translated by Erik Butler

Wladimir Velminski

HOMO SOVIETICUS

BRAIN WAVES, MIND CONTROL, AND TELEPATHIC DESTINY

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In October 1989, as the Cold War was ending and the Berlin Wall about to crumble, television viewers in the Soviet Union tuned in to the first of a series of unusual broadcasts. "Relax, let your thoughts wander free ..." intoned the host, the physician and clinical psychotherapist Anatoly Mikhailovich Kashpirovsky. Moscow's Channel One was attempting mass hypnosis over television, a therapeutic session aimed at reassuring citizens panicked over the ongoing political upheaval—and aimed at taking control of their responses to it. Incredibly enough, this last-ditch effort to rally the citizenry was the culmination of decades of official telepathic research, cybernetic simulations, and coded messages undertaken to reinforce ideological conformity. In *Homo Sovieticus*, the art and media scholar Wladimir Velminski explores these scientific and pseudoscientific efforts at mind control.

In a fascinating series of anecdotes, Velminski describes such phenomena as the conflation of mental energy and electromagnetism; the investigation of aura fields through the "Aurathron"; a laboratory that practiced mind control methods on dogs; and attempts to calibrate the thought processes and physical movements of laborers. "Scientific" diagrams from the period accompany the text. In all of the experimental methods for implanting thoughts into a brain, Velminski finds political and metaphorical contaminations. These apparently technological experiments in telepathy and telekinesis were deployed for purely political purposes. The history described in *Homo Sovieticus* offers bizarre, intriguing insights into the uses and potential abuses of our engagement with technology.

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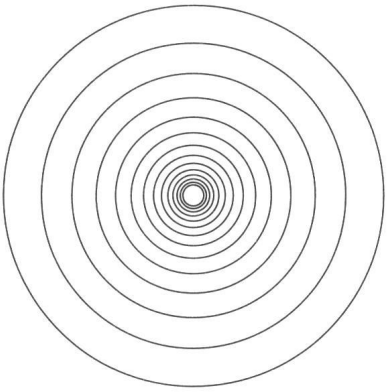

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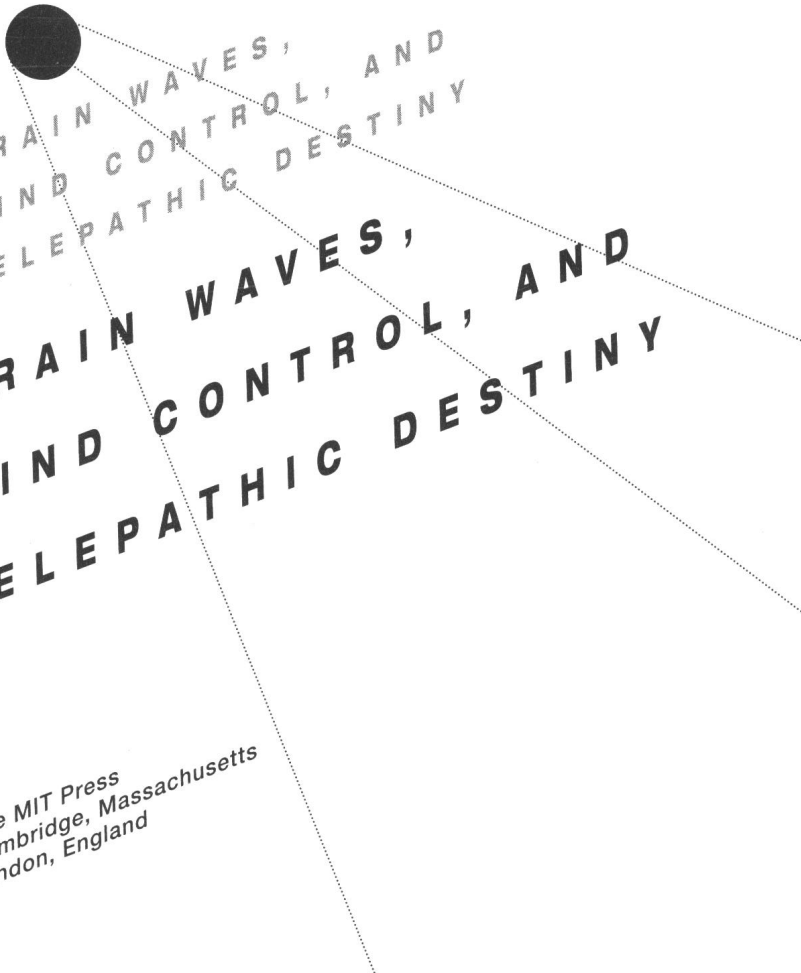

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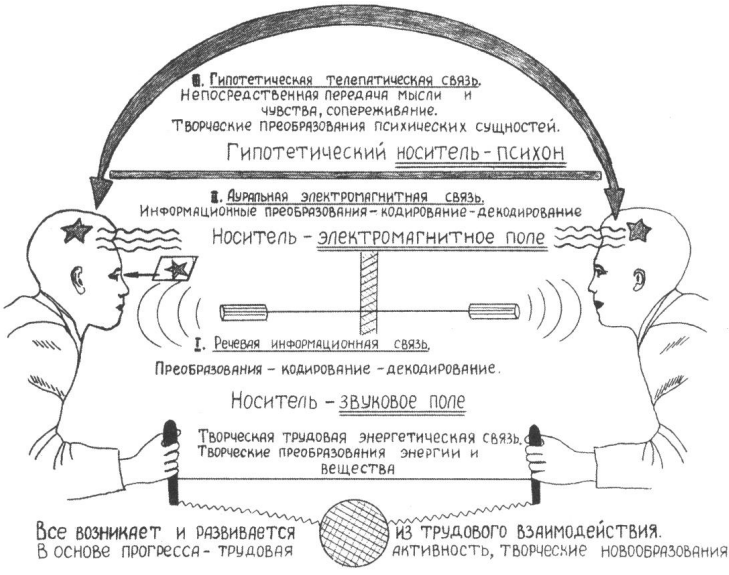

Материальные основы телепатии.

1.1

Material foundations of telepathy

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1

Preliminary Settings: Material Foundations

The question of how to educate and control the human being, how to improve and perfect physical and mental construction, poses an enormous problem that can only be understood on the basis of socialism.

Leon Trotsky

The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society.

Edward Bernays

Auxiliary supports for gray matter can entail the diminished ability to think individually. A gesture meant to enlighten may give rise to a mode of influence setting collective brainwashing into motion. In figure 1.1, the stars where brains should be point to canny political calculations factoring into would-be modern blessings. This ballpoint sketch, made by the Soviet cybernetic scientist Pavel Gulyaev in 1965, shows a control circuit linking two figures. At the lower edge of the picture, a saw cutting into a tree trunk checks the loop; two identical-looking men are working the handles. A red arrow arches over the figures; its points aim at their heads. In each case, a star is shining where thought occurs. A Soviet star: a neural prosthesis.

The drawing's subtitle reads *Material Foundations of Telepathy*. Inside the control circuit, Gulyaev lists cybernetic field systems. The first, *rhetorical-informational switching* in the auditory sphere, is a matter of reorganization, coding and decoding; the drawing presents the circuitry as a sender-receiver network. The second is *auratic-electromagnetic switching*, which also concerns information-processing, coding and decoding; its medium, the drawing shows, is an electromagnetic field.

The waves emanating from inside the figures' heads make the iconic significance of the circuitry plain: having received a visual transmission (depicted in a rhombus containing a star), the figure on the left is coding this message as electromagnetic impulses and broadcasting it again; to the right, the other figure—the receiver—is decrypting it. Knowledge is being conveyed via thought based on material transmission technologies; it is directly registered on the receiving end. The stars where brains should be indicate that mental transfer has been politically instrumentalized through and through: the scene legitimates censorship and control on the basis of established scientific insight and the speculation of research.

(2)

The design indicates that when *rhetorical-informational* and *auratic-electromagnetic* systems are perfectly guided, the third attribute of *Homo sovieticus* emerges: a *hypothetical-telepathic circuit*. Represented by a straight line, its functionality comprises the unmediated transmission of thoughts, feelings, and sensations; at the same time, it involves the creative reorganization of psychic substance. *Psikhon* is Gulyaev's word for the energy coursing through this circuitry; clearly, its properties take shape in a *feedback* system that alternates between *control over* media and *being controlled by* media.

The following discussion of neural prostheses does not concern twenty-first-century medical implant methods. Nor does it concern electrodes or brain pacemakers set up to stimulate thoughts.[1] Instead, the focus falls on processes that act on people from outside. That said, it is impossible to draw a dividing line between the two realms inasmuch as the practices described are directly connected to the research practices of the era and were in fact implemented within such a framework to enhance creativity, improve memorization, and heighten performance. In this context, the use of cerebral prostheses did not involve individualized courses of treatment to promote original thinking. Instead, the messages coded as stars were meant to reach the brain of a whole society, propagate there, and establish uniformity of thought

[*Gleichschaltung des Denkens*]. As such, the term *neural prostheses* does not refer to technology that brings about an aura of the mechanical so much as actual designs that effect switching, steering, and control.

The dialectic at work connects with the idea of a "prosthetic God" that Sigmund Freud discusses in *Civilization and Its Discontents.*[2] For all that, the study at hand does not address the "natural aspirations of culture"; instead, it explores how these aspirations were influenced and guided.[3] Although the psychic apparatus of the new Soviet collective was a construct, the operations of the "soul" were determined and directed by electromagnetic stimuli more than by dreams.[4] "Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole land," Lenin's slogan declared. These words were to become the motto for the people as a whole.

Gulyaev's schematic follows the psychobiological vision of human perfection that Leon Trotsky—Lenin's closest confidant and intended successor—announced to intellectuals and artists in 1923:

> Man at last will begin to harmonize himself in earnest. He will make it his business to achieve beauty by giving the movement of his own limbs the utmost precision, purposefulness, and economy in his work, his walk, and his play. He will try to master first the semiconscious and then the subconscious processes in his own organism, such as breathing, the circulation of the blood, digestion, and reproduction; within necessary limits, he will try to subordinate them to the control of reason and will. Even purely physiological life will become subject to collective experiments. The human species, the coagulated *Homo sapiens*, will once more enter into a state of radical transformation, and, in his own hands, become an object of the most complicated methods of artificial selection and psychophysical training.[5]

Until Trotsky was declared the public enemy of the Soviet Union, he devised projects that ran counter to the plans of the Central Committee (which Stalin dominated). Accordingly, the *New Man* was to "make it his purpose to master his own feelings, to raise his instincts to the heights of consciousness, to make them transparent, [and] to extend the wires of his will into hidden recesses" of his being.[6]

Thirty years later, Gulyaev built on this very program to create a higher social-biological type, integrating futurist and constructivist ideas of the 1920s into a state-of-the-art cybernetic mechanism. The iconography of his drawing points to psychological and physiological experiments on human subjects at the borderlands of science: a control system located simultaneously in the political and social spheres. As depicted, this system focuses on an interconnected and optimally calibrated form of polarity: two citizens' combined and coordinated efforts to saw through a log blocking their way.[7] *Absolutely synchronized* equality results from this relationship, and a new medium takes form. Hereby, the function of labor plays a central role. Even if work and associated ergonomic operations have not been integrated into the circuitry, they still provide the foundation as *creative-dynamic-energetic* connectivity. Work stands for the *productive* transformation of energy and matter. *Everything* comes into being and develops through reciprocal labor, the text just under the saw affirms. Work to create the *new* constitutes the basis of the constructive process.

These same, *material foundations* for an immaterial medium stand at the center of the pages to follow. Gulyaev's writings, held at the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, serve as the compass throughout.[8] The point of departure is provided by the ergonomic operations outlined by labor scientist Aleksei Gastev (1882–1939), which were repurposed as *creative-dynamic-energetic circuits* in the language-oriented, incorporeal practices that the neurophysiologist Vladimir Bekhterev (1857–1927) implemented in a laboratory setting to engineer *rhetorical-informational circuits*.

In turn, the patents and designs of television pioneer Hovannes Abramovich Adamian (1879–1932) represent *auratic-electromagnetic networks*. Linked directly to Bekhterev's experiments, they provide the basis for *hypothetical-telepathic circuitry*.

In this light, the psycho-hygienic prescriptions and cybernetic wiring in Gulyaev's design amount to a technological process for exercising influence and control. The underlying constellation of forces comes into view through the mediating circuitry that steers operations; through this lens, it is possible to describe and analyze the emergence of immanent strategies of power, apparatuses for influencing, methods of surveillance, and paranoid modes of thought. The point is not to identify yet another "science of man" during the Soviet era—much less to practice such a science. Rather, the goal is to outline a new picture of the thinking that shaped the age.

Such an approach—which ties the construction of epistemological objects to the ways they are presented to, and staged for, the public—will enable us to discern creative dispositives beyond the confines of the laboratory. Inasmuch as the truth claims of these paraphysical sciences offer aesthetic alternatives—as in a work of fiction—our attention turns, again and again, to the political and metaphorical contaminations that occur in the process of transfer.[9] In other words, the designs examined in the following did not just function reactively, as means for conveying simplified versions of difficult scientific insights; rather, they represented ways that new findings were situated—and transformed—in a process of illustration, decontextualization, and recontextualization.[10] Especially in the Soviet Union, such plans did not unfold in a politically neutral space. Instead, they served to spread and instrumentalize ideological positions and aesthetic precepts, with contagious epistemological effects.

On the one hand, then, the coupling of science and poetology points back to human beings who, in receiving an aesthetic transmission, are meant to understand the neurological basis of the

New Man and make it their own. On the other hand, this same feedback loop affirms the postulates of a controversial science whose foundations are a matter of political calculation.

By way of historical thought-experiments—which do not belong to a metaphorical register in this context—our study explores how the phantasms haunting scientific research were enlisted to steer thinking and manipulate the population. The heyday of such practices of suggestion occurred when the regulatory cycle of the Soviet Union was threatening to fail: popular elements, already suspicious of the system, needed to undergo treatment in order to be "recharged."

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