

Rituals of Stalinist Culture at Work: Science and the Games of Intraparty Democracy circa 1948

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We cannot do without self-criticism, Aleksei Maksimovich. Without it, stagnation, corruption of the *apparat*, and an increase of bureaucratization would be inevitable. Of course, self-criticism provides arguments for our enemies, you are completely right here. But it also gives arguments (and a push) for our own progressive movement.

Joseph Stalin to Maxim Gorky, 1930.

The Lysenko case has become a symbol of the ideological dictate in science and its damaging consequences. It is often explained that in the years following World War II, the Stalinist leadership launched an ideological and nationalistic campaign aimed at the creation of a Marxist-Leninist and/or distinctively Russian, non-Western science. Concepts and theories which were found idealistic or bourgeois were banned, their supporters silenced. In no other science was this process completed to the same degree as in biology after the infamous August 1948 Session of the Soviet Academy of Agricultural Sciences, at which Trofim Lysenko declared the victory of his “Michurinist biology” over presumably idealistic “formal” genetics. The August Session, in turn, served as the model for a number of other ideological discussions in various scholarly disciplines.

This widely accepted interpretation, however, encounters two serious difficulties. The first arises from a selective focus on one particular debate which best fits the

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stereotype. It was critics of the Stalinist system who singled out the Lysenko case as the most important example of the application of Soviet ideology to science. The Soviet Communist party viewed it differently. It did regard the event as a major achievement of party ideological work and a great contribution to the progress of science (until 1964, when the mistake was quietly acknowledged). But what is more interesting, and less expected, is that Communists claimed five, not one, major ideological successes in the sciences: philosophy (1947), biology (1948), linguistics (1950), physiology (1950), and political economy (1951).¹ The additional four cases did not become as widely known outside the USSR as the biological one, apparently because they did not fit as well the standard picture of the campaign as an ideological purge. Their effect on scholarship was not obviously damaging, patterns and outcomes were much more confusing than that of the “clear” Lysenko case, and they did not present the critics of communism with such a perfect example of scandalous failure that could be used in Cold War propaganda.

The second difficulty concerns the apparent incoherence of events. Any straightforward generalization based on the single case of Lysenko could hardly be sustained against a wider factual background. Those who assume that the goal of the campaign was to subordinate science to ideology disagree considerably on what constituted the ideology which had to be applied in the sciences. Indeed, many different ideological principles were pronounced, they often contradicted each other, and none was consistently carried through the entire campaign. Dialectical materialist and Cold War slogans suffused the rhetoric, calling for unity in struggle against idealism, cosmopolitanism, and obsequiousness before the West. At the same time, however, one also frequently encounters attacks on monopolism in science and encouragement of creativity and free criticism. David Joravsky has characterized this ideological mess as a “bizarre mixture of elements,” “obvious self-contradiction” for “the outsider,” and the “most astonishing incongruity in the Stalinist drive for monolithic unity.” At the same time, he noted that, for Stalin, there was no self-contradiction here.²

These particular five ideological cases acquired the importance of a general political event and had to be publicized far beyond the circle of directly concerned scholars because Stalin participated in them either openly or behind the scenes. But even having been approved by the same authority, they still form a rather chaotic set, in light of their conflicts, contents, and outcomes. Philosophers met in June 1947 to criticize a book by Georgii Aleksandrov, a high party official who, although demoted, was later appointed to direct the work of his critics.³ The August 1948 Session, as mentioned above, led to the banning of international genetics in favor of an idiosyn-

¹*Istoriia Kommunisticheskoi Partii Sovetskogo Soiuz* (Moscow, 1959), 606. Later editions dropped the biological discussion as damaging to the party's reputation. For the same list of major discussions see “Bol'shevistskaia kritika i samokritika,” *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, 2d ed., 51 vols. (Moscow, 1949–58), 5:515–18; Iu. A. Zhdanov, “O kritike i samokritike v nauchnoi rabote,” *Bol'shevik*, 1951, no. 21:28–43; and M. T. Iovchuk, “Bor'ba mnenii i svoboda kritiki—vazhneishee uslovie razvitiia peredovoi nauki,” *Voprosy filosofii*, 1952, no. 2:14–31.

²David Joravsky, *Russian Psychology: A Critical History* (Oxford, 1989), 405–6.

³“Diskussiia po knige G. F. Aleksandrova ‘Istoriia zapadnoevropeiskoi filosofii,’ 16–25 iunია 1947 g.: Stenograficheskie otchet,” *Voprosy filosofii*, 1947, no. 1; V. D. Esakov, “K istorii filosofskoi diskussii 1947 g.,” *ibid.*, 1993, no. 2:83–106.

cratic and specifically Soviet version.⁴ The linguistics controversy presents quite a contrast. In June 1950, after a series of polemical publications in *Pravda*, the candidate for Lysenkoism in linguistics—revolutionary and anti-Western Nikolai Marr’s “new doctrine on language”—was silenced in favor of a very traditional and internationally accepted comparative approach.⁵ Conceptual disagreements in physiology were not so pronounced when, in July 1950, representatives of this field gathered at the joint session of the Academies of Sciences and of Medical Sciences. Nevertheless, the disciples of Ivan Pavlov fought a serious battle over which of them followed the orthodoxy of their deceased teacher more closely and should therefore direct his physiological institutes.⁶ Finally, in November 1951 a closed panel of economists and politicians at the party’s Central Committee (TsK) discussed the project of a new textbook on political economy. This meeting apparently did not end up with any resolution, but it provided the pretext and inspiration for Stalin to write his last major theoretical opus, *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*.⁷

The variety already displayed in these most-controlled cases increases considerably when one takes into account dozens of other critical discussions reported in the press in 1947–52. They could be as large as an all-Union conference and as small as an institute’s meeting devoted to the review of a book or a textbook. Political authorities at some level were occasionally involved, but most of the meetings were organized solely by academics. Ideological argumentation and accusations sometimes were used very heavily, in other cases the discourse was almost scholarly in style and paid only lip service to political rhetoric. In the majority of episodes it is difficult or even impossible to classify the participants according to two categories, such as “Lysenkos” and “true scientists.” Disputes could reflect serious conceptual disagreements, but also institutional conflicts or merely personal animosities. Some critical discussions led to serious changes in the academic hierarchy, others only confirmed existing power relations. Their general effect on scholarship can be described as confusing: sometimes negative, sometimes, as in linguistics, more positive, and in many other cases largely irrelevant.⁸

⁴*The Situation in Biological Science: Proceedings of the Lenin Academy of Agricultural Sciences of the USSR, Verbatim Report* (Moscow, 1949); David Joravsky, *The Lysenko Affair* (Cambridge, MA, 1970).

⁵I. V. Stalin, *Marksizm i voprosy iazykoznaniiia* (Moscow, 1950); V. M. Alpatov, *Istoriia odnogo mifa: Marr i marrizm* (Moscow, 1991).

⁶*Nauchnaia sessiia posviashchennaia problemam fiziologicheskogo ucheniia akademika I. P. Pavlova, 28 iunია-4 iulia 1950 g.: Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow, 1950). For a history see Joravsky, *Russian Psychology*; and “Pavlovskaiia sessiia” 1950 g. i sud’by sovetskoi fiziologii, *Voprosy istorii estestvoznaniia i tekhniki*, 1988, no. 3:129–41, no. 4:147–57, and 1989, no. 1:94–108.

⁷I. V. Stalin, *Ekonomicheskie problemy sotsializma v SSSR* (Moscow, 1952); L. A. Openkin, “I. V. Stalin: Poslednii prognoz budushchego (Iz istorii napisaniia raboty ‘Ekonomicheskie problemy sotsializma v SSSR’),” *Voprosy istorii KPSS*, 1991, no. 7:113–28.

⁸The discussion in cosmogony was almost academic in style and did not involve politicians. See A. E. Levin, “Bitva bez izbieniia: Soveshchanie po planetnoi kosmogonii 1951 g.,” *Priroda*, 1991, no. 9:99–107. Changing the institute’s director was apparently the main goal of a discussion in literary criticism (“Protiv idealizatsii ucheniia A. Veselovskogo,” *Izvestiia Akademii nauk SSSR: Otdelenie literatury i iazyka*, 1948, no. 4:362–64). A major discussion, which did not allow a revolt against the existing academic hierarchy, took place in chemistry. See Loren Graham, *Science, Philosophy, and Human Behavior in the Soviet Union* (New York, 1987); and A. A. Pechenkin, “Antirezonsnaia kampaniia 1949–1951 gg.,” in *Metafizika i ideologiia v istorii estestvoznaniia* (Moscow, 1994), 184–219. The institutional conflict between Moscow University and the Academy of Sciences was the driving force behind the discussion in physics (G. E. Gorelik, “Fizika universitetskaiia i akademicheskaiia,” *Voprosy istorii estestvoznaniia i tekhniki*, 1991, no. 1:15–32).

Diverse patterns and results notwithstanding, these discussions taken together constituted a political campaign in the Soviet sense: several highly publicized model events and a number of local reactions and imitations. The very fact of holding a discussion already had a political meaning prior to what its particular outcome would be. My goal is to understand what in this campaign made it look coherent to insiders, Communist practitioners, although it appears irregular and chaotic to us, cultural outsiders.

Elsewhere I have already suggested that regularity can indeed be found, but on the level of formal rules and rites of public behavior rather than in the contents and results of disputes. This idea has helped to explain events in physics and why they ended up differently than in biology.⁹ The argument I sketched in earlier papers will be developed here further and applied to three other crucial cases. The Philosophical Dispute of 1947 was not only chronologically the first but also the purest performance staged by politicians themselves. Its analysis will reveal the rules of the Communist games of *diskussiia* and *kritika i samokritika*. An inquiry into the rituals of Stalinist political culture and its special domain called “intraparty democracy” will then be needed to understand both the ascribed functions of these games and the possible motivations of politicians who proffered them to scholars as methods for handling scientific disputes. Provoked from above, scholars engaged in a variety of academic conflicts while pursuing their own agendas and inventively using available cultural resources in dialogues with politicians. An important thing about these games was that, in theory and often also in practice, their outcomes were not predetermined, but depended upon the play. How scholars interpreted and exploited this particular feature will be shown by analyzing two further contrasting cases—in biology and linguistics.

The campaign of ideological discussions will thus be reinterpreted as the transfer of the rites of intraparty democracy from Communist political culture to academic life. In this process, the rules of public behavior and, to some degree, rhetorical vocabulary, were relatively stable, but they left sufficient room for the unpredictability and diversity that actual events displayed. This model allows me in the end to draw some general conclusions about the relationship between science and ideology, and between scholars and politicians, in Stalinist Russia.

EXERCISES ON THE PHILOSOPHICAL FRONT

In Marxism perfectly, / he could express himself and write, / admitted mistakes easily, / and repented elegantly.

Soviet folkloric play on line from Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*.

Even in dictatorial and hierarchical Stalinist Russia, authorities were not entirely exempt from grass-roots criticism. On special occasions such criticism was not only possible but also welcomed, and even required. Soviet philosophers knew this when

⁹A. B. Kozhevnikov, “O nauke proletarskoi, partiinoi, marksistskoi,” in *Metafizika*, 219–38; Alexei Kojevnikov, “President of Stalin's Academy: The Mask and Responsibility of Sergei Vavilov,” *Isis* 87 (March 1996): 18–50. See also an earlier version of this essay, “Games of Soviet Democracy: Ideological Discussions in Sciences around 1948 Reconsidered,” Preprint 37 (1996), Max-Planck-Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte, Berlin.

the TsK summoned a representative gathering of them to a meeting on 16 June 1947. Andrei Zhdanov, the Politburo member responsible for ideology and Stalin's current favorite, presided over the meeting and, in a few introductory words, informed the participants that their task was to discuss Georgii Aleksandrov's *The History of West European Philosophy*. Having expressed the hope "that the comrades invited to the discussion will take an active part in it and will freely voice all critical remarks and suggestions," but stopping short of providing any more detailed instructions, Zhdanov opened the meeting and let the panel go.¹⁰

To understand the humor of the situation, one has to imagine oneself in the shoes of a rank-and-file philosopher who also had to be a party member and for whom Aleksandrov was the official authority, within both the profession and the party. Having not yet turned forty, Aleksandrov had accomplished an extraordinary career within the party apparatus. Zhdanov's protégé, he was appointed in 1940 as director of the Department of Propaganda and Agitation (Agitprop), which together with the Department of Cadres was the most important office in the TsK. The following year he was elected candidate member of the TsK and member of TsK's Orgburo. Aleksandrov's philosophical publications were devoted to topics more original than one would have expected from a party bureaucrat: Aristotle and pre-Marxist philosophy. In the fall of 1946 he reached the apex of his political career and added to it signs of academic recognition by receiving a Stalin prize for his textbook, *The History of West European Philosophy*, and by becoming a full member of the Academy of Sciences. Zhdanov's rise to favor in 1946 and renewed stress on ideological work placed Agitprop, and Aleksandrov as its head, into the center of the party's political activity. Under normal circumstances, he would be the one who would call in philosophers, scold them for mistakes, and deliver instructions on their job, while they would have considered it a great honor to be invited to publish a laudatory review of his book.¹¹

At the Philosophical Dispute, however, the roles were reversed, and philosophers were encouraged to develop a principled critique of the book and its highly placed author. The sort of criticism expected was not an obvious guess: the first attempt to engage into a serious discussion had already been made in January 1947 at the Academy's Institute of Philosophy. It had been prepared by Alexandrov's colleague from Agitprop, Petr Fedoseev, but the level of criticism failed to satisfy the TsK. In Zhdanov's words, discussion was "pale (*blednaia*), skimpy (*kutsaia*), and ineffective." For the second try, Zhdanov himself presided over the meeting, and more participants, in particular from outside Moscow, were invited and encouraged to freely express their disagreements.¹²

The audience fulfilled Zhdanov's hopes and demonstrated a great deal of activity. For more than a week, almost fifty speakers presented their critical comments on the book, and twenty more who had not received time to speak insisted on including

¹⁰"Diskussiiia," 6. On Zhdanov's episode in Soviet politics see Werner Hahn, *The Fall of Zhdanov and the Defeat of Moderation, 1946–1953* (Ithaca, 1982).

¹¹On Aleksandrov see *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, 3d ed. (Moscow, 1970), 1:413; Hahn, *Fall of Zhdanov*, 58–68; *Pravda*, 27 June 1946; and *Filosofskaia entsiklopediia* (Moscow, 1960), 1:43.

¹²For the report on the first discussion see Rossiiskii Tsentri Khraneniia i Izucheniia Dokumentatsii Noveishei Istorii (RTsKhIDNI), Moscow, f. 17, op. 125, d. 477.

their texts as an addendum to the published minutes. Several remarks made it clear that the event was taking place because Stalin had expressed his dissatisfaction with the book.¹³ Historian Vladimir Esakov has suggested that the entire chain of events was started by a letter of criticism, or denunciation, by one of Aleksandrov's foes, Moscow University philosopher Zinovii Beletskii. The letter, dated November 1946 and addressed to Stalin, was discussed at the TsK Secretariat and prompted the decision to organize a critical discussion.¹⁴

The philosophers did not know the particularities of Stalin's and the TsK's criticisms, if indeed there were any, so they had to develop critiques of their own, guessing about the essence and seriousness of Aleksandrov's mistakes. Within certain limits, the gathering produced a variety of conflicting views on the book's scholarly and political shortcomings. Mark Mitin and Pavel Yudin, the "old guard" of Communist philosophy and Aleksandrov's personal foes, apparently hoped that the event would shake up the young Turk's career and restore their own importance in the field. Supported by Beletskii and Aleksandr Maksimov, they spoke against "conciliatory attitudes" displayed during the previous discussion of the book and called for a "principled criticism" and for "militant struggle" with bourgeois ideology.¹⁵ More moderate critics included a group of up-and-coming young philosophers like Bonifatii Kedrov and Mikhail Iovchuk, who proposed such slogans as "creative criticism" and "further creative elaboration of Marxist philosophy." Many who did not belong to either "militant" or "creative" camps and had no personal reason to be for or against Aleksandrov used the opportunity to speak before Zhdanov, demonstrate their talents, loyalty, and activity, while not forgetting to mention various personal agendas.¹⁶

Only after having listened to the others did Zhdanov deliver his talk, in which he summarized the results of the discussion and drew further conclusions. According to him, although deserving encouragement as the first attempt to write a Marxist textbook on the history of philosophy, the book had in general failed to meet its goals. Zhdanov criticized several examples of bad style and unclear definitions and accused Aleksandrov of committing not only factual mistakes but also such political ones as "objectivism"—insufficient criticism of pre-Marxist bourgeois philosophy. According to Zhdanov, the textbook's deficiencies reflected the generally unsatisfactory situation "on the philosophical front." The uncritical reception and laudatory reviews of the book, until Stalin intervened, had demonstrated "the absence of Bolshevik criticism and self-criticism among Soviet philosophers." Combining the slogans of rival philosophical parties, Zhdanov said that Soviet philosophical publications were often scholastic and conciliatory rather than creative and militant, that they stopped short of developing Marxist doctrine further and of fighting against idealistic perversions.

¹³"Diskussiia," 267, 289; RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 477, l. 4.

¹⁴Esakov, "K istorii," 87. A few others also claimed to have signaled to the TsK about mistakes in the book (RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 477, l. 111; *ibid.*, d. 527, ll. 9–37).

¹⁵On the feud between Mitin and Alexandrov and groupings among philosophers see D. Chesnokov's and Agitprop's reports to Georgii Malenkov and Mikhail Suslov in 1949, RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 155, ll. 20–26; and *ibid.*, d. 161, ll. 8–36.

¹⁶For a comparison of the slogans of the "creative" and "militant" parties see the editorials, "Za tvorcheskuiu razrabotku marksistskoi filosofii," and "Za boevoi filosofskii zhurnal," in *Voprosy filosofii*, 1948, no. 1, and 1949, no. 1, respectively.

Aleksandrov failed to ensure good leadership in the field; “moreover, he relied in his work too much on a narrow circle of his closest collaborators and admirers”—at this point Zhdanov was interrupted by the applause and shouts of “Right!”—and “philosophical work had thus been monopolized by a small group of philosophers.”¹⁷

At the end of the Session, Aleksandrov was given an opportunity to engage in self-criticism. His role was technically the most difficult one: on the one hand, the ritual strictly forbade the use of a defensive tone; on the other, his career would not benefit were he to accept the most serious accusations. For the game to be performed and resolved successfully, and to convince the spectators that his repentance was sincere, Aleksandrov had to estimate correctly the mood of the audience and higher referees and find the right tone of self-accusation. Having done this in the first part of his speech, having thanked everybody for exposing his mistakes, and having summarized them once again, Aleksandrov then shifted his tone to that of a philosophers’ instructor and urged everybody to learn from his case and to improve work on the philosophical front.¹⁸

The Stalinist system preferred distinct black and white colors over shaded tones and had difficulty drawing an intermediate line between unequivocal political praise and complete political denigration. In Aleksandrov’s case, however, the discussion did not destroy him either as a politician or as a person, but did constitute a turning point in what had been an extraordinarily rapid and successful career. Although Aleksandrov survived for another three months as director of Agitprop, and even submitted a proposal for further work, his career was in danger.¹⁹ In September 1947 the TsK Secretariat reviewed the results of the philosophical discussion and decided to remove Aleksandrov from his influential party post.²⁰ Demoted, he was appointed as director of the Institute of Philosophy, in which position, presumably, he had to supervise directly how his critics were learning from his mistakes. Stigmatized by the event, Aleksandrov was repeatedly criticized within the party apparatus, especially after the death of his patron Zhdanov in August 1948. In July 1949, Aleksandrov was accused of political mistakes, fired from the editorial board of the party’s main theoretical journal, *Bol'shevik*, and disappeared for a while from the public political arena. He managed to return to it in 1950 and even to come back into favor during the political changes which followed Stalin’s death. In 1954, Aleksandrov was appointed minister of culture, only to be removed the following year in a sex scandal. He was transferred to Minsk and died there in 1961 as a rank-and-file member of the Belorussian Institute of Philosophy. Such was the end of this turbulent and unusual career for a Soviet bureaucrat.²¹

¹⁷“Diskussiiia,” 269.

¹⁸Ibid., 288–99.

¹⁹Esakov, “K istorii,” 96–97; RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 543, ll. 154–58.

²⁰“Stenogramma soveshchaniia Upravleniia propagandy i agitatsii TsK VKP(b) ot 19 sentiabria 1947 g. ‘O sostoianii raboty v oblasti propagandy i agitatsii,’” RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 493. Petr Fedoseev, who had organized the discussion of January 1947, was criticized for a lack of principles.

²¹RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 160, ll. 91–98; *ibid.*, d. 155, ll. 1–51; [Roy Medvedev], *Politicheskii dnevnik, 1964–1970* (Amsterdam, 1972), 215, 221; *Belaruskaja savetskaja entsyklopediia*, vol. 1 (Minsk, 1969); B. Kedrov and G. Gurgenidze, “Za glubokuiu razrabotku leninskogo filosofskogo nasledstva,” *Kommunist* 32 (September 1955): 45–46.

GAMES OF INTRAPARTY DEMOCRACY

The ritualistic performance described in the preceding section may seem weird to a modern reader, but for Soviet audiences it was an example of the familiar cultural games of *diskussii* (disputation) and *kritika i samokritika* (criticism and self-criticism). These games originated and were usually played within party structures and belonged to the repertoire called “intraparty democracy.”

Soviet, and more narrowly, intraparty democracy is a controversial topic. Merle Fainsod described it as mere propaganda and a “verbal masquerade.” Roy Medvedev took it seriously as an element of true democracy and argued against violations of its principles in party life. More recently, Arch Getty called attention to its function of controlling local party bosses with the help of rank-and-file members, and argued that under certain conditions the process could get out of control and produce a massive purge.²² Communists themselves, in public and in private, viewed intraparty democracy as a mechanism for making officials accountable to the party masses and as the main tool in the struggle against bureaucratism and corruption in the party apparatus. Although openly preferring administrative centralization and hierarchical discipline as the organizing principles of social life, they were also aware that local bosses were in a position to abuse their power and to prevent higher authorities from receiving objective reports about local conditions. The Stalinist leadership tried to establish a system of counterbalances designed to provide feedback as well as to define situations and limits within which grass-roots control of the apparatus was possible. In combination with the principle of administrative hierarchy, this system was called by the idiosyncratic term “democratic centralism”; and, as we shall see later, it could lead to idiosyncratic results.

Intraparty democracy could perform all of the above-mentioned functions—propagandistic, democratic or populist, controlling, and purging—but it would be a simplification to reduce it to any particular one of them and to define it by its function. The phenomenon is more complex and might be better understood as a system of cultural rituals specific to, and of central importance to, Stalinist society. For members of that culture it had a high ideal value in its own right, not only because of its presumed practical goals. It also had sufficient power to ensure the public compliance of even the highest officials, such as Zhdanov. In modern anthropological studies, rituals are no longer described as rigid, strictly repetitive, and noncreative activities, but as forms of life: they are formalized collective performances, a unity of spatial movement and verbal discourse, which constitute the core of social identity in all communities and have both sacred and practical meanings. Although being rule-governed, the activity is not a petrified or simply symbolic one: rituals “are not just expressive or abstract ideas but do things, have effects on the world, and are work that is carried out.” “[Ritual] is an arena of contradictory and contestable perspectives—participants having their own reasons, viewpoints, and motives and in fact is made up as it goes along.”²³

²²M. Fainsod, *How Russia Is Ruled* (Cambridge, MA, 1953), 180–86; Roy Medvedev, *Kniga o sotsialisticheskoi demokratii* (Amsterdam, 1972), 124–56; J. Arch Getty, *Origins of the Great Purges: The Soviet Communist Party Reconsidered* (New York, 1985), 97–98, 141–42.

²³Daniel de Coppert, ed., *Understanding Rituals* (London, 1992), 1–4, 13–18.

Social life under Stalinism was ritualized to a very high degree. In its political sphere, the most typical space of formalized collective action and discourse was a local meeting of a party organization or some institution. The repertoire of distinctive types of meetings, with their specific genres of discourse, was quite rich, and there were also many words for “meeting with discussion” in the political language: *sobranie*, *soveshchanie*, *zasedanie*, *vstrecha*, *obsuzhdenie*, *priem*, *sessiia*, and others. Some correspondence, although not one-to-one, between genres and names can be established. The English word “discussion” is too general and too neutral to account for that diversity. In the following I will use “discussion” as a generic term, and more specific words to stress when necessary the differences in genres. For instance, a local meeting (*sobranie*) which invited participants to discuss and draw conclusions from an authoritative decision or decree would be typically called an *obsuzhdenie* (consideration). When a meeting was announced as a *diskussiia* (disputation), this was a sign that participants were invited to demonstrate polemical skills in a theoretical matter which had not yet been decided by authorities. A *diskussiia* allowed for temporary, public disagreement over important political questions. It was often used for, or followed by, resolving the controversy and formulating a decision, after which further expressions of disagreements were ruled out. The decision was sometimes taken by participants’ voting, sometimes by authorities who either observed the meeting in person or reviewed its minutes later. In the most serious *diskussii* that threatened to split the party several times during the 1920s, it was the party congress, or *s’ezd*, that resolved the controversy. Officially, a *s’ezd* was the highest party authority. By voting, it settled the disputes once and forever, and the opposition, or the losing party, had to stop any further polemics with the majority.²⁴

Besides *diskussiia*, *kritika i samokritika* (criticism and self-criticism) also belonged to the repertoire of intraparty democracy, but it usually dealt with personal rather than theoretical matters. Berthold Unfried has already described it as a ritual central to the culture of the party and as a dialectical combination of two functions: initiation (educating and enculturating party cadres) and terror (exposing and destroying enemies). Standing the trial of *kritika i samokritika* was a necessary part of the training of new party members and officials. Subordinating one’s personal views to those of the collective, accepting criticism and delivering self-criticism in the proper way, were the proof of successfully internalized cultural values and of one’s status as an insider. The same ritual could also be used as a mechanism for purging, for revealing and accusing internal (but not external) enemies. Its cultural force was so strong that even Communist oppositionists who faced the death penalty were still proving their insider status by admitting imaginary crimes and accusing themselves in the *public* performance of Moscow trials, while denying their guilt in last *private* letters to Stalin or to the party.²⁵

²⁴Of course, theoretical openness did not exclude manipulations and intrigues, in which the TsK had to engage in order to secure the necessary majority. Another attempt to flirt with the idea of democracy in Stalinist times is discussed in J. Arch Getty, “State and Society under Stalin: Constitution and Elections in the 1930s,” *Slavic Review* 50 (Spring 1991): 18–35.

²⁵Berthold Unfried, “Rituale von Konfession und Selbstkritik: Bilder vom stalinistischen Kader,” *Jahrbuch für historische Kommunismusforschung* (1994): 148–64. See also Klaus-Georg Riegel, *Konfessionsrituale im Marxismus-Leninismus* (Graz, 1985).

Another role of *kritika i samokritika*, identified by Arch Getty, allowed and provided an institutional framework for grass-roots criticism of local bosses.²⁶ Party secretaries normally would rule in an authoritarian way, exempt from criticism from below, but within ritualistic space-time constraints, the usual hierarchy could be temporarily reversed and horizontal or upward critique welcomed. The requirement of self-criticism forbade the local authority under fire from using his power to suppress criticism. In Communist self-descriptions, this democratic institution supplemented the hierarchical structure of the party and was steadily at work revealing and repairing shortcomings and local abuses of power, “however unpleasant it might be for the leaders.” In practice, *kritika i samokritika* was performed mainly on special occasions and usually required permission or initiative from above. It could be applied when higher authorities wanted popular justification for their desire to remove a local functionary, when they were not sure about denunciations against him and wanted to test him publicly, during elections to party posts, or simply as a substitute for the Christian ritual of “penance” for the regular cleansing of the system.

Analyzing the Philosophical Dispute of 1947 as a combination of two rituals, *diskussiia* and *kritika i samokritika*, reveals some of their rules. Rule-governing in the ritual does not necessarily imply the existence of an explicit code, but the shared perception that there are some rules: “Even when neither observers nor participants can agree on, understand, or even perceive ritual regulations, they are united by a sense of the occasion as being in some way rule-governed and as necessarily so in order [for a public ritual] to be complete, efficacious, and proper.”²⁷ Party members learned most of their cultural rituals not from such texts as party statutes, but from watching and participating in actual performances; their behavior and discourse at a meeting depended in the most crucial way on the announced type of ritual. The feeling of definite rules permeated the entire procedure of the Philosophical Dispute: participants watched each other’s behavior and often criticized perceived violations. They protested when, in their opinion, speakers were expressing personal animosities instead of principled criticism, and especially strongly when self-defense was being offered in place of self-criticism. The ritual could not be considered completed without a solo performance of “sincere self-criticism.” Aleksandrov displayed a good example of playing according to the rules, and thus proved his loyalty and his status as an insider. But at the 1950 physiological discussion, when Leon Orbeli protested against the accusatory style of criticism, the audience got more infuriated at this “violation of rules” than at his other alleged mistakes, and at the end of the meeting Orbeli had to deliver another, much more humble talk.²⁸

Both *diskussiia* and *kritika i samokritika* were rule-governed public performances, the results of which did not have to be fixed in advance. Although the structure of the discourse was quite rigid, the critical content and the outcome of the discussion

²⁶Getty, *Origins*, 50, 67, 134–35, 145, 224.

²⁷Coppert, *Understanding Rituals*, 15.

²⁸*Nauchnaia sessiia*, 94, 187, 501.

depended very much upon the activity of players. On the theoretical side, Aleksandrov's mistakes were not exactly known to participants, but had to be found out during *diskussiia*. On the career side, the ritual of *kritika i samokritika*, like the ritual of confession, could be constructive as well as destructive. In the regular training and elections of party cadres, self-criticism could often be followed by a promotion. At a trial of an official, such as in Aleksandrov's case, the procedure was certainly a purgatory for him, but it could still end up anywhere between purge and practical acquittal. Public contestations which, like *diskussiia* and *kritika i samokritika*, had more or less fixed rules but open results, would be more appropriately termed "ritual games."²⁹

The Philosophical Dispute can also illustrate the characteristic role structure of both games. Since both constituted a temporary challenge to the normal order—conceptual or hierarchical—the play often required a permission or encouragement from a higher authority, either in a concrete form or as an announcement of a general campaign of, say, *samokritika*. A representative from an agency further up the administrative hierarchy typically moderated the meeting: he was not directly associated with actively contesting parties—he played above them—but was not completely impartial, either.³⁰ Thus Zhdanov's presence in this role at the Philosophical Dispute was needed to announce the type of ritual to be played and the topic, to suppress by his aura of power the usual hierarchy between Aleksandrov and his subordinates, and to enforce procedures and rules. Various agencies could fulfill the role of referee. Many participants at the Philosophical Dispute included indirect appeals to the TsK in their speeches. As it turned out, the TsK Secretariat played referee with regard to *kritika i samokritika* by deciding about Aleksandrov's career, whereby minutes of the dispute were certainly taken into account. Zhdanov himself refereed the *diskussiia*, when at the end of the meeting he summarized its theoretical results and fixed the consensus.

The roots of these rituals are not to be found in Marxist doctrine, either in its original form or as it was developed by Lenin. Apparently, they were first established in Communist practice and only later in theory. *Diskussiia*, as a way of sorting out and resolving factional disagreements within the party, existed in some form before the Revolution, and in a fully developed version certainly by 1920. Within its space-time constraints, the opposition was arguing for and partially achieving the *freedom to criticize* party authorities. *Samokritika* as a political slogan and campaign first appeared in 1928 and meant "the purge of the party from below," which allowed

²⁹The metaphor is used here not in the narrow sense of the game theory, but in the wider Wittgensteinian sense. See examples of games in L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (London, 1958), §§ 66–71. A comparison with a game like amateur soccer, where players follow certain models, but can also argue and improvise about rules, suffices for the purposes of this essay.

³⁰Although Getty does not assign a special role to the moderator as the third party (besides the mob and the local boss) in the performance of *kritika i samokritika*, this figure appears in his narratives whenever he describes a meeting in detail (*Origins*, 72, 151–53). The moderator did have his own agenda and usually tried to direct the meeting, but he had to avoid being explicitly partisan. Sometimes the discussion could get out of his control: Getty describes a *kritika i samokritika* meeting during which angry Communist insurgents ousted the district party secretary, despite the protective attempts of the higher representative.

young radicals to criticize authorities and do away with NEP.³¹ By 1935 the ritual had changed its name to *kritika i samokritika* and was playing an important role in the party purges. Among Soviet leaders, Zhdanov always appeared as its chief promoter and propagandist. It was familiar to all members, applied on various occasions within party and Soviet structures, and considered one of the main principles of party life. But by the time of the 1947 Philosophical Dispute, it had not yet received a higher justification from Marxist theory.

In his talk at the dispute, Zhdanov presented the first outline of such a theory.

The party long ago found and put into the service of socialism this particular form of exposing and overcoming contradictions in socialist society (these contradictions exist, although philosophers are reluctant to write about them), this particular form of the struggle between old and new, between withering away and emerging in our Soviet society, which is called *kritika i samokritika*. ... Development in our society occurs in the form of *kritika i samokritika*, which is the true moving force of our progressive development, a powerful tool in the party's hands.³²

In what was further developed as the theoretical rationalization for existing practice, *kritika i samokritika* was supposedly doing for socialist society what “bourgeois democracy” did for capitalism—providing mechanisms for change. In the one-party system, so the argument ran, when no competing political party was providing external criticism, the Communist party had to carry the burden of self-criticism to reveal and repair its own defects if it were to cleanse and improve itself. Such was the Communist interpretation of the democratic idea as applied to the party itself.³³

OPENING PANDORA'S BOX

The great and serious tasks arising before Soviet science can be solved successfully only through the wider development of *kritika i samokritika*—“one of the most serious forces that pushes forward our development.”

Vestnik Akademii nauk, 1948, quoting Stalin.

According to the official point of view, the Philosophical Dispute “enlivened work on the philosophical front and stimulated further progress in it.” The immediate consequence was the establishment of the professional journal *Voprosy filosofii*. Bonifatii Kedrov, who during the meeting argued in favor of such a journal and managed to pass a note to Zhdanov asking for a personal appointment, became

³¹On the 1928 campaign of *samokritika* see *Spravochnik partiinogo rabotnika*, 7th ed. (Moscow-Leningrad, 1930); G. Alikhanov, *Samokritika i vnutripartiinaia demokratiia* (Leningrad, 1928); and *O samokritike* (n.p., 1928). For a description of *samokritika* in the Moscow party structure see Catherine Merridale, *Moscow Politics and the Rise of Stalin* (Basingstoke, 1990), 198–215.

³²“Diskussiia,” 270. Originally, Zhdanov tried to ascribe authorship of the concept to Stalin, but Stalin crossed this out from the manuscript (Esakov, “K istorii,” 92).

³³“Bol'shevistskaia kritika i samokritika.” For more on the theory of *kritika i samokritika* see “Samokritika—ispytannoe oruzhie bol'shevizma,” Stepanian, “O protivorechiakh pri sotsializme,” and “Pod znamenem bol'shevistskoi kritiki i samokritiki,” all in *Pravda*, 24 August 1946, 20 August 1947, and 15 March 1948, respectively.

editor-in-chief.³⁴ The entire first issue of the journal was devoted to the minutes of the discussion. The theory of *kritika i samokritika*, developed by Zhdanov and sanctioned by Stalin, was thus introduced to wider audiences as an important new contribution to Marxism-Leninism. It offered a basis and inspiration for mid-level politicians to develop derivatives and applications. A demonstration of zeal by initiating and carrying out a successful interpretation of the general slogan could certainly bring rewards and push one's career ahead. At the same time, risks could never be eliminated entirely. We shall see later that, no matter how correct the official might try to be in his actions, the chance always remained that he might come under fire for real or assumed mistakes.

Although the minutes of the Philosophical Dispute did not suggest yet that the method ought to be applied within other academic disciplines, the slogan "*kritika i samokritika* in science" soon became one of the policies of Agitprop under its new leadership, the official director and TsK secretary, Mikhail Suslov, and the acting director Dmitrii Shepilov. However, it was mainly lower-level politicians whose names became directly associated with the initiative. Kedrov was apparently the first to publish, in February 1948, a theoretical paper on the topic. Later the entire campaign was reviewed and praised by former Agitprop officer Mikhail Iovchuk and by Iurii Zhdanov, a young Moscow University graduate and the son of Andrei Zhdanov, who came to Agitprop in late 1947 to head the Sector of Science.³⁵ Extending *kritika i samokritika* to the sciences could well have seemed a safe bet. The word "sciences" in Russian, *nauki*, embraces not only the natural and social sciences but also the humanities and ideological scholarship. The Dispute of 1947 was performed by party members who just happened to be philosophers. But since philosophy was also one of the *nauki*, it was just as natural to apply the same, presumably so effective, method to other fields as well. The double status of philosophy as both a party business and an academic field made it easier for the games of *diskussii* and *kritika i samokritika* to be transferred from party culture to academia.

When Kedrov published his theoretical essay in February 1948 in *Vestnik Akademii Nauk*, the official monthly of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, readers could still regard the work as the author's personal opinion. The appearance of the editorial, "The First Results of Creative Disputations," in the subsequent issue, however, signified to readers the existence of an ongoing political campaign. Unsigned editorials in newspapers were the usual means for delivering messages from authorities regarding sanctioned opinions and policies. The March 1948 editorial reviewed several early examples of "creative disputations": the Philosophical Dispute, the disputes on Varga's book on world economics, on textbooks in linguistics, law, and on the history of the USSR, discussions at Moscow University and the Academy of Sciences on intraspecies competition, and a few others. The editors mentioned that the initiative had come from the party press and appealed to scien-

³⁴Esakov, "K istorii," 93–102. See also B. M. Kedrov, "Kak sozdavalsia nash zhurnal," *Voprosy filosofii*, 1988, no. 4:92–104.

³⁵Kedrov, "Znachenie kritiki i samokritiki v razvitii nauki (K voprosu o roli otritsaniia v dialektike i metafizike)," *Vestnik Akademii nauk*, 1948, no. 2:68–100; Zhdanov, "O kritike"; Iovchuk, "Bor'ba mnenii." See also "Za svobodnuiu, tvorcheskuiu nauchnuiu kritiku," *Vestnik Akademii nauk*, 1950, no. 8:10–20.

tists from other fields to follow these examples. Methods of creative *diskussii* and of *kritika i samokritika* had to be applied in the work of scientists in order to “reveal our own mistakes and to overcome them.”³⁶

This new Agitprop initiative differed markedly from Andrei Zhdanov’s earlier crusade of 1946, which hit mainly literary journals, films, theater, and music, but also some academic institutes in law and economics. In his talk in August 1946, Zhdanov had called for an increased level of criticism in various cultural fields: “Where there is no criticism, there solidifies stagnation and rot; there is no room there for progressive movement.”³⁷ However, the initiative was expected then to come from the party. When first plans for such an extension of ideological work were discussed at a closed meeting of Agitprop on 18 April 1946, Zhdanov was particularly concerned about the weakness of internal criticism in such hierarchically governed organizations as the Writer’s Union and the State Committee for Cultural Affairs: “Who can correct these departments’ attitude which spoils the work and contradicts the interests of people? Of course, only the involvement of the party ... through the organization of party criticism in order to counterbalance the department’s own criticism.”³⁸ Open party involvement in cultural affairs followed. Politicians apparently considered themselves competent enough in literature and film to make expert judgments and to issue them publicly in the name of party bodies. Writers and film directors convened afterwards and held *obsuzhdeniia* (considerations) of authoritative decisions.³⁹

In contrast, when it came to scholarly disputes in the fall of 1947, politicians preferred to act behind the scenes, left most public performances to scholars, and let decisions be issued in the name of a representative academic meeting. This choice was not a random one, but very characteristic of the place of *nauka* in Stalinist society. In their theoretical views about science, Soviet Marxists tried to combine adherence to objective scientific truth with the idea of an inseparable relationship between knowledge and social values. A typical solution drew a line between specific problems in science, where scholars were recognised experts, and philosophical interpretations, where politicians had the right and duty to intervene and interact with professionals. Politicians alone did not possess the knowledge and authority to define agendas in sciences, but required the active participation of, and dialogue with, experts. They therefore recommended games—*diskussii* (with a special adjective,

³⁶“Pervye itogi tvorcheskikh diskussii,” *Vestnik Akademii nauk*, 1948, no. 3:15.

³⁷“Doklad t. Zhdanova o zhurnalakh ‘Zvezda’ i ‘Leningrad,’” *Pravda*, 21 September 1946.

³⁸“Stenogramma soveshchaniia v TsK po voprosam propagandy, o rabote tsentral’nykh gazet i izdatel’stv, 18 aprilia 1946 g. pod predsedatel’stvom A. A. Zhdanova,” RTsKhIDNI, f. 77, op. 1, d. 976, l. 40.

³⁹The campaign for *tvorcheskie diskussii* in science also has to be distinguished from the 1947 campaign for teaching patriotism to scientists as well as from the 1949 anticommunist witchhunt. On the former see V. D. Esakov and E. S. Levina, “Delo ‘KR’ (Iz istorii goneniia na sovetkuiu intelligentsiiu),” *Kentavr*, 1994, no. 2:54–69, and no. 3:96–118; and Nikolai Kremontsov, “The ‘KR Affair’: Soviet Science on the Threshold of the Cold War,” *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences*, 1995, no. 3:3–30. On the latter see G. Kostyrchenko, *V plenu u krasnogo faraona: Politicheskie presledovaniia evreev v SSSR v poslednee stalinskoe desiatiletie: Dokumental’noe issledovanie* (Moscow, 1994). Although they shared many common rhetorical themes, the formal rules of public games differed and these campaigns need separate treatment.

tvorcheskaia—“creative”) and *kritika i samokritika*—from their repertoire of intra-party democracy which implied grass-roots initiative and criticism.⁴⁰

Scholars were thus invited to play, within their own ranks, party games, and they could respond in a number of different ways. A sufficient demonstration of loyalty would be to hold an *obsuzhdenie* of the Philosophical Dispute at a local meeting and adopt a resolution with assurances that disputes and criticism had always been, and continued to be, crucial for their work. Some interpreted the invitation as permission for more freedom in academic discourse.⁴¹ Many reacted with discussions imitating the Philosophical Dispute. Since the model event was a dispute over a textbook, most of the early imitations also took the form of a discussion of a certain book or textbook.⁴² Being the best informed about the rules of the game, philosophers staged one more smooth performance. In January 1948 a *diskussiia* was organized in the Institute of Philosophy, and it became a miniature replica of the 1947 Dispute. The cast of characters included Aleksandrov, who had become director of the institute, presiding over the meeting as mini-Zhdanov; and Kedrov, with his book *Engels and the Natural Sciences*, playing mini-Aleksandrov. Both were apparently in control of the situation, and the meeting only confirmed the existing hierarchy. While presenting a mixture of moderate praise and criticism of the book, the audience turned largely against Kedrov's main opponent, Aleksandr Maksimov, blaming him for unfair and dogmatic use of criticism.⁴³

While agendas and outcomes were not predetermined, the rhetorical and cultural resources, in a certain sense, were. Rival groups of scholars were already used to including political argumentation in academic discourse, and to sending political authorities letters of denunciation and complaints against colleagues. Agitprop files are filled with such letters, only a relatively few of which could receive any serious attention. With the new agenda of critical discussions, a tempting possibility emerged for scholars to proceed with existing academic conflicts in more open and politically sanctioned forms. The campaign stimulated public as well as unofficial dialogue between scholars and politicians, wherein the common language was mainly that of current politics and ideology; by appealing to politicians as referees and striving for their support, scholars competed in translating scientific concepts and agendas into

⁴⁰On the border between the spheres of cognitive authority of politicians and experts see Kojevnikov, “President of Stalin's Academy,” 38–39. For a contrasting view on *kritika i samokritika* as a method of subordinating science, suppressing all signs of independent thinking, and creating a specifically Marxist science see N. L. Kremontsov, “Ravnenie na VASKhNIL,” in *Repressirovannaiia nauka* (St. Petersburg, 1994), 2:94–95. This view is based on the standard interpretation of the campaign as “the intention of party agencies to establish complete control over the scientific community and to affirm the status of the Central Committee ... as the supreme authority in scientific questions,” and on unjustified generalizing upon the single case of biology. See Nikolai Kremontsov, *Stalinist Science* (Princeton, 1997), 193.

⁴¹This led to the publication of a paper on the philosophy of physics and to a subsequent *diskussiia*. See M. A. Markov, “O prirode fizicheskogo znaniiia,” “Diskussiia o prirode fizicheskogo znaniiia: Obsuzhdenie stat'i M. A. Markova,” *Voprosy filosofii*, 1947, 2:140–76, and 1948, no. 3:212–35.

⁴²See, for example, “Obsuzhdenie uchebnika prof. A. I. Denisova ‘Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo,’” and “Rasshirennoe zasedanie Redaktsionno-Izdatel'skogo soveta AN SSSR,” *Vestnik Akademii nauk*, 1948, no. 4:103–5, and no. 6:73–80, respectively.

⁴³“Obsuzhdenie knigi prof. B. M. Kedrova ‘Engel's i estestvoznanie,’” *Vestnik Akademii nauk*, 1948, no. 3:100–105.

that language. Conflicting academic parties were developing ideological pictures of their fields in ways that would support their positions in controversies.

In these scenarios, politicians could fulfill different roles. That “*kritika i samokritika* is the law of the development in science” quickly became a commonplace for them.⁴⁴ In fields like philosophy, political economy, and law, Agitprop initiated and set the direction of some discussions. More often, it did not have its own agenda but welcomed scholars’ critical initiatives and was more interested in the very fact that a discussion came about than in its particular result. In these cases, disputes were performed within the academic hierarchy and depended largely upon internal conflicts and power relations. In some situations, politicians listened to appeals for support by rival groups of scientists and, if convinced by the rhetoric, could accept the role of referee. The following section applies this interpretation to an analysis of the events in the field of biology leading to the August Session. This case has served as the core model for most previous interpretations and therefore requires special treatment.

RESOLVING THE CONTROVERSY AND ACHIEVING CONSENSUS

In science as in politics, contradictions are resolved not through reconciliation, but through an open struggle.

Andrei Zhdanov and Georgii Malenkov, July 1948.

The conflict in biology had ripened long before 1948. Geneticists had suffered serious losses in the late 1930s, with Nikolai Vavilov and several other prominent figures perishing in the great purges and Lysenko rising to head the Academy of Agricultural Sciences and the Institute of Genetics in the Academy of Sciences. After World War II geneticists tried to regain some ground and to undermine Lysenko’s position. Anton Zhebrak, a geneticist, and in 1945–46 an Agitprop officer, wrote letters to the TsK arguing that Lysenko’s monopoly was damaging the reputation of Soviet science among the Western Allies, and lobbied for opening another institute of genetics in the Academy, with himself as its future director.⁴⁵ Perhaps as a result of a denunciation that too many Agitprop workers were seeking membership in the Academy of Sciences in major elections during the fall of 1946, it was not Zhebrak but another geneticist, Nikolai Dubinin, who was elected corresponding member despite Lysenko’s opposition, and the Academy proceeded with the plan to organize an institute for him. Soon after Iurii Zhdanov became the head of the Science Sector in Agitprop on 1 December 1947, he was visited by several of Lysenko’s opponents, who complained about the unsatisfactory situation in biology.⁴⁶

Once the campaign of *tvorcheskie diskussii* started, a new dispute about Darwinism and the problem of intraspecies competition erupted between Lysenko and

⁴⁴See, for instance, G. F. Aleksandrov, “Ob oshibochnykh vzgliadakh B. M. Kedrova v oblasti filosofii i estestvoznaniia,” 23 February 1949, RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 180, ll. 48–97.

⁴⁵On this and other attacks on Lysenko see Esakov and Levina, “Iz istorii bor’by s lysenkovshchinosi,” *Izvestiia TK KPSS*, 1991, no. 4:125–41, no. 6:157–73, and no. 7:109–21; E. S. Levina, *Vavilov, Lysenko, Timofeev-Resovskii — Biologiia v SSSR: Istorii i istoriografiia* (Moscow, 1995); RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 359, ll. 5–8; *ibid.*, d. 449, ll. 48–49, 108–11; and S. I. Alikhanov to Stalin, 6 May 1948, *ibid.*, d. 71, ll. 4–41.

⁴⁶Iu. A. Zhdanov, “Vo mgle protivorechii,” *Voprosy filosofii*, 1993, no. 7:74.

his opponents on the pages of *Literaturnaia gazeta*. With silent permission from Agitprop, and in line with the new policies, biologists organized conferences at Moscow State University (November 1947 and February 1948), and at the Biology Division of the Academy of Sciences (December 1947), where they criticized some of Lysenko's views.⁴⁷ On 10 April 1948, Zhdanov, Jr., entered the discussion with a lecture at a meeting of party propagandists on "Controversial Questions of Contemporary Darwinism," in which he partly sided with Lysenko's critics. According to him, the struggle was between two schools of Soviet biology, rather than between the Soviet and bourgeois sciences. Both Neo-Darwinians (geneticists) and Neo-Lamarckists (Lysenkoists) had accomplishments, and both had succumbed to an undesirable radicalism during the struggle. Lysenko, in particular, should not claim to be the only follower of the great Russian selectionist, Michurin. Having started as a pathbreaker, Lysenko later lost his self-critical attitude and, by suppressing other approaches, he had brought about direct damage. Monopolies in every field of scientific research should be liquidated: creative disputations, developing *kritika i samokritika* in science, and cultivating a variety of research methods would help achieve this.⁴⁸

A young and inexperienced *apparatchik*, Iurii Zhdanov prematurely tried to referee the biological controversy. Although he had consulted with his boss, Shepilov, he spoke up too early and secured neither definite approval from higher authorities nor the means to drive Lysenko toward *samokritika*. Zhdanov made it clear to the audience that he was delivering his personal rather than the official opinion. Although Lysenko was not invited to the lecture, he managed to hear it secretly and became intimidated, for he had apparently almost lost this round of *kritika*. Cleverly enough, he started a new one. Since Lysenko was a major authority in the field of biology, he would have committed a rhetorical mistake had he decided to complain about the criticism from below. Instead, he built a new triangle of *kritika i samokritika* by presenting his school as the minority constantly attacked by biological authorities, complaining against the actions of Iurii Zhdanov, who was the party authority for scientists, and appealing to Stalin as referee. In his letter of 17 April to Stalin and Andrei Zhdanov, Lysenko appears as a nonparty but loyal scientist who was upset by Iurii's lecture and did not know whether the party had lost trust in him, or whether the critique was just the result of a young official's incompetence. Were the former true, Lysenko offered in another letter his resignation as president of the Agricultural Academy.⁴⁹

Lysenko's complaint impressed Stalin. At a Politburo meeting in June, Stalin expressed his dissatisfaction with Zhdanov's talk. In later interviews with Valery

⁴⁷"Nauchnye diskussii," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 29 November, and 10 and 27 December 1947; "O vnutrividovoi bor'be za sushchestvovanie sredi organizmov (Reshenie Biuro Otdeleniia biologicheskikh nauk AN SSSR)," *Vestnik Akademii nauk*, 1948, no. 3; "Moskovskaia konferentsiia po problemam darvinizma," *Priroda*, 1948, no. 6:85–87.

⁴⁸Zhdanov, "Vo mgle," 74, 81, 85–86.

⁴⁹Lysenko to Stalin and Andrei Zhdanov, 17 April 1948, and Lysenko to I. A. Benediktov, minister of agriculture, 11 May 1948, published in Valery Soyfer, *Lysenko and the Tragedy of Soviet Science* (New Brunswick, 1994), 172–77.

Soifer, Iurii Zhdanov and Shepilov made contradictory and obscure remarks about who in the ideological hierarchy, and in what form, admitted responsibility for the mistake. A committee was established to investigate the case. Following the unwritten rules of the bureaucratic *modus operandi*, Shepilov advised the younger Zhdanov to write a letter of self-criticism. According to Iurii, rivals of Zhdanov, Sr., among the upper level of the Soviet leadership used the occasion to criticize the youngster for “insufficient disarmament” and the father for protecting the son.⁵⁰ Whether Iurii’s precipitate action may have thus contributed to his father’s fall, or whether it was Andrei Zhdanov’s loss of power that helped the agricultural bureaucracy to prevail over the ideological one, is still difficult to tell with certainty. But some connection apparently existed, for Politburo decisions on the Lysenko case and on the TsK apparatus coincided. Andrei Zhdanov became the main victim of these changes, while most other concerned party officials managed to improve their positions. Malenkov, his chief rival, was added to the TsK Secretariat on 1 July and took over the chairmanship there one week later when Zhdanov took two months’ vacation (during which he would die under suspicious circumstances). On 10 July the Politburo effected a major reorganization of the TsK apparatus, shifting its emphasis in work from propaganda to cadres. Suslov took charge of international relations, Shepilov was promoted to the official directorship of Agitprop, and Malenkov, besides cadres, oversaw the TsK’s reestablished Agricultural Department. The younger Zhdanov received a severe moral reprimand, but Stalin spared him from any more serious punishment. He remained in his position at Agitprop, but only for so long as Stalin was alive. Learning the rules of apparatus intrigue required years of experience; a hasty and amateur involvement in high politics could be very dangerous.⁵¹

On 15 July the Politburo met to discuss questions presented by the agricultural establishment—the Academy, ministries, and the new TsK Agricultural Department—and to repair the damage caused by “the incorrect report of Iu. Zhdanov on matters of Soviet biology, which did not reflect the position of the TsK.” Stalin’s expression of sympathy for Lysenko could possibly suffice to ruin the career of a Politburo member, but not to close the scientific dispute. On behalf of the committee investigating the case, Andrei Zhdanov had written, and Malenkov cosigned, a draft resolution on the situation in biological science and the mistakes of Iurii Zhdanov, but the party again stopped short of issuing the decision in its name. Instead, the Politburo approved the agricultural lobby’s proposal to appoint a number of Michurinists as new members of the Academy, and decided to reimburse Lysenko for moral damage by allowing him to present to the Academy, and publish, a report “On the Situation in Soviet Biology.”⁵²

⁵⁰Zhdanov, “Vo mgle,” 87. On D. T. Shepilov see “Problemy istorii i sovremennosti,” *Voprosy istorii KPSS*, 1989, no. 2:48–55.

⁵¹On the conflicting principles of the TsK organization and the Zhdanov-Malenkov rivalry see Fainsod, *How Russia Is Ruled*, 172–77. Kedrov also lost his job as the editor of *Voprosy filosofii* in November 1948 as an indirect consequence of the August Session (RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 34).

⁵²A. Zhdanov and G. Malenkov, “O polozhenii v sovetskoi biologicheskoi nauke,” RTsKhIDNI, f. 1, op. 77, d. 991; and the protocols of Politburo meetings on 10 and 15 July 1948 in *ibid.*, f. 17, op. 3, d. 1071.

The session of the Lenin Academy of Agricultural Sciences of the USSR opened on 31 July with a major presentation by Lysenko. Stalin had edited the manuscript and corrected its ideological profile, but party support was not announced at first. Lysenko's task was to prove that he could control the field, mobilize enough grassroots support, and stage a smooth performance. Only after he had passed this test, on the last day of the meeting, was Iurii Zhdanov's repentant letter published in *Pravda*, and Lysenko allowed to say that the TsK had approved his talk.⁵³ Having been sanctioned both by the voting at the representative scholarly meeting and by Stalin's support, the victory of Michurinist biology became final.

One can recognize behind this pattern the model provided by another game of intraparty democracy: the party congress, or *s"ezd*. The first important feature is that, officially, the decision adopted by the representative collective body had more strength than the decision of any individual leader. Even Stalin could later be declared fallible by Khrushchev, but none of the decisions of party congresses could be. Second, everyone knew from the party *Short Course* history that congresses had served several times in the 1920s as the method for final resolution of the most important party disputes. Factions and propaganda on behalf of opposing views were allowed before the *s"ezd*, but after the ballot further polemics were forbidden. The opposition had to "disarm itself" and to cancel all organizational activity. For the TsK, preparing such a *s"ezd* was a challenge: the election of deputies on the local level had to be manipulated to ensure the necessary majority.

Lysenko proceeded in a similar way. His difficulty was that the Agricultural Academy, where he had many supporters, was not the only natural authority to adjudicate theoretical problems in biology. Early interference from the Academy of Sciences could have spoiled the smooth scenario. Hence preparations were made very quickly, and most of Lysenko's opponents from the outside did not know of them and did not attend the session. Iosif Rapoport learned about the meeting only by chance and at the last moment. With some difficulty he managed to get into the building and to become one of the very few who raised a dissident voice.⁵⁴ These few were just enough to create the impression of a militant, but numerically insignificant, opposition. One cannot say that almost everybody in the hall was a convinced Lysenko follower, but many who in a different setting would have preferred to remain aloof from the polemics or even take the opposite side joined the common chorus at the August Session.

This behavior was for all intents and purposes enforced by the genre of discourse set by Lysenko's main talk and the subsequent initial speeches. Opponents tried unsuccessfully to change the game being played, and therefore the style of polemics. They argued that the dispute had not been organized properly and that the other side had not been informed and given time to prepare and explain its views. "We have to hold another free *diskussiia* in a different place," demanded P. M.

⁵³Kirill Rossianov, "Editing Nature: Joseph Stalin and the 'New Soviet Biology,'" *Isis* 84 (1993): 728–45. See also *The Situation in Biological Sciences*. On 6 August the Agricultural Department sent a long report to Malenkov, proving that the majority at the ongoing session was supporting Lysenko (RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 138, d. 30, ll. 1–39).

⁵⁴E. D. Manevich, "Takie byli vremena," *Voprosy istorii estestvoznaniia i tekhniki*, 1993, no. 2:124–25.

Zhukovskii—but many other speakers made it clear that the game was different and that time was up.⁵⁵ “*Diskussiia* had been finished after the meeting at the editorial office of the journal *Under the Banner of Marxism*. Since then . . . on part of formal genetics . . . there is not a scientific creative *diskussiia*, but factionalism and struggle, which took most unnatural and useless forms,” proclaimed the Lysenkoist Nuzhdin. The intended meaning was that geneticists had failed to meet the basic rule of a loyal party opposition: to “disarm” after being defeated during the *diskussiia*. Their status therefore changed, from tolerable partners for dispute to disloyal saboteurs who needed to be suppressed administratively, rather than verbally.⁵⁶

According to the rules of the game of *s'ezd*, the voting at the session resolved the dispute forever. Further *diskussiia* was off the agenda. The only possible games to play were *obsuzhdenie* and *kritika i samokritika*, which had already started on 7 August, the last day of the session, and which continued on 24–26 August, at the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences. The local authority subjected to criticism was the secretary of the Biology Division, Leon Orbeli. President of the Academy Sergei Vavilov played the role of moderator and opened the meeting with a dose of *samokritika*, reproaching the Presidium for “neutrality” and its attempts to preserve parity between two directions in biology. In the discussion that followed, Orbeli failed to convince the audience of the sincerity of his repentance. Vavilov then suggested that Aleksandr Oparin be elected as the new secretary of the division.⁵⁷ While the Academy was allowed the privilege of purging itself, a dozen directors of large agricultural institutes and biological departments were replaced after the August Session by direct decision of the TsK Secretariat, and over one hundred professors by an order of the Ministry of Higher Education. The minister’s proposal to remove a number of biology books from public libraries gathered support from Agitprop but was finally rejected by the Secretariat. In most biological institutions, non-Michurinists had to “disarm themselves” through *samokritika*; teaching and research plans were changed according to the results of the controversy.⁵⁸

PARADIGM SHIFT, SOVIET STYLE

Nineteen forty-nine passed without a major *diskussiia*, although there were plans for the All-Union Council of Physicists. The conflict behind these plans was institutional rather than conceptual: physicists of Moscow University proved to be more active

⁵⁵*The Situation in Biological Sciences*, 391. Another attempt to change the genre of discourse by proposing a different political model was made by B. M. Zavodovskii, who reminded the audience that the party had fought an “ideological struggle on two fronts,” “against right- and left-wing deviations” and “against mechanistic vulgarization of Marxism, on the one hand, and against Menshevistic idealism, formalism, and metaphysics, on the other.” Zavodovskii called for defending the middle line of “correct Darwinism” against both Neo-Lamarckism and Neo-Darwinism (*ibid.*, 338, 345).

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 101 (see also 165, 233, 254, and 510). The *diskussiia* at the editorial office of *Pod znamenem marksizma* occurred in 1939 and ended rather unfavorably for geneticists (Krementsov, *Stalinist Science*).

⁵⁷“*Rasshirennoe zasedanie Prezidiuma Akademii nauk SSSR, 24–26 avgusta 1948 g.*,” *Vestnik Akademii nauk*, 1948, no. 9:26. On Orbeli see RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 132, d.40, ll. 65–68. The academy’s report to the TsK is in *ibid.*, ll. 176–82.

⁵⁸See the protocols of the TsK Secretariat from 6, 9, 11, 16, and 20 August in RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 116, dd. 364–69. On the Ministry of Higher Education see *ibid.*, op. 132, d. 66. On library books see *ibid.*, ll. 7–21. For other administrative consequences of the August Session see Kremontsov, *Stalinist Science*.

and better equipped for political discussion in the Organizing Committee, and they were determined to push some of their more privileged colleagues from the Academy of Sciences toward *samokritika*, thus challenging the existing hierarchy in the field. The meeting, scheduled for March 1949, was indefinitely postponed by the TsK Secretariat, and the rehearsed performance was never played publicly. The credit for preventing the discussion has been usually given to nuclear physicists and their political boss Lavrenty Beria. However, archival documents suggest that it was not the atomic bomb, but a quiet bureaucratic intrigue by Dmitrii Shepilov and possibly Sergei Vavilov, which directed the Secretariat to corroborate the opinion that the council had not been properly prepared.⁵⁹

The Lysenko Session therefore was not eclipsed by another important political event in the sciences until 1950, when two discussions occurred almost simultaneously. The July meeting on physiology, the Pavlov Session, had been under preparation for about a year. The main moving force behind it was Iurii Zhdanov, who later claimed that he wanted to stage something more reasonable than the August Session. It is clear from the archival documents, however, that he wanted to end the monopoly of Leon Orbeli, who had inherited from Ivan Pavlov the main physiological institutions. Other pupils of Pavlov were quite willing to criticize Orbeli and to get their share of the institutes. Every politically important event in those days needed an ideological rationalization: the high principle applied in this case was strict faithfulness to Pavlovian doctrine, despite the fact that it did not belong to the body of Marxism-Leninism. This also brought under fire several other unorthodox physiologists and psychologists, and resulted in another monopoly in the field. Zhdanov had learned the lessons of the Lysenko case and rehabilitated himself: he prepared the Pavlov Session without haste, in a professional bureaucratic way, and secured Stalin's approval for it.⁶⁰ In contrast, even Agitprop was unprepared for the sudden outbreak of the "Free Discussion on linguistics in *Pravda*" in May 1950. The controversy shattered the emerging order and reversed the consensus that nearly had been achieved in the field, which already had passed through several consecutive rounds of *kritika i samokritika*.

A figure in Soviet linguistics who was in some aspects similar to Lysenko, Nikolai Marr was a mixture of genius and insanity, with a tendency to develop from the former toward the latter. He spoke an enormous number of languages, in particular those of the Caucasus and other linguistically complicated parts of the world. The Caucasus remains a problem for standard systems of linguistic classification even now. Marr's pathbreaking studies of this area challenged the accepted Indo-European theory. In 1923 he announced a complete break with that theory and started developing what would become known as the "new doctrine on language." In place of the existing picture of multiple languages developing from few common ancestors, Marr substituted a reverse evolution from initial variety, through mixture, toward the future unification of languages. In Marr's scheme, independent languages

⁵⁹See Kojevnikov, "President of Stalin's Academy," 43–47.

⁶⁰Zhdanov, "Vo mgle," 88. On the preparations for the Pavlov Session and the role of Zhdanov see RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 161, ll. 43–73, 180–86; *ibid.*, d. 177, ll. 144–62; and *ibid.*, d. 347, ll. 1–10.

passed through common stages which corresponded to the level of the development of the society. This offered him later an opportunity to connect his theory with Marxism, declare it materialistic, and oppose it to bourgeois Western linguistics.⁶¹

In the battles of the Cultural Revolution, around 1930, Marr and his school defeated their non-Marxist and Marxist opponents and achieved a monopoly in the field. Upon his death in 1934, Marr was beatified as one of the “founding fathers” of Soviet science along with Michurin, Pavlov, and Williams. “The new doctrine on language” became the official Soviet linguistics. Its keeper, and the heir to Marr’s position in the Academy, Ivan Meshchaninov, adopted a conciliatory approach: heresies and pluralism in actual research were tolerated, so long as ritualistic loyalty was expressed and the political status of Marrism as the Marxism of linguistics was not challenged.⁶² Alas, this compromise did not survive the test of the discussion campaign.

The genres of discussion in linguistics in 1947–50 were dictated by the need to respond to and hold *obsuzhdeniia* on the model events: Zhdanov’s 1946 critique of the literary journals *Zvezda* and *Leningrad*, the 1947 Philosophical Dispute, and the 1948 August Session. Correspondingly, linguists reviewed the work of their journals, discussed the quality of their textbooks, and criticized idealism. But, driven largely by the aspirations of two deputy directors (of the Moscow Institute of Language and Thought, Georgii Serdiuchenko, and of the Institute of Russian Language, Fedot Filin), these ritualistic performances were suffused with exposing and criticizing those who deviated from Marr.⁶³

The titles of the two main talks at a joint meeting of the Leningrad branches of these institutes in October 1948, “On the Situation in Linguistic Science,” and “On the Two Trends in the Study of Language,” were borrowed from Lysenko’s address to the August Session. In fact, there were three trends, for Marrists attacked modern structuralism as well as classical Indo-European linguistics, but the ritual of imitation proved to be stronger than logical considerations. Meshchaninov, who spoke first, took a softer theoretical approach, which showed his reluctance to fight. He could not avoid, after all, some self-criticism for having tolerated idealists too long. Trying to draw parallels between linguistics and biology, he equated Wilhelm Humboldt’s “spirit of the nation” with “hereditary substance,” and both Indo-European theory and genetics with racism. The second speaker, Filin, provided a more militant and practical criticism, calling for the “total scientific and political exposure” of open and

⁶¹Alpatov, *Istoriia*, chaps. 1–2; R. l’Hermite, *Marr, Marrisme, Marristes: Une page de l’histoire de la linguistique soviétique* (Paris, 1987). Linguistic theories had very important political meanings, as they were related to issues of nationality policies, Soviet views on nations and ethnicities, and to the big practical work on constructing languages and nationalities in the USSR. For penetrating analysis which pays attention to these themes see Yuri Slezkine, “N. Ia. Marr and the National Origins of Soviet Ethnogenetics,” *Slavic Review* 55 (Winter 1996).

⁶²Alpatov, *Istoriia*, chaps. 3–4; Slezkine, “N. Ia. Marr.”

⁶³“Obsuzhdenie rabot po iazykoznaniiu,” *Vestnik Akademii nauk*, 1948, no. 2:113–18; “Obsuzhdenie raboty zhurnala ‘Izvestiia AN SSSR: Otdelenie literatury i iazyka,’” and “Ocherednye zadachi sovetskogo iazykoznaniiu,” *Izvestiia Akademii nauk SSSR: Otdelenie literatury i iazyka*, 1948, no. 5:463–66, and 466–68, respectively.

hidden non-Marrists, and arguing that peace in Soviet linguistics was only illusory and that the struggle between materialism and idealism had to break out.⁶⁴

Besides conceptual considerations, institutional ones were obviously in play, since the main target of criticism was Viktor Vinogradov, who was not the most open non-Marrist but definitely the most highly placed one. He directed the Philological Department of Moscow University and had recently become a full member of the Academy. At the 1947 discussion Vinogradov's textbook, *Russian Language*, had been criticized.⁶⁵ Now Filin accused him of sticking to his views even *after* that dispute. "Undisarmed Indo-Europeanists among us have to think carefully! They must abandon incorrect methodological principles not only in words but also in deeds," he concluded.⁶⁶

Several similar local battles took place during 1949, in which Marrists gradually suppressed heretics one by one, institute by institute.⁶⁷ The main administrative success occurred in the summer of 1949, when the Ministry of Higher Education ordered changes in the curriculum and the Academy corrected research plans of its institutes. Vinogradov was driven to engage in *samokritika* a couple of times, repented in words, and resigned as the department's dean, but survived as chair of the university's *kafedra* of Russian language. A few were fired, but many more were forced to denounce former views and at least formally subscribe to the prevailing orthodoxy. Only on the periphery, in particular in Georgia and Armenia, had a few open dissidents not yet been disciplined.⁶⁸ The community was straightening itself out and approaching a consensus. In order to fix it, one would have needed a real political event. Starting in July 1949 the Academy of Sciences sent reports to the TsK about its decisions against anti-Marrists and about the continuing struggle. Agitprop supported its position and was quite willing to host a meeting with linguists (all Marrists) "in order to finish the work of discussing the situation in Soviet linguistics and to submit to the TsK a proposal on the improvement of work." The Secretariat answered in January 1950 that the discussion should be organized by the Academy itself.⁶⁹

Meanwhile, disagreements were developing among Marrists. Meshchaninov was still trying to keep to the middle ground, accepting that there were mistakes in Marr's doctrine, too, and that it needed *creative* development. But his position as the institutional leader was becoming shaky as radicals criticized him ever more often and openly. On the other hand, on 13 April 1950, Suslov received a report that

⁶⁴I. I. Meshchaninov, "O polozhevii v lingvisticheskoi nauke," F. P. Filin, "O dvukh napravleniakh v iazykovedenii," and "Rezoliutsiia," *Izvestiia Akademii nauk SSSR: Otdelenie literatury i iazyka*, 1948, no. 6:473–85, 486–96, and 497–99, respectively.

⁶⁵"Obsuzhdenie rabot po iazykoznaniiu."

⁶⁶Filin, "O dvukh napravleniakh," 496.

⁶⁷Alpatov, *Istoriia*, 149–67.

⁶⁸A. V. Topchiev, "I. V. Stalin o problemakh iazykoznanii i zadachi Akademii nauk SSSR," *Vestnik Akademii nauk*, 1950, no. 7:8–19; A. M. Samarin, "O sostoianii uchebnoi i nauchnoi raboty po iazykoznaniiu v vuzakh i mery po ee uluchsheniui," *Vestnik vysshei shkoly*, 1950, no. 9; Alpatov, *Istoriia*, 150–51, 158, 167.

⁶⁹I. P. Bardin (Academy of Sciences) to Malenkov, 30 July 1949 and November 1949, and Kruzhkov and Zhdanov (Agitprop) to Suslov, 19 August 1949, November 1949, and 10 January 1950, in RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 164, ll. 16–114.

referred to information received from the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences and accused Serdiuchenko of intolerance, lack of professionalism, denying any mistakes in Marr's works, and opposing *samokritika*. Suslov showed a willingness to distinguish between what was ideologically wrong and right in Marrism: in a draft of his remarks he wrote that "scientific problems cannot be solved administratively" and mentioned the need to organize a *diskussiiia*.⁷⁰ But the crucial moment had already occurred three days before, when leaders of the Republic of Georgia presented Stalin with a new *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Georgian Language*. They also introduced him to the dictionary's editor, Arnold Chikobava. Probably the most open fighter against the "new doctrine on language," Chikobava had called it anti-Marxist and racist because it placed Indo-European languages higher than Georgian on the developmental scale. Supported by republican party leaders and enjoying a stronghold in the Georgian Academy of Sciences and the University of Tbilisi, Chikobava remained one of the few who had not yet been subdued.⁷¹

As a result of his meeting with Stalin, Chikobava got the commission to write down his views as a discussion note: "You will write, we will consider," said Stalin. They met two more times to discuss the text, and on 9 May 1950 the linguistic order was broken again: "In connection with the unsatisfactory state of Soviet linguistics, the editors consider it essential to organize an open *diskussiiia* in *Pravda* in order to overcome, through *kritika i samokritika*, stagnation in the development of Soviet linguistics and to give the right direction to further scientific work in this field. . . . Chikobava's article, 'On Certain Problems of Soviet Linguistics,' is printed as a matter of dispute."⁷² In this essay Chikobava accepted Marr's early works on the theory of Caucasian languages, but not the general linguistic theory, and praised his desire to become a Marxist, but denied the thesis on the class nature of language, thus accusing Marr of being "unable to master the method of dialectical materialism and to apply it to linguistics."⁷³

Reportedly, *Pravda* received over two hundred letters in response to the article.⁷⁴ In numbers, Marrists should have prevailed, but the papers selected for publication constitute a very symmetrical set. In articles as long as Chikobava's, Meshchaninov praised Marr, and Vinogradov was inconclusive. The same structure of one positive, one negative, and one opportunistic letter was preserved in three other issues. Every Tuesday, workers and peasants, *intelligenty* and *militisionery*, received a sophisticated scholarly-ideological reading in linguistics, knowing neither why it had suddenly become a matter of general political importance, nor what the

⁷⁰Suslov's remarks are in RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 336, ll. 4–9. See also Meshchaninov "Dokladnaia zapiska," 12 April 1950, Academy of Sciences to Malenkov, 17 April 1950, *ibid.*, ll. 10–76, and P. Klimov and P. Tret'iakov to Suslov, 13 April 1950, *ibid.*, ll. 4–9.

⁷¹A. Chikobava, "Kogda i kak eto bylo," in *Ezhegodnik iberiisko-kavkazskogo iazykoznaniiia* (Tbilisi, 1985), 9–52.

⁷²A. S. Chikobava, "O nekotorykh voprosakh sovetskogo iazykoznaniiia," *Pravda*, 9 May 1950. "As a matter of dispute" (*v diskussionnom poriadke*)—a necessary remark to let readers know that, despite publication in *Pravda*, the text should not be considered authoritative.

⁷³*The Soviet Linguistic Controversy*, trans. John V. Murra, Robert M. Hankin, and Fred Holling (Morningside Heights, 1951), 10.

⁷⁴Alpatov, *Istoriia*, 169.

truth was. Then, on the seventh week, came the following message: “We continue to print articles sent to *Pravda* in connection with the dispute in Soviet linguistics. Today, we publish articles by I. Stalin, ‘Concerning Marxism in Linguistics,’ and Prof. Chernykh, ‘Toward a Critique of Some Theses of the “New Doctrine on Language.””⁷⁵

It may be that Stalin originally planned to participate and gave himself some time to develop an opinion, or that his contribution was triggered by one of the articles of the previous week, which was devoted almost entirely to the question of class and language. Having admitted in the beginning that he was “not a linguistic expert and, of course, cannot fully satisfy the request of the comrades,” Stalin continued: “As to Marxism in linguistics, as in other social sciences, this is directly in my field.” From the linguistic point of view, the paper consisted of trivial but surprisingly competent statements; from the point of view of orthodox Marxism, it certainly would have been considered heretical, had the author been anybody else. Stalin denied not only that language was a class phenomenon but also that it had a place in the superstructure, which none of Marr’s harshest critics dared to do. The stress on the class issue, once a very powerful ideological resource, proved to be a misfortune for Marrism. By the 1940s internationalist class rhetoric had lost its central role in Soviet ideology to nationalist themes, although it received lip service. In the end, Stalin approved *Pravda*’s (in fact, his own) decision to open the dispute, and accused Marr’s school of suppressing critics and a free discussion, which could have revealed the mistakes and the non-Marxist nature of the theory. “It is generally recognized,” Stalin asserted, “that no science can develop and flourish without a battle of opinions, without freedom of criticism. . . . Elimination of the Arakcheev [police] regime in linguistics, rejection of N. Ia. Marr’s errors, and the introduction of Marxism into linguistics—that, in my opinion, is the way in which Soviet linguistics could be put on a sound basis.”⁷⁶

The “Free Discussion in *Pravda*” lasted another few weeks, but the discourse changed from *diskussiiia* to *obsuzhdenie* (commentary, praise, and further applications), *kritika*, and *samokritika*. Then came the time for more practical meetings in ministries and institutes, and for administrative changes. Meshchaninov, Filin, and Serdiuchenko lost their administrative jobs and became ordinary scholars. Their institutes were merged into the Institute for the Study of Language, with Vinogradov as its director and the new leader of the field.⁷⁷ “Stalin’s doctrine on language” was the hottest ideological topic until 1952, when the “Corypheus of science” wrote another theoretical piece on political economy. Dozen of volumes and hundreds of articles commented on Stalin’s paper and were “introducing Marxism into linguistics.” The result of this party involvement in science and of the suppression of a scientific theory by Stalin’s heavy hand was, in the case of linguistics, the rehabilitation of the classical and international, comparative Indo-European approach. One

⁷⁵*Pravda*, 20 June 1950.

⁷⁶J. V. Stalin, “Concerning Marxism in Linguistics” (1950), in Stalin, *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics* (Peking, 1972), 29, 32.

⁷⁷“Prezidium Akademii Nauk, Postanovlenie,” and “V institute iazykoznaniiia,” *Izvestiia Akademii nauk SSSR: Otdelenie literatury i iazyka*, 1950, no. 1:80–85, and 86–88, respectively.

older academic even spoke of Stalin's piece as of a "sobering voice of reason."⁷⁸ Structuralism would have to wait a few more years, until Khrushchev's liberalization.

CONCLUSION

Following the end of the World War II, science in the Soviet Union became a top state priority. This was not limited to physics and other military-related disciplines, but embraced all fields of scholarship, or *nauki*, in the Russian sense. *Uchenye* (scholars in this wider sense) came to form an elite social group next to party *apparatchiki*, industrial administrators, and the military, and became more privileged than engineers. In material terms, this change of status was decreed by the Council of Ministers on 6 March 1946.⁷⁹ Not only resources for research, but individual salaries as well, were raised higher than at any other time in Soviet history. As in the case of other elites in Stalinist society, with increased privileges came increased dangers, and with attentive care, tighter control. As an elite group, scientists came into a closer dialogue with politicians and accepted some of their values, language, and games.⁸⁰

Increased concern with science prompted politicians to undertake a conscious effort to stimulate progress by available cultural means. In particular, several rituals of party life which were thought to provide mechanisms for change and repair of local defects were applied in academic fields. The choice of these rituals reveals a characteristic distribution of authority between politicians and experts in Stalinist society. The politics prescribed certain operative procedures with open agendas and outcomes, which provoked initiatives, criticism, and conflicts. Scholars were invited to fill them with more substantive matters and policies. Although politicians rarely had their own agendas in sciences, they reserved the right to intervene if and when some important political, philosophical, or ideological issue was at stake. This possibility had the effect of stimulating appeals to them to serve as referees. In order to make politicians understand and intervene, scholars competed in translating conceptual, institutional, group, and personal agendas and conflicts into the language of current politics and ideology. Such behavior was not an unknown phenomenon—at least since the 1920s—but in the 1940s it reached an unprecedented scale.

Soviet ideology, as any rich ideology, was inconsistent enough to allow the presentation of a great many academically meaningful positions in ideological terms. Still, the ideological language was not sufficient to ensure adequate translation. Scholars and politicians thus participated in Wittgensteinian language games, communicating by means of a language with severely limited resources.⁸¹ Some of the confused results of the ideological discussions campaign in the sciences can be ascribed to the indeterminacy of translation.

⁷⁸I. I. Tolstoi, "Otrezvliaushchii golos razuma," *ibid.*, 62–63.

⁷⁹"O povyshenii okladov rabotnikov nauki i ob uluchshenii ikh material'no-bytovykh uslovii," Decree No. 514 of the USSR Council of Ministers. This document was marked "secret," and only a short note on it appeared in *Pravda* on 7 March 1946.

⁸⁰On the notion of the elite group being extended to include the intelligentsia see "Introduction: On Power and Culture," in Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca, 1992), 1–15.

⁸¹Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 7.

An important feature of the party games was that they closed with a single definite resolution, even though at the initial stages pluralism and freedom had been encouraged. This offers an explanation of why policies announced as, in Mao's later words, "let a hundred flowers bloom," usually ended up with the opposite result. Actually, this is characteristic of many political games in general, in contrast to many regular academic ones. Stalinist culture, however, was particularly strong in its belief in the single truth, as well as in the desire to reach a conclusion without delay, often to its own self-defeat.⁸² No matter how strongly the struggling parties diverged in their specific views, they usually agreed in their denial of an even temporary pluralism of truth, and in their intolerance to the opposing opinion.

The main discussions—which saw higher politicians acting as referees and which brought about an effective resolution and official conformity—were, although the most publicized, still exceptional cases. Many scholars tried to gain the support of the political leadership, but only very few succeeded. The chances of organizing a scholarly meeting that would be representative enough to definitely settle a serious academic controversy, and even more, of getting Stalin to intervene and adjudicate, were very small. In the majority of fields, discussions were held but their impact was either indecisive or limited. This vast majority of events still has to be studied.

In communists' own theories, the party and the state had the obligation and power to decide on all politically important issues. This idea of omnipresence and total control was, of course, utopian and impossible to realize in practice, and it often resulted in sporadic interventions in arbitrarily selected cases.⁸³ In the events discussed above, rarer instances when the leadership did actually interfere were determined by peculiar constellations of circumstances rather than any consistent logical criterion. It was impossible to predict, for instance, which of the thousands of letters addressed to Stalin would manage to reach his desk, attract his attention, and stir his emotions. But once this had happened, the case would immediately be declared supremely important. The Stalinist system thus reacted on a random basis but with excessive power, producing outputs which were quite inadequate to the level of the incoming "signal from below." In modern physics, systems with similar behavior are called "chaotic": they can be deterministic on the microscopic local level, but produce unpredictable global results.

Each of the important political decisions, however, including those caused by internal chaos, had to be publicly presented as the logical outcome of high principles. Portraying itself as an ideologically governed and effectively controlled society, Stalinism developed ideological rationalizations for all its major actions. The notion of ideology determining the master plan, and of the totalitarian regime as capable of directing society toward its implementation, has been a very powerful explanatory model. Insiders were often deceived by it, therefore miscalculating the consequences of their moves. Even some critics who opposed the ideology and politics of the regime still depended upon the very same rationalizations in their constructions of

⁸²Compare this to Joravsky, *Lysenko Affair*, 97–98.

⁸³When describing this pattern, Joravsky used the words "authoritarian caprice," "zigzag party line," and "fluctuations." See his "The Stalinist Mentality and Higher Learning," *Slavic Review* 42 (Winter 1983): 575–600.

the enemy as “Manichean”—logical and powerful—evil. Such interpretations of Stalinism were inspired by a political or moral desire to expose and defeat the dangers of totalitarianism, either in its original form, or its direct legacy. Presently, as those conditions have ceased to exist, it becomes possible to examine Stalinism as “Augustinian”—controversial and chaotic—evil.⁸⁴ Reconsidering simple pictures of the dead version of totalitarianism provides better tools for recognizing its new forms and species.

⁸⁴On images of the enemy, Manichean and Augustinian, see P. Galison, “The Ontology of the Enemy: Norbert Wiener and the Cybernetic Vision,” *Critical Inquiry* 21 (Autumn 1994): 228–66.