

**Self-Representation and Argumentation in
Letters from the Soviet Audience
to the Mass Media
1988-1989**

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Abstract

This research focusses on the ways that self-representations and the usage of personal experience in letters to the mass media in the late 1980s in the Soviet Union. My research question centers around how people perceived the changes which happened around them and how they tried to build their argumentation concerning those events in the Soviet public sphere. I focus on letters, which written to foreign media, including *Radio Liberty* and also on letters to the Soviet media, with prominent focus on *Nauka i Zhizn'*. The Socialist system started to collapse and one of the most basic problems was the loss of credibility of the Communist Party and of Marxism in general. People felt that the system was discredited, but felt its stability until the times when it started to criticize itself. The perception toward this collapse of ideology appeared in letters and ways of self-representation is the main question of my research.

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Introduction

The winds of change had blown in the Soviet Union in the second half of the 1980s and had brought many new phenomenas to public life, which had either never happened before or were forgotten by most citizens. Words such as "perestroika", "liberalization", "democratization" and "glasnost" appeared on the pages of newspapers, and were often pronounced on the radio and were used by official figures to declare a new stage in Soviet history. These new words were not senseless statements made by Party leaders who wanted to adopt some new policies, but instead influenced the everyday life of Soviet citizens and were actively discussed in society.

The situation changed rapidly and confused many people both inside the Soviet Union and abroad. In several years, films and books, which were prohibited before, were allowed; the ideas of market mechanisms in the economy, forgotten in the 1920s, were recalled to help stagnated manufacturing; ideas and topics, which were tabooed or spoken only in one official way started to be rethought. All this could be enjoyed as well as being frightening because people did not know what would happen next and when this liberalization of public life would end.

Most researchers who study the period of Perestroika usually pay attention to the upper level of these changes: to the policies themselves, to the economic conditions or to national relations, which, according to their view, can explain the reasons behind the Soviet Union's collapse. They realize that all the changes, which happened at the times, influenced the lives of millions of Soviet citizens and could evoke different reflections and attitudes. But unfortunately, a lack of scholars take it into account the perception of ordinary people to these changes.

In this thesis I try to research the history of Perestroika from below. I analyze the

notion of the “self”, which Soviet citizens demonstrated through the medium of letters in the public sphere and, to some extent, their attitudes toward the changes that happened and influenced their lives. I claim that these changes confused people because of their accustomed practices, their system of values and the Soviet ideology no longer worked in the way in had before. They expressed this confusion through their reflection on different events writing letters to the mass media.

The main research question analyses whether there were differences in the ways of self-representation and in ways of using personal experience when people wrote to Soviet media and when they wrote abroad. I investigate these differences in letters which people wrote to radio “Liberty” and to journal *Nauka i Zhizn*’. On one hand, radio “Liberty” had never been under the control or censorship of the Soviet authorities and broadcasted more or less liberal ideas in their programs. On the other hand, one of the most popular non-fictional journal *Nauka i zhizn*’ (Science and Life) had been under Soviet censorship until late 1980s. This comparison can help to understand if there was any common notion of the “self”, which had been internalized by Soviet citizens during previous periods in Soviet history, whereby the authoritative discourse formed the Soviet subject according to this main communistic ideology.

In a broader sense, this research can contribute to the understanding of the reasons behind the Soviet collapse, because history is made not only by main political actors, and transition is not based only on huge economic processes. The lives of ordinary people, their views, beliefs, and everyday culture, which is not fully influenced by the authorities, are also important for historical development, especially during the periods of rapid changes. If no one supported these ideas, and if no one stopped believing in the official ideology, if the rituals, values, and practices, produced by the system did not change, the Soviet Union would not have collapsed, or, at least, it would have happened another way.

Chapter 1. Theoretical and Historical Context of Perestroika

1.1. Theoretical Framework

Researchers usually tend to pay attention to the grand processes which happened in the political, economic or social spheres of the Soviet Union right before its collapse. These processes include crises, people's strikes and the spread of anti-socialist ideas as well actions taken by the authorities to prevent the destruction. Most of them try to explain those events from above, looking to the political¹ or economic² spheres, describing processes and decisions made by the Communist Party and Soviet authorities³. Unfortunately, few scholars try to analyze how all these changes appeared on the level of everyday life and influenced lives of ordinary people, how they perceived it and how they expressed their opinions, especially after the Glasnost policy adoption in 1987, when the censorship was lightened.

The events of the late 1980s and early 1990s appeared on the level of everyday life and put ordinary citizens of former socialist states into the situation of political, economic and social crisis when experiences and practices which had been a dominant feature in the previous years, and the future had become unpredictable. This situation mobilized people, and made them worry about the future of their countries and their lives. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe⁴ claim that the epistemological deadlock of Marxism, which became obvious in the 1980s, made researchers, authorities and even ordinary citizens of socialist states look for new ways of building societies. The last group, the ordinary citizens, were in the most interesting position because people still did not have access to real decision-making. However, those people tried to express their disagreement with the situation.

¹ Gelman V. Out of the Frying Pan into the Fire? Post-Soviet Regime Changes in Comparative Perspective. *International Political Science Review*, 2008, vol.29, N2, P.157-180.

² Gaidar Y. *Collapse of an Empire: Lessons for Modern Russia*. Brookings Institution Press, 2007.

³ Kotkin S. *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2008.

⁴ Laclau E., Mouffe Ch. *Hegemony and socialistic strategy*. London: Verso, 1992.

Researchers argue that in these kinds of situations, when accustomed social structures, rituals, language and way of life, in general, break down, people usually feel this epistemological crisis. However, they often cannot understand that the breakdown of culture is the main problem, which destroys other spheres of life. Ordinary people in this situation and start to complain about everyday problems: social inequality, ecological and economic problems and political instability. In other words, the collapse of every regime, especially a totalitarian or authoritarian one, is at the same time a destruction of official ideology, language and official discourse, which had been promoted by the authorities in previous years in their attempt to spread the "right worldview". This old worldview no longer had ideological feeding because of the epistemological crisis of the Marxist theory itself, and people felt it mostly unconsciously, but expressed their disagreement with actual processes and events, which took place in the world around them and could easily be perceived.

I claim that the main reason for the collapse of the Soviet Union was the result of change in mentality which destroyed the belief in socialistic ideology. This idea was first contributed by Leon Aron in his article, "Everything You Think You Know about the Collapse of the Soviet Union is Wrong"⁵, where he also argued that Soviet citizens had lived through more traumatic and tragic periods and yet the State had continued to exist. He argues that in the late 1980s people stopped believing in socialist ideology, but does not provide any clear arguments to support his idea.

In research about late socialism in the Soviet Union, A.Yurchak⁶ in his book *Everything Was Forever Until it Was No More*, suggests the term "authoritative discourse" to describe the official language, rituals, slogans, symbols, and structures, which were used by

⁵ Aron L. Everything you think you know about the collapse of the Soviet Union is wrong. URL: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/06/20/everything-you-think-you-know-about-the-collapse-of-the-soviet-union-iswrong/>

⁶ Yurchak A. Everything was forever until it was no more. The last Soviet generation. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to promote the ideology and to spread its influence. He argues that this discourse started to lose its influence as well as its role as "the only one" during 1970s-1980s. The official language, rituals and symbols became senseless to people, especially for the younger cohort, which he called the last Soviet generation. However, as it is clear from the title of the book, he claims that none of them really believed that the existence of Soviet State would end so soon.

The problem of an official language, discourse and the promotion of official ideology to the masses, or, in other words, the problem of power relations, should also be discussed. Michael Foucault⁷ in his works describes citizens as subjects who are created and influenced by the discourses which are produced by authorities and society, and who re-translate them. Applicable to totalitarian and authoritarian states, which control public life through the use of censorship, there usually exists only one official dominant discourse which disseminates the official ideology.

In my research, the ideology which is discussed in detail is Leninism, which was perceived as equal to Marxism and Communism, and the authorities were usually represented by the Communist Party, which was the only official Party permitted. In this regime, subjects could only speak this official language, especially publicly. Stephen Kotkin⁸ called this phenomenon "speaking Bolshevik" when he considered the language which was used by workers in Magnitogorsk, a city in the Soviet Union, in the 1930s. Igal Halfin⁹ and Jochen Hellbeck¹⁰ further developed Kotkin's ideas in their works and showed the categories, and values, which Soviet subjects used to describe themselves, and the discourse which influenced them or, rather, dominated their opinion.

⁷ Foucault M. The history of sexuality. V. 1-3. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

⁸ Kotkin S. Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as civilization. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

⁹ Halfin I. Red autobiographies. University of Washington: Distributed by University of Washington Press, 2011.

¹⁰ Hellbeck J. Revolution on my mind. Writing a diary under Stalin. Cambridge, mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006.

I have chosen to elaborate on the discussion regarding Marxism, Leninism, and Communism, and sometimes even Bolshevism. Yurchak in the article "The Canon and the Mushroom"¹¹ focuses on the functioning of the image of Lenin and the perception of Leninism. He claimed that the destruction of authoritative discourse was closely connected with the meaninglessness of Leninism among Soviet citizens. The main argument of Yurchak is based on the fact that all Soviet leaders after Lenin portrayed themselves as "true Leninists" and accused their previous predecessors of deviation from "real Leninism" and declared their aim to return to pure Leninism. But most of them, especially in the second half of the twentieth century, had not even read the whole of Lenin's works and had a very superficial knowledge about his real ideas. For them, as for many Soviet citizens, these ideas were just compilation of highly promoted slogans.

The same situation was experienced by Soviet university students, who had to make notes with quotations from Lenin's during compulsory courses of Scientific Communism, which were taught for all students, regardless of their major.¹² However, these quotations had already been underlined in the books by previous generations of students and the easiest way to pass the course was just to copy them. Such practices were senseless for most students and as a result they did not fully comprehend Lenin's ideas and, in addition, they had not read Lenin's works.

The course was called "Scientific Communism", but students had to make notes mostly from Lenin's works, and the general name of the ideology studied was Marxism-Leninism. Since almost no one read Lenin and Marx, a lack of people could really understand the differences or, even, perceive them as important. That is why Leninism, Communism, and Marxism were perceived as symmetrical. The term "Bolshevism" was used in a different way,

¹¹ Yurchak A. The canon and the mushroom: Lenin, Sacredness, and Soviet collapse," 2017 / Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory 7 (2): 165–198.

¹² Ibid. P. 174.

as compared to Leninism, Communism and Marxism, because it underlined the ideology of the 1920s-1930s but for some people who had lived in that times, it could also be considered the same as the other three terms.¹³

The CPSU and its leaders were always considered to be the main experts in the field of social progress which gave them the “right” to rule. In the 1920s-1930s the Communist Party was called "the Avant-garde of the society" (*Avangard obshchestva*) and was to lead society on the way to bright future. In the late Soviet period one of the slogans hold "The Party is our ruler" (*Partia – nash rulevoi*). But since Communism was scientific, it meant that only experts in the field, i.e. members of the Communist Party really knew how to build their “bright future”, according to the theory. These Communist Party members people were the experts in Communist ideology and that was how the expert knowledge used. In the work of M.Foucault "Intellectuals and power"¹⁴, this theory of expert knowledge was developed further.

For many Soviet people, as demonstrated by Yurchak, ideology and its scientific notion lost its meaning many years before the collapse. However, in the late 1980s, the Party continued to promote it in order to create an image that at least its members were still mobilized with these ideas, creating the notion that the system was still stable. In the late 1980s, after the adoption of Glasnost policy, many articles which criticized the Communist ideology or, at least, its usage in the Soviet Union, appeared in mass media and were also written by members of the Party. Party members themselves admitted the mistakes, which were made by their predecessors and by themselves as well, and demonstrated that the system

¹³ My emphasis on Scientific Communism as an example is used to show how Marxism, Leninism and Communism had been proven already through extensive research, which helps to explain why so many people believed in its mission purpose. The title "Scientific Communism" is also not a neutral one, and promotes the idea that Communism had a strong scientific background. It was not the only manifestation of the idea that future social progress could be researched. This scientific nature of the ideology made it extremely difficult to argue against it because science, even social, always means some objective truth.

¹⁴ Foucault M, Deleuze G. Intellectuals and power. A conversation between Michael Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. URL: https://monoskop.org/images/8/8a/Foucault_Michel_1972_1977_Intellectuals_and_Power.pdf

needed to be changed to turn it back to the “true” Leninist ideas. This showed that even Party members did not believe in the ideology and that there was no one clear explanation of what would happen next. With increasing social instability, the Party began to lose its credibility among the population, and people lost their sense of stability with the system and became afraid of their future because there was no clear view of what would happen. This is in stark contrast to the constancy of the previous periods.

1.2. Sources for Studying Personal Views in the Late 1980s

To research people’s self-representations as well as their perception of everyday life in this particular historical moment, some personal documents are needed, because only in these documents can the real voice of the author be heard. Due to the specifics of this researched period it is hard to find diaries and memoirs as of these kinds of sources remain unpublished. The preservation and shortage archiving of these kinds of materials by organization in the late Perestroika period is extremely limited. Due to this, I have chosen to analyze a different type of source, namely letters to mass media. mass media in my research includes letters to radio “Liberty” and to *Nauka i Zhizn’*.

This type of source is difficult to use as writing letters to a newspaper or radio infers to the inclusion of the author into the public discussion: his or her letter has the potential to be published on the pages of a newspaper or read aloud during a radio show. This means that these authors usually censor themselves and sometimes use very specific, "official" language. However, in this research, this “self-censorship” plays an important role, because the lightening of censorship resulted in new discourses which were to appear in the letters even if authors used them unconsciously.

The question of the source sample is also very important for this research due to the huge number of letters to the mass media. All of these letters were written to different editors

who worked in different countries, under different conditions (both historical and current), and who had their specific audiences as well as raising several discussible topics. There is a strong need to clarify the sample and source specifics first to prove the relevance of comparison.

The first group of sources is letters to *Nauka i Zhizn'* (Science and Life), which was one of the most popular Soviet so-called *nauchno-populiarnii* (non-fictional) journals. Difficult conceptions and theories from different fields of sciences and arts were explained there in a very simple way so that every reader, regardless of his or her education, could understand the main ideas. In reference to the main audience of this journal, it is often thought that the journal was read mostly by the intelligentsia, however, as far as I have noticed during the analysis of letters which were received by the editors, a wide range of different groups of people expressed their opinion concerning articles which were published. This audience included students, pensioners, poorly educated workers, candidates and doctors of science.

All of these people shared their opinions about a series of articles called *Istoki Stalinizma* ("The beginnings of Stalinism"), which were published in *Nauka i zhizn'* in 1988-1989. These letters to *Nauka i Zhizn'* are part of the archival collection of the Center for Independent Social Research in Irkutsk and were collected by Mikhail Rozhanskii¹⁵ and group of students in 1988-1989. At that time, they were interested in the process of rethinking history and, due to a lack of space for storing documents, they collected only letters which referred to history. The collection of letters about *Istoki Stalinizma* contains sixty-seven letters and all of them were used or, at least, analyzed for this research.

The second group of sources, which I used, is a collection of letters to the office of radio "Liberty". This radio station had never been located in Soviet Union and, as a result, had never been under the Soviet censorship. The only form of "censorship" which radio

¹⁵ The Head of Center of Independent Social Research in Irkutsk, candidate of philosophy, at that times worked in Irkutsk State University.

“Liberty” experienced was the KGB attempts to protect the Soviet area from its broadcasting. However, people listened to radio «Liberty» even with these restrictions, because it provided an alternative point of view and content, which was unavailable in the Soviet Union. radio “Liberty’s” programs included liturgies religious programs, as well as information concerning human rights and political prisoning in USSR, public reading of hardly accessible Samizdat or Tamizdat novels and discussions with writers.

This description of these programs can also draw a picture of the radio’s audiences – mainly dissidents and other people, who did not believe in the Soviet ideology. Probably, this audience depiction is true if we refer only to the period before 1987-1988, when the broadcasting was blocked by the KGB. However, after an analysis of the letters to radio “Liberty” it is clear that in 1989, when the KGB stopped their attempts to prevent the broadcasting to the Soviet area, there were those and strongly believed in the Soviet regime and perceived radio “Liberty” as a foe. According to the Soviet supporters, who also listened to radio “Liberty”, it wanted to destabilize the system with the help of USA Congress financial support.

The collection of letters from listeners to radio «Liberty» is now kept in the Open Society Archives in Budapest and contains around fifty boxes of letters for the years 1988-1992 years. In this research I only used letters, which were written in Russian and sent from the Soviet Union in 1989. The letters for other years were not used because this research is focusses only on Soviet responses in the years 1988-1989. The language and location were also chosen as to be as close as possible to the *Nauka i Zhizn*’. This sample helped to reduce the number of letters to a several hundred. The letter to radio “Liberty” contained references to many different topics and issues of which I focus predominantly on history and current affairs, as I did with *Nauka i Zhizn*’.¹⁶

¹⁶ Most of the readers wrote short letters, where they thanked the speakers and shared their suggestions,

1.3. The Role of the Mass Media in Public Relations in the Late Perestroika

During the long age of Soviet rule, the role of the mass media was determined and regularized. Radio, newspapers, journals, and, in the second half of the twentieth century, also television, were under the State control. Some samizdat media remained exceptions, but they cannot be considered fully as “mass” media: they were available for a very small group of people in large cities, were irregularly published and distributed and could be shut down at any moment. Other media were controlled by the authorities and were called “the official megaphone” (*rupor vlasi*). This “megaphone” played a very important role (and sometimes the most significant one) in the creation of public opinion. Soviet authorities, as well as creating policies, actively traced how their actions were reflected, and created the “right” opinion about them. Mass media, in this model of public relations, was the provider of ideology. It retranslated the authoritative discourse and was the mediator between the authorities and society. The media was not an independent actor.

It is important to talk about the role of mass media in general, regardless of the Soviet experience. The function of newspapers, journals, and radios are to encourage and mediate the spread of information concerning current events. Different types of media can decide for itself which kind of information should be transmitted to the public, or, in some cases like in the Soviet Union, the authorities can decide for them. In both cases of selection of information, only a small part of current events, the ones which are considered by the selector to be the most valuable, appear in public sphere. The value of the content is dictated by the preferences and worldview of editors or regulatory organizations.

comments or complaints concerning radio broadcasting politics. They also asked radio “Liberty” to send them a schedule of broadcasted programs. Many readers asked about more serious things: to help them to emigrate from the Soviet Union or for assistance to go abroad for a medical treatment. Many readers also wrote about religion and asked for Bibles. Only those letters sent to radio «Liberty», where authors wrote about the history of the Soviet Union and the current situation were considered in the research, in accordance with my *Nauka i Zhizn*’ research.

This theory was described by S.Hilgartner and Ch.Bosk and is known as the model of public arenas.¹⁷ Their theory which claims that the mass media forms so-called "public arenas" and provides a thematical platform for public discussion. By this I mean that the media chose which topics were to be discussed in the public field.. So, the mass media decides for itself which news will be delivered to the public and therefore discussed by citizens, and which information will not be presented and will remain unknown to the public. Of course, differences can appear not only in the content but also in the ways of its framing, in paradigms and ideological fulfilling of the materials. All of these frameworks form the public's picture of current events, of the value and importance of what happens though its representation in the media. This theory helps to explain why many letters which were sent to the mass media concerns a particular topic which is discussed by the media.

The connection between the mass media and the reader was not one-dimensional one in the Soviet Union: the letters were not simply sent to the media and forgotten. Letters and comments which people sent to different newspapers and radios were sometimes published there under different sections. Karnaukhov S. referenced the publication of letters, which were presented in different media: "In the Soviet period in every newspaper there were rubrics *On reader's letters* or *You have written to us*, where the letters about "certain disadvantages" or the letters about the latest enactments or decrees of party and government, written as on demand, were published"¹⁸. This shows that letters to mass media played a very interesting role and were used as a representation of public opinion. This opinion was always used to support politics or to criticize some of its aspects, but only slightly.

¹⁷ Hilgartner S., Bosk Ch.L. The Rise and Fall of Social Problems: A Public Arenas Model /*American Journal of Sociology*. Vol. 94, No. 1 (Jul., 1988), pp. 53-78.

¹⁸ Karnaukhov S. Mesto pamiati – sovetskaya derevnia // "Pis'ma ob istorii I dlia istorii". 1988-1990 gody/. edit. By M. Ia. Rozhanskii. Irkutsk, 2014. P. 84. [The place of memory – Soviet village / "Letters about history and for history". 1988-1990 years].

These implications, made by Karnaukhov are applicable only to the letters which were published. As it was already mentioned above, unpublished letters are more interesting because they contain much more information: despite the practice of editing before publication, these letters also sometimes contained other topics or reasons for writing, which can even be separated from the mass media activities. For instance, I. Utekhin, who analyzed complaints on housing problems in the 1960s, pointed out that many people who sent those letters did not send them directly to the authorities, but instead sent them to different media outlets and then the editors sent them to town's executive committees.¹⁹

All this means that the mass media did not hold any valuable political weight and were not even perceived as independent actors: only as a mediator between the people and the authorities. According to Sh. Fitzpatrick who studied the practices of letter writing in the 1930s, this splicing of authorities and mass media allows to equalize these letters and consider all of them as letters to authorities, because for these two recipients there was only one actor, only one power, which could make decisions and produce some ideology.²⁰

These different requests through the medium of letter writing to the media show that in the case of radio “Liberty”, when people asked for help with emigration or for travel for medical treatment or to send them Bibles, it was not a unique case and can be explained by an accustomed practice which can also be applied to the Soviet media. In this case people did not know where to write to and who could help them with their problems and, since radio “Liberty” spent a lot of time broadcasting about emigration, human rights, and religion, since the access to information about all these topics was difficult for most Soviet citizens who had a lack of friends or relatives abroad, it was the easiest way for them to share their problems.

¹⁹ Utekhin I. Iz nabliudenii i poetikoi zhaloby // Studia Ethnologica. The works of the department of anthropology. SPb, 2004. P. 7. [From the observation of complaint's poetics] URL: https://eu.spb.ru/images/et_dep/sborniki/trudy2/ethn_305.pdf.

²⁰ Fitzpatrick S. Signals from below: Soviet Letters of Denunciation of the 1930s / The Journal of Modern History, Vol. 68, № 4, 1996. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2946722>.

However, with the emergence of Glasnost, the situation changed. Official censorship was canceled, the authoritative discourse was not meaningful anymore, plural opinions were allowed, and so as a result the mass media began to promote their own views on current events. In this sense, we can say that at the end of the 1980s, the mass media became an independent actor of public life and could broadcast the discourse how they wanted in order to make an impact on the worldview and perspective of the readers or listeners, as well as actively participating in public discussion and involving new participants.

This transition did not go unnoticed: the circulation of journals and newspapers increased, as well as the number of radio listeners, and the number of letters, addressed to the editors' offices also increased. S.Kotkin in his book *Armageddon Averted the Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000*, characterized the changes which happened, "the weekly newspaper *Arguments and Facts*, launched in the late 1970s, achieved a circulation above thirty million during Perestroika –the most of any other paper in the world – and its editors recieved 5000 to 7000 letters per day."²¹

The aim of letter writing also changed. Before Perestroika it was a support of politics which encouraged communication, but by the end of the 1980s, letters could contain a critique of the authorities, "during Perestroika the reasons to write changed: letters, which criticize the editor's policy, authors of articles, appeared, and despite all these they were published in Party newspaper."²² This proves a change not only in the role of mass media but also in the perception of mass media. If earlier a critique of an editor's politics, especially concerning Party newspapers, could be perceived as a critique of power, in the late 1980s the mass media became an independent actor, and a participant of public discussion, and were responsible for the content and policies themselves. People realized that they had a right to criticize the mass

²¹ Kotkin S. *Armageddon Averted: the Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000*, Oxford University Press, 2001 P.68-69.

²² Karnaukhov S. Opt. cit. P.84.

media, which means that they began to see themselves as independent actors of public discussion too – as subjects, who can not only perceive the world around but also react, reflect and influence it somehow.

Chapter 2. Letters to *Nauka i zhizn'*: Self-Representations and Arguing with the Expert

Now the main theoretical framework has already been described, let us turn to the consideration of the sources themselves. In this chapter, letters from the audience to the journal *Nauka i zhizn'* will be analyzed from the positions of subjectivity and language which the authors used to represent themselves and build their argumentation regarding the history of Stalinism in general, but in special reference to the series of articles entitled, “Beginnings of Stalinism”²³ which were published in late 1988 and early 1989.

The collection of essays on the “Beginnings of Stalinism” were written by the doctor of philosophical sciences Aleksandr Tsipko. In the late 1980s he was the consultant of CPSU in socialist countries, and, in 1988-1990s, advisor of A.Yakovlev, who supervised the ideological sphere in the Soviet Union at that time. This means that Tsipko was not only an expert in the field of Soviet History and socialist ideology, but was also engaged with the authorities. Other professional historians and philosophers whose articles were published in journals and newspapers at that time were experts in their professional area but were separate from the authorities in an institutional sense. So, the opinion of Tsipko cannot be regarded only as his professional and individual view, but also as an opinion of the Communist Party.

Four articles were published by the advisor on ideology (Tsipko) in one of the most respectful and popular journals in the Soviet Union, and were titled: "About Zones, Closed for Thought"²⁴, “Reverses of “Pure Socialism”²⁵, “Egoism of Dreamers”²⁶ and, "No Need to be Afraid of the Truth"²⁷. These articles were not about Stalin and Stalinism itself, but showed

²³ Tsipko A. Beginning of Stalinism. *Nauka i zhizn'* [Science and Life]. ##11-12, 1988, ##1-2, 1989.

²⁴ Tsipko A. O zonah, zakrytyh dlia mysli / *Nauka i zhizn'*. Vol. 11. 11.1988. [About zones, closed for thought]

²⁵ Tsipko A. Prevratnosti „chistogo sotsializma“ / *Nauka i zhizn'*. Vol. 12. 12.1988. [Reverses of „pure socialism“]

²⁶ Tsipko A. Egoizm mechtatelei / *Nauka i zhizn'*. Vol. 1. 01.1989. [Egoism of dreamers]

²⁷ Tsipko A. Ne nado boiatsa pravda / *Nauka i zhizn'*. Vol. 02. 02.1989. [No need to be afraid of the truth]

historical conditions and theories, which had helped him to become a leader and initiate such policies. The author analyzed the main dogmas of Marxism and tried to demonstrate that during 1920s the main ideas had been wrongly reinterpreted— that is how the State of workers, which was to consider their happiness as a main value, became a totalitarian State with strong and powerful authoritative bodies, whose main aim was to show the whole world an “unusual” way of historical development, and which did not pay attention to the needs and living conditions of its citizens. The author described the main stages of the development of the Russian Revolutionary movement, and showed that terror was always considered a useful instrument in the pursuit to achieve the “bright future”, even before the increased popularity of Marxist ideas.

According to Tsipko, the future of the Marxist discourse was never connected to the present, it was something abstract, which had no base and was to be built. The number of victims of this future construction, or historical conditions and presuppositions, which were to be the base for this future, had never been considered by the leaders who wanted to destroy “all the world of violence and build a new world”. Tsipko showed that terror was predetermined by the development of the ideas of Russian “unique way” and “special future”, which were just romantic Utopian dreams and had no preconditions to the present authors who described it. However, this future had to be achieved and no one cared about the real situation in every historical moment, because the living conditions and other humanistic values were not important.

Many readers did not get the main point of the article and became confused with the changes of the image of Stalin. This topic acted as a trigger, and encouraged them to write letters because Stalin and his “bright” image were equal to the Past and the whole communistic ideas. Almost none of them tried to take part in the discussion about “the beginnings”, but all of them wrote about Stalinism, because it was the trigger – Tsipko had touched the topic

which was considered to be sacred for many readers. People tried to protect their ideals and their world view which were formed by the ideas which had been criticized in the article. They argued that happiness and living conditions of citizens were less important than the illusionary “bright future”, which should be achieved “with an empty stomach” or, to make it clearer, they did not pay attention to the question of living conditions – they protected their ideals of strong State, which was able to win in any war. In this sense, it is important to understand how people possessed themselves in this situation, when they needed to argue with a “specialist”, who had relevant education, was representative of authorities, but wrote inappropriate things, which were perceived as an attempt to destroy “sanctity”.

In this kind of complicated situation, where people were arguing with the First Adviser over ideology (Tsipko), the authors of these letters had to somehow present themselves into the discussion. Most of them had a lack of special or expert knowledge in the field of history, philosophy or Marxism, however, they wanted to share their own views and wanted their voices to be heard and considered seriously by the editors or even Tsipko himself. The authors of the letters needed to create a positive images of themselves in order to make their views more valuable. The question of how to attract the attention of the readers and persuade them that their views were important was often considered. Consciously or not, people tried to build an image of themselves in order to solve this problem and to be heard as they wanted to be. This was the first and, very probably, the most important reason why authors chose to include information regarding their personality, interests, life, and working experience into these letters, where this type data was not mandatory.

2.1. Strategies of Self-Representations in the Endings of the Letters

Typically, the format of a letter requires a signature at the end which sometimes also includes the first and family names of the author. In the 1980s, in the pre-digital era, an

address could also be inserted at the bottom of the letter for instances when an envelope was lost or if the author wanted to give the editor or author a chance to respond. The date could also be included there. These requirements are quite general for all letters, both formal and informal.

Formal correspondence with official institutions also requires the author to identify himself/herself, which should demonstrate the author's belonging to a relevant group. For instance, when one writes to a bank, one can represent himself/herself as a client, or as a bank worker (potential, current or former), as a State tax inspector, or as a manager of a partner company. When one writes a letter to a professor in a university, they can represent themselves as a student, colleague or journalist who ask for a professional opinion or comment on a situation. In the case of readers' letters to the mass media it is not quite so clear which personal data could be relevant and useful, and usually it depended on the topic of the article. To participate in the public discussion, one needs to prove their knowledge about the situation: one can be a witness or an expert in the question, but it should somehow be shown to make the letter and opinion valuable.

In the case of the letters to *Nauka I zhizn'*, it was not clear to the authors of the letters which were sent to the journal which part of their social background they could use to make their opinion more valuable. If an author had a lack of specialized knowledge, their self-representation within the letter format needed to show how their contribution to the public discussion was socially meaningful; in other words, they needed to show their personal relevance to the discussed question as well as their right to participate in public discussions. During my research, I established several thematic groups of personal information included at the endings of letters. These thematic groups included: work experience or occupation, age, war experience and Party experience. I have discussed each of these thematic groups individually for further analysis and clarity.

The first group, which includes information regarding work experience or occupation (both current and former), is the most prominent group among the others. The people who chose to use their occupation as their self-representation in the letters were not experts in the field about which they wrote and usually were not witnesses of those events. They provided some information which they considered to be socially valuable, as in the examples below:

“Tamara Feodorova, worker of community facilities service.”²⁸

“Teacher of biology, Shram Vasilii Emelianovich.”²⁹

“With respect, engineer V.V.Mishakov.”³⁰

“With respect to the journal Dm.Bezhisparov, biologist-hunter.”³¹

“L.Mikhailov, journalist.”³²

“Leading engineer of Donetsk special adjustment department of *Donetsugleavtomatika* trust, N.I.Kovalenko.”³³

The analysis of such endings helps to understand what was perceived to be valuable in people’s perceptions of themselves: people represented themselves in the category of labor, which was a strong priority in classical Marxism. Usage of this category of representation means that even in the late 1980s, work was still considered to be important and valuable to people, and it was still perceived as a basic social value or, at least, the authors thought that they had to represent themselves in this way in order to be taken seriously and so they believed that the idea of labor was still important in the public discourse.

The different types of professional employment which people mentioned are also important to the discussion surrounding self-representation. As it can be seen from the examples above, in every case, people referred to their ideologically “correct” professions for their choice of self-representation. The truthfulness or validity of this data is not put into question in this research because it is not important to the discussion of how people chose to represent

²⁸ [Family name unknown] T.F. Letter to *Nauka i Zhizn*’. 28.03.1989. CISR-Irkutsk. F.1 D.8.

²⁹ Shram V.E. Letter to *Nauka i Zhizn*’. 17.12.1989. CISR-Irkutsk. F.1 D.17.

³⁰ Mishakov V.V. Letter to *Nauka i Zhizn*’. 04.03.1989. CISR-Irkutsk. F.1 D.23.

³¹ Bezhisparov Dm. Letter to *Nauka i Zhizn*’. 07.04.1989. CISR-Irkutsk. F.1 D.28.

³² Mikhailov L. Letter to *Nauka i Zhizn*’. 23.04.1989. CISR-Irkutsk F.1 D.29.

³³ Kovalenko N.I. Letter to *Nauka i Zhizn*’. 29.12.1989. CISR-Irkutsk F.1 D.32.

themselves. It should be noted, however, that it was reasonably easy for authors to misrepresent themselves by changing their occupation if they thought their actual occupation could play a negative role, or even by lying and creating new personalities by using several professions which were perceived as socially acceptable and meaningful: doctor, engineer, worker e t.c.

None of the authors who wrote, for example, admitted that they were a cooperator or worked in a trade. These kinds of professions were usually perceived by people negatively because historically, during times of deficit in the Soviet Union, people who worked in these professions often had access to resources and, notoriously, did not redistribute them honestly. Authors frequently represented themselves as workers or as intelligentsia because these two groups were ideologically correct and respected: people from both groups worked hard for the “bright future” using their potential and commitment to the future and did not try to enlarge their profit at the expense of others. All these made them constituted the “correct” Soviet people: honest workers, whose opinion should be taken into account due to their contribution to the process of social development.

The same strategy worked with those authors who could no longer work: pensioners:

“Rozhkov Konstantin Efimovich, doctor-pensioner.”³⁴

“Antonov, pensioner.”³⁵

The social status of pensioners was not used solely to show the age of the authors and their life experience, but also to show their former engagement with labor, and their contribution to social development. Rozhkov, for example, mentioned his profession: he had worked as a doctor during his life, had saved lives and helped numerous people. He was not an expert in the fields of history or philosophy. However, his working experience allowed him to show the editor that he had made a huge contribution to social life and so his voice should be heard.

³⁴ Rozhkov K.E. Letter to *Nauka i Zhizn*. 13.03.1989. CISR-Irkutsk. F.1 D.42.

³⁵ Antonov A.S. Letter to *Nauka i Zhizn*. 29.11.1988. CISR-Irkutsk. F.1 D.45.

The word “pensioner” only increased the value of working experience as it pointed out the fact that Rozhkov had worked in his occupational field for a very long period of time. The same also works with Antonov, who preferred not to mention his profession, but also pointed that he was pensioner, and so it can be assumed that he also had worked for a long time.

The category of age was also used in the endings of letters, but with different purposes, depending on the age of the authors and their working experience:

“Stepanova Svetlana Gennadievna, 24 years old.”³⁶

“Liahov Viktor Kirillovich, 1927 y.b.”³⁷

“With respect, Stenents Vladimir, 30 years old, worker.”³⁸

“Pashaev Iusuf Suleimanovich, 1942 y.b., specialist in metalwork in Consumer Services Center.”³⁹

In the last two examples, people included their professional experience due to the reasons described above. Their ages were mentioned to emphasize the duration of the experience and to show the author's belonging to a particular generation, which could be considered to be important for the editor if he/she wanted to know the opinion of a cohort, and could also help to explain the views of different groups of authors, because ideas of de-Stalinization and Perestroika found different levels of support among people of different ages. The same is also relevant in the case of Stepanova who did not include her professional background but showed, through her inclusion of her age, her belonging to the category of “youth” who at that time mostly supported the contemporary political changes. In addition, Liahov chose to mention the year of his birth to emphasise his relevant life experience. Since he was old enough to live under Stalin and therefore remembered those times, his opinion could be considered as a witness'.

³⁶ Stepanova S.G. Letter to *Nauka i Zhizn'*. 04.04.1989. CISR-Irkutsk. F.1 D.4.

³⁷ Liakhov V.K. Letter to *Nauka i Zhizn'*. 1988. CISR-Irkutsk. F.1 D.67.

³⁸ Oranents V. Letter to *Nauka i Zhizn'*. 24.11.1988. CISR-Irkutsk. F.1 D.56.

³⁹ Pashaev Iu.S. Letter to *Nauka i Zhizn'*. 06.01.1989. CISR-Irkutsk. F.1 D.35.

The information about war experience was also shown by authors in an attempt to justify their opinion as witnesses’:

“Novgorodskii Leonid Andreevich, pensioner, participant of war.”⁴⁰

“Veteran of war, Chernogorskii Ivan Petrovich.”⁴¹

“With respect, the veteran of the Party, War and Military Forces. The former military political worker of Air Force. Fedunov Nikolai Maksimovich.”⁴²

Participation in Great Patriotic War was considered to be socially valuable and the experience of protecting the Motherland and a struggle with the enemy in order to ensure the safety of the “bright future” for the next generations was respectable, or at least, was publicly proclaimed as respectable. That is why an author’s choice to mention it was to show his contribution to society and underline his right to share his opinion. But the most important factor remained to be the appellation to age and experience: these people were witnesses of Stalin’s rule.

Witnesses of Stalin’s rule are the first group who related to the questions which were discussed. They did not have a special education or any specific knowledge to qualify them as equal participants of the debates surrounding Stalinism, but since they had experienced those times and could remember them, their opinion was taken into account. If they provided some autobiographical implications in the main body of their letters, they could be considered as a source of information about the 1930s-1950s and could be interesting for Tsipko or other experts. The experience of living through the Stalinist era gave them right to write, regardless of their professional background.

The next group of authors provided information concerning their membership in CPSU:

“V.S.Sokolov, 53 years, CPSU member, engineer.”⁴³

⁴⁰ Novgorodskii L.A. Letter to *Nauka i Zhizn*’. 22.11.1989. CISR-Irkutsk. F.1 D.57.

⁴¹ Chernogorskii A.P. Letter to *Nauka i Zhizn*’. 02.03.1989. CISR-Irkutsk. F.1 D.11.

⁴² Fedunov N.M. Letter to *Nauka i Zhizn*’. 27.03.1989. CISR-Irkutsk. F.1 D.39.

⁴³ Sokolov V.S. Letter to *Nauka i Zhizn*’. 23.02.1989. CISR-Irkutsk. F.1 D.7.

“Katser Mikh.Sergeevich, 1906 y.b., Veteran of the Great Patriotic War and CPSU, doctor of arts, professor.”⁴⁴

Using this strategy, authors tried to demonstrate their involvement in the political community. They also were neither historians nor philosophers nor social scientists but instead belonged to the group of experts in another way. CPSU, as it was described above, pretended to be a group of the most conscious Communists, who knew the dogmas better than others. Communism itself was a theory which was presented as a scientific one. And so people who represented themselves through the CPSU could have a lack of specific academic background in the social sciences, but because they knew the main paradigm better than others, they had the ability to use this privileged position to make their opinion more important and more valuable.

These views were not homogeneous and authors had different opinions regardless of the same theoretical base which formed it. Some of them even thought that articles like Tsipko's could destroy the state because there no longer existed only one right opinion. Others tended to think that exactly this kind of “pluralism” in views toward Soviet history was an important step to the democratization and reformation of socialism. But, ironically, both groups used their Party experience to show that they knew how everything would be.

The ending of a formal letter should always include some relevant information concerning the author's relation to the recipient and his/her belonging to a target group. These affiliations are more or less obvious especially in the case of different institutions. However, if one writes a letter of response to the mass media and wants to either criticize or support the article, one needs to define which information would be relevant and should be included into the ending of the letter.

⁴⁴ Katser M.S. Letter to *Nauka i Zhizn'*. 16.02.1989. CISR-Irkutsk. F.1 D.14.

In letters to *Nauka i Zhizn'*, where people had to argue with the philosopher (the expert in the field) and with a representative of authorities (as he was perceived that way), the question of how one could prove one's right to write as well as making one's own opinion more valuable was tricky. Those who had neither a specialized education, knowledge or party experience, nor were witnesses of the described events, used their occupation. Labour was respectful and socially valuable in the Soviet Union, at least in the official discourse. And so people tried to show their contribution to the Soviet Union's social development using the categories which seemed the most appropriate and important. An honest person had chosen to work honestly and faithfully, and that was reason enough to respect them and their opinion.

The second strategy which was used by authors was to include a note about war experience or age. These people still did not have special knowledge in history or philosophy, but were witnesses of the events which were being discussed, remembered them and demonstrated their right to speak about de-Stalinization, using their personal experience and memories. War experience was mentioned there to emphasize the author's contribution to the victory and the development of Soviet Union as well as to underline their right to write about their remembered events.

Some of the authors also included their Party experience into the endings of their letters. They pretended to represent themselves as experts in the field of social development. They did not have a special academic background in relevant spheres, but since Communism was scientific, the Communist Party members were also presented as a group of experts in Marxism, who know these dogmas better than others. That gave these authors the right to act within the role of an expert and to criticize the author.

2.2. Ways of Personal Experience Usage for Argumentation

Now the strategies which were used by authors to prove their right to write have been described, let us turn to a consideration of the methods of argumentation which were presented in the main bodies of letters. Authors often did not have the specialist knowledge to participate in an academic discussion but still wanted to share their opinions about Stalin. The topic was very important for them because it symptomatized the destruction of the Soviet system, which took place in the late 1980s and concerned current events during that period.

In general, all letters can be divided into two groups: responses of those who supported Tsipko and letters from those who argued against his views. However, people could agree with the general idea of the articles that Stalinist politics were repressive, but frequently had another opinion about the more specific details like the personal characteristics of the despot, his particular actions and so on. There were even those who strongly criticized Tsipko because his accusations were not strong enough and he drew the too bright image of Stalin in his articles. Others criticized his views in general and tried to protect their positive views towards Stalin.

All this can be put down to the lack of credibility which expert knowledge suffered from in the Soviet Union at that time. One of the main figures in ideology – Tsipko – criticized one of the former rulers – Stalin, – who supported the same ideas of Communism. But he put into question the rightness of interpretation of these ideas, made by leaders in previous periods – so, Tsipko criticized the system, which grew him up and to which he actually belonged. Regardless of the authors' views which could hold a positive attitude toward Tsipko's opinion or even towards protecting past ideals, it showed that the ideological base of Communism in the Soviet Union was not homogenous and it had never been homogeneous. Arguably, if there could be several different opinions among people who had tried to build Communism and had served the system, it meant that no one actually understood what was happening or what had taken place in the past and so they were not real experts which is how they were presented.

This growing disillusion with expert knowledge encouraged people from all backgrounds to write and gave them an opportunity to use other types of argumentation, except professional historical knowledge. Many authors used their life experience to criticize both the Stalinist past and current processes and events which happened at the end of the 1980s and were no longer afraid to put forward their non-expert opinions because the experts themselves had lost credibility.

Many authors, especially those who supported Tsipko, included their personal experiences into the letter. For example, as quoted below, one author named Okunev expressed his agreement with Tsipko and supported him but also provided a personal story which he considered to be an important argument which, in his opinion, showed that Stalin was a fool rather than agreeing with Tsipko's depiction of him as a despot:

"About the order # 227 of the Commander-in-Chief Stalin about barrier troops. To be honest, we were running both before and after the order! Here is one example.
Town Brody is in Livov region. Our division took part in the roundup of Brod.
There is small village Gas Detkovetsku, in one kilometer from it there is high ground, from where the town can be observed. That high ground was defended by 86th Austrian regiment, and I supported 75th regiment. Once at the end of the day, Germans came to the high ground. Our infantry forces went out from a trench and started to run away! Barrier troop started to shoot to it. Our infantry force lied down and started to creep out from high ground. In some time, barrier troop also started to run away. There were no Soviet troops on the high ground. Then Germans opened fire on. It was 7th battery who shot. Finished. And the silence began. At night out, infantry troops went back to the high ground and the next day there was no talk about that events. Conclusion. Barrier troops cannot restrain forces, which runs away. However, many people commended this order. Those who did not have to run away!"⁴⁵

Okunev provided this story to show the gap between ideology and reality, which took place both in the 1940s and in the late 1980s. He realized that some historians and philosophers could propagate the great role of Stalin in the Soviet Union's Second World War victory, as his "strong hand" had encouraged people to fight for their Motherland. However, the author had seen the reality and had known that even the orders, signed by Stalin, had not always worked because he had not known what really needed to be done. That was the reason

⁴⁵ Okunev G.M. Letter to *Nauka i Zhizn'*. 24.11.89. CISR-Irkutsk. F.1. D. 21.

why Stalin's "strong hand" had not functioned properly and people still had had an opportunity to run away, saving their lives.

In this case, the personal experience of participation in the war was used explicitly. Okunev provided this personal story to show his disillusionment with Stalin, his policies and the general discourse which were propagated about the Second World. The victory was not the achievement of the leaders, because they had not participated in war themselves and had in fact made many mistakes. These ideas could be applicable also for the whole system in general.

Other authors, who supported Tsipko, used different types of experiences to show their opinion about the system and how it functioned. Katser M.S wrote in his letter:

"I am from middle peasants. We worked honestly, actively, selflessly. But the attitude toward us had always been incredulous."⁴⁶

In the main body of his letter he argued that the State should be built not on a theory, but on justice. According to him, all people should receive benefits equal to their work, not based on their origin or social class. Here, Katser promoted clear Marxist ideals which had been misinterpreted during the 1920s and 1930s. He supported Tsipko, and so he did not put into question the knowledge and experience of current Party leaders, but demonstrated that their predecessors had lost their credibility in his eyes and hoped that his personal opinion would be taken into account to justify a turn to real Marxism.

A.P. Masiutin, a young man from Yakutsk, also wrote about social inequality, which he had experienced when he was young:

"I realized social inequality when I was 11 and I had a keen interest in football and wrote a letter with my friend to Leningrad, to the sports school. After that I have never written something anywhere."⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Katser M.S. Letter to *Nauka i Zhizn'*. 16.02.1989. CISR-Irkutsk. F.1. D.14.

⁴⁷ Masiutin A.P. Letter to *Nauka i Zhizn'*. 25.01.1989. CISR-Irkutsk. F.1 D.43.

He did not write the end of this story but from the last sentence presented here it is obvious that he was not enrolled at the school. It is likely that there was no answer to his letter at all, but the most probable outcome is that he received a rejection or rude response. The most important note from this example his experience of social inequality versus its representation in a State which officially held formal equality of all citizens.

Another author, Masiutin, asked Tsipko many questions about his views and theories. He also wrote that he had been excited and had not been able to read the whole article at once because he had too much to think about. All of this this shows that he had doubted before but probably had not understood why. His childhood experience of miscommunication with the Soviet system had been perceived as something offensive but systematized. And, after the publication of Tsipko's articles, he put his feelings into context and suddenly realized how the system worked. But since he supported the author, and was waiting for positive changes, led by Party, he hoped that his personal experience would be considered when attempting to improve the situation.

Several other authors also claimed that authorities distributed labor force and privileges incorrectly which showed their discontent with the Soviet system and were upset with it. For example, N.G.Lysak provided the following story to prove his point of view.

"I remember the reforms by Khrushchev, [I] remember how this reform was stifled. <...> In times of Khrushchev I, non-party, was recommended to lead communist-labor team with the suggestion of responsible workers of District Party Committee and the administration of enterprise. Year after by the hands of "recommenders" and with the support of "collective" team simply disbanded. Amazing young specialists moved to the city. <...> We were strictly controlled every turn. The team made 1,5 limits, and all these did not influence salaries. We were imposed to make cheap, but "volume" products. We were imposed to do the biggest, laborious, but an underpaid job. And once team did not achieve the limit, because it refused to make foozle. <...> What was next? Recommendations of bureaucrats, which had been given to me for Party enrollment were annulated"⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Lysak N.G. Letter to *Nauka i Zhizn* '. 20.01.1989. CISR-Irkutsk. F.1 D.51.

As it is seen from the example above, the author had a negative experience of Party enrollment, and he exemplified that it had not been fair to him. In his letter he accused Stalin of criminality and promotion of terror and repression as many other authors also did. But his central idea concerned the system of public control, which, according to him, had been created by Stalin with the support of the military service and continued to exist in the decades after. He accused the "strong hand", which had ruled, controlled and punished for his own current situation. This point of view is extremely interesting and quite untypical for the letters because, as it will be considered later in the chapter, many people missed or forgot to mention those times of order and the "strong hand". However, Lysak thought that the base of problems in the State was in this control which took away the possibility of private initiative. The control was not obligatory performed by the Party, and it could also have been realized by collectives or "masses" as the author used in his letter.

These masses were a real tool for the Party in the post-Stalin period. As O.Kharkhordin showed in his book *The Collective and Individual in Russia: the Study of Practices*⁴⁹ after Stalin, both control and accusation became more implicit than they were before and were oriented toward smaller asocial behavior, which was not appropriate to real Communists. With the help of different social groups, such as the "labor collective", with which everyone was to be engaged, the Soviet authorities tried to raise ideal citizens, to control their behavior and views even in the private sphere and, occasionally, punish them in community courts for inappropriate, but not criminal, actions.

Lysak claimed that these masses had accused him in court and the Party took back all of his recommendations which meant that he was not considered to be a conscious Soviet man anymore. But it was not his fault and it was not fair to deprive him of his privileges, because the administration of the enterprise had not yet realized the best way to increase production

⁴⁹ Kharkhordin, O. *The collective and individual in Russia: the study of practices*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

quality whilst underpaying their workers who worked harder for their jobs. He was disillusioned with the system and with the Party as the main expert for the question of social development and socialistic production because of these actions, but since he supported Tsipko, there seemed to be a hope for change.

His colleague, engineer L. Novgorodskii, also used his working experience, but as a metaphor to show why the system did not work:

"I [am] a constructor in past, and if I was ordered to [start] the deal from the sheet [of paper], this deal burned, and if I had time to work on in on stand and change some corner pieces and details, this construction was viable and worked many years. The same is with new state regime when we wheel it out from the sheet of paper, our deal destroys."⁵⁰

Novgorodskii was not an expert in the field of social life and political structures, but, as a constructor, he had experience, which he assumed as relevant in this situation, because he thought that these things might work similarly. He constructed some structures, worked as an engineer and as a result used this construction experience to explain how he perceived the mechanisms of the CPSU. Party members and government officials of the Soviet Union did the same with public life and the political regime: they constructed social structures, institutions, economy and cultural practices according to some theory (Marxism) and their knowledge in this theoretical field. In both cases, both construction work and Party policies, when everything was done too urgently and heedlessly, nothing good could be the result. This demonstrates that the system had lost its credibility to him because of the experts who led it. These “experts” had made wrong, hasty decisions, and so were not real professionals.

As it is seen from the previous examples, those who supported Tsipko built their argumentation around their personal experience. This experience was predominantly negative, and the authors realized that the system, led by the Communist Party, was dishonest and began to understand that it had nothing in common with the officially declared policy of social

⁵⁰ Novgorodskii L.A. Letter to *Nauka i Zhizn'*. 22.11.1988. CISR-Irkutsk. F.1 D.57.

equality. The system lost its credibility, and the Party as a group of experts who should have known better how to develop society, lost its credibility too. However, since the system had started to admit its previous mistakes and the Party accused its predecessors and declared their decision to turn to pure Marxism, many people supported the author.

These examples contain reflections of a turning point which changed the worldview of different authors and shows their disillusionment with the system. It had happened to them in the past and during Perestroika they were able to believe Party again. But there is an example, when the disillusionment happened in the late 1980s. Author had supported the system, created by Stalin and believed him, but then turned to the opposite side during Perestroika. Venediktov V.V., who worked as an agitator for a long period of time wrote in his letter the following:

“I have seen something, but not only by hearsay know about Stalinism. In 1937 in 10th grade, on the last exam I was arrested. 10 days of individual cell, 3 months in special building for political [prisoners], 6 months before the court. Military tribunal of Kharkiv military district judged behind closed doors. <...> 4 pupils were arrested, including me. I have seen something like “Ivan Denisovich” by Solzhenitsyn, but I have continued to be Stalinist. And not only me, but many others. I remember, we were counting, when would be 15 years from the times Stalin [became] general secretary and there [should be] amnesty. We thought that “The Great” and “The Insightful” does not know what is happening in prison.

<...> The words “Stalin is rude and capricious” I have known long before the XXth Party Congress. They are with me from 1940. It is in the book of Stalin “On opposition” 1927. But [I] have understood and became an enemy of Stalin only after the [publication] letter of Fedor Raskolnikov”⁵¹

In this letter Venediktov also described his biography, which proved that he had been a Stalinist during his whole life: he had studied on special courses for propagandists several times and worked in this sphere for a long time. From this is can be concluded that he belonged to the group of people who provided the ideological politics and who had special knowledge of the functions of Marxism. He believed in Stalinism for a long time, proclaiming Stalin’s

⁵¹ Venediktov V.V. Letter to *Nauka i Zhizn*. 23.02.1989. CISR-Irkutsk. F.1. D.2.

ignorance of the pain of the prisons, but seemed to have switched his opinions upon reading further into Stalin's actions.

This "awakening", when Stalin's policy lost its credibility for the author is the most interesting part of the letter. He had known the criticism of Stalin before but had not believed it. He had been a victim of the regime, however, he realized the role of Stalin himself and the nature of the repressions only years after. He had believed in the Party, in the system, which he had supported and been a part of. He had special knowledge in Marxism, but had thought that Stalin's politics had been right. And the moment of his disillusionment towards Stalin and his policies is demonstrated in his letter.

Raskolnikov's letter, which Venediktov mentioned, was first published in 1939 in the emigrant newspaper *New Russia* and accused Stalin of the repressions, the Terror and drew an image of Stalin as a despot in charge of the Soviet State.⁵² The image of Stalin in Raskolnikov's letter was similar to the descriptions of him in the articles written by Tsipko, but the difference was that Raskolnikov did not try to explain the deep rooted causes of those events. He was focused mostly on the figure of General Secretary, with whom he had worked. This letter was available in the 1970s to a small group of intelligentsia because it was circulated in samizdat. But it is hard to believe that many Soviet people had access to this letter before its first publication in the Soviet Union in *Ogoniok* in 1987.

Venedikov realized that Stalin had not cared about the Soviet people and that the period of his rule had had nothing in common with a dictatorship of the proletariat. This was a moment of personal disillusionment for him because he had also believed in those Stalinist ideas and had even propagated some of them in his former years as an expert. This "awakening" was not described and discussed specifically in this letter, however, it was important for

⁵² Raskolnikov F. Open Letter to Stalin. [Raskolnikov F. Otkrytoe pis'mo Stalinu] URL: https://scepsis.net/library/id_446.html.

the author because it changed his whole worldview and made him reconsider all of his life choices as well as the actions of Party to which he belonged.

This particular “awakening” of a former Party member can be analyzed as an event which is quite opposite but at the same time the symmetrical to the “awakenings” which Igal Halfin researched in the 1990-2000s, when he looked to the personal documents of the Party members and tried to establish the construction of the selves there. He analyzed autobiographies of potential Party members in 1920s and claimed that most of the candidates described some moments or events which made them communists. It was a kind of ritual which parallels a mental shift for the person in question. By this I mean that when someone recognized the “reality” of the tsarist regime, and the “wrongness” of the White Army, they turned to Communism and became “conscious” to struggle for the “bright future” for all people.⁵³

This letter shows is an example of the exact opposite of this transition which happened to people in the 1920s when the Revolution was still new. Venedictov did not stop perceiving himself as a communist because he did not write that this was something which had changed, and he wrote his “communistic” biography freely – he was an agitator, serving the needs of the Soviet ideology and he had no moral conflicts because of it. However, he changed his Stalinist beliefs because he realized, or “awakened” to the fact, that the regime had not been Communistic in a sense: there had not been a dictatorship of the proletariat or even basic care of people's living conditions, that all the policies had been directed to have unique Soviet way of development and to show the greatness of the Soviet Union to the whole world, regardless of victim's number. The heterogeneity of Marxism was shown in his letter and he realized that the theoretical dogma could be interpreted in different ways he began to question its scientific nature.

⁵³ Halfin I. Op cit.

There were those authors who continued to be Stalinists and attempted to protect his ideas and ideals by arguing with Tsipko. They also used their personal experiences to build their arguments which concerned the system and its destruction by comparing past and present.

The next author, Antonov, began to argue with the author from the first lines of his letter, where he represented himself as an academician:

“First of all about doctor [of philosophy - Tsipko]. I am, for example, an academician⁵⁴ and [I] never show it off, because there are a lot of doctors in the World.”⁵⁵

Regardless of whether he was an academician or not, Antonov mentioned his engagement with science in this letter, and so the reader would be ready to believe him because he was perceived to be intelligent enough to understand how things worked. He wrote that he had never showed off his achievements, however, he did mention that he belonged to the academic circle several times in his letter (which is 22 pages long). Even if he was not an expert in the Social Sciences, he still pretended that his opinion was more valuable in comparison to those who did not have an academic background.

The arguments in the author were based only upon his personal experiences, but not on his theoretical knowledge. He used not official, but conversational language to present them and to protect the bright image of Stalin:

“Yes, I am Stalinist, and [I] continue to be him forever, and because he broke all contra [counter-revolutionaries], and because he prepared the economy of the country, a new generation to death hour – to Great Patriotic War! Because he understood well the sense of conquered by October 1917.”⁵⁶

As it is clearly seen from the letter, his political views were connected to the idea of a strong State and country which was not directly connected to civil rights and the happiness of people

⁵⁴ Member of the Soviet Academy of Science.

⁵⁵ Antonov A.S. Letter to *Nauka i Zhizn*. 29.11.1988. CISR-Irkutsk. F.1 D.45.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

(or workers at least). The personal happiness of Antonov, his personal success and his satisfaction with life were dependent only on his feeling of belonging to the strong Soviet State. He was proud to be a Stalinist and portrayed this freely because, to him, to be a good person meant to love his country and its leader who made it strong and powerful.

This also shows the heterogeneity of Marxism which became more obvious during those times. In contrast to Tsipko's supporters, Antonov perceived Stalin as the most conscious communist and did not believe in the statements or actions of the current political actors. This disbelief was also connected to patriotism. Antonov recognised the destruction of the system and saw the negative social consequences and he concluded that all of this happened because the State was not strong enough. Pure Marxism meant taking care of the people but, for the author, citizens could only be happy in a strong State.

Surprisingly, he did not accuse Khrushchev who had first adopted the policy of de-Stalinization, which meant that Stalin was not perceived as a godlike figure to him. His views were based on social stability and good supply of shops, and all the leaders, who could organize it well, were perceived as good:

“And we are witnesses that in two years in county in shops became better, when it was stated that the Soviet condition of people of that times would live under communism, then in the shops, not like now, appeared meat and meat products on 5, milk and milk products on 5: cheeses, curds, sour cream, curdled milk, kefir, fermented baked milk, butter. And oven-baked ham with ham and ham [buzhenina s vetchinnoi I okorokami] was good. And what [is] now: just scones on a dirty cooperative pan with state powder on people's butter! And pension. And 5-days working week, which is being transferred to 6-days. And pension is rendered to null with cooperative prices. <...>

I am absolutely free and [I] do not accept western "freedom" to rob and exploit, because there are anarchically oriented people, and they live to do whatever they want, to take what they like. Due to this, I cannot stay indifferent to abundance of socialist discipline and order, because the socialistic revolution has its own laws and to equal them with capitalistic [ones] – [is] crime.”⁵⁷

From this narrative, we can conclude that one of the most important factors which showed the effectiveness of authorities for Antonov was food supply. But it was not enough for him to have a huge variety of products in the shops, he also wanted them to be cheap. This is

⁵⁷ Ibid.

connected to the socialistic ideas of social equality and social justice, where everyone had equal access to different goods. With the appearance of cooperation, prices increased rapidly and the economic crisis made pensioners one of the most unprotected groups. And so even as their income decreased, a shortage of food in state shops made their basic needs hardly satisfiable, and prices in the cooperative sector were not affordable.

Antonov connected the supply of goods with ideas of a strong state because he believed that the Soviet state was not only great on an international platform, but it also took care of its citizens. To him, the idea of cooperation or market mechanisms in the economy were not perceived as positive because it was based upon speculation and meant that the State lost control of the situation and could not protect its citizens anymore and allowed some people too much opportunity to earn money by exploiting the needs of others. For Antonov, that was the reason why the system and the Party lost their credibility and Tsipko was not authoritative.

2.3. Being a Patriot: the Idea of a Strong State

Since Tsipko's main reason for writing was to produce a philosophical article which touched upon questions of social and political development, many readers perceived themselves in relevant terms. For example, V.S.Sokolov started his letter with the following phrase:

“I've read in the 1st number of 1989 “the research of philosopher” A.Tsipko. As a reader and Soviet citizen, I express my objection.”⁵⁸

The author perceived himself to be a citizen of the Soviet State and as a reader of the journal who had the right to express his opinion about the article which contained “incorrect” facts and details which, in his opinion, could destroy the belief of the Soviet people in the Soviet State. So it can be said that he was a conscious citizen who took care of the State and the

⁵⁸ Sokolov V.S. Letter to *Nauka i Zhizn*. 23.02.1989. CISR-Irkutsk. F.1. D.7.

society in which he lived, and he wanted to prevent such destructive ideas which were promoted on the pages of one of the most popular journals at the time. That means that he doubted the actions of the Party and authorities at that time, and thought that they were no longer experts in their field, because they had lost the real power which in turn caused the destruction of the system.

This destruction was perceived as discursive one. Sokolov protested against any criticism of the predecessors because it showed heterogeneity of Marxism and put into question its scientific nature, since it could be interpreted in different ways:

“Firstly, your journal is read by youth, mostly students. What do you offer to them by the article? To question everything, to believe nothing?”⁵⁹

The author tried to argue that young people should know the only one truth, not several different opinions, and that this truth should work in sync with the image of State, to mobilize people and make them believe in their country. This showed the destruction of the authoritative discourse and made a different interpretation of Marxism possible and gave the Soviet citizens an opportunity to doubt in the Party because it accused its predecessors of repression and showed the heterogeneity of Marxism. So young people, whose views were not yet formed, could doubt in the truthfulness of any kind of Marxism because it had lost its credibility and it would be the reason for the collapse of the whole system.

Sidorov also described himself in terms of belonging to the Soviet State, or, more accurately, to the Soviet people:

“I am a Soviet man, appealing to the editors of *Science and Life*. Comrades, why do you slander the Bolshevik Party. I am a Russian person, and I feel ashamed of communists who conducted anti-Bolshevik company.”⁶⁰

The equality of the "Soviet man" and the "Russian person" should additionally be

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Sidorov I. Letter to *Nauka i Zhizn'*. 23.09.1989. CSIR-Irkutsk. F. 1. D. 2.

discussed. According to his family name and place of residence (Sidorov was from Moscow) he could be Russian by nationality, but it is hard to believe that he used it in national terms. More explicitly, he cared about the future of his fatherland, which was both Russia and the Soviet Union. In other words, he showed that since Russia put together all other Soviet republics, and was perceived as the main Soviet republic, it was the same for him: to be “Russian” and “Soviet” both meant to be a citizen of the State. Later, he wrote the following:

"I feel shame for our Russian people, where we bring Russia. We came again to bourgeoisie Russia"⁶¹

This once again shows the usage of "Russia" and "Russianness"⁶² not in national or ethnic terms, but as belonging to the Soviet State, as a synonym to "Soviet", which was used, most probably, only in Russian language and among Russians.

His suggestions about Bolsheviks and Communists, as well as reasons to protest against article's publication, are also interesting and important:

"You blow the minds of the old people, who survived through war, they are mostly illiterate people <...> Stalin had a program, he loved Soviet people, and I believe if he lived in our days, we would have communism and the highest level of life. Stalin was united together with the working class and someone wants to divide him from people now. No, Stalin and the All-Union Party of Bolsheviks were united, do not divide us and the Party. To judge Stalin, only bastards can venture to do this who don't like their peoplehood and country. They are renegades, enemies of the people who were not finished off. <...>

And now you convince the youth that he is bad! Who to believe, it means that our party is bad and there is no belief in her. <...>

And now the Communist Party created such a mess that youngsters do not believe neither in new nor in old, [you] have taken away the belief in the future and there is no present."⁶³

Sidorov here has a clear understanding of those events, because, as he claims later in the letter, he experienced it. This personal experience is perceived as the stronger argument in the discussion and in the next paragraph he writes that Tsipko has no right to write about the events which he had not seen himself.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² In Russian language there are two words, which can mean the belonging to the Russian state or nationality. *Russkii* is usually used in national terms, but the nation itself, as it is seen in the examples above, can be understood broader than in ethnical terms. *Rossiiskii* is usually used to show the belonging to the State, so it shows the citizenship, but not the nationality itself. This gap between belonging to the State and belonging to the nation can also explain the views of authors.

⁶³ Ibid.

The main accusation toward Tsipko is the “blowing of mind”, which he did in his article. In this part Sidorov writes about old people but he also (as Sokolov also did) cared about the younger generation. The main idea was that both old people, who are not educated enough, and youth, who have no strong world view, need one “clear truth”, not a sum of opinions which could make them think incorrectly and interpret the Soviet history inappropriately. These things worked the same as in the previous example when Sokolov protested against publications of such articles because a critique of actions committed by former Communist authorities helped to discredit Marxism.

Another interesting idea of the article is the unity of Stalin, the Party and the people. Since the author writes that only those who did not like their peoplehood and their communities had the possibility of accusing Stalin, to Sidorov, the Soviet people were the same as the working people. I do not think that he included only workers into this group, and more specifically, he most probably meant to include all of those who worked honestly for the bright future for all other citizens of the State. In Stalinist era, and Sidorov clearly portrays this, the Bolshevik Party was the representative of proletarians, and since the USSR was the “State of the workers” it was therefore united with proletariat. Since Stalin was the head of the Party, he also was united with them. However, even after his death, after the transformation of the Party and social structure of Soviet society, they were still perceived as united elements, but the word “worker” changed its meaning from “proletarian” to “all those who work honestly”.

To some extent, this also explains his objections against the publication of Tsipko’s article. Bolsheviks were perceived as those who cared about the people and when Communists, their followers, criticized them, it showed the disconnection between present and past, the withdrawal of ideas which were important for the author. This also had the potential to discredit the Communist Party, as it has been shown in many examples before. Sidorov appealed to the personality of Tsipko, but not to his professional skills and knowledge. He

did not try to prove that Tsipko was a bad historian or philosopher, because in the hierarchy of arguments, personal experience was the strongest one for him since the Communist Party lost its right for expert knowledge since it allowed the publishing of anti-Bolsheviks articles and permitted the criticism of former Party leaders.

* * *

The destruction of the “expertness” of the Party was demonstrated through these examples of letters to *Nauka I Zhizhn*. Marxism was scientific, and the main dogmas were written and intended for the care of people by the State and for social equality. Different groups of people, depending on their attitude toward Perestroika and the articles by Tsipko had incorporated these ideas as a part of their worldview, but implicitly used them and their personal experience for different purposes.

Those who supported Tsipko provided examples of social inequality which had concerned them even before Perestroika and showed their disillusionment with the system which had happened in previous Soviet periods. The publication of articles which allowed for critique of Stalinism meant that there had been changes in official ideology and gave people hope for a turn to pure Marxism with its classical system of values, such as equal access to different services and goods. The destruction of “expert” knowledge of the party and the discretization of Marxism's scientific nature was not as important for them, but the people still felt it.

Those, who argued against Tsipko mostly argued for the idea of a strong state whose purpose was to take care of its citizens, and thought that a public discussion and accusation of Stalin, made by the first adviser on ideology (Tsipko), destroyed the system. They were dissatisfied with this because the authorities lost their credibility with these actions. The new

authorities criticized previous leaders and showed that Marxism could be interpreted in different ways. It destroyed the homogeneous image of the theory and put its scientificity into question so that the perception of Marxism as the only one truth was weakened, it made its authors and readers feel lost and afraid of the future, which was no longer known.

Chapter 3. Self-Representation in Letters to *Radio Liberty*

Radio Liberty was a radio station whose main offices were located in Munich, Paris and New-York, and broadcasted to the Soviet Union. The Russian department of the radio worked throughout the second half of the Twentieth century and discussed events and processes which took place from a perspective which differed considerably from the official Soviet paradigm. For example, information concerning Soviet dissidents, the reality of life in camps and human rights violations in the Soviet Union was presented via *Radio Liberty*.

The KGB (Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti or the Committee for State Security) tried to prevent the negative ideological influences of foreign independent mass media to the Soviet people by using different kinds of technical equipment to block the broadcasting. Sometimes this blockage was successful, but since *Radio Liberty* was well-known in USSR, these efforts did not give the desired result and people could still access *Radio Liberty's* alternative point of view and the information which was concealed by the Soviet media.

Because of its content and because of all these actions of Soviet security services, *Radio Liberty* was perceived as an independent instrument of information dissemination which translated liberal ideas and was closely connected to the dissident movement. All the programs of the radio station started with the beginning: "You listen to the independent radio station *Radio Liberty*, which is sponsored by the USA congress". This could be perceived as an attempt to promote American values and way of life or as an attempt to destroy the Soviet system through anti-Soviet propaganda. However, since the broadcasting was hardly accessible for Soviet citizens, *Radio Liberty* had a very particular target group of people who really wanted to listen to them and shared their values.

The situation changed in 1988 when Gorbachev proclaimed that the KGB would no longer block any foreign broadcasting. From 1988, this easy access to the radio station, which was prohibited earlier, in conjunction with a general openness and growing interest toward

different points of view, enlarged the number of listeners from different backgrounds and points of view. The fall of control over foreign correspondence and broadcasting gave people the opportunity to write letters to *Radio Liberty*.

The purposes of writing were different and could vary depending on authors' views, living conditions and experience of *Radio Liberty*. Most people showed a keen interest in their broadcasting and asked for the radio to send them a schedule. For many listeners, *Radio Liberty* was the only source from abroad where they could get information about emigration, medical facilities and life outside of the Soviet Union – and ask for help if they wanted to leave the country or find a friend to write to. This was also typical for letters to the Soviet mass media where, through letters, people could also correspond for different reasons which were not directly connected to broadcasting or publishing. However, in the case of *Radio Liberty*, the topics of communication were different and concerned religion or foreign life. The attitude of the writers also differed considerably as *Radio Liberty* was perceived more as a friendly radio which had the potential to help and be honest.

Formally, *Radio Liberty* was an institution which had no formal or informal connections to the Soviet listeners. When the listeners wrote letters to the radio, they needed to catch the attention of the reader to explain the purpose of their writing. Their letters needed to be formal because they had no personal relations with the radio workers, and they felt the necessity to introduce and represent themselves somehow. The genre and format of a formal letter lacks a place for such purposes of self-representation as only relevant information should be included there. The format of a formal letter usually does not often leave space to include personal information (except for cases when people write a complaint or request, usually to the authorities). However, people needed to represent themselves somehow within their letters. They needed to do this for different reasons and more often than now, their objective was to make their communication more informal or make an impression on the

reader and recipient of their letter. Due to a lack of place in the standard format of a formal letter for people to write about themselves, they needed to be creative.

One of the authors, Kurilov, had to write about himself in Post Scriptum in his letter because he had not found any other place:

“P.S. A little bit more about myself than it is presented on the sheet for the consulate. It was a time – [I] tried to write, but it is – not for me, my hands were smarter than the head. I craft, work in wood, do metal work, painting, sculpting, [I] have learned property, worked in theater as a puppet master, [I] net macramé, so if it's God's will, [I] will not get lost.”⁶⁴

The main purpose of Kurilov when he wrote this letter was to ask for help for emigration purposes from the Soviet Union. So Kurilov included these specific craft activities and unique skills which he could perform, to show that he could find some way of making money almost anywhere. He needed to assure the radio workers that if they spent their time helping him, he would survive. This personal information could not be shown in the main body of his letter, because it was written formally and contained his questions concerning emigration, the reasons for it and some ideas about the current situation in the country. Self-representation was taken away from the main body of the text but it was still important for him.

This letter is an exception as authors usually used more implicit ways to represent themselves. It can be also explained by the format requirements of the letters and also with his purpose: Kurilov had asked the workers at *Radio Liberty* to help him, and so it can be considered a letter of request. However, those who just wanted to share their opinions included less personal information in their letters and usually used the endings and beginnings for this purpose.

3.1.Strategies of Self-Representations in the Endings of Letters

The most common and most obvious way of self-representation in letters is the affiliation at

⁶⁴ Kurilov V. Letter to *Radio Liberty* 26.02.1989. OSA. F. 300, S. 33, B. 11, F. 7.

the end. But it was not always clear to the authors, however, which information they should include there. Some of them could include their occupation and age and some mentioned Party and War experience. And, sometimes, an author described their attitude toward the Soviet regime, as in the following case:

“Udovidchik Hicolai Lukianovich, working pensioner, countryside reporter, who has an incentive from editors for active contest publications in Republican press. [I] suffered because of critical publications.”⁶⁵

Here, the author tried to show his belonging to the journalistic community and, at the same time, his problems with this community in the Soviet Union. He mentioned not only his occupation, social status, and working experience, as did authors of the letters which are considered below, but even included a short narrative about his problems with the editors which had happened due to his political views and provocative articles. This demonstrates his belonging to a group of “free-thinking” professional journalists, who were not afraid to state their opinion and suffered because of it. In the author’s perception, they worked similarly to the workers at *Radio Liberty* and with this self-representation at the end of his letter, he clearly wanted to induce some respect toward him from them. Lukianovich struggled and suffered for the same ideals which *Radio Liberty* put forward, but on the other side of the Iron Curtain.

Most authors who wrote letters to *Radio Liberty* did not include any personal information at the end of their letters. The most common option was a short sign which just mentioned the author’s name and family and their address and, usually, included notes which could show the belonging of the authors to the *Radio Liberty*’s listening community or even just a respectful attitude toward the radio:

“Your listener, Andrei Kulik”⁶⁶

“With respect, your friend, Gorodnichii Oleg”⁶⁷

In these cases, as in many others, the authors tried to show their respect and positivity through

⁶⁵ Udovidchik N.L. Letter to *Radio Liberty* 20.08.1989. OSA. F.300, S. 33, B. 21, F. 2.

⁶⁶ Kulik A. Letter to *Radio Liberty* 16.12.1989. OSA. F.300, S.33, B.11, F. 6.

⁶⁷ Gorodnichii O. Letter to *Radio Liberty* 28.04.1989. OSA. F.300, S.33, B.5, F. 7.

their letters and communicative acts in general. Kulik mentioned that he listened to the radio to show his belonging to the community of *Radio Liberty* listeners, to explain why he started to write and why he thought his letter should be read.

Almost the same strategy was used by Gorodnichii who did not mention his belonging to an audience of listeners, but simply wrote that he was a “friend”. This was done to make an impression on the reader of the letter and to create a positive attitude toward the author and make the author’s opinion more valuable for the editors: a friend may suggest, may criticize, but overall a friend really cares and wants to help make improvements to make broadcasting better, and that is why Gorodnichii letter’s should to be taken into account or simply perceived positively.

These authors also provided their addresses, which cannot be mentioned here due to personal information protection requirements. On the one hand, it can easily be explained by the genre requirements of a letter: if the envelope was lost, the recipient of the letter could easily find out the information about where to send a response. On the other hand, it demonstrates the hope of most authors of getting a response:

“In case of need, I am copying my address: [address] Demenchuk Sergei Georgievich.”⁶⁸

Demenchuk, like many other authors, asked for the recipient of the letter to send him the schedule of broadcasted radio programs and it is for this that he decided to add his address as he hoped for further communication with the broadcasting office and wanted to make this correspondence easier. Since most of the authors also asked to for something to be sent to them or even for help with their problems, the inclusion of contact information at the end of the letter was useful because it suggested that they could and might get a response. However, even those who simply shared their opinions toward the content of the programs or current events provided this information. This can also be explained by their hope for further private

⁶⁸ Demenchuk S.G. Letter to *Radio Liberty* 11.09.1989. OSA. F.300, S.33, B.6, F. 7.

epistolary communication on the topics of their letters which would include only the author of the letter and a member of the *Radio Liberty* community.

This hope seems quite usual within the tradition of writing letters to a friend, relative or other specific persons, where both sides of the communicative act are people or, at least, both sides have a strong interest in continued communication (which can also be applied for organizations). Things were different in the case of *Radio Liberty*. Even if letters were addressed to particular people who worked there, they were public figures who received letters from private actors. This asymmetry in the positions explains why listeners' letters often went without responses in most cases: broadcasters had lack of sources and a lack of interest to continue with this communication. And yet people still hoped for further correspondence because as it is clear, they perceived *Radio Liberty* in a more informal and friendly way than other media.

The attempt to turn the style of a letter into a more informal one was also used by some authors in their signing when they used just their first names and left out their family names and any kind of affiliation which are more or less required for a more formal style of letter,

“I wish you good health and all the best in your life. Ella”⁶⁹

The author of this letter, Ella Prohnikskaya, showed a strong interest in further cooperation with *Radio Liberty* because she was a writer and a journalist. In the text she described the situation which had happened to her: she had been estranged from the Soviet publishing houses and media due to a conflict which had taken place 10 years prior to her sending this letter to *Radio Liberty*. In her letter, she put forward a suggestion for the creation of a film about Stalinism and for a further history of the Soviet Union, and, in this case, relied upon cooperation with the radio. She tried to make her communication more informal to achieve her aim and, also, because she perceived the radio as friendly in ideological terms.

⁶⁹ Prohnikskaya E. Letter to *Radio Liberty*. 27.12. 1989. OSA. F.300, S.33, B. 17, F. 1.

Some listeners used this strategy to prevent negative consequences for themselves if the letter was read by KGB agents. Another option was to change their family name:

“That is why I am not signing, Tatiana M.”⁷⁰

“Member of CPSU... I change the family name due to understandable reasons... I would be sent to “re-upbringing” to a mental hospital [address], Ageeva A.P.”⁷¹

Both authors strongly criticized the current situation in the Soviet Union and both of them were somehow engaged with the system. Tatiana M. worked in the Ministry of Foreign Trade and had taken business trips abroad, and A. P. Ageeva was a member of the Communist Party. These affiliations at the same time showed their belonging to some of the authoritative structures, as well as real experience and knowledge of the process of decision making which was to prove the reader that the facts which were written in the letter were real and truthful.

As Ageeva did, some other people also included their Party experience to the endings:

“Baranov A.

On the 5th of May, I was excluded from the CPSU due to political reasons on Town's Committee of Communist Party of Ukraine in Kerch”⁷²

“With respect, CPSU member, Perfiliev Georgii Vasilievich”⁷³

This situation, when Party members wrote letters to foreign radio stations, which had been perceived as the enemy during several decades, is paradoxical. However, all authors used their experience in the same way as Ageeva did: they showed their knowledge of the current situation from the inside. All of them criticized the current situation and the politics of the CPSU and legitimized their opinion using their experience of involvement in the system itself. This demonstrates the discretization of the CPSU and the Soviet authorities even among those who had to serve it and who, in theory, had to be the most devoted citizens. Even they realized that the Communist system was collapsing and that Marxism lost its influence the Soviet Union.

An interesting case of self-representation is presented by those authors who provided their

⁷⁰ [Family name unknown] Tatiana. Letter to the *Radio Liberty* 07.1989. OSA. F.300, S.33, B. 20, F. 6.

⁷¹ Ageeva A.P. Letter to the *Radio Liberty* 23.10.1989. OSA. F. 300, S. 85, 33, B. 1, F. 3.

⁷² Baranov. Letter to the *Radio Liberty* 21.12.89. OSA. F.300, S.33, B.2, F. 4.

⁷³ Perfiliev G. Letter to the *Radio Liberty* 12.10.1989. OSA. F.300, S.33, B.15, F. 10.

occupation and age at the ends of letters:

"Vasiliev R.N., fireman."⁷⁴

"Khandadash Malik ogly Gubadov, the doctor in district hospital."⁷⁵

"Kochin S. Kirov. Lawer."⁷⁶

"With respect, (44 years, electrician) Levchenko Georgii (Iura) Arsenievich."⁷⁷

"Glumshak <...> I'm 72."⁷⁸

"With respect, Andrei Prohorov, 25 years."⁷⁹

"Vadim Rudikov, student, Krasnodar, 22 years."⁸⁰

"S. Tselishchev, concreter on industrial association Yaroslavsky electromashinostroitel'nyi zavod."⁸¹

The information concerning occupation or age was used by authors to induce some personal feelings and create an image of the author in order to make the author "alive". This could also be used by them to strengthen their opinions which were presented in the letter and their argumentation as both age and occupation refers to some sort of personal experience. It also worked in the cases of young authors as their age meant that they had a lack of life experience, but had the energy to do something and because they had only lived in the Soviet Union for a shorter time, the influence of Soviet propaganda in their minds was minimal and they could think "clearly". This shows that the way people communicated with *Radio Liberty* was not perceived as fully formal, the authors tried to represent themselves as real people and hoped for a conforming attitude.

Interesting cases of self-representations at the endings of the letters were used by two men in the following examples:

"Bondarev Vladimir Vasilievich, y.b.1948, Ukranian, worker"⁸²

"Tronov Igor' Feodorovich, the worker since 1962, 43 years, [I have] 2 children"⁸³

Both people demonstrated their high dissatisfaction with the current situation in the Soviet

⁷⁴ Vasiliev R.N. Letter to the *Radio Liberty*. 07.09.1989. OSA. F.300, S.33, B.4, F.1.

⁷⁵ Gubadov Kh. M. ogly. Letter to the *Radio Liberty*. 22.05.1989. OSA. F.300, S.33, B.6, F.3.

⁷⁶ Kochin S. Letter to the *Radio Liberty*. 06.07.1989. OSA. F.300, S.33, B.11, F.1.

⁷⁷ Levchenko G. Letter to the *Radio Liberty*. 22.04.1989. OSA. F.300, S.33, B.12, F.3.

⁷⁸ Glumshak. Letter to the *Radio Liberty*. 12.04.1989. OSA. F.300, S.33, B.6, F.1.

⁷⁹ Prohorov A. Letter to the *Radio Liberty*. 21.08.1989. OSA. F.300, S.33, B.17, F.1.

⁸⁰ Rudikov V. Letter to the *Radio Liberty*. 23.10.1989. OSA. F.300, S.33, B.18, F.1.

⁸¹ Tselishchev S Letter to the *Radio Liberty*. 04.10.1989. OSA. F.300, S.33, B.22, F. 4.

⁸² Bondarev V.V. Letter to the *Radio Liberty*. 09.03.1989. OSA. F.300, S.33, B.3, F.3.

⁸³ Tronov I.F. Letter to the *Radio Liberty*. 18.06.1989. OSA. F.300, S.33, B.20, F.11.

Union and showed that they were afraid of the future. They realized that the CPSU no longer controlled the situation and they could therefore begin to predict negative consequences for themselves and their children. Bondarev wrote that he did not want to take part in the "fratricidal war" and that is why his nationality was important in this research because he knew about the nationalistic conflicts within the Soviet Union. Igor Tronov mentioned his children to show that he was afraid for their future, and that he wanted to protect them from the negative consequences of the system's collapse.

Veterans of war also used their experience. They sometimes included their experience at the ends of their letters to show their contribution to the victory and to Soviet history but these examples were rare among the letters to *Radio Liberty* :

"Bykov Stepan Spiridonovich, the veteran of war and labor."⁸⁴

"With respect, Sbitnyi Gr. Mikh – participant of Western Ukraine campaign, of breakthrough Mannerheim line, the storm of Vyborg – of Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945."⁸⁵

These examples show the use of war experience as a means of self-representation but the content of the letters was different to the letter to *Nauka I Zhizhn* and people used it for different purposes. Stepan Bykov sent a negative response toward broadcasting policies: he disagreed with the ideas, which were translated by the radio, he argued with the critique of the Soviet Union and tried to protect the ideals for which he had struggled. Sbitnyi, in contrast, agreed with the content of broadcasting but asked for more programs about war and especially the Soviet-Finnish war as he wanted to know more information. He wrote that even he, a real participant of those events, did not know much about them.

The ways of self-representation in the endings of the letters which were sent to *Radio Liberty* in 1989 differed from one another because of the different purposes of writing. Many people tried to show their positive attitude toward the radio and its content which was

⁸⁴ Bykov S.S. Letter to *Radio Liberty*. 29.06.1989. OSA. F.300, S.33, B.3, F.7.

⁸⁵ Sbitnyi G.M. Letter to *Radio Liberty*. 05.12.1989. OSA. F.300, S.33, B.18, F.7.

broadcasted. They tried to represent themselves as a real, “alive” people who supported the radio and its policies. Sometimes they even included some facts to get assistance or information from the radio station and so asked for something which was not the main profile or purpose of this organization.

Some of them included their belonging to the CPSU to show that they had a real knowledge of the process of decision making and current politics in the Soviet Union. They criticized the situation in their country and, using their affiliation to the Party, showed that even they did not believe in the system and the main dogmas. *Radio Liberty* had been perceived as an enemy for a long time, but if those who had to support the regime and criticize foreign influence wrote to *Radio Liberty*, that meant that the system lost its credibility.

3.2. Censorship and Self-Security: the Case of Writing Abroad

Radio Liberty was an independent radio station which got its funding from the USA congress and broadcasted mostly the Soviet Union. Soviet citizens, with luck and some knowledge of radio settings, could listen to its programs even in their national languages. The KGB and security services made attempts to block the broadcasting because the content of the programs was perceived as hostile and contradicted the official point of view. *Radio Liberty*, therefore, was seen as an instrument which could decrease the influence of Soviet propaganda and form wrong values among Soviet citizens.

The authorities’ attitude toward the foreign radio station is also visible by reading the letters which were addressed there from the Soviet Union. At least some authors mentioned their attempts to make contact with the radio itself or with some other foreign organizations and described their personal experience of the consequences:

“P.S. Even one year ago it was senseless to write to you. Where would my letter come?! And that is not because of fear. But once upon a time, I was invited to very correct and intelligent

interview about my "self-consciousness."""⁸⁶

Needless to say that this interview, described by the author, took place in the KGB and was to check his ideological background, his loyalty to the Soviet system and authority, and his communistic conscious. Mostly these conversations were more or less preventive action from secret services because correspondence with foreign recipients was not prohibited, but when it was an ideologically inappropriate organization, like *Radio Liberty*, the KGB had to be sure that the person writing was not an active dissident and would not become such.

Even in the period of Perestroika, in 1989, when the politics of glasnost had already been implemented and all ideological barriers and contradictions demolished, people were still afraid that their letters would not reach the office of *Radio Liberty*. This can be explained by the actions of the KGB which still had to control the situation in the Soviet Union. People sometimes mentioned that the quality of the broadcasting (or signal) was very poor and connected it with previous attempts to block the radio which, according to their opinion, still took place even after the official announcement of the cancellation of such practices.

The second reason is that people wanted to get some response to their letters from the workers of *Radio Liberty*, but did not receive any and therefore wrote repetitively, thinking that their previous letters had been withdrawn and read by the KGB on the Soviet border. This was the main reason people feared negative consequences which could happen after the sending of such a letter:

"I am writing to you and [I'm] not sure that the letter will come. There is more chance that I will be "come", but there is nothing to do. I am doing it myself and I know what I do. I am fed up of being afraid, at least a little, but I will live normally."⁸⁷

People had realized that they had won some freedom but did not know how much and what was allowed and what was still prohibited in those years. They hoped that everything would be fine with their letters and with themselves after sending these letters, but still felt

⁸⁶ Altman. Letter to *Radio Liberty*. 18.09.89. OSA. F.300, S.33, B.1, F.7.

⁸⁷ Demenchuk. Letter to *Radio Liberty*. 11.09.89. OSA. F.300, S.33, B.6, F.7.

discomfort due to a lack of knowledge concerning the limitations of liberalization and KGB work under new conditions. But this fear did not prevent them from writing, which could mean that they were too tired of the constant fear to be scared any longer.

3.3. Ways in which Personal Experience was Used for Argumentation

Letters to *Radio Liberty* can be divided into two big groups: those who supported its broadcasting due to different reasons, and those who accused radio station of foreign influence toward the Soviet system and perceived it as an enemy. In the previous decades, when broadcasting of *Radio Liberty* was hardly accessible by Soviet citizens, and negative repercussions issued by those who disapproved of the radio could appear earlier because special action could be achieved to find the signal from those who tuned into the radio. However, not all of those who considered the radio station to have a negative impact committed themselves to finding the perpetrators. However, in 1989, when the broadcasting was no longer blocked, everyone could easily listen to *Radio Liberty* and express their opinion about it.

The ways of self-representation are interesting in this case because people were not experts in media, broadcasting, and ideology and used their personal experience and views to show their attitude. Their reasons to write, as well as the emotional part of the letters, were different because this collection of letters was not formed on the basis of a program to which people replied. Most of the authors from the sample which is used here asked for some support or help, or just wanted to share their views with the editors and write about their disenchantment with the socialist system. There were several people, however, who strongly criticized the ideological connotations, which were translated by radio “Liberty”:

“I am an ordinary Soviet citizen, already a pensioner, not a Party member and not a dissident
<...> I want to ask what Soviet Russia had done to annoy you that you, a Russian person,

serving the "Pentagon", are broadcasting such dirt to the Soviet Union???"⁸⁸

Bykov underlined that he did not belong to the CPSU nor was he a dissident, which showed his impartial attitude toward the broadcasting policies and content. *Radio Liberty*, in contrast, was presented as a radio station which was sponsored by the USA government which automatically meant that it served the interests of Pentagon and slandered Soviet Russia. So, by claiming his impartiality, the author wanted to prove his open-mindedness to his ideological "enemies" at *Radio Liberty* and to bring them to justice for their views and agenda, as he wrote later in his letter:

"I, as a patriot of my country and participant in the war against fascist Germany, accuse you of prejudice in the compilation of broadcasting programs of radio station "Liberty" to the Soviet Union, and proclaim you as an enemy, not only to me personally, but to the whole of the Soviet people, excluding dissidents."⁸⁹

Here Bykov used his personal experience and his contribution to the greatness of his motherland to explain his point of view. He had struggled against the fascists, had ventured his life for the Soviet Union's victory and future, and therefore was within his rights to protect it from an ideological enemy through his letter because he was a patriot and did not want *Radio Liberty* to destroy the ideological stability of the country he lived in. His decision to mention patriotism and his attempt to prove his impartiality in one letter means that in the worldview of this author, patriotism was a usual thing which should be adhered to by everyone. However, the aggressive accusations show that this kind of patriotism was blind and ideologically predetermined and did not only mean love of one's country, but also its glorification, and this is something which was not fully understood by the author.

Other authors also used their war experience and patriotic feelings in their letters to prove the wrong attitude of *Radio Liberty* toward the Soviet Union, but did it in a less aggressive way:

"As a participant of the Great Patriotic War, a senior lieutenant, a disabled veteran, I had to

⁸⁸ Bykov. Letter to *Radio Liberty*. 29.06.89. OSA. F.300, S.33, B.3, F.7.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

spend 15 years in prison, without having committed any crime and I could not attain rehabilitation. On the 23rd of September, I will be 70. <...> I believe in the Party and when the war took place, the whole world could see that the victory would be ours and that we would win."⁹⁰

The author of this letter, Konovalikhin, was upset with the content of *Radio Liberty* which, according to his opinion, reduced the achievements of the Soviet Union and slandered it. His opinion was not connected to the reality of the situation, however, because he chose not to mention all of the problems which the Soviet Union had, and he perceived all the programs where the current events and conditions were discussed on metalevel as a general attempt by *Radio Liberty* to portray a negative image of the Soviet Union, but without criticizing particular aspects. That is why, in my opinion, he chose to write about war in his letter. He believed that the Soviet Union was a great country because it had won the war once and could repeat it once again if necessary. This belief is easily explained by his self-representation through personal experience. He had been a participant of the war, had been disabled there and had been imprisoned after it. But he continued to believe in his country and rulers and this made the Soviet Union great and powerful because people as he were devoted to their Motherland.

This blind devotion to the Motherland was closely connected with the devotion to its leaders, especially past ones.

"And do not touch Lenin, please. His brother was hanged by the tsar-autocrat, and Vladimir Il'ich himself spent long years in tsarist prisons and in exile. Personally, for me, he is saint, as many other compatriots. And I am proud that Vladimir Il'ich was born and raised in our country, as well as I am proud that I live in the Soviet Union"⁹¹

"We knew and believed that [we] built, headed by Stalin, socialism and a good future for ourselves, for our children and grandchildren. And we gave ourselves to the work to achieve this future. We and our elder brothers and sisters, as well as our mothers and fathers, believed in Stalin as we did in God and this belief helped us build of socialism, in rout of fascism and in the reconstruction of the destroyed establishment in this country."⁹²

These two paragraphs from two different letters written by two different people show the

⁹⁰ Konovalikhin. Letter to *Radio Liberty*. OSA. F.300, S.33, B.10, F.6.

⁹¹ Busel. Letter to *Radio Liberty*. 05.12.1989. OSA. F.300, S.33, B.3, F. 7.

⁹² Perfiliev. Letter to *Radio Liberty*. 12.10.1989. OSA. F.300, S.33, B.15, F.10.

same glorification of Stalin and Lenin. The author of the first letter, Busel, wrote that Lenin was holy for him, and Perfiliev, the second author, wrote that he believed in Stalin. The preposition "in" is very important here because it shows their attitude toward Stalin – one can believe only in something supernatural. Both of these characters were not real people for authors of the letters, but played an important role in their lives: they made Busel and Perfiliev patriots of their country, who were happy to feel their belonging to it.

One theme which was commonplace in all of these letters is the irrational belief in the greatness of the Soviet Union and its leaders. People were patriots and tried to protect their Motherland from ideological influences from the West. The attempts to talk about real problems in the Soviet Union, which took place on the radio, were perceived by Soviet citizens as an effort to slander their country and so the idea of Motherland became inseparable from Communist ideology and regime. Surprisingly they did not notice the destruction of the system as their letters did not contain any critics of the current situation or of the past situations, only glorification.

The situation when people changed their views on the Soviet Union and talked about it was quite widespread among Listeners of *Radio Liberty*. Usually, people did not pay much attention to this transition however, they needed to show this switch:

“Since I was a child, and since I was born I honestly believed in Stalin, in communism and so on. But this great and fantastic belief became a full unbelief and disbelief.”⁹³

Igor’ Tronov, the author of this paragraph, complained that he believed in nothing in his life, not in the success of perestroika, not in God (but he had honestly tried), not even in the successful arrival of his letter to the radio station. He left positive feedback on the policies of *Radio Liberty* which, in his point of view, helped to provide democratic ideas. However, he thought that this liberalization would soon come to an end and the ideology would once again become restricted which would cause a new wave of arrests.

⁹³ Tronov. Letter to the *Radio Liberty*. 18.06.1989. OSA. F.300, S.33, B. 20, F.11.

As he mentioned, he believed in Stalin and in communism. The preposition "in" (in Russian: в) plays a great role once again here because one could easily believe in Stalin's capabilities as a leader, but when one believed *in* Stalin it has a parallel with belief in God or a saint or even supernatural. The moment of disenchantment with this belief would have been a traumatic experience. Unfortunately, Tronov did not mention when his disillusionment happened and why.

This loss of faith demonstrated by Tronov, in addition to the ideas about further restrictions by the regime, demonstrates his understanding of the system's collapse. The CPSU as a group of experts who knew how to develop society better than all others, made a mistake when it allowed unrestricted foreign broadcasting to the Soviet Union. The author was sure that when the authorities realized this mistake, they would prohibit it and recall those who supported the independent radio station and would provide repressive politics to regain their influence. However, the author felt that this influence, especially in ideological sphere had been weakened in the late 1980s.

The same idea of "awakening" and of transition from communistic views to "liberal" ones, like in the letter of Reznikov, connected this transformation with *Radio Liberty*:

"All my life, all 58 years, I have lived in the fear of American aggression and imperialism. And only at the end of my life have I realized and ascertained that I have lived my life in an imperial closed bastion which is called the USSR which is at the same time a scary, concealed suppressor of freedom and an international aggressor <...> I thank that day when I first heard *Radio Liberty* (*radio-svobodu*). At the beginning for me, a young communist with a merry character, your information baffled me like I had been put among two teachers-sages and started to listen more attentively and seriously, and for some time I could not understand who it was that was telling me the truth, a working man? I started to look at life more attentively, my living horizon increased <...> Then I heard about the intervention of Soviet tanks in Czechoslovakia in 1968, and the help of the USSR following aggression in Kampuchea, Vietnam, Ethiopia, in Nicaragua and Salvador. And the most shameful aggression in Afghanistan, where 70 million people were lost. And finally, I realized the value of your programs when I heard about the destiny of Andrei Dmitrievich Sakharov."⁹⁴

Long lists of repressed dissidents and events which happened during 1970-1980s were provided by the author (but which were left out in this extract for length purposes). However,

⁹⁴ Reznikov. Letter to *Radio Liberty*. 29.08.1989. OSA. F.300, S.33, B.17, F.5.

all of these events played an important role in the worldview of the author. He also described how he described the one-dimensional and untruthful presentation of these events in the Soviet media, in Party meetings and the negative consequences for him and his family which meant a lot to him because he had realized the untruthfulness of the whole system.

In the letter he represented himself as a young communist with merry character, and from this we can gather that he was not embarrassed that he had believed in the system and the main ideology for a period of his life. As it is seen from his text, his change in beliefs was not a momentary event, but took time. When he listened to *Radio Liberty* as well as when he read Soviet newspapers and watched television, he had tried to analyze its content and its applicability to the reality in which he lived. He had doubted how truthful what he had been told was and how events really happened only at the end of his life (and he had listened to *Radio Liberty* since the 1960s, being a communist), From this he finally realized who was right and he made some conclusions from the policies of the Soviet Union both in the inner and external sphere.

Reznikov showed his disillusionment with the system in his letter. He had become aware of the untruthfulness of the regime, its repressive and aggressive character, which contradicted his personal views. And he was a member of the Communist Party, so he knew the dogmas of Marxism, and saw that these actions were not connected to the pure dogmas. After 20 years of listening to *Radio Liberty* he finally realized that the ideological fulfillment of his Party experience was a lie and stopped believing in the system.

Other authors also demonstrated disappointment with the system. Baranov in his letter declared his rejection of the party:

“The CPSU, being the only Party in the country when, with the liquidation of inner platforms and groups, stopped being a revolutionary, thoughtful party and performed as a tool, with which every general secretary and his *politburo*, in a struggle with someone and something, has always flogged, flog and will flog our society... I do not want to be a part of this Party anymore and I declare that I sever myself from it.”⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Baranov. Letter to *Radio Liberty*. 21.12.1989. OSA. F.300, S.33, B.2, F.4.

In his argumentation, he showed that the CPSU had stopped satisfying his moral needs, because it provided a lack of opportunity for further development as any critique or alternative interpretations of Marxism were prohibited, as well as any groups or fractions. However, it did not prevent the critique of predecessors who had interpreted Marxism wrongly. The Party was perceived here as something monolith which could not develop according to current needs of society, but could justify its actions with the critique of former leaders. This was the real reason for this disappointment: the author understood the unreality of the changes inside the Party and, due to this, the unrealistic possibility for reforms in life and a lack of opportunity to express his personal views in order to make life better being a member of the Party. It lost its credibility because it was not able to increase living conditions and look after people's wellbeing, and the ideological debates were used only for the justification of its existence.

This credibility gap which existed between the people and the Party and even between the highest Party leaders, was presented in the letters of other authors as well:

"The thing is that I am just an ordinary Soviet person who does not believe in socialism, I also do not believe in Perestroika because all this is just a conversation about a happy future, and if you were to dig deeper you would see that Gorbachev, as well as his representatives, on the one hand, talk about justice and democracy, and, on the other hand, builds dachas for himself and hangs medals on his Party toadies."⁹⁶

Chernetsov, the author of the letter quoted above, represented himself as an ordinary Soviet person, which meant that he had no access to power and money and lived as many other people did in the Soviet Union. He, just an ordinary Soviet citizen, also felt the gap between Communist ideology and Soviet reality which resulted in his disbelief in the possible success of Perestroika. He realized that at the time when he and other people in the Soviet Union struggled with deficit and worsening living conditions on regular basis that the leaders of the Party and State, whose role was to take care of people and improve their lives, declared

⁹⁶ Chernetsov. Letter to *Radio Liberty*. 11.10.1989. F.300, S.33, B.22, F.6.

reforms and future economic development, but broke their promises through corruption and worked only for their own welfare. That is why, for him, the authorities became discredited.

There were a group of people, however, who were not really disillusioned in some particular moment, but never believed in the Soviet system. They had suffered because of the regime throughout their whole their lives and thought that nothing would ever change. They did not believe in the proclamations made by the party, because in all the previous years they had experienced the dishonesty of the Party statements and had no reason to believe in a new course which was announced by the Party.

A young listener of *Radio Liberty*, Chernetsov, expressed it in his letter using his personal experience to prove it:

“This is a longstanding listener of your radio station writing. I am fifteen, but despite my young age I perceive myself as a person with formed capitalistic political views. You are probably interested in my views: my teachers call me *antisovietchik*, encomiast of Americans and many other words, which I will not provide. My friends say that I am a person who understands the sense of the things. I think that all this Glasnost, democratization and acceleration (*uskorenie*) is crap.”⁹⁷

Chernetsov’s personal experience of living in the system and of studying in a Soviet school made him disillusioned in regards to the official ideology. He represented himself as a young, but a conscious person, whose worldview was the opposite to the official and translated ones. He did not believe in all the declared policies because he had experienced the negative effects of the ideology himself and realized that the situation would not change, and all these proclamations were made to justify the current regime, but not to give more freedom to people.

The word "capitalistic", which he used for the description of his political views is interesting because it never appeared in the other letters. It can be explained with the idea that this word had a very negative connotation during the Soviet era, and was perceived this way even by those who did not support the regime (because there were a lack of options when it

⁹⁷ Ibid.

could be used in a positive way). However, the representor of the younger generation was not worried that he would be understood incorrectly, and expressed himself as he found it to be appropriate for him personally. It is important to note that when he wrote his letter to *Radio Liberty*, he probably realized that he would be correctly understood. *Radio Liberty* influenced the content of many letters because many people asked for help with immigration or just wanted to share their personal experiences, which were connected to the content of the programs by *Radio Liberty*, such as suffering as a result of the Soviet system, life in mental hospitals and other problems too. For instance, one author, Demeshin, also showed his lack of belief in the Soviet system and used his autobiography and current experience to prove the absurdity of it:

"The thing is that nearly ten years ago I, as many others during the so-called "years of stagnation" (*gody zastoia*), was declared a schizophrenic and was sent to mental hospitals as well as there being other consequences, but this, of course, is not consistent with the reality. And this is because, not being a conformist, I thought and spoke about those [things], which in all the world are considered normal, but in the Soviet Union were considered to be sedition and *dissidentstvo*. <...> Is it necessary to tell you how difficult it has been to live with this stigma in the Soviet Union, especially in small town. I went through a lot of trouble to make someone reconsider it objectively, but I finally realized that it is meaningless inside *Sovdepia* <...> Unfortunately, I was born a Russian and I have no hope of leaving this country of absurdity at once, especially due to this stigma which means I have no opportunity to travel to a socialist country."⁹⁸

One of the main ideas which are presented in this passage is the untruthfulness of the diagnosis and the conclusions made from the "symptoms" of the disease. These symptoms were considered normal outside of the Soviet Union, only in the Soviet Union was dissidence the reason to put someone into a mental institution in attempts to heal him and ruin his life. The consequences of those events, when he had to spend some time being "schizophrenic" because of his views, he experienced in his present. Since the times had officially changed and liberalization, democratization, and waves of rehabilitations happened in the Soviet Union, his case, probably, also had a chance to be reconsidered. But it was not, and that is why the

⁹⁸ Demeshin. Letter to *Radio Liberty*. [unknown date] OSA. F.300, S.33, B.6, F.7.

author admitted that he regretted that he was born as Russian and therefore could not emigrate from the country where nothing changed even if the Party leaders said it would.

The same experience was shown in the letter of Amirov who also suffered from the psychiatric punishments which were given to dissidents in the Soviet Union and wanted to talk about it:

“Now a little bit about myself. I was born in 1958 in Siberia near a communist concentration camp where my father served his sentence for 10 years for having been captured during the war. My biography was formed almost tragically. In the army, I did not withstand the humiliations and abuse and tried to commit suicide. Then I had some huge disappointments in my life due to the realization of what the longstanding regime of the Communist Party and its notion brings to society. Then I tried to emigrate and was exposed an attempt of false “schizophrenization” in a Moscow mental hospital, but which was not successful for the KGB. Then I had many other troubles and a chain of events which formed my political views – now I am an anticommunist till the end of my days.”⁹⁹

His case is particularly interesting because he described the entire chain of events which caused his political views. Starting from early childhood, even on a biological level as the son of imprisoned person, he had always been punished for something and could not seem to find his place in life. Using examples of his tragic biography, he tried to explain, that he, probably, could have had another attitude toward the Soviet system and its reality, but since he had been persecuted for his whole life, he had a full right to be anti-communist, because he experienced all the repressive natures of it personally and had no reason to believe in the changes which took place during Perestroika.

* * *

Aspects of self-representation and the usage of personal experience in the letters to *Radio Liberty* were analyzed in this chapter. Many authors did not include any specific information concerning themselves into the endings of their letters and wrote just their first and second names. They also usually provided an address, hoping for further communication.

⁹⁹ Amirov. Letter to *Radio Liberty*. 05.12.1989. OSA. F.300, S.33, B.1, F.8.

Mentioning age or occupation was used to make authors more “alive” and turn the correspondence into more informal, friendly style.

Those, who had former or current experience of engaging with the Party or the authorities mentioned that experience. However, since all of them criticized the current situation in the Soviet Union, it was done to show the involvement of the author in these structures and their real knowledge of the situation and policies. This shows the disillusionment in the actions taken by the Party, because they criticized it in their letters to *Radio Liberty*, which had been perceived as an enemy for a long period of time.

The usage of personal experience and self-representations in the main bodies of the letters also shows this disillusionment in many cases. Those who wrote about repressive politics which had been geared toward themselves and dissidents had become aware of the dishonesty of the system much earlier than the late 1980s, but were able to describe it only during that period because the system had lost control over the people’s contact with foreign media. The same worked with those, who “awakened” only in those years.

Some of the readers, however, criticized the ideological influence of *Radio Liberty* toward the Soviet people. They showed their patriotism and preferred not to mention current problems. Most probably, these authors did not realize the system’s loss of credibility. But it can be also connected to the foreign character of *Radio Liberty*, and they did not want to slander their country in an international sphere but could more likely criticize the current events if it were in letters to the Soviet mass media.

Chapter 4. A Comparative Analysis of Letters to *Nauka i Zhizn'* and to *Radio Liberty*

All the ways of self-representation and the attitudes toward the system, which have been described in previous chapters are of interest and may provide some conclusions about the perception of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the change of people's worldview who lived in the Soviet Union in the late 1980s. However, to find some common ground and to understand whether there were any common themes and their roots, these two groups of letters should be compared together.

It seems logical to start with the comparison of the two recipients of the letters: *Nauka i Zhizn'* and *Radio Liberty*. *Nauka i Zhizn'* was one of the most popular non-fictional Soviet journals which described different scientific theories and achievements in a simplistic way. It provided expert knowledge about nature, techniques and humanities among Soviet people in order to educate them. This journal can be considered an important one because it spread ideology on a meta-level. Since religious knowledge was strongly criticized by Marxist dogmas, scientific, objective, theories were used to replace it and explain how things really worked. Marxism was also perceived as a scientific theory as it pretended to be objective, and that is why this journal provided both knowledge about the world as well as serving the main ideology on two levels. *Nauka i Zhizn'* was a propagator of objective truth and, in some cases, when articles on humanities and social sciences were published there, it was also an instrument to spread knowledge of Marxism.

Radio Liberty had different purpose and target audience. Before the 1980s it was mostly oriented to the intelligentsia and dissidents who did not support the Soviet system, had

realized the dishonesty of the Marxist ideas or even just the gap between theory and reality. Programs about human rights in the USSR which looked at repressions and dissidents, religion and culture, and non-socialist literature were all broadcasted there. The main purpose of the radio station was to spread liberal ideas among those Soviet citizens who really needed an alternative point of view and who wanted to know more than was presented in official Soviet media.

The policies toward these media, their status and the perceptions of them in the Soviet Union were also different. Firstly, *Nauka i Zhizn'* was one of the main popular journals and its editors officially worked in USSR and, on the other hand, *Radio Liberty* was located abroad and was listened to by small group of people. *Nauka i Zhizn'*, as all other mass media in the Soviet Union, was under ideological control and could only publish "correct" articles in order to satisfy censorship requirements. *Radio Liberty*, in contrast, never experienced any kind of censorship over its broadcasting programs or spread of its ideas, which its broadcasters and listeners considered to be meaningful. That is why *Nauka i Zhizn'* was represented to the Soviet audience as one of the most interesting and important journals and *Radio Liberty* was considered to be an enemy, sponsored by ideological foes of the current socialistic regime, and was blocked by the KGB.

These implications are relevant only for the period before 1987, before the policy of glasnost was adopted. *Nauka i Zhizn'*, as all other Soviet mass media post-1987, had an opportunity to publish articles which contradicted the official point of view and even criticized the Communist Party or re-thought Soviet history. Liberalization toward *Radio Liberty*, as well as other foreign radio stations took place later, in 1988, when Gorbachev proclaimed that the KGB would no longer block broadcasting signals from abroad. This easy access to the foreign point of view enlarged the number of listeners and reshaped the main target audience. Different people with different views and backgrounds began to listen to *Radio Liberty* just

to gain knowledge of as many opinions as possible, in order to find some truth. Not all of them were satisfied with the ideological aspect of the programs, however, and still accused *Radio Liberty* of anti-Soviet propaganda and continued to proclaim it as an enemy.

These difference discourses surrounding *Nauka i Zhizn'* and *Radio Liberty* were discussed by Soviet propaganda before the late 1980s, and the general ideological dimensions of these media, influenced the correspondence in 1988-1989. Even in the situations where every opinion had a right to exist in the public sphere, people still perceived *Nauka i Zhizn'* as more of an “academic” genre of media and wrote there only to respond to articles, not to ask for help or advice which were not in the sphere of journal. In contrast, *Radio Liberty* received many letters of request from the listeners who asked them for help with emigration or to find them pen-pal from outside the Soviet Union.

This is explainable in relation to the place of these two different media in the Soviet system. *Nauka i Zhizn'* was an ordinary Soviet journal, and there were many other journals with similar purposes and organizational and institutional positions, but with different content. Before the late 1980s, these journals were not independent actors, but were mediators between the authorities and the people. Even after the adoption of glasnost, when journals became independent actors who could provide their own discourses and opinions, they still highlighted a small variety of topics and had their particular spheres of interest. *Radio Liberty* was, in fact, the only accessible foreign institution for many Soviet citizens who had very limited access and knowledge relating to information about life outside the Soviet Union. Many people did not know where else it was possible to get information about leaving the Soviet Union and about the West in general. That is why they hoped that the radio station would continue its broadcasts by spreading information which was previously unavailable, as it had been in previous decades.

This explains the general tones of communication. Authors who wrote to *Nauka i*

Zhizn' did so in a more formal way, because they realized that their personalities were not important in the context of the journal's agency. Only scientific debates took place on its pages and the authors of the letters continued to keep their distance from the editors. Even when they attempted to criticize the journal and the editors, it concerned only the editors' policies and articles which were published. Those who wrote to *Radio Liberty*, on the other hand, tried to write in a more informal way and hoped that this personal approach would help them be heard and encourage the radio to respond. Since the radio station was not an official institution which helped Soviet people in their purposes, and since people knew that their requests did not concern *Radio Liberty's* main agenda, the pressure to input personal characteristics and style their letter more informally seemed to be the best way to achieve their aim for writing.

The self-representations which people used at the ends of their letters were quite similar for two groups of sources, but were used for different purposes. In the letters sent to *Nauka i Zhizn'*, people needed to show that they had the right to write and to be heard. Since the journal was scientific, people felt that they needed to have some special knowledge in order to write there and to argue with the author. That is why they tried to affiliate themselves with things which could increase the meaningfulness of their opinion. Those who did not have any relevant background tried to show their contribution to social development and the building of a "bright future" by including their occupation. The second group who also tried to show their contribution had more right to write. They represented themselves as the veterans of War, or mentioned their age to show that they were witnesses of those events about which the journal wrote. The third group was presented by those who pretended that they had some expert knowledge in the field because they were members of the Communist Party and so knew how the main ideology worked and could therefore discuss the rethinking of Soviet history and its influence on the current situation. This demonstrates that people represented

themselves in positions of the old authoritative discourse when they wrote to the journal, because they tried to prove their right to share their opinions with the editors and, as was desired, with other readers of the journal. However, this also can be considered to be a destruction of this “expert knowledge” discourse, since people felt a strong need to write about their own opinions, and so they did. They were Soviet citizens who cared about the future of their country and wanted to be the part of the public discussion which concerned it. They had realized that not only experts had this right.

The same categories were used by the listeners of *Radio Liberty* but differently. There was no need to prove their right to write since the radio station did not pretend to be an arena for expert knowledge only. Listeners tried to represent themselves as a real people with their own lives and needs. It is for this reason they included their occupation as it was the simplest way to create an image of the self. War participants also used this category to represent themselves, but as part of their argumentation in order to show their long-term relations with the Soviet system and their contribution to the victory of the Soviet Union. Members of the Communist Party, both former and current, did not pretend that they had special knowledge about how everything was in the Soviet Union, but with this implication they hoped to show that they knew the real situation inside the country in order to justify their critique of it. People did not feel as though they were in an unequal position when corresponding with *Radio Liberty*, because it was not portrayed as media which had monopoly on truth, so a listener’s inclusion into discussion there was perceived as much more fluid.

The ways in which personal experience was used also differed among these two groups of sources. In letters to *Nauka i Zhizn’* people referred to their autobiographies when they wanted to argue with the expert or support him. They realized that they had a lack of special knowledge in the field and therefore could not be involved into a fully academic discussion. However, their personal experiences were perceived as something important.

Many of them were witnesses to events or had lived through the system in the late Soviet period. This gave them an opportunity to criticize the Soviet system in general, regardless of the content of Tsipko's articles. In letters to *Radio Liberty*, people did not need to argue with the experts and could use their personal experiences for their own purposes, such as in critique of the broadcasting content or in their support of it, or in their requests for information which was not the main purpose of the radio's activities.

Those who supported Tsipko were less interested in the discussion about Stalin. Some witnesses could provide some examples to prove the chaos of Stalin's policies, but the main purpose of this argument was to share their disillusionment with the Soviet system in general. People provided examples in order to demonstrate that they did not believe that the Party provided correct policies because it contradicted the main dogmas of Marxism. The same strategy was also used by the authors who wrote letters to *Radio Liberty*. Most of them suffered because of their views in the Soviet Union and wrote to the independent radio station which discussed such cases considerably in their broadcasts.

The main arguments made by those who criticized Tsipko and protected Stalin, and those who criticized the broadcasting policies of *Radio Liberty* also had a lot in common. The main principle for these authors was that of the strong state which could take care of its citizens. The personal happiness nor the living conditions were important to the authors who wrote to *Radio Liberty* because they wanted to protect their country from the perceived slander by the foreign radio station. They noticed the destruction of the system and the negative processes which were taking place inside the Soviet Union, but did not want to present these thoughts abroad. Those who criticized the articles of Tsipko, in contrast, demonstrated that they had felt the changes in the current situation in the Soviet Union and built their argumentation on the opposition between their current experience, and their life under Stalinism when the State had been strong enough to take care of its citizens.

The motive for their “awakening” was demonstrated in both groups of letters. People showed their disillusionment with the Soviet system which happened to them during Perestroika. In those cases, when authors described the processes or the moment of this change or “awakening”, the alternative information had played a great role. Venediktov, who wrote a letter to *Nauka i Zhizn*’, had changed his mind when the letter of Feodor Raskolnikov became available for the wide Soviet audience. He realized that the truth in which he had believed for a long time was not a truth, and that the person in whom he had believed and supported, was actually a repressor. Reznikov, in his letter to *Radio Liberty* showed the long process of his transition which had taken place because of alternative information and had given him an opportunity to think critically about the Soviet authorities and their decision to censor this information so it would not be spread.

In general though, the ways of self-representation in these groups of letters were different. People who wrote to *Nauka i Zhizn*’ wanted to strengthen their opinion and make it as expert as possible. They realized that they were writing to a journal whose purpose was to spread scientific ideas and so in order for them to discuss Soviet history, they needed some knowledge of the Marxist ideology. On the other hand, those who wrote letters to *Radio Liberty* represented themselves as ordinary Soviet citizens who were not experts of any kind when it came to ideology, and so they could think clearly.

This discussion showed the duality of the late Soviet notion of the self. People did not know how to talk to the editors of a journal like *Nauka I Zhizn* which had been under censorship for a very long period of time and were not sure that they could be involved in the public discussion since they were not experts in Marxism. They continued to represent themselves in an accustomed system of Soviet values and built their argumentation accordingly. Those who wrote to *Radio Liberty* preferred to include less ideological knowledge and tried to represent themselves in the most neutral terms.

Conclusion

The letters of the audience to the mass media have provided an excellent opportunity to study the worldview of the authors who wrote. In this research, letters to the Soviet journal *Nauka i Zhizn'* and to *Radio Liberty* were analyzed. The main focus was given to the ways of self-representation which people used to make their arguments and describe the problems which they had seen.

The late 1980s was a time when the Soviet system started to collapse rapidly and all the negative consequences previous Soviet politics appeared on the level of everyday life. The destruction of the Marxist ideology became more obvious and began to make people to feel less secure about the future. People unconsciously demonstrated this uncertainty in their letters and the implications were presented in almost every letter which were analyzed.

When the system allowed for criticism of itself and for the rewriting of the official Soviet history, it revealed the non-scientific nature of Marxism and so gave plenty opportunities for people to think differently. People demonstrated that they were disillusioned with the system before this period, however they had felt more comfortable about their future because of its stability. In the late 1980s, the system started to change rapidly and these changes were not predictable, the future had become undetermined and people had begun to feel confused what would come.

In the late 1980s, people did not know what was allowed and what was not and so continued to represent themselves in the same categories of authoritative discourse, especially in the case of correspondence with *Nauka i Zhizn'*. They used arguments which could be regarded as expert knowledge in order to make their opinions stronger. However, in the case of correspondence with *Radio Liberty*, which had never been under State control, they used the more neutral categories. This shows the duality of the perception of the Soviet self and demonstrated the changes which took place with the collapse of the system.

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