

# 'Sociomorphs', Soviet social theory, and philosophy: an essay on intellectual practices:

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I.

I WANT TO EXAMINE an issue which, in my opinion, has met with less than adequate consideration: the delegitimation of 'Soviet-type theorizing' in the human and social sciences and the light it sheds on the culture of science and intellectual practices under Soviet/post-Soviet conditions. Recourse to the cumbersome expression 'Soviet-type theorizing' is justifiable in view of the formerly widespread debates about 'Soviet-type societies'. I will assume that the kind of structural characteristics and patterns of development that were ascribed to the latter found their match in the domain of intellectual practices and knowledge production under Soviet conditions.

The simple truth is that, in the human and social sciences, the accumulated capital of several generations of theoretical labor by Soviet scholars has ceased on the whole to be a resource for what sociologists of knowledge term 'knowledge-production'. With a sideways glance in the direction of Quine's concept of 'ontological commitment'<sup>1</sup>, we can say that, following the delegitimation of Soviet theory, Russian scholars (can) no longer 'bind the variables' of statements in their theories with an eye to predicates once deemed mandatory in the language of the Soviet 'world view' (its categorial framework or 'ontology'). For this reason, it is literally true that a 'world view' has gone missing; entities that formerly furnished the 'Soviet' world have simply dropped out of sight.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The most familiar theory of ontological commitment is that offered by Quine in his "On what there is" (1948). It may fairly be called the received view of ontological commitment. In effect, it is a combination of a criterion of ontological commitment and an account of that to which the criterion applies. The criterion itself is quite simple. A sentence *s* is committed to the existence of an entity just in case either (i) there is a name for that entity in the sentence or (ii) the sentence contains, or implies, an existential generalization where that entity is needed to be the value of the bound variable. In other words, one is committed to an entity if one refers to it directly or implies that there is some individual which is that entity.' (Extracted from an entry by Gene Wittmer on 'Ontology' in the Internet *Dictionary of the Philosophy of Mind*, <http://www.artsci.wustl.edu/~philos/MindDict/ontology.html>)

<sup>2</sup> J.M. Bochenski analyzes 'Weltanschauung' as '...a set of propositions and rules which contain three subsets:  
1. a synthetic description of the universe as a whole (called 'Weitsicht' in German)  
2. a set of rules of behavior forming a moral code  
3. a class of answer to so-called existential problems.'  
(J.M. Bochenski, 1991, 'Did we not waste our time?', *Studies in Soviet Thought* 42:1, 299)

However, the significant thing here is not discovered by engaging in discussions about whether the 'Soviet theory' was true or false, but by attending instead to cultural and social factors informing the conditions of knowledge production. What is at stake are intellectual practices, i.e. the rules and directives for producing, conveying, and spotlighting claims to knowledge within a determinate, in this case 'scientific', institutional context and the conditions which contribute to, or detract from, the status of the latter. In the post-Soviet context, to produce such sentences as, for example, 'Nature, society, and thinking are governed by dialectical laws,' a sentence that in the Soviet context was contextually intelligible and legitimate as knowledge claim, would most certainly be registered as a joke or a provocation and brand the author as a reactionary. Moreover, the fact that no one today, it seems, is concerned to 'translate' Soviet theory into some other 'corresponding', scientifically accredited theory, if only to preserve a modicum of continuity within the relevant—in this case, philosophical—scientific community, demonstrates the degree to which the delegitimation of the former has impacted the social identity of those once engaged in producing 'Soviet theory'.

It had been one of the mainstays of the Soviet scientific community, from period to period, that it promulgated a distinctive attitude with respect to intellectual practices. Beginning at least with Lenin and Bogdanov<sup>3</sup> and carried on energetically throughout Stalin's cultural revolution,<sup>4</sup> directives were devised concerning what it meant 'to do' science and produce knowledge in the era of the construction of socialism and the New Soviet Man. In accord with the overall goals of the revolution, these initial and successive later directives were consistently held up as emblematic of the recon-

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<sup>3</sup> 'At least...' given that, among Marxists, the debate about science and its social role, about intellectuals and their role with respect to classes and class conflict, reaches back to the 'classics' themselves, for instance in the passages devoted to 'ideology' and 'consciousness' in Marx's and Engel's *German Ideology* (1845). Here I have in mind the institutionalized setting of knowledge production by party-minded (*partijnnye*) intellectuals.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. fn 15 below.

figuration of intellectual practices that would yield Soviet knowledge. The qualifier 'Soviet', as in the phrase 'Soviet philosophy', for example, was meant to designate a conceptual and methodological specificity as regards knowledge production. It distinguished Soviet-type theorizing, as 'correctly configured' intellectual practices, from other alleged forms of knowledge production. All the same, the former was *not* understood to be incommensurable with non-Soviet epistemic constructions; rather, Soviet theory was promoted in all domains as the *essential* corrective to the latter, in effect superceding them on their own terrain. It is worth noting, finally, that in the Soviet scientific establishment and elsewhere in the Soviet bloc meta-theories of science were typically hostile to 'positivism', i.e. to a picture according to which science is descriptive and generalizing. In its stead so-called idealizational models of science were advanced, viz. systemic and /or syncretic methodologies; virtually deontic, i.e. stipulative theories of category construction ('models'); and, of course, historicism, that is the self-ascribed privilege of hindsight for the sake of the 'total picture'. Though it would be unfair and inexact to hold that Soviet epistemologists were of one mind in regard to these questions, it is on the whole safe to say that Soviet metascience cleaved *to* a predominantly non-descriptivist (e.g. non-phenomenological as well as non-linguistic), but realist, i.e. essentialist and foundationalist, perspective. For example, the role that the so-called 'logic of the abstract and concrete' came to play as of the 1960s—initially *in* the Soviet Union<sup>5</sup> and later among philosophers elsewhere, notably in Poland, in the Poznań school, where it was explicitly applied to 'corrective' treatment of non-Marxist philosophies of science—testifies to the attitude and the program.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The most outstanding advocate of this 'logic' in the Soviet Union was Èval'd Il'enkov. Cf. for example, his book *The Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx's Capital*, Moscow 1982 [transl. of: idem, 1960, *Диалектика абстрактного и конкретного в «Капитале» Маркса*, Москва].

<sup>6</sup> My remarks concerning the Poznań school, i.e. the work carried out under the auspices of Leszek Nowak and Jerzy Kmita, in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, are not intended in a critical vein. The fact remains, however, that for all the often interesting abstract theoretical investigation, the 'school' persisted in its pursuit of an eclectic and to this extent contrived philosophy of science in the spirit of Marxian historicism, that is the self-ascribed privilege of totalizing hindsight that claims to bring the 'manifestation of essence' into view.

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I have belabored the point because I think it helps us appreciate the drama of the delegitimation of Soviet 'knowledge'.<sup>7</sup> One early dramatic expression of the stakes involved is found in the writings of the Georgian philosopher Merab Mamardašvili, whose refrain became the virtually Heideggerian question: 'how, in the midst of the debacle of Soviet communism, is it possible to think at all?', 'can we mark the spot from which thinking can start anew?'<sup>8</sup> Mamardašvili's own practices attest to the degree to which he sought to free 'thinking' from the Soviet paradigm. Symptomatically, he gained a reputation as a thinker who eschews the text and its institutional confines for the sake of direct encounters with his public, events often remembered today as 'happenings' during which Mamardašvili 'thought out loud', in this way giving witness to the event (*sobytie*) of thinking.

Those less given to drama have been seeking to examine whether and how far intellectual communities are restructuring, to see if and where significant shifts are discernible at the level of directives and methods, discursive styles, patterns of behavior with respect to other social interests, governing values, and the like. I have been fortunate to be associated with a research project conducted with an eye to just such questions.<sup>9</sup> My Russian counterpart in the project has been the late Gennadij Batygin, a sociologist of knowledge with long experience in the Institute of Sociology in Moscow.<sup>10</sup> The team

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<sup>7</sup> In two earlier publications I examined the question as it touched on philosophy: E. Swiderski, 1993, The crisis of continuity in post-Soviet Russian philosophy, in: B. Smith (ed), *Philosophy and Political Change in Eastern Europe*, La Salle, 111.; idem, 1998, Culture, contexts, and directions in Russian post-Soviet philosophy, *Studies in East European Thought* 50:4,283-328.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. the collection of Mamardašvili's writings published as *Какая понимаю философию* (Москва, 1990). Mamardašvili, who is counted among the more celebrated of the *šestidesjatniki*, became a legend in his own time; following his death in 1990, his many conference and lecture works have been appearing regularly.

<sup>9</sup> The project financed by a grant from the Swiss National Research Fund bears the title 'The restructuring of intellectual elites, the social sciences, and transitional developments in Russian post-communist discourse'.

<sup>10</sup> Gennadij Batygin (1951-2003) was<sup>was</sup> head of the department of the sociology of knowledge in the Institute of Sociology (RAS); he was the founder and editor of the journal *Социологический журнал*. His publications that are relevant to the present project include Г. Батыгин (ed), 1999, *Российская социология шестидесятих годов в воспоминаниях и документах*, Москва; also the introductory essay in В. Ядов (ed), 1998, *Социология в России*, Москва. Additional references are provided below.

he brought together has been pursuing piecemeal research on a number of crucial indicators against the backdrop of his own research into the social and cultural history of science in the USSR. In the rest of this section, I will briefly describe the sub-themes under investigation in the project; in succeeding sections, I will turn to a somewhat more philosophical exercise bearing on an interpretation of Soviet intellectual practices in light of their delegitimation.<sup>11</sup> The program of themes for investigation in the project is consistent with the pertinent issues in a contextually sensitive account of intellectual practices. There are, to begin with, biographical and auto-biographical accounts of life for a Soviet scientist, what it meant to choose and engage in a career in the scientific establishment. In this connection generational differences are of paramount importance in scaling shifting value perspectives. Further, the question of the structuring forces within the community of discourse comes into play, the kinds of things sociologists of knowledge have in mind when they speak of networks, invisible colleges, and alliances within the hierarchy of science where symbolic power is acquired, exercised, and inevitably contested.

One critical aspect here is the prestige of the 'West', as measured by personal contacts with foreign scholars, including communication across cyberspace. In general, the question as to who 'talks' to whom, where, and how provides a good idea of the resources with which scholars work and the kind of production they engender; it also allows classifications of the networks to which they belong and which can be ranked according to their degree of influence in the "knowledge-production industry (for example, as measured by citation indexes). This approach is likewise useful for the light it sheds

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<sup>11</sup> The Russian team has so far produced the following studies : О. Мазлумян-Иванова, Человек в науке. Биографические исследования ; О.А. Оберемко, Репертуар книжных публикаций передовой литературы по социально-гуманитарным наукам в России за 1990-1992 гг.; А. Н. Малинкин, «Русский вопрос» и «Русская идея» в начале третьего тысячелетия (аналитический обзор российской социально-научной литературы 1990-х гг.); Г. В. Градосельская, коммуникационные сети в автобиографиях обществоведов; Л. А. Козлова, Грантовая поддержка и реструктурирование академического сообщества России; Р. Г. Арефьев, Интеграция российского академического сообщества в глобальные коммуникации; Н. Даурих, Рецепция и типы цитирования в журналах по социологии; Г. Батыгин, Структурные изменения в дисциплинарной организации и тематическом репертуаре социальных наук.

- These texts as well as a contribution by the undersigned are forthcoming at the end of 2004 in a volume to be published at the Institute of Sociology (RAS), "sponsored by the Russian Foundation for the Humanities.

on entirely 'specific' products, with little or no echo elsewhere in the scientific community, for example the ongoing debates about the 'Russian Idea' or the claims on behalf of 'culturology'. Here the question is whether and to what extent conceptions enter into, that is complement or conflict with, paradigms in social theory and the humanities from 'Western' sources.

A crucial additional indicator in this respect is acquaintance with languages and thus the range of likely or unlikely familiarity and interaction with work elsewhere. Statistical correlations show, for example, the relative infrequency of citations from 'foreign' sources in publications that promote discourse on the Russian Idea or on Eurasian themes building on, for instance, the linguistics of a Tru-beckoj. Can it be that someone who builds a career as a theorist of the Russian Idea is at home, to put it mildly, only with the Russian language?

Other important indicators follow from lexical analyses, including the methods of content-analysis and semantic markers. However, one need not study reams of text to acquire a working idea of the state of 'science'. Analysis of thematic repertoires of bibliographies and similar documentation, for instance those published regularly by **INION** [*Institut naučnoj informaciipo obscestvennym naukam*], throws much light on the development as well as the self-perpetuation of social scientific and humanities discourses. There is a neostructuralist ring to this kind of investigation: authors are clearly disassociated from their texts and fall into the background.

In still another vein, it is clear to all that the material life of science depends on financial resources and, in this way, on relations with organisms vested with the power to influence the course of science, culture, academic affairs, the media, as well as the public sphere generally. How intellectuals adapt to these realities is of major concern today, following the breakdown of Soviet intellectual protectorates. Here, too, there is the vexed question of the market for intellectual and cultural goods in post-Soviet Russia. At what price does professionalization in science come? Who today are the middlemen who process intellectual wares, for what kinds of public, with what returns on the principle invested? Are newly raised standards of professionalism supplanting the traditional Soviet, and for that matter Russian, idea of *kul'turnost'* and, for many intellectuals, their—perhaps—mythical self-image as 'cultural representatives' ?

The background to these, on the whole empirical, investigations is, as I suggested, a (cultural) hermeneutic of intellectual practice. The account I wish to sketch below is construed as a commentary to several key affirmations by Gennadij Batygin. The broader frame of reference of these affirmations and my interpretation thereof is the 'transition', that is, in the first place, the 'exit from communism' as a social and cultural phenomenon in its own right.

### 3. Intellectual practices: the intellectual as sociomorph

Consider the following claim:

In his preface to *The Persian Letters* by Montesquieu P. Valéry writes about an age of order based on fictions and the effective presence of absent things, on a conventional system establishing connections among individuals which, though imaginary, have quite real effects.<sup>12</sup>

A few lines further on Batygin identifies intellectuals as those who produce such fictions:

Intellectuals ... express 'social myths' and ensure their transmission by way of ideologies, moral and legal norms, images of the past and future... [*The upshot is:*] Without such connections no society is possible.

I submit that this statement can hardly be taken as a truism; my purpose is to work out its background and elaborate the 'logic' underlying it.

Firstly, the proximate referent of the statement is a type, the Soviet intellectual. Though the dating here is not unimportant, it is not crucial. We are dealing with the intellectual in the Stalinist and post-Stalinist periods, who was engaged institutionally in producing what counted as societal knowledge and/or cultural values.

Secondly, this type of intellectual is assumed to be a 'cultural representative'<sup>13</sup> he or she speaks 'in the name of —', seeks to be the spokesperson for the 'representative culture' at large.<sup>14</sup> To be sure, this characterization suggests the virtually mythical picture of the 'Russian intelligentsia' with its mission to 'go to the people'. I leave

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<sup>12</sup> Gennady Batygin, 2001, The transfer of allegiances of the intellectual elites, *Studies in East European Thought* 53:3,257-67.

<sup>13</sup> Johannes Weiss, 1998, Repräsentative Kultur und kulturelle Stellvertretung, in: idem, *Handeln und Handeln lassen: Über Stellvertretung*, Opladen.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Friedrich H. Tenbruck, 1990, Representative Kultur, in: Hans Haferkamp (ed), *Sozialstruktur und Kultur*, Frankfurt-a.-M. At least one contemporary Russian social scientist is familiar with these distinctions and questions, viz. Leonid Ionin. See the essays gathered in *Russische Metamorphosen. Aufsätze zu Politik, Alltag und Kultur* (Berlin, 1995), and the Russian version in *Социология культуры: путь в новое тысячелетие\** (Москва, 2000).

the question open whether or not the concept of cultural representative as applied to the Soviet intelligentsia overlaps with the traditional image.

Thirdly, however, the passage is silent about a crucial issue in regard to cultural representation. Do intellectuals *articulate* the social environment (as Robert Wuthnow terms it)? That is to say, do they 'draw resources, insights, and inspiration from that environment:... reflect it, speak to it, and make themselves relevant to it?'<sup>15</sup> For the case of the Soviet 'cultural representative', there may well be room to doubt that articulation so understood was ever an issue.

The social and cultural environments in Soviet Russia were marked well into the **1930s** at least by a 'revolutionary' ethos, an atmosphere imbued simultaneously with the opposing values of 'deconstruction' (break with the past) and 'construction' (building socialism). Established identities had been shaken, indeed even destroyed; new identities were ascribed, sometimes by force in view of the tactics of mass mobilization. To be sure, such deconstruction and ascriptive construction applied as well to 'Soviet' intellectuals, in particular during Stalin's early cultural revolution.<sup>16</sup>

Under such circumstances can there be any sense in which articulation in the meaning cited was ever the issue? I suggest not; indeed the reference to 'fictions' in the passage from Batygin effectively suggests an altogether different interpretation of cultural representation on the part of the Soviet intellectual elite. I will come back to this presently.

With these points and questions in mind, a paraphrase of the cited passage could be as follows. To *speak about* (i.e. signify) 'Society' is to project a pure-meaning (intentional) order, as indicated by the reference to 'social myths', including artefacts such as

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Wuthnow, 1989, *Communities of Discourse. Ideology and Social Structure in the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and European Socialism*, Cambridge, Mass.

<sup>16</sup> I have in mind the studies Sheila Fitzpatrick published as *The Cultural Front. Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (London • Ithaca, N.Y., 1992). Cf. also by the same author: 'Ascribing class: the construction of social identity in Soviet Russia', in: eadem (ed), 2000, *Stalinism: New Directions*, London • New York, 20-46.



'ideologies', 'images', and the like, all of which are *conventional* and live only in discourse and/or discourse-relative *interpretational* constructs (e.g. texts, artworks, symbols and symbolic rituals, rites, behavioral styles, and so on). 'Society' is the logical product of the signifiers and codes conveyed by discursive (and discourse-relative) practices. Moreover—and this is the core claim—these interpretational constructs originated with a class of producers—the 'intellectuals'; in the discourses they produce, the intellectuals encipher, and to this extent 'construct', 'Society'.

Assuming that my paraphrase is consistent with the thrust of the passage cited, it is striking how much 'power' it ascribes to intellectuals. Their role is described in strong modal terms. A Society that is not founded in 'conventional connections' produced by intellectuals is nothing; without them Society is not possible. According to this view, intellectuals can then be categorized as *sociomorphs*, literally those who give form to Society, where the 'form' is discursive and the substance of 'Society' is first and foremost semantic (representational). It follows that were the intellectual class to lose or relinquish this power, such that the 'words' (signifiers) they put into circulation ceased to carry their sociomorphic functions, 'Society' would cease to be a term of reference and to that extent would cease to exist (cf. the reference above to Quine's account of onto-logical commitment). Here again, the dangling question about articulation resurfaces: Does societal discourse so understood exemplify the characteristics enumerated by Wuthnow—drawing resources, insights, and inspiration from the social milieu, i.e. reflecting the latter, speaking to it, making Societal discourse relevant to it? In other words, to the extent that intellectuals, in the terms of my paraphrase, encipher and thus construct Society, do they in fact shape the social identities of those who fall under the web of societal meaning spun by sociomorphs?<sup>17</sup> Another way of stating the question would be: Do societal discourses so understood latch onto every-day social experience and its patterns of signification?

It is illuminating to compare my reading of the passage from Batygin with ideas Georg Simmel advanced in his classic essay, 'How is society possible?' (1908). Starting from a Kantian premise, Simmel wanted to delineate the analogy, but nevertheless also the difference, between the 'constitution' of Nature and the 'constitution' of Society. In both cases, he avers,

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<sup>17</sup> To be sure, a sociology of societal discourses would more than likely focus on the question of domination, that is on the power built into a discursive formation to exclude other, alternative interpretational constructs of 'Society'. In the present context, sociomorphs are the 'producers' of 'Society', though what they say may remain without a *fundamentum in re*. The kinds of distinctions that are often invoked to characterize Soviet experience attest to this possibility, e.g. the distinction—and opposition—between the public and the private, the institutional and the informal, the collective myth and the individual experiences, etc. Vadim Volkov has written in a similar vein about 'Soviet civilization' as a kind of substratum of a silent, unarticulated majority whose practices had nothing to do with 'Society'. Cf. Вадим Волков, 1997, Советская цивилизация как повседневная практика: возможности и пределы трансформации, in: Т. И. Заславская (ed), *Куда идет Россия? Общее и особенное в современном развитии*, Москва, 313-33. I return to this in the closing part of the paper, in particular in the concluding table.

individual elements are given which ... undergo their synthesis into the unity of a society only through a process of consciousness which puts the individual existence of the several elements into relationship with that of the others ... The decisive difference between the unity of a society and that of nature, however, is this: the latter ... comes to existence exclusively in the contemplating unity (*Subject*), it is produced exclusively by that mind upon and out of the sense materials which are not in themselves interconnected. On the contrary, the societal unity is realized by its elements without further mediation, and with no need of an observer, because these elements are consciously and synthetically active.... *The consciousness of constituting with the others a unity is the whole unity in question in the societal case, [italics mine, E. M. S.]*

Now Simmel adds in passing that this societal synthesis does not, as he writes,

exclud[e] an observing third party from performing in addition *a synthesis, with its basis only in himself, between the persons concerned, as between special elements, [italics mine, E. M. S.]*<sup>18</sup>

The comparison with the passage I have been commenting is quite telling. What Simmel added in passing—that an external 'third party' (the sociologist?—the class of Soviet intellectuals?) is not excluded from performing a societal synthesis—has acceded, in the passage, to center stage. Intellectuals are not presented here as 'outside observers' à la Simmel; their 'synthesis' is not merely 'additional'. On the contrary, it is essentially constitutive. In its absence, we have been told, Society would not be possible. Moreover, the passage is mute as regards any kind of Simmelian 'direct interaction', the 'consciousness of constituting with the others a unity'.

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<sup>18</sup> Georg Simmel, 1910-11 [1908], How is society possible? *The American Journal of Sociology* 16 (1910-11), 372-91, at 373-4.

What are we to make of this ? The reference to Kant in this context has, I think, suggestive power; it gives greater emphasis to the picture of intellectual practices that Batygin is at pains to convey.

Suffice it to say for present purposes that for Kant 'imagination' has no 'object'; it is not subordinated to the logic of representations (under concepts), and thus falls outside the realm of judgments to which truth-conditions apply. Imagination arises in a 'free play' of the faculties (understanding, sensibility, even the moral sense). Though arational the faculty of imagination testifies as to the way men do transcend the epistemic sphere *sensu stricto* in order to enhance their sense of reality as meaningful (the realm of 'ends', that is values). Simmel distinguished the Kantian 'rational' (i.e. apriori) synthesis from the kind of social interactionism (in his words: *Wechselwirkung* as the basic form of sociation, *Vergesellschaftung*) he had in mind. Nor does Batygin's de facto socio-morphizing account of intellectual practices have anything to do with 'rational synthesis'. His recourse to terms such as 'fictive' and 'imaginary' would hardly be apposite when talking about 'rationality'. Nevertheless, a Kantian line can be read into the societal synthesis that seems to be at stake here. Sociomorphic intellectual practice fits what Kant labelled *imagination* (in the setting of the third *Critique*).

Assuming no more than this from *Begriffsgeschicht*<sup>19</sup> and leaving textual exegesis aside, let it be granted that there is a distinction between the imaginary and the real, on one hand, and between the imaginary and fiction, on the other.<sup>20</sup> It is trivial, of course, to distinguish between reality and fiction; they are mutually exclusive: you can fictionalize *only* if you *suspend* belief/unbelief with regard to standard truth-conditions pertaining to statements about the real. By contrast, however, the assumption about the imaginary is hardly trivial. To catch the sense of what is assumed we will need to set the imaginary free from any explicit or implied opposition to (empirical) reality, for which reason, too, it is not to be assimilated to fiction. Think instead of the imaginary as invention, construction, in a manner that is analogous to the way some have claimed that artworks are 'inventions', i. e. not 'imitations of reality' qua *fictional*

<sup>19</sup> The neo-Kantian theme—from Windelband and Rickert to Weber—of Wertbeziehung would be another, complementary question to consider in this connection.

<sup>20</sup> A contemporary approach is Wolfgang Iser, 1993, *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology*, Baltimore • London.

*representations*. This analogy will gain in substance presently; for the time being, note that to say that artworks are inventions rather than 'imitations' suggests that their 'meaning' is self-contained, so to speak, it is set altogether apart from any reference to an independently existing, cognizable 'referent'. This position is basically Kantian. Cassirer (symbolic forms), and, closer to our day, Castoriadis (the *imaginaire radical*), had it, quite in the Kantian spirit, that the fundamental 'apriori' from which the organization of experience proceeds is in fact the imaginary; in Cassirer's view, it is the originary, irreducible pre-predicative 'function' of meaning which is still visible in unmediated form in 'myth'.

#### **4. Excursus: the imagined community and sociomorphism.**

To give some measure of plausibility to this gesture in the direction of a concept of imaginary, I will for a moment compare it to current discussions about 'intellectuals and the articulation of the nation', in particular to the debate over so-called 'hard constructivism'. For hard constructivists, as Alexander Motyl calls them, nations are understood to be the work of intellectual elites; the latter 'purposefully create national identity'.<sup>21</sup> How should the phrase be understood? Motyl underscores the language used by the proponents of the 'hard' approach: intellectual elites *invent, imagine* the nation. In his analysis, nation-construction typically involves, first of all, propositions which reidentify groups, their practices, their self-conceptions, etc. Abstractly, these propositions operate with the form 'this is that' which is concretized to yield typical statements such as 'this group of people is a nation'.

The logically minded analyst will certainly wish to pay closer attention to the following: What is the logical status of the 'is' in the formula 'this is that'? Is it the 'is' of hard Aristotelian-Leibnizian identity, or is it some other 'is', e.g. that of predication?—Motyl notes that the propositions vehicled by hard constructivists 'need not actually *be* true: they need not correspond to empirical reality and therefore qualify as facts.' Interestingly, in light of my earlier questions to this effect, Motyl goes on to observe that the ideologies promulgated by nation-building intellectuals do not *articulate* the life-world in a one-to-one relationship, i.e. narratives about nations

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<sup>21</sup> Alexander J. Motyl, 1999, *Inventing invention: the limits of national identity formation*, in: Ronald Suny & Michael D. Kennedy (eds), *Intellectuals and the Articulation of the Nation*, Ann Arbor, 57-73.

are either askew or utterly alien to the meanings invested in every -day experience and behavior (the micro-level of Simmelian direct [..sociation, we can assume). In view of the question: do Soviet 'socio- morphs' relate by way of articulation to the milieu they invest with their discourse?, Motyl's observation applies equally to sociomorphs à la Batygin. A nation, then, turns out to be an invention, and as such the privilege of self-styled 'cultural representatives'/ sociomorphs.

So how can or should the identity in question be understood; what is the 'logic' of the statement form 'this is that'? I propose, in View of my remarks above about the imaginary, that the underlying logic runs along the lines of what Arthur Danto fixed with the i description, the "'is" of artistic identification'.<sup>22</sup> These blobs of paint, or this sound pattern are not mere real things; they 'are' works of art. But you will not discover this—at least not for a great many interesting cases—just by 'looking'; you have to be attuned to, practiced in, if not discursively proficient in articulating, the conditions governing the 'is' of artistic identification. Otherwise you will remain forever blind to artworks. By analogy, how do you Motivate the claim that this or that aggregate of humans is a nation, or from within another conceptual tradition, a societal class the members of which together exemplify the same 'objective interests', and the like? Again, not simply by looking and seeing, but by being (practically) skilled in the art of nation-construction or class-identity ascription. So, it seems that the 'hard constructivist' works with an 'is' that is logically akin to that of artistic identification; and Identification of this kind fits, I submit, the logic of the imaginary. Neither the one nor the other depends on an abstractive selection and arrangement of elements traceable to and identifiable within some given empirical domain; both are 'transformations', though effective as such, only on the condition that they not be seen as transforms'.

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<sup>22</sup> First of all in the 'classic' 'The artworld', published originally in "The journal of Philosophy LXI (1964), 571-84, and since the repeatedly in aesthetics readers.

## 5. Literaturocentrism and textual sociality<sup>23</sup>

Here are three statements from Batygin that bear on the points I have been attempting to formulate with regard to sociomorphic intellectual practices.<sup>24</sup>

[T]he history of social science in the USSR is best understood in the framework of the *literary discourse* of the period ... It makes sense therefore to consider the topoi of the social sciences not as the unfolding of scientific problems, with their techniques of rational argument to overcome anomalies and attain consensus, but as *the production and reproduction of a text constituting society* and its ideology.<sup>25</sup>

Even stronger is the following statement.

[T]he social sciences represent an epistemic chimera, the union of essentially incommensurable planes of knowledge: the description of reality as it is and an ideal project which does not admit the world in its actual form [but] strives to change it *in accordance with an artistic project*.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The term 'literaturocentrism' circulated widely among Russians into the late 1990s; it was meant to capture, so far as I can tell, a complex of properties ascribed to Russian and then Soviet culture. These included: the role of the writer and the importance of the literary-artistic medium in the particular socio-political conditions of Russian/Soviet culture; the fact that literature has often been a kind of syncretic medium in Russian culture, meaning that it is not infrequently read 'extra-literarily' (extra-esthetically) as a font of truth about metaphysical, etc. issues; the role of literature as an ideological organ, regardless of the position in the spectrum of socio-political platforms. Some of these meanings were at the core of the methodology and research of the Tartu-Moscow semiotics-structuralist school, in which 'literature-text-culture' became a universal framework for cultural analysis in general. Batygin is thinking, I believe, of the latter perspective, not to mention similar perspectives in Western discourse analysis where 'text', intertextuality, etc. are prime beneficiaries of the 'linguistic turn' in cultural studies.

<sup>24</sup> The first extract is drawn from Batygin's «Доктрина и словарь советского обществоведения», in: А.И.Володин & С. Б. Роцинский (eds), *Мысль и власть в эпоху моноидеологизма* (= Отечественная философия: Опыт, проблемы, ориентиры, исследования, XX) (Москва, 1997); the remaining two are taken from the manuscript cited above (fn. 11), «Структурные изменения». Italics added by the present author.

<sup>25</sup> «историю общественной науки в СССР целесообразно рассматривать в рамках литературного дискурса эпохи.... Поэтому имеет смысл рассматривать топикку общественных наук не как развертывание научных проблем с присущими им техниками рациональной аргументации, преодоления аномалий и достижения консенсуса, а как воспроизводство текста, конституирующего общество и его идеологию.»

<sup>26</sup> «Социальные науки представляют собой эпистемическую химеру — сочинение сущностно несоединимых феноменов знания: описания реальности как она есть и идеального проекта, не признающего мир в его наличном бытии и стремящегося изменить его в соответствии с художественным идеалом.»

And finally:

Freed from facticity, the social sciences ... fulfill not a denotative function (the description of reality), but a figurative function..., viz., *the transformation of extra-textual reality into a textual sociality*.<sup>27</sup>

All three passages pertain *grosso modo* to Soviet social science; all three reinterpret, or rather reidentify, Soviet social science as 'literature\*'. What in the Soviet context counted as knowledge, or science, turns out, according to these extracts, to be 'literature'. Unlike science, literature is characterized as lacking empirical truth value, for which reason it is qualified not as cognition but as 'artistic project', the result of which may be called 'textual sociality'.

It is worth underscoring the point that is at stake here. Characterized as 'literature' Soviet social knowledge production turns out, on this reconstruction, to have been no more than an action program, that is, a set of directives for generating a discourse, in the first place consisting of performatives carried by textual forms to which the appropriate kind of reaction was not primarily 'rational-cognitive' but, rather, 'emotional'. Moreover, the program is likened to an artistic undertaking; it is constructive (inventive) in the manner of art/literature the materials, signs, and values of which are 'representative' in the way suggested above: by virtue of 'artistic identification' a transformation is enabled that is conducive to 'projecting a world' the existential locus of which is the 'text', the word, signifiers, as these are reproduced within a community of discourse.<sup>28</sup> What results is a self-contained 'meaningful', autotelic construct, on the whole unconstrained by external realities.

If we take Batygin's point to heart, it will be useful to attempt to flesh out an essential dimension of the imaginary/textual sociality. The dimension is essential not only because it played a determining role throughout Soviet theory (i.e. Marxist-Leninist doctrine as exemplified first of all in Soviet philosophy and sociology), but

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<sup>27</sup> Избавленные от фактичности, социальные науки ... выполняют не денотативную функцию (описание реальности), а функцию фигуративную ... — превращением внетекстовой реальности в текстовую социальность.

<sup>28</sup> Nelson Goodman, 1978, *Ways of Worldmaking*, Indianapolis • Cambridge, Mass.; Nicholas Wolterstorff, 1980, *Works and Worlds of Art*, Oxford • New York. Wolterstorff in particular has taken the 'action' approach to the ontology of art. Projecting a world is a (complex) action achieved by, say, writing sentences, portraying characters, and the like. Goodman, for his part, insists that worlds are made aplenty; none is a reality more than any other, as everything depends on the symbolic resources brought into play to 'make a world'.

because by its very nature it could only take form in/as an imaginary. Above, when highlighting the sociomorphic nature of Soviet intellectual practices, I drew attention to the issue of 'articulation', i.e. to the question whether Soviet intellectual practices articulated the culture of everyday practice. My answer was that they did not. The answer brings into focus the 'construction of socialism', more exactly, the *ontology* around which the program of socialist construction was construed. The latter was not understood as a hermeneutical reading of everyday practices, i.e. as a deep(er) interpretation of subjectively meaningful behavior and interaction at the level of everyday practices. On the contrary, the entities to which the ontology of socialist construction was committed superseded or overrode the 'world' of ordinary experience (the *Lebenswelt*). A salient example of this hiatus between the everyday and the ontology of socialist construction was the intrusion of the 'political' into all domains of everyday life, namely the alleged discovery, even at the level of basic life practices, of the 'real' class identity—progressive or reactionary—of the latter.

My recourse to Simmel's concept of *Vergesellschaftung* as direct intersubjective interaction, from which I drew conclusions as to the sociomorphic function of Soviet 'societal' discourse, is of course compatible with the conclusion that a hiatus existed between the ontologies of socialist construction and the *Lebenswelt*.<sup>29</sup>

The principal consideration in this regard, however, is marked by the concept of 'construction' (of socialism). More than anything else, this concept underlines the import of the imaginary for Soviet theory. 'Construction'—much like the contemporary term 'transition'—throws up the image of a middle area, a space between two temporally specified poles, the past and future; something between the poles is on the way, it is becoming. Roughly speaking, the something in question was identified to be the 'moral and political unity of the Party and the masses' that would give way, more or less, to

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<sup>29</sup> It is worth noting how Russian-Soviet post-avant-garde art has worked this theme, for example Il'ja Kabakov. A most thorough and fascinating review of this can be found in Aage Hansen-Löve, 1997, «Wir wussten nicht, dass wir Prosa Sprechen», *Die Konzeptualisierung Russlands im russischen Konzeptualismus*, in: idem (ed), *Mein Russland. Literarische Konzeptualisierungen und kulturelle Projektionen. Beiträge der gleichnamigen Tagung vom 4. — 6. März 1996 in München* (= Wiener Slawistischer Almanach. Sonderband 44), München, 423-508.—In his *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin* (München • Wien, 1988), Boris Groys underlined much the same theme, insisting, moreover, on the underlying 'artistic dimension' of the universal transformation that the construction of socialism was intended to be.



the New (Soviet) Man. As it proceeds, this 'subject' either draws on already available and acknowledged resources, means ready to hand from elsewhere, to constitute something; or else it 'pulls itself up by its bootstraps', constituting as it moves the means to go on moving. In the former case, the acknowledged resources would provide a measure of objectivity and thus constrain even as they enable the process of construction. Soviet socialist construction, however, by dint of its self-characterization as a revolutionary undertaking, retained an ambiguous, indeed frequently hostile attitude to 'resources' from elsewhere, in particular from the 'bourgeois'/Russian 'past'. For the most part, these were to be 'deconstructed'. Moreover, the construction was cast in the mould of 'socialism in one country', i.e. virtually total isolation, to the dismay of those who envisaged à la Trotsky the 'permanent revolution'. In short, the Soviet experience falls rather into the pattern of a self-generating process (auto-poiesis). In particular it was self-determining in regard to whatever was to be the crucial sign/symptom that the 'end' of the process was at hand, that the hitherto 'virtual' reality of the construction had acquired substance.

With regard to this 'sign', the question can be raised: Did it ever become clear, was there ever a consensus among those who labored to produce Soviet 'textual sociality', from generation to generation, as to what this sign was to be and how it was to be recognized? Where personal, psychological factors at the level of interaction in the *Lebenswelt* are written off as adventitious and for this reason remain irrelevant to socialist construction, the categories deployed to articulate the latter can only be, it seems, 'imaginary' (not even, as I argued above, as fiction, i.e. a free selection among pre-given materials that retain some degree of their empirical identity).

It is not difficult to draw a picture of discussions within the Soviet social-theoretical establishment which would confirm such a thesis. The outstanding example is the call to 'new thinking' under Gorbačëv. Categorical structures in the hitherto 'official' Soviet world view were entirely subverted, simply gutted. Of particular significance, in this regard, was the call, first, to reconceive 'socialist categories' as fundamentally 'cultural' in nature and not, as before, as 'natural-historical categories of socio-economic formations'; second, to bring human beings into the ontology of socialist construction in the guise of 'persons' (*ličnosti*) and not merely as 'social subjects' of 'collective transformative practices'. Just how 'imaginary' the last-named categories turned out to be is obvious in light of the

sometimes pathetic laments that accompanied the final crisis and collapse of the Soviet system. The often-intoned judgment that the Soviet experience had in fact yielded a kind of socio-cultural mutant, labelled either *prostoj sovetskij čelovek* (Levada) or *homo sovieticus* (Zinov'ev), made it all the more evident how unlikely it was to suppose that anyone knew what 'personhood' meant and how the quality is inculcated (in a meaning that was first of all Kantian in inspiration—the self-determining subject who affirms and appropriates her worth in a setting in which each recognizes the other never as a 'means', but always and only as an 'end' (an irreducible value)). The point, however, is not whether this was true, whether the 'laments' about *homo sovieticus* were justified. In the present context, the point the example makes is that 'Soviet theory' was unconstrained, it literally 'invented' categories that continued to be reproduced within the confines of institutions in which the theory was the only 'Society' that counted (Batygin's 'textual sociality'; the imaginary).

The closing table represents a potted reconstruction of the real conditions for the societal imaginary that was the object of 'social scientific discourse' in the meaning of the phrase that I read into Batygin's commentary.

*The overarching Soviet 'societal' imaginary and its 'textual'/categorical construction*

<i>'Society' of social atoms</i>	<i>Socialist collectivism</i>
<p>Dualisms to be 'DECONSTRUCTED' ⇐ REVOLUTION ⇒ ['<i>Aufhebung</i>']</p>	<p>Integral social whole to be 'CONSTRUCTED'</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• private <i>vs</i> public</li> <li>• informal <i>vs</i> institutional</li> <li>• spontaneity <i>vs</i> institutional</li> <li>• the 'inner' self <i>vs</i> social actor</li> <li>• 'personal freedom' <i>vs</i> societal constraint</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Social</i> subject</li> <li>• <i>Social</i> praxis</li> <li>• <i>Social</i> morality</li> <li>• <i>Collectivist</i> culture</li> </ul>
<i>Mediating mechanisms</i>	<i>Mediation</i>
<p>State Civil society Market relations [commodity fetishism] ... Public sphere and 'High Culture'</p>	<p>'Moral and political unity of the party and the people' [= Collectivisation; Industrialisation; Cultural revolution]</p>
<p>SOCIAL ONTOLOGY OF 'EXTERNAL RELATIONS' + false consciousness ideologies</p>	<p>SOCIAL ONTOLOGY OF 'INTERNAL RELATIONS' the 'New Man'</p>