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Prolegomena to the Study of Totalitarian Communication

KIRILL POSTOUTENKO

Introduction

This book is devoted to a double-faced concept which simultaneously looks at two different research traditions. Depending on the weight attached to one or another side, one could interpret totalitarian communication either as an attribute of totalitarian society or as a special case of social communication. Up to date, the first approach has proved to be significantly more popular, but its efficiency—some notable exceptions aside—leaves much to be desired, as many scholars may well have sensed: the recent proposal to move “beyond totalitarianism” (Geyer and Fitzpatrick 2009) was prepared by innumerable subversion attempts, including, but not limited to, the breakup of the term (“totalitarianisms”) or encroachment upon its referential jurisdiction (“*totalitarianism* and *authoritarianism*... / *fascism*... *dictatorship*... etc.”).

The difficulties are not confined to the fact that such a semantically vague and ideologically contested term as “totalitarianism” is neither clear enough nor sufficiently differentiated to serve as a strong a priori foundation for any sensible deductions. Nor they are limited to the general preoccupation with the large-scale practices (propaganda) and preferred communication channels (mass media). The crucial problem seems to be the underlying perception of totalitarian society as a special structure composed from ready-made political, moral and epistemic inequalities between leaders and followers, tyrants and victims, messengers and recipients etc. Communication, in this model,

merely amalgamates existing dichotomies, producing synergies needed for highlighting the gaps (something like ‘*immoral tyrannic messengers manipulate recipients*’). As long as communication is treated as a kind of courier service facility within the state apparatus, its crucial role in shaping and maintaining social distinctions and cohesions will remain unexplored. Besides, the absolutization of social and cognitive gaps within the society makes totalitarian communication at once superfluous (gaps do not change anyway), improbable (non-relational distinctions within society?) and incomparable to its non-totalitarian equivalents (no systemic identity, separable from “social structure”, is displayed).

Hence most of the authors of this volume reject this approach, explicitly or implicitly, and try to move, as much as possible, in the opposite direction. “As much as possible” means first and foremost taken for granted the basic distinction between *leaders* [*executives/rulers*] and *followers* [*subordinates/subjects*]. To be sure, this difference can (and eventually should) be formulated in communicative terms, but at this point none of us, it seems, really knows how to link its variations to any meaningful differences between totalitarian and non-totalitarian communication. All other dichotomies are seen as variables—including the very distinction between the “totalitarianism” and “democracy”. In fact, although the focus on the usual suspects (such as Nazi Germany, Soviet Union, Fascist Italy) remained in force, an attempt was made to replace the Manichean dichotomy ‘*totalitarian*’ / ‘*non-totalitarian*’ with a sliding scale. In particular, the three poster examples were juxtaposed with the cases that could be reasonably described as totalitarian by analogy (the Vichy France), as well as with borderline phenomena such as seasoned democratic systems with the extreme executive power (the ‘New Deal’ USA or France under Charles de Gaulle) or young democracies with strong kinship identities (post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan), or even democracies developed at the cost of disempowered autocracy (United Kingdom). Furthermore, an attempt was made to forgo the unfruitful fixation on the state as a whole and move *a maiori ad minus*, describing totalitarian communication through the prism of specific practices not specifically associated with totalitarianism: here the most general interactional rules (such as turn-taking or repairs discussed below) go hand in hand with the detailed study of links between the British extreme-right newspaper *Reality* and its readership, or relations between the famous Soviet writer Maxim Gorky and his proletarian apprentices.

On the whole, totalitarian communication appears to be anchored in

the political organization of society; yet the general rules of social interaction to which it conforms cannot be always directly linked to politics or governance. At the same time, the examples of the U.S. during the war and France after the war show that emerging totalitarian communication may be a reliable indicator of those authoritarian tendencies that elude social reflection and attract little notice in political analysis. Still, these findings, important as they are, stop short of describing totalitarian communication as a special kind of communicative system. This is hardly surprising, giving the breadth of approaches involved (psychology, political studies, history, sociology, linguistics), and a stable description may not be even necessary at this stage. But a step in this direction seems to be needed, if only to stake out a claim for an alternative approach to totalitarian communication and provide its working definition for further discussion. Given the specifics of this approach, it seems natural to precede this volume with a brief outlook at communication in general and then proceed to its totalitarian variation. After that, the intricacies of interdependence between totalitarian communication and its socio-political environment may be easier brought into the picture.

From Biological to Social Communication Role Exchange, Turn-Taking, Repairs

Although this project is devoted to a communicative system in its own right, it would be difficult to ignore the fact that communication is first and foremost a function of social life which has no identity of its own and no other goal than to serve its members (collectively referred to as “society”). In this sense, communication is the same sort of allopoetic system as ‘God’ or ‘market’, which fictitious self-reference is hypothesized on the slim circumstantial basis of correspondences between other-references of real social actors, *i.e.* human beings participating in social interaction (for the distinction *autopoetic/allopoetic* see: Maturana and Varela 1980: 80-81). To be sure, these correspondences, based on binding norms and expressed through highly universalized codes, are significant enough to treat the aforementioned systems as “subjects” able to “react upon themselves, “repeat”, “revise” and “complete” (the examples are borrowed from: Luhmann 1987: 213). But such a perception, at least from the sociological standpoint, is not particularly useful. In dissipative systems (which communication and society unquestionably are), the relations between the whole and its parts are rather trivial: every system

works nonstop on maintaining its integrity (organizational closeness), and every subsystem has a potential of breaking away. Communication undoubtedly has this tendency to becoming an autopoietic system; it cannot be even ruled out that it has goals extending beyond this compulsory secessionist tribe and subsequent self-preservation. But these intentions are no more relevant for social life than the intentions of God or the intentions of the market, since humans have no semiotic competence to decipher codes in which all aforementioned teleologies are expressed, or even to ascertain existence of such codes (see the same argument in a different form: Schmidt 2003: 78-79). Hence an empirical study of communication is inevitably limited to the assessment of its functions in the context of the mega-project pursued by society in general—emancipation from the environment.

From its very beginning, such an emancipation has been a dire necessity crucial for the survival of human race. Endowed with meager sensory abilities, modest physical strength, low fertility and long rearing times, humans would not have survived by simply reproducing biological identity of their specie (Vine 1975: 367). Of course, this identity has been in principle capable of adaptive changes, but within a lifetime of a single individual each of his (or her) biological utterances, being a single-valued function of gender, remained the same regardless of what was happening around it. Every new exchange of these “genotypically determined signals” (Bateson 1972: 419) was similar to the old one, could not last more than one turn, and its adaptation to environmental hazards was limited to varying frequency of the same unidirectional interaction scenario (one sperm cell \rightarrow one ovum). Indeed, in each interactive act the number of spermatozoa contacting ovary is quite sufficient (around 50 million, to be precise), but they are all the same so that each ejaculation (and all ejaculations) are nothing more than mechanical repetitions of a single statement (for details see: Stent 1972: 44-45). The sheer number of messages, aimed at preemptively offsetting the poor quality of communication, created by constantly alternating environmental hazards, is functionally equivalent to the monotonous pleading for help in the dark. Alas, such pleading is rarely helpful and does little to work out a sensible rescue strategy.

Inevitably, the cooperation for the purpose of defense requires compulsory acquisition of social identity by each individual: even among plants the form and content of messages exchanged are sufficiently deregulated in order to relate the specific position of each communicator to its environment (see, for instance: Karban and Shiojiri 2009). To

be sure, biological interaction does react upon environment: in many species mating behavior occurs only at the specialized territories (so-called stamping grounds) or does not occur at all if conditions are adverse (Ardrey 1966: 69). But the participants of biological exchanges cannot select their utterance (let alone code): they are inextricably tied to their *one and only* message which may be uttered or not uttered depending on environmental conditions.

In contrast, the way to social cohesion lies through making environmental perceptions communicable, which necessarily requires that communicators X and Y are relatively free to choose between messages x and y and know of each other's freedom (see the survey of "double contingency" in: Vanderstraeten 2002). Potentially, the decoupling of speaker and message can fortify society in its battle against the all-devouring ecological macrosystem: the correlation between environmental perception and the *content* of interaction makes meaningful interaction possible (see: Andrade 1999: 148). Furthermore, diversification of codes and their adjustment to the best developed sensors of the species (for humans—sight and hearing rather than tactile and olfactory sensibility) puts at their disposal the codes with the highest throughput capacity (*symbols* and *icons*) and thus raises the chances of timely response to the common challenges.

However, these potentialities could only become actual if the deregulation measures are counterbalanced with secondary stabilization: in other words, the individual environmental scans should not only be different but also comparable. Indeed, whereas the informational value of such reports is proportional to their perceptual egocentricity, their social relevance depends on potential transferability of data perceived, which is impossible without some or other degree of allocentric universality in the code employed. In the natural language, for instance, this complementarity of speaker- and environment-based referential markers keeps together not only a single social self, where the unique *self-performance* ('I'-reference to the present communicator) can only be communicated by means of the universal *self-statement* ('I'-reference to all potential speakers), but extends to the most salient aspects of intersubjective coordination such as time ('*now*' vs. '*at 12:40*') and space ('*here*' vs. '*in Constance*').

Arguably the most important mechanism of equilibration between the individuality of a living being in society and its necessary interactive actualization is the *role exchange* which separates an autonomous living being from its societal role. Role exchange simultaneously drives

communication on various levels beginning with basic distinctions (interchangeability between 'I' vs. 'you' in *symbolic* language as opposed to irreducible *indexicality* of voice tone) and extending to the complex interaction scenarios (interchangeability of characters in the play as opposed to ritual) (see: James 1909: 217; Huizinga 1956: 32; Caillois 1958: 62; Turner 1979: 95; Goffman 1974: 129; or—in a more elaborated form—Rappaport 1999: 42). Most visible in its norm-setting functions (such as furnishing society with the cognitive and institutional background), the role exchange also serves as an impetus for a dynamic social consensus, projecting obligatory reversibility of basal communicative functions ('*speaker*'/'*addressee*') onto complex social roles ('*power*'/'*opposition*') (Huizinga 1956: 52, 87). Furthermore, combined with the sequential (sometimes called "linear") order of verbal interaction, it enables extension of a dialogue beyond a single '*utterer*'/'*listener*' exchange (Goffman 1964: 65; Sacks, Schegloff and Goffman 1974). The contribution of this *turn-taking* to the stability and integrity of social system could hardly be overestimated: at any rate, its salience goes far beyond the habitual conversational settings (Knorr Cetina 2007) and as far as stability is concerned, it beats political structures hands down (Schegloff 2006: 71). In general, is perhaps indispensable for peaceful survival as it helps to tune the form of message to the listener's cognitive expectations, which, in its turn, reduces the risk of accidental confrontations based on misunderstanding. To be sure, neither turn-taking nor communication in general are aimed at producing consensus between the parties involved (Luhmann 1987: 237; O'Connell, Kowal and Kaltenbacher 1990). Rather, as cooperation happens from time to time to counter the ruinous selfish teleologies, the consensual perception of interactional settings normally emerges when the wasteful parades of individual differences block information exchange. Furthermore, the serial allocentric generalizations of specific communicational circumstances eventually produce norms and institutions and lead to formation of "primary frameworks" (Goffman 1974: 21-39) that enable reverse stabilization of social identity through the retroactive correction of its anomalous (that is, deviant in relation to the situation) behavior (Goffman 1971: 95-187; Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks 1977) Needless to say, the practice of *repairs*, based on the clear-cut separation between the living being and its social role, greatly decreases the centripetal tendencies within social system. As a sort of compulsory social insurance, repairs safeguard individuals from peremptory social exclusion on all levels of society from isolated interaction practices (upward or downward stylistic self-correction in a conversation) to the

moral and legal foundations of society (prevention of total social exclusion of “the possessed”—or “the incorrigible”—on respectively religious or moral grounds).

Ideally, the combinations of these three practices ensures stability an elasticity of communicative codes and customs: lending equivocal support to some wannabe-systems (such as “families”, “classes”, “national cultures”) and ignoring others, social communication ideally keeps complexity of *the* allopoetic system ‘society’ on the level optimal for its operation—ideally. But some political structures have less patience with the homeostatic properties of social systems than others, and it is worth looking at the respective modifications of the communicative subsystems that serve, or disserve, such societies.

Systemic Features of Totalitarian Communication Role Exchange is Impossible, Turn-Taking is Not Topical, Repairs Compound Errors

It would be anthropologically naive and historically untrue to couple limitations, imposed on role exchange in power relations, with specific political systems formed in Europe and America after the first World War. The alternation of norms encouraging or prohibiting role exchange in politics runs all through the European history: on the one hand, as it was possible for the thinkers of classical Antiquity to differentiate a living being from its power function (Kantorowicz 1957: 496), on the other hand, it was also natural for the 18th century peasants to believe in the miraculous powers of the king’s touch (Bloch 1924). Obviously, the dominance of ritual in politics, coupled with suppression of its playful, ironical relativizations (such as carnival), lives in every pore of traditional society. The fusion of simple communicative prevalence and long-term political authority is particularly visible in the systems which legitimacy is based, fully or in part, on transcendental references, hereditary monarchies or priestly theocracies being the most notable examples.

Nevertheless, the institutional environment of the interwar Europe notably differed from its absolutist past. Most importantly, the obligatory rotation of political elites, together with their symmetrical functional differentiation, was institutionalized in universal practices (elections) and legal norms (constitutional separation of power). These mechanisms of legitimacy maintenance, which made some forms of *role exchange* compulsory, have clashed with the authoritarian tendencies in the postwar

societies across the globe. It is well known that in some cases the conflict was resolved in favor of norms reinforcing role exchange (introduction of the two-term limit in the United States after Roosevelt presidency), whereas in others the norms were either gradually removed (*Führertum* in Nazi Germany) or—in a more paradoxical way—created anew and progressively rendered senseless (“elections” in Soviet Union).

What seems to be remarkable in the two latter cases is the role of communication in social enactment of these conflicts. If one agrees that advanced communicative systems, capable of using symbolic codes, necessarily differentiate between action and utterance and between message and information (Luhmann 1987: 193-195), then the ritualistic character of authoritarian politics reveals itself in partial suspending of these differentiations (Leach 1976: 37; Rappaport 1999: 58), which effectively implies the unity of body, its communicative role and its political power. Whereas offsetting this vast consolidation of social value in one hand by means of egalitarian interactive devices appears to be a norm observed on various communicative levels of many societies (Ruesch and Bateson 1951; Heritage 1997: 170), the cursory glance at totalitarian communication indicated its movement in the direction of the pathological scenario described in family sociology (Habermas 1974: 264): grossly overemphasized, the interactional distinction between the speaker and the audience served as a synecdoche, if not hyperbole, for the social distance separating political leader from his followers, whereas the semantic aspects of communication play a relatively minor role.

To prove this hypothesis, the comparison was made between the public speeches of “totalitarian” (Benito Mussolini (M), Adolf Hitler (H)) and “democratic” (Winston Churchill (Ch), Franklin D. Roosevelt (R)) politicians (see the table below):

Table 1: Public Speeches

	1	2	1+2	3	4	5	6	Total (%)
H1	0	0	0	7 (12.3)	0	13 (22.8)	37 (64.9)	57 (100)
H2	7 (43.7)	4 (25.0)	11 (68.7)	0	0	5 (31.3)	0	16 (100)
M1	3 (18.8)	2 (12.5)	5 (31.3)	1 (6.2)	0	21 (48.8)	16 (37.2)	43 (100)
M2	4 (40.0)	3 (30.0)	7 (70.0)	0	0	0	3 (30.0)	10 (100)
R1	0	0	0	5 (62.5)	0	1 (12.5)	2 (25.0)	8 (100)
R2	4 (7.5)	0	4 (7.5)	0	5 (9.4)	13 (24.6)	31 (58.5)	53 (100)
Ch1	2 (9.5)	1 (4.8)	3 (14.3)	8 (38.1)	0	0	10 (47.6)	21 (100)
Ch2	1 (20.0)	1 (20.0)	2 (40.0)	3 (60.0)	0	0	0	5 (100)

To reduce personal factors to a minimum, two different leaders were chosen for each group. The rhetorical production of each politician was

represented by two roughly equal text samples corresponding to the two stages of political biographies common for all the actors—seeking power in opposition (H1 (Hitler 1927), M1 (Mussolini 1918; Mussolini 1919), R1 (Roosevelt 1928; Roosevelt 1932), Ch1 (Churchill 1929; Churchill 1931a; Churchill 1931b)) and exercising it at the top of the state system (H2 (Hitler 1935; Hitler 1938; Hitler 1941), M2 (Mussolini 1934), R2 (Roosevelt 1936a; Roosevelt 1936b; Roosevelt 1943, Ch2 (Churchill 1941a). Since the idea was to compare the fixed institutionalized framework (speaking leader—listening followers) to its reflexive repercussions in the speeches, the special attention was paid to the sentences duplicating this framework within the texts by directly referring to the speaker ('I') and the audience ('you'), or to the audience ('you') only. Such sentences were further subdivided in accordance with the relation between the framework and the model: naturally enough, it was supposed that the 'I'-'you' constructions could *uphold*, *discuss*, *undo* or *invert* inequality of communicative power inherent in the rhetorical construction of public oratory. Accordingly, the following categories (represented in the table as columns) were isolated:

1. *Upholding power inequality in action terms*—i.e., invoking a non-negotiable spatial subordination of addressees to the speaker ("You have been called together at my desire...");
2. *Upholding power inequality in speech terms*—invoking a non-negotiable communicative subordination of addressees to the speaker ("At this point, I demand your attention");
3. *Discussing power inequality in action or speech terms*—i.e. invoking a negotiable spatial or communicative subordination of addressees to the speaker ("I invite you to endorse this attitude on my part");
4. *Undoing power inequality in action of speech terms*—i.e. invoking the equilibrium between communicative or spatial positions of the speaker and addressees ("You and I know a simple fact...");
5. *Inverting power inequality in action of speech terms*—i.e. invoking a non-negotiable communicative or spatial subordination of the speaker to addressees ("You are the makers!");¹

1 | It was generally held that positive sentences with 'you' as a grammatical

6. *Unspecific references to power inequality* (“What [...] will be *your* line of moral and logical resistance then?”).

The results confirm correlation between the specific political system and a degree of uniformity of various configurations of social power. The data on Hitler after 1934 and Mussolini after 1922 shows a drastic change from self-deprecation to self-aggrandizement: in both cases, almost two-thirds of ‘*I*’- and ‘*you*’-sentences reinforce rather than offset the communicative imbalance resulting from the hierarchical construction of public speaking. The changes in Churchill and Roosevelt go in the same direction but look moderate in comparison. Finally, it is worth mentioning that the political leaders of USA and Great Britain react upon their ascension to power by activating the rhetorical mechanisms of checks and balances: whereas Roosevelt’s presidential speeches earn him the nickname of “youandme-president” (Dos Passos 1934: 17), Churchill’s oratory contains an explicit endorsement of role exchange on a political level: “As long as the Socialist Government drop all this nonsense about Socialism, nationalization of industry, fantastic expenditure and taxation, wild schemes for ‘monkeying’ with the currency and credit systems on which we depend, and as long as they do not give away the rights and interests of Britain to foreign cultures or endanger the safety and unity of the Empire, everyone will be glad that *they should have their turn* and a fair chance to see if they can make things go a little better” (Churchill 1941b: 4633).²

Having demonstrated how totalitarian communication strengthened political asymmetries by imitating, multiplying and magnifying them in preferred interactional scenarios, one should not ignore the reflexive impact of this fixed permanence of intertwined politico-interactional roles, discernible at the lower levels of communication system. In particular, the lexical layer of natural speech reacts to the decay of role-exchanging mechanisms by the abnormal growth of defamation vocabulary, built around such asymmetrical concepts as “*bloodsucker*”, “*beast*” or “*Un-mensch*” which exclude consensual use (acceptance by the other) in principle (see: Koselleck 1975). For instance, it is remarkable that in

subject in an active predicative construction invert the communicative superiority of ‘*I*’ even if it is not present in the sentence.

2 | Uttered by a politician not known for his disinterest in power, this remark may in fact suggest that the mutual acknowledgment and implementation of regular role exchange on various social levels may be a better characterization of “democratic” communication—as opposed to “totalitarian” one—than the traditionally highlighted “competition” (see, for instance: Aron 1965).

Franklin Roosevelt's campaign speech of 1928 where the attacks on the political adversary were expected, there was only one asymmetrical nominal construction ("reactionary element") out of nineteenth references to Republican Party (Roosevelt 1928: 55-58), whereas in a formally neutral coverage of the Trotskyite activity in Soviet Union in a Pravda editorial from August 24th, 1936, the same ratio was 30 out of 57. The rarity of nominal defamation in "democratic" communication could be linked both to the regular role exchange between "power" and "opposition" and to the smooth turn-taking as its presupposition generally observed by all competitors: under such circumstances, carrying rhetorical strife to the point of no return would be tantamount to throwing a boomerang. As it could be seen later, it might also be related to the general practice of avoiding undifferentiated personal stigmatizations which could make self- and other-corrections impossible and threaten the stability of the communicative system.

* * *

Lenin's famous equation—"Communism is the Soviet power plus electrification of the whole country" (Lenin 1920: 30-31)—gave birth to the tradition linking informational poverty of communication in totalitarian states to the disproportional development of its technological mediation (see, for instance: Gorjaeva 2000). Refined from technological fetishism (radio or television as such do not grant preferences to speakers or listeners), this argument contains a grain of historical truth: given that mass media have been started up in the 16th century and revolutionized in 20th century on demand of such informational monopolists as church and state, it was only natural that the possibility of spatio-temporal distance between the communicators was used to increase existing inequalities of communicative chances (Giesecke 2007: 206). But these praxeological observations do little to enrich our understanding of totalitarian communication as a system. In particular, it seems unclear what is the rationale behind the minimization of role exchange and amalgamation of power practices, which obviously destabilize communicative system and increase the chances of its breakup. It is also not immediately apparent how the information flows were actually modified in such a way that the increasing entropy did not blow up the system (for some time, at least).

It would be naive to attempt a general answer to these questions: the

contribution of Lorenz Erren in this volume makes it apparent that in Soviet Union at some point even the controlled dissipation of totalitarian communication (for instance, the creation of public sphere formally independent from mass media) was deemed admissible. However, this small-scale concession for various reasons could not be a universal practice, and one is tempted to search for communicative mutations on the higher levels. This brings us back to the general norm of *turn-taking*, which cannot be eliminated from communication altogether but is highly adaptable to the needs of parties involved due to its unparalleled flexibility.

It goes without saying that ceremonies greatly constrain the flexible distribution of turns (see: Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974: 701, 709, 730), although the ways of specifying turns in advance normally depend on the communicative environment, ranging from individual application of general norms (shame, fear, guilt or respect) to the all-embracing external regulation—for example, in a form of bidirectional *center-terminal/terminal-center* communication network with delay times specified by center (Inose 1972: 126). But this utopian (or, rather, anti-utopian) scheme has never been realized in practice: whereas the total organization of listeners' ceremonial behavior by state media was simply beyond the capacities of Soviet and Nazi authorities (Rossi and Bauer 1952: 656; Zimmermann 2006: 442), the complete removal of coordination between the adjacent turns could never happen for communicative reasons (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974: 725; Matoesian 2005: 184): one would be hard-pressed to call “dialogue” a spatial proximity of two or more individuals whose verbal and non-verbal behaviors show no signs of interdependence. In other words, turn coordination persists in all kinds of social environment, and its specific criteria may be a significant differentiating factor: whereas the advance allocation of turns is evident in most of the “orchestrated encounters” regardless of social system (Dingwall 1980), the correlation between the adjacent “replicas” (in whatever code) sheds light on the type of information being actually transmitted in various communicative systems (Heritage 1984: 1; see also the pioneering case study: Beck 2001). As long as one isolates the major scenarios of extracting information from a message and processing it in a certain way, it seems possible to go beyond ceremony and look for the serialization of these processing schemes in less rigid acts of communication. If social systems associated with “democracy” or “totalitarianism” display the consistent divergence of scenarios across the interactional settings, this regularity of differences (or difference of

regularities) may single out the special forms of information packaging, selection and processing which make up for the constricted role exchange in totalitarian communication.

An almost random selection of ceremonial exchanges under similar circumstances could serve as a starting point (turns within each example are marked by Roman numerals):

1

- I. (Winston R. Churchill:) "I am sorry to say that I have got no definite information as to the results, but I feel they can hardly be other than satisfactory in view of the naval forces of which we dispose in the Mediteranean sphere.
- II. (Aneurin Bevan:) Will the Prime Minister use whatever methods are available to convey from the House of Commons, this Sitting Day, our admiration of the confidence in the defenders of Crete?
- III. (Winston R. Churchill:) I certainly will" (Churchill 1941: 6404).

2

- I. (Benito Musolini:) "Non restava che il terzo atteggiamento: quello che le masse operaie hanno già accolto, realizzato: quello l'adesione esplicita, chiara, schietissima allo spirito ed agli istituti della Rivoluzione fascista.
- II. (Audience:) Viva il Duce!
- III. (Benito Mussolini:) Se il secolo scorso fu il secolo della potenza del capitale, questo ventesimo è il secolo della potenza e della gloria del lavoro" (Mussolini 1934: 130).

3

(1)

- I. (Joseph Stalin appears on the tribune)
- II. (Audience:) (long standing ovation) + "Ура тов. Сталину! Да здравствует тов! Сталин! Да здравствует Великий Сталин! Великом гениу тов. Сталину ура! Виват! Рот фронт! Тов. Сталину слава!

III. (Josef Stalin:) Товарищи! Конституционная комиссия, проект которой был представлен на рассмотрение на стоящего Съезда, была образована, как известно, по специальному постановлению VII Съезда Советов Союза СССР” (Stalin 1936, 3).

(2)

I. (Joseph Stalin:) Это укрепляет веру в свои силы И мобилизует на новую борьбу для завоевания новых побед социализма.

II. (Audience:) (standing ovation) + Ура! Да здравствует товарищ Сталин! + (singing *International*) + Ура! + Да здравствует наш вождь товарищ Сталин!

III. (Joseph Stalin leaves the tribune)” (Stalin 1936, 32).

All the examples portray one and the same communicative arrangement: speakers Winston R. Churchill, Benito Mussolini and Joseph Stalin, who are also the political leaders of their respective countries, pronounce public speeches addressed to the audiences which gathered (workers on the Duomo square in Milan) or were selected (House of Commons in England, Congress of Soviets in USSR) for that occasion. The ceremonial character of this setting is based on the pre-allocation of turns, common for institutional settings from game to funerals and implying the marked asymmetry of interactional roles: whereas one of the exchange participants is generally entitled to unhindered self-selection based on loosely defined institutional relevance of his turn, others are confined to occasional responses by minimal communicative means (Goffman 1961: 29; Hahn 1999: 99). Still, this rigid frame allows for a significant variability of turn-taking practices, and the variations may point at general communicative properties of respective political systems.

1. The *first* example is a clear case of a *non-conventional interruption*:

1a: The *second* turn (Aneurin Bevan's words) is performed by *non-minimal* means (elaborate sentence requiring a response rather than exclamations, applause, whistling or booing);

1b: It cannot be categorized in simple dual terms (approval/disapproval), but rather exemplifies a *topical correlation* with the previous speaker's turn: as soon as the first speaker (the Prime Minister) has chosen the Battle of Crete as his topic, he is asked to pass information from the other speakers (Members of the House of Commons) to the absent party (the defenders of Crete). Meanwhile, the retroactive topical correlation is supplemented by the forward-looking grammatical one, since the interrogative sentence normally requires an answer in the next turn (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974: 716, 718).

1c. Despite the non-conventional character and significant distractive effect of the *second turn*, caused by its length, informational value, grammatical form and reference to the topic not covered by the first speaker, the *third turn incorporates* the *second turn* into the dialogue by a topical response which also contains approval in a form of indirect performative act (*I certainly will*).

2. The *second* example represents a *conventional interruption*:

1a. The *second turn* (the listeners' shouts "Long live the Duce!") is performed by *minimal* means (exclamation).

1b. It can be categorized in simple dual terms (approval rather than disapproval), but its *correlation* with the previous speaker's turn is predominantly *indexical*: although the exclamations are "invited" (Atkinson 1985: 409-410)—i.e., uttered in relation to the content of the speech immediately after Mussolini's praises to the proletarian sympathizers of fascism—they as such gloss over this topic and instead refer to the speaker himself.

1c. In reinforcement of ceremonial rules valid for the current setting, the *third turn incorporates the second turn* into the dialogue on the basis of its *minimality* (non-interference), although the explicit approval of the speaker by his audience and correlation (mostly indexical) of the *second turn* with the *first turn* plays some role as well. Praising or ostracizing, the audience's replica is too short and

undemanding to elicit a response, let alone to influence the content of the next turn. Accordingly, the prevalence of self-selection is manifest both in the topical correlation of the *third turn* (the tirade on the role of labor in the 19th century) with the *first turn* and in the first speaker's nonchalance of the *second turn*.

3. Lastly, the third example illustrates conventional non-interruption:

1a. The *second turn* (listeners' standing ovation, singing of the *International* and exclamation "Hurray!", "Hurray to comrade Stalin!", "Hurray to the Great Stalin!", "Hurray to the Great genius comrade Stalin!", "Viva!", "Rot Front!", "Glory to comrade Stalin!") is performed by differently coded and qualitatively extensive means which connective potential is, however, *minimal*: no response is required or even expected.

1b. It can be categorized in simple dual terms (approval rather than disapproval), and its *correlation* with the previous speaker's turn is *indexical*, as in the Mussolini case. But, unlike the previous example, this indexicality is not relative but absolute (or at least close to absoluteness). Indeed, in (1) the *second turn* starts in response to the mere appearance of silent Stalin on the tribune, preceding communication of any non-indexical information to the audience.

1c. In contrast to the two previous examples, the *second turn* is not incorporated by the *third turn* into the structure of the dialogue, and this non-incorporation seems to be an intentional technique aimed at maximizing the ceremonial character of the exchange. In particular, this maximization upgrades pre-allocation of turns from general tendency to an inviolable rule and extends it to the "spontaneous" elements of a dialogue (such as ovation or exclamations of approval). This is achieved not only by the likely scripting of the whole exchange, but by placing the *second turn* to the very last position in the dialogue (as in (2)), so that its incorporation is prevented the very interactional frame of the ceremony. Together with the evi-

dent invariance of *second turns* in (1) and (2), their position on the margins of Stalin's speech leads to complete dissociation between the adjacent turns: their connection seems to hinge solely on the all-embracing indexical reference of audience to the speaker.

One should be cautious not to over-interpret this small sample, which heuristic value at this stage consists mainly of singling out improbabilities (scenario 3 was not found in Churchill's or Mussolini's public appearances at times of their respective leaderships, and scenario 1 is absent from Stalin's rhetorical activity in his capacity of Secretary General). Nevertheless, if provisionally accepted as representative, the sample confirms the findings of the previous chapter. As with role exchange, turn-taking seems to function differently in communicative subsystems of "democratic" and "non-totalitarian" societies.

In the former case, the mutual reinforcement of interactional and social inequality is prevented by equilibration practices that set communicative values against political ones. Winston R. Churchill, the Prime Minister of Great Britain and a designated speaker in his House of Commons appearance on May 22nd, 1941, reacts to the question of his political adversary from the Left by adjusting *ad libitum* the content of his speech to the topic of the inquiry. Repeated a couple of sentences later one more time ("*I certainly will [...] I certainly will send good wishes of the House*"), this adjustment ensures not only the topical relevance of the turn change but grants temporary leadership in a dialogue to its communicatively and politically underprivileged party.

Joseph Stalin, by contrast, displays the same unity of corporeal, communicative and political supremacy that was preventing role exchange on various levels. Firstly, the only relevance in turn-taking between the Soviet leader and his audiences is built upon the audience's indexical reference to the speaker's body (Plamper 2003; Rolf 2004): in effect, this renders the symbolic information transmitted in natural language irrelevant. Secondly, the placement of the audience response outside of the speaker's narrative eliminates even the theoretical obstacles to his perpetual self-selection, widening the gap between the topical organization of the speaker's turns and the indexical organization of the audience responses. This absolutization of communicative supremacy as a thinly veiled metonymy for political power is evident in the press coverage of the 8th Congress of Soviet, where Stalin on November 25th, 1936 presenting the new Soviet Constitution to the delegates: during the

Congress, the party newspaper *Pravda* almost exclusively refers to the Soviet leader as “the speaker” (“докладчик”) whose audience extends to the “whole country” and then eventually to “the whole world”.³

Looking at this example, it is hard to avoid the impression that transmission of new information between the leader and the followers through channels with high throughput capacity (natural language being one of them) is a low priority for totalitarian communication. Rather, it is the circulation of the same pair of familiar messages affirming—depending on the viewpoint—protection or loyalty and expressed in incontestable, unequivocal non-verbal terms which gets the upper hand in the communicative process (for a general perspective, see: Barker 2001: 83; Leese 2007: 631). It is perhaps understandable that the political system containing so many asymmetries and so few mechanisms of their harmonization, stakes at reducing information flows in order to minimize the emerging complexity and maintain autopoietic closeness and homeostatic stability. (Indeed, even the better balanced systems of a similar kind react to the maximum tension by sticking to the familiar script: this is, for instance, the case of American politics at the climax of presidential electoral cycle when the candidate’s reiteration of “convictions” values higher than consistency of any kind (see: Lempert 2009: 233). But it seems also predictable that uncontrolled repetitiveness bordering on circularity, utter neglect of symbolic codes and weak differentiation between action and communication, messages and messengers start at a certain point posing serious obstacles for transmitting systemically relevant information.

One of the serial problems caused by this unorthodox distribution of contingency and stability within the system is the malfunctioning of its feedback chains—the problem generally known for its destructive potential (Wiener 1948: 235). When the more or less extensive ideological message, sent from leader to followers, undergoes reality check and comes back enriched with some relevant environmental data, the automatisms of simple indexical codes, coupled with the atrophy of complexer abstract references, sometimes present the original replica in a curiously distorted form. On a general level of code management, the fusion of concrete individuals with their political functions (leaders/followers) and communicative roles (speakers/listeners) encouraged indiscriminate (and wasteful) code-switching, common for all commu-

3 | Hitler’s discursive performance, by contrast, is presented in German media as a barely distinguishable part of his general activity (see my other article in this volume).

nication contexts centered on power maintenance (Jan 2003; see also: Gorham 2003).

Consequently, in the followers reception of the leader's political speech, all three preconditions of understanding between communicators (physical co-presence, normatively describable social distance, and conventionally coded semantics of the message) are jumbled up. This confusion of different codes is detectable on various levels of language, including the basal subject-predicate relations within a sentence. Thus in a published sample of 43 letters addressed by Soviet citizens to their leaders in 1937, the new soviet Constitution, passed at the 8th Congress of Soviets, is mentioned 10 times (Livshin, Orlov and Khlevniuk 2002: 325-392). While only a half of these references is *thematically* related to the source text (including one mistaken and two very unspecific references to "rights" and "freedoms"), *all* of the references *indexically* link the soviet General Law to the speaker who introduced it at the Congress ("Сталинская Конституция"). The latter word combination brings to mind the similar neologisms in Nazi vocabulary (from *Führereinsatz* to *Führerprinzip*), all incongruously combining the routine indexical reference to the leader's unique personality with just about any governmental activity or norm, big or important enough to justify indisputable sanction (the lists are provided in: Berning 1964: 244-247; Brackmann 1988: 77-78).

This data attests to the persistence of stabilizing communication outside of ceremonial context which, ironically, leads to the even bigger instability as the perfunctory reproduction of *protection/loyalty* exchange, common in rituals (Chwe 2001: 29; specifically for Stalinist rule see: Kertzer 1988: 181; Glebkin 1998: 93; Brooks 2000: 67), spins out of control: sticking to this trodden circular route, feedback messages fail to feed the center of the system with the crucial information about its borderline areas. This growing semantic gap between socially relevant turns in communication exchanges leaves explosive amounts of information on both ends of the system unprocessed (Hoffmann 1969; Hoffmann 1973: 203; Barry 1994: 93), so that its mere storing, let alone transporting to the top of the system, becomes a risky affair. The pressure of this risk might explain the unceasing construction of redundant and ever more secretive feedback channels, firewalled from the environment and, increasingly, from the system itself (Rosenfeldt 1991: 145). The case in point was the simultaneity of Stalin's consolidation of personal power and his personalization of security service control (see the most recent survey and analysis in: Khlevniuk 2008: 248-271). But even this single-

handed management of system was showing breakup tendencies (Rees 2002: 208), so that at the end of his rule Stalin, if we are to believe Nikita Khrushchev, mistrusted himself no less than everyone else (Khrushchev 1971: 84).

* * *

Although it has been already hinted at the link between the human ability to exchange roles and the citizens' right to retroactively adjust unfitting remarks or gestures to the situation, the same connection could perhaps be better described *a contrario*. It seems like one of the reasons for the staunch resistance of ritualistic practices to cast substitution is their semiotic underdevelopment, which reveals itself in the absolute prevalence of the whole over its parts (Rappaport 1999: 151). The fact that rituals are not to be interrupted or rolled back is probably due to the fact that their semantics cannot be subdivided into replaceable symbols with generic meanings (Baiburin 1993: 14). Indeed, the continuous script of a ritual imitates the irreversible flow of a "natural" (dissipative) system, and its halt or replay would be synonymous to death: spontaneous "backward-looking" duplication of human identity, common in reflexive thinking and repairing actions (such as apologies), has no place in rites and ceremonies.

This anthropological given makes probable the positive correlation between the resistance to role exchange and the banishment of *repairs* from social practice. The top-down argument in favor of this correlation is plausible but rather trivial and of questionable systemic relevance. Confession, the best-known institutional practice of social repair adapted in part by legal systems, had explicit "primary frameworks" (secular or sacred law) and a relatively stable pragmatic efficiency: few notable exceptions aside, every apology uttered in a European court or a confessional would improve the chances for freedom, life or at least salvation (Dülmen 1997: 45). But as soon as the explicitness, intersubjectivity and latency of norms succumbs to the self-referentiality of leaders' discourse—as was the case with the "laws" of history and nature invented by the Third Reich ideologues (Arendt 1958: 474, 477)—the number of communicative agents qualified for repair shrinks accordingly. Unsurprisingly, the banishment of other-correction on a large scale excludes it from public communication and turns backwards the timing of the remedial procedure: the conflict between social norm and

individual violation is reduced to the discrepancy between the *speaker now* and the *speaker then*, which is invariably resolved in favor of the most recent (i.e. most ideologically pertinent or strategically advantageous) position. A case in point is the history of Communist party, which was rewritten five times in fifteen years (1923-1938) in order to retroactively adjust the canonized (normative) past to the swelling of absolutism, complemented by the steady growth of the internal enemies' circle (Wolfe 1969: 296).

It seems like the opposite, bottom-up perspective on confession might shed more light on the systemic differentiations of communication in “democratic” and “totalitarian” systems by bringing into view the group of interaction agents, temporarily or permanently disadvantaged in social, political and communicative sense. Overall, the differentiation between body and social status, or between social status and communicative role seems to be the minimal precondition for the “second-order communication”—reflexivity needed for successful repair (Harré and Langenhove 1992: 396; Baecker 1999: 188): for instance, the imaginary “return” to the original state which existed before the awkward move, wrong deed or false assertion presupposes the unchangeable core of the subject (for example, its bodily integrity) which guarantees the validity of self-reference throughout the repairing process (for a summary of relevant theories see: Postoutenko 2007; Postoutenko 2010). But as long as body is indistinguishable from social status (as in Nazi racist ethnocracy), or social status is invariably tied to political role (as in Bolshevik proletarian dictatorship), the productive reflexivity of excuse ceases to exist (see respectively: Poliakov, Delacampagne and Girard 1976; Ennker 1996: 112-113; Werth 1999: 42). In such a context, the remedial communication of the “enemy” is refused any informational value and treated as yet another hostile action (Kharkhordin 2002: 52-53; Studer 2003). Small wonder that under this circumstances, repairs disappear from all but the lowest levels of interactional systems on both ends of communication. The following examples contrast this disappearance with the “normal” practices.

1. (Franklin D. Roosevelt): “And here and now I invite these nominal Republicans who find that their conscience cannot be squared with the groping and the failure of their party leaders to join hands with us” (Roosevelt 1932: 71);
2. (Adolf Hitler): “Meine Prophezeiung wird ihre Erfüllung finden,

dass durch diesen Krieg nicht die arische Menschheit vernichtet, sondern der Jude ausgerottet werden wird" (Hitler 1942, 116);

3. (Nikolai Bukharin): "Всем видно мудрое руководство страной, которое обеспечено Сталиным. С этим сознанием я жду приговора. Дело не в личных переживаниях раскаявшегося врага, а в расцвете СССР, в его международном значении" (Iodkovskii 1938: 344).

Ostensibly, it is precisely the dualism of human nature staking personal identity as an anchor of stability (*essential goodness of human being*) against its mistaken moral (*bad consciousness*) and political (*nominal Republicanism*) stance, which allows Roosevelt to suggest reconciliation via self-correction to the bitter political rival. For Hitler, by contrast, the essential faultiness of *Untermensch* makes any further differentiation pointless, any search for reversible social and political attributes misplaced and, ultimately, any self- or other correction deceptive. The last word of Nicholai Bukharin at his 1938 show trial, presents an even more curious case of non-differentiation: one of the most respected followers of Lenin refuses—in defiance of the legal tradition and common sense—to make any personal statement disputing fantastic accusations mounted against him, or at least hinting at self-correction in the future. Instead, the broken-down Bolshevik invalidates his own possible remedial statement by adopting the stance of prosecution, including not only its derisive language but also its interactional stance and even grammatical form, addressing himself in the third person ("*It's not about the personal feelings of the repentant enemy*"). At this point not only the equilibrium of the adversary trial, questionable from the start, falls apart, but the mere distribution of interactional roles turns into a perfunctory formality.

But the paradoxes of totalitarian communication arguably go beyond this simplified polarization of interactional stances, taking their roots in excessive and misapplied stabilization mechanisms of the system in general. The wobbly asymmetrical construction of authoritarian state was further destabilized by its multiple hyperbolic reenactment in communication process, but the frantic attempts to control this colossus with feet of clay by eliminating all uncertainty and doubt were automatically blocking the production of information (Shannon and Weaver 1949: 13; Cherry 1966: 171). As a result, the overdetermined and still imbalanced communicative system consisting of unchangeable roles, inflexible turn-allocation and irreparable interactional spheres was re-

duced to ceaselessly copycatting its past stability. Being out of touch with its own environment (Rittersporn, Behrends and Rolf 2003: 35), totalitarian communication could neither preempt nor adapt to external challenges and internal ruptures: the loyalty of Soviet media, for instance, was only partially useful, because they were increasingly seen by readers as “uninformative” (Dzirkals, Guistafson and Johnson 1982: 67). For such and similar reasons, perhaps, it ended up dissipating into nonviable subsystems with little relation to each other: the fruitless search of Kremlinologists for esoteric communication in Soviet media attests not so much to the misleading lastingness of the Soviet façade as to its rotten interior (Dzirkals, Guistafson and Johnson 1982: 69).

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