

2/14/01 Wednesday's Rock, Grace Maryanka
Closing time: 11:13 p.m., C.S.T.

Professor Marler and associates found that chickens adjust signals depending on the sex and number of birds listening to them, e.g. a rooster responds to a predator image by giving an alarm call, but calls much more if hens are present. This "audience effect" exemplifies subtlety in communication previously thought restricted to more advanced organisms. In short, Professor Marler's research on bird song has led to fundamental insights into the principles of neurobiology of memory and learning and into the importance of social and auditory experiences in shaping communicative skills. It is valued by investigators in such disparate fields as linguistics, child development, speech and hearing, neuroscience, learning theory, developmental biology, ecology and animal behavior.

Charles R. Goldman, Thomas W. Shoener and Shang Fa Yang,
Announcement of the 53rd Annual UC-Davis Faculty Research Lecturer, Peter Marler's "From the Heart or From the Head? Reflections on the Sounds of Animals."

In one way or another, all official and liberal science defends wage slavery, whereas Marxism has declared relentless war on that slavery. To expect science to be impartial in a wage-slave society is as foolishly naïve as to expect impartiality from manufacturers on the question of whether workers' wages ought not to be increased by decreasing the profits of capital.

V.I. Lenin

A Visit to Lenin's Tomb

Call it nostalgia, call it the weak remembrance of love, but the pop of the Velcro fasteners as the Mausoleumist's hands released them always afforded Vladimir Ilyich the muted flicker of remembered pleasure. Still, in general, he disliked innovations, and his pleasure was always somewhat despoiled by his longing for the old laces, those loose knots that a living hand was forced to caress, to linger over as each one was untied. The attention, even if it was to his backside, brought a pink warmth to the constant Mausoleum Spring of 15 1/2 degrees centigrade, and a subdued sweetness to his cogitations. Not that it mattered all that much, the latex gloves, introduced long before the Velcro, being the closet he ever got to the blood-heat of a human hand. For contact with Mobile Incarnates, a.k.a. M.I.s, he had long since accommodated himself to only receiving the uncertain radiations of their curious, stupefied gazes — not much veneration now — and to hearing the mindless repetitive jabber of the bourgeois tourists' misinformed historical musings. What did they know — this trickle of foreign thrill

seekers — who came with their printed tourguides to gape at a relic — of the agony of exile and repression, of the constant terror that Russia always spawned in her children? Once there were thousands, the party faithful, the proletariat, the narod, the true believers, waiting silently in the sub-zero cruelty of Moscow's winter, stomping their feet in blackened packed layers of snow, and lining up in columns that snaked across the entire immensity of Red Square, spreading from dawn to dusk, as gray and as persistent as the crushing weather.

The team of Mausoleumists finished undressing Comrade Lenin, examining the body for discolorations and corruption, while making the usual jokes about the irony of his Mr. Monopoly attire. They unwrapped the rubber bandages. Then with thin scalpels, they cleared the slits arranged on the abdomen, shoulders, thighs, back, palms and on the webs between the fingers and the toes. These incisions allowed the epidermis to more readily accept the preserving marinade. They checked the placement of the glass eyes and the sutures sewing the eyelids and mouth closed. One of the Mausoleumists holds a clipboard, which contains a long list of procedures. The scientists are efficient. Old hands at this task, they are the loyal holdovers of the Soviet regime that is now dead, and unlike its founder, rotting in the aftermath of hooliganism and lawless black market capitalism. After the completion of each task, the technicians repeat its name, and the Mausoleumist with the clipboard crisply answers “Da!”

In the beginning, Vladimir Ilyich loathed these ministrations, but now he has come to look forward to them, not so much for the sensation, which is vague to non-existent, but because they mark the passage of time. The relic is attended to bi-weekly for “spot checks” as the Mausoleumists insouciantly refer to them, but these complete immersions take place only every 18 months. Their regularity keeps Lenin from being entirely swallowed up in the dialectics of eternity, something that he fears and despises, since the visitations of other incorruptables, mostly saints — detested idealists and revisionists — tend to refute his materialistic philosophy. When the Mausoleumists complete the procedures listed on the clipboard, they slip the body, like a gigantic white fish into a tank of “balsam,” the name that they use to refer to the mixture of 240 liters of glycerin, 110 kilograms of potassium acetate, 150 liters of distilled water and — as a disinfectant — a 1 to 2 percent solution of quinine chloride. The laboratory, as well as Comrade Lenin's relic, unlike the perfumed bodies of the saintly incorruptables, reeks with the effluvia of this mixture, and the Mausoleumists, conscious of its toxic effects, work quickly to conclude their tasks. Besides, what worldly honors, which are, in any case, as defunct now as the Soviets, could possibly compensate these compromised scientists for the sweating nightmares they suckle every night, when the phantasm of a single housefly slips under the glass to destroy their entire complicated empire of inertia. Like Lenin, they want out, so when they finish, they feel a nervous relief as they leave their great fish floating in its temperature controlled fluidic realm, and ascend, somewhat like divers themselves, in the creaking bell of the elevator, back to the surface world of the sarcophagus.

But the Mausoleumists, despite three-quarters of a century of Soviet-style communism, are still prisoners of wage-slave scientific precepts. As they ascend to the so-called world

of the living, they do not leave “the object,” as they refer to Comrade Lenin, drifting alone and oblivious in his decay-deceiving emollients. No matter that they have removed the brain, buttered it with formalin and alcohol, divided into blocks and set it into paraffin. No matter that they have sliced those blocks into 30,963 sections and have issued reports, reeking as one revisionist biographer puts it “of political obedience and predetermination.” The object is more than just another of the everlasting dead. It is alive, but alive in a way that the culturally deluded scientists can scarcely imagine. True, from a strictly materialist point of view, purportedly scientific language such as “V.I.’s brain possessed such a degree of organization that even during illness, despite much damage, it continued to function on a very high level,” would seem to be as patently absurd as the effusive Bolshevik epithet “Lenin is more alive than all the living.” There were, in fact, phases of Lenin’s own development in which such assertions would have been recognized as being quite pukey and would have been mercilessly dissected as such. But times, even times awash in historical imperatives, as Lenin is beginning to imperfectly understand, change, although the object apparently doesn’t. In certain apostate enclaves of the psychode, these statements are more true than any revolutionary patterer could possibly fathom. Little did they know, those industrious bemedaled heroes of Soviet Science, as they dutifully dissected the icon’s gray matter, that those little sections, which they were comparing to heaps of other merely run-of-the mill genius brains, still had sentience residing in them. As the Marxist researchers peered into their microscopes and made their meticulous observations and analyses, Comrade Lenin, somewhat less monolithic in his beliefs, having had some time and some timelessness to mull over the matter, was, is, making his own observations and analyses. His conclusion, based on his own personal experience was, is, this: that M.I.s are absurdly arrogant in assuming that theirs is the only conscious reality, or even the most influential one. These days, Comrade Lenin, both as the big fish floating in the Mausoleum’s underground aquarium, and as the multiple entities shuffled about on microscope slides at *The Institute of the Brain*, is still discovering the intricacies of consciousness.

This cud is actually something that Lenin had been forced to begin chewing somewhat before the psuedo-scientific pronouncement of his death. The ruminations began on the day that Fanny Kaplan’s, or someone’s, bullet, deftly slipped between his larynx and gullet on what Professor Rozanov referred to as its “unusual fortunate path.” The cunning and soon to be expelled Rozanov was perfectly correct in stating that “had the bullet deviated by one millimeter in either direction, Vladimir Ilyich would of course be dead.” But the use of the words “fortunate” and “dead” were perhaps hyperbole. The bullet, guided by something more than mere chance, had given direction to a process that was already sprouted by the hereditary atheroma which was hardening the large vessels of Vladimir Ilyich’s heart. Processes of transmutation as profound as Comrade Lenin’s are conceived of years, sometimes centuries, before their fruition. And yet, in hindsight, it is easy to trace their antecedents: the paranoid frenzies, the sensitivity to violins, the nervous rages when another’s footstep squeaked on the floor of his study. These irritations, sentient in their endless provocations, plunged him into fantasies of violence. The premises led to inescapable conclusions. Of course, Lenin was required to exhort his followers to use knives, sticks, knucklebusters, paraffin soaked rags, nails, slabs of gun-cotton, stones, acid *et al* as the tools of their revolutionary dialectic. These provocateurs

were necessary if the calcification of the blood vessels in the brain were to creep, like stone roots, into the corpse-strewn soil of the Other world. This “vermicelli,” as the Bolsheviks named that endless tangle of trivial administrative affairs that awaited Lenin each day in the interminable hours of the Sovnarkom meetings began to fray into the whole permeable corpus of Russia. Given these circumstances, how could Vladimir Ilyich, their progenitor and victim, help but to embark simultaneously on a course of ossification and disbursal? Naturally, as this process evolved into the medically identifiable symptoms of strokes, the oscillations between the desire to retire to a life of rabbit breeding and mushroom farming and the compulsion to foment a worldwide Marxist revolution — with himself as the sole Dictator of the Proletariat — were gyrating madly beyond the bounds of any strictly materialist Weltanschauung. The wildly staring eyes evidenced in the photographs of the last stages of his earthly illness are more than sufficient testimony for these raging internal conflicts. A very strange and very violent stalemate was rigidifying the newly born Soviet State, so that even in its infancy, it began to exhibit the petulant paroxysms of advanced senility. Is it any wonder then, that the Politburo turned its collective cataracted eyes to a mummy for its inspiration? Comrade Lenin had apparently obtained what he had most desired, and yet, as we shall see, as he floated naked and perforated in his tank of toxic chemicals, the Commissar of Commissars was anything but pleased.

From west to east, from Petrograd to Vladivostok, contrary to the movement of the sun, a new wind is sweeping across the immense horizons of the illimitable, metaphysical Russias. The rabbits, forgetting for a moment their vulnerability, stand on their strong hind legs, and raise themselves up into this freshness, twitching their noses delightedly. In the shadows, mycelial armies clone fibers of timeless fantasies stolen from the stars. Snowflakes arrest their downward spirals in mid-fall. And Comrade Lenin, a fish in the underground, adrift in the stasis of apostate dialectics, although he has 30,943 superior brains, misses this moment in which time finally blossoms.

Fowl Play

On stage everything is observed, every movement is deliberately made visible to the audience. One's most private thoughts are expressed in solos and soliloquies, whose intimate envelope is enlarged to include all eavesdroppers. The secret assignations of lovers are illuminated in cunning ways that express darkness, but manifest light. Whispers are heard at the very back of the hall. The least significant member of the chorus moves on the stage in a crossfire of eyes. In this way, life's theater differs from stagecraft, and this difference is exacerbated in times of war. War is a drama of the highest stakes played out on continents with populations, in which most players are anonymous. Because death hovers so near, the visible no longer takes center stage, and the disguised, the clandestine, the invisible, its hands as dark as they are bloody, douses both footlights and houselights and stalks the players with predatory intentions. People hide, disguise themselves, and bury their movements in camouflage. In an atmosphere secluding all but the most explosive displays, it was easy to conceal oneself. All one has to do is to appear ordinary, and as one who was extraordinary at display, for Grace, displaying the ordinary was easy. The former *prima ballerina assoluta* simply adopted the most conspicuous of any given available disguise, and slipped across Germany, seen,

but never noticed. Had she traveled with an entourage, had she been draped in the fiery costumes of Bakst, had she promenaded to the blare of Stravinsky's rhythms, but had posed no threat nor offered any booty, she might have still been ignored. Concealed by the war itself, which captured everyone's attention but obscured their vision, Grace infiltrated the various theaters of operation as obscure as smoke in smokiness. It was not as if the conflict were some allegorical figure marching through the skies, wrapped in the flag of this or that warring nation. No, the war was a fist-sized storm raging in every individual's heart, a noxious vapor obliterating every external color, and forcing one to live in fearful circumspection. In such a cloud, the trick of invisibility was facile. Act preoccupied, project a bit of purpose, a bit of wildness, a bit of danger, a bit of unfulfillable need, and above all don't stop to ask or to answer questions. Simply move, and keep moving. Thus Grace moved north towards Russia.

The ballerina's crossing of the eastern front, unlike her penetration of the lines on the Somme, was not punctuated by exploding mines and rampaging offensives. She simply flowed with the disintegration. Loosely guarded prisoner's of war, the wounded, uprooted villagers, displaced Jews, officers without troops, troops without officers, horses without riders, monks on pilgrimage to God knows what relic or icon, crippled children, drunk moujiks — here was an immense cast made up almost entirely of extras, following the loosely woven and disastrous narrative of the whole wild futility of Russia. Russia, the theater of perpetual dissolution, an enormous, amorphous monster whose many legs traveled no where, whose many eyes were blind to everything except misery and miracle, whose great gut, always starving, could manage to eat nothing but its own children. Grace had a curious, desultory feeling of inertia, even though she was on the move, the feeling that she was a perpetual refugee from heaven, having settled by some bizarre metaphysical accident on earth. As soon as she crossed the frontier, she knew that she was not only in a different place, but a different time. Everything here was played out on the vastest possible scale. Everything was wrapped in a ragged and beggarly version of eternity. This country, as she, and every Russian knew, was not a political entity, it was a state of the soul, a dreamspace which spread out indiscriminately in a mass of primitive contradictions — ignorance/sagacity, splendor/squalor, drunkenness/mystical frenzy, miracle and the finest and most excruciatingly dreadful grind of the mundane. Russia embodied all the immense and unfathomable idiocy of her wayward humans who were scattered like dots on a plain that stretched for more than a day's journey of the sun itself from the Baltic to the Bearing Sea. The visions Grace had of the Alma, the erotic opium deliriums of the *Ballet Russes*, the madness of war, the insensible weirdness of psychotic dreams — all these, compared to Russia, seemed pale, linear and orderly. To say that the madness of Russia was a result of the war was to overestimate the effect that humans have upon the soul. War, even so great a war, is a conditional and impermanent state of insanity, but Russia, Russia was the unfathomable home of irrationality itself, its boundaryless domain squeezed down into the crumpled space of every Russian's heart. This was a place that was always dying, but could never die, because its death throes were a part of the very wellsprings of the cosmos, the winter snow that made for spring's fresh green. The war's madness was enormous, even mind-numbing in its inestimable miseries, but Russia's miseries were infinite.

The Germans were appalled. On the eastern front, they were attacked — if that was the word — by armies, which cringed at the sight of aeroplanes, thinking them the fingers of God. Men went into battle carrying sticks, because the chaos of the world's most intricate and inefficient bureaucracy could not provide them with guns. They walked unarmed into machine gun fire, sometimes in rows, as docile as children lined up for communion. As she crossed over, Grace heard the German officers complain about piles of Russian corpses stacked so high in front of their positions that the troops had to detonate the wall with explosives in order to shoot the newly advancing hoards. The craziness of the war merely intensified the craziness that Russia had been indulging in for centuries and had telescoped it down to a finite timespan. The Great War's violence was but one colorful adjective clinging to an interminable history of ponderous nouns. The novel of Russia would wind on and on and the war would only exist in it as a few tattered, wailing words.

Indiscriminate killing, even in Russia, exacerbates indiscriminating behavior. The primal blood-odor of the war rekindled old religious animosities. Jews who had escaped the pogroms of the previous two decades were driven from villages that they had occupied for centuries and were left to wander the roads or to hide in forests or marshes. The Old Believer schismatics from Peter's state-directed orthodox reforms were once more hunted down and persecuted. In these days, as in those predicted in the apocalypse, humans tormented humans with a spiritual fervor, proving once again, that in the theater of the world, even the oldest plot lines can be resurrected, and the old knife of vengeance, no matter how long dormant in its sheathe, can be whetted once more on the throats of the unrighteous. The country that spawned religious sects with the fury of an enormous insect queen, likewise pullulated the ferment of religious hatred and murder. Grace breathed this atmosphere as she did in her first moment on earth, and sought refuge here from the glamour of her old life of fame and luxury as an infection yearns for a cauterizing flame.

After weeks on the road, travelling far beyond the blood-beaten tracts, Grace stumbled upon a monastery of the Old Believers. She was disguised as a wounded and horseless cavalry officer, and as she approached the crude wooden church on foot, she assumed, as best she could, the aristocratic air of military strength and authority, an attribute she hoped would come with the uniform. As she traveled, she always expected and was prepared for danger, but she was not prepared for what awaited her here. Somehow the inhabitants of the monastery intuited her arrival, and the old Abbot, dressed in his vestments, came down the rough-hewn wooden steeples of the church to greet her. Behind him, following meekly, like those *moujiks* who walked into German enfilade fire, came a double row of black clad, silent monks. All of them looked to be at least a century old, white-bearded, heavy-browed, with drawn up cowls and wearing habits festooned with the instrument of Christ's torture. They all wore the face of Adam, having survived the millennia of disasters that succeeded the primal disaster: the expulsion of The Fall. They had observed vows of silence for years, and all were silent now, as they bowed to the ground before her, their venerable foreheads pressed to venerable earth. The sight sent a shiver of Otherness down her spine. Here was old Holy Russia, living in the past, but about to be disrupted by the Now.

And yet, for a moment, for a day, Grace thought that she'd found a refuge. Maybe this was the place where the Alma was trying to lead her. For in all the violence of the war and of Russia's long history, this place, Russian to the core, but another Russia, one of ethereal calm, exuded the magnitude of peace. Peace lived here in the very ancientness of the trees, in the rigidity of long sworn vows, in the endless repetitions of silent prayer. Yet for Grace, it was a peace that came with the price of deception. Because no women, not even female animals, not even cows, milk goats or hens, were ever allowed to pollute this sanctity, and tempt its denizens to a second disgraceful expulsion. So, Grace was forced to maintain her disguise as a man. The anomaly of deceit in a place dedicated to the ultimate search for truth galled her conscience. And yet, she could not entirely shake the feeling that deceit, as a part of the cosmos, had a home here, too. She longed to reveal her secret, but, as things turned out, there wasn't time. The place was bliss, but not eternal bliss. Grace had only been in this blessed sanctuary for a week when a terrible visitation descended. The darkness of the predawn mist-laden air was torn to tatters by an invading force — an orthodox Archamandrite empowered with the weapons of fifty mounted Cossacks swept through the forest and pounced on the defenseless enclave. Evidently the Archamandrite and grown tired of laying communion wafers on starving and lying tongues and had hooked up with this band of renegade horseman who, for their part, had grown weary of being the targets of the superior German guns. A few words of exhortation from the scriptures had sent this whirlwind in motion to find and prey upon an easy fodder. Inspired by holy precepts, the invaders drove the monks from their quarters, dug up the graves of the saints, broke into coffins, smashed bones, icons, relics, chalices, raised pine tar torches and burned the place to ashes. Grace, still wary and lightning-reflexed from weeks in war zones and years of ballet training, had fled into the forest at the first tremor of trouble, where she hid, watching the atrocities by the great swaying candelabras of ancient burning trees. The Old Bishop they stripped naked and clamped in irons. No matter that he has well past 90, they lashed him to a horse, and fulminated that he was to be sent into exile from Earth and from the flesh. "The sentence," thundered the red-faced Archamandrite, "is death by torture from God's elements." Then he slapped the mare solemnly on her white-starred croup with the flat of his sword, making blood jump where it cut her hide, and sending her scampering terrified through the forest, her haggard rider flopping as helplessly on her back as a rag doll. And so the old Abbot, silent as ever, as ever, true to his vows, and dignified in his naked indignity, was brutally whisked away.

Grace had seen plenty of madness, but this was Russian madness. She fled deeper into the forest, the flames of the dying hermitage fading behind her as she moved into the heavy and damp darkness of night's last, fatal gasp. After a few hours, or was it days, she came upon a flock of chickens — and not just a few chickens — hundreds of chickens, chickens of all shapes and sizes, chickens of every variety and breed. Grace proceeded through this density of chickens as if she were being led through a chicken labyrinth to the hearth of the chicken god. And finally, she found him — the chicken god — a hermit of the Old Belief, in a hut, gathering eggs that he himself would never eat to give to the monastery that was no longer there. He did not speak. He did not hinder her from speaking. She spoke. Her speech was a kind of drunken speech, a drunken speech

in a drunken country. It was a guarded speech, as speeches in repressive countries tend to be, a speech with many layers of disguise. It was a guarded drunken speech made by a Russian cavalry officer who was anything but what he seemed to be, a speech made to a man who seemed as authentic as the trees, a holy man venerated by an immense flock of chickens. The speech lasted a few minutes or a few hours. The speech perhaps contained the secrets of the universe, but perhaps not. After she finished, they sat silently. The sun set. The chickens sat on the ground, on the hut, in the trees. Everything grew black. Grace and the hermit went into the hut. He was a tall man, and had to stoop. She thought for the briefest flash that he was a man not accustomed to stooping, she thought, in fact, that she had somehow seen him before, but she let the thought subside. Humble as he was, to her, in his very stooping, he seemed like royalty. But she had spent her life travelling among royalty of a different kind, and this world was as foreign to her as hers no doubt was to him. Inside, the hut was nearly empty, except for an icon and its candle, an uncovered pine plank bench, a crude oven, and a few sickly chickens. The ceiling was low. The one tiny window was covered with a thick scarcely translucent material, like the dried and stretched bull bladders that covered the holes in the *izba* she lived in as a child. But she couldn't imagine this man causing the least harm to anything, let alone slaughtering a bull. The hermit stooped inside his hut, by pushing his head forward from his broad shoulders, as a chicken might stoop to enter a low-roofed coop. The hermit, his large hands calm in the shadow of the flame, lit his single candle. Grace and the hermit ate black bread, spreading crumbs for the chickens. They drank the water of dew-wells and frost-melt from mossy wooden cups whose rims had been pecked rough by thirsty beaks. She lay on the pine plank, he on the hard dirt floor. She slept. She did not dream.

At dawn, light needled through the trees, slipped through the wide chinks of the hut's logs, and faintly crimsoned the stretched bull bladder. She opened her eyes, and went out blinking into the light. It was pink. Pink dew jeweled the ground and jeweled too the pink chickens, feathers and eggs, which were everywhere. Grace could feel her heart beating as if newly awakened. Perhaps now she was free. Everything was sweetened by the pink light. But as the sun climbed, not everything was as it seemed to be. The chickens rose from their roosts and began a hullabaloo of searching, scratching and calling. They turned over leaves, found grubs, tugged at unwilling worms. The hermit, stooping, came out of the low, black hut. He spoke. In the midst of these hundreds of squabbling chicken voices, his lone, low human voice said, "You are not a Russian cavalry officer." She froze. "You are Grace Maryanka, the *prima ballerina assoluta* of the *Ballet Russes*."

The *anahata* can never be deceived.

Condensation

In the morning, there is dew on the grass.
This is the Real, the thing worms dream about,
Now dampening the laces of our shoes.

Events of the past, events that will come to pass,

Lie magically close together in the mind,
A differential of two planes of pressure,

Real and unreal, moisture and empty vapor,
Style and content, atmosphere and dirt.
Worms sense this pressure as the eyes sense light.

The sun ascends and dries the tears of earth.