Losing Pravda: Russia’s Encounter with Freedom of the Press

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INTRODUCTION

This is a book about the momentous transformation in Russia’s political and public culture that took place after the fall of the Soviet Union. I take political culture to be what people know, understand, believe and feel about politics – how it is conducted, by whom, to what ends, and with what consequences for people’s individual and collective lives. Political culture thus has an epistemic and an ethical dimension. It has an institutional dimension as well: politics is practiced more visibly in particular locales and contexts, and by people in particular occupations.

The sudden dissolution of the Soviet Union – and the vertiginous political transformation that ensued – offered social scientists a rare opportunity to closely observe social and political change in the making. A key concern among post-Soviet reformers and lay and academic observers was whether the intended rebuilding of political institutions away from authoritarianism would be accompanied by a corresponding shift toward liberal political beliefs among citizens. The worry was that the change in beliefs might lag behind, as beliefs are presumably harder to transform than institutional practices (or so we are told).

This book speaks to this set of concerns. However, instead of treating culture as a desired aftereffect of institutional change, I see it as a constitutive component of that change. Political regimes and people’s knowledge about the world – the common and collective world people inhabit together – are closely intertwined (Glaeser 2010). Political regimes do not exist without
particular epistemologies and ethics built into them; regimes and knowledges about politics stand together and change together.

This book, then, is about the ethical and epistemic dimensions of post-Soviet political change. Put differently, it is a study of political change as a cultural process. Methodologically, it was imperative for a study like this to proceed at two levels of analysis – going back and forth between the institutional level and the level of meanings. Given these goals, several political institutions slated for a democratic transition in Russia could have served as good research locales for a study like this. If we understand democratic politics to be about the righting of wrongs and the pursuit of justice (Ranciere 2004), then I believe the legislative branch, the courts, and the press would all have made particularly fitting research sites.

I chose to focus on the press because access to journalists and newsrooms was far easier to secure for a single ethnographer without political connections than gaining unmitigated entry to courtrooms and legislative chambers. Another reason in favor of studying the press was the fact that I shared the educational background with many Russian journalists. Lastly, and crucially, journalism remains one of the quintessential political professions in modernity, alongside diplomacy and law, as Max Weber remarked a century ago. Political advocacy – taking a stance, fighting for a cause, and bearing responsibility for it – is “the politician’s element” (Weber 1947:95). “To an outstanding degree, politics today is in fact conducted in public by means of the spoken or written word” and “the journalist is nowadays the most important representative of the demagogic species” (Weber 1947:96). Studying journalism’s transformation after the fall of the Soviet Union, then, offered a particularly good vantage point for studying how people’s knowledge and sentiment about politics might have transformed in that process as well.
Studying Russia’s political culture as a process means giving up on a predetermined set of stereotypes about how Russians “are” or what they “wanted” from the transition. Studying political culture through the vantage point of journalism in particular means going against the grain of the dominant narrative about the curtailment of press freedom in Russia over the past twenty years. More generally, it means challenging the conceptual binary between journalism and propaganda where the two are seen as mutually exclusive. The dominant narrative goes like this: press freedom was granted to the (then) Soviet press by Mikhail Gorbachev and carried forward by Russia’s first President Boris Yeltsin. Powerful media moguls and oligarchs who emerged in the 1990s began to put various kinds of pressure on media outlets, which began to derail press freedom’s movement from its tracks. With the arrival of President Putin in 2000, press freedom was further and unequivocally curtailed, as private media began to be harassed, censorship was reintroduced, and independent journalists began to be threatened and even murdered.

While acknowledging the significance of these stark and tragic developments, I wish to point out that this particular narrative has many unexamined and often contradictory assumptions built into it. The shift from government propaganda to a free press, for instance, is imagined – conceptually – as a clean, hundred and eighty degree turn. Journalism in the authoritarian period

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1 Several admirable attempts have recently been made to unsettle that binary – whether by exposing its Cold War roots (Nerone 1995; 2013; Sparks 2000; Szpunar 2012) or by attempting to theoretically decouple journalism from democracy (Josephi 2013; Zelizer 2013; Gronvall 2015), but doing so remains difficult. This is because it goes against the grain of centuries of liberal political thought, where journalism is conceptually tied to freedom of the press as a historical co-conspirator and constitutive element of liberal democracy. And liberal democracy, in turn, remains the primary source of modern political legitimacy. Recent suggestions to think beyond democracy as the privileged site of political legitimacy in the contemporary West (Crouch 2004) inevitably push against a strong conviction that democracy is one thing that Western liberals cannot afford to give up (Brown 2010).

2 Russia’s Center for Journalism in Extreme Situations (CJES) and Glasnost Defense Foundation (GDF) documented over two hundred murders and countless beatings and intimidations of journalists in Russia between 1991 and 2006.
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is imagined as having been either a vehicle of indoctrination or an outlet for resistance, with little
room in-between or outside of that binary. Soviet media audiences are imagined to have been
fully indoctrinated or, alternatively, to have been yearning for freedom and capable of seeing
through propaganda’s mystifications. Soviet journalists, in their turn, are variously imagined as
cynical careerists, spineless yes-men, or closeted dissidents. With the lifting of censorship by
Mikhail Gorbachev, Soviet journalists are understood to have tapped into their freedom-loving
nature, quickly transforming themselves into fearless watchdogs shining the light of publicity on
the abuses of power. In Yeltsin’s Russia, independent journalists fought for equality and justice,
educating citizens on matters of public concern, and providing an open forum for multiple
political voices. Where they failed to do that, they were marred by their backward cultural
“legacies” or by pressure from oligarchs and media moguls. With the reemergence of censorship
under Putin, the freedom switch is understood to have been turned back off, and things more or
less went back to where they were before the fall of the Soviet Union.

I find these assumptions, and the entire metaphor of press freedom’s progressive
movement derailed from its tracks not very helpful because it forces us to see Russia’s media-
political transformation as driven primarily by powerful actors (presidents, oligarchs, media
moguls) while overlooking the sociocultural dimensions of that transformation. Those broader
social and cultural dynamics and their unintended consequences can tell us much more about
what has been going on in Russian media and politics over the past three decades.

Instead of perpetuating these common assumptions yet again, this book offers a new
vocabulary for discussing journalism and its political and cultural significance in non-democratic
and post-authoritarian settings. It is an ethics-based vocabulary, where ethics is a continuously
evolving set of practices and criteria of judgment, rather than a set of normative rules. I use the
trope of truth-seeking and telling as the central category of my analysis. The relationship between journalism and truth-telling is at least as old as between journalism and press freedom, but is not identical with it. This is because the vocabulary of truth-telling is broader than the vocabulary of political liberalism, to which the concept of press freedom belongs.

Again, the classic narrative about journalism and truth in the Soviet Union is well-known. It is captured by an old Soviet dissident joke: “There is no izvestia in Pravda, and there is no pravda in Izvestia,” where Izvestia and Pravda are the names of Soviet newspapers and izvestia means “news” and pravda means “truth.” Cold War communication scholar Wilbur Schramm (1956) offers a classic elaboration of this view in his influential essay, “The Soviet Communist Theory of the Press.” The difference between the Soviets’ and “our own” approach to truth, says Schramm, is that the Soviets believe that there is only one truth out there – that of Marxism-Leninism. “The teachings of Marx are immovable because they are true,” Schramm quotes Lenin as saying. The job of the Soviet mass communicator, then, was to interpret daily events from the standpoint of class struggle, to penetrate behind appearances, to abstract away from specifics, in order to uncover the underlying Marxist reality behind events. Truth is thus revealed to Soviet audiences through the mass media, whereas in the liberal tradition, Schramm (1956) says, truth is always contested through rigorous argument, confrontation of evidence, and exchange of ideas. At its most fundamental, Schramm (1956:145) sums up, “the differences between the Soviet tradition and ours are the differences between Marx and Mill [:] on the one side, man as a mass, malleable, unimportant in himself, in need of Promethean leadership; on the other side, man as

3 On the institutional overlap between the emerging fields of mass communication and of Soviet studies during the Cold War, compare Simpson (1994) and Engerman (2009).
intelligent, discriminating, perfectly able to purchase by himself in a ‘free market place of ideas’.”

Leaving Schramm’s self-congratulatory rhetoric aside for the moment, let me point out how he is in fact drawing on an approach to knowledge and truth that has long been prevalent in Western epistemology. This is the view that knowledge – whether in science or in politics – is properly formed only when truth claims are subjected to doubt, skepticism, and rigorous questioning from all sides. As influential as this approach has been historically, it is not the only way to understand knowledge formation. There is a lesser known tradition in Western epistemology that views knowledge production as dependent as much on trust as on skepticism and doubt. Knowledge in this tradition is understood to be a social institution and a collective good, and cognitive and moral orders here are seen as closely intertwined. In *A Social History of Truth*, historian of science Steven Shapin (1994) reminds, for instance, that for most of our history, the credibility of someone’s truth and knowledge claims was assessed through face-to-face interactions. “Premodern society looked truth in the face. Veracity was understood to be underwritten by virtue…Truth flowed along the same personal channels as civil conversation” (Shapin 1994:410). The same was the case, Shapin demonstrates, in early-modern Europe where modern scientific practices first took hold. Only those who were known as virtuous persons could successfully participate in the creation of scientific truths; knowledge-production was a collective effort and practitioners relied on one another’s honesty, integrity, civility and a sense of proportion to succeed. Today, elaborate systems of institutional expertise, with checks and balances and rigorous internal monitoring, are said to guarantee scientific truthfulness, instead of “the personal qualities of scientists” (Shapin 1994:413). Yet, Shapin points out, when it comes down to it, any particular subfield of science today is still made up of interdependent actors who
are pushing the limits of knowledge together. And like their early-modern predecessors, they make judgments about one another’s personal integrity that are simultaneously judgments about the scientific merits of one another’s work.

Shapin’s approach to truth as a social product underscores how skepticism and doubt live on the margins of trust. Our ability to doubt someone’s words or actions depends on our “ability to trust almost everything else about the scene in which [we] do skepticism” (Shapin 1994:417, original emphasis). Doubting is still a social and communicative engagement; it is an attempt to calibrate “one dubiously trustworthy source by others assumed to be trustworthy” (Shapin 1994:21). When trust is fully severed, a community of discourse and knowledge falls apart: it is not only that people cannot agree with one another; rather, the possibility of disagreement itself is withdrawn (Shapin 1994:36, original emphasis).

That trust is the solution to the problem of moral order, Shapin sums up, is not news: it intuitively makes sense and has been commented upon countless times. But the argument that knowledge depends on trust is counterintuitive, because we tend to think that knowledge (cognitive order) and belief (moral order) are antithetical: “modern epistemology has systematically argued that legitimate knowledge is defined precisely by its rejection of trust” (Shapin 1994:16).

So, if even the hardest of scientific facts are formed through ethical practices such as the granting or withdrawal of trust, then the “softer” varieties of political knowledge – such as the knowledge about what constitutes justice and fairness, what it means to be a citizen, to have a

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4 Jumping ahead of the story, this is precisely what happened to a substantial portion of public discourse in Russia throughout the 2000s.
voice, to have rights, to mount grievances, to fight for a cause, to be represented – these forms of knowledge must also depend on the moral judgments people make about those in their midst who “do” politics. Government officials, party activists, people’s deputies, judges, political advocates, and of course journalists have always been recognized as people who engage in politics. These groups of people existed, acted, and were judged for their actions both before and after the fall of the Soviet Union. Other groups of actors – election consultants, private media owners, campaign strategists, and other varieties of political operatives – joined them after 1991.

To play the devil’s advocate, we may ask: Do politicians, activists, journalists and other public figures even care whether and how they are judged by their mass publics? Some of them probably do not; and others certainly do. Does it matter? It most certainly does. As media scholar Daniel Hallin (1994) observed with respect to journalists (and as most ideological workers understand very well), there are actually limits beyond which even the most instrumental or strategic use of communication cannot be pushed. “Every process of communication involves a social relationship, in fact, a network of relationships, among active human subjects,” Hallin (1994:32) writes. “The maintenance of these relationships imposes demands on institutions like the media … [in that they] have to attend to their own legitimacy. [The media] must maintain the integrity of their relationship with their audience and also the integrity of their own self-image and of the social relationships that make up the profession of journalism. Maintaining these relationships requires a certain minimum of honesty” (ibid). If the media fail to attend to their own integrity in this way, Hallin (1994:33) sums up, they face the risk that they “may become ineffective ideological institutions.”

Paradoxically, this aspect of the Soviet media system and its satellites has received very little attention from scholars. Aside from important work by Ellen Mickiewicz (1981; 1988)
who, from the early 1980s, was demonstrating through Soviet opinion polls that Soviet mass audiences trusted their media on some topics, but wanted more honesty on others, few attempts have been made to systematically examine the mechanisms through which the credibility of Soviet-style media offerings was challenged and maintained.\(^5\) This book offers such an examination. It is centrally concerned with those relations between journalists and their publics Hallin (1994) talks about, and especially with journalists’ efforts to maintain the integrity of those relations during and after Russia’s encounter with press freedom in the 1990s.

This book argues that contrary to conventional narratives, Soviet-era journalists did share a truth- and justice-seeking\(^6\) ethic for which they were recognized by their audiences. Soviet journalism carried on elements of social and intellectual critique from the nineteenth century, modeling itself on the writings of prominent justice-seekers who inspired the Russian revolution such as Alexander Herzen and Vissarion Belinsky.\(^7\) Bona fide journalism thus co-existed with official propaganda in the Soviet Union, at times standing more clearly apart and at other times blending more easily together. The majority of Soviet journalists, though, worked hard to maintain the trust of their audiences, and were recognized by readers for their efforts. After the fall of the Soviet Union, those social and moral relations began to strain and were eventually severed. Media privatization at a time of economic collapse in the early 1990s led to the fragmentation of journalism as a profession, alienating journalists from one another and from

\(^5\) But see Boyer (2003), Wolfe (2006), Meyen and Schwer (2007), and Muller (2013). Earlier examples of scholarship that paid some attention to the social and moral aspects of relations between Soviet mass communicators and their audiences include Inkeles (1950), Hopkins (1970), and Dzirkals et al. (1982).

\(^6\) In Russian, *iskat’ pravdu* – to seek truth – simultaneously means to seek justice as well. See the entry for *pravda* in Cassin (2014).

\(^7\) Alexander Herzen (1812-1870) was one of Russia’s most prominent political writers and philosophers of the 19\(^{th}\) century. Influenced by Proudhon, Rousseau, and Hegel, he is credited with creating the political climate that led to the emancipation of the serfs in 1861. Vissarion Belinsky (1811-1848) was Russia’s most preeminent literary critic and magazine editor of liberal persuasion, advocating for a socially-conscious approach to literature.
their audiences, undercutting their moral authority, and bringing about a public discourse in which journalism began to be framed as political prostitution (“the second oldest profession”) that had been absent in the USSR.

The broader and more ambitious argument this book makes, is that this spectacular institutional unraveling brought about a society-wide erosion of the value of seeking truth, and of speaking it to power. Because journalism is linked to the most cherished of Enlightenment ideals – the idea of freedom of speech, and of speaking truth to power – when journalism devolves, those values, I argue, devolve with it. The ability (and the need) to seek truth and justice and to do so publicly is fundamental to the maintenance of most social and political orders. Citizens’ ability to seek justice, and the society-wide appreciation of those efforts, was just as central for the workings of socialism as it is for the maintenance of liberalism. To suggest that post-Soviet society lost its taste for truth- and justice-seeking is thus to suggest that the collapse of the Soviet Union wreaked moral havoc in the lives of many Russians. This profound moral disorientation is what much of this book is about.

Last but not least, this book examines how this devolution in journalism has articulated with forms of state-sponsored cynicism that president Putin has actively pursued during his tenure. Putin bolstered his authority in part by trying to discredit Western ideals and practices, particularly those of democracy promotion and civil-society building. My study shows why his efforts succeeded—because they had been prepared by the crisis of journalism as an institution of truth-seeking that had set in before Putin came to power. By the time Putin began to consolidate his influence, manipulation of public opinion was simply expected; indignation about it was absent; it was no longer news. This un-tied Putin’s hands and those of his allies, to the point that by the end of the 2000s, Russian officials and other power brokers (including some
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journalists) began to get away not only with displays of cynicism directed at liberal institutions, but with periodic open admissions of manipulation and deceit.

With this erosion of the value of truth-seeking, neither journalism nor press freedom make much sense. This crucial development paved the way for the emergence, and the society-wide acceptance, of rabid ultra-nationalist propaganda in Russia since 2014 (leading up to, and following the annexation of the Crimean peninsula from neighboring Ukraine) that would not have occurred without the tacit acquiescence of the majority of Russia’s journalists who had only recently thought of themselves as representatives of an independent Fourth Estate.

Before moving on any further, any book claiming to say something new on the subject of truth-telling in Russia must first deal with an older, familiar claim that Soviet public life was full of falsehoods and lies, and that those lies were perpetuated out of collective timidity or convenience, or both. The appeals by Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1974) and Vaclav Havel (1989) to their fellow citizens to “Live Not by Lies” and to “Live in Truth” are well-known examples of this position. So a discussion of truth-telling in Russia is necessarily linked to the discussion of the morality of the Soviet political project as a whole. It is to this discussion that we must first turn.

**Truth in the USSR: An Ethical Turn**

A moral condemnation of all things Soviet is a perspective with substantial intellectual pedigree, beginning with what was loosely known as the totalitarian school of Sovietology—a body of scholarship about the Soviet Union produced at the height of the Cold War. These works considered Soviet political rule fundamentally illegitimate and therefore immoral, based on coercion and indoctrination, rather than consent (Conquest 1968; Friedrich and Brzezinski 1956;
Kennan 1954; Schlesinger 1949). The early works of the totalitarian school saw “the new Soviet man” to be a victim of propaganda and terror, atomized from fellow human beings, “dissolved in communist ‘patterns of thought,’ and unable to sustain a critical distance between himself and society” (Krylova 2000:9). Historian Anna Krylova (2000:8) argues that this image of the new Soviet man—easily suggestible, fearful, unable to relate to others, unwilling to think critically—was none other than “an immoral opposite of the liberal self,” Western modernity’s alter ego. Krylova (2000:4) suggests that this kind of knowledge production took place in the particular, post-WWII environment when Western intellectuals felt “an uneasy sense of connectedness” to their totalitarian alter ego and were searching for “the roots of totalitarian deviation” so as to protect Western modernity from a potential internal enemy.9

In the 1940s, Western social scientists had to rely primarily on official Soviet documents for their knowledge about the Soviet Union. In the 1950s, new sources of data became available: interviews with émigrés who did not return to the Soviet Union after the end of World War II (the large-scale Harvard Émigré Interview Project), and the so-called Smolensk Archive—a large trove of archival documents from the Smolensk Oblast Committee of the Communist Party that was captured intact by Nazi Germany in 1941, retained by Western Germany, and subsequently

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8 Consider also Arendt (1951), Hayek (1944), Koestler (1941), Orwell (1949). In addition to Sovietology, speculations about the degree of legitimacy of Soviet political order were a major current in other academic fields that similarly came of age at the height of the Cold War and were nurtured by it, including modernization and development studies, social psychology, comparative political science, and mass communication scholarship (Pletsch 1981; Simpson 1994; Engerman 2009).

9 Krylova (2000:8) points out the irony involved in some of the juxtapositions from that period. Some accounts (e.g., Erikson 1954) distinguish “the balanced, organic wholeness” of the liberal self from the “one-sided, mechanical totality” of the new Soviet man. The contrast thus drawn is between “‘wholeness’ as good and ‘totality’ as bad” (Krylova 2008:8).
made available to Western scholars.\textsuperscript{10} Those new data helped to substantially refine the views of Cold War Sovietologists on “how Russia [was] ruled.”\textsuperscript{11} On the one hand, there was now clear evidence that many Soviet citizens genuinely endorsed state socialism as a legitimate form of government, and that many recognized the gap between political ideals and attempts at their implementation. On the other hand, Cold War scholars discovered that the Soviet Union also had plenty of “non-believers” who had learned to manipulate the system to their personal advantage. The presence of these calculating, self-interested individuals supported Sovietologists’ earlier suspicion that even in the midst of a social totality, there must have been “islands of separateness” where “non-indoctrinated individuality survives” (Krylova 2000:10). While calculated self-interest was hardly an illustration of high moral probity presumably expected of “non-indoctrinated individuality,” finding it in the Soviet Union partially answered the question of “why did they not resist?” that haunted American postwar Sovietology (Krylova 2000:10).

The 1960s witnessed the birth of the dissident movement in the former Soviet bloc, and this brought about another dramatic shift in how the field of Soviet studies understood the basic morality of the Soviet political project. The emergence of underground periodicals (\textit{samizdat}), the steady stream of manuscripts smuggled out of the Soviet bloc to be published in the West, the growing number of forced émigrés and political prisoners among the dissidents—all of this gave the dissident voice the authority to tell Western audiences the truth about what was “really” going on in the Soviet bloc. The question of “why did they not resist?” was no longer posed; “they” were obviously resisting, even if they were the brave few. With that, the basic morality of

\textsuperscript{10} Many of the classic texts of Cold War Sovietology were based on those two sources of data, including Inkeles (1950); Fainsod (1953); Bauer, Inkeles, and Kluckhohn (1956); Inkeles and Bauer (1959) and others.
\textsuperscript{11} The title of Fainsod’s (1953) classic text.
the Soviet order had shifted once again, and the possibility for maintaining individual dignity and
moral integrity in the midst of a social totality was reinstated in the subject-position of the
dissident. Moreover, the non-dissident majority of Soviet citizens began to be viewed primarily
as calculating conformists rather than as true believers. The story told by the Soviet dissidents
and retold by Sovietologists featured the manipulative rather than the manipulated Soviet
majority: people from all walks of life using the system for their advantage, avoiding public
confrontation with it, “while mocking it in the private realm, at the kitchen table” (Krylova
2000:15). In this narrative, the non-dissidents appeared as persons of compromised morality—at
best, as individuals who made arrangements “between one’s conscience and convenience,” and,
at worst, as “moral invalid[s] who both lacked inner integrity and laughed about it” (Krylova

In the 1970s and 1980s, against the grain of the totalitarian school, and under the
influence of détente in U.S.-Soviet relations, there began to emerge scholarship that came to be
loosely known as the revisionist school in Soviet area studies. The revisionists challenged the
totalitarian school’s views on many counts, including the negative portrayal of Soviet society as
under siege and crippled from an all-powerful dictatorship established as a result of the
Bolshevik conspiracy plot in 1917.12 Drawing attention to the existence in the USSR of upward
mobility, of professional groups and ideologies, and of inter-bureaucratic and center-periphery
conflicts, revisionist historians were arguing that Soviet socialism-building was a form of state-

12 As Sheila Fitzpatrick (2008), a leading figure among the revisionists, points out, challenging the grand narrative
of Cold War Sovietology on moral grounds was only one of the tasks of the revisionists. The other, stronger
impulse, according to Fitzpatrick, was the push towards greater empiricism through a more detailed use of archives
(following the data wherever they led) and away from abstract model-building and ideological partisanship that had
dominated the totalitarian school.
sponsored modernization and, as such, enjoyed some degree of legitimacy from the population at large (Viola 2002, Fitzpatrick 2007, 2008).  

Not surprisingly, such perspectives were bound to be interpreted as whitewashing Bolshevism and Stalinism. Revisionists’ work on the Great Purges – especially Arch Getty’s (1985) study arguing that the Purges might have been an unintended outcome of power struggles, disorganization, and considerable autonomy at lower levels of government, and not necessarily a top-down relay of Stalin’s bloodthirstiness—was equated to Holocaust denial. “If the Nazis had won, we would have had revisionist scholarship pointing out Hitler’s good sides,” wrote one proponent of the totalitarian school in a New York Times editorial (quoted in Fitzpatrick 2008:687). At every opportunity, revisionists were thus expected to offer public acknowledgment that “the purges were a bad thing and that Stalin and the Soviet system were responsible for them” (Fitzpatrick 2008:692). As Fitzpatrick (2008:694) sums it up, until the mid-1980s, revisionism was seen as an “unpardonable exercise in ‘tout comprendre, c’est tout pardonner’.”

With the end of the Cold War, the intellectual climate in the West once again shifted, the range of intellectual perspectives on Soviet history dramatically widened, and research into the human and moral dimensions of state socialism no longer carried the high political stakes it did before. Ironically, in the 1990s, the revisionists began to focus on resistance to, rather than support for, the Soviet rule, since there was now plenty of evidence of resistance from the newly opened archives (Fitzpatrick 2007). It was now a new cohort of scholars, sometimes called the

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14 “To understand all is to forgive all,” a phrase said to originate in Tolstoy’s War and Peace. For a contemporary iteration of this attitude to revisionist scholarship, see Etkind (2005).
post-revisionists, who have continued to be interested in the legitimation mechanisms of the Soviet rule. The works that have come out in this tradition in the 1990s and 2000s have been interdisciplinary and have been as much an exercise in cultural theory as in Soviet historiography.

A substantial body of post-revisionist scholarship to date has been produced in direct engagement with Michel Foucault’s ideas about modern disciplinary power and governmentality (Collier 2011; Engelstein and Sandler 2000; Halfin 2000, 2003, 2009; Hellbeck 2006; Kharkhordin 1999; Kotkin 1995; Wolfe 2006). There continues to be disagreement among Russia specialists as to the appropriateness of wholesale (or even piecemeal) appropriation of Foucault’s frameworks to Russian historical realities (Boym 2002; Engelstein 1993; Etkind 2005; Kharkhordin 2001; Plamper 2002). Yet, this Foucauldian turn has served a very important purpose in Russian studies: it has allowed the conversation about the moral valence of Soviet rule to continue without scholars having to commit themselves, explicitly or implicitly, to either denouncing or exculpating the Soviet political project, as has been the case in the past. The moral ambivalence of many of Foucault’s philosophical positions\(^\text{15}\)—including his unwillingness to reproduce the dichotomies of truth and falsehood, of conformity and resistance—struck a welcome cord with the new cohort of Russia scholars who similarly did not want to have to choose sides. Foucault’s ambiguity around the moral valence of truth and power allowed these scholars to move beyond the polarities of good and evil to speak instead of Soviet “governmentality” and “subjectivity” from a position of seeming moral neutrality.\(^\text{16}\)

\(^{15}\) On some possible explanations for this ambivalence, see Rorty (1992).
\(^{16}\) Oleg Kharkhordin’s (1999) work is clearly an exception here. For a thorough review of Western historians’ approaches to Soviet subjectivity and personhood, see Chatterjee and Petrone (2008).
One of the most nuanced accounts of the ethical dimension of Soviet life has been offered by anthropologist Alexei Yurchak (2006). While not drawing directly on Foucault (the theoretical debt is instead to Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari, Bakhtin and others), Yurchak’s (2006) historical ethnography is similarly committed to not reproducing any of the dichotomies of modernity, including truth and falsehood, liberation and oppression, and so on. Yurchak’s (2006:10) aim was to “rehumanize Soviet life,” to understand how that life could be simultaneously experienced as dull, stagnating, and coercive on the one hand, and meaningful, creative, and ethical on the other. Drawing on J.L. Austin’s theory of performatives, Yurchak argues that, especially in late socialism (after Stalin’s death in 1953), most elements of Soviet public discourse—official speeches and reports, newspaper editorials, ritualized acts like party meetings, political information sessions, public demonstrations, parades, and so on—lost much of their literal meaning for Soviet citizens (but not all meaning). People participated in those acts not because they supported a particular candidate or endorsed this or that party position on an issue—most of the time, those positions were seen as irrelevant. The reason people delivered official-sounding speeches at meetings, took part in public events, voted in favor of resolutions, paid membership dues and so on was in the performative value that such participation carried. Such acts “did things” beyond their literal meaning: they signaled to others that one was a particular kind of person—one who was bored by the dullness of public ritual, but who nevertheless espoused the values of sociality, inquisitiveness, altruism, equality, creativity, and self-fulfillment that were at the heart of the socialist project. Soviet ideology in the late socialist period thus claimed a certain “hegemony of form,” as Yurchak (2006) puts it, but left much of ideological content indeterminate and open-ended.
That was the key paradox of late socialism: the more humane, creative, and meaningful aspects of socialism could be experienced only if, and sometimes even in the process of, taking part in ideological formalities. In moments of such collective togetherness (even if those occasions were explicitly ideological), a particular community of like-minded people was produced—a community of svoi, or “our own kind of persons,” as Yurchak calls it. These communities of svoi would pop up whenever and wherever people recognized themselves as belonging to svoi—often in the spaces of official public events and through the act of reproducing official Soviet discourse. An open refusal to participate in those events would have meant risking exclusion from these communities. Such a refusal could get the communities of svoi “into trouble” with the authorities, so there was a certain “moral responsibility not to cause problems to one of svoi” (Yurchak 2006:109).

This account of ordinary Soviet morality, as I am calling it here, and its relations with official discourse, significantly improves our understanding of the moral worlds Soviet citizens inhabited in late socialism (from the 1960s onwards). It shows that one might partake in official events and discourses for a host of reasons, including not only the cynical pretense or the full identification with Soviet power, as had been suggested before, but also a complex ethical mechanism theorized through the concept of svoi. Yurchak (2006) here makes a very important contribution to our understanding of how Soviet ideology was co-produced by speakers and listeners in everyday practice: the act of saying or doing something in public—including officially sanctioned words and actions—could transform the meaning of that act for those involved, sometimes in unexpected or unpredictable directions. The performative dimension of

17 “Svoi” is a reflexive possessive pronoun in Russian, meaning “one’s own.” It is similar to Latin sui, Spanish suyo, German sein and so on.
an ideologically-marked utterance would routinely get unhinged, as it were, from its literal meaning, and would begin to drift in some other direction (commonly, toward reaffirming the sociality of svoi). The meaning of a public act would therefore undergo an internal displacement, unnoticeable on the level of form but nevertheless recognized by all involved.

This influential account of how Soviet citizens related to official discourse does, however, gloss over some important aspects of ordinary ethics in late socialism that are crucial for understanding the social and moral relations Soviet journalists maintained with their audiences; so it is to these overlooked aspects of ordinary morality that we must now turn. One issue that needs to be addressed in greater detail is Soviet attitudes to political dissidents and to the phenomenon of non-conformity more broadly. Yurchak (2006) controversially places dissidents and party activists on the same plane—as people who took the official Soviet discourse too literally and too seriously.18 The committed party activists defended the official positions, the dissidents denounced them as lies, while the most sensible position, according to the self-described “normal people” Yurchak interviewed, would have been to treat official Soviet language simply as irrelevant or uninteresting.19 As historians Kevin Platt and Benjamin Nathans (2011:316) have pointed out, Yurchak’s account leaves us with a view of the dissidents that borders on caricature. Taking official ideological pronouncements too seriously, the dissidents come across as people of compromised morality who were willing to jeopardize the sociality of

18 See also Oushakine (2001).
19 In discussing common perceptions of the dissidents as “abnormal,” as “having a screw loose,” and, borrowing from poet Joseph Brodsky, as “the sick” who were “written off” by “the healthy majority,” Yurchak (2006:106) is oddly silent about the links begging to be made between these characterizations and the normalizing practices of European insane asylums examined by Foucault. This seems like a most fitting application of a Foucauldian frame to Soviet realities, given the notorious Soviet practice of actually incarcerating some dissidents in mental hospitals.
svoi—the human bonds that would have emerged if one were willing to perform ideological formalities together with others.20

More recent studies of non-conformist practices and attitudes in the Soviet Union (e.g., Boobbyer 2005; Nathans 2007; Firsov 2008; Suslov 2011) show that there was actually substantial ambivalence toward both dissidence and conformity in Soviet Russia. Even if dismissive attitudes to non-conformists were as widespread as some of Yurchak’s interlocutors claim, such dismissal might have been due to psychological repression rather than indifference21 (Platt and Nathans 2011:314). It is likely that the dissidents’ open non-conformity was “uncomfortable and stressful” (Platt and Nathans 2011:309) for many educated people in the Soviet Union because it reminded them of their own conformism, which was in conflict with the value of frank and honest speech they also espoused (Boym 1994:95-102). Behaving contrary to one’s value orientations can generate strong cognitive dissonance, so Yurchak’s interlocutors might have been trying to reduce such dissonance, coming up with ways to rationalize their conformist behavior. One way would have been to talk oneself into devaluing non-conformity, choosing to see the dissidents as fighting political windmills, as it were, and deciding that such fighting was pointless and therefore irrelevant and uninteresting.22

Continuing with the idea of cognitive discomfort, sociologist Alena Ledeneva (2011) explores the other side of the same phenomenon—the uneasiness many people felt when faced

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20 Negative attitudes to individuals willing to jeopardize the well-being of the group are an instantiation of the larger social phenomenon of krugovaya poruka (variously translated as “forced trust,” “imposed cooperation,” “the circle of collective responsibility,” or “cover up”) that, for historical reasons, has a particularly rich genealogy in Russia (see Ledeneva 2006).
21 In his earlier work, Yurchak (1997) did invoke Freud’s metaphor of repression to explain the proliferation of political jokes in the Soviet Union; but he seems to have moved away from Freud’s vocabulary in his later work.
22 Poet Joseph Brodsky seems to have been thinking along the same lines when he invoked “the healthy majority” for whom the dissidents were “a convenient example of the wrong deportment” and “a source of considerable moral comfort” (quoted in Yurchak 2006: 101).
with evidence of their own and others’ conformist rather than dissident behavior. Ledeneva (2011) zooms in on the phenomenon of the knowing smile—a signal people can send one another in situations of moral squeeze—when they recognize they are complicit in some morally ambiguous behavior, feel awkward about it, but do not want to openly acknowledge it. People in Soviet Russia experienced moral squeeze, Ledeneva (2011:730) argues, when they found themselves in situations that were governed by contradictory values or logics—such as wanting to help a friend in need but feeling ashamed about using public resources to do so, or wanting to speak bluntly and directly but sensing the group’s “ambivalence about the idea of being honest [and] upright.” Ledeneva (2006; 2011) argues that in such situations, most Soviets gravitated toward decisions that privileged silence over speech, and people’s personal well-being, or the well-being of a small group (svoi), over the public interest or the common good.

Yet the notions of the common good and of speaking out did have their place in a Soviet system of moral, if not always political coordinates—which is precisely why acting as if those ideals did not matter created uncomfortable situations of moral squeeze. Sharing an awkward “knowing smile” was one way to handle this moral discomfort: it allowed participants to mutually recognize that what they were doing was not quite right; but it took away the pressure to openly acknowledge the transgression. This way, a knowing smile worked as a safety valve in the repression mechanism theorized by Freud—similar to winks, political jokes, or a genre of

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23 Alena Ledeneva’s (2011) work is among the first to bring the concepts from social and cognitive psychology “back in” to discussions of Soviet ideology and subjectivity in Russian area studies. Psychologists, particularly Raymond A. Bauer (1952, 1956) were active participants in the initial production of knowledge about the Soviet Union, but psychology and Sovietology rather quickly parted ways. There are, I believe, more discoveries to be made if we incorporate concepts that have since been developed in social and cognitive psychology (such as rationalization, self-deception, cognitive dissonance, motivated reasoning, wishful thinking, learned helplessness, rational and willful ignorance, and so on) into our theories of the working of social and power relations both in the Soviet Union and beyond.
talking that literary scholar Svetlana Boym (1994:1) called “communication with half-words.” Speaking with half-words protected communities of Soviet intellectuals “from outsiders and, in a way, from its own members,” Boym (1994:1) noted. “If all at once those other halves of words were to be spoken, intimate gatherings of friends might end—in fistfights” (Boym 1994:2). This, Boym explained, was because the values of honest and sincere speech were also prevalent in that milieu. Official de-Stalinization reinforced those values in the late 1950s and 1960s, encouraging a new round of soul-searching among the intellectuals, and a renewed desire to share the results of such introspection with others.

Historian Marci Shore (1998) documents similar developments for Czechoslovakia in the late 1950s and 1960s. There, as in all countries of the former Soviet bloc, the state needed the cultural and moral support of intellectuals for socialism’s continued political survival. During the high-mobilization Stalinist period, the tasks of developing class consciousness, becoming attuned with the proletariat in order to lead them forward, building faith in the socialist project while practicing comradely criticism and self-criticism—these tasks were central to Marxist intellectuals’ understanding of their moral and cultural roles. But after the Twentieth Party Congress in Moscow in 1956 with which official de-Stalinization began, the language of intellectual Marxism across the former Soviet bloc became more existentialist, “a language made up more of questions than of answers” (Shore 1998: 439). What is the relationship of individual to society? What does it mean for the intellectuals to be “the conscience of the nation”? What is individual conscience and responsibility? These were the new concerns of educated people

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24 See also Sartre 1974.
across Eastern Europe, Marxists or not, from the late 1950s forward (Shore 1998; 2013; see also Boobbyer 2000, 2005).

This new focus on conscience and individual responsibility brought about a renewed concern with frank speech. Speaking frankly and honestly might be one of humankind’s earliest virtues; and it acquires special—political—significance if it is done in front of many others (Arendt 2005) and delivers a message the majority does not necessarily want to hear (Foucault 2010, 2011). Frank speech demands courage; it is thus antithetical to conformity, and is a key element of the truth/power nexus that is often overlooked in discussions of truth, power, and subjectivity. In his final two years of lectures at the Collège de France, Michel Foucault (2010; 2011) concentrates on the ancient Greek concept of parrhesia – the practice of frank and courageous speech delivered at the risk of angering a majority or a more powerful interlocutor.25 As a practice of truth-telling, parrhesia for Foucault has several distinct characteristics. It is speech that is clear and direct, with nothing left to interpretation. It is an ethical act because it is based in conviction (which distinguishes it from rhetoric, where public speakers need not be personally invested in what they argue). It is ethical in another sense: it is experienced as a moral duty. Parrhesia is also a political act: it is criticism from a position of less power. Classic examples of parrhesia Foucault gives are of a philosopher criticizing a tyrant, a citizen criticizing a majority, or a student criticizing a teacher.

25 “Calling things by their real names,” “telling it like it is,” “not mincing words,” and “speaking out” are some of the ways people acknowledge courageous speech in English. The Russian equivalents include Govorit’ pravdu v glaza (v litso), Govorit’ priamo, rubit’ (rezat’) pravdu-matku. I thus disagree with Svetlana Boym (1994:1) who noted that “the American metaphors” for open and frank speech such as saying what you mean and being straightforward “do not translate properly into the Soviet and Russian contexts.”
This focus on the courage of truth-telling is an important shift, or perhaps an important refinement, in Foucault’s broader thinking about the relationship between subject, truth, and power. In interviews given in his final years, Foucault admitted that his earlier work might have been misunderstood as claiming that truth, like freedom, is merely an effect of power and does not exist outside of it (Foucault 1997a; Laidlaw 2002). Foucault clarifies that he draws a distinction between power and domination. The latter is an abuse of power, when the governing of others becomes fixed, “blocked, frozen”; whereas power itself is “mobile, reversible, unstable” and is thus permeable to ethics (Foucault 1997b:283, 292). The practice of parrhesia therefore becomes the bridge that connects ethics and politics as the exercise of power. When people speak openly and courageously in front of others, they try to bring ethics back into politics, aiming to realign the political with the ethical that they perceive had gotten out of sync. The practice of parrhesia, Foucault suggests, is the thread through which the genealogy of the critical tradition in Western political thought and practice can be traced.26

This somewhat modified and clarified perspective on truth and power, where truth is seen as close and connected, but not subsumed by power—is particularly useful for approaching the nexus of conformity and dissidence in the Soviet Union, as it helps to move beyond the common view that it was either the party or the dissidents who held a monopoly on truth-telling in the former Soviet bloc. This book will argue that courageous speech was a rare but highly valued occurrence across many different strata in Soviet society, and was not limited to the dissident milieus; it occurred in both private and public settings; and it was particularly important and meaningful for journalists. Understandably, the safest place to practice courageous speech was

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26 Foucault’s death in 1984 prevented him from undertaking a historical investigation into the role such non-confessional varieties of truth-telling played in the formation of modern subjectivity (Kotkin 1995:392n90).
among the like-minded communities of svoi (Boym 1994:94-102; Pudovkina 2000; Yurchak 2006: 131-157). But recall that those communities often existed in official Soviet spaces, such as public “Palaces of Culture,” youth organizations, after-school clubs and programs, or, as the next chapter will show, in newspaper offices that were open to the public.27 In one such after-school club in Leningrad, for instance, appropriately termed Derzanie (“Daring”), participants gathered regularly to discuss literature, films, and current events. The club was open to young people from all walks of life, and was led by a team of older teachers; local authors, poets and other dignitaries were often present at discussions. According to one member of the club, participants “argued about everything, harshly and freely,” with “teachers and students […] disputing on an equal basis” (Pudovkina 2000; quoted in Yurchak 2006:136). When the work of a local author was being discussed, few attendees felt “any special ‘reverence’ for the author.” “We were the impudent young fellows [yunye nakhaly], allowing ourselves to aim critical arrows at our older colleagues. I don’t particularly recall them objecting to it” (Pudovkina 2000). Those gatherings are often remembered as giving people an opportunity to pursue their own pravda (truth); but perhaps because of the official devaluation of the word itself, participants refer to those experiences as having been about a pursuit of “truer truths” (Boym 1994:96), “deep truths” (Yurchak 2006: 130), or even “horse doses of truth” (Pudovkina 2000).

Courageous speech also belonged in Soviet workplaces, where, again, it was a rare but valued occurrence, marking someone as a person of integrity. Whenever one publicly expressed their frustrations, drew attention to an injustice, confronted their superiors, urged a colleague to “think with their own head,” reminded others of their responsibility for their actions, or acted in a

27 For the genesis of these youth initiative clubs that proliferated throughout the Soviet Union after Stalin’s death, and for the rationality behind the official endorsement of them, see Tsipursky (2012).
myriad other ways that drew on one’s faculty of thinking and demanded some amount of courage—one was “luring what [would] otherwise [be] passed over in silence into the area of discourse” (Arendt 1968:78). As historian Stephen Kotkin (1995) argued in his influential study of social and power relations in a Soviet industrial town in the 1930s, even at the height of Stalinism workers spoke out about their frustrations and grievances during production meetings. Those “occasional public moments of catharsis,” especially when “brief but blunt words” were coming from “the most authoritative ‘core’ proletarians, hard-working […] men who had sufficient clout to say what others could not and just had had enough,” were, Kotkin (1995:229) argues, part and parcel of “speaking Bolshevik.”

Such public instances of frank speech were a key component in the “subtle, if unequal negotiation” of the terms of political and moral engagement between the workers and the state that was supposed to represent them. Such negotiation was possible to the degree that Soviet power itself was “pliable”—that is, productive of new moral frameworks, but also amenable to moral exhortation (Kotkin 1995: 22). It would be a mistake, Kotkin says, to privilege such moments of catharsis as “moments of truth” that

28 Historian Jochen Hellbeck (2000:81; 2006) has both derived inspiration from Kotkin’s work and has criticized it for endowing Soviet subjectivity with a certain “extrahistorical kernel” from which Soviet power could be resisted. For Hellbeck, Kotkin (1996) reads too much resistance into the acts of speaking out he describes. Hellbeck (2000:81) suggests that Soviet subjects not only “spoke Bolshevik” but “thought Soviet”—that is, sought to align their intimate selves with the revolutionary project. They could and did speak out, and often experienced the need to do so as a duty, but they owed the authority to do so “to their self-alignment with the revolutionary master-narrative” (Hellbeck 2000: 95). I am generally sympathetic to Hellbeck’s arguments, especially his insistence that we do not treat “only negative, resisting statements as indices of a true speaking out” (2000:85). But I also believe Hellbeck leaves too little space between power and ethics, doing what Foucault’s critics accused him of doing—that is, suggesting that freedom and truth are an effect of power and do not exist outside of it. Perhaps it is the need to theorize the space from which power can be spoken to, and not only inhabited, that led Foucault to his interest in parrhesia in his late work. For this reason, I think Kotkin’s (1996) take on “speaking Bolshevik”—with an important inclusion of parrhesia in it—still stands.

29 See also Lynn Viola’s (2000:57) discussion of peasant vystuplenia—acts of public defiance, of “stepping out of line”—as the most frequently used word in police reports about peasant disturbances during the Stalinist 1930s. Importantly, vystuplenie can also be translated as “speaking out,” which sets it apart from other acts of peasant resistance under Stalinism, including peasant insurrections and riots. Vystuplenie can thus be seen as an act of speaking to power, in the hopes of being heard.

30 Kotkin (1995:392n.90) mentions that Foucault’s lectures and seminars on parrhesia, or the courage of truth-telling, delivered at Berkeley in 1983, were a crucial inspiration for Kotkin’s analytical framework.
revealed the basic falseness of the rest of life under Stalinism. Rather, such behaviors coexisted with people’s belief in the basic rightness of socialism, the sense of purpose people derived from being part of the socialist project, and with their ambivalence, or perhaps even a “willing suspension of disbelief,” about the mismatch between revolutionary ideals and their everyday implementation (Kotkin 1995:230).

As mentioned, it would be incorrect to see these instances of frank speech, delivered in public, as necessarily examples of dissidence, just as it would be wrong to see them as manifestations of conformity. Rather, they are better thought of as instances of people risking to take an ethical stance in public—effectively saying “This I can’t do” (Arendt 2003:78) in front of others—and not quite knowing what will follow. I purposefully invoke Arendt’s ideas on individual responsibility here as it takes us back full circle to the question of the moral valence of state socialism as a political project with which this section began. In Arendt’s (1951) estimation of Stalinism, it differed little from Nazism in that both regimes aimed to eliminate diversity of thinking and independence of judgment and employed mass terror to achieve those goals. There is indeed much historical evidence today that at the height of Stalinist “dark times” (Arendt 1968), it was conformity and withdrawal from politics, rather than speaking out, that allowed many people to physically survive in the Soviet Union (Fitzpatrick 1999; Geyer and Fitzpatrick 2009). There are also many indications that following de-Stalinization, Soviet society continued

31 Following official de-Stalinization, portrayals of workplace parrhesia—of speaking bluntly in front of others while “meaning well”—began to make it into official Soviet popular culture. One good example is from Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears, an Oscar-winner for Best Foreign Film in 1980. There is a scene in the film where the protagonist, a worker-turned-factory-director named Katia, is preparing to give a shop-floor interview on television, to be filmed by a man who was once her lover. As Kristin Roth-Ey (2011:283) describes it, “An imperious and distinctly foreign-looking [television] producer shoves a script into [Katia’s] hands to memorize, but once the camera begins to roll, Katia is flustered and blurts out her own, contrarian opinions instead. The contrast between honest Katia and the slick and manipulative world of broadcasting could not be clearer.”
to be susceptible to conformism and privatism, albeit of a somewhat different variety, perhaps owing to the growing post-war emphasis across the Soviet bloc on consumption and mass entertainment.\footnote{On conformity within bureaucratic circles in late Stalinism, see Hooper (2006). On the increased importance of consumption and entertainment in post-Stalin’s Russia, see Lovell (2003); Koenker and Gorsuch (2006); Siegelbaum (2008); Crowley and Read (2010); Roth-Ey (2011); Tsipursky (2012).}

This does not mean, however, that the value of speaking honestly and openly disappeared in late socialism. As I just argued, and will do so again throughout the book, taking courageous stances in public continued to be valued precisely because it was rare, unpleasant, inconvenient, risky, but no longer potentially deadly as it often was under Stalinism.\footnote{See Hooper (2008), Schattenberg (2006), D. Kozlov (2013). See also the rapidly expanding body of scholarship on everyday life and social relations during Khrushchev’s Thaw, including Jones (2006), Bittner (2008), D. Kozlov and Gilburd (2013). On political protest, dissent, and diversity of thinking during the Khrushchev and Brezhnev periods, see Boobbyer (2005), Firsov (2008), Nathans (2007, 2011), V. Kozlov et al (2011), Suslov (2011), Hornsby (2013).} In fact, it was Soviet journalists, cultural producers, educators, and other intellectuals who, in late socialism, continued to remind their fellow citizens of the significance of frank and honest speech—both for personal integrity and for society’s well-being. For journalists in the late Soviet period, courageous action, among other things, came to mean speaking on behalf of those readers who were unjustly wronged by Soviet bureaucracies. As Chapter One will argue, most readers knew that in cases of conflict between citizens and bureaucracies, journalists were on their readers’ side, even though they were often limited in what they could openly publish. Readers’ knowledge that journalists and readers were “in it together” was very important for maintaining the integrity of journalist-reader relations that broke down after the fall of the Soviet Union. It was also important for the credibility of Soviet journalism as a profession, and even for the legitimacy of the Soviet political project as a whole. It is to these topics that we must now turn.
SOVIET JOURNALISM, PROFESSIONALISM, AND POLITICAL LEGITIMACY

Just as we needed to identify whether courage and individual responsibility a) existed and b) were valued in Soviet society, so that we could make better judgments about the moral valence of state socialism as a political and moral project, we now need to perform a similar kind of excavation for Soviet journalism – to see if we can speak of it as a legitimate social and political institution. If, as many Western scholars have argued, press freedom and liberal democracy were crucial to the emergence of journalism as a phenomenon, were people working in Soviet media organizations under conditions of censorship journalists in name only? Or can we still call what they did journalism? To answer these questions, we need to take an institutional look at the Soviet press, examining its role in the social and political structure of Soviet society, including its role as a legitimating mechanism of the political order of which it was part.

When discussing the conjoined histories of journalism and liberal democracy, Western scholars usually focus on several developments. Initially, the press played an important role in creating the liberal bourgeoisie as a distinct social class by connecting disparate economic actors and providing them with relevant information about prices, major events, and technological innovations that could affect their business interests (Hallin and Mancini 2004:26). From Reformation onwards, the press was also centrally involved in political mobilization of large groups of people for revolutionary causes (the political advocacy role that Weber flagged as paramount). And in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the press was crucial to the emergence of the new phenomenon of public opinion that became as an important counterweight to the political authority of the bourgeois state (Habermas 1989).
How did the press aide in the creation of public opinion? Most importantly, by monitoring government actions and by shining the light of publicity on abuses of power; and by providing a platform for a public discussion on these topics. This is precisely what philosophers ranging from Immanuel Kant to Thomas Carlyle to James Mill meant by the notion of the press as the “Fourth Estate” (Habermas 1989; Peters 1995). Over time, this monitorial or watchdog role for the press became the key normative feature of liberal-democratic media systems.34

Christians et al. (2009) provide a good overview of this monitorial role for journalists in liberal democracies. Journalists are needed, Christians et al. (2009) argue, to continuously survey what goes on in the life of a democratic society for signs of anything that might pose a threat to the survival of that society. Christians et al. (2009) ground this normative view of journalism in what Harold Lasswell (1948) identified, in structural-functionalist terms, as the surveillance function of communication in social life. Journalists, according to Lasswell, are akin to the sentinels in the animal kingdom who “stand apart from the herd or flock and creat[e] a disturbance whenever an alarming change occurs in the surroundings” (Lasswell 1948:39).

Similarly, sociologist Robert Park (1967) has argued that journalists are the modern equivalents of town-criers whose job was to relay information of vital importance to the community (fires, births, deaths, major disturbances), so that townspeople could “keep track of their neighbors and to offer help or initiate criticism as appropriate” (Tuchman 1978:3).

The journalistic monitoring of what goes on in the life of a society is clearly not the same as intelligence gathering that we have come to associate with the modern concept of surveillance.

Journalists conduct their investigations to make them public, so that citizens, in the preferred phrase of media theorists, have the information they need to govern themselves effectively. The data gathered through spying and other covert operations, on the other hand, is not for public consumption; it is often done to manage or manipulate the behavior of those under surveillance, and likely benefits those who initiate such data-gathering rather than the public at large (although officials working for security agencies around the world would probably beg to differ).

Nevertheless, the continuous monitoring of people’s actions has been an inescapable element of actual governing practices – whether this monitoring is done openly by journalists in the name of transparency of government, or by various covert agents in the name of security and order.35 This is because governing and self-governing is more difficult when polities are comprised of large numbers of people who have little or no face-to-face contact with one another (cf. Tocqueville 1954). Face-to-face contacts make it easier to (self) govern – both when it comes to policing and to deliberations on matters of common concern. Surveillance is thus central to governing and self-governing in modernity, which is why another name Christians et al. (2009:142) give to journalism’s monitorial role is that of “good” surveillance.36

What, then, makes the mechanism of “good” surveillance tick, we may ask? What precisely is good about it? How exactly does it work as a key component of governing – that is,

35 Investigative journalists’ unease about some of the methods they (or their colleagues) might use to get to the story, such as going undercover, points to the porousness of boundaries between “good” and “bad” surveillance. Our language also offers evidence of such porosity: “investigation” belongs both to journalism and to police work, “survey” shares the same root with surveillance, and the meanings of “informant” and “informer” can be uncomfortably close. On concerns about doing journalism in the era of mass (digital) surveillance, see Andrejevic (2008) and D. Allen (2008).

36 Historian Peter Holquist (1997) makes a related point in his influential article on Bolshevik surveillance practices and their modern European counterparts. Following early 20th century usage, Holquist (1997) suggests we distinguish between policing (activities designed to prevent delinquency and maintain order within a territory) and surveillance (gathering information on large numbers of people to make effective interventions into their behavior). Surveillance, for Holquist (1997), is a modern governmental practice that transcends the socialism-capitalism divide.
of generating and sustaining authority, solidarity, and value? Of central importance here is the notion of publicity or publicness, which has both a participatory and a spectator dimension (Peters 1995). The public is both what matters or belongs to the whole society, and what the whole society sees or witnesses. It is thus about openness and exposure, but also about people “being in this together.” Publicity in these interlocking senses is a powerful mechanism both for the enforcement of values and norms, and for the re-articulation of those norms. Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton (1948) recall anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski’s (1926) observation that, among the Trobriand islanders, deviations from social norms were tolerated unless or until a public announcement of those deviations was made. Publicity – as the public exposure of deviation – is a mechanism that forces members of a group to recommit, as it were, to the social norm that has been violated. Publicity, in Lazarsfeld and Merton’s (1948:103) terms, “closes the gap between ‘private attitudes’ and ‘public morality.’ [It] exerts pressure for a single rather than a dual morality by preventing continued evasion of the issue.” That is, when many people are paying attention, a particular kind of moral certainty is produced – certainty that comes from committing to, or watching others commit to, a set of moral coordinates. Publicity’s moral pull on us is so strong, anthropologist Roy Rappaport (1979:198) explained, because “failure to abide by the terms of an obligation that one has accepted [in front of others] is generally, perhaps even universally, categorized as immoral, unethical, or wrong.”

So people govern and self-govern through publicity because it is a powerful way to get individuals to re-align their behavior and even their beliefs with the prevailing social norms. One could thus conclude that publicity encourages conformism, and in many ways it certainly does.

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37 See also Katz (1982).
But, paradoxically, publicity also makes room for the opposite: it creates openings for rearticulating society’s commitments and values – and that is publicity’s political (rather than its social) role. The public realm, as Hannah Arendt (1958) famously argued, is the space where human plurality and distinctness manifest themselves through people’s speech and action. When people speak in public, they not only recommit to existing social norms, but also create opportunities for new beginnings, including new relations, norms, and values. This is possible because risk, courage, novelty, and unpredictability are also built into human action. When we address a public, in that moment, we do so as peers (Arendt 1958). Acting in public puts us in a position that is both vulnerable and powerful: it forces us to confront our private reservations, to pass judgment, to make choices, and to stand by them.

This combination of freedom and obligation makes publicity a particularly important mechanism through which political leaders can be made accountable for their actions. Publicity – in the sense of transparency of government – became the rallying cry of Enlightenment reformers against the arbitrary rule of monarchs and their lack of accountability and disclosure (Lucas 1996; Peters 1995). The idea of the press as the Fourth Estate, mentioned earlier, is built on the same idea of democratic government through openness, transparency, and “good” surveillance.

Now, when one thinks about surveillance under state socialism, one likely thinks of the interception of letters and phone calls, secret police informers, and other ignoble aspects of covert surveillance. But can one speak of any “good” surveillance – in the senses described above – under state socialism? Is it even possible to conceptually separate the “good” from the “bad” surveillance in communist political systems? These are high-stakes questions, since answers to them crucially weigh in on whether there were any elements of popular rule in state
socialism— which, in turn, taps into the issue of basic legitimacy of Soviet-style political projects as such.

In line with Marx’s vision of human emancipation, and driven by the need to retain power, the Bolsheviks made a number of key governing decisions early on: away from multi-party elections, legal proceduralism, and freedom of the press and in favor of what they saw as more informal and more flexible mechanisms for adjusting policy and delivering justice and accountability.38 Major emphasis was placed on soliciting citizens’ appeals, grievances, complaints, suggestions, criticisms, and other kinds of input as forms of popular control from below, as it was officially known. Citizens were encouraged to bring their complaints against local and regional authorities to other levels and branches of government, including the press, and many people appealed to different governing agencies at once. Those appeals were not unlike petitions in imperial Russia when peasants complained to the tsar of abuse at the hands of local administration or police (V. Kozlov 1996; Verner 1995). The key difference after the Revolution was that citizens could now expect that their grievances would be examined and investigated— because citizens were now invited to be the “eyes and ears of Soviet power” assessing the performance of their coworkers, including managers and officials, at building socialism.39

38 For how and why some of those decisions were made in the first few years after the Revolution, see Berman (1948), Boim (1974), Kenez (1985a, 1985b), Solomon (1985), Huskey (1992), Burbank (1995).

39 Historians David Hoffmann (2011) and Peter Holquist (1997) have argued that these attempts to monitor the performance of lower-level bureaucrats, carried out both overtly and covertly, can be placed on a broader continuum of forms of modern European surveillance that were not unique to revolutionary Russia. Hoffmann (2011) suggests that such initiatives were in fact rather “progressive” compared to governing practices during the monarchy, when popular moods and input were largely disregarded, as people were simply expected to obey. Now, Soviet authorities wanted to involve the masses into politics, and to do so effectively, they needed to both understand them and to be seen as responding to their needs and concerns— hence the prevalence of both overt and covert surveillance over lower level bureaucracies.
For most of the Soviet period, but especially under Stalinism, popular denunciations – voluntary reports of wrongdoing by some citizens against others, brought before any level of authority, including the press – became a constant feature of Soviet governmental landscape.\textsuperscript{40} Some denunciations, particularly during the Stalinist 1930s, were accusations of fellow citizens’ lack of loyalty to the regime, reports of marital infidelity, or of concealing one’s class background. More serious accusations, widespread throughout the entire Soviet period, were so-called abuse-of-power denunciations (\textit{zloopotreblenie vlast’yu}). They arrived both from people in subaltern positions, and from people working within Soviet administrative or managerial bureaucracies. English speakers would recognize such practices as instances of whistle-blowing. In Soviet Russia, whistle-blowing quickly became a key feedback channel in the new communicative relationship, however poor and imperfect by democratic standards, between average citizens, local and mid-level officials, and central authorities (V. Kozlov 1996). In the absence of many legal avenues for the resolution of conflicts between citizens and bureaucracies, Russian historian Vladimir Kozlov (1996) argues, whistle-blowing became a singularly important means of popular oversight of lower and mid-level managers and administrators, who could thus be held at least somewhat accountable for their actions.

More than any other institution, whistle-blowing, given its public nature, “belonged” to the Soviet press. Newspapers actively encouraged signals from below, and received the lion’s share of letters containing abuse-of-power denunciations (Fitzpatrick 1996:834). With readers’ and correspondents’ input, newspapers published relatively frequent exposés of misappropriation of funds, negligence, malfeasance and other misdeeds at different levels of industrial and

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administrative bureaucracies. So while Soviet journalists did not enjoy freedom of the press in the liberal sense of the marketplace of ideas, they did have the mandate from the political system at large, in fact an obligation, to partake in governing by providing administrative and managerial oversight with the help of overt surveillance from below. This is not to say that every case of whistle-blowing that came to journalists’ attention turned into an abuse-of-power exposé, or that interested officials did not try to actively prevent the publication of damaging information about them. It is also not to diminish the historical role of high-pitched diatribes which were especially prevalent during the Stalinist period—when, under the appearance of an exposé, the state would come down harshly on its critics, non-conformists, and other inconvenient individuals falsely accused of acts they did not commit.

The press thus occupied an important but ambiguous position in the Soviet system of governance. Being an organ of the Communist Party, the press was clearly subordinate to it; on the other hand, the party was dependent on the publicity the press generated – because publicity has the power to both enforce social conformity and to challenge prevailing values and norms, as discussed above. In any political system, this capacity of public criticism to both maintain and challenge moral orders is what allows political communication scholars to speak of the legitimating function of the press vis-à-vis the political order of which it is part (Alexander 1981; Habermas 1975; Paletz and Entman 1981; Tuchman 1978). In liberal democracies, when the

41 On worker-peasant correspondents in the 1920s and early 1930s and on their struggles for authority within their communities, including through “abuse of power” denunciations, see Coe (1996) and Gorham (1996).
42 See especially Brooks (2000) and Lenoe (2004). Denunciations in Soviet Russia have often (and sometimes primarily) been discussed in conjunction with Stalin’s Great Terror—as something that actually oiled the terror machine (Arendt 1951; Fainsod 1953; see also Goldman 2011). Russian historian Vladimir Kozlov (1996:871) argues that while, indeed, denunciations became “dry kindling” for the most notorious wave of massive political repressions during the late 1930s, by themselves, denunciations did not cause the repressions, because as a phenomenon, they stretched over a much longer period in Russian history both prior to and after the Purges.
press, in its watchdog role, enters into fierce conflicts with other major institutions (the parliament, political parties, or the presidency, such as what arguably happened in the United States during the Watergate era or toward the end of the Vietnam War), this stand-off between the press and other institutions does not mean that the legitimacy of the entire political order is about to collapse (Paletz and Entman 1981). Rather, journalists in their “good surveillance” role understand themselves, and are likely to be seen by audiences, as upholders of democracy who “present the correction of abuse as the ultimate proof of its soundness” (Hallin 1994:33). We could make a similar argument for the role of whistle-blowing, and its manifestations through journalism, under state socialism. Soviet authorities could not afford to be seen as ignoring signals from below without jeopardizing socialism’s legitimacy.\textsuperscript{43} A public acknowledgment of (at least some) official wrongdoings, as unpleasant and risky as it was, was governmentally important because it performed a measure of justice both to those affected by the wrongdoing and to those watching the act of public judgment.\textsuperscript{44}

This is not to say that denunciations were not used instrumentally. Because of its public and political character, denunciation is a highly charged act, both for the whistle-blower, and for those he or she denounces. As already mentioned, in Stalinist Russia, denounced officials commonly became targets of direct political repression. Denunciations, especially by bureaucrats against one another, could be made out of spite, as a way to settle personal disputes, to seek

\textsuperscript{43} The same ambiguity has been built into China’s mass communication system, starting from the Maoist period and continuing to some extent today (Zhao 2011, 2012). For the role of public criticism in the maintenance of party-state legitimacy in socialist Czechoslovakia, see Chapter Three in J. Larson (2013).

\textsuperscript{44} On public judgment as a non-legal act of justice, and on the liberal fear of judging and the problems it poses for democratic politics, see Arendt (2003:18-22).
revenge, or to deflect blame (V. Kozlov 1996; Tsipursky 2010).\textsuperscript{45} To protect themselves against denunciations, bureaucrats tried to discredit the character of the denouncer, questioning his or her integrity and motives. For this reason, some of the whistle-blowers sought anonymity (in effect, asking to speak “off the record”), which newspapers and other authorities handling denunciations did not guarantee. Another way a denunciation could backfire on its author was when the denunciation letter would be sent back to the offending bureaucracy with a request to investigate into the matter and to take action as appropriate. Needless to say, in such cases, the action taken would often involve punishing the denouncer for his or her betrayal. This, in turn, might prompt the denouncer to launch another complaint against the offending bureaucracy, this time directed at higher-level authorities, and adding “suppression of criticism” to the original list of grievances (Fitzpatrick 1996; V. Kozlov 1996).

It is interesting that even in liberal democracies, whistle-blowing can be seen as a morally ambiguous activity, and journalists have an ambivalent relationship to it (Carr 2013; Wahl-Jorgensen and Hunt 2012). This is despite the fact that the majority of investigative reporters crucially depend on whistle-blowers for their stories (Waisbord 2000). Journalists’ (and everyone else’s) ambiguity toward whistle-blowing, Fitzpatrick and Gellately (1996) explain, owes to competing notions of loyalty and citizenship, and to remaining uncertainty about the legitimacy of governments. Who do we, modern citizens, primarily owe our allegiance to – our families, our friends, or political entities like our community, our nation, our country? The morality of denunciation seems to depend on whether one approves or disapproves of the political project at hand, say Fitzpatrick and Gellately (1996). “If we disapprove of a regime, church, or party and

\textsuperscript{45} Silvio Waisbord (2000:103-118) describes a similar practice in Latin America, known as \textit{denuncismo}, when political insiders use journalists to fight intra-elite battles through media denunciations.
regard its interests as distinctly separate from and opposed to the interests of its citizens, we are likely to condemn the citizen who voluntarily offers information on another citizen to the authorities and will characterize his action disparagingly as collaboration or betrayal. Conversely, if we approve of the regime, we will tend to minimize the distinction between state and citizen interests, perhaps even regarding ‘the state’ as synonymous with ‘the community of citizens,’ and will see the citizen-denouncer as performing a necessary civic duty” (Fitzpatrick and Gellately 1996: 766). These distinctions—between state and citizen interests—become increasingly difficult to make in times of revolutions and major political upheavals, when moral foundations of states are changing and people’s loyalties and senses of citizenship are in formation.46

To sum up thus far, Soviet journalists did not enjoy freedom of the press as the power of the better argument, or as a platform for the workings of “the public sphere” where private citizens come together to discuss matters of common concern. They were unmistakably representatives of the state; and in that role, they were entrusted with two very different governmental tasks. One was symbolically representing the state to citizens – in Jürgen Habermas’s (1989) sense of representation as outward display, performance, or pomp (Brooks

46 This was precisely the dilemma with the attitudes toward denunciations during the French Revolution, according to historian Colin Lucas (1996). Proponents of the Revolution made an effort to distinguish between délation (informing and spying, a much-hated practice of the Old Regime) and dénonciation, which the revolutionaries struggled to define as a critical act of citizenship, as vigilant concern for public virtue and common good. The press (with titles like Sentinelle, Observateur, Véridique, Censeur, and Dénonciateur) became a natural ally of the Revolution. “The debate on press freedom turned precisely on these issues of denunciation,” Lucas (1996:776) notes. To defenders of press freedom, journalists and publishers were “a vigilant eye of the People,” and their denunciations were “rays of light shining into the darkness of evil” (ibid). To defenders of the Old Regime, “journalists were in effect délateurs, purveyors of calumny, and, thus, generators of fatal discord” (Lucas 1996:777).
2000). The other task, however imperfectly accomplished, was monitoring the very governing bureaucracies of which the press was part, helping to “strengthen the hand of the upright elements in the government […] and weaken the hand of the corrupt” (Lazarsfeld and Merton 1948:104). In this monitorial capacity, the Soviet press could perhaps be compared to the Scandinavian institution of an ombudsman (Boim 1974), or to the office of Inspector General in the United States (Schudson 2010).

Another way to speak about Soviet journalism in institutional terms would be through the concept of professionalization. After all, citizens in liberal democracies tend to trust journalists in part because of journalism’s relatively successful efforts at professionalization over the past century (Schudson 1999; Schudson and Anderson 2009). As contemporary sociologists understand it, professionalization is an occupational project where occupational groups struggle for jurisdiction over a particular domain of knowledge and practice (Abbott 1988; Waisbord 2013). In that process, members of an occupation develop a sense of common interests and commitments. As a group, they negotiate relations with other social institutions, including the state. The aim of such negotiations is to settle on a social contract where the state guarantees professional groups a degree of autonomy in exchange for those groups’ expertise and commitment to public service. As part of the same process, members of professionalizing groups strive to also be recognized by their clients—the public at large—as legitimate bearers of particular forms of knowledge and expertise.

47 See also the growing literature on the anthropology of the state, where representations of the state are a crucial component of what the state is and does (Geertz 1980; Gupta 1995, 2005, 2012; Navaro-Yashin 2002; Sharma and Gupta 2006; Steinmetz 1999).
Can one speak of journalism in communist media systems in these terms—as a professional institution, recognized as such by society and by the state? For decades, in U.S. media scholarship, the notion of journalistic professionalism was equated with the idea of commercial independence of media outlets from political parties and the state (Hallin 2000). Any kind of party-affiliated press, communist or not, was understood to lack professionalism precisely because of its dependent, partisan character. This has begun to change, as evidence of professional practices and logics in communist media systems began to grow.48 As Jane Curry (1990) in particular has demonstrated, professional and political logics in communist media systems do not cancel each other out.49 Polish journalists whom Curry (1990) studied in the late 1970s, understood themselves as “experts first and communists second,” as “loyal opposition in the English sense,” as they themselves put it. Many of them moved back and forth between the political and professional worlds to advocate for fellow journalists, to weigh in on government policies, to put pressure on politicians, and to expand their professional options—much like lawyers do in the United States (Curry 1990:161-204).

What were the professional logics and goals of Soviet-era journalists, then? For a variety of reasons (pre-publication censorship, unavailability of official data, citizens’ fear of going on the record), a focus on news—as fast-paced, event-driven reporting of current events, as it is known in Western journalism—was almost absent in communist media systems.50 This was further augmented by a more general orientation of Soviet-style societies and their media systems not to current events but to the future—to the building of socialism and communism—

49 Neither do they cancel each other out in continental Europe, where party-affiliated press has had a long history (Hallin and Mancini 2004).
50 It was also, as Jean Chalaby (1996) has argued, absent in continental Europe until the early 20th century.
and to “life as it was becoming rather than as it was” (Fitzpatrick 1999:9). For Soviet journalists, this meant that at any given time and in any given locale, “socialism was both present and absent” (Wolfe 2006:29). In this context, being a good journalist came to mean devoting effort to exploring this tension between socialism’s reality and potentiality in the genre of long form non-fiction essays (ocherk).

There was, however, an occupational feature that journalists in liberal democracies and their colleagues in socialist Eastern Europe did share – it was the belief in the desirability of social progress as such. This belief went hand in hand with the confidence journalists, as public intellectuals, felt that they were better equipped – better than political elites or the public at large – to judge whether a behavior, a position, or a policy was in line with progressive ideals or was falling short of them. While in the United States journalists embraced social progressivism without the state’s involvement or encouragement (Schudson 1978; 2001; 2007), both in capitalist and in socialist Europe the state played a more direct role in tacitly acknowledging journalists’ (and other cultural producers’) claims to cultural and social leadership (Boyer 2003, 2005; Hoffmann 2011). In Western Europe, the development of journalistic professionalism was aided by the growth of the rule-bound authority of the civil service, with the all-important exception that journalism always remained a political profession, straddling bureaucracy and politics. In Soviet Russia and other state socialist countries for which there is evidence,

51 Anthropologist Katherine Verdery (1996) has identified a related phenomenon she called “etatization of time” in socialist Romania. See also Mihelj and Huxtable (2016) on the flow of time on socialist television in the Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia.
53 Karl Bücher, a late 19th century German economist and public figure, “argued that journalists were similar to civil servants in their social functions and that systematic journalism education should for that reason be supported by the state” (Hardt 1979, quoted in Hallin and Mancini 2004:195).
journalism similarly exhibited many of the classic features of a political profession, as theorized by Weber (1946) in *Politics as a Vocation*. Soviet journalists were trained in professional programs, not in special schools for party cadres (Mueller 1992; Remington 1988); they had a professional union since 1959 (French 2014); they understood themselves as social progressives who could push back against political decisions that contradicted those principles; they maintained strong group solidarity; recruited colleagues based on merit; engaged in peer review; and defined their own criteria of excellence. And, as recent archival data show, there was at least some understanding among the Soviet officialdom that, to remain an effective channel of communication with the citizenry, journalism needed to maintain some identity of its own.

As a result, Soviet journalism ended up having negotiated two kinds of social contracts—one with the Soviet state, and another with the public at large. The state both distrusted journalists and relied on them for the production of social values. As Chapter One will show, this relationship between journalists and the state was conflictual and tense but relatively stable, and only glasnost and perestroika broke open that social contract for renegotiation. On the other end, journalists worked hard to establish their own relationship with audiences, and they were largely successful at it. Audiences across the Soviet bloc understood that journalists were limited in what they could air and publish (Curry 1990:95; Meyen and Schwer 2007). Nevertheless, the press maintained credibility with audiences as “the most humane (chelovekoobraznyi) department of Soviet power,” as Pavel Gutiontov (2005), a well-known Soviet journalist put it—a department to which the average citizen, wronged by Soviet bureaucracies, could reliably turn for help.

55 It is likely, though, that in the first few years after the Revolution, there was some confusion around precisely that issue. In a letter published in *Rabochaya Gazeta* (Workers’ Gazette) in 1924, for instance, a party official instructs his audience of worker-peasant correspondents: “You are not informers […] you are organizers of the workers’ affairs […] you are public opinion […] workers’ opinion” (Brooks 1989:23).
Similarly, in socialist Poland, for instance, journalists “tended to lend an aura of credibility” to party and state bodies when they publicly participated in policy discussions, giving those “usually faceless [bodies] a clear, publicly recognizable face” (Curry 1990:7).

How were those moral ties between Soviet journalists and their audiences created and maintained? What led to their near total breakdown in post-Soviet Russia? Finally, how does one begin to restore faith in the possibility of honest public communication, after that belief had been severed? These are the questions at the heart of this book; in the remainder of this chapter, I put forward some theoretical tools with which to approach them.

**TRUTH-TELLING AS VIRTUE AND PRACTICE**

German philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1984; 1990) usefully distinguishes between instrumental uses of communication (advertising, propaganda, public relations) and more genuine forms of discourse oriented toward reaching understanding. This distinction is a good entry point into this part of the discussion. For Habermas, speech and action is instrumental, or utility-maximizing, when speakers treat their interlocutors as means to an end and turn to manipulation, deception, coercion, rewards, and punishments to reach their goal. Speech and action are oriented toward understanding, on the other hand, when communication is interactive, cooperative, and uncoerced. Of central importance to this book is Habermas’s insight that, to avoid a legitimation crisis, modern societies and their media systems *must* make enough room for a kind of communication where people can genuinely connect with one another on a human level. Without that opportunity—when public discourse is dominated by the instrumental logic of money and power, as happens in advertising, propaganda, and public relations—media institutions (and
political regimes of which they are part) eventually lose their credibility. To put it another way, the mass media and other institutions of cultural production risk becoming ideologically ineffective if what they offer has nothing to do with people’s lifeworlds, or the intersubjective domain of lived experience.

It might be important to acknowledge at this point that I am making a conceptual distinction between propaganda and ideology. In line with Habermas’s (1984) notion of strategic action, I understand propaganda as a variety of instrumental or purposive communication that is not bound by the need for communicatively achieved understanding or agreement. Classically, propaganda is a one-way rather than a feedback-driven mode of communication: it is singularly oriented to changing the beliefs and behaviors of others; it treats its audiences as opponents rather than as co-participants; and it frequently involves deception. Ideology is a broader and more complex phenomenon than propaganda; it is a system of ideas linked to particular social, political, and economic institutions, rather than a direct instrumental intervention aimed at changing people’s behaviors and beliefs. This is not to say that ideological content (ideas, images, assertions about the world) cannot be advanced through propaganda—they certainly have been, in the Soviet Union and elsewhere. But it is to say that ideological production is fundamentally a cultural process that must respond to people’s lifeworlds and lived experiences, and as such, it cannot be reduced to (or replaced by) propaganda’s means-ends calculus.

One of the objections raised against Habermas’s (1984) division of communication into instrumental and genuine or uncoerced is that it sets up too neat a dichotomy, presupposing on one end a communicative domain that is free of power, whereas in the real world power can never be excised from social and communicative relations. This is a valid objection, and one response to it might be to treat instrumental and uncoerced communication as Weberian ideal
types of speech and action which do not exist in pure form but may in fact be co-present in any particular communicative situation. Another way to respond to this objection would be to recall the distinction Michel Foucault (1997a) made between power and domination, mentioned earlier in the chapter. Foucault operates from the assumption that power permeates human relations, but he sees it as distinct from domination which he defines as abuse of power. When power – as domination – resorts to coercion, thereby becoming “blocked” or “frozen,” as Foucault puts it, it seems to map onto the concept of strategic action advanced by Habermas. But when power is “mobile, reversible, and unstable” (Foucault 1997b:292), when it responds to ethical challenges, such as those of parrhesia (open and frank speech directed at more powerful interlocutors) – we seem to back to Habermas’s domain of lifeworlds, intersubjectivity, and reaching understanding.

And yet, beyond Habermas’s core insight that uncoerced public communication is central to the legitimacy of a political order, the utility of his theory is limited if we want to explain the actual mechanisms through which the integrity of Soviet journalist-audience relations was maintained. This is because Habermas’s theory remains explicitly normative and relies on participants approximating what Habermas calls an “ideal speech situation” in order for those communicative experiences to count as genuine, real, and true. A fundamental requirement of the ideal speech situation is that it is modeled on rational face-to-face interactions where everyone can speak, express their desires and needs, introduce assertions and question the assertions of others. Some of the rules of the ideal speech situation require that speakers assert only what they really believe, that they not contradict themselves, avoid ambiguity, use words consistently, and so on (Habermas 1990; 2001). There is no question that rational, rule-bound interactions between public speakers and their audiences (where audiences, ideally, also speak and respond, ask questions and give answers) would be crucially important for building audiences’ trust in the
speakers. But trust is built not only through rational interactions of this sort (even assuming that such interactions do sometimes occur) but through the entire range of social relations public speakers maintain with their audiences in particular historical and cultural settings. As early as in *Rhetoric*, Aristotle states that in addition to argumentation (*logos*) and emotional appeal (*pathos*), a key determiner of whether or not the words of a speaker will resonate with the audience is the speaker’s *ethos*, or moral character. Listeners’ judgment of the speaker’s moral character is necessarily social, contextual, and historical, extending beyond the immediate speech act taking place in a particular place and time. This judgment is also processual and cumulative, in that it is reinforced or transformed over a span of multiple communicative encounters.

To understand what allowed Soviet audiences to trust journalists, and how that trust was severed in the 1990s and 2000s, we need a theoretical toolkit that would ground the ethics of public discourse *not* in following the rules of the ideal speech situation, as Habermas suggests, but in the actual practices of public speaking to mass audiences – practices that would be judged as well-executed, believable, appropriate, meaningful, and worthwhile. This requires making a shift from rule-based to practice and virtue-based approaches to ethics—a move that has been made by many moral philosophers over the past few decades (Cavell 1979; MacIntyre 1981; Williams 1985, 2002). Following this neo-Aristotelian turn in ethics, as it has come to be known, contemporary media scholars are just beginning to theorize what a virtue-based approach to speaking in public, in and through the media, might look like in different historical and cultural settings (Silverstone 2007; Couldry et al. 2013; Asen 2013; Scannell 2014). This book contributes to those growing efforts.

A key advantage of introducing virtue-based vocabulary into discussions of ideology, as I am doing, is that it gives us new tools to theorize the *uncertainty* that accompanies the practices
of ideological production and reception. Over three decades ago, Stuart Hall (1986) reminded us of the fundamental problem of ideology. As a dominant system of ideas and beliefs, ideology in any society is tied to the social, political and economic institutions at hand; but those links are never permanent or secure. The problem with Marxist theories of ideology, Hall (1986:29) argued, is that they cannot guarantee how at any particular time “ideas of different kinds [would] grip the minds of the masses.” Scholars of ideology, Marxist or otherwise, “have to acknowledge the real indeterminacy of the political” (Hall 1986:43). A virtue-based approach, I believe, does offer some new tools for how to account for this fundamental indeterminacy of ideology – that is, for whether and how people in various historical settings will accept certain ideas, and political institutions behind them, as legitimate. One of the reasons they will do so, this study argues, is when the bearers of those ideas – in our case journalists – come across as people of moral integrity, as people who argue soundly, judge fairly, blame justifiably, warn rightly, advise well, and so on.

Ethics and morality is a dimension of human life that is fundamentally about dealing with the uncertainty of social experience, and with the need to act in the face of that uncertainty. Ethics entails continuously making judgments about the actions of others and of oneself; it also entails confronting the limits of those judgments (Lambek 2010). For that reason, ethics – as an ongoing practice – is open-ended; and it is grounded in previously established but continuously revised criteria of judgment. Such criteria are usually tacit and are outside people’s conscious awareness; but they rise to the surface and become “available for conscious discernment and deliberation” (Lambek 2010:43) when people are unsure of, or disagree about how to interpret the actions of others.
What, then, might be some of those criteria according to which people tacitly judge the truthfulness of public speakers, particularly those endowed with institutional power, such as journalists? Drawing on the work of moral philosophers and anthropologists of ethics, I believe we can identify several such criteria, including a concern with accuracy, willingness to stand by one’s words, sincerity, seriousness, reflexivity, and courage. We could, following moral philosopher Bernard Williams (2002:7), also understand these as the virtues of truth-telling – that is, “qualities of people that are displayed in wanting to know the truth, in finding it out, and in telling it to other people.” This list of criteria (or virtues) of truthful speech I am suggesting is by no means exhaustive. But it is, I believe, important not to extend it to all known virtues, simply so that we can keep our focus on the actions and practices most centrally associated with public truth-seeking and telling – such as wanting to get to the bottom of things, wanting to avoid comfortable falsehoods, and calling on power to correct abuse, bias, or error.56

A concern with accuracy is the first criteria of truthful speech Williams (2002) identifies. The way accuracy is usually discussed in relation to journalism is along the lines of what philosophers call the correspondence theory of truth: as fidelity to reality, or correspondence between our knowledge about the world and the world itself. That is indeed the answer one will get from most professional journalists: accuracy to them is reporting the world as it is, without fabricating characters or events, with proper attribution of words and deeds, and so on. But journalists also know that with this commitment to facts, they are rarely on firm ground: more often than not, “correspondence to the facts is necessary but neither simple nor sufficient” to the

56 For this reason I am not including in this list the virtue of hospitality, for instance, that media theorist Roger Silverstone (2007:136) identified as “the first virtue of the mediapolis,” and which Nick Couldry (2012:197) has extended into a broader virtue of care – as in the care for the consequences of what media producers do on the airwaves, in print and online. See also Scannell (2014) for another admirable attempt, drawing on Heidegger, to make “care” a central category of media analysis.
truthfulness of a news story (Ettema 2009:116). Moreover, as journalism scholars Ettema and Glasser (1998) have masterfully shown, the harder the facts that need to be established in a news story, the more they seem to involve the hard moral work of corroboration and justification.

A different way to think about accuracy, Williams (2002) suggests, is to see it as the care one takes in trying to find out what is going on. Unlike with sincerity, seriousness, or courage, a concern with accuracy is more centrally a concern with truth-seeking rather than truth-telling. Williams (2002:87) suggests we think of accuracy in terms of an “investigative investment” – what it might cost somebody “in time, energy, opportunities lost, perhaps dangers run” to try “to get to the bottom of things” or “to get it right.” Despite the cost-benefit language, a commitment to accuracy for Williams is not (only) an instrumental value, but a matter of dignity and conscience. When one is committed to finding out what is going on, one is likely to encounter obstacles, both external (people withholding information) and internal (laziness, wishful thinking, bias and so on). Overcoming those obstacles might be a source of both public recognition and self-respect.

As a virtue, a concern with accuracy manifests itself primarily through practice, through speech and action. As such, it becomes amenable to ethnographic investigation. We can pay attention to the persistence, the effort, even the obstinacy with which one might (or might not) try to get to the bottom of things. We can study whether, how, and in what situations accuracy is “prized, praised, cultivated” (Williams 2002:127). All of this can yield an understanding of the qualities of people recognized as truth-seekers. In Chapter One, we will see that when it comes to the virtues of accuracy, Soviet journalists’ record was mixed. On the one hand, there was toleration of guesswork, use of direct quotes reconstructed from memory, journalists’ subjective evaluations of events and persons, and other narrative embellishments that would be disapproved
of in Western journalism. On the other hand, there is evidence that Soviet journalists did value perseverance in overcoming obstacles when investigating abuses of power by Soviet officials, scrupulously following up on readers’ complaints. Many of those investigations never made it to print; but it does not mean they did not happen or that they were not valued for what they were. Post-Soviet Russia saw the emergence of Western professional norms of reportorial accuracy (properly sourcing a story, not using composite characters, taking care in quotations and paraphrasing, not taking statements out of context, and so on). At the same time, there emerged a flaunting disregard of those norms by many newcomers to the profession. As Chapter Two will show, especially during election campaigns, some journalists would display no qualms, and in fact show a certain amount of pride, in producing what has come to be known as kompromat or “black PR”—character assassination pieces of political opponents based on partly or fully fictitious claims about the lives of those opponents.57

Another criterion, or virtue, of truthful speech I would like to flag is simply standing by one’s words. Following through on a commitment one has publicly accepted is perhaps the most fundamental ethical act (Lambek 2010; R. Rappaport 1999). Since, as mentioned earlier, ethics is about acting in the face of uncertainty, making and keeping promises and watching others commit to a course of action (or to a set of moral coordinates) is crucial to reducing that uncertainty. Knowing, or at least expecting that others will follow through on their promises, allows us to take our bearings in the world (Arendt 1958). This is what anthropologists of ethics call the “truth-producing” feature of ritual: promises made in public help lay the ground for people to trust one another. It activates the link between publicity and truthfulness discussed

57 For more on the production and reception of kompromat and “black PR,” see Ledeneva (2006) and Shevchenko (2009).
earlier in the chapter: Publicity helps to keep people in check as they act in front of many others, putting their honor on the line.\textsuperscript{58}

Unlike their Western colleagues, Soviet journalists were explicitly called on to govern; and they did so visibly, in open view.\textsuperscript{59} To maintain legitimacy, the Soviet state needed to be seen as binding itself to its own declared principles of rationality, fairness, and justice. Soviet journalists were thus expected to perform that key task: to continuously demonstrate that the Soviet state was ready to stand by its own words, as it were. In many ways this was an impossible task to fulfill, given the suppression of the many politically sensitive topics in the media through censorship. Nevertheless, there was an aspect of journalist-reader relations in the Soviet Union that was akin to keeping a promise. Readers knew that if they brought a valid complaint to the attention of a newspaper, they were guaranteed a response (which was not the case with other branches of Soviet bureaucracy). It was also expected that if a problem had been written about in the newspaper, measures would be taken to correct it, and often quickly. Such inevitability of response (journalists bound to respond to readers, officials bound to respond to newspaper criticism) was a form of moral-political commitment that was upheld throughout the Soviet period, for which journalists took credit. As Chapter Two will show, one of the first forms of “liberation” experienced by journalists with the arrival of press freedom in Russia in 1990-

\textsuperscript{58} There have been several important works in communication scholarship treating mass media as ritual, building on James Carey’s (1989) pioneering call for a cultural model of communication, away from a “transmission” model (Couldry 2003; Dayan and Katz 1992; Ettema 1990; Liebes et al. 1998; Schill 2009). Most of these accounts have focused on analyses of mass-mediated events as public ceremonies. There has not been (to my knowledge) an account viewing ritual as a dimension of communication that deals with the truthfulness of non-ceremonial public utterances, the way I am doing it here. Eric Rothenbuhler’s (1998) account comes closest.

\textsuperscript{59} For perspectives on U.S. journalism as co-participant in political governance, see Cook (1998), Bennett (1990), Entman (2003).
1991 was liberation from this obligation to respond to readers’ complaints. The “freedom” of officials to ignore criticisms leveled at them in the press soon followed.

The next criterion of speech that aims at truth, *sincerity*, has received substantial attention from moral philosophers, literary scholars, social scientists, and lay commentators. J.L. Austin (1962) identified sincerity as one of the key felicity criteria of successful utterances. Austin’s theory of performative utterances—of “doing things with words”—is usually invoked as an illustration that speech acts can be felicitous or infelicitous (successful or not), rather than true or false. Austin’s student, moral philosopher Stanley Cavell (1995, 2005) has argued that this view significantly underestimates the novelty of Austin’s contributions. To the extent that a performative utterance is an invitation to participate in a moral order, its failure to secure uptake (to use Austin’s term) is not only a pragmatic, but a moral and an epistemological problem as well.60 Much of our knowledge about the world is acquired through what Austin called implicit performatives, such as assertions about the state of affairs in the world and our relationship to it. We decide whether or not to trust the speaker in part by tacitly judging whether his or her assertions are backed up by conviction and belief. This is because convictions take time and moral resources to develop, and, once established, cannot be easily changed, so we inherently place some value onto the process by which people come to hold a belief. It is precisely this expectation that one will not change their beliefs at will or under pressure that is at the core of our notion of integrity (Halfon 1989).

60 Cavell (2005:159) argues that with his theory of performatives, Austin wanted “to bring the philosophical concern with truth down to size”—that is open an inquiry into how a sense of truthfulness is produced in ordinary speech. In Austin’s own words, “It is essential to realize that ‘true’ and ‘false’ […] stand […] for a general dimension of being a right or proper thing to say as opposed to a wrong thing, in these circumstances, to this audience, for these purposes, and with these intentions” (Austin 1962:145).
Sincerity, then, is how we signal through speech that our assertions correspond to our beliefs and internal states. The most important implication of this practice, for Williams (2002), is that in doing so, we establish bonds of solidarity, reciprocity, and trust, and thereby signal our intention not to deceive our interlocutors.61 Aiming for sincerity was important for Soviet journalists, for that is indeed where they drew the line between ideology and propaganda.

Chapter Four will examine the rise of a particularly disconcerting variety of cynicism in Russia in the 2000s where people in positions of power (which sometimes includes journalists) periodically admit deceit rather openly.62 After an election campaign, for example, a journalist might admit in an interview that he or she did, indeed, try to manipulate public opinion to some desired effect. For all the shortcomings of the Communist party press, such public admissions of deceit would have been inconceivable in the Soviet Union. There is thus substantial moral erosion around the practice of sincerity in Russia in the 2000s. Some correspondence between people’s words and their interior states presumably remains, but there is no longer the intention not to deceive associated with it. For many in the profession of journalism and outside of it, this has been a very disorienting development, signaling that people are dealing not only with a decline in trust, but with the erosion of the value of truthfulness itself.

61 There is a growing body of work in cultural anthropology on the practices of sincerity, probably because sincerity is closely tied to personhood, which has traditionally attracted anthropologists’ attention. See, for instance, the work of Keane (2007), Glaeser (2000), Lambek (2007), Klumbyte (2011), Yurchak (2008). These accounts underscore that sincerity manifests itself differently in various historical and cultural settings, and that people display the perceived link between their words and interior states for many different purposes. Still, these anthropological accounts do not seem to dispute Williams’s (2002) claim that the intention not to deceive is built into the concept of sincerity and connects it to trust.

62 When the Russian investigative journalist Anna Politkovskaya was assassinated in her apartment building in Moscow in October 2006, President Putin famously remarked that her murder “brought more damage to the Russian authorities than her publications ever did” (see Roudakova 2009). While not directly admitting deceit, Putin did indirectly admit with this statement that he saw no value in Politkovskaya’s investigative work.
Seriousness, I believe, is yet another helpful criterion for judging the truthfulness of one’s public words and actions. It has obvious overlaps with sincerity and with standing by one’s words, but it is not identical with them. Seriousness is distinctive because of its links to gravity, solemnity, suffering, and sacrifice – what the Greeks called *pathos*. In Russian, “*pafos*” is a native term and is very commonly used. Seriousness or pathos is thus a way of getting at what matters via a connection to the tragic dimension of life. There is a reason one can be “dead serious”: At least in principle, it involves one’s willingness to suffer for what one holds dear, even to risk one’s life for one’s convictions. For Durkheim (1961), the domain of the serious is where the sacred finds its shadow in secular societies. He coined the concept of *la vie sérieuse* (“life in earnest,” “life for real”)—a dimension of human affairs that is elevated above others, treated as “unquestionable, ‘beyond interdiction’… [dealing with] ideas, symbols, and activities… so important that they deserve to be set aside and protected” (Rothenbuhler 1998:24). For moderns, *la vie sérieuse* is about “the struggle for existence, the family, citizenship, duty, knowledge of the world” (Watts Miller 1996:81). There is “grandiloquence” about these topics, Durkheim (1973:172) noted, which would be “ridiculous” in discussions of other, more ordinary affairs.63

One important problem with seriousness is that it is easy to overuse it.64 Signals of seriousness in speech, to use J.L. Austin’s language again, can fail to secure uptake if they are performed incorrectly. It is worth recalling that Austin (1962) identified two kinds of infelicities or things that can go wrong with an utterance and prevent its successful uptake. One was

63 A puritanical streak is evident in Durkheim’s separation of *la vie sérieuse* from *la vie légère*, which for Durkheim covers everything “light-hearted” from game and recreation, to the frivolity of imagination, to the enjoyment of the arts (Watts Miller 1996:81-82).
64 This is where an Aristotelian approach to seriousness as a virtue is most helpful: for Aristotle, virtuous behavior entails maintaining the right balance between not displaying enough of something and displaying too much of it.
misfires, or flaws in the execution of the procedure (inappropriate speaker or audience, saying the wrong words, saying them in the wrong order and so on), which are more relevant for explicit performatives (e.g. marrying someone). The other kind of infelicity, abuses, is more relevant for implicit performatives, such as assertions, interpretations, acts of warning, urging, challenging, doubting, taking sides, and so on. Austin pointed to insincerity as the main example of abuses; but I think this is even more relevant for seriousness. If one overdoes it on pathos, his or her public appeal might fall flat, being perceived as too pompous, fake, or simply false.

This, I believe, is what happened to much of the official language of Soviet propaganda—the familiar turns of phrases one would encounter on the front pages of Soviet newspapers, and in official speeches delivered at various public events. Yet, as Chapter One will show, there were other modes of address in Soviet press where pathos and conviction were not overused to the point of falling flat. Chapters Two and Four will then illustrate how during the 1990s and 2000s, many post-Soviet journalists once again began to “abuse” pathos, whether consciously or not. This, I will argue, is because among the different criteria of truthful speech, pathos is the easiest to try to fake, compared to, say, sincerity or courage. Finally, Chapter Five will demonstrate how, since the early 2010s, one route to re-establishing the value of truth-telling has been a careful dance between reducing pathos in public speech on the one hand, and simultaneous reaffirming its importance, on the other.

Presence or absence of signals of reflexivity is yet another criterion by which audiences may judge the truthfulness and trustworthiness of public speakers. At its broadest, reflexivity is about our capacity for self-awareness, self-distancing, and self-examination. It includes not presuming one has the monopoly on truth; allowing that one might be mistaken; and simply being able to see things from another’s point of view. Reflexivity is about forming a relation
with oneself, and as such, it is fundamental to thinking – that “soundless dialogue between me and myself” that is at the core of ethical life (Arendt 1971:442; Foucault 1997a:117; Keane 2014). Importantly, reflexivity is also about confronting the limits of one’s knowledge. It thus involves a degree of epistemological and ontological risk: the risk of who I might become when I face the limits of what I can know (Butler 2001).

Reflexivity and mainstream Anglo-American journalism have not been especially good bedfellows (Ettema 2005; Niblock 2007; Mason 2014). “Journalism, supposing that it would lose itself in self-contemplation, is characteristically hostile to the mere mention of reflexivity” (Ettema 2005:146). Journalism scholar James Ettema acknowledges that editorial pages in American newspapers do sometimes feature more contemplative styles of writing, especially when editorialists engage in what Ettema calls acts of plural reflexivity – moments when the editorialist encourages readers to consider “who we are” as a society (Ettema 2005:143). But on news pages, Ettema (2005:143) laments, the moral considerations of American journalists are hidden or “conveyed [only] surreptitiously through selection of stories and sequencing of facts.”

As mentioned earlier, news reporting in the Soviet Union was almost absent as a genre; but long-form non-fiction essays and feature stories telling contemplative moral tales based on real events were very common. This genre of writing was known by a distinct name – ocherk – and was considered the most prestigious and the most difficult genre for journalists to work in. Why was ocherk-writing considered difficult? Because a good moral tale needs to resonate with readers instead of coming across as empty moralizing. Resonance is difficult for any writer to achieve. It requires a) empirically credibility and b) commensurability with our lived experience – with our fears, desires, longings, and visions of a good life and of the future (Ettema 2005).

Anatoly Agranovsky, the Soviet Union’s best known ocherkist, urged fellow journalists to open
their own processes of thinking to readers to achieve greater resonance. “Thinking is the root of journalism. He who thinks well, writes well” – he apparently liked to repeat.\(^6\) Leo Tolstoy, another inspiration for many Soviet *ocherkists*, advised writers to do the same: “In order to be influential, the author needs to be a genuine seeker. If he found everything and knows everything and begins to preach […] he does not act. Only when he is searching, the reader will join him in his search” (quoted in Agranovsky [1978] 1999).

Lastly, a discussion about the virtues of truth-seeking and telling would be incomplete without considering the *courage* involved in speaking truth to power. Not every act of truth-telling involves speaking it to power; but to the extent that it does, it is important to understand what makes it distinctive and how it is recognized. “Speaking up,” “not mincing words,” “telling it like it is,” “calling things by their real names,” “without fear or favor”—these are some ways we acknowledge courageous words. As discussed earlier in this chapter, this concern with truth-telling as a courageous activity (parrhesia), and its relationship to personal ethics and to politics, was central to Michel Foucault’s later thought (2001; 2010; 2011). With his focus on parrhesia, Foucault could be seen as joining other social and political theorists who understand truth to be at arms’ length from power—that is, close and connected, but not subsumed by it (Lambek 2000; Laidlaw 2002). To the extent that there is any space between truth and power, ethics occupies that space, enabling power “to be reflected upon, to be addressed, to be harnessed or warded off, to be explicitly internalized” (Lambek 2000:312).

\(^6\) For a detailed analysis of Agranovsky’s essays, and on reflexivity as a key feature of Agranovsky’s style, see Wolfe (2006:71-103).
This is a particularly useful perspective from which to approach the question of truth and power in Soviet journalism. Censorship eliminated *parrhesia* – the courage of truth – from the front pages of Soviet newspapers. But in the back pages of newspapers, particularly in *ocherki*, as well as in reviews of readers’ letters, the courage of the writer pushing the limits of the sayable could come across. Moreover, as Chapter One will show, internal criticism was a common practice within Soviet editorial collectives, and was regarded as a sign of personal and professional integrity. Editors valued their free-spoken colleagues (even if grudgingly); and at times engaged in acts of parrhesia themselves when confronting their party overseers.

As Chapters Two, Three, and Four will argue, speaking truth to power lost much of its meaning and value in Russia in the decade and a half after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The sudden destitution of privatized media outlets and the unending demands from new owners for political and electoral promotion created conditions for what Foucault (2010) called “bad parrhesia”—the practice of political speaking to audiences that is manipulative, pandering to crowds, done by many rather than a few, and motivated by personal gain rather than courage. Significantly, as my ethnographic material will show, a sense of solidarity and camaraderie, found in many Soviet editorial offices, was replaced in the 1990s and 2000s by cliquishness and by an almost military variety of super- and subordination. Internal criticism was discouraged, disparaged, or dismissed; in that sense, paradoxically, many journalists in post-Soviet Russia ended up having an even narrower margin of freedom than their Soviet predecessors.

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66 There were a few institutionalized and carefully monitored avenues for critical speech in the Soviet press, including *feuilletons* (satirical pieces about select officials and their corrupt practices), as well as a rubric adopted by many newspapers titled “If I were the director....” The rubric began during Khrushchev’s Thaw and published letters to the editor containing constructive criticisms of the Soviet economy. 67 *Ocherki* is the plural of *ocherk*. 
As the former Soviet journalist (now journalism educator) Nadezhda Azhgikhina, who is of the same generation as Anna Politkovskaya,\(^\text{68}\) sums it up,

“Between the official line of Pravda and the samizdat Chronicle of Current Events were the liberal Literaturnaya gazeta, Yunost’, Sovetskaya Rossiya under Mikhail Nenashev, and Komsomol’skaya pravda under the editorship of Boris Pankin. These papers published the best minds of the era, and educated their readers in civic awareness, appealing for a better life and awakening a yearning for justice and truth that filtered through the Aesopian language to which the Soviet eye was accustomed. In fact, all the main tenets and ideology of perestroika were formulated latently in the Soviet liberal press. That press demanded that the truth be told about our tragic past, that its crimes be evaluated and that we cleanse ourselves of lies, definitively rehabilitate the victims of the repression, and call corruption and stupidity by their real names. It demanded respect for human rights, talent and independence. All of this completely corresponded with the high moral standards current among the journalistic community of the liberal press—there was an unwritten ethical standard that journalists honoured as something sacred. Yea-saying propagandists seeking promotion and ready to curry favour were not respected by the community” [Azhgikhina 2007:1250].

What made this state of affairs (or at least this perception of it) possible, how it unraveled, and where things go from there, is the subject of this book.

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\(^{68}\) As mentioned in an earlier footnote, Anna Politkovskaya was a human rights activist and an investigative journalist who worked for Novaya Gazeta. She was very critical of President Putin’s policies, especially resulting from the fallout of the two wars Russia fought in the Republic of Chechnya in the 1990s and early 2000s. Politkovskaya was assassinated in her apartment building in Moscow on October 7, 2006.