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Abstract

Propaganda was always a key preoccupation of the Soviet regime and it was not limited to the printed word. Public speaking – whether in meetings and lectures or on the radio – had a prominent place in the Soviet version of modernity. From the early 1920s onwards, propagandists, journalists and performers debated how best to use the spoken word: what was the balance to be struck between oratory and information, edification and theatricality, authority and popular participation? Radio professionals struggled with these issues more than anyone: they had to get broadcasts right, yet studios worked under great pressure and faced serious technological constraints. By 1937 experimental and interactive forms of broadcasting were effectively banned. They made a slow comeback in the postwar era, thanks in no small part to technological improvements such as the introduction of mobile recording equipment. The story of how Russia learned to speak on air is an important and hitherto overlooked aspect of Soviet ‘cultural construction’.

Keywords

broadcasting, communications, oratory, propaganda, radio, Soviet

The history of communications in modern Russia is usually narrated as the coming of the written word. Jeffrey Brooks has shown us to what extent Russia had ‘learned to read’ by the early twentieth century. In the next, more coercive phase of cultural modernization, the Bolsheviks sought both to accelerate the acquisition of literacy and to use it for their own purposes. Abandoning commercial entertainment literature for their own concept of popular edification, they turned the printed word into a basic index of socialist modernity. In the process, language was

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ruthlessly standardized and the written text became a straitjacket for speech. In his thorough and imaginative investigation of the linguistic debates of the 1920s, Michael S. Gorham has shown various ways in which the charismatic oratory of the revolutionary period gave way to the deadening orthodoxy of Stalinist scripture. By the 1930s, as Evgenii Dobrenko has shown, the imagined addressee of Soviet culture was a reader, not a listener. The notion of a shift from orality to literacy has the further advantage of slotting perfectly into Vladimir Papernyi's 'two cultures' model of Soviet history: the open-ended Culture One of dialogic speech contends with – and loses out to – the monumental Culture Two of Stalinist scripted monologue. This theoretical framework might also seem to work well for later decades. By the end of the Soviet period, public speaking had entirely abandoned its charismatic origins and was governed by the leaden formulas of printed discourse.¹

Yet there are also good reasons to doubt whether the written word vanquished the spoken, even if we limit ourselves to public discourse and ignore the enormous hinterland of informal oral communication in Soviet society. Most obviously, the Soviet authorities never gave up on the face-to-face spoken word. Even in the early 1980s, a time of near-total literacy, 70,000 lectures were given per day in the USSR.² 'Agitators' still banged on people's doors at election time and expounded the issues of the day.³ The role of public speaking was all the greater in the early Soviet period, a time when the population's opportunities to access print culture, and capacity to make any sense of what it read, were vastly more limited. The revolutionary period had placed an enormous premium on the ability to communicate effectively through speech.⁴ Even after the Bolsheviks established themselves in power, public speech remained for them a key political technology. It was a crucial interface between regime and population, a way of achieving two key goals that were not straightforwardly compatible: to establish the hegemony of Bolshevik discourse while at the same time eliciting popular participation. Soviet culture in the 1920s and 1930s was extraordinarily performative. Hundreds of thousands of people were called on to speak up, or to account for themselves, in public meetings. 'Speaking Bolshevik', as coined by Stephen Kotkin in his *Magnetic Mountain*, has tended to mean 'writing Bolshevik': the phrase has mostly been taken up by

1 The works referred to in this paragraph are: J. Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861–1917* (Princeton, NJ 1985); M.S. Gorham, *Speaking in Soviet Tongues: Language Culture and the Politics of Voice in Revolutionary Russia* (DeKalb 2003); E. Dobrenko, *The Making of the State Reader: Social and Aesthetic Contexts of the Reception of Soviet Literature* (Stanford, CA 1997); V. Papernyi, *Architecture in the Age of Stalin: Culture Two* (Cambridge 2002); A. Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until it Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ 2006), Ch. 2.

2 N.I. Mekhontsev, N.N. Mikhailov and M.F. Nenashev, *Slushatel' v auditorii (Po materialam sotsiologicheskogo issledovaniia v Cheliabinskoi oblasti)* (Moscow 1983), 3. This study concluded that lectures had not lost their importance, despite the rise of the mass media, though the audience had become more demanding.

3 T.H. Friedgut, *Political Participation in the USSR* (Princeton, NJ 1979), Ch. 2.

4 P. Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917–1929* (Cambridge 1985), 51–62.

scholars interested in self-fashioning through the written word.⁵ Perhaps, however, we should take it more literally. In a detailed study of authoritative discourse in the making, Igal Halfin notes the care with which Bolshevik speakers phrased their speeches at party congresses in the early 1920s. By the mid-1930s, as Halfin documents in another study, the discourse had been made and spoken deviations from the norm were no longer tolerated. There was now no such thing as an ‘innocent’ slip of the tongue.⁶

Public speaking, then, had a prominent place in Soviet modernity. The Soviet case highlights a truth that is too seldom acknowledged in histories of communication technologies: that there is no one-way street from orality to literacy. Modernity, in fact, gives rise to new kinds of interaction between print and speech: in the stump speeches that drew crowds of thousands but then provided breakfast reading for the middle classes of late Victorian England, in the jury trials that were avidly followed by the Russian newspaper-reading public of the 1870s and afterwards, or in the exhaustively stenographed debates in the State Duma of the early twentieth century.⁷

When we reach the Soviet period, the relationship between orality and literacy is further complicated by innovations in communication technology. In Russia, from the early 1920s onwards, the spoken word received new kinds of amplification, both literally (in the form of the loudspeakers that were set up in public places in urban areas) and metaphorically (in the form of broadcasting). Potentially, radio was a huge blessing for the masters of Soviet culture: it offered a way of projecting the voice of authority into every workplace and communal flat in the USSR and of showing Soviet people exactly how to ‘speak Bolshevik’. This top-down model of broadcasting was faithfully reflected in listening technology: in the 1930s radio spread across urban Russia principally by means of ‘wired’ networks that allowed the audience no discretion to switch channels (or even, in many cases, to switch off).⁸ Yet broadcasting was also a source of much anxiety. Like all new media, its form and functions were fluid in its early days. It was also overwhelmingly a live medium, a troubling fact for a regime that strove to achieve unblemished authority. However the Party might strive for total control, and however rigorous the system of preliminary censorship might be, a lot that went out on air was bound to be beyond control: intonation, pronunciation, not to mention slips of the tongue and technical glitches. Even if words were completely scripted (which they very often were not in the early Soviet period), there remained the question of how they would

5 Kotkin himself does have something to say about ‘speaking’ proper: his book contains a passage on the role of agitators (of whom there were 214 at the Magnitogorsk steel plant in 1936). See *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley, CA 1995), 205–6.

6 See I. Halfin, *Intimate Enemies: Demonizing the Bolshevik Opposition, 1918–1928* (Pittsburgh, PA 2007), esp. 33–4, and I. Halfin, *Stalinist Confessions: Messianism and Terror at the Leningrad Communist University* (Pittsburgh, PA 2009), 60–1.

7 On Victorian England, see J.S. Meisel, *Public Speech and the Culture of Public Life in the Age of Gladstone* (New York 2001).

8 On the technologies of listening in the interwar Soviet Union, see S. Lovell, ‘How Russia Learned to Listen: Radio and the Making of Soviet Culture’, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 12, 3 (2011), 591–615.

be delivered. Soviet Russia had an urgent need for speech norms to match the norms for the written language that were in place by the mid-1930s.

A good deal has been written (mainly in Russian) on early radio as an element in Soviet 'cultural construction'. Much has been said about the spread of broadcasting technology and its limitations; thanks notably to Tat'iana Mikhailovna Goriaeva, we are also well informed about the nature and extent of political control over broadcasting.⁹ In this article, however, I turn to a rather different question: how did the practitioners of Soviet radio set about establishing a way of talking that would be suitable for the new medium? As studies of other broadcasting cultures have shown, there is nothing automatic about the emergence of radio speech. In Germany and the United States, for example, it was some time before the strange intimacy of the studio was used to full effect.¹⁰ The radio, in effect, gave rise to a 'new orality': broadcasters had to work hard and imaginatively to develop effective ways of talking.¹¹ In this article I will explore how they fared in the Soviet Union, a country that was technologically weak, poorly educated, but ruled by a regime with vast ambitions to remake consciousness through culture.

In the 1920s, the Bolsheviks were acutely concerned with the effective use of language. This was no abstract matter: it was essential to get through to a weakly literate population. Studies nervously probed the extent of popular ignorance of Marxist-Leninist terminology. A study of Red Army soldiers in Moscow examined transcripts of 12 political agitation sessions and discovered that the spoken language of these men differed wildly from the printed word that was directed at them.¹²

Given the manifest failures of print culture to reach its audience, the spoken word was expected to fill the communication gap. Tens of thousands of 'agitators' went forth to spread the word of Bolshevism. More generally, public speaking was deemed to be a skill of prime importance in the new society. There were now innumerable reports (*doklady*) to be delivered and meetings at which to speak up. As one manual intoned, 'anyone who wants to be an active member of the new Soviet society must be able to speak in public and must learn the art of oratory'. A 'tongue-tied society' (*obshchestvennoe kosnoiazychie*) was the undesirable legacy of an old regime that had kept most people mute.¹³

9 T.M. Goriaeva, *Radio Rossii: Politicheskii kontrol' sovetskogo radioveshchaniia v 1920–1930-kh godakh. Dokumentirovannaia istoriia* (Moscow 2000); T.M. Goriaeva (comp.), *Velikaia kniga dnia...: Radio v SSSR. Dokumenty i materialy* (Moscow 2007).

10 See K. Lacey, *Feminine Frequencies: Gender, German Radio, and the Public Sphere, 1923–1945* (Michigan 1996) and D.B. Craig, *Fireside Politics: Radio and Political Culture in the United States, 1920–1940* (Baltimore, MD and London 2000).

11 S.J. Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination, from Amos'n' Andy and Edward R. Murrow to Wolfman Jack and Howard Stern* (New York 1999), 12.

12 I.N. Shpil'rein, D.I. Reitynbarg and G.O. Netskii, *Iazyk krasnoarmeitsa: Opyt issledovaniia slovaria krasnoarmeitsa moskovskogo garnizona* (Moscow and Leningrad 1928). For a valuable survey of the audience research of the 1920s, see J. Brooks, 'Studies of the Reader in the 1920s', *Russian History*, 9, 2–3 (1982), 187–202.

13 A. Adzharov, *Oratorskoe iskusstvo: V pomoshch' molodomu oratoru* (Moscow and Leningrad 1925).

In the proliferating advice literature of the time, budding orators were told they needed to be aware of their audience and know its 'class composition'. When they reached the podium, they should draw attention to themselves, avoid false modesty and launch in with an arresting opening gambit. The audience must at all costs be kept quiet and attentive – if necessary by asking disruptive people to leave. It was important not to speak too early in a meeting, thereby allowing your opponents to trump your arguments. As for style and register, the recommendation was to avoid pomposity and speak directly. The linguistic standard was the 'clear, resonant' language of the Moscow proletariat. Jewish, Ukrainian, Nizhnii Novgorod or Iaroslavl' accents only 'deformed' Russian pronunciation. Speakers should avoid cheap rhetorical effects and over-exuberant gestures. They should marshal their physical energy and their self-belief in order to win over their audience. Speakers should not attempt to learn their speech by heart, but might find notes useful. They should make sure they had had plenty of sleep and avoid eating anything that might challenge their digestion before taking to the platform. In short, the authoritative works on the subject were as one in their conviction that good orators were made, not born.¹⁴

Yet effective public speaking was less about self-empowerment than about providing an effective means of mobilizing the masses. Soviet instructional literature differed from earlier manuals on public speaking (which were published profusely in late imperial Russia) in its focus on the various forms of grass-roots political assembly that Soviet citizens were likely to encounter: *sobraniia* (ordinary meetings), *mitingi* (larger-scale meetings), *besedy* (talks) and *chitki* (readings).¹⁵ There was, however, no question that the printed word provided the raw material and the primary point of reference for these gatherings. Potential orators needed not only to be possessed of self-assurance, concentration and a good pair of lungs – they also needed to have studied the resolutions of the relevant party congresses.¹⁶ The main place to acquaint oneself with such material was the newspaper, which for the early Bolsheviks was without doubt the most valued channel for political communication.

14 Adzharov, *Oratorskoe iskusstvo*, 9, 13–18, 25, 62, 65, 85; V. Rozhitsyn, *Kak vystupat' na sobraniakh s dokladami i rechami* (Moscow 1928), 32, 36–7. Other guides to public speaking include: A. Iaron, *Oratorskoe iskusstvo (Kak sdelat' sia khoroshim oratorom)* (Moscow 1917); A.V. Mirtov, *Umenie govorit' publichno*, 2nd edn (Moscow and Leningrad 1925); E. Khersonskaia, *Publichnye vystupleniia: Posobie dlia nachinaushchikh*, 2nd edn (Moscow 1923); V. Gofman, *Slovo oratora (Ritorika i politika)* (Leningrad 1932).

15 Besides the sources already mentioned, note the following: V.A. Kil'chevskii, *Tekhnika obshchestvennykh organizovannykh sobranii* (Iaroslavl' 1919); E.P. Medynskii, *Kak organizovat' i vesti sel'skie prosvetitel'nye obshchestva i kruzhki* (Riazan' 1918); S. Beksonov, *Zhivoe slovo kak metod propagandy i agitatsii* (Samara 1921); E. Khersonskaia, *Kak besedovat' so vzroslymi po obshchestvennym voprosam* (Moscow 1924); I. Rebel'skii, *Vechera voprosov i otvetov* (Moscow 1925); R. Burshtein, *O gromkikh chitkakh v derevne* (Novosibirsk 1926); V. D. Markov, *Zhivye doklady: Rukovodstvo dlia derevenskikh politprosvetchnikov i dramaticheskikh kruzhkov* (Moscow 1927); *Kak provodit' gromkie chitki khudozhestvennoi literatury* (Leningrad 1936). A rare attempt to treat popular speech on its own terms, rather than as an object for remaking, is G. Vinogradov, *Ob izuchenii narodnogo oratorskogo iskusstva* (Irkutsk 1925).

16 Rozhitsyn, *Kak vystupat' na sobraniakh s dokladami i rechami*, 40.

Where did radio fit in to the Bolshevik typology of communications? In the early days it was a heterogeneous facilitator of other forms of communication rather than a medium in its own right. On the one hand, radio was an extension of agitation – little more than a glorified loudspeaker. On the other hand, it was a way of increasing the geographical range and the impact of print culture. When Lenin famously spoke of the radio as ‘a newspaper without paper and without distances’, he meant this a little more literally than one might assume.¹⁷ In the early days, broadcasting fed off its neighbouring media. In the civil war period, that meant above all the telegraph: ‘radio’ was valuable not for its performative quality (which it did not acquire until much later) but for the mere fact of being able to transmit information over large distances. It was above all the handmaiden of the more important medium of the print newspaper: it enabled information from Moscow to reach newsstands and street corners in the provinces within hours.

When regular broadcasts began in 1924, radio still took its lead from print culture. The dominant genre of radio speech was the ‘radio newspaper’ (*radiogazeta*). As the first ever broadcast announced on 23 November 1924: ‘The “radio newspaper” is the same kind of newspaper as any other. It has an editorial and a feuilleton; it has ROSTA telegrams from all over the world; it has the day’s events in Moscow; it has the latest on science and technology’. But the radio version was ‘completely unlike the printed newspaper that you get through the post . . . The radio newspaper is the most live newspaper in the world. It is written in lively conversational language. It consists of lively short articles. And lively short announcements. Anyone who picks up the receiver of their radio set will listen through to the end. And they’ll find out about all the most important political and other events’.¹⁸ In February 1926, the radio newspaper became more class-specific, as separate versions were created for the worker and peasant audiences. In due course further differentiation occurred and regional radio newspapers were set up. As the leading radio journal reported, by 1928 there were already more than 80 different *radiogazety*.¹⁹

The very term *radiogazeta* (like the alternative ‘radio press’, *radiopechat*) suggested that radio speech still had an indeterminate, not to say parasitic, status. It was part-newspaper, part-agitation, but not yet anything in its own right. In the 1920s it was still unclear what the special qualities of the medium might be. Yet, around the turn of the decade, a coherent critique of radio speech as it then existed began to take shape. The trenchant literary theorist and critic Viktor Shklovskii delivered a snappy diagnosis of the problem. In his view, ‘the whole of literature has been poisoned by writing for hundreds of years’. The task of radio was ‘to overcome written language’; the radio news should therefore be positively oratorical. It still had a long way to go to achieve this: Shklovskii mentioned the case of a

17 The comment was made in a letter to the inventor M. A. Bonch-Bruевич of 5 February 1920. See P.S. Gurevich and N.P. Kartsov (eds), *Lenin o radio* (Moscow 1973).

18 V.B. Dubrovin, *K istorii sovetskogo radioveshchaniia: Posobie dlia studentov-zaochnikov fakul'tetov zhurnalistiki gosudarstvennykh universitetov* (Leningrad 1972), 25.

19 ‘Radiogazeta i ee rabsel'kory’, *Radioslushatel'* 3 (1928), 1.

radio performer who had let slip the phrase ‘I will say something about this below’, making clear that his frame of reference was typographic rather than oral.²⁰ Other writers of the time took news broadcasts to task for their failure to use dialogue, for their surfeit of newspaper clichés, for their excessively long sentences and factual (especially statistical) overload. Listeners were inherently less patient than readers: they ‘craved variety’ and could not be expected to listen to long texts on a single theme.²¹

To judge by material later in the 1930s, the problems lived on. In October 1932, members of the radio committee in the major industrial city of Gor’kii bemoaned the persistence of dry ‘newspaper language’ in broadcasts. Script-writers had still not learned to write short sentences and avoid subordinate clauses, while announcers rushed over texts, leaving readers guessing as to their punctuation.²² Such criticisms would be a regular refrain in radio committees around the country for at least another two decades. All the same, as of the early 1930s, the search for a distinctive style of Soviet broadcast speech was on.

There had always been more to Soviet broadcasting than dry-as-dust news bulletins. By far the single greatest element in the schedule was music, while the spoken word was represented by lectures, speeches and theatre. Even the routine work of continuity announcers made a contribution to defining a style of Soviet broadcasting. Yet, for the first few years, the political masters of Soviet culture gave very little direction as to what this style might be. From 1924 until the introduction of preliminary censorship in early 1927 and the liquidation of the notionally autonomous broadcasting company *Radioperedacha* in July 1928, broadcasters were largely left to find their own ways of speaking. Much was determined by the available personnel. The Soviet broadcasting corps was for the time being made up not of proletarian orators but of moonlighting actors. Before the revolution, theatre had played a crucial role in setting speech standards. Sure enough, it was actors – especially from the Moscow Arts Theatre – who dominated on the radio in the early days of Soviet broadcasting. But these stage performers often reflected on the difficulty of adapting to the microphone and on the fact that broadcasters required specific microphone training that was lacking in the Soviet Union.²³ When first presented with a microphone, they were disorientated by the paradox of broadcasting: here was a medium that could reach an audience far greater than even the most powerful orator, yet it made possible an intimate and conversational style of delivery. In 1933, Aleksandr Abdulov, one of the best-loved early broadcasters, was already able to look back on the 1920s as a bygone era. He recalled how back

20 V. Shklovskii, ‘Preodoleem pis’mennuiu rech’’, *Miting millionov* 1(5) (1931), 22–3.

21 Quotation from ‘Iazyk radiopressy (Iz doklada prof. A. Shneidera)’, *Govorit SSSR* 2 (1931). Other examples: “‘Krest’ianskaia radiogazeta”’, *Govorit Moskva* 29 (1930), 2–3; S. Bugoslavskii, ‘Kakim dolzhen byt’ radioiazzyk? My prodolzhaem obsuzhdat’ problemu zvuchashchego iazyka’, *Govorit SSSR* 5 (1931).

22 Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Nizhegorodskoi oblasti (hereafter GANO), f. 3630, op. 1, d. 74, ll. 4–4ob.

23 A Western observer made the same point in the mid-1930s, noting a ‘lack of “microgenic” feeling’ as a failing of Soviet broadcasting. See K. London, *The Seven Soviet Arts* (London 1937), 299.

in the early days he had to keep shifting his position relative to the microphone in order to find the best acoustic solution. Even then, it was very difficult for a performer trained in the theatre to feel any connection to the audience in an empty room. For this reason, he liked to have at least one live listener – most often the fire officer who happened to be on duty.²⁴

Another source of discomfort – for broadcasters and party authorities alike – lay in the fact that radio was primarily a live medium. Even if most broadcasts were fully scripted from 1927 onwards, the spoken word remained worryingly uncontrollable on air. By the end of the first five-year plan, recordings still accounted for only a little more than 10 per cent of broadcasting.²⁵ Even in 1940, recordings made up just over a quarter of all musical programming. Gramophone records were unsatisfactory, because they had to be obtained abroad at great expense and because the sound quality they offered on air was in any case poor. A better-quality alternative was to record on sound film (*tonfil'm*), but this too was expensive and the materials needed to manufacture nitrate film were also in demand with the defence industry; film had the further drawback of being highly inflammable, which meant that storing it was very expensive.²⁶

The preponderance of live material, and the inadequacy of the technical support, meant that glitches on air were practically unavoidable. Radio committees and the radio press throughout the 1930s issued a stream of complaints and accusations about botched programmes.²⁷ Two conferences of radio workers in September 1934 revealed the extent of technical problems. Interruptions to broadcasts were regrettably routine matters. An egregious case had come at the first Congress of Soviet Writers the previous month. The start time of Gor'kii's speech was wrongly announced and when the broadcast did begin, the writer's voice was transmitted poorly because a microphone had malfunctioned. Another embarrassing case had been the triumphal return to Red Square of Otto Schmidt (the leader of an Arctic expedition that had got stranded and been dramatically rescued), where background noise had drowned out the speech of the returning hero. Another source of interference was the studio workers themselves, whose private conversations could sometimes be heard on air. Admittedly, announcers faced less than ideal working conditions. The level of technical support was inadequate and the instructions from studio managers were last-minute or opaque. At the Congress of Soviet Writers, it had not been clear which speeches were to be broadcast and which were to be withheld from the audience. Yet, according to one speaker, there was no doubt that radio performers had become careless. Three years before announcers were in awe of the microphone and entered the studio as if it were a 'Buddhist

24 'Akteŕ i chtets u mikrofona', *Govorit SSSR* 21 (1933), 25–6.

25 Dubrovin, *K istorii sovetskogo radioveshchaniia*, 45.

26 G. Stukov, 'Otchet o rabote vsesoiuznogo radiokomiteta za 1940 god', in Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (hereafter GARF), f. 6903, op. 1, d. 55, ll. 24–5. In March 1936, for example, recordings on *tonfil'm* accounted for only 10.5 hours of broadcasting on central radio. See Golovanov, 'Tonfil'm na radio', *Radioprogrammy* 19 (1936), 14.

27 For a regional example, see the discussions in the Nizhnii Novgorod radio committee in 1932 in GANO, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 8, ll. 1–3; d. 17, l. 2.

temple'. Now, by contrast, the studio was like 'Tverskoi boulevard' during broadcasts as people wandered about and scraped chairs. The real-life consequences of such glitches were not too far from the surface. As the concluding speaker observed, in local radio networks 'there have been cases of people being arrested and put you know where' for mistakes committed by central broadcasters.²⁸

For their part, announcers regularly complained that they were working under unreasonable pressure: they received the script too late to prepare properly and 90 per cent of mistakes on air were due to poor editorial work in advance of the broadcast.²⁹ The memoirs of Nataliia Tolstova, perhaps the best-known Soviet radio newsreader other than Iurii Levitan, who started her career in 1929, describe early broadcasters as confronting constant technical problems – both short-term glitches and more fundamental inadequacies (such as the fact that sibilants were swallowed up in the ether).³⁰

Outside the capitals, conditions were even worse and the calibre of personnel left much to be desired. Radio workers in the 1930s tended to be poorly educated and proletarian.³¹ Finding competent staff was close to impossible in the remote 'periphery'. In the Buryat-Mongol radio committee no fewer than 30 editors came and went during 1940 alone. Not a single staff member was competent to edit texts in the local language.³² A journalist in the slightly less remote Komi Republic got his start in January 1941, when he knocked on the door of the modest wooden house that accommodated the local radio committee. He was given a trial as an announcer when it was ascertained that he was at least literate. Here too, personnel with basic broadcasting know-how who also spoke the local language were in vanishingly short supply. In practice, texts of broadcasts were often sent from Moscow for translation into Komi.³³

Little seems to have changed until well into the postwar era. As of August 1945, the broadcasting employees in Gor'kii – hardly the back of beyond – numbered 58; 45 were candidate or full members of the party, 10 were Komsomol members, but only four had higher education and almost half had worked on the radio for less than one year. Salaries were low and there was no money for bonuses. The underpaid radio staff were also overworked: they had to produce each day two news broadcasts of 30 minutes each, two agitprop programmes each of 35 minutes and a survey of the local newspaper *Gor'kovskaia kommuna* for 15 minutes. In addition, 20-minute youth programmes went out three times a week and there were numerous other weekly or monthly musical and literary programmes.³⁴

28 Archive of A. S. Popov Central Museum of Communications, St Petersburg, collection of V.A. Burliand, d. 12, l. 5; d. 13, ll. 2, 5, 9, 11ob, 28.

29 A view expressed, for example, by E. Ia. Rabinovich in 'Diktor – tvorcheskii rabotnik', *Govorit SSSR* 22 (1933), 9–10.

30 N.A. Tolstova, *Vnimanie, vkluchaiu mikrofon!* (Moscow 1972), 18–20.

31 See the lists of personnel for the Gor'kii region in 1932–33 in GANO, f. 3630, op. 1, d. 96.

32 GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 58, l. 35.

33 V. Krivoshein, 'Oskolki minuvshogo', in *Radio: Vremia i liudi* (Syktyvkar 2001), 18–20.

34 GANO, f. 3630, op. 2, d. 70.

The authorities, however, were disinclined to make allowances. Small errors and editorial lapses of judgment came under close scrutiny. As one reviewer noted in dismay, a radio newspaper in Tver' had blithely admitted to the existence of an opposition within the party, while another in Krasnodar had allowed unfortunate juxtapositions: an item on loans for industrialization had been followed by a waltz called 'Autumn Dreams' and a report on relations with Poland had been followed by a funeral march.³⁵ From the end of 1934 the tone of reprimands became more menacing. Slips of the tongue or technical glitches were automatically interpreted as counterrevolutionary sabotage.³⁶ Thus, while announcers might enjoy a certain degree of celebrity, they were also in the firing line for public disapprobation if they erred in style or substance. As the children's writer Lev Kassil' observed at a meeting during the war, 'No form of art and propaganda gets so much harsh criticism as radio. A newspaper sits there at home and stays silent until you open it, but radio invades all the crevices of your mind and you notice even the slightest slip and find it offensive'.³⁷

Besides outright mistakes, any deviations from the linguistic standard were matters for reprimand. Whether in letters to Central Radio or in public meetings, listeners regularly expressed their indignation at poor diction and incorrect stress.³⁸ Slang, of course, was completely off-limits.³⁹ Announcers were also to avoid 'provincialism', which meant in the first instance errors in stress: *ulitsa Vorovskógo* (Vorovsky Street) was a very different place, in cultural terms, from the correct *ulitsa Voróvskogo*; Gládkov was unrecognizable as the writer Gládkóv.⁴⁰ When Iurii Levitan, later the most famous voice in Soviet history, auditioned for the Comintern radio station, he fell at the last hurdle: his Vladimir accent counted against him. He was offered an administrative job as a consolation and in due course got his chance as an announcer after attending a course at the Shchukin theatre school to cure his speech of its regionalisms.⁴¹

It was not even clear what standard pronunciation was. The theatres of the capital no longer set the standard, nor was there a single Moscow pronunciation. The population was now far too heterogeneous for that. What resulted, in the words of one commentator, was 'pronunciation chaos'. The education system was directing all its attention at inculcating written norms and neglecting the spoken word. In this light it was all the more important for radio to adopt a consistent standard.⁴²

35 E. Riumin, 'Kak delaiutsia radiogazety na mestakh', *Radioslushatel'* 3 (1929), 5.

36 Examples are given in Gorjaeva, *Radio Rossii* (2000), 158–9.

37 GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 91, l. 50.

38 See the evidence from letters and meetings in 1940–1 in GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 49, l. 25; d. 54, ll. 33–5; d. 58, l. 91.

39 See the negative review of a recent programme on 'How our young people talk' in N. Sukhanchuk, 'Zametki mimokhodom', *Govorit SSSR* 6 (1934), 17–18.

40 Archive of A.S. Popov Museum, Burliand collection, d. 13, ll. 3, 6, 29ob. For a later, very similar criticism expressed at a meeting during the war, see GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 89, ll. 9–10.

41 D. Iablonovskaia and M. Shul'man, *Odessa – Tel'-Aviv' i 'Radio – liubov' moia* (Tel Aviv 1985), 130–1.

42 S. Bernshtein, 'Problema russkogo proiznosheniia', *Govorit SSSR* 1 (1936), 23–7.

In 1928, the leading radio journal *Radioslushatel'* posed the question: 'What is a radio announcer? A reader? An orator? An actor?'.⁴³ The implied answer was 'all of the above'. Yet these various identities were not straightforwardly compatible. It was hard for radio speakers to attain the charismatic spontaneity of oratory, given that they read out from a text composed by someone else. Soviet broadcasters professed disdain for 'bourgeois' rhetoric – but how was this to be differentiated from Soviet oratory, if the latter was artfully scripted? Early in 1929, Commissar of Enlightenment Anatolii Lunacharskii was asked whether radio journalists should always read from a written script, or whether they should improvise. His answer: 'the best form for political commentary is probably the unmediated oratorical declaration'. But Lunacharskii went on to say that much preparatory work was required if one were to improvise at the microphone.⁴⁴

In due course the debate on appropriate styles of radio delivery became considerably more heated. A guide published in 1932 issued a clarion call for a proletarian style of speech that would have no place for 'rhetoric', which in the author's view was synonymous with 'bourgeois' oratory.⁴⁵ In January 1932, a reviewer took radio performers to task for a false style of declamation that was wholly inappropriate for a proletarian culture. She praised one actor's performance of Bulgarian revolutionary literature for its 'genuine fervour, stern passion, complete absence of tearful sentimentality'; in the same broadcast, however, she found another performer's delivery to be 'cold' and 'monotonous', although technically accomplished. As the reviewer concluded: '75 per cent of our broadcasts are based on words, but what proportion of them fails to achieve its aims because of poor and inexpressive delivery and form that kills content?'.⁴⁶ The rhetorical question was picked up in a discussion later in the year. According to the wisdom of the time, a broadcaster should be 'at a high level of political consciousness' and capable of 'breaking off from the text at any moment and conveying the content in his own vivid fashion'; he was not only a reader but a 'co-author' of the broadcast text.⁴⁷

In November 1933, Platon Kerzhentsev, the Old Bolshevik in charge of the All-Union Radio Committee, weighed in on the pages of the leading radio journal. He tried to chart his own course between the Scylla of 'theatricality' and the Charybdis of 'dreariness'. The radio announcer, in his view, should find a way of being 'emotional' without resorting to staginess. Even a 'note of humour' was permissible 'in small doses', as long as it did not become 'false' and 'theatrical'. Kerzhentsev went further in this vein than any of his comrades would have dared. 'Do we perhaps make too "serious" a matter of the presenter's performance?', he asked. If a radio

43 'Naiti, sozdat' diktrov!', *Radioslushatel'* 2 (1928), 10.

44 P.S. Gurevich and V.N. Ruzhnikov, *Sovetskoe radioveshchanie: Stranitsy istorii* (Moscow 1976), 111.

45 Gofman, *Slovo oratora*.

46 N. Goncharova, "'Mademuazel' Zhorzh" i "'Kniaz' Vasili'", *Govorit SSSR* 1 (1932).

47 N. Goncharova, 'Kakim dolzhen byt' diktov?', *Govorit SSSR* 9 (1932), 13; 'Kakim dolzhen byt' diktov?', *Govorit SSSR* 14 (1932), 5.

presenter had a slip of the tongue, he or she could briefly apologize and no harm would be done.⁴⁸

The debate rumbled on into the mid-1930s. In 1935, the actress N.N. Litovtseva made a high-profile plea for the ‘creative’ mission of the radio announcer. Any text – from the rescue of Otto Schmidt and his crew to the weather forecast – could be read in such a way that it achieved an emotional effect on listeners. Announcers had to ‘transform’ themselves as they read, to be filled with enthusiasm whatever the subject.⁴⁹ They had to establish a relationship with the audience: as a later article observed, in the studio the announcer was ‘talking with his family, his audience, helping it, lovingly nurturing it, raising its general political and cultural level by the most varied means’.⁵⁰ Yet Litovtseva’s manifesto did not meet with universal assent. As one colleague observed, announcers might try to deliver their text as effectively as possible, but they could not afford to forget even for a moment their role as ‘administrator’ in ensuring continuity on air. Another expressed scepticism that a reader could pour ‘love’ into delivering the weather forecast.⁵¹

The task of a radio presenter in the 1930s was unenviable. There were so many pitfalls to avoid: ‘bourgeois’ rhetoric, ‘aristocratic’ declamation, staginess in all its manifestations. It was not clear how the requirement for a ‘proletarian’ style of delivery could be made compatible with the rigorous high-cultural standards that obtained in public discourse. The transcripts of in-house discussions during the war make it clear that the Soviet quest for an acceptable way of speaking on air did not end in the 1930s. If anything, the war raised the stakes for radio announcers: any slips were likely to be considered treasonous, while the pressure of work only increased. One Komi announcer, who had trained as an actor before the war and started work on the radio in the summer of 1941, recalls having to think on her feet and correct errors in printed texts as she read them out. There was, moreover, a good deal of material to get through: quite often the local papers were read out on air from cover to cover. Studio conditions were woeful. Music was broadcast by placing a gramophone next to the microphone; the broadcaster had to announce the piece and then run round to put the record on.⁵² All the same, in September 1944, no less an authority than Iurii Levitan observed that radio announcers were working ‘amateurishly’ (*kustarno*) and relying too heavily on their own initiative. His eminent colleague, Nataliia Tolstova, noted cases where broadcasters had kept their sang-froid under pressure – even in the midst of bombing – and observed that writers too often served up heavy material that was unsuitable for broadcast delivery. But she observed that announcers were often unable to simulate – let alone inspire in the audience – interest in technical and

48 ‘Diktor – tvorcheskii rabotnik’, *Govorit SSSR* 22 (1933), 8–10.

49 N. Litovtseva, ‘Za diktora-khudozhnika, za diktora-tvortsya’, *Govorit SSSR* 8 (1935), 42.

50 G. Avlov, ‘Kakim dolzhen byt’ diktor’, *Govorit SSSR* 14 (1935), 28.

51 O. Fridenson, ‘Povyshat’ kul’turnyi uroven’ and A. Neznamov, ‘Za ku’turu slova’, both in *Govorit SSSR* 18 (1935), 20–1.

52 K. Moiseeva, ‘Eto bylo nedavno – eto bylo davno’, in *Radio: Vremia i liudi* 27, 29.

agricultural topics. It was crucial to vary rhythm and intonation if listeners were to pay attention throughout the broadcast.⁵³

But there was an opposite extreme from dead-pan uninterested delivery. Some newsreaders, especially during the war, were thought to strive too hard for a solemn tone. They tried to imitate their famous colleague, Levitan, to whom the most crucial government announcements were entrusted. The results, however, were more often pompous than inspiring. A declamatory, theatrical style of delivery was hardly the most effective way of reading out telegrams. One wartime announcer was accused of 'literally screaming' his broadcasts to the front line.⁵⁴

In the postwar era, announcers were regularly called on to account for themselves, whether at editorial meetings (*letuchki*) or at meetings with listeners. Even if such occasions were a strain, theirs was now a desirable profession – at least if it was pursued at one of the central studios. A competition to select new announcers in 1948 drew 3000 applications; one candidate was appointed immediately, while a further 10 were put on preparatory courses.⁵⁵ Whatever energy announcers poured into self-improvement, however, certain material challenged their ingenuity. How, for example, was it appropriate to deliver material in March 1953 on the recently departed dictator? One announcer in Gor'kii was taken to task at a staff meeting on 18 March for delivering an item on Stalin's death in too 'solemn' a tone. At least, by now, this was not a criminal offence.⁵⁶

The status of radio speech depended not only on the performance of announcers. It also rose or fell according to the outcomes of a debate on the aesthetic functions of radio and in particular its relationship to literature. In the early 1930s, the debate was polarized in the same way as other areas of Soviet cultural production. At one undesirable extreme stood 'naturalism' (the unmediated reproduction of sounds from life); at the other stood 'formalism' (the excessive use of 'artificial' techniques such as sound effects and montage). Unlike the case, say, of literature or theatre, however, such polemics reflected fundamental uncertainty as to the status of radio as a form of cultural expression. Was radio actually an art form in its own right?

In the 1920s, the genre of radio drama had influential supporters. They notably included Luncharaskii, who in his unpublished 'Theses on Radio Art' (1926) backed the notion that radio should differentiate itself from other art forms. In 1928, first Leningrad and then Moscow acquired their own 'radio theatres'. But that did not settle the issue of whether radio should serve merely as a convenient means of disseminating conventional staged theatre or should try to do something else entirely. At the end of the 1920s, a body of opinion formed that radio needed its own repertoire of plays written specially for the medium. To begin with

53 GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 102, ll. 2, 4–6, 12, 16.

54 GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 90, l. 36 (meeting of August 1944). Similar is GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 89, l. 16.

55 GARF, f. 6903, op. 3, d. 62, ll. 54–5.

56 GANO, f. 3630, op. 2, d. 134, l. 53.

these were called 'radio films' rather than radio plays, which again underlines the fact that radio was conceived by analogy with existing media. In the first half of the 1930s a substantial number of such works were written and broadcast. But the tide turned decisively in late 1933, when the Writers' Union called radio art a 'formalist theory' and before long the term 'radio play' was effectively banned from the discourse of the Radio Committee. It did not help that the genre of radio play was associated especially with the now-fascist Germany. It was not until the end of the 1950s that it made a comeback in the Soviet Union.⁵⁷

The rise and fall of the Soviet radio play did not, however, prevent radio gaining prestige as a medium for more conventional literary works. One critic in 1933 expressed a view that would soon become standard. Although many dramatic works, even if written specially for radio, did not come across well on the radio, 'artistic reading' of literary works (*khudozhestvennoe chtenie*) was another matter. The level of concentration on the speaking voice that could be achieved made radio preferable even to live stage performance.⁵⁸ Literature accordingly had its broadcasting 'breakthrough' in the mid-1930s.⁵⁹ Many works by well-known Soviet writers – Il'f and Petrov, Leonov, Afinogenov, Paustovskii, Serafimovich, Svetlov – were first 'published' on air. The theorists of 'artistic reading' weighed in, trying to distinguish genuine 'artistry' and 'emotional charge' from 'formalism' and 'clichéd pathos'.⁶⁰

One way of avoiding the pitfalls was for the author himself to do the reading. As one article noted, 'we did not preserve Maiakovskii's voice, but the voices of Gor'kii, Serafimovich and many others should sound forever'. The author's own reading was 'the best possible commentary on the work'.⁶¹ It also had an unrivalled authenticity and immediacy. The famously ailing Nikolai Ostrovskii, author of the socialist realist classic *How the Steel Was Tempered*, made several broadcasts from his apartment in 1935–6. Contemporary writers made recordings of their own works; conversely, various classics were adapted for radio. As Marietta Shaginian observed in 1934: 'we writers must learn to communicate not only in writing but also orally'.⁶² All the same, listeners were impatient with writers reading their own works if they were unable to do it well.⁶³ During the war no less a body than the Orgburo of the Central Committee instructed that radio texts should be given to a professional announcer if there was any doubt about a person's ability as a performer.⁶⁴

57 T. Marchenko, *Radioteatr: Stranitsy istorii i nekotorye problemy* (Moscow 1970), 28, 40–1, 74, 99–106.

58 I. Sokolov, 'Est' li radioiskusstvo i v chem ego spetsifika?', *Govorit SSSR*, 4–5 (1933), 13–14.

59 The trend is noted in N. Sukhanchuk, 'Litdramveshchanie na perelome', *Govorit SSSR* 6 (1934), 3–5.

60 S. Bernshtein, 'V chem sushchnost' khudozhestvennogo chteniia?' and V. Cherniavskii, 'Tvorchestvo chtetsa', both in *Govorit SSSR* 24 (1935), 34–6, 38–9.

61 Itlar, 'Grammofon – aktivnyi sotrudnik radioveshchaniia', *Govorit SSSR* 2 (1931).

62 Gurevich and Ruzhnikov, *Sovetskoe radioveshchanie*, 139–41.

63 GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 49, ll. 4–5 (feedback meeting of 5 September 1940).

64 GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 49, l. 85 (stenogramme of meeting in All-Union Radio Committee, 7 February 1945).

Orality and literacy found a satisfying accommodation in the phenomenon of literary broadcasts. The fact was, however, that Soviet broadcasting had as its objective not only the creation of a standard authoritative way of speaking; it also claimed to project the voice of the 'masses'. How, if at all, was authority to be combined with demotic diction?

In 1926, at the First All-Union Congress of the Society of Radio-Lovers, broadcasters were urged to take radio out of the 'hothouse' of the studio and bring it to society.⁶⁵ By 1928 there were dozens of different 'radio newspapers' across the USSR, though their content did not show corresponding diversity. The main radio journal of the time bemoaned the timidity of the editors of such broadcasts – their reluctance to let worker-peasant correspondents have their say over the wires in case they let slip anything politically suspect.⁶⁶ Although factory *radiogazety* did indeed make mistakes in presentation, they were popular with the workers themselves and should be continued, but with greater material support and political supervision from Party organizations.⁶⁷

As a guide to local *radiogazety* argued, weakly literate workers could not hope to contribute to newspapers, but they could at least speak on radio. Speakers could – should – be ordinary workers, but they should either write their contribution down and let it be edited or submit a summary (*tezisy*) in advance. In other words, close editorial control was obligatory. Yet the author also insisted that a *radiogazeta* had to be 'made by the workers themselves' and that they were to speak at the microphone as straightforwardly as they did with their comrades. Contributions should be kept short (2–3 minutes) and concrete. Dialogue was recommended as a way of presenting information. Roving brigades should name and shame; 'microphone raids' could expose substandard practice anywhere from the factory workshops to the canteen.⁶⁸

As the editor of the *rabochaia radiogazeta* urged in a 1927 report to the Central Committee, radio was to be a participatory medium. The crude propaganda techniques of the Civil War were no longer effective. If the great achievement of Soviet newspapers had been to transform the mass reader into a mass writer, broadcasting now had to achieve something similar: to turn the mass listener into a mass speaker. The best way to build up a core of broadcasting activists was to develop the format of 'radio meeting'. These more interactive occasions had already proved an excellent means of eliciting feedback and making abstract issues concrete for workers. In the first five months of their existence, *radiomitingi* had given 370 people the opportunity to make short presentations (*vystupleniia*).⁶⁹ Two years later, Leningrad broadcasters were publicly praised for overcoming the habitual

65 A.M. Liubovich, *Nuzhno li spetsial'noe radioiskusstvo: Materialy k I Vsesoiuznomu s'ezdu ODR* (Moscow 1926).

66 'Radiogazeta i ee rabsel'kory', *Radioslushatel'* 3 (1928), 1.

67 I. Malkin, 'Stengazeta bez bumagi', *Radioslushatel'*, 5–6 (1928), 4.

68 V. Iurovskaia, *Radiogazeta na predpriiatii* (Moscow 1932), 16, 24–5, 35–6, 39.

69 Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (hereafter RGASPI), f. 17, op. 85, d. 148, ll. 39–42.

passivity of the audience and staging 'radio meetings' on how to carry out economy measures in industry.⁷⁰ As a manual for radio journalists reiterated, broadcast meetings were an opportunity for listeners to have their say. Editors were to avoid giving the impression of steering the discussion too firmly. They should draw up in advance the 'score' of a meeting that was to be broadcast, bearing in mind that workers were not professional announcers and making their text as simple as possible.⁷¹

An even more striking means of demonstrating popular participation on the radio was the live link-up (*pereklichka*), typically between the workers of different factories. The first such event to link different cities (Moscow, Leningrad, Baku and Tbilisi) took place on 7 November 1928, while the first enterprise link-up (*proizvodstvennaia pereklichka*) took place on 13 April 1929 (it involved factories in Moscow and Leningrad).⁷² Another gesture towards the vox pop came when Soviet radio started producing outside broadcasts from polling stations at the elections that were launched in 1937.

The microphone sought out the ordinary Soviet person not only on big occasions. In one bucolic broadcast, a shepherd on a collective farm won over one reviewer with his fluency: 'The shepherd held the text in his hands but didn't use it – it was easier for him to speak than to read, and the editor didn't insist'.⁷³ Any such impression of spontaneity was, however, exceptional. By 1938, the genre of 'home broadcast' (*transliatsiia iz kvartiry*) was mentioned as a cliché. The pattern was described as follows: 'The announcer declares that the microphone has been set up in the home of a worker or collective farmer. He then says that comrades have come to see the resident of the apartment in order to share their experience. The resident is asked to speak. Forgetting about his guests, he delivers a speech to the radio listeners.' Broadcasters made only token efforts to liven up proceedings: 'halfway through the announcer suddenly tells us that there's a good spread on the table. The wife of the host invites the guests to have some tea, you hear spoons clinking against glasses... and then the speeches go on'.⁷⁴

The extent of direct political intervention in programme content increased markedly from the early 1930s. Although the need to bring more ordinary people to the microphone was constantly emphasized, the penalties for allowing people to speak in the wrong way were severe. As a consequence, the gap between official and demotic speech became a chasm. In one grotesque instance, a peasant suddenly fell silent when recalling the famine of 1933 because, as an illiterate, he was unable to read the text that had been composed for him. Local initiative was stifled. A special Department of Microphone Materials was created in 1936 to send

70 'Leningradskii opyt', *Radioslushatel'*, 15 (1929), 3.

71 I. Malkin, *Gazeta v efire: Soderzhanie i tekhnika radiogazety* (Moscow 1930), 35–7, 45.

72 Dubrovin, *K istorii sovetskogo radioveshchaniia*, 33.

73 Malov, 'Pastukhi u mikroфона', *Govorit SSSR* 5 (1934), 51–2.

74 V. Sysoev, 'Vnestudiinye peredachi', *Rabotnik radio* 3 (1938), 30.

approved texts out to local radio stations. In October 1937 the most mass-participatory form of 1930s broadcasting – the *pereklichka* – was banned.⁷⁵

The start of the war placed a renewed premium on broadcasting a plausibly popular voice. In the capitals, ordinary people were handed the microphone in late June 1941 to express their outrage at the German invasion. On Leningrad radio, 20,000 letters to and from the front had been broadcast by the end of 1942. In May 1943 it was reported that more than 3000 soldiers from the Leningrad front had spoken on radio over the 20 months of the war to that point.⁷⁶ Whether they were bloodthirsty and vengeful or family-centred and intimate, these individual contributions brought to wartime radio a more authentic and less doctrinaire popular voice than had been possible in the 1930s. For the first time ever, ordinary Soviet people were permitted to go on air to let their husbands and sons know that their children were safe at the dacha or the Young Pioneers camp, or simply that all was well at home. Here, at long last, was a Soviet version of the fireside, even if had taken life-or-death world war to achieve it.⁷⁷

Radio presented special challenges for a dictatorship because it was so fast-moving and ‘live’. This distinguishing quality of broadcasting in the era before tape recorders made it dangerous, yet also held out much promise. Soviet culture was never merely about turning citizens into the passive objects of propaganda. To the contrary, the whole of the Soviet period may be seen as a balancing act between the need to impose authority and the need to elicit involvement. It was not enough for Soviet people to sit quiet and do what they were told; they also had to show signs of spontaneous, willed participation in the cause of building socialism. They did not only have to listen to and accept the truths of Bolshevism, they had to enunciate these truths themselves.

Unsurprisingly, these goals did not prove easily compatible. Political conformity and Sovietspeak were always much stronger than the commitment to elicit spontaneous utterances. In the 1930s – with violence in the air and errors subject to severe punishment – broadcasters were rigid and formulaic in their dealings with ‘ordinary’ Soviet people.

Prospects improved at the end of the war for reasons less political than technological. The arrival of tape recorders in Soviet radio journalism in the mid-1940s meant that detailed montage was possible for the first time. Editing could now give human speech a hitherto impossible fluency and cogency.⁷⁸ A pioneer was Lazar’

75 Goriaeva, *Radio Rossii* (2000), 154–5, 158.

76 V. Kovtun, “‘Govorit Leningrad! Govorit gorod Lenina!’”, in T.V. Vasil’eva, V.G. Kovtun and V.G. Osinskii (eds) *Radio. Blokada. Leningrad: Sbornik statei i vospominanii* (St Petersburg 2005), 6; Tsentral’nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva Sankt-Peterburga (hereafter TsGALI SPb), f. 293, op. 2, d. 346, l. 2.

77 For a sample from mid-July 1941, see TsGALI SPb, f. 293, op. 2, d. 147. The role of wartime broadcasting in creating a new sense of intimacy is well explored in J. von Geldern, ‘Radio Moscow: The Voice from the Center’, in R. Stites (ed.) *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia* (Bloomington IN, 1995), 44–61.

78 V. Vozchikov, ‘Zvukovoi dokument i kommunikatsiia vo vremeni’, in V. Vozchikov (ed.) *Zvuchashchii mir: Kniga o zvukovoi dokumentalistike* (Moscow 1979), 32–4. M. Shalashnikov, ‘V dni,

Magrachev, a Leningrad radio journalist and leading exponent of 'human interest' stories. Even before the advent of mobile recording apparatus, Magrachev strove to give his (scripted) interviews a natural, spontaneous feel – sometimes, as he admitted later, 'torturing' his interviewees by rehearsing their contributions exhaustively. The first 'trophy' tape recorder reached Leningrad during the war and this gave Magrachev the opportunity to attempt his first entirely unscripted interview in May 1946. Though he lost his job in the anti-Semitic purges of the late 1940s, he returned to broadcasting in the post-Stalin era, by which time the unscripted interview was his 'credo'.⁷⁹ Although few other Soviet broadcasters could match Magrachev's flair, by 1960 or so the voices of ordinary people could be heard far more often on Soviet radio: even regional radio stations were routinely inserting interview footage into their broadcasts.⁸⁰

The Soviet vox pop still most often failed to make compelling listening. Part of the problem was technological. For some years that German tape recorder remained the only such equipment owned by the Leningrad Radio Committee. Most programmes still went out live, which meant that journalists minimized risk by scripting interviews.⁸¹ A more important factor, however, was that radio journalists had every reason to be risk-averse. Even in the post-Stalin era, the dangers of misspeaking were only too fresh in their minds. In March 1953 a leading Leningrad broadcaster, M.N. Melaned, suffered a coughing fit while announcing the death of Stalin. Within minutes the police were waiting for him outside and he never worked on radio again.⁸² It is hardly surprising that most broadcasters played safe. The radio press of the 1950s was peppered with ritual complaints about the dreariness of much broadcasting and the need to cultivate 'living speech' (*zhivoe slovo*) rather than falling back on turgid recitation. In April 1953, a member of the radio committee in Gor'kii commented on how drearily a housewife had read her text on the news. Later that year, another speaker noted that 'Moscow is recommending that we record live speech more often, which means that our programmes are more likely to have incorrect turns of phrase'. As the head of the committee replied, 'Recording live speech does not mean recording everything that the speakers are saying. They need to be corrected in timely fashion'.⁸³ Stilted, politically correct first-person narratives from exemplary 'ordinary' Soviet people remained staple fare in Soviet broadcasting.⁸⁴

kogda ne bylo magnitofonov...', *Sovetskoe radio i televidenie* 5 (1961), 35–6, reflects on the dire state of radio equipment until the mid-1940s: in these conditions, montage was all but impossible.

79 L. Magrachev, *Siuzhety, sochinennye zhizn'iu* (Moscow 1972), 181; L. Magrachev, *Vstrechi u mikrofona* (Moscow 1959), 12; L. Markhasev, *Belki v kolese: Zapiski iz Doma radio* (St Petersburg 2004), 155.

80 A. Grigor'ev, *Nash drug-radio* (Tula 1966), 86–7. For more direct evidence on changing programme format, see the transcripts of central news broadcasts in GARF, f. 6903, op. 11.

81 A.A. V'iunik, 'V "Poslednikh izvestiiakh": 50-e gody', in P.A. Palladin, M.G. Zeger and A.A. V'iunik, *Leningradskoe radio: Ot blokady do 'ottepeli'* (Moscow 1991), 133.

82 *Ibid.*, 141.

83 GANO, f. 3630, op. 2, d. 134, ll. 62, 159.

84 For an entertaining account of this genre, see Markhasev, *Belki v kolese*, 143–5.

All the same, the quest for a more natural and compelling style of radio delivery animated much discussion on the pages of the leading journal for media professionals. In 1960, a Leningrad representative of the daily news – traditionally the epitome of lifeless delivery and leaden formulas – wrote in to put the record straight. Since January of that year the station had ceased, in all but ‘exceptional cases’, to broadcast interviews (*vystupleniia*) that were recorded from ‘texts written in advance and edited down to the last comma’. Interviews were now in general unscripted, which had ‘incomparably greater propaganda effect’, as they sounded ‘natural, convincing and intimate’.⁸⁵ Even the Komi Republic saw its first experiments with unscripted interviews in the 1960s.⁸⁶ As a Stalingrad journalist noted, recording technology and montage had solved the old dilemma of the Soviet broadcaster: spontaneous speech was hard to get right, while scripted speech sounded unnatural.⁸⁷ There was no question that, as in the interwar early days of radio, a new technology had changed the ways in which Soviet society could represent itself. The arrival of radio in the early 1920s had seemed to fulfil the dream of unmediated, instant communication between government and people. Now, thanks to user-friendly recording equipment, broadcasters could give the impression that the Soviet people was co-authoring the script. For a regime on the threshold of ‘developed socialism’, with its welfare discourse and gestures towards popular well-being, this was a timely rhetorical coup.

The impact of this new radio rhetoric was, however, under question from the very beginning. The problem was that improvements in the technology available to broadcasters were accompanied by an even more fundamental transformation in the technology of listening. In the postwar era, as it strove for complete ‘radiofication’, the Soviet regime launched mass production of wireless sets, which by 1963 outnumbered the traditionally dominant wired radios. While this had the effect of extending the reach of broadcasting to the remoter corners of the USSR, it also turned Soviet listeners into consumers rather than addressees of propaganda. Now people did have the option of switching channels – and some of the channels to which they tuned in, distressingly for the authorities, were Western.⁸⁸ A medium of communication conceived as top-down or ‘vertical’ had now become ‘horizontal’.⁸⁹ At just the moment Soviet broadcasters learned how to speak, they discovered their listeners had moved on.

85 T. Bogoslovskii, ‘Proshu slova!’, *Sovetskoe radio i televidenie* 6 (1960), 34. This article was written in response to an article earlier in the year from the Estonian radio committee, which was a trailblazer in Soviet news reporting.

86 G. Tur’ev, ‘Troie sutok shagat’ . . .’, in *Radio: Vremia i liudi*, 70–1.

87 S. Chuprikov, ‘Eksprompt ili montazh?’, *Sovetskoe radio i televidenie* 5 (1960), 36.

88 For an excellent account of this development, see K. Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire That Lost the Cultural Cold War* (Ithaca, NY 2011), Ch. 3.

89 For an application of these concepts to Russian history, see S.F. Starr, ‘New Communications Technologies and Civil Society’, in L.R. Graham (ed.) *Science and the Soviet Social Order* (Cambridge, MA 1990), 19–50.

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