

Old Wives' Tales

Notes on the Rhetoric of the Post-Soviet Intelligentsia

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1. Introduction

In our time of global cultural change, deconstruction of totalitarian ideologies seems to top the hit list of research subjects in humanities, presenting a thrilling intellectual adventure in semiotics, psychoanalysis, critical theory, textual analysis and social linguistics; a fecund field to plow for a conceptual artist, a writer and a critic. This has been the case with Western intellectuals who probe into totalitarianism with the ultimate goal of learning something new about its eternal counterpart, Western democracy. This has also been the case with Russian intellectuals — or *intelligentsia* — probing into the system and themselves in an attempt to find a new role (if at all) for itself in the new ideological environment that is gradually evolving and taking shape in Russia.

Talking about the present-day Russian intelligentsia and the (assuma-bly) new role they are expected to play, one must not overlook the specific nature of this social and cultural community.

The intelligentsia are the unique class of text producers whose only purpose seems to lie in generating discourse for their own consumption (as they generally constitute the reading public they address in their own writing or artistic production), a discourse, moreover, which is mostly about themselves (the protagonist of reflection being an intellectual/ artistic individual generally opposed both to political power and to mass-cultural majority). The cultural niche occupied by the intelligentsia can be described, therefore, as a middle position between the bureaucracy or otherwise state-employed producers of discourse, on the one hand, and the highly commercialized, mass-cultural structures that employ professionals to produce marketable commodities, on the other.

Thus, if we assume that the intelligentsia is a cultural community fulfilling the social order of self-analysis in a broad political and cultural context, that it is the only group professionally engaged (and politically *engagée*) in the production of texts, that it is both the subject and the object of social and cultural reflection and critique, then the task of elucidating the role of the intelligentsia is necessarily preceded by another task, that of identifying the rhetoric peculiar to this class. The Russian and Soviet intelligentsia have always been a highly class-conscious stratum. Being an *intelligent* — one of the intelligentsia — was, and still is, viewed as a moral obligation and a privilege, a special position of chosenness with respect to the non-writing, "non-thinking" majority. This class-consciousness is reflected in numerous rhetorical gestures which must be understood as such rather than as objective statements.

Since the intelligentsia evolved as a social stratum in Russia, it has found itself in a conflicting and contradictory relation to power, opposing it or trying to reform it. Yet, despite the openly oppositional stance, throughout its history the intelligentsia has always turned out being either defeated by the state, or engaged in political establishment. It would be interesting to find out to what extent and in what way this dramatic situation is reflected in, and produced by, the intelligentsia's own discourse.

In his critical review of the latest ART-MIF art fair (V. Turchin 1993), the author notes with ironic satisfaction the abundance of second-rate Socialist Realist art production (and its tremendous commercial success). The writer devotes a long passage to memories about his own childhood when such art permeated his whole life. "Anyway, my own underdeveloped aesthetic feeling was formed in the presence of such works of art. And no knowledge of any "other" art, whether Kandinskij, Rothko, Bacon, or Kabakov, would ever heal me. Like all of us, I am ill with powder milk, *pelmeni*, kolchoz pageants, *seljankas*, sunflowers, [...], and the mysterious "777" [popular cheap port wine. - I.S.] that meant more at that time than the Biblical "666". I invariably start to weep when I see this sort of painting: it's my own childhood clumsily painted by good-for-nothing daubers who gave expression to their time with adequateness and appropriateness. It is not the colors, neither the perfection of drawing, nor composition that such art production is valued for, as all of these notions have nothing to do with it. It is valued because it shows the pictures that are dear to one's heart. Hey, who is that person carrying a jar of pickled cucumbers in a string bag, who is that one boating, who is that person picking flowers in the fields, who is

looking at a shop window smiling to a comely girl and holding a moist rose in his teeth? This is "ME", "me", "me", "me"."

The humorous effect is achieved by the author as he enumerates popular subjects of cheap Socialist Realist paintings together with cheap public catering treats of the time of his childhood. In this feast of *aesthetics* (etymologically, the Greek word *aisthetikos* means "pertaining to the body"), there evolves a new personage endowed with an *individual historical existence*, and this existence — in spite of the bitter irony — finds its ideological roots in the Stalinist discourse that used to be so absolutely disavowed during Perestrojka.

The fact that the intelligentsia now, after a long period of negation, seems to be starting to reconcile itself to its totalitarian individual history and to reconsider it as personal, not somebody else's guilt, seems very important to me. It would appear that the totalitarian experience from which we have been trying to alienate ourselves is now being re-interiorized, re-introduced into the personal experience of the intelligentsia as the sole foundation from which self-identification should proceed. Totalitarianism is now beginning to be experienced as something very intimate. The fact of supreme significance, as I see it, is that totalitarianism is being "re-visited" in terms of aesthetic values par excellence. This means that the Soviet cultural heritage is being subjected to a critical revision in that very part of identity that is associated with the most intimate, the most sublime memories of an individual, namely the memories of his or her childhood. The paradoxical situation is that, in spite of the fact that totalitarianism with its semantics and pragmatics of the Grand Style sought to annihilate the significance of the personal, it is the personal experience, highly subjective, narrow in scope and barely articulated at all, that seems to reveal both new grounds for a critical revision of Russia's totalitarian past and new possibilities for interior-ization and further critical cognizance of the collective historical experience.

2. *Intelligentsia* vs. *Sluzascie*

In the debate that is now being waged about the intelligentsia and its role, one factor is often overlooked (or cleverly hushed up), that of *the intelligentsia* and *the Soviet intelligentsia* being two notions, not one. The opposition was introduced by Stalin in the 1936 Constitution and in his notorious book *Voprosy Leninizma*. The Soviet intelligentsia — as

opposed to the bourgeois intelligentsia — is a social stratum (not a class since it produces no material goods, is not involved in production relations and can therefore play neither an economic nor a historical role of its own) with a principally "new socialist content". The new content, it would seem, is the result of the fact that the Soviet intelligentsia serves the new revolutionary classes, not the "rich" classes as is the case in bourgeois society. The two institutionalizing factors — (a) that of alienation from material production and hence from history and (b) that of giving service to the revolutionary classes — seem to have determined the list of social strata defined as intelligentsia. In Stalin's edition of *Bol'shaja sovetskaja énciklopedija*, those classified as intelligentsia are people of "intellectual labor", among them writers, "workers of art and culture", teachers, doctors, engineers, as well as Soviet and party functionaries, heads of state industrial and agricultural enterprises and officers and generals of the Soviet army (the latter category, obviously, also included the KGB). This has nothing to do with the pre-revolutionary idea of the intelligentsia whose definition one finds in the dictionary by Vladimir Dal': "The intelligentsia is the reasonable, educated, intellectually developed part of society". Nor does one find in the term "Soviet intelligentsia" the moral connotations conveyed by the pre-revolutionary word usage *podlinnyj, istinnyj intelligent* (a genuine intelligent), implying a moral standard, a paragon of honor, honesty, professionalism and political independence.

In the list of professions that Stalin classified as "intellectual labor" one can easily identify two groups. The first one includes positions endowed with functions of state control, both ideological and political. Here, we can find state and party bureaucrats, functionaries engaged in control over artistic life and educational activities, and the higher echelons of the army. Alongside those who worked in organizations responsible for direct ideological and political repression, and listed at the same level of hierarchy and in the same cultural category, are professionals responsible for "the spreading of culture to the masses": artists, actors, filmmakers, writers, scholars, teachers, etc. Ideologically correct discourse production and management, or "the improvement of the ideological and cultural level", as party documents referred to it, was evidently conceived in totalitarian social practices to be as important as immediate physical and political repression.

The idea of the intelligentsia "giving service" was in line with the Leninist tradition of dividing the intelligentsia into "progressive" and "reactionary". As early as 1902, in his article *Čto delat'*, Lenin denied the intelligentsia any independent revolutionary role in history, but he

emphasized the need for the "progressive", socialist-democratic intelligentsia to introduce the communist consciousness, the theory and ideology of "scientific communism", into the spontaneous (*stichijnaja*) struggle waged by the proletariat against capitalism. Thus, writing produced by the revolutionary intelligentsia of the pre-October period on the one hand, and ideologically correct scientific, scholarly, artistic, and literary discourse by the socialist intelligentsia after the victorious proletarian revolution on the other were employed for the propagation of Bol'shevik ideological influence, as a medium or a tool for the dissemination and propagation of the power of the party.

Remarkably, the word "intelligentsia" in *Lingua Sovietica* was only used in cultural contexts, as an occupational rather than a social denotation. In official documents, all of us, scholars and authors, musicians and teachers, were defined in terms of social origin as *sluzascie*, "salaried employees" (literally, "the serving ones"). Obviously, the word is a remnant from the early days of Soviet power when the Bo'lsevik state machine began to employ representatives of the old Russian intelligentsia for petty bureaucratic jobs and further as "bourgeois specialists". Towards the latter category of workers, the authorities were deeply suspicious, so their position within the class structure of Socialist society was highly insecure. One can read in Stalin's works of the late 1920s and early 1930s (Stalin 1933) that these "bourgeois specialists" and other remnants of the "old exploiting classes" were internal enemies of the proletarian state, a source of danger for the economic and political well-being of the nation. The term *sluzascie*, in distinction to its "positive" counterpart *the Soviet intelligentsia*, obviously, at that time and long after, bore clear connotations of the massacre of the intelligentsia of the year 1937, the bloody memory of which still lives among present-day intellectuals. The fear that 1937 could be repeated remained long after Stalin's death, so the word *sluzascie* that we used to write in our personal files when applying for a job or to a college in the USSR was evidently intended to remind us of our true place, the place of those *serv*ing the totalitarian political machine. It is notable that in today's debate around the role of the intelligentsia this other name, "the serving ones", *sluzascie*, is being ignored.

Hence, I would be justified in concluding that the Stalinist definition of the intelligentsia as a cultural hypostasis of politically "serving ones" remains relevant for the identity of today's intelligentsia (compare Michel Foucault's conclusions about Discourse as a subsidiary of Power in the introduction to his *History of Sexuality* (Foucault 1980)). The next

conclusion would be that one has to be careful in analyzing the intelligentsia's own statements about its being in "natural" opposition to power. The intelligentsia could be defined as a social group onto which the important function of discourse production and control is conferred, the function of "discourse police". This places the intelligentsia in a most intimate connection with power, a connection that is only now starting to be realized and, although reluctantly and ironically, is coming into the focus of the intelligentsia's self-reflection.

3. *Intellectuals vs. Intelligentsia: the Rhetoric of Self-Justification*

In spite of the short period that has elapsed since 1985, there have been radical changes in the predominant attitudes of Russian democratically-minded intellectuals; accordingly, perceptible changes of rhetoric — and ensuing cultural behavior — are to be witnessed.

A novelty to be seen in intellectual writing of the post-Soviet period is the appearance of the personal pronoun "I" as a major reference point of the whole discourse. In the post-Soviet writing of the older generation of liberal intelligentsia (the so-called Chruscev generation), the "I" had been mostly concentrated in texts relating the intelligentsia's experience of dissident activities under the Soviet regime or the history of the quiet opposition and the (futile) attempts to make the fierce ideological regime "more rational". This First-Person-Singular mode of discourse indicated a new subjective concept of history and a new status of writing: it was no longer sanctified by the official censorship, an institution that formerly imparted a quality of canonicity to the writing that was considered to be politically and ideologically correct. There evolved a new protagonist, a truth-seeking "I" pursuing *pravda* (a specific Russian word denoting an ethical hypostasy of truth) not to be found in the Soviet ideological system which was thereby represented as completely false and immoral. *Pravda* denoted both truth and a moral absolute, the two cornerstones of "spiritual human values"; the ideal society was conceived as "a society open both to *pravda* and truth [*istina*]" (ApreP 1989). Numerous examples could be found in the writings of ApreV (an association of writers who supported Gorbacev's reform in the struggle against staunch Communists which he waged before the August 1991 coup).

The younger generation of independent intellectual critics who followed in the wake of the Chruscev liberals were guided by the *feeling of truth* rather than by its *knowledge*. Like Bazarov in the famous novel by Turgenev *Fathers and Sons*, they were determined, to sum up

their stance, to overthrow the new lies that the previous generation of freedom-loving intellectuals ("the fathers") had heaped on top of the old lies of totalitarian ideology. Obviously, the "lies" in question were predominantly associated with the attempts of the previous critics to find new moral imperatives ("common human values") and to use them as a lever in the disassembly of the old symbolic system. In the younger generation, the possibility of "moral renewal" was rejected together with morals as such. The most outstanding example of the new independent critique was Dmitrij Galkovskij's novel *Beskonečnyj tupik* (Galkovskij 1992), an exquisite work of art symptomatically mistaken by its critics for a political manifesto of immoralism and nihilism. While the liberal intelligentsia mostly used mainstream journals and magazines (*Ogonek*, *Novyj mir*, *Znamja*, etc.) as their forums, the new independent criticism was confined to publications in *semi-samizdat* literary collections and almanacs and semi-underground art and literature. This kind of criticism often took the shape of a radical artistic gesture and soon became part of the counter-cultural rhetoric of young artists and intellectuals. An important feature of their nihilistic attitude is the heavy reliance on aesthetic criteria in their critique directed both against totalitarian practices and against their own liberal intellectual predecessors, as two phenomena that are equally alien to the aesthetic preferences of the "I" of the creative personality.

Three points are important concerning the critical rhetoric of the independent intellectuals: (a) they denied any liberating power in the role of the intelligentsia; (b) they refused to identify themselves with the intelligentsia; (c) they proclaimed that the intelligentsia was dead.

Of course, the critical work carried out by that trend was largely belle-lettres rather than political or cultural analysis. Jorge Luis Borges once said: "Literature is a form of art that can prophesy its own muteness, can vent its anger on Virtue itself, can love its own demise and see, with all decency, its own remains to its last abode" (translated into English from a Russian edition). Therefore, it would be reasonable to look at declarations like "the intelligentsia is dead" as rhetorical figures instead of taking such statements at face value.

What seems really important about the rhetoric of the two opponent camps of democratic intellectuals after Perestrojka is their constant reference to "T": both the "T" of the author and the abstract Individual as a cultural institution opposed to the collective body of Soviet man (*so-vok*). On the one hand, the introduction of the First Person Singular in critical and analytical discourse is an important sign announcing that the

discourse of Soviet ideology was gone, or at least undermined, that discourse for which no "I" could exist by definition. Therefore, by introducing the "I" into public writing, post-Soviet intelligentsia attempted to draw a line of demarcation, to proclaim that their discourse was to be evaluated according to a new, non-totalitarian, frame of reference.

Another and a more important fact connected with the introduction of "I" was the abandonment of the writer's identity as part of a collective social body, the emergence of an individual body among the new *dramatis personae* of public discourse. One's own self, one's intimate feelings, one's deep emotions, one's personal likes and dislikes began to be used as a frame of reference and became the predominant line of argumentation; the "I-don't-like-it-but-I-couldn't-care-less" position of the new independent critical wave came to replace the "I-don't-find-it-fair-or-true" one of the previous liberal intelligentsia; in other words, ethical modalities gave way to aesthetic modalities.

Going back to the extract from the critical review quoted above, we can see that the latest attitude that is beginning to be visible among rhetorical figures employed by the intelligentsia in their self-reflection, no longer either liberal or nihilistic, can be summed up as a desire to re-represent totalitarianism in terms of "positive aesthetic values". The art critic Josef Bakshtein has written a critical review of the work of the Soviet emigre artists Komar and Melamid, the creators of the famous sots-art painting "Once I Saw Stalin". The critic's immediate response (and his credo) was: "Once, as a boy, I also saw Stalin." It seems that totalitarianism excludes any empathy in terms of ethics but invites the desire to identify with it on the basis of aesthetics. Again, "aesthetic" should be understood etymologically as pertaining to the domain of sensorium, to the intimate personal values and the resulting subjective modalities caused by bodily sensations, vague perceptions, heart-felt emotions and deep-lying feelings. It would be only natural if we try to delineate the semantic area associated with this type of modalities in order to see how respective rhetoric evolves on its basis.

4. The Conflict between the Official and the Personal: *Bol'shoe* vs. *Maloe*

It was Alia Efimova who observed that the opposition of *bol'soj* vs. *malyj* (the major vs. the minor, the big vs. the small) has been of extreme significance for Soviet cultural identity. The word *bol'soj*/*bol'saja* began to connote the sphere of officialdom: the *Bol'soj* theater,

Bol'saja sovetskaja ènciklopedija (the Big Soviet Encyclopedia), *Bol'saja sportivnaja arena* (the Big Sports Arena in Luzniki stadium), *Bol'soj zalkonservatorii* (the Big Hall of the Moscow Conservatoire); compare also *bol'soj stil'*, the Grand Style as a name of Socialist Realism, *Bol'soj Brat*, Big Brother, etc). The word *malyjmalaja*, on the contrary, usually referred to things that were relieved of the function of official representation, things that were supposed to be experienced on a more private, more emotional, and more subjective basis. For instance, in the 1970s there appeared the concept of *malaja rodina* (the smaller motherland), the place where a person was born and in relation to which it was permissible to entertain vague, patriotic sentiments slightly tinted with nationalism. *Malaja rodina* was conceived in opposition to, and alongside with, Soviet patriotism and communist internationalism, the expected predominant attitude towards our *Velikaja Rodina*, the Great Socialist Motherland. Ideologically doubtful writing produced by the writers Valentin Rasputin, Vladimir Makanin, Andrej Bitov, Ljudmila Petrusovskaja and other non-official but also non-samizdat authors of the 1970-80s were termed *malaja proza* (the smaller prose) by official literary critics. This was a compromise to describe a creative attitude that depicted the Soviet character as a highly split and morally degraded individuality, an attitude impossible within the framework of the doctrine of official — *bol'saja*, the big — literature. The semantic area of *malyjmalaja*, therefore, includes the following connotations: (a) the term connotes the sphere of individual existence, values and preferences not exactly opposed to officialdom but described as if *in absentia* of the latter; (b) these are highly subjective connotations appealing to an individual's emotional self, the domain of personal relations; (c) their motives mainly belong to the area of aesthetics.

I would like to follow this tradition by applying the *bol'soj* vs. *ma-lyj* opposition to the two rhetorical corpora that are present in Soviet discourse, namely, the major Soviet rhetoric manifested in official Stalinist and post-Stalinist verbality and visuality on the one hand, and, on the other, the minor Soviet rhetoric manifested in the linguistic and cultural behavior of an individual, not as a collective being but as a private personality, in those situations that are not codified by an official cultural norm, i.e. in private life and in private self-reflection, on the other.

The personal experience of the present author (which has been discussed and found to be shared by many members of the intelligentsia in Russia) is that in our personal lives, in our attitudes and behaviors we

seem never to have been guided by official imperatives as such. In my generation of the intelligentsia born in the post-war period the rhetoric of the totalitarian state was subject to complete and irreversible estrangement. At the same time, the rhetoric developed by the intelligentsia itself cannot be looked upon merely as a gesture of negation with respect to the officially approved values. The relationship between these two types of discourse seems rather complicated. One of the problems that arises in this connection is that the major state-generated rhetoric has been articulated in all clarity, both in party directives and in officially permitted forms of art and writing. On the contrary, the minor individually generated rhetoric is produced unconsciously, it is hardly understood as rhetoric at all. Still, if one does agree to the above classification of rhetoric, the crucial question that arises is how these two rhetorical corpora relate to each other and what kind of world pictures they represent. There are grounds to suspect that the many political and economic contradictions, by which Russia seems to be torn into pieces at present, are rooted in the conceptual rather than in the economic or political sphere: the new rhetoric of Russian reform (actually, this same minor intelligentsia's rhetoric) sometimes appears merely as a new language for representing the old world model upon which the major totalitarian rhetoric rested in all its magnificence. This is a painful question, and it obviously lies beyond the scope of this paper. I would only suggest that there *do* exist two corpora of rhetorical gestures, that they *did* co-exist, in confrontation, for over 70 years, and I would proceed by supposing that between these two symbolic dimensions there must exist some "bridges" that would permit an exchange and mutual accommodation of meanings to make such co-existence possible at all. In other words, there must necessarily exist special symbolic "membranes" (or "valves", or "interfaces") between the two conflicting symbolic systems, interfaces that would tune the two systems together, symbolic mechanisms that would make the totalitarian cultural order and the individual at least tolerable for each other. I would further suggest that one such membrane — and a unique phenomenon in European cultures — is *babuska*, the Grannie.

5. The *Babuška* Factor

In Russian and Soviet culture, one's grannie (or somebody else's grannie) is a very interesting persona. Suffice it to say, that a member of the intelligentsia as such is, substantially, a product of Grannie's edu-

cation. Our grandmas would more often than not stay with us in our preschool and early school age. Grandma is most often the first witness of the words uttered by a little child, of his or her first steps, the vigilant guardian of the infant's health, the untiring teacher of the child's first habits and ways, the nourisher of the child's insatiable curiosity, the uncompromising monitor of infantile sexuality. As Mum and Dad are constantly at work and out of reach, it is Grannie who teaches the child elementary reading and writing, who does the comforting, the storytelling and the preaching. She surveys the child's progress at school, she watches his or her social life and sorts out undesirable company. In short, the grandmother is the one responsible for acculturation, the first one to guide the future member of the intelligentsia within the maze of language and cultural constructions, the one who imbues the child with textual desires and instills in him or her the need to express his or her self through writing.

Individual grandmas have merged together into a persona of Everybody's *babuska*, a conspicuous though deplorably ignored character on the Russian cultural scene. *Babuskas* are mostly retired women, almost always widows. In our life, *babuskas* are the nightmare of younger people, self-appointed and uncompromising monitors of public morals and ways. Grandmothers have a wonderful feeling of what is fair and what is not, and they never hesitate to speak out.

In improving your ways, the grandmother's argument appeals, on the whole, to your ratio, to your conscience, your sensibility, your pre-sup-posed awareness of the needs and good of others and to your ability to suppress your own egoism for the sake of others. "How can you swim in the pool without your cap on? Don't you know there are other people in the swimming pool who don't like your dirty hair? Such a brainless girl should not be let in at all!" Or: "How can you sit with your feet on the bench? You don't think about someone else who might want to sit down and have a rest here." Or: "Stand in line, young man, and wait for your turn. How can you be so selfish seeing so many people standing and waiting patiently?" Or: "This Malevic. Educated artist that he is. And painting a white quadrangle against a white background when the world around him is so full of colors. I absolutely cannot understand him."

Incidentally, Soviet power seems to have disapproved of Malevic's "thoughtless conduct" for these same reasons. One of the Socialist Realism dogmata was that of "conscious reflection of actual reality" which implied social and political awareness, awakeness to the ideological needs of the regime and readiness to suppress one's own individuality.

This "consciousness" of Socialist Realism — and of the grandmother — was antonymous to political immaturity, it was an attribute of someone who is politically and ideologically adult, while "non-consciousness" (together with the sub-conscious, an impossible thing in Soviet official culture) was rejected as ridiculously infantile. In her appeal for sensibility, Grandmother urges the thoughtless personality to abandon corporeality for the "real" reality, that of collective conscious action. However, this appeal coming from *babuska* is something very different from similar appeals coming from official propaganda, as the latter lacks *babuska's* emotional connotations.

The Gulfstream of Big Culture rages far away leaving *babuska* a forgotten out-of-the-way island, an idyll swept by tender waves and warmed by the sun. *Babuska* is a green field, a retreat, a shelter. This is the place allotted by official Soviet culture to the personae of Arina Rodion-ovna, Puskin's nanny, and the grandmother from Maksim Gor'kij's autobiographic trilogy. A patch of still waters in the raging ocean of political and economic struggle waged by grown-up males. *Babuska* is a source of warm emotion associated with the very depths of folk culture, a substitute Mother giving the support of love and humanity in the devastating Oedipal conflict between the Hero and the monstrous Imperialist/Capitalist System. She is the embodiment of *narodnost'*, a deep-lying familial association between folk wisdom and the wisdom of the ruling regime.

In today's rhetoric, reconstruction of *babuska* is a very popular genre. The memory of one's grandma is most often evoked in connection with unrealized, unimplemented possibilities suppressed in the previous generation, that of Mums and Dads. One can make a fetish out of a suitcase or an old Paris city guide with which a grandmother had travelled abroad before the revolution, to get an education. The old garbage is thus elevated into a human rights symbol, an allegory of a wrong turn that has been taken somewhere before your birth, a fatal deviation onto a by-road of world culture and civilization. The vagueness of mythology inscribed by present-day writers into the grandmother and her attributes is extremely meaningful. The image of the grandmother, her lifestyle and values, are ambivalent productions of infantile memories, a very subjective reconstruction obtained from family stories. One's memory works out new truths which are purposefully biased, non-universal, intimate, unpenetrable from the collective, socially approved point of view.

A childish secret shared with one's grandmother often becomes the first road sign indicating one's future vocation. A young Russian Orthodox priest remembers his secret visits to church where his grandmother

sometimes took him as an infant without the knowledge of his Jewish atheist father. The young man believes this to be a starting point of his commitment, a fact which was to determine his further destiny. A woman filmmaker cherishes the memories of her Ukrainian grandmother in whom she used to confide her childish secrets in the Ukrainian language, a socially inferior dialect shunned by her Russian-aculturated parents. The Ukrainian language spoken by the *babuska* of her childhood is the starting point of creation for her now, though she lives in France. In my own memory, and in the childish memories of my mother there remained Yiddish words in which my Internationalist Bol'sevik grandmother sometimes described the life of the children's room. When my own children were born I often heard my mother use these words in similar situations without even knowing exactly what they meant. Incidentally, Yiddish was not the only secret of my grandmother. She also cleverly concealed her knowledge of Ancient Greek, Latin, German and French which she had learned before the revolution and as a member of a proletarian state was wise enough not to disclose. A feminist grandmother, a *kulak* grandmother, a Jewish Orthodox grandmother, a German grandmother, a Stalinist camp prisoner grandmother, a CeKa grandmother, a grandmother with relatives abroad... All these subjects began to be slowly brought into daylight under Perestrojka, when people stopped being afraid of their own personal histories, when they suddenly started reciting family legends to their friends fearing no longer that there might be informers among the audience. The previously suppressed or censored grandmother Saga also underlies the discourse of self-identification produced by the present-day intelligentsia.

And not only the intelligentsia, but power, as well. In terms of power, *babuska* is assumed to be a mild, intimate alternative to the Father of the Nation, or the Big Brother, that is, to a severely oppressive uncompromising mode of totalitarianism. This is assumably a harmonic opposition, one which presupposes bloodless, non-violent, state-initiated reform, political and economic renovation, as a family matter. I remember Michail Gorbacev using the *babuska* symbolism in one of his early speeches explaining the idea of Perestrojka and economic reform. He envisaged a new economic reality in which private property would be combined with state ownership so that an old retired woman, a *babuska*, might make a contribution to her moderate income baking rolls and selling them cheap in a nice café, with her grandchildren helping around after school hours. His concept of "socialism with a human face" was largely a desire for a non-radical, stay-at-home and sit-by-the-fire change.

He was heavily relying on the emotional connotations of *babuska*, trying to disguise a dangerous political game as an internal family matter, unconsciously appealing to the grandma memories of each and every member of society as a common cultural basis.

However, to take the sweet *babuska* myth at face value would be a gross misconception. The real *babuskas* of today retain their position of public moral judges and teachers of public discourse. But personally they have nothing in common with the obscure Arina Rodionovna of the Soviet propaganda. Most of them have college degrees and combine a lifelong professional career with an equally long experience of making their families survive in the Soviet economic test-tube. They have passed through the stormy history as politically active participants, not as meek speechless victims. Many of them were in Stalinist camps, still more were party members and every one has lost at least one family member in wars, purges, and famines. They have seen many things during their lives, and they have invariably assumed an active attitude. They read newspapers and they listen to political programs, and it is very difficult to deceive their judgement. Wherever two old women get together they start speaking, and quarrelling, about politics. Lines in foodstores are political clubs. They do not believe any more but they react to political life more intensely than they would respond to any fact of private existence. There is no Faith in them but there is unshakable, ineradicable Hope. It is the *babuskas'* hopes, to be sure, that yielded El'cin a 75% vote around Moscow during the 1993 April referendum. It is the *babuskas'* hopes and their political instincts, too, that are smartly exploited by ex-party propagandists, those shrewd experts of Soviet hearts, in organizing old women into anti-government meetings.

As an example of grandmothers' involvement in the development of the intelligentsia and as an individual case history of the formation of rhetoric I would like to give the reader some facts about my own family — an average family of the Soviet intelligentsia. My own interests, as I understand now, are the result of a three generation continuity in the family, a continuity running in the female part of it. My grandmother was a teacher of history, a school headmistress, and at the dawn of her career she was engaged in the campaign of working out ABCs and other teaching aids for the alphabetization of Northern national minorities. My aunt, a professor in teaching methods, is, incidentally, engaged now in a similar Russian-American project of alphabetization of peoples of the North, this time US citizens. My foster aunt taught history at a college. Another aunt worked as a literary editor at a big publishing house. Still another aunt was a logopedician. Finally, the most important influence

was my mother who was a psychotherapist. In short, all women in three generations of our family have been professionally occupied in careers involving the protection of, and control over, public discourse - a profession that I previously referred to as "discourse police". Like the *ba-buskas* in my own family, other grannies in Russia are sweet but they are also dangerous. The *babuska* factor is not only profound, it is very stable and does not appear at all to be expiring: I often hear- Russian teenagers tease each other: "Quit it, or I'll tell Grannie on you". A promising beginning for a child from a family of the intelligentsia.

6. Conclusion

The problem of the intelligentsia and the role it plays in society, as the author sees it, should be approached from the aspect of textual analysis of the intelligentsia's writing and speech practices. Forms of rhetoric that are employed by the intelligentsia in constructing their own cultural identity, when subject to textual analysis, give one an access to the world picture that is the driving force behind the intelligentsia's social and cultural behavior. The question remains open, whether the Russian intelligentsia is capable of elaborating a viable world picture that would compete with, and ultimately oust, the world picture that drove totalitarian praxis. To answer that, a researcher should look at what kind of dependence there exists between the state ideology and the individual rhetoric produced by the intelligentsia.

Though the intelligentsia readily disavows the role of "the serving ones" that power wants them to play in the process of production and reproduction of ideologically correct texts, this fact does not relieve the intelligentsia of its functions of political discourse production, control and management, even in the absence of total censorship. Therefore, the bond between the intelligentsia and power remains very strong. This strength, as the author presumes, is brought about by the specific relations between official discourse that imposes rigid norms and private discourse that adapts those norms to individual existence (reflected in the major Soviet rhetoric and the minor Soviet rhetoric, respectively). It can be supposed that the continuum of totalitarian *ethos* is re-articulated in the minor Soviet rhetoric in terms of *aisthetikos* thus evoking a net of emotional connotations.

The formation of such connotations has been shown in the example of *babuska*. *Babuska* as a method of taming the oppositional instincts of

the intelligentsia appears to be much more effective than the severe ideological repression that totalitarian power practiced to suppress the reflecting individual. *Babuska* is an area of meanings for the "investment of desire", to use Jean-François Lyotard's term, a factor seducing the member of the intelligentsia into entering an engagement with power and a membrane that protects the individual from the danger of developing a schizophrenic personality split between the two originally antagonistic discourses.

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