



## THIRD EUROPE-ASIA LECTURE\*

# In the State of Post-Soviet Aphasia: Symbolic Development in Contemporary Russia

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But we keep coming back to the ruins of culture ... We keep coming back. We stroll across the dilapidated ramparts, we climb the devastated staircase, we sift through the sandy pieces of shard, we back up on a grassy knoll until we can see the grandeur and the beauty of the prospect. But there we are, and we cannot just stand back, despite the fact, perhaps because of the fact, that we know the ruin is littered with unexploded mines ... We exist in a state of emergency; we live near ruins.

Nicholas Dirks<sup>1</sup>

THE PHENOMENON OF SIGNIFYING PRACTICES, symbolic assumptions that underlie people's daily routines and activity, has been at the core of anthropological research for many years. From different perspectives and through different theoretical lenses anthropology tries to understand the logic of cultural difference, cultural specificity, cultural incommensurability. This understanding, however, has a certain focus. As Sherry Ortner recently pointed out, anthropological research, taken as a combination of interpretative and ethnographic work, has 'always been carried out in relation to larger theoretical frames that both shape such work and are revised by it.'<sup>2</sup>

In this article I want to follow this tradition of bringing together the empirical and the theoretical in order to understand the historical and cultural specificity of the post-Soviet subject. The main purpose of this article is to attempt to elaborate a conceptual framework within which to analyse the material that I collected in Barnaul, Siberia, during the past three years, mostly in 1997. This attempt, however,

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has two untypical but related qualities. First of all, somewhat contrary to the dominant anthropological tradition, my analysis will be focused on my own, Russian, culture. And secondly, instead of pointing towards the non-correspondence between *geographically* distant cultural practices and cultural frameworks, as is customary, I want to concentrate my study on the dynamic of relations between different *temporal conditions* of the same culture. Instead of the usual juxtaposing of *synchronically* co-existing but spatially different modes of cultural signification, by analysing such basic identificatory concepts as ‘man’, ‘woman’ and ‘motherland’ within the context of Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia, I would like to explore the theoretical possibilities of *diachronic* symbolic development of the *same* geographical and cultural landscape.

The textual material of my analysis consists of 178 written interviews and surveys, in which 15–22-year-old Russians (81 males and 97 females) described their understanding of national and gender identity. The selection of this particular group was determined by the unique socio-cultural location of this generation. On the one hand, this is the first generation in Russia that was almost entirely formed during the *post-socialist* period. At the same time, the immediate environment of this generation (parents, school, public culture, architecture etc.) bore and still bears significant traces of the *Soviet* life-style. I think it is precisely this borderline socio-cultural location that allows us to see the generation of transition both as a product of current changes and as a symbolic manifestation of these changes. The young people’s self-description and self-reflection on their identity, in other words, might provide us with a point of entry into understanding the logic of the transition itself. Or, rather, into understanding the role of transition in (young people’s picture of) the post-Soviet world. While being conceived within the realm of representation, the young people’s narratives nonetheless demonstrate their ability (or inability) to practically orient themselves within a symbolic space that exceeds the limits of their personal imaginary. In other words, one’s ability to locate his or her own self can be understood as demonstration of one’s—conscious or unconscious—awareness that this ‘self’ is indeed locatable within a larger cultural context. Which, in turn, demands familiarity with structuring principles of this context as well as with forms of navigation through it. Thus personal narratives, associations and stories, being always part and parcel of history, act as an ‘interface’<sup>3</sup> between self-formation, cultural memory and socially accessible forms of symbolic self-representations.<sup>4</sup>

Interested in analysis of the relationship between the available social position (e.g. ‘the post-Soviet’) and the symbolic forms of its articulation, I asked young Siberians to describe three types of figures—the *Soviet* man/woman, the *new (rich) Russian* man/woman and the *post-Soviet* man/woman—and then to define their own location in regard to any of these three types, or to come up with their own models.<sup>5</sup> By asking the young people to perform this act of imaginary identification, I wanted to see how/where this largely post-Soviet generation would (or would not) locate itself on the available symbolic map.

### *The limits of the sayable*

Among the questions that every new regime or movement tries to solve in the process of establishing itself is the question of self-expression, more precisely, the question

of finding a distinct linguistic style and linguistic sensitivity, of finding—to borrow Orwell's term—a 'newspeak', to be associated with. Social changes thus manifest themselves as discursive changes, as changes *of* and *in* language, linguistic structures and discursive practices. Correspondingly, becoming a new political, cultural, economic or social subject is accompanied by the establishment of a 'verbally constituted consciousness',<sup>6</sup> which is framed by historically specific 'limits and forms of the *sayable*'.<sup>7</sup> At times, changes in discursive fields and changes of 'verbally constituted consciousness' might be more telling, so to speak, than political changes themselves. In other words, socio-political changes can be approached through the transformation of 'differentiated subject-positions and subject-functions' that a '*discoursing* subject'<sup>8</sup> assumes within the discursive field under construction.

But what happens—subject-wise and discourse-wise—when such a (discursive) production of subjectivity fails to produce a *speaking* subject? Does the subject of *speech* cease to exist as a *subject*, too? Some recent publications in the field of post-Soviet studies seem to suggest that this is exactly the case. For instance, the sociologist Nina Naumova in her book about 'relapsing' (*retsidiviruyushchaya*) modernisation in current Russia describes the establishing of the 'speechless culture' (*bezmolstvuyushchaya kul'tura*),<sup>9</sup> in which silence is a reaction of post-Soviet people to the threatening instability of social system, a reaction that is caused both by the lack of trust in social system and by what Naumova defines as 'a weak social identification', i.e. a lack of feeling of belonging to a social group.<sup>10</sup> In a similar fashion, albeit from a different point of view and within a different framework, the sociologist Ellen Carnaghan also interprets the lack of a clearly articulated response on the part of Russian respondents as a sign of inability to formulate an opinion, an inability rooted first of all in individual apathy, disinterest and/or lack of information about the current situation.<sup>11</sup> The issue of social silence is discussed on a popular level too. In two recent issues *Novaya Rossiya*, a glossy post-Soviet incarnation of the old propagandistic magazine *Sovetskii Soyuz*, ran a mini-discussion titled 'The Silence of the Nineteen-year Olds', in which today's condition of the young generation was defined by one of the authors as 'solipsism' developed in a situation of lacking the 'constitutive backbone' (*stanovoi khrebet*) that could provide a moral and ideological support for building one's life.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, to an anthropologist such a stress on silence accompanying a transitional stage of an individual and/or group is understandable and hardly surprising. When describing a logic of transition from one structurally defined position (e.g. 'adolescence') to another (e.g. 'adult'), the anthropologist Victor Turner, for example, indicates that *silence* of the passenger is one of the main characteristics of this transition.<sup>13</sup> The origin of this silence is structurally conditioned, i.e. the symbolic frame acquired by the individual during the stage that preceded the transition is to be forgotten/repressed, while the new associations, corresponding to the 'post-transitional' stage, have not been formed yet. In this context, silence is an indicator of one's agreement to deliberately 'erase', 'suppress', 'jettison' one's previous semiotic ability in order to be able to acquire new codes and a new social location.

However, despite a seeming similarity, I believe the logic of transitional silence and the practice of post-Soviet symbolic development in today's Russia are not quite the

same. In the text that follows I want to suggest a different approach to what seems to be a problematic relation between the post-Soviet language, or rather, post-Soviet discourse, and the post-Soviet (transitional) speaker. I argue that the inability of the young post-Soviet subjects to assume a certain subject-position and to perform a certain subject-function within the dysfunctional discursive field results not so much in speechlessness and/or silence but rather in activation of different, substitutive modes of signification that have been formed and shaped to a large degree by the previous cultural period. By developing the concept of *the post-Soviet aphasia*, I want to examine a particular case of discursive production of (post-Soviet) subjectivity in a situation when the very discursive field is going through a period of serious structural (e.g. semantic, syntactic, stylistic etc.) changes. By tracing various discursive and cultural *regressions* and *substitutions* in the texts of my respondents, I want to answer the following questions: Does the post-Soviet discursive change have any internal logic, that is, an internal structure? How is the socio-cultural transformation of the discursive field reflected in the individual discursive practices? And finally, what could be said about the subject who is to embody this transformational (or transforming?) discourse?

Before I go into discussion of the state of *post-Soviet* aphasia, a short terminological explanation is in order. For a long time, 'aphasia' was understood as a speech disorder (literally, 'inability to speak', in Greek) caused by physiological reasons, more precisely by a certain type of brain damage.<sup>14</sup> There are, however, other, non-physiological traditions in studies of aphasia. One of them, for example, is represented by Ernst Cassirer's phenomenological philosophy of symbolic forms, in which 'the theory of aphasia took a definite direction, leading toward the universal problem of the symbol'<sup>15</sup> and representation, toward the problem of the individual perception and consciousness.<sup>16</sup> Along with the phenomenological approach, the structural study of aphasia initiated in the early 1940s by the Russian linguist Roman Jakobson has allowed yet another totally non-physiological understanding of this type of linguistic behaviour. In this article I will also approach aphasia as a phenomenon whose logic can help to understand the peculiarity of intersection of the individual's *ability to speak* and society's *ability to provide a language* with which to speak. Following a long-established tradition of phenomenological and structural analysis, I will use the concept of aphasia to interpret the 'pathology' of the 'symbolic',<sup>17</sup> and 'verbal consciousness'<sup>18</sup> rather than a pathology of brains.

In the 'structural' understanding of aphasia, according to Jakobson, two interconnected processes are of pivotal importance: they are the processes of 'regression and disintegration' of *individual* speech.<sup>19</sup> I want to extend Jakobson's rather *individualistic* treatment of aphasia to a *collective* discursive behaviour and use the term 'post-Soviet aphasia' to describe a manifestation of (1) *regression* to symbolic forms of the previous historical period that has been caused by (2) the society's *disintegrated* ability to find proper verbal signifiers for the signifieds of the new socio-political regime. Aphasia, then, will be construed here as a double phenomenon that makes apparent discursive 'losses and compensations'.<sup>20</sup> On the one hand, the term will indicate what Jakobson called 'the "frozen" beginning stage',<sup>21</sup> a *state of lacking*, at which the already formed desire to communicate is not yet complemented by the ability to communicate *something*. From that point of view, aphasia denotes the

*inability* of the post-Soviet subject to use language creatively. On the other hand, like Jakobson, I also understand aphasia as a *compensatory* type of discursive behaviour, in which lack of a new creative symbolic production ('disorder of output') is to be filled by complex patterns of usage of the symbolic forms acquired during the previous stages of individual and societal development.

### *The loss of transition*

When replying to my questions about their own social identity, the majority of the students chose to identify themselves as *post-Soviet*. But what exactly does this position imply? The following responses were typical:

The post-Soviet man and post-Soviet woman? These are us—the ones who happened to catch the demise of the Soviet Union and who live now in a Russia not yet settled down (*neustanovlenoi*) (f-17).<sup>22</sup>

Post-Soviet person—I guess that's me, for I cannot describe myself either as Soviet or as a new Russian (f-17).

Post-Soviet people—the ones who have not become new Russians but who are not Soviet anymore. They are the main part of the Russian population—dreaming about old times while knowing that there would be no return of the past (m-17).

With some rare exceptions, what all these comments indicate is a certain feeling of being caught *in-between*: between two classes (poor/rich), between two times (past/future), between two systems (Soviet/non-Soviet). Certainly, this feeling of being on the borderline could be interpreted as the students' reflection and projection of their own marginal structural location—*between* the family of their parents and their own family, *between* school and future job, *between* a situation of financial and social dependence and (anticipated) economic and social autonomy.

The interesting thing, though, is that neither of the poles that defined the young people's frame of references—be it the 'Soviet' or the 'new Russian'—functions in the essays as a site of possible identification. Instead, they act precisely in a framing, constraining manner, being perceived by the young people rather negatively. The post-Soviet threshold, the post-Soviet *transitionality* and *in-betweenness* thus has a peculiar nature—it does not provide any cues about the direction to follow, it does not channel one's identificatory process;<sup>23</sup> instead it outlines the paths that should *not* be taken. For example, a female student describes the two alternatives known to her in the following way:

A Soviet man? He wears the same shirt all year around, [is] unshakable in his opinion and decisions (and he has *the* ground for that—the party's directives' ...). Woman for him is seldom of secondary importance: it is good if she occupies tenth place on his list of priorities.

A Soviet woman? Despite her own wishes and desires, her family is always overshadowed by her job problems. Work always comes first. Plus all the financial problems of family life. In her early 30s she is already talking about men in this manner: '... those guys ..., what could you expect from them ...' In other words—these are largely unhappy people with an abnormal (unnatural) life style.

A New Russian man? Those who have a business bent are happy today, but what about all the others? ... New Russian man is a man of will, who needs nobody. He is also unhappy ... The New Russian man is a parody of an 'average American' from a cheap Western movie (f-18).

A male student gives a similar, although less 'personalised', account of the alternatives, neither of which is attractive:

The Soviet Union—the leadership cheated the simple-hearted Russian man with his ideals of universal justice and his readiness to die for them.

The new Russia? Everyone wants to get as much as possible; everyone thinks: 'I can keep stealing until I am caught'—and thus our Russian society is falling apart (m-17).

Yet another student, having described the Soviet past and the new Russian present, demonstrates a typical situation of not being willing to identify herself with any of the categories available:

Soviet man and woman? They had faith in communism, they were fixed on it, and on their work. Women were lacking in femininity. Men were sort of bossy, with brief-cases. At first glance they looked totally innocent but were corrupt and rotten inside.

The new Russian men? These are the hard-core bold guys with golden neck-chains, crosses and huge bellies. They are not especially famous for their intellectual abilities but they are certainly good at counting money. They are way too far from being perfect. They spend money easily for it was not hard for them to get it. The new Russian women are slightly better, but not by much. The new Russians look down upon ordinary people, but at the same time they are effective and business-minded persons.

I cannot relate myself either to the new Russians, or to the post-Soviet, or to the Soviet. I believe my friends and I belong to a new generation that would be able to change life for the better. At least this is what I hope for (f-17).

There is an interesting tendency in the way the students symbolically map their picture of Russian society. Despite their temporal and even spatial proximity, the line that connects the 'old Soviet' and the 'new Russian' with the post-Soviet seems to have a rather complicated configuration. The extremes—the old Soviet/the new Russian—cannot be easily and straightforwardly connected. The extremes are not on the same continuum; nor do they indicate the trajectory of development. The post-Soviet person is not the new Russian's embryo, nor is s/he an overdeveloped version of the Soviet one. Instead, as one student puts it,

a post-Soviet person is one who is lost in this world, one who tries to find his self and who, despite the constant failure to accomplish this, has not lost his faith. Because this faith is the only thing he has; he is totally naked—spiritually, materially and nationally (m-17).

I think it is precisely this feeling of being lost 'between' the 'old Soviet' and the 'new Russian', this feeling of being stripped of any *thing* that could possibly reveal one's symbolic belongingness, this feeling of a profound symbolic lack that forces young people to metonymically bridge the 'Soviet' to the 'new Russian'. As I shall show, these extremes—epitomised by the 'faithful communist' and the 'self-indulgent new Russian'—function as the aphasic substitutes called upon to designate and

circumscribe the empty space of the post-Soviet subject in/of transition. Before I try to outline the structural and cultural reasons for this transitional 'loss' of the post-Soviet subject, I want to quote yet another, albeit less personalised, example.

On 11 March 1999 a Moscow newspaper reported that the lower house of the Russian parliament—the Duma—had approved a draft of the law 'On the State Anthem of the Russian Federation'. The draft proposes to use as the anthem of today's Russia the music of the Soviet Union's anthem written in the 1940s. As the newspaper reminded us, this move by the Duma challenged the decision made in 1990 by the Duma's predecessor—the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Soviet Federation. In 1990 the Supreme Soviet chose to use as the anthem of the 'independent' Russia the music of the 'Patriotic Song' written by Mikhail Glinka in the early 1830s.

The 1990 decision, however, did not solve one essential problem with the anthem's text: the lyrics of the 'Patriotic Song', glorifying the Russian Emperor and the Russian people, were utterly inappropriate in the contemporary situation. As a result of this political—or rather, textual—inapplicability, coupled with the inability to create a new text, until now the 'Patriotic song'—to quote the title of the famous Russian New Year TV-show, the 'Old Song About the Most Important'—has been performed during official ceremonies without words.

The newspaper indicated that a specially created committee of the Duma had come to the conclusion that it would be impossible to produce a text that would match Glinka's music. This forced the deputies to take a drastic step and—as Elena Muzulina, a member of the Duma from the Yabloko party, put it—to replace a melody which is 'difficult even for simple reproduction' with the less convoluted and more familiar melody of the Soviet anthem, whose lyrics are also yet to be re-written. The paper also quoted Vasilii Shandybin, a deputy representing the Communist Party, as saying; 'all the working people and the working class are impatiently looking forward to the situation when Russia will finally acquire its new [i.e. the Soviet] anthem' for 'we were born with the words of this anthem and we shall die with them'. 'There is no reason to hurry to die', the newspaper comments sarcastically, 'for there are no words so far' to die with.<sup>24</sup>

I find these two examples—the wordless post-Soviet/Soviet anthem and the students' inability to find a proper symbol, a proper signifier to represent their 'post-Soviet' location, very similar in origin. It seems to me that, besides a clear lack of creativity, these examples reflect a more fundamental tendency of individual and collective inability either to put into words normative ideals and desired goals of the post-communist period or to express the changes that have already happened in Russia.

Despite (or maybe because of) the politics of *glasnost*, the gaps that during the communist time separated one's words from one's thoughts and one's actions so well have not become any narrower. Instead, as Andrei Sinyavsky, a prominent Soviet dissident, pointed out shortly before his death, there has been 'an incredible devaluation ... of words' in Russia.<sup>25</sup> There is, as Vladimir Kolesov, a historian of Russian language, indicated recently, an obvious tendency in individual and public discourses towards a 'deformed speech' manifested by predominance of 'vague and unclear ... discourse'. 'Have our language skills become worse', asks the linguist, 'or is it our language itself that rejects us as its "carriers"?'<sup>26</sup> As if they had exhausted their

former political appeal during the period of *glasnost*, words in post-Soviet Russia somehow became meaningless, that is, both unable to manifest content and unnecessary for this purpose. Thus the anthem remains without words, and the discussion—also symptomatically—is reduced to choosing among already existing melodies; the lack of ‘new words’ is covered up by the *old* (musical) symbols.

I believe this dominant logic of the post-Soviet ‘deformed speech’ in contemporary Russia is not unlike the logic of expressive aphasia elaborated by Jakobson. It seems to me that the ‘state of post-Soviet aphasia’ can usefully describe a current situation in Russia that is characterised by a profound difficulty in bringing together a ‘world of words’ with a ‘world of things’, a difficulty in mastering, managing the social world—even if only on the level of language. The main questions, certainly, are: What are the reasons? and What are the consequences of this post-Soviet aphasia? In the rest of the article I outline the linguistic characteristics of this post-Soviet *asymbolia* and then offer my interpretations of political and personal implications of it.

### *Chained signifiers*

As the example of the ‘new’ old Russian anthem suggests, there is an obvious difficulty in society with finding an adequate signifier to symbolically envelop the new historical period.<sup>27</sup> And yet, as the example indicates, the difficulty might result in speechlessness, in the absence of a *new*, i.e. *post-Soviet* text, but not in silence. In that respect, a conclusion drawn more than a hundred years ago by Hughlings Jackson, one of the pioneers of studies of aphasia, is still valid: ‘speechlessness does not mean entire wordlessness’.<sup>28</sup> Rather, it means a change in the pattern of communication.<sup>29</sup> And this is a point I want to stress: the post-Soviet ‘disorder’ of ‘symbolic formulation and expression’,<sup>30</sup> while ostensibly lacking in *new* signifiers, manifests itself through an elaborate and intensive usage of ‘languages’ of the previous, that is, the Soviet, period. The usual attempt to find a new expressive style, able to distinctively reflect changes of the period, was supplanted by what appears to be a ‘nostalgic’ aesthetical and rhetorical regression. Contrary to some recent studies that construe ‘the post-communist political and intellectual world’ as a ‘battlefield between different, often incompatible myths’ that are ‘able to inspire collective loyalties, affinities, passions, and actions’,<sup>31</sup> I argue that the situation is the reverse, at least when it comes to Russia. Instead of being involved in production of *new* mythical narratives able to encompass the ongoing changes and to embrace individuals in a collective entity, both public discourse and individual speech in post-Soviet Russia demonstrate a different dynamic. Mythologisation of the narratives of the recent past has a somewhat parasitic (‘nostalgic’) nature here. It is not the *morphology* of the narrative that gets ‘corrected’ or ‘improved’, as usually happens during the process of ‘inventing’ histories and traditions. On the surface, the structure of the ‘sacred’ texts remains largely the same. What is being changed, though, is the context of the texts’ existence and origin, the texts’ *etymology*.<sup>32</sup> It is in this de-contextualisation, in this dissociation of a cultural text from the place of its origin, in this dissolution of a binding effect of the Soviet meta-language, that the ‘post-Soviet aphasia’ makes itself apparent. The new symbolic/discursive regime is strongly

defined by the vocabulary of the previous cultural epoch without, however, being merged with it.<sup>33</sup> To illustrate the point, suffice it to mention the vast proliferation of memoirs as a cultural genre in contemporary Russia: while deeply rooting their narrative structures (mostly) in the Soviet *past*, memoirs, nonetheless, are being shaped by the demands of *current* markets. The Soviet past thus becomes an object of purposeful commodification and a product of active post-Soviet cultural consumption.<sup>34</sup> And the post-Soviet reproduction of the Soviet aesthetic style, in that respect, can be read as a post-Soviet *epilogue*, i.e. as a commentary on the main text or, as the term 'epilogue' suggests, as something that comes when all the words have already been said.<sup>35</sup> I shall return to this point later.

Being unable to represent the rapidly changing social system adequately, however, is not the same as being unable to represent it at all, or to think about these changes. In his seminal work on aphasia, Jakobson indicates that the loss of ability to express certain things is always counterbalanced by a certain type of symbolic compensation, a 'symbolic substitution'.<sup>36</sup> To state this differently: the lack of a new signifier does not necessarily imply that there is nothing new to signify at all. The question remains, though: Is there any way to explain, to interpret this presence of new signifieds in the absence of new signifiers? Or, to reverse the proposition, how can one explain the persistent presence of the old (Soviet) signifiers, devoid of their *original* meaning?

In his study, based on an old linguistic tradition, Jakobson indicates that there are two main operations that underlie our verbal behaviour. One of them deals with the speaker's freedom to *select* words, while the other deals with the speaker's ability to freely *combine* them into a larger context. Taking this distinction as basic, Jakobson outlines two main *types of aphasia*.<sup>37</sup> The person's difficulty with *selecting* similar words usually manifests itself as the *metonymical type* of verbal behaviour. Jacques Lacan, during his Jakobsonian stage, called the structure that underlies this form of discourse a 'word-to-word connection'.<sup>38</sup> In this type of 'word-connection' (the absence of) meaning is not so much revealed but rather displaced: from one signifier to another. The second type of aphasia, rooted in difficulty with *combining* words, manifests itself as the *metaphorically-oriented* verbal behaviour, i.e. the one that substitutes 'one word for another', producing in the end, as Lacan put it, 'sense ... from non-sense'.<sup>39</sup>

As I have tried to show, one of the main characteristics demonstrated in the students' texts is their inability/unwillingness to decode the notion of the 'post-Soviet'. Instead of filling it in with substantive definitions/meanings, the students chose to *metonymically displace it* onto other signifiers. That is, they chose to define the post-Soviet in terms of its temporal or spatial contiguity rather than its semantic similarity. The post-Soviet is construed by students as something that exceeds (or does not fit, for that matter) such neighbouring categories as the 'Soviet' and the 'new Russian'. As a student puts it:

A post-Soviet person does not have enough money (or chances to make it) to become a new Russian. At the same time, he cannot be a Soviet Russian either—for something is already missing (f–18).

And yet, this 'something', that, in fact, is constitutive for the post-Soviet subject, is almost never spelled out in the students' essays, its meaning is almost never

explicated. The ‘something’ remains *some thing* which is yet to be defined. As Jakobson indicates in his work, such an approach to the symbolical mapping of the social reality has its own logic and can be defined as ‘expressive aphasia’.<sup>40</sup>

What does the metonymical type of verbal behaviour (or the ‘expressive aphasia’) of the young Russians say about their ability to interact with the post-Soviet context? What is the logic of the context behind this proclivity to avoid metaphorical comparisons? As Jakobson formulates it, ‘the interpretation of one linguistic sign through other, in some respect homogeneous, signs of the same language [i.e. the use of metaphor] is a metalinguistic operation ... The aphasic defect in the “capacity of naming” is properly a loss of metalanguage’.<sup>41</sup> And later: ‘Similarity in meaning connects the symbols of a metalanguage with the symbols of the language referred to. Similarity connects a metaphorical term with the term for which it is substituted’.<sup>42</sup>

To put this in terms of my own project: when I asked the students to find a proper definition, to find a proper symbolic frame or a symbolic content that could correspond to their understanding of their own personal social location, in fact, I asked them to perform precisely the operation of substituting one word for another, or, in a different transcription, the ‘metaphoric operation’. However, as I have indicated, the students’ texts demonstrated a deep inability to perform such an operation, an inability that indicates, as Jakobson suggests, a difficulty with understanding the *meta-context* within which this metaphorical comparison of the post-Soviet might be possible. The field of discursive possibilities from which meaning could be derived seems to be restricted here by the *immediate context* of the speaker; so are the subject’s ‘ideological environment and ideological horizon’,<sup>43</sup> i.e. his/her vision of socially and discursively available subject-positions and subject-functions. As Jakobson suggests, when confronting the task of defining a general meaning of a discursive construction loosely or not at all connected with his/her immediate context, the individual whose verbal style is based on the metonymic approach is left somewhat paralysed, being unable to crack the codes that unify the ‘synthesised data’.<sup>44</sup> To frame this differently, on the level of understanding, such an individual is unable to dissect ‘a context into its constituents, to separate them, and to operate with those constituents which are not prompted by the context’.<sup>45</sup> As a result, the post-Soviet functions as a pure metaphor whose parts remain enigmatic. Notice how this tendency to describe ‘reality’ metonymically, that is, through details and features that are located within the same spatial and temporal context, is manifested in the following comment by a male student:

A Soviet man—he is dressed in a grey suit, and constantly thinks ‘where to get stuff?’, with a minuscule salary. A Soviet woman – she is exhausted by the queues in stores, but still is beautiful. A new Russian: a crimson suit, a five-kilo golden neck-chain, a 600th Mercedes, a pile of dollars which he spends mindlessly. Post-Soviets—they have not become new Russians but they ceased to be Soviet, too. They are longing for the past, knowing that it won’t come (m-17).

Symptomatically enough, the first two temporal registers—the Soviet and the new Russian—are perceived very concretely, through a set of familiar objects that could represent the notions in question. However, the approach changes drastically in the description of the post-Soviet—the concreteness of associations is displaced, first, by

the reflection on the terms that circumscribe the notion of the post-Soviet (i.e. the 'new Russian' and the 'Soviet') and, second, by the unspecified reference to the past. Inability to *dissect* the (post-Soviet) context into its constituents, inability to define any *thing* specifically post-Soviet, is circumvented/substituted by a dual attempt to *describe* the context through notions that are either structurally (spatially) connected with it in the narrative (i.e. 'Soviet', 'new Russian') or that represent a temporal link with it ('the past').

Again, it must be pointed out that my respondents are by no means original in their metonymic approach. The post-Soviet mass media offer many examples of this type of symbolic production. The most noted and most talented of them is probably Leonid Parfenov's project 'Our Era: 1961–1991'; broadcast by NTV. In 31 episodes the show presents a year as a peculiar conglomerate of isolated, distinct facts and events happening that year. There is only one factor that brings together, for example, such whimsically selected events of 1990 as the unification of Germany, the wide spread of leggings in the Soviet Union, the release of Nelson Mandela, the mass import by the Soviet government of a purportedly radioactive tea from Turkey, the crisis of the Soviet tobacco industry and the incredible popularity of the dance called the lambada. The temporal contiguity of these 'news items' is sustained not by a conceptual framework or in an ideological message but by the figure of the anchor of the show, that is, by the figure of the subject of recollection, who is able—literally speaking—to insert himself in the midst of this or that event.<sup>46</sup> Narrative homogeneity is thus presented as one's very ability to recollect elements. Or, rather, the very process of recollection is used as producing a structuring narrative effect. And metonymic invocation of things and events punctuates this process.

There are, of course, other projects that are based on the same metonymic principle. For instance, the RTR show 'The Old Apartment', although less politically oriented than Parfenov's 'Era ...', also uses things of the past (e.g. refrigerators, TV-sets etc.) as the dominant means to represent this past. Among printed media suffice it to mention the popular magazine *Ogonek*; the inside cover of the magazine now displays 'The Museum of the Twentieth Century', in which such objects of Soviet life-style as galoshes, an abacus, a typewriter, a drinking glass, a portable immersion water heater etc. are accompanied by short reminiscences of famous Russian people on the role of this or that object in the Soviet lifestyle. Of course, the key feature of this media production is not so much its retro orientation but rather the way this retro style is approached—namely, through inventory of things rather than through analysis of ideas. It is exactly the lack of a bigger framework that prevents these projects from moving beyond narcissistic absorption by the niceties of details of the past towards analytical understanding of reasons that make this carefully detailed past impossible any more. The question now is: How does this loss of metaphoric 'metalanguage', how does this regression to the metonymic perception of reality become possible?

*Choose it or it will get even worse!*

This situation of symbolic (or discursive) impotence of the post-Soviet regime to a degree is a historically unique phenomenon. As historians of Russian language almost unanimously indicate, a similarly revolutionary change in 1917 was indeed

accompanied by a profound discursive transformation. For example, Andrei and Tat'yana Fesenko stressed that 'the Russian language ... has never had a period when the two stages of its development differed as drastically as did the before- and after-October stages'.<sup>47</sup> Nikolai Marr, a linguist whose theory of language for a long time dominated Soviet linguistic policy and Soviet linguistics, emphasised in 1931 that 'along with construction of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics there is a new linguistic construction. All the Union has turned into a laboratory of linguistic creativity ...'.<sup>48</sup> Afanasii Selishchev scrupulously documented various tools and products of this 'reinforced speech activity among the population involved in the revolutionary movement'.<sup>49</sup>

Surprisingly enough, neither 'reinforced' speech activity of the population nor linguistic 'creativity' can be associated with the post-Soviet discursive regime. Moreover, development of the regime is acquiring a very different dynamic. Major innovations in the Russian language are apparently brought about by the dissolution of borders and hierarchies both among different sub-systems within the language and between the Russian language and foreign languages;<sup>50</sup> the innovations, in other words, are the results of active borrowing from formerly marginalised or ideologically opposed communities. There is, however, an interesting paradox brought about by these changes. As Vladimir Shaposhnikov, a Russian linguist, writes, changes in public discourse produce an overall effect that can be termed 'euphemistic', i.e. aimed to conceal rather than make transparent the meaning behind the borrowed terms.<sup>51</sup> As in aphasia, the words here do not reflect what they say and are used technically; meaning here, though, has not been lost—it just has not been manifested.

This tendency towards 'technical' and/or 'euphemistic' usage of available symbolic means makes itself apparent not only on the level of the linguistic but also on the level of political discourse. Tat'yana Kutkovets and Igor Klyamkin's analysis of a 1996 survey on the popularity of various types of national identity in Russia<sup>52</sup> demonstrates a very similar result. On the one hand, the authors state that, based on their research, it is possible to argue that 'society has acquired a unified political language, understandable by and accessible to all, or almost all' members of Russian society. On the other, as the authors indicate, '... different groups of the population invest (*vkldyvyayut*) in the same ideas different, if not contrary, meaning'.<sup>53</sup> As I argue, this structural possibility of polysemy, that is, ability to use the same word for expressing a different meaning, is a result of two factors: inability to find distinctive signs/signifiers capable of manifesting ideological/cultural differences coupled with the relatively stable/stagnating condition of the already existing symbolic field.

How does this somewhat arrested discursive creativity, this state of post-Soviet aphasia become possible institutionally? What functions as the main structural mechanism that 'freezes' the creative abilities of post-Soviet discursive practices? I believe there are at least two main structural reasons. One is the gradual disappearance of what could be called a meta-symbolic framework that initially enveloped the discourse of *perestroika*, while the other has to do with the absence of the field of post-Soviet cultural production. In the following sections I will deal with these institutional reasons for the state of post-Soviet aphasia.

In post-communist scholarship it has by now become almost a commonplace to say that 'the revolutions of 1989 were not the bearers of new political ideas. Instead their

shared ideology was one of restored normalcy, of a return to Europe'.<sup>54</sup> The very term 'transition', borrowed from studies of south European and Latin American democracies,<sup>55</sup> was to represent—almost literally—a geographical shift, a spatial transformation, a unification of the previously separated Eastern European communist archipelago with the democratic European mainland. This 'geographical shift', in other words, was meant to manifest the 'wave of democratisation', that is, a transition of democracy from the West to the European East.<sup>56</sup>

This understanding of transition that provided a more or less clear-cut geographical and ideological scheme for symbolic representation of the changes was definitely present in the public discourse of political and economic reforms in the Soviet Union of the late 1980s. Certainly, such a view of transition was one of the major sources of inspiration and one of the major messages of the main political bestseller of *perestroika*. Written in 1987, Gorbachev's *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World* called—somewhat imperiously—for a new world-picture in general and for a new vision of 'our common European home' in particular.<sup>57</sup>

However, the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the political, economic and social turbulence that has followed it ever since have resulted in quite a different public discourse of changes in Russia. By the middle of the 1990s the democratic European mainland had not become any closer, nor had capitalist prosperity. NATO's enlargement, accompanied by heated debates in Russia, made the discourse of Russia's 'return to Europe' increasingly inappropriate.<sup>58</sup> After the decade of transformation launched in March 1985 the country had apparently ended up at the point from which it had departed, facing the same old problem—where to start?<sup>59</sup> And the title of the book published by Gorbachev in 1995 again captured these social as well as rhetorical changes pretty well: *The Search for a New Beginning: Developing a New Civilization*.<sup>60</sup>

The uneasiness of the 'search for a new beginning' and a 'new start' became even more complicated during the presidential election campaign of 1996, which squeezed the political landscape into one binary: Communists vs. non-Communists.<sup>61</sup> The 1996 version of 'transition', resulting from such a polarisation, then, implied not so much a return to Europe but rather a retreat from carefully presented horrors of the communist past.<sup>62</sup> *Kommersant-Daily*, paraphrasing the official slogan of El'tsin's campaign, '*Golosui, a to proigraesh!*', wittingly summarised the logic of the period: '*Golosui, a to khuzhe budet!*'<sup>63</sup>

The rhetorical juxtaposition of what Michael Urban framed as 'communist phantom vs. non-communist phantom',<sup>64</sup> coupled with the impossibility of utilising the discourse of the 'European home', has several consequences. First of all, the ideological necessity to 'fight the ghosts of the past' made rhetorically redundant any articulation of a 'better life'; the discursive emphasis fell not on 'building a new future' but rather on avoiding the 'repetition of the past'. This missed chance to offer a new (ideological) horizon, this negative identification with the communist past not counterbalanced or even supplemented by a 'new' alternative beginning, 'locked' the major part of the population within the old frame of symbolic (e.g. Soviet) references. The path to aphasic regression thus was open. The incapacity of the discursive regime to symbolically frame, to verbally describe, to reproduce on the level of speech the new social, political and cultural situation, forced the post-Soviet subject to build his/her new identity on the basis of 'mythic notions *retrieved from the past*'.<sup>65</sup>

The students in Siberia with whom I talked were no different in this respect. The majority of them, when unable to frame or define changes in Russia, would refer to elusive, vague and yet utterly stereotypic concepts of 'soul', 'spirituality' or 'national character' without, however, elaborating the content of these notions. The following quotation from a student's essay exemplifies pretty well both the feeling of losing a familiar language, a familiar frame of reference, and a lack of understanding of what would compensate this loss. Describing 'new' (i.e. post-Soviet) Russia, the student writes:

Rushing from one corner to another, the new Russia is about to lose—or maybe it has already lost—its face, being over-stuffed with American films and products. And yet, at the same time, behind this ostensible lack of well-being, one can feel something profound, spiritual. That which is being revived, which comes from 'underground'. That which has been silenced off or banished. It appears that the new Russia is a battle-field between the material and the spiritual (f–19).

Besides the juxtaposition of the material(istic) West vs. the spiritual East—very traditional for the Soviet rhetoric—the quotation also demonstrates a lack of clear definition typical for such a type of argumentation, a lack of a clear vision of what the 'spiritual something' able to replace the lost 'face' of the new Russia consists of. This inability to verbally 'envelop' the notion on which the speaker relies, the unnamed, elusive nature of 'the spiritual', produces at least two consequences. Grammatically speaking, it leaves the sentence without a properly defined subject ('that which ...') and the speaker without the object to exercise her speech skills on: action is applied *to* rather than initiated *by* the subject yet to be named. Cognitively, a lack of a symbolic anchor that leaves the symbolic (e.g. linguistic) boundaries of the social situation unnamed—and thus not mapped out—also perpetuates what other students call the new Russia's condition of 'chaos' and 'flux'. The undetermined signifier of 'the spiritual', in other words, is to match the state of general confusion. The individual 'cognitive vacuum' reflects the societal state of uncertainty.<sup>66</sup>

And yet again, without a metalanguage to use, this turning towards the myths of the past has not resulted so far in any coherent narrative or framework: on the personal and societal levels mythical notions retrieved from the past, even when put together, did not produce any inspiring and mobilising picture. And the result of the 1996–97 search for a 'National Idea', conducted by the 'commission of consultants' chaired by Georgii Satarov, a Kremlin adviser, is just one more example of this inability to cope with the context without a framework to put it in. When in July 1996 President El'tsin declared an urgent necessity to elaborate 'our own national ideology', *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, published by the Russian parliament, started a public discussion/competition. From August 1996 until October 1997 it published more than 200 articles, essays, programmes and letters discussing the issue.<sup>67</sup> Symptomatically, despite the active debate in the press, after a year of work, all that Satarov's group was capable of producing was a digest, a catalogue, an inventory of the opinions published in Russian mass media,<sup>68</sup> a digest that was not even accompanied by an analytical commentary.<sup>69</sup> As if unable to metaphorically envelop 'The Idea', the group retreated to an old safe tool, namely to the obsessive aphasic reproduction of the already familiar, to the metonymic cataloguing of the already available and articulated ideas.

Without distinctively articulated social and personal landmarks to signal the direction(s) of the transition and with quickly vanishing, even if only ideological, perspectives, how can the post-Soviet changes be visualised and personally appropriated? What could function in this case as an object of positive identification? In other words, what does fill the post-Soviet symbolic void, then?

### *Culture of symbolic shortages*

Given the regressive logic of the state of aphasia, it is hardly surprising that the post-Soviet cultural development in Russia has become closely associated with 'longing for the past', as a student put it, with a profound cultural nostalgia. It is an outbreak of 'no(w)stalgia',<sup>70</sup> an 'epidemic of nostalgia', as it was defined recently,<sup>71</sup> that frames the post-Soviet symbolic landscape in the late 1990s.<sup>72</sup> Inability to articulate a new language adequate to a new period, coupled with a loss of the 'enframing' meta-language, has been compensated by stylistic regression to the language of the preceding period.<sup>73</sup>

Certainly, to reduce the problem of cultural 'no(w)stalgia' exclusively to the individual incapacity to creatively use available symbolic means would be an exaggeration. Besides the transitional location of the post-Soviet subject there must be structural reasons within the symbolic field itself that not only *provoke* the aphasic regression to the previous cultural styles but also *prevent* the new symbolic styles from emerging. As I have argued elsewhere,<sup>74</sup> the most significant of these reasons is the absence of what, following Pierre Bourdieu, can be defined as the field of post-Soviet cultural *production*. That is to say, the absence of the field in which post-communist economic and political dispositions of the social actors could find adequate *symbolic, cultural equivalents*.<sup>75</sup> Such a structural underdevelopment (or even absence) of 'post-Soviet cultural industry'—connected with but not limited by the unstable structural location of the post-Soviet political and cultural elite and thus the hierarchy of cultural tastes—is compensated by a relatively developed field of post-Soviet cultural *consumption*, with quantity as its main indicator.

The thesis about the absent (or underdeveloped) field of post-Soviet symbolic *production* has certain consequences. One is a methodological shift to questioning the *structure* of symbolic consumption rather than its *content*. Or, to put it differently, instead of determining and delineating the (inherent) meaning of this or that symbol, the purpose of such an analysis is to try to understand how/why one's attachment to (or investment in) certain cultural symbols has become possible and how this attachment is sustained. Instead of the *structure of the institutions* that define and determine forms of cultural consumption, it is the *structure of the individual* that occupies the primary analytical place. Let me pause here.

As some scholars point out, the culturally un-operationalised condition of the post-Soviet realm is reflected most vividly in the absence of 'mediating structures of political life',<sup>76</sup> in the lack of 'a political matrix within which competing identities can find mooring'.<sup>77</sup> Naturally enough, this fundamental lack of mediating structures that makes it hard for the individual to assume a certain subject position *vis-à-vis* social changes brings with it the problem of subjectivity, the problem of one's self-localisation and self-description in regard to the processes that have yet to be

loaded with graspable meaning. To put it differently, the lack of mediating structures coincides with the lack of 'tools' with which to understand the transformation. Without such tools neither changes themselves nor one's relation to them can become meaningful. Notice how absence of the code with which to 'dissect' the knots of reality produces a state of hermeneutic paralysis: 'To describe the new Russia? It is a country whose future is unclear', writes a 17-year-old student, 'whose present is foggy and contradictory (but I hope for the best)' (m-17).

The main aspect of this paralysis, however, is not *merely* symbolic but has a lot to do with the role of symbolic mechanisms in production of subjectivity and agency, in mapping out one's field of possibilities and trajectories. Hence the post-Soviet asymbolia correlates with the post-Soviet anomie: the loss of words with the loss of self. For example, when asked to describe his own position, a male student wrote: 'Where am I? I cannot associate myself with any of the categories—be it 'Soviet' or the 'New Russian ...' (m-21). Another one puts it somewhat more resolutely: 'I am not a new Russian. But I have no idea of who I am' (m-20). Yet another one, describing his attitude to the changes, phrased it this way: 'My attitude to the changes is negative, and I do not see any place for myself there' (m-15).

Michael Burawoy and Katherine Verdery in their recent discussion of studies of (post-communist) transition indicate that, while focusing on the process of evolution of the macro institutions in the post-communist world, transitologists remain largely blind in regard to the micro processes and micro transformations.<sup>78</sup> Earlier, Richard Sakwa, demonstrating the same logic, went as far as to claim that 'the transition from communism ... entails the *rediscovery* of "subjectivity" in the social polity'.<sup>79</sup> In the remaining part of this article, in my analysis of the post-Soviet aphasia, I attempt to bring together the micro and macro levels of the transition by looking at reflection of social changes in individual language. In order to do this, I want to re-visit two major theoretical concepts of transitional development: Victor Turner's 'liminal stage' and Donald Winnicott's 'transitional object'. In spite of their different origins, I think the two concepts describe essentially the same phenomenon of profound transformation of the individual and/or society passing from one structurally defined location to another. While Turner emphasises the societal, collective aspects of a transformation, Winnicott focuses on the individual side of this process. Both authors, however, are instrumental for understanding the logic of symbolic activity typical for the transitional/transformational stage in contemporary Russia.

#### *Permanence of transition*

Following Arnold van Gennep,<sup>80</sup> Turner<sup>81</sup> develops a concept of 'liminality' and 'liminal personae' or 'threshold people'.<sup>82</sup> Studying rites of passage, that is, 'rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age',<sup>83</sup> van Gennep indicates that this 'transition' from one state/status to another, reflected in the rites, consists of three phases: 'separation, margin (or *limen*, signifying 'threshold' in Latin), and aggregation'.<sup>84</sup> The first stage of separation consists of

symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a 'state'), or from both. During the intervening 'liminal' period, the characteristics of the ritual subject (the

'passenger') are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or no attributes of the past or coming state. In the third phase (reaggregation or reincorporation), the passage is consummated. The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a relatively stable state once more ...<sup>85</sup>

This anthropologically grounded three-stage explanation of the rites of passage might be useful for grasping the logic of the transition through which Russian society as a whole and people in Russia as individuals are going. It needs, however, a crucial amendment.

Turner's 'liminal entities' which are located 'neither here nor there; ... [being] betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, customs, convention, and ceremonial',<sup>86</sup> are precisely *transitional*. In other words, liminality here has a metonymic, sequential nature; it is framed by a clear understanding of the point of departure and a clear picture of the point of arrival. The purpose of the liminal stage, then, is to provide the individual/group with a spatial and temporal location in which to become *ready to learn* the objectives of the new status. Hence, the positive, i.e. meaningful, effect of the liminal stage is a result of a double negation, as it were: negation of the structural constraints that have been previously exercised upon the person in transition and negation of (or freedom from) the limits that the anticipated state will bring with it.

At first glance Turner's liminal stage conceptually coincides with the main thesis of studies of transition. That is, liminality here is a structurally necessary temporal period, a period of 'growing a new skin', as Katherine Verdery puts it.<sup>87</sup> The question is, what happens during the liminal stage in a situation when structural configurations of the arrival point are not clear, as is the case in Russia? Moreover, if the major goal of the liminal stage, as Turner puts it, is to provide individuals with 'myths, symbols, rituals, philosophical systems, and works of art',<sup>88</sup> i.e. with symbolic tools capable of rendering happening changes meaningful, then how could the very absence of the post-Soviet field of cultural production modify both the notion of transition and the notion of liminality? As I have already indicated, in the absence of one of the opposites (the point of arrival), the post-Soviet stage of cultural liminality manifests itself as a twofold phenomenon. On *the level of the signifier* it is expressed as an extensive subversion and re-production of the previous symbolic structure ('*the epidemic of nostalgia*'), while *on the level of the signified* the liminal stage works through various mechanisms of personal investments and attachments, latent rather than manifested, associated *with* rather than expressed *through* the signifier.

To put the same idea differently: in the absence of new cultural forms ready to epitomise ongoing social changes, an individual—the *passenger*—faces basically two (not necessarily alternative) choices. One of them deals with changing patterns of *usage* of the old symbols; this approach can be called the '*paradigm of remake*'. The other is based on changing one's *attitude* to the old symbols; this pattern of symbolic production can be labelled the '*paradigm of revival*'. Both strategies, however, are aimed at keeping the old signifier/symbol intact, while changing its signified/content/context. Both activate the individual's creative ability within the rigid symbolic frames of the previous era.

Now, how could this attachment to the signifier be explained? What is its

mechanism, and what can the fact of this attachment tell us about the individual in transition? One way to answer these questions is through understanding the dynamic of the process that is a reversal of the attachment, i.e. the process of gradual disinvestment of meaning from the previously important object. In his earlier work Turner described this process of *dis*-attachment, or even *re*-attachment, which in fact constitutes the primary purpose of the liminal stage, as a 'social drama', i.e. a 'processional form' of the 'social handling of structural vulnerability'.<sup>89</sup> Turner stresses first and most of all the *structural effect* of the social drama, that is, a new social equilibrium that is achieved in the process of dramatic rearrangements and transformation of the individual actors and groups and relations among them.<sup>90</sup> Yet, as the concept indicates, the structural transformation, this 'apparent exception to statistical regularity' as Turner calls it,<sup>91</sup> is accompanied by *very personal* emotional behaviour 'at the point of fission'.<sup>92</sup> In other words, there are always concrete people on the stage, performing this or that social drama. Winnicott's 'transitional object' helps to see how the social drama is played out on the individual level, or rather, how the individual's social drama is perceived by its actor. The main question here is, how does the individual handle his/her being 'at the point of fission'? Or, in a different transcription, what are the mechanisms that allow minimisation of the pain of transition?

Winnicott's starting point is rather straightforward. As he puts it, 'it is assumed that the task of reality acceptance is never completed, that no human being is free from strain of relating inner and outer reality, and that relief from this strain is provided by an intermediate area of experience ... which is not challenged (arts, religion, etc.)'.<sup>93</sup> Certainly, there is a similarity between what Winnicott calls 'an intermediate area of experience' and Turner's 'liminal phase'. The importance of Winnicott's theory, though, is in its insistence on the fact that liminality here is realised/lived through the individual's active engagement with what Winnicott calls the 'transitional object'—i.e. a 'piece' of reality that functions as the main anchor of the individual's illusion: be it a teddy-bear, a totem or a national anthem. The transitional object acts here as a site/screen for the individual's projections and helps to mediate one's 'internal environment' and the 'external world'. As Winnicott indicates, it is precisely the mediating function of the transitional object, rooted in the individual's *partial* ability to recognise and accept reality, that determines the psychological import of the transitional object.<sup>94</sup>

Hence the transitional object has a double nature, not unlike the aphasic usage of signifiers. Psychologically, the familiarity of the 'object', its not challenged and not challenging nature, helps the individual to safely use it as a site of projections. Socially, the physicality of the object, its belonging to the 'outer world', i.e. the object's external nature, provides the individual with possible exits/entries through which to leave the internal domain of imaginary experience (i.e. projections and fantasies) in order to enter the external domain of social activity. The function of the transitional object, 'to which inner reality and external reality both contribute',<sup>95</sup> is to direct one's transition from the 'source domain' of the familiar to the 'target domain' of the anticipated.<sup>96</sup>

Let me phrase it in a different way. As Winnicott suggests, the process of acquiring 'social literacy', i.e. the individual's ability to coordinate him or herself adequately in

regard to the outer world requires several elements to be accomplished. First, such a form of literacy is acquired through a process of gradual *negotiation* between the individual's inner environment and his/her external world. Second, the process of this negotiation involves two types of mechanisms. On the one hand, there is a need for an *externally* produced object (e.g. toy, totem, symbol) that can be 'privatised'. That is, one needs an object whose task is to pave the way to the newly configured and hardly known reality of which this object is a part. On the other hand, there is a mechanism of phantasy whose imaginary constructions associated with the transitional object help to 'gloss over' the gaps in the individual's relations with the world and thus allow the 'not yet quite grown skin' to mature.

Structurally speaking, the transitional object acts here as a signifier that gradually shifts from one field of signifieds to another. The signifier's presence (or rather that of its image) in one's life and the signifier's physical constancy create a feeling of consistency of one's personal history. Thus, for example, it becomes important to restore the Soviet anthem in order to bridge the gap with the *personal* past, to 'homogenise' and 'streamline' one's *bio-graphy* (or 'memoirs', for that matter) in a situation of social havoc. At the same time, since the signifier belongs to a larger symbolic field (e.g. 'market' or 'politics'), it provides the individual with a point of entry into the domain of symbols: hence the discussion about the *status* of the anthem and its *social importance* becomes possible. Yet the loose connection between the signifier and the signified opens up a structural possibility for changes to be reflected in the already established signs, until one's investment in the 'transitional signifier'—e.g. the Soviet anthem—is not completely exhausted and a new signifier—e.g. a new anthem—is found. It is through a slow disinvestment and disattachment from the transitional object/signifier that the individual can finally realise him or herself as something 'outside and separate'<sup>97</sup> in regard to his/her object of initial attachment—be it a toy, a symbol or an identity.

Thus the concept of 'transitional object' can help to understand a certain deadlock that unproblematic equation of the logic of post-socialist transition with that of the liminal stage might conceal. Rites of passage, the individual or collective 'passing from one cultural state to another',<sup>98</sup> inevitably go through a period of 'liminality, marginality, and structural inferiority',<sup>99</sup> accompanied by subversion, inversion and transformation of the previously constitutive elements of one's cultural location. However, the level of regression of rites of passage is limited by the overall goal of the passing, that is, by achieving a clearly defined social/cultural/political point of arrival. However, as I indicated, this structural clarity does not seem to be present in the case of Russia's contemporary development. In fact, the confused and chaotic picture (if any) of the *post*-transitional condition reduces the conceptual usefulness of the notion of *transition* largely to its rhetorical function. When the final destination of the rites of passage has become unclear, the liminal phase, instead of marking the beginning of a new type of symbolic production, appears more likely to result in active parasitic re-use of the symbolic vocabulary of the previous stage, turning it into 'transitional object'. As a result, instead of the process of 'passing *from* one stage *to* another' we might have a process of *institutionalisation of the transition*. Consequently, this might mean that the rituals called upon to mark off one's *passage* become a self-sufficient process, without a passage to refer to. And Winnicott's

concept of 'transitional object' helps to understand what 'might happen when such a *transitional* object becomes the object of a *permanent* attachment. Such a fixation on the 'previously significant' pieces of reality ('transitional objects'), Winnicott suggests, is sustained by creating an imaginary realm, a realm of phantasy, a 'realm of illusion'<sup>100</sup> which acts as a 'resting-place'<sup>101</sup> alleviating the difficulties that the individual faces when entering a new (political, social, cultural etc.) environment. However, as multiple examples of the 'epidemic of no(w)stalgia' demonstrate, in a situation of permanent transition, instead of struggling with the decoding of the new reality, one might retreat into the 'realm of illusion' using the already familiar objects as points of such a retreat.

### *Conclusion*

As I have tried to show, the state of post-Soviet aphasia—with its nostalgic regression and over-used Soviet symbols—can be seen as a reaction to socio-cultural transformations that started happening in Russia in the second half of the 1990s. I have suggested that one of the most striking aspects of this discursive behaviour, demonstrated in the essays written by young Russians, was the loss of a metalanguage and thus the loss of ability to 'dissect' the metaphor of the 'post-Soviet'. This lack of knowledge about one's own location and being, I proposed, is closely connected with absence of the post-Soviet field of cultural production that could have provided the post-Soviet subject with adequate post-Soviet discursive possibilities/signifiers. Such absence of an adequate post-Soviet interpellation capable of 'naming' the subject<sup>102</sup> undermines the very foundation of the existing discursive field and its institutions. The 'post-Soviet' remains an empty space, a non-existence, devoid of its subjectifying force, its own signifier, and its own meaning effect. For, as Voloshinov puts it, 'if experience does have meaning, if it is susceptible to being understood and interpreted, then it must have its existence in the material of actual, real signs ... *experience exists even for the person undergoing it only in the material of signs*. Outside that material there is no experience as such'.<sup>103</sup>

The inability of young Russians to name, to identify the *others vis-à-vis* themselves and thus to structure their own location, i.e. the students' virtual absence as subjects, manifests yet another aspect of the lack of post-Soviet signifiers. Sign is a product of the social, or, in Voloshinov's terms, 'signs can arise only on *interindividual territory*'.<sup>104</sup> 'It is essential', Voloshinov continues, 'that the two individuals be *organised socially*, that they compose a group (a social unit); only then can the medium of signs take shape between them'.<sup>105</sup> When looked at from this perspective, the state of post-Soviet aphasia with its lack of signs socially mediated and recognised as such, I believe, can be seen as a condition where the 'interindividual territory' has been increasingly shrinking and where the intersubjective is more and more reduced to the inner-subjective, or to the *inner speech*.<sup>106</sup>

The culture of symbolic shortages thus makes the process of production of the post-Soviet subject very problematic. The symbolic structure of post-Soviet society apparently fails to produce clearly defined positions and functions with which the post-Soviet subject could identify. Moreover, being in its embryonic state, this symbolic structure cannot provide post-Soviet society with the necessary mediating

link, thus provoking a situation of social dispersion and/or narcissistic withdrawal. In the absence of this mediating, intersubjective space, I argue, the very situation of transition might become institutionalised. Unable and unwilling to struggle with the symbolic impenetrability of the very conditions of their being, the potential post-Soviet subjects might find (and already have found) an escape in the realm of the imaginary, being constantly propped up by the flow of nostalgic transitional objects.

One of the students wrote in her response to my questions:

The post-Soviet person is the answer to the old puzzle: 'if it is neither fish nor fowl, what is it? It is a lobster'. [It is the] same with post-Soviet man—he does not know where he should move—forward or backward (f-19).

Nor, as I suggest, does the post-Soviet person have a language to describe his/her situation. Except, maybe, for the old songs about the most important. With lyrics. Or without.

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Dirks, 'In Near Ruins: Cultural Theory in the End of the Century', in N. Dirks (ed.), *In Near Ruins: Cultural Theory in the End of the Century* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Sherry Ortner, 'Generation X: Anthropology in a Media-Saturated World', in G. Marcus (ed.), *Critical Anthropology Now: Unexpected Contexts, Shifting Constituencies, Changing Agendas* (Santa Fe, School of American Research Press, 1999), p. 57.

<sup>3</sup> See also Michael G. Kenny, 'A Place for Memory: The Interface Between Individual and Collective History', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 41, 3, 1999, pp. 420–437.

<sup>4</sup> There is an extensive body of literature on the role of narratives and social memory in identity production. For a useful and condensed discussion see, for example, Robert Franzosi, 'Narrative Analysis—Or Why (and how) Sociologists Should be Interested in Narrative', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24, 1998, pp. 517–554.

<sup>5</sup> The survey includes more questions; this article, being a part of a bigger project, deals with only some aspects revealed in my respondents' answers.

<sup>6</sup> Valentin Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. L. Matejka & I. R. Titunik (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1998 [1929]), p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Politics and Study of Discourse', in G. Burchell, C. Gordon & P. Miller (eds), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality: With Two Lectures By and Interview With Michel Foucault* (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 59.

<sup>8</sup> Foucault, 'Politics and Study ...', p. 58.

<sup>9</sup> Nina Naumova, 'Molchanie kak golos surovogo zhiznennogo opyta', in N. Naumova, *Retsidiviruyushchaya modernizatsiya v Rossii: beda, vina ili resurs chelovechestva* (Moscow, Editorial URSS, 1999), pp. 143, 151.

<sup>10</sup> Naumova, 'Molchanie kak golos ...', p. 162.

<sup>11</sup> See Ellen Camaghan, 'Alienation, Apathy, or Ambivalence? "Don't Knows" and Democracy in Russia', *Slavic Review*, 55, 2, 1996, pp. 361–362.

<sup>12</sup> Aleksandr Kotov, 'Molchanie devyatnadsatiletnykh', *Novaya Rossiya*, 1999, 3, p. 123; for responses to this article see *Novaya Rossiya*, 2000, 1, p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York, Aldine Publishing Company, 1968), p. 103.

<sup>14</sup> It was Paul Broca (1824–80), a French anthropologist and surgeon, the founder of *La Revue d'Anthropologie* and of the Anthropological Society of Paris, who in 1861 presented a paper to the Société d'Anthropologie in which, based on post mortem medical analysis and clinical observation, he demonstrated that a severe loss of speech correlates with lesion in the middle part of the frontal lobe of the left cerebral hemisphere (see John Forrester, *Language and the Origin of Psychoanalysis* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 15.) Thanks to Broca's discovery, the problem of speech disorder—aphasia—was for a long time firmly connected with the problem of brain lesion. Or, to use a different language, the lack of expression/understanding was displaced onto the issue of localisation of physiological damage. For more discussion see, e.g. Alexander Luria, *Traumatic Aphasia: Its Syndromes, Psychology and Treatment* (The Hague and Paris, Mouton, 1970), pp. 17–26.

<sup>15</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms. Volume Three: The Phenomenology of Knowledge*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1957), p. 215.

<sup>16</sup> Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, p. 202.

<sup>17</sup> Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, p. 205.

<sup>18</sup> Voloshinov, *Marxism ...*, p. 15.

<sup>19</sup> Roman Jakobson, *Studies on Child Language and Aphasia* (The Hague and Paris, Mouton, 1971), p. 13.

<sup>20</sup> Jakobson, *Studies on Child Language ...*, p. 31.

<sup>21</sup> Roman Jakobson, *Child Language, Aphasia, and Phonological Universals* (The Hague and Paris, Mouton, 1968), p. 15.

<sup>22</sup> To indicate the gender of my respondents I will use M and F for male and female respectively; the number indicates the age of the respondent. Since all my respondents were either senior high school students (*starsheklassniki*) or first and second-year students at the local universities, for the sake of brevity I will use the term 'students' when referring to them all.

<sup>23</sup> In her study of self-identification of *Rossiyan*e, the Russian scholar Natal'ya Tikhonova points to a similar tendency: the young post-Soviet generation typically does not choose new models of civic self-identification instead of the old ones but rather tends to refuse any type of civic self-identification altogether. See Natal'ya Tikhonova, 'Samoidentifikatsiya Rossiyan i ee dinamika', *Obshchestvennye nauki i sovremennost'*, 1999, 4, p. 11.

<sup>24</sup> Dar'ya Korsunskaya, 'S gimnom vas, dorie tovarishchi!', *Vremya MN*, 11 March 1999.

<sup>25</sup> Andrei Sinyavsky, *The Russian Intelligentsia*, trans. Lynn Visson (New York, Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 75.

<sup>26</sup> Vladimir Kolesov, *Russkaya rech': vchera, segodnya, zavtra* (St Peterburg, IUNA, 1998), p. 210.

<sup>27</sup> Zinaida Sikevich, a sociologist from St Petersburg, in her study of popular symbolic representation of past and present, has pointed out that the current situation does not provide people with any 'basic' sign that could have epitomised the changes: '... if in the respondents' view about the past it was the [Communist] party that cemented with its activity all events of public and private life, then the current situation in Russia is more chaotic and internally contradicting: is it at all accidental that among the first four most frequent symbols are two 'positive' (freedom and democracy) and two 'negative' (unemployment and the Chechen conflict)?'. See Zinaida Sikevich, '“Obraz” proshlogo i nastoyashchego v simvolicheskom soznanii Rossiyan', *Sotsiologicheskoe issledovaniya*, 1999, 1, p. 88.

<sup>28</sup> As quoted in Jakobson, *Studies on Child Language ...*, p. 63.

<sup>29</sup> See Jakobson, *Studies on Child Language ...*, p. 63.

<sup>30</sup> Henry Head, *Aphasia and Kindred Disorders of Speech*, Vol. 1–2 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1926), Vol. 1, pp. 211–212.

<sup>31</sup> Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 15 (my italics).

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Michael Urban's discussion of Igor Chubais's attempt to devise his own model of Russian national idea: Michael Urban, 'Remythologising the Russian State', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 50, 6, 1998, p. 976.

<sup>33</sup> Popular culture, certainly, is the best example of this form of cultural decontextualisation (and commercial displacement). Thus in 1997–99 the NTV channel produced three New Year Shows, 'Old Songs About the Most Important', in which Russian pop-singers performed hits of the Soviet period. The incredible market popularity of this project forced many popular singers to come up with their own incarnations of old songs—for example, the CD *Raskinulos' more shiroko*, where such rock-stars of late socialism as Boris Grebenshikov, Vyacheslav Butusov, Yurii Shevchuk and others sing the classics of the 1930s; see also Andrei Makarevich's CD album *Pesni, kotorye ya lublyu*, and the singer Professor Lebedynsky (e.g. his album *Hello/Goodbye* where he appropriates some Soviet songs, albeit within different musical frames). Public anniversaries and anniversaries of public figures also contributed to this process of cultural restoration; for two different examples see the project *Desyat' pesen o Moskve* (old songs about Moscow performed by today's singers) issued to celebrate the 850th anniversary of Moscow in 1997 and 'Surpriz ot Alli Pugachevoi' (old hits of the most successful Soviet pop-diva are sung by today's performers) commemorating Pugacheva's 50th birthday in 1997.

<sup>34</sup> For ideological aspects of post-Soviet memoirs see Michael Ellman & Vladimir Kontorovich, 'The Collapse of the Soviet System and the Memoir Literature', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 49, 2, 1997, pp. 259–279; on commodification of Soviet symbols see Theresa Sabonis-Chafee, 'Communism as Kitsch: Soviet Symbols in Post-Soviet Society' and Alexei Yurchak, 'Gagarin and the Rave Kids: Transforming Power, Identity, and Aesthetics in Post-Soviet Nightlife', in Adele M. Barker (ed.),

*Consuming Russia: Popular Culture, Sex, and Society Since Gorbachev* (London and Durham, Duke University Press, 1999); Serge Schmemmann, 'As Time Goes By Russians Savor the Soviet Era', *The New York Times*, 16 July 1999, p. A4.

<sup>35</sup> It is remarkable that even the most interesting linguistic product of the 1990s—the so-called 'new journalism' represented by such newspapers as *Nezavisimaya gazeta* (during 1990–92), *Segodnya* (1993–96), *Russkii Telegraf* (1997–98) and, to a degree, by the magazine *Itogi* (since 1996) was formed as a conscious reaction to 'the Soviet consciousness of the 1970s as reflected in language', as Oleg Proskurin puts it (Oleg Proskurin, 'Maksim Sokolov: genezis i funktsii 'Zabavnogo Sloga'', *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 2000, 41, p. 299). Speaking about Maksim Sokolov, the brightest representative, if not the originator, of the 'new journalism style', Proskurin indicates that Sokolov's ironic play with the signifiers of the previous periods is efficient as long as the *original* context of these signifiers is still known. Without this knowledge, the subversive message of the style and the stylist is lost for the reader (see Proskurin, 'Maksim Sokolov ...', p. 304).

<sup>36</sup> Jakobson, *Studies on Child Language ...*, p. 39.

<sup>37</sup> Roman Jakobson, 'Toward a linguistic classification of aphasic impairments', in Harold Goodglass & Sheila Blumstein (eds), *Psycholinguistics and Aphasia* (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. 33–37.

<sup>38</sup> Jacques Lacan, 'The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud', in Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London and New York, W. W. Norton, 1957), p. 156.

<sup>39</sup> Lacan, 'The agency of the letter ...', p. 157.

<sup>40</sup> E.g. Jakobson, *Studies on Child Language ...*

<sup>41</sup> Jakobson, *Studies on Child Language ...*, p. 59.

<sup>42</sup> Jakobson, *Studies on Child Language ...*, p. 72.

<sup>43</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin & Pavel Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*, trans. by Albert Wehrle (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 14.

<sup>44</sup> Jakobson, *Studies on Child Language ...*, pps. 83–90.

<sup>45</sup> Jakobson, *Studies on Child Language ...*, p. 100.

<sup>46</sup> In his show Parfenov uses the computer technique first employed in *Forrest Gump* (there is a direct reference to the film in the show, too) to demonstrate images of himself assisting Khrushchev, kissing Marilyn Monroe, etc.

<sup>47</sup> Andrei Fesenko & Tat'yana Fesenko, *Russkii yazyk pri Sovetakh* (New York, Rausen Bros, 1955), p. 100.

<sup>48</sup> Nikolai Marr, *Yazyk i myshlenie* (Letchworth, Prideaux Press, 1977), p. 6.

<sup>49</sup> Afanasii Selishchev, *Yazyk revolyutsionnoi epokhi: iz nabludenií nad russkim yazykom poslednikh let: 1917–1926* (Moscow, Rabotnik Prosveshcheniya, 1928), p. 23. For an interpretation of examples of more refined versions of linguistic creativity in Soviet literature of the post-revolutionary period see, for example, Dar'ya Moskovskaya, 'V poiskakh slova: "Strannaya Proza" 20–30kh godov', *Voprosy literatury*, 1999, 6, pp. 31–65.

<sup>50</sup> See, e.g. L. Krysin, 'Russkii literaturnyi yazyk na rubezhe vekov', *Russkaya rech'*, 2000, 1, p. 29; also V. G. Kostomarov, 'Bez Russkogo yazyka u nas net budushchego', *Russkaya rech'*, 1999, 4, pp. 3–10.

<sup>51</sup> Vladimir Shaposhnikov, *Russkaya rech' 1990-kh. Sovremennaya Rossiya v yazykovom izobrazhenii* (Moscow, MALP, 1998), pp. 104, 144. Of course, in itself the euphemistic nature of public discourse in Russia could hardly be seen as distinctively *post-Soviet*. What does make it distinctive, though, is the fact of close correlation between linguistic import on the one hand and increasingly euphemistic language as a result of this import, on the other. Discussing the impact of the active borrowing of foreign terms, Shaposhnikov makes an interesting observation—despite a *massive* presence in Russian stores of new food products, the 'food section' of popular Russian language hardly demonstrates any significant changes—the new foreign food items have not been discursively digested by an average Russian speaker (Shaposhnikov, *Russkaya rech' 1990-kh ...*, p. 104).

<sup>52</sup> 1519 people from different parts of Russia were polled; respondents were offered nine options (e.g. 'Russia should be the state of Russian people' or 'Russia should be a state whose strength and power is ensured by the increasing well-being of Russian people'). See Tat'yana Kutkovets & Igor Klyamkin, 'Russkie idei', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 16 January 1997.

<sup>53</sup> Kutkovets & Klyamkin, 'Russkie idei ...'.

<sup>54</sup> Milada Anna Vachudova & Tim Snyder, 'Are Transitions Transitory? Two Types of Political Changes in Eastern Europe since 1989', *East European Politics and Societies*, 11, 1, 1997, p. 1.

<sup>55</sup> Phillippe C. Schmitter & Terry Lynn Karl, 'The Conceptual Travels of Transitologists and Consolidologists: How Far to the East Should We Attempt to Go?', *Slavic Review*, 53, 1, 1994, pp.

173–185; Valerie Bunce, 'Should transitologists be grounded?', *Slavic Review*, 54, 1, 1995, pp 111–127.

<sup>56</sup> E.g. Schmitter & Karl, 'The Conceptual Travels of Transitologists ...'; Philippe C. Schmitter & Terry Lynn Karl, 'From an Iron Curtain to a Paper Curtain: Grounding Transitologists or Students of Postcommunism?' *Slavic Review*, 54, 4, 1995, pp. 965–978.

<sup>57</sup> Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World* (Cambridge and New York, Harper & Row, 1987).

<sup>58</sup> Grigorii Yavlinsky, the leader of the Russian liberal Yabloko party, summarises it pretty well by saying:

The most important message of NATO expansion for Russians ... is that the political leaders of Western Europe and the United States do not believe that Russia can become a real Western-style democracy within the next decade or so. In their eyes, Russia, because of its history, is a second-class democracy. Perhaps this is understandable. The combination of Chechnya ..., the collapse of the Russian army, failed economic reforms, semi-criminal government, and El'tsin's unpredictability has given the West enough justification to conclude that Russia, for the time being, cannot be a dependable partner and that NATO expansion should therefore continue. Ironically, if the United States explained its push for NATO expansion in these terms to Russian people, they would at least understand why the alliance is expanding and respect the West for its honesty. But when the West says to Russians: 'Russian democracy is fine, Russian markets are fine, Russia's relationship with the West is fine, and therefore NATO is expanding to Russia's borders', the logic does not work, leaving the Russian people and their leaders bewildered and bitter (Grigory Yavlinsky, 'Russia's Phony Capitalism', *Foreign Affairs*, 77, 3, May/June 1998, p. 77).

<sup>59</sup> Certainly, there is a bigger question of whether the metaphor of returning to Europe was an appropriate rhetorical tool for Russia at all. As Ralf Dahrendorf reminded us recently, the very idea of Central (and to a large extent—Eastern) Europe was conceived of as an antithesis to the Soviet empire, *perestroika* notwithstanding (Ralph Dahrendorf, *After 1989: Morals, Revolution and Civil Society* (London, Macmillan, 1997), p. 161). Moreover, the recent festivities on the occasion of NATO's enlargement have been rhetorically framed in the same way. As the Hungarian Foreign Minister, Janos Martonyi, put it, 'it has been our manifest destiny to rejoin those with whom we share the same values, interests and goals'. When asked by *The New York Times* correspondent whether Russia could be seen as joining this group, Martonyi replied: 'Silence is your answer' (*The New York Times*, 13 March 1999). Besides its political importance, the example has a substantial rhetorical significance too: by the end of the 1990s inside as well as outside Russia the metaphor of 'returning to Europe' had lost its ability to symbolise the process of Russia's transition.

<sup>60</sup> Mikhail Gorbachev, *The Search for a New Beginning: Developing a New Civilization* (San Francisco, Harper, 1995). See also Tat'yana Alekseeva, 'Posle Kholodnoi Voiny: poisk novoi paradigmy', *Pro et Contra*, 2, 1, 1997, pp 54–66. For a different version of the same rhetorical trope see Alexandr Galkin, 'On the Threshold of a New Start: Reflections on the fate of the Socialist Idea', *Sociological Research*, 38, 2, 1999, pp. 19–37. For a comprehensive attempt to question the applicability of the model of transition in Russian conditions see Andrei Melville, 'Russia in the 1990s: Democratization, Postcommunism, or Something Else?' *Demokratizatsiya*, 7, 2, 1999, pp. 165–187. Western literature on the problematics of transition is abundant; for a recent review of transition studies see Steven Solnick, 'Russia's "Transition": Is Democracy Delayed Democracy Denied?', *Social Research*, 66, 3, 1999, pp. 789–823; see also the special issue of *Slavic Review*, 58, 4, 1999.

<sup>61</sup> See for example David S. Mason & Svetlana Sidorenko-Stephenson, 'Public Opinion and the 1996 Elections in Russia: Nostalgic and Statist, Yet Pro-market and Pro-Yeltsin', *Slavic Review*, 56, 4, 1997, pp. 698–717.

<sup>62</sup> Vsevolod Vilchek, the chief analyst of an independent Russian TV channel (NTV), recently admitted that during the election days in the summer of 1996 an 'atmosphere of anxiety' was consciously created by specially designed TV programming. Any film that could possibly produce in viewers an effect of optimistic identification with the Soviet past (the factor on which the Communists built their campaign) was put off, while films producing a negative identification with the past were given the green light (Tat'yana Koshkareva & Rustam Narzikulov, 'Vsevolod Vilchek: chem dal'she ot Moskvyy tem bolshe auditoriya u ORT i menshe u NTV', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 23 October 1998).

<sup>63</sup> *Kommersant-Daily*, 8 August 1997.

<sup>64</sup> Michael Urban, 'The Politics of Identity in Russia's Postcommunist Transition: The Nation Against Itself', *Slavic Review*, 54, 3, 1994, p. 737.

<sup>65</sup> Urban, 'The Politics of Identity ...', p. 737, (my italics).

<sup>66</sup> For a discussion of the cognitive vacuum see German Diligensky, 'Individualizm staryi i novyi: lichnost' v postsovetovskom sotsiume', *Polis*, 1999, 3, p. 8. For more on this see V. Pantin & V. Lapkin, 'Tsenostnyye orientatsii Rossiyan v 1990-e gody', *Pro et Contra*, 4, 2, 1999. As the authors indicate, '... Russian society, its elite and the major mass of citizens are experiencing a state of uncertainty and having to choose among different possibilities of the evolution of values' (p. 157). Mark Umov, President of the Fund of Analytical Programmes 'Expertise', summarises the tendency clearly by stating that 'there are no basic, dominant values in society' (*Moskovskie novosti*, 14–20 March 2000, p. 15).

<sup>67</sup> In January 1997 the newspaper announced the mid-term winner of the competition for the best national idea (unfortunately I was unable to locate the finalist). Guri Sudakov, 56, a member of the Vologda regional Legislative Council won 5 million rubles (\$853) for the line: 'The salutary moral principle for Russians is the concern for the Fatherland and the feeling of citizenship' (*The Moscow Times*, 17 January 1997). For a summary of the discussion see G. Osipov, V. Levashov & V. Lokosova (eds), *Rossiya: vyzovy vremeni i puti reformirovaniya. Sotsial'naya i sotsial'no-politicheskaya situatsiya v Rossii v 1997 godu* (Moscow, Rossiiskaya Akademiya Nauk, 1998), pp. 121–122.

<sup>68</sup> See Georgii Satarov (ed.), *Rossiya v poiskakh idei: analiz pressy* (Moscow, 1997).

<sup>69</sup> As Satarov himself put it, 'world and historical experience has shown that it is not just national idea that is important, but the process of finding it too' (*The Moscow Times*, 12 August 1997).

<sup>70</sup> Natal'ya Ivanova, 'Nastol'yashchee: retro na (post)sovetskom teelekrane', *Znaniya*, 1997, 9, pp. 204–211. For an English version of this article see Natalya Ivanova, 'No(w)stalgia: Retro on the (post) Soviet Screen', *The Harriman Review*, 12, 2–3, Winter 1999/2000, pp. 25–32.

<sup>71</sup> Ivanova, 'Nastol'yashchee ...', p. 205.

<sup>72</sup> See also Mason & Sidorenko-Stephenson, 'Public Opinion ...'; Michael Urban, 'Stages of Political Identity Formation in Late Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia', in Victoria E. Bonnell (ed), *Identities in Transition: Eastern Europe and Russia After the Collapse of Communism* (Berkeley, Slavic and East European Center, University of California), pp. 140–154; Elena Bashkirova & Yurii Fedorov, 'Labirint Posttotalitarnogo Soznaniya', *Pro et Contra*, 4, 2, 1999, p. 142.

<sup>73</sup> Marilyn Ivy observes a structurally similar tendency in contemporary Japan where 'nostalgia as style' aims at the third post-war generation. As she puts it, 'the use of 1920s typography and design or the actual reproduction of period pieces evokes, however, now a historical period but a free-floating past. Stripped of any tangible historical context, these cited moments of style operate as novel elements in the image repertoire of hip Japan' (Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 56).

<sup>74</sup> See my article 'Kolichestvo Stilya: vobrazhaemo e potreblenie v usloviyakh simvolicheskogo Defitsita', *Sotsiologicheski i zhurnal*, 1999, 3/4. See also Serguei Oushakine, 'The Quantity of Style: Imaginary Consumption in the New Russia', *Theory, Culture, and Society* (17, 5, 2000).

<sup>75</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1993).

<sup>76</sup> Richard Sakwa, 'Subjectivity, Politics and Order in Russian Evolution', *Slavic Review*, 54, 4, 1995, p. 964.

<sup>77</sup> Urban, 'The Politics of Identity ...', p. 737.

<sup>78</sup> Michael Burawoy & Katherine Verdery, 'Introduction', in M. Burawoy & K. Verdery, *Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Postsocialist World* (New York and Oxford, Rowman & Littlefield, 1999).

<sup>79</sup> Sakwa, 'Subjectivity, Politics and Order ...', p. 965, (my italics).

<sup>80</sup> Arnold van Gennep. *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom & Gabrielle L. Caffee (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1909).

<sup>81</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process ...*

<sup>82</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process ...*, p. 95.

<sup>83</sup> van Gennep as quoted in Turner, *The Ritual Process ...*, p. 94.

<sup>84</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process ...*, p. 94.

<sup>85</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process ...*, pp. 94–95.

<sup>86</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process ...*, p. 95.

<sup>87</sup> Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 229.

<sup>88</sup> I.e. 'with a set of templates or models which are, at one level, periodical reclassification of reality and and man's relationship to society, nature and culture, [while at the other,] they incite men to action as well as to thought' (Turner, *The Ritual Process ...*, pp. 128–129).

<sup>89</sup> Victor Turner, *Schism and Continuity in an African Society: A Study of Ndembu Village Life* (Oxford: Berg, 1957), pp. 91, 232.

<sup>90</sup> Turner, *Schism and Continuity*, pp. 160–62.

- <sup>91</sup> Turner, *Schism and Continuity*, p. 231.
- <sup>92</sup> Turner, *Schism and Continuity*, p. 232.
- <sup>93</sup> Donald W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (New York and London, Routledge, 1997), p. 13.
- <sup>94</sup> Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p. 3.
- <sup>95</sup> Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p. 2.
- <sup>96</sup> Naomi Quinn, 'The Cultural Basis of Metaphor', in James W. Fernandez (ed.), *Beyond Metaphor: The Theory of Tropes in Anthropology* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 57.
- <sup>97</sup> Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p. 14.
- <sup>98</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process* ..., p. 112.
- <sup>99</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process* ..., p. 128.
- <sup>100</sup> Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p. 14.
- <sup>101</sup> Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p. 2.
- <sup>102</sup> Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1971), p. 174.
- <sup>103</sup> Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy* ..., p. 28.
- <sup>104</sup> Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy* ..., p. 12.
- <sup>105</sup> Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy* ..., p. 12.
- <sup>106</sup> Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy* ..., p. 29.