was like at its purest and what needed to be overcome. As has been common in Russia's history, what was most "Russian" was often assumed to be the most irregular, the least transparent, and the most corrupt. This included, for instance, abusive, over-demanding bosses, rude and unsmiling personnel, and lazy and self-absorbed administrators. It conjured up abruptly answered phone calls, refusals to give reasonable assistance, and

overly bureaucratic adherence to obscure rules. It also involved vulgar displays of

wealth, reliance on bribes, family ties, and other types of connections, along with

secretive scheming in imagined dens of power and corruption.

Along these lines, most of those that I encountered in the St. Petersburg business

world, whether communication experts themselves, or local or expatriate professionals

working in St. Petersburg companies, assumed that, as a Western scholar, what I wanted

to do was point out how Russian communicated poorly and illuminate what they could

achieve if they did it better. This is a common type of analysis in the communication-

oriented scholarship on the region, which often shows how, for example, Russians lack

"empowerment" in communicating and what is to be gained if they could accomplish it. [11]

This was the position I found myself in at Razorsharp when I was consulted about

employees' communication skills. It also, I believe, accounted for some of the suspicion

I sometimes encountered when trying to gain access to business or training sites. While

sometimes, especially because I worked in positions akin to unpaid internships and

presented myself as a graduate student, I was seen as too inconsequential to deserve

much attention, at other times people became defensive and wary about my research

requests, worried that my goal was to tell them, like so many Western experts who had

jetted into the region since the fall of the Soviet Union, that something was *ne tak* (not

right). These suspicions, combined with training methodologies that identified free and

open training environments as critical for improving communication skills and worries

that Post-Soviet employees and training program participants would be particularly

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[11] See for instance Fey (2007), Matyash (2002), Michailova (2002) .

sensitive to being watched or recorded,[12] meant that even when I was granted access it was often limited. One trainer, for instance, allowed me to record his instructions and observations, but not the contributions of trainees, stressing that he did not want "to put the mistakes of the participants into the international arena."

This dissertation, however, takes a different approach. While there is good evidence that, for instance, Soviet-style socialism and American-style capitalism have emphasized different aspects of communication at work[13], the focus of this dissertation is not communicational "deficiencies" but projects that have drawn attention to and reproduced these ideas of deficiency through their efforts to transform Russians' communication skills. These include communication training sessions for professionals conducted in new private training centers, secretarial courses that promoted particularly feminine models of interpersonal interaction, and meeting practices in a Western multinational that were claimed to empower employees and promote workplace efficiency. They also include everyday practices of public relations and sales and representing Russian businesses to both local and international customers. I look at the ways in which advocates of such projects themselves constructed notions of Russian communication as poor and positioned communication as a privileged site that, if improved, held the potential to solve many other problems. Thus, I view communication

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[12] When permitted to record, I found that comfort with recording varied widely, particularly in individual interview situations. There were those, especially people in their forties and older who I had not met previously, who seemed quite aware of being recorded and seemed to speak with an awareness of the possibility of recordings being passed on to a larger audience (despite discussions about anonymity.) However, I also found that when I was permitted to record group events such as trainings or lessons, despite the fears of organizers, participants generally did not seem particularly concerned.

[13] Verdery (1996), for instance, argues that the lack of customer friendliness in socialist settings was related to the logic of a socialist system that prioritized procuring supplies (and thus befriending those higher up with power over supply mechanisms) over the capitalist imperative of attracting customers. However, it is worth noting that this distinction was not absolute, and the Soviet Union did make some efforts to enhance the consumer experience (Hessler 2000; Kelly 2001).

not as an absolute, fixed category, to be evaluated in accordance with universal standards of efficiency or correctness, but as a category formed amidst cultural and social change, at the juncture of different discourses and ideologies about what it means to talk and communicate at work.[14] "Communication" from this perspective is not so much about talk itself, but about the concern that people bring to this phenomenon (Cameron 2000a), a concern that I view as historically, ideologically, and culturally situated in the habits, concerns, and interactions of everyday social life.

Egalitarian Language Ideology

One day in the spring of 2007 I shared tea and cake with a well-known St. Petersburg academic psychologist and trainer in her university's cafeteria. Widely known as an expert in communication training techniques, the psychologist, whom I will call Galina Mikhailovna, had deflected many of my questions about communication training during the more formal interview I had conducted with her earlier. In the cafeteria she explained that she felt that what business people really wanted in Russia now, after 15 years of the market economy, was not communication training but something quite different. Everyone was exhausted from working so much, and what bosses really wanted was simply to keep their employees happy. Inspiring good feelings and increasing motivation were much more important now in her opinion than improving communication skills. (Not incidentally, she was offering a new series of trainings along these lines.) Pulling out a sheet of paper and drawing a graph indicating the demand for her various trainings, Galina Mikhailovna told me that companies tended to order communication trainings less frequently than the others. I was surprised, considering my

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[14] See Hymes's (1971) critique of universalistic, asocial notions of communicative competence.

own observations to the contrary and questioned her further. As she answered, it became clear that Galina Mikhailovna understood communication training in a very specific way. "They want vertical power" she explained, speaking of company management "and it [communication training] destroys this. They don't want transparent communication (*prozrachnaia kommunikatsiia*) with their subordinates." While she later agreed that communication training was after all of interest to some companies, she insisted it was only of interest to those founded with Western capital.

Rather than taking this to mean that workplace communication was no longer important in St. Petersburg in the 2000s, I see this psychologist's account as significant for the contrast it presented between a certain vision of communication training and the bosses who were unwilling to subscribe to it. Particularly important in this respect were the metaphors Galina Mikhailovna invoked. If contemporary directors were reluctant to order communication training, she suggested, it was because they were invested in their current brand of dominating "vertical" power, in which the "top" presumably dominated the "bottom." Communications training here was presented as a kind of intervention, one that could (if purchased) disrupt this verticality, presumably through training people in a different type of sociality, a type of social relationship that was no longer simply about "vertical" domination but involved other types of directionality. In a training manual she described this in more detail, suggesting that communication trainings could potentially provide a multi-directional type of disruption. In order to be effective, the manual explained, communication must be "transparent and mutual along all directions, horizontal, vertical, and diagonal, and especially from the top down and the bottom up." Instead of the vertical domination associated with Putin-era directors during our snack in

the cafeteria, this was a mutual type of communication that broke out of "vertical" channels to give voice to subordinates and connect employees occupying different levels and divisions of office hierarchies.

Galina Mikhailovna chose not to describe this communication exclusively in terms of spatial relations, however, but rather to incorporate another common metaphor in discussing power, the metaphor of "transparency," or visibility, more generally. This is a politically rich and globally circulating trope generally applied to the workings of powerful social actors and institutions. It valorizes clear, rational, open, and ostensibly democratic practices and procedures, with the implication that the powerful actually often act in ways that are opaque, mysterious, and secretive (Schumann 2007; West and Sanders 2003). It also, at least in some settings, involves ideas of personhood and social relationships, making transparent language representative of an honest, trustworthy character (Gal 1998). Galina Mikhailovna suggested that communications trainings could potentially lead to "transparent" relationships with subordinates, suggesting that these subordinates would thereby gain a wider purview of vision, learning more about management and the work of the company than they did in the previous "vertical" (opaque) mode. This suggested a type of communication that was more egalitarian than the current vertical kind, a type in which subordinates' right of access to information was equal (or at least more equal than previously) to that of their bosses. If this type of communication posed a potential threat to current modes of vertical power, it was precisely because of this radically different vision it presented of egalitarian social relationships unbounded by rigid managerial control.

This was a vision of communication as intervention. Communication training and

the kind of communication it produced were presented as potentially active, effectual, and transformative. They involved a type of language whose performative effects would not only enact societal order but potentially bring new types of social order into being. This, true, was presented as an unrealized vision in the current political and economic setting—but this was precisely why it carried the potential for so much societal and organizational change. This was an intervention intertwined with relationships of materiality—better communication was presented as something that could be offered, sold, and, in turn, increase profit and success—but this did not prevent there from being much more than material relationships at stake. Further, it was cast as a specifically "Western" type of intervention. Whether or not only companies with Western capital had ordered Galina Mickhailovna's communications trainings (and many others did not paint this distinction with such broad brushstrokes) this statement was important not as a reflection of empirical reality, but for the kind of distinctions it made between "Western" and "Russian" types of companies and communicating: Egalitarian communication techniques appeared to be something Western only of interest to companies with a heavy Western influence.

Similar ideas were held by many communications experts and business people I met in St. Petersburg. These were not the only ideologies present and they were often combined in various ways with other types of understandings. However, similar themes of egalitarianism, Westernness, transparency, and horizontal connection (generally opposed to the domination of overbearing bosses and bureaucratic systems of organization more generally) were a common reference point in discussing how Russians should communicate at work and the ways in which they were currently failing. These

ideas, which, I call ideologies of egalitarian communication, generally hold that there is something utopian about communication between people. Communication, especially of a type in which subjectivity communes with subjectivity with little interference from rank or hierarchy, is seen as having many positive social effects. These ideologies suggest that communication of this type can overcome pre-existing inequalities, sometimes temporarily, sometimes with long-term, structural consequences. This is because of the special type of communication involved, in which one self conveys its thoughts or feelings to another self, unimpeded by societal mediation. Such communication is said to be a societal good, as well as, in workplace versions, an economic good, which both improves efficiency at work and makes the workplace more democratic and equitable. It is also said to have the potential to solve many important problems, especially those related to structural inequalities. In workplaces these include stultifying bureaucracies, rigid social hierarchies, dominating bosses, and trapped, oppressed subordinates.[15]

The significance of making this kind of argument in the former Soviet Union is profound. The entire Soviet project can be viewed as an attempt to create a radically egalitarian order that transcended all existing societal inequalities, especially those associated with work. Workers not only would not be dominated by management, but would be identical with it.[16] In the "workers' state," official discourses had it, the bourgeoisie had been eliminated, and workers were now working for themselves and building a more just society. The equality of work relationships was to be the foundation of a society in which democracy was undiminished by the class divisions that had

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[15] See Cameron (2000a). For descriptions of related Western ideas about communication, see also Axel (2006), Deetz (1992) Kaplan (1986), Peters (1999), and Putnam et al. (1996). Also relevant here are discussions of the ideologies of Western linguistics, e.g. Duranti (1993b), Irvine (1996b), Rosaldo (1982).
[16] On these themes, see, for instance, Kotkin (1995), Oushakine (2004), and Stites (1989).

plagued European societies since the industrial revolution. Soviet factories were no longer to be sites of bitter, alienating domination, but "palaces of labor" filled with skilled workers who took great pride in their work. As such, reforms in industrial relations were figured as a key part of the wider transformations that would remake the world on a new egalitarian basis, mirroring the greater inclusiveness and justice of Soviet society more generally.

However, while the Soviet vision involved new types of communication, the main site of change was generally located elsewhere. Substantial societal transformation was unimaginable without actively working to directly transform social structure, particularly as it was intertwined with industrialization and the conditions of labor.[17] Along these lines, the early years of the Soviet Union saw mass industrialization campaigns that involved building expansive new factories and factory towns and cast these as key to ushering in a new era of modernity and civilization.[18] At the same time as these campaigns brought new people into the industrial fold (Hoffmann 1994), the state undertook massive interventions to reshuffle class hierarchies, and those labeled "workers" were promoted into management positions through vast programs of continuing education and worker-oriented "affirmative action" policies (Fitzpatrick 1979). Another key transformation was the organization of Soviet society into collective social units known as *kollektivy* (or collectives) (Kharkhordin 1999). *Kollektivy* were small groups, such as work brigades, said to be united by collective labor, which were found in workplaces as well as other societal institutions, such as schools and prisons. It was through their participation in larger *kollektivy* that workers and other Soviet citizens

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[17] See Kotkin (1995) and Fitzpatrick (1999).
[18] On the industrialization campaigns see, for instance, Kiromiya (1988), Kotkin (1995), and Lewin (1985).

were supposed to attain collective consciousness and pursue the collective goals that the socialist state required.

This is not to discount the role of language in the former Soviet Union, where linguistic transformations of various types were given a powerful supporting role. Perhaps those most intoxicated with the revolutionary potential of language were the avant-garde of the teens and twenties. They, however, were not as interested in the types of egalitarian linguistic transformations touted by Galina Mikhailovna, as they were concerned with establishing a revolutionary culture that would transcend the profanity of capitalist society by recovering or creating pure and authentic aesthetic modalities (Clark 1995).[19] The Futurists poets, for example, strove to find new combinations of new words that not only would depict the new world, but would also substantially transform the relationship of people and things within it (Lemon 1991). They trumpeted new forms said to be mined from a primordial past alongside modernizations of grammar, syntax, and orthography. Along similar lines, the Russian poet Khlebnikov touted a new "transrational language" (*zaumnii iazik*) that, by using a less arbitrary and more consistent system of signs, would become the universal language of the future. Literary critics inspired by Russian formalism also extolled the potentialities of new types of language in the pages of the avant-garde journal LEF. In one issue, they celebrated Lenin's verbal powers, describing the revolutionary leader's use of colloquial speech that avoided cliché as a powerful weapon charged with meaning that could be used to transform the world.

Such faith in language was not only the province of poets and literary critics.

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[19] See discussions of avant-garde approaches to language in Lemon (1991) and Gorham (2003). On "transrational language" see Janacek (1996).

During the Revolution and the early years of the Soviet Union, many others shared the conviction that language needed to be transformed in order to reflect the larger transformations of Soviet society and promote similar transformations in the mentalities of Soviet citizens (Gorham 2003). New acronyms to describe new institutional arrangements proliferated at the same time as a reinvigorated and more meaningful model of oratory came to seem an important instrument for rousing mass audiences. Some of these efforts were intertwined with ideas of egalitarianism: Proposed changes included new patterns of pronoun use and the minimization and transformation of ranks and titles, along with new styles of newspaper and novel writing that would theoretically be more accessible to workers and better reflect worker sensibilities.[20] Another important set of linguistic practices with implications for egalitarianism involved practices of criticizing factory management that were said to give workers a kind of "control from below" (Kharkhordin 1999; Kuromiya 1990). At the same time, there was an enormous faith invested in literacy and literary language in addition to other types of propaganda designed to reflect state ideals. Socialist realist novelists were said to be "engineers of human souls," who would transform readers into Soviet New Men by creating positive heroes that served as worthy role models.

There continued to be considerable state concern with the language of citizens throughout the Soviet period. Proper language use, whether by individuals, or as individuals as part of collectivities, often was seen as reflecting proper relations between citizens and the state. From the Stalin era through the 1980s, for example, the state invested a number of resources in both verbal and nonverbal aspects of etiquette,

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[20] On these transformative endeavors see Stites (1989), Gorham (2003), and Kenez (1985). Also see Trotsky on egalitarian pronoun usage (1973 [1922]).

targeting workers in particular as requiring instruction in this area. In conjunction with ideas of *kul'turnost'* (or culturedness) that encompassed both an understanding of high culture as well as an understanding of etiquette, cleanliness, dress, and the finer points of everyday civility,[21] various educators, campaigns, and textual sources stressed the importance of speaking to others politely in both work and nonwork settings. One was to use "cultured" speech that adhered to linguistic standards and principles of politeness (while avoiding showy turns of phrase) with everyone, regardless of one's own social status or that of one's conversation partners (Kelly 2001). At the same time, as I discuss in more detail later in this dissertation, social psychologists and educational theorists working in the 1960s-1980s also devoted much scholarly attention to the special types of collective communication that were both supposed to support and inspire workers in factory *kollektivy* as well as aid the learning process in the classroom.[22]

However, these efforts, at least in official discussions, did not generally cast egalitarian talk between people as an oppositional force that could undercut existing economic and political structures. After all, socialism, according to state doctrine, had already been achieved in the mid-1930s, meaning that any further transformations were generally cast as supporting this project in official contexts. (Although, as I discuss later in the dissertation, some social psychologists reflecting on their Soviet era work from the standpoint of the Putin era did retrospectively see their work as oppositional.) Such arguments echo a different tradition, one that recalls Habermas more than Marx. For Habermas, a special kind of verbal interaction is the key to democracy (Gal and Woolard

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[21] See Volkov (2000), and Kelly and Volkov (1998).

[22] Another important area of attention to language in Soviet society was cybernetics, an attempt to create a universal, objective scientific language and linguistic theory that applied to both people and machines (Gerovitch 2002).

2001). In the *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, (1989) Habermas argues that in the salons, coffee houses, and table societies of 17th and 18th century Western Europe new norms and practices of interaction arose with the promise to transform the existing balance of power. In these venues, the status distinctions that had governed everyday interactions and the "representational" culture of the state and court were to be left outside the door, and instead the private people who gathered were to interact as equals, regarding others as possessors of a "common humanity." In the political and other types of critical debates that occurred in these places, the primary criteria for determining a winner was reason, a theoretically universalistic criteria that applied to all in equal measure. As such, these debates, Habermas suggests, were the basis for a participatory, democratic ethos that could stand against the authoritarian tendencies of the state in general and the absolutist tendencies of the monarch in particular. Reasoned communication could create a space of interaction in which people could critically discuss matters of political importance apart from political and economic domination and therefore stand up to and provide a check on state power on matters that would otherwise remain unquestioned.

Habermas's understanding of communication underwent significant elaboration and alteration in later works as he elaborated an ideal (and universal) speech situation characterized by mutual understanding and made it the grounds of his theories of communicative action and deliberative democracy.[23] However, in all of Habermas's work, the promise of communication is predicated on a vision of ideal communication as an uncoerced face-to-face exchange between individuals in which people express their

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[23] See, for instance, "Toward a Theory of Communicative Action" (Habermas 1970), *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Habermas 1984[1981]), and *Between Facts and Norms* (Habermas 1998).

"own" thoughts and participate in debate *qua* individuals. These are assumptions basic to Western liberal ideologies of "personalism," which locate linguistic meaning in the intentions and subjectivities of speakers, rather than, for example, taking into account the role of hearers or other aspects of the social production of speech.[24] The notion of "common humanity," which, Habermas suggests in the *Structural Transformation*, originated in the intimacy of the bourgeois family and conditioned debate in the public sphere, conjures up an image of persons independent and free from all other relations but the human, unfettered by economics or politics, linked only via subjectivity and emotion. Indeed, communication in the public sphere is supposed to be maximally effective precisely because its "universal" rules share this sense of individuals as abstract, separated, and self-determining monads. Ideal communication connects individuals who are independent entities, and communication of this type can stand up against more coercive types of power precisely because it creates a new basis for authority that comes from individual, rational individuals connecting in ways that are generative because they are participatory and free of coercion.

This is a vision with a long history in the Western liberal tradition. John Locke, for instance, while less invested in the democratic potentialities of interpersonal communication, was similarly concerned with cultivating independent, disinterested speech as a way of promoting larger social goals. To serve as a modern and precise medium of philosophy and everyday civil speech, language needed to be divested of any connection to social position or indexical grounding. Correspondingly, individuals needed to be able to rationally express the views that they formed through independent reflection, unmarked by intertextual links to the viewpoints and authority of others

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[24] See Duranti (1993a), Hill (2008; 2000), Holquist (1983). Also see Rosaldo (1982).

(Bauman and Briggs 2003). John Dewey, for his part, writing two centuries later, was less concerned with the expression of individual viewpoints and more interested in the problem of making individuals into participating members of larger and more vibrant communities (Peters 1989). Yet he too saw the egalitarian communication practices of those individuals as important in transforming the social world. Defining democracy as "a mode of associated life, or conjoint communicated experience" (1916:87), Dewey held that it was particularly through participating in community life through linguistic practices of discussion, debate, critique, and deliberation that community members would build a truly democratic and spiritually rich social order in which all could achieve self-realization.[25]

Many Western industrial reformers have granted communication a similarly important role. In these cases, however, the transformations promised have been more measured, a pledge to heal the rift between workers and management engendered by Taylorist management techniques rather than transforming society altogether. If for Marx, the distance between bourgeoisie and proletariat was insurmountable without revolutionary transformation, liberal workplace reformers from Elton Mayo to contemporary proponents of empowerment and teambuilding have seen communication as a tool that could potentially transform class conflict into cooperation without fundamentally transforming the structures of society or the industrial enterprise and disturbing the classic liberal separation between economy and society (Hollway 1991; Miller and Rose 1995; Rose 1999a). For some reformers, this has been a matter of management communicating with workers via counseling programs and climate surveys

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[25] An interesting comparison here are models such as Victor Turner's (1969) conception of *communitas* and Bakhtin's (1984[1965]) discussion of carnival that see moments of equal communication as otherworldly departures from everyday practice rather than building blocks of a new democratic order.

aimed at understanding their personal concerns. In these cases, communication serves as a "bridge" between workers and management (Rose 1999a) that improves employee morale and helps management to better address worker concerns when explaining its policies. Another family of approaches, from mid-20th century "T-groups" (or training groups) to more recent attempts to mold "corporate culture," has been more interventionist, seeing egalitarian communication as a force for organizational change that could in itself substantially alter the relations in the workplace, not just make existing arrangements work better. From these perspectives, which I will discuss in more detail throughout this dissertation, communication conducted according to "open," egalitarian norms has the potential to "open up" bureaucratic structures and "delayer" organizational hierarchies, creating a more flexible and egalitarian working atmosphere that is better for individual workers and managers as well as for the company as a whole.[26]

While some Soviet theorists of workplace communication were aware of and even inspired by such approaches, they are a far cry from the models of collective labor and workplace participation envisioned by Bolshevik reformers at the dawn of the Soviet period. Yet they have been quite influential in Russia, not only in the post-Soviet period, but also in the Soviet 1970s and 1980s. Although there are some important parallels between the unachieved structural egalitarianism of the past and the promises of communicational egalitarianism in the present, one might suspect that any perceived similarities might make these programs less rather than more attractive to local social actors. How, then, are we to understand the appeal of such ideologies in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia? What is it about liberal visions of connection and communication that

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[26] For summary and analysis of these approaches see Hollway (1991), Kaplan (1986), Miller and Rose (1995), and Rose (1996b; 1999a).

have made them sometimes seem to hold the key to reforming workplace organization?
And what other visions have competed or intertwined with these as communication has
become a battleground for remaking workplace social relations, and Russians more
generally, into models deemed appropriate for the market economy?

The New Work Order

Some scholars have suggested that communication of this type has become
particularly important in the work sphere in recent years due to world historical changes
in the nature of capitalism and political governance. These transformations are the shifts
that have been variously described as globalization, neoliberalism, post-Fordism, flexible
capitalism, or simply, "the new economy," or, in the case of work, "the new work order."
These accounts suggest that capitalism in general and work in particular has been
reformulated in the last thirty or so years in a way that is fundamentally new. Despite
industrial reformers' claims to the contrary, many of these scholars argue that these
transformations do not represent reforms or improvements in capitalist practice, but
instead an acceleration and extension of capitalism's fundamental logics of expansion
and domination. Although most such accounts tend to focus on the experiences of the
United States and Western Europe, many narratives describe the fall of state socialism in
Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and the ensuing "transition" as a critical step in the
acceleration of these processes, ensuring the ultimate triumph of capitalist globalization
worldwide even in the areas formerly cut off by the "iron curtain." (However, it is also
important to note that Russia's position in the global order often seems equivocal and
many recent narratives express worry about a growing Russian authoritarianism that

resists full incorporation into the global economy and global norms of political and
economic conduct.)

It is important to review these accounts here, because some have suggested that
the transformations associated with neoliberal globalization and flexible capitalism have
particularly important implications for the ways in which people communicate at work.
The new work order, they argue, simultaneously involves new expectations for
workplace communication, new ideas about the nature of communication at work, and
new claims regarding what proper communication at work can accomplish. Monica
Heller (2005), for instance, has argued that "one of the major features of the new
economy is the central role that language plays, both as a means of production and as a
product itself." Where many have argued that these transformations are leading to the
production of increasingly individuated "neoliberal" individuals, scholars who keep
language and communication in view offer a different standpoint that instead highlights
the production of new types of interaction and connection between people at the
workplace and beyond.

There are two non-mutually exclusive stories about the transformations that have
occurred in the workplace and the world more generally. Both take the U.S. and Western
Europe as paradigmatic cases. In the more political-economic version of this story,
globalization is the prime mover. [27] In the face of increased globalization and increasing
global competition from abroad, this argument suggests, corporations have turned to new

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[27] Those who stress this side of the story include Cameron (2000b), Castells (2000), Fairclough (1992a;
1992b; 2006), Gee et al. (1996), Heller (2003; 2005), Iedema (2003), Iedema and Scheeres (2003),
McElhinny (2007a), Sarangi and Roberts (1999) and Urciuoli (2008). Also see Holborow (2007) for
critique. Key descriptions of these shifts more generally include Harvey (1990; 2005), and Martin (1994).
Also see Hardt and Negri (2000), who bridge both economic and governmentality perspectives, as well as
Dunn who does so in a postsocialist context (2004).

types of management strategies that have fundamentally reorganized the nature of capitalism. Where the old, Fordist capitalism was rigid and hierarchical, the new capitalism is flexible and specialized. This involves first, a transformation in marketing and production from mass-production and mass-marketing to more targeted practices of niche marketing and flexible production, focused on the production of specialized items. It also involves a transformation in employment structures from rigid hierarchies of long-term employees to delayered, more mobile arrangements with less middle management and a greater reliance on a flexible workforce of part-time, temporary workers that can be augmented and released with the fluctuations of the market. This has also (in Western Europe and the U.S. in any case), these theorists suggest, been accompanied by the growth of the service sector at the expense of the industrial sector as manufacturing has moved to more peripheral locations. Such transformations are said to go in hand with new company strategies that aim to increase global competitiveness through a new focus on language and communication both in newly transformed industrial contexts and in the realm of customer service.

In the more policy-oriented version of this story, the recent transformation is more a matter of shifting political rationalities and programs than a direct result of globalization.[28] These scholars have described recent transformations affecting the economic, political, and work spheres as a shift from the more socially oriented types of governance associated especially with the welfare state. The new "neoliberal" ethos, they suggest, associated especially with conservative politics, emphasizes self-reliance and market-based strategies over social welfare and social benefits. In one influential strand

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[28] Accounts linking neoliberal governmentality to a new focus on language include Cameron (2000b), du Gay (1996), and Inoue (2007). Key general sources representative of this perspective include Miller and Rose (1995), Ong (2006), and Rose (1999a; 1999b).

of theorizing, this is described as a shift in governmentality (Foucault 1991[1978]). By analyzing political and economic discourses in places such as Thatcherite Britain and Reagan's United States[29], governmentality theorists track movement from a more overt type of power wielded by states and other institutional actors, such as corporations, in the name of "the social" to a neoliberal rationality that is more covert and focused on the individual. As British sociologist Nikolas Rose has put it, "it has become possible to govern without governing *society*—to govern through the 'responsibilized' and 'educated' anxieties and aspirations of individuals and their families"(1999b:88). In this new version, subjects are seen not as members of society but as "enterprising subjects" in search of personal meaning who actively make choices to further their own interests (du Gay 1996; Miller and Rose 1995; Rose 1999a; Rose 1999b). These shifts, these theorists suggest, have important implications for the work sphere, since the capitalist enterprise, like the state, begins to govern covertly through the self-interest of its subjects: Management, like statecraft, becomes a matter of governing without seeming to govern, providing the structure and guidance that encourages workers to take on corporate goals as their own personal desires. While much of this theory has an Anglo-American focus, scholars have also traced the diffusion of this discourse to transnational sites such as international NGOs, the World Bank, and multinational corporations, as well as various other nation-states.[30]

Whether globalization or political strategy is seen as the prime mover, however, both versions of this story suggest that an integral part of these new transformations are new types of management strategies. Sometimes called "new wave management" and

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[29] See especially Rose (1999a; 1999b).
[30] See for instance, Dunn (2004), Ferguson and Gupta (2002), Li (2005), Olds and Thift (2005), and Sharma (2006). Also see Larner and Walter (2004).

also associated with ideas about "empowerment," "engagement," and "excellence," these

are types of management that are said to be less authoritarian and bureaucratic (and, thus,

more "flexible" and self-driven) than the hierarchical organizational style generally

associated with Taylorist management techniques.[31] While such approaches are most

associated with 1980s American managerial theory[32], they have also been intensely

developed in Great Britain and Scandinavia, and have been used in varying degrees in

companies throughout the world. (They are also deeply connected to the traditions of

liberal interventions into Western workplaces I have discussed earlier, although these

historical predecessors are generally glossed over by those who see these approaches as

typifying the new work order.) In these styles, which I loosely describe in this

dissertation as "empowerment approaches" to management, lower-level employees are

theoretically afforded more room for independent action and decision-making. Thus,

they are said to be "empowered" to make their own decisions about work tasks, a

measure that, proponents suggest, creates employees who are more emotionally invested

in their workplaces and job responsibilities, and thus, work harder and better for the firm.

Lower-level employees take on some of the responsibilities of middle management, while

higher levels of management, in theory, manage in less repressive and more egalitarian

ways, concerned less with sanction and control and more with facilitation and guidance.

Thomas Peters and Robert Waterman, whose business guide *In Search of Excellence*

(1982) is a touchstone for empowerment approaches, suggest for instance, that in such

managerial styles the job of management now becomes "shaping values and reinforcing

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[31] On empowerment and neoliberal governmentality see especially Cruikshank (1999), Dean (1999), Dunn (2004), du Gay (1996) Rose (1999a; 1999b), and Miller and Rose (1995).
[32] Although these approaches are often said to be new, they bear relation to a much longer tradition. See Hollway (1991) and Miller and Rose (1995).

through coaching and evangelism in the field—with the worker and in support of the cherished product" (xxv). As such, empowerment approaches are said to lead not only to a more productive workplace, but to a more humanitarian environment in which employees feel freer and more self-actualized.

Commentators have connected empowerment approaches with a greater emphasis on language and communication in several ways. First, they have suggested, the empowerment project itself is linguistic, in that it involves a new vocabulary and new types of management discourse and phraseology. Managers in particular must "speak the language of enterprise" as a "political necessity" (du Gay 1996:150), using new terms such as "partner" instead of "worker" and imbuing discussions of work activities with new references to managerial "visions" and "values."[33] Second, some have suggested that these new developments mean that talk simply becomes a more important part of the jobs of many different types of employees, from the new legions of new service workers who must verbally demonstrate their commitment to the firm through attention to customer service (Cameron 2000a) and the new "language workers" whose talk becomes a commodity to be sold (Heller 2005) to industrial workers who, as part of their increased self-management responsibilities, are now forced to be more verbally reflexive about their activities rather than only engaging in the types of talk that support on the job action (Fairclough 1992b; Iedema and Scheeres 2003). Third, commentators call attention to the emergence of new types of speech events taking place in workplaces that support transformations to empowerment management styles. These include special meetings in which workers and others must metapragmatically reflect on their jobs, new types of performance evaluations that borrow from psychotherapeutic models, and new types of

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[33] Also see Gee et al. (1996) and Wasson (2004).

teamwork that cut across different levels of workplace organization (Cameron 2000a; du Gay 1996; Inoue 2007).

However, one of the most significant ways in which these approaches involve language and communication, I will suggest in future chapters, is the extent to which they imbue talk between people as a tool for change.[34] While empowerment approaches do sometimes involve some degree of structural change, a central aspect of these approaches are ideologies of egalitarian communication that suggest that much of the transformation they promise is to be enacted and produced through talk of an egalitarian sort. Such measures include the kind of "information sharing" about company performance that the St. Petersburg trainer advocated, along with "coaching" sessions between bosses and subordinates in which managers are supposed to listen to employees and elicit employee responses more than they speak themselves. They also involve a variety of suggested forms and methods for fostering mutual communication between employees of similar and different organizational functions and levels, whether constituted as teamwork, quality circles, or even "communities of practice."[35] All of these types of interventions, empowerment proponents suggest, not only make talk at work more pleasant but fundamentally transform the atmosphere, and with it, the power relations, of the workplace. Verbal interactions in particular that avoid overt displays of power and dominance are said to provide a unique mixture of freedom and control that both guides employees and imbues them with new agency and independence.

I found similar approaches popular in many places in Putin-era St. Petersburg, particularly in Western-based multinationals, but also in a number of Russian companies,

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[34] Also see Cameron (2000a).
[35] See also Cameron (2000a), Fairclough (1992a), and McElhinny (2007a).

especially those considered "progressive" or "Western" in outlook. Such approaches were also advocated by many local consultants and trainers. In these places, theories about the new work order and neoliberal governmentality often seemed to capture key management priorities with almost ethnographic specificity. Managers and trainers hailed good communication as a potent means of improving workplace atmospheres, increasing employee independence, and increasing productivity and efficiency. These proclamations worked in concert with other types of work practices that aimed to encourage individual agency, forge flexible connections across company divisions, and harness the enthusiasm and skills of employees to increase efficiency in the wake of pressures to compete globally.

However, such approaches were not embraced in all institutional sites where I conducted research, and many places seemed to share some of the assumptions of empowerment approaches without sharing others. This was not merely a matter of "Soviet legacies." Many held that Russia's version of the new work order was constraining communication between people rather than freeing it up; while some advised employees on various communication techniques that might bring personal success under such conditions, they unapologetically invoked hard-felt divisions between emerging social strata, gender roles, and national positions within the global economy. Indeed, even within the private business sphere—the area of society that we might expect to conform most to ideal-typical descriptions of neoliberalism and the new work order— social actors displayed a wide variety of ideological commitments that are neither captured by sweeping narratives about a new neoliberal work order that encompassed Russia and Eastern Europe after the West, nor equally sweeping narratives about Russian

exceptionalism and authoritarianism that stress its defiance of international norms. This suggests the need for a more nuanced approach to the new global work order, which takes seriously concerns about its increasing pervasiveness as a kind of neoliberal capitalist governmentality, but at the same time does not attribute it an all-determining role.

The Global as Linguistic Process

My approach interrogates the role of neoliberal globalization in shaping office communication projects while at the same time trying to forestall the sense of coherence, inevitability, and strict periodization that is often involved when scholars invoke the "global." Rather than looking at how globalization and neoliberalism have sparked a "new work order," I interrogate how notions of communication that I found in St. Petersburg offices were shaped by several different types of transnational movement in conjunction with more historically sedimented practices and ideologies. Globalization can be narrowly seen as a recent economic process involving the expansion of capital in search of cheap labor. However, it can also be seen as an ongoing cultural process, not limited to capitalism, in which ideas, things, and various semiotic forms circulate transnationally.[36] Further, it can also be seen as an idea in itself, a concept and a discourse produced and shaped through the work of various social actors, from states to Wall Streeters, in a time of increasing worldwide exchange.[37] Globalization in all of these senses, I suggest, intersected with St. Petersburg workplace communication projects in complex and nonlinear ways. My approach, from this perspective, simultaneously considers how projects aimed at shaping workplace communication (and the debates

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[36] This literature is expansive. See for instance Appadurai (1996), Featherstone (1990), Jameson and Miyoshi (1998). On the globalization of semiotic forms, see Keane (2007).

[37] See Besnier (2007), Fairclough (2006), Ho (2005), Tsing (2000; 2005).

these inspired) were a site for working through some of the tensions of neoliberal globalization and capitalist marketization in Post-Soviet Russia and examines how these projects and debates incorporated and transformed ideas about workplace communication that were in transnational circulation. At the same time, I do not limit my focus only to transnational scales and interrogate how these ideas intertwined with others current in St. Petersburg at the time of my fieldwork.

I consider the global dimensions of communication projects not only because of the transnational reach of discourses about managerial communication and the intertwining of management communication projects in Russia with the processes that have been described as economic globalization, but also because "global" reference points were central to St. Petersburg business contexts. "World standards," the "world stage," and the "West" were all constant frames of reference, with the "West" often made equivalent with the first two categories. (While globalization is not necessarily Westernization, to many St. Petersburgers, it felt that way.) Many Russians felt that with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the ensuing economic devastation of the 1990s, they had been thrust into a new global milieu that had put them at severe disadvantage.[38] Russian consumers in the 1990s, for instance, decried that their country, once the pinnacle of the Soviet empire, had now seemingly become another example of a demoted "third world country" (Patico 2001), occupying the lowest position in an imagined hierarchy of interlinked nation-states. In this context, post-Soviet politicians, marketing professionals, scientists, and everyday consumers have all measured their own practices

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[38] This was a different perspective on globalization than that promoted by its most ardent proponents, a discourse that suggested that globalization did not bring benefits to all, but also involved new types of competition and stratification between nations (Fairclough 2006).

against perceived "Western" or "global" standards and often found them lacking.[39] Even

within the improved economic conditions of the Putin era, "Western" or "global"

standards and norms were a constant context of comparison in business settings when

considering matters of personal and corporate conduct ranging from dress to issues of

transparency and corporate governance. They were often invoked to critique "Russian"

practices (although they could also be used to valorize them). At the same time,

participating in large companies with global connections and conducting business

internationally was often intensely exciting, especially for promising young graduates

embarking on new careers. Much like other cosmopolitans, many young business people

in a city where foreign tourists and business people were regular parts of the urban

landscape yearned to participate in a global milieu that involved work, travel, and other

types of connection across nation-state borders.

Yet while conceptions of the global had emic relevance, globalization as an

analytic concept can often conceal more than it reveals. As a number of commentators

have pointed out, globalization is a term bound up with the triumphal proclamations of

free-market advocates.[40] In the 1980s and 1990s, in particular, Wall Street banks,

economists, financiers, politicians, and manufacturers all celebrated their "global" reach,

proclaiming that through technology, the expansion of the market, and lowering

restrictions on trade, the globe was in the process of becoming—and would inevitably

become—a seamlessly integrated whole, an outcome that they suggested would benefit

all involved. Much of the social science and humanities scholarship on globalization,

critics have pointed out, has shared many of these assumptions: Globalization similarly

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[39] See Ninetto (2001), Patico (2001; 2008), Mamut (2007).
[40] See Ho (2005), Jacquemet (2005), Tsing (2000; 2005).

appears an inevitable and all encompassing force that in the current global era effortlessly

knits together even the most disparate corners of the globe. Celebratory accounts of

cultural globalization tend to rely on the metaphor of "flow," which suggests a steady,

gushing stream in which particular circulating elements, whether people, things, or ideas,

generally originating in the "West," stream through the world in perpetual motion

without boundaries, limitations, or any other conditions shaping or limiting their

movement (Jacquemet 2005; Tsing 2000). At the same time, negative accounts worried

about specters of homogenization, Westernization, and cultural imperialism also tend to

privilege coherence, unidirectionality, and inevitability. This has often been the case

with more recent castings of global capitalist processes as "neoliberalism," as it has been

with older metaphors of "penetration."[41]

Anna Tsing (2005) proposes replacing discussion of "flows" with discussion of

"friction": The work of global connecting is never smooth, she suggests, but always

involves "the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection

across difference" (4). Even visions that claim to have universal relevance, Tsing argues,

can only be made workable in specific, contingent encounters that involve particular

groups of people (often from very different backgrounds) and have unpredictable, yet

significant effects.[42] I take this as a cue to look at globalization (and with it,

neoliberalism) as a process rather than an accomplished fact. It suggests that we need to

attend not only to *what* circulates, but *how* circulation occurs on the level of everyday

encounters. One piece of this story involves the work of states, transnational

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[41] For critiques see Hoffman, DeHart and Collier (2006), Kipnis (2008), and Rofel (2007). Also see
reconceptualizations of neoliberalism by Ong (2006), Ong and Collier (2005), and Zhang and Ong (2008).
[42] On the importance of attention to encounters, see also Comaroff and Comaroff (1997) and Sahlins
(1985).

organizations, businesses, and other institutions that promote and facilitate various types of transnational processes. However, an equally critical piece of this story occurs on the level of everyday practice. Rather than attend to the "global" alone, we might turn to specific, grounded situations that involve both elements marked as "global" and those marked as "local" and examine how these intertwine in practice.

Several theorists have pointed towards such a process-oriented approach.[43] I find particularly suggestive here a burgeoning sociolinguistic literature on language and globalization. While much of this work focuses on the global spread of particular languages as a whole (English in particular[44]) some of the most sophisticated accounts provide a more nuanced, practice-based view. These accounts suggest, as Niko Besnier (2007:72) has put it, "there is no script for globalization and its relationships to local contexts, but a complex series of positions subtly encoded and negotiated in day to day interactions."[45] These scholars avoid determinism by tracing how particular forms, genres, styles and other linguistic practices that circulate transnationally are taken up (or resisted or transformed) in particular linguistic environments by particular social actors in particular social interactions. Transnationally circulating practices are viewed as one set of resources among the many available in particular situated locales for indexing particular meanings and accomplishing particular goals (often those associated with a global, cosmopolitan, international outlook.) From this standpoint, globalization is not an

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[43] See, for instance, Gaonkar and Povinelli's (2003) and Lee and LiPuma's (2002) discussions of "cultures of circulation," which call particular attention to the role of institutions and institutionalized practices in circulatory processes. Also relevant here is Appadurai's (1996) concept of "indigenization," Ong and Collier's (2005) description of the process of decontextualization and recontextualization involved in creating "global assemblages," and Rofel's (2007) discussion of national neoliberal projects.

[44] E.g. Phillipson (1992), Kachru (1990).

[45] Accounts in this vein include Besnier (2007), Blommeart (2003), Leap and Boellstorff (2004), Lempert (2007), Pennycook (2003; 2006), and Jackson (2008). On language and globalization see also Fairclough (2006), Machin and van Leuuwen (2003), and McElhinny (2007c).

anonymous force, but rather a process mediated by social actors who "create semiotic opportunity in globalization processes" (Blommaert 2003:610), drawing upon globally circulating elements to create new types of meanings and make new types of distinctions.

My contribution here is to approach intersections between globalization and communication not by focusing on the circulation of particular practices in and of themselves, but by examining the circulation of ideologies that shape how particular communication practices are framed (Bateson 2000[1972]; Goffman 1974) and understood in particular social contexts. In this sense, I look at communication not as a universal and abstract process, but one that is situated temporally, culturally, and locationally.[46] I found that in the context of a globalized business milieu, everyday linguistic and paralinguistic practices such as smiling, conducting discussions, and asking subordinates questions about their everyday lives took on an ideological significance that could not be understood by examining these practices alone. Not only were such practices often seen as "Western" imports, but what that meant depended on many other associations. The same practices could alternately be seen as good customer service, signs of equality, evidence of democracy, or, sometimes, obsequiousness or falsity.[47] While for some, engaging in such practices were ways of generating structural transformations in Russian society as a whole, for others they were ways of adjusting one's "image" to get a job or please a client or boss—and for still others, they were simply natural signs of being a content or polite type of person. Similar ideas surrounded

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[46] This stance comes out of a long tradition in linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics. An important reference point here is the ethnography of speaking and its insistence on the importance of situating language use within particular communities and their characteristic speech events (e.g. Hymes 1964; Hymes and Gumperz 1972).

[47] Several theorists have drawn attention to the multifunctionality of the sign. See for instance, Bauman (1983), Bateson(2000[1972]), Burks (1949), Gal (1991), and Rosaldo (1982).

practices that seemed more obvious imports, from speech events such as training sessions to particular problem-solving genres (although the genealogies of these practices was often more complex than they originally appeared.) While interpretations of these practices drew in part from longstanding ideas in the Russian context and responded to contemporary local realities, they also often drew from currents that transcended Russia's borders. These ideas, such as the ideologies of egalitarian communication I discussed earlier, often claimed to have universal and "global" relevance, despite their own origins in specific historic and regional milieus.[48]

What I am suggesting is that interpretations of these practices were ideologically mediated, and that many of these ideologies were also entwined in processes of transnational circulation. In this I draw upon the considerable linguistic anthropology literature on language ideology.[49] Not to be confused either with Marxist understandings of ideology as false consciousness or with meanings of ideology that refer to the official positions of the Soviet regime (e.g. "Soviet ideology"),[50] language ideologies are culturally and historically specific ideas about linguistic practices and their connections to the social world. Generally seen as being linked to the positionality of those that employ them, language ideologies are usually conceived not as neutral descriptions of linguistic practice, but rather as intertwined with a particular "loading of moral and political interests" (Irvine 1989:255). Theorists who take this approach examine closely

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[48] On the circulation of universals, see Bauman and Briggs (2003), Chakhrabarty (2000), and Tsing (2005). Also see Ong and Collier's (2005) discussion of "global" phenomena.
[49] See, for instance, Kroskrity (2000), Schieffelin et al. (1998), Silverstein (1979).
[50] Scholars who study language ideology are aware of the many popular and scholarly associations with the term "ideology" and the theoretically consequential differences between them. The term, characterized by one scholar as a "choice. . as much circumstantial as considered" (1998:9) is generally meant to underline the positioned nature of these cultural conceptions.

how positioned speakers make links between particular languages or linguistic practices[51] and various social phenomena, whether these be activities, group or personal identities, or particular moral or political visions. While some analysts find these ideologies in the explicit metacommentary of speakers, others focus their attention on a more implicit metapragmatics that may never be discursively expressed. Taking the first route, I am particularly interested in what both experts[52] and everyday speakers have to say about their own talk and that of others. Following the lead of other scholars of language ideology, I hold that such explanations do not only describe the world but also create it by playing a constitutive role in shaping linguistic and social practices.

A language ideological perspective suggests that it is not enough to simply follow the movement of linguistic (and other) transnationally circulating practices. We need to also understand the ideologies that mediate circulation by shaping accounts of movement, guiding interpretations of circulating practices, and influencing how these practices are moved along and taken up. This means on the one hand attending to the ideological discourses that circulate transnationally alongside (or along different pathways) from those practices, whether this be through the circulation of related texts, the interventions of people moving across borders, or the actions of various types of transnational institutions.[53] It also means, on the other hand (as has been more common in the language and globalization literature) attending to more situated discourses about

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[51] Although much of this work focuses on ideas about particular languages, or codes, scholars have increasingly focused on ideologies about other types of linguistic practices, often examining how these intersect with other dimensions of sociocultural experience.

[52] Scholars working in this paradigm have not limited themselves to everyday talk, but have also considered continuities between the ideological aspects of everyday and various expert discourses, ranging from the analyses of colonial linguists to the theoretical texts of philosophers and social theorists. See Bauman and Briggs (2003), Gal (2005), Hill (2000), Irvine and Gal (2000).

[53] Relevant here is Keane (2007), who examines the circulation of semiotic ideologies as entextualized in particular semiotic forms.

transnationally circulating elements prominent in particular locations[54], along with attending to connections and disjunctions between these and less territorialized varieties. Some of the most critical ideologies for understanding globalization processes may be involved with ideas about the "global" itself. What speech practices are commonly held to be "local" and which are held to be "global"? What do people think that people who inhabit "global" milieus, whether these be close to home or in foreign countries, expect of them and how do they consequently orient their speech practices towards (or away from) these audiences?[55]

Taking such an approach to office communication requires taking business discourses seriously.[56] Rather than dismissing managerial discourses as mere "business speak," I interrogate these for how they, through providing accounts of linguistic and paralinguistic practices, present visions of proper social relationships both in work and in society in general. This means that while, like other analysts of language ideologies, I am sensitive to the ways in which these ideas about language are positioned and may serve the interests of a particular social group, I also suggest that they do more than this. Certainly, ideas about office communication often serve to naturalize certain capitalist practices, including practices associated with economic globalization, and often give support to a global power structure dominated mainly by Western people and practices. However, not only can these ideologies be mobilized for many other purposes, but their effects go beyond any narrowly economic or political logic. While ideologies about office communication may involve considerations of profit, commodification, and

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[54] See discussion in Blommeart (2003) and Jacquemet (2005). Also relevant here are notions of interpretive communities (Gaonkar and Povinelli 2003; Lee and LiPuma 2002).
[55] On these questions, see Besnier (2007), Wilce (2005).
[56] I thank Jessica Smith for this insight.

efficiency, they are not merely about economics, and also can serve as the basis for creating many other types of understandings of society and social relationships.[57] I am interested from this perspective in how ideas about management, as they are drawn upon in everyday work practice, become grids of intelligibility that shape how people make sense of social interactions inside and outside of the office in the post-Soviet market economy. How do transnationally circulating managerial discourses inspire interpretations of everyday social practice and in so doing contribute to the production and reproduction of various types of action, communicative practices, and social identities?

At the same time, we cannot assume that transnationally circulating management discourses simply "flow" into new settings unchanged, forming a unified "neoliberal" front that drowns out everything in its path. Here too, I have learned much from the theorizing on language ideology, which unlike Foucauldian approaches, does not assume that what people say, what they do, and the consequences of both of these "link up" (Burchell 1996:25) in a neat, connected ideological package that can define an era or a moment. Viewing connections between these elements as in itself a product of ideology, most linguistic ideological approaches embrace multiplicity: Language ideologies are generally conceived as multiple and often as conflicting or contesting.[58] This suggests that any attempt to come to grips with the transnational also needs to keep heteroglossia (Bakhtin 1981) in view, considering globally circulating elements as one resource among many others, some of which are more historically rooted in a particular location. Along

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[57] Compare Urciuoli (2008), who, in a compelling, but, I am suggesting here, too narrowly drawn, paper describes how neoliberal discourses about communication and related skills turn these skills into commodities that are sold by communications trainers and enhance the marketability of those that possess them on the labor market.

[58] See Schieffelin et al. (1998) and Kroskrity et al. (2000).

with embracing multiplicity, I also stress hybridity and transformation.[59] Language ideologies, as a number of scholars have discussed, often develop and gain new associations over time as new indexical links supersede or build upon older connections in conjunction with various social, historical, and linguistic transformations.[60] I seek to outline how ideologies with transnational origins are transformed as they are drawn on by situated social actors with their own particular concerns and ideological reference points. How do transnationally circulating ideologies gain new associations and become recontextualized in new social, historical, and political contexts?

As a means of focusing my inquiry, I have found particularly useful a suggestion from Susan Phillips (1998) to examine ideological discourses as they are found in particular institutional locations. "Without [institutional] grounding," Phillips writes, "it is not possible to take the next interesting step of talking about how language ideologies are socially ordered across institutions and groups within a nation and transnationally" (222). In order to understand the larger ideological landscape, this suggests, we must first analyze and examine ideological discourses and practices in specific and particular places. By examining how social actors in various workplaces and educational institutions mobilize circulating management ideologies I thus explore global influence as a thoroughly textured and contingent phenomenon, intertwined with both institutional and national historical trajectories and the agentive activities of particular institutional actors with specific inclinations and goals. This makes it possible to navigate theoretically between extremes of McDonaldization and an exclusive focus on the local, providing an entry way into examining how similar ideological discourses may have

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[59] See various accounts of neoliberal hybridities: Collier (2005), Hoffman (2006), Ong (2006), Ong and Collier (2005), Rudnyckyj (2009).
[60] See Inoue (2006), Kulick (1992; 1998), Meek (2007), Schieffelin (2000), and Silverstein (1985).

widely different (and unexpected) effects in different places within the same city.

In so doing, I also aim to navigate between approaches that celebrate the creativity of social actors in drawing from circulating resources and those that stress power, control, and the hegemony of ideas from abroad. Particularly relevant for a study of workplace communication practices is Deborah Cameron's (2000b) discussion of call center workers in the United Kingdom. Although Cameron does not specifically look at the global circulation of the "feminine" speech style advocated for call center work, she discusses how this involves a top-down "styling" of speech, which unlike the "crossing" engaged in by adolescents who index speech identities that are not their own (Rampton 1995), is specifically designed by certain people (managers or consultants) to be used by others (customer-service personnel) with yet another set of people involved in monitoring use of the style. This suggests that particular institutional actors (those that that Cameron calls "styling agents") may be particularly influential in deciding which transnationally circulating linguistic practices are made available to be taken up in particular institution locations, as well as determining which types of speech practices will be accepted and rewarded. In similar ways, others have called attention to the role of the media and other mediating bodies in influencing how particular circulating linguistic practices are distributed in larger speech communities.[61] Coming from a world systems perspective, Blommaert (2003; 2004; 2005) takes this further by examining differences between how transnationally circulating practices are picked up in the "periphery" and the "core."[62] Structural differences, he argues, affect the distribution of linguistic resources, as well as consequent evaluation of linguistic practices, meaning that especially when people or

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[61] See Blommaert (2003), Machin and van Leeuwen (2003), Rampton (1999).
[62] See also Jacquemet (2005) and Park and Wee (2008).

their linguistic products travel, peoples' attempts to meaningfully draw upon globally circulating practices may be interpreted very differently than they had originally intended.

With these approaches in mind, I consider how engagements with transnationally circulating ideologies are entwined with various material concerns and inequalities. On the institutional level, I pay particular attention to agents of cultural production, people like trainers, bosses, teachers, and human resources personnel, who were actively engaged in shaping workplace communication projects and were often positioned in ways that made their visions more likely to prevail than others. I do not assume that all exposed to these discourses subscribed to their attempts to shape communicative practice, however, and also examine how various other social actors within institutions from jobseekers to administrators variously "deployed" (Briggs 1998:230), transformed, and contested these visions in the context of everyday work and educational practices and particular personal and institutional dilemmas and concerns. At the same time, I also keep in mind institutional regimes of evaluation and control that further constrain engagements with the global. Departing from dominant institutional lines in the place I studied could mean not only incurring the censure of bosses or instructors but also potentially risking one's chances for hiring, promotion, or retaining one's job all together.

With a background of globalization in mind, I do not view these types of control as strictly institutional, and also connect territorialized work processes to larger transnational, national, and citywide transformations with material impacts. This includes, for example, the expansion of Western-based multinationals to Russia in search of inexpensive labor. It also includes the power relations involved as Russian companies

do everyday business with clients from abroad and seek to meet their expectations for both service and products. At the same time, I also pay attention to the shifting material contexts of work within Russian boundaries and the continuities and disjunctures that have been involved in the transformations from the Soviet socialist system to Russia's new market economy. I consider in this vein shifts that have occurred as everyday business transactions have taken on more of a "market" character (although I do not presume these market practices are identical to those in Western democracies). These include large-scale transformations in the processes through which people obtain employment and how businesses procure supplies and distribute goods. They also involve significant shifts in teaching and training, as these have taken on a more marketized, commodified form. At the same time, they also involve various other transformations connected to these material changes in complicated ways, such as widening status inequalities and shifting patterns of gender relations.

In considering these transformations, one of my priorities is attending to the ways in which different social actors make sense of these shifts. Bonnie McElhinny (2007b) has suggested that language (along with gender) "can become an idiom through which other social transitions are contested and constructed" (3). With this in mind, I examine how projects to shape office communication styles and the debates these inspired could be ways of both articulating visions of Russia's transition to capitalism and registering disapproval of many of its results thus far. How did people situate their own shifting status in the wake of Russia's considerable social and political transformations through debates over the proper ways to communicate at work? How was workplace communication a forum in which people negotiated the place of Russia

and Russians vis-à-vis a "global" economy? And how, from this perspective, were these projects and debates related to perceptions of social (in)equality and hierarchical relations on different scales from office politics to geopolitics?

A City of Art and Profit in the Age of Putin

By the time I conducted my fieldwork in St. Petersburg in 2003-2007, commercially oriented projects aimed at transforming communication skills were hardly novel. While in 1989 the program of a Moscow Image Center that instructed women in appearance and communication skills seemed rather new (Bridger, et al. 1996), fifteen years after the fall of the Soviet Union similar types of programs, while new to some, had lost some of their sheen. Although older people and those who did not work in the private sector were still often unfamiliar with workplace training practices, they were a known aspect of the institutional landscape for young, ambitious people working in private firms. Professionally oriented universities and continuing education courses regularly included training in communication and other "soft" skills, and employees in multinationals regularly received such training as part of larger company programs. Meanwhile, even employees at firms that didn't provide structured training programs often petitioned their bosses to attend useful courses and seminars.

Along with this, business and the market in general were hardly surprising any more. A number of anthropologists have written about the severe dislocations that postsocialists experienced in the late 1980s and 1990s as market-oriented activities spilled out of the shadow economies that once confined them and many experienced severe levels of material hardship. Often pointing to a longstanding preference for the

spiritual over the material in Russian culture, many scholars have pointed out how the market economy struck many as shocking, empty, shameful, and soulless. [63] This has gone along with reports that, calling attention to the extreme degree of social stratification that emerged from the "transition," have figured business people in particular as a particular rarified and hated segment of society. Accounts pit the everyday suffering *narod* (people, folk) against immoral and corrupt "New Russians" who live in a mythological, glittering world of wealth and privilege.

One might expect opposition to the market economy to be particularly strong in St. Petersburg, a city long associated with artists, writers, and the prerevolutionary nobility. The city's European-style spires, canals, and bridges in many accounts are supposed to speak of art and civility of a type that transcends more mundane and material concerns of business and profit. St. Petersburg, more than any other city in Russia, is particularly associated with the key notion of "culturedness" or *kul'turnost'*, the Russian ideal often linked to the intelligentsia that encompasses adherence to various norms of proper comportment, as well as an orientation to art, literature, and other aspects of high culture. It is supposed to be the anti-Moscow, a city whose residents are more concerned with intellectual and spiritual edification than rubles.

However, most of those I met in the private business sector in St. Petersburg did not see this as an absolute divide. As Jennifer Patico (2008) has argued, "'Russian concerns for collective welfare, generosity, and 'soulfulness,' though clearly part of people's sense of national continuity and particularity, are not *always* invoked nor pitted so cleanly against the 'outside' or 'Western' world of commerce, profit making and

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[63] See Caldwell (2004), Ries (1997), Humphrey (2002), Lemon (2000), and Pesmen (2000). On similar responses in Eastern Europe see Mandel and Humphrey (2002).

consumerism"(19).[64] While St. Petersburg was not seen to be as rich and developed as Moscow, most people seemed proud of its growing private sector, which placed it firmly above the provinces in terms of business success. In fact St. Petersburg, because of its legacy of culturedness, was sometimes seen as producing a more civilized, softer type of capitalism (marked by a more cultured style of communication) that softened the harsher, brutal type characteristic of Moscow. Along with this, while the economic stratifications that existed both within St. Petersburg, and even more starkly, across Russia as a whole, should not be underestimated, there were many people participating in the private business world from secretaries to young professionals and middle managers that are not captured well by overly dichotomized images of rich and poor. These people, while aware that their fortunes were better than others, did not consider themselves rich, and certainly did not consider themselves "New Russians," terminology that in any case was already considered dated by this point.[65]

While I did meet some people in the city, especially those who did not work in private business, who questioned the market's morality, for most people working in private companies, the facts of business were simply the facts of life. Even those who worked elsewhere often expressed their approval. When I described my fieldwork at a Russian-owned insurance company to my landlady, an administrator in the city administration, for example, she was pleased to see a Russian-owned business prospering. "Our young Russians, they are clever ones (*molodtsye*)!" she exclaimed, expressing admiration for the intelligence, success, and generally positive qualities of the

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[64] See also Caroline Humphrey's (2002) discussions of the multiple relationships towards profit and consumerism in 1990s Russia and the more positive valuations of these activities among particular social groups particularly invested in their pursuit, such as traders and New Russians.
[65] See also Patico (2008).

company's founders.

To many people in St. Petersburg at the beginning of the new millennium, I would suggest, Russian business seemed to be becoming more "normal" and "civilized," both in respect to the West, as well as in respect to Russia's history.[66] This might be surprising to some, considering that concerns of Western observers and aligned Russians about the return of Soviet-style control also grew over the course of this period. These narratives seemed to suggest that the country was veering away from the promising path towards democracy and a market economy that it had embarked upon with the "transition" of the 1990s. The biggest concern was President Vladimir Putin himself, whose style of leadership via a "strong hand" reminded many of Soviet authoritarianism. Concerned onlookers worried, for example, about increasing state control of the media, elections that seemed heavily swayed in Putin's favor, seizure of the private oil concern Yukos, and the matter of Putin's succession itself in which Putin retained power by becoming prime minister and anointing Dmitrii Medvedev, a little-known aide as the next president. Descriptions of Russia's "managed democracy" or the "illusion of democracy"[67] suggested that Russia had made a sharp departure from the predicted path of true democracy that was supposed to follow after "transition."

However, for many urban Russians this appeared like a time, after the upheavals of the 1990s and the aftermath of the 1998 economic crisis (and before the global recession of 2008) when the country was finally regaining its footing and beginning to catch up in the West, in part because of the stability that Putin seemed to provide.

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[66] On normality in the postsocialist context see Fehervary (2002) and Stukuls (1999). See also Patico (2008), who notes that while St. Petersburg school teachers' questioned the market intensely in 1998-9, by 2003 the market seemed more normalized and less fraught with moral transgression.

[67] On managed democracy, see for instance, Anderson (2007), Colton and McFaul (2003), Kagarlitsky (2005). Shevtsova (2007) speaks of democracy's illusions.

Enough time had passed, so that a 2005 film dedicated to "those who survived the nineties" (Balabanov 2005) could already bracket the decade of "wild "business and target it for satire.[68] *Zhmurki* (or *Blind-man's Bluff*) begins in a university business classroom, where the lecturer, a respectable woman in her 60s, stresses the importance, as well as difficulty, of obtaining start-up capital for a new business in the current period. Things were quite different, however, she suggests in the 1990s, a time when the oligarchs quickly obtained their property, pyramid schemes ran rampant, and various types of criminal groups flourished. The film then cuts back to a comic version of the wild 90s, where bungling, uncultured, and quick-shooting gangsters, thick gold chains, and raspberry-jacketed New Russians still reign.

While everyone in Putin-era St. Petersburg knew of shady business people and exploitative business practices, most would not disagree with publications that presented being a high-level manager or business owner in the abstract as a respectable and desirable profession.[69] Money and how to get more of it through career advancement seemed to be just about on everyone's minds in St. Petersburg in an unapologetic, pragmatic way. Those who could enrolled in professional preparation courses, earned second undergraduate degrees, used the contacts they had to search for suitable jobs, or tried their luck getting positions through recruitment services, resumes, and job interviews. Those whose skills were not so easily marketable often strove to find alternative paths to better paying jobs. Psychologists, who had yet to gain a sizable following outside poorly paid state clinics, became consultants. Academics tried to

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[68] Also see Oushakine's (2009) discussion of widespread characterizations of the 1990s as the time of "*bespredel*," or lawlessness, a term simultaneously referring to "a lack of any visible obstacles or limits" and "an absence of any shared rules or laws (1).

[69] See for instance "Est' li geroi. . ." (2000).

secure foreign grants or live abroad. Gas prices were up, salaries were rising, and professionals in St. Petersburg were generally enjoying a better standard of living than they had previously. Even meager state salaries were on the rise. (Although other people in the city, such as those considered too old for most jobs, still suffered, and, people acknowledged, the situation was quite different in other regions of the country.)

In this period of relative stability, what once had been surprising was continually being reworked and reprocessed into a narrative in which business, capitalism, and the market were woven into the fabric of everyday "normal" existence. One thread of this fabric involved communication. Everyday projects aimed at shaping communication at work also involved visions of what it meant to communicate normally in the country's private offices in the context of a normalizing market economy embedded in a global economic system.

Outline of the Chapters

In the dissertation I move between institutional and historical sites, analyzing different understandings of office communication as they were drawn upon and debated in relation to particular historical, political, and economic circumstances. Part I of the dissertation, entitled Global Empowerment, focuses upon Razorsharp St. Petersburg, a factory that was a subsidiary of a major American-based multinational that made razors and other consumer products. By beginning here I start by approaching Russian communication skills from a foreign vantage point, providing an outsider's perspective, taken up by expatriates as well as the Western-oriented Russian employees of the multinational, that Russian communication skills were generally in dire need of

improvement and required intervention that only the latest globally circulating neoliberal management techniques could provide. Ideas about communication at this site most closely fit scholarly narratives about the new neoliberal work order, and I take the opportunity in these chapters to conduct a dialogue with theorists of globalization and neoliberalism, drawing out the implications of paradigmatically neoliberal management theories for understandings of communication in the context of a specific ethnographic case. I show how these techniques, despite their associations with individualism, are deeply concerned with communicative relations between people and explore how their use in the factory shaped everyday practices, subjectivities, and debates in multiple and complex ways that cannot be separated from the political economic and situational context of their employment.

Chapter Two introduces the Razorsharp factory at the moment of a corporate expansion project in the early 2000s that threw the factory into near crisis. It explores how amidst the tensions of the expansion "communication" came to be seen as a means of production that could address shop floor problems, situating these appeals to communication with respect to globally circulating governmental strategies of employee empowerment and caring communication said to produce a more egalitarian workplace. By tracing debates over the links these approaches make between communication and efficiency, I, following the observations of some of the Razorsharp employees themselves, probe some of the rifts in neoliberal discourse, suggesting that accounts of a smooth harmonized global milieu, no matter how "caring," cannot counter deeply felt material realities of expansions eastward in search of cheap labor.

The third chapter moves inward from the global scale to look more closely at how

globally circulating ideologies about empowerment and caring communication became territorialized at Razorsharp. Shifting its focus from the shop floor to the meetings, documents, and orientations of professional and supervisory office employees, it examines how even seemingly egalitarian language ideologies can become transformed in particular historical and institutional contexts, becoming a type of symbolic domination that often divides people more than it brings them together, even when many of these ideas are widely shared. While company employees generally embraced sanctioned company values of "discussion" and "speaking up," amid pervasive and deeply felt distinctions between Russia and the West, evaluations of employee talk often seemed to suggest that Russian employees lacked the agency, as well as communication skills, required for work in a modern globalized milieu.

Part II, Partnership *Obshchenie* and the Soviet State, looks back to the Soviet 1970s and 1980s to disrupt narratives of the new global work order by arguing that there was also considerable concern about issues of workplace communication in the Soviet Union in the late socialist period. In particular, it examine the case of the "sociopsychological training," an interactive method of pedagogy in a small group context that was imbued with tremendous significance both in Anglo-American contexts and in the former Soviet Union (Chapter Four). Drawing from Soviet training manuals as well as contemporary oral and written recollections of Soviet training methodologies, I describe how Soviet trainers recontextualized the training form, known in the United States for fostering individual self-expression and a democratic social order, as a technology for producing conversational equality suited to a proclaimed socialist democracy marked with the signs and communication styles of bureaucratism and

hierarchy. In so doing I reflect upon the global circulation of particular sociolinguistic technologies and their articulation with particular sociopolitical contexts, as well as the multiple, multidimensional, and often indeterminate possibilities of meaning creation made possible by such processes of movement and translation.

In Part III, Moralities of Market Interaction, I return to the Putin era to examine how technologies of office communication such as the training have been applied to the new dilemmas of capitalist marketization. No longer taking the perspective of foreign companies that deny Russian communicative abilities, I focus here on locally rooted actors who were concerned with producing a moral and civilized post-Soviet business sphere that would supersede the wildness of the early days of the market. Facing the realities of a stratified market environment, rather than the hierarchies of socialism, the people I describe in this part of the dissertation found tools for success in a wild market less in egalitarian dreams than in pragmatic approaches to capitalist interaction that were highly attuned to matters of power and influence as well as moral correctness and civilized behavior. As they struggled to articulate a model of communication appropriate for the Post-Soviet marketplace they at the same time worked to construct a model of Russian business practice appropriate for a local labor market that was nonetheless felt to be continually on the world stage.

In this vein, Chapter Five focuses on Fokus secretarial school, a private and locally owned educational institution that offered courses in etiquette and image alongside courses in typing and document preparation to women considering working in the highly sexualized secretarial profession. Here, consideration of the gendering of the Post-Soviet labor market provides a springboard for meditations on a prevalent Post-

Soviet metadiscourse on image that both drew from and departed from ideal-typical

models of neoliberal and liberal personhood and communication. While image appeared

to offer everyone an opportunity to compete in a market economy subject to the imagined

standards of Western others, at the same time it promoted types of self-presentation that

required astute attention to the signs of inequality. In this chapter I examine the school's

production of a self-realizing, yet elegantly subservient secretarial image as a response to

the dilemmas that the market economy presented to young women, examining image not

only as a tool for individual success, but also as an attempt to provide problematic market

transactions with a morally sound foundation of beautiful and cultured communicative

interaction that would play well at home and abroad.

Chapter Six continues the discussion of image, influence, and status by shifting the

focus from local labor markets and gender relations to relationships between companies

that span local and global scales. Centered around the public relations work of a rapidly

expanding St. Petersburg-based conglomerate called the Neptune Group, it puts

discussions of image in a broader context, showing how understandings of image

prominent in professional discourses of PR, marketing, and advertising were intertwined

with international, quintessentially neoliberal concerns about contracts and corporate

governance as well as understandings of Russian business based upon informal networks

of social ties. The chapter extends the discussion of interpersonal communication to

relationships between firms, examining how various social actors solved what has been

cast as a particularly Post-Soviet problem of forming links between firms in the wake of

central planning. As such, it brings together scholarly discussions of the "abstract"

nature of capitalist market interactions and the "embedded" nature of Russian

dependence of personal connections, suggesting that these approaches do not, as is often

suggested, represent diametrically opposed types of economic interaction, but instead

intermingle in complex and unpredictable ways. This is followed by a conclusion that

summarizes and expands upon the theoretical implications of the dissertation.

PART I: Global Empowerment

Chapter 2

Global Trajectories of Caring Communication

Razorsharp is a major US-based multinational that produces razors and other consumer goods. By the time I arrived at the company's St. Petersburg manufacturing facility to conduct fieldwork in the summer of 2004, the corporation had already been in St. Petersburg for over twelve years and was widely known as one of the more successful examples of foreign investment in the country. However, the St. Petersburg plant was currently in a state of near crisis. On the orders of the highest levels of Razorsharp management, the company was in the process of a large transfer in production operations: Those once carried out in Western Europe were being moved to Central Europe and those once carried out in Central Europe were being moved to St. Petersburg. This would theoretically allow the company to make large savings on labor costs and improve its profitability and competitiveness. However, from the perspective of the office and managerial workers that supported the production process at the St. Petersburg plant, the plans were tied up with a number of serious problems. Not only did they have to make a number of logistical arrangements to accommodate the transfer, but even once the machinery and production plans were in place, they were faced with a whole host of new difficulties. Machines were constantly underperforming or failing. High numbers of defective products were constantly being produced. Turnover levels of production staff

were high, while percentages of experienced personnel were low. Although production plans had been adjusted to allow for a transition period, making targets was difficult, and factory staff continually worried that the factory would not have enough razors to ship to locations where they were needed around the world.

Among all of these multiple and complex issues, a common refrain heard throughout the office was the need for better "communication." Poor communication was often named as a cause of many of the factory's problems, while improved communication was said to be a way of solving many of the issues the factory faced. Strangely, those who invoked communication in these ways often had little contact with those they held to be poor communicators. Yet, communication remained an extremely pervasive explanation that even the most ardent opponents had to argue against to have their voices heard.

Why amidst so many technical and organizational issues was communication named as one of the keys to making the factory work better? How was this intertwined with the political economic logic of the corporation's expansion into St. Petersburg? And what other explanations competed with this stress on communication and what do they suggest that a focus on communication occluded? These are the questions I answer in this and the following chapter. Most immediately the source of these appeals to communication was the recent expansion that had pushed the factory to the limit. However, I suggest that this response also had much to do with globally circulating and historically specific ideas about management, communication, and efficiency with a global trajectory beyond St. Petersburg.

My goal in this chapter is threefold. First I aim to give a sense of the environment

at Razorsharp St. Petersburg and begin exploring appeals to communication at the factory. However, more generally I aim not to look at this factory as an isolated case but as one place where a powerful discourse that has been seen to typify neoliberal rationality has been put into practice. In this sense, my second aim is to, as Aiwa Ong (2006) has put it, look at the "actual work entailed in introducing globally circulating management ideas and practices into a particular site (19). At the same time, I, thirdly, interrogate debates over the place of communication at the factory for what they might have to say about neoliberal rationalities of governmentality more generally, in particular those that make claims to "empower" or "engage" workers. In so doing, I describe how factory management simultaneously harnessed communication as a moral good and a means of improving efficiency through accountable governance and explore how various members of the office staff mediated the considerable tensions between these intertwined aims.

Razorsharp under Pressure

To get to Razorsharp for my initial meeting with the company management I took the crowded Metro to a station where Lenin still stood, across from a large McDonalds. While Razorsharp employees, I was later to find out, had buses that took them directly from the station to the doors of the factory, for the time being I needed to figure out which of the many crowded *mashrutki*, vans crammed with seats facing in various directions, or new spacious and colorful buses made by Swedish company Scania would take me to my destination. (Occasionally faded city buses might come by, but they were a much rarer occurrence.) Preferring the spaciousness of the Swedish bus, I craned my head out the window as we took a large, busy multilane road past a relatively

unpopulated expanse dotted with several boxy new factory buildings and tried to

determine where to disembark. Missing my target slightly, I quickly got off the bus, and

scanned the scraggly banks of the road to find the Razorsharp factory building. I

backtracked, but could not find a traffic light or walkway where I could cross, and, after

waiting several minutes, very carefully made my way across the multilane road, darting

the cars coming from both directions.

After taking a long muddy path to the factory doors, I felt relieved, finding a

modern space that reminded me more of the airy buses than the perilous highway. The

Razorsharp factory was sleek and contemporary, with large glass doors that automatically

opened into a spacious reception area. The area around reception was decorated in

soothing grays and blues with a shiny case of razors and shaving creams proudly

displayed near the circular reception desk and several comfortable seats for visitors. The

young receptionist greeted me in Russian, but quickly switched into clear English when

she heard my foreign accent. After signing in at the security window next door, where I

was given a guest badge, I was soon greeted by the director's personal assistant, a tall,

serious, young blond woman with a long ponytail who efficiently ushered me upstairs

while greeting me in English, using her own plastic security badge to open the locked

glass door that led to the office. We soon walked into a large contemporary office space

with an open floor plan, where office workers mainly in their twenties worked quietly at

their computers in clusters of cubicles. The space was rimmed by glass-paneled offices,

where the occupants, who were generally a decade or two older than those who sat at the

cubicles, could still be glimpsed from the outside. The shop floor was hidden from view.

I later learned that it lay just beyond this office space, past a heavy door that could only

be accessed by those with an appropriately authorized badge.

By the time I arrived, Razorsharp had already been successfully manufacturing razors in St. Petersburg for over a decade The St. Petersburg plant had been formed in 1991 as a joint venture with a recently privatized Soviet enterprise, Aviia,[70] that manufactured aviation equipment in addition to razor blades and other consumer products. As part of the arrangement with Aviia, the Razorsharp company, which had a controlling interest, initially rented space in two of the Soviet company's factories and began its production operations there. This had involved an extensive renovation of the Soviet factory spaces, and staff who had been around at that time fondly remembered how the company had sanitized the old factories, renovated the bathrooms along with the rest of the facilities, and set up a small aquarium of fish in one of the lobbies (while also, less appealingly, firing many of the old personnel.) At the beginning of the 2000s, having weathered the 1998 crisis well, Razorsharp bought out the joint venture, and moved to the current location, where it constructed the brand new production facility where the factory now stood. Despite all of these changes, however, the St. Petersburg production facility, by most accounts, had been relatively stable for the past four years. There had been little change in the machinery used or the number of product lines produced, and staff numbers had stayed at a similar level with little turnover or need to hire new employees.

Yet at the moment I arrived, despite my initial impressions of modernity and efficiency, there was little of this stability in sight. I arrived in August 2004, a few weeks before a new factory expansion was to take effect. While I did not understand much about the expansion at this time, what was immediately evident to me was the stress the entire staff was under. I was most associated with Human Resources and helped the

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[70] A pseudonym.

department with paperwork, filing, data entry, and other administrative jobs in addition to some training and survey work. Although I had my own cubicle, I spent a good portion of my time in the small office that the two junior HR specialists, Sasha and Nina, shared, chatting, getting new assignments, or helping out with various tasks. The narrow room was filled with foot-high stacks of documents that covered shelves, desks, and windowsills. These were mainly *prikazy*, or "orders," announcing the hiring of new employees, contracts, and contract renewals, along with associated documentation, such as copies of diplomas and certificates of marriage and divorce. Hundreds of employees were being hired, but Sasha and Nina, who had to deal with everyday responsibilities such as payroll and training in addition to the extra pressures of the expansion, had little time to do the paperwork the corporation and Russian government required, which generally had to be completed in both Russian and English versions.

The entire department was strapped for time. When I began my fieldwork in August, for example, one hundred packers, to pack company products into boxes, needed to be found almost immediately, and no one knew where to find them. "They expanded the factory, but they forgot to expand HR," Sasha, a petite, and generally cheerful brunette in her early twenties explained to me grumpily at one point. On top of everything, the department director had left a few months earlier and a suitable replacement had not yet been hired. Nina mentioned to me that she spent just ten minutes getting ready every morning in order to begin work at 8 or 9 a.m., and often left near 10 p.m. Very thin, with limp blond hair, she once recalled laughingly how she had large puffy cheeks before she took her job as an H.R. administrator at the company in the spring, but now had lost a significant amount of weight with all the stress, and her face

had hollowed. Although she sometimes intended to cook dinner for herself and her husband, she usually ended up the McDonald's near the Metro station near her home. When members of the department managed to leave at six o'clock, the official end of the work day, they would usually note ironically that they had left early.

Just about the entire office and supervisory staff felt extremely overworked at this time. From most accounts, there had always been a pressured atmosphere at Razorsharp, which, as a multinational was considered a "high level" firm with strict rules and regulations. Office staff often mentioned that they rarely had the time to sit and chat over tea with coworkers, and those who had worked in the company for many years suggested this had long been the case. For many Russians office workers this is an important part of the workday, and at the other companies where I conducted fieldwork coworkers would generally slip into the kitchen or cafeteria with friends once a day to enjoy an extended conversation over mugs of tea and some sweets. At the time of my fieldwork, however, Razorsharp office employees generally clustered for no more than ten minutes in the small office kitchen in mid-morning where they stood to drink tea in plastic cups and eat the small sandwiches the company provided. Birthday and holiday celebrations at Razorsharp were similar, taking place during very short breaks, while at many other companies holiday celebrations in particular were full day affairs.

If Razorsharp had long had this type of pressured atmosphere, more recently, employees said, things had gotten much worse. In particularly, they called attention to the Eastern Expansion Project (EEP).[71] The EEP was a part of Razorsharp's efforts to, as one PowerPoint presentation on the project put it "attack costs. . . and drive both cost and asset productivity. . without compromising quality." Operating on a pan-European scale,

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[71] I have renamed the project here.

the project, in a move familiar to observers of economic globalization, aimed to shift manufacturing operations eastward to locations where pay, and, thus operating costs, were lower, streamlining production operations in the process. The company was closing a British plant and moving its operations to a new manufacturing, packaging, and warehouse facility in Poland where salaries were lower. At the same time the company was also closing a factory in the Czech Republic and moving its production operations to St. Petersburg, where labor was even cheaper than in either of the central European locations. The EEP dramatically changed the scale of St. Petersburg operations, nearly doubling the factory's staff and increasing the number of product lines produced at the facility by more than two-thirds.

In the company newsletter, the management billed the expansion as "an exciting new stage in our manufacturing capabilities in St. Petersburg," which could potentially set the factory on a path to "join the group of the biggest and most important factories in the Razorsharp world." While many office employees did see the expansion as a positive step for Russia and were proud of their accomplishments in making it come about, what was most pressing and overwhelming for all was the amount of extra work the project entailed. Among other tasks, the project entailed obtaining the requisite government permissions for the expansion, physically moving the machinery to the city, reorganizing the factory floor to make room for the new machines, engineering the transferred machinery to work in the new location, discarding old equipment, hiring enough new employees to produce the new product lines, and training workers, mechanics, and engineers in how the new machinery should be used and maintained. It also required related adjustments from nearly all the office staff: Planners needed to transform their

plans to encompass new product lines, engineers needed to get the newly installed machinery working, and quality staff needed to deal with the defective products that were inevitably produced as people adjusted to the new machinery. Meanwhile human resources personnel had to cope with hiring and training the masses of new staff, and administrators had to cope with increasing volumes of paperwork. With initial preparations that began at the end of 2003, the effects of the expansion continued to be strongly felt at least throughout the following year.

"Communication" as Means of Production[72]

Among the tensions of the expansion, the issue of "communication" construed broadly was a recurrent concern. A peek into the special operations meetings that were convened to cope with the expansion provides a glimpse into the ways in which communication could be invoked. These meetings took place in a small meeting room perched on the mezzanine that overlooked the factory floor, just beyond the door that separated office and factory. Hassan, the company's energetic Turkish operations director, headed the large table at the center of the room, surrounded mainly by senior managers, engineers, and production supervisors, with some team leaders (or factory foremen) generally lurking in the second row of seats that hugged the walls. Because Hassan did not speak Russian, the meetings usually took place in English, the official company language, with Russian confined to side comments and occasional translations, although everyone else in the room, aside from myself, was generally Russian.

One day after the new machines had been running for over two months the meeting began as usual with everyone scanning the sheets of "numbers" for the day. These were

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[72] See also Heller's (2005) discussion of language as a means of production in the new economy.

charts that graphically represented the recent output of various machines in the factory, the problems they had run into in recent shifts, and the progress that had been made towards fulfilling the monthly plans that factory planners negotiated with the London office. The numbers on this day, like countless others that had preceded it, did not look good, especially in regard to Splintek[73], one of the new product lines transferred from the Czech Republic. Hassan as usual started in immediately with questions about what had happened. Why were the numbers so low? What had happened to Splintek production? The members of the various departments chimed in with various explanations. Production supervisors claimed there were less "people" (workers) than usual on the shop floor, a recurrent complaint linked to the continuing difficulties of hiring and retaining staff during the expansion. Some of the engineers broached another possibility: Perhaps some of the shop floor "ladies" (female workers) were turning the speed of the machines down. Hassan was not convinced by either suggestion, but agitatedly followed up on the second: "Was any message sent to team leaders about that?" Anton, the engineering manager, with studied calm, responded negatively, suggesting that this lay outside the senior management's job responsibilities: "The team leaders should be sending information to us, not the other way around."

Hassan became increasingly upset. "Well, what will we do?" he exclaimed. "I can't help; communication is cut in every way!" What seemed to upset Hassan was not so much the factory difficulties themselves as the attitudes towards communication they seemed to represent. On the one hand, managers such as Anton who recognized potential problems were doing little to communicate their observations to those lower in the factory hierarchy, such as the team leaders, who were closer to the problems being

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[73] I have renamed the product here.

discussed. On the other hand, the lack of consensus among the senior management suggested an equally serious problem with horizontal communication: There was no sign that these managers had met to discuss the problem, analyze it, and determine possible solutions prior to the meeting, as Hassan had repeatedly admonished them to do. Meanwhile, there also seemed to be a problem affecting communication upwards from the team leaders on the shop floor. Team leaders needed to convey their observations about production processes to the senior managers authorized to address large-scale problems, and the emails they sent did not seem to be giving anyone a clear picture of what was going on. In all of his twelve years of experience at Razorsharp, Hassan exclaimed, he had never seen a communication problem like this before. If things continued in this way, he would tell the big decision-makers in the company not to invest any more money in this factory. Characterizing the factory staff's attitude with the Turkish saying "If the snake doesn't touch me, let it live for a thousand years!" he urged the meeting participants to get together and discuss how communication might be improved. If the various departments could communicate better, he guaranteed, output would be increased by twenty percent.

In the remainder of the meeting, the group examined various electronic and face-to-face links in the organizational communication process. They discussed, for instance, whether the email messages that the production team leaders sent managers were flooding inboxes with too much information, and whether maintenance team leaders became aware of production problems in sufficient time to react to them and send mechanics to fix them. A major topic in this regard was "internal benchmarking": Might it be feasible to model communication practices in Production after those in a department

like Quality or Finance that communicated better? Or perhaps, an engineer suggested, it would be possible to modify an already existing electronic database to help communication flow particularly smoothly. Hassan was excited and encouraged by the seeming progress. "We're out of the box, brainstorming!" he exclaimed.

This scene brings up a complex set of issues, ranging from concerns about agency and technology to conceptions of Russianness and socialism that were often expressed in communicational terms. For the time being, however, I would like to highlight a more basic point. Amidst all of the organization and technical issues of the expansion, "communication" here was singled both out as an overarching explanation for factory problems as well a potential solution to those problems. Good communication seemed a key to greater efficiency and increased production, while poor communication seemed like an explanation for why so much was going awry, making communication here, as Deborah Cameron (2000a:3) has observed of pervasive American and British discourses found everywhere from talk shows to education, both "cause for all problems and source of all ills." If one could conceive of many possible relationships between language and political economy (Irvine 1989), in this cases language seemed to be regarded literally as a tool of the production process that would bring improvements or cause problems in a particularly instrumental way. It was a production "resource" like machines, materials, and people essential for making production work. Like these other resources, it could be altered and manipulated through practices of "continuous improvement" commonly associated with industrial strategies of "Total Quality Management." [74] By analyzing

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[74] Total Quality Management is a widespread managerial approach said to originate in Japan that holds that by making industrial processes visual and measurable, setting performance improvement goals, and working to achieve those goals, one can achieve "continuous improvement" that will ultimately reduce

factory communication, setting goals to improve it, and working to achieve those goals, one could theoretically speed production and improve the factory's numbers, helping the factory to meet monthly production targets and increase overall efficiency.

That this connection between communication and efficiency seemed natural to so many at Razorsharp, I will suggest, was linked to concerted corporate efforts to manage through attention to communication.[75] Certainly, Soviet managers were also concerned with maximizing production output, and since the time of Lenin, Soviet specialists drew on Taylorist assumptions regarding how production could be managed by a decoupling of "mental" and "menial" labor (Braverman 1975).[76] There was also considerable attention to rationalizing workplaces, as well as to practices that promoted accountability through numbers,[77] and cybernetic theorists in the 1960s suggested that computerized systems of handling information could improve industrial planning and control (Gerovitch 2002). A number of Soviet psychologists also, as I will discuss later in this dissertation, especially in the late Soviet period, showed some concern with the role of communication in production. However, here communication figured less as a production resource and more as an attribute of the collectivities and individuals found in the workplace, reflecting proper relationships between citizens and the state. Worker's *kollektivy*, for example, were conceived as naturally fostering closely knit communication between those who worked together closely and knew each other well (Kharkhordin 1999).

Meanings of "communication" at the Razorsharp factory were not fixed, and as

defects and increase satisfaction. See for instance Berk and Berk (1993). Also see discussion in Dunn (2004).

[75] See Cody's (2007) analysis of how literacy programs in India worked to naturalize connections between written communication and ideals of enlightenment.

[76] See Bessinger (1988) on Soviet scientific management, as well as Berliner (1957) on Soviet management practices more generally.

[77] See Collier's (2005) discussion of Soviet city planning, as well as Dunn's (2004) and Lampland's (2009) discussions of accounting in socialist Eastern Europe.

Urciuoli (2003; 2008) has described, communication often seemed a "strategically employable shifter" that held different meanings in different discursive contexts. Conceptions of communication shifted easily from the interpersonal to the technological, from communication as a sign of agency and self-expression to communication that encouraged agency and self-expression, from rationality and transparency to openness and care. However, among these different usages, the connection between communication and efficiency kept on coming up again and again. While not everyone was sure that greater attention to communication could streamline the production process, this was a connection continually reproduced by company policies and procedures and consistently underlined by various members of factory management as they attempted to govern the factory and its people through attention to talk and interpersonal relationships.

Assessing Communication and Care

I first realized the importance attached to communication at Razorsharp during early discussions about my fieldwork at the firm in the summer of 2004. I was still conceptualizing my project as focused on secretarial work at this time, and when I met with Hassan, the Turkish operations director, to discuss the possibility of conducting research at the company, I explained, in line with my original project conception, that I was interested in working in an unpaid position that would put me in contact with administrative personnel. Hassan immediately suggested that he had the perfect solution that would help me to meet my goals as well as help him cope with the pressures of the expansion. Noting that Human Resources was an "administrative" department, and thus suitable for my research project, he suggested that I work with him and the department

staff on some HR projects that would ease the consequences of the expansion.

In explaining why these projects were necessary, Hassan drew a sharp contrast between his own approach to the factory and his staff's. It was important to him, he said, to create a friendly atmosphere among his employees. He held special recreational events, where personnel could get to know each other in a relaxed environment, and gave yearly gifts to employees and their children. Yet his employees, the company's managers and supervisors, he said, lacked this level of engagement and enthusiasm. They tended to flee as soon as they could to get even a 10% salary increase. (The company HR director had just left, and he was thinking it would be better to hire a foreigner this time around, who wasn't so likely to leave.) Further, older managers who had not worked in the West, whom he presumed were particularly affected by "socialism," worked very slowly and seemed to do little to lead their subordinates and inspire them to work. If such issues were a perennial problem in Russia in Hassan's view, they were of particular importance in the wake of the changes unleashed by the expansion, which he feared had made an already bad atmosphere in the factory even worse. He was interested in my help in conducting a survey that would assess supervisors' presumably poor leadership practices in addition to other aspects of workplace "climate," as well as constructing an outline of a supervisory skills training program for the factory's youngest supervisory staff, the "team leaders," or factory foremen.[78]

Although this initial discussion did not directly address communication issues, over

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[78] I did, as I describe later in the chapter, take on these and related assignments, wanting to provide the company with useful service in exchange for the research opportunity, despite my trepidations about becoming a communication "consultant" (see introduction). However my fieldwork at the firm encompassed much more than this. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, much of my time was spent helping the HR department with administrative tasks, from filing to working on electronic databases to helping fill out government paperwork. I also observed and participated in meetings and training sessions. I chatted with coworkers at lunch and on the bus that took employees to and from the metro station to work, as well as conducting more formal interviews.

time I began to notice how much the distinctions that Hassan (who later became factory director) drew between Russian and foreign employees such as himself were linked to perceptions of their "skills" in talk and interpersonal communication. Of particular concern were the team leaders, or factory foremen, most of whom were new and had been hired as part of the EEP. While they were young (mainly in their early twenties), Hassan suspected that these new hires, like the older managers he discussed earlier, did little to lead, inspire, and guide their employees. This was a deficiency that he often expressed in terms of their presumed inability to "talk" with their subordinates, the factory's machine operators, mechanics, and quality inspectors. Paradigmatic in this regard were our discussions about the factory survey, which was initially oriented towards relationships between the team leaders and the shop floor workers (although it was later expanded to encompass the entire factory.) Hassan had scribbled various topics he would like the survey to address on a piece of hotel stationary, such as "caring," "development," "direction," and "recognition," in addition to opinions of food and working conditions. When I met with him in his office to discuss the list, he became particularly animated when I asked him to explain a question about the last time employees had talked to their supervisor. He jumped out of his seat, abruptly closed his usually open door, and sat back down again abruptly before returning to the question. "There is something about socialism," he explained, "in that the management think they are above workers and don't talk to operators." Such tendencies, Hassan implied, were so persistent in Russia, that even the new team leaders, who lived half their lives in the postsocialist period probably spoke with their subordinates rarely.

Not only frequency was important here, but also issues of communication style

and manner. Hassan went on to elaborate several questions he wanted the survey to

address (with the assumption that the team leaders would likely fail on all these counts.)

He wanted to find out, he explained, if supervisors were taking care to ask questions such

as "How are you? How is it going?" and if workers, consequently, felt as if anyone was

"caring about them"? Along with this, he was interested in related "development issues."

Did supervisors show a similar care and attention to workers by speaking to them about

improving their skills and providing them the means to do so? Did they give them

"objectives," "targets," and the necessary "management" that would help them to achieve

better results? What about the performance appraisals of those employees who had been

with the company long enough to have them: Did their supervisors carry these out in a

perfunctory manner and simply fill out a form, or did they hold a true "discussion" with

their employees over their appraisals in which they gave employees clear feedback and

asked them about their goals for the future?   And, further, what were supervisors doing

to inform subordinates about the company and its policies? How was the "information

flow"? Was someone explaining the direction of the company to shop-floor employees

and giving them a better sense of what they were working toward?

These were questions that circled around a number of related issues. In one sense

"communication" was important here because it "conveyed" information. Here, as is

common in many Western communication ideologies, good supervisory communication

appeared as a "channel" that facilitated the conveyance of information from one party to

another.[79] The idea of "information flow," for example, portrayed information as a liquid

that would stream steadily from supervisor to subordinate, conveying information about

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[79] On communication as a means of conveyance, see Peters (1999), Putnam et al. (1996), and Reddy
(1993[1979]).

the company and its principles and values to workers. However, not only informing workers was seen as important, but more strikingly, showing them "care" (Livesey and Kearins 2002) through communication. Here good communication appeared not so much like a channel as a way of building an interpersonal connection with others via dialogic talk (Cameron 2000a). Good supervisors not only "informed" their subordinates but also expressed personal interest in them through discussion and verbal interaction. They greeted employees and asked them how they were, attending to their emotions, concerns, and everyday lives both inside and outside of work. They also inquired into employee's work goals and ambitions, showing support for their vocational growth and "development," and made them feel like someone was "caring about them." Ultimately, such supervisors connected with employees on a deep interpersonal level, showing them the respect and care of one self with feelings, emotions, and ambitions connecting with another similarly constituted self.[80]

At the same time, this "caring" attitude, Hassan suggested, also needed to be matched with a much harder attention to rule, structure, and efficiency. Good supervisors, he suggested, not only showed care for their employees, but also set targets for them to meet and charted out paths for the future. They informed employees in clear, objective ways whether they were performing adequately and explained how they might improve, making it a priority to ensure that employees worked as efficiently and competently as possible. The aim of this aspect of communication, then, was not "care" but performance and efficiency. This was, after all, a factory with a bottom line to meet

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[80] There is a large literature on the cultural grounding of Western concepts of the self. See Geertz (1974) for an influential description of the concept. Also see related discussions of how Western ideas have shaped conceptions of speech such as Searle's (1969), which ground language in speaker intentions (Du Bois 1993; Duranti 1993a; 1993b; Rosaldo 1982).

and orders to fill, and it was also the responsibility of supervisors to communicate with employees in ways that would encourage them to increase their job skills, improve their on the job performance, and achieve better "results." While at first these imperatives to communicate in ways that showed "caring" and brought "results" might seem contradictory, they were heavily intertwined at Razorsharp.

Global Empowerment Strategies

The questions that the survey was to address were not merely a personal whim of Hassan's, but reflective of deeper strategies of corporate management that in turn echoed the recommendations of numerous management experts from the U.S. and other Western countries. Soon after I arrived at Razorsharp, Larissa, the assistant HR manager, loaded me down with thick white binders that she suggested I could use as sources for the supervisory skills training. Labeled with English titles such as "Developing Global Leaders," "Developing Others," and "Tools for Teams," these were manuals from various English-language trainings Razorsharp had conducted throughout the years in various locations from the UK to Moscow. Inside, the loose-leaf pages were filled with abstract statements about management techniques along with accompanying illustrations and exercises. They included, for example, a discussion of the "4 pillars on which leadership success sits," a checklist managers could use to determine if they were enhancing employees' "self-esteem," and a "fishbone" problem-solving diagram that facilitated analyses of causes and effects. These binders were key resources for human resources activities in the Petersburg plant, used as sources for trainings and other instructional efforts. When I later approached Hassan for additional manuals, he handed over some

with the stipulation that I kept them under lock and key. After I explained there was no place to lock them up in my small cubicle, he made sure that some staff members found me a locking cabinet (a precious commodity at the moment) which had arrived in St. Petersburg along with the machinery from the Czech Republic.

If, as Keane (2007:42) has noted, "ideas, like everything else, circulate insofar as they have some medium, these binders, along with the trainings with which they were associated, were key media for conveying globally circulating ideas about management and communication particularly associated with the United States, and to a lesser extent, Western Europe in Razorsharp contexts. The company's trainings and training materials were generally developed in the company's Global Training and Development Center in the United States in conjunction with U.S.-based multinational consulting firms, who were responsible for much of their content. They were then offered periodically in different locations from the St. Petersburg plant itself or the company's offices in Moscow to Razorsharp facilities in the UK or Germany.[81] (In the latter case, these were generally trainings for senior managers, who were flown out to attend.) The company would also run certain trainings in many company locations over a given year, such as recent initiatives on "teaming" and "innovation." The trainers, whether they were based in Moscow, Germany, or the U.S., generally needed to be certified by the multinational consulting companies in the methods and content of a particular training before conducting it. Thus, the content of most of the company's training materials emerged through a fairly direct route from the company's headquarters in the U.S., as part of an effort to create a uniform "technological zone" (Barry 2001) with standardized policies

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[81] Corporate trainings were often conducted in English. However, those trainings I observed conducted by Russian trainers were generally conducted in Russian (although, in one case, on the basis of mostly English written training materials.)

and procedures across Razorsharp plants around the world. This was considered particularly important in the wake of the expansion and one of the primary ways through which the company would theoretically preserve "quality" while transferring production operations from the west to the east. While these kinds of global forms always undergo processes of decontextualization and recontextualization (Ong and Collier 2005), the company was invested in making these translations as standard as possible. If more local training initiatives, such as the training on supervisory skills, did not undergo such strict controls, they often involved borrowing materials from these other trainings, as well as other American sources (such as in this case, Stephen Covey's bestseller *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* and articles from the Harvard Business Review) in addition to a few scattered Russian sources. The plant did occasionally use local training providers, but they were generally chosen for their fluency in Western management techniques.

Communication of various sorts was a major topic of these trainings and manuals. Whether expressed in terms of "leadership," "development," "coaching," or various other co-registered terms (Urciuoli 2008), these training materials highlighted the importance of a management style that, like the style suggested by Hassan's survey questions, combined caring communication with regulation and structure. The manual on "Guiding the Development for Others," for example, introduces a rigorous five-phase process that managers are to follow to help employees build their vocational skills and prepare them to take on new responsibilities and positions: The manager assesses employee skills, the employee assesses his or her own abilities, both jointly discuss employee's future plans, the employee writes a document outlining these plans, and the manager periodically

checks on the employee' progress in fulfilling it. Each of these phases, furthermore, is to be accompanied by related communicative interventions from the manager—from "assessing" to "discussing"—oriented at helping employees better understand their strengths and weaknesses on the job and encouraging them to take steps to improve them further. While these differ substantially depending on the phase, the manual generally advises managers to always keep employees' "feelings" in mind:

> Feelings can affect not only the course of a discussion but job performance as well. To perform at their best, people need to feel valued, appreciated, listened to and understood.

Caring communication, the manual suggests, is a critical part of the "development" process, which affects individual discussions about job improvement, as well as performance on the job more generally, in addition to simply making employees feel better about themselves. Thus, while this kind of communication is generally presented as a moral good, it is also presented as a potent managerial technique that works in concert with the other formal aspects of the development process to improve employee efficiency and performance by attending to the emotions of the individual employee.

Razorsharp was far from alone in promoting this type of role for communication. This combination of structure and care, what 1980s management gurus Peters and Waterman (1982:318) have called "loose-tight" leadership, is a hallmark of what has been called the "empowerment" approach to management, a globally circulating set of management techniques typifying the new work order that has been called the "central motif of management thought in the 1990s" (Collins 1999). Most associated with American managerial theory, what these and related approaches[82] share is a stated

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[82] Other similar terms include "engagement," "excellence," "enterprise," and "participatory management." Many of the assumptions of these approaches pervade contemporary Western theorizing about

commitment to transcend much the hierarchical organizational style associated with Fordist and Taylorist management techniques. According to empowerment proponents, Taylorism exerted too much control over employees, suppressing their potential by trapping them in strict hierarchies with little room to do much more than fulfill orders given from above. In place of this, empowerment proponents advocate organizational transformations, such as "delayered" organizational structures, which push various managerial responsibilities to lower levels and theoretically enable employees to fulfill their organizational duties in a relatively independent manner. "Empowered workers" are said to have the freedom to manage how they will do their work and determine the best way to do it, creatively charting their own path rather than having it dictated by their boss. This is said not only to produce happier employees, but to vastly increase productivity and efficiency, since, according to advocates, empowered employees work better because they are truly invested in their work and unhindered by the usual bureaucratic barriers. A newer version of the theory that values employee "engagement" is similar, but stresses the importance of developing employees' inner emotional commitment to the job over their capacity for independent action.[83]

Most critical analysts who have studied empowerment and related practices have

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management, even when these terms are not specifically invoked. Thus, I am not speaking here specifically about what management theorists might delineate as "empowerment," but rather a family of approaches with family resemblances.

[83] Curt Coffman, a management theorist who works for the Gallup Organization, which administers the widely used Q^{12} survey assessing employee engagement, defines the engaged employee in the following way in an interview: "Engaged employees are builders. They want to know the desired expectations for their role so they can meet and exceed them. They're naturally curious about their company and their place in it. They perform at consistently high levels. They want to use their talents and strength at work every day. They work with passion, and they have a visceral connection to their company. And they drive innovation and move their organization forward" (Sanford 2002). See also Smythe (2007).

stressed their individualizing effects.[84] Foucauldian scholars describe how in these

settings, work, like society more broadly, produces "enterprising subjects" in search of

personal meaning who actively make choices to further their own interests (du Gay 1996;

Dunn 2004; Miller and Rose 1995; Rose 1999a; Rose 1999b). Yet while there is

undoubtedly a strong dose of individualism in empowerment approaches, what these

analysts often miss is the importance that these programs attribute to interactions between

people—particularly those of a linguistic nature— in making the transformations that

lead to an empowered workplace come about.[85] One critical psychologist has suggested

that in similar discourses employed in health and welfare contexts, "empowerment is

something that is done to you by others, or that you do to others who thus become

empowered by your actions not their own" (Baistow 1994:37). I would put this

somewhat differently to stress the interactional component of employee empowerment

discourses: Empowerment is something that you do with others who become empowered

through this interaction. Thus, communication is not only seen as a means of conveying

information via a channel, but is literally viewed as a way of doing things with words

(Austin 1962) and transforming the workplace through one's verbal skills.[86]

How this is imagined to work is exemplified well by a managerial "fable" about

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[84] There has also been considerable critique of empowerment approaches within managerial circles. Common criticisms are that that these approaches do not offer "authentic" empowerment or that there are major gaps between rhetorics and realities of empowerment programs. Many argue in this regard that while these approaches can theoretically offer a degree of empowerment, they are generally implemented in ways that are too superficial, profit-minded, or contradictory to allow this to occur (e.g. Argyris 1998; Ciulla 2004; Cunningham and Hyman 1999). Even strong advocates acknowledge a number of barriers, particularly highlighting resistance they see as stemming from persisting hierarchism (e.g. Hennestad 1998). More radical critics suggest that empowerment is impossible under contemporary capitalism and/or claim that this would require more in-depth structural changes involving more scope for worker input in decision-making. See Johnson (2006) for review.

[85] Compare Inoue (2007), who suggests that the quintessential neoliberal speech event is the individual speaking her self, expressing her "own" sentiments about her "own" experience.

[86] On conceptions of communication as a "skill" see Cameron (2000a), Heller (2003; 2005), and Urciuoli (2003; 2008).

empowerment (Byhamm 1988), written by the president of one of the American

companies that developed Razorsharp's training materials. In one section, Ralph, an

employee of the "Normal Company," using a machine specially constructed to observe

empowerment in action, watches as an ideal supervisor, Lucy, charges her employees

with the "zapp" of empowerment:

> By now, though, Ralph knew that Zapp did not happen by itself.
> Lucy had to be doing something. He watched her some more.
> Then he noticed Lucy was letting the other person do the talking.
> She would be standing or sitting nearby, often a hand on her chin, eyes
> focused on the other person, sometimes her head angled to one side. And
> as she did this, a little Zapp would pass between her and the person
> talking.
> What was she doing, Ralph wondered.
> Why of course! She was *listening*! (1988:72)

Here, as we see, the "zapp" of empowerment is depicted as literally emerging out of the

caring communicative interaction between the supervisor and the employee. Lucy

neither tells her employee what to do (the Fordist approach) nor leaves her employees

alone to act independently (a mistaken view of empowerment as abandonment), but

instead offers them a therapeutic support through attentive "listening," exemplified by her

use of eye contact and a supportive, affirming body pose. She also, we see elsewhere in

the fable, engages in a number of other similarly supportive and respectful linguistic

practices, such as expressing "empathy," avoiding "insults," and asking her employees

for "help" rather than giving them orders, as well as generally providing inspiration and

setting group goals. In these ways, she interacts with her employees in ways that

constitute them as independent agents and selves with voices, actions, and emotions of

their "own"—even when she ultimately wants them to get something done— and in so

doing, the fable suggests, imbues them with feelings of independence and self-worth and

inspires them to further empowered action. Such measures eventually create departments thoroughly charged with "zapp" that, when viewed with the special machine, are seen to have changed substantially in shape and form, eventually representing starships about to take off.

Aside from the starships, such a stance is typical of empowerment approaches, which generally stress the importance of an open and supportive communicative environment for empowering and engaging workers and transforming the workplace. In addition to advocating caring, respectful communicational interactions with managers that provide "vision" as well as "support," proponents cite the importance of granting empowered workers access to company information once reserved for their bosses. They also advocate special organizational forms, such as "teams" and "quality circles" that theoretically provide employees an opportunity to speak openly with those of different formal organizational levels and division. These are types of communication that are often claimed to be effective in transforming the workplace because they are egalitarian. Although proponents do not usually pretend that supervisor-subordinate relationships can be entirely done away with, they draw a sharp contrast between the necessary practices of empowering communication and the practices of "ordering" and "following" that they say generally typify Fordist communication styles, reconstituting supervisors as friendly "coaches" or inspirational "leaders" rather than dominating "managers." One proponent (Eisenberg 1994) for instance, ideally describes meetings between employees of different formal ranks as a "dialogue" in which all members have equal opportunity to present idea and opinions and all show empathy for others' ideas. Much like Habermas's coffee-house debaters, empowered employees and supervisors theoretically shed any trappings

of external hierarchy to meet as equals in conversations in which all are empowered to express their "own" views, even though supervisors are delegated a particular role in making sure that those that they supervise feel comfortable speaking up. Empowering communication becomes a transformative force in its own right, which literally brings an egalitarian workplace into being (and thereby increases efficiency and productivity) by constituting employees as equals.

Communicative Governmentality

Similar ideas were often expressed at Razorsharp, although the company had not explicitly proclaimed an "empowerment" program and I only occasionally heard this terminology. Claims about the power of "open" communication to create a more egalitarian and healthy workplace environment were embedded in countless attempts to shape corporate culture brought over from U.S. headquarters and instituted locally, from trainings for managers emphasizing nonauthoritarian management styles to monthly meetings between the top management and shop-floor employees aimed at sharing information about company progress and encouraging workers to express their thoughts and observations about work processes. The "team leaders" were named as such to indicate that they had higher-level managerial responsibilities beyond mere supervision, and many company initiatives depended on mixed or single-level "teams" of various types. The company also periodically conducted the Gallup-Q[12] survey, used by Western-based multinationals worldwide, to determine the degree to which employees were truly "engaged" and to highlight related areas for improvement. Along with this, as I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter, the vast majority of office and

supervisory employees praised an open, empowering communication style and suggested that it was the ideal towards which the factory should strive.

Seemingly paradoxically, however, these questions of atmosphere and communication often became most acute at Razorsharp when discussing workplace speech events such as performance reviews, where hierarchical relationships were most prominent. Indicative here is the series of supervisory skills trainings I worked on, most of which, as far as I know, was never executed. Larissa, the assistant HR manager, was ultimately in charge of conducting the trainings, and often apologized to me that during the expansion, when she was busy with issues of lockers and contracts, she didn't have time to deal with the "really interesting stuff" of this sort. However, at one point in January, under the directions of the new HR director, she did manage to create a training for the team leaders very loosely based on the materials I prepared in addition to other sources, which addressed how these shop floor supervisors should conduct their upcoming performance reviews with workers. Conducting these reviews was a new responsibility for the team leaders, taken on as part of the empowerment rationale that afforded increasing managerial responsibility to lower-level personnel.

Premising the Russian-language training sessions with an apology for not translating English terms such as the "performance management cycle," which originated "in the Wild West" (*Dikii Zapad*)—a joke playing off the common conception of Russia as the really "wild" place in addition to cowboy associations—Larissa went on to describe the review process, putting a particular emphasis on the importance of conducting an attentive and caring individual discussion about the review with each worker. This was a point she made by flashing a PowerPoint slide adorned with clipart

of a red cartoon devil (entitled in English, "interview from hell"). What could you do, she asked the team leaders to determine in groups, to make sure that the review discussion was "so nightmarish," "so horrible" that employees would remember it for their entire lives? The team leaders had fun with the activity, enthusiastically suggesting, for example, that they could achieve the desired effect by making workers stand during the reviews, affecting sour expressions, abruptly dismissing them, and never giving them a chance to express their opinions (or giving them the opportunity to speak and then bluntly contradicting them.) Particularly, effective, one team suggested, would be forgetting their employees' names altogether during the review. Such a discussion had particular resonance in a country where practices of sometimes harsh public criticism in schools as well as workplaces were a long institutionalized tradition.[87] The lesson, of course, as Larissa didactically explained afterwards, was that these were practices that the team leaders should always make sure to avoid in their performance review discussions to make them a positive experience for supervisor and employee alike.

Here, communication figured less as way of creating a genuinely egalitarian atmosphere than a means of mitigating a demonstration of power and control that, if mismanaged could become a "nightmarish" expression of overt dominance. This points to the dual role caring communication played at Razorsharp not only as a worthy ideal, but as a technology of "governmentality," a form of power, which, as Foucault (1991[1978]) has described, involves the "conduct of conduct"[88] or roughly, practices

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[87] Critical stances, as Oleg Kharkhordin (1999) has pointed out, were promoted by a number of Soviet practices, ranging from the purges, to discussions of students' grades in front of the classroom, to specially organized meetings of the Komsomol, the Soviet youth organization, designed to vet individual members. Also see Ries (1997) and Lemon (2004) for later variants, as well as Gal's (2005) discussion of the public/private dichotomy in Eastern European socialism. I discuss Putin-era debates over disjunctures between this type of "open" criticism and the softer "openness" of caring communication in Cohen (2008).
[88] See discussion of Foucault's use of this phrase in Burchell et al. (1991) .

intended to impact the behavior of others by operating through their subjectivities.[89] Governmentality scholars, as I discussed in the introduction, have suggested that empowerment and similar programs are emblematic of a larger epochal shift from a repressive type of power to a new type of "neoliberal" or "advanced liberal" governance based upon the appearance of freedom and democracy.[90] This has particular implications for Russia and Eastern Europe, which, many contend, have undergone an abrupt shift to neoliberal rationalities of power with the end of state socialism. While these neoliberal rationalities of power claim to preserve individual autonomy, governmentality scholars stress, they at the same time work to guide subjects from afar in particular ways, making them, in some estimations, often more "neo-Taylorian"(Shore and Wright 2000:64) than a transcendence of Taylorist principles.

I will suggest throughout this dissertation that this shift is not as total or as uniform as governmentality theorists often make it seem. However, these scholars nonetheless point to important mechanisms through which these kinds of globally circulating approaches to government are supposed to work. In the context of the corporation, governmentality scholars have delineated how various technologies, from "corporate culture" (du Gay 1996) to forms, job descriptions, and quality control logs (Dunn 2004), work to channel the seemingly independent action of empowered employees in service of the larger organization. Indeed, empowerment theorists would probably not substantially disagree with these descriptions. Despite their often lofty

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[89] Others who have discussed linguistic practices as forms of governmentality include Bauman and Briggs (2003), Cody (2009), and Pennycook (2002a; 2002b). See also Stoler (2004; 2008), who describes how states harness the sentiments of citizens and legislate their appropriate distribution as a strategy for power and control.

[90] On empowerment and neoliberal governmentality see Cruikshank(1999), Dean (1999), Dunn(2004), du Gay (1996) Rose (1999a; 1999b), and Rose and Miller (1995). Other key references in the governmentality literature include Barry et al. (1996), Burchell et al. (1991), and Foucault (1991[1978]).

rhetoric, proponents make no secret about the need to find a means to control employees while ostensibly empowering them. This is one of the reasons why these programs are often called "loose/tight," because they are said to free up personnel to act independently while at the same time providing a "tight" control over their behavior through attention to corporate culture initiatives that shape organizational and personal values.

From this perspective we see that caring communication is supposed to subtly work together with forms and policies to steer workers to develop in the ways that the organization has deemed desirable, while at the same time at least overtly showing respect for their independence and personhood. This is captured well by the *Developing Others* manual, which sums up the career development process as follows:

> *Career Development is the **process** by which **employees take ownership** for developing their capability in making a contribution to the organization. This is accomplished by **working together** with the manager to identify growth and development opportunities that **align** their individual strengths and interests with organizational needs.*

It is in this "working together" (depicted as a collaborative, often communicative, enterprise) that managers are to make sure that employees develop in ways "aligned" with those of the organization, and not in any direction they might desire (or not desire) to do so. While employee, boss, and organizational interests, of course, did not always align at Razorsharp St. Petersburg (for instance when professional employees wanted to take on new positions or responsibilities and their supervisors preferred to keep them in their current jobs) this approach was interwoven into numerous factory policies and procedures, from the "personal development programs" (or PDPs) that all of the professional staff nervously filled out in English each year before discussions with their supervisors to the evaluation practices for lower level staff.   In the case of the PDPs,

"alignment" meant that professionals needed to construct numerical goals for themselves that matched the specific yearly goals set by their department and the factory as a whole.[91]

Caring communication, then, was a kind of glue that theoretically sutured the aims of the employee to the aims of the organization.[92] It was to create efficiency and productivity not only by unleashing the capabilities of employees, but by helping employees to set the goals that would bring the types of results that the company desired and thereby fostering accountability. Scholars have described how similar neoliberal technologies such as audit work to govern subjects "at a distance" (Rose 1996a:61), theoretically creating accountability and self-discipline, along with efficiency, through processes of self-monitoring.[93] At Razorsharp much of the work of governance could also be said to be accomplished at a distance, since these performance evaluations and PDPs were a corporate imperative that had come down from corporate headquarters in the United States. As with other accountability measures, these technologies, in ways similar to financial audit, required making the usually invisible visible in a form that could be assessed and monitored from afar (Strathern 2000b). At the same time, communicative governmentality theoretically narrowed this distance, translating these bureaucratic imperatives into nurturing and therapeutic interpersonal interactions, and

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[91] This approach had much to do with what has been described as a major shift from "personnel management" to "Human Resources Management" (or HRM), an approach to personnel work introduced in the United States in the 1980s. In contrast to traditional personnel management focused on record-keeping and personality conflicts, HRM is said to be much more concerned with business strategy, subjecting the HR department, once considered of secondary managerial importance, to the same orientations to profit and efficiency as the rest of the organization. For review see Redman and Wilkinson (2001). Also see Townley (1994).

[92] See also Dean (1995), who in the context of Australian unemployment policies describes how the state may engage in "pastoral" practices, such as counseling, that provide an interface between state governmental activities and self-oriented practices. Also see McElhinny (2007a), who discusses a similar focus on egalitarian relationships within communities of practice.

[93] See Barry (2001), Dunn (2004; 2005), Ong and Collier (2005), Power (1997), Strathern (2000a).

coaxing employees to engage in the business of goal-setting and self-monitoring through dialogic talk.

Indeed, corporate management attributed such an importance to the role of communication in these policies and procedures that they also subjected "communication" itself to a similar type of control. This was through the concept of "competency," defined in one training that I attended as a unit of analysis that described "the concrete knowledge, motivation, and behavior that a worker needs in order to successfully perform his work." Competencies were observable skills that were scientifically determined to predict success on the job (Townley 1994). They could be determined ahead of time by experts in the United States and used as a universal rubric for assessing potential employees, developing current staff, and monitoring staff performance in St. Petersburg during interviews, evaluations, and development discussions. American Razorsharp training and development specialists had worked out a list of twelve competencies which a top professional employee was supposed to possess (see figure 2.1), many of which involved building work relationships through some type of verbal interaction.

Adaptability	*Leading Through Mission and Values**
Innovation	*Building Strategic Working Relationships*
Coaching*	*Facilitating Change**
Aligning Performance for Success*	*Customer Focus*
Building a Successful Team	*Drive for Results*
Communication	*Strategic Leadership/Decision-Making*

*For managers only.

Figure 2.1: Razorsharp Competencies, Professional Staff

These included "communication" itself, defined in terms of presentation skills and clarity

of message, as well as other competencies, such as "coaching" and "building a successful

team" that more specifically involved practices of caring communication. The former,

for instance was said to involve "providing timely guidance and feedback to help others

strengthen specific knowledge/skill areas needed to accomplish a task or solve a

problem." (See full descriptions of these and other interactional competencies in the

appendix to the dissertation.) Caring communication was not only a tool that could

render employees accountable; it was also itself an object of accountability, theoretically

subject to similar processes of monitoring and control.

Empowerment and Efficiency

"Every worker is a part of 5S" (*Kazdyi rabotnik uchastnik 5S*.) This was the

slogan that Inga, the young safety engineer, created to muster support for a factory

program aimed to engage workers in plans to clean and organize their workspace. 5S is a

widespread managerial initiative used in factory settings, which is said to be Japanese in

origin, but has been adopted by many Western companies as a means of increasing

worker engagement along with shop floor efficiency. Like many other such programs,

Razorsharp's 5S program, in the planning stages during the time of my fieldwork, aimed

to motivate teams of shop floor workers to discuss workplace organization issues and

implement solutions in creative ways, following a series of steps that began with "S." (In

one English version, "sort," "set in order," "shine," "standardize" and "sustain." [94])

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[94] The Razorsharp 5S team came up with Russian versions of the 5s's: "*sortirovka,*" (sorting) "*struktura*"(structure) "*sanitaria,*"(sanitation) "*sistema,*"(system) and "*samokontrol*" (self-control).

Inga's slogan, modeled after a popular Russian children's saying for remembering the colors of the rainbow and illustrated with a rainbow logo,[95] stressed this participatory nature of the project, suggesting that this was a project to which all would contribute and in which all voices would be heard. Because workers were the closest to work processes, they were theoretically the best positioned to share ideas on how to improve them. The program in this respect was supposed to increase shop floor efficiency in concert with workers' sense of pride and engagement in their workplace. Its participatory spirit was also supposed to be mirrored by the organization of the 5S planning team itself, which involved several young engineers of similar organizational levels in addition to a rotating contingent of team leaders, who were theoretically responsible for managing themselves (although one young male engineer generally served as leader and the group also occasionally needed to pass their ideas by Hassan.)

Such initiatives, which combined a stress on participation in general with a more linguistically mediated sense of the power of discussion, were thought particularly important for improving the St. Petersburg plant. Efforts to govern communication at the plant were not only a reflection of general corporate policies, but also were deeply related to the positionality of the factory in a differentiated transnational corporate network. Thus, while the highest levels of management strove to create a uniform Razorsharp "corporate culture" and instituted many of the same trainings, policies, and procedures in plants throughout the world, these did not apply to all plants and all staff at these plants in

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[95] The original rainbow saying is "Each hunter wishes to know where the pheasant sits" (*Kazhdyi okhotnik zhelaet znat' gde sidit fazan*.) The first letter of each word of the saying corresponds to the first letter of a color of the rainbow in spectrum order, e.g. the first word, *kazhdyi*, corresponds to the first color, *krasnyi*, or red. The 5s slogan was shorter than the original and invoked an abbreviated version of the rainbow with somewhat different color names. The colors here, corresponding to the first letter of each word of the slogan, were *krasnyi* (red), *ryzhii* (the red-orange color of red hair), *ul'tramarinovyi* (ultramarine, a bright blue) and *fioletovyi* (violet).

the same way. [96] I realized this through conversations with Kate, the American expatriate who was eventually hired to fill the human resources director position. Kate, who was in her early 40s, came to Razorsharp St. Petersburg after many years in the company's corporate headquarters and a recent stint in one of the UK plants, bringing along with her a couple of toys that she had accumulated along the way, including a soft rubber "Koosh" ball and some magnetic figurines. She was a true enthusiast for many empowerment measures, and spoke to me several times about the successes she had witnessed at the British factory, when they had employed a similar set of initiatives called "blitz-kaizens."[97] The UK plant, she noted, was in horrible shape when she arrived. Shop floor personnel seemed to care more about days off than their days on the job, and the factory regularly failed to meet multiple production targets each month to the great frustration of customers. However, Kate told me, this changed dramatically when they began to conduct the blitz-kaizens, weeklong events in which mixed teams of factory staff, including everyone from HR personnel to operators, joined together to discuss problems and find solutions. She told me that true "eureka moments" emerged from the group discussions, when, one team, for instance, discovered how to cut the time that was required to switch a line from producing one type of shaving cream to producing another by 75%.

Kate felt that something similar needed to happen in St. Petersburg. She often marveled that factory workers at the St. Petersburg plant were still manually assembling

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[96] Cody (2009) and Dunn (2008) have pointed out that governmentality is not a uniform phenomenon and may have differential effects across social space.

[97] The "blitz kaizen" is a shorter, mainly American incarnation of the Japanese managerial practice of "*kaizen*," or "continuous improvement," associated with TQM. *Kaizen* is a long-term approach to improving manufacturing processes in incremental steps through team-based discussions. It has been particularly tied to empowerment in Western settings, although Japanese versions tend to tout a community-based logic (Styhre 2001).

razors,[98] telling me that if I visited the British and American plants I would see a very different picture: a highly automated production process where robots rather than people were filling pallets. This difference, she told me, was a direct result of company strategy, since a primary attraction of St. Petersburg for the corporation was its low salaries, and, with it the opportunity to use lots of manual labor. While she understood the corporate rationale, Kate also felt that this strategy posed a particular challenge for local managers since the corporate management, enticed to the region by low labor costs, was unwilling to invest much money in the St. Petersburg plant's technology yet still demanded that the plant, like others in its network, continually increased its efficiency. Thus, to "keep up with the Razorsharp world" she felt that it was imperative for the St. Petersburg factory to employ measures such as the blitz-kaizens (slated for upcoming months) and a recent workshop on innovation (where office staff gathered to brainstorm about possible factory improvements) that could increase productivity without material investment. "So we will be figuring out, how do we increase those efficiencies?" she told me soon after the innovation workshop. "And that was why we did the innovation workshop last week, because we need to get everybody's ideas." While the factory had not been particularly good at "empowering" people in the past and few seemed willing to "speak up," Kate said, making these kinds of improvements in this context required measures that would harness employee ideas through the power of group discussion and collaboration: "We need a different approach, and you need everybody to be contributing their expertise and their insights into what's wrong."

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[98] As I mention later, the high amount of manual assembly at Razorsharp St. Petersburg during my fieldwork was mainly a temporary measure, as the factory waited for an appropriate machine to be shipped from another plant across the globe. However, even if this machine were present, operations in the factory would still be much less automated than in the American and British plants Kate described.

While many of the strategies employed at Razorsharp St. Petersburg are often heralded as typical of the "new economy" (e.g. Heller 2005) this was in many ways an "old economy" production job, which preserved a Taylorist emphasis on extracting the labor power of large contingents of factory floor workers. In this context, communication was a perfect corporate medium for increasing efficiency because it was cheaper than either technology or additional labor. If it seemed generally more pleasant for all to have a more open and egalitarian communicative environment, and this served as an important strategy of governmentality in the corporations' subsidiaries worldwide, this was particularly important in a case in which other means of increasing productivity were limited by a larger corporate strategy of capitalizing on low labor costs. Emily Martin (1994) has described how, in the American 90s, metaphors of "flexibility" in the corporate world were connected to corporate cost-cutting measures such as downsizing and reliance on a temporary labor force. Invocations of communication at Razorsharp were often tied to cost-cutting in an even more direct manner, promising an increase in efficiency and productivity that could overcome corporate decisions to restrict spending in other areas that many deemed even more important to the happiness and productivity of the St. Petersburg factory's staff.[99] Thus, this was not just a general strategy of governance that applied to all subjects equally, but rather a policy that applied differentially across local factory hierarchies and different globally positioned branches of the corporation as a whole.

Although many of the office employees thought that measures such as the blitz-kaizens and the workshop were a good idea, they were well aware of the inequalities that

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[99] In U.S. contexts, empowerment approaches have also been tied to cost-saving, since they theoretically entice employees to work more productively while the company saves money on middle management.

appeals to egalitarian discussion and participation evaded. As I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter, office employees often complained about the bureaucracy involved in having to check all of their actions with U.S. and regional headquarters, suggesting that this could make it difficult for local staff to make their ideas and voices heard, despite company rhetoric to the contrary. They also complained about numerous divisions internal to the plant, many of which were a result of larger managerial prerogatives. These included differential treatment of office staff on temporary contracts and those on permanent contracts who received more benefits, of administrative personnel who did not receive much training or developmental guidance and young specialists being groomed for managerial positions, and of senior management who met monthly to discuss the most pressing projects and others excluded from these meetings. Perceptions of English competency were also deeply divisive, with those perceived as less competent often looked over for promotions and development opportunities. An even larger gap separated the office staff from those on the shop floor, who were not only physically separated from the office by heavy doors, but unlike the office staff, worked alternating night and day shift schedules, wore uniforms, and generally received lower pay.

This was a gap that the factory management attempted to bridge for a few weeks in January, after the new machinery had already been running for four months. The factory was relying particularly heavily on manual labor at this time because one of the machines needed to automate the assembly of a particular type of razor had not yet arrived, and while temporary personnel had been hired to cope with this, they were proving insufficient. Facing the prospect that the factory would only meet 70% of its production

goal for the month, the operations meeting participants decided to join the workers on the shop floor. This was an idea particularly championed by Kate, who had recently begun to attend the meetings once a week. "When professionals get involved," she told the meeting participants, "this really brings improvement [and] boosts morale." Over the next few weeks, a wide variety of office personnel, from senior managers to warehouse administrators flooded the shop floor. (I also joined them myself.) In many cases, office staff didn't actually fill in for the jobs where there were missing people, but took on other tasks. Some worked alone at work stations where they could screw razor parts together, while others snapped the heads of plastic razors onto their handles. Some worked on conveyor belts, packaging displays of razors into boxes for shipping.

While very little communication of any type with workers occurred, the foray onto the shop floor was undertaken with the same spirit of bridging boundaries that was supposed to be embodied by the efforts to improve communication at the factory. Yet, this was very much a symbolic gesture, complete with the director's personal assistant running around with a camera to take photographs of the "work" and the office staff who was doing it. Office staff had no norms to fill and could stay as long as they wanted, allowing many to experience this as a fun and enjoyable break from the everyday routine, where they had a rare chance to socialize for an extended period of time. Although a government safety inspector was coming soon to check that workers were wearing proper safety shoes and uniforms, the office staff snapped razors together in their business casual attire, usually without the safety earplugs that were provided in order to better use the time to chat and joke. We weren't subject to any type of work norms (although there was intense interest in what these might be), and indeed, there were a lot of mistakes on our

end. We also mainly worked among ourselves, in a separate room or in a tightly knit group of professionals, only occasionally sitting at a table near the usual workers.

The limits of this approach became especially apparent one day when I ended up working on a conveyor belt alongside Ania, the director's personal assistant, a generally cheerful and pretty young blond woman in her early twenties. Our task was to assemble cardboard sheets into boxes by inserting various flaps into grooves and then scoop up store display packs of razors that were moving by on the belts and place them inside the assembled boxes. The packers who usually did this job were ostensibly on tea break, although, it turned out, several of them, women of various ages, stuck around to watch. I failed miserably at grasping the details of constructing the boxes, and the team leader, who had initially explained the task to me in Russian, thinking perhaps the problem had to do with language comprehension, tried again in a mixture of Russian and English. This didn't help matters in the least. As I grasped to turn some of the cardboard sheets into boxes, the display packs as well as additional cardboard sheets continued moving by. Ania tried to push them back on the belt, but this only multiplied the number of packs and sheets that consequently came our way, making it difficult for us to ever catch up. We only managed to make progress towards the end, when a team leader cleared away the excess, pre-folded some boxes for us, and I finally figured out which side of the boxes to close.

I was frazzled during my time on the line and could pay little attention to anything but delineating one flap from another. Ania, however, had apparently been more aware of the social contexts of our encounter than the anthropologist, and when I spoke to her while waiting for the morning bus the next day, she told me that she felt that the packers

had been deliberately mean. They, she said, had purposely not slowed the line for us to adjust, saying that we should see what their work was like since we didn't do any real work, and proclaiming "Let them suffer!" (*Pust' im pomuchit'sia!*), They also suggested that they should split our salaries. (Although I wasn't actually getting paid, the workers would not have known this and most probably took me, as a foreigner, as a high-paid expat.) Regardless of the accuracy of Ania's account, this suggests that the foray onto the shop floor did little to mitigate social tensions at the factory related to economic inequalities and differential treatment of personnel. Although this initiative was intended to transcend differences, it at the same time reproduced them and made them particularly visible.

Sponsorship: A Case Study

In October, about a month after the new machinery went online, Hassan proposed a shop floor "sponsorship" program at an Operations Meeting. Citing a statistic of seventeen percent general turnover and twelve percent turnover of new operations personnel, he suggested that the best way of improving those numbers was to assign new shop floor employees a "sponsor" who would meet with them periodically to discuss their experiences and impressions. The sponsor would not be their own direct supervisor, but a member of the supervisory and managerial staff from another department. Sponsors would meet with sponsees three times over the course of the year and ask them various questions about their experiences on the job and any problems they were facing, giving them the opportunity to discuss these issues openly without any worry about reprimand from their own supervisor. The program, as Hassan described it in subsequent meetings,

was to be a "bridge" that would increase communication and embody the idea that "we need to take care of our people." It would simultaneously make the workers feel better while also alerting management to any problems they might be able to solve. The email formally announcing the program ended with a quotation from Goethe that spoke to the potentially positive impact of this communicative intervention on employee morale, performance, and development: "If you treat a man as he is he will remain as he is; if you treat him as he ought to be and could be, he will become as he ought to be and could be." It also contained a second unattributed quote that that underlined that the best means of achieving these results were verbal: "When all other means of communication fail, try words."

The proposed program was primarily a response to Hassan's worries about the new team leaders, who, as he mentioned in our initial meeting, he felt were neither talking with their employees nor doing so in the appropriately nurturing, caring, and inspiring ways characteristic of a "coach" rather than a simple "supervisor." A number of other people at the factory shared this concern as well. In a company where team leaders, following the tendency of empowerment approaches more generally, were being given increasing managerial responsibilities, the communication styles of these front-line supervisors were particularly under question. While managerial and HR staff had little direct knowledge of the types of interactions that occurred between team leaders and workers on the shop floor, most had a suspicion that these interactions were not happening the way they should be. Surveys, exit interviews, and word of mouth had it that the atmosphere on the shop floor was not particularly engaging or empowering, and this was seen as a problem that was potentially undermining much of the work of the

expansion. From this point of view, sponsorship was an innovative way of mediating this gap, which would at least demonstrate some level of caring communication, even if it didn't come from those who most needed to display it. At the same time, many people at the factory were also conflicted over the program and whether it addressed the root causes of factory problems. While just about everyone at the factory nominally supported caring communication and felt that it would surely help the atmosphere on the shop floor, they were less sure about the logic that tied communication to efficiency and control.

One such staff member was Sasha, the young HR specialist, who I accompanied shopping one day. Office staff could leave early on Friday afternoons, and Sasha was excited about taking advantage of leaving early for once, although she noted she still would have to come in on the weekend to catch up. After shopping at Oggi, a fashionable store that featured its own domestic brand of middle-range work clothes for young women, we sat at a cafe over some coffee and cheesecake. Chatting in Russian a bit about cheesecake and other types of food, Sasha abruptly switched to English and began inquiring about my observations of the operations meetings, noting that HR staff rarely had attended them. Responsible for shop-floor hiring decisions, Sasha worried that the meeting participants must be speaking badly of her because of the still unstable situation on the shop floor. She stressed that she did her best to hire supervisors and workers that showed a willingness to learn on the job. However, she explained, with Razorsharp's salary requirements, which were once exemplary for the region, but were now mediocre at best, she often had to choose youth over experience. A nearby foreign factory, for instance, was offering 1500 rubles more for a very similar packing job.

After I tried to soothe Sasha's fears, she mentioned that she had a feeling that a lot of unpleasantness was occurring on the factory floor. Sasha was generally protective of the workers she hired and turned away potential applicants with health problems that she thought might be worsened on the job (such as poor hearing) with the air of a mother who knew the best and safest course of action for her child. While she said it was a "mystery" to HR what was happening on the shop floor, she suspected that the atmosphere there was harsh and uncaring, and suggested that people were deliberately keeping the full extent of the problem away from human resources personnel. The workers, Sasha felt, were probably being worked extremely hard due to the pressured plan and the team leaders were likely doing little to make the atmosphere more pleasant. The company, for instance, emphasized that team leaders should organize on the job training for workers, but she didn't know if this was happening and somehow doubted it was. She described the workers' first days on the job as probably bereft of attention and care, save the initial tour she gave them of the factory. After this, she surmised, the new hires sat alone for a few hours reading work instructions, and then went to work with little or no on-the job-training or attention from the team leaders. In general, she did not think the team leaders were checking up on their subordinates throughout the day or giving them much direction, and she described disapprovingly how, for instance, one packaging operator would often end up doing the work of many others because of lack of management from the team leaders.

Sasha, like Hassan and Kate, was one of many people at the factory that suggested that the team leader's ability to interact with people in caring and attentive ways had something to do with the problems on the shop floor. While she had little direct

knowledge of the shop floor atmosphere, she simultaneously portrayed the team leaders as not speaking with subordinates enough, not training them enough, and giving them little personal attention, leaving the workers abandoned and alone. While for her this was less a matter of efficiency than a matter of moral decency, she retained a similar sense that communication at the factory deserved significant attention. At the same time Sasha also invoked a more materialist explanation for factory problems that was probably even more common: The salaries of workers were simply not competitive enough at the present time to motivate them to stay during a particularly pressured period, and further, the quality of the workers was low because of the relatively low wages that the shop floor staff was offered.

Many of the staff at Razorsharp, like Sasha, worried about the communicative atmosphere on the shop floor. However, they often put these concerns more in terms of moral behavior than in terms of efficient results. Where neoliberal empowerment theories fuse concerns about morality and efficiency, presenting these as one and the same, Razorsharp employees often related to these conjunctures more ambivalently. It was not that "morality" and "efficiency" presented two entirely "alternate frameworks by which to judge value" (cf. Dunn 2004:38), but that some people saw these as overlapping more than others. Few could be against caring at the workplace, but not all were persuaded that the kind of caring that could be accomplished in the difficult material circumstances of the expansion made up for other types of care. For these people, better material compensation, along with better material conditions more generally could convey the management's "caring" for the workers more than any sort of friendly communication ever could. If "caring communication" was supposed to render workers

accountable, these people suggested that it was even more important to render the corporation as a whole accountable for its role in distributing material resources.

Talk about salary at the factory played an important role in sorting out the efficacy and morality of "care." Salary was a particularly prominent issue at this moment because St. Petersburg from many employees' point of view was just in the middle of an economic turning point: Where in the 1990s, working at a foreign company was the logical choice for an ambitious young employee because the salaries of all the foreign companies far exceeded what Russian companies could offer, people felt that it was increasingly the case after the 1998 crisis and the recovery that followed that both workers and professionals could attain higher or equal salaries at Russian-owned private companies, which were currently flourishing. At the same time, because inexpensive labor was a major motivating factor behind Razorsharp's expanding presence in St. Petersburg, the company management was not seen to be particularly amenable to major salary increases. If once Razorsharp salaries were at some of the highest levels in the city, now many of the employees regarded them as middle level at best, falling behind many other foreign firms as well as domestic employers. Some small raises were given while I was there, but none were substantial enough to counter this general impression.

Such concerns swirled around the debate over sponsorship. A number of people, especially among the HR staff, which had been consulted in the development of the program, at least nominally approved of the program and thought it could make some difference in the current factory atmosphere. At the same time, many were unsure. Hassan's initial announcement of the program met with a murmur of skepticism from the senior managers. The quality manager, for example, didn't think her department would

really relate well to the others and didn't think they had many problems of this sort, while the production manager wanted details about which departments were most afflicted by turnover and explanations of why exactly these people were leaving. Many of the arguments centered around the difficulty of conducting such a program in the context of the pressure and responsibility everyone was already feeling under the expansion as well as the logistical problems of supervising those in other departments. However, even more fundamentally, meeting participants, as well as those who I spoke to about the program outside the meeting, often suggested that the most central issue was being evaded by pinning problems on issues of talk and communication. Salary, they suggested was the most critical factor at work in issues of retention of shop-floor personnel, and issues related to money could only be repaired by offering more money.

Anton, the engineering manager, for instance, was particularly critical of the sponsorship program and cycled through both logistical and material counter-arguments at one of the meetings where it was discussed. First, he suggested to the group, the added responsibility would probably detract the already busy team leaders from their core responsibilities: Wouldn't it be better to wait until the dust from the expansion settled? Hassan countered that it was impossible to wait that long, since by then more than half of the new employees could already be lost. "In any case," Anton went on to say, "99% of the issue is salary. People can't feed their families. Of course I will explain how nice it is to work for Razorsharp so on and so on, but it's not for everyone." This was not a matter of niceness or atmosphere, Anton suggested; it was fundamentally a matter of material compensation—and no degree of talk could repair a situation in which people did not have enough food for their families to eat.

I heard a number of similar arguments from others, who suggested that while office staff might be enticed to work at Razorsharp because of its atmosphere and reputation, which they might be able to parlay into a more lucrative position at another company in a few years, this was not enough for "simple workers" who cared about nothing but their paychecks. If in some versions, this argument was somewhat derogatory towards workers and reflective of office staff's own opinions about their own higher "cultural level," it also displayed a felt sense that current systems of compensation were out of step with the company's espoused values and professed "care" for its staff. According to Ianna, an administrator in the quality department who had begun her career at the company ten years before as a shop floor quality inspector, the workers currently at the company did not relate to their work as "respectfully" as they had in her shop-floor days, especially because of the feelings about the company that a small salary created. While, it would be ideal to find people who respected their work regardless of salary, such people, she felt, were quite rare. The workers, for their part, did express concerns about salaries in their factory surveys, including one, who, when asked what three aspects of work he would like to improve, responded "salary, salary, salary." This was not an answer that Hassan liked to hear, and when I mentioned at a senior management meeting that salary complaints often came up in the surveys, he visibly winced.

Frustrations about the material positions and rewards for the workers in particular were expressed in a number of other venues as well. Of particular discussion was an issue identified by the survey, the bus that the workers took from the Metro to the factory. The worker bus was a dusty, old Soviet bus that contrasted sharply with the brightly colored Scania bus I had originally taken to the factory, a model increasingly seen around

the city. While the office workers also took the same dusty bus at a different time, the bus for workers was packed so tightly after the expansion that people often had to stand pressed against each other and few could sit down. (Managers, incidentally, often drove in cars, which the company helped them to attain.) Office workers, not particularly fond of their own bus, were especially critical of the worker bus, which they also occasionally took when coming to work early or leaving late. Such a situation, many argued, did not represent the proper message of care, understanding, and respect for the workers that Razorsharp claimed it wanted to convey.

Sergei, for instance, who supervised the electricians, was particularly concerned about the bus issue, and suggested in an interview that it was one of the primary areas where the company was now doing a disservice to its workers. Workers were coming to work already fatigued, he said, and if they could rest a bit on the bus, they would be more relaxed and ready to work. While Sergei usually took a car to work, he had recently taken the bus with the office workers, and contrasted his own experience where he could sit with that of the workers who had to stand. "I sat, sat!" he exclaimed. "Dozed a little, chatted, you see. And those that come at eight [e.g. the workers] they don't have that possibility, because they are so crowded." Such a situation he suggested did not properly reflect the "face of the company" and needed to be addressed. He was equally critical of the salaries the workers were receiving later in the interview, which again in his opinion did not properly reflect the company and what it stood for. While he felt that work conditions were generally good in the factory, material compensation needed to be high enough so that workers also had similarly good conditions outside of the factory:

> That we attend to work conditions is one thing. [The worker] likes it here,
> but it's necessary to do things in such a way so that he can also allow

> himself a bit more than he can allow himself now. In this case he would also value his work. It's a kind of political propaganda. You go through the gates of the factory: "I work for Razorsharp. I can afford to sit here and not there. I can afford to vacation there and not here. I not only can afford to do this myself, but I can go with my family." Right? (Recorded interview, translated from Russian)[100]

In this way, Sergei suggested that a bond between a worker and the enterprise was created not so much by attentive communication, as it was by creating appropriate material conditions for workers both inside and outside work. This not only involved attending to issues of comfort such as the bus, but also, more fundamentally by providing workers with higher salaries that would allow them to pursue the types of comfort they would personally enjoy.

Another related subject of criticism was the company's reliance on inexpensive temporary workers to conduct manual assembly in the context of the expansion. The company employed a mixture of its own temporary workers (on renewable contracts) and those arranged with a temp agency. Some managers felt that this arrangement also undercut any message of caring communication that the corporation was trying to convey, since these workers would never feel a part of a united *kollektiv*, a measure, they suggested, that could impart care in a way that no special communications programs— which the temporaries were generally excluded from in any case—could. When the company was smaller and had a higher proportion of permanent staff, they suggested, the workers as well as the office personnel generally felt much better about the company, even without special communication programs. (One female engineer who had worked for Avia before the joint venture with Razorsharp was particularly nostalgic in this

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[100] For this and the next chapter only, because of the heavy use of English at Razorsharp, I will mark whether conversations presented in block quotes were in English or Russian. Italics will be used to mark use of English words in Russian conversations. In other parts of the dissertation, Russian should be assumed to be the language used in block quotes, unless otherwise noted.

regard.) From this point of view, the chaos on the shop floor was less the fault of the team leaders and more the fault of the corporate strategies of the expansion, which had very quickly increased the amount of people on the shop floor, using the prerogatives of increasingly common "flexible" work relationships (Martin 1994) to rapidly expand the number of temporary workers who felt little or no connection to the company.[101] Although the team leaders could potentially help in this matter, these people suggested, it was unfair to blame them for what were larger matters of company decisions and strategy. One manager told me that the best way fix the factory was to get rid of all the temporaries or at the very least to put them on longer-term contracts, which would "give people a completely different feeling," as well as support productivity and quality. While the sponsorship program was eventually put into force, it was difficult to get supervisory and office staff to meet with their sponsees, and even the assistant HR manager, who had been a big supporter of the program, admitted that to her shame she had still not yet met with her sponsees a few months later.

Uncoupling Communication and Efficiency

Many members of the Razorsharp factory management drew from globally circulating managerial discourses that positioned communication as a key node to be worked upon to increase productivity and efficiency. As they attempted to meet their own goals of increasing efficiency and productivity under the constraints of larger corporate strategies that differentiated Eastern and Western factories, communication seemed like a site that could be improved with little material investment and effort.

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[101] Also see Gee et al. (1996) who point out how the empowerment literature is silent about the implications of ephemeral "fast capitalist" networks for stable communities of people with shared histories.

Communication, constituted as a "universal" good, also seemed universally applicable, a transcultural category that could be analyzed and improved according to universal criteria, regardless of the larger cultural environment.

Yet, this tactic significantly obscured some critical details of the expansion, as many of the Razorsharp employees realized and pointed out in factory debates over communication. Deborah Cameron (2000a) has suggested that the neoliberal view that conflicts can be resolved by better communication among equals often obscures the power inequalities that lie beneath those conflicts. In a similar way appeals to communication generally evaded many of the structural inequalities of the expansion, a point that employees made through the discussions about workers, buses, and temporary workers. These people were for the most part materialists, rather than neoliberals, who saw structural problems and not the individual subjectivities of workers and the cultivating skills of team leaders as the root causes of the problems at the factory. This tendency towards materialism could be understood in a couple different ways. On the one hand, one might point to a Marxist legacy of attention to the material side of labor. On the other hand one might point to another explanation I have often heard, a distrust of greater ideologies, the idea that after the collapse of Soviet ideologies, Russians are tired of big, totalizing explanatory frameworks that purport to explain and dictate everything and everyone, from the direction of history to the intricacies of individual behavior. One might also point to the legacy of socialism itself and the related idea that the state, and with it the industrial enterprise, should take care of all of workers needs in a paternalistic fashion.

Yet, none of these explanations seems entirely adequate. As I will discuss in the

next chapter, many Razorsharp supervisory and office employees embraced the power of discussion as a force for a more pleasant and professional working environment. They were neither entirely stuck in the Soviet past nor unwilling to take on new frameworks of explanation (even if they suggested that workers were less so inclined.) Thus, while believing in the power of communication and the importance of care at the factory, they nonetheless questioned the corporate logic that tied together communication, efficiency, and morality, suggesting that there was no necessary connection between these elements: Moral communication was not necessarily efficient, moral behavior did not necessarily coincide with communicative behavior, and efficiency often undercut morality and communication. The communication explanations often subsumed others in official management settings, monopolizing a rhetoric of care while erasing the material and rendering it not under discussion. By bringing the material back into play, Razorsharp supervisory and office employees questioned these evasions, asking what it was that the rhetoric of communication and care was concealing and how it was connected to the greater strategies the company embarked in as it spread eastward in search of cheaper labor.

Chapter 3

Communicating Agency between East and West

Ol'ga was a Razorsharp supervisor in her early fifties who always looked quite composed in heavy makeup, cropped black curls, and dark blazers and blouses. When I interviewed her in her well-organized office she spoke with just a hint of polite modesty about her efforts to create a participatory atmosphere in the Quality department that she headed. Ol'ga described her method as a combination of two seemingly disparate elements. "On the one hand," she explained, "one should assign tasks in a way that [subordinates] will relate to them respectfully, so that they can attain results," an approach she described as fostering "a discipline of subordination." "On the other hand," she went on to say, "one should do this in a way that fosters initiative and lack of fear of the boss, so that they can express themselves and. . . without being afraid for their lives after opening their mouths, discuss what they like and what they don't agree with." The key to the latter objective, Ol'ga suggested, was to encourage "discussion" in the department, and throughout the interview, she went on to list various steps she took to create an atmosphere that promoted it, from including team leaders in problem-solving sessions, to making an effort to regularly speak to the team leaders and the inspectors they supervised, to being honest about her own mistakes and failings.

While Ol'ga was perhaps more candid about the need to promote subordination here than many empowerment proponents, she seemed to embrace a similar mixture of

guidance and freedom to that advocated by Razorsharp corporate trainings and policies.

Yet despite this, Ol'ga told me she felt she had reached her own "glass ceiling" at the

company. Having originally entered Razorsharp as a low-level quality inspector during

the 1990s when the research institute where she worked previously was crumbling, she

had risen through the corporate ranks throughout the years and had now been the primary

supervisor in the Quality Department for more than a year and a half. However, she was

never officially promoted to "manager" level (like the last person in this position) and

retained the lesser title of "superintendent." Ol'ga surmised there was upper management

sentiment against her, and while she did not know exactly why this might be, a recent

negative performance review suggested it had something to do with perceptions of her

managerial and communication skills. Hassan, her boss, said that she didn't "work well

with other people," citing as evidence that she didn't "discuss" issues with others at the

operations meetings he led. Of all possible critiques, Ol'ga found this one particularly

upsetting. Not only did she feel like the company was like her "family" and its problems

like her own personal problems, but she had originally advocated for the meetings

precisely because she felt that open discussion would be as useful for the entire

management team as it was for her department. In the end, however, she told me, she

found the meetings more a matter of attack and accusation than facilitation and team

spirit, and as a result, tended to rely upon different types of discussion practices, talking

over issues in small meetings of two to four rather than in the larger arena of the

operations meetings. "There other ways where and how to discuss," she stressed. Such

practices, however, had seemingly come back to haunt her.

For professional staff at Razorsharp St. Petersburg, to be seen as a person capable

(or incapable) of promoting discussion, communicating with others, and "speaking up" had real consequences. If one was not seen as communicating properly, this also cast doubt on a number of other aspects of one's managerial and professional competencies, including most prominently, one's ability to complete one's job responsibilities with the right kind of professional agency to be effective and productive. Such judgments not only shaped impressions of people and their work; they could also have serious consequences for one's career, affecting decisions about hiring and promotion. Yet evaluations of people's communication skills were not the types of "objective" judgments that performance reviews and other assessment tools made them seem to be. These judgments were positioned, shaped both by structural position within the factory setting as well as both personal and structural ties to the "West." While, as Ol'ga's own self-presentation to me attests, beliefs about the importance of discussion and communication were hardly confined to expatriates at Razorsharp, nonetheless the view persisted among both foreigners and Russians alike that Russians (or certain types of Russians) lacked competence in this area, along with the types of agentive action commonly associated with it at the factory. Thus, even those Russians who strongly embraced company values of empowerment and participation needed to grapple with the opinions of those who saw communication styles and managerial skill in terms of national origin.

In this chapter, I turn from managerial discourse about the shop floor to managers and professionals themselves, examining how the Russia/West distinction was a "discursive landmark" (Lemon 2000:195) particularly prominent in discussions of management, communication, and agency both at the factory and elsewhere. Focusing on managerial meetings, along with the discourses and practices of managerial and

professional employees, I describe how engaging in the right types of communication at Razorsharp was not only seen as important for facilitating the company's global expansion into the region in the present, but was also considered a critical way of countering some of the worst traits associated with the enterprises of the Soviet past. These associations, I suggest, were not static, but shifted in the context of situated use as office employees of different levels and backgrounds drew upon distinctions between "Russian" and "Western" communication styles in efforts to align themselves and typify others, often finding themselves classified in ways that they would not have chosen themselves. This chapter then both examines prominent language ideologies that existed at the factory and "analyzes their efficacy" (Woolard 1998:11), the ways in which they acted in the world that they described. It also continues to consider the language ideologies at the factory in the context of their global circulation, asking what happens when language ideologies travel and are drawn upon in particular situated milieus.

Of Splitting Wheels and Communicative Divides

One day, just before September's plan was to be completed, Aleksei, the Razorsharp planning manager, a generally calm and gentle man who had worked at the company since it began production operations in Russia, started going over the numbers at the crowded operations meeting optimistically, noting that there were fewer changes than there had been the day before. However, the tenor of the meeting quickly changed when Hassan noticed the poor performance of a new product line called EZCut, continuing a several week trend. "We cannot continue with EZCut like this!" he exclaimed, and asked the group why the numbers were so low. Lena, a high-level shop-

floor supervisor who spoke English with a controlled British accent, tersely responded that there had been a problem with "splitting," an operation that involved dividing long sheets of blades into two. When Hassan inquired further, sighing deeply, members of the group explained that a critical part, a splitting wheel, needed to be replaced. To replace the part would take time, since the wheels were imported from Europe and not readily available within Russia. Nonetheless, they were doing their best to find substitute parts produced by Russian suppliers that could temporarily take the place of the faulty wheel. Turning red and beginning to shake, Hassan exploded, raising his voice: "Excuse me. We are starting October tomorrow and you have known about this for one, two, three weeks! What is the fucking problem? Excuse my language, but I told Turkey we would have six million ready for them next month."

The meeting attendees responded quietly with more details.   Since a lead time was required for orders, the soonest that they would be able to receive a new European wheel would be in a few weeks. At the same time, Oleg, the ever-stressed supervisor of the mechanics noted, the size and grades of the comparable Russian parts they had found would make modification difficult. Hassan paused to take in this information, and then turned tensely to each of the senior personnel members sitting near the head of the table, making eye contact with each one before moving on. "You knew," he said to Lena, and then moved on to Aleksei and Oleg: "You knew, You knew." They looked stunned and sat at their places around the table silently, without affirmation, waiting to see what would come next. Hassan then arrived at one of his closest allies, the Production Manager Dmitrii, who had not said much thus far. "Did you know?" Without giving him a chance to respond, Hassan observed, "Yeah, you knew." Hassan then abruptly cut the

meeting short: He would leave, he said, and the group would "take action." They were to find a solution by the next morning, even if they had to stay up all night. As he exited, Hassan returned to the meeting participants' prior knowledge of the wheel crisis, commenting: "I'm not part of team? Everybody knows before I do. Everybody is hiding things."

Hassan here interpreted circumstances surrounding the delayed splitting wheel in terms of a deep communicative divide. He pinpointed particular members of the senior personnel individually as knowing about the wheel problem and deliberately trying to conceal it, singling out each one individually with the pronoun "you" ("You knew.") He then depicted their behavior as intentionally exclusionary, a purposeful effort to bar him from an imagined unity free of hierarchy and status, the greater management "team." And while these were but a handful of the people in the room, he generalized his assessment to apply not only to them, but to everyone in the room beside himself. Not just the senior managers, but "everybody" in his interpretation both knew about the problem and decided to hide it. While it is clear that some of the senior personnel did already know about the broken wheel (and had taken steps towards addressing the problem), a number of factors may have accounted for the way in which the information was conveyed to Hassan. They may have, as Ol'ga mentioned, feared talking about the issue in the generally tense meeting atmosphere, or, as one of the other managers later suggested to me about such issues, they may have been simply too busy with other urgent problems at once to bring this one to Hassan. In Hassan's reading of the series of silences and communicative events that had led to his discovery of the problem, however, the primary explanation was not situational but cultural: a perduring Russian and Soviet

tendency to "hide things" and restrict discussion to a closed inner circle rather than speaking about issues "openly" with all concerned.

Such portrayals are typical in Western-oriented management discourses about Russia, which, like other discourses about "transition" tend to portray an unchanging Russian or Soviet culture as a major obstacle in moving forward and achieving parity with the West.[102] Attitudes toward speech and speaking, along with related linguistic practices, form a commonly cited dimension of this obstacle that, in the eyes of management specialists, must be overcome in order for Western multinationals to operate successfully in Russian conditions and local businesses to work as efficiently as Western ones. Thus, in this context, ideas about language, as has often been observed by students of language ideologies, become a powerful means of typifying difference between the "East" and the "West" that "do not just express social difference, but play a crucial role in producing. . . the categories by which social difference is understood and evaluated" (Keane 2007:17).[103] Management specialists portray Russian and Western business people as having fundamentally different approaches to talk and work, and while it is assumed to be universally desirable for Easterners to talk like Westerners, the attainment of this goal is seemingly forever deferred by the differences in "mentalities" and "culture" that differences in language use purportedly reflect. In this, these management specialists echo a long semiotic tradition of classifying Europe as significantly divided between the more advanced "West" and the lagging "East."[104]

According to these portrayals, which are rampant in the American and Western

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[102] On similar tendencies throughout postsocialist Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, see Burawoy and Verdery (1999), Kennedy (2002), and Verdery (1996).
[103] On this point, see especially Gal and Irvine (1995) and Irvine and Gal (2000).
[104] See Irvine and Gal (2000), Todorova (1997), Wolff (1994).

European management literature on the region[105], as well as the talk of aligned Russians

and Eastern Europeans,[106] the typical Soviet boss (who is overwhelmingly described as

male) was a brute.[107] In one such account (Kets de Vries, et al. 2004), for example,

management specialists affiliated with a French business school describe the general

director of the Moscow-based Bolshevik Biscuit factory at the time of its 1994 purchase

by French multinational Danone as a perfect specimen of the type:

> The general director at the time Danone acquired Bolshevik was a self-made boss, a typical 'red' director. He had spent most of his life at the factory and started his career from the position of a mechanic at one of the factory workshops. His physical appearance and behavior were intimidating: he was a noisy, corpulent man with a large tattoo on his wrist and a thick gold chain around his neck. While his manners left much to be desired, he knew the business and was a master at controlling relationships with subordinates. . . [H]is typical Soviet distrust of his subordinates influenced his management style of vigilant supervision, intimidation and power hoarding. (89)

Although the ostensive focus here is on the immediate post-Soviet period, the general

director here appears a model of "Soviet" authoritarianism, rude and forceful with a

penchant for strict control of his subordinates. His supervision is "vigilant" and he

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[105] The English-language management literature on the Soviet Union and Russia is already rather sizable. Some widely cited publications in the scholarly management literature pertaining to the concerns of this chapter include Bollinger (1994), Elenkov (1998), Michailova (2000), Fey and Dennison (2003), Fey et al. (1999), Puffer (1993; 1994), Shekshnia (1994), Shama (1993), and Vlachoutsicos and Lawrence (1996). More recent articles include Alexashin and Blenkinsopp (2005) and McCarthy et al. (2005). Popular guides oriented towards business people include Wilson and Donaldson (1996), as well as Holden et al. (1998).

[106] While the majority of contributors to these discourses are themselves from North America and Western Europe, allegiances do not break down strictly along national lines. Those whom I will be calling for convenience "Western-oriented management specialists," also include aligned Russians and Eastern Europeans (often educated in Western companies or working in Western firms), as well as similarly inclined managerial specialists from other parts of the world. And while I focus here on discourses in English, similar sentiments are also expressed in some Russian-language publications, often under rubrics such as "democratic leadership style," as opposed to "authoritarian" or "excessively liberal" variants (e.g. Denisova et al. 2004; Gromova 2004; Nosyrev 2005).

[107] A more nuanced portrayal can be found in Lawrence and Vlachoursicos's (1990) comparative study of Soviet and American enterprises, conducted in 1988. While Lawrence and Vlachoursicos found Soviet managers to be more reliant on hierarchy in decision-making and subject to higher expectations for providing strong directive leadership than American managers, they also found that Soviet managers had much more direct contact with lower-level subordinates than American managers (who were more concerned with sticking to a strict chain of command) and were more involved with their employees' lives outside of work. See also Puffer (1994) and Barnes et al. (1997).

manages via "intimidation" and "hoarding power" as well as bodily presence. This portrait of stereotyped authoritarianism continues in later passages, where we learn about the director's habit of yelling at subordinates—one worker mistakes the general director for a gangster—and confronting them with a "coercive power" that "bordered on physical abuse" (98).

Where this account portrays Bolshevik's director as a "Soviet" relic, usually "Russian" managers or employees fare little better in the Western managerial literature. Some accounts do celebrate the coming of "market-oriented" or "Western" managers[108], meaning those who most seem to resemble "Western" business people. However, for the most part, these managerial discourses provide a stock picture of Russian managers that has only shown slight variations since the Soviet period. Echoing Cold War portrayals of totalitarian leaders, the Russian manager,[109] like the Soviet manager, appears a problematic figure obsessed with power and status, a firm believer in a hierarchical organization headed by a strong leader. Meanwhile Russian subordinates generally appear like passive followers who expect and even welcome submission to such dominating figures. In the terms often drawn on in managerial scholarship, Russia is continually cited as an example of high "power distance,"[110] meaning that Russians generally accept and expect large status differences between bosses and subordinates as

[108] See Camiah and Hollinshead (2003), Puffer (1994), and Veiga et al. (1995). The strongest statement of this position is in Alexashin and Blenkinsopp (2005).

[109] The English term "manager," which is in common use in Russian as *menedzher*, can be confusing in Russian settings. English-language managerial discourses generally use the term rather non-specifically to denote a rather high-ranking leadership position. Positions at Razorsharp St. Petersburg worked similarly, and the highest ranking factory personnel who led departments, aside from the factory director, were officially called managers in English, and informally referred to as *menedzhery* in Russian. Meanwhile, many Russian companies use the term *mendedzher* in reference to lower-ranking personnel, using other terms for section and division heads, such as *glava* (head), *nachal'nik* (boss), *rukovoditel'* (leader), and *direktor* (director).

[110] The primary figure associated with this conception of power distance is organizational psychologist Geert Hofstede (1980), who also set out several other classifications for quantifying cultural distance. See also Mulder (1977).

compared with citizens of North America and Western Europe.[111]

Language and communication style are a major component of these portrayals, seen to suffer from the same authoritarianism typical of Russian management styles more generally. The communication styles of Russian bosses appear unremittingly hierarchical, relying too strongly on orders and intimidation, and providing little room for free expression. One Bulgarian management professor, for example, notes:

> Russian managers and employees . . . place high importance on hierarchy and formal status. The hierarchical levels are linked through pyramidal connections and forces. No creativity is required from shop-floor workers and this is intensified by top-down, one-way communication. (Michailova 2002:184)

Correspondingly, Russian subordinates are generally portrayed as displaying submissive communication styles typified by their tendency to seek instruction and evade decision-making. An Australian expatriate I met in St. Petersburg, for instance, echoing the managerial literature, exasperatingly told me that when he first came to the city in the 1990s to manage a branch of a major Western consulting firm, a Russian employee came to him to report that the office was out of envelopes and ask if more should be ordered. While at first he found the employee's inclination to ask for instructions in such a trivial matter perplexing, as such requests multiplied, he explained, he soon realized that these requests reflected a much deeper "lack of initiative" pervasive in contemporary Russian culture that was bred by Soviet authoritarian management practices. In the most critical of these accounts, Russians employees are typified not only as "closed" and unwilling to speak or act independently, but also purposely vague, deceptive, and evasive. "Does the person give a direct answer rather than digress?" suggest one manual, should be an

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[111] Management articles citing "high power distance" in the Russian context include Bollinger (1994), Elenkov (1998), Javidan and House (2001), Naumov and Puffer (2000), Veiga (1995) .

important consideration when choosing a Russian manager (Wilson and Donaldson 1996:138).

While state socialism may have indeed fostered "regimes of voice" that differently imagined the pragmatics of personal expression and authority than liberal and neoliberal reformers (Larson 2007), what I am questioning here is this fixed picture of Russian and Soviet managers, as well as their Western counterparts, that has changed little over time. Pairing timeless cultural essences with linguistic and management styles, these discourses, in a way similar to pervasive Western equations of language and culture, view Russians and Westerners as each possessing a single inherent communication style, which can only be transformed—if it can be transformed at all—through targeted interventions. Current Russian communication styles are seen as projections of Soviet (and often even Tsarist) practices, with little account of how these have also been shaped and transformed by the changing conditions of Soviet and Post-Soviet work environments, the politics and projects of particular institutions, and the goals and milieus of particular individuals.[112] Further, as in earlier symbolic geographies based upon the East/West distinction, East and West are represented as mirror images, with Western styles representing all that is worthy and modern, and Eastern styles representing all that is problematic and needs to be changed.

Indeed, Soviet-era representations of supervisors and directors provide a more complicated picture. There were continual tensions over the perceived need for authoritarian control and the importance of bosses showing care to subordinates throughout the Soviet period.[113] Ideally, high-level figures, such as plant directors, would

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[112] On similar dynamics in the context of Eastern European gender relations, see Gal and Kligman (2000).
[113] See for instance Dunham's (1976) discussions of these tensions in Soviet novels of the 1940s and 1950s.

fulfill both functions, staying firmly in charge while also acting as fatherly defenders of

their labor collectives who were attentive to the personal needs of their people. Directors

were expected to know their workers by name, respond personally to their individual

problems, hold visiting hours in which employees could bring up work and personal

issues, and occasionally take a stroll around the shop floor to interact with workers more

directly.[114] Satires and other critical accounts often did portray directors, officials, and

other authority figures (both male and female) as bluntly commanding, out of touch, and

impossible to reach without excessive effort. However, this was generally presented as a

breach of morally acceptable conduct, rather than a sanctioned principle.[115] At the same

time, widespread practices of *blat* (or "pull") that enabled managers and others to meet

enterprise quotas through personal connections involved cultivating relationships with all

sorts of people both in one's own firm and outside it. (See Chapter Six.) Everyday

moralities of the *khoziain,* or "owner/boss," thus involved being the type of person who

was not disconnected from others, but on the contrary had many such personal

connections and could draw upon them to take proper care of both one's area of

supervision and the people one supervised (Rogers 2006).

    With this in mind, I would suggest that Western management specialists examine

Russian communication practices through a very specific lens that has much to do with

the empowerment ideology I have outlined in the previous chapter and its liberal

precedents. Elevating particular Western ideals to the status of universals, and thereby

supporting Western claims to superiority in a way very similar to colonial-era

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[114] See Bizyukov (1995), Clarke (2007), Rogers (2006), and The Samara Research Group (1995).

[115] *Krokodil* cartoons of the 1920s-1940s, for instance, satirized the amount of time that people needed to wait to present problems to officials, as well as officials' rough, unsympathetic manner (Kelly 2001). Also see Fitzpatrick (1999).

Europeans,[116] Western-oriented management specialists describe "good" communication as open and egalitarian. Managers are encouraging and employees correspondingly "speak up" and embrace action. Meanwhile, "poor" communication is depicted as the opposite of this: closed and bureaucratic, associated with intimidating supervisors and subordinates that are reluctant to act independently and speak openly. In the application of the universal to the particular, however, these language ideologies undergo a significant indexical shift. [117] Empowerment ideologies, as I have discussed, are generally based upon a temporal comparison in the wider management literature. They contrast the old, hierarchical management styles of Fordism with new open and empowering modes of communication said to be management's future. However, in the Russian context, the same characteristics become representative of spatial difference and related moral distinctions between persons.[118] Thus, these language ideologies not only associate open, caring modes of communication with independent action, but also connect these with democracy and Westernness. At the same time, these are opposed to "closed" modes of communication that are generally seen as undemocratic, autocratic, and Russian and/or Soviet, as well as lacking commitment to independent, agentive activity.

Western managers and businesses appear as paradigms of empowerment, who communicate openly, deemphasize hierarchy, promote egalitarianism, spark initiative, and share information with colleagues and subordinates, while Russian managers and

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[116] See Bauman and Briggs (2003), Chakrabarty (2000), Gal and Irvine (1995), Irvine and Gal (2000).

[117] Language ideologies, as a number of scholars have discussed, often develop and gain new associations over time as new indexical links may supersede or build on older connections in conjunction with various social, historical, and linguistic transformations (Inoue 2007; Kulick 1992; Kulick 1998; Meek 2007; Schieffelin 2000; Silverstein 1985). A similar process, I am suggesting here, can also occur as ideologies in global circulation are drawn upon in different local contexts.

[118] Also see similar dynamics in Dunn (2004).

businesses, by contrast, are portrayed as failing on all of these counts. One managerial

specialist, for example, writes of Russia:

> Within this hierarchical society, knowledge and information are
> considered sources of power. Obtaining but *withholding* information from
> others gives individuals an advantage. By contrast, among Westerns,
> *sharing* knowledge is seen as means of enhancing ones reputation and
> status. (Barnes, et al. 1997:542)

Similarly, another specialist describes the Russian working environment's stifling

atmosphere as contrasting strongly with the atmosphere in the West:

> [The Russian] working environment—which is very different from one
> found in most Western firms—has left several legacies. One of the most
> influential might be called a "keep your mouth shut" style of working—
> a natural result of years spent under a system in which to talk and ask
> questions was to invite trouble. No wonder, then, that Russians are
> hesitant to ask for help, take the initiative, admit to being confused or
> engage in open styles of communicating. (Cooley 1997)

While Russians here seem not to speak up or "engage in open styles of communicating"

it is implied that the opposite occurs in the "very different" working environment of

Western firms. Through semiotic processes of erasure (Irvine and Gal 2000), Russian

and Western communication styles appear nearly as polar opposites with little

acknowledgement of heterogeneity on either side.

This dichotomized logic sets the scene for Western companies to come into

Russia and "save" Russian employees[119] by employing communication styles that

provide employees with more "freedom" and room for independent action.[120] The

Australian manager, for instance, told me that he soon took decisive steps to turn the

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[119] Walck (1995) thus describes these efforts as "missionary management." See also Verdery (1996).

[120] Managerial specialists focused specifically on empowerment have cautioned that this is very difficult to do, invoking some of the same distinctions between the empowering styles of Westerners and the hierarchical styles of Russians. Snejina Michailova (2002), a Bulgarian researcher based in Denmark, has strongly argued that empowerment is neither welcomed nor wanted by Russian employees, who expect strong leaders, are uninterested in initiative, and "prefer directives instead of discussions" (183). American scholar Carl Fey (2007; 1999) has similarly suggested that the Russian tradition of a strong leader poses a major problem for empowerment initiatives.

consulting company's St. Petersburg office around by interacting with his employees in ways that would encourage more "initiative." He answered requests for direction not with "orders" but with further "questions," such as "What do you think?" that put the onus of decision-making on his employees. He also made a point of speaking to everyone in the office from upper level managers to lower level staff to "keep in touch" and make sure everything was "OK," an intervention that he suggested made his employees, used to a more hierarchical style, quite uncomfortable. Such discomfort, he suggested, still had not yet completely abated, and he presented his efforts to manage via open communication as a continual but valiant struggle. "I am committed to speaking to all levels of staff," he stressed, "and will continue to do it, despite what others might think." While it may be tempting to support this executive's seemingly egalitarian impulses, part of my aim here is to complicate the story told by this recent iteration of a familiar narrative in which the West provides enlightenment to the East.

Communicating and Meta-communicating Action

Although the operations meetings were not always as dramatic as the splitting wheel incident, similar confrontations occurred regularly. I found these clashes puzzling as well as upsetting. How, I wondered, in a place where there was so much talk about the power of caring communication did these meetings end up being so divisive? How could a manger like Hassan who seemed so interested in improving communication end up criticizing the communication styles of subordinates in ways that seemed to block further discussion? And how could this end up happening again and again in meetings that had originally been convened, like so many Razorsharp initiatives, in the spirit of harnessing

open discussion among different levels of staff to solve factory problems? If in the end openness was not the primary goal of these meetings, why did communication style seem to matter so much here, and how was it related to the "friction" (Tsing 2005) between factory personnel positioned differently in company hierarchies as well as larger symbolic geographies? I found these clashes especially puzzling because so many people in the factory seemed to agree about the importance of "communication," even if they sometimes disagreed about whether it was the ultimate solution to the factory's problems.

Part of the answer, I will suggest here, had to do with a number of overlapping and sometimes contradictory ideologies entangled with the Russia/West distinction that Hassan drew upon in his efforts to cope with pressing problems on the shop floor. Although the meanings of terms like "communication," "speaking up," and "discussion" often shifted during the meetings, distinctions between (poor) Russian communication styles and (admirable) Western ones remained a constant. In this way, Hassan, through both implicit and explicit metacommentary built up a portrayal of Russian personnel as poor communicators, who were unwilling or unable to contribute to group discussions, and along with this, lacked the agency necessary to address company concerns.[121] I draw attention to these moments not to place blame on Hassan, who himself was trying to meet organizational goals in a pressured situation, nor to defend the practices of Russian staff, but to describe how an influential member of factory management drew upon the Russia/West binary in complicated and often contradictory ways that reproduced a stereotypical picture of Russian communicational and organization skills that was strongly felt among many of the company's office employees. Meeting participants were

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[121] See Wortham's (2005) related discussion of how identities are formed through intertextually linked series of events.

quite aware of these portrayals and, regardless of their own views about their own communicative abilities, needed to negotiate them as they carried out their everyday work tasks, including speaking at and attending the operations meetings themselves. In this context the meetings were not simply "tools" for organizational effectiveness (Schwartzman 1989), but the site of complex negotiations over identity, agency, and norms of proper communication.

Being from a Turkey, a country often seen to be straddling the European "West" and an Islamic "East," Hassan was potentially ambivalently placed in discourses making sharp West/East distinctions. He was one of three prominent expatriates in the factory at the time of my fieldwork. The others were the factory director that preceded Hassan's promotion to this position, an Egyptian, and Kate, the American HR director who began in the fall. (Other foreigners also visited the factory periodically. During my fieldwork, this included an American vice-president, a British engineer, an Indian HR executive, German and American trainers, and a German intern.) The company had long made a policy of promoting managers from locations throughout the world to high-level leadership positions both in their own countries and abroad, often after a stint in a "Western" branch of the company in the United States or Western Europe.[122] Hassan's career fit this pattern. He had risen through the ranks in Turkey and worked in both Germany and the Czech Republic before arriving at Razorsharp. Having undergone this long apprenticeship in an American company, Hassan identified strongly with the West, a characterization mainly supported by Razorsharp staff, who saw him as particularly

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[122] I do not know if managers in certain locations were favored for these promotions over others. However, a member of the HR staff once mentioned that she could not imagine one of the St. Petersburg Russian employees rising to the level of a global career with important leadership positions abroad. She described this as due to a lack of ability and drive.

Western because of his use of English for everyday workplace communication and his own energetic communicational style. Hassan embraced Western business rhetorics of "engagement" and Total Quality Management, and went out of his way to greet all of the office personnel daily and sit with different groups of office employees during lunch in the cafeteria to demonstrate his approachability.

Along with this, Hassan often positioned himself as a Western expert who could reveal Russian employees' deficiencies in various areas, including communication. Hassan's most common refrain when it came to employee communication abilities, in addition to accusations of evasiveness and keeping things "under the table," had to do with staff having trouble "speaking up," "discussing," or "talking" more generally. He judged the success of events like trainings and meetings in part by the extent to which staff ostensibly did or did not "speak up," "talk," and "discuss," and was so concerned with the lack of talk he perceived at the operations meetings that when I began attending them, he briefly sought my guidance on how meeting communication might be improved. He also joked about employees silence at the operations meetings themselves, quipping one day, for instance, when a request for information was met with hesitation from the group: "I'm having a problem with my wife. I have no energy to talk when I get home because I'm talking all day. My marriage will be destroyed if you don't start talking."

More than talk, however, was at stake here. These meetings were a site that exemplified Michelle Rosaldo's (1982:203) observation that "ways of thinking about language and about human agency and personhood are intimately linked." Concerns about employee speech often expressed a deeper concern about Russian staff's capacity

for independent action.[123] Despite the jokes, Hassan was deeply frustrated with Russia and Russians, a sentiment only exacerbated by the continual problems that kept cropping up during the expansion project. If we take agency to mean the "socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (Ahearn 2001:12) we might say that talk about talk here often involved a deep conviction that Russian employees lacked the agency appropriate and necessary for employees of a respected and efficient Western multinational in particular and the modern capitalist world more generally. This was expressed by a series of overlapping expressions, which encompassed staff failures to "speak up" and "discuss," as well as corresponding lacks of "initiative," "caring," and "ownership."

Understanding the links between these requires a deeper understanding of the types of agency promoted at the factory. While in this setting, the empowerment logic that credited the caring communication of managers with inspiring action explained some of the stress on communication and agency, this could more broadly be connected with Western ideologies of personhood (sometimes glossed as "personalism") that view persons as containing an inner core where intentions, knowledge, and feeling reside. In paradigmatic expressions of personalism, "the individualist ideology of intending agents" (Hill 2000:267), speech, along with action, is seen to emanate directly from this inner core with little or no external mediation. Where managerial discourses about empowerment did often credit the work of managers with inspiring action, at the same time they also erased these contributions, making speech and action nonetheless seem to spring directly from individual persons who set out their "own" goals in planning

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[123] European colonists were similarly concerned about issues of speech and independent action in colonial encounters (Keane 2007).

discussions.[124] Other factory discourses made this connection between persons, their acts, and their words even more explicit.

Paradigmatic here was a factory genre for solving problems I call "action-focused problem solving"[125] that was taught in company trainings and enacted in many different contexts of factory life. This approach was related to Total Quality Management (or TQM), the originally Japanese approach to manufacturing embraced by Western corporations that advocates continual analysis and improvement of industrial processes.[126] In the spirit of "continuous improvement" promoted by TQM, employees were constantly exhorted to find problems that faced the factory, using methods ranging from quality control techniques to brainstorming sessions. However, it was not enough just to find problems: One also, according to the logic of action-focused problem solving, needed to evaluate which problems made the most sense to solve and pair the selected problems with a solution, or as office staff generally described it at the factory, an "action," thereby constructing an "action plan." After this it was imperative to execute the action plan and verify if it worked as intended. Action-planning often involved large white flip-charts where problems and actions could be brainstormed, refined, and torn off for public display. But it could also occur on a smaller scale when a staff member recorded problems and solutions in a small notebook and later distributed electronic

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[124] Hill (2000) similarly discusses how a "discourse of theater" common among political campaign specialists calls attention to the collaborative formation of a politician's message at the same time as it locates important qualities as residing within the individual.

[125] Several techniques of this type are widely cited in the managerial literature (e.g. G. F. Smith 1998). These are generally called simply "problem-solving" methods, with more specificity saved for particular techniques such as brainstorming, Paretto analysis, and SWOT analysis.

[126] Total Quality Management is a widespread managerial approach said to originate in Japan that holds that by making industrial processes visual and measurable, setting performance improvement goals, and working to achieve those goals, one can achieve "continuous improvement" that will ultimately reduce defects and increase satisfaction. See for instance Berk and Berk (1993). Also see discussion in Dunn (2004).

versions to concerned parties. Over the course of my fieldwork, I observed office staff construct action plans that addressed a range of problems, including increasing "innovation" at the factory and preparing HR paperwork for an upcoming government inspection. "Actions" could also be invoked ironically. When I discussed with an HR colleague the management's seeming reluctance to consider salary as an explanation for difficulties retaining shop-floor workers, she replied, mainly in Russian, except for the critical (English) term: "And what kind of *action plan* could come out of that?"

While "results" mattered here more than "intentions," this schema was consonant with the personalist emphasis on a type of agency that emerged directly from responsible persons. In the world of the action plan, proper agency involved noticing a problem, planning a solution, acting on that solution, and, above all, being responsible for seeing an action through in a linear, chained way with little hesitation or delay. Although action plans were generally said to emerge out of a group process, particular individuals were made responsible for executing the plan and guaranteeing its completion. At the operations meetings, this logic was exemplified by the "agenda," a glorified "to do" list. An electronic document that Hassan wrote in English in tabular format and stored on a group server for staff to print out before attending meetings, the agenda listed multiple ongoing issues deemed in need of follow-up, such as improving transitions between shifts, various types of machine repairs, and checking factory documentation for completeness, in a line-by-line format. Each line had a place for a problem, the person or people responsible for solving the problem, a target date for completion, and the actual completion date, as well as a multipurpose space for a small action plan or notes about the current status of the issue.

The agenda epitomized and worked to reproduce company expectations about employee agency at Razorsharp.[127] Here, for example, is an exemplary line related to the 5S project abstracted from one week's agenda. It refers to plans to improve the layout of furniture in areas around the factory floor.

Item No;	Cat.	Subject	Responsible	Completion Target Date	Completion Date	Done	Status/Agreement /Actions
94	**Other**	Work place arrangement. chairs, cabinets, ergonomic layout	5 S Team				Chairs, cabinets, order with HL [Hassan]

Figure 3.1: Excerpt from Razorsharp Agenda[128]

This is a visible representation of accountability: the problem listed (workplace arrangement) is paired with an "action" (ordering chairs and cabinets) and a group responsible for solving it, with little room left to dispute what will be done and who will do it. While Hassan generally had firm control over the items that made it on the agenda, authorship here, as in other agenda lines, is effaced by the tabular electronic format, making it seem an objective and authoritative record coming from no one and nowhere in particular.[129] This is not a full action plan, since much more is involved in creating an ergonomic layout than simply ordering chairs and cabinets. However it shows a concrete "action" that a concrete set of people are to take to solve the problem (while also simplifying the many actions that would actually be involved in accomplishing this goal and glossing over the other people and situational factors that might be involved in its completion.) In this model of agency, problem, "action," and

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[127] In this way the agenda functioned similarly to the Calvinist creed (Keane 2007).

[128] The width of the table has been condensed to fit the page. I have also reproduced the heading line here for clarity.

[129] Hull (2003) discusses the complex practices involved in effacing individual authorship of bureaucratic documents and producing collective authority.

responsible party are clearly indicated and linked together, iconically providing a representation of the larger company ideal that valued employee independent action in service to corporate priorities.[130] Although here the responsible party is a "team" rather than an individual, reflecting the general stress on teamwork in the factory, the team is positioned as a group that resembles an individual and is similarly called upon to see an "action" through from beginning to end.

At the meetings, struggles over the agenda became emblematic of larger Russian problems with agentive action. Hassan spent much of the meetings after the initial reading of the numbers noting down problems on a printout of the agenda and asking who would be responsible for solving them (often designating a responsible party if there were no volunteers) as well as checking with staff to see if these tasks had been completed. Yet, while this was supposed to be a technology that fostered efficiency, independent action, and responsibility, in the context of the multiple problems of the expansion, tasks tended to linger on the agenda for months at a time without completion. Although responsible parties were generally listed, often problems were listed without corresponding notes about status or actions or the notes provided did not yet show any type of solution. (One line related to missing boxes of finished goods, for example, was marked simply "URGENT.") Usually, at best, only a couple of items could be marked completed each meeting, meaning that the agenda lists were always too long to address in one seating. The number of lines on the agenda ranged from about 70 items when I

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[130] The agenda, like action-plans more generally, renders responsibility, and with it, results, something that can be assigned and then enacted by individuals or individual groups, as is common in Western settings (Hill and Irvine 1993). See also Hull (2003), Larson (2008). One might compare a similar document used in Soviet times as well as in many contemporary Russian businesses, the *protocol*, or minutes. This formal document also lists what was decided at a meeting, along with the events that occurred there, but as a matter of official form lists who spoke, rather than who was nominated to carry out the resolutions made.

started attending the meetings in September to nearly 170 at one point in November.

Hassan often commented on the slow movement of agenda items with frustration,

remarking that many of these were simple tasks that could be completed with minimal

effort, a comment that usually got muffled laughs and sighs from staff members, who

thought quite differently about these tasks that represented additional responsibilities

beyond everyday supervision. Many of the tasks did seem to me to be quite time-

intensive: Ordering chairs and cabinets to improve the factory floor layout, for example,

was not merely a matter of making a phone call, but deciding which pieces of furniture

would best meet the 5S goals of streamlining people's workspaces.

Discussions of various agenda items quickly became typifications of the agency of

Russian staff. One day, for instance, the group was discussing how workers were

continually placing defective Splintek components in a box designated for good

components, and Hassan noted this was very similar to a lingering agenda item assigned

to Boria, a young Quality engineer. When Boria responded meekly that he thought the

item referred to a different type of razor, Hassan was livid, noting that he would now

write on the agenda item that the problem needed to be solved "everywhere," continuing:

> That is the problem in fact. No one takes responsibility or initiates
> anything. Everyone accepts everything as it is, waits for others to do
> things. (From fieldnotes, English conversation)

This implied that this was not the momentary oversight of one engineer, but, like the

splitting wheel incident, a matter of deeper cultural dispositions afflicting the agency of

"everyone" in the factory (except for, by implication, Hassan himself.) Ideally, staff

would not only find solutions and enact action plans because they were on the agenda,

but they would also undertake similar types of action through the force of their individual

volition. Hassan often stressed employees' failure to do this by using idioms of "ownership" and "care." They, he said, lacked "ownership" [131] of the factory, meaning that they did not treat problems at the factory as their "own" and work to solve them as they would their personal problems, as well as a general sense of "care" for the factory and its people. Similar dispositions, he often suggested, underlay the vast majority of factory problems, whether they were machine breakdowns or garbage bins punctured with holes that remained on the factory floor to drip garbage.

Hassan's critiques of employee communication abilities were tied in many ways to this view of agency. This was something I began to understand when I first started attending the meetings and Hassan suggested that I might lead a discussion with the group on how communication might be improved. (While I agreed to do this despite reservations, it never happened because the splitting wheel incident broke on the day it was scheduled, and I decided not to pursue the matter further.) Hassan led up to the announcement of the upcoming discussion at the end of one meeting in the following way:

> I would like to offer some feedback. Communication is an issue between departments and within as well. People don't communicate about problematic issues, they stay with them. When you see something needs attention, it should be addressed, there is nothing stopping you. It's an issue of ownership. I want to see everyone own the factory, own the process. Criticize all: your boss, me, our department. It should be constructive though, not finger-pointing.
> (From fieldnotes, English conversation)

Here, communicating about problems appears almost equivalent to taking action because it also involves taking steps to solve them. While talk is not enough, communication, whether it expresses "problematic issues" or involves "constructive" criticism of people

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[131] A common buzzword in paradigmatically neoliberal contexts (e.g. Mosse and Lewis 2005).

at the factory, is the first step in making sure that problems are addressed. This is portrayed, like "actions" more generally as a matter of individual volition reflecting an individual stake in company problems. This is why "speaking up" is equivalent to "ownership": It shows that one is committed to factory goals (as if they were one's own) and ready and willing to address them. To speak was in part to act, and accordingly, if staff stayed silent in the meetings, this seemed not only to demonstrate a refusal to be a "principal" in Goffman's (1981) sense, who took responsibility for one's own words, but to reflect a more fundamental refusal to act more generally.[132] Thus, complaints about lack of "speaking up" and lack of "discussion" were not just complaints about communication skills, but also criticisms of employees' lack of initiative in dealing with problems on the shop floor and beyond.

Russian employees did speak at the meetings, although not always when and how Hassan would have liked. To talk of silence in this context both devalued Russian employees' communication styles and erased the larger power relations of the meetings, as well as employees' efforts to speak in a foreign language that not all found comfortable.[133] Hassan dominated the floor, and while he speculated with me about changing this by rotating meeting facilitators or other similar experiments, he did not do much to change this while I was there.[134] Although Hassan gave the floor over to designated staff members during some fixed parts of the meetings, for the most part, the

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[132] See also Larson (2007), who similarly discusses statements linking expressing an opinion and political action in Slovakia.

[133] Institutional labels of "silence," as Gal (1991) has discussed, often work to authorize certain linguistic practices and not others, rendering those who do not engage in sanctioned strategies inferior and erasing the social context of talk.

[134] Although, he did, after discussing it over with me, occasionally leave the room to allow for staff to discuss an issue in Russian as a way of facilitating more discussion, and the production manager occasionally led the meeting in Russian when Hassan became very busy a few months after the machinery went online.

meetings revolved around Hassan's questions about the numbers and agenda items.

Employees for their part generally did try to answer, providing multiple suggestions and

observations when possible. However, it was not unusual for these questions to be met

with long pauses, and senior managers generally contributed much more than others.

Team leaders rarely spoke unless spoken to, and usually gave rather short, minimal

answers. For example, in one meeting Hassan asked a team leader, Katia, about a female

employee who was being trained to move to a new machine involved with producing

EZCut[135], one of the factory's new product lines:

> H: How long has she been training?
> K: Only today.
> H: Why aren't we using her on a normal wrapping machine?
> K: We are training her backup on EZCut
> H: Forget EZCut for a while, postpone training for a month, then she can use
>   normal wrap machine.
> (long pause)
> H: You're not happy.
> K: Happy.
> H: Tell me. I don't want to interrupt your business, don't get me wrong.
> (long pause)
> (From fieldnotes, English conversation)

Here, Katia answers Hassan's questions when directly asked, but does not volunteer extra

information. After Hassan has given her orders on what to do (using bald directives), she

is hesitant to say anything contradicting them, even when Hassan provides an opening:

"You're not happy." My observations and conversations with meeting participants

suggest a number of factors probably contributed to this type of staff unease in

contributing to the meetings, including discomfort with Hassan's abrasive style, a feeling

among junior staff that they lacked the experience to contribute meaningfully, various

levels of comfort with the English language, and the general pressure of the expansion, in

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[135] I have renamed the product here.

which staff could hardly handle their immediate job responsibilities, let alone prepare themselves for Hassan's usually rather detailed question sessions. On the occasions when Hassan was away and the meetings were conducted in Russian, the discussions tended to flow much more smoothly.

More often, however, employees were speaking, but they were not speaking in ways that Hassan viewed effective or appropriate. Early on, when I was beginning my work on the survey, I explained to Hassan that I would find it useful to consult with office staff about factory dynamics first. He directed me, however, to speak only with the HR department and take my inspiration from existing models such as the Gallup survey that could reveal employee attitudes with a simple, scientific clarity on the basis of very few questions. "You could speak to my guys," he said, speaking of the senor personnel beneath him, "but they would talk you in circles." Despite sometimes trumpeting "openness" and "discussion," at other times Hassan stressed that he wanted "facts" rather than "feelings" and consensus rather than a plurality of views. This occurred for instance, one day in September when discussing a "joining" machine for fusing parts that was not operating properly. As usual, the group had spent the beginning of the meeting exploring several different explanations of what could be wrong with the machine in response to Hassan's questions (much as they did when discussing the low Splintek numbers in Chapter Two) and when Hassan returned to the issue later on in the meeting he summarized critically: "I don't want to be hearing six opinions on what is going on. People don't talk." It was not his place, he stressed, to hear technical details, and while he could help the operations personnel with direction, he said, addressing the senior personnel in particular, it was up to them to meet and reach consensus before the

meetings started as well as to conduct the types of scientific analyses of machine functioning that would provide insight into the source of problems. "What I am getting is mostly feelings," he explained, "and even if I could just get some idea of where the problem is coming from that would be something." He then returned to one of the explanations floated earlier, that this was ultimately a problem with welding: Did they have "data" that this was the case?

While this stance, like empowerment, prioritized action, it seemed to draw from quite a different language ideology connected to action-based problem-solving that connected agency not merely with speaking "openly" itself, but with speaking in a clear, systematic, and scientific way that showed prior and future commitment to demonstrated action.[136] It stressed clear, concise answers that would presumably lead to agentive "actions" over discussions that were more meandering and exploratory, and prioritized backing up ones words with "facts," preferably backed up by systematic observations, experiments, graphs, and charts. While Hassan often continued to express this in an idiom of employees' problems with "communication" or "discussions," what was generally most critical here was not the current discussion itself, but an imagined series of possible past conversations and related activities implicated in the present discussion (Irvine 1996a). Hassan often expressed the expectation, as he did here, that staff would come to unanimous agreement about problems and action plans before the meeting, ideally by meeting in a large group context with all concerned parties, along with conducting related analyses that would make the paths to solutions clear. When staff

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[136] This fact-based version of management is emblematic of the types of approaches that Peterson and Waterman's *In Search of Excellence* (1982) was directly opposing in proposing an empowerment perspective. It also recalls long-standing Western associations between ways of speaking deemed forthright, sincere or impartial and models of ideal individual agency. See Bauman and Briggs (2003), Hill (2000), Keane (2007), Rosaldo (1982).

presented multiple solutions or were unable to demonstrate root causes and clear action plans, he often suggested that such conversations had not taken place.

By extending beyond the meeting frame, such judgments about meeting communication sustained a more general picture of office staff that rarely "discussed" or "spoke up." As we saw in Ol'ga's case, these perceptions of poor meeting communication could also extend to issues of general management expertise reaching far beyond the meeting itself. They were also implicated in the assertions that Russian shop floor and supervisory staff had trouble talking with subordinates and speaking with them in empowering ways. Issues of accountability are always at stake at meetings, and performances at meetings commonly stand for activity outside of meetings (Munro and Mouritsen 1996), as well as more general aspects of workplace identity, organizational activity, and the wider organizational community (Schwartzman 1989). Here, in a way that echoed and reproduced other Western-oriented management specialists' indictments of Russian communication and agency, meeting performance became a particularly powerful icon of more general Russian dispositions that worked against "discussing," "speaking up," and acting agentively. These indictments extended far beyond the meetings themselves to the factory and the country as a whole.

Yet, while assessments of poor employee communication skills certainly reflected a type of symbolic domination (Bourdieu 1992), at the same time it is important to remember that Hassan's main purpose here was not to condemn Russian employees but to promote factory productivity and deliver results to even higher members of the corporate hierarchy in very difficult circumstances. We might venture that these generalizations about employee agency and communication skills provided an easy

answer to a bewildering situation in which Hassan, set apart from his employees by his leadership position as well as perceived cultural difference, did not fully understand why tasks were not getting done and could not easily ascertain the reason why. This separation was exacerbated by the different codes in use in the factory: Without a working knowledge of Russian, Hassan did not have much access to employees' communicative interactions, and while he could certainly detect whether a formal meeting was taking place, as a practical matter, had little opportunity to ascertain directly whether other types of communication were occurring or not.

Other Economies of Communication

Sveta, a junior member of the planning department, first caught my attention at an operations meeting, where it was her responsibility to pass out some of the numbers of the day and go through them in front of the group, a task usually handled by her boss. In her late twenties at the time with long black hair pulled away from a pale face, Sveta took a long pause before she began, and Hassan, assuming the hesitation was due to Sveta's discomfort with speaking English, told her that she could go through the numbers in Russian, a large departure from the protocol of the usually English-only meetings. As a result Sveta quietly muttered the numbers in Russian under her breath, going through them rapidly and embarrassed, as if she wanted to finish as soon as possible. Meanwhile, Hassan studied the printed numbers sheet with his usual analytic attention, and, after Sveta had finished, discovered through his usual pointed questioning that production of one of the product lines was low due to a problem with the raw materials used to make it. "Is planning keeping this under the table?" he asked Sveta sharply in English. "*Net*" (no)

she responded quickly and softly in Russian. Although Sveta did have the English competency to elaborate, she did not, seemingly scared of what Hassan might say next.

This was the kind of moment fraught with pauses, hesitations, and silences that Hassan was often referring to when he complained that employees did not "speak up," and lacked a proper stake in the company's concerns. Yet what Hassan did not realize, and what assessments of this type erased, was the depth of ambition that employees like Sveta harbored, as well as the wide spectrum of communicative activities that preoccupied them both on and off the job. I would learn that Sveta, for instance, despite this initially meek appearance, was a very sociable young woman with great energy and strength for pursuing her goals. A Ph. D. in mathematics with a penchant for unusual clothing choices such as bright purple pants, Sveta had quickly immersed herself in the commercial world while finishing her degree, spending a couple years at PFZ, a medium-sized Russian-owned industrial supplier of pipe parts before (as she saw it) trading up to Razorsharp. She was quite devoted to the job and, because she served as a relay between the planning department and the various shifts of workers on the shop floor, was constantly fielding phone calls from work even during her time off. She was also obsessed with gaining a promotion and did whatever she could to make this more likely. While fluent in Italian due to a special college mathematics exchange program, she desperately wanted to improve her English, which she worried affected her chances for promotion in the company. In addition to taking classes after work several times a week, she pursued a friendship with me that seemed strongly motivated by her desire to practice English with a native speaker. When I returned to the country a couple years later, Sveta had decided that English alone would not get her ahead and, in addition to informally

expanding her job responsibilities, was pouring nearly all of her salary into an after-work MBA program that she hoped would help her secure a more senior and better paid position, if not at Razorsharp, then elsewhere.

Sveta was also extremely outgoing and went out of her way to maintain communicative ties with numerous people from her past and present. "I have a bit of a talent for bringing people together," she once told me proudly in English over a creamy Italian pasta dish that she had cooked in the apartment she shared with her boyfriend for me and a friend from PFZ. Every couple of weeks Sveta would rent out a private room at a local sauna and invite young women she knew from various parts of her past, from PFZ to graduate school, organizing every aspect of the meeting from making the initial plans to designating parties to buy fruit and tea through emails and phone calls from her Razorsharp cubicle. Her thirtieth birthday (which I viewed on DVD in 2007) was a testament to this facility for maintaining social ties. As opposed to a more customary birthday party, which might take place in someone's apartment, Sveta's birthday was a true spectacle held in a restaurant, which involved an elaborate medieval masquerade theme and costumes for all, as well as hired actors. She had divided each of her sets of acquaintances into separate "orders," who arrived at the event in large limo SUVs and paid homage to her, the "queen" of the night. There was the "Blue Chrysanthemum" (various employees from Razorsharp), the "Black Tulip" (the *mbashchiki*, or generally wealthy students from her MBA program) and two sets of "friends," including university friends with low-paying government jobs as well as the director at her former workplace. While Sveta told me that she felt like some of these social ties were already frayed, at least for a night she had managed to bring these people from different social strata and

different aspects of her past together. This spoke to a different type of facility with communication than heralded in the operations meetings, which was about maintaining relationships rather than communicating directly and forthrightly.

However, it is not necessary to leave the factory to examine what these assessments of poor communication skills missed. Office employees habitually met with each other in several informal venues at the factory, including the bus trip to work, tea breaks in the office kitchen, and lunchtimes in the cafeteria, using their limited time away from their desks to chat about both personal and professional concerns. They also regularly darted into each other's offices and cubicles to discuss pressing work issues. While the HR department, for instance, did not hold a regular weekly meeting open to all until the new American HR director arrived, the shared office of the two junior HR specialists Nina and Sasha was right next door to the office of the assistant director Larissa. Not only were Nina and Sasha constantly discussing work issues with each other throughout the day as they worked away at their computers, but all three were continually weaving in and out of each other's offices to discuss issues that had recently come up, such as appropriate disciplinary measures for an employee who came to work drunk or ongoing negotiations of training contracts with external providers. These informal, impromptu meetings could be seen as somewhat exclusionary in that they did not incorporate those who assisted the department, such as the receptionist (who had taken on HR responsibilities in addition to her reception duties and sat at the reception desk downstairs) or the part-time hr assistant, who generally sat at a cubicle in the center of the office away from the desks of the others. At the same time, however, they also represented a strong willingness to address the problems that arose in the factory through

communicative means.

Beyond this, most office employees were intensely preoccupied with their linguistic abilities, a concern that centered around their ability to speak English. While Sveta was probably more focused on her English than most, she was not alone in fretting about English competency. Many office employees, particularly those in their twenties (who had generally studied the language intensely throughout their schooling) told me that being able to "use" and "practice" their English was a significant attraction of their jobs. At the same time, many of these employees also worried a great deal about their English-language performance at work. There were a few younger staff members, such as the director's personal assistant Ania, an English philology graduate who bragged that she could turn on and off "British" and "American" accents at will, who felt rather comfortable with the language, and the middle-aged senior managers,[137] who could not reach their positions without high levels of English competency, had generally grown quite accustomed to the company's bilingual environment. However, many others, even those with a substantial background in the language, agonized that they could not say all they wanted to say in English and worried that their oral speech in the language in particular sounded strange. Indeed, particularly because I was a native English speaker without an important position in factory hierarchies, employees constantly approached me with questions about English wording and grammar, often seeking assurance that they had spoken English correctly during an earlier occasion.

English could be particularly troubling for those, who, like Sveta, felt a

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[137] These managers had gained competency in English through a variety of means. This included work abroad (sometimes organized through Razorsharp) as well as private tutoring. One manager told me how lucky he was to have attended a Soviet school specializing in English language instruction in the Brezhnev period when English lacked its later prominence, noting that the combination of his language skills and technical background landed him a position in the company in the early nineties.

substantial gap between their abilities and certain requirements of the job. One such employee was Viktoriia Nikolaevna, an older quality supervisor who had worked at Aviia before joining Razorsharp at the time of the joint venture. While giving me a personal tour of the shop floor in English, Viktoriia Nikolaevna boasted that while she had little formal schooling in the language, she had learned it by making it a priority throughout her working life to speak English with the foreign engineers who periodically passed through. Yet despite her considerable pride at this accomplishment, it was not enough to make her feel a functional user of the language of the factory. While Viktoriia Nikolaevna occasionally attended the operations meetings, she found them deeply frustrating, both because she had trouble comprehending what was being said and because Hassan often did not seem to understand her. One day, when we were meeting in a new room, closer to the factory floor, where it was difficult to hear voices over the machine noise coming in from outside the door, Viktoriia Nikolaevna finally had enough. She got up and left the room abruptly, whispering loudly in my ear "*Angliiskii* awful!" (*English* awful!).

Employee concerns about English were so pervasive that it is worth taking a short digression here to discuss some of the linguistic practices and language ideologies relevant to code use at the factory. English, which was not particularly important during the Soviet period, when Russian was the lingua franca of the Soviet Union and socialist Eastern Europe, was by far seen as the most important foreign language in Putin-era St. Petersburg. It was considered particularly critical for securing a professional job in the private business sector. Although there were positions where French, German, or even Norwegian were in demand, as well as many jobs where Russian alone was sufficient, in

St. Petersburg, as in many other cities around the world, English was viewed as the premier international language, and those who spoke it were seen as particularly well-suited for business jobs in forward-thinking companies, even when positions did not requires much contact with English-speaking foreigners.[138] However, English had an especially firm presence at Razorsharp, where, as I have mentioned previously, it was codified as the official company language. While Russian Razorsharp employees generally chatted amongst themselves in Russian and held Russian-language meetings among themselves, English was the language of all Razorsharp meetings where non-Russians were present, the language of emails, phone calls, and visits with foreigners, and the language of documents coming from and going to non-Russian branches of the company, including U.S. headquarters. Internal plant documents and databases often existed in both English and Russian, or combined, versions. However, generally, English versions were the most official corporate versions. The one exception was paperwork oriented to meet Russian state requirements.

In written company language policies, English ability, like communication ability more generally, was generally described as a set of "skills" to be mastered.[139] The company periodically offered on-site English language classes to permanent employees and provided financial contributions to other types of language instruction. Like other skills, skills in the English language were to be acquired and improved by individuals as a way of enabling them to simultaneously "develop" themselves as workers, increase their

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[138] See Park's (2009) description of similar (as well as different) ideologies of English in South Korea. See also Besnier (2007), Bhatt (2001), Pennycook (2003), and Seargeant (2005; 2008) for discussions of ideologies of English in places not usually considered the language's ancestral home.

[139] See Heller's (2002) discussion of recent shifts in Canadian discourses on French-English bilingualism from "modernizing" discourses that tied speaking French to national identity to "globalizing" discourses that constituted speaking French as a set of "language skills" independent from issues of identity.

own sense of self-worth, and enable them to better achieve company goals. Razorsharp

Russia's official policy on English language study, for example (itself written in

English[140]) reflects this orientation:

> English language courses are looked upon as an investment, which
> improves the skills and knowledge levels of the Employees to allow them
> to achieve the Company business objectives more efficiently.

This was also generally the position on language training courses around the HR

department, where they were regarded as "technical" trainings akin to instruction in

specific computer programs or particular types of financial analysis. Different job

positions in the company were seen as requiring different levels of English "skill."

Company policies demarcated five proficiency levels in this regard, from a "simple

conversational level" (level 1) to the level of "native speakers" (level 5), all of which

involved different skill sets. Managers were expected to be at level 4, a level

characterized by, among other things, the abilities to comprehend "normal speed

conversation between native speakers," make "comprehensive presentation[s] and short

speeches," write "good" business letters, and (rather intriguingly) "obtain information

from an uncooperative person."

Employees' concerns regarding English were often similarly centered on their

"technical" abilities in the language, although employees tended to worry less about their

abilities to accomplish particular tasks and more about the general "correctness" of their

English speech and writing. This was an orientation that, like so many other language

ideologies in general[141] and ideologies of English as a Foreign Language in particular

(Bhatt 2001), assumed a single "correct" standard and denied the legitimacy of

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[140] I am not sure if there were also Russian language versions of this policy.
[141] E.g. Milroy and Milroy (1985), Silverstein (1998).

variation.[142] Yet, what was particularly problematic about English for most office employees was not so much the ability to perform particular tasks, as the" skills" discourse suggested, as the perceived primary audience of writing and speech in English, namely the foreigners such as Hassan who occupied some of the highest positions of the factory hierarchy, as well as important positions abroad. "I can speak English with you in such a relaxed way" Sveta observed in Russian on the first day we spoke for an extended period of time in English. "Hassan only speaks to me when there are problems." One young male engineer typed up his daily "to do" list in English and posted it in a prominent place in his office where Hassan could easily read it. Even questions that I was asked about conversational English seemed to sometimes be asked with future conversations with important English speakers in mind. Nina, the H.R. administrator, solicited my help one dreary week when half the department, including myself, had caught bad colds after the assistant manager's return from a vacation in Spain. Nina, who had recently been to see the factory doctor, stopped me in the office restroom to ask how she might express in English the idea of someone infecting her with an illness (*zarazit' bolezn'iu*). The somewhat clunky translation I gave, "spread illness," reappeared the next day when Nina ran into Hassan in an office corridor and chatted with him for a moment, noting "I think Larissa brought back a Spanish illness and she spread it to me!"

English was in this sense very strongly associated with higher status people and important factory business as well as work more generally, fueling the anxiety about correctness. Ironically, two of the most important foreigners around the factory, Hassan

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[142] Similar standardizing ideologies have also long been prevalent in relation to Russian and probably have also contributed to Russian concerns about producing Standard English. See Blianiuk (2005), Gorham (2003), Smith (1998).

and the previous factory director, an Egyptian, not only weren't native English speakers, but also did not speak a particularly standard form of the language and did not seem very concerned about this. While many of the Razorsharp office employees did their best to approximate Received Pronunciation and used bookish grammar, Hassan, for example, had a heavy Turkish accent and regularly skipped articles and prepositions where standard use would require them. Nonetheless, this did not stop employees from worrying about minute aspects of English grammar and usage when speaking with him or preparing documents he would read. With the heavy weight they put on "correct" English, most Russian employees were reluctant to speak the language when it was not absolutely necessary. While groups of Russian speakers would usually switch to English to converse with foreigners at lunch out of politeness and respect, many were reluctant to do this for long and people on the periphery of the conversation often soon reestablished Russian conversations.

In comparison, Russian employees worried very little about speaking Russian, a language that they did not associate exclusively with work, bosses, or professional conduct. They readily spoke Russian both when conducting business among themselves and on breaks, often telling jokes and sharing personal stories in the language that they did not tell in English. At the same time, it is important to note, even the Russian that Razorsharp office employees used was fraught with significance, since they generally used a version of the language that, as they readily acknowledged, made heavy use of English terminology. This went along with a general feeling that, as I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter, the factory was a particularly "Western" realm within Russia, set apart from "Russian companies" through a Western approach to management

and communication that most employees admired.

The appearance of new English language words and other types of Russian-English mixing in post-Soviet Russian is a much commented upon phenomenon. For those who regard it positively, it generally conjures up Westernness, cosmopolitanism and a sense of the new. It is especially associated with youth, advertising, business, technology, and general "coolness" as well as prestige.[143] At Razorsharp, where mixing with English generally occurred on the level of words or phrases, many of the words employees used mirrored usages common in other places in the city in areas such as business terminology, e.g. *rekruter* (recruiter), *tim-bilding* (team-building), slang, e.g. *super* (super), *prikol'no* (cool), and objects and places of consumption, e.g. *noutbuk* (laptop), *fitness-klub* (fitness club). However, it also went beyond this to encompass English language lexical items particular to the corporation and its policies and practices, which unlike much of the more widespread terminology was often not phonologically adapted to Russian. In addition to product names, which were never translated, these included factory departments, generally described using English and Russian names in Russian conversations with equal frequency, e.g. "Quality," or its equivalent "*Otdel kachestva*" (literally "Quality Department"). Job titles worked similarly, and the team-leaders, for example, were alternately described as *tim-lidery* (a term that was notably adapted both to Russian phonology as well as following Russian grammatical rules in adding "*y*" for pluralization) or *brigadiry* (an equivalent akin to "factory foremen" that lacked any pretenses of empowerment theory). Certain company practices were almost always spoken about with English terminology, such as the PDP or the aforementioned

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[143] On Russian-English mixing in Russia and its meanings, see Gorham (2000), Sichyova (2005), Ustinova (2005; 2006; 2008), Yelenevskaya (2008), and Yurchak (2000).

concept of an "action." Employees would also use various English words relatively unaltered when speaking about concepts they saw as especially "Western," whether it was a discussion of an "open door policy" or going for the "win-win" (although English words could also be used more idiosyncratically to refer to a "day off" or a database that needed to be "updated.") "Communication" and "communication skills" fell into this category and were often described in English in Russian conversations.

Purist linguists and politicians in Russia have criticized Russian-English mixing as involving unnecessary redundancy, disrupting clarity, and creating incomprehension, in addition to demonstrating excessive Western influence.[144] However, for office and supervisory employees at Razorsharp, English terms created clarity and comprehension and made conversation more efficient and accurate. Employees would sometimes grasp for Russian words in Russian language interviews and conversations with me and choose English words instead, explaining that the English versions were "simpler" and they remembered them better. I also witnessed similar comments in cases when I was not the primary addressee. (Recall, for instance, Larissa's apologetic introduction of the English term "performance management cycle" during the team-leader training described in Chapter Two.) This was particularly common with those concepts that seemed particularly "Western," and thus seemingly untranslatable into Russian. To describe fully how staff drew upon Russian and English as well as their rationalities for doing so requires more attention than I can give it here. However, even this brief excursion into the topic is enough to suggest that Razorsharp office and supervisory employees were far from neglectful of matters of communication. Not only, as I will suggest in the following

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[144] For summaries of these views, see Gorham (2000), Ustanova (2005), Yelenevskaya (2008), and Yurchak (2000).

sections, did employees personally subscribe to many of the tenants of the empowerment ideology of caring communication; they also continually interacted with fellow employees while negotiating complex issues of code use in an arena where both Russian and English had a particularly weighted significance.

On and Off the List

Meeting participants did sometimes contest the representations of themselves as poor communicators at the meetings, while still attending to similar categories of "discussion" and agency. They insisted to Hassan that they did have "discussions," people did "care," and they were constantly taking "action." However, they also suggested that in the context of the expansion they were consumed by the volume of the tasks in front of them and did not have enough time or staff members to meet them suitably. One of the senior managers, for example explained to me in an interview, reflecting on the meetings:

> So, sometimes people, because of the lack of experience or because of the lack of the time, uh people could didn't have any idea about the crises that were waiting them tomorrow, the day after tomorrow. Or they couldn't deal with all the issues because they had a lot of priorities and all of the priorities were high. And that is why we got this feeling that nobody cares, etc., etc. But I believe that's not true, because if a person is put in an environment where this person can do a good job, he will do a good job. (Recorded interview, in English)

Indeed, many felt that the expansion had occurred too rapidly to get everything necessary done, and several suggested to me that it would have been better to stop production in order to make the transition work more smoothly. They also pointed out that they were much more efficient and had much better systems of communication in place in the years before the expansion began, not only because they had more time to devote to formal

communication initiatives, but also because the factory was smaller and everyone knew each other better.

Further, some meeting participants occasionally took this point further to contest the criteria Hassan was using for evaluation. The types of issues Hassan focused on, they suggested, whether they were the ever-lengthening agenda, or his questions about the root causes of machine problems, did not provide good representation of the kinds of action and discussion that they were actually involved with on an everyday basis. These were for the most part issues of immediate importance ("fire-fighting" in the parlance common at the factory) rather than the long-term, strategic issues that Hassan prioritized in his own questioning sessions. One day in November, for instance, Lena, the production supervisor, articulated this position particularly explicitly. As usual Hassan had been inquiring about machine efficiency and was frustrated when his questions about a sharpening machine that had been stalled for three days received the usual wide spectrum of answers. He then broadened his questioning, asking the employees to rate various machines around the factory. "Which hardening machine is best?" "Which sharpening machine is best?" Lena and the team leaders, gathered together as usual on one side of the meeting room, looked at each other helplessly and struggled to find answers. Hassan, making a point he had clearly planned to make before the meeting, drew out copies of a prepared graphic analysis of machine performance, distributed them, and stated that he wanted to see meeting participants prepared with similar analyses in the future. "I don't want you to speak from stomach," he stated. "I want you to know which is good." Continuing, he asked with an edge in his voice if anyone present wanted to stop attending the meetings. "I am asking very simple questions," he reiterated, "why this machine is

not working, etc."

After a moment of tense silence, Lena responded sharply, explaining, that while she hardly enjoyed the meetings, she understood they were useful. However, she noted "I'm not a great help after two days off," drawing attention to her difficult shift schedule in which she, like the workers, worked two days, took off two days, and then worked two more nights. When, Hassan, as usual, responded by stressing the importance of maintaining strong communicative channels with shift leaders and others that could keep her informed, Lena countered that she had been quite occupied with communication that morning, although perhaps not of the sort he had in mind: "I received all sorts of information, emails, but there are other issues you are not aware of. I can answer some questions you are not asking." After Hassan expressed some interest, Lena began to list them. "Why is the factory floor flooded with finished goods today?" "Why is the factory floor flooded with trash today?" Going on to answer her own questions, Lena explained that a serious problem had occurred in the warehouse attached to the factory the night before: Its staff had refused to accept the goods the factory produced during the night, and now company products of all sorts were crowding the shop floor in places where they didn't belong. While she was still working on the trash problem, it seemed it was also somehow related. It was not that she was not working or not communicating, Lena's response suggested; it was simply that Hassan's questions were neither addressing the pressing issues that she had been occupied with all morning nor the kinds of communication and action she was engaged in. Another day, Oleg, the supervisor of the mechanics, made a similar point in relation to the agenda. "Some things," he told Hassan, "are more important than the things that are on the list."

Yet, while some Russian office staff contested accusations that were poor communicators or actors, they generally did not contest the broader ideological framework in which communication and action were important. Alignments were far messier than suggested by management theorists or Hassan himself and did not break down neatly into Eastern and Western persons. Not only did some Russian members of Razorsharp staff, like Ol'ga, explicitly avow allegiance to company values of empowerment and participatory communication, but some, firmly aligning themselves with the West, critiqued subordinates or other members of the Razorsharp staff in very similar terms to Hassan, particularly if they were in supervisory roles themselves. However, rather than making blanket statements about all Russians, they generally, following a fractal logic (Irvine and Gal 2000), tended to distinguish between those "Western" Russians who were more agentive, better communicators and those that were less so, exempting themselves from the same criticism they reserved for others.

One such employee was Anton, the engineering manager, a soft-spoken man in his forties. Presenting himself as a paragon of independent agency, Anton told me that he had worked in Germany and South Africa in the 1990s as a way of "proving himself" before returning to Russia at the end of the decade. When I interviewed him in his office after work one day, he spoke about his own employees' styles of acting and communicating in ways that strongly recalled Hassan's evaluations of the meeting participants. Describing his own managerial style, which he said was heavily influenced by his time abroad, as one in which he aimed to give employees "freedom," Anton mentioned that he was probably providing his employees with "too much freedom" for Russia. Speaking in English (and demonstrating his own comfort with Western milieus),

he explained: "Because in Russia, it's, it's a problem . . . you could probably notice that you expect people to be active, to speak, to express their opinion, and they are not doing it." Aligning himself (and me along with him) with Western emphases on activity and speaking up, Anton, much like Hassan, cast his employees in the roles of "Russians" who were deficient in these areas, while also leaving himself out of these categories.

Also much like Hassan, Anton saw employees' participation in meetings as particularly emblematic of these deficiencies. Beginning with the operations meetings, which he attended, Anton similarly painted a picture in which employees had trouble "discussing" and "speaking up." However, Anton divided the group rather differently than Hassan. Rather than stressing the difference between Hassan and the Russian employees, Anton called particular attention to differences between senior staff such as himself and junior employees, noting that he was surprised that the team leaders were not taking a bigger part in the meeting: "It's not for me or Dmitrii [the production manager], and I don't want to sit and talk." Further, Anton suggested, I would see an almost identical split between senior and junior staff if I came to his department meetings:

> A: Uh, if you come to my meeting, weekly meeting of the department, you will see the same picture. I sit, and and talk.
> S: (laughs)
> A: And very seldom, very seldom they. . . I am very happy when they start talking, because we we at least we can have a discussion around the table. But here it's more like a one-way traffic.
> S: Why do you think people aren't talking?
> A: It's again, it's a mindset. They used to be told they think they must be told and not much depends on them most probably and. . . . or, which is worse, they don't know what to say
> S: mmm
> A: Or they are not interested probably, I don't know.
> (Recorded interview, in English)

According to Anton, while he "sat and talked," the engineers he supervised very rarely

responded, spoke up, or engaged in discussion, a stance he connected to a deeper

"mindset." While Anton explored a few different reasons for this stance, most of them

paint a similar picture of inactivity and apathy: The engineers, in his opinion, were either

accustomed to waiting to be told what to do, felt (wrongly) that "not much depend[ed] on

them," or lacked the knowledge or interest required to take part in an active way. Like

Hassan, Anton was also strongly invested in categories of discussion, speaking up, and

agency, and shared a sense that these categories were connected to Russianness and

Westernness, even though he employed these distinctions in different ways that cast

boundary lines in different places.

Sovdepiia **and the Symbolic Geography of Companies**

Distinctions between Russia and the West were common in the talk of just about all

Razorsharp office employees in ways that recalled, but also diverged from the heavy

critical focus on communication of managers such as Hassan and Anton. Sveta, the

planner with a talent for bringing people together, provides a particularly vibrant

example. In addition to her embrace of sociality, Sveta had a great appreciation for

luxury and splendor, much of which she found at places around the city frequented by

foreigners. Over the course of our acquaintance, she invited me to a variety of such

elegant, expensive venues, including English pubs, Italian restaurants, and fancy cafes,

despite my protests about my graduate student budget. While Sveta, like me, did not

have an unlimited cash supply, she felt that just experiencing such environments was

worth a premium and found ingenious ways to experience luxury without paying its full

price, such as visiting a fancy restaurant or hotel and only ordering a pot of tea, or

attending the exquisitely decorated Taleon Club Casino and buying only fifteen euros of chips, while taking advantage of the complementary wine and sumptuous smoking room decorated with soft leather chairs. While in such venues, Sveta would only speak to me in English, and went out of her way to meet the other foreigners who surrounded us, whether they were British, Italian, Greek, or Turkish. She desperately wanted to work abroad, and while she was still working at Razorsharp St. Petersburg in a similar position when I returned a couple years later, had been doing everything she could to convince the management to give her some sort of international assignment in Western Europe. While Moscow had been floated as a possibility, she was not interested, and only Western Europe would do.

Yet within St. Petersburg, Sveta found the company a much better option than the Russian company where she had worked earlier. This was in part because she, like many Razorsharp employees, saw Razorsharp, as a foreign company, as being on a "higher level" than PFZ in terms of its size, scale, and degree of sophisticated management and manufacturing practices. However, it also had something to do with the kinds of persons she saw typical of both companies, something I realized after she helped arrange for me to conduct interviews with the PFZ staff. Sveta had apparently not realized that this meant I was planning to end my fieldwork at Razorsharp, and when I mentioned this to her, she sharply advised me not to attend the company on a daily basis because it wouldn't be "interesting" for me. When I pressed further, Sveta explained that "The social level (*sotsialnyi uroven'*) is different," calling attention to a difference in material and societal status between Razorsharp and PFZ, where not only salaries were lower, but, she felt like the quality of people was lower as well. While she could afford to go to

interesting, expensive cafes and movie theaters, for instance, Sveta explained, many of her PFZ colleagues could not. When I mentioned that this did not bother me, she admitted that she was probably thinking more of herself and her own preferences. For Sveta, part of what was most appealing about Razorsharp St. Petersburg was the high level of the company and its staff on an imaginary ranking of companies and persons, something that was related to its Westernness as well as the standing of its employees, whom she felt not only shared similar ideas of recreation to herself, but also similarly high levels of educational attainment and cultured behavior.

I start this section with Sveta because she illustrates the affective and experiential level of the distinction that many Razorsharp employees felt between Western companies and Russian ones. Not all office employees were as addicted to luxuries as Sveta and they did not consider themselves rich, although they could afford small extravagances such as vacations in Egypt, movies in theaters, shopping for clothes in stores rather than in markets, and occasional dinners out. However, they did share a sense with Sveta that they worked in a special environment that differed in important and desirable ways from most Russian companies, even if hours were long and opportunities to relax were few. Common Russian symbolic geographies portray the country as itself bridging a Western, more European part, exemplified by St. Petersburg, and an Eastern, more Asian part. However, it was self-evident to employees that there were nonetheless clear distinctions between Russia and the "West," and these also applied to representative companies within Russia. Western companies, sometimes spoken of as "Western" (*zapadnye*), although more often spoken of as "foreign" (*innostranye*), were generally thought to be quite different from Russian ones in set ways that involved, but also went beyond, issues

of communication style. For most office employees, who had actively sought out employment in a Western company, these distinctions were a primary attraction of the job. (When speaking about companies, office employees did not usually use the term *russkie*, which means ethnically Russian, but *rossiiskie*, a more inclusive term referring to the Russian state.) It was possible, following a fractal logic to subdivide Russian companies further, distinguishing a subset of newer companies with more progressive management that were similar to Western companies. However, the categories of Russian and Western retained a strong oppositional charge.

The salience of these distinctions was emphasized to me when I joined Razorsharp office employees for bowling night, one of many activities sponsored by Razorsharp as a way of increasing sociability and communication. We all met at a stylish bowling complex located in the gleaming *Sennaia Ploshad'* shopping center, a recently constructed mall near a central Metro station that was populated with a number of different Western shops and spoke of modernity and Westernness. Between turns, amid the computerized lanes and brightly colored bowling balls, I had a chance to speak to Dar'ia, a warehouse administrator in her twenties with long vibrant, red hair, who was also a second-year graduate student in management at *FinEk*, the prestigious Institute of Finance and Economy. Dar'ia was interested in learning more about my research and asked me about the overarching theme of my dissertation. When I began by explaining my project as focusing on "the office in contemporary Russia," Dar'ia laughed so hard that she almost snorted. "In a Western company!?!" she exclaimed. While Dar'ia was somewhat appeased when I explained that I eventually planned to extend my focus beyond Razorsharp, she found it inconceivable that studying a Western company would

tell me anything about Russia at all, a sentiment I heard many times both from Razorsharp employees, as well as from acquaintances from within the St. Petersburg scholarly community.

Many of the distinctions that Razorsharp office employees made between Russian and Western companies circled around ideas of communication and atmosphere in ways that both echoed and departed from both the caring communication promoted by trainings and the independent "speaking up" called for in the operations meetings. Many scholars of language ideologies have observed that one speech community may exhibit multiple language ideologies (e.g. Gal 1998). However, less attention has been given to the ways in which the borders of these ideologies may themselves be permeable and certain subgroups with different backgrounds, experiences, or positionalities may share certain indexical associations and differ with respect to others. [145] While most Russian office employees at Razorsharp, well-steeped in the company's trainings and selected for their own sympathy to Western approaches, also valued open, agentive types of communication, viewed these as "Western," and saw these as fostering a more productive work environment, they also associated Russianness and Westernness with other types of communicational and organizational features that departed in significant ways from the assumptions of the operations meetings and company trainings.

I informally interviewed many of the office employees (even those who I knew well) to learn more about the details of their jobs. While I did not specifically ask

[145] Although, see those who have discussed how language ideologies within a single community change over time (Inoue 2007; Kulick 1992; 1998; Meek 2007; Schieffelin 2000; Silverstein 1985). Gal (2005) has also similarly discussed similarities and differences between Eastern European and Western European views of concepts such as "public" and "private." Also see Lemon (2002) on contrasting ideologies about Russian and Romani form and function, as well as Hill (1998) on shifting attitudes towards Spanish by Mexicano speakers.

questions about communication style, questions about atmosphere, differences between

Western and American firms, differences between Razorsharp and previous Russian

workplaces, and management styles were almost always met with answers about the

friendliness, pleasantness, and helpfulness of the Razorsharp *kollektiv*, as well as the

openness and approachability of managerial staff. For example, when I asked Seriozha, a

new engineer in his early twenties, what he liked most about the factory he responded:

> What I like most of all is that there is a different approach to the
> organization of the factory in particular, to the organization of the entire
> firm as a whole. The management is closer to the staff, in other words,
> you can approach them and speak for a bit. That is to say, they are not off
> somewhere there, somewhere, off in their offices with closed doors. In
> other words, it's more open, you see. People have more of an open
> approach to you, that is to say, interaction with people is better. That's
> why. (Recorded interview, translated from Russian)

Here, as was typical, Razorsharp appears a pleasant place where managers are

approachable and open, ready and willing to speak with their employees at any time.

Although Seriozha was not particularly concerned with agency, he did suggest that this

was the kind of environment that encouraged rather than discouraged employee speech

(and might, by extension might be seen as a kind of caring communication.) He also, in a

rather typical way, made an implicit comparison to other types of (Russian) workplaces,

where management did not have such a close, approachable relationship to subordinates

and sat "off somewhere there" in offices with "closed doors." These kinds of portrayals

had a certain stereotyped quality, and to some extent reflected a tendency that I noticed in

most interviews I conducted in St. Petersburg workplaces (particularly those that took

place at work) to portray the company one worked for in a positive, rather than critical

light. At the same time, the ubiquity of such responses speaks to the prominence of these

communication-based distinctions among Razorsharp employees.

Although in broader cultural contexts Russians have been known to celebrate their own friendliness and sociability over other more stereotypically uptight nationalities such as Germans, never once did anyone connect the type of communicative openness at Razorsharp to any aspect of the Russian mentality. Razorsharp employees were more prone to criticize Russian companies as cold, brusque, and inhumane places, where supervisors were distant, difficult to approach, and more emotional than at Razorsharp. Leila, a planning specialist of Uzbek origin with a particularly strong work ethic articulated some of these perceived differences eloquently. Even if a Russian firm offered her a higher salary than Razorsharp, she told me in an interview at her cubicle, she wouldn't work there because of the difference in mentalities between Western and Russian firms. When I asked her to explain further, Leila asked me if I knew the word "*sovdepiia*." (The term, a play on "sovdep" or soviet of deputies, a local Soviet government body, was long used as a derogatory name for the Soviet Union.[146]) I didn't, and Leila went on to explain, making clear divisions between the approaches to people, labor, and communication in Russian/Soviet and Western environments:

> It is a completely Russian [rossiskaia], that is to say, Soviet system of labor organization. When . . . for example, relationships there [tam]. . . For example, a person comes here [to Razorsharp], right? To get a job. He comes here. There is a girl at the reception desk here [zdes']. She says, "OK, great, come in! So, I will call the personnel department now." The personnel department comes, then conducts an interview, right? They hire him and that's it. They say to the person, "OK, come here at such and such a time. Here is your card. Here is this for you. Here is this for you. Let's work."
> In a Soviet organization, for example, there they will say something like this to you: "Well, everyone there also has work, let's work." A person comes, right? He doesn't know anything when he is there at security, or, there in the reception area: "Miss, and how do I get to the personnel department there?" "I don't know. Who did you come to speak to? I don't know, sit and wait." That is to say, there is that kind of

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[146] See Raeff (1990) and Stites (1985).

relationship, right? Well there is that type.

Later interactions: Here, the person is given a job and, like, there is a relationship to him of "Yes, we will hire this person. Maybe, I will like him there or not like him, but I accept him as a worker, as a colleague." And it is clear and orderly. And I don't have to show, for example that "Oh, he doesn't like me there" right? There there might be such a thing: the person arrives at the department where he will work. "Oh, and who is this anyway?" They don't communicate, don't ask anything, don't, well, share information, what and how. "Well, you have come, you do it."

But you have been hired to do a job. That is, here, there is immediately a system of education, training for us, right? It's obligatory. Then there is this, well, *induction* [orientation] immediately. Well, it is that way in all foreign companies I think. Maybe it is called something different. But you see, it is, you see, obligatory for everyone. That is to say, there there isn't such a thing: well you arrive and it's "Go, work."

There is probably the issue of what one needs to teach a person. He is a person, yes, he is new, but he has a lot of potential. But without sufficient experience. But that's ok, we will teach him, he will work. And there, maybe it's not that way. Well, you see, you are hired, you go and work. What trainings and what type, well. . you arrange them yourself. If I believe I need trainings, I have to go and say, "I, well, want to go to a training, give me money." Or something of the sort, there is that sort of relationship.

(Recorded interview, translated from Russian, italics mark English)

In this account, Leila articulated a number of important distinctions between Razorsharp St. Petersburg and Russian/Soviet companies, anchoring them deictically in the "here" (*zdes'*) of the specific company where we were sitting and the "there" (*tam*) of a generalized imaginary of Soviet and Russian companies that had hardly changed with time. Many of these speak to the issues of caring communication and agency raised by company management, although Leila did not take the critical stance of Hassan and Anton, but instead, with the optimism of someone portraying her company as positively as possible, suggested that company employees fully exemplified the desired Western approach. In her portrayal, Razorsharp staff, and by extension, those of all "foreign companies" appear helpful and friendly to all as a matter of strict company policy: A

receptionist meets new candidates when they arrive with appropriate pleasantries and efficiently passes them over to the personnel department, who, in turn provides new employees with everything they need. By contrast in the Soviet/Russian organization, no one helps job candidates or new workers at all: The receptionist forces them to sit and wait with little promise of future aid, and they do not receive any kind of helpful orientation. While it might be possible to quibble with some of the details here—for instance, job candidates at Razorsharp were generally sent up to personnel by the receptionist, but I witnessed a lot of waiting among new shop-floor hires who were left in cubicles for long stretches of time to read paperwork—this account is important less as an accurate description of reality than for its dichotomized portrayal of Western and Soviet businesses based upon an equally dichotomized perception of employees' facilities with various aspects of organizational communication. Indeed, at least some of the lack of helpfulness, Leila suggested, was related to a communication gap that extended beyond staff's abilities to provide pleasant direction. In a way that recalled the Western criticisms of Soviet and Russian management styles as well as empowerment proponents' celebration of "open" communication, she stressed that in the Soviet firm no one even knows who employees are or what to do with them, because "they don't communicate" or "share information."

At the same time, Leila's account also added another dimension to the distinctions between Russian/Soviet and Western firms that departed in significant ways from the portrayals of company management. Immediately following the passage quoted above, she went on to clarify further:

> Further, maybe, there is more of these human. . . That is, maybe, things are more dependent on human relationships. And for us us well in

a foreign company all the same, well, things are built on our
responsibilities, well. And there, more on human relationships, well,
because they might be grounded also in some sort of intrigues of some
sort, right? People there don't do work, they are busy with some sort of
intrigues. Another minus. That is the minus is: discipline is not the same.
And another minus: behavior. And that things are more dependent
perhaps on personal relationships than here.
(Recorded interview, translated from Russian, italics mark English)

Here, breaking from the discussion of Western helpfulness and friendliness, Leila turned

to portray relationships at Razorsharp as less emotionally colored than at Soviet/Russian

firms. While at the Soviet/Russian companies, she suggested with disapproval, "personal

relationships" were important and led to a number of detrimental consequences such as

the "intrigues" that constantly occupied the staff, at Razorsharp supervisors related to

staff more abstractly, in a way that she typified as "clear and orderly" in the first passage.

They were regulated by "discipline" and "responsibilities" (a term she notably injected in

English) rather than the shifting vagaries of emotion and corresponding relations of

personal "like" and "dislike." This was a point Leila picked up at other points in the

interview, where she explained that she appreciated greatly that at Razorsharp she had her

own clear, well-defined job responsibilities associated with her job description that were

marked out as hers to fulfill, and she knew that she would be evaluated on these rather

than on her supervisor's personal feelings towards her. In many ways, this seemed to

work against the general narrative of caring communication advanced at Razorsharp,

suggesting that structure at the company was ultimately more important than care, and

that the care provided was more a matter of superficial everyday policy than the deeper

emotional responses and subjectively rooted "likes" and "dislikes" of Russian bosses.

Leila was not unusual in this regard, and despite the stated efforts to break down

hierarchical structures at Razorsharp, what many office employees seemed to appreciate most about the company was its clear bureaucratic structure and policy-governed relationship to employees, as opposed to an oft-cited typically Russian reliance on "personal relationships." (See Chapter Six.) Speaking in ways similar to Weber's (1978) description of bureaucratic rationality, Razorsharp employees, themselves presenting the company as a kind of exemplar of an ideal type, stressed the company's adherence to rules, fixed chains of command, and clearly defined job descriptions, and embrace of "order" more generally, rather than the caprices of individual bosses. For the most part, office staff, most of whom had deliberately sought out a Western workplace, approved of this type of organization and praised it in relationship to contemporary Russian businesses, which they found infected with everything that Weber says should be outside of an ideal bureaucracy: emotion, favoritism, vaguely assigned responsibilities, and arbitrary, yet unclearly defined power. While at Razorsharp, for example, staff said, it was always clear who to turn to with a particular issue, at a Russian company it was never clear who was the right person to approach: (Soviet companies appeared similarly chaotic, despite Western stereotypes of Soviet enterprises as the epitome of rule-governed bureaucracy.) Where Western companies had large systems of management and authority figures were beholden to rules and higher authorities, in Russian companies, where the director and the owner were commonly the same person, often anything could go. In this vein, Razorsharp was widely spoken about as a "white company" (*belaia kompaniia*), meaning that unlike many Russian companies, it followed official government regulations and paid a "white salary" (*belaia zarplata*) that was reported accurately to the tax authorities.

In this context, a number of employees suggested that any problems with agency at the factory were less a matter of Russian proclivities than the unfortunate side effects of working within a large global bureaucracy defined by Western-style rules and regulations, where many decisions were determined on higher levels, and any attempts to express new ideas had to pass through a long chain of command before ever reaching those who might approve them.[147] Even tiny changes in computer systems could require permission from people located in the United States, India, and Germany, and proposals for new product designs sent to U.S. headquarters were met with large volumes of paperwork that needed to be filled out in English. One middle-aged administrator, Liuda, who had once worked as a chemist in a Soviet research institute, compared the company to the army in this regard: "If before when I was a junior scientist there [in the institute] I could, for example make a proposal over someone's head and it didn't bother anyone, then here I should tell my boss, my boss will tell his boss, and his boss will tell his boss. I can't just write the president of Razorsharp with my suggestions." Indeed if company human resources practices were supposed to foster initiative and independent action, many members of the office staff felt that there was often more room for a kind of initiative that went beyond everyday job responsibilities in the more informal and less enforced structures of contemporary Russian companies and Soviet firms, where more was determined at the factory level.[148]

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[147] Also see Golikova (2006), who similarly suggests that the strictness of foreign companies "lowers [the employee's] initiative and strategic thinking" and gives rise to "a lack of desire to make decisions and take responsibility."

[148] Relevant here is Burawoy and Lukás's (1992) observation that divisions of multinationals can resemble state socialist firms in that both involve multiple layers of hierarchical organization. Subsidiaries of multinationals, they suggest, much like socialist firms, are given the task of fulfilling the needs of a larger entity, and may be granted few resources or incentives to innovate.

The difference came out especially in conversations with the few office employees who, like Liuda, had begun their working lives in the Soviet period. According to Viktoriia Nikolaevna, the older quality supervisor who struggled with English and had had worked at Aviia before the joint venture with Razorsharp, the Aviia factory was completely "autonomous" (*samostoiatel'nyi*) with its own factory, research department, standards department, product development department, and design department: "We could propose our improvements to blueprints and to product design, we could do our own artwork, and we worked on these as much as we could do in the framework of a Soviet enterprise where there wasn't always money for this kind of design." By contrast, she explained, Razorsharp St. Petersburg was a "production center," one node of an international network that was supposed to produce efficiently and cheaply, not create:

> Now, our task is to make products. We try to fulfill the standards worked out in [U.S. headquarters[149]], we don't propose anything here, our task is only to strictly fulfill what is set up for us there. So for the workers nothing changed, but for office workers, you are already confined within the strict constructs of what has been set up for you.

Although the company nominally welcomed innovation and new ideas, and numerous communication programs were set up with the aim of cultivating them, from the perspective of company employees it sometimes seemed that the need for approval from abroad, combined with tight chains of command, greatly impeded individual creativity and initiative. While most claimed to value the corporation's strict "Western" rules, many also felt locked in a larger, inflexible "Western" structure in which their factory was afforded only a limited role as a production center in a vast multinational corporate

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[149] She named the U.S. city where Razorsharp is headquartered here. I have suppressed it here as part of my efforts to preserve the company's anonymity.

network, charged with the work of mechanically reproducing products designed by others.

Ideologies in Friction

Anna Tsing (2005) argues against a story of globalization in which unstoppable, unrestrained global forces impinge upon and transform a waiting and defenseless local. Rather, she suggests, global forces, along with the specificities one might call "cultures," are produced through a type of local/global interaction she describes as "friction," the "awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference" (4). In this chapter, I have described stances on communication, agency, and national identity that have sprung from a particularly Western-oriented milieu in St. Petersburg in which friction has long been a regular and expected occurrence. While many employees seemed to share similar orientations to these issues, everyday interactions from meetings to performance reviews were nonetheless vibrant arenas of friction, which spanned not only differences that one might call "local" and "global," but also differences of personal alignment in relationship to categories of Russia and the West, as well as positionality within company hierarchies. Communication practices, I have suggested, lay at the center of these zones of friction. As such, debates over communication were not just about talk, but more fundamentally explored what it meant to work and speak within a peripheral node of a Western multinational and questioned whether Russian employees possessed the professional competencies and inner qualities deemed necessary for such a modern, cosmopolitan milieu.

Unlike Tsing, however, I do not suggest that this friction sprang directly from the

moment of encounter itself. Rather, I have suggested in this chapter that encounters across difference are mediated by ideologies through which people make sense of those differences. I draw attention not to the mere encounter between "global" and "local" (or "Western" and "Russian") but to the ideas that local actors carried about those encounters and categories of "Western" and "Russian" more generally, showing how these mediated employees' judgments about persons, companies, actions, and communication styles. While these distinctions shaped and were reproduced by various types of encounters, they were not reducible to them, and bore the marks of longer and at least partially shared histories, as well as a generally shared sense of what kinds of communication should be encouraged and what kinds should be avoided. At the same time, I have tried to show that these ideologies were not reproduced unchanged, but instead were variously transformed in different milieus, from the English-language scholarly texts of management specialists, to the pressures of employee meetings, to Russian employees' efforts to make sense of a work environment that they felt differed substantially from those found elsewhere in the country both in the present and in the past.

Part II: PARTNERSHIP *OBSHCHENIE* AND THE SOVIET STATE

Chapter 4

Training for Socialist Democracy

In the winter and spring of 2003, before I began my fieldwork at Razorsharp, I conducted research at Fokus, the local secretarial school that offered courses for adult students. On the first day of the program in January, we were handed a schedule for the first couple weeks in which two days were specially blocked off and devoted from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. to something labeled a "training" *(trening)*. When I arrived at the school's largest classroom, painted lovingly with bright landscapes, for the training the next day, it was clear that this was a lesson that would not be like all of the other lessons. Not only was it much longer than the others, it was also led by a psychologist rather than a teacher, a woman of about thirty in long flowing pants who had already demonstrated her psychological credentials by administering us a computerized personality test to assess our suitability for secretarial work. And while in general the secretarial students, much like typical St. Petersburg high school students, sat in shared desks in rows, here we were told to drag our seats into a circle. Further, the *trening*, unlike any of the classes that would follow, began with a discussion of how we would address each other, as well as the instructor. Where standard practice for unknown adults called for using the plural form of "you," "*Vy*" with others, here the instructor encouraged us instead to use the more familiar singular second-person pronoun "*ty*," usually reserved for family and

people of a similar status whom one knows well.[150] The psychologist also suggested we might want to address her using "*ty*," a suggestion so out of the ordinary that, despite the fact that the psychologist was of a similar age as some of the students, none of the students could bring themselves to do.[151]

If at Razorsharp, trainings were already a well-worn and expected aspect of the institutional landscape, in a number of other settings, such as Fokus, trainings seemed novel and exciting, marked with strange rules for behavior and an often unfamiliar psychological sensibility. Seen mainly as a recent import from the West, trainings seemed a particularly new type of educational intervention that contrasted starkly with old Soviet techniques of ponderous lecture and memorization. When I mentioned the Fokus training to a Russian sociology graduate student I had met, for example, she heartily approved. The school was using quite "modern" methods, she said, which should bring good results. However, as I was to learn later, much of the methodology behind the training was not particularly new or entirely "Western," and, indeed, had been an intense focus of interest in Soviet academic circles almost thirty years earlier. One Moscow academic psychologist that I met was particularly ironic about widespread assumptions that trainings were a Post-Soviet phenomenon. "When I read somewhere that the training was taken from America in the 90s, from the people who came here, I laugh," he said. "If they didn't bring them here, there still would have been more than we needed."

This chapter steps away from the Putin era and the world of the Post-Soviet

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[150] In contemporary practice, however, many young adults very quickly start using "*ty*" with each other, so this may have occurred among at least some of the students without prompting.
[151] On the social constitution of pronominal use in Russian and the complex meanings of switching from one pronoun to another in the context of a given relationship, see Friedrich (1966).

Western multinational to explore 1970s and 1980s efforts to develop a Soviet methodology of the "socio-psychological training." Heralded as an innovative and potentially revolutionary educational technique that differed measurably from normal pedagogical practice, the training was a key site in which norms of both workplace and non-workplace communication were theorized, reworked, and shaped in the late socialist period. It was supposed to both model a new type of communicative practice and teach participants to communicate in similar ways outside of the training, producing citizens and workers who interacted in a manner that was less egocentric and more attuned towards to others than the communication styles seen to typify many spheres of Soviet life. As such, a study of the training's debut provides an unusual window into late Soviet concerns about communication that belie the conventional wisdom that the production-oriented Soviets, walled off from "Western" concerns, cared little about the "softer" side of work and the finer points of communicating in professional settings. Such narratives, while possessing a certain heuristic value, betray a more complex history of Soviet attention to communication that encompassed complex transnational interactions between foreign methodologies, Soviet traditions, and the creative attempts of various specialists to develop new approaches that would both be deemed appropriate for socialist society and speak to the everyday practices and realities of Soviet life, sometimes criticizing those practices in the process.

In exploring these entanglements, I cast doubt on approaches that represent economic regimes and regimes of expertise as indelibly fused. Training pioneers in the Soviet Union in the late seventies and early eighties were grappling with many of the same issues that are now celebrated by foreign companies as empowerment, openness,

and nonhierarchical communication. They too looked to ideologies of egalitarian communication as a potent resource for shaping organizations, practices, and sometimes, subjectivities. This suggests that these practices and ideologies of communication, far from being intrinsically linked to a new neoliberal work order, not only have longer historical roots, but also have no natural connection to a democratic or capitalist sensibility. Mobile and adaptable, embroiled in multiple processes of global circulation, they have been harnessed for a variety of different purposes, including those entangled with the conditions and practices of actually existing socialism. Even in the context of socialism, however, I suggest, the meaning of trainings was not one-dimensional, and the connections between these speech events and the state has held different meanings for different participants in the movement over time. Neither fully oppositional, nor fully representative of the "official line," I argue, trainings articulated in a wide variety of ways with people's experiences of everyday Soviet life.

Following the Form

American psychologist Carl Rogers once called the "T-group," or training group, the "social invention of the century" (1970:1). These groups, which flourished in the United States in the 1950s through the 1970s, were radical experiments in pedagogical method.[152] Participants would arrive in isolated locales for multi-day sessions to discover that despite the presence of a trained facilitator, it was up to the group members to organize themselves and set their own agenda for the training sessions. Anger and confusion as well as intense feelings of *communitas* (Turner 1969) often ensued as group

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[152] The American history of the T-groups is recounted in numerous publications. See for instance Back (1972), Bradford et al. (1964), Highhouse (2002), and Kleiner (1996).

participants did their best to cope with the amorphous task in front of them, while adhering to the facilitator's prompts to openly and honestly express their feelings and observations about the group experience as it was happening. For Rogers, as for many other American T-group theorists, the method was particularly promising because of the possibilities it provided for self-expression. "Gently at times, almost savagely at others," he wrote, "the group demands that the individual be himself, that his current feelings not be hidden, that he remove the mask of ordinary social intercourse" (1970:27-28).

Rogers was enticed by the power of the groups (which he called "encounter groups") and suggested that they could lead to real social as well as individual change. Yet, he was also quite defensive about them. T-groups were charged by conservatives in the Cold War United States with a whole slate of totalitarian sins, from Communist funded brain-washing to Nazi groupthink,[153] and Rogers very carefully negotiated these charges in his writings, stressing that the groups did not represent the controlling collectivities associated with the USSR and the Third Reich, but rather a democratic spirit that facilitated individual freedom.[154] In his book on the groups, he stressed that they were "unimaginable" in countries such as Russia or Czechoslovakia, where the residents were starving for the type of "freedom of expression" that a T-group encouraged. "No," Rogers wrote with emphasis, "the encounter group can flourish only in a basically democratic environment" (Rogers 1970:160).

Yet, similar types of Soviet groups began to appear just a few years later in the mid 1970s, charged with an aura of excitement that matched that of Rogers's breathless

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[153] Summaries of this criticism are found in Kleiner (1996) and Rogers (1970). Also see Warring (1991), who suggests that such criticism led theorists and practitioners to make more limited claims for the groups.
[154] In charting a path to social transformation via encounter groups that celebrated individual freedom rather than more threatening specters of collective action, Rogers resembled many other Americans of this era (Braunstein and Dowle 2001).

proclamations. Developed mainly by psychologists in the recently revived field of Soviet

social psychology, the Soviet T-group was known as the "socio-psychological training,"

(*sotsial'no-psikhologicheskii trening*). While several different types developed, most

Soviet theorists were united in presenting trainings as an active and egalitarian method of

instruction that departed significantly from traditional Soviet educational methods of

lecture and memorization. In trainings, the small groups of participants were not to

passively listen to lectures, but to spend a large proportion of their time actively

developing new communicative abilities through participatory activities such as

discussions and role plays. Some of these theorists probably drew the lines between new

and old too sharply: One need only think about Vygotsky's (1978) proposals for active

learning via scaffolding, Makarenko's (1951[1935]; 1953[1938]) work with reforming

juvenile delinquents through self-governance, Stanislavskian theatrical training exercises

(e.g. Stanislavsky 1989[1936]), and a whole host of everyday Soviet practices in

classrooms and pioneer groups through which children learned some of the essential

tenants of Soviet society by participating in and leading various *kollektivy*.[155] However,

trainings were nonetheless constituted as a separate and innovative form with great

potential for fostering both individual and group development. Though far from a mass

phenomenon, they became an object of intense study and creative reworking by Soviet

psychologists in metropolitan centers throughout the Soviet eighties and were conducted

in a variety of educational, vocational, and recreational settings. A 1982 report on a

scholarly conference on trainings in Moscow announced proudly the participation of 150

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[155] See Kharkhordin (1999). A particularly interesting related phenomenon with roots in the 1960s were specially led collective discussions or "little flames" (*ogonki*) conducted with campers around campfires at the Pioneer camp Orlenok that encouraged campers to discuss the events of the day, along with their experiences and feelings in an open and honest atmosphere (Kolominskii 1981; Soloveichik 1989; Tuchkova 2002).

people from twenty-three cities in the Soviet Union, including Moscow and St.

Petersburg, as well as Tallinn, Novosibirsk, Riga, Vilnius, and Tartu (Kovalev, et al.

1982).

Those who developed the Soviet trainings were aware of the work of Rogers and

other American training theorists, and as such, the Soviet trainings might be analyzed as

an example of a globally circulating form, albeit of a type of globalization that was not

limited to capitalism, but instead crossed the boundaries of what has too sharply been

imagined as an "iron curtain" dividing the capitalist and socialist worlds. These

trainings, however, were not mere copies of the American groups, but were carefully

developed in relation to the concerns and traditions of the Soviet environment.   If for

Rogers, the technique was tightly linked to self-expression and democracy, and was, thus,

unimaginable in a state socialist political setting, it carried a very different weight in the

Soviet Union, where terms such as individual and collectivity were differently charged.

Here, the main emphasis was not *self*-expression, but communication that bridged, and

sometimes interpenetrated subjectivities, showing understanding of and attention to

others, whether the ultimate goal was formulated as "competence in *obshchenie*"

(Petrovskaia 1989; Zakharov and Khriashcheva 1989), "communicative competency"

(*kommunikativnaia kompetentnost'*) (Emel'ianov 1985), or eliminating "shyness"

(Dobrovich 1982).[156] Generally said to be useful for all adults, this type of

communicative competence was often said to be particularly important in the work

sphere, where those who occupied a wide variety of (non-worker) professions, such as

managers, doctors, and teachers, could theoretically, by learning these generally

applicable communicative techniques, better participate in leading and participating in

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[156] See also Sidorenko (2006).

the *kollektivy* that were at the center of Soviet civilization.

As such, the case of the training provides an opportunity to explore the global circulation of particular social and linguistic technologies and their articulations with particular sociopolitical contexts. A wide range of theorists, from psychologists such as Rogers to critical social thinkers, are prone to suggest tight linkages between particular technologies, the effects they produce, and larger political imaginaries. The governmentality school inspired by Foucault is particularly subject to this tendency. Along these lines, Nikolas Rose (1996b; 1999a) describes the research in social psychology that gave rise to T-groups as an important precursor to later neoliberal shifts in Western democratic contexts. The American and British social psychology of the 1930s-1950s, from his point of view, provided a "vocabulary" for analyzing a democracy, as well as technologies such as the T-group that translated democratic principles into scientific expertise and made it possible to govern subjects "through their freedoms, their choices, and their solidarities rather than despite these" (Rose 1996b:20). Like technologies of neoliberal empowerment such as corporate culture and performance reviews, then, trainings, from this point of view, would appear to represent a similar mechanism of instilling the orientations that a democratic government and capitalist economy requires, one that hinges not on state edict but harnesses individual aspirational desire to improve the self by using the requisite leadership techniques at work.

To understand how trainings could articulate with state socialism, however, requires departing from such rigid analyses that link particular technologies tightly to larger socio-historical and political regimes. Ong and Collier (2005) provide a starting point by suggesting that while certain "global forms" are amenable to movement across

spatial and cultural domains, they constantly interact with other social and political

elements, including those associated with authoritarian and/or socialist rule, forming

"assemblages" that are "the product of multiple determinations that are not reducible to a

single logic" (12). While such assemblages might be labeled "neoliberal," they always

involve tensions between their heterogeneous elements, meaning that a neoliberal

technology of marketization, for instance, might coexist with a state socialist concern for

the substantive ends of a budget proposal (Collier 2005). The case of the Soviet training

pushes us to go even further, however, to not only examine disparate varieties of

neoliberalism, but also to examine the articulation of a particular globally circulating

technology with multiple types of social and political imaginaries, including American

democracy as well as Soviet socialism.

In the discussion that follows, I am interested in how the training,

decontextualized from concerns about democracy and capitalism, was recontextualized

(Bauman and Briggs 1990; Blommaert 2003; Ong and Collier 2005) and transformed in

the milieu of Soviet socialism by social actors who were quite aware of their positioning

within the larger Soviet state. In so doing, I pay close attention to mediating practices

such as manual-writing, performances in various institutional settings, and other types of

scholarly production. While, I will suggest, the training retained an association with

ideologies of egalitarian communication, at the same time these ideologies and the form

of the training itself underwent substantial transformation. Via efforts to make the

training form practicable and useful in local conditions, while maintaining a legitimacy

that came in part from previous incarnations, new forms were created which sometimes

retained, as Bakhtin (1981:293) would say, "tastes" of their former contexts, but also

differed in substantial and meaningful ways. At the same time, I will suggest, the meanings of these forms in relationship to the larger political and economic system of Soviet socialism were quite complicated and resist attempts to reduce them to a single sociopolitical functionality.

A Genealogy of the *Trening*

The genealogies of these groups are complex. The T-group, according to most Russian and American accounts, was developed in the United States by German émigré social psychologist Kurt Lewin—who himself lectured in the Soviet Union and trained some Soviet students in Germany before his emigration (Cooke 1999)—and his American colleagues during World War II. According to legend, the methodology originated by happenstance when the participants in a Bethel, Maine workshop that was organized as a means of studying group relations joined the researchers one evening in 1947 to analyze that day's data and vocally expressed their observations and interpretations of group events. This led the researchers to develop what became the hallmark of the T-group methodology: an unstructured group setting in which participants were encouraged to verbalize their observations and feelings about the interactions of the group and its members in the "here and now." The initial aim of the groups apparently was not to foster the types of self-expression later heralded by Rogers, but rather to provide the participants with a researcher's nuanced understanding of what it meant to interact in a small group. However, over time, in the hands of the psychologists at the National Training Laboratory founded to develop the method, along with other psychologists such as Rogers, the groups became increasingly psychological, cast less as

laboratories for studying group dynamics and more as processes of self-discovery in which individuals learned about the self through participating in the group process (Bradford, et al. 1964; Farr 1996; Hollway 1991).

Although the goals of American T-group theorists differed, most explicitly connected the groups to visions of democracy, although usually this vision was said to differ from the actually existing democracy found in both state and corporate institutions. In the shadow of World War II and concerns about Nazi totalitarianism, Lewin and his colleagues were particularly concerned with "democratic" styles of leadership even before their work on T-groups, and in a famous set of experiments conducted with boys' groups, tested the premise that education took place best in an environment in which instructors acted less like "authoritarians" who led via strict orders and more like "democrats" who encouraged student participation via group discussion (Lewin, et al. 1939). T-groups, particularly because of their egalitarian nature, were also supposed to support this type of democratic leadership style. They would ideally create "change agents" who applied the skills learned in the trainings to the places where they worked and lived, transforming institutions one person at a time (Benne 1948). Even proponents of the more psychological T-groups retained a sense of critique informed by notions of "democracy" and equality. For Rogers (1970), for example, the experience of self-expression in encounter groups made not only "opened up" individuals, but could also potentially "open up" organizations, countering the institutionally rigidities of bureaucracies such as the state department with a more democratic, egalitarian, and responsive ethos. Similar claims were made by those who in the 1970s and 1980s brought the groups into the industrial sphere in the form of corporate "sensitivity groups"

that would theoretically ameliorate industrial problems by giving participants a space to verbalize the interpersonal feelings and issues that often went repressed in the more hierarchical atmosphere of daily corporate life (Kaplan 1986).

Those who brought the training to the Soviet Union were aware of the American T-groups and heavily cited researchers such as Lewin and Rogers in their writings, along with the occasional American or British sensitivity training manual or social psychology textbook, at times translating entire sections with slight alterations. [157] However, this occurred within the arms of Soviet psychological traditions and through indirect paths that led through other socialist countries. Despite a more than 60-year official ban on Freudian psychoanalysis[158], the Soviet Union was home to a number of officially recognized psychological schools, some of which were heavily entwined with the world of work. [159] While many psychological approaches, especially those with a practical slant, were repressed during the Stalin era in conjunction with Stalin's 1936 decree against pedology (a type of scientific study of children), some similar work continued even during this time in the arms of pedagogy (cf. Andreeva 1980). Social psychology was the subdiscipline most concerned with developing the training form. Much discussed in the 1920s, it carried the taint of the bourgeois West for several decades,

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[157] Emel'ianov (1985) for instance, includes a table that contrasts "effective" and "ineffective" groups (147-8), which closely follows an American textbook (Johnson and Johnson 1975:5). He also includes a series of homework exercises for training participants that asks them to interrogate the social sources of their self-evaluations (124-129), translated with minor adaptations from Pines and Malach (1979:47-53).

[158] In the 1920s, there were a number of attempts to apply psychoanalysis, which was well-known in Russia before the revolution, to Soviet ideals (Etkind 1997; Tugaybayeva 1996). While banned in the 1930s and only officially rehabilitated by Yeltsin's government in 1996, this should not be seen as a total absence of access to Freudian theories. According to Moscow psychologists interviewed in Cote (1998), at least some academic psychology lectures covered Freudian theories, and specialists who could demonstrate a need for Freud's work could access them in the library, at least in the 1970s and later.

[159] Particularly relevant here are psychotechnics (*psikhotehnika*), a discipline that in conjunction with efforts to develop a Soviet managerial science (Bessinger 1988), applied experimental psychology to work, and pedology (*pedologiia*), a psychological subfield devoted to children that made use of psychological testing to match children to suitable educational tracks. See Bauer (1952), Jovarsky (1989), Kotelova (1972[1967]), Petrovskii (2000).

undergoing resurgence after the Stalin era. Discussions about the establishment of a

Soviet social psychology began to appear in journals in the late 1950s, with a laboratory

opening up in Leningrad in 1962, and department subdivisions opening up in the

psychology departments of Leningrad State University (LGU) in 1965 and Moscow State

University (MGU) in 1972.[160] Yet, while social psychologists of this era were very

consciously creating a new Soviet psychological subdiscipline, it would be mistaken to

view this as a total break with the past: Soviet social psychologists made efforts to

connect their field to earlier work in Soviet psychology and pedagogy at the same time as

they charted out new areas of study and application.

Communication and its relationship to work was a primary concern of social

psychology during this period (Andreeva 2007; Kharkhordin 1999; Kol'tsova 2002),

making it a fertile ground for developing the training methodology. However, in these

writings of social psychologists, communication was most often conceptualized not in

terms of *kommunikatsiia*, a Russian term seen as a direct borrowing from English

"communication," but in terms of a uniquely Russian concept "*obshchenie*." While

obshchenie might be translated as "communication," in everyday late socialist usage it

encompassed multiple types of verbal and nonverbal group interaction with an emphasis

on the positive, enjoyable experience of group sociality. As Yurchak (2006) describes it,

"*Obshchenie* was far more than communication between separate individuals; it produced

a form of sociality and a form of personhood that transcended the personal and the

social" (148). Yet, while everyday uses of *obshchenie*, tended to index activities that

were not defined by official discourses (Yurchak 2006), this was not the case in the

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[160] On the history of Soviet social psychology, see Andreeva (1997; 2007), Pugacheva and Iarmoliuk (2002) Petrovskii (2000), and Samoilova and Iasiukova (2000).

register of Soviet social psychology. Social psychologists were particularly interested in the types of *obshchenie* said to occur within official structures, such as factories and schools, and suggested in their writings that it enhanced the achievement of officially defined goals, including the development of a "socialist personality." They generally described *obshchenie* as fundamental need of the person as a social being that at the same time was inseparable both from social context and the division of labor.

From its beginnings the new social psychology had a close relationship to Soviet industry, with various laboratories and social psychological centers in industrial settings opening throughout 1970s.[161] As such, Soviet psychologists did not study *obshchenie* in isolation, but rather examined it as an activity inherent in and inseparable from the group processes of the *kollektivy* said to make up all aspects of Soviet society from workplaces to schools. Social psychologist Artur Petrovsky's "stratometric conception of the *kollektiv*," elaborated in 1979, envisioned the *kollektiv* as a tri-level structure with a core that centered around production-oriented activity in service of society, a second, divided layer encompassing shared values and interpersonal *obshchenie* about matters of production, and a third, outer layer of nonofficial, interpersonal *obshchenie* between group members. Soviet social psychologists also showed interest in connections between *obshchenie* and the individual, or *lichnost'*, a concept that can refer to the collection of unique qualities that a person possesses, as well as to the individuality of the human being and the deep aspects of psychological structure, akin to Western concepts of personality. *Obshchenie*, they suggested, played a key role in binding the *lichnost'* to the group. Produced by the demands of group processes, as well as facilitating cooperation in the collective activity of work, *obshchenie* was the medium that made the *lichnost'* not

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[161] See for instance Samoilova and Iasiukova (2000), Tutorskaia (1983).

a purely individual, but also a socially constituted phenomenon (Kharkhordin 1999).

This research provided a context in the mid- to late 1970s for some of these social psychologists, who were particularly, although not solely, concentrated in Leningrad and Moscow,[162] to, in conjunction with the inspirations of foreign visitors, turn to the study of the training and its effects on *obshchenie*.[163] The Soviet Union had long put an emphasis on various types of vocational training, from specially oriented high schools to an array of adult-oriented part-time training programs, especially at institutes for "raising qualifications," *instituty povysheniia kvalifikatsii*. There was also a vibrant tradition of "business games" designed to develop management skills using interactive methods and simulations.[164] Group therapy, which most saw as very closely aligned with trainings, had also been conducted in a few select medical institutions like the Bekhterev neurological clinic beginning in the early 1970s.[165] However, the socio-psychological training was viewed by just about everyone involved in 70s and 80s social psychology circles as something quite new, particularly because of its learner-centered pedagogy and focus on issues of communication.

In a political atmosphere in which East-West exchanges were limited, trainings

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[162] This account is admittedly focused heavily on work within the Russian Republic, particularly in Moscow and Leningrad, where psychology programs were most concentrated during the period. However, as noted earlier in the chapter, training researchers could be found in many different Soviet cities. The Baltics were a particular vibrant area of training activity.

[163] This summary of training methodology and the generalizations that follow are based upon the analysis of textual sources on training and communication from the Soviet period, as well as recent interviews with Soviet training practitioners and various published and presented Post-Soviet reviews and reminiscences focused on the Soviet training movement. The main Soviet textual sources consulted were Bogomolova and Petrovskaia, (1977), Dobrovich (1982), Emel'ianov (1984; 1985), Kharash (1981), Petrovskaia (1982; 1989), Mikkin (1983; 1986) Zakharov and Khriashcheva (1989), Zhukov (1981; 1988), Zhukov and Pilipeichenko (1989), and Zhukov et al. (1991). Another important background source was Forverg and Al'berg (1984).

[164] On business games and games of related types see Bel'chikov and Birshtein (1989), Prigozhin (1988), Rotkirch (1996), Walck (1994), Zhezhko (1992).

[165] See mention of this, for example, in Deriabina (2007) and Masterov (2007). Also see discussions in Cote (1998) and Havenaar et al. (1998).

mainly traveled to the Soviet Union via channels within the socialist world.   Particularly influential were visits from East European psychologists from counties such as East Germany and Poland, who conducted training demonstrations in major Soviet universities. A key figure, particularly in Leningrad, was East German social psychologist Manfred Vorwerg, who had developed an explicitly "socialist" training program, along with theorizing the foundations of a Marxist social psychology in Leipzig and Jena in the early 1970s.[166] Widely credited as the source for the term "socio-psychological training," Vorwerg, along with his wife Traudl Alberg gave what has been described as a "difficult" paper on the topic at MGU in 1974 (which sparked the interest of a couple key academics in the training field, but did not really catch on[167]) and gave widely attended training demonstration at LGU in 1982. In Moscow, a more influential figure was a Polish therapist, Pawel Boksi, who after studying psychology in the United States, conducted legendary training sessions in a more Rogerian tradition in the social psychology department at MGU in 1976.[168] Psychologists in the Baltic republics were another important influence, since these republics generally had stronger therapeutic traditions. These included a video training program developed by Henn Mikkin in Estonia, as well as group therapy seminars conducted by psychotherapist Aleksandr Alekseichek in Vilnius.[169] Although during Perestroika Western psychotherapists and trainers began to visit in quick succession, with a particularly influential visit by Rogers himself in 1986 (Cote 1998), many of the people involved at the time already were quite familiar with the methodology from the prior visits.

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[166] For more on Vorwerg, see Dumond (1999).

[167] Recounted in Bogomolova (2007).

[168] This is discussed in detail by Deriabina (2007).

[169] See Mikkin's papers on his video-training work (Mikkin 1983; Mikkin 1986), as well as Sidorenko's (2006) recollections of Alekseichek's seminars.

According to Elena Sidorenko, a St. Petersburg University psychologist and professional trainer, the social-psychological training originally raised controversies in some circles. Sidorenko, who studied social psychology at LGU in the early 1980s (and began conducting trainings herself shortly thereafter), reflects upon the early years of the training movement in a 2006 training manual (Sidorenko 2006). She writes that the training methodology was originally criticized by some Soviet psychologists and philosophers for its non-conformance to key tenants of Soviet psychology. Particularly problematic were perceived roots in "behaviorism," which had long been under disrepute in Soviet psychology, despite the official embrace of Pavlov. Sidorenko describes how LGU psychology students learning about training methodologies during this period often had to defend trainings against such charges of "behaviorism" in philosophical seminars, while dutifully demonstrating that training methodologies were actually founded on the work of canonized Soviet psychologists such as Uznadze, Rubinshtein, and Galperin. In Moscow too trainings seem to have been hardly unproblematic. One training pioneer at MGU reminisced in 2007 that when she and a colleague submitted the first paper on the topic (Bogomolova and Petrovskaia 1977) to a university journal in 1976, they were wanted not to use the word *"trening"* because of its Western associations. As a result, after consulting with the department dean, noted psychologist Aleksei Leont'ev, they received permission to publish the article under a title that avoided the problematic term and instead referred to "methods of active socio-psychological preparation."[170]

Despite such obstacles, trainings not only became a vibrant topic of academic research, popular with psychology professors and students alike, but were also conducted in a number of educational and industrial settings beginning throughout the 1970s and

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[170] See Bogomolova (2007).

1980s, from universities and neurology clinics to factories, scientific institutions, and the *instituty povysheniia kvalifikatsii*, often in conjunction with research programs. At the same time, both these academic psychologists, as well as others with psychological educations, also conducted trainings in less formal settings, including apartments, student dorms, singles groups, and various conversation and lonely hearts clubs.[171]

Methodologies for Partnership *Obshchenie*

In a published collection of interviews conducted by an American translator in the mid-late 1990s (Cote 1998), MGU psychologist Boris Masterov, a consultant as well as academic psychologist, reflected upon his initial exposure to training and therapy methods[172] in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Masterov was a student of Larissa Petrovskaia, the MGU psychologist credited with the publication of the first monograph on the training in 1982. Like several of the people involved with trainings at the time, he described them as transformative, emotionally intense, and wondrous experiences that had repercussions far beyond the frame of the training itself. Speaking about the movement in terms of "humanistic psychology," a term that Petrovskaia used to describe her Rogerian approach to trainings, he explained:

> [H]umanistic psychology here almost became a religion (as it is for some
> Americans) instead of a system of therapy, it became a value system

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[171] See, for instance Armeev (1984) on trainings in the Bekhterev Psycho-Neurological Institute and a music conservatory, Aleksandrova (1981), Dobrovich (1982), Egides (1999), and Kozlov (1997) for conversation clubs, Kozlov (1997) and Petrovskaia (1989) on the singles group "For those Over 30" (*Komu za tritstat'*), Petrovskaia (1982; 1989) for university-based trainings, and Sidorenko (2006), Zakharov and Khriashcheva (1989), and Bakirova (2004) for trainings in industrial settings. Kozlov (1997), along with several of my interviewees, discussed work in the sphere of *povyshenie kvalifikatsii*. Also see recollections of trainings in many of these settings by Bogomolova (2007), Deriabina (2007), Lushpaeva (2007), and Masterov (2007) .

[172] Masterov refers more specifically to "therapy" groups here rather than trainings; however at the time, especially in the Moscow tradition of humanistic psychology, these understandings overlapped and were often used synonymously.

> which one had to live up to. Our behavior changed: we began to call each other by first name, to communicate spontaneously and easily, without timidity; we hugged each other kissed each other, etc. I remember that I was 26 years old at the time, and even though my teacher Larissa Petrovskaya was a lot older. I was able to call her by her first name and use ["ty"[173]] without feeling awkward. This being able to call someone by their first name and use "ty" eliminated social roles and meant that we accepted the other person first as a unique person and then only as a professor or as a student – that we ourselves were unique persons capable of communicating with others without formalities. (186-7)

For the students and instructors that were involved, he suggested, the psychological approach associated with trainings was transformative both on the level of values and on the level of everyday practice, including, notably, on the level of talk. Communication was free, easy, spontaneous, and imbued with emotional feeling. Along with this, it was marked by a greater sense of equality between participants than would usually inhere in university life, a phenomenon that he connected to shifts in forms of address. Where students customarily refer to teachers in Russian by using a first name and patronymic, in this new atmosphere, Masterov suggested, everyone was on a first name basis. Similarly, as we were encouraged to do in the training at the secretary school several decades later, teachers and students both addressed each other with the uncustomary "*ty*" rather than the usual "*Vy.*" For Masterov, these linguistic shifts signaled a larger value shift in which both teachers and students interacted not in terms of formal social roles, but rather as "unique persons" bound by a relationship of mutual acceptance.

In Soviet scholarly accounts of training, the training methodology was similarly described as a method that fostered mutual understanding on a foundation of equality. In this, the claims of Soviet training pioneers did not differ substantially from American

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[173] Cote includes only English translation of the interviews. For clarity I have edited her efforts to explain the meaning of "ty" in the text to English-speaking readers. In Cote's version, this reads "the informal form of 'you'" (ty—"thou"—MC)

theorists of the technology. Unlike more "traditional" methods of education such as

lectures, trainings were said to be based upon fundamentally more equal principles of

interaction among all members of the training group, including instructors as well as

participants. A key principle of the training methodology was what some trainers called

"partnership *obshchenie*" (Zakharov and Khriashcheva 1989), a type of communication

that was said to involve the equal positioning and mutual understanding of all participants

in a communicative interaction.[174] Zakharov and Khriashcheva, academic psychologists

who were based at LGU, echoing earlier discussions by Petrovskaia (1982), describe this

type of *obshchenie* as characterized by:

> The equality of the psychological positions of the participants, the
> recognition of the value of the lichnost' of another person, attentiveness to
> the interests of one's conversation partner [sobesednik], and also – the
> activity of the sides, in which each person doesn't only experience
> influence but each also to an equal degree himself also influences the other
> one, the mutual interpenetration of the partners into each other's world of
> feelings and experiences, and also the mutual humanistic stance
> [ustanovka] of the partners, striving towards co-partnership, empathy, and
> acceptance of one another (7).

Predicated on the equal "psychological positions" of all those who participated,

partnership *obshchenie* required that participants paid attention to the "interests" of their

conversation partners and more fundamentally recognized them as a *lichnost'* in their

own right. Yet while partnership *obshchenie* showed respect for individuality, it was also

profoundly mutual, involving a mutual process of "influence" in which each conversation

partner influenced the other one, as well as a high degree of shared experience, attitudes,

and emotion, involving, as is described here, the interpenetration of the partners' "worlds

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[174] Compare Lemon's (2004) account of pedagogical techniques in a Russian theatrical academy in 2002-3. Instructors had students engage in various bodily exercises designed to build partnership (*partnerstvo*), at the same time as they also engaged in complex practices of criticism that both fostered related emotional states such as compassion and empathy and worked against partnership between students and instructors.

of feelings and experiences," the "shared humanistic dispositions of the partners," and a "striving towards copartnership, empathy, and acceptance of one another."

While there were some significant differences in training methodologies and approaches, with some being relatively unstructured and others focused more on specific techniques and skills, most socio-psychological trainings were designed around a conviction that partnership *obshchenie* (or something very similar to it) was the ideal and most "effective" way to communicate, both within the special environment of the trainings and in everyday life. Some, recalling Bakhtin, pronounced this "dialogic" (*dialogicheskoe*) rather than monologic *obshchenie*, calling attention to the ways in which words were not simply pressed upon the participants of a training by an authority figure, but rather derived from a shared communicative process between trainer and trainees (e.g. Kharash 1981). Others pronounced this "subject-subject" *obshchenie,* stressing that the training participant was not to be a mere "object" to be controlled and manipulated by the training leader, but an active subject in his or her own right who interacted with both other participants and the training leader through a process of mutual influence and empathetic understanding situated within *obshchenie*. This involved mutual participation in group activities, joint sharing of experience and impressions, and efforts to come to a common understandings of others (e.g. Petrovskaia 1989:14).

A number of points of training methodology were directed towards promoting this type of ostensibly mutual and equal educative exchange. As we have already seen, a common ground rule was that participants and group leaders alike should all use the less formal "*ty*" instead of the formal "*Vy*" with each other. Trotsky (1973 [1922]), writing soon after the Revolution, had worried that Red Army commanders overemphasized

hierarchy by using "*ty*" and expecting a non-reciprocal "Vy"; he thus advocated that the most equitable solution was for all levels to demonstrate mutual respect by addressing each other in "Vy." However, for training theorists, reciprocal "ty" rather than "Vy" was the road to parity; they stressed that the use of "*ty*" by all would create a close-knit trusting atmosphere akin to that found among family or close friends. Along with this, participants were also encouraged to address others by first name only rather than the more formal use of first name and patronymic. Whether or not these rules were always followed in practice (and, considering the trouble that contemporary training participants have with these practices, it is doubtful that they always were [175]), these shifts marked a significant difference from usual practice that would have been profoundly felt by training participants.

This was highlighted in a 2007 interview with Vera, a psychologist (and mother of a friend) who had learned about and participated in trainings in the late eighties and early nineties at various seminars and short-term programs. Over tea and cookies in her kitchen she refreshed her memory by looking at her carefully written notebooks from the period and explained:

> V: So forms of address are discussed. In "ty" or in "Vy." Because you
> see it is such an important issue in Russia. Well as far as I understand it,
> in America, there is one form, "*you*". . . "*you.*" "Ty" and "Vy", they are
> all "you," right? And here, well it is so important, you can say "ty," and
> you can say "Vy." And well it was expected, well earlier especially, that
> you would speak with unknown people using "Vy."
> S: And it is already not so formal now, right?
> V: Now it is already not so formal, now, yes, now it is simpler. Somehow

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[175] Sidorenko (2006) discusses the difficulty these rules may pose in practice, suggesting that in recent periods people have less trouble with them than they did previously. However, she notes that it is currently common for participants to refer to other participants in "*ty*" and retain "*Vy*" for the trainer, something that occurred in all of my observations of contemporary practice. She also observes that training participants often continue to use "*vy*," as well as first name and patronymic for their bosses, or avoid referring to them altogether during the training.

people more quickly switch to ty. At trainings as a rule it was often
proposed to converse using ty. Well, in order to truly diminish any sort of
tension . . . in order to ensure a higher level of trust. . as well. . these
moments were somehow discussed.
S: And also with the leader, or only among the participants?
V: With the leader too, he was in some way equal. Somehow equal with
all of the members of the group.
(Recorded interview, italics mark English)

Through discussing differences in pronominal usage both between Russian and English

and between the Putin-era present and the late socialist past, Vera, drawing on a

particularly psychological sensibility, suggested that in the late socialist period the choice

of an address form made a significant emotional difference to training participants. It

both increased "trust," and sent a message that this was a setting where even an instructor

could be "somehow equal" to participants, even if that seemed to contrast markedly with

the expectations and practices of everyday interaction during the period.

Other aspects of the training methodology were also oriented to producing a

trusting atmosphere that was warm, comfortable, and emotionally open. The groups were

small (typically 8 to 12 participants) and generally stretched on for several days to foster

a feeling of closeness and security among training participants. Training manuals also

pay great attention to matters such as the positioning of participants—in a circle rather

than at desks in rows—as well as the styles of leadership exhibited by trainers. Most

manuals are in agreement that trainers should strive for a non-directive, non-authoritarian

leadership style, although, as I will discuss later on, what this meant in practice differed

widely. While almost all the manuals proposed a fairly rigid plan for the lessons that was

to be worked out by the instructor, at the same time they also called attention to the

importance of techniques and attitudes that would create a more egalitarian atmosphere,

such as, for example, listening carefully to participants, being ready to offer help in case of difficulty, and striving to place most of the responsibility of evaluating performance onto the participants themselves, often with the aid of videotape. Many also paid particular attention to the ways that leaders should speak, suggesting that leaders avoid bald directives, show their concern for participants, and speak openly, expressing their own feelings about group processes. In turn, participants would ideally speak in ways that were themselves "open," actively taking part in group activities, and verbally expressing their feelings and observations about themselves, other members of the group, and various aspects of group activities, while also supporting other group members by listening to them and paying attention to their concerns.

This experience of mutuality, support, and partnership within the specialized setting of the training was supposed to correspondingly help participants develop a similar set of communication skills and dispositions that they could draw upon in their everyday interactions. Thus, the training experience, despite its unusual rules for conduct and communication, was to be a model for the very different interactions of everyday life. Zakharov and Khriashcheva (1989), for instance, went on to delineate a number of skills that their training, entitled "Introduction to partnership talks in problematic, conflict, or tense situations," was supposed to develop, all of which were connected with the principles of partnership *obshchenie* they had set out earlier:

> The foundational program. . . aims to complete the tasks of forming the
> abilities and habits of obshchenie, and also those dispositions that are
> necessary for successful obshchenie. These involve recognizing the value
> of another person's lichnost', an orientation towards mutual understanding
> during the process of obshchenie, and paying attention to the interests of
> one's partner. Partnership obshchenie requires fully taking into account
> the interests of all participants in obshchenie when making decisions, it
> excludes reaching one's own goals at the expense of the interests of other

people. (40)

Whether the targeted communicative events were conceived dyadically or in group-oriented terms, would-be conversation partners were urged to show interest in others rather than the self. It was perfectly acceptable and even encouraged to present a contradicting point of view, but it was axiomatic that one should first make sure to understand the other's perspective. This stance did not view talk as entirely constituted in social interaction: It, in a way that recalls American versions of personalism, is based upon the premise that individuals do have their own "interests" and points of views. However the stress here remains on understanding others rather than self-expression. Perhaps even more telling here is Zakharov and Khriashcheva's accounting of the tell-tale signs that one has not attained these partnership dispositions: ignoring the point of view of one's partner, forcing one's opinion on one's partner, interrupting one's partner while he or she is speaking, "verbosity," and attempting to convince one's partner of something without having understood his or her position beforehand (40).

While most Soviet training methodologies were oriented towards promoting some type of partnership *obshchenie* both inside and outside the training, there were also significant differences when it came to what exactly conversational equality required. Central here was a debate over whether partnership *obshchenie* engaged internal states, and the personality more generally, or not. As is common in Soviet and Russian scholarship, there was a particularly strong divide between training theorists located in Moscow and St. Petersburg. While both schools, more than the American training theorists, tended to see communication as socially constituted and located in relationships between people rather than purely within the self, they differed on the extent to which

improving communication required individual subjectivities to be involved at all. While for some, mainly based in Moscow, true partnership *obshchenie* required a deep understanding of the self and its relationship with others, for others, centered in Leningrad, this was more a matter of communicative "technique," mastery of certain set skills that could be easily transmitted during a training without involving deep inner transformation.[176]

For Larissa Petrovskaia, Masterov's teacher, along with many of her colleagues in Moscow, interacting with others on a partnership level was something that profoundly involved the individual personality, which intermingled with other personalities in the process of talk.[177] Inspired by Rogers, but retaining a focus on intersubjective interactions rather than self-expression, Petrovskaia described *obshchenie* based upon partnership relations as a particularly "deep" form of communication opposed to "standardized," "external" types of communication characterized by orders, prescriptions, and sermons (Petrovskaia 1989:15). It was a productive, emotionally rich, and intensely intersubjective process that profoundly engaged the *lichnosti* of the people involved, and thus was "*mezhlichnostnoe*" (1982:35), or on the level of or "between" multiple *lichnosti*. Speaking of the type of connection fostered during trainings akin to the ways in which others might describe a connection via the soul (Pesmen 2000), Petrovskaia suggested that trainings ultimately demanded and produced a type of particularly intense partnership *obshchenie*—or more specifically, in her terms, "subject-subject *obshchenie*"

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[176] Iurii Zhukov (2004) speaks about the same division in contemporary Russian approaches to communications training. These are also often delineated as two separate approaches in Western accounts (e.g. Plum 1981). Masterov (2007), however, proposes a somewhat different division of Soviet training approaches between those directed towards "changing people," those directed towards changing the system of relationships and mutual interactions of participants, and those directed towards "problem-solving."

[177] This is particularly clear in a review coauthored with N. M. Koriak (1987) of a recent monograph by Leningrad training pioneer Iuri Emel'ianov (Emel'ianov 1985) critiquing Emel'ianov for his stated rejection of personality-oriented approaches, which he sees as potentially dangerous and too ambitious.

characteristic of personal, trusting relationships that involved an emotional understanding of another person on the deepest possible level. While many cited her comments about the intersubjectivity of this type of communication, for her this was a central training principle. Trainings, she wrote, fostered an intensely intersubjective process that involved "the partners' mutual breaking through into the world of feelings and experiences of each other, their readiness to support the point of view of the other side, striving towards co-feeling [and] co-experiencing, acceptance of one another [and] the active mutual humanistic dispositions of the partners" (15).

As such, Petrovskaia's training methodology, which she described as "perception oriented" (1989: 45), often resembled that of the classic American T-groups in that it involved a relatively free-form, unstructured, yet emotionally intense process, in which participants continually expressed feelings and emotions about the interactions of the group, and especially (as we will see below) their opinions about others, although she also occasionally made use of more directive exercises such as role plays. Significantly, she highlighted that the method fostered significant personal growth, and described a main goal of the training as the "increase of one's psychological culture, as an essential aspect of the multifaceted development of the *lichnost*'" (Petrovskaia 1989:47). Yet while this type of personal growth was located within the individual, it nonetheless meant that the individual was to realize the importance of societal interaction in the form of *obshchenie* itself and a generally other-oriented style of communication. Throughout her manuals, Petrovskaia highlighted how training participants moved from more egocentric, self-centered positions to those in which they appreciated the views and feedback of others and learned to appreciate *obshchenie* as a value in and of itself.

The approach in Leningrad was different. Here, despite nods to the intersubjective processes described by Petrovskaia, what was most at stake in trainings was not the development of a personality oriented towards *obshchenie*, but rather the transformation of communicative behaviors, viewed as almost mechanical practices that did not emanate from an inner self. This had much to do with the training practices advocated by East German psychologist Vorwerg, who had a much greater influence in Leningrad than in Moscow. As Vorwerg and his wife Traudl Alberg summed up their approach in a Soviet psychology journal:

> Our proved training technique, developed on the basis of the theoretical position of Soviet psychologists and personal research, can improve behavior based upon a theoretical analysis of the demands of a particular profession (position, role, etc.) That means that the main goal of our conception of the training is **transforming behavior.** . . The special group form of the training helps to actualize the mechanisms of psychological regulation that influences the mental processes that are part of the resulting behavior. (Forverg and Al'berg 1984:57)

From this point of view mastering partnership *obshchenie* required not personal development but attention to concrete conversational "techniques." One simply needed to use particular phrases or types of body language in place of other less effective ones. Rather than unstructured meditations on self and others, these trainings involved lessons about proper conversational approaches, along with instructor-directed exercises in which participants could practice what they learned. These techniques included, for example, "active listening," which , here, as in many other parts of the world, involved demonstrating attentiveness through back-channel cues such as *"da, da"* ("yes, yes"), nodding one's head, and asking clarifying questions, as well as "verbalization," in which one repeated much of the content of what one's partner was saying with an introductory phrase such as "As I understand you . . ." (*Kak ia ponial Vas. . .*), "In your opinion" (*Po*

vashemu mneniiu. . .), "You believe. . . " (*Ty chitaesh'*) (Sidorenko 2006:77).

Although some combined this approach with the personality approach, others were adamant that penetrating to the level of the personality—which perhaps seemed to be too close to certain "bourgeois" training models—was not necessary. Zakharov and Khriashcheva (1989:4-5) for their part, made clear while their brand of trainings, which was oriented particularly to *delovoe* (or "business") *obshchenie* should foster the "abilities," "habits," and "stances" (*ustanovki*) of successful *obshchenie*, in addition to developing participants' psychological "knowledge," deeper transformations associated with honing abilities to adequately "perceive the self and others," and developing and correcting the "system of relationships between *lichnosti*" were best left to other training models such as Petrovskaia's.

Socialist Democracy and the Subtle Influence of the *Kollektiv*

Some scholars view attention to "equal" communication of this sort as synonymous with democracy and a liberal or neoliberal capitalist viewpoint. As I have discussed in previous chapters, empowerment initiatives based upon "equal" conversations between various members of institutional hierarchies are widely spoken about as key examples of global shifts connected with the expansion of neoliberal governmentality both in the West and throughout the world. Shifts in formality of forms of address and transformations in communicative genres to minimize overt displays of status have also been cited as emblematic of processes of democratization associated with the growth of neoliberalism (e.g. Fairclough 1992a). Similar comments have been made about the spread of "therapy talk" that minimizes status differentials via ostensibly equal

and understanding exchanges between people who are differently positioned in systems of hierarchy (e.g. Cameron 2000a). While some would suggest these transformations involve an actual democratization of liberal capitalist societies, others, such as the governmentality school, would suggest that they at the very least involve an effort to exert power and maintain hierarchy while creating an appearance of liberal democratic rule.

How then can we account for the intense interest in seemingly liberal ideologies of egalitarian communication in the late Soviet Union? It may be tempting to read these in terms of force and resistance, to see trainings as part of a dissident movement that showed the yearning of Soviet citizens for freedom and Western democracy. Indeed this is the kind of reading that might stem from the common view inherited from the Cold War that sees Soviet socialism and Western capitalism as two discreet and entirely opposed political and economic systems that can only be bridged by a thorough and abrupt "transition" from socialism to capitalism. Yet, while ideas about democracy and equal interaction promoted during trainings might immediately seem antithetical to Soviet society, or, at the very least oppositional, a look at the ways in which trainings were contextualized in the context of Soviet ideas and institutions provides a more nuanced picture, in which these appear neither completely identical with "official" values, nor the work of those leading an overtly oppositional movement.

It is useful here to look back a bit further before the beginning of the training movement to an early management text published at the end of the 60s (Vendrov 1969). The author, Vendrov, was quite critical of managers in socialist society that lacked a

"democratic" approach to their workers, particularly in the area of communication, [178] and cited the example of a mining supervisor named Gushko who, in his opinion, was rightly replaced due to his "autocratic" leadership style. While Gushko fulfilled the plan, worked hard, and was technologically savvy, he had one fatal flaw: he "relate[d] poorly' to workers. When the mining foreman came for advice, Gushko "didn't let him open his mouth" and "chased him away." He also "swore at a worker profusely" and passed by "without saying 'hello.'" Prone to "naked commands," and official reproofs, Gushko typically "[didn't] listen to what subordinates [said] to him" (65). This behavior, Vendrov explained, was strongly felt by the workers, who felt Gushko's lack of respect for them as well as their work.

Much better, the author suggested, was the behavior of Stepan Profir'evich Solov'ev, the director of the Moscow Hard Alloys Combine, the type of leader that could only appear in socialist society. As opposed to Gushko, as well as to capitalist managers who prioritized the bottom line over worker welfare, Stepan Profir'evich spent every morning walking around the factory floor and talking with the workers in a respectful way. While he clearly outranked them, he nonetheless paid close attention to their concerns:

> He mixes strictness and exactingness with a high level of culture, with an attentive relationship to people. When he enters the workshop, people come to him with the most various issues, from technical questions to family problems . . . Many a day Stepan Profir'evich Solov'ev manages to visit the workshop a few times. Isn't it surprising that he knows almost all the workers by first name and patronymic, that he knows many details of their personal lives . . . (50-1)

Although clearly outranking workers both formally as well as in life experience, we are told, Stepan Profir'evich truly cared about them as people, as expressed by his efforts to

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[178] See also, for instance, Kovaleva and Rabichev (1979).

learn their names and talk to them about personal issues. While some, speaking from the perspective of the Putin era, might disparagingly label this relationship paternalistic—and indeed Stepan Profir'evich does, like many other idealized leaders of Soviet society resemble a father figure,[179] for Vendrov, such leaders were "democratic" (62), as evidenced by their willingness to interact with their subordinates as well as consider their point of view. Further, this was a type of democracy seen to be fully compatible with socialism. Democratic leadership, in Vendrov's opinion, involved discussing decisions with members of the *kollektiv*, as well as interacting with them less formally via *obshchenie*. It also meant never exhibiting one's superiority over them and only giving orders after a thorough discussion, acting "not as if one is standing on the *kollektiv*, but rather, like a member of this *kollektiv*" (62). While this was a type of "democratic" relationship that ultimately placed responsibility on the senior party, it nonetheless involved relating to one's subordinates in a way that was respectful and lacked condescension.

This author was not alone in his concern for democratic leadership in the workplace. While official discourses in the Soviet Union had long proclaimed conceptions of socialist democracy built upon the equality of workers and management, in the social psychology of the 1960s-1980s we see an attempt to grapple with actually existing structures of power and privilege that belied officially stated principles. Work on the psychology of management, while published in official state journals, was generally quite critical of authoritarian stands in management and called attention to the need for a softer, kinder and less haughty approach to interacting with workers that took

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[179] See Brooks (2000), Bizyukov (1995), Clarke (2007), Rogers (2006), and The Samara Research Group (1995).

into account "the human factor."[180] While these authors often held firm to older ideas about the all-embracing focus of the leader, whose job it was to both educate and organize the masses, they also stressed the importance of attending to the subjectivity of subordinates. Such issues were also heavily discussed in the press. Where Stalin-era conceptions of the "New Man" who devoted all of his energy to the party left little room for human relationships (Bauer 1952; Clark 1981), social psychology in the Soviet Union, much like humans relations interventions in Britain and the United States, promoted a more humanitarian, warmer form of management style.[181]

However, socialist democracy—even socialist democracy with a human face— was not shy of admitting socialist influence. Where Anglo-American democracy, and with it neoliberalism, from Rose's point of view, requires a subject who is ostensibly "free," socialist democracy stressed the influence of powerful agents of society in forming a proper socialist subject with a proper socialist "democratic" ethos. One needed to be suitably formed by an authority figure in order to communicate in a more egalitarian way. This was a stress of the work of Anton Makarenko, a canonized figure of Stalinist pedagogy and inescapable reference point for theorists of the sociopsychological training. Best known for his work with educational colonies for delinquent youth designed to reshape personalities according to the values of socialist society (Makarenko 1951[1935]; 1953[1938]), Makarenko was a believer in the power of

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[180] For discussion of the discourse on "the human factor" during Perestroika, see Rawles (1996). Zweynert (2007) traces use of the concept among economists to progressive-minded economists of the mid-1960s (drawing connections with pre-revolutionary social philosophy), noting that it reached the state of official dogma in the 1980s.
[181] This is not to say, however, that tensions over a more "human" approach and a more authoritarian one were not felt in other areas of Soviet society at other places and times. For instance, Vera Dunham in her (1976) study of Soviet novels of the late 1950s and 1960s reveals significant conflicts between the perceived need to organize and control people and the need to inspire them with enthusiasm, attentiveness, and kind words.

the environment to shape personal change. For Makarenko, as Oushakine (2004) discusses, creating new socialist subjects required separating people from their pasts and placing them in new social conditions that would shape them in desired ways. The source of this influence had a number of components. On the one hand it required a *kollektiv* that would train those who were part of it in the habits and dispositions that were necessary for participating in other *kollektivy* in society. On the other hand, especially until these *kollektivy* were fully functioning, it required the heavy hand of the teacher, who should show respect for the members of the *kollektivy*, but at the same time take a directive approach that maintains discipline through "compulsion" (Makarenko, cited in Oushakine 2004:414). Further, the *kollektiv* itself also often took disciplinary action, in particular by requiring those who had trespassed its norms to become accountable for these transgressions in front of the group (Kharkhordin 1999). Far from an exchange of participants' innermost selves, fostering egalitarian behavior here involved directed shaping both by authority figures and by the *kollektiv* itself.

This provides us with a starting point for understanding how claims of partnership *obshchenie* and linguistic egalitarianism articulated with the traditions of Soviet socialism. Petrovskaia, the ardent defender of the "personality" approach to training methods, for example, for all her discussion of personality development, emotional communion, and mutual interaction, was similarly candid in her publications about using the training as a means of shaping and forming participants. Criticizing Western psychological approaches for insufficient attention to the role of social context in determining the personality and instead presenting a naive and bourgeois viewpoint that one "finds oneself" in trainings, she noted in the introduction to her 1982 monograph

on the socio-psychological training:

> What is most important is that what is being talked about in this case is a certain form of psychological influence in the process of intense *obshchenie* in a group context. The influence is directed towards increasing the psychological competency of participants in *obshchenie* (Petrovskaia 1982:3)

The training for Petrovskaia was above all an instrument of influence rather than freedom. If for Rogers, as Petrovskaia herself notes, trainings were merely a vehicle that allowed a natural process of self-realization to occur, here nothing is natural. Rather the training is specially designed to influence participants and instill in them socially acceptable values (such as an orientation to others rather than the self) in a manner akin to other state-sponsored attempts to shape individual Soviet citizens via the *kollektiv*. While the ultimate goal was producing people who were ready and willing to enter equal and open *obshchenie* with others, this would occur not by freeing them up but by using the group context to teach them to interact in this way. Making some mention of Makarenko, Petrovskaia made a particular effort to connect this approach to the work of a later Soviet pedagogical theorist, V. A. Sukholminskii, who, while still stressing the importance of collective influence, had a softer touch. This was exemplified by his assertion, quoted by Petrovskaia that: "To influence a person through the *kollektiv* you need to do so in a way that is subtle and undetectable" (Petrovskaia 1982:82).

Along with this, where American psychologists such as Rogers highlighted the importance of a methodology that facilitated "open" self-expression, Petrovskaia stressed the potentialities for the groups to diagnose the communication problems of their members via a process of "open" feedback. "The group," she wrote "is a whole system of mirrors that gives a generalization of one's full image" (1989:137). While equality

was important here in creating an atmosphere where all felt comfortable to comment, this was a kind of equality in which the weight of the group outweighed that of the individual, the "truth" of the individual was seen as social, and the group ultimately had the final word on social reality (Kharkhordin 1999). While these types of group perceptions were also of some importance in American T-groups (especially those of the "sensitivity" variety), in general American T-group theorists accorded more weight to what individuals had to say about themselves. In Petrovskaia's version of the training methodology, external perceptions were assumed to be more true than "internal" perceptions, which were likely mistaken. Accordingly, in her monographs Petrovskaia included numerous quotes from training participants who explained that the group feedback enabled them to reach a better understanding of themselves and their conversation problems. "The group lessons, more than anything gave me the opportunity to see myself from the outside, to reflect on the external picture of my behavior," noted one participant (1989:99).

In this vein, Petrovskaia recommended training exercises in which members were encouraged to describe others members of the group, suggesting that this would provide each participant with a greater understanding of how he or she "appeared in the eyes of others" in the process of *obshchenie*, and consequently a more "objective" understanding of his or her communication problems, as well as strengths (1989:86). Consider, for example, this exchange from the first meeting of a training group recorded in one of Petrovskaia's publications (Petrovskaia 1989). Whether or not it is a faithful transcription of an event that actually occurred, it gives a quite vivid picture of this emphasis on external viewpoints:

> *Leader.* Volodia, now we will give you our associations connected to
> our first impression of you.

> *Volodia.* Great, very interesting!
> *Ira.* He is like a newborn chick. Something about him is unexpected, surprising. He really looks at the world. It is like he only just appeared among us.
> *Leader.* And he reminds me of a recruit, but not so "military." His face is like that of a recruit, but something at the same time makes him more solid.
> *Liuba.* For me he calls up the image of a new commanding officer.
> *Ira.* Yes, something like that, new, not experienced.
> *Volodia.* And can I defend myself while this is going on?
> *Leader.* It's not worth it, here we don't justify ourselves to anyone. Drink it in. If you like it, that's great, if you don't, it's also not bad, if it's unexpected that's even better. Think about all this. After all, you need to deal with first impressions of yourself at work too—or when you go somewhere on a business trip. Should we continue? (185)

While Volodia clearly wants to intervene on his own behalf and express something about himself that he doesn't feel that the others are capturing, he is dissuaded from this by the training leader—presumably, Petrovskaia herself, who, noticeably, is taking quite a directive stance here to the course of events. As opposed to American training methods with their stress on self-knowledge, Volodia's viewpoint here is considered practically irrelevant, because what is at stake is a socially situated subjectivity as enacted in talk, rather than an internally located sense of self. Indeed, in Petrovskaia's monograph the excerpt continues for several more turns of talk, as several other training participants provide their own impressions of Volodia, and Volodia, having been instructed to stay silent, does so until he finally hears some feedback he likes. Still not overtly expressing an impression of himself, but apparently quite relieved, he exclaimed "Gosh! It's becoming a bit easier to breathe!" (185)

A similar, but perhaps harsher, emphasis on external influence was present in the Vorwergian tradition. Here socialist influence was portrayed as a heavily controlled process designed to break down individual conceptions and instill in their place more

"correct" ways of speaking and behaving that involved a more egalitarian stance towards others. Although the key lesson of the skill-based trainings conducted by Vorwerg's followers was learning to listen to others and understand their point of view, in practice the methodology involved creating a training environment in which participants would realize that their habitual ways of approaching communication, as well as their own opinions about themselves were incorrect. Participants were seen as needing help in realizing their own behavioral mistakes, as well as needing to break down their own firm opinions of themselves and their communication abilities. Sidorenko, reflecting in 2006, notes of the approach cynically, "The more actively a person insists that he 'doesn't have any problems in *obshchenie*,' the more quickly and decisively it is necessary to show him that they exist" (75). According to classic Vorwergian methodology, the main goal of a training was to induce a state of "labilization" (*labilizatsiia*) in the training participants, in which they would reconsider their former approaches and attitudes and reach a state of readiness for new instruction and influence.

To these ends, trainings in the Vorwergian tradition followed a set sequence. Before receiving instruction on how they were expected to communicate, participants were asked to participate in role plays and other exercises. This might, for example, involve guessing the "hidden motives" of another character being role-played or passing a message to another participant via a "telephone" like exercise. Participants were expected to "fail" at these tasks, and if all went as planned, these failures would be analyzed by the group in group discussion, often with the aid of a videotape of the participants' performances. Through such a process, participants should theoretically realize their failure, reconsider their former approaches and attitudes, and then reach a

state of labilized "waxy softness" (Sidorenko 2006:76), where they were open to new influences and prepared to learn new ways of communicating (Forverg and Al'berg 1984; Makshanov 1997; Sidorenko 2006). In such a way an inclination to partnership *obshchenie* would be induced via the rather forceful influence of trainer and training group.

Congruent, Perpendicular, *Vnye*?

To suggest that the Soviet training movement simply aligned with the stated goals of the state, official definitions of socialist democracy, and hegemonic traditions of pedagogical influence, however, would belie some of the complexity of the phenomenon and how it articulated with actually existing socialism. This was particularly evident to me when I spoke with some of the trainers and students who had been involved in these early trainings in Moscow and St. Petersburg in 2007. Although I did speak to some who were proud of training traditions that developed in the Soviet period, others were reluctant to speak about them, seemingly seeing these early attempts as irrelevant in a field in which presenting something "new" and different was now essential to making a profit and a living. People particularly were surprised that an American, someone coming from the country that was most identified as the source of most contemporary training methodologies, would be interested in these Soviet attempts. More than once I was told "I can't believe anyone in America would care about that."

But probably the most uncomfortable interactions occurred when I asked about articulations between early trainings and official ideology. These produced a range of complex responses. On the one hand, many of these psychologists, invested in a

universalistic psychology, seemed to see such questions as somewhat insulting, and stressed that trainings conducted in the Soviet period, just like trainings conducted in the present, addressed universal psychological processes that were true of people anywhere in the world. These people were keen to stress their use of Western (presumably "universal") conceptions and methodology, and one St. Petersburg trainer took issue to a question I asked about the influence of the conception of the "*kollektiv*" on trainings: "We never spoke about the *kollektiv* in St. Petersburg," she answered sharply, "we spoke about small groups," using terminology that recalled Lewin more than Makarenko. Some called attention to the necessity of writing something the state would find acceptable during the Soviet period, and thus discounted any parallels I found between older traditions in Soviet psychology and training methodology. There was also Galina Mikhailovna, the St. Petersburg trainer I mention in the introduction to this dissertation, who did not want to speak to me about these issues at all. She suggested that, despite my protests to the contrary, the Soviet history of trainings, as well as their relationship to ideology was simply "not interesting." She was generally tired of thinking about and conducting trainings and bitterly reflected upon the current economic need to supplement a paltry academic salary by constantly conducting trainings whether she felt like it or not.

While many of these responses seem related to these psychologists' own positioning in the Post-Soviet scholarly and professional field of psychology, combined with the fact that they were speaking to an American researcher, I would also suggest that they also point to something else, the difficulties in dividing Soviet practices into "official" and "unofficial" spheres and the shifting ideological significance of making these types of divisions during the Soviet period and after the Soviet Union had

collapsed. In *Everything was Forever, Until it was No More* (2006), Alexei Yurchak critiques dichotomous approaches to late socialism that view socialist citizens' practices and speech acts in terms of either supporting or resisting official norms, and highlights a variety of other possible alignments to official ideologies.[182] One might be engaged in the reproduction of official discourses as a means of enabling other types of practices, some of which aligned with official values and some of which did not. Or one might be alienated from the seemingly senseless rhetoric required by official speeches and nonetheless be invested in particular socialist ideals. Or one might not concern oneself especially with official ideology at all, investing one's time and energy in other, seemingly more meaningful pursuits, occupying a position he calls "*vnye*," simultaneously "inside and outside the system." (128). For these people "while the forms, acts, and rituals of authoritative discourse were immutably and ubiquitous, the constative meanings of these forms were irrelevant. . . Instead, they injected their lives with new meanings, forms of sociality, and relations. . . and making them something else, deterritorializing them" (130). While there were party activists and dissidents who did strongly align with or away from the state, such positions, Yurchak suggests, were unusual, and quite puzzling and disturbing to the vast majority of people.

Such a wide spectrum of positions was also evident in psychologists' Post-Soviet accounts of what it meant to engage in training methodologies in the late socialist period, made even more complex by the fact that they were reflecting on these in a very different set of political and economic circumstances. Not only had politics changed, but careers had changed, as some remained or became academics (now poorly remunerated), some embarked on more lucrative careers as consultants, independent commercial trainers, or

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[182] Also see criticisms of this dichotomous view by Gal (1995) and Humphrey (1994).

directors of training centers, and many were involved with some combination of these. In this vein, a colleague of Petrovskaia's in Moscow, speaking with me a year after she passed away in 2006, brushed away her references to Sukholminskii, suggesting that everyone had to write "what was required," and the general procedure was to write something, then "cross oneself and forget about it."[183] From his point of view, discussing "humanism" was a particularly brilliant move on Petrovskaia's part because it was something that could not only seem "socialist," but it was something that could be seen as being even truer of socialist society than capitalist society. However, at the same time he suggested training practices were neither aligned with the state nor not particularly opposed to it; rather they occupied a different dimension. Trainings and the official state sphere, he stressed, were "perpendicular" realms, putting one hand at a 90-degree angle to another to make his point. "They were absolutely not loaded ideologically," he explained, mentioning that the state neither particularly cared about trainings nor interfered. This made them an ideal area of research and practice from his point of view, because psychologists could be creative and do what they wanted, safely ignoring party pronouncements and Marxist-Leninist classics, with only a few references here and there in academic texts to show that they were playing along with the official rules of the game.[184]

Along these lines, some psychologists who participated in the Moscow trainings describe them (much like Masterov) as alternative realms that both existed in conjunction

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[183] See also Masterov (2009).

[184] Others similarly speak of the relatively apolitical nature of Soviet psychology, suggesting it was subject to less oversight than other social sciences such as sociology. Andreeva, who worked in the Sociology Department at MGU before joining Psychology, notes in a published interview much less "pressing" in Psychology (Pugacheva and Iarmoliuk 2002). For other accounts of the relative freedom in psychological departments and institutions see Samoilova and Iasiukova (2000) and Petrovskii (2000). All do note certain constraints, however, in the topics sanctioned for study and the occasional need to insert a Marxist quote.

with the ostensibly "official" structures of the university and at the same time provided a

pleasurable place for communicating with others that was seemingly *vnye* in Yurchak's

terminology. [185] They remember the trainings warmly as places of companionship and

communion, as well as places where new and different lessons about psychological

interaction were revealed. Part of this had to do with the *obshchenie* characteristic of

trainings, which often seemed to mirror registers more characteristic of the types of open,

honest communication shared by close friends than the regimented language of the state.

As such, participating in the trainings involved a peculiar combination of inside and

outside, of speaking in intimate ways in "public" contexts, and of the formation of a new

type of "private" groups characterized by open and honest communication that

nonetheless had a sort of "public" existence. [186] One former student of Petrovskaia's in a

paper presented at a conference held in Petrovskaia's honor, breathlessly recalled

trainings as an almost sacred space where important secrets and truths about human

nature were disclosed:

> And I, a third year student, sat in a circle in an embrace with a Maiak tape
> recorder, and with bated breath, watched, listened, absorbed, and felt in
> my skin, how slowly and not simply the secrets of Meeting and
> *Obshchenie* were unfolding. (Lushpaeva 2007)

Another described the trainings as a sort of secret society on a website devoted to

Petrovskaia's memory:

> We gathered in apartments or in the dorm. Probably it was something like
> a secret society, but energetic and joyful. Now, entering a training, people
> are trying to study something, to come to results that are in accordance
> with the expense. Then it had more of a relation to forming a way of life,

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[185] On a similar effect of business and related games at the same period see Rotkirch (1996).

[186] On issues of "public" and "private" speech in the region see Gal (2005) and Gal and Kligman (2000). This feeling that private speech has crossed into public speech is discussed by many of the psychologists in Cote (1998). Feelings of openness and community in the trainings are also discussed by many of the training participants quoted by Petrovskaia (1982; 1989).

a subculture, particular values. (Vospominanie 2007).

That these trainings could be described in published books and articles as reflecting

official modes of socialist influence did not preclude their participants from embracing

them as almost intimate spaces set apart from state and institutional constraints. It is

significant here that Petrovskaia herself in a 1999 article in an applied psychology

textbook (Petrovskaia 1999), would later call for a "psychological privatization" of

society akin to the privatization of socialist industry.   Rather than prioritizing behavior

that served state goals, it would celebrate *obshchenie* as an intimate, personal sphere

existing expressly outside the purview of the state.

Some, however, did not see trainings as just perpendicular to the state, but as more

sharply opposed to both official ideologies and standard practices in the Soviet Union.

Many suggested, implicitly or explicitly, that the ideas about partnership *obshchenie*

conveyed by trainings differed significantly from the usual ways of doing things in Soviet

society, which by contrast, were portrayed as hierarchical and intensely concerned with

status. In the tradition of dissident writers and others who attacked the power and

privilege of Soviet authorities, these people called attention to typical Soviet

communication styles that were domineering, authoritative, and judgmental. From this

point of view, trainings provided a model of communicative conduct that directly

opposed the actual way in which the state usually functioned: Trainings promoted non-

official values of true egalitarianism that departed both from tired official slogans about

socialist democracy and perceived realities of rigid hierarchy and inequality in actual

practice.

A good example of the hierarchical style these commentators saw as typical of

Soviet society is contained in psychiatrist Anatoli Dobrovich's somewhat fictionalized[187]

account of training sessions with shy journalists, *Glaza v Glaza* (1982). In one section,

issues of bureaucracy and hierarchical communication come to the fore when the trainer,

ostensibly Dobrovich himself, asks two members of the training group to role-play a

scene in which one person needed to request something from a high-ranking figure.

While the person requesting something is to try as hard as possible to obtain what he or

she wants, the high-ranking person is to try as hard as possible to refuse. With these

instructions in mind, two of the training participants, Andrei and Zoia, decide to act out a

scene in which a woman asked a bureaucrat to sign a document enabling her to enroll her

child in daycare. As the scene begins, the bureaucrat, played by Andrei, who has now

taken on a "self-conceited look" is speaking on the phone with a member of his staff,

played by the trainer:

> TRAINER. I am listening, Andrei Ivanovich.
> ANDREI. How long is my office going to be a mess?!
> TRAINER. I'm sorry, Andrei Ivanovich. Nastia the maid stopped
> working here, and there is still no one new in her place, you yourself know
> how hard it is to find. . .
> ANDREI (*interrupting*). I'm not interested in that!
> TRAINER. You're right. Now I'll ask Verochka, she'll clean it.
> ANDREI. "Verochka". . . Until you chew someone out, no one does
> anything! (36)

In this stereotyped interaction, as we see, the subordinate/trainer listens and responds to

the bureaucrat/Andrei's concerns, while the bureaucrat has no interest in hearing

explanations of why his demands are not being met. While the subordinate makes sure to

underline his respect for the bureaucrat by using his first name and patronymic twice in

the course of two lines, the bureaucrat does not do this in return—and indeed underlines

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[187] Although presented mainly as an account of an actual training group, Dobrovich notes at the end, for
example, that certain members of the training group as presented didn't actually exist and were composites
of others participants.

the importance of "chew[ing] someone out."

As the scene continues and Zoia, playing the woman with the daycare request, enters, there are a number of departures from usual protocol. While a continued asymmetry is evident, Zoia does her best to counteract this and act on a more equal level with the bureaucrat, a move that only makes the situation worse in the end. This stage begins when Zoia knocks, walks in, and sits down at a desk with no response from the bureaucrat, although etiquette in this situation would generally require being invited in. The bureaucrat/Andrei is not pleased and continues to become progressively annoyed as the scene continues:

> ANDREI (*offhandedly*). What's this?
> ZOIA (*extending the paper*). Here. Sign this. I am trying to put my child into daycare.
> ANDREI. Respected one [*uvazhaemaia*], my consultation hours for personal questions are on Monday, from 3 to 5.
> ZOIA. And I need this today. It's not the thing to be late, there won't be any places.
> ANDREI. It doesn't matter what you need. I'm busy. Why aren't you at work?
> ZOIA. I already explained. Are you a person or not? (36)

This accusation angers the bureaucrat, who eventually cries for coworkers to remove the "hooligan" from his office. Although Zoia refuses to leave—a comic scenario—the bureaucrat eventually leaves the office himself, leaving her without the desired signature despite her efforts. While this is clearly a transgression of usual protocol, it suggests a general expectation in which the bureaucrat would have had a high level of control over the situation. In the more usual situation the bureaucrat would have invited her into the office, hardly listened to her request, asked her to return on another day (when he might or might not have been available for actually listening to the request), and she would have left obediently with little opportunity to elaborate upon her request or express her feelings

about the matter. While such behavior, as Zoia indicates here, was critiqued by many as not being characteristic of a "person" (*chelovek*), a notion indexing more soulful humanity and an everyday, practical (rather than ideological) approach to matters of human decency (Pesmen 2000; Yurchak 2006), most Soviet training materials suggest implicitly or explicitly that this was the way that powerful people generally communicated with subordinates.

Along these lines Sidorenko's (2006) recollections of early trainings in the Vorwergian tradition suggests a wide array of felt slippages and disjunctures between the stated aims of these trainings to foster equality and typical Soviet communication practices based upon status display. Sidorenko dubs the early trainings "revolutionary" (24), contending that the model of partnership interaction they presented was "foreign" to Soviet citizens (23) and "intimidating" to the authoritarian state (24). Where the trainings proposed a type of "psychological equality" in which people should feel like they were equal to those with a higher social status, she suggests, this was "unnecessary" and even potentially "dangerous" in Soviet society, where one's superiors would implicitly (like Andrei's bureaucrat) not feel the same way (24). Indeed, she goes on to say, this type of psychological equality also came as quite as shock to high status individuals accustomed to special treatment all their lives, especially if they were advanced in years, who suddenly had to model equality in a training setting:

> And behold the head of a workshop in St. Petersburg's biggest factory or
> the senior technologist of another equally important plant or the director of
> a school was supposed to suddenly break through the status barrier that
> usually divided them from other people and end up undifferentiated from
> those that used to be nobody (to them). (24)

Ever the psychologist, Sidorenko suggests that for these people trainings meant such a

break with the normal deference that they expected based upon a lifetime of experience in hierarchical conditions, that trainings could become a "personal drama" that could potentially lead to an identity crisis (25). While some would fight the trainings or avoid them altogether, many would leave a five-day training session with the feeling that their experience and status was worthless: Having entirely lost faith in themselves, they nonetheless had to return to a world where these things were still important even less equipped to function than before.

In addition to this disjuncture between lived experienced and training content, Sidorenko also discusses a second set of disjunctures between the egalitarian lessons of the Leningrad trainings and the hierarchical manner in which they were ultimately conducted.[188] The trainings, she suggests, involved a fundamental "paradox of introducing partnership methods by non-partnership methods" (26). First, she suggests, forcing older, high status people to model psychological equality for the duration of the training was in itself a lesson in cruelty, which forced these people (who often had not participated in the trainings voluntarily) to take on and enact the trainers' ideas about equality with little room to opt out without looking ridiculous and embarrassing themselves. Even more fundamentally, however, the trainings, she suggests, were simply not organized to practice what they preached. Many of the training leaders, schooled in older traditions in Soviet pedagogy, prioritized the status of teachers over the contributions of students, often favoring dictating long lists of communication techniques over taking student observations into account: "It was better for the participants to fulfill the rules and follow the formulas in place of arguing, discussing contrary examples from one's own life, demonstrating something of one's own, etc."(18). Beyond this, however,

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[188] See similar dynamics in Lemon (2004). Also see Fournier (2007).

she suggests the Vorwergian methodology itself was fundamentally authoritarian. After several years of conducting trainings in this style, she says, she realized that setting up participants for failure as a means of "labilizing" them was a profound breach of trust and respect that destroyed equality more than it created it. From this point of view, trainings were often conducted in a way that matched the authoritarianism and hierarchicalism typical of Soviet state practices even as they introduced practices that theoretically countered them.

An even more complex alignment is suggested by the story of Ekaterina Rakhova,[189] a well-known trainer and specialist in psychodramatic psychotherapy that I interviewed in Moscow in 2007. Over a smoke in the courtyard of a building where she was still conducting trainings, Rakhova, an engaging and vibrant older trainer, discussed her own experiences conducting trainings in the Soviet period with considerable enthusiasm. Having been introduced to training methods in the mid-1970s through a program on the "International Work *Kollektiv*" that united participants throughout the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, by 1981 she was conducting trainings at the Academy of National Economy (*Akademiia Narodnogo Khoziastva*) in Moscow. An interbranch training program that included a two year program for promoting Soviet managers (Bessinger 1988) the academy was the elite management school of the Soviet Union. Founded in 1977, the program groomed people that already had very high level posts for even more prestigious leadership positions in industry and various governmental organs. Starting in 1981, Rakhova, along with a colleague, was employed by the Academy to conduct a large number of training hours with the Academy's students on topics such as business communication, influence in the workplace and presentation skills, using a

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[189] A pseudonym.

methodology that generally combined role playing with detailed transactional analysis of the shifting hierarchical relationships between participants (see more on this methodology below) as captured on videotape. Rakhova said she easily conducted over 300 hours of training with the students each year, an unprecedented opportunity that she could never have in the current market environment.

For Rakhova, trainings represented a kind of freedom for both herself and her students that was at the same time supported by what for her was the opposite of freedom: bureaucracy and hierarchy. The academy itself, Rakhova stressed, was an intensely bureaucratic environment, an elite institution where the intricacies of power were always palpable. Yet at the same time she discussed her time at the academy exuberantly, stressing that this was the freest time of her life: She was given the chance to be creative, to experiment, to do whatever she wanted in the trainings she conducted, as well as use the academy's expensive video equipment. "Within a bureaucratic organization," she explained, "we were free." The reason for this, she stressed, was a paradox that had everything to do with the realities of hierarchy in late socialism: Her students were more important than her own supervisors. They "were people who had power and influence on people," and as such, her supervisors knew that the students could easily remove instructors or demand fewer hours of certain subjects and more of others. And as it turned out, Rakhova explained, these important students of hers really enjoyed the trainings she conducted with them—in a way she also separated from their bureaucratic status. "They were *nomenklatura*," she said, "but they were also people for whom something was interesting." Because her important students took such joy in the trainings, Rakhova and her partner experienced an almost unimaginable lack of

regulation and oversight, constructing their own programs and methodologies with little or no restrictions from university supervisors.

However, despite the fact that this training program was supported by the intricacies of Soviet hierarchy, from Rakhova's point of view, the training themselves not only departed from official values and provided an alternative space for self-exploration, they also presented a vision that was in many ways oppositional. Although the focus of her trainings was ostensibly business communication, Rakhova saw another even more important aim in them. They opened up the "internal world" of the participants in a way that transgressed the official values that elevated the *kollektiv* over the individual:

> In some sense [the trainings] had a psychotherapeutic function, they opened one up. That is, they suggested that there is individuality, there is in general an internal world, and business. . .for [the participants] business trainings were more colored by the lichnost'. They became conscious of themselves somehow. Because we lived in a country where people were not conscious of themselves, if it is understandable what that means. They revealed that it turns out there are needs, individual ones, that in general another person exists, and its necessary to consider his world if you want to have influence.

To even present a vision of interiority, Rakhova suggested, was radical in communally oriented Soviet society. Her explanation here seems to draw on two related threads of opposition. On the one hand, the trainings admitted "individual needs," along with individuality more generally, as opposed to official discourses (such as those surrounding the creation of the New Man) that stated that all Soviet citizens should bypass individual desires to achieve socially oriented goals. On the other hand they also suggested that "another person exists," an attitude that seemingly opposed not just ideologies of socially oriented goals, but also the types of everyday practices of hierarchical interactions that left little room for recognizing the humanity of others.

Yet still more subversive in Rakhova's opinion, was her trainings' stress on partnership principles. Not only did she hold, like Sidorenko, that models of partnership communication presented in trainings broke with the everyday hierarchies of Soviet life, but she (somewhat more optimistically viewing her trainings as thoroughly imbued with partnership principles both in theory and practice) suggested that on the level of "technique" (*tekhnika*) these trainings relayed a clear, anti-state political message:

> To some sort of extent these trainings carried in themselves a culture of partnership, what we would call now a "negotiation culture," which, from my point of view, is the foundation of democracy.[190] That is, it is so strange to me, we in some sort of sense fulfilled this ideological function, these, you could even say Western ideas, democracy, Western democracy. . . only on a very practical level. On the level of philosophy, on the level that it manifested, in the real interactions between people.

From this point of view trainings, far before Perestroika and the transition, introduced not only new types of psychological interiority, but also fundamental principles of Western democracy that did not exist in any meaningful way in a Soviet socialist form. To encourage a communicative approach in which both sides strove to understand and respect each other, Rakhova suggested, was a direct counter to principles of authoritarian leadership central to the Soviet state, and undermined them on the level of practice, if not in an overt form that would have overtly contradicted socialist values and raised alarm. Yet, paradoxically these efforts not only took place within a prominent state institution, but were supported by the same everyday realities of power, pressure, and hierarchical relationships that she sought to mitigate through her trainings.

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[190] Relevant here is Rakhova's discussion of negotiation culture in a published round table. Here she speaks about negotiations as an important type of horizontal communication that is based upon contract-like clarity between the two sides involved. She contrasts this to what she sees as typical Russian approaches inherited from the Soviet period in which each side attempts to press upon the other and makes little attempt to understand the other side's point of view.

Exam: A Game of Equality and Obligation

Trainers who advocated partnership *obshchenie* were not naive about the power

relations existing in Soviet society and in some cases addressed these directly in training

exercises, while also suggesting the importance of attaining "psychological equality." A

prime example of the ways in which these concerns interacted is provided by "Exam," a

role-playing game that academic psychologist Iurii Zhukov discussed and analyzed in

methodology manuals in the late eighties and early nineties (Zhukov 1988; 1991).[191] The

game apparently had earlier roots and was credited to an instructor at the Moscow

Institute for Radiotechnology, Electronics, and Automatics. It, according to Zhukov was

widely used in a number of settings, including the Institute's course on "The Foundations

of Organizational and Educational Work of the Engineer in the Work *Kollektiv*," separate

trainings for professionals and managers, and continuing education courses for

instructors. The game, Zhukov suggested, might be used diagnostically to call attention

to existing communication "problems" or as a way of deepening participants'

understanding of communication processes either in the middle or at the end of a general

training on communication skills. It would generally be acted out by particular members

of the training groups while others watched and analyzed,[192] sometimes in front of video

cameras to aid the analysis.

The game involves four main characters: a student in the second year of an

electronics institute and three physics instructors (an assistant, a lecturer, and the head of

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[191] I rely mainly here on the more full 1988 version here.

[192] He does also suggest a "team" version, in which teams of 3 to 5 people decided how each character in the scenario should act.

the Physics Department.[193]). The student has always done well in the institute, but

recently failed his exam in Hard Body Physics (administered by the assistant) despite the

fact that he attended all of the lectures and did all of his homework. As was standard, he

was given a second exam (this time by the lecturer), which he also failed. The exams

were oral, as was the usual case in Soviet institutes, and both the assistant and the

instructor, as also often occurred, tried their best to help the student answer correctly.

However, he demonstrated a complete lack of ability in the subject despite their best

efforts. Now it is time for a third exam to be administered by all three physics

instructors, which according to the rules of the school, will be final. The action of the

game occurs in the office of the department head in the time surrounding the exam.

As characterized by Zhukov, the game "model[ed] a difficult communicative

situation with a conflict of goals" (1988:54). To these ends, he described how all of the

characters have different goals in relationship to the situation at hand as well as different

degrees of knowledge about the situation. (To model this, each player was given separate

instructions, describing the situation from their character's point of view.) Although this

description of the situation in terms of personal goals might seem to suggest a stress on

internal motivations, akin to intentional states, the main conflict of the scenario is firmly

grounded in the positionality of the student and his instructors in larger institutional and

societal hierarchies. The key factor here is that the student's parents are important

electronics specialists with very prominent positions in the electronics industry, and,

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[193] In the Soviet system, most members of academic departments were at the level of *dotsent*, which generally refers to a faculty member who has completed the first level of graduate work, the *kandidat* degree. The character I am describing here as a "lecturer" is technically a *dotsent*. A minority of faculty members went on to obtain the more prestigious *doktor* degree, a necessarily qualification to be named a "professor," which is the rank of the department head. In addition, the system differentiated between a general department (such as the Department of Psychology), and a sub-department (such as the Department of Social Psychology) of *kafedra*. This department head is the head of a *kafedra*.

further, the president of the institute used to work for the student's father. The department head is very aware of this and has already received a call from the institute president stressing the need to give him a passing grade. The other instructors are somewhat less informed, and while well-disposed to the student, the lecturer (who is somewhat aware of the student's parents) thinks that it might be a good idea to teach such a well-off, pampered student a lesson. Meanwhile, the student also feels the pressure of his prominent parents, who want him to follow them into the electronics industry, and, unbeknownst to all, has been failing the exams intentionally—and plans to do so again—in order to fail out of the institute and embark on a new career in the area he really wants to study, medicine.

Resolving this tangled net of concerns is said to involve attention to the various techniques generally identified with partnership *obshchenie*. In general, Zhukov advocates that individuals should interact in an open manner in which they share their intentions and points of view, although he cautions that this should be a limited openness, not a "spiritual striptease" (15). In conjunction with this, the observers are asked to pay attention to related aspects of the performers' communication styles. Of particular importance here are the performers' use of active listening techniques, including nodding and saying "aha," paraphrasing what others have said, and asking clarifying questions, as well as things they might do that would not indicate active listening, such as interrupting their conversation partners. They are also asked to pay attention to who seemed to be the "leader" of the conversation (according to factors such as speaking more than others and succeeding in achieving personal goals) although ideally, no one person would be a conversation leader. They were also urged to observe how those involved in the game

distributed the responsibility for the conversation and whether there was someone in the game who seemed to push this responsibility onto other people. The observers are ultimately to determine the root causes for the success and the failure of the participants, although the posited reason for success and failure is already contained in a question that the trainer is to address to them: "Was everything done in order to clarify the situation, achieve mutual understanding?" (59).

Along with this, observers were to analyze the events that proceeded via transactional analysis, a technique that some of the Soviet psychologists, like some trainers in Anglo-American contexts (Cameron 2000a; Leidner 1993), used to analyze the extent to which dyadic pairs interacted in a partnership manner.[194] Inspired by the work of Canadian psychiatrist Eric Berne (often in Soviet versions, in conjunction with the work of Russian theater and pedagogical theorist P.M. Ershov), transactional analysis generally suggests that people can occupy one of three psychological states: a "child" or dependent state, an "adult" state that is focused on the here and now, and a "parent" or authoritative state. Transactional analysis looks at the "transactions" that occur as a person in one state interacts with a person in another state, for example as a person in a "child" state interacts with a person in an "adult" state. In general transactional analysis suggests that communication works best (is smoothest and least conflictual) when these states are "complementary," which happens either when a "parent" interacts with a "child" or when the states are the same.[195] Following along with the ideals of partnership *obshchenie*, Zhukov suggests that communication is particularly effective when people at work interact on an adult-adult level, which he equates with an "open," partnership

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[194] In addition to work authored or co-authored by Zhukov (1981; 1991; 1989), see Lopukhina and Lopatin (1986). For a similar approach based on Russian theatrical traditions see Egides (1999) and Eshov (1997).
[195] See Berne (1961; 1964).

approach. (However, he allows that other combinations of ego states along with a more "closed" approach may facilitate certain interactions.[196])

Zhukov's analysis of the game and the way it plays out acknowledges the power of social ties and hierarchy while at the same time advocating that these be surmounted by open and equal communication. The difficulty of the game, he writes, putting power relations into a psychological vocabulary, is that all of the main characters are psychologically "dependent" on one another: the child on the parents, the department head on the president (and in turn on the parents), the lower-level instructors on the department head. While this could theoretically be bridged by "open" communication, what usually happens is that the characters never lose this dependence, particularly because the performers, despite having already learned various partnership techniques, neither try to understand others nor reveal their own positions. While the department head generally calls a meeting with the other instructors and tries to learn about their awareness of the situation, he then tries to convince them of the importance of passing the student, never letting them know his own reasons for doing this. The other instructors generally follow his lead and authority, calling the student in for the exam, never giving him a chance to explain his own motives, and giving him a good grade despite his attempts to fail. Everyone's point of view "remains closed" (61) and all of the characters use their positionality to manipulate others:

> The student through deception manipulates the feelings of his parents, his parents, using their old ties, manipulate the President, the President—the Department Head. The Department Head—his coworkers, and the cohort of instructors—the student. A closed circle! All participants only deepen

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[196] He reserves a place for "light" child-child communication in the workplace, as well as more authoritative "parent-child" communication in cases where one person is clearly more competent than the other, such as with a doctor and patient. "Closed" communication, he notes, might also be acceptable in the later case, as well as during a conflict.

their own problems, having strengthened their infantile dependency. (61)

While put in the psychological language of "infantile dependency," this at the same time

draws attention to ties and hierarchies with a socio-structural basis. It is precisely

because of the prominence of the student's parents, as well as the hierarchical ties

between the other characters, that this situation is even viewed as an important one to

consider in the first place.

A better strategy, according to Zhukov, involves a psychological effort to leave

these dependent positions behind via an "open" approach based upon "cooperative

interaction" (55). However, even in this case, the prominence of the parents continues to

be an issue. In the best case scenario, he tells us, the department head would speak

openly with his staff about the president's request to give the student a good grade, which

would help the staff more effectively search for a solution. Then, ideally, they would

decide to have one of the instructors talk with the student before the exam and attempt to

understand his side of the story. Here in particular, Zhukov explains, cooperative

discussion and listening techniques are important, from "establishing contact," to "the

ability to listen to another and readiness to share responsibility for the course of the talk"

(62). Although there is a temptation to speak to the student via a one-sided conversation

in which the instructor acts like a parent and the student a child, and this might

sometimes be successful, in the best case scenario they would meet on a more equal

level:

> The results of the meeting are more productive if both participants
> establish a relationship of the Adult-Adult type and realize this via an open
> strategy. An exchange of points of view (not only of information but also
> of relationships to the situation) creates a precondition for the search for a
> constructive solution. (63)

With enough openness at this point, we are told, the players might be spurred into even more types of "open" action. The student could openly confront his parents with his desire to pursue medicine, while the department head could openly inform the president that, because his request for a good grade for the student was based on incorrect information, it could not be fulfilled. Indeed, the department head might even ask the president to openly exert some influence on the student's parents to encourage them to support him in entering medicine.

Yet, we might note, even in this scenario, the ties of personal obligation and hierarchy remain. There has only been momentary clarity of positions. And even the creation of this momentary clarity is laid mainly on the shoulders of the department head, who first decides to speak openly with his staff, and then decides to pay attention to the student's point of view. While switching to an open, partnership style of communicating is at times presented as a mutual process that involves all parties in the conversation, nonetheless here we see that in the end the responsibility for making the switch lies upon one of the characters with the highest status in the scenario. Zhukov here seems to be alternating here between a model of communication that is heavily tied to status and one that ostensibly can break through status barriers. At the same time, he does not, like many of the American theorists of T-group technology, suggests that these moments of openness can lead to larger organizational transformations, but merely highlights small moments where this type of strategy might be able to make a momentary shift in widespread practices of hierarchical, top-down communication.

Conclusion: Perestroika, Glasnost, and the Politics of Discussion

Similar claims about the importance of openness, discussion, and respect for other points of views—as well as claims about the lack of all these things in everyday practice— permeated political discourses of Glasnost and Perestroika in the 1980s (Melville and Lapidus 1990). If for some what was at issue was the opening up and expression of issues, information, and histories that had not been previously admitted into official discourse, many others called attention to the egalitarian communicative processes through which this was supposed to occur. Here, as in the discourse on training methodology, there was a stress on the importance of open discussion in which everyone, regardless of rank, expressed a point of view and tried to understand the points of view of others, as well as criticism of the lack of this sort of approach in everyday practice marked by hierarchy and bureaucratism. It is a vivid example of how definitions and debates regarding the nature of political systems are often intertwined with particular conceptions and ideologies of communicative interaction (Bate 2004).

For Gorbachev, speaking at the 19th All-Union Conference of the Communist party, Perestroika involved a return to true "democratic centralism" as opposed to the "bureaucratic centralism" that he said had for many years stood in place of it. He described a movement towards greater openness and discussion as a return to true Leninist principles of socialist democracy. While the Party, he said, had been built by Lenin along related principles of "free discussion" and "joint action," over time the more bureaucratic approach predominated in which principles of equality among Communists were ignored and interactions involved instead simply "orders and their execution" (Gorbachev 1988:76). The return to democratic centralism, he suggested, required not

only "openness," but also "discussion," along with a number of other factors such as principle and discipline. He described Glasnost' as a particularly vibrant sort of discussion. It, he said, "presupposes a plurality of opinions on all questions of home and international policy, a free play of different points of view, and discussion" (89). Gorbachev heralded an atmosphere in which everyone could express their point of view and opposed it to one ruled by dogma in which the state held a monopoly over opinion, and people were criticized for their views with no opportunity to respond.

Meanwhile, during this period, a number of commentators in the press critiqued Soviet abilities to conduct discussions and dialogues, suggesting that for many years discussion had been discouraged. To express a point of view, discuss it with others, and pay attention to what one's opponent had to say was said to be a skill that Soviet citizens lacked. For instance, one Soviet television commentator speaking in 1987 noted simply "It turns out we are not very good at discussion. And that is not surprising, because for many years discussion has not been encouraged." He continued on by suggesting that certain recently broadcast political interviews, along with recent broadcasts of the American television show *Donahue* involving Soviet citizens were important, because they taught the skills necessary to conduct a discussion: "They graphically confirmed how important it is to learn how to debate and argue one's point of view, while at the same time hearing out one's opponent" (Melville and Lapidus 1990:32). In a similar fashion, a politician interviewed on the reforms suggested that learning democracy involved not only learning to vote, but also learning to tolerate opposing views, especially in the context of discussion and debate. "People on both sides of our debates still want to prove that their opponent has dirty underwear," he noted, calling attention to

a widespread tendency to dominate rather than to act in a more equal plane. "The problem is,' he continued, "we just aren't used to normal debate" (Cohen and Heuvel 1989:211) Others criticized Glasnost for not having gone far enough, suggesting that their own attempts at openness were often met by criticism and insult rather than mutual understanding.[197]

Such discussions about discussion also interpenetrated discourses about economic restructuring. In a prominent book review of Aleksandr Bek's long repressed novel "The New Appointment" (*Novoe naznachenie*), which was published in 1987, for example, future Moscow mayor and economics scholar Gavriil Popov (1987) criticized the existing "administrative system" for fostering a closed communication style.[198] Based on the depicted experiences of the book's hero Onisimov, a high-ranking executive and minister who rose through the ranks of the system under Stalin, Popov in a way not unlike the later criticisms of Western management specialists, indicted what he viewed as the Soviet system's characteristic style of centralized decision-making and unquestioning execution of official directives with little room for discussion or argument. Onisimov, from Popov's point of view, was an ideal executive of the administrative system who was devoted to his duty and made sure that every little detail was fulfilled properly. Yet such a style, Popov suggested, was completely inadequate for the challenges of restructuring ahead, precisely because Onisimov's entire mode of operating (including the way in which he communicated) left little room for the necessary creativity and innovation. A "little screw" of the administrative system (59), the high-powered figure did little more than fulfill orders from above and made sure that his subordinates did the same. The

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[197] Such comments appear in a number of the press accounts in Melville and Lapidus (1990), as well as in some of the letters to the editor of *Ogonek* reprinted in Cerf and Albee (1990).

[198] On discussions of this article, see Lukin (2000).

inadequacy of this, from Popov's point of view, was particularly depicted in a scene where Stalin was arguing with another official in a conversation conducted in Georgian in Onisimov's presence. Although Onisimov did not understand Georgian (and Stalin knew this), he was compelled by Stalin as well as his own duty to the system to profess full agreement with Stalin's side of the argument. Meanwhile, Onisimov's own thoughts, as well as any of his more "human" emotional ties and impulses remained repressed. Summarizing, Popov notes: "We will not hear once, and more importantly, not feel once, what Onisimov thinks about people. He fulfills the directives and orders of the top and the boss with an unconscious striving not to argue, so that he does not end up in a situation of contradiction" (58). Perestroika, Popov stressed, required people who were more open about expressing feelings and points of view, as well as a system that did not encourage this kind of closed behavior.

In this broader discourse, egalitarian discussions in which people could express views and others listened to them stood for a new type of democratic process that was supposed to be compatible with a new type of socialism. Meanwhile, I've suggested, late socialist trainings in similar types of communication interfaced with socialism and the socialist state in a variety of different ways that cannot be so easily identified with democracy, whether of a socialist or capitalist variety. Whether these trainings were perceived as a realm perpendicular to the state, a collectivist means of inculcating official values of socialist democracy, or as radical critiques of existing patterns of bureaucratic discourse, they interfaced with the realities and ideologies of the state in a variety of ways that cannot be captured by approaches that make simple equations between "open" speech and democratic politics or neoliberal transformations.

PART III: MORALITIES OF MARKET INTERACTION

Chapter 5

Mannered Markets: Cultivating Secretarial *Imidzh*

The training that started off the program at Fokus secretarial school in 2004 not only shared rules with the trainings of the 1970s and 1980s but also shared much else as well. Similar to Petrovskaia's by now classic trainings, much of the two day training seemed designed to harness the power of the group process to provide the exclusively female participants with external perceptions of how they came across to others. In the first exercise of this type, the psychologist, who introduced herself to the group with her first name, Nadia, split the group into two and gave each subgroup an assortment of cards, each of which was blocked out in a single color such as green, yellow or white. While, as of this time, the students had hardly interacted at all beyond initial introductions, each group was advised to carefully study the members of the other group, consider the character of each person, and based upon this, decide which colors these people would likely choose for themselves. In another exercise, identical to one posed by Petrovskaia, Nadia directed a single member of the group to rank all of the other according to a singular (and slightly odd sounding) personality characteristic, such as the extent to which they were "fluffy" (*pushistyi*) or "sharp" (*ostryi*), by physically moving the bodies of the other students into a ranked line. A third exercise involved an inversion of this technique: One student sat on a chair in front of the other students and stayed

silent while everyone else discussed her personality traits. A young woman wearing snug tweed pants and a sweater with her brown hair tied back in a ponytail, for instance, was quickly dubbed "confident" and "talkative," as well as "calm," "ethical," "serious," and "nice."

Yet, while Nadia was interested in fostering a comfortable atmosphere in the group and suggested that these activities would help bring the students closer together, she was less interested in fostering the habits of egalitarian partnership *obshchenie* than in providing the students with a tool that would help them get ahead in a harsh and sometimes wild job market that was anything but egalitarian. While the first impression was often an "emotional" and "subjective" one, and it wasn't always accurate, she told the students, it was something that was very important and must be attended to if one wanted to get a job and achieve success at work. It was particularly important for secretaries, whom, as the group later discussed, were subject to a whole host of negative stereotypes, including that of being a "*sekretutka*," midway between an administrative helper and a prostitute (*prostitutka*). To these ends, Nadia recommended that the students be aware of and pay attention to multiple aspects of the self and how it came across to others, from the expressions on their faces and the intonation and timbre of their voices to the openness of their poses and the appropriateness of their clothing, makeup, and hairstyles.

The primary lesson of these trainings was the importance of *imidzh* (image), a central post-Soviet preoccupation. In the training, as in the secretarial courses as a whole, image, and with it, new modes of self-confident, carefully calculated self-presentation said to differ markedly from Soviet communication styles, appeared the

primary mechanism through which these aspiring secretaries could achieve individual goals in a sometimes treacherous market environment. Combining several different streams of thought, from globally circulating discourses on goal-oriented behavior to various brands of local and imported psychology to deep-rooted but ever-changing Russian and Soviet ideals about gender and culturedness, talk about image was far more ambivalently related to ideals of equality than Soviet social psychologists' ideals of partnership *obshchenie* (which also continued to be promoted by some in post-Soviet Petersburg.) On the one hand, it seemed to suggest that everyone had an equal chance of success if they only put enough effort into their appearance and manner. On the other hand, it was not naïve about the inequalities that existed in the post-Soviet labor market and advocated types of self-presentation that often in themselves meant embracing and enacting existing models of inequality, along with the stratified logics of market consumption. While this was seen to be necessary for all Russians in the new market economy subject to the expectations and standards of global commerce, many felt it was especially important for women in general and secretaries in particular. By anticipating the expectations of unknown people and shaping one's self-presentation accordingly, women could theoretically transverse the barriers presented by a highly gendered market milieu, where secretarial work was both an opportunity for success and a deeply problematic site of stereotype and submission.

In this chapter I examine this metadiscourse on image in the context of the courses at Fokus secretarial school, exploring how it combined an embrace of ideal-typical liberalism with a seemingly non-liberal stress on shaping oneself to serve the needs of others. I am particularly concerned with tracing image not only as a tool for achieving

individual success, but as a broader response to the realities of the post-Soviet market economy. I view the discourse on image not simply as a frivolous discussion about hair and makeup, but as a profoundly moral stance on Post-Soviet marketization. While talk about image could be critical of certain types of behavior prevalent in the Post-Soviet market environment, it at the same time was not critical of all types of market activity and often aimed to establish aesthetic, moral, and cultural standards for gendered market interactions. In so doing, it gave suspect market interactions a moral foundation, normalizing regimes of inequality that had shifted substantially since the late socialist era.

The Face (and Legs) of the Firm

The popular seventies Soviet comedy *Sluzhebnyi roman* (Office Romance), showcases a female boss who is the director of a statistics institute (Riazanov 1977). Liudmila Prokopievna wears heavy, mannish brown suits, slicked back short brown hair, and large black clunky glasses, and speaks in gruff, commanding tones. She is clearly meant to be seen as overly masculinized, and when a terrified male subordinate begins to woo her as a way of getting a higher position, it is evident that the idea of her receiving male attention is meant to be absurd. The joke, however eventually turns into reality, particularly after she undergoes a thorough makeover. The key character in Liudmila Prokopievna's transformation is her secretary, a woman who is perhaps too concerned with appearance for a Soviet civil servant, but possesses the requisite skill to school her boss in the ways of femininity. She demonstrates a light breezy walk said to separate a "woman" (*zhenshchina*) from a "business woman" (*delovaia zhenshchina*), advising her

boss to move slowly and calmly, "from the hips." Ludmila Prokopievna soon not only masters the womanly walk, but also learns to fluff her hair, pluck her brows, wear a patterned dress, and apply make-up, and, upon returning to the office, floats joyfully from room to room with a pleasant, smiling expression on her face. Correspondingly, although there are several misunderstandings along the way, by the end of the film Liudmila Prokopievna and her subordinate have fallen in love. The two marry, and, as the parting words on the screen tell us, have a child nine months later. Ludmila Prokopievna, we are led to believe, has finally grasped her essential feminine nature that in her leadership position she had denied for so long.[199]

This film can be read as a response to earlier Soviet official discourses about the equality of men and women and the ability of both to equally be engineers, tractor-drivers, and cosmonauts (Barsukova 2001). The new Soviet woman had been invested with different degrees of femininity over the years, but she was always a strong, capable figure ready to devote herself to working for the state.[200] By the seventies, however, the model, satirically represented in *Sluzhebnyi roman* by pre-transformation Ludmila Prokopievna, was severely under question. Seventies films, pronatalist policies and educational theorists all paid close attention to issues of gender difference, promoting woman's rightful role in the realm of home and family.[201] Such concerns only deepened in the 1980s and 1990s with the transformations of Perestroika and efforts to create a market economy. To want or have a career was often portrayed as being contradictory to true womanhood in general, at the same time as the heroes of the emerging private sector

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[199] See Kalinina (2000) for a discussion of the film and the social type it is evoking from the perspective of a Russian organization that encourages women to embrace their femininity as a way of securing leadership positions in society.

[200] On the new Soviet woman, see Attwood (1990; 1993; 1999) and Clements (1985).

[201] See Attwood (1990; 1993) and Bridger et al. (1996).

were overwhelmingly described as male.[202] To be a "woman" in this sense was seen as something quite different from being a businessperson, and at the very least, many suggested, women had to choose between them.[203]

Many scholarly commentators in the early 1990s worried that between the valorizing of essentialist gender ideologies and the increasing material inequalities that accompanied the coming of the market, women would be pushed out of the workforce altogether (e.g. Posadskaya 1994). While it turned out that many of these worries were overblown,[204] in Russia, as in other postsocialist countries, ideologies about gender have nonetheless been highly intertwined with transformations in the labor market, structuring larger and widespread processes of social stratification (Gal and Kligman 2000). Although women have been working, they have been less likely to occupy managerial positions than men and more likely to occupy lower-paying and less prestigious public sector jobs as teachers and health care workers.[205] Those who have focused primarily on media representations have pointed to related symbolic exclusions of professional women in advertising, television, and print media. Especially in the realm of lucrative, private business, these scholars have argued, women have not usually been seen as central actors, but have been provided only subsidiary roles as figures such as housewives, mistresses, prostitutes, and secretaries.[206] Private business, they suggest, is gendered a particularly male realm to be undertaken by ambitious, risk-seeking young men unrestrained by

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[202] See Bridger, et al.(1996) Voronina (1994), and Yurchek (2002).
[203] E.g. Andreev (2004).
[204] Ashwin (2006) reports statistics from 1992 and 2002 that show that unemployment rates were actually higher for men than women, suggesting that "since 1992 women have never been the primary victims of unemployment" (2). See also Ashwin and Bowers (1997).
[205] See Ashwin (2006).
[206] See, for example, Lipovskaya(1994), Sperling (2000), Zdravomyslova (1996). See also Barsukova (2001), who argues that although there was a distinct 90s image of the woman-entrepreneur, this was inaccessible and undesirable to most. A more accessible dream for most women, she suggests, was to be a wife of a New Russian.

children or family.

In this context, the figure of the secretary represents women's pernicious place in the post-Soviet private business sphere. The profession has been attractive to many women who have wanted to enter the lucrative private sector, often after having lost other types of jobs. Yet it often seemed to come with a catch. While secretarial work was long the special providence of women in the Soviet Union (and as we saw in *Sluzhebnyi roman*, sometimes carried particularly feminine connotations) in conjunction with the 1990s emphasis on women's sexuality in general, the career became highly sexualized in the popular imagination. In popular representations, the secretary was a very young blond with long legs and a tiny skirt, who was inevitably having an affair with the boss.[207] As one late nineties business magazine described her:

> The businessman divides his time among conferences, business meetings, and trips. And who is this long-legged, silk-flapping, and mist-scented creature next to him? It's clearly not his bodyguard and, needless to say, not his wife. It's his secretary. . . For the secretary the reception room and the master's office constitute a little world where most of the professional and personal time is spent. Here the boss reveals his secrets. Here, on leather sofas and polished desks, the boss and his assistant get to know each other.[208]

An office version of the wife, the secretary was represented as both sexual companion and personal assistant, whose work constituted sexual services as much as it did typing and serving coffee. Nineties job advertisements often proclaimed that secretaries needed to be attractive women "without complexes" (*bez kompleksov*), that is, without sexual hang-ups that might stop them from sleeping with the boss, while jokes often circled

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[207] On stereotypes of secretaries current in St. Petersburg in the late 1990s, see Chepurnaia (1999).

[208] From *Kar'era*, 1998, no. 6, Viktor Gavrikov, "Brak s Bisznessmenom: Priiatnoe s poleznym." Cited in Yurchak (2003), p. 82.

around office affairs.[209] A joke published in *Trud* (once the official vehicle of Soviet labor unions) for instance, presented having a secretary who was also a mistress as a matter of course for New Russians:

> A new Russian invited his mistress-secretary (*liubovnitsy-sekretarshu*) to a restaurant in the suburbs.
> -"What will you order?" he asked, looking at the menu
> -"Order an ambulance" she whispered. "There comes my husband!"
> (Mironov 1999)

At the same time, concerned commentators worried about the risk of sexual harassment for women who worked as secretaries in a country with little precedent of taking such cases to court. If, as one late nineties article reported, for one-third of Russian companies, inviting female coworkers to bed was the norm, secretaries were said to be a group particularly at risk.[210]

By the time I enrolled as a student at Fokus in 2003, most people I met there suggested that the situation had improved in recent years. Now, they said, many bosses were more interested in professional competencies than sexiness and understood that to find a true "professional" they needed to look beyond appearance. However, sexual stereotypes of the profession were well known, and the appearance and manner of the secretary, often described as the "face of the firm" (*litso firma*) was still considered to be an important factor in the hiring process. Many of the job advertisements posted on the walls of the school, in addition to specifying competencies in areas such as computers and foreign languages, also specified that secretaries must be "girls" (*devushki)* of a particular age—generally between 20 and 30—with an attractive appearance (*priiatnaia vneshnost'*), business style (*delovoi stil'*), grammatical speech (*gramotnaia rech'*), and

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[209] See discussions of advertisements in Bridger et al.(1996), Sperling (2000), and Stanley (1994).
[210] Levina (1998). See also Minaeva (1998) and Stanley (1994).

knowledge of business etiquette (*znanie delovogo etiketa*).[211] At the same time the risk of overt sexuality seemed an ever-present threat that secretaries needed to guard themselves against. Even in 2009, a number of Russian internet ads specify that they are searching for a secretary "with intimacy" (*s intimom*), or sexual services. Indeed, one internet-based company, which has received considerable media attention, specializes in the selection of such secretaries.[212]

Secretarial *Imidzh*

In the eyes of Fokus administrators and teachers, image was one of the primary ways in which women could navigate and succeed in this fraught profession. While named a "school," Fokus was more accurately described as "courses" (*kursy*), a continuing education program for adult students administered by a private institution. It was founded in 1990 by Anna Nikolaevna, an administrator with years of experience in a Leningrad *institut povysheniia kvalifikatsii*. As Anna Nikolaevna explained to me in the school's busy offices, from the beginning she saw the school as a way of helping women have fulfilling professional lives. Having observed how difficult it was for women to have a career in the Soviet Union (where she noted, political concerns such as party membership often eclipsed professional abilities) and worried that women would not be able to find suitable work in the new market economy, she opened the school soon after attending an entrepreneurship program at an Austrian business school. "When I returned from there," she told me, "I had such a great desire to open a school that could help women. . . that could help them to have a career here in Russia." She saw secretarial

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[211] Although some did express a preference for older women who were presumed to be beyond their child-bearing years, who were often seen more as office "hostesses" (*khoziaki ofisa*).
[212] See for instance Dmitrash (2009), "Trebiuetsia Sekretarsha. . ." (2009).

work as the students' first step in a much longer career trajectory, and saw the mission of the school as providing students with the knowledge that would allow women to take that first step confidently and professionally.

Although Anna Nikolaevna was a stout and serious presence that recalled Liudmila Prokopievna more than her secretary, the school was an expressly feminine space. Set up in several rooms on one of the floors of a larger state university, the school was set apart from the dark and dusty university hallways by warm wood floors, carefully tended plants, and a cat that wandered through the classrooms to make everyone feel at home. As we sat at our keyboards in the computer room, the typing teacher rang out various drills in a pleasant singsong voice – " '*K', probel', probel', 'K' probel', probel'*" ("K," space, space, "K, space, space.") — that seemed to make typing a feminine art aligned with music rather than an everyday work skill. Here, as in many other similar institutions and publications aimed at women, private business was presented not as a primarily male realm populated by peripheral and sexualized female support figures, but as a place where women could work as women, interacting with others in ways that were extensions of proper femininity. It was a place that often embraced the idea, articulated by nineties female entrepreneurs in Russia, that "women should not only maintain their 'natural' feminine attitudes when engaging in business but should further turn them into the central principle behind their work activities" (Bruno 1997:64).

Although some professional competencies were considered important in this regard, it was considered at least as important for students to master the behavioral and communicational competencies that would enable them to successfully cultivate a positive and feminine image of themselves. Anna Nikolaevna had welcomed the students

formally a couple days before the training in the same classroom (this time with seats neatly lined up in rows). Lecturing rather grandly, she explained that the days had passed when most held that the secretary "should be an attractive girl and it wasn't necessary that she knew anything." She instead heralded a new approach accordant with the increased prestige of the secretarial profession, which valued the secretary's knowledge and self-presentation:

> Today for employees the most important principle, without a doubt, is professionalism. It stands in the first place. The person should be literate, she should know everything about office work. That's first. Second, well, naturally, it's the culture of appearance, but the culture of appearance, it's the ability to present oneself properly at the right time in the right atmosphere. That is, friendliness (privetlivost'). Well, so she doesn't do it in a way that a person who opens the door and sees a secretary sitting there. . . wants to close the door again. No, it is necessary to be able to speak with others and have a culture of appearance. (Recorded lecture)

To these ends, the school's five month curriculum included not only traditional secretarial subjects, such as typing and *delopriozvodstvo* (document preparation), as well as classes in English and computer skills, but also a cycle of "image subjects" that taught all of the finer points of self-presentation both through physical appearance and behavior.[213] These included *Imidzh*, a special class on beauty and dress, *Etiket*, an etiquette class that taught the rules of proper behavior both on and off the job, and *Postanovka rechi*, a voice-training class that trained students in proper pronunciation and diction.

When I discussed the program with Anna Nikolaevna, she advanced a couple of different reasons why attending to image was so important at the school. On the one hand, drawing on a psychological rationale, she said that from when she first opened the

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[213] As is typical in Russian secondary schools and universities, the curriculum consisted of several classes of different lengths and durations.

school she had felt that educating women about image-related concerns, particularly in an era when it was becoming clear how much Russians had to learn in areas such as dress and etiquette, would give them the confidence and self-esteem to succeed professionally. "You understand," she said, "women have particular complexes and a goal of the school was to take away these complexes, to give them confidence to feel their own strength, their own possibilities." At the same time, she also felt that the image of the secretary was particularly important in a market environment. Soviet secretaries, Anna Nikolaevna said, followed the logic of the administrative-command system, in which top-down control was key. They functioned as gruff gate-keepers, whose main job was to keep visitors away from their boss. If a person dared to open the door, Soviet secretaries would scowl "Why did you open the door, go away!" By contrast, the type of secretary educated at Fokus was supposed to be an "entirely new person" who knew "etiquette and how to dress beautifully," along with how to "speak correctly and beautifully." Through her mastery of these subjects, this new person would welcome visitors into the office, attracting clients as a market system required rather than scaring them away.

While Anna Nikolaevna tended to frame the need for image education in terms of a contrast between the post-Soviet present and the Soviet past, perhaps reflecting the school's origins in the early nineties, as I spent more time at the school I realized that at least in its current incarnation, image was mobilized as much as a reaction against the nineties itself as against the Soviet period. Administrators and teachers at Fokus aimed in many ways to shape a model of the secretary that, while still feminine and attractive, was opposed to the overly sexualized stereotype of the nineties. What was at stake was not merely being attractive, but rather being attractive in a way that was not vulgar or

overly sexual. Secretarial dress and manner were supposed to reflect the new professionalism and prestige of the profession, and dressing in a "business style" (*delovoi stil'*) was often credited with marking the difference between serious specialists and those who were hired for more sexual purposes. At the same time, as I will discuss in more detail below, image was also drawn upon in ways that opposed not only the sexual crassness of the nineties labor market, but the crassness of the market more generally. In this sense, secretarial image was also a profoundly moral intervention that aimed to shape a version of femininity that could be reconciled with market practices.

Yet these interventions sometimes sat uneasily with the aims and goals of the students themselves. The students ranged substantially in age and educational background from a current high school student to a stout mother of older children with a Soviet-era economics degree, with most in their twenties with recent high school or institute credentials. However, most were no strangers to considerations of the fashion and make-up side of image. The group of students that I followed most closely began in January, and almost all, like other Russian women in the city, wore elaborate fur and leather coats to class that hung beside us on the pegs of the wall. Many continued to wear high-heeled black leather boots throughout the winter (often with pointy toes and spike heels), taking care not to let the dirt from the St. Petersburg streets cling to these for too long by wiping away the grime with little brushes or sponges at the beginning of the day. Fashions did vary: Ira, a tall, thin student in her early twenties with long blond hair favored a pair of tight leather pants with a light sweater throughout the winter, while Iulia, a former police investigator in her thirties was more likely to wear sedate black knit trousers and a pastel top. However, the vast majority put considerable effort into their

appearance and the way they looked. The younger students in particular often brought

recent issues of the Russian version of *Cosmopolitan* to class, which they would pore

through collectively during breaks.

At the same time, few of the students had been attracted to the courses because of

image concerns. Not all had even been particularly sure they wanted to become

secretaries before reading about the courses in the newspapers. Many said they had been

attracted to the courses because they provided reasonably priced training in multiple

technical skills, such as computers and English, which would be useful and valued in any

office environment in contemporary conditions. Some hoped that the courses, which

advertised a broad database of available positions open to graduates, would facilitate their

pathway into a desirable job in a way they were unable to do on their own. Others were

not even sure if they wanted to work and saw this as a first step out of their apartments

after they had spent an extended period of time at home caring for children. Regardless

of what had initially drawn them to the courses, however, the students soon became

immersed in an environment that stressed that one of the most important things they

could do to succeed professionally was to work on their appearance, mannerisms, speech,

and charm.

Imidzh: An Introduction

Western theorists have often pointed to an increasing focus on image as a recent

historical development tied in with globalization, neoliberalism, and shifts to a new,

service-based economy. David Harvey (1990) describes a virtual world of fleeting

images as characteristic of the contemporary era, connecting this to an increasing stress

on services over production. Scholars specializing in management and corporate culture have similarly linked the growth of the service sector to increasing attention to how employees look, act, and speak,[214] putting a particular stress on the corporate practices of international service providers such as McDonald's where employee interactions, from facial expressions to speech, are almost entirely scripted (Cameron 2000b; Leidner 1993). In the Russian context, however, talk about image was usually not about a worldwide historical development, but instead concerned an approach that (like so many other communicative interventions) the West had seemingly always had and arrived in Russia late. In this sense, although attention to self-shaping via appearance and manner had many Soviet precedents, image-talk indexed something particularly new and Western that came to Russia in an incomplete way with attempts to establish a market economy and democracy. It was said to be particularly important for work in Western companies.

By most accounts the word "*imidzh*" is a new term for Russia, entering Russian popular discourse after the English "image" in the early 1990s in conjunction with translated Western books about beauty and fashion, as well as Western-style public relations techniques[215] (although the term does seem to have some earlier Russian roots[216]). Most often defined as "*obraz*," a word that in this context refers to a look, appearance, or conception of someone or something, *imidzh* puts stress not on the person or thing itself, but rather its perception from an external point of view. "When we speak about the image of a person," explains noted image specialist Aleksandr Panasiuk "then

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[214] See, for example, Nickson et al. (2003) and Wellington and Bryson (2001).

[215] See Panasiuk (2003), Petrova (2003), and Shepel' (2002).

[216] The term was used in a negative sense to refer to the manipulative aspects of Western advertising that separated "image" from "reality" at least as early as the seventies (e.g. Feofanov 1974). Some of those who currently conduct research on image also discuss their own work on the topic in the early eighties in later publications (Beliakova 2005; Shepel' 2002). Bridger et al. (1996) also describes an image consulting center founded by a Moscow fashion designer in 1989.

we have in mind his appearance (*obraz*) as it has appeared to others" (Panasiuk 2003:9).

In this sense, one can speak about the *imidzh* of an individual or a product, or the *imidzh* of more abstract entities such as a company or a nation. The term is probably most often discussed in terms of visual impressions and personal style, and as such, *imidzh* is a stable of fashion advice in contemporary Russian magazines for both men (Chenova 2003; Yurchak 2003) and women (Patico 2005). However, many of those who speak and write about *imidzh* insist it is also formed by factors beyond appearance, encompassing how one speaks and carries oneself as well as the material items one consumes. Specialists in this area are known as "image-makers" (*imidzhmeikery*), a term that is most associated with political consultants and public relations specialists, but is also used by stylists, personal image consultants, and writers of dress for success guides, as well as (to the chagrin of some of the others) hairstylists and cosmetologists.

Lemon (1998) writes about an increased attention to issues of surfaces and authenticity in Russia during the 1990s: "In a world where once-closed archives were opening, once-illicit market trade was moving to central urban space, and once-public party connections were going underground, everyday moral and material judgments depended on the ability to quickly re-discern substantive value from illusionary surface" (23-4). This points to a prevalent concern with reading internal states off mystiques of image and surface and ascertaining whether these authentically represent what lies beneath. Those who have focused on image-shaping in Russian business contexts, however, have generally stressed another side of this relation of surface and substance, the projection of images so compelling that they leave no room for doubt or further scrutiny. It is about carefully shaping one's own exterior in a manner that ensures that

others will perceive one in a positive way in a market context in which such judgments are often quick, fleeting, and impersonal, connected to one's fluency in the practices and objects of consumption (Berdahl 1999; 2005), as well as to one's chances for upward mobility and success in an economically stratified landscape.

Image-makers are not solely concerned with business and may apply their skills and recommendations to a wide range of areas spanning politics, show business, family interactions, and matters of national pride. However the image of business people and related consumption practices has been a major concern, informed in part by popular foreign books such as Dale Carnegie's thirties classic *How to Win Friends and Influence People*.[217] Also the subject of a number of locally published books with titles such as *I am your Image-Maker and I am Ready to Form your Professional Image* (Panasiuk 2003), image is still often discussed in business training contexts, sometimes alongside advice about egalitarian communication,[218] even as some suggest image has become somewhat less important than it was in the 1990s.[219] Many of these books are written by contributors to a newly founded applied psychological discipline called "imagology" (*imidzhelogiia*)—often said to be a Russian invention— which combines Western public relations theory, Soviet social psychology, and Western psychoanalysis, among other

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[217] Other popular foreign titles on image include British author Poly Bird's *Sell Yourself*, and titles from Mary Spillane, the American-born founder of the British "Colour Me Beautiful" image-consulting system.

[218] Aside from in secretarial courses, I found that image in business training contexts in St. Petersburg in 2003-2007 was most often discussed as part of a larger training on, for example, communication, leadership, sales, or negotiation skills. Similar issues were also discussed in terms of "influence" (*vlianie*), or from another angle, in terms of avoiding "manipulation" (*manipuliatsiia*). Another related trend in business training are courses in NLP, neurolinguistic programming. There were also separate training centers that focused on speaking skills.

[219] Such accounts generally refer to overt material display of expensive goods as a sign of one's wealth and prestige (discussed in more detail below). However, those that advocated such measures did not necessarily speak against consumption of expensive things for other reasons. One 2005 business magazine article, "*Zachem liudi pokupaiut takuiu doroguiu mebel"?*" (Why do people buy such expensive furniture?), for example, suggested that one should only buy expensive goods if one could appreciate them for their superior qualities and use them in a properly cultivated way.

disciplines.[220] Imagology researchers aim to provide a psychological understanding of how images are formed and perceived, along with perfecting and promoting specific techniques said to allow people to exert control over these processes.

These discourses on business image, which have often, like other discourses on Russian business, targeted mainly a male audience,[221] put a particular stress on the importance of both material and nonmaterial forms of symbolic capital for creating an image that projects success. An underlying premise is that Russian business people are often unreliable in comparison to their counterparts in more established market democracies, and, as such, come in different degrees of trustworthiness that to some extent correlate to the size of one's firm, whether insignificant "small" (*melkii*), or "prominent" (*krupnyi*). While what is often said to be at issue is whether one is liked or not liked, what generally seems to be most at stake in business image is what status a businessperson, and by extension his company, appears to have.[222] This is something that can be demonstrated through appropriate consumption of expensive Western ties, watches, and cars, along with elegant speech and gestures (Chenova 2003; Yurchak 2003). Panasiuk (2003) in this regard conveys the internal thoughts an onlooker might have when looking at a sloppily dressed businessman:

> His hair is always a mess, his jacket is always rumpled. . . No, to believe

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[220] Scholars come to imagology from a wide variety of disciplines including psychology, philosophy, and semiotics. Many different genealogies for the discipline have been proposed, with Shepel's (2002) version reaching back to Hippocrates and Machiavelli. However, most cite Western public relations theory, and many draw attention to traditions in Western and Soviet psychology. In Soviet psychology, a major source is said to be the social psychology of *obshchenie* discussed in the previous chapter (E. A. Petrova 2003; Utlik 2006). Also relevant here is social psychological work on first impressions, in particular the work of A. A. Bodalev (1982).

[221] Kelly (2001) suggests that in general conduct guides did not turn towards businesswomen until 2000, although there was some brief discussion of skirt lengths in earlier guides as well as work advice for women in women's magazines.

[222] Such status-consciousness, it is important to note, however, was also not created de novo with the fall of the Soviet Union. On pre-Revolutionary and Soviet precedents, see Boym (1994), Meshcherkina (2000), and Oushakine (2000).

that his firm has already entered the international market is quite difficult. (64)

Image appears here as index of the prestige and solidity (*solidnost'*) of one's company, and wearing the right business suit or having the right kind of car demonstrates not only that one belongs to a certain privileged class that can afford such items, but also that one's firm has attained some degree of success and should be trusted for business purposes.

However image is not only a matter of consumption. Panasiuk, for his part, carefully lays out the implications of the images sent out by various channels including not only physical appearance and one's possessions, but also speech, movement, and the places where one spends one's time, pointing out that each of these has a vital role in shaping other peoples' subconscious judgments about a person's status. Less material aspects of male image-shaping are also highlighted by another prominent imagologist, V. M. Shepel', who is generally credited as the founder of imagology. For Shepel' (2005[1994]), who calls the subject of imagology the "technology of personal charm," image for businessmen and others is more a matter of personal influence than status and prestige:

> [Imagology] helps one to master the real mechanisms of using the external appearance of people to effectively influence each other. He is happy who God has given an attractive image. As a rule, however, many obtain the sympathy of others through technologies of self-presentation. Without them, one cannot achieve major success in any type of activity or grasp the joy of receiving attention from people. (4-5)

Thus image for Shepel' is not so much about trumpeting one's status through material consumption as it is about developing an ability to influence others via one's attractiveness and charm. While this can involve innate abilities that help one to get

along with people easily, empathize with others, and influence others with words, it can also involve acquired characteristics. Shepel' advocates in this regard that people master particular "technologies" (*tekhnologii*) (437) that involve interacting with others in a pleasant, non-elitist, and respectable manner and reflecting one's inner spiritual energy externally through an attractive and compelling appearance. From this standpoint, a charming image is the secret to success because it enables one to be liked by others, which, in turn makes it substantially easier for one to achieve one's own personal goals.

Similar concerns about both charm and consumption also appear in the special division of image advice targeted at working women.[223] Despite the assertions of the imagologists that everyone should attend to image, there is a sense that this type of attention has been traditionally connected with femininity and continues to be an especially feminine concern, both because of women's "natural" interest in appearance and because image is a particularly feminine means of control in a work arena that is often hostile to women. One male trainer I met in 2007, for instance, spoke of beauty as a female "weapon" to be used in the war for status and power at work. Image specialists in this regard generally recommend that women model themselves after an idealized figure they call the "business woman" (*delovaia zhenshchina*)[224] or "business lady"

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[223] This includes titles such as Shibaeva's (2004) *12 Image Secrets of a Successful Woman* (discussed below), Ivanova's (2005) *Self-Presentation in 15 Minutes,* and the Sorinyi Sisters' (2004) *Image of a Woman and her Clothing.* (The latter is written by academic imagologist E. A. Petrova and her sister N. A. Korobsteva under a pen name.) Similar types of advice can be found in books specifically aimed at secretaries (e.g. Sheinov 2002).

[224] "Business woman" is an exact translation of "*delovaya zhenshchina*." However, note that businesswoman has also been incorporated into Russian as "*biznesvoman,*" which generally has a narrower meaning, referring to a female entrepreneur or other particularly business-minded woman. While an ideal *delovaia zhenshchina* balances femininity and business, a *biznesvoman* can be seen as lacking proper femininity.

(*biznes-ledi*), who blends "business" and "feminine" characteristics. [225] The author of a

book entitled *12 Image Secrets of a Successful Woman* for example, separating the

business lady from the less charming and more authoritarian lady boss (*ledi-boss*),

describes the appearance of the figure as "attractive and strict, elegant . . . taken care of."

She wears "expensive things," in particular "a strict, elegant business suit in a not bright

color, a blouse in the tone of the suit, heels with a height of 5-7 centimeters, a few

accessories." Her personality is active yet restrained:

> Independent, self-disciplined, highly intellectual, energetic, striving
> towards goals, inclined to risk, socially daring, talkative, self-restrained,
> realist, manages the situation, confident, oriented towards success. (67)

With "unobtrusive" makeup and "confident, powerful, emotional" speech, the business

lady walks in an "energetic, confident" way. Her body language is characterized by a

"lax pose," "smooth movements," and "broad gestures," as well as "pressed lips, a

penetrating glance, and a firm handshake (67-68). She is both attractive and engaging, a

woman who knows how to consume properly as well as how to attract the attention of

others through her confident yet poised appearance, speech, and manner. [226]

Fashion advice for women is not new in the Russian context: It was a staple of

women's magazines throughout the Soviet period. However, official sources generally

focused upon consuming in ways that would enable the individual to fit into an orderly

societal milieu, rather than suggesting that individuals differentiate themselves from

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[225] In presenting this blend, image specialists are not alone. Just as profiles of successful women in the press often stress their relationship to love and family (Tartakovskaya 2000), contests for young business women, such as "Miss Financial World," stress both beauty and business sense (Chastitsyna 2006).

[226] Some do suggest personalizing the model in various ways. The male trainer who spoke of beauty as a female weapon generally advocated that women craft their work image to reflect their sexual side. He advised me to craft my own personal image by first thinking of what kind of man I liked the most and then shaping myself in the model of the type of woman such a man would find most attractive. Another image specialist I met in 2007 cautioned that it was important to consider the image requirements of a particular workplace rather than to follow set rules.

others in ways that would enable social climbing.[227] According to Ol'ga Vainshtein (2000), official sources in the 1960s and 1970s, including schools as well as magazines, promoted a unified beauty aesthetic based upon meeting rigid rules for appearance, such as "Pink suits blonds" (31). There were fixed conceptions of what was appropriate for work and what was appropriate for home, as well as for day and evening and holidays and workdays.[228] Especially with respect to work clothing, publications stressed the importance of choosing clothing according to whether it was appropriate for a particular place (*umestnost'*), as well as how proper it was in general (*prilochnost'*). While clothing was supposed to be beautiful, it also, in contrast to bourgeois fashions, was not supposed to be elaborate, and, as such, Vainshtein suggests, magazines also stressed the importance of simplicity and modesty, as well as comfort, restraint, and practicality. Indeed, being too fashionably dressed, or too concerned with fashion more generally, could be seen as a sign of moral laxness.[229]

Yet while there is perhaps a similarity between the uniformity of much of this advice and image-makers' programmatic suggestions for contemporary business women, post-Soviet advice is set apart by its much more elaborate attention to consumption as a means of achieving desired goals. This is particularly exemplified by the Western women's magazines that have been published in specially adapted Russian editions since Perestroika, which like other editions of these magazines, stress elaborate self-presentation skills as a solution to life dilemmas for working and nonworking women

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[227] Dunham (1976) suggests that while post-World War II Soviet publications presented consumption as a reward for successful achievement, status-climbing was regarded much more ambiguously.

[228] This is not to say, however, that people did not take measures to differentiate themselves from this unified aesthetic by attaining unique consumer items or otherwise approximating particular styles, from the pompadour-wearing *stiliagi* of the 1940-1960s to the hippies of the 1970s-1980s (Humphrey 2002; Kharkhordin 1999; Pilkington 1994; Yurchak 2006).

[229] See also Tarakovskaya (2000) and Kharkhordin (1999).

alike (Machin and Van Leeuwan 2003). Advised one article in the March 2004 issue of

Russian *Cosmopolitan*:

> So, clothes should not only fit well, but in general work on your image.
> Only then will you, first, be interesting to men (which isn't that hard) and,
> second, attract those men that interest you (and that is already much
> harder.) For example, if you have decided that your trump characteristics
> are trustworthiness, honesty, and openness, then this should be translated
> into your clothes. . . .If you are dreaming about the roles of a housewife
> and a mother to a large family, it isn't worth it to cover yourself in a
> business suit, that type of seeker of your hand and heart won't be clinging
> to you. All is simple in fact: clothes should reflect your essence, your
> wants, and your strivings. (Ol'shanskaia 2004:320).

From this standpoint image was not simply about fashion but about deciding on one's

goals, whether they were being a housewife and mother, or being a business woman

(here, notably presented as incompatible desires), and using dress and related image-

shaping means to pursue them. While this article focused on attracting men, another in

the same issue (Shchedrova 2004) applied a similar calculus to success on the job. The

author, herself a young woman, documented her own efforts to form a new "image" of

herself as a "self-confident and successful woman" that she presumed would help her at

work (284). This was a project that involved, among other tasks, getting stylish haircut,

finding more expensive eyeglass frames, and giving herself compliments twice a day.

The resulting transformation, she wrote, was so successful that she not only received a lot

of compliments from others, but she also received a substantial raise. In this context,

image was not so much about fitting oneself into an existing and orderly social milieu so

much as it involved taking goal-directed measures to obtain personal advantage within a

stratified marketplace host to multiple possible life trajectories (and very different

material circumstances) through consumption and other types of attention to the self.

Entrepreneurs of the Secretarial Self

The ideal image of a secretary promoted at *Fokus*, much like the image-makers'
portraits of business women, followed a set paradigm. Fokus was particularly aimed at
producing a particular type of secretary, a *sekretar'-referent*, or secretary to the director
of a company, often said to be the most prestigious type of secretary. The ideal secretary
simultaneously commanded technical requisites of the job such as typing and document
preparation, as well as projected an air of competence, elegance, and warmth through
image management. This involved on the one hand, meeting certain formal
requirements. Dress was supposed to be classic, professional, and feminine without
being too sexy; behavior was supposed to follow all of the requirements of world
etiquette, and speech was supposed to be elegant, grammatical, and accented correctly.
But it also involved the cultivation through speech, actions, and body language of a
persona that was friendly and welcoming. In contrast to company directors, who might
be gruff and off-putting, the secretary was supposed to be the smiling, friendly "girl"
(*devushka*) at the door, who ushered in guests, poured them tea, and made them feel
comfortable. At the same time, she was supposed to be competent and intelligent enough
to fill in for their boss if the need presented itself.

Yet, while most of the staff and students at Fokus agreed on the basic traits of a
successful secretary, there was less agreement on what it meant to shape oneself and
pursue a career in this manner. A key tension here was related to the directionality of
image-shaping: Was it mainly an individual project involving individual striving for
individual goals, as magazines like *Cosmopolitan* often seemed to suggest, or one
oriented towards others in ways that belied the image discourse's promises of self-

realization and individual fulfillment?

On the one hand, the classes did often reflect the idea that one could get whatever one wanted if one tried hard enough, regardless of structural obstacles. In this sense, image had much in common with the personalist types of agency valued at Razorsharp, which involved responding to problems with individual effort and a clear action-plan. Although the goals here were individual rather than corporate, nonetheless there was a similar sense that almost any goal could be reached through individual striving. One might even call this emphasis a paradigmatically neoliberal sense that in the wake of the collapse of Soviet socialism, students needed to be "entrepreneurs of the self" (Gordon 1987; Rose 1999b), who, as described by theories of neoliberal governmentality, took responsibility for advancing their careers and managing their lives. Image-cultivation skills were often discussed in the context of getting a job in the current market environment, and although it was often acknowledged that connections were often the best way of getting a job in Russia[230] (see Chapter Six) image-shaping and successful self-presentation in interviews was presented as an important new way of securing a position in a marketized economy where jobs were no longer allocated as in the Soviet period, but instead were subject to substantial competition, making attaining a job primarily an individual, rather than a state responsibility.

"No one needs you" boomed the director's husband, Boris Petrovich, a gray haired and well-fed businessman, at the beginning of a full day lecture on how to get a job. This idea, he said, was particularly shocking for the first job-seekers after the fall of the Soviet Union, who had grown up expecting the state was obliged to automatically offer them a

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[230] On connections as a way of getting a job in Russia see Tartakovskaya and Ashwin (2006), Yubovich and Kozina (2000), and Clarke (2000)

place in accordance with their specialty after graduating from institute. Yet, while this was perhaps less shocking to the current crop of secretarial hopefuls, many of whom had already experienced first-hand that their specialties in areas such as teaching or philology did not qualify them for lucrative private sector positions in the current labor market, Boris Petrovich still suggested this required a new, energized type of agency that few of the students had embraced previously. Correcting himself slightly, he clarified that the students were certainly needed by their parents, children, and husbands—but no one needed them to work at their firm. In such circumstances, the most important task ahead was to "demonstrate one's necessariness" *(dokazat' svoiu nuzhnost')*, something that prior generations had never learned to do and was still much more difficult psychologically for Russians than Americans.

This meant not complaining about employers' preferences for secretaries of a certain age or background or despairing about one's lack of connections, but taking independent action towards one's goal of getting a job regardless of obstacles. To these ends, Boris Petrovich told stories about Fokus graduates who had gone to great lengths to obtain a job. In one, for example, a young secretarial graduate scoured the city for offices with multiple Mercedes in the parking lot, surmising that the more Mercedes there were the more likely it was that the firm would pay well. Having found an office with a suitable number of the cars, she then observed it carefully from the street for a couple weeks, determined the schedule of her potential boss, and "accidentally" ran into him when he entered the office one morning, which resulted in her being offered the high-paying position she desired. In another story, a 56-year-old women who had graduated from the school's accounting program, considered too old to get a job easily, approached

the same store seven times to propose her services, being refused every time: She was then finally hired on the eighth try. In a third, the job-seeker was Nivkh, from an indigenous Siberian background. Unable to find any Russian employer willing to hire Nivkhs, she finally, upon Boris Petrovich's recommendation, searched around for an employer with a Nivkh last name, who eventually hired her.

Image-shaping was said to be an important part of this agentive process. Although personal characteristics such as age or ethnicity were difficult, if not impossible, to transform through image work, Boris Petrovich suggested that nonetheless image was malleable and could be shaped in ways that would increase one's chances of securing a job. Later in the day (using a generic name for a typical employer) he explained to the students that "Ivan Ivanovich has made a decision that he is getting a secretary, and he has already drawn a picture of this secretary in his head." While the students could not hope to guess all of the features of this internal picture, they were advised to try to exemplify all of the characteristics typically associated with an ideal secretary, since at least some of these would likely coincide with Ivan Ivanovich's vision. Although Boris Petrovich claimed to be generally against deception, he urged the students to omit areas of their backgrounds that might reflect negatively on their image, and advised them to present themselves as positively as possible, explaining that lying might be necessary in some cases. "We are used to just saying what we want to say," he noted at another point in the lecture. "We need to think about what Ivan Ivanovich wants to hear." Thus, to achieve their goals students were to fashion themselves in accordance with the presumed expectations of their employers, harnessing image work as a means of getting the jobs they personally desired.

This accorded in many ways with other voices at the school that suggested that women should be independent entrepreneurial subjects who didn't let anyone else prevent them from reaching their goals. Anna Nikolaevna, for example, took this to a more extreme position than most. Referring to the St. Petersburg visit of a representative of an American secretarial organization where the school had gained affiliation, the director advised the students in a lecture to follow Western women in this regard:

> I have contact with a lot of our foreign partners and see how women from other countries build their careers. You see, the mentality of the Russian woman . . . The American woman from our association came to visit me, and she has children, and I asked her "Dear, how are you managing as a parent? How did you leave your children behind?" And she didn't understand me. She said "Well, it's my work and I went. My husband and a nanny are there." That is, the person sets her own goals for her career and her work. And everything else . . . is dragged in to these goals, and the problem is solved. And here, first we solve the problem, and then the career is dragged into it if it works out. Well, when will it work out? One needs to choose one's priorities. (Recorded lecture)

Directly opposing prevalent Russian ideas that suggested that unless women had chosen the path of the single business women they should prioritize family life before work, the director stressed here that the students should prioritize their own hopes and dreams over those of others, including family members. They were not to let their "problems" (such as their family responsibilities) affect their goals, but, like American women who rely on nannies and husbands to help, shape their family life around their larger career objectives. Pronouncing the attainment of one's goals as "the greatest possible happiness," she advised in this regard that the students make serious career plans and write down their goals as well as the steps needed to achieve them, viewing secretarial work as only a starting point for future success.

Although many of the students found the director's stress on work over family

somewhat excessive, the message of taking independent action to achieve goals did resonate with many of them. While not all of them had defined long-term plans and some were focused on, for instance, finding a decent paying job that wouldn't be too taxing, for others, some of whom dreamed of opening a business of their own someday, the courses were a decisive step towards changing their fates. For instance, Tania, the pony-tailed student who sat silently during the training while she was described by the others, was a recent college graduate with a degree in biology that qualified her mainly for a paltry state salary as a laboratory technician. In an interview she represented her decision to attend the courses as a decisive and independent move towards career advancement that separated her from the more passive lab workers she left behind:

> I don't understand people, where there is no internal. . . Of course, I understand people, who, well, sit only with one thing, in their place, and they are scared to lose it or afraid somehow to take a risk. You see simply in my lab there were girls who complained all the time that there was no salary, no salary, and I said. . . that is, a small salary. I said: "Girls, leave, find yourself something else!" "Well, how can we? It's frightening!" I said: "Girls, it's not frightening, its scarier to sit and whine about how there's no salary, about the fact that there's nothing to buy stockings on." Yes, or, well, you think, "Will I buy a loaf of bread or take the bus today?" Well, that's terrifying, and everything else in life isn't terrifying. (Recorded interview)

For Tania, much as Anna Nikolaevna outlined, becoming a secretary was the first of a series of steps she would take towards a more lucrative and independent lifestyle. She also viewed being a secretary as only a starting position, explaining that once she entered the work world she would see what types of skills were demanded and get a second degree in a subject such as marketing or management. Indeed, a month into the courses, she obtained a sales position in a local shop, and seized the opportunity, which she thought might turn into a higher position later on, while continuing to attend the courses

with a group that met in the evenings.

Yet, while many of the students embraced the idea of working towards individual goals, some were more ambivalent about whether image-shaping, at least of the extreme variation proposed by Boris Petrovich, was truly the best way of following their inner desires. One such student was Iulia, the former police investigator in her mid-thirties, who told me that she had left her job because she had found the profession too emotionally draining to be a suitable job for a woman. Single and supported by her sister's modest salary as an accountant while the two of them lived together in the communal apartment she had secured as an investigator, Iulia was searching for a "serious" secretarial position in a bank or other large, prestigious organization, where she would both be able to draw on her degree in law and feel emotionally fulfilled. Yet, while Iulia generally thought that it was important for women to attend to both the physical and behavioral aspects of image (and thought the school's program was particularly useful in giving younger students confidence in this area) she was deeply stung when during the lecture on getting a job, Boris Petrovich suggested that it would be in her best interests to hide her police background in an interview. Since her institute specialty was in law, he said, she would be better advised to say "lawyer" instead. The reason for this was clear to all: Since most local firms were thought to be "black" firms technically operating outside of official laws, especially when it came to reporting tax income, connections to the police department might not be regarded particularly positively. Iulia could not believe Boris Petrovich wanted her to hide her previous experience in this way and mulled over the issue with me for weeks. "What rubbish!" she finally told me. "I will speak sincerely."

Iulia was not alone in feeling that attention to image sometimes carried an uncomfortable whiff of deceit. While image-makers often say they merely accentuate the good and hide the bad, or claim to create a new harmony between the external and internal characteristics of a person, critics, particularly in discussions of political image-making, have often suggested that there is something inherently false, distasteful, and manipulative in this attempt to achieve particular goals through image work.[231] (One satirical advice book (Susloparov 1998:3), for example, dubbed *imidzh* "the art of creating a picture of a political figure for the broader public that has nothing in common with his sincere nature.") Image-shaping could feel dishonest, an attempt to sell oneself in the capitalist marketplace by losing oneself and one's identity in the process of appealing to the expectations of powerful others.

Lessons in *Krasota*

Talk about image offers a compelling picture of a type of control that rests firmly in the hands of the image-shaper. This is one of its promises: In a world where success seems difficult and contingent, one's goals can be achieved via work on the self. Structural factors fade into the background as individuals are encouraged to stop blaming others for their lack of success and instead hurdle these obstacles through the force of their own initiative. Yet, at the same time this is a type of individual action that is relentlessly aware of the presumed judgments and preferences of others. Where neoliberalism, and with it, the new work order, is often said to be about a new attention to

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[231] See for instance, Druzenko (2001). Also see discussions in Stoliarenko (2003) and Denisova (2005). These criticisms are related to widespread discourses about the prominence of "black PR" (*chernyi piar*) to paint a negative picture of politicians via informal and often illegal means, many of which suggest that all PR is "black" (Ledeneva 2006).

inner substance and expression of inner desire (Inoue 2007; Rofel 2007) at Fokus it was often eminently clear that despite all of the exhortations for students to reach their individual goals, the students own unique wants and desires were not always the most important ones at stake.

Key forums for negotiating these issues were the classes on etiquette and image, which were both taught by the same instructor, Elena Ivanovna, a middle-aged former geography and aesthetics teacher of Russian descent, who had recently moved to St. Petersburg from Kyrgyzstan. A self-proclaimed "imagemaker-psychologist," Elena Ivanovna had begun teaching etiquette in technical high schools under the guise of aesthetics in the late Soviet period, rejecting the overly ideological aesthetics textbook she was given for scraps of information about etiquette she found in magazines, newspapers, and library books. She later obtained a second degree in psychology and had substantial experience teaching image to bankers and other office workers in Bishkek before moving to St. Petersburg. Elena Ivanovna often proclaimed that people should think about image every day and seemed to apply this rule to herself as well. She always came to class with her short, blond hair styled firmly in place, wearing heavy, neutrally toned make-up and draping outfits that covered her full figure to best advantage.

The classes she taught at Fokus were an intricate bricolage (Levi-Strauss 1966) of firm "Do's" and "Don'ts," didactic stories, unsolicited personal advice, citations from psychologists and other experts in image and etiquette from various periods and nationalities, and exhortations reminiscent of self-help manuals to take an assertive, positive approach towards life. Together (at least according to official lesson plans) they comprised 100 hours of the curriculum, a substantial chunk of the 720 hours total slated

for the five-month session. While the image class focused more on issues related to dress, make-up, and skin care, and the etiquette class focused more on behavioral rules, in practice the classes tended to blend into each other and the students considered them more or less the same class. In both classes, which unlike most others at Fokus, were ungraded, Elena Ivanovna lectured and gave related advice about a wide array of topics from skin care regimes to the importance of giving compliments at work, occasionally breaking up the monologue with practical activities, exercises, multiple-choice quizzes, or personal critiques and observations, often tinged with a touch of psychology. For example, on the first day of etiquette class, after having the students introduce themselves to the group, Elena Ivanovna took the opportunity to critique how the students said their names. While most had, as is common in everyday, informal settings, used their nicknames, the instructor advised them of the much more impressive effects of using one's full name. One should use Ol'ga rather than Olia, Viktoria instead of Vika, Ekaterina instead of Katia. "Tatiana said that she was "Tatiana," Elena Ivanovna went on to say exuberantly, "and I immediately heard that it was said in such a way that something happened inside us, we can't even analyze it ourselves!"

The messages of these classes were quite complex. Elena Ivanovna, like Boris Petrovich and Anna Nikolaevna, embraced a version of image-based self-striving, but hers was a vision more tempered by social convention and Soviet-era cautiousness about egocentrism. On the first day of etiquette class, she put forth her general philosophy, describing the necessity of devoting attention to the self in conditions of market competition:

> In order to, well, receive a place under the sun today, one needs to know
> how to present oneself, not how to pay attention to one's neighbor—let

him live as he wants) but how to pay attention to oneself. And strongly, strongly, like I simply don't know, fall in love with oneself. No, not on the level of "Am I beautiful or very beautiful?" I'm not sure which. . . "Am I smart or am I a genius?, that's the question." That's not love for oneself, that's, you know, such narcissism, yes, well "I'm so wonderful." No, love for oneself—it's a good whip. It's a very good whip, which gives us the right to obtain important knowledge, which gives us the right to gain experience. (Recorded lecture)

Particularly in a market setting, Elena Ivanovna proclaimed here, appropriate self-presentation required a strong love for the self. It was this love that would inspire one to work on one's image and gain the knowledge one needed to shape it as well as put the effort into maintaining it and presenting it to others. However, this was not to be a love that was overly confident. It should, she went on to say, be marked by a certain "modesty" (*skromnost'*)—a value heralded for women in much of the Soviet era—at the same time as this shouldn't turn into a shyness (*zastenchivost'*) that prevented one from presenting oneself without shame and being able to call attention to one's strong points in interviews and other settings necessary for professional success. While many Russians have seen a Post-Soviet focus on self-presentation as a foreign import that contradicts earlier moral values such as modesty (in addition to, for example, spirituality and social consciousness)[232] Elena Ivanovna presented a synthesis that combined select aspects of both sets of values in a new form.

The students were to portray themselves and their worth (and in so doing raise their own self-esteem) by cultivating beautiful, natural, and correct mannerisms, attractive appearances, and pleasant conduct, rather than brash, egotistical, and deceptive

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[232] See Annenkova (2006) and Klushina (2006). Note, however, that attention to the self is not entirely new in the Russian context. See Hellbeck (2006) and Kharkhordin (1999) on Soviet practices such as diary-writing that similarly involved paying attention to the self with improvement in mind.

self-presentation. Elena Ivanovna promoted a deep self-transformation that did not only

give employers what they wanted, but was also profoundly moral, correct, and beautiful

in its own right, developing the self psychologically at the same time as it put the self in

harmony with well-established societal principles. In stressing the importance of

beautiful appearance and behavior, in one lecture, Elena Ivanovna drew an analogy with

the typical Russian practice of wearing slippers (*tapochki*) inside the home and dress

shoes (*tufel'ki*) outside the home: While *tapochki* are more comfortable, she explained,

people still wear *tufel'ki* to work and institute because they're more beautiful. Similarly

the students should always strive towards beautiful behavior, especially while at work,

even if it did not always seem comfortable. In this, the *tapochki* and the emphasis on

comfort were said to be connected to the least developed part of the person, the individual

(*individ*), which corresponded with the subconscious (*podsoznanie*). The *tufel'ki* and

corresponding striving to be beautiful, by contrast, were said to be connected to the most

developed part of the person, the personality (*lichnost'*) and consciousness (*soznanie*),

which required conscious, cognitive effort. In this sense, making oneself beautiful was

framed as a critical aspect of moral self-development and self-perfection.

This was a thoroughly penetrating beauty (or *krasota*) that embraced both

physical appearance and conduct. Sometimes in image class Elena Ivanovna, much like

Panasiuk, stressed the messages about status that various clothing choices sent, calling

attention, for example, to the greater prestige of a rectangular silhouette over a circular

one, or stressing that nine centimeter heels were too sexy for work, but appropriate for an

evening soiree. Much of the time, however, aesthetics itself was at issue, although here

too there were relatively rigid rules. On one of the days in which we discussed clothing

choices, for example, Elena Ivanovna drew upon the popular system of typing women's complexions by season that is associated with British company "Colour Me Beautiful." She drew over fifty swaths of fabric out of her bag in colors ranging from light blue to dark maroon and bright orange, wrapping them around each of our necks, one student at a time, and offering a mirror so that we could see the difference it made when we wore the "correct" colors, although the students did not always agree. Ira, the tall blond-haired student, was happy to see that as a "spring" she was supposed to wear pastels, noting that she had recently bought a pastel business suit for interviews. Meanwhile, Tamuna, a young Georgian student, loved a purple-plum swath and asked permission to drape it around her neck. She was quite disappointed when Elena Ivanovna informed her that as a "winter" this was not her main color, although she was told that this was permissible for a single dress.

A similar attention to beauty was a common theme of etiquette class, where a common premise was that etiquette rules generally reflected the most beautiful and attractive way of holding oneself and accomplishing a particular task. One early class, for instance, turned to posture. Observing students slouching at their desks with legs open and feet planted firmly on the floor, Elena Ivanovna advised that in order to maintain the elegant look they needed for job interviews they needed to alter their stance substantially: The students were to sit tall, but not too tall, with their hands folded and their ankles crossed and slightly behind them, so that they rested on their toes. Their bags, which had been scattered across desks, should hang on their chairs. Following Elena Ivanovna's instructions, everyone promptly clasped their hands, crossed their ankles, and moved their bags, although some soon lapsed back into a slouch with open

legs and feet flat on the floor, similar to their position before the lesson began. In another class, she took on the aesthetics of table etiquette. The most beautiful way of eating fruit, she advised the students, involved the use of utensils. Bananas should be peeled open, cut in pieces with a knife, and eaten with a fork, while kiwis should be eaten with a spoon, like soft-boiled eggs. Oranges, it was advised, were better to skip altogether, since there simply was no attractive way of eating them. Similar points were made about speech, which should project a pleasant attractive persona through, for example, ringing out a melodic "Hello!"(*Zdravstvuite!)* rather than a half-gulped "Hi!" (*zdras'te*!)"

Yet, while these rules were often presented as objective matters of beauty, there was more at stake here than cultivating the self for aesthetics alone. While Elena Ivanovna wanted the students to embrace image for their own personal development and suggested that image-shaping was an important means of controlling how one was treated and achieving one's goals, she also continually stressed that this version of self-development (not entirely unlike the versions of Soviet training theorists) was one that was strongly oriented towards others. Although what one should do or not do in this context was often put in terms of what was "beautiful" (*krasivo*) or "not beautiful" (*ne krasivo*) or what was "proper" (*prilichno*) or "not proper" (*ne prilichno*), these were ultimately framed as judgments about whether the other people one encountered would find a given behavior or technique pleasing. Borrowing heavily from Panasiuk, Elena Ivanovna continually reiterated that image was always relational, involving those who perceive an image as much as those who try to create it. Whether this image was created through manner, dress, speech, or the objects that one consumed, image was ultimately not a picture that an individual constructed in isolation, but was rather, as she repeated

several times in lectures, "the impression that we make on other people."

More than the Most Expensive Furniture. . .

If all image-shaping involves *some* calculation of the expectations of others, in this case, the orientation to others was magnified. As young women in general, and as women being trained for a profession defined in terms of service to others in particular, often the projected expectations of these others seemed all-controlling and all-determining. In this regard, a favorite saying of Elena Ivanovna's was that "The smile of a secretary is worth more than the most expensive furniture in the boss's office," a statement that made the secretary's facial expression little more than an office accessory that enhanced the boss's status.[233] Secretarial smiles were also similarly compared in this vein to expensive cars parked by the office door. Even Anna Nikolaevna, for all of her talk about self-realization, in a newspaper article on the school, noted (in a way that seemed to somewhat contradict her views on the importance of personal image) "People in this profession . . . should not work on themselves, but on the interests of the firm, on its image and prosperity."

In this context, secretarial communication, whether through speech, dress, or manner, was not about expression of one's inner self, but rather about projecting a pleasing and beautiful surface that did not give away internal depth. Facial expressions and gestures, Elena Ivanovna explained in one lecture, should not be a screen that reflected emotions for all to see, but instead should be confined to the presentation of

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[233] Panasiuk (2003) similarly describes secretaries as pleasant accessories that exhibit a businessman's status. In a discussion oriented towards businessmen, he suggests that an ideal to strive for when it comes to office space is a "proper office with a proper secretary" (*prilichnyi kabinet c prilichnoi sekretarshey*" (99).

beauty, pleasantness, and elegance:

> Our face should be like a face, it should be very friendly, it should be very affable, but it shouldn't express any of our internal relationships. Why present so much information to other people? Why give out a lot of information that is entirely not needed and ruins us? One needs to do simply the opposite: try to present those gestures, those actions, that make us beautiful.
> (Recorded lecture)

While from this perspective, secretaries should smile, these smiles were not about the secretary's feelings, so much as part of the effort to provide a pleasing and friendly image to others. In this respect, the lessons were very similar to what Arlie Hochschild (2003[1983]), speaking of especially of American service professions engaged in by women, has termed "emotional labor," "labor that requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others"(7). Yet, the real labor here, at least as it was represented in the classes, was not suppressing one's own emotions, so much as it was shaping one's exterior into the form that others expected and required.

In etiquette and image class, as in many popular books on image-work in Russia and elsewhere, an often quoted statistic, based upon the work of American psychologist Albert Mehrabian (1971), involved the "information" that people provide about themselves through various semiotic channels. As it was explained at Fokus, 55% of the information people provide to others comes from how they look (appearance, body language, and facial expression), 38 % of the information people provide comes from how they speak (emotion, intonation, timbre, and tone of voice), leaving only 7% for the content of what they say. Thus, what the students "said" through appearance, body language, and voice, was often said to be more important than the content of their words,

and the instructor often stressed the importance of not having a contradiction in any of these elements. In practice, however, form often seemed to eclipse all other matters entirely, and the content of what the secretaries would say was given little attention, with the bulk of the attention given to appearance, manner, and attitude.

One thought experiment given to the class for interpretation on the first day of etiquette class was particularly telling. Elena Ivanovna asked the students what they should do if they were in a cafe drinking some beer with some friends on a weekday around noon, and a potential boss who was acquainted with one of their friends, approached the table. They really wanted to work in his firm and had three minutes to impress him. "Tell me, please, what great thing can you do?" she asked. What great thing do you need to say? You have three minutes." A couple students focused on the beer, joking that they would need to hide it, or at the very least, not order more and not drink it in front of him. Others suggested things they might say—perhaps, complimenting him, his firm, or his extraordinary abilities. One suggested it was important for the job-seeker to make sure to say her name and tell him that she was a professional.

The recommended approach, however, was for the jobseeker to invite him to the table, introduce herself (making sure to say her name in a pleasant way) and not say anything further. "Do you need to say something during this?" Elena Ivanovna asked rhetorically. "And, you know, in these three minutes you probably don't need to do anything." What was most important was that the jobseeker looked beautiful (as she always should) and smiled pleasantly, since what was most important here was making a good first impression on the potential boss, which would entice him to join the party at

the table. Women often looked smarter when they stayed silent, Elena Ivanovna noted, and there was little point in making a self-presentation about their work abilities in this short period of time, especially when the most important task at hand was to be liked. She explained this approach via a recent quote about attracting a man from Soviet pop singer Irina Ponarovskaya: "In order to attract someone you don't need to try. You need to try earlier and when this has already taken place, in general you don't need to do anything." In this case attention to form seemed to eclipse content entirely.

This was a general message of the classes, which suggested that, while secretaries should avoid expressing their own thoughts and feelings, they should make it a priority to encourage others to express theirs. This was in part because of the ever present threat of sexual harassment: If women spoke too much about their personal lives, they were seemingly inviting their bosses to come closer than the proper distance a workplace required. However, this was also because this was what was required to make others feel good about themselves and like the secretary in return. She should "converse" (*razgovarivat'*) rather than "speak" (*govorit'*), drawing others into the conversation in a pleasant and engaging way. She should also refrain from saying "I" too much, which would put too much attention on herself, but instead charmingly encourage others to express their views: Rather than saying "I think" (*Ia dumaiu*) or "I know" (*Ia znaiu*), she should say "It seems to me" (*Mne kazhetsia*), or even better, "How does it seem to you?" (*Kak kazhetsia vam?*).[234] And rather than asking visitors whether they would have tea, implying a secret hope they wouldn't burden her with the responsibility, she should

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[234] Scholars have observed a Post-Soviet increase in "I" centered statements in Russia (particularly in conjunction with advertising), generally considering this phenomenon an intrusion of an Anglo-American style into Russian, a language where dative constructions, such as "It seems to me" (*Mne kazhetsia*) are common (Annenkova 2006; Yurchak 2003) . Elena Ivanovna here is trying to counteract this tendency.

show her willingness to serve visitors whatever beverages they desired. Not, "Will you have tea?" (*Chai budete?*), but instead providing a choice: "What would you like: Tea, coffee, water?" (*Chto Vy zhelaete: chai, kofe, voda?*).

While this advice is somewhat reminiscent of the caring communication promoted for managers at Razorsharp, the context here was very different, being more about enacting submission than in empowering one's subordinates. The others in these interactions were usually described as men, whether husbands or high-status figures at work such as bosses or important clients, and it was usually assumed that these people would not be putting nearly as much time and energy into impression-management as the secretaries would. Another common theme in this respect was that while the secretaries should consider image constantly, the image of those they served was irrelevant. "We should see them as the most important, the most central, the most significant client for our firm" Elena Ivanovna explained, speaking of visitors to the office, "and how they look in this case—it's completely not our concern." Similarly, husbands also were rarely held accountable for their appearances or actions, although it was advised that the students also pay close attention to the impressions they made upon them. Husbands were said to generally have a crisis around forty, and if one didn't converse with one's husband, or one didn't make sure to look beautiful for him, Elena Ivanovna often noted, one shouldn't be surprised when he left them for a younger, prettier girl.

Image-shaping, from this point of view, was supposed to give the students a type of control and agency, but it was not a purely liberal control based solely on the freedom (or appearance of freedom) to obtain self-realization, but instead a type of nonliberal, and quintessentially feminine control in which the future secretaries had to constantly

consider their own social roles and expectations of others. It was not about resisting ideologies that tied women to home and family (as the director had advocated with her suggestion to put individual career goals first), so much as it was about "inhabiting" feminine norms and enabling individual action through submission to a particular normative discourse (Mahmood 2005:27). This task was made easier through a simplified grammar of expectations that made the reactions of others seem regular and predictable, following set rules that changed little from situation to situation.[235] By embracing submission, the students could theoretically become successful entrepreneurs of the secretarial self with an individual agency that surpassed that of the expensive furniture in the boss's office or the pricy cars in his parking lot.

Give yourself as a Gift

When I have discussed my fieldwork at Fokus with both scholars and other acquaintances in the U.S., they have sometimes assumed that the approach there was a relic of earlier times, between the school's embrace of what they have viewed as "traditional" gender roles and stodgy rules of etiquette. One Fokus student also told me a few months after the classes were over that this seemed more like an etiquette class from twenty years ago than one that dealt with the dilemmas of contemporary office life. Yet, as Gal and Kligman (2000) have noted, postsocialist gender ideologies are the product of

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[235] These simplifications become clearer if we compare this popular metapragmatics with the work of Goffman, who was equally concerned with impression-management. Although Goffman, especially in his early work (1959) writes about how people can gain control of a situation by shaping people's impressions, he also acknowledges the contribution of these others to impression management, suggesting that others also convey their own definition in their response, colluding to keep a positive impression afloat. In his later work on footing (1981), as I discuss later in the chapter, Goffman provides an even more nuanced account of how people can in a short stretch of talk shape impressions of others in ways that might differ significantly from the impressions those others intend to project.

numerous and overlapping processes that proceed according to varying rates and temporalities, making assessments of "continuity," or for that matter "rupture," vast oversimplications. Not only do historically sedimented patterns have "roots of different time-depth" (111), but "old practices are transformed because they are being interpreted in new ways" at the same time as "new arrangements and solutions are given legitimacy and authority by linking them to old patterns" (114). In the case of secretarial image at Fokus, I would argue, the approach advocated by Elena Ivanovna was a less a matter of socialist legacies than a deeply moral response to the disjunctions and dislocations of the Post-Soviet labor market, especially in the "wild" version that characterized the 1990s. It drew from visions of imagined global standards, along with Soviet notions of cultured femininity, to craft a type of post-Soviet market conduct that avoided both the boorish disregard for self-presentation in the Soviet period and the crassness seen to mark the first decade of capitalism in the country.

A key premise at Fokus was that this attention to beauty, form, and friendliness had been lacking in the Soviet period. This was said to be true not only for the secretaries who brusquely guarded their bosses, but for all women regardless of profession. Despite the fact that Elena Ivanovna herself had begun her own forays into etiquette in the 1970s and managed to find enough materials in books and magazines to put a class together, this attention to beauty and etiquette was marked as almost entirely new. While many scholars, as I have discussed earlier, have pointed to long-standing Russian and Soviet concerns with ensuring the "culturedness" of the country's citizens, encompassing proper norms of public conduct, consumption, and hygiene in addition to an appreciation of art

and high culture,[236] both the director and the etiquette teacher, while to some extent drawing upon these notions, at the same time stressed in their lectures to the students that there had been little or no etiquette or attention to appearance in the Soviet Union. For seventy years, they suggested, the world had continued to develop while Russia had been cut off, meaning that Russians were unprepared for a post-Soviet milieu conditioned by global commerce, where, for example, business people needed to know what to do at a cocktail party. They painted the Soviet Union as a place where women did not put in the necessary effort to make themselves attractive (unsatisfactorily expecting people to accept them as they were, without make-up, flattering clothes, or cultivated mannerisms) and citizens in general knew little about how to behave in public company. Soviet cafes and cafeterias, for example, the director told me, only offered only spoons as cutlery, reflecting a more general Soviet scorn for table etiquette.

In this context, while the aesthetics presented in the etiquette and image classes, as well as, more pointedly, its grounding in a sense of normativity (Rausing 2002) took much from the Soviet past—and in many ways responded to that past—it was also very much a response to the exigencies of a contemporary labor market embedded in a global economy in which "Western" norms rather than Russian ones were generally seen as the guiding principles for international business practice. These etiquette rules and beauty tips are what I would call imagined standards, in that they both reflected a Russian imaginary of what the norms of the West might be in the context of competing in a globalized world and at the same time imposed a regime of value with a normative power that resembled that of the official standards enacted by agencies of global governance

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[236] See Hoffman (2003), Kelly (2001), Kelly and Volkov (1998), Patico (2005), Volkov (2000).

(Dunn 2005). While etiquette rules and beauty tips were naturalized as universally beautiful and pleasing, it was also clear that they also represented an ideal that was supposed to be Western, and usually Western European. France was named as the birthplace of etiquette and England where it was most developed. If these European traditions had been somewhat adapted for a domestic audience in the 18th century, Elena Ivanovna did not hesitate to cite rules directly from translated Western sources. [237] In this sense she followed in a long Russian tradition, noted by Catriona Kelly (2001:xvi), of "assuming civilized values to be of universal significance, yet embodied in their most perfect form by Western European societies."

Like the "imaginary West" that Yurchak (2006:158) describes as characteristic of late socialist dreams, however, this West was more unspecified ideal than reflection of Western European or Russian reality. Certainly, the actual West was far more accessible than it had been in late socialism, and St. Petersburg was flooded with Western people and products, providing some grounds for making judgments about Westernness. At the same time, many of the etiquette rules focused upon relatively formal events such as fancy cocktail parties and black-tie banquets that students were unlikely to encounter very often in their everyday work experience as secretaries for local firms. There was a long discussion of the exotic foods students might encounter, such as crabs, artichokes, and sushi, as well as the intricate operations they might have to conduct with business cards to register subtleties in intention and status. (At the same time there was, significantly, no mention of contemporary Western business trends promoting

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[237] Along with citing the work of the Russian imagologists, Elena Ivanovna commonly cited etiquette rules from contemporary Western guides such as German author Inge Wolff's (1997) book *Contemporary Etiquette*, along with citing behavioral tips from Dale Carnegie and beauty tips from American-British author Mary Spillane.

empowerment and more egalitarian interactions between supervisors and subordinates.)

Indeed, when I mentioned these classes to a consular secretary who worked at the U.S.

consulate in St. Petersburg, he remarked that it sounded like the students were being

trained for quite high-level positions. This was a vision in which certain upper-class

Western practices, as represented in various heavily referenced advice books on etiquette

and image, stood for normal and expected behavior on the global stage, regardless of the

likelihood that the students would need to engage in these practices as part of their

everyday work lives.

Yet, at the same time, these classes, despite valuing a version of Western practice,

did not embrace all aspects of the contemporary West or the Russian present. While

Elena Ivanovna in many ways embraced the possibilities the market provided, at the same

time, she was also particularly critical of the lack of "culture" she saw in present day St.

Petersburg, which in her estimation was potentially the most beautiful of all Russian

cities. Like many other post-Soviets before her, Elena Ivanovna often found this new

wild market regime deeply suspect, an overly material affront to more deeply rooted

moral values that had existed in the Soviet period and earlier.[238] She spoke about

etiquette and image not only as a way of helping the students surmount "Soviet"

practices, but also to critique the ways in which nineties marketization had overturned

more deeply rooted standards of class and taste (Patico 2005). While Kyrgyzstan, Elena

Ivanovna felt, had taken both the best of "Western" advice, as well as well as the best of

"Eastern" respect for others, many in contemporary St. Petersburg from her point of view

lacked a proper upbringing. She told the class that she had cried when she had returned

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[238]See Caldwell (2004), Ries (1997), Humphrey (2002), Lemon (2000), Mandel and Humphrey (2002), and Pesmen (2000).

to St. Petersburg a couple years earlier, and seen that the streets were covered with bottles, cans, and other types of trash. Even more disturbing, she said, was the conduct of the "girls" (*devushki*) of the city, who flaunted their bodies, smoked on the street, drank heavily, and used improper language, swearing as well as muddling their speech with unseemly "parasite" (or filler) words (*slova-parazity*).

Echoing many voices in St. Petersburg and beyond, Elena Ivanovna often expressed her disapproval of this version of the wild market through stories of the "New Russians"[239] who profited from post-Soviet transformations and could seemingly buy access to whatever they wanted for enormous sum of money, but lacked the cultivation and taste conventionally associated with access to such goods.[240] While the time of the New Russians was mainly seen to have passed, Elena Ivanovna loved to point out how they had made fools of themselves by not understanding universal (Western) etiquette rules, laughing, for example, at how New Russians had often worn red jackets, when red is the color of a hotel employee's uniform in the West. Young women in the country had not done much better in the realm of consumption, however, Elena Ivanovna suggested, and like New Russians transgressed the norms of social respectability in morally problematic ways. Not only did these "girls" drink, smoke, and speak in an unbecoming manner, but the short skirts that they wore caused a series of unfortunate misunderstandings when visiting Western men took them for prostitutes. For her, as for many female arbitrators of conduct in the Soviet period and after, manners, morality, and appropriate appearance were tightly related, and all were particularly important for young

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[239] On New Russians and their consumption practices, see Patico (2008) and Humphrey (2002[1998]). Also see Kortunov (1996) for a standard description of the figure.

[240] See also Bruno (1997) and Oushakine (2000). Sampson (1994)discusses similar issues in Eastern Europe.

women in particular.[241]

From this standpoint, the program of beautiful gestures and appearances advocated by image and etiquette class was an attempt to construct a new, morally grounded model of market interaction for women that avoided both the excessive consumption of the New Russians and the overly sexy consumption of "girls" who favored short skirts (an even greater danger for the future secretaries), along with the bare materialism of the market more generally. Several scholars have described how, in the postsocialist world and elsewhere, the coming of market capitalism has been experienced as a deep affront to more firmly sedimented moral sensibilities. Writing in 2002, Humphrey and Mandel, for example, note that "ten years on. . . the postsocialist societies still struggle to come to terms with the clash between deeply ingrained moralities and the daily pressures, opportunities and inequalities posed by market penetration" (1). However, it is becoming increasingly clear that a number of other relationships between markets and moralities are possible besides those of force and resistance.[242] If many post-Soviets saw a gap between material privilege and moral legitimacy and pondered the relationship between them (Patico 2005), the etiquette and image classes were an attempt to form moral legitimacy in a sphere that according to some was not supposed to have it. Like many other image specialists, Elena Ivanovna suggested that image-fashioning, despite its own connections to consumption and materiality, could be the foundation of a mode of market interaction that was not only not an affront to moral sensibilities, but was, in itself profoundly moral

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[241] Ries (1997) and Kelly (2001) both discuss the role of Russian women as guardians of etiquette, morality, and propriety. Attwood (1996), Bridger (1996), and Pilkington (1996) discuss Russian worries over young women's morality in the context of a potentially exploitative capitalist marketplace. On the gendering of discourses about etiquette and morality more generally, see Ardetti (1996) and Curtin (1985).
[242] Rudnycky (2009) and Cahn (2006; 2008) discuss projects and discourses that make markets moral. Also see Welker's (2009) analysis of the moral commitments of those that defend capitalist practices.

and civilized.[243]

I began to understand this a few months after my immersion in the rules and regulations of image and etiquette class was over. I was observing the final image session of a different group of students than I followed normally, a class in which the students were to use what they had learned in etiquette and image class in mock interviews while being videotaped. The room was crowded, the students were nervous (especially because of the presence of the camera) and talking excitedly. While some jumped into the mock interview, more than half held back. Elena Ivanovna was playing the employer, but her own role in the exercise was quite minimal. After each student knocked on the door to the classroom, she briefly acknowledged their presence and told them to enter with a serious and formulaic "Please sit down." The students then gave speeches about themselves with serious, sometimes halting voices and tensely clenched body postures (at times breaking out into anxious laughter) as Elena Ivanovna silently watched. One student for example, in a particularly brief attempt, spoke mainly of her technical high school degree and her Fokus education with relevant dates, along with her knowledge of *deloproizvodstvo*, typing, computers and basic English. Searching for more to say, she concluded by haltingly calling up some relevant personality characteristics. "I am responsible. . . industrious. . . punctual." (*Ia otvetsvennaia. . . ispolnitel'naia. . .punktual'naia.*")

Afterwards the students were supposed to watch the videotape, observe their gestures, speech, and appearance, and critique their performance. However, on the day I

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[243] Shepel (2005[1994]) for example, credits *imidzh* with the power to harmonize inner and outer worlds, bringing out the spiritual essence of the individual. Individual attention to image, along with etiquette, has also been credited with the potential to rejuvenate the spiritual richness of the nation and counter post-Soviet moral degradation (e.g. Koval'chuk 2003; N. A. Petrova 2003)

was observing, the video camera ran out of batteries and the students were unable to view themselves as planned. Instead, Elena Ivanovna concluded the exercise by drawing on her memory and providing some comments about the students' individual performances, as well as their performance as a group. Many of these comments were technical details: some of the students had fiddled with their bags immediately after they entered in an unattractive way, one had used too many filler words (although she had a pleasant timbre to her voice), another didn't look directly at people when speaking to them. However, Elena Ivanovna's main comment was a more general one: "You are selling yourselves, and you should be giving yourself as a gift." They, she said, were waiting for the employer to choose them like "sacrificial victims" and instead needed to actively and beautifully interact with the employer in a way that would ensure positive emotion on the employer's part. "He should be happy because you decided on him," she explained. Instead of repeating the same timeworn phrases about their punctuality, industriousness, and responsibility, the students needed to use more attractive phrases that would make deficiencies seem like worthy qualities. For example, rather than saying they were "talkative" (*obshitel'nyi*), which might suggest that they would not respect confidentiality, they should find a more attractive way of conveying the same idea, such as "I am a very communicative (*kommunikabel'nyi*) person. I really love people. I am good at connecting with them."

This was a complicated comment that drew from several different overlapping understanding of the exchange relations involved in getting a job in a capitalist labor market. On the one hand, Elena Ivanovna suggested that the future secretaries were "selling" themselves, a strictly market metaphor that made their acts of self-presentation

akin to that of selling any other type of commodity. While a common metaphor for self-presentation in interview settings, here, in a way echoing many other Post-Soviet critics of capitalism[244], everyday self-presentation took on a negative tinge, making it more akin to prostitution, perhaps one of the most morally problematic acts for young women, than a regular and normalized aspect of capitalist practice. Here the market exchange involved was laid (too) bare, as these young women sold themselves in a way that was too explicit and materialistic. Speaking about this not in terms of a sale but of a ritual sacrifice perhaps put some of the moral blame on the system or the employer rather than the "sacrificial victims" themselves, but made the act of self-presentation equally violent and morally problematic: The students were offering themselves up for slaughter, showing little respect for themselves through their self-presentation (perhaps even less than involved in the excessive selling of prostitution, if this was possible.) They did not understand that they had some agency in this process and actually had some room to choose their employer instead of simply being chosen as a passive victim.

However, to speak about giving oneself as a "gift" indexed an entirely different set of exchange relations, the tightly interwoven and emotionally saturated ties of what some have called long-term exchange (Parry and Bloch 1989), rather than the impersonal and short-term interactions involved in a quick commercial exchange for sex or the entirely one-sided relationship of sacrifice. This pointed to the need for an approach that was more personal, imbued with feeling, and oriented to both the employers and the interviewees needs than bare "selling." Elena Ivanovna, unlike many earlier post-Soviet critics, did not reject market interactions and saw them as normal occurrences in modern

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[244] The act of selling oneself (and selling more generally) involved in capitalism has been criticized by many post-Soviets for its materialism and lack of modesty (Klushina 2006), with the ultimate symbol of selling oneself being prostitution (Bornstein 2006).

Russian society. However, she also saw a need to transform them into a more morally acceptable form. By imbuing the interview interaction with the same beautiful gestures, words, and appearances that they had learned in the courses thus far, this suggested, the students could in effect transform the interview from a commercial exchange to a gift exchange. They were to give themselves to their employer not for money (nor for nothing in return as in slaughter), but because of a relationship that existed between them, more akin to friendship or family ties than the relationship between an employer and a prospective employee.

To approach an interview from the standpoint of image and etiquette here was a means, as Dale Pesmen (2000) has described, of approaching the market not as a bare exchange of cash, but instead avoiding "money's growing moneyeness" (141) and experiencing it in terms of social relationships. It hardly mattered that this was a type of simulated social relationship that derived solely from the efforts of a single party (the interviewee), retained a certain aesthetic and moral distance, and never penetrated to the level of "true" feelings and "true" emotions. The beautiful, feminine style Elena Ivanovna advocated for the secretarial students was a way of gentrifying the commercial interaction, of making it more pleasant, human, and personal for all, a matter of long-term gift exchange rather than short-term profit. It made the market safer for women, less a matter of "wild" prostitution (or sexual harassment) and more a matter of everyday business practice within the guidelines of acceptable feminine morality.

Not from the Forest

Image class came late in the five month session of the group I followed most

closely, long after the series of etiquette lessons, which had taken place in January and February. The first image class in early April had been canceled entirely, and due to a family illness, Elena Ivanovna arrived very late to the second class. While the initial etiquette classes had been nearly full and the students had participated quite actively, by the time the image sequence began in earnest, the classes had only a handful of students. One time I was the only "student" present for the first half hour of class and received a personal lecture on skin care until a couple of others students finally dropped in. Attendance had dropped in all the classes by this point, but in Image much more dramatically, than, for example in Computers, where everyone was scrambling to finish homework on spreadsheets in Microsoft Excel, or in *Deloproizvodstvo*, where students were trying to sort out different types of *prikazy* (ubiquitous documents used to carry out "orders"), and the wording, spacing, and signatures each required. Then, the last image class, the culminating lesson (described above with another class) in which we were supposed to be videotaped, was slipped into the schedule after Accounting at the last moment on the Friday before the Victory Day holiday weekend.

Everybody decided it wasn't worth it to stay for Image. "All we do is quizzes," noted Olia, the mother with a Soviet economics degree. "I can buy a book of quizzes and do them myself." Another student, Masha, a thin blond in her early twenties with a fondness for short skirts and midriff bearing tops, suggested that in any case Fokus would probably reschedule the class. We all walked out into the bright and sunny May day when it seemed like spring had finally arrived in St. Petersburg. Masha promptly lit up a cigarette, and, perhaps thinking of image class, remarked that she didn't find it beautiful (*krasivo*) when other girls smoked, but this didn't stop her from doing it all the same.

Everyone took off their coats to soak up the sun on the walk across the bridges, streets, and canals to the Metro station, joking that they were getting "naked." But they singled out Tamuna, the young Georgian student, who was wearing a tight leopard-print shirt and matching lycra pants, and teased her that she was "naked" already.

Fokus students sometimes expressed a moral sensibility, similar to Elena Ivanovna's, about the appropriateness of particular types of dress and appearance (at the same time as many regularly breached these rules in their everyday dress and conduct.) However, most of them in this group were not particularly motivated to go to a class where they weren't being graded and they weren't obtaining much new, concrete, information. They were most happy about the classes where they received detailed instructions about how to handle business cards or eat fruit properly, but were tired of hearing many of the same theories and pronouncements about the importance of image and self-presentation over and over again. Where, according to Bridger et al. (1996), women who attended free classes on beauty and fashion at a Moscow image center in the early 1990s were quite eager to attend more lessons, the Fokus students in my group often felt that they weren't learning enough new material to justify so many hours of Image and Etiquette.

In any case, much of this material was hardly new. A number of the students had husbands or past or present boyfriends who were in some way involved with business and many saw themselves as fairly cosmopolitan. Masha, for instance, who had once worked for a company that arranged marriages between Russian women and Western men and currently lived with an older Russian businessman, often spoke about fancy restaurants, martinis, and her addiction to sushi, while Lena, the tall blond student with a pastel

business suit, had just ended a long-term relationship with an older Englishman and often reminisced about her time in England and the civilizedness of the country. Not everyone had connections to the business world or to a high-status lifestyle, but many inhabited such milieus vicariously through the American show *Sex and the City*, which was currently being shown on Russian TV, or through the pages of Russian *Cosmopolitan* that they flipped through during class. Further, they were all inhabitants of St. Petersburg, considered by many to be the most cultured of Russian cities. "Why did so many of the girls skip lessons?" Iulia, the former police investigator asked herself rhetorically in an interview: "With many of these things . . . we are all adults. We didn't come from a remote village, not from the forest. Everyone lives, well, in a big city." Significantly, one of the students who seemed to take the lessons most to heart was Vika, a mother of two in her late twenties who had not grown up in St. Petersburg, but in a rural area outside of the city. Inspired in part by my recording of the lectures, she had brought a tape-recorder of her own into several etiquette classes, explaining to the instructor that "My husband thinks I'm not cultured enough."

When I asked them directly, most of the students said that they agreed with the approach in etiquette and image as well as with most of the content presented. One young student noted she learned how to apply make-up "more correctly," while another said "these are the things you really wanted to know," and a third was happy to get concrete tips on how to pick out a business suit, as well as to have Elena Ivanovna as a model of female conduct to emulate later in life. Although the students occasionally raised questions about the instructor's pronouncements on proper style, many also fretted about skirt lengths and heel heights before interviews that were held at the school, usually

having found themselves wearing an outfit that seemed inappropriate for meeting an employer. Some stressed that although they personally had a good sense of dress and taste, they thought the classes were a good idea for some of the other students, who clearly needed more instruction in these matters. In general, adhering to a widespread respect for teachers as a source of knowledge, the students were reluctant to criticize any of the classes too thoroughly, including those on etiquette and image.

At the same time, there was a sense among some of the older students in particular that all of these rules, tips, and thinking about external validation, weren't necessary if you were already the right type of person. "If a person has a sense of internal culture (*vnutrenaia kul'tura*)," Nina, a student in her thirties mentioned multiple times, "he should be able to conduct himself in any type of situation."[245] While Nina, like Elena Ivanovna, also accorded a moral importance to conduct, she situated the source of this moral sense more in the inner core of a person than in his or her external appearance and mannerisms. This idea of "internal culture" represented a person not as a superficial surface with an occluded inner depth, but rather as a more unified whole, organized around a central moral compass formed in childhood that provided an internal moral and aesthetic sensibility that made following explicit rules for appearance and behavior unnecessary. A graduate of the state university's prestigious philology program with outdated specialties in Bulgarian and Polish, Nina purposely eschewed wearing visible makeup to class despite negative comments on this from both Elena Ivanovna and her English teacher. This was not because she didn't care about her appearance (indeed, she visited the cosmetologist regularly), but because she contended a bare face was

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[245] On conflicts between more internal notions of culture (or *kul'tura*) and more external notions of culture, which can be acquired through effort (e.g. *kulturnost'*) in the Stalin period, see Fitzpatrick(1992).

healthier for her skin.

For the most part, however, the students were ultimately less worried about the moral ramifications of their own conduct and more worried about that of their employers and others involved in the process of getting a job. As they began to meet employers at the school, go on interviews, and contact personnel agencies, they were often taken aback by the questions they were asked and the treatment they received. Iulia, for example, the former police investigator in her thirties, had a very difficult time finding the type of serious secretarial job she wanted. While she did not speak to me much about the impact of her age or her former career on her job search, she often spoke to me about the lack of professionalism of those she encountered on the job market, from prospective employers that seemed to be trying to catch her in a lie, to placement agencies that sent her to interview for entirely inappropriate jobs, such as being a maître d' in a restaurant (while still taking a fee from job-seekers), to firms that called her in for several interviews and then acted like they didn't even know who she was when she called. Other companies called her in for interviews and spoke of nothing but coffee and tea, or, conversely, seemed to want fluent English speakers who could work as translators for cheap secretarial salaries. "Russia is still a wild country" she told me one day nearly a year after the courses had ended, as we took a long walk together around the city, past elegant and well-known landmarks such as the golden dome of St. Isaac's cathedral and the statued walkways of the Summer Garden. "People either like you and help you or they don't." In this case, image-shaping did not seem to be fulfilling many of its promises, from the prospect of individual self-realization to the dream of a civilized marketplace.

Finding Footing through *Imidzh*

Goffman begins his (1981) article on footing by describing an event that turns on female image. After an Oval Office bill ceremony in 1973, President Nixon commented on American journalist Helen Thomas's choice of slacks rather than a dress. In addition to asking Thomas to pirouette to model the slacks, he asked her what her husband thought of her fashion choice, and, then suggested to humorous effect that since pants were no cheaper than dresses, she should change her outfit. For Goffman, the incident ultimately speaks to the subtle shifts, or changes in footing, that can occur in alignments between speakers and hearers from moment to moment, the comment on Thomas's dress, along with the action of singling her out from the crowd, representing a shift from the more formal bill-signing ceremony to a less serious moment of joking and small talk. In the context of this chapter, however, of particular interest are Goffman's initial comments on the article, before he begins his discussion of footing. "The incident," he writes, "points to the power of the president to force an individual who is female from her occupational capacity into a sexual, domestic ones during an occasion in which she . . . might well be very concerned that she be given her full professional due, and that due only" (125).

This assessment contrasts strongly with the ideologies prominent at Fokus in a couple of revealing ways. First, while, Goffman, perhaps taking his cue from the efforts of 1970s American feminists, assumes a marked contrast between a woman's professional self-striving and a feminine, domestic role, and implies this is necessary condition of female success, at Fokus the conditions of success looked quite different. In the wake of official Soviet egalitarianism, as well as Perestroika-era insistence on choosing between feminine domestic and professional roles and nineties sexualization of

the secretarial profession, Fokus represented an attempt to forge a model of working womanhood that fused femininity with professionalism. Here, not only were feminine domesticity (of a particular subservient type) and professionalism seen as compatible; they were both seen as necessary elements of success on the job for women. The ideal secretary was simultaneously feminine and professional, self-realizing, yet also often self-effacing, resolutely female, yet avoiding overt sexuality. She managed to always keep her own professional goals in view, while at the same time being professionally attuned to the needs and desires of others. She embraced hierarchy in an attempt to give herself an equal chance at professional success. This is a model of professional subjectivity not captured well by Western liberal (and neoliberal) models of self-striving, modeled after historically masculine models of independent action.[246]

Goffman's discussion of the Thomas incident also highlights another significant contrast with the ideologies of image held to be important at Fokus. Although Goffman implies that Thomas may have chosen her slacks particularly through a type of image-shaping (here, an attempt not to emphasize her femininity and be taken seriously in an American social milieu where this was seen as a prerequisite to feminine success) this attempt ultimately fails because of Nixon's effort to lighten up the atmosphere with a joke at Thomas's expense. While ideologies of image at Fokus held that women could gain a type of control by anticipating the expectations and reactions of powerful others, we see here that these are not so easy to predict and can change from moment to moment as those others, better positioned to impose their own definition of the situation, pursue their own particular communicative and social goals. Because of the psychologized, self-

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[246] Commentators on Habermas's work, for example, have commented on the gendered nature of this liberal vision. See Fraser (1993), Landes (1988), Gal and Kligman (2000), and Ryan (1992).

help nature of the image-shaping models prevalent at Fokus and elsewhere in Putin-era Russia, however, they vastly oversimplified the role of others in forming an impression at the same time as they claimed to make this a central principle of image formation. To determine whether one would be liked, and ultimately whether one would succeed, appeared to be simply a matter of acting according to a uniform set of rules, which were said to obtain in nearly all situations, regardless of the other parties in the interaction.

Yet while these rules, culled from both Soviet era ideas about culturedness and new anxieties about competing in local labor markets conditioned by global expectations, increasing consumerism, and ever shifting ideals about proper feminine behavior, represented extremely simplified rubrics for gauging others expectations, they were nonetheless invested with a vast significance that demands that we take them seriously. I have suggested that image-shaping was ultimately a moral response to Post-Soviet marketization that aimed to create a new, cultured basis for market interaction. It aimed to legitimate and civilize the wild market of the nineties, normalizing the significant inequalities it engendered, at the same time as it attempted to fashion a model of Russian professional subjectivity that would be respectable in the eyes of a larger imagined global audience. To enact the model of subordinate female professionalism celebrated at Fokus was not only to further one's career but also to contribute to the gentrification of the market economy, and with it the civilizedness of the Russian nation. Although for the students who attempted to navigate the post-Soviet labor market with such tools in hand, the market nonetheless often remained a terrain more wild than civilized.

Chapter 6

Images, Connections, and Contracts in the Global Economy

Pavel was the director of a new branch of a Urals-based bank that was just coming to St. Petersburg in 2007. A former physicist then in his 40s, he had retrained in economics and entered banking at the beginning of the 2000s. He was soft-spoken and always polite, a family man who spoke often of his wife and daughter's upcoming summer trips to Finland and Italy. I was giving Pavel English lessons for a couple of months in the future St. Petersburg bank branch, a building being constructed anew for this purpose. We would always meet outside the building, since the path to his office where we held our lessons (the one nearly finished room in the future bank) was perilous. Each time we met, we made our way past various workmen through an ever-shifting interior of boards, wires, and other construction supplies. Gradually, I began to recognize the contours of the future bank. Yellow wallpaper began to appear on the walls. Glass partitions began to appear between offices.

Pavel missed a week of lessons to head back to the Urals for a negotiations course. When he returned, aware of my interest in business communication, he showed me his course materials. Awkwardly (though we were speaking Russian at the time) Pavel presented the material he had learned in the course to me, reading much of it straight off the training booklet. This included, for example, discussions of various communication styles one might use to cope with conflict and distinctions between "confident,"

"unconfident" and "aggressive" negotiating behavior. A particularly important principle was the importance of "establishing contact" (*nalazhivanie kontakta*) during the beginning stages of negotiating a deal, a concern often accompanied by advice to project an appropriate image that demonstrated one's interest in others. Pavel spoke apologetically in relaying this material, explaining that he was not a specialist in this area, and mentioned that he often forgot much of the content of trainings soon after they were over in any case.

However, as we talked in more detail about his work, Pavel seemed to suggest that many of the techniques he learned, especially those relating to establishing contact, weren't even applicable much of the time. While Pavel often engaged in telephone and face-to-face negotiations over loan rates with various businesses, he was rarely ever starting from scratch. "In Russia," he explained, "the presence of personal contacts carries significant weight." This meant that often the negotiation process did not involve *establishing* contact through perpetuating an appropriate image, so much as it meant, as he described, maintaining "relationships" (*otnosheniia*) and perpetuating "emotional contact" (*emotsial'nyi kontakt*). While Russians were beginning to trust banks more and more, and even Pavel's elderly parents were now regularly using the *bankomaty* (or ATMs) found on nearly every street corner, it was important to people, he explained, to have this extra level of trust that came from an already existing personal relationship with a banker. There was a lot of competition between banks, and personal contacts were important for customers deciding between different offers. As a result, even bank managers who began working at a new bank often didn't need to begin negotiations with completely new clients, because they carried personal contacts with them from previous

jobs. Those they had worked with in previous positions would continue to work with them in the context of a new institutions, turning to them for future business as well as recommending their friends and colleagues. "It is simply more comfortable for them that way," Pavel explained.

To many business people and business educators that I met in St. Petersburg, one of the major differences between working in a market economy and a socialist one was the need to attract various partners, clients, and customers rather than having these relationships mapped out by the dictates of the plan. This was an underlying premise at Fokus, where the secretarial students were not only being trained to ace job interviews, but also to help their companies attract new business and retain current clients through attention to their appearance and manner. From this perspective "transition" meant that businesses needed to actively work to forge links with other businesses as well as consumers where they had not existed before. Several "new" market-oriented communication practices have been highlighted as a key tool in this transformation. These include sales, advertising, and public relations techniques, as well as more generally applicable techniques for sealing deals such as negotiation skills. These techniques, for the most part, have been presented by purveyors of business advice as tools for bridging an impersonal marketplace populated by atomized buyers and sellers, who only come into contact with one another in specific, goal-oriented business transactions. Intertwined with *imidzh* concerns, as well as "Western" concerns with contracts and corporate governance, they often appear to delineate a new, market-oriented realm of professional communication in which market players are independent agents drawn together through the magic of the market and the communication skills of

the sellers, who attract unknown buyers through various displays of verbal skill on interpersonal and public levels.

Yet, while such concerns were becoming particularly important in the 2000s as business people (not unlike secretarial educators) strove to establish business activities on a more "civilized" and professional foundation than had existed in the chaos of the "wild" 90s, they provide only a partial glimpse of how links between businesses could be formed. Establishing links between companies using new market-oriented techniques was a major preoccupation of many Putin-era professionals. However, there were significant tensions between formal descriptions of these practices in textbooks and training courses and widespread understandings of business communication based upon logics of personal contacts and emotional connection. A considerable scholarly literature has documented the importance of informal networks in the Soviet period as a means of making industrial production work. This literature suggests that far from being dictated by the plan, Soviet business relationships were often driven by citizens' individual efforts to draw on carefully cultivated personal ties. Similar types of social relationships continued to be of great significance to many in the St. Petersburg business community in the Putin era, and a reliance on such "connections" was often seen as the distinguishing mark of Russian business that separated it from business in the West. These descriptions of business via connections, which invoked logics of strong "human" relationships and getting something "through someone" (Pesmen 2000:144), often differed substantially from those accounts that portrayed the market in terms of independent buyers and sellers connected through little but their own mutual desire for profit.

At the same time, however, "connections" do not explain everything about

business in Putin's Russia. In scholarship, as well as in the popular press, a typically "Russian" reliance on connections has too often been viewed as entirely opposed to market-based methods of making connection with others. In this chapter, my purpose is not to claim, as many scholars have before me, that connections are what really matters in Russia, nor to oppose a personalistic sphere based upon informal networks to a neoliberal ideal based upon individualism and the meeting of atomized individuals (e.g. Dunn 2004). Rather, I see my task as exploring how ideologies of abstract market-oriented communication and business through connections overlapped, merged, and existed in tension in everyday business practice, as St. Petersburg business professionals endeavored to forge professional links both with those that they already knew and those that they did not.

In so doing, I move back and forth between the dilemmas of forging links on local labor markets and those of forging connections across borders. In an economy steeped in transnational relationships, when many companies were trying to forge both domestic and international ties simultaneously, these efforts were often tightly related. The focal point of this chapter is the work of a rapidly expanding St. Petersburg-based conglomerate I call the Neptune Group, which was actively engaged in attracting new clients and partners in both local and foreign markets. Examination of the Group and its activities provides an opportunity to return to issues of economic globalization and complement the discussion of communicative projects in local Russian labor markets in the last chapter with an understanding of the regional and international ties that interpenetrated economic (and communicational) transactions in St. Petersburg at the time of my fieldwork. Thus, I do not separate concerns of global and domestic trade but consider how similar

ideologies of communication mediated both domestic projects of corporate self-presentation and efforts to draw foreign clients and project images of Russian firms abroad.

The Problem of Market Ties

Wood pellets are a "biofuel," or alternative energy source, made from wood waste. Used for heating and the generation of electricity, they closely resemble large pieces of rabbit food. I was drawn into the global wood pellets trade when I conducted three months of fieldwork at Neptune, a young St. Petersburg-based conglomerate with particular expertise in the shipping insurance industry, in spring 2005. (This was followed by three more months of fieldwork there two years later in spring 2007.) The company was founded as a daughter company of a Norwegian insurance firm in 1999, but had since shed its foreign ownership, becoming officially a "Russian" (*rossiskaia*) company in 2002. Along with this, Neptune had rapidly expanded into diverse industries, including other types of insurance, finance, leasing, construction, travel, and port services. When I started fieldwork there, working in the company's Marketing and Development Department on an unpaid basis in a position most viewed as an internship (*praktika*), I was told that my primary role would be to help the company in general and the business development manager Misha in particular with a conference and Public Relations event entitled "Shipping Days," which was advertised as a place where foreign and Russian ship owners could gather to discuss the state of the industry in Russia. However, a few days after I began my fieldwork, I was told that the event was being cancelled. (Although I was never given a full explanation, various rationales I heard

cited an official state-sponsored event of a similar type that would take place in the near future as well as a lack of participants that would not allow the Group to redeem its costs.)

Misha, an ever-enterprising young manager with a marketing degree who nearly always wore a loose brown suit to work, soon came up with another idea, a business conference that would bring together those involved with producing and purchasing wood pellets. The industry was just emerging, both in Russia and elsewhere. However, he explained to me, the interest in wood pellets was enormous, especially in light of the recent coming into force of the Kyoto Protocol on climate change after Russia's ratification. While there was not much of an internal market for the pellets in a country where oil and gas were exceedingly cheap, Misha explained, Russians were eager to produce them. This was especially because the pellets promised little or no cost for raw materials, since they could be made from the byproducts of the country's considerable logging operations. Meanwhile, European countries—especially Scandinavian ones— couldn't get enough of the pellets: The more, the better. With this in mind, Misha presented a vision of a business conference that would bring together pellet producers from Russia and other CIS countries with European buyers, along with some equipment manufacturers, logistics company, and, possibly, financiers. To make the event especially enticing it was to occur on a cruise ship en route to the sacred island of Valaam during the White Nights, St. Petersburg prime tourist season, when the days were long and the sun never set.

As Misha described it, the conference would have two interlinked communicational aims. He described the event as a place for deal-making, where the

framework of presentations and recreational activities would all be a background to the real action of the conference, in which buyers and sellers met and agreed on lucrative contracts to ship pellets from the East to the West. At the same time, the conference would also have significant benefits for Neptune, since it would promote the Group's image among the attendees and potentially make them more likely to turn to the company when they were in need of its services in areas such as marine insurance, leasing, and consulting. The only obstacle it seemed was actually getting the producers and buyers in one place. It was already March, and to make the White Nights the conference would need to be held in June. Misha was not particularly concerned with finding speakers, whom he said he could find easily after his work on a similar conference he had organized when he had worked at the Danish consulate. He was also not particularly concerned with conference logistics, since this could all be handled by Neptune's own tourist company, which would profit from the conference. The real task was to be able to attract the conference attendees. These he divided into the wood pellets producers from the CIS countries—whom he often glossed as simply Russian (*rossiiskiie*)—and the wood pellets purchasers from the West, or "foreigners" (*inostrantsie*) as he generally put it, a term he did not use for potential attendees from Ukraine and Belarus. While Misha was relatively unworried about attracting the "Russians," whom he claimed to know from his work on the earlier conference, he was quite concerned with attracting the "foreigners," who were critical if any deals were to be made.

In trying to bring in both types of participants, we engaged in several strategies, both drawing on existing ties and trying to create new ones. On the one hand, Misha drew on his previous contacts from the last conference to connect with the "Russians" in

Russian, making phone calls and sending emails to those he knew well. Along with this he returned to and revitalized the Russian Wood Pellets Web Portal[247], a web site devoted to the wood pellet industry he had built the last time around, posting industry news items in Russian and English, as well as using the space to advertise the conference and sending emails about the conference to an associated mailing list. Meanwhile, although Misha was fluent in English himself, it became my job to try what he described as a "blind method" (*slepoi metod*) of bringing in the more elusive "foreigners." I made lists of potential "foreign" attendees from the internet, faxed and emailed conference descriptions, and repeatedly called members of the list to find out if they had received our materials and would commit to coming. Whenever any of the foreigners showed interest, I told Misha, who would excitedly speak about how "interesting" the conference could be, and then contact them personally by email or phone.

As the event came closer, however, it became unclear if the conference, like Shipping Days, would happen at all. The timing was tight: This was not the only wood pellet event this summer and others had been organized much earlier and took place within European Union boundaries. The price was also significant (700 Euros for Western participants, although less for those from the CIS.) There were also some serious reservations from Western participants about engaging in business with Russia, which I will discuss in more detail later in the chapter. Over time Misha's estimates of the number of expected "foreign" participants in conference promotional materials dropped from 10-15 to 6-10. Refusals from "foreign" participants began to creep in even from those who had been interested, while Russian and other CIS confirmations began to rise. Misha found a certain old joke that he said was from the 1990s apropos. One

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[247] I have renamed the website here.

Russian said to another, "I will sell you some chocolate for $10,000." The two Russians later saw each other running around and each asked what the other was doing. One said he was getting the chocolate, the other, the $10,000. In the joke, set in the wild period of the 90s, everything is unstable: It is unclear whether the two people, the material goods being traded, and the money to fund the trade will ever come together. In our case, operating in the context of a successful company a decade later, our worries were not about mustering up financial resources so much as they were about making links between people. However, this was a task that was proving exceedingly difficult. Indeed, it was unclear until the last moment whether we would attract enough interest to hold the event in the first place or meet our goals of uniting eastern and western buyers and sellers and increasing Neptune's customer base.

In these difficulties Neptune was not alone. In the postsocialist business environment forging links between businesses posed a particular problem. The coming of the market economy often seemed to require a substantial transformation in the nature of business relationships from a system in which inter-firm relations of supply and distribution were dictated from above via the plan to one in which companies needed to forge these relationships themselves. One middle-aged factory manager I interviewed in 2004, for example, like many other private sector business people I met, was generally critical of large enterprises that had survived from the Soviet era and suggested that they generally hadn't changed with the times. The only companies of this type that he thought had any hope of survival, however, were those that had opened marketing departments, a highly significant step towards modernization that, in his opinion, represented an entirely different way of doing business. He headed a department responsible for purchasing

industrial materials and suggested that the way in which this was done had changed markedly since the Soviet period. "In Soviet times," he explained to me, "There was no kind of marketing whatsoever, there was the state plan and there were corporations that, let's say, were preapproved somewhere there in Moscow." Buyers, he went on to explain, could buy products only from these preapproved factories, meaning that the market for products was also planned ahead of time. "No one," he stressed, "needed to sell any type of product to anyone." If a company contained a marketing department, this suggested, it at the very least signified that it had begun to embrace a new, more active "market" approach to doing business that involved taking steps to "sell" products to other firms rather than the more socialist approach of passively waiting for customers to magically appear on their doorstep as if directed from above.[248]

While, as I will discuss later in this chapter, a number of scholars have argued that Soviet systems of supply and distribution were far more complex than this and involved quite active processes of bargaining plans and using personal connections to procure necessary materials, many other Russian business people, along with business educators and scholarly observers, have similarly viewed "transition" as a movement from a system in which all was determined from above to one in which business people needed to take a much more active part in forging business relationships with other businesses and consumers. One Russian sociologist notes that as both enterprises and the state turned increasingly towards the market a new requirement for sales personnel appeared: "Now it was no longer enough to just release (*otpuskat'*) goods to customers that had already come to a store; the necessity arose to search for potential clients and be

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[248] See also Berliner's (1957) and Verdery's (1996) descriptions of the role of the plan in industrial supply relationships under socialism.

able to propose (*predlagat'*) that they obtain a product." (Kazurova 2005:657). The difference perceived here is between a passive process of "releasing" goods to whomever comes and an active process of "proposing" them, which involves taking equally active steps to find customers and encourage them to buy the company's products.[249] Where Soviet manufacturing was said to prioritize the technical aspects of producing, a market orientation seemed to mean increasingly putting emphasis on the cultivation and formation of relationships with other businesses, from suppliers to partners to clients, as well as with the general public.

A greater emphasis on sales may have been the most visible aspect of this perceived shift. However, along with sales, a number of other types of professions oriented on forming links between businesses became increasingly important at the same time as professional commentators generally complained that Russians did not fully understand these disciplines or practice them well. In addition to sales, this included advertising, an even more depersonalized type of selling without the mediation of a salesperson to respond directly to customer questions and objections. It also involved marketing, the process that creates the conditions for making the initial contact with the client through market research, product development and placement, and related promotional activities directed at ascertaining, producing, and meeting customer needs. Another important area of concern has been corporate public relations, which strives to draw new customers and partners as well as manage existing relationships through specially designed events and press coverage that cultivate the company's image in

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[249] However, it is important to note that, despite impressions to the contrary, there was considerable effort paid to the "culture" of sales in the Soviet period (Hessler 2000).

dialogue with the public.[250] Along with this, there has been an increasing stress on other related business practices that require forming and maintaining links with other businesses, from cultivating corporate clients to choosing suppliers to forming strong business partnerships of various types.

Creating these links in a professional and moral way seemed particularly important to many St. Petersburg professionals in the Putin era. Misha, who was obsessed with doing things in a "civilized" (*sivilizovannyi*) manner and made it his personal mission to clean up the "mess" (or *bardok*) he perceived in Neptune's office procedures, once explained to me that marketing in Russia at the present moment was at an important crossroads: "We have just left the wild market and obtained some sort of rules of the game. Companies have just begun (more or less) to worry about their reputations." Although all business people could point to semi-legal, unprofessional, or outright corrupt practices employed by many local businesses (including, often, their own), many had a sense that a critical point had been reached that required a more professional approach to business-to-business communication. This was entangled with a feeling that competition had increased. This was no longer a time in which it seemed that anyone who jumped in the market could make money, and using professional communication tools such as sales, marketing, and PR to connect with other businesses in a more sophisticated manner was seen as an important way of differentiating one's company from others.

Yet, despite the ever-vaunted "stability" of the Putin era, the position of many

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[250]These descriptions of advertising, marketing, and PR were particularly influenced by Rep'ev (1997), an interview with Igor' Mann (Tsarevskaia 2005), and Veksler (2005), respectively. For scholarly discussions of marketing and advertising in Russia see also Mamut (2007) and Holden et al. (2008).

businesses in St. Petersburg was still exceedingly fragile. It was not always clear which companies within the domestic market could be trusted, and Russian companies that wanted to enter the international market encountered doubts about their own stability and trustworthiness. In such a context, this was an environment in which people pondered, interrogated, and reworked understandings of the social relationships involved in business transactions in particular and the market more generally.[251] If the shifting place of the market and market exchange more generally has been a site of problematization in many times and places, the new focus on professional inter-business communication in the Putin era seemed to raise particular questions. How could one connect with others in the context of the abstract market relationships that often seemed to exist between buyer and seller? How could one make sure that these links could be trusted in a still unstable marketplace environment? And how could one present one's firm and oneself in a way that would overcome other people's feelings of wariness and distrust, particularly in cases in which business was being conducted across regional and national boundaries? Further, what was the proper relationship between an individual and the company he or she represented: How could one simultaneously represent and advance the interests of one's business and oneself amidst the seemingly impersonal logic of exchange?

Abstracting and Concretizing Markets

Traditional Western approaches to economic thought hold that under capitalism, the market works as an abstract mechanism. It is impersonal, as suggested by the metaphor of the "invisible hand," and exists separately from social ties. People are involved in this abstraction only as individual agents pursuing their own self-interest who

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[251] See Agnew (1986) , Lemon (1998), Patico (2008).

anonymously engage in economic transactions and then quickly leave them. They "enter and leave the exchange like strangers" (Callon 1998:3), momentarily coming into agreement about a price and then becoming strangers once more. The only "cement" in this world capable of tying together atomized individuals is the "contract" that ties parties to an agreement together by legal means (Booth 1994:657). Even those accounts that have endeavored to critique the expanding market have often fallen into similar lines of reasoning, separating "nonmarket" cultures or historical periods in which social relations were primary from modern market economies based on these impersonal mechanisms (e.g. Bohannan and Dalton 1962; Polanyi 2001 [1944]). Thus, whether the market is seen as the result of the natural propensity of people to engage in exchange or an ever-expanding force that subsumes nonmarket approaches, markets appear transhistorical, acultural, disembodied, and disembedded from culture and society (Dilley 1992). This sense of abstraction and disembeddedness only intensifies in globalist accounts of the global economy and transnational markets that are supposed to be seamlessly connected, yet connected to no place in particular.

Like much of scholarly thought, this view also circulates in various popular and everyday discourses.[252] In Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, for many, the "transition" often similarly seemed to involve a movement to more abstract, more depersonalized, and agentless market forces for everyday citizens. Verdery argues, for instance, that a move to an abstract vision of economic processes was a critical component of the immediate postsocialist moment: "Things that were personal come to seem impersonal; "the economy" becomes a separate domain and a force of nature, for whom no one in particular is responsible" (181). One would not want to overstate the

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[252] See Dilley (1992). Also, more generally, Giddens (1979).

case, since, as many anthropologists (including Verdery herself) have pointed out, abstract senses of the economy in the early years of postsocialism coexisted with personalized ones in which certain types of people became identified and disparaged as agents of the market's most destructive tendencies.[253.] However, this nonetheless points to the way in which, in conjunction with the circulation of various scholarly and popular discourses about abstract market mechanisms, it became possible to imagine an abstract economic sphere with its own laws in which the state was no longer the agent that controlled economic activity, and instead economic practices grew in an undirected manner out of the aggregate activity of buyers and sellers.

A variant of this type of thinking, I would suggest, is prevalent advice about selling, negotiating, and other types of business communication in books and trainings, which presents the buyer-seller relationship in as abstract a fashion as the economy as a whole. Decoupled from Soviet-era discourses of speculation that criminalized acts of buying and selling for profit as exploitation[254], and informed by Western sales techniques, selling, for instance, could often appear as an abstract process in which two strangers meet for a brief exchange. The sales person, from this perspective, like the secretary, is ideally a master of the art of image and self-presentation. He or she is to use special verbal and nonverbal techniques to form a momentary, but fleeting, relationship with the customer that raises the probability of a sale. One author of internet sales advice, for example, notes that customers are likely to see buying as a risk, and suggests that one of the key elements of ensuring a sale involves cultivating a relationship with the customer that will allow him or her to trust the sales person (who by implication is

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[253] See also Humphrey (2002[1998]), Lemon (2000), Patico (2008).
[254] On speculation, see for instance, Humphrey (2002).

someone that the customer does not already know). It, thus, becomes the task of the sales person to "lesson the perceived risk, impart the additional 'weight' of one's expert opinion, and find a path to establishing good relations with the customer" (Molchanov 2006). To do this, he suggests, it is particularly important to pay attention to certain "external signs" that attest to one's authority by, for example, wearing a serious business suit or advertising that one has relevant educational credentials. One should also use verbal techniques that will help create a sense that one is honest and trustworthy. For example, to lessen the impression that they are only driven by material concerns, salespeople should advise customers not to buy unworthy, expensive products and instead suggest that customers choose cheaper and better alternatives, positioning themselves as trusted advisors with the best interests of the customers at heart.

This is a relationship that has no history. The prototypical example of sales is not a longstanding relationship between an industrial buyer and a supplier, but instead a customer in a store, who has seemingly entered for the first time. Employees at one St. Petersburg training center for example, centered on American psychologist Daniel Goleman's fashionable idea of "emotional intelligence," spoke to me in a 2007 interview about how their new approach to selling trumped earlier approaches with reference to interactions between a customer and a retail salesperson. "Before it was great when a salesperson would just say "Hello"!" explained the company's energetic development manager Dasha. "But now something more is needed. One needs to be oriented to the customer and find out what he wants!" The director of the company, Anatolii, went on to describe how he had gone into a store because he wanted a stove, but momentarily had stopped by the refrigerators because he had just bought one: The sales person told him

all sorts of technical details about refrigerators when this was not even what he was looking for. They then went on to list similar cases: a salesperson overwhelmed a customer buying a TV with multiple special features without finding out what was most important to her, computer salespeople lost sales because they didn't realize that customers wanted a carrying case with their laptop. They eventually switched to the slightly different scenario of insurance agents who gave clients too many insurance details without considering their underlying fears about accidents and loss. However, even here, this was a scenario in which there was no preexisting relationship between buyer and customer: The question of what the consumer wanted and felt became particularly salient because salesperson and client met as unconnected strangers. While Dasha and Anatolii, as specialists in "emotional intelligence," were more attentive to the role of long-standing relationships in the emotional balance of a workplace *kollektiv*, in all of the cases in which commercial exchange was at stake, transactions were depicted as momentary and unprecedented encounters.

While some market exchanges, of course, do take place as relatively anonymous exchanges of limited time and duration, others do not.[255] From this point of view Goffman's (1959) view of commercial interactions as short-term individual or team performances in which all work to maintain a "front" needs to be complicated by accounts which allow for more historical and cultural depth. A particular inspiration in this approach are studies of advertising that focus upon the cultural production of advertising images[256], a process, that as Mazarella (2003a) describes it, "takes the form of

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[255] Sociologists such as Dore (1983) and Granovetter (1985) in this respect have described certain longstanding business relationships as more durable and personal than accounted for in classical economic theory. See also Carrier (1997).

[256] E.g. Moeran (1996; 2003), Mazarella (2003a; 2003b). See also Kemper (2001) and Miller (1997).

a series of interactions and negotiations both within the agency and between the agency and the client" (153). These studies suggest that advertising deals are not quick exchanges, but highly complex processes in which members of advertising agencies make efforts to predict clients' reactions and tastes, drawing both on their already existing knowledge of those clients and generalizations about national and regional types. They show that the process of making a deal occurs over time through multiple internal meetings and meetings of different types with various parties representing the client, all of which involve some degree of strategic planning.[257] Deal-making and market exchange, from this perspective, is a process that is situated and historical, involving concrete agents whose interactions are not confined to the processes of buying and selling alone.[258]

My aim in this chapter from this respect is to examine this more abstract view of business interactions not as a scientific truth, but as one among the many views on building links between businesses that existed in St. Petersburg, examining market interactions and especially those that take place in global contexts as a situated, historicized phenomenon rather than as abstract and disconnected sets of meetings between atomized individuals. In the remainder of this chapter, I look at some of the ways in which the processes of connecting with others in the market were described and enacted by those I met in St. Petersburg business circles who were actively involved in

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[257] Thus, like linguistic exchanges more generally, commercial exchanges "have a relation to other acts, including the past, the future, the hypothetical, the conspicuously avoided and so on, and these relations. . . inform the participant structure of the moment" (Irvine 1996b:135).

[258] See Agnew (1986), Carrier (1997), Dilley (1992), Ho (2009), Mitchell (2002), Tsing (2005). In the postsocialist context see Hann (1992) and Mandel and Humphrey (2002).

processes of transaction and exchange.[259] In particular I call attention here to the ways in which ideas about communication and connection interpenetrated descriptions, understandings, and practices of relationships between representatives of different businesses. I look at how various communicational tropes were mobilized to discuss market exchange in St. Petersburg and how these understandings were drawn upon and intertwined in practice.

Promoting a Corporate *Imidzh*

I had to leave the country for a few weeks before the wood pellets conference was to take place. While at this time I still did not know if it would be cancelled, a few emails closer to the event confirmed that the show would indeed go on as planned. I returned to Russia a few days before the conference, however, to find Misha looking quite pale and experiencing considerable stress. He was now expecting only four Western companies (including two equipment manufacturers, who did not count for deal-making purposes) and about thirty companies from the CIS countries, with more expected to show up without registering ahead of time. Moreover, of the CIS companies, most were not actually producing pellets yet and were only considering pellet factories or in the early stages of getting production operations off the ground. Over the next couple days, the situation continued to worsen. Misha called one of the Western pellet traders to find out when its representatives were coming and discovered that they were cancelling due to illness. Not only did they want over 2000 euros returned, but we were down to one buyer.   When a representative of a Belarusian company called, Misha greeted him

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[259] Indeed, as Dilley (1992) has suggested, views of market transaction as an abstract process are hard to maintain for those who actually engage in market exchange, and thus experience it as the market's active agents rather than passive consumers .

cheerily and politely, but as soon as he got off the phone he muttered under his breath "I don't even know why he's coming." Later on, he elaborated, "They are coming to make deals (*krutit'sia*[260])" and there is only one Western company." After cooling off a bit more, Misha had a new suggestion. With a deadpan face he proposed that he could play a "foreign" buyer at the conference. The PR assistant, a student who was working at Neptune alongside her studies, was taken with the idea and chimed in that I could play one as well. "Can you lie?" Misha asked me.

This was only a joke. However, it touched on some of the key issues we faced at the conference. The conference was not merely supposed to be a series of talks, dinners, coffee breaks, and recreational activities; it was also supposed to be a representation of Neptune and its "solidity" as a firm. PR events such as this conference had several aims: While on the one hand they directly involved earning some money for the Group (in this case the Group's travel agency, Neptune Travel) they also aimed to attract attention to the Groups' companies by indirect means and in so doing attract new clients that would help the company's business grow in the future. If we could not ensure a reasonable mix of CIS and Western participants, when we had promised as much in our promotions for the conference, we were not only risking the failure of the event, we were also risking denigrating Neptune's name rather than promoting it positively and decreasing rather than increasing its client base and profit.

According to the imagologists' manuals for personal business success, intercompany relations are an extension of individual image. If one pays attention to the

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[260] See discussion of this and other "krut" words in Pesmen (2000). One of her Siberian informants suggests that the relationships indexed by "*krutit'sia*" are similar to those indexed by *blat'*, a Soviet-era practice of drawing on connections (discussed in more detail below.) Both, from this perspective suggest a hidden, personalistic approach to exchange.

image of a company's representatives (and in particular the image of its director), clients will be attracted to the business and be interested in what the business has to sell. In the realm of PR, advertising, and "brand," these representational logics multiply. Not only individual dress and manner, but promotional materials, events, and deeds all become critical manners of reputation that help one draw new clients and retain old ones.[261] These images are not produced *de novo*, in the context of limited and fleeting interactions, but accrue over time, in conjunction with prevailing impressions of the company, the region, and, especially, though not only, in the context of trade across borders, impressions of the country and its business as a whole. And while in Putin-era Russia proper consumption of expensive goods and a cultured, high-status manner, the stock-in-trade of the imagologists' advice for personal success, seemed to be important here, constructing a viable and profitable company image involved much more than this. Particularly important were assurances of the company's legitimacy and trustworthiness. In a business milieu that still felt uncertain, companies needed to project an image of why they could and should be trusted from both financial and ethical standpoints. An image of material prosperity was important, but not sufficient in this regard.

Image was quite important at Neptune, and the company's image-shaping efforts did encompass considerations of material wealth and status. Neptune's offices, located in an old building near the St. Petersburg port, stunned me when I first visited. I was escorted there in a chauffeur-driven car with smooth leather seats by my contact with the firm, an executive at a nearby company, who was also one of Neptune's clients. We breezily passed the building's security guard as well as the company's own security service to enter an office that was green and white and sparkling, seemingly adorned with

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[261] See Himmelstein (1997) and Jackall and Hirota (2000).

a shimmering hallway of mirrors. This glamorous impression only continued as I met with the company's young director (who like everyone at Neptune seemed no older than thirty). We met in a spacious and well-equipped office that featured a large and impressive desk as well as a low, informal coffee table surrounded by black leather seats where we sat and discussed my research plans. As a visitor, I saw a space that seemed bright and modern, with more than bit of glamour. (Although, I did not, however, feel quite the same way when I returned to work there, taking a crowded *mashrutka*, or minibus, from the Metro station to sit in the cramped "backstage" (Goffman 1959) office space of the Marketing and Development Department. The department was jam-packed with five people sitting at five desks turned in various directions, some towards each other, some at angles to the wall, as well as boxes full of presentations and promotional materials.)

Several people at Neptune were especially concerned with image in ways that encompassed linked considerations of materiality and prestige. These included the personnel manager Lana, a blond woman of about thirty who generally showed up at work in tailored pants and a nice blouse. Lana allowed me to observe several preliminary interviews with job candidates, and at the first of these, which was to fill a vacancy for the director's personal security guard, she apologized to me in front of the applicant that we were starting on such a lowly position: "We will need to find you something more proper (*prilichno*) next time." Although in the other cases, which were for office positions, interviews were held in the company's spacious conference room, this time we descended to a dimly lit security office in the basement, where we clustered around a small dusty table. While in this respect, Lana did not seem particularly concerned with

the company's image in front of the job candidate, she did make sure to smile often during the interview while asking him various questions about his experience and interest in the job. The male candidate, about a decade older, was wearing a worn jacket layered over a sweatshirt and polo shirt, and answered quietly and tersely. When asked how he would choose between this and another position; at first he said simply "I like this position." After Lana probed further, he admitted that salary would be the deciding factor and explained that he had not worked for four months and wanted to take care of his family. Lana did not offer him the job. "It was immediately evident, that this was not our image" she explained to me afterwards. (However, she preferred to tell the candidate he had little chance because he lacked a driver's license.) Even a personal security guard, because he might potentially accompany the director to meetings, needed to be the kind of person one could picture groomed neatly and wearing a suit—and this candidate, more concerned about bare survival than self-presentation, did not seem to have enough polish to picture in that role.

The members of the Marketing and Development Department were engaged with similar concerns on a more public scale. The members of the department generally called it the "*Piar* Department" (*Piar Otdel*) on the phone, using the popular imported English abbreviation for public relations.[262] As in many such departments in Russia, the department staff had a broad range of responsibilities oriented to the relationship between the company and its current and potential clients, partners, and competitors, including public relations, advertising, marketing research, and product development. The

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[262] In the nineties those concerned with the importation of many such terms from English into Russian tried to introduce various other "Russian" equivalents for *piar*, the most successful of which is *sviazi s obshchestvennostiu* (literally, "relations with the public"), used mainly in more formal, written contexts. "PR," using latin letters is also sometimes used. See Gekkina (N.d.).

members of the department, which ranged in size from three to five members over the course of my fieldwork, strove in this regard to project a high-level image of the company to current clients, potential business customers, and members of the wider public through the creation of promotional materials, appearances at exhibitions, and the planning of various events that could attract attention to the Group's companies by more indirect means. Material considerations and related status concerns were particularly important here, because marketing department employees aimed to position the companies of the Group as providers of "VIP-level services," whether they were offering insurance for yachts to those wealthy enough to own them or auto insurance to members of the general public. Even the most ordinary person without a fabulous home or car, in buying insurance from Neptune, should feel like he or she was a member of a much higher circle.

This was seen as particularly important in the Group's relations with other businesses, whether these were partners, clients, or potential clients. The members of the department had generally discriminating tastes, and especially the two permanent female members of the department (both women in their early twenties) tended to be rather demanding of local businesses in their everyday personal and business dealings. They, for example, subjected a hotel restaurant that was currently providing Neptune staff with lunch to intense scrutiny, and regularly called over restaurant managers to complain about various concerns with the service they were receiving, such as being served water that they contended was from the tap rather than bottled.[263] Similar attention was given

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[263] Water quality is an issue of concern to many in St. Petersburg, where the parasite *Giardia* is a threat in tap water, and many do not drink tap water without boiling and filtering it.

to the department's prize event, the "Insurance and Reinsurance Summit"[264] a conference organized by Neptune that brought together major players of the Russian insurance industry, as well as interested foreigners. For this event, it was important that everything be just so. Photographs from the conference show hundreds of young men and women in crisp business suits sitting in the audience during talks and intermingling in a lavish, adorned setting. Making sure the event met the most discriminating standards, one staffer emphasized to me, was very important because it exhibited the capabilities of the Group and its ability to finance such an event. More broadly, it also demonstrated that an event of this type could be held on such a "European level" in St. Petersburg, especially when most of the Russian insurance business, like other business, revolved around Moscow.

However, at Neptune image was not just about conducting company business at the highest level from a material standpoint. This was evident in a series of PR tours led by Nina, the head of the Marketing and Development Department, in 2007. The Group had recently completed the construction of a new port terminal that received shipments of foreign cars for wider distribution throughout Russia. Nina, acting as the Group's public relations representative, showed off the terminal in two separate tours, one addressed to a group of representatives of foreign consulates and other foreign state organizations, and one to a group of local journalists. The tours were nearly identical, except for the clothing choices of Nina and the guests: For the state representatives, Nina, a spirited woman in her mid-20s with bright blond hair, wore a suit (covered with a warm jacket) to match the guests, while for the journalists, she had switched to a tight top and tweed trousers, still a step above the raggedy journalists who favored jeans.

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[264] I have renamed the event here.

Throughout the tours Nina pointed out the "high level" of the port's construction and operations, stressing that its establishment in St. Petersburg was quite an impressive feat. The tours for the foreign representatives, for example, began with a bus ride through the faded industrial landscape of the port, a muddy expanse littered with rusting trucks, cranes, containers, and platforms. After this, the bright green and white terminal, adorned with glittering Nissan cars, provided a stark and modern contrast. Although it was a cold, windy March day, Nina called attention to the difference with a cheery disposition. Speaking in Russian,[265] she exclaimed, "You see how much the territory differs from the territory we just passed! Everything here is up to date!" The territory had been a "junk heap" when Neptune had first acquired it, she explained, but the company managed to fix it up in only 14 months. "Many people had this idea before, but only we were able to realize it!" she explained proudly.

As she pointed out the port terminal's many features and capabilities, including a beneficial customs arrangement, Nina also went beyond the Neptune Group's achievements to describe the qualities of the Group that made this success possible. The formula here was the same in both tours. On the one hand, Nina suggested, the Group's companies adhered to certain well-established principles for good business behavior. After leading the tour groups inside, away from the wind, Nina introduced them to members of the terminal administration and gave a PowerPoint presentation about Neptune and its various companies. In this presentation, repeated nearly verbatim in both tours, Nina stressed the company's reputation for openness, reliability, and trustworthiness with reference to internationally recognized business standards. She

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[265] Nina offered to do the tour in English. However, despite these being representatives of foreign organizations, most were Russian or Russian-speaking, and suggested a Russian language tour was better. One group (representatives of the Japanese consulate) brought along a translator.

presented precise figures about the Group's assets and made sure to note that it had been rated by international credit rating agencies. She also called attention to the Group's "recipe for success": "our positive reputation that stems from a central principle of our operations, the importance of fulfilling all of our obligations." A particular point of pride was that the company had recently won second place award in a set of ratings naming "the most open company."[266] "We really strive towards this," she explained to the foreign representatives, "and in this spirit we are ready to answer all of your questions!"

However, as Nina explained it, openness and fulfilling obligations wasn't the only secret of Neptune's success. Although not a significant part of the official PowerPoint presentation of the Group, she also stressed throughout the tours that the Group also had the type of social ties that made this kind of large-scale project possible. Neptune did not know until the last moment if they could realize the project, she said, but right before they began the members of the company reached a critical understanding. "We understood that the city authorities supported us," she explained, almost conspiratorially, to the foreign representatives. Further, she went on to say, they continued to have the authorities' support. Here she cited as evidence that the Group had recently acquired an adjoining piece of land for a future expansion project that would both expand the terminal's capacity and enable it to handle other types of shipments. Such municipal support, Nina hinted, would help Neptune to realize even its most ambitious plans, which in addition to future expansions, included plans to build its own railroad away from the terminal to help those who used the terminal bypass the clogged port roads.

Projecting an image of Neptune, then, was a complex and multifaceted endeavor. On the tour and elsewhere, with foreigners and locals alike, constructing Neptune's

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[266] This was a rating limited to issuers of promissory notes, although she did not call attention to this here.

image did not only involve issues of materiality, professionalism, and prestige, but these intertwined in complicated ways with two other different sets of concerns. First, the company was supposed to be both open and committed to its obligations, displaying the kind of virtue demonstrated by a commitment to fulfilling contracts and observing internationally recognized principles of corporate governance. However, the company was also supposed to have strong social ties with various parties ranging from state authorities to other local and foreign businesses. While these concerns are often thought to be mutually exclusive, I suggest in the following sections that both were critical issues for many business people in St. Petersburg as they worked through the problem of making links with other businesses both at home and abroad and endeavored to build a stable and "civilized" Russian business sphere.

Codes of Corporate Governance

Neptune's press materials consistently positioned the company as a reliable and trustworthy business player with little subtlety. This can be seen in the central description of the firm that appeared in the "presentation" (*prezentatsiia*) of the Group, a document that was projected on the screen in PowerPoint during public relations events (such as the port terminal tour), read aloud during those events, and printed out in spiral-bound booklets for promotional purposes in both English and Russian versions.[267] This document was often edited, and as such, slightly different versions often existed at one

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[267] As part of my work for the company, I produced new English translations of the presentation from the Russian versions, which were written first. In general, this was seen as simply a matter of direct translation, although I was instructed to make a few minor changes for foreign audiences, such as eliminating state license numbers and dates (which foreigners were presumed not to care about), as well as occasionally scaling down the claims about the company, calling it, for example, a "major player" in the insurance industry rather than a "leading" one, since marketing department staff considered the latter claim to be overblown in an international context. My analysis in this section is based upon a Russian version; quoted passages are direct translations of this version.

time. One Russian version begins by discussing the Group's history, rapid development, and the expertise of all of its companies. It then continues with a description of the head company of the group, Neptune Consulting (the company where the Marketing and Development Department was officially located):

> In Russia and abroad the Neptune Group is well-known due to the
> business that its head company, the insurance and reinsurance broker
> Neptune Consulting, which is one of the leading players in the world
> insurance and reinsurance market, has conducted abroad. Neptune
> Consulting's success and recognition is due to its stable reputation and
> observation of all aspects of conducting civilized business in its work.

Some of the descriptions of the Group here point to its "high level" and prestige. It is "well-known" and a "leading player"; it has received "success and recognition." Moreover, this success and recognition are confirmed by not just Russian, but world standards: It has conducted business "abroad" and is a "leading player" in the "world" insurance and reinsurance market. However, other descriptions of the company, those that explain why it has achieved this success, index more than "level." These point to the moral legitimacy of the Group, a legitimacy that comes from its adherence to "world" business standards (which many would gloss as "Western"), encompassing adherence to legal strictures as well as proper conduct. It has a "stable reputation," as opposed to less stable, and, also, by implication, less ethical businesses, and adheres to the principles of "civilized business," as opposed to the implicitly "wild" and "corrupt" activities of many of the country's less stable businesses, especially, though not only, in the 1990s.

The legal aspects of this moral legitimacy are especially brought out by the next section, which moves from the example of Neptune Consulting to the Group as a totality:

> For several years, the Neptune Group has attained the level of a
> dynamically growing set of companies that possess one interrelated
> culture and achieve the goals set for them. The meticulous work of the

> Neptune Group involves fulfilling all of its obligations strictly and observing the norms of law. The activity of the Group is fully transparent to our clients and partners.

Here, again, we see references to the high level of the firm in general ("the level of a dynamically growing set of companies"), along with fuller descriptions of what is meant by "civilized business." There are a number of interrelated ideas here. First, we see that Neptune has a progressive set of (Western-standard) human resources practices, as indicated by the use of the term "culture," here, meaning corporate culture. To speak of corporate culture was to show that one knew the most modern HR lingo and applied its principles to one's company. However, even more than this, we see that this is a corporate culture that meets three interrelated standards. First, the companies do what they promise: They "achieve the goals set for them" and "fulfi[ll]. . obligations strictly," meeting the promises they make in their contracts. Second, they "observ[e] the norms of law," or operate within legal strictures. Third, they observe principles of "transparency," making their activities "fully transparent to . . . clients and partners." In the juxtaposition, we see that this is not the transparency of open, soul-to-soul communication, but a legalistic, organizational transparency, a principle of correct conduct that is seen as being as established a principle of "civilized business" as legality and meeting one's obligations. The overall picture is of a company that is successful and trustworthy because it adheres to open and lawful "world" business principles, as compared to other implied Russian companies that are dishonest and opaque.

I do not have any basis for assessing the Group's adherence to principles of openness and legality, although a friend of mine, a Russian sociologist, was immediately skeptical. "They started out small; they had to make their way somehow," she

commented, slithering her hand in the wavy "*krut*" motion often used iconically to refer to activity evading the boundaries of law (see Pesmen 2000). However, whether or not the Group actually adhered to all legal strictures (something that many contended was impossible in Russia), I call attention here to the efforts Group staff made to present the image of doing so. Part of Neptune's image strategy, I suggest, involved connecting the activity of the group via indexical means[268] to global standards of "corporate governance," one of the cornerstones of corporate ethics in Western business discourse, an understanding that combines the force of an ethical regime with considerations of accountability, transparency, and legality. One of Neptune's strategies for making links with other businesses in this regard was to represent their firm with reference to these principles, and thus, showcase it as dependable and worthy of partnership and using its services. In doing so, Neptune staff were not merely representing themselves or their firm, but were also depicting how their company was situated in larger structures of region, nation, and globe.

Strictly speaking, corporate governance involves how power is exercised in the corporation. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the author of a widely influential set of corporate governance guidelines defines it as:

> Procedures and processes according to which an organisation is directed
> and controlled. The corporate governance structure specifies the
> distribution of rights and responsibilities among the different participants
> in the organisation – such as the board, managers, shareholders and other
> stakeholders – and lays down the rules and procedures for decision-
> making. (OECD 2009)

Thus, most at issue in discussions of corporate governance is the construction of a system

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[268] See in this regard Silverstein's (2003) discussion of political "message" in general and Jackson's (2008; 2009) description of the "register of the international development community" employed in Malagasy politics.

that specifies how decisions about the corporation will take place. Particularly of concern is mediating what is said to be an inherent conflict between owners of companies, who want a return on their investments, and hired managers, who might theoretically lead the firm in ways that are more advantageous to themselves than to those who supplied investment funds.[269] According to the prevalent Anglo-American model, good corporate governance requires establishing an independent board of directors, selected by the shareholders, that has the power to hire and fire the CEO and approve significant corporate decisions. More generally, good corporate governance is associated with an array of aligned principles, including "transparency" (especially in respect to the disclosure of financial information and information about ownership structures), protection of shareholder rights (especially minority shareholders), respect for legal strictures, and adherence to business ethics more generally.[270] While there are some national variations, these key Western corporate governance principles circulate globally, setting standards for international corporate behavior.

Russian companies, generally typified as being run by all-controlling owner-managers, have mainly been targeted for their *lack* of adherence to international corporate governance principles. Primary among these allegations are opaque financial reporting (especially because of rampant tax fraud), illegal takeovers, and little respect of the rights of minority shareholders. However, as with other aspects of "transition," good corporate governance is generally seen as an endpoint to which all Russian companies are

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[269] See McCarthy et al. (2004) and Shleifer and Vishny (1997). The OECD principles (2004) provide a good introduction to widespread corporate governance concerns.

[270] In this sense concerns of corporate social governance can overlap with those of corporate social responsibility (Welker 2009), in which businesses confront larger public ramifications of their work in areas such as the environment and human rights. However, most debates in Russian contexts center upon the key issues of transparency, legality, and protection of shareholders.

(or should be) moving, and by the 2000s, certain large Russian companies were increasingly being recognized in the international and local business press as paving the way in this regard, including some of those run by the so-called "oligarchs," better known for their earlier abuses of corporate governance. These companies wrote codes of corporate conduct, established independent boards of directors, disclosed information about shareholdings and profits, and set policies for protecting minority shareholders rights. These efforts were also promoted by local ratings bodies, international rating agencies, and various local and foreign NGOS. They have also received official state support in Russia in the form of the Federal Commission for the Securities Market's establishment of a set of voluntary corporate governance standards.[271]

Image, as determined in relation to international standards for corporate governance, has undoubtedly been an important motivation in Russian companies' turn towards these concerns.[272] This has especially been highlighted in respect to the international market, where Russia has long said to had a national image problem, entangled with views of the country as mafia-driven on the one hand and subject to an all-controlling state bureaucracy on the other.[273] In this respect the prominent oligarch Vladimir Potanin, who became head of the National Council on Corporate Governance, argued in a 2003 magazine article that:

> Corporate governance can be viewed not only from the view of increasing
> the ratings of particular companies and the improvement of the investment
> climate in the country in general, but as an investment of Russian business
> in achieving the positive scenario of drawing the country into

[271] For general discussions of issues of corporate governance in Russia, see, for instance, Belikov and Verbitskii (2005) and McCarthy et al. (2004).

[272] On the force of international standards in the postsocialist context see Dunn (2005).

[273] Vladimir Lebedenko (2004) , an official in Russia's Ministry for Foreign Affairs, argues in this regard that Western media have purposely discredited Russia and given it a poor image abroad in order to weaken both the country's political position and economic competitiveness, with dire effects for commercial enterprises.

globalization. (Potanin 2003)

Suggesting that low levels of corporate governance in Russia firms were currently one of the foundational obstacles in the development in Russia's economy, Potanin noted that in transitional countries such as Russia, the quality of corporate governance was one of the most important factors that foreign investors used in making decisions whether to invest in a given company or otherwise conduct business with it. In this light, he presented Russia as located at a critical juncture that could only be decided by its companies' commitment to corporate governance principles. "There are two paths that Russia can take," he wrote. "The path of development and flourishing in close interaction with more developed states and the path of degradation, turning into a lower level third-world country, ruled by methods of strength." This portrayed adherence to international corporate governance standards as necessary for success in a stratified global milieu, not so much because it would improve how Russian companies worked, but because it would improve their image abroad.

I discovered at Neptune, however, that this type of image projection was not only targeted at foreign audiences. Seeing so many corporate governance buzzwords that had credence in international circles in Neptune publicity materials, I initially assumed that this was part of the company's efforts to appeal to foreigners. However, marketing department staff explained to me that although these principles were certainly important in dealing with foreign markets, these comments were more generally oriented at the internal market, since foreigners would expect legality and civilized behavior as a matter of course. Indeed, my very asking about such issues was seen as proof of the difference. When I asked Misha about the focus on "transparency" and "meeting obligations" in

Neptune press materials, he responded by wagging his finger at me and taking on a tone of mock schooling an uncomprehending foreigner, "For you, it goes without saying. In Russia, it's not obligatory!" Particularly for a group of companies involved in the insurance business, it was seen as important to promote that this was a company that would indeed provide the payouts that it promised. This was seen as particularly critical at the current moment when people were just beginning to venture into the insurance industry and taking financial risks without full assurance that the companies that they were dealing with were truly trustworthy and stable. Marketing department staff felt that having the image of adhering to the formal rules set by law and international business standards provided an extra level of assurance to consumers and business partners alike.

This was a task of image-projection aided by the company's own ambiguous positioning as a Russian company originally founded with Norwegian capital.[274] When I mentioned my fieldwork at Neptune to the director of a Russian medical services company I met in a training, he was adamant that this company was more foreign than Russian. "Where foreign capital has been present—that's not a Russian company!" he exclaimed. While on the one hand, the taint of foreignness sometimes, the marketing department members felt, could cause Russians to be suspicious of Neptune and lack trust in it, on the other hand, they felt that this did give it a certain advantage in supporting its claims to trustworthiness and legality that could be exploited for marketing purposes. (Indeed, some of the PR materials occasionally referred to Neptune as a "Norwegian company," although these were being changed at the time I was conducting fieldwork

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[274] As Daniel Miller (1997) has pointed out, designations of companies as "local" or "global" are not straightforward and companies' representations of locality or globality may have more to do with judgments about which is more beneficial than actual distributions of capital, shareholders, and decision-making.

there.) In their estimation, the company's history was well known to those it did business

with, and, as a result, to Russian companies they often seemed like a foreign company

that worked by stricter rules, a reputation that they believed drew many partners to the

company, although it potentially chased away others. Especially because of the

associations between corporate governance and the West, the company's foreign roots

potentially enhanced its claims to be following these standards.

Business *Po-Chelovecheski*

In Russia those that value corporate governance, like other "Western" types of

legality and rule-following, often contrast it to illegitimate and corrupt "Russian"

business practices based on "connections" and other types of more personalistic

sociality.[275] This has much to do with the legacy of the New Russians, who were widely

seen as having illegitimately acquired the resources for starting their businesses through

longstanding social ties, either within the former nomenklatura or through shady

"speculation" activities and partnerships with the emerging criminal underworld.[276] Even

in cases where companies have instituted formal corporate governance policies,

commentators often suggest that this is a matter of image alone that has no basis in

reality. One business writer, for example, having noted the recent trend for big business

to seek investment through establishing corporate governance programs cautions:

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[275] Press coverage of the oil company Yukos has been paradigmatic in this regard. The company, formed via 1990s privatizations, was thrust into international prominence in 2004 when the Russian government charged the company's founder Mikhail Khodorkovskii with tax evasion, an action that Western commentators (along with aligned Russians) widely denounced as politically motivated. However, to many Russian observers what was most significant about the company was how Khodorkovskii had seemingly undergone an about face in the years prior to the arrest, relinquishing the criminal activity that he, like many other oligarchs, was said to have perpetuated in the 1990s and presenting a new face of (Western) corporate responsibility intermingled with (Western) political leanings, a move most found extremely suspect. See, for instance, Shmarov (2001), Perekrest (2006).

[276] See Watts (2002).

> [D]on't be naïve and think that this is the only way that business is conducted! Through this style of shareholders meetings, discussing and voting, meetings of directors, a business plan, the tense work of governing. . . Nothing of the sort! Yes, of course, in all sensible firms all the aforementioned procedures and organs work, but only when the owners have already made decisions higher on the Rublevka [an elite Moscow suburb] or in a closed club, in an atmosphere of trust without partisans. (Shmarov 2001)

Thus, while companies might hold the meetings required by corporate governance procedures, these appear a mere "Potemkin village" constructed to draw investment but lacking functionality. Business in Russia is really done in quite another way, this author suggests, not though impersonal laws and procedures, but through tightly knit social networks to which only certain people are admitted. Invariably, discussions of these connections in pro-corporate governance discourses move from pointing out practices in which business people rely upon social ties to linking these practices to various undesirable and notorious aspects of Russian business behavior, such as hiring hitmen, pushing out legitimate shareholders through illegal means, and practices of *razvodka*, or framing (Volkov 2002).

Such accounts were not only found in the business press. When I met Kolia, a friend of a friend in his early thirties, on a typically snowy mid-March day, he took the opportunity to voice many of his gripes about Russia. "The weather will always be bad here" he explained after I neutrally pointed out the snow on our way from the Metro station where we met to a nearby coffee shop. Kolia was a trained psychologist who had done some business consulting but mainly conducted trainings with educators. We had first met a year and a half earlier, and since that time he had progressively become involved in writing, having recently published a magazine article in which he explained why great art during the time of Rembrandt was produced in Holland rather than Russia.

While our meeting was ostensibly to discuss the possibility of my observing one of his educational trainings, Kolia took the opportunity of speaking with a foreign visitor to complain about various aspects of contemporary Russian society and politics. Targets of Kolia's complaints included the high level of rudeness (*khamstvo*) of Russian citizens as well as their deep-rooted reliance on authority, which led them to expect others to do things for them (and made it impossible for him to successfully organize a mentorship program for beginning psychologists.)

Along with this, Kolia contended that Russia and Russians suffered from a basic lack of trust. However, he suggested, corporate governance principles did little to establish it. Instead, he located efforts to establish trust in Russian business relations elsewhere, somewhere he found more suspect. "Everything in Russia is done by personal relationships," he explained. While business people closing a deal might draw up a "contract," Kolia contended, it was not the contract that mattered but the personal relationship underlying the contract. The situation, he noted, was the same with the law. While the law existed, if you knew the right person, you could evade legal infringements. So too with medicine: While no law specified that patients should give doctors bribes, people regularly did this to get better medical care.[277] In this way he represented everyday life in Russia in general and business practice in particular as marked by communication practices based upon personal connections that carried a strong taint of corruption and illegality. Russians were always "around" or "behind" the law, Kolia contended, so Western approaches based on law did not work in the country. This very much felt like a continuation of our earlier conversation, where Kolia had tried to shock me with stories of the unlawful and unethical behaviors of Russian company directors

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[277] See Rivkin-Fish (2005).

who valued personal connections over legal strictures. Russian directors, he had told me, commonly conducted business in the *bania* (baths) with close compatriots—as well as prostitutes. They also, for example, hired sales managers quickly only to fire them when their trial period was over and it was time to raise their salaries. While these practices (which Kolia admitted were not as popular as they once were) differed in significant ways, his account seemed to suggest that there was something illegal, illegitimate, and corrupt about the use of personal ties in business that put it on par with other activities that clearly transgressed legal boundaries.

However, at least in the circles where I conducted fieldwork, I found that logics of corporate governance and social ties were not mutually exclusive. Indeed, one of the remarkable aspects of Neptune's image strategy was the way in which it embraced representations of close social ties alongside those of corporate governance and legal action. The company had first been established in Russia as an insurance broker that sold other companies' policies and did not sell its own insurance (although it later began to do so). As such, establishing strong partnerships with other Russian insurance businesses was very important to Neptune from its first days as an independent company in the Russian market. And, from the point of view of the marketing department staff, just as important as having these social ties was displaying them in a way that also showcased the company's commitment to the principles of civilized business. Particularly illustrative of this was the planning for the Insurance and Reinsurance Summit, which the company management and the marketing department conceived not only as a way of exhibiting the company's prestige and wealth, but also as a way of drawing attention to the company's social ties with other insurance companies. Nina proudly told me that the

Summit, from the first year it was held, brought in hundreds of insurance company representatives from throughout Russia, a number of interested foreigners, and quite a few Moscow bureaucrats. "It was an indicator of our work, an indicator of our achievements, an indicator of our connections (*sviazi*)," she explained to me. "All the people who came. . . it is a sign that they know us."

However, what was particularly important here from an image point of view was not only the company's connections, but its relationship to those connections. As Nina told me, from the earliest stages of planning the event with the company's director, a major aim was to:

> display Neptune consulting near its partners and display the openness of
> the firm . . . . that we were ready to invite all of the other insurance
> companies, to present them, both our foreign partners and our Russian
> ones, and to show that we, as an insurance broker, openly cooperated with
> both. And along with this that we didn't hide our key partners and were
> ready to familiarize them with each other.
> (Recorded interview)

Thus, what was particularly important here was the willingness to openly display social ties (as recommended by regimes of corporate governance) rather than keep them hidden. In this Neptune staff deftly differentiated the company from those implicitly more corrupt businesses that were also dependent upon close networks of social ties, but kept them closed from view. They did not deny the importance of having social ties to both other business people in Russian and international companies; however, they aimed to present a model of business relationship that appeared not like illicit "corruption," but rather as modern and Western "cooperation" and "partnership."

This suggests a need to uncouple perceptions of business by connections and illegality and corruption. Here I draw upon the considerable literature on the place of

personal ties and informal networks in Russia and other countries of the former Soviet bloc.[278] In the Soviet Union, the primary term for most underhanded version of these kinds of practices was *blat* ,"the use of personal networks and informal contacts to obtain goods and services in short supply and to find a way around formal procedures" (Ledeneva 1998:1). Social scientists who have studied *blat* and similar practices of exchange relations based on informal ties have stressed that these practices played an essential role in everyday survival both in the socialist period and in the present. Rather than viewing these practices as "corruption," however, a term that connotes unambiguous moral disapproval, these scholars emphasize that these practices possessed a morality all of their own. Accounts of the Soviet period in particular suggest that operating through personal relationships was an unavoidable fact of everyday life, necessary even to obtain those goods and services that one was legally authorized to obtain. Thus, many suggest, it is better to view these practices not as "corrupt" transgressions of state practices, but as an integral part of socialist economies that was necessary for their survival.

Discussions of the Soviet period generally have focused most on individual efforts to provide for families and individuals using social ties. *Blat*, for example, could be useful to get access to scarce consumer goods (often jumping lines to do so), obtain a better apartment than one would otherwise, or secure better medical care or a space in a tourist group. However, particularly relevant for our purposes is the importance of these ties on the job. *Blat*, for instance, was indispensible for administrative personnel in completing organizational tasks such as organizing a conference, where one needed personal ties to book hotels, restaurants, and banquet halls (Ledeneva 1998). In industrial

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[278] See Berliner (1957), Caldwell (2004), Dunn (2004), Ledeneva (1998; 2006), Lovell et al. (2000), Patico (2008), Pesmen (2000), Verdery (1996) as well as more general discussions of the "second economy" in the former Soviet bloc (e.g. Grossman 1977; Kornai 1992).

settings, factory employees used personal connections to mediate official channels of supply and distribution in several ways. They bargained with officials in ministries and allied state and local organs to adjust plans and receive greater quantities of supplies. They also used personal contacts with personnel from other firms to arrange for the delivery of supplies through various types of exchange and barter. The masters of ensuring the delivery of supplies were specially appointed personnel, *tolkachi*, or "pushers," who were known for their expertise at making, developing, and drawing upon personal connections to ensure that an enterprise received needed supplies (Berliner 1957; Ledeneva 1998).

Many people I met in Putin-era St. Petersburg suggested that similar types of social ties were still important in business settings. One of the most common answers that I heard when I would speak to Russian business people (especially those who worked in Russian-owned businesses) about the specifics of their work was that in Russia business was about the person (*chelovek*), rather than the firm, as it was, by implication, in the West. In this respect, operating through "contacts" (*kontakty*) and" human relationships" (*po-chelovecheski*) was often said to be one of the most important aspects of working in Russia, especially, although not exclusively, for men.[279] Strong social ties were said to give business people numerous advantages in finding jobs, making deals, and mediating interactions with partners and clients. (People also mentioned "connections" (*sviazi*) in this regard; although by this they often meant ties that gave people an illegitimate

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[279] People did not speak at all of "*blat*" in these contexts, a term I only heard a couple of times in the context of procuring favors. Other ways of describing similar processes were operating "via acquaintance" (*cherez znakomstva*), although this was usually used in contexts of getting a job rather than using one's contacts on the job, as well as through *sviazi* (connections) as discussed below.

advantage, especially in regard to securing advantages from the state.[280]) Some also

explained this less instrumentally as a means of establishing a sense of security and trust

in business interactions. In an unpredictable marketplace, I was told, people were

looking for ways to ensure trust, and personal ties were the easiest way to establish a

connection in a marketplace in which so many businesses were unreliable and the legal

system was not a realistic and dependable method of resolving commercial disputes.[281]

One of the most forceful people I met on this point was Dmitrii Alekseeivch, a

sales director I interviewed at PFZ, the pipe-parts supplier where Sveta at Razorsharp at

worked before beginning her job at the multinational. (See Chapter Three.) Dmitrii

Alekseevich was the director of "active sales" (*aktivnyi prodazh*) at PFZ, which unlike

the more "passive" part of the sales division that responded to unsolicited orders and

concentrated on keeping older clients, was responsible for seeking new customers.

Immediately upon meeting me in the company's warmly decorated, wood-paneled

cafeteria, before I turned on my MiniDisc recorder for our interview, Dmitrii Alekseevich

began to inquire into the true purposes of my research. He told me about a government-

sponsored trip that he had taken to Japan several years earlier, where he had the

opportunity to observe large firms such as Mitsubishi and Sony. It was a good chance to

make contacts (*kontakty*), he noted, and the contacts he made in Japan eventually led to

his current job. Perhaps, he asked, I was doing something similar? Like many other

business people I met in St. Petersburg, Dmitrii Alekseevich found it hard to believe I

would take the effort to travel to Russia simply to work on a dissertation (which, many

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[280] See also Ledeneva (1998), who argues that in the 1990s connections were the most important in places, such as the state, where benefits were not primarily distributed on a monetary basis.

[281] See Shusterman (2006), who argues that business through connections is a moral practice that by creating trust creates a temporary foundation for business practice in a business sphere bereft of legality and contractual relationships.

people noted cynically, in present-day Russia could be bought somewhere rather easily, along with the Ph.D. itself.[282]) Was I, for instance, he proposed (perhaps, hoping for an affirmative answer) looking to establish a joint venture?

Dmitrii Alekseevich was clearly skilled at developing and drawing upon personal contacts. This, he suggested, was critical in Russia, where business dealings were always conditioned by obfuscation and secrecy. (For example, it was difficult to know who was really making decisions about sales deals, he said, since often the real decision-maker was not the person one was dealing with, but a committee or an owner far away.) Indeed, later on in our interview, also when the MiniDisc player was off, Dmitrii Alekseevich bragged to me about how he had enlisted a friend to secure him records of all the repairs the city government planned to make in the year ahead. These listed when contract bids would take place, giving him a leg up on sealing deals. "I had a portfolio of information this thick," he boasted with a glint in his eye, demonstrating a thickness of about half of a foot with his hands. Business success, this suggested, was almost unimaginable in present-day Russia without having a personal network of acquaintances to rely upon. Personal acquaintances not only could provide one with access to a job in the first place; they also enabled one to cultivate channels of privileged information that could counteract the uncertainty that surrounded even the simplest business deals.

Yet, what I found most interesting here was that these methods of securing business advantages through acquaintances coexisted in a delicate balance with the primary thrust of Dmitrii Alekseevich's job, which was to establish links with *new* clients. This meant

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[282] These kinds of sentiments also had to do with the low-level compensation for academics in St. Petersburg at the time. Many also suggested that if I really was in Russia simply to write a dissertation, I would still eventually turn this dissertation towards a use more profitable than an academic career. A woman who also worked at PFZ put it to me starkly: "So, a client will be coming to you. What will he buy?"

that his job was not merely a matter of doing business through connections alone; personal ties were a tool that could be used to bridge more impersonal business relationships, and, at the same time, more impersonal business relationships could be turned into more personalized ones.[283] This struck me during another break in the interview and recording. One of the interview questions had involved Dmitrii Alekseevich's interest in working in a foreign firm, a question that he had answered quickly and affirmatively. During the break he returned to the question. Noting that he had recently been given an enticing offer that he ultimately turned down, he went on to speak of the genius of the joint venture model in which Western partners supplied technical knowledge and local people supplied an understanding of how business in Russia was done. How, then, I asked, was business in Russia done? Dmitrii Alekseevich explained:

> You have five companies approaching the client. They are all identical with identical offers. You need to set yourself apart and prove that you are the most trustworthy [nadezhnyi]. The only way to do this is in a human way [po-chelovecheski]. You need to create trust in yourself. (Fieldnotes)

Thus, although this was theoretically a matter of negotiating an impersonal sales deal and might involve approaching people that one did not already know, Dmitrii Alekseevich suggested that it was still possible to approach it *po-chelovecheski*, in a human way.[284] One could personalize the impersonal interaction and demonstrate that one was worthy of trust. This was not a matter of institutional trust in the firm as a reliable and trustworthy organization, but rather a trust in the sales director as a person. In this vein, Dmitrii

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[283] Note that Soviet-era *blat* practices also involved some degree of personalizing impersonal relationships in efforts to amass new contacts. Indeed, this was said to be one of the primary skills of the *tolkach'* (Berliner 1957; Ledeneva 1998).

[284] Compare Pesmen's (2000) discussion of everyday techniques in which exchange in 1990s Siberia was "experienced in terms of friendship and help" (131).

Alekseevich discussed how big sales deals generally required him to meet personally with another director of his level or higher, even if a lower-level person had done the preparatory work, and draw upon his own skill for speaking with such people "in one language" (*na odnom iazike*).

In the realm of deal-making, then, methods of "human connection" coexisted with more abstract, impersonal methods of creating links with other businesses, and these intertwined in complicated and nonlinear ways. Many Putin-era St. Petersburg business people made use of more abstract methods of attracting clients, such as advertisements in trade journals or customer-friendly sales techniques. Yet while these were fashionable and could be somewhat useful, these were often seen as ultimately impoverished. Those business people who spoke to me most about the importance of sales techniques in business-to-business dealings and establishing a connection through measures of politeness, tone, and voice were generally lower level personnel: sales managers, new marketing managers, and others whose day-to-day responsibilities mainly involved mechanically responding to order forms and following up on these with clients. Especially higher-level male managers and directors, such as Dmitrii Alekseevich however, suggested that these mechanical, impersonal methods were not enough. They tended to stress instead the importance of combining these methods with others that involved drawing upon existing personal ties and making efforts to transform abstract relationships into more personalized ones. These, they suggested provided a more solid foundations for business relations than a few quick sales techniques.

Another example is illustrative here. Iurii was in his thirties, the director of a factory founded three years earlier that manufactured industrial equipment and parts. He

met me at a nearby Metro station in a shiny red car, dressed down in fashionably dark designer jeans. Over espresso in his large office (served by his secretary), we discussed his company's marketing and advertising strategy. While the company, which had recently received journalistic acclaim for its success, did advertise in trade journals and on the internet, Iurii explained that one of the best ways of finding new clients was through meetings at large trade exhibitions where it was possible to meet with new clients directly. "It is one of the particularities of Russia," he explained. "From afar you cannot always convince someone that you in particular are a good partner with the help of these generally available resources."

However, even more than exhibitions, Iurii suggested that his business success rested largely on recommendations, word of mouth, and his willingness to turn recommendations into more long-standing contacts through forging personal ties. This was particularly important for him as he was of a younger generation from most of the industrial directors who were his clients. These he described as men in their fifties, formed in the Soviet period. Simple sales techniques often did not work with them, he told me: They were a rather closed community and to grow his business it had been imperative to rely upon certain clients within this circle to recommend his firm to others. Still, even this was not enough to personalize the interaction. He (and not an employee lower in the company hierarchy) needed to go out and visit these directors personally, even if they lived in Moscow or far-off provincial regions. It was only through spending time with them that he could forge a more personal type of connection:

> They have a certain view on life. In the nineties they formed their own opinions on who they could work with and who they couldn't work with. And thus forms of active sales don't always work. You need to go and explain why they should partner with us and not with them. You need to

go to them and explain. You know how it is in Russia, you need to drink vodka with them too. (Recorded interview)

While it was possible for a new firm like Iurii's to attract new clients in this business milieu, this required consistent attention to social relationships and social ties. Iurii had to work to both mobilize existing ties and make efforts to quickly forge personal relationships where they had not existed before. He also, he noted a bit later, had to be willing to accept the "rules of the game" that were mandatory in this sphere, which included, among other things, giving kickbacks to those individuals involved in providing his company with lucrative contracts. What Iurii described was less a marketplace of abstract and legalistic links between atomized buyers and sellers, and more a stratified field in which personal contacts and recommendations, combined with astute attention to turning the impersonal personal established business relationships on a more human foundation.

Images, Contacts, and Contracts across Borders

In a business milieu where personalized contacts were so important, establishing links across borders could be particularly fraught. Here, processes of forming and negotiating business relationships could seem especially impersonal. Contact was difficult to establish and images of corporate governance were difficult to sustain. This was particularly difficult in light of Russia's aforementioned "image problem." Images of the nation are indelibly interlinked with images of a country's businesses, and while states and businesses may take steps to govern these processes, much of how a country is

represented abroad escapes efforts to brand nations from above.[285] In the case of Russia, highly associated in Western countries with communist dissimulation, post-communist criminality, and renewed Putin-era authoritarianism, establishing a basis for trust between businesses across borders was often a difficult challenge.

We did end up holding the wood pellets conference after all. About fifty people got on the renovated East German ship, complete with dancehall and bar (where we held the bulk of the proceedings) and tiny cabins with attached bathrooms that allowed odors to waft into the rooms as the ship rocked. The attendees, in addition to Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians, included four representatives of a Danish trading company, Interpellets[286], as well as a Dutch representative of an American equipment manufacturer, whom we picked up at a port along the way because his plane was late. There was an opening speech from Misha, a short talk from a representative of a regional logging and wood-processing organization on a governmental initiative to promote biofuel production, and two talks from the sales representatives of foreign equipment manufacturers (both the Dutch rep and a Russian rep of a German company) that shaded into sales presentations. There was also, as promised, a tour of Valaam, although the weather, as it commonly is in Northwestern Russia, was dreary and rainy, in addition to a disco. Meals, organized by the boat company, were sometimes late and the presentations sometimes started more than an hour later than planned—but this didn't really matter because the schedule wasn't all that full.

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[285] See Paley (2001) and Tsing (2005) on efforts to perform images of the nation amenable to foreign investment. Also relevant here are recent practices of "nation-branding" that apply marketing techniques to national images with an eye to political and financial returns (Dinnie 2008; Kaneva 2007): On efforts to brand Russia, see Kirchick (2009) and Lebedenko (2004). At the same time, note that goods may also be branded in a way that also reproduces particular images of the nation (Manning and Uplisashvili 2008; Mazzarella 2003a).

[286] A pseudonym.

What struck me about the conference was how all of our communicative aims seemed to fade from view. The conference seemed neither a site of frenetic deal-making nor a vehicle that would attract many new Neptune customers. First, despite Misha's imaginations of deal-making and individual business meetings between "Russians" and "foreigners," very little interaction occurred between the CIS and Western participants. Misha opened the conference by calling attention to its unique format as an opportunity to both expand and personalize professional contacts: "I hope that the informal atmosphere of the cruise will facilitate the establishment of productive contacts (*kontakty*) and pleasant conversation (*obshchenie*) between the participants." However, it seemed that despite the small number of "foreigners," these informal connections, so important to establishing trust and building businesses in so many local business contexts, were quite difficult to establish across regional and linguistic lines. The conference was ultimately split into two groups, the tiny group of "foreigners," and the much larger group of "Russians" and very few people ventured outside of these divisions.

The members of the Danish company, Interpellets, and the Dutch sales representative found each other quickly. When they met early on in the conference, Maaren, the Dutch sales rep, speaking in English, admitted that without knowing Russian he hadn't gotten a chance to meet anyone else so far. Karen, the director of Interpellets, smiled and exclaimed "Stick with us!" pointing out that they had a translator. As a result, the "foreigners" generally sat together at one table during presentations and meals, speaking mainly English among themselves, while the "Russians" sat at separate tables, socializing with employees of other CIS companies. (The translator, for the most part, only sat with the "foreigners" during official presentations, and otherwise joined the

Russian-speaking group.) The dynamics were not lost on the "foreigners," and Karen astutely observed when all of the tables were pushed together for pictures: "So we won't be at our own table apart from everyone else!" Nonetheless, despite the fact that after the photo the "foreigners" were located in the middle of the larger group, after it was over they continued to speak only among themselves and were not approached by any of the CIS participants (some of whom could speak English) who were conducting their own conversations on both sides. The one major exception to this dynamic, in addition to the translator and myself, was Misha, who spent much of the cruise darting from table to table to check in with everyone, although even he spent longer with the Russian-speakers than with the "foreigners."

Meanwhile, many of the Russian-speaking groups did seem to be networking with participants from other CIS companies and enjoying themselves. Vadim, a young manager of a wood-processing factory located near the Ural Mountains that I met over breakfast, spoke to me enthusiastically about the gala dinner and the drinking and dancing that followed. "It was lots of fun—everyone had a good time!" The disco (which I had missed, having collapsed in my cabin with jet lag) was spoken about with especially high praise. Since many participants were just thinking about getting pellet factories started and needed to learn the most basic issues about costs and equipment, many were not concerned with the lack of buyers or deal-making with foreigners. Vadim, for instance, represented a woodworking factory that was considering whether it was worthwhile to build a small wood pellet factory. He was fairly uninterested in the "foreigners" and was looking at the conference as a way to gather information about pelleting as well as a company-sponsored vacation (and thought it would have been even

better if the conference had been held in St. Petersburg proper rather than on a boat, so that attendees could spend more time experiencing the pleasures of the city.) Some others were more interested in finding buyers and did not miss their low numbers. "I wasn't paying much attention in the opening," one participant asked me at lunchtime with a seemingly calculated naiveté, "Are there any buyers here at all?" However, such interest did not seem to translate into much social contact with Interpellets, the one trading company that had come to the conference.

The distance between the groups wasn't only linguistic, but also involved issues of image and corporate governance. The "foreigners" were more impressed with the drinking skills of the "Russians" than their business skills, and Karen, the Interpellets director duly noted an uproarious table: "I think they started with their vodkas in the afternoon!" Along with this, Benn, another Interpellets representative, told me how difficult it was to do business with Russia. They would send a boat to Russia to pick up pellets only to find that the pellets had been sold at a higher price to someone else. For an inexpensive product, this was a considerable waste of time and expense. This was a sentiment that had also come up in discussions with potential Western European participants in the initial preparations for the conference. Western business people associated Russia with exceedingly poor business practices, including not following through on basic aspects of contractual agreements, and this image of the nation cast a large shadow on the image of any Russian company that wanted to trade across borders. Interpellets, Benn explained, preferred to do business with the Baltics, which, being located in the European Union, made it more difficult for people to shirk their contractual obligations. "In Russia," he explained to me "they can disappear." The CIS participants

for their part were not unaware of these perceptions, which Misha drew attention to in his initial speech with a strict warning about the importance of adhering to contracts. Vadim, the manager from the Urals, treated the issue with more levity, joking when I told him I was an American interested in Russian business, that it was impossible for an American girl (*amerikanka*) to understand. "What for you is a contract for us is only paper!" A bit later he recycled the joke with a new comparison: "What for you is a contract for us is only water!"

Between language issues and concerns about corporate governance, the most significant interactions that occurred between the two groups took place in formal, public parts of the conference and involved interactions that were quite depersonalized. This occurred first during Maaren's official talk, when, after a formal presentation on his company's pelleting equipment, several participants asked technical questions through the translator, about whether, for example, steam or water was a better driver of the equipment, and if one chose steam, how it might be supplied. Such questions, as is the case with lectures more generally (Goffman 1991[1976]), positioned the speaker and participants not on the relative horizontal plane of deal-making, but rather figured the speaker as a privileged source of expertise and knowledge. This tendency was even more dramatic in the period originally slotted for individual business meetings (*delovyie besedy*, or literally "business talks.") This was supposed to be for meetings between representatives of different companies, presumably between sellers and buyers in particular, and according to Misha, was where the real deal-making would be done. However, the technical questions had gone on for quite some time, and in light of the skewed mismatch of "Russians" and "foreigners," Misha proposed a different format:

Everyone would relocate to tables in the corners of the room, where questions could be asked individually (*v individual'nom poriadke).* The Dutch sales representative would occupy one table, the Russian sales representative whose talk followed the other. The third would be occupied by Interpellets, who had not given a presentation, but from the very beginning of the conference Misha had spoken about as "the most interesting company" there. From mere participants, the representatives of Interpellets were elevated to the status of presenters without needing to do any presenting.

What occurred were neither "business talks" nor individual questioning, nor the formation of informal social ties, but a much more public event. The discussion with Interpellets spilled out of the frame (Goffman 1974) of individual questioning into a much more public question-and-answer session. Just about everyone in the room ended up clustering around Interpellets in a tight little circle. Interpellets became a gateway to the Western European market in general, and the participants played the part of eager students. Through Misha, who was acting as translator, or sometimes asking questions in English themselves, the CIS participants asked the Interpellets representatives questions about European standards for size and color, pulling out bags of samples and asking if these were what Europeans were looking for. They wanted to know not only how much Interpellets might pay for pellets, but how much exactly the pellets would fetch on European markets in general (questions that the Danish group mainly answered vaguely or evaded.) They also discussed which European pellet markets were the most advanced (Denmark and Sweden), where markets were opening up (Belgium, Luxemburg, Italy), where markets were small but could grow.

Any presumption of big business deals occurring at the conference was quickly

headed off. "How do we make you an offer?" one Russian-speaking man asked

Interpellets. Karen, the company director, suggested this was far ahead of the game.

"We have certain conditions," she stated seriously. "You have to meet them even before

we start talking." Pellet samples had to be sent to Interpellets's laboratories in Denmark,

where they would be rigorously tested for quality. If the samples passed this test, then

Interpellets's representatives would come and inspect the factory for themselves. Only

then would Interpellets consider a trial contract—and then, only for one shipload. And

only after that occurred successfully would they consider a longer, two-year contract.

Especially in the wake of the problems Interpellets had faced when dealing with Russians

in the past, an image of adherence to corporate governance and contracts was not enough.

Trust needed to be earned and verified by empirical means, including demonstrating that

a contract could be fulfilled in a timely fashion. This was not a horizontal business

meeting between equals, as demonstrated by the Interpellets representatives' position in

the center of the large circle. The company was in a position to dictate its conditions and

would use strict measures of control to verify if a company (especially a Russian one)

could be trusted.

Meanwhile, among these events, the second communicative vision of the

conference also seemed to fade. If this conference was supposed to be a public relations

event for Neptune that, by familiarizing participants with the Group, would make it more

likely that they would turn to the Group's companies for their business needs in the

future, there was little sign that this would occur. Not only did the event fail to reach the

high standards of quality and service that the Group generally aspired to meet, but no one

seemed to have any sense of who the Neptune Group was. When I told conference

attendees that I had been working and conducting research in the company, most looked at me blankly. After talking further, some remembered Neptune's travel company, Neptune Tour, which they had used to book the cruise tickets, but were unaware of any other companies in the Group. In retrospect this was, perhaps, not surprising. Misha had written in the official conference schedule that he would go through the *prezentatsiia* of the Group after the technical talks. However, between the preponderance of technical questions that followed the sales presentations (which Misha allowed to continue much longer than scheduled) and the unplanned discussion with Interpellets that followed, this never occurred. Without this, the attendees' exposure to the Group was minimal: a banner with the Group's name near the podium where the presenters spoke, some marketing materials about the Group that we had stashed in the participants' conference folders, and a brief mention in Misha's speech.

Yet at the same time, a new image seemed to appear. While Neptune seemed to fade from view, Misha, along with the Russian Wood Pellets Web Portal that he had reinvigorated for the conference, did not. Indeed, this was the true success story of the cruise. Throughout the event Misha subtly reworked his resume and expertise to highlight his own personal expertise in the wood pellets arena and promote his web portal, which he listed in the conference materials as "a provider of informational and consulting services." This was a tendency that had begun well before the conference itself took place. The emails that we sent out to advertise the event touted "our three year experience" in the wood pellet industry, although Neptune had never been involved in this before, and only Misha himself had a three year connection to the trade. This continued during the cruise, where Misha constructed a story of himself more as an

expert on the wood pellets market who had developed this expertise over several job

positions than a representative of a company that was promoting an event:

> You probably all know that my name is Mikhail Krupkin, I spoke to you all by email and phone. I worked in the commercial department of the Danish consulate, which is actively involved in the sale of wood pellets in Russia, especially in respect to potential Danish customers. It also has an interest in selling equipment on the Russian market. From that time I have supported the Russian Wood Pellets Portal. It is a very promising project, an independent place to exchange information, publish opportunities, proposals. Beginning in 2004 I became an employee of Neptune Group. Right now it has no direct interest, but it is a located on the port, close to logistics and transport, and could also be useful to manufacturers of wood pellets. (Recorded talk)

Company and current job affiliation became unimportant, as Misha drew his various

professional experiences in areas related to the wood pellets trade into a biographic

continuity while also briefly addressing the interests of his various workplaces in the

industry. This was a narrative that, in the spirit of ideologies about the importance of the

"person" over the organization in Russia, artfully made a connection between all of

Misha's past roles and presented him more as a specialist on wood pellets then a

representative of Neptune Group. It also drew attention to his web portal in particular

and suggested that this was an ongoing personal project, more important to him than

either of his professional positions.

Indeed, throughout the cruise, Misha positioned himself as a trusted middleman,

someone who could help CIS participants understand what Western buyers wanted and

Western buyers find reliable CIS pellet suppliers. If bringing the two sides together was

difficult, he would be the one person who could possibly forge a bond between them. In

this respect, Misha's presentation to the conference was less a promotion of Neptune, and

more an encyclopedic account of the development of the wood pellet trade in the country

that attested to his neutrality and reliability. Misha provided a chronology of the establishment of pelleting plans in Russia, as well as recounting conferences that had been held on the topic. He also presented the CIS participants in particular with several suggestions on how they could achieve success. (These included, for example, understanding the needs of their customers, being "transparent," paying attention to quality, and putting agreements into writing.) Along with this, he positioned the Russian Wood Pellets Portal as a similarly neutral source of expertise that could potentially serve an important role in developing the market and fostering cooperation among members of the pellets trade. Stressing the importance of setting up on an independent information portal, he in an offhanded way suggested it already existed. "It needn't be the Russian Wood Pellets Portal, that's not important," he commented to the conference attendees. "Of course to me, it's important."

I was not surprised when I returned to St. Petersburg a couple years later to discover that Misha had soon left Neptune to work on the Russian Wood Pellets Portal and its consultancy services full time. While planning the conference Misha had gotten excited even when there was interest from "foreigners" who said that they could not attend, suggesting that it would be possible to contact them later to offer them consulting services that would help them to enter the Russian market in other ways. While I had assumed that these services would be offered through Neptune, it now appeared that this would instead be a task that Misha would take on in the auspices of the burgeoning web portal business. The English version of the site promised to assist individuals in utilizing Russian opportunities, including help with finding reliable and professional partners and market research, while the Russian version offered help with consulting on quality,

marketing, and sales, as well as attracting financing. Misha had deftly parlayed his contacts, energy, and expertise into a new career as a cultural mediator, in which he would help to form links between CIS and foreign businesses despite the difficulties of making contact.[287] If corporate governance was particularly important in business across borders, it was the human connection that Misha could provide that would bring the two sides closer together.

Conclusion: Civilizing the "Gap"

In an article entitled "The Villas of the 'New Russians,'" Caroline Humphrey (2002[1998]) discusses how difficult it was for 1990s New Russians on the periphery of Ulan-Ude to construct the extravagant homes of their dreams. New Russian visions of aristocratic estates and European modernity, Humphrey argues, were nearly impossible to realize in the material conditions of 1990s Buriatia, where, for example, a Jacuzzi might be installed in an expensive bathroom blemished by cracks and plumbing problems that made it impossible to use. "The point," Humphrey writes, " is it is very often the case that none of these styles can be achieved. There is a slippage between the mental image and the physical fact of the building, often indeed a ludicrous gap" (176). A similar gap always seemed to lurk beneath the surface of Putin-era business interactions in St. Petersburg, no matter how strongly those involved applied themselves to image-shaping: a specter of partnerships that could fall through, contracts that might not be fulfilled as planned, supply relationships that would break down. Those, who could, by whatever means, convince others that they could eliminate such gaps were well positioned to

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[287] In this he was much like the Shanghai cosmopolitans discussed by Ong (2008), who "build their individual power by creating relationships that span diverse spheres of value" (185).

accrue individual connections and success, as well as gain lucrative business advantages for the companies that they (at least for the moment) represented.

From this perspective, efforts to forge links between businesses, like efforts to produce new types of secretaries, constituted moral visions of proper business practice in a larger private business sphere that could revert to "wildness" at any time. Thus, as St. Petersburg business professionals worked to make links with other businesses and told stories about the ways in which these links were forged, there was far more at stake than just acquiring new clients and business partners. They were at the same time both constructing the parameters of post-Soviet business networks and negotiating what it meant to be Russian inside a larger global economy that often seemed to have more stable and civilized rules for business conduct, even if these did not always seem applicable to Russian conditions. As they grappled with images of Russia and Russian business on both foreign and domestic markets they also made efforts to rework and rethink those images, to imagine new ways of connecting that combined "Western" rules and legality and "Russian" practices of relationships and social ties. In many ways this was a reiteration of the eternal question about Russian "specificity": Could Russia and Russians legitimately be considered part of a larger global, civilized business community, or did Russian business constitute a special case with its own rules of the game that had little currency when viewed from vantage points outside of its borders? Post-Soviet professional communication practices and the ideologies that described them, then, were less an aggregation of meetings between isolated strangers and more a meditation on the proper basis for constructing a civilized and trustworthy post-Soviet business sphere.

Chapter 7

Conclusion: Global Dreams

We all speak about globalization. About transnational corporations eating up the planet and turning it into one gigantic factory with inhuman labor conditions and low salaries. We say aloud with complete seriousness that McDonalds, Coca-Cola and Microsoft have forced us do this and that.

It's nonsense. You understand that it's complete nonsense? For a long time here you haven't needed to force anyone to do anything. Everyone moves to meet "Companies without Borders" by leaps and bounds. Think about it, why do my subordinates (they are not stupid in general), young people that have gotten a good Russian education, strive to look stupider than they actually are? An education in the classical sense. Not a narrow one, but a broad one. Maybe not always deep thematically, but providing a place to potentially create graduates with broad horizons for realizing their strengths. An education that does not put systemic thinking above systemic demands. Who of them values this?

Instead of using this as their foundation, they all imitate hard-lipped and narrow-minded Americans. The same gestures, the same smiles, the same manner of behavior. The same idiotic way of speaking words—advertising slogans. Why do smart people strive day and night to make themselves into idiots?

You know I don't hate them because they are clerks. But because they dream of being clerks. Soldiers of the International Corporate Army. And God forgive if you take this dream away from them.

-Sergei Minaev, *Dukh*less[288], pp. 34-35

The epigraph is taken from a bestselling 2006 Russian novel about a Muscovite

who works as the commercial director for a Western multinational. I cite it here because

it echoes, yet modifies with a certain cynicism, a common view of neoliberal

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[288] Written in a combination of Russian and English morphemes, the title roughly translates as "soulless." "*Dukh*," written in Cyrillic characters means "spirit," while "less," written in Latin letters, refers to the English suffix meaning "without." The use of English here and throughout the novel underlines the new, fashionable, Western-influenced (and, as the epigraph suggests, deeply problematic) world of the generation Minaev is describing. The full title is *Dukhless: Portrait of a Fake (Nenastoiashchem) Person*.

globalization and the new work order as a unified force, Western in origin, that has spread around the world transforming every country it touches, reaching Russia with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Further, the preeminent signs of this transformation that the author, Sergei Minaev, chooses to highlight are communicative, the "gestures" and "smiles" of "hard-lipped" Americans and their "idiotic way of speaking words." Minaev's hero, speaking here, reverses the standard formula somewhat, suggesting that it is Russians themselves (particularly the young) who welcome globalization with open arms rather than the multinationals that force them into submission. Yet, he retains a sense that the transformations engendered by globalization are fully American in origin, contrasting strongly with the much broader, and much more substantive in his opinion, Russian educations of the past. Russian young people, he suggests, are transforming themselves copied gesture by copied gesture into the lowest ranks of an American-led corporate army, rather than using their broad educations to think and dream of deeper and more worthy things.

This reminds us that, as I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, globalization is not just a scholarly concept but an idea with purchase on the ground: Russians, like people in many places in the world, are deeply aware of themselves as participants in a globalizing world, and often consider the place of themselves and their country within it as they live, work, and communicate. "Globalization is a good thing," noted my cubicle neighbor Dima at Razorsharp with a characteristic touch of irony when I told him I was interested in the subject. "It allows people to take the best things from other parts of the world. You have the best management. Maybe, you can take something from us. . . Ballet?" Part of the joke here, turning on my own identity as an American,

was that globalization could be conceived as two-way at all. Dima, much like Minaev's hero, alluded to a fundamental disproportionality in the direction of globalization and its seeming flows, a scenario that put Russia on the losing end of a global regime of value in which American management seemed to matter much more than Russian ballet. If for many observers the Putin era has stood for a resurgence of Russian pride and a new assertion of a Russocentric geopolitics, it often did not seem that way to St. Petersburg business people, working in a sphere where the West was often seen as the ultimate source of what are commonly called "best practices." Many, like the subordinates described in the epigraph, welcomed ideas said to be from abroad, but still retained a sense that these contrasted markedly with typically Russian and Soviet approaches to work and communication.

While I have suggested, after many people that I met in St. Petersburg, that American and more generally "Western" ideas about proper communicative practice have played a particularly important role in efforts to transform Russian communication styles, I have also tried to avoid this popular view of globalization as a foreign incursion on virgin soil. Inspired by scholarly traditions that view linguistic practices as rooted in everyday social lives in particular situated communities, I have presented the globalization of ideologies of communication as linked to the practices, projects, and aims of social actors located in particular institutional contexts within St. Petersburg and beyond. The story of globalization I have told in this dissertation is neither the tale of a unidirectional force sweeping the entire world into its net (and Russia along with it) nor that of a spreading Americanization eagerly embraced by welcoming corporate armies, but rather depicts a conjunction of multiple processes of varying geographic and temporal

scales. These involve multiple historical trajectories, idiosyncratic paths of circulation, and various stances towards shifting political and economic structures, as well as the efforts, reactions, and interpretations of differently positioned local and foreign actors pursuing their own personal, occupational, and political goals.

I have particularly highlighted the role of globally circulating ideologies of communication in these processes. Globalization, I have suggested, is not simply a process where global meets local. Rather, it is mediated by diverging, overlapping, and sometimes contradictory ideologies that people draw upon, deflect, and transform as they make social distinctions, cope with ongoing dramas, counteract worrisome societal tendencies, express visions for the future, chart paths to personal success, make deals, and carry on the work of global corporate expansion. Although I have often spoken about the global circulation of "Western" ideologies and communication practices, particularly those related to egalitarian communication, I have also suggested that these were not drawn upon in the same way in different institutional settings and historical periods in St. Petersburg (nor were they deployed in the same way by all the social actors within a particular institution.) While I have suggested that techniques of active listening, for example, could signify open and caring communication in the St. Petersburg subsidiary of an American multinational, I have also shown how they could be drawn upon to mask interiority and exemplify submission to more powerful others in a local secretarial school. In the context of the late socialist training movement, I mapped out a large range of positions that embrace of such techniques could signify, from dutiful adherence to key premises of socialist democracy, to a joyful alternate realm apart, yet inside the state, to a radical critique of Soviet bureaucracy and its reliance upon

hierarchical and non-egalitarian forms of interpersonal communication.

Yet at the same time, I have also shown that all of the settings I have discussed were not so far apart. In all of the settings I have explored, communication was identified and heralded as a particularly significant site of change. While I have suggested that this is not entirely new for Russia, and was rooted in the exigencies of contemporary social life along with historically sedimented approaches of the past, I have argued that it also has had much to do with globally circulating ideologies of communication mediated through several different channels, including academic psychology, managerial discourses about employee empowerment, and self-help guides and dress-for-success books. If for Habermas, egalitarian communication practices seemed to hold the promise of standing up against the state, in late socialist and Post-Soviet Russia, a wide array of communication practices, from those that embraced equality to those that embraced subordination, seemed to carry the potential to at the very least alter the balance of power between individuals and larger sociopolitical, economic, or corporate structures, whether by subtly knitting individuals further into institutional webs by harnessing their self-actualizing impulses, or allowing them to achieve personal advantage within the larger marketplace. By acting on communication, it appeared that one could supersede, transcend, evade, support, or transform critically important aspects of economics and politics, from the efficiency of industrial production to the wildness of the post-Soviet labor market, to the hierarchies of democratic socialism, to the contradictions of globalization itself.

By claiming this I may appear to be going against the grain of recent scholarship that has suggested that a direct effect of reforms in Russia (whether these take the form of

neoliberal economic transformations or new psychologizations of everyday life) is a certain depoliticization of the citizenry and a new reliance on the individual rather than the state. Thomas Matza, for example, has claimed in a recent article in *Cultural Anthropology* that individualized strategies for coping with political dissatisfaction "invoked forms of governance that aimed to substitute social programs with assemblages of 'uncoordinated' actions of autonomous actors that scale up to functional, efficient, self-administrative wholes" (512).[289] This is not my intention. Certainly many of the projects to transform communication I have described involve putting much of the burden once carried by the socialist state onto individuals that have been made primarily responsible for their own success and survival in the wilds of market capitalism. In some cases these efforts can be linked to concerted corporate efforts to enact larger projects of paradigmatically neoliberal governance, such as the caring communication prescribed at Razorsharp, while in other cases, such as many of the independent training programs I have considered, these would seem to have a looser connection to more general political and economic processes involved in creating a capitalist "labor market" in a former socialist state. And, as I have described, to make communication between people a central locus of change does often has a side effect of bypassing other, more structural explanations for current difficulties—as well as associated accountabilities—that might link these to the actions of larger bodies such as the state, the corporation, or various regulators of the global economy (see Rivkin-Fish 2005), even as participants in these projects sometimes call attention to these erasures.

However, the path that I have taken, of focusing my analytic gaze on ideas about communicative relations *between* people, rather than, as so many others have done, the

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[289] See also, for example, Rivkin-Fish (2005) and Mamut (2007).

production of neoliberal individuals, brings other types of effects into view. To dismiss projects of communication reform as individualistic, apolitical, or beholden to corporate business interests is to also deny the very real promise they hold for many participants to achieve positive effects much larger than the individuals involved, a promise particularly felt by the Soviet training pioneers who reminisced with me about late socialist trainings from the perspective of the 2000s. I think here, for example, of the excessively personalist approach towards communication I witnessed at *Reshenie*[290], a psychological center I visited in 2007 that provided therapy to individuals as well as trainings for trainers, many of whom later went on to work in business settings. The staff of the center were very concerned with "inner" development, and when I attended a communication training there that was also the final project of a student in the center's training program, it was assumed, much as in the American encounter groups heralded by Carl Rogers, that communication was ultimately a matter of an individual expressing his or her inner self in an atmosphere of open and egalitarian facilitation. The training, entitled, "Only I know about my wishes?" was centered around the premise that it was generally difficult to express one's desires openly and the explanation for why this occurred, as the trainer underlined, was "inside us." This stress on the internal locus of communication and communication problems continued throughout the training, as we all drew our "interfering part" (*meshaiushchaia chast'*), the part of ourselves that prevented us from expressing out wishes, as well as our "helping part" (*pomogaiushaia chast'*), the internal resources that aided us in expressing those wishes, on a piece of paper. Somewhat paradoxically, we eventually also acted out these "internal" dilemmas with the aid of other people. In my case, I found myself caught in a drama between my "interfering

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[290] A pseudonym.

part" and my "helping part," the young man playing the interfering part holding me immobile, and the young woman playing the helping part yelling out "Listen to me, I exist!" and telling me to try to jump up nonetheless.

Yet despite this focus on innerness, the staff of *Reshenie* maintained a faith that such work on the speaking psychological self would have social effects stretching far beyond the individual. "We believe that changes in each separate individual will lead to changes in his environment" read the mission statement on the center's website. "Accordingly, changes in even a small group of people can lead to a broader, positive transformation in organizations and even in society as a whole." This orientation was evident at the center's annual international applied psychology conference, sponsored in partnership with an American center based in Michigan, which aimed to explore the resolution of conflict on multiple scales, from the internal conflicts of the psyche to international geopolitical disputes. Key in this process was dissolving the "barriers" often said to prevent communication between people, a process modeled in an exercise during the opening ceremonies, where one of the American organizers advised everyone present (who included psychologists and students from St. Petersburg as well as special guests from other regions of Russia and abroad) to find a person who seemed "different" from themselves, and tell them about themselves, doing so in their "own" language, regardless of the language of their conversation partner. Along with assuming a one-to-one mapping of languages and speakers, this exercise suggested that a certain parity could be achieved between persons that allowed each one to convey the essential aspects of himself or herself to others unencumbered by the materiality of code. Indeed, despite the wide array of linguistic match-ups that occurred, most of the participants who

commented on the exercise publically expressed an instant feeling of connection and collaboration. One American woman, for instance, ecstatically claimed to the group that she felt that she and her partner really understood each other: She didn't know if they were speaking about children or cats, but it didn't matter because there were loved ones in their life. A Russian translator, meanwhile, spoke about how wonderful and romantic it was to be spoken to in French (a language she did not know) by a man. Such testimonials, as much as they reinscribed difference, also projected a larger international social imaginary in which moments of intense intersubjective communication could transcend cultural, linguistic, and other differences between people, and in so doing bring the world closer together.

Most of those at the business-oriented sites where I conducted fieldwork did not share such broadly humanitarian ambitions. Still, I would contend, there was often more at stake in projects to transform communication than the relationships between isolated individuals or efforts to enact a type of communicative governmentality identical with the aims of the corporation or nation-state. While many of the people I met in St. Petersburg were simply trying to survive, get a job, finish their work, or excel in the new market environment, many of them were also trying to do more than this. I return here to a claim I have made at various points throughout the dissertation. Many Putin-era communications professionals and business people, I have suggested, were engaged in a larger project of "civilizing" the market, a space often seen as morally reprehensible, and making it safe for "normal" business practice. Rather than seeing the post-Soviet business sphere as a space of illegality and corruption, then, I highlight in this respect the efforts many such people have made to counter suspect practices with new moral visions

of proper interaction at work.

Some claimed to be countering the lingering abuses of the Soviet past; others, the "wildness" of the 1990s and the dislocations of neoliberal globalization. Many opposed their interventions to some combination of these factors. However, whether they were expatriate managers who aimed to instill practices of caring communication heralded by empowerment theorists, instructors in a private secretarial program who schooled women in beautiful and cultured styles of interaction, or public relations professionals seeking a balance between stereotypically Russian practices of business through connections and global ethics of corporate governance, all, I would suggest, amid their many other idiosyncratic goals and aims, including the quest for profit, were in some sense striving to provide the often harsh and much criticized post-Soviet marketplace with the firm moral foundation that they felt that it lacked. Globally circulating ideologies and imaginaries of global (Western) audiences combined with more historically rooted sensibilities, as communications specialists and business people crafted visions of market interactions acceptable for local institutional contexts that nonetheless were felt to be continually subject to gazes from elsewhere. If communication was not equally important to everyone, and some countered these communicative visions with other types of moral understandings that were more attuned to the material repercussions of globalization and marketization, it nonetheless was one important site for coming to terms with the place of Russia and Russian employees in a global market economy. Indeed, to speak of transforming communication was often a means of formulating a civilized path forward that would allow individuals to participate in the market as good capitalist employees without being hampered by the larger socioeconomic dislocations that the market

engendered.

      This, of course, does not add up to a Habermasean public that might stand up to the state. Many Russia observers have hoped that one result of "transition" would be a free and vibrant "civil society" that would assume the functions of Habermas's public sphere; they have been bitterly disappointed with Putin's Russia as businesses and nongovernmental organizations seemed to increasingly fall under the "vertical" purview of authoritarian state control.[291] Yet, at the same time, I would insist, many of those who endeavored to improve business communication were at the very least motivated to construct social imaginaries greater than themselves. Where for Habermas and his followers talk between people holds potential because of the possibility of achieving consensus through rational deliberation, for reformers of workplace communication styles in post-Soviet Russia, perhaps the most important aspect of talk between people, whether this has been explicitly acknowledged (as in discourses on image), or has become increasingly apparent in practice (during assessments of employees' competencies in caring communication, for example) had to do with constructing a new private business sphere characterized by "civilized" linguistic and nonlinguistic self-presentation, the stuff of metapragmatics rather than rational debate. Such efforts worked to normalize shifting regimes of inequality linked to local labor markets, the policies of the Russian state, and global capitalism, at the same time as they provided these spheres with a new degree of moral legitimization. From this perspective, joining the international corporate army appears not a matter of mere imitation, but rather an act of moral negotiation deeply rooted in the specific concerns of social actors in Russian corporate and educational settings and their own dreams of civil communication.

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[291] For review, see Hemment (2004). For examples of this perspective see Evans. et al. (2006).

Appendix

Interactional Competencies at Razorsharp

These descriptions are taken from a guide to company competencies widely available on the company intranet, which was also reproduced in slightly altered versions in various training and evaluation materials. I have selected and included here those competencies described in this guide as involving a significant amount of skill in verbal interaction. They represent seven of the twelve key competencies identified as important for Razorsharp professional staff.

Aligning Performance for Success
Focusing and guiding others in accomplishing work objectives.

Sets performance goals – *Collaboratively works with direct reports to set meaningful performance objectives; sets specific performance goals and identifies measures for evaluating goal achievement*
Evaluates approach – *Collaboratively works with direct reports to identify the behaviors, knowledge, and skills required to achieve goals; identifies specific behaviors, knowledge, and skill areas for focus and evaluation.*
Creates a learning environment – *As necessary, helps secure resources required to support developmental efforts; ensures that opportunities for development are available; offers to help individuals overcome obstacles to learning.*
Tracks performance – *Implements a system or uses techniques to track performance against goals and to track the acquisition and use of appropriate behaviors, knowledge, and skills.*
Evaluates performance – *Holds regular formal discussions with each direct report to discuss progress towards goals and review performance; evaluates each goal, behavior, knowledge, and skill area.*

Building a Successful Team
Using appropriate methods and a flexible interpersonal style to help build a cohesive team; facilitating the completion of team goals.

Develops direction—*Ensures that the purpose and importance of the team are clarified (e.g. team has a clear charter or mission statement); guides the setting of specific and measurable team goals and objectives.*
Develops structure – *Helps to clarify roles and responsibilities of team members; helps ensure that necessary steering, review, or support functions are in place.*
Facilitates goal accomplishment – *Makes procedural or process suggestions for achieving team goals or performing team functions; provides necessary resources or helps to remove obstacles to team accomplishments.*

Involves others *– Listens to and fully involves others in team decisions and actions; values and uses individual differences and talents.*
Informs others on team *– Shares important or relevant information with the team.*
Models commitment *– Adheres to the team's expectations and guidelines; fulfills team responsibilities; demonstrates personal commitment to the team.*

Building Strategic Working Relationships

Developing and using collaborative relationships to facilitate the accomplishment of work goals.

Seeks opportunities *– Proactively tries to build effective working relationships with other people.*
Clarifies the current situation *– Probes for and provides information to clarify situations.*
Develops others' and own ideas *– Seeks and expands on original ideas, enhances others' ideas, and contributes own ideas about the issues at hand.*
Subordinates personal goals *– Places higher priority on team or organizational goals than on own goals.*
Facilitates agreement *– Gains agreement from partners to support ideas or take partnership-oriented actions; uses sound rationale to explain value of actions.*
Uses key principles *– Establishes good interpersonal relationships by helping people feel valued, appreciated, and included in discussions (enhances self-esteem, emphasizes, involves, discloses, supports).*

Coaching

Providing timely guidance and feedback to help others strengthen specific knowledge/skill areas needed to accomplish a task or solve a problem.

Clarifies the current situation *– Clarifies expected behaviors, knowledge, and level of proficiency by seeking and giving information and checking for understanding.*
Explains and demonstrates *– Provides instruction, positive models, and opportunities for observation in order to help others develop skills; encourages questions to ensure understanding.*
Provides feedback and reinforcement *– Gives timely, appropriate feedback on performance, reinforces efforts and progress.*
Maintains positive relations *– Establishes good interpersonal relationships by helping people feel valued, appreciated, and included in discussions (enhances self-esteem, emphasizes, involves, discloses, supports).*

Communication

Clearly conveying information and ideas through oral media to individuals or groups in a manner that engages the audience and helps them understand and retain the message.

Organizes the communication *– Clarifies purpose and importance; stresses major points; follows a logical sequence.*
Maintains audience attention *– Keeps the audience engaged through use of techniques such as analogies, illustrations, body language, and voice inflection.*

Adjusts to the audience – *Frames message in line with audience experience, background, and expectations; uses terms, examples, and analogies that are meaningful to the audience.*
Ensures understanding – *Seeks input from audience; checks understanding; presents message in different ways to enhance understanding.*
Adheres to accepted conventions – *Uses appropriate syntax, pace, volume, diction, and mechanics.*
Comprehends communication from others –*Attends to messages from others; correctly interprets messages and responds appropriately.*

Customer Focus

Making customers and their needs a primary focus of one's actions; developing and sustaining productive customer relationships.

Seeks to understand customers – *Actively seeks information to understand customer's circumstances, problems, expectations, and needs.*
Educates customers – *Shares information with customers to build their understanding of issues and capabilities.*
Builds collaborative relationships – *Builds rapport and cooperative relationships with customers.*
Takes action to meet customer needs and concerns – *Considers how actions or plans will affect customers; responds quickly to meet customer needs and resolve problems; avoids over-commitments.*
Sets up customer feedback systems – *Implements effective ways to monitor and evaluate customer concerns, issues, and satisfaction; develops systems to anticipate customer needs.*

Leading Through Mission and Values

Keeping the organization's mission and values at the forefront of associate decision-making and action.

Communicates the importance of the mission and values – *Helps others understand the organization's mission and values, and their importance.*
Moves others to action – *Translates the mission and values into day-to-day activities and behaviors; guides and motivates others to take actions that support the mission and values.*
Models the mission and values – *Takes actions, makes decisions, and shapes team or group priorities to reflect the organization's mission and values.*
Rewards living the mission and values – *Recognizes and rewards associations whose actions support the organization's mission and values.*

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