

Review

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After Newspeak: Language Culture and Politics in Russia from Gorbachev to Putin. By Michael S. Gorham. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014. xviii, 234 pp. Appendix, Bibliography, Index, \$75.00, hard bound. \$24.95, paper.

There are very few books analyzing post-Soviet culture from the perspective of politics and vice versa. Michael Gorham's second monograph belongs to this rare and highly valuable breed, as it embraces the period from Mikhail Gorbachev's glasnost to the anti-Putin protests of 2011–12. *After Newspeak: Language Culture and Politics in Russia from Gorbachev to Putin* focuses on the interaction between the politics of language and the language of politics. Basing his argument on the premise that "language at once helps shape and is shaped by culture and society" (5), in the first half of his work Gorham traces how the changing political reality of perestroika and the 1990s affected "language ideologies" and shaped new "language economics." In the book's second half, he examines how rhetorical practices and language gestures have contributed to Vladimir Putin's politics and public image in the 2000s and 2010s.

Published in 2014, Gorham's monograph, naturally, could not reflect the events of the last two years, from the Pussy Riot trial to the annexation of Crimea and Russia-sponsored conflict in eastern Ukraine. However, today's perception of *After Newspeak* inevitably includes the imprint of these events, which, thus, somewhat changes the reading of the book. One cannot help seeking in it explanations for the radical turn toward neoconservatism and neoimperialism that has defined not only Russian politics but all of Russian society's modus vivendi in 2014. Surprisingly, despite the obvious anachronism, Gorham's book does provide some highly insightful answers to today's questions. *After Newspeak* offers tangible evidence and sensible commentary, suggesting that the rhetorical and symbolic shifts in the culture of the 2000s prepared the political turn of 2014: Russian society as a whole and, first and foremost, the intelligentsia, with its cult of norms and traditions, laid the foundation for Putin's neoconservative internal agenda and neoimperialist international politics.

In the introduction, Gorham presents the concept of language ideology, the main tool of his further analysis. He defines language ideologies as diverse and mutable constructs, which are, nevertheless,

deeply rooted, less susceptible to transformation as a result of certain historical, social, or political forces. In order to better understand the nature and dynamics of a language culture, we have to consider economies of language that give value, symbolic or more concrete, to different ways of speaking and writing and thus influence the degree of power and authority they enjoy at a given point in time. The value of certain language ideology or style will vary depending on a variety of market forces—again, both symbolic and more concrete. (16)

Language ideologies may gravitate toward either essentialist or instrumental poles. According to Gorham, "The essentialist view treats language as more of an abstract ideal (*langue*) that reflects innate features of 'Russianness,' whereas the instrumental view regards it more as a more concrete tool or weapon (*parole*)" (12–13). "Revolutionary times," he notes, "ascribe greater import to language's instrumental capacity to break down and transform reality, whereas periods of restoration place more value in language's immutable, institutional function as a marker of identity and therefore stabilizing force, and regard with suspicion more discrete manifestations of verbal imperfection, resistance, or excess" (13).

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In general, this approach is valid and proves to be quite fruitful in application to Soviet and post-Soviet cultural processes, as demonstrated by the chapters that follow. In the first, “The Soviet Legacy: From Political to Cultural Correctness,” Gorham discusses a transition from the operational language ideologies of the 1920s to Stalinist essentialist concepts. The former are exemplified by Grigorii Vinokur’s, Valentin Voloshinov’s (or Mikhail Bakhtin hiding under his name), and Nikolai Marr’s interpretations of language as a constructed phenomenon, a “social fact” with an emphasis on “the individual speaker as a creative force in the process of language production” (29). The latter tendency arose in the 1930s, relying “for its symbolic authority on the parallel discourse of culturedness, or *kul’turnost’*, and norms,” and later, in the 1940s, quite naturally, moved toward “essentialist notions of language as an innate marker of Russian national identity” (29–31). Such prominent linguists as Lev Shcherba and Dmitrii Ushakov, such writers as Maksim Gor’kii, and, certainly, Iosif Stalin, as the author of *Marxism and the Issues of Linguistics*, appear as proponents of this language ideology, which emerged as a structural double of the political ideology. Gorham aptly notes that “the discourse of *kul’tura rechi* described language more in terms of essence and form, while Soviet political discourse underscored its instrumental function,” but that “both relied on the notion of centralized authority—either cultural or political—that reinforced established hierarchies in both realms” (46).

In fact, this doubling manifested long-standing Russian tradition. As Irina Sandomirskaia demonstrates in her 2001 book, *Kniga o Rodine: Opyt analiza diskursivnykh praktik* (The Book about the Motherland: Analyzing Discursive Practices), the homogeneity of linguistic and nationalist concepts harkens back to Admiral Aleksandr Shishkov’s infamous theories of language. As Sandomirskaia shows, Shishkov (1754–1841), the state secretary and the minister of education, as well as creator of the censorship regulations and the president of the Russian Academy, was the first to construct a paradigmatic quasi-religious discourse of the motherland that included the sacralization of Russian nature and representation of the country as a family, predicated on the foreign military threat and an apocalyptic vision of history. He used conservative language reform as the major vehicle of this discourse, since language was interpreted as a “political icon” manifesting national identity and connecting a subject with the sanctity of the motherland. Not only did Shishkov become “the architect of the [discourse on the] motherland as a doctrine of pious statist patriotism,” but while performing his architecture through the proposed language reform, he also offered a prototypical example of “an ideologue’s interference in the process of creating the symbolic community. This interference does not react to the official authorities’ legitimization but precedes it” (Sandomirskaia, 168, 163). This preceding of the political course by proposed language reforms is clearly echoed in post-Soviet culture, with one significant difference: Shishkov’s language conservatism has resonated with romantic inventions of national identity; in post-Soviet culture, however, similar practices, first and foremost, reflect the reinvention(s) of the intelligentsia.

Although *After Newspeak* does not address this issue directly, Gorham’s discussion of language ideologies in the Stalin period sheds new light on the Soviet (and even post-Soviet) intelligentsia’s symbolic capital. On the one hand, the emphasis on stable, conservative language norms resonated with the “stabilization” of Stalin’s regime (Gorham persuasively reveals a similar logic behind essentialist language ideologies of the 2000s) and presented the latter as the heir to the age-old cultural traditions of imperial Russia. On the other hand, the protection of language norms and their promotion contributed to the newly refurbished symbolic capital of the Soviet intelligentsia, redesigned as faithful supporters of Stalinism. If the postwar period evidenced the conversion of purist language ideology into a vital component of the Soviet nationalist, chauvinistic cultural agenda, in the 1960s this essentialist language

ideology became adopted by the so-called Russian Party (to cite Nikolai Mitrokhin's concept), an informal movement uniting intelligentsia and apparatchiks. This movement ideologically challenged the Soviet version of Marxism as too cosmopolitan, promoting nationalist ideas instead. Such writers and critics as Leonid Leonov, Vladimir Soloukhin, Mikhail Lobanov, Viktor Chalmaev, Vadim Kozhinov, and, yes, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn effectively employed this very discourse as a double-edged sword against two opponents: the liberal, that is, "cosmopolitan" and western-oriented intelligentsia, and the Soviet authorities, represented by "the greatest threat to the linguistic well-being of the nation—the horribly clichéd and wooden language of the Soviet language of state" (43). Gorham argues that Soviet bureaucratic lingo was not addressed well enough by the speech-culture movement. Nevertheless, *kantseliarit* remained at the center of language criticism in the 1960s–70s. Curiously enough, a hatred of this kind of language practice united nationalists and such liberals as, for example, Kornei Chukovskii, whose 1962 book *Zhivoi kak zhizn'*, actually introduced the word *kantseliarit* while fighting against the normative approach to language.

Symptomatically, the symbolic capital based on the association of the intelligentsia with the protection of language norms continues to generate profits even today, and not only in nationalist circles. Pointing out the misuse of language and mistakes in grammar and spelling constitutes one of the most popular rhetorical gestures employed by the Russian Internet's liberals against their opponents. Symptomatically, after the singer Elena Vaenga's angry and blatantly illiterate posts against Pussy Riot, strictly following linguistic norms has become a part of liberal rather than conservative Facebook etiquette.

In general, the question of the sociocultural forces behind competing language ideologies represents one of the most intriguing aspects of *After Newspeak*. When discussing the opposing language ideologies of Gorbachev's glasnost period, Gorham isolates those defended by the party apparatchiks, on the one hand, and the liberally oriented intelligentsia, on the other (chapter 2). He explains the essentialist turn in language ideologies of the 2000s in chapter 4 by the fact that "a growing number of Russians grew disillusioned by the unrealized promises of new capitalist or Western identities and bought into the growing drumbeat of 'linguistic lawlessness' from the language guardians" (194). Yet, it is not entirely clear whether it is the "drumbeat of 'linguistic lawlessness'" created by nationalist academics and writers that inspires "the masses" or if members of the intelligentsia express a general cultural sentiment shared by many outside academe through their linguistic critique. It also remains unclear which sociocultural forces stand behind the influx of loan words and the popularity of obscenities in the public language culture of the 1990s (addressed in chapter 3) and who benefits from the discursive turn manifested by Internet-based social media in the 2010s (chapter 6).

At the same time, even without an overt discussion of the connections between a given language ideology and certain sociocultural groups, Gorham's monograph offers a sensible instrument for understanding the association between language and politics in post-Soviet Russia. His argument invariably demonstrates that the conceptualization of language in post-Soviet Russia is always political. It does not matter if the debate is about the use of *mat* or the gender of coffee, the destiny of the ever-needed and ever-failing reform of spelling or the pronoun associated with Ukraine ("в Украине" versus "на Украине")—the clash of language ideologies serves as a litmus test for political choices and contains scenarios for future political choices. The recent bans on profanity in the public sphere passed by the Duma which appeared soon after homophobic laws against "the propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations" and the interdiction against the adoption of Russian children by foreigners, albeit situated beyond the chronological framework of Gorham's book,

add new inflections to its main theme, testifying to the inseparability rather than just the congruence of post-Soviet politics and language politics.

As the most illuminating example of this thesis, *After Newspeak* clearly demonstrates that the concept of *russskii mir* (the Russian world), one of the major rhetorical supports for Russia's aggression against Ukraine, was born more than a decade earlier in debates about language, while the eponymous political agency was created specifically for the promotion of the Russian language abroad. "At least by the 1990s the term *russskii mir* has become a mantle for the 'patriotic' red-brown opposition, a convenient marker of that which had been demolished by the collapse of the Soviet Union, the rise of the Western-oriented reform policies, or some other moral or spiritual calamity." Back then, this concept already included the interpretation of "the traditional values of the Russian World" as "the foundation of the state ideology" (158). It had also presupposed a neoimperialist (disguised as postcolonial) "concern" about "ethnic Russians living in the 'near-abroad' who . . . were in need of defending because of their own post-Soviet status of oppressed language minority" (161).

Why does the language debate immediately become political in post-Soviet Russia? Gorham's monograph implicitly suggests that the Russian revolutions and restorations "from Gorbachev to Putin" were predominantly rhetorical processes, wherein linguistic and symbolic shifts became primal driving forces for political transformations while economic and social changes may or may not have followed. This hypothesis sounds especially relevant in the context of chapter 2, "Glasnost Unleashed: Language Ideologies in the Gorbachev Revolution." While tracing the genealogy of the word *glasnost* (apparently first introduced by the uber-conservative Faddei Bulgarin), Gorham reveals the tension between two meanings of the word: "state-sanctioned access to information and outright 'freedom of speech'" (54), which has defined the political debate of the perestroika period. Gorham demonstrates what it meant in practice by analyzing the minutes of the Nineteenth Party Conference, in 1987, and the First Congress of People's Deputies, in 1989. The main conflict unfolds between "the deed-oriented glasnost of the apparatchiks" (59) and "the word-oriented glasnost of the democrats" (63). One may expect that the promoters of political change would deemphasize "the importance of speeches and talk, underscoring, instead, the need for action as a means of bringing about (primarily internal) change" (57). Yet, Gorham demonstrates that this was, on the contrary, a conservative rhetoric. Perestroika appears as the revolution of words, since "the 'democrats'—the more liberal members of the media, intelligentsia, and party itself—viewed glasnost primarily as the basic right to speak one's mind, publicly and freely, and thus accentuated the 'word' as a means of bringing about change—potentially of a revolutionary sort" (59). Anybody who remembers that time would immediately recall the excitement, bordering on euphoria, caused only by words—words banned and publically used for the first time, invented and restored in meaning, spoken and written. The most powerful performative symbols of perestroika were all speech acts: from Boris El'tsin marching with his party card in his raised hand toward the podium of the Nineteenth Party Conference, in defiance of the ban on his public speeches, to Gorbachev interrupting Andrei Sakharov at the First Congress of People's Deputies (a scene Gorham analyzes in detail).

The first chapter ends with a conclusion about the "rhetorical impotence of the apparatus" (72): while the democratic movement had been bringing new discourses and new cultural rhetorics, "the apparatchiks, in contrast, lacked a compelling story to tell or case to make, and, by and large, a compelling language in which to do so" (74). All the following chapters of *After Newspeak* read as the story of the defeat of perestroika's victors and revanche of apparatchiks and their heirs, who won the rhetorical war in the 2010s.

Chapter 3, “Economies of Profanity: Free Speech and Varieties of Language Degradation,” discusses the language culture of the 1990s and focuses on two main issues: the “great influx of loanwords” and “the rise in prominence of profanity, or *mat*” (80–81). Although I also consider these two processes as defining for the period, *After Newspeak*, for the sake of streamlining, somewhat reduces the multi-dimensional nature of these phenomena. For example, the author emphasizes the “cathartic power of *mat*” (81), seeing it as a form of cultural therapy “rooted in the mythology of the outlaw and romanticism in general” (83). This is indeed true and resonates with many positive cultural reassessments of *mat* not only by the notorious Vladimir Zhirinovskii (cited in the book) but also by Andrei Bitov and Joseph Brodsky (not mentioned), among many others. Yet, the association of *mat* with violence cannot be overlooked either, and the increasing presence of obscenities in the cultural sphere, while obviously liberating, at the same time reflected the rhetorical normalization of violence in the cultural atmosphere of the 1990s. Similarly, *After Newspeak* interprets loanwords as “capable of infusing contemporary language culture with a degree of aggression and even violence that easily turned them into a source of metalinguistic resentment and attack” (89). According to Gorham, loanwords acquired “the status of verbal scapegoats” (94), since they embodied “a new barbarity that most Russians had come to resent, if not loathe” (89). This argument is supported by the analysis of words like *killer* and *voucher* as standing for new, highly unpleasant concepts in the social life of the period. But what about the large number of loanwords associated with computers and the Internet (*vinchester*, *zabutit*, *apgreid*, *brauzer*, *router*) or business sphere (*marketing*, *provider*, *franshiza*, *merzha*)? They rarely function as “verbal scapegoats”; rather, their sociocultural role is different—they signify a cultural divide between those who remained in the “Soviet” past and those who have embraced the new era and new opportunities. Perhaps, this divide could also shed light on the political splits in 2011–12 and especially 2014–15, when neither generation nor education, neither class nor regional criteria, could help explain who protested and who supported Putin’s regime and its policies?

In chapter 4, “In Defense of the National Tongue: Guardians, Legislators, and Monitors of the Norm,” Gorham analyzes essentialist and, eventually, nationalist ideologies of language that became popular in the 2000s, uniting academics, writers, and a large number of “ordinary people.” Lamentations about the linguistic catastrophe and the degradation of the Russian language, as Gorham demonstrates, “served thinly veiled arguments about the state and fate of Russian national identity itself” (99). *After Newspeak* isolates three of the more prominent discourses of purism, which were “particularly emblematic of the shift from instrumental to organic metaphors of language—‘language identity’ (*iazykovaia lichnost*), ‘language ecology’ (*ekologiia iazyka*), and ‘linguistic taste’ (*iazykovoii vkus*)—and all three recognize a direct link between language and national identity” (99–100). Launched by such linguists as Iurii Karaulov, Lev Skvortsov, Vitalii Kostomarov, and Vladimir Kolesov, this movement received energetic support from ultranationalist writers Vasilii Belov, Valentin Rasputin, Vladimir Krupin, Valerii Ganichev, and their monopolized organs, *The Literary Gazette* and *Literary Russia*. Although Gorham does not always explicate the membership of the most energetic proponents of linguistic purism to the aforementioned Russian Party, his conclusive observations in this chapter are apt and accurate: if dictionaries of *mat* proliferated in the 1990s, “the 2000s witnessed an emerging cottage industry of popular scholarly works dedicated to identifying and parsing the ‘constants’ of Russian language and/or national identity—a kind of representative ‘lexicon of Russianness’ that, taken together, projected a certain ideology or clusters of ideological language” (111–12). This is how the steel was tempered and the

rhetorical foundation for the aggressive “Russian World” of 2014 was laid. No wonder that Putin always demonstrated his support for this intellectual movement: “In January 2000, Putin revived the Russian Language Council, this time giving it greater financial and symbolic support than it had enjoyed under Yeltsin” (114), “signed a law making Cyrillic the official alphabet of the Russian Federation” in 2002 (115), and created the Russian World Foundation. Furthermore, following the logic of language being politics, essentialist and nationalist interpretations of language, the plea for strict norms and restrictions in language use, immediately translates into the concept of the “national leader” as not only a political but also a cultural and linguistic authority: “The popularizing trend corresponded to the emergence in the political realm of a leader who also came to be known for populist, even vulgar, rhetorical turns, a speaking style that in its own way brought a startling modicum of stability, if not normalization, to the language culture of the day” (130).

Hence, chapter 5, “Taking the Offensive: Language Culture and Policy under Putin” examines “Putin’s verbal practices on a variety of levels” (131). In Gorham’s assessment, Putin’s “most memorable speech moments, his astute manipulation of language technologies, and his support for promoting Russian internationally as tool for ‘soft power’ all helped project a general sense of stability in contemporary language culture allowing Putin to garner a degree of rhetorical authority that Russian leaders have not enjoyed since the early days of perestroika” (112). Gorham defines Putin’s language style (and his implicit language ideology) as the speech of “a polished technocrat” spiced by “special effects,” like his famous phrase about the Chechen terrorists whom Putin promised to “waste in the outhouse once and for all [*zamochit’ v sortire*],” or his suggestion that western supporters of tolerance toward Islam get their circumcisions in Russia so that nothing would grow back, or his greeting to the president of Israel, accused of raping ten women (“What a mighty guy! Raped ten women! . . . He surprised us all! We are all envious”).

Gorham argues that despite the obvious “vulgarization” of language, these special effects have solidified Putin’s popularity among various strata of Russian population: “Putin reflected rhetorically the general sense of desperation that had come to dominate Russian society, while at once demonstrating a willingness to use it to do battle against the very sources seen as the prime perpetrators of corruption and instability. Whether or not this language was part of Putin’s personal vocabulary from the start, by using it he tapped into an ever-rising flood of verbal discontent among the ‘common people,’ and elevated that common boorishness to a level of prominence hitherto unknown” (135–36). I believe that the issue of violence, somewhat downplayed in *After Newspeak*, can also be factored into the interpretation of this phenomenon. By using these highly offensive and linguistically aggressive forms, Putin performatively articulated what might be called the “re-nationalization” of violence. If in the 1990s, the state’s monopoly on violence was “privatized” by multiple social and political actors—first and foremost, by criminal/business groups—in the 2000s, Putin rhetorically returned this monopoly to the state. The use of criminally colored language clearly pointed to the previous “owners” of violent rhetoric (and practices). In combination with the stylistic neutrality of the main body of Putin’s speech—free from the regional phonetic peculiarities for which Gorbachev and El’tsin were famous—these “populist” features did indeed contribute to Putin’s cultural role as the “modicum of stability, if not normalization, to the language culture of the day.”

Furthermore, Gorham demonstrates how this role has served as the foundation for Putin’s rhetorical performances of power during his “Direct Lines”—the scenes of Putin in dialogue with the nation, highly staged yet imitating spontaneity: “The projection of a tsar-like image is one of the more potent functions of the ‘Direct Line’ and is far more pronounced here than in any of the other mediated genres that con-

tribute to Putin's public persona" (153). Putin's performative speech represents him as a benefactor constructing "rhetorically a national and presidential image of continuity between the glory of the past, stability of the present, and promises of the future" (156). As a result, Putin's rhetorical skills define his political agenda: "Notions of 'normalization' in both language and politics served institutional needs for reestablishing authority, but also found a great resonance with the population at large" (165).

Gorham suggests that this position was shaken by the protests of 2011–12, when, during an event organized in lieu of the "Direct Line," Putin, at that moment the prime minister and incoming president, for the first time since the early 2000s "projected an image not of a benevolent tsar but rather of a defensive and defiant politician. Attempts at populist jokes and tough-talking turns of phrase, the standard fare of his earlier meetings, seemed to fall flat" (167). It is not Gorham's fault that this interpretation seems overly optimistic from today's perspective. It is instructive, however, that Putin has radically strengthened his power and his popularity by translating the semantics of the rhetorical position established in the 2000s into direct political action of the 2010s; he obviously has converted the language "form" of essentialist rhetoric into the political "content" of neoimperialist aggression.

The book's final chapter, "'Cyber Curtain' or Glasnost 2.0? Strategies for Web-Based Communication in the New Medium Age," raises the question of the new rhetorics and ideologies of language that might be able to confront and undermine Putin's cultural-political regime. This question sounds even more pressing today than it did in 2012, during the anti-Putin protests. Gorham suggests that the Russian Internet and especially such social media as LiveJournal and Facebook have provided for "a new era of glasnost": "It had originated in the relatively confined world of the Internet, but with the help of new media technologies had spilled out into the streets and then onto national television to seriously challenge Putin's long-vaunted veneer of order and stability" (170). Despite focusing on Aleksei Naval'nii's RosPil website and illuminating radical differences between the Russian and American versions of LiveJournal and Facebook, *After Newspeak* does not discuss the new language and political strategies elaborated by the Russian Internet community in much detail. Certainly, this problem deserves special study, and Gorham, as a coeditor (along with Ingunn Lunde and Martin Paulsen) of the 2014 volume *Digital Russia: The Language, Culture, and Politics of New Media Communication*, has already started this much-needed research. Yet, thinking of the congruence between post-Soviet language ideologies and politics of the not-so-distant future, one may mark as significant such widespread rhetorical practices in the Russian Internet as crowdfunding and the signing of petitions of support or protest (sometimes effective); the public exposure and shaming of former friends (e.g., on Dissernet); direct political reactions to intentional or unconscious reflexes of hostile (conservative, xenophobic, nationalist) ideology in private posts; the broad use of visual forms of critique and satire ("demotivators," "photo toads"); the coexistence of personal political analysis with reposts from various media sources, foreign and domestic alike; and, eventually, the general transformation of Facebook into a sort of "anti-TV," or, more specifically, into a radical alternative to the Russian state-television channels and their ceaseless hateful propaganda.

Gorham concludes his book on a cautiously optimistic note: on the one hand, "while the opposition may enjoy a stronger rhetorical presence, ruling authorities, both nationally and regionally, have considerable means by which to apply economic and legal pressure to "regulate" that presence—and are hastening to do so" (197). On the other, "the struggle for linguistic purity, just as the struggle for political authority, therefore, will always be tempered not only by contrary forces of degradation, innovation, resistance, and reform, but also by a fundamental gap between linguistic ideals and everyday practice. And it is in this gap that the shifting trends of continuity

and change in language culture take form” (198). Both of these theses remain true today, despite radical political changes. This proves that *After Newspeak* has not lost its relevance in the “post-Crimea” context. Rather, now more than ever, it is obvious that Michael Gorham has written a highly necessary book establishing a new approach to post-Soviet politics through the study of competition between language ideologies and rhetorical models warring for political prominence. Each of these models, as Gorham’s analysis shows, is pregnant with future politics—one just has to start paying attention. *After Newspeak* is a truly pioneering book that exemplifies this approach in the most appealing and thought-provoking way. Written in a highly accessible manner and rich with unique factual material, it should become an essential part of diverse courses on post-Soviet culture, language, and politics on both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

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