

TOTALITARIAN AND AUTHORITARIAN DISCOURSES

A Global and Timeless Phenomenon?

Edited by Luitgard Lams, Geert Crauwels
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Introduction

This book aims to investigate the functioning and strategies of both totalitarian and authoritarian discourses and their aftermath.¹ We analyse these discourses from a broader perspective than academic works dealing primarily with communist and post-communist discourses, as we focus our attention on the universality of strategies of totalitarian discourses beyond communist, fascist and Nazi political regimes.

The present collection has been compiled with a view to assessing the characteristics, similarities and differences, trends and consequences of totalitarian/authoritarian discourses from Cuba, former German regimes (the German Democratic Republic, or GDR, and Nazi Germany), North Korea, the Philippines, China, former Yugoslavia, Lithuania, Burma, Romania, and Tunisia. The contributors are a network of specialists who intend to capitalize on a conversation on this topic in which they have been engaged for the last half decade, thus giving rise to the gradual organic growth of this volume. It is the result of several years of seeking out cross-cultural and transnational expertise on the topic at hand.

With this introduction, the editors aim briefly to clarify the intellectual perspective and the methodological approaches underlying this volume, as well as to draw the reader's attention to a number of essential terminological distinctions, such as those between language and discourse, and between authoritarian and totalitarian discourses. Both the theoretical chapter and the ensuing sections describe several common traits of the totalitarian discourse across cultures, geographical areas and historical periods: the loss of subjectivity and the Othering of the individual, the cult of personality and mystification of national leaders, the normalization of dominant discourses

and demonization of dissonant voices, the artificiality of language (*langue de bois*), the naturalization of the ideological language, and so forth.

Even though the various contributions to the volume draw on diverse scientific backgrounds, using specific concepts from within their disciplines, they primarily subscribe to a pragmatic vision of discourse. Methodologies used in the various chapters stem from approaches in the disciplines of linguistics, sociology and political science, analysing text and context as well as the power/knowledge complexes. The research questions discussed here are related to the investigation into the functioning of authoritarian and totalitarian discourses and their strategies in order to highlight the less obvious commonalities between regions and regimes, between various types of totalitarian and authoritarian regimes (fascist, Nazi, Stalinist, military, martial law) and across different eras.

That which interconnects the different chapters in this volume, we argue, is that they distinctly disclose the ideological artificiality – in several cases drawing on utopian, (seemingly) traditional or even (quasi-) religious ideals – of these discourse types. The discourses are shown to be characterized by linguistic constructedness and, despite all efforts at naturalization, lack of naturalness: totalitarian discourse is a forcefully inflicted, highly instrumentalized, and a meticulously and efficiently optimized type of discourse. Or, as Slavoj Žižek noted, with totalitarian discourse 'we pass from language as *discourse*, as social link, to language as pure *instrument*'.² As a consequence of the general nature of these observations, the self-proclaimed uniqueness that is often put forward by those in power in totalitarian and authoritarian regimes is a wilful misrepresentation and can barely conceal the discursive characteristics as shared with the discourse of other totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, or with similar regimes in different time periods. As a matter of fact, such misrepresentations seem to serve other purposes, such as the demonization of other types of regime or of ideological opponents, intended eventually to lead to the creation or the strengthening of a national identity *ex negativo* and/or a consolidation of the current power structures.

1 The editors, Luitgard Lams, Geert Crauwels, and Henrieta Anișoara Șerban, would like to express their thanks to the Flemish Fund for Scientific Research (FWO), the Belgian Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the Romanian Academy for facilitating the dialogue between several of the participants over the years.

2 Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism? Five Interventions in the (Mis)Use of a Notion* (London: Verso, 2011), 119.

As far as the discursive strategies themselves are concerned, three further differentiations can be made. Firstly, we note a monoglossic environment with an explicit emphasis on the Party's or Leader's monopoly on truth. Secondly, there is as a rule an emphasis on the successful progression from the pre-modern traditional power structures, morals and ways of life toward a mobilized modern society. This progress encompasses, for quite a few contributions within this volume, the religious aspect, the appropriation of religious rituals by the political system (paganization, sanctification of the God-like messianic leader). A third feature of the discourses is oppression and repression, the creation of the enemy, that is, the personalization and depersonalization within the semantic field. The individual becomes an integral part of the masses, and a collective individual, a collective identity is mostly directed toward an external enemy.

In all the chapters below, we note how the functioning of totalitarian/authoritarian discourses implies a multitude of features such as the discursive construction of reality and a falsification of past, present and future, we/they dichotomization, mythmaking, and so forth. As a consequence, mythmaking and the subjective construction of reality emerge as central parts of the distorted reference to reality, with the abuse of some symbols and symbolic figures while others are forgotten in a sort of selective amnesia. This volume does not touch on reception analysis in the strict sense, but occasionally on the people's perspective in relation to the violence and the oppressive functioning of the regime.

For clarity's sake, in what follows the concept of authoritarian discourse is considered to be a subspecies of totalitarian discourse. Its defining features can be described as follows. First, totalitarian discourse always presents and describes itself as something else: a discourse oriented toward progress and also producing progress itself, a discourse of reform, an advanced discourse, a discourse of renewal, and so forth. Using a pragmatic perspective, this study correlates a series of defining traits of totalitarian discourse in order to identify the commonality of their claims to universal validity. Paradoxically, these claims to universal validity simultaneously assert the uniqueness of totalitarian discourse in itself as a political or ideological system, a self-declarative emancipation from geographical aspects, historical matters or political regimes. Totalitarian discourse is a reified grand narrative that

tends to become a set of passwords – a *wooden tongue*, both an aggression of the all-intrusive totalitarian power and a linguistic shield against the violent and brutal exercise of totalitarian power.

Second, totalitarian discourse is the use of language in totalitarian states and in totalitarian political regimes but also in authoritarian ones, that is, totalitarian discourse is not intrinsically related to communist, fascist and Nazi political regimes. This type of discourse imposes itself by the simultaneous presence of the following: its *wooden language*, or *langue de bois*, also called 'newspeak'; the aim of creating a new man, the mobilizing and inciting tone, an omnipresent monologue with futurist orientation. By insinuating itself into all sectors of society, it denies individualism and any of its manifestations. This is the discourse of a society on the march. Propaganda reaches its peak as indoctrination and the cult of a Big Brother personality flourishes. Totalitarian discourse installs a sort of radical and monstrous civic republicanism deprived of individual rights, but lit up by bright individual duties.

In authoritarian regimes, repressiveness takes over society as a totalizing goal in itself. Thus, for authoritarian cases, we can talk of totalitarian discourses in authoritarian regimes, especially in establishing a cult of the centralized/authoritative power, or of the military, as a type of the cult of personality that reshapes both national history and society entirely according to an authoritative vision. Political power is concentrated in a military or single party personality and the totalizing discourse gathers the society under the banners of this ongoing cult of personality. In countries with authoritarian regimes the official discourse – that is, the discourse of individuals and institutions representing the state – is totalitarian by metonymy. The military or a single party takes over the entire society, explaining its past, present and future existence and, in a repressive and not merely hegemonic manner, dictates most or all of the ways in which other parts of society, and society as a whole, are to function. Rights of association and rights of religious practice are mere trimmings, smoke and mirrors in the propagandistic game. Authoritarian discourse adopts either the cult of personality or the cult of the military/single party as a totalizing principle of society. Many of the other discursive totalitarian traits are also present: the mobilizing and inciting tone of a wooden tongue, imbued with

pathos. The denial of individualism is present to a lesser extent, because it allows for the activities of religious bodies and civil associations so long as the people involved are not critical of this military and patriotic 'sun' of society. Finally, we argue totalitarian discourse is not just a shadow from the past. In the current economic crisis fascist discourse is still present in the success of extreme right-wing discourse, exploding into a myriad of varieties.

The structure of the volume is based on its main argument concerning the universality and timelessness of totalitarian discourse. Therefore, it does not follow divisions found in other volumes on totalitarianism along temporal or geographical lines,³ but takes a more holistic approach by constructing three main sections based on the common foci of the papers: I. Creation – Identity and Memories; II. Mass Communication and Official Discourse; III. Power Structures – Politics and Truth. The three sections intersect in that identities and memories have to be symbolically created through communication and mystification, while constructing the power structures. The power of the leadership has to be communicated and shapes the identity of the nation through mythmaking. The structure of the volume therefore emphasizes the main avenues of social and individual change provoked by totalitarian discourse. The aforementioned diversity of the contributions is subcategorized under these three main headings, reflecting – however, without exhausting – the main foci of the studies.

The first part of the volume, 'Creation – Identity and Memories, combines facets of totalitarian discourse captured in literature, philosophy, myth, or collective memories. Răzvan Victor Pantelimon explores the 'Uses and Abuses of Che Guevara's Myth in Political Cuban Discourse'. This article investigates the manner in which the image and the impressive and cherished myth of Ernesto Che Guevara are present and used in official Cuban political discourse. The image of Che Guevara was used as one of a mythical revolutionary and leader, justifying some actions and attitudes that

3 A recent example of this approach is the volume edited by Ernest Andrews, *Legacies of Totalitarian Language in the Discourse Culture of the Post-Totalitarian Era* (New York: Lexington Books, 2011). See also references to this book in the chapters by Lams and Marcinkievičienė.

not only do not accurately reflect the main ideas and thoughts of Ernesto Guevara, but are even at odds with his ideals and convictions. The Cuban political regime's long-standing use of the myth of Che Guevara as a legitimizing image is undermined by the perpetual presence of wooden language, a one-party political model, and the obsolete economic system. Using the image and discourse analysis method, comparative politics and historical methods, the chapter proves the hypothesis that the actual image of Che in Cuban political discourse is an idealized and declarative one which often contradicts the ideas and political thought of Ernesto Guevara himself.

Geert Crauwels focuses on the *sozialistische Persönlichkeit* (socialist personality) in 'The I and the Socialist Personality: The Questioning of an Ideological Concept in Post-GDR Literary Autobiographical Discourse'. The paper investigates the manner in which the broader concept of the socialist personality affected post-GDR autobiographical discourses, on the one hand, and the (re-)construction of personal identity after the sudden evaporation of the totalitarian East-German state, on the other. The central question therein is whether (and if so, how exactly) the post-GDR autobiographical subject has been able to release itself from the long-lasting entanglement in this discursive net and whether the mere distance in time suffices to develop a critical distance from the former self as a discursive construction or is able to reclaim in a retrospective life account the singularity of a previously socialized I.

Arvi Sepp, in 'Totalitarianism and Performativity: The Redemptive Language of National Socialism in Nazi Poetry', notes that in the Third Reich the opportunities for literary expression were systematically limited by the Nazi regime, which attempted to impose an uncompromising unity upon all cultural spheres, seeking to replace the textual subtleties and polysemic creativity with a style of writing that exemplified the coming of a new era. Poetry – often written to be sung and thus to be collectively performed in a liturgical manner – had an important ideological role as part of the propaganda apparatus. The author focuses on the linguistic structures in the party poetry of Heinrich Anacker, Baldur von Schirach, and Hans Baumann. Their propagandistic poems are characterized by a confessional bias and a reverential, almost liturgical type of verse. This genre of poetry sought to give voice to a sacrificial rhetoric, showing dedication

to the superhuman Führer Adolf Hitler and selfless commitment and self-surrender to the transcendent values of Party, People, and Fatherland, an ethos that the poets formulate in a (pseudo-)religious manner. What emerges in these verses is a form of secular chiliastic mysticism, rooted in the poets' devout adoration of Adolf Hitler, who is represented in metaphorical chains ranging from *high priest* and *Redeemer* through *Christ* and *martyr to angel* and *Son of God* in hymn-like verses. The theme is the eradication of anxiety and personal loss through eschatological absorption into the national-racial collective thanks to the guiding leadership of a political *Messiah*. Through the devices of politicized religious language, Nazi poets sought to idealize and sacralize the ideology and policy of the new state, providing them with an aura and mystique that would camouflage the political pragmatism upon which they were based.

Soonhee Frayse-Kim interrelates ideological constructs in the chapter entitled 'Constructing Them and Us in North Korea', again emphasizing the central role of the leader. Why do North Korean (NK) people seem to obey their Leader so blindly and genuinely entrust their fate to him, even allowing for their intimidation? While foreign media attention is focused on the Kims' political performance, few efforts have been made to understand the reasons behind the submissive attitude of the people. The construction of the ideological discourse of NK language textbooks based on the articulation of keywords mirrors the aim of the regime's indoctrination program: a consciousness for every single individual of a collective national identity threatened by external enemies, an excellent artefact of self-seclusion, or other-phobia. The question addressed is the following: what does *Earthly Paradise*, the North Korean national catch phrase, mean and how does this term promote *uri*, the quintessential expression of *us* in Korean? Taking critical discourse analysis as the theoretical framework and using corpus analysis, this study explores the discursive construction of NK national identity through a systematic analysis of language in school textbooks used in North Korea compared with that in South Korean textbooks. The analysis focuses on five Korean words – *father*, *we/us*, *home*, *enemy* and *world* – the use of which in North Korean textbooks is quantitatively and semantically different to their counterparts in South Korean textbooks.

Part II, titled 'Mass Communication and Official Discourse', starts with an interesting instantiation of totalitarian discourse, namely the rise to power of President Ferdinand Edralin Marcos on the Philippine political scene in the 1960s, interpreted by Jorge V. Tigno and Jean Encinas in 'The Language of Dictatorship in the Philippines: Marcos and Martial Law'. A charismatic and eloquent politician, he fashioned himself as a saviour who would rescue Filipinos from the *mestizo* oligarchs, save the country from so-called communists and transform society. When he declared martial law in 1972 and extended his term, he abolished parliament and justified his rule as a form of constitutional authoritarianism. Though the move was staunchly criticized by the opposition and the Philippine Left, Marcos was generally quite popular; at least among the Filipino masses in the first three years of martial rule. The authors argue that, to a large extent, the language of dictatorship helped make this possible. Specifically, the chapter puts forth an analysis of the linguistic discourse that underpins the political writings of Marcos and a selection of his presidential decrees (PDs) in terms of the many ways they manifest the perspective of autocracy in statecraft. It is further argued that the period of autocratic rule is one that is heavily associated (at least in linguistic terms) with strong modernizing tendencies. However, hidden behind this modernizing and democratizing façade is actually an argument for an *autogolpe* or self-coup. The language of autocracy in the Philippines under Marcos can be described as one that betrays hostility towards traditional politics, politicians, and parties as well as contempt for inept democratic institutions. Such linguistic discourse is not unusual among autocratic regimes elsewhere.

'Strategies of Symbolic Meaning Construction in Chinese Official Discourse' by Lutgard Lams examines whether characteristics of totalitarian Maoist discourse are still noticeable in present-day official discourse in the People's Republic of China [PRC]. Rather than presenting an exhaustive picture of the various discourses in contemporary China, consisting of dominant and underground voices, the study primarily aims to examine how official discursive strategies of the totalitarian era have survived or been altered over the last few decades. On the basis of a text analysis of three corpora of media texts about events of major historical or political importance to the Chinese leadership, ranging from 1997 to 2005, the

author traces Chinese strategies of symbolic meaning construction, drawing on the theoretical depth-hermeneutical approach to ideology research. After a brief sketch of formalized language use during Maoist times and a discussion of how PRC official discourse moved from totalitarian to authoritarian style, findings from the three text analyses are combined to map the state of contemporary Chinese official discourse. In addition, Lams also investigates whether certain traits in Chinese official discourse emerging from those three case studies fit Van Calcar's comparison between totalitarian and communist ideology.⁴ Many of the defining traits of former communist discourse still appear to be valid for present-day China, such as the leaders' strong meta-pragmatic awareness of the power of language, the use of language ambiguity and vague denotation, positive orientation of harmony, avoidance of open expression of conflict. Other characteristics appear in the background, such as powerful regulatory measures concerning formal aspects of language use, despite the continued media censorship and the quest for hegemony of the official voice amidst rising tension between dominant and dissonant voices.

⁴From Liberators to Villains: The Transformation of the Image of the Soviet Soldier in the Yugoslav Press (1945–1953) by Ivana Dobrovojević follows an interesting discursive turn. Until the great Soviet-Yugoslav split Soviet soldiers, military commanders and the Red Army war strategy were uncritically praised. The press wrote about Soviet generals and officers in superlatives, depicting them as heroes and superhumans. The Soviet army was perceived as the most democratic army and its leader Stalin portrayed as the titan of military science. Through uncritical articles about Soviet society and the Soviet army, the Yugoslav propaganda machinery tried to convince the citizens that only a planned economy, heavy industry, labour discipline and political obedience could enable peace, stability, and the country's independence. After the split with Cominform (1948), the image of Soviet society and the Red Army was dramatically changed. Suddenly,

4 Willem J.M. Van Calcar, *Totalitair Taalgebruik: Taalbeschouwing over Fascisme, Totalitarisme en Discriminatie: een Tekstwetenschappelijke en Taalkundige Benadering* [Totalitarian Language Use: Language Study about Fascism, Totalitarianism and Discrimination: a Text Scientific and Linguistic Approach] (Leuven, Acco, 1990).

the soldiers of the most disciplined army were portrayed as the invading hordes, immoral cowards, petty thieves, and decadent alcoholics. The press wrote extensively about the rapes committed by Soviet soldiers, pointing out that such behavior was symptomatic of new socialist ethics and was the logical outcome of an aggressive policy. The death of Stalin enabled normalization of Yugoslav–Soviet relations. The anti-Soviet campaign in the media was stopped. However, in the mid-1950s Yugoslavia turned to the policy of equidistance, distancing itself both from the West and East.

Rūta Petrauskaitė shows in 'The Pathos of the Soviet Press' that totalitarian discourse, in spite of its many facets and forms of manifestation, has a core set of linguistic features that enable it to be identified intuitively almost at first glance. As George Orwell points out, the ideological bias of totalitarian discourse manifests itself in the inflated style, frequent euphemisms, clichés, stale imagery and pretentious diction, which all lead to 'sheer cloudy vagueness'. A forced political conformity demands an imitative style and usage of specific phrases, idioms, and metaphor. Stale and prefabricated language is part and parcel of the official discourse, especially of some press genres (editorial, reportage, foreign news items). This study addresses the lexicon and phraseology of Lithuanian dailies in their development during five decades of Soviet power. A distance in time and the methods of corpus linguistics make it possible to identify specific clichés and patterns that made up the official discourse. Totalitarian discourse developed during this period in the direction of a less explicitly expressed Marxist ideology. After the proclamation of Lithuania's independence this type of discourse disappeared leaving scant traces in the present day press. However, it formed an autonomous and clear-cut layer of discourse that was common to all languages of the then Soviet Union. All languages over a vast territory, irrespective of their type and level of literacy, shared similar vocabulary and imagery. Specific metaphors, especially metaphors of warfare, would be spread via numerous translations, imitations, and bilingualism as well as the urge to use the right official phraseology. Therefore, the analyses of one language might help to reveal the overall tendencies of Soviet discourse, detecting the most prominent patterns of evaluations obtained from the prefabricated language and to analyse them from the point of view of both form and meaning.

Part III, 'Power Structures – Politics and Truth' links the latter two aspects via discourse in a specific manner. In 'The Myth of the Indispensability of the Military in Burmese Political Culture: Totalitarian Discourse in the State of Myanmar', Ko Ko Thett argues that even though Myanmar had been widely considered an authoritarian state, the official discourse in its most recent history has been totalitarian. Thett maintains that the most reiterated idea throughout Myanmar totalitarian discourse is the continued relevance and indispensability of the military in Burmese politics. This security-intensive and racialist discourse has been built upon three myths: the Burmese military as a historically rooted institution, the Burmese military as key to liberating the country from British colonization and from Japanese occupation, and, lastly, that the state of Myanmar would have collapsed were it not for the custodianship of her army. While an endogenous factor, namely the momentum of Burma's nationalist movement, may be key to the country's independence in 1948, the Myanmar official discourse has always downplayed global factors that influenced the worldwide wave of decolonization. Finally, the author contests the notion that the Burmese military has been the sole guardian of the state without which the country would have collapsed. Over the latter half of the twentieth century, the Burmese military has gradually penetrated into the social fabric of its society by claiming the lead not just in the area of defence and security but also in the administrative, political and economic spheres. Despite local and international opposition, the 2008 Constitution, which aims to institutionalize the indispensability of the military in Burmese political culture, has been approved and enacted. As such Burma/Myanmar in the twenty-first century continues to be in a constitutional crisis high on ultra-nationalist and racist sentiments, and the most daunting challenge in her democratization efforts will be none other than the undoing of the totalitarian discourse.

The working hypothesis of Viorella Manolache's chapter, 'Totalitarian Discourse and the Rule of "Anti-"', is that Romanian communism was a discourse of modernity informed by the concept of simulacra. The author's investigation relates historical realities, their philosophical dimension and their discursive dimension. She also makes enquiries into the relation of the Eastern European option (to form a so-called *Eastern bloc*)

and the Romanian case (History against history, that is, rather particular and more West European in orientation). It is already well known that the official communist discourse (*logocracy*) uses *wooden language*, a type of language that misinforms and does not contribute to knowledge at all. The author's hypothesis supposes that the Romanian totalitarian discourse exceeded the impersonal and passive character of the sentences, or the abundance of linguistic resources, serving to emphasize mandatory language and Manichaeism. There is Manichaeism in the lack of nuances, the strict division of any area into two categories, divided by a 'versus': good vs bad, friends vs enemies, abstract vs concrete, general vs particular, objective vs subjective, and so on. Wooden language unfolds through excessive metaphors and personifications or encoding, becoming a violent instrument, denouncing through the rule of the *anti* any objective hierarchy. The argument capitalizes on Orwell's distinction between political opinion and the specific aspects of the language, and what Lenin named the intervening complementary action of the communication forms (*propaganda*). Also, it assesses the *logocracy* of the 'New-' (Russian for 'Neo-') Romanian communist discourse, that is, of the 'New'-elite, reviewing its attributes through elements of great manipulations, through obedience, repressive measures and techniques of suggestion. The Romanian communist discourse, through the ideological fabrication of meaning, addressed a *homo ideologicus*, using particular forms and a preliminary matrix of meaning, in order to organize and determine its content. As Zinoviev stated, *homo sovieticus* thinks bricks of thoughts and feels just bricks of feelings.

Finally, in 'Some Aspects of Totalitarian Discourse in Ben Ali's Tunisia', Abdenbi Sarroukh analyses a selection of discourses of the Tunisian totalitarian regime to show how far removed from reality these were. It does so by offering instances of discourses such as national solidarity, reformism, human rights, and untruths in presidential and official addresses in Arabic. In addition, it shows that the techniques of domination and repression were embedded in (economic) mechanisms of everyday life such as national solidarity. The discourse of reformism, too, is unveiled as a construction and a myth serving simultaneously to promote economic interests and the mechanism of coercion and repression.

To conclude, totalitarian discourse denies individualism and any or most of its manifestations. Society becomes a sort of aggregate and the individual a piece of this mechanism. This discourse of a mechanized society reaches its peak as indoctrination and the personality cult of a Big Brother. Finally, and notwithstanding the particularities acclaimed by those in power in the various regimes discussed in this volume, a clear universality emerges over time and space: totalitarian discourse installs a monstrous civic republicanism deprived of individual rights, but lit up by individual duties.

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HENRIETA ANIȘOARA ȘERBAN

Theoretical Argument. Totalitarian Discourse: The New Snow White/ Society in the Discursive Wooden Mirror

He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be
 One against whom there was no official complaint,
 And all the reports on his conduct agree
 That, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word, he was a saint [...]
 For in everything he did he served the Greater Community. [...]
 Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd:
 Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.

— W. H. AUDEN, *The Unknown Citizen*

A Universal Discursive Spectre?

Both society and individual identity share a discursive nature, which is dependent on the social, political, historical economic and geographic context, as a social construct and not as a mirroring effect. Paradoxically, defining totalitarian discourse means, on the contrary, identifying (and extracting?) its *universal traits* beyond the particularities concerning the geographical aspects, historical matters or political regime, underlining its self-declarative emancipation from these aspects.¹ It pretends to be the

1 Language versus discourse is seen analogously to *langue* versus *parole* as well as in a Foucaultian perspective: discourse is a product of language *used* among people.

'real' democracy and the direct embodiment of Historical Reason.² In this view, totalitarian discourse is present in every aspect of the society: from architecture and institutions, to the dressing codes. Totalitarian discourse is a discourse gone wooden, reified, reduced to a set of allowed and prescribed formulae – passwords, keywords for political access and individual safety. If vocabularies describe relatively limiting worlds, a poor, indoctrinating and Manichaistic vocabulary expresses a bleak totalitarian world.³

Related to this distinct perspective, we have to also notice from the very beginning that totalitarian discourse always presents and describes itself as something else – a sort of discourse of modernity (of progress and producing progress, a reforming discourse, an advanced discourse, a renewing discourse, etc.). In totalitarian discourse, advancement, progress and renewal become all intrinsically linked with the figure of the (party) leader who embodies a condensation symbol. Murray Edelman noticed, clearly subscribing to Harold D. Lasswell's perspective, that:

Politics is for most of us a passing parade of abstract symbols, yet a parade which our experience teaches us to be a benevolent or malevolent force that can be close to omnipotent. Because politics does visibly confer wealth, take life, imprison and free people, and represent a history with strong emotional and ideological associations, its processes become easy objects upon which to displace private emotions, especially strong anxieties.⁴

The power of politics is the power of discursively manipulated symbols embodying both fear and hope. 'Potent condensation symbols (...) are created through living "within the social texture"; this is notably true of political forms which become symbols.'⁵

2 Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism? Five Interventions in the (Mis)Use of a Notion* (London: Verso, 2011), 155.

3 Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

4 Murray Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 5.

5 *Ibid.*, 20.

Totalitarian discourse presents itself as something so advanced and particular that cannot be understood by (the decadent) foreigners, mainly because it is something emanating 'organically' from the revolutionary soul and soil of the nation and from a particular heroic vision. It may be the vision of the Führer, of the fascist leader, of the communist leader, or of the authoritarian. In addition to this key feature of the heroic source (that is, of the heroic leader), totalitarian discourse is here primarily characterized by a *wooden language*, or *le langage de bois*, also known as 'newspeak', the aim of creating a new man, the mobilizing and inciting tone, with future orientation and its monologue characteristic, a totalizing presence insinuating itself into all sectors of society. Totalitarian discourse is the use of language in the totalitarian states, in the totalitarian political regimes, but mainly as type of discourse also in authoritarian ones, that is, not intrinsically related to the communist, fascist and Nazi political regimes. Totalitarian discourse is the discourse of a marching society. Propaganda reaches its peak as indoctrination and the cult of Big Brother personality flourishes. Totalitarian discourse installs a sort of radical and monstrous civic republicanism deprived of individual rights, but lit up by bright individual duties.

We can encounter all these characteristics in Nazism, fascism, Stalinism, communism, but also in authoritarian regimes, although these are different, as political regimes. These authoritarian regimes are described by the extremely centralized power maintained by repressive means. This repressiveness takes over society as a totalizing goal in itself. Thus, for the authoritarian cases, we can talk of totalitarian discourses in authoritarian regimes, still, especially in establishing a cult of the centralized/authoritative power, or of the military, as a type of the cult of personality that reshapes both national history and society entirely according to an authoritative vision. Political power is concentrated in a (military) personality and the totalizing discourse gathers society under the banners of this ongoing cult of personality.

The official discourse in countries with military authoritarian regimes is totalitarian by metonymy: the military part takes over the entire society explaining its past, present and future existence and, in a repressive and not only hegemonic manner, determines most or everything relating to

the functioning of the other parts of society and of society as a whole.⁶ Freedoms of association and of worship are mere trimmings, smoke and mirrors in the propagandistic game. Authoritarian discourse has either the cult of personality or the cult of the military as a totalizing principle of society. Many of the other discursive totalitarian traits are also present: the mobilizing and inciting tone of a wooden tongue imbued with pathos. The denial of individualism is present to a lesser extent, because it allows the activities of religious groups and civil associations only for as long as the people involved in such activities are not critical of this authority functioning as a military and patriotic solar centre of society.

As an aside, we mention here the concept of *authoritative discourse* proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin in his discussion of literature. The concept is relevant for the lived literature of totalitarian regimes describing a particular type of discourse, which claims its *unconditional* assimilation by the *receiver* in the same way in which a religious dogma imposes itself. Although Bakhtin describes it to explain the creative role of the novel in setting, in discussion the dogmas of unquestionable authoritative discourses, this notion of authoritative discourse – *monoglossia* – is also a good framework for the evaluation of the specific type of *closed* discourse of indoctrination because it situates itself outside the realm of criticism and interpretation. Both totalitarian and authoritarian discourses, as such, are forms of unconditional authoritative discourse – hyponyms of authoritative discourse as a hyponym.

But why do we choose to speak of totalitarian *discourse* and not totalitarian *language*? In the philosophical literature on communication, and cultural studies in general, the distinction between language and discourse is covered only implicitly and not really addressed directly. I propose to assess this difference here, briefly, saying that language sustains discourses as *units of language*, larger than a developed sentence or a phrase. So discourses are produced in a language and they have a strong pragmatic characteristic

6 The official discourse is the discourse of individuals and institutions representing the state.

– they are functions of use and functions of power.⁷ But what is really interesting and relevant for our discussion is missing from the above definition. We turn to pragmatics then: a discourse is a unit of language in a context of social interaction. We are interested in the 'relation of signs to their users'.⁸ That unit of language is produced within that social context, and in a life situation that clarifies or adds clarification to the meaning which is produced when in use between speakers and interpreters.

In a totalitarian context we speak of totalitarian discourse founded on the totalitarian type of social interaction, emphasizing the residues of what we usually understand by social interaction – an interaction based on the mystification created by propaganda and a personality cult, fear and perpetual suspicion. Thus, with totalitarian discourse, the very factuality of the events narrated is suspended and reduced, along with the social interaction context, to mere schemes and formulae. Discourse is 'productive' – totalitarian discourse is an interaction oriented to create the new society and in the process create the new man. It is a changed form of interaction, because it is the manifestation of the effort to mimic as closely as possible an indoctrinating, prescribed interaction (a perversion of the term 'interaction' that requires response possibilities). This perverted interaction can be degraded even further, evolving toward an implosion and a disappearance of the social linguistic interaction. Totalitarian reality is evolving toward the society-state where totalitarian discourse again becomes language; language at its purified instrumental dimension. Totalitarian discourse is a refuted grand narrative that tends to become a set of 'discursive keywords' functioning in society similarly to military passwords – a linguistic shield of keywords against the all-intrusive totalitarian power.¹⁰

To summarize, we define totalitarian discourse in a pragmatic perspective: totalitarian discourse gathers the entire society under a totalizing

7 Michel Foucault, *London des discours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).

8 Morris, Charles, 'Foundations of the Theory of Signs', in R. Carnap et al. (eds), *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938), 69.

9 Foucault, op. cit.

10 S. Žižek, op. cit., 119.

principle, presenting also the traits of wooden tongue, a future orientation, a monologic demeanour, a mobilizing tone and the denial of individualism. To emphasize and investigate these characteristics, we shall address in more detail the following dimensions: totalitarian discourse as the discourse of dystopia, as the discourse of a mobilized society (Nazism, fascism and Stalinism), and the style of totalitarian discourse as wooden tongue. Tatiana Slama-Cazacu describes *wooden tongue* as:

(...) sub-system of a language designating mainly lexical elements, but also phraseological units, with character of fixed expressions, petrified clichés with meaning determined within the context of an 'authority', mainly used stereotypically and dogmatically, to express an ideology (or a simulacrum of ideological, economic, political, cultural, etc., which retain a power or an authority), mimicked, but also imposed by political power or by groups and individuals with such inclinations (even though, generally, the promoters or the epigones of the ideological system do not know always the exact semantic content), which is disseminated then by repetition, by frequent use within diverse written or oral media, thus annihilating the thought of the receiving masses which can arrive under collective suggestion; the real intent, or at least the effect obtained, is to impose authority, either by the secrecy or prestige of the code employed, or through technocratic knowledge, preventing any other modality of thought and, in general, hiding and masking the true reality, whenever it is not favourable.¹¹

Living Dystopia

Either as a discourse of the (quasi-) left or of the (quasi-) right, totalitarian discourse is the mark of the dispiriting disappearance of the very possibility of acts of solidarity. People cannot decide what happens to them or to the others, because this is for the totalitarian or even authoritarian governing

11 Tatiana Slama-Cazacu, 'Limba de lemn' ['Wooden Tongue'], *România literară* (4–5, October 17, 1991), 4.

figures to decide and not for them. People just follow orders. They live in the *not-there-yet-times* of a utopian indoctrination of *tomorrow* with a bleak present but promising prospects. Totalitarian discourse is unveiled in its perfect function of ultimate a-solidarity agent in communism; forbidding individualism it forbids human empathy and solidarity. It forges atomization and a society of Homucuses.¹²

Totalitarianism treats real people as virtual entities,¹³ as raw material to be transformed. Within the communist system, as analysed by Zinoviev,¹⁴ the authorities express the reactions of a large part of the population to whatever they consider to be derogation from the norms of the communist life. Zinoviev¹⁵ explains that it is not a case of a wicked power deliberately depriving individuals of their elementary liberties, but rather of a society that, even at the most basic level, has no use for individual liberties and it is even hostile to those.

Communist society is a mechanism in an absolute form; it is Hobbesian to the extreme. Individuals do not count, except as the articulation of society, and specifically those which justify the power of the general secretary (who corresponds to Hobbes's sovereign). The main justification for the existence of ordinary people is allowing for the existence of the superiors from the lower levels *nomenklatura*, which exists to be represented by the middle levels of *nomenklatura* and those for the upper levels of the Communist Party and those to give meaning to the existence of a general secretary of the Party. People enjoy the right to work as a duty, not out of some sense of dignity but because communist society cannot approve the existence of any right that cannot be a cover for a communist duty. Since rights at their core bear a freight of liberties and values they are, *naturally*, both meaningless and dangerous in a communist society. Even in the case of the duty/right to work we can easily perceive the deprivation of values

12. Alexander Zinoviev, *Homo Sovieticus*, trans. C. Janson (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1985) and A. Zinoviev, *Le communisme comme réalité* (Paris: L'Age de l'Homme, 1981).

13. Žižek, *op. cit.*, 136.

14. Zinoviev, *op. cit.*

15. *Ibid.*

when it is deployed by communism. It had nothing to do with industriousness, or perseverance, or creativity, but was only an ideological label for a mechanism of constraint. It is beneficial for any individual deprived of values, who is ready to follow the communist rules and maybe go around them, but anyway, leave them unquestioned.

As in Leviathan, the individual under communism has his bare minimum covered, but it is not necessarily lawful to hope or plan for more unless that individual becomes, one way or another, one of the *authorities*. In abstract and in absolute terms, everything is possible and the main strength of the communist system is its ability to produce this impression that a true paradise is being built for its people. For them, the fact that they are participating in this magical work-in-progress is what most offers them a feeling of *naissance*, powerful enough to make them obey and enjoy the communist society and its most characteristic dimension, the forced labour camp. This dimension is absent in Leviathan, but Hobbes was not much interested in the political economy of his commonwealth. For him, peace was a sort of spontaneous and generous wealth provider.

In a communist system, all individuals alike quickly come to be animated by a survival mode. The absence of values and attachments is the only simplifying factor within the entangled and dense fabric of manoeuvres and plots that replaces the social relationship and obliterates social capital. The communist society tends towards a total depersonalization.

Once born, the individual is processed to become a *l'homme nouveau*, *function-man* or *Homocous*. This is an attempt accompanied all the way by a discourse opposed to its purpose. The moral discourse is divorced from the communist realities encountered by the individual and this has a very efficient educative role in creating a human being deprived both of any moral sense and of any sociability. Even more, totalitarian society and totalitarian leaders will often rid themselves of those who dare be *real*, either eliminating them or forcing them fight for a *good* (meaningless) cause inside the system – in order to reduce them to the common denominator and exhaust their moral energies. In a communist society we encounter a monster, a Leviathan who is interested in assuring his power, its self-preservation and its self-defence, by reducing everyone to a state of ultimate lack of value – to mediocrity, servility and nullity. Hence, *Homocous*

is the key to understanding this extreme form of Leviathan that is the communist system. Zinoviev¹⁶ explains how deeply the absence of value leads to odium for values, the absence of freedom, to hatred of freedom and a parody of democracy. The *Homoculus* is not merely a reactionary type. Indeed, while in Western countries even the most ardent reactionary fights for democracy, which allows voicing differences of opinion, a *Homoculus*, put to live in a Western environment finds it difficult to stand democracy on a day-to-day basis.¹⁷

Totalitarian discourse is a symptom of fear and guilt, spread widely through society, illustrating both the aim of those in political power to indoctrinate, mobilise and thoroughly transform the human being, and the failure of governance, the incapacity to govern the country through normal authority and executive measures.¹⁸ Due to this incapacity of normal governance, the civilian individuals become an army of *homoculus*, indoctrinated toy soldiers, enrolled in the mechanism of the totalitarian society. S. Žižek¹⁹ notices a link between the incapacity to govern and the divinization of the Leader, as a supreme Genius intervening in everyday life at all levels, because otherwise nothing can function on the most everyday level.

To emphasize even more the specificity of totalitarian discourse we can use Lasswell's model of communication in journalism, describing in fact any act of communication, known as 'the five W'.²⁰ The model consists of the following questions that describe and bring to the fore several important characteristics when applied to totalitarian communication.

Who says what? The enunciator is the chief of the party, or the mouthpiece of official propaganda, or the rank-and-file individual, as new man or *Homoculus*. With Zinoviev²¹ we have the *Homoculus* but with Yevgeny

Zamiatin²² the new man is plainly a robot. In all totalitarian societies, the political police muster society's official and voluntary forces of brutal violence to install and maintain the total power by producing inflated proofs of individual guilt and rendering meaningless the very idea of individual rights and liberties. The official forces of approved violence are already transformed into *Homoculus*. Ruxandra Cesereanu notices that describing totalitarian reality is an exercise that requires recourse to various bestiaries.²³

Who says what? The discourse labelled as totalitarian is partly or totally, simply put, formed of lies, because even the matrix of prescribed discourse of indoctrination-mobilization is formed of half-truths and projections taken as reality.

Who says what through which channel? The channel of totalitarian discourse is the paramount path to indoctrination. Totalitarian discourse is a monologue, oriented to the *Homoculus(es)*. When does it speak? It speaks anytime. Where does it speak? It speaks anywhere. Totalitarian discourse is utopian and a-temporal, it is a paradoxical discourse of indoctrination sustaining at the same time that the ideal society is, in ideology, already here and you have to prove yourself worthy of it any second, because this means to be a new man. Whatever shortcomings are accepted by the censoring ruling figure(s), it is for the new men to mobilize themselves to bring society even closer to the ideal.

To whom does it speak? It speaks to the *Homoculus*. *To what effect* does it speak? The results of the totalitarian discourse are duplicity, indoctrination and mobilization.

Speaking of the power of indoctrination, Françoise Thom notices that power is not truly absolute unless it forces the individual to speak against oneself, asserting one's ideological fidelity.²⁴ Self-criticism is a

22 Eugene (Yevgeny) Zamiatin, *He*, translated by Gregory Zilboorg (New York: Dutton, 1924).

23 Ruxandra Cesereanu, *Gălugăr în oștiștii românești* [The Gulag in Romanian Consciousness] (Jassy: Politrom Press, 2005), 333. See also such Romanian authors as Bujor Nedelcovici or I.D. Sârbu, who illustrate the details of an era of the creeps.

24 Françoise Thom, *Limba de Lemn* [La langue de bois/Wooden Tongue], translated from French by Mona Anohi (Bucharest: Humanitas Press, 1993), 138 and 134.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Žižek, op. cit., 119.

19 Ibid. 120.

20 Harold D. Lasswell, 'The Structure and Function of Communication in Society,' in Lyman Bryson (ed.), *The Communication of Ideas* (New York: Harper and Row, 1948), 38–50.

21 Zinoviev, op. cit.

major characteristic of all communist regimes. Self-criticism goes hand in hand with making engagements and with the self-humiliation necessary for indoctrination. Recognizing mistakes offers a much-needed surplus of legitimacy for the repressive power, eliminating the difference between the blood spilled ritually and the blood wasted by the criminals.²⁵ Totalitarian discourse of the brave new world²⁶ leads always to duplicity, because until the transformation is complete people tend to protect and hide their thoughts, becoming only more vulnerable. The discursive protection functions against the whole world – his family, community, society at large. It is an art of insulation. The discourse inscribes the imitation of person into an imitation of society whose totality, meaning and purpose exist solely within the accepted type of discourse, that is, the totalitarian discourse.²⁷ Within this process of discursive validation, history plays an important role, too.

The Totalitarian Discourse as Cause and Effect of Crisis and War: Nazism, Fascism and Stalinism

The one who noticed that it is important to talk about the 'language of the Third Reich' was Victor Klemperer, mentioning this in his diary entry for December 12, 1941.²⁸ But he also noticed, very importantly, as did Hannah

25 René Girard, *Tapul ispișitor*. [The Scapegoat] Romanian translation by Teodor Rogin (Bucharest: Nemira Press, 2000).

26 Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (New York: Harper, 1938).

27 See also Mihaela Nicolae, 'Fragmente din arhitectura lumii totalitare', *Memoria-revista gândirii arătește*, <http://revista.memoria.ro/?location=view_article&id=1022> accessed June 2012, 188.

28 Apud Jean-Pierre Faye, *Langages totalitaires, la crise, la guerre, Colloque de Censy-la-Salle*, available at <<http://www.jean-pierre-faye.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/JPF-Colloque-de-Censy-2010.pdf>> accessed 7 June 2012.

Arendt,²⁹ that we should discuss Nazism, fascism and Stalinism together. At the time, the pragmatic view on language and discourse theory was not employed in cultural, social and political studies, discourse meaning only the oral official coverage of a subject with an occasion. Both Victor Klemperer and Jean-Pierre Faye,³⁰ who quotes the former and his diary (which in the French edition bore the title *Mes soldats de papier* [*My Paper Soldiers*]), are in fact talking of the use of specific totalitarian language in everyday life, that is, totalitarian discourse. Faye wrote that it was a totalitarian language, a paroxysm that animated the Third Reich provoking the entire world to rally against it, because its passage through history left more than fifty million victims in its wake. Some would say that it was not the use of totalitarian language that killed those victims, but Faye explains that precisely the use of this language created the framework for this atrocity to unfold and identify and insulate the victims destroying all traces of solidarity in social human relations. But to understand exactly this language and its effect, one has to recall the numerous sources that contributed to this power of producing mass murders at an unprecedented level in history. These sources led to the apparition of the very word *totalitarian*. We have to note that it appeared in four different instances. The term was used first, an aspect now often forgotten, in Italian, as *Stato totalitario*: the adjective coined by *Il Duce* in October 1925 and integrated into *La dottrina del fascismo* in 1930 by the neo-Hegelian ideologue Gentile.³¹ Then, Faye traces this terminology through different European languages with a totalitarian history.

It then cropped up in German as the modified term 'totale Staat', defined by the jurist Carl Schmitt and consecrated by a discourse of the Führer in October 1933. It became a fixture of the Spanish language in Franco's state in *Los Puntos* of the Spanish Phalanx, signed by its founder, José Antonio Primo de Rivera, in 1934; with a reference to the 'New Totalitarian State' in the 'Discourse of Unification' of the Phalanx and the 'Cardinals' in 1937; with an extra mention of 'other totalitarian states'; then in a speech by 'El Caudillo' and in the founding text of the Charter of Labour, the *Fuero*

29 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Meridian Books, 1958).

30 J.-P. Faye, op. cit.

31 *Ibid.*, 1.

del *Trabucio*, in 1938. As a political marker in French the term showed up in July 1940, in Pierre Laval's discussion of instituting a Head of State who would replace the Third Republic's President of the Republic and President of the Council.³²

The moment of birth of totalitarian language is identified as June 10, 1925, before the tomb of Emperor Augustus, in a speech that Faye identifies a few lines of as especially suggestive: "We shall pursue with *even more*³³ ferocity what we called our fierce totalitarian will ...". The keywords here are ferocity and pride; and this kind of intensified ferocity shall constitute the mark of a monstrous totalitarian language and regime. The original totalitarian language, fascism, adds to the previous two key words the intransigence which was explained in the political communication of the time directly by the fact that "Fascism does not compromise and does not stop ... it takes over the course of the revolution, bent on the full, totalitarian and inexorable conquest of all the powers of the state."³⁴ Faye appreciates the crucial importance of Giovanni Gentile as ideologue of fascism and the kernel of his totalitarian idea that everything is in the state and nothing outside it and that in this sense fascism is totalitarian, because the fascist state provides the synthesis and unity of all values, developed and increased through the life of the people. In comparing the relation of similarity with Heidegger's *Bekennnis zu Adolf Hitler und dem national sozialistischen Staat* [*Declared belief in Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist State*], against Husserl's *Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man*, Faye also makes the observation that Gentile's fascism was counterweighted by the humanism of Benedetto Croce.³⁵ Thus, the epoch was not deprived of anti-totalitarian thought, but totalitarian thought was simpler and more powerful than the sophisticated anti-totalitarianism. In our perspective, indeed as a consequence of crisis, it created the illusion of solving all the problems and shortcomings of the

32 Ibid., 2.

33 'Even more' is a mark of socialist and communist discourse noticed by Faye, but also by (German, Romanian etc.) linguists.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., 3.

people, more urgent around the economic crisis of 1929, while it only created the conditions for the disappearance of human individualism and humane society.

The language of crisis transforms the totalitarian state into the total state: a state with a strong economy, a powerful state of quality and energy owning all the means of power, as described by Carl Schmitt (1936) in a conference.³⁷ A sort of language deemed pathetic (Faye calls it 'monstrous intensity') is typical for wooden tongue, too. From the dawns of totalitarian language the totalitarian state was conceived in close relationship with the total revolution, to create this total state of ultimate perfection heralding the end of times. As if the state that gathered all means of power was not total enough, it undertook also the assignment to change everything from foundations. So, the total state had to lead and win the total revolution. Faye mentions that Adolf Hitler placed himself at the disposition of the revolution led by the National Socialist party as a tin drum. Indeed, the leader of the total state had to be a herald and a wizard of total vocabularies. As Faye puts it: "The narrative transformation works on the 'vocabularies' and freights them with contradictory content. Thus sprang up the 'conservative revolution' propounded by the 'revolutionary conservative' Moeller van den Bruck' – a man that Hitler in 1936 described to a *Hitlerjugend* rally as 'the most conservative revolutionary of the world'.³⁸

What we have here is the evidence of the dramatic struggle for any scrap of legitimacy possible and the oxymoronic phrases underline this aspect. This was to be a perennial problem for totalitarian discourse. Any relation to tradition was felt to be a valuable source of legitimization, and seized upon, even if in fact destroyed tradition by its revolutionary interaction. This lack of legitimacy was solved by the deployment of force – *totality by weakness* was replaced by *totality by force* – by the institution of the arbitrary power of the president of the Reich, after 1931.³⁹ Then totalitarian will became the synonym of the *state* – its ultimate expression. The

37 In Faye, op. cit., 3.

38 Ibid., 4.

39 Ibid., 2.

symbolic hides at the core of the real and, ultimately, it also generates the real – it is a double inverse circulation between realities and language.⁴⁰

In a similar vein, Hannah Arendt⁴¹ notices in totalitarianism a collapsing of the state and morality: this means that morals remain at the discretion of the total state, which is a dangerous legitimating movement. The historical, linguistic, discursive and factual fabric of reality made clear that in the epoch a phenomenon of both contamination and alignment of the totalitarian states took place. Thus, the collaborationist Vichy government from 9 July 1940 borrowed some of the trappings of totalitarianism in their modifications of constitution, in the deformation of certain terms and in their conduct, too, generated by the language of collaboration with the Nazi Germany. The totalitarian terms identified exactly this two-way correspondence between social and historical reality and language. Totalitarian language engulfed the realities of economic crisis and the realities of the world war and threw them back in propaganda and indoctrination intended to mask the deprivation of such goods as human dignity, individual rights and human decency. Words were coined: *Mangelware* in Germany, and the ration cards per household that accompanied totalitarian reality everywhere, from Nazi Germany and the GDR to the Soviet Union and communist Romania.⁴²

Part of the same discursive-historical equation was the single-party Stalinist state. Declared repeatedly as the opposite of the totalitarian state – according to Jdanov, 'the Grand Inquisitor of Russian culture' – the Soviet democracy was its perfect parallel.⁴³ Even though the Soviet Constitution maintained all the institutions and all the basic stipulations of the liberal democracies, by the prescription of the single party it annulled them all.⁴⁴

40 Ibid., 6.

41 Hannah Arendt, op. cit.

42 Jean-Pierre Faye quotes Klemperer and his 'Dictionnaire philosophique' in one of the appendices: *Was ist ein Reich? / Ein Führer ohne Frau Ein Bauer ohne Sau / Ein Metzger ohne Fleisch* [What is a Reich? / A Führer without a woman / A farmer without sows / A butcher without meat].

43 Ibid., 8.

44 Ibid.

The domination of the single party was nothing other than *the* totalitarian factor: the source of all / any rights, morals, agencies, et cetera. Missing the obvious racial obsession, Soviet totalitarianism can be perceived as a *paradox* parallel to Hitler's totalitarianism: maintaining just the cult of the state, the concentration camp state, the political police, the conflation of state and morality, national revolution, insistence on the sanctity of national soil, and so on. Žižek identifies different degrees of irrationality in these totalitarian regimes:

In Fascism, even in Nazi Germany, it was possible to survive, to maintain appearance of 'normal' everyday life, if one did not involve oneself in any oppositional political activity (and, of course, if one were not of Jewish origin ...); while in the Stalinism of the late 1930s, no one was safe, everyone could be unexpectedly denounced, arrested and shot as a traitor. In other words, the 'irrationality' of Nazism was 'condensed' in anti-Semitism, in its belief in the Jewish Plot; while Stalinist 'irrationality' pervaded the entire social body. For that reason, Nazi police investigators were still looking for proof and traces of actual activity against the regime, while Stalinist investigators were engaged in clear and unambiguous fabrications (invented plots and sabotage etc.).⁴⁵

Nevertheless, in all these totalitarian cases, at the discursive heart of the ideology there is a total 'science' of the people and of the state, which glides gradually toward the identification and total extermination of the enemy both within society and oneself and toward the end of history itself.⁴⁶ At the core of Stalinism, purges were the 'betrayed revolutionary heritage',⁴⁷ leading to extreme ambiguity, because Stalinist ideology, even 'at its most "totalitarian" exudes an emancipator potential'.⁴⁸

As said, the economic crisis pushed Europe over the edge into barbarism, but was it the only factor? There is also the universal temptation, anthropologically, (Cassirer again)⁴⁹ in discursively instilling social order

45 Žižek, op. cit., 128.

46 Faye says that among Hitler's last words were also 'I am the Dr. Koch of the bacillus of History', op. cit., 10.

47 Žižek, op. cit., 129.

48 Ibid., 131.

49 Ernst Cassirer, *Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2006).

within a process of social renewal, which can quickly degenerate to the order of the concentration camp, and of discursive delirium, or in identifying one explanatory principle for the entire reality, one problem (or one type of people) as the source of all evils, in creating one *unifying* grand narrative, in sacrificing freedoms for the sake of secure order etc. This is the path to totalitarian discourse, deeply rooted in the human condition, the ugly face of symbolic man (there is a beautiful face of the symbolic human embedded in the human condition, too).

Hate speech is a contemporary travesty of fascist discourse. It opens the way toward the undiscerning identification of the enemy, which is so imminently dangerous, because it implies the popular acceptance of the powerful state even at the cost of individual rights – a form of total state. This is why German law punishes *Völkerverhetzung*. The European Council makes a very interesting distinction, though, between forms of expression which are to be considered offensive and contrary to the Convention (including racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, aggressive nationalism and discrimination against minorities and immigrants) and forms of expression that criticize aspects of reality.⁵⁰ Genuine and serious incitement to extremism should be attentively separated from the right of individuals (including journalists and politicians) to express their views freely and to offend, shock or disturb others. There is no universally accepted definition of the expression *hate speech*. The Court's case law has established certain parameters making it possible to characterize hate speech in order to exclude it from the protection afforded to freedom of expression (Article 10) or freedom of assembly and association (Article 11).⁵¹ Hate speech should be marginalized and punished when identified, but it should not become a newspeak forbidding any social criticism. Žižek warns that the spectre of 'totalitarianism' is still 'roaming around':

In the unconstrained autopoiesis of capitalism which followed the demise of Socialism, the spectre of 'totalitarian threat' survives in three forms: the new religious-ethnic

50 Anne Weber (2009) 'Manual on Hate Speech', Council of Europe Publications, available at <<http://echr.coe.int/echr/rts.aspx.6>>, accessed 19 November 2012.

51 Ibid.

fundamentalisms, usually personified in Evil Dictators (Slobodan Milošević, Saddam Hussein); the rise of New Right Populism in the West itself; and, last but not least, the notion that the digitalization of our lives poses the ultimate threat to our freedom – soon, our daily lives will be registered and controlled to such an extent that the former police state control will look like a childish game: the 'end of privacy' is in sight.⁵²

Nowadays, economic crisis strikes again and fascist discourse is travestied in the success of far-right discourse exploding into a myriad of varieties. Ruth Wodak and John E. Richardson analyse fascist discourse in its political continuities and discontinuities in post-war European discursiveness.⁵³ Europe's traumatic past of two world wars and a history of imperialist expansionism cannot be denied a role in the continuities identified by the authors in the rise of ideologies, themes, arguments, idioms of right-wing extremism, in spite of the democratic sensitivities and the more liberal European taboos of the post-war order. The interdisciplinary approach examines fascist text and talk, deconstructing exclusionary political discourse to its fascist 'bones'.⁵⁴ But what are the 'bones' of totalitarian discourse? Is it its pathetic tone? Its cancellation of reality?

New-Born to Be Wooden: Newspeak, Pathetic Tone and Other Deformities

Newspeak, double think, or wooden tongue are all labels for the same central characteristics of totalitarian discourse. This is relativism of reality and the conflation of the state and morality. Big Brother's argument for legitimacy is also his slogan: 'WAR IS PEACE/ FREEDOM IS SLAVERY/

52 Žižek, op. cit., 229.

53 Wodak and Richardson, op. cit.

54 Ibid.

IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH:⁵⁵ The Ministry of Truth is only one of the faces of Big Brother, the universal totalitarian leader. The intrusion is complete, since the individual lacks her very own possibility of creating meaning. Meaning is received with the pre-established passwords replacing genuine interaction and communication. As Orwell puts it,

Down in the street the wind flapped the torn poster to and fro, and the word INGSOC fitfully appeared and vanished. Ingsoc. The sacred principles of Ingsoc. Newspeak, doublethink, the mutability of the past. He felt as though he were wandering in the forests of the sea bottom, lost in a monstrous world where he himself was the monster. He was alone. The past was dead, the future was unimaginable. What certainty had he that a single human creature now living was on his side? And what way of knowing that the dominion of the Party would not endure forever?⁵⁶

The only truth propagated through totalitarian discourse is the received one, but it is also everlasting, outside any critical categories and eventually outside meaning itself. Newspeak should eventually abolish the very concept of freedom and whatever else man could keep in high esteem in this stage of struggling existence. Totalitarianism aims at providing a ready-to-live life, situated outside struggle:

'Orthodoxy means not thinking – not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness. [...] There is a word in Newspeak, said Syme, 'I don't know whether you know it: *duckspeak*, to quack like a duck. It is one of those interesting words that have two contradictory meanings. Applied to an opponent, it is abuse; applied to someone you agree with, it is praise.'

The construction and fulfilment of the self, the existence of identity, communication or solidarity, they all become impossible. It implies an extreme relativism of the human realm and of social life that becomes dystopian. People become ghosts in a world deprived of meaning: 'Clearly, people capable of using such phrases have ceased to remember that words have

55 George Orwell, 1984, Part I, ch. II, available at <www.liferesearchuniversal.com/1984-2.html> accessed February 2012.

56 *Ibid.*

57 *Ibid.*, ch. III.

meanings.⁵⁸ This is the pure expression of Newspeak. Newspeak is investigated as 'langue de bois' [wooden tongue] by Françoise Thom (1993) in the Soviet discourse of the newspaper *Pravda*. According to her analysis, the Soviet tongue to be found in *Pravda* is characterized by the excess of nouns, within a paradise of weird and forced syntactical constructions. For instance, certain facts do not reflect some aspects but they find their reflection in something, 'provided help' replaces always the simpler form 'help', 'taking the decision to act, is preferred to 'acting' and so forth. 'Now' stands for 'our times', while 'tomorrow' indicates 'the future', 'we' is the implicit counterpart of 'them' which means 'the reactionary forces'. Thom notes further characteristics as the abuse of passive and impersonal constructions and of comparatives, the excess of imperative mood. (This is the discourse of indoctrination, the discourse of the mobilised society). 'Communist discourse betrays itself, through its syntax and, maybe, through its terminology. This "wooden" syntax affects in the same manner very different languages, such as French, Russian, English or Chinese.'⁵⁹

In wooden discourses, the very 'law of systematic determination' – a description of intertextual determinations clarifying and supporting meaning – is broken.⁶⁰ Thom quotes Victor Klemperer, who explained that the Third Reich did not only coin words, but also changed the value of words and their frequency, appropriating for the Party what was a common good, poisoning the words, the groups of words and the form of the phrases, enthralling language to its awful system.⁶¹ The real is already interpreted and judged. The conclusion of this ideological trial: it is not good enough, and it has to be tailored to this inflationist enchantment of 'peace', 'progress' and 'cooperation'. It is not a mere lie any more because it ceased to relate to an actual referential. Its referential is the sum of prescribed indoctrination phrases. All these characteristics underline the utopian immanence of totalitarianism.

58 G. Orwell, quoted in Fr. Thom, *Limba de lemn* [La langue de bois/Wooden Tongue], Bucharest, Humanitas, 1993, 36.

59 Fr. Thom, *op. cit.*, 36, 46.

60 T. Slama-Cazacu, *Lecturi de Psiholingvistică* [Psycho-linguistics Lectures] (Bucharest: Didactic and Pedagogic Press, 1980).

61 Fr. Thom, *op. cit.* Slama-Cazacu, *op. cit.*

In terms of vocabulary, wooden tongue is poor, Manichean, organic, metaphorical, expressing abusively the wilfulness and the embodied ideals.⁶² The fatal blow is the replacement of the expression of forms with the expression of reflections. Françoise Thom shows that

A world of forms is inaccessible to it for two reasons: on the one hand, its structure makes it refractory to the following of a universal intelligibility scheme and, on the other hand, within the ideological approach by excellence, the passing from the appearance to a secondary pre-known immutable reality has no influence on a universe of varied and solid forms speaking for themselves.⁶³

Thus, the forms are replaced by reflections. The forms, the phenomena and the consciousness merely reflect: revolutionary aspirations, the state of the forces of production and the class relations, the interests of the dominant class etc. This leads to a terminology of dissimulation and presents a religious indoctrinating matrix 'deprived of the positive figure of God that sustains it',⁶⁴ claiming demystification. As a consequence, the terrible poverty of vocabulary pales before the conceptual poverty. The dictate of a small number of vague but attractive images entertain in their semantic orbit a series of words and concepts deprived of their *natural* meaning and injected with their compulsory indoctrinating one.

Under these circumstances, the wooden tongue is definitely unclear, passing perpetually from hyperbolic expression to euphemism, and semi-adequate to the subject. It imposes a certain style that is maintained regardless of the topic, forcing some connections and disregarding others so that it can be a Hymn of the Light and Guidance of the Party, of the Great Leader of the World Proletariat, Progress, of the New Tomorrow and so on. In the words of Nicolae Ceaușescu:

We must create new literary opuses, with a higher patriotic content, new movies, and plays mirroring the life and achievements of our people, in the spirit of revolutionary Socialist humanism. ... We need new revolutionary and patriotic songs, inspired by

62. Fr. Thom, op. cit., 62: 'The communists are the flesh of the flesh and the blood of blood of the working class'.

63. Ibid.

64. Žižek, op. cit., 153.

the life of our people and its melodious spirit. ... All the arts are called to build the new man, inspired by the process of edifying him.⁶⁵

Which is the function of wooden tongue? Françoise Thom underlines its futility: it neither expresses any new thought nor describes anything at all. Nevertheless, it is crucial for the leader, party and to the totalitarian state as entertainer of the ideological fiction, as a protector of it ('from the evil spirit of things, identifying the 'weak links' of the 'real world'), thus permitting a mending of the 'holes' generated by this damaging reality in the ideological fabric that should be always pristine and utopian.⁶⁶

The wooden tongue indulges the violence of totalitarian discourse. It proffers unlimited and arbitrary nonsense, powdered with contradictions, while requiring endless faith and repetition. The individual, whether she be Romanian, German or Chinese, has to perpetually reaffirm her availability and adhesion to the ideological party line. From the German concentration camp, to the Chinese or the less dramatic Romanian workplace, the walls speak in great humour: *Be grateful to the state or Work Is Freedom or Arbeit macht frei* or another hopeless wooden prayer (here, an arrogant and reiterated affirmation of arbitrary power). The universality of indoctrinating reason replaced the universality of reason which legitimates totalitarianism – the unbearable mutation, conducing to discursive imprisonment.

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66. Thom, op. cit., 8.

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