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MAKING THE SOVIET INTELLIGENTSIA: UNIVERSITIES AND INTELLECTUAL LIFE UNDER STALIN AND KHRUSHCHEV

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Khrushchevian principles of favoring the admission to higher education of people with work experience remained in a softened and perhaps more effective form until the collapse of the USSR, while student construction brigades became such an established part of late Soviet life that efforts to revive them have emerged in the Putin era.[108]

The revolutionary impulses of the late 1950s had a wider basis than the quixotic mind of Khrushchev, yet in practice they discredited themselves in the eyes of many members of educated society. In addressing this unanticipated outcome, it is worth stressing the challenges the reformist leadership faced. In articulating policies toward higher education and youth as in other areas, Khrushchev worked from the notion of a second, de-Stalinizing Cultural Revolution. During the Stalin period, higher education was a central part of cultural construction, but it had also become an engine of social stratification by serving the interests and feeding the social identities of Soviet educated society. Efforts to recreate a revolutionary model of higher learning and to merge educated elites into a mythologized vision of the toilers flew in the face of Stalin-era social interests and values. In this context, it is hardly surprising that the politics of Cultural Revolution, even if pursued in a surprisingly tentative form, produced confrontation with parts of university communities and indeed with educated society as a whole. The Soviet intelligentsia was a creation of the Stalin era, and its tenacity in the face of post-Stalin reformism should be seen as part of the checkered process of grappling with the legacy of the past that was so central to the Khrushchev era.

[108] A. V. Pyzhikov, "Reformirovanie sistemy obrazovaniia v SSSR v period 'ottepeli' (1953–1964 gg.)," *Voprosy Istorii*, no. 9 (2000): 102.

CHAPTER 7

Uncertain terrain
The intelligentsia and the Thaw

In 1959 Les' Taniuk, a first-year student at the Kyiv Theater Institute, reflected on the Soviet leader in his diary. Taniuk "truthfully like[d] Khrushchev and the principal things that he is doing," but also had grave reservations about the first secretary. He was troubled by Khrushchev's personality, "his talkativeness, the universalism of his advice and all-knowingness, his lack of *great* culture." The first secretary was only concerned with material ends, "means of production," and "bases," rather than "deep values of the spirit" and "conscience." All of this had degraded the Soviet people, which had freed itself from the fear of the Stalin era only to "become petty-bourgeois [*mishchanity*]." Evidently distasteful in its own terms, the neglect of culture under the first secretary's rule threatened to lead back to the "restoration" of Stalinism. Taniuk pinned his hopes for the future on "culture itself," for only in it could "moral criteria be preserved."[1]

Taniuk's comments anticipate a longstanding scholarly consensus on the place of "great culture" for the Khrushchev period. Literature and the arts became a national obsession in the period as writers and artists pushed for freer expression and young poets subverted Soviet aesthetic traditions, appearing in front of electric crowds that filled soccer stadiums. For its part, the Khrushchev leadership looked on nervously, alternatively supporting and attacking these new voices in the creative sphere. Scholarly accounts often present the culture of the Thaw as "proto-politics," in which intellectuals and their supporters sought to "create a new language of civic culture," a "framework of social and moral responsibility, truth and sincerity."[2]

[1] Les' Taniuk, *Tvory v 60-i tomakh. Tom IV: Schodennyky 1959–1960 rr.* (Kyiv: Al'terpres, 2004), 60.
[2] Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2009), 162 and Stephen Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw: Experience and Memory in Moscow's Arbat* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 174–210.

In such a reading, creative intellectuals and their audiences embraced a new model of citizenship as an effort to overcome the heritage of Stalinism and prevent its reoccurrence, an agenda that inevitably drew them into conflict with Soviet officials within and outside the cultural world who derived their authority and livelihoods from the Stalinist order.[3] Adding to this break with the regime, in most accounts, were the widening intellectual horizons that Soviet thinkers experienced through contact with the outside world, and especially with the USSR's essential constitutive Other, the capitalist West. In recent years, a burgeoning literature has complicated these assumptions about Thaw culture, for instance by stressing the rifts within the Soviet creative professions and the complicated reactions of Soviet audiences to the cultural innovations of the period.[4] And yet the fundamental interpretation still holds that the politics of educated society were about "de-Stalinization," the passage from one epoch to another. From this fundamental temporal divide flow several binary oppositions: old and new, false and authentic, stale and fresh, and evil and good.

Taniuk also points to a different aspect of the Thaw that is less often explored by scholarship – the longstanding *mission civilisatrice* that dominated Soviet intellectual life. During the Thaw as before, Soviet culture was geared toward civilizing the "petty-bourgeois" Soviet masses. For Taniuk as for the student rebels discussed in Chapter 5, intelligentsia culture seemed all the more urgent in the disorienting post-Stalin era as only it could overcome Stalinism, which was a moral failing predicated on a lack of enlightenment. Taniuk's invocation of the intelligentsia's cultural mission was not easily reducible to the binary oppositions implicit in the "proto-political" view outlined above. Indeed, the political implications of Taniuk's musings were anything but clear. If intellectuals were the carriers of culture and all that was thought to come with it, what attitude should they take to political leaders who seemed to have little respect for such matters? Khrushchev, a reformer but also widely seen at the time as hostile to intellectuals, posed a particular conundrum in this regard. Taniuk highlighted this by depicting the first secretary as a threat to post-Stalin development while expressing support for "the principal things he is doing."

[3] Particularly influential accounts in this idiom are Stephen Cohen, "The Stalin Question since Stalin," in Stephen Cohen (ed.), *An End to Silence: Uncensored Opinion in the Soviet Union: From Roy Medvedev's Underground Magazine 'Political Diary'* (New York: Norton, 1982), 22–50; Priscilla Johnson McMillan, *Khrushchev and the Arts: The Politics of Soviet Culture, 1962–1964* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1965).

[4] Historians who have forced reconsideration of the Thaw include Stephen Bittner, Susan E. Reid, Miriam Dobson, Polly Jones, Kristin Roth-Ey, Eleanory Gilburd and Denis Kozlov; their works are cited throughout this chapter and the book.

This chapter focuses on the place of the intelligentsia in the Thaw by examining student experiences of two important historical developments: the cultural debates of the period and the opening of the country to the capitalist West. Following a theme of Chapter 5, it presents the Thaw as a development which was intricately connected to social identities.[5] For students, the overarching concern of the Thaw was a moral revival of post-Stalin Soviet society, but they viewed this task through the prism of the culture-carrying Soviet intelligentsia. The conflation of the political task of overcoming Stalinism and the social identities that had along accompanied belonging to the intelligentsia – among them a commitment to learning and "culturedness" along with a consciousness of the prestige that was attached to these pursuits – shaped much of student politics in the 1960s. This connection was at the core of the Thaw and provided it with its distinctive mindset and intellectual framework. Nevertheless, the social questions raised by identification with the intelligentsia also created problems for students embracing the Thaw agenda of renewing Soviet society.

In just twenty years

The Thaw emerged during a period of historical optimism. The dawn of the 1960s saw a kind of revolutionary dreaming that had not held central stage for decades. Khrushchev announced that the "period of extensive construction of communism" had begun and that members of the younger generation would live to see communism in their lifetimes. A new party program elucidated the path to the future: Soviet society had finally surpassed the stage of the dictatorship of the proletariat, during which a conventional state was needed to repress remnants of the hostile classes. Rapidly freeing itself of social contradictions, the Soviet order was becoming a "state of all the people" in which the population could begin to administer themselves en route to the withering away of the state: "Each Soviet person must become an active participant in the administration of societal affairs!" Khrushchev proclaimed.[6] Rather than being a propaganda slogan alone, this vision

[5] The need to bring social groups into discussions of "de-Stalinization" is noted in Miriam Dobson, "The Post-Stalin Era: De-Stalinization, Daily Life, and Dissent," *Kritika*, 12 (2011): 912.

[6] N. S. Khrushchev, *An Account to the Party and the People: Report of the C.C. C.P.S.U. to the 22nd Party Congress of the Party, October 17, 1961* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), 97–103. See also Alexander Titov, "The 1961 Party Programme and the Fate of Khrushchev's Reforms," in Melanie Ilič and Jeremy Smith (eds.), *Soviet State and Society under Nikita Khrushchev* (London: Routledge, 2009), 8–25.

found concrete application in reforms aiming to invest power in societal organizations (including the ossified Soviets and trade unions) at the expense of state bureaucracies and to shift work in such disparate spheres as policing, legal procedure, and party administration to (generally unpaid) volunteers.[7]

The leap to the future came via a detour to the troubled past. After five years of deafening silence, the party returned to the topic of the cult of personality at the proceedings of the Twenty-Second Party Congress. In contrast to the secret speech, the congress and limited discussions of it were conveyed in Soviet media; moreover, Stalin's name and image were excised from Soviet life and his remains removed from the mausoleum on Red Square. For all its decisiveness, however, the new wave of de-Stalinization produced far less upheaval in the universities than it had five years before. Critical discussions about the past and historical responsibility did occur in the dormitories and hallways, but with scattered exceptions, they did not overwhelm the university's public spaces as they had five years before.[8] In part, the more subdued response to the second round of de-Stalinization reflected the party's clearer articulation of its objectives. Gone were the secret speech's confusing presentation of Stalin and its vague definition of the limits of permitted criticism; this time, the congress made clear that de-Stalinization as a process was complete and Leninist norms of party life fully restored.[9] This shift was crucial in the universities: as discussed in Chapter 5, many young dissenters in the universities during the first wave of de-Stalinization had seen their actions as support for reformism within the Soviet leadership rather than as outright opposition to it. This brand of loyal – and sometimes naïve – extrapolation of party pronouncements was much harder to articulate in the firmer political situation of 1961.

The less heated responses of students to the second round of de-Stalinization also reflected changes in the student body. In 1956, students had reached adulthood during the Stalin period; they had a fresh memory of his rule; and, in many cases, they still maintained faith in the leader when Khrushchev attacked him. None of these conditions applied to the cohorts enrolled in the early 1960s.[10] This does not mean that this later generation

[7] A. V. Pyzhikov, *Khrushchevskaia ottepel', 1953–1964* (Moscow: OLMA-PRESS, 2002), 136, 246–51.

[8] For specific cases of student dissent related to the congress, see RGASPI-M f. 1, op. 46, d. 331, ll. 85, 120–25.

[9] N. S. Shevtsova (ed.), *XXII s'ezd Kommunisticheskoi partii sovetskogo soiuza – s'ezd stroitelei kommunizma; lektsii dlia studentov gosudarstvennykh universitetov* (Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1963), 20.

[10] Igor' Volgin, "Na ploshchadi Maiakovskogo materializovalos' vremia," in L. V. Polikovskaia (ed.), *My predchuvstvie – predtecha – : ploshchad' Maiakovskogo, 1958–1965* (Moscow: "Zvenia," 1997), 37.

was uninterested in the Stalinist past or that it tended to accept the party's account of it uncritically. On the contrary, anti-Stalinism was now *de rigueur* in many student circles as it had not been five years before, as clearly illustrated by the appearance of anti-Stalin themes in the repertoire of popular student songs in the early 1960s.[11] However, the explosiveness of the Stalin question had shrunk while confidence in the future had grown. A 1961 sociological study that aimed at discovering Soviet youth's view of itself – one of the first of its kind in the USSR – discovered a "highly positive emotional-psychological tone" among the vast majority of young people surveyed, students included.[12] The "cult of personality" appeared a thing of the past or, at least, would soon become one.[13] A French graduate student returned from a trip to the USSR with the impression that students believed that the "progress and advances" after 1953 were there for good and that the Stalin era was now a "closed book."[14]

Paradoxically, the students' overarching optimism about post-Stalin advances coincided with emerging disdain for the very figure that had done most to bring about them about. Many students agreed with Taniuk in supporting the general line of Khrushchev's policies while holding the leader in disregard. As Chapter 6 demonstrated, the party-state's embrace of social affirmative action through education, and the populist rhetoric that accompanied it, was deeply unpopular among university communities. More broadly, the first secretary himself, an impulsive, earthy, and poorly educated worker, came across as an embodiment of the party's disrespect for intelligentsia status.[15] A French student who spent a year studying at MGU was shocked by "the scornful gibes and the 'aesthetic' disgust that the very name of Khrushchev evoked in young people"; he was "a 'third rater,' a 'swindler,' the incarnation of rudeness and

[11] See for instance V. F. Lur'e (ed.), *Fol'klor i kul'turnaia sreda GULAGA* (St. Petersburg: Sovmestnoe izdanie Fonda "Za razvitie i vyzhivanie chelovechestva" i Izdatel'stva "Kraia Moskvy," 1994), 63–68.

[12] B. A. Grushin, *Chetyre zhizni Rossii v zerkale obschestvennogo mneniia: ocherki massovogo soznaniia Rossii vo vremena Khrushcheva, Brezhneva, Gorbacheva, i El'tsina*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress-Traditsiia, 2001), 189–95; Pyzhikov, *Khrushchevskaia ottepel'*, 291.

[13] A telling indication of this change was the stress on the recovery and reintegration of victims of terror in literary works of the period. See Polly Jones, "Memories of Terror or Terrorizing Memories? Terror, Trauma and Survival in Soviet Culture of the Thaw," *Slavonic and East European Review*, 86 (2008): 346–71.

[14] "Interview with a French History Graduate Student back from Moscow," BR # 1–60, 4 January 1960, RFE/RL, HIA, 529/7, 5.

[15] Attitudes toward Khrushchev among intelligentsia warmed after his removal, which helped to obscure the gulf between them during his rule. William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: Norton, 2003), 629–33.

disgrace."[16] Capturing this impression was one episode at MGU in 1961; students watching Khrushchev's televised speech following talks with Kennedy in Vienna broke into laughter when the first secretary spoke about the German Bundesrat, pronouncing it *Bunde-srat'* ("Shit Office").[17] In the larger scheme of things, Khrushchev's personality was no laughing matter, and not only because of its potential ramifications for the Berlin Crisis. If the path to a humanized Soviet Union depended on civilized behavior, the leader's lack of it was a serious matter indeed.

This loss of respect for Khrushchev – and the intelligentsia attitudes that underpinned it – tainted students' attitudes toward the lofty plan to build communism in twenty years. Despite the widespread appeal of a reformed socialism in the late 1950s, students' responses to the new line on communist construction were quite restrained, both in the capitals and in the provinces. At SGU, the mandatory social science classes and lectures on the new congress were decidedly humdrum events, particularly in the less ideologically driven exact science departments; one student allegedly opined that it was "pointless to read lectures about the XXII Congress to mathematicians, read them to the historians."[18] Questions posed to propagandists sent to explain the party's vision for the future suggest that many young people saw it as fantastical and unscientific: one asked, "Where will the funds come from to construct communism given the constant struggle between two systems?"[19] Just as damaging to student morale as the confusing picture of the communist future was the regime's failure to provide students with concrete outlets to help bring it about. Policies meant to presage the "state of all the people" in the universities were largely uninspiring. An example was the "self-service" (*samoobsluzhivanie*) campaign, which transferred everyday tasks in the universities from paid employees to the students themselves. Ostensibly an experiment in revolutionary practice, self-service was also a barely disguised strategy to humble cocky students, a goal wholly in line with the concurrent experiments with labor projects at the Virgin Lands and elsewhere (see Chapter 6).[20] Cleaning the

[16] "Report by a Frenchman Recently Returned from Moscow," BR # 22–50, 30 September 1958, RFE/RL, HIA, 529/3, 4.

[17] "Some Observations on Life in Moscow," BR # 24–61, 29 August 1961, RFE/RL, HIA, 530/2, 2.

[18] GANISO f. 652, op. 1, d. 4, l. 14. For a meeting on the Party Program at MGU, see David Robert, "Moscow State University," *Survey*, no. 51 (1964): 30.

[19] RGASPI-M f. 1, op. 5, d. 824, ll. 6–7.

[20] For further discussion of *samoobsluzhivanie* and citizen policing, another manifestation of the "state of all the people" in a collegiate context, see Benjamin Tromly, "The Rise and Decline of Soviet Patriotism: University Students in Khrushchev-Era Russia and Ukraine," *Nationalities Papers*, 37 (2009): 299–326.

hallways and operating the cloakrooms did not drum up much enthusiasm for communist construction, perhaps because it served as a reminder that the intelligentsia as a social group was meant to disappear as communism approached.

Khrushchev's culture wars

For growing parts of the student body, then, communist ideology had become unexciting, despite – and perhaps sometimes because of – the fact that it seemed an immutable reality. Culture filled the void. In some ways, Thaw culture constituted a substitute for old-style Komsomol collectivism, to which it indeed bore a family resemblance. For young people engaged in the Thaw, the project of bringing about a moral regeneration of society through culture recreated something like the pathos of creating a new world. The differences between the Thaw and Komsomol activism were overwhelming, however, and one of them deserves particular attention: the reliance of the former on the social construct of intelligentsia. However universal its objectives were, the Thaw was a creation of educated society and deeply connected to its social and cultural attitudes. And if the intelligentsia animated the Thaw, the central questions become how people made claims to belong to this group – and, indeed, how such claims found validation. Two such mechanisms stand out for the student milieu and require discussion: social networks and cultural consumption. As my discussion will make clear, these ways of marking oneself an *intelligent* made the Thaw possible yet also presented their own complications for the project.

The friendship networks of the Thaw were a product of postwar university life. Already during the late Stalin years, students with intellectual proclivities formed friendship groups whose loose and informal nature had contrasted with the official youth collectives, a development exemplified by the BOKS publication discussed in Chapter 1. In the Khrushchev years, these "companies" (*kompaniia*) became important centers of Thaw thinking, particularly in provincial settings far from the concentrated intellectual elites of the capitals.[21] For instance, a group of SGU students which met to read poetry and reflect on paintings gave itself the name VChIN (an acronym

[21] An account of the companies that does not focus on questions of intellectual identities is Juliane Fürst, "Friends in Private, Friends in Public: The Phenomenon of the Kompania among Soviet Youth in the 1950s and 1960s," in Lewis H. Siegelbaum (ed.), *Borders of Socialism: Private Spheres of Soviet Russia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 229–50.

for "all that is interesting"). Highlighting their own intellectual distinction, they wrote a song in which they boasted that they "did not borrow the lightning of their thoughts | from the bookshelves."[22] In the capitals of Moscow and Kyiv, more elaborate companies emerged which brought students into contact with intellectually minded people outside the student milieu. The following description of a company in Moscow conveys a sense of the combination of intellectual concerns, political debate, and socializing in these social groupings: "Old *politzeki* [political prisoners] would be shouting something at young philologists, middle-aged physicists would be locked in hot debates with young poets, and some people I had never met would be doing unrecognizable dance steps to someone's scratched Glenn Miller record."[23] Regardless of their differences, companies were a place for adherents of the Thaw to imagine and even construct in microcosm the future society they desired – one dominated by erudition, truthful talk, and solidarity.

While companies represented distinct social worlds with their own values and habits, it is nonetheless true that university life provided students engaged in the Thaw with significant social space within which to function. As discussed in Chapter 1, the universities provided students with a rich array of cultural activities that had the explicit function of making them *Kulturträger* in the Soviet mold. Culture-building activities took on new urgency with the anticipated approach of communism in the Khrushchev years and the concomitant need to produce "fully and harmoniously developed, spiritually rich, morally clean, and physically strong" individuals.[24] Communist morality, ethics, and aesthetics became ersatz academic disciplines, while Komsomol undertook what one activist called a "crusade for culture," which saw students reading lectures to workers in volunteer "universities of culture" and traveling to distant villages to perform theatrical sketches.[25]

More importantly for the Thaw, the official focus on cultural construction widened the scope for less regimented forms of cultural activity, such as

[22] Vitalii Azef, "'Taina' 42-ei komnaty: odnazhdy v Khrushchevskuiu 'ottepel'," *Sovety: fakty, sobytiia*, 28 April 1991: 3.

[23] Ludmila Alexeyeva and Paul Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation: Coming of Age in the Post-Stalin Era* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990), 84.

[24] These are the words of a participant in an October 1962 Komsomol seminar. RGASPI-M f. 1, op. 5, d. 824, l. 69. See Catriona Kelly, *Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite Culture, and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 313–20 and Deborah A. Field, *Private Life and Communist Morality in Khrushchev's Russia* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2007).

[25] RGASPI-M f. 1, op. 5, d. 1096, l. 119. See also L. G. Dobrovol'skii, "Kurs marksistko-leniskoi etiki i nravstvennoe vospitanie molodezhi," *VVSh*, no. 3 (1962): 67–70.

an array of new youth clubs ("youth initiative groups") with varying focuses and youth cafes where students could spend their evenings listening to poetry and music and take part in more or less organized discussions.[26] These institutions quickly took on a life of their own. In 1963, students at MGU were holding "spontaneously organized disputes" without Komsomol approval; at one of them, a student Glebov was heard criticizing Lenin for "not understanding the revolutionary nature of new forms and methods in art" – and not a single member of the Departmental Komsomol Bureau took him to task, the university's top Komsomol secretary later noted with disgust.[27] For their part, the new student cafes came to develop the reputation among Komsomol leaders as "places for meetings of rogues and for collective drinking binges and debauchery."[28] In short, Khrushchev's goal of Cultural Revolution had the unintended consequence of providing outlets for the cultural initiatives of the Thaw, including those that would run afoul of party authorities.

The consumption of cultural artifacts was another critical building block for the Thaw intelligentsia in the university environment. Shaping what art and literature people should consume and how this was to be done was critical to the Thaw project. This was certainly true of professional producers of culture in the period; for instance, Susan E. Reid has argued that Khrushchev-era Soviet designers and artists championed a "contemporary," moderately modern and internationalist aestheticism, one that they saw as constitutive of their intelligentsia cultural mission.[29] But it is also true that consumers of Thaw culture defined their own rules of evaluating cultural artifacts. Given the importance of written texts, student literary judgment presents itself as a useful case for exploring how cultural consumption reflected intelligentsia identities. Rather than being a simple reflection of personal proclivities, reading was a socially constitutive act through which a future member of the professional strata could make a claim to belong to the intelligentsia. At the same time, the emergence of a Thaw literary canon gave shape to social

[26] A recent account on youth initiative clubs does not focus on the specific intellectual and cultural context of higher education. Gleb Tsipursky, *Having Fun in the Thaw Youth Initiative Clubs in the Post-Stalin Years* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 25–27, 33–36. See praise of the cafes in Saratov and Kharkiv universities in RGASPI-M f. 1, op. 5, d. 802, l. 117.

[27] TsAOPIM f. 6083, op. 1, d. 54, ll. 19–21.

[28] See the minutes of a 1964 Komsomol TsK conference on the struggle against bourgeois ideology among youth. RGASPI-M f. 1, op. 31, d. 975, ll. 79–80.

[29] Susan E. Reid, "Destalinization and Taste, 1953–1963," *Journal of Design History*, 10 (1997): 177–201. The pioneering work on aesthetic taste as a matter of demarking social positions is Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

networks which held in common the Thaw agenda of regenerating Soviet society. In this regard, the Thaw paralleled other student movements of the 1960s around the world in which lists of "required reading" helped to solidify campus opinion and to identify insiders and outsiders.[30]

At the risk of oversimplification, two traits of student literary reception deserve special emphasis. First, in determining what to read and what sense to make of it, students valued innovations in artistic forms of all kinds. To an extent, at work here was a visceral reaction to the "monochrome" character of Soviet culture inherited from the Stalin period; as the young poet Tatiana Zhirmunskaia commented to a foreign visitor in 1965, if ten completely unknown poets put up a sign advertising an evening of poetry, they would be sure to fill a theater.[31] Rather than representing interest in novelty for its own sake, however, finding new forms of expression was critical to the overriding Thaw agenda of correcting the moral deformities of the Stalin period through culture. Only by talking about human problems in a sincere and ethical way, it was believed, could the constrictiveness, emptiness, and cynicism of the existing society be undone.[32] While specifically aimed at the Stalin question, some students saw the new sincere talk in a wider frame as a modern and progressive response to universal human problems. "It is impossible in the century of electronics and the atom bomb to retain previous positions," an MGU student argued; rather, one should "speak about the individual personality and the life that surrounds him with an entirely different language."[33] This statement makes clear the Thaw's connection to a distinctly Soviet understanding of culture – namely, that it constituted an all-embracing pursuit of civilization and progress.

A second pillar of Thaw taste was the paramount attention given to the moral authority of the writer. Stalinism had encouraged an intensely personal relationship between readers and writers, whom Stalin dubbed "engineers of the human soul."[34] Yet Khrushchev-era students diverged from the model

[30] Cf. Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 88–130.

[31] See the account of a meeting with Tatiana Zhirmunskaia in Mihajlo Mihajlov, *Moscow Summer, 1964: A Traveler's Notebook* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965), 48. On "monochrome" culture and its sources, see Stephen Lovell, *The Russian Reading Revolution: Print Culture in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Eras* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 21.

[32] The importance of language to the Thaw is a major theme in Slava Gerovitch, *From Newspeak to Cyberspeak: A History of Soviet Cybernetics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

[33] RGASPI-M f. 1, op. 31, d. 19, l. 46.

[34] See E. A. Dobrenko, *The Making of the State Reader: Social and Aesthetic Contexts of the Reception of Soviet Literature*, trans. Jesse M. Savage (Stanford University Press, 1997), 282–306 and Juliane Fürst, *Stalin's Last Generation: Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 128–34.

Soviet reader in seeing the mark of the true writer not only in truthfulness and moral purpose but also in freethinking and a refusal to compromise one's principles. Indeed, student readers tended to divide contemporary Soviet writers into conformists to be spurned and critical and progressive writers to be applauded, categories that stabilized or shifted with the political situation at any moment. A mass survey of youth reading habits in Leningrad demonstrated that the popularity among students of writers like Vasilii Aksenov, Robert Rozhdestvenskii, and others reached its apex in 1963 when they came under harsh criticism in the central press; students were "taking [them] under protection," the authors of the study posited.[35] And when writers were perceived to fail at truth-telling, criticism could be harsh. One exchange student referred to "top-flight" intellectuals at MGU spurning a leader of the Thaw, Evgenii Evtushenko, for following up "Bab'i Yar," his controversial poem about anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, with a series of "sell out" poems.[36] The paramount role of writers' moral stature in influencing student readers also goes some way in explaining the popularity of writers past and present whose works had been deleted from the Soviet canon and were only beginning to be published in the 1960s. The "password" for entering certain youthful social circles in Moscow during the period was "knowledge of Gumilev, Pasternak, and Mandel'shtam" – all victims of Soviet power.[37] Of course, reading is always a social act, but this was especially crucial for the Thaw in the student milieu. Reading the right works and poems – and having the right kinds of insight about them – showed that one was an insider who carried the progressive culture on which the project of the Thaw was built.

Grabbing hold of the philistines: the radicalization of the student Thaw

Establishing norms of aesthetic appreciation – just like the formation of companies and other social networks described above – was a way for students to embrace the Thaw mission of transforming Soviet society through culture. However, the specific social mechanisms of the Thaw life and the cultural elitism they reflected proved highly divisive when

[35] See a summary of the unpublished study by the staff at the Krupskaia Leningrad State Institute of Culture dated 1 August 1964. RGASPI-M f. 1, op. 46, d. 352, ll. 20–21.

[36] "Moscow Revisited: A Russian-Speaking British Exchange Student's Observations on Soviet Attitudes," BR # 27–63, n. d., RFE/RL, HIA, 530/5, 10.

[37] Bukovskii, "Gaid-park po-sovetski," in Polikovskaia (ed.), *My predchuvstvie – predtecha*, 10. Nikolai Gumilev and Osip Mandel'shtam perished in the Stalinist terror. See below on Boris Pasternak.

students confronted the society over which they sought to establish cultural patronage. The polarizing character of the Thaw's intellectual vanguardism shaped the most famous episode of student protest during the Khrushchev period: the independent poetry readings at Maiakovskii Square in Moscow. The amateur readings began with official blessing in 1958 following a ceremony marking the erection of a statue to the avant-garde communist poet on the square. The free-wheeling events, at which anyone could take the rostrum regardless of professional qualifications, let alone official vetting, quickly became a magnet for young supporters of the Thaw throughout the capital, including some students who had come into conflict with Komsomol in the colleges. Not surprisingly, party authorities put an end to the reading of ideologically suspicious and provocative published and unpublished poems in downtown Moscow. But they reappeared in September 1960 through the initiative of a smaller group of young people from around the capital (according to one recollection, the audience for this second phase of the readings made up fewer than 100 people).[38] For about a year, a remarkable situation prevailed in which young poets read while Komsomol citizen policing forces tried to disrupt the proceedings. This contest for public space was clearly a much more radical endeavor than the usual university politics, even in their most boisterous 1956 form.[39]

In part because of their very public nature, the Maiakovskii Square readings have come to be remembered as a chapter in Soviet dissent – an interpretation with some merit given that several of its participants would come to participate in the human rights movement that emerged roughly five years later. But the poetry readings were in fact more ambivalent in their opposition to Soviet authorities than they are sometimes imagined, especially in their first semi-authorized phase. A variety of motives drew young people to the poetry readings: mere curiosity, a purely aesthetic interest in fin-de-siècle ("Silver Age") poetry, or even naïve hope that a reformist leadership would view the readings as support for the agenda of purging the system of lies and cynicism – a misreading of Khrushchev's intentions that the latter fed with his talk of socialist democracy and attaining communism.[40] To be sure, the activists who spearheaded the second,

[38] Alisa Gadasina, "'Maiakovka' dala nam vnutrennuiu svobodu," in Polikovskaia (ed.), *My predchuvstvie – predtecha*, 103.

[39] V. N. Osipov, "Ploshchad' Maiakovskogo, stat'ia 70-ia," *Grani*, no. 80 (1971): 116. See also Evgenii Shterenfel'd, "Ya vypolnial funktsii okhrannika," in Polikovskaia (ed.), *My predchuvstvie – predtecha*, 121–23.

[40] Leonid Prikhozhan, "Postupilo takoe ukazanie . . .," ibid., 144; Volgin, "Na ploshchadi Maiakovskogo," 41. Liudmila Alexeyeva, *Soviet Dissent: Contemporary Movements for National, Religious, and Human Rights* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1985), 270.

unsanctioned phase of the readings were a more radical lot. Boisterous political discussion emerged at the square. Its most important product was an underground oppositional group that was eventually uncovered by the KGB, bringing about an end to the readings in 1961. The group composed an ideological program founded on internal Marxist critique of Soviet communism discussed as "revisionism" (discussed in Chapter 5). More exceptional for the period was the plan a few participants discussed to assassinate Khrushchev, which a few of them saw as the only way to avert war during the Berlin Crisis.[41] Although this group was small, it is also true that the poetry the young people read at the square, including original works penned for the purpose, was often provocative, to say the least. Yurii Galanksov's "The Human Manifesto," the most notorious original poem performed at the square and which was widely distributed in the *samizdat* networks that grew up around it, called on its listeners:

> Do not believe the ministers, leaders and newspapers!
> Those who are lying face down, rise up!
> You see, there are globules of atomic death
> In the graveyards of the world's eye-sockets.

The determined young people who gathered every week to defend poets such as Galanskov from Komsomol toughs nonetheless presented a more uncertain agenda than the action at the square might suggest. For most of their participants, the goal of the readings was not revolution – indeed, even Galanskov's "Human Manifesto" could appear as a critique of capitalism rather than a call to arms – but the core Thaw project of bringing consciousness to the people. According to one participant's later recollections, the readers at the square "tried somehow to grab hold of the philistines walking past who stopped with their jaws dropping open"; their goal was "to interpret something for them, to convince them of something, to excite them, maybe even to insult them – anything to keep them from being indifferent."[42] Here the project of spurring cultural renewal through finding new means of expression was taken to its extreme, becoming a kind of collective rebuke to society for its lack of enlightenment. This paradoxical attitude underscored a broader dilemma of the student Thaw in the 1960s. The square's activists built on intelligentsia ideals in claiming moral guardianship over the people. At the same time, the Maiakovskii Square activists'

[41] See Anatolii Ivanov, "Gavrilo Printsip naoborot," in Polikovskaia (ed.), *My predchuvstvie – predtecha*, 237–38. These discussions never came close to being acted upon. See Eduard Kuznetsov, "Ya rodilsia na zemle . . .," ibid., 222–23.

[42] Gadasina, "'Maiakovka' dala nam vnutrennuiu svobodu," 102.

bleak reading of Soviet society and its potential for overcoming the Stalinist past led them to a rhetorical radicalism, one that could only isolate its participants from the Soviet order. Indeed, some of the readings' regular participants dropped out of college and adopted a bohemian lifestyle, devoting their time to the square and to late night poetry readings at friends' apartments, often accompanied by heavy drinking and drugs.[43] However the young people's self-imposed isolation should be understood, it certainly aided the regime in its efforts to "expose and ridicule young people who aspire to the role of 'poet-enlighteners' but in reality are ignoramuses and loafers," as Komsomol TsK assigned newspapers to do in the wake of the readings.[44]

With their clashes for public space, the Maiakovskii Square readings were a particularly radical manifestation of Thaw culture among youth. However, the more commonplace forms of student cultural consumption in the universities also became more politically charged in the early 1960s. A watershed in this regard was the Manezh Affair in late 1962, when Khrushchev lashed out at modernist and abstract painters at an exhibition of the Moscow Artists' Union, notoriously questioning their sexuality and threatening them with arrest or expulsion from the country.[45] The party-state leader's actions and the more restrictive party line in creative affairs that followed had several causes: behind-the-scenes agitation by conservative forces in the party, his humiliation of the Cuban Crisis which occurred just before, and a deepening perception that artistic circles were coming under Western influence.[46] For educated society, however, the episode inevitably encapsulated Khrushchev's hostility to intellectuals and his demagogic political style.

Khrushchev's intervention in the arts drew heated responses in the universities. For the most part, students who supported the Thaw had adopted a highly optimistic prognosis for cultural affairs in the USSR. During the period, the creative professions were enveloped in conflicts between loosely formed reformist and conservative factions, with the first secretary presiding inconsistently over the fray. Before 1962, however, students committed to the Thaw often chose to read this uncertain situation as a

[43] Vadim Pomeshchikov, "Appolon i Iura," ibid., 118; RGASPI-M f. 1, op. 32, d. 1026, ll. 39–40, reproduced ibid., 158.

[44] This is a quotation from the Komsomol TsK protocol from November 1961. RGASPI-M f. 1, op. 3, d. 1062, printed ibid., 254.

[45] An overview of the event and its ramifications is in Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 588–92.

[46] See this argument in Zubok, *Zhivago's Children*, 207–13. For the conflation of Western-ness and Thaw culture in the press, see A. Sukontsev and I. Shatunovskii, "Frenk Soldatkin – mestnyi chuzhezemets (fel'eton)," *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 25 August 1960: 2.

bump on the road to ultimate cultural renewal, hailing the publication of each work that broke official taboos as proof that censorship and publication bans would soon become a thing of the past.[47] The Manezh Affair destabilized this interpretation: the already unpopular first secretary had now tied himself unambiguously to conservative priorities in the arts. A more strident tone in student thinking was clear at a meeting of the MGU "Club of Lovers of Art" attended by 300 students. According to a Komsomol report, speakers who praised Khrushchev's management of the arts were drowned out by whistling and screaming. The crux of many of the student speeches was that "one person or even collective cannot interfere in the matter of aesthetic consciousness and force his own opinion and that the press does not have the right to speak in the name of the people."[48] Under the impression of Khrushchev's demarche, some students adopted the view that the communist leadership and perhaps the party as a whole was a fundamental obstacle to the project of renewing the Soviet project through culture.

As at the Maiakovskii Square readings, students' investment in the Manezh Affair exposed the extent to which the student Thaw had become an insular social milieu. The exhibition of the Moscow Artists' Union which had sparked Khrushchev's intervention also brought to the surface social tensions in the Thaw. Susan E. Reid's sensitive reading of visitors' books for the exhibition suggests the ways that some students' support of controversial artists distanced them from the broader society. One Moscow student, whom Reid characterized as "confident in his cultural capital," talked about the need to elevate the aesthetic tastes of the masses; but another criticized "self-satisfied philistines" who condemned works of art they did not understand.[49] Juxtaposing these comments is useful. The first student was invoking the core Thaw task of de-Stalinization through intelligentsia enlightenment. In contrast, the second, by disdaining people for retaining Stalin-era tastes, exposed frustration with the unwillingness of many citizens to follow the intelligentsia's agenda. Clearly, some participants in the student Thaw were adopting a more combative stance toward both the party and the people who were supposed to embrace the intelligentsia's enlightening influence. A noncommittal bystander captured this shift in his

[47] An American graduate student who spent a year at MGU reported that such thinking was widespread among his Soviet classmates. "Interview with an American Student who Spent an Academic Year at the University of Moscow," BR # 2–63, 16 January 1963, RFE/RL, HIA, 530/5, 2 and Volgin, "Na ploshchadi Maiakovskogo," 44.

[48] RGASPI-M f. 1, op. 31, d. 19, ll. 46–48.

[49] Susan E. Reid, "In the Name of the People: The Manège Affair Revisited," *Kritika*, 6 (2005): 711, 714, 704, 709. As Reid notes, it is unclear whether the comments in the visitors' books were entered before or after Khrushchev's denunciation of the exhibition.

description of a "typical scene" at the 1962 exhibition. A "not very highly educated" member of the older generation would approach an abstract painting and ask in a Khrushchevian vein "what sort of smear is that?" A crowd of nearby young bystanders would then pounce on him and argue for hours on end.[50] In the student milieu, the Thaw proved to be a difficult endeavor: by tying the intelligentsia's cultural mission to an ambitious attempt to de-Stalinize the Soviet project, it worked to divide students from the very masses they ultimately sought to lead.

Confronting the wider world

In the summer of 1957, Moscow felt like the center of the world. The VI World Festival of Students and Youth brought thousands of young people from all corners of the world to the streets of Moscow and, to a lesser extent, other locations in the country. Coming in the wake of the Hungarian crisis, the event's purpose was to brighten the Soviet state's tarnished international reputation; more broadly, the regime sought to convince young people around the world that the country was advanced and dynamic. The result was an event that stressed friendship, universal values, and culture above ideology, an approach that differed sharply from the usual celebratory events organized by Moscow-dominated international youth organizations. Class enemies as well as friends were invited to the Moscow event in large numbers, and control over their movements was uncommonly loose.[51] More remarkable still, informal interaction between everyday Soviet citizens and the strange visitors was not only allowed but encouraged.[52] Crowds of young people mingled freely in the streets and visited Muscovites' apartments, creating a truly exuberant and even wild atmosphere; young people mobbed every single foreigner as if he were "somebody from another planet."[53]

[50] "A Conversation with a Young Soviet Engineer in London," BR # 12–63, 3 May 1963, RFE/RL, HIA, 530/5, 2.

[51] Of 34,000 youths who took part in the festival, some 21,000 came from "capitalist and post-colonial countries." Moreover, less than 40 percent of all the non-Soviet participants were "members of communist organizations." See the report of TsK VLKSM to TsK KPSS on 30 August 1957. RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 233, l. 156.

[52] See discussion of the festival's origins and organization in Eleonory Gilburd, "To See Paris and Die: Western Culture in the Soviet Union, 1950's and 1960's" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2010), 49–100 and Pia Koivunen, "The 1957 Moscow Youth Festival: Propagating a New, Peaceful Image of the Soviet Union," in Ilič and Smith (eds.), *Soviet State and Society*, 46–65.

[53] This is from a Soviet student who recorded his impressions of the event on tape, evidently for Radio Liberation. "Radio Liberation and the Moscow Youth Festival," BR # 14–58, 30 August 1957, RFE/RL, HIA, 529/2, 2. The complex politics of sexuality enabled by this proximity is the theme of Kristin Roth-Ey, "'Loose Girls' on the Loose: Sex, Propaganda, and the 1957 Youth Festival," in Susan E. Reid and Melanie Ilič (eds.), *Women in the Khrushchev Era* (Houndmills, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 75–95.

The festival was a defining event in a broader opening of the Soviet Union to the outside world, including the enemy states of the capitalist West. Khrushchev sought to transform the Cold War from an incipient military conflict to a competition of civilizations, a strategy of "peaceful coexistence" that required a dramatic (if, in practice, incomplete) rejection of the closed borders and xenophobia of the Stalin period. In analyzing the growing exposure of Soviet citizens to the outside world, commentators – and particularly people who were themselves involved in waging the cultural Cold War – have presented contact with the West as inherently corrosive of Soviet values and institutions. In this view, exposing Soviet intellectuals and students to "relentless standards" of "truth and comparison" – or, what is seen as the same thing, "Westernizing" them – meant that loyalty to Soviet institutions and ideas inevitably fell by the wayside.[54] However, the Youth Festival in fact provides evidence for a more complex account of how young Soviet citizens viewed the outside world, and especially how important "culture" was for them. If young people embraced things foreign with unqualified enthusiasm during the festival, this was in part because Komsomol itself espoused an internationalist vision among them, for instance by encouraging young people to befriend visitors and even organizing the study of foreign songs and dances.[55] At the same time, many young people participating in the festival took quite seriously the fact that they were representatives of Soviet culture for the outside world. In preparation for the festival, the colleges put cultural activities into high gear by staging "Festivals of Soviet Youth" that featured street festivities, holidays of song, youth balls, carnivals, and concerts.[56] Indeed, the consensus in Komsomol circles was that the festival had helped to strengthen Soviet culture, even if there was concern that foreigners had used the event to infiltrate Soviet society.

Recent treatments of the topic have offered a critical corrective on the simplistic "Westernization" perspective by emphasizing how Soviet contexts and ideas informed contacts with the West. Eleonory Gilburd has stressed that for many Khrushchev-era Soviet citizens – including cultural administrators, intellectuals, and youth – broadening ties with the West was about

[54] Allen H. Kassof, "Scholarly Exchanges and the Collapse of Communism," *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, 22 (1995): 263. See also Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003) and Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945–1961* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 115–17.

[55] RGASPI-M f. 1, op. 46, d. 182, l. 74. See also Gilburd, "To See Paris and Die," 121–28.

[56] See RGASPI-M f. 1, op. 3, d. 889, l. 62 and TsAOPIM f. 478, op. 3, d. 52, ll. 5–6.

more than the narrowly political agenda of fighting the Cold War through the clash of civilizations. Rather, the "idea of a great humanistic culture shared by all" gained a foothold in official discourse, propelled by the tenets of socialist internationalism as well as the universalizing parameters of Soviet notions of civilization.[57] The anthropologist Alexei Yurchak highlights Soviet ways of thinking in his discussion of late Soviet youth's fascination with an "Imaginary West." In his account, Soviet socialism offered young people a confused framework for responding to foreign culture. Socialist internationalism undercut the simple binary oppositions of Cold War rhetoric; for instance, a Soviet citizen could find ideological justification for embracing capitalist culture in the writings of Lenin, which presented the dictum that any national culture contained competing progressive and reactionary elements. Responding to such confused ideological messages, young people appropriated and adapted Western cultural artifacts to their own environment without abandoning Soviet values as they understood them.[58]

This discussion builds on this literature by presenting intelligentsia as another crucial Soviet idea that colored perceptions of the Cold War enemy among students. In this perspective, students' belief in their cultural mission and the special status it brought helped to make the West appear both attractive and fundamentally foreign. A fitting focus for exploring this theme is student exchanges. Cultural exchange agreements with several Western countries, including the Lacy–Zarubin agreement with the United States in 1958, brought students from the capitalist world to study in the premier Soviet universities – and hence into contact with the Soviet intellectual elites of the future.[59] The Cold War enemy, however feared, had often appeared as a distant and even somewhat abstract entity for Soviet students and other citizens; now he or she lived and breathed in one's midst.[60] While the student exchanges made universities in Moscow, Leningrad, and (to a lesser extent) Kyiv central battlefields of the cultural Cold War, provincial institutes were much less affected, not to speak of those in closed cities like Saratov which remained off limits to foreigners entirely.

[57] See Gilburd, "To See Paris and Die," 22–30 and Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 92–98.

[58] Alexei Yurchak, *Everything was Forever, until it was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton University Press, 2006), 158–205, at 164–65. Although focusing on the Brezhnev period and beyond, Yurchak suggests that this specific dynamic began in the late Stalin period.

[59] Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War*, 14–20.

[60] For Cold War hostilities in the context of previous Stalinist enemy politics, see Serhy Yekelchyk, "The Civic Duty to Hate: Stalinist Citizenship as Political Practice and Civic Emotion (Kiev, 1943–53)," *Kritika*, 7 (2006): 552.

Whatever the limits on direct contact with the West, the party saw it as a threat to the ideological makeup of Soviet society. Indeed, in Khrushchev's last years party and Komsomol discourse presented the "inroads of bourgeois ideology" as an almost existential threat to the Soviet order. Training students and graduate students from the capitalist West in the USSR was an exceptionally politicized affair. To be sure, Soviet higher education had already experienced extreme difficulty in training foreign students, both the longstanding cohorts of students from the people's democracies and the more recent ones from post-colonial or developing countries. Stalinist xenophobia, great power chauvinism, and – in the case of the students from the second group – racism all rendered Soviet internationalism hollow.[61] Nevertheless, the small groups of students from the West posed distinct problems for university authorities and students alike: if there was hope that fellow socialists and post-colonials would follow the Soviet historical path, there was none vis-à-vis the capitalist students who were treated as hostile elements to be contained from the outset.[62] KGB tracked the capitalist students from their arrival by sending covert agents to befriend them and plainclothesmen to follow them through the streets.[63] Soviet students quickly learned the dangers of associating with the capitalist students, and those who did so anyway sometimes implored the Westerners not to write about their experiences once back home for fear of retribution from university authorities.[64]

Such distrust was surely counter-productive. Some of the capitalist exchange students, and the Americans most of all, came to the USSR with the goal of fighting the cultural Cold War, but the suspicion and bureaucratic barriers they encountered at every turn only firmed

[61] See Julie Hessler, "Death of an African Student in Moscow: Race, Politics, and the Cold War," *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Soviétique*, 47 (2006): 33–64. The troubling consequences of Stalinist xenophobia for intra-bloc exchanges are the topic of Benjamin Tromly, "Brother or Other? East European Students in Soviet Higher Education Establishments, 1948–1956," forthcoming in *European History Quarterly*.

[62] In 1965, there were 21,236 foreign students and graduate students enrolled in higher education establishments, with 11,802 from people's democracies, 9,183 from post-colonial countries, and only 251 from "developed" capitalist countries. RGANI f. 5, op. 55, d. 136, l. 105.

[63] "Attitude and Mood of Some Young Soviet Citizens," BR # 20–57, 12 September 1957, RFE/RL, HIA, 529/7, 2. These practices had not changed a decade later, as shown by William Taubman, *The View from Lenin Hills: Soviet Youth in Ferment* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1967), 96–99. Westerners, especially graduate students trying to conduct research, also confronted endless bureaucratic hurdles from suspicious administrators in the universities and libraries. See the accounts gathered in Samuel H. Baron and Cathy A. Frierson (eds.), *Adventures in Russian Historical Research: Reminiscences of American Scholars from the Cold War to the Present* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2003).

[64] "Attitude and Mood," 7.

their views.[65] Students from the West wasted no time in creating waves in the universities by entering into heated arguments with their Soviet overseers and classmates – treated, in turn, by university administrative, party, and Komsomol authorities as hostile attacks to be repulsed by all means possible, short of those which would cause major diplomatic setbacks.[66] Despite this degree of political tension – and in part because of it – the capitalist students provide a useful context for examining the place of the West in the mindsets of Soviet students. Foreign students living in the midst of the Soviet students for months or even years had countless interactions with their Soviet peers which were not controlled by political authorities. Sometimes they were "amazed" at being "able to discuss politics freely and straightforwardly" with their Soviet classmates, as an American graduate student who studied from 1962 to 1963 at the MGU Economics Department – typically thought of as a pillar of party conservatism – reported.[67] Moreover, the foreigners were eager observers of Soviet student life, providing a sense of the immediate social contexts for student cultural and political discussions that Soviet sources sometimes leave obscure.[68]

The experiences of exchange students from capitalist countries leave no doubt about the extreme interest of Soviet students in the West. A case in point was students' all-consuming passion for foreign literature. The study of mass reading habits cited above revealed that virtually all students polled read foreign authors, with Erich Maria Remarque, Ernest Hemingway, Jack London, and Theodore Dreiser (in that order) being most popular.[69] Although the reading of Western literature was widespread among Soviet youth of all social stations, the depth and seriousness of engagement with it distinguished the students. Educated youth spent countless hours combing second-hand bookstores for books published abroad, waiting in line in libraries for dog-eared works in

[65] One of the early American exchange students recalled that he knew not one peer "whose views weren't hardened against the Soviet Union" while studying there. David C. Engerman, *Know Your Enemy: The Rise and Fall of America's Soviet Experts* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 88.

[66] For strategies of containing exchange students, which included mobilizing the Komsomol *aktiv* and settling supposedly ideological Soviet students in the dormitories close to them, see TsAOPIM f. 478, op. 3, d. 84, ll. 91–92.

[67] "Interview with an American Graduate who Spent Five Months at Moscow State University in the Economics Faculty," BR # 32–63, 12 August 1963, RFE/RL, HIA, 530/6, 1.

[68] In part, the foreigners' reports of the university scene provide a useful contrast to letters to authority, a type of primary source used widely in recent histories of the period which are composed by a self-selecting range of authors by definition. For thoughtful use of the letter to authority genre to study the Thaw, see Miriam Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime, and the Fate of Reform after Stalin* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), esp. 10–12 and Denis Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

[69] RGASPI-M f. 1, op. 46, d. 352, ll. 20–22.

translation, and even wading through literary texts in German, English, or French with dictionary in hand.[70] "Personality cults" arose around some Western writers, as evinced by Soviet youth who imitated Hemingway by talking in curt phrases, wearing turtlenecks, and growing beards.[71]

Reading such passionate interest in foreign writers as the symptom of a fundamental "Westernization" of Soviet youth would be a mistake. Rather, several aspects of the Soviet students' worldview during the Khrushchev period made foreign cultural artifacts meaningful, and prominent among them was the Thaw. Foreign writers, perhaps even more than the young poets of the Thaw, seemed to provide a genuine mode of expression – the antipode of the stale and conservative Soviet literature of the present – which might feed the cultural and societal renewal that Thaw activists eagerly anticipated. But even young intellectuals who did not embrace the Thaw developed a strong interest in foreign literature. This should hardly surprise given the internationalism of Soviet ideology in the Khrushchev period. If high culture was to be seen as a universally held value, then foreign literature – or, rather, those works which the Soviet state saw as sufficiently "progressive" to publish in translation – was part of the cultural baggage that the Soviet intellectual was duty-bound to amass.

Foreign literature also became a status symbol for young members of the educated strata. A Soviet defector from Kherson in Ukraine explained to Radio Liberty that consumption of foreign art served to distinguish between social groups among young people: "among youngsters of better education and higher social station it is considered gauche to read Soviet writers," he commented, with the only exception being the celebrated writers of the Thaw like Evtushenko and Rozhdestvenskii.[72] Status distinctions also held with regard to different foreign writers. A West German journalist who socialized extensively with intellectuals and students while living in Moscow explained that easier-to-read works by Heinrich Böll, Erich Maria Remarque, or Arthur Miller could "only move the reader in the provinces and the intellectual 'petty bourgeois'," even in their original editions; however, it was "almost a sin against the spirit" to be uninterested in finding the books of Uwe Johnson, Tennessee Williams, or Eugène Ionesco.[73] Although this respondent's sarcastic tone might give pause, there is no reason to doubt his claim that the

[70] "The Role of Western Literature in Soviet Intellectual Circles," BR # 22–63, 20 June 1963, RFE/RL, HIA, 530/5, 5–6.

[71] Alexeyeva and Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation*, 97.

[72] "Soviet Youth, as Seen by a Young Defector," BR # 14–63, 9 May 1963, RFE/RL, HIA, 530/5, 2.

[73] "The Role of Western Literature," 2.

appeal of foreign books depended on how hard they were to access as well as on their content – indeed, this should surprise given the role that considerations of scarcity played in shaping the habits and values of Soviet readers in general.[74] In short, on display in students' appreciation of foreign writers was the tight intertwining of the goals of the Thaw and the broader traits of educated society associated with the intelligentsia.

If high-brow literature from abroad was wholly compatible with Soviet intelligentsia identity, the situation was more complicated in the case of Western mass culture, and particularly popular music. The tremendous popularity of the latter in the universities is beyond question: Western exchange students discovered that their Soviet counterparts flocked to American concerts and listened religiously to jazz broadcasts on Voice of America (VOA).[75] Such forms of cultural consumption were deemed decidedly "low" by Soviet leaders – "men of the ancient régime when it came to culture," as a recent study characterizes them – and this was no doubt one reason why many Soviet adults saw listening and especially dancing to foreign music as a threat to the morality and political obligations of Soviet youth.[76] Nevertheless, interest in jazz and, later, rock and roll was primarily about the taste of forbidden fruit and bore no clear connection to oppositional "moods." Going further, Yurchak is surely correct in asserting that Soviet "authoritative discourse" was elastic enough to provide space for attachments to Western culture. An American scholar who had long discussions with students in Kyiv reported that, in the opinion of his informants, "interest in Western dress and Western jazz cannot be taken as a symbol of protest," as "many jazz fans are ardent members of Komsomol."[77] Indeed, Komsomol activists sometimes used the Youth League to lobby for jazz performances at college events.[78]

Despite its apolitical thrust, however, Western mass culture proved challenging for people preparing to enter the ranks of the intelligentsia.

[74] See Lovell, *The Russian Reading Revolution*.

[75] "Some Attitudes of Soviet Students in Moscow and Leningrad," BR # 76–65, 17 December 1965, RFE/RL, HIA, 531/2, 3.

[76] Kristin Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire that Lost the Cultural Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 9. For the shifting relationships of the Soviet state to jazz, see Frederick Starr, *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union 1917–1991* (New York: Limelight editions, 1994).

[77] "Note from a Trip to the Soviet Union in the Spring of 1961," BR # 11–61, 17 May 1961, RFE/RL, HIA, 530/2, 12. A recent study argues that interest in Western culture among late Soviet youth was "countercultural" in nature, but in fact presents much evidence to the contrary. Sergei I. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dniepropetrovsk, 1960–1985* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2010), 13, 67–68.

[78] TsAOPIM f. 5463, op. 1, d. 4, l. 117.

For students who took their cultural mission seriously – including many activists of the Thaw who held the ethical implications of learning sacred – real culture was high culture, not empty entertainment produced by and for markets. The predisposition of some students to serious culture informed their negative responses to the subculture of American-aping stylish youth called *stiliagi*, a phenomenon which arose in the Stalin period and continued throughout the Khrushchev years.[79] Despite the large interest they have generated among later scholars, *stiliagi* had a small presence in universities in the capitals and provinces (although their visibility on the dance floors at institute events was much larger). A part of the student body condemned the lifestyle of stylish youth, both for their deliberate rejection of collective life and for their reputation for drinking and sexual depravity – a stance that no doubt bore the imprint of press campaigns vilifying *stiliagi*.[80] In all likelihood, a more common attitude among adherents of the Thaw was to view *stiliagi* with scorn rather than with hatred or fear. In this view, while hardly subversive, wide ties, narrow pants, and boogie-woogie were decisively "petty-bourgeois" and uncultured.[81] The Kyiv students who met with the American academic noted above thought that students "most imitative of the West" were not "the most responsible elements" and certainly "not the ones among whom dissent on grounds of cultural freedom would spring."[82] The subtext of the formulation is clear: while there was nothing wrong with consuming Western mass culture, it should not come at the expense of the serious business of freeing Soviet society through enlightenment. Of course, such a ranking of cultural priorities reflected broader social realities, as it was largely students' special connection to culture which defined them as a social group.

Western mass culture might pose problems other than distracting students from serious culture. By its very nature, popular culture could not provide intellectual elites with the same kind of social status as the serious learning of an intelligentsia did. While students and intellectuals were at the forefront in embracing jazz and then rock and roll in the 1960s, tastes soon became democratized and lost their exclusive social function (as fashions always do).[83] Moreover, the pursuit of exotic foreign cultural

[79] The best account of the emergence of this phenomenon is Mark Edele, "Strange Young Men in Stalin's Moscow: The Birth and Life of the Stiliagi, 1945–1953," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 50 (2002): 37–61.

[80] RGANI f. 5, op. 17, d. 529, ll. 104–5, 110–12. See also L. V. Silina, *Nastroeniia sovetskogo studenchestva, 1945–1964* (Moscow: Russkii mir, 2004), 131.

[81] Edele, "Strange Young Men," 42–43.

[82] "Note from a Trip to the Soviet Union," 12.

[83] See the account of the social diffusion of these musical styles in Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City*, 65–81.

products – and, it is true, this applied to rare books as well as jazz albums or blue jeans – brought one into a shadowy world of illicit money-making. Students who supplemented their meager stipends by trading Western books on the black market provided a strange spectacle of high culture and its antithesis, one which must have proven uncomfortable for future *intelligenty*.[84] In short, students' association with the intelligentsia and their penchant for Western consumer culture coexisted awkwardly. This fact complicates Yurchak's presentation of Soviet youth drawing freely and comfortably on foreign culture to suit their cultural environment.[85] Soviet students might have imagined the West, but the ways they did so reflected their own contested social identities and interests.

Enemies in our midst?

It is also true that the West could not, in the end, be pried apart from questions of political ideology. Apart from being the mythic home of Hemingway and Glenn Miller, the West was the Cold War enemy – something that could hardly be forgotten given the widespread fear of catastrophic war in the period.[86] It is indeed striking that an idealized image of the West as a political and ideological entity – rather than a cultural one – took hold of some student minds in the period. This phenomenon emerged even in the closed city of Saratov, where direct contact with foreigners was totally lacking.[87] In 1961, the SGU Komsomol Committee heard the case of the student Churkin, who spoke openly about the advantages of life in foreign countries, including "freedom of speech in America" and multi-party democracy. When a member of the Komsomol Bureau stated that Churkin was indebted to the state for his education and much else besides, the latter responded that he owed it nothing: on the contrary, the "bureaucratic machine" was repressing him and seeking to prevent him from graduating. He declared that he could emigrate and finish

[84] "The Role of Western Literature," 4–5. For exploration of a similar tension in the context of Soviet tourism to the West, see Anne E. Gorsuch, *All This Is Your World: Soviet Tourism at Home and Abroad after Stalin* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 130–67.

[85] Yurchak only hints at this tension between Soviet culture and market-based culture for Soviet youth. *Everything was Forever*, 172–73.

[86] For a different context in which the "Imaginary West" took on very concrete implications, see Andrei Kozovoi, "Eye to Eye with the 'Main Enemy': Soviet Youth Travel to the United States," *Ab Imperio*, 2 (2011): 221–37.

[87] For an earlier and non-elite version of Soviet pro-Americanism, see Rosa Magnusdottir, "The Myth of 'Amerika' and Soviet Socialism: Perceptions and Realities in the Postwar Soviet Union," *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, 31 (2004): 291–307.

university abroad "if it was necessary."[88] Although the outcome of this conflict is unclear, Churkin was far from alone in pondering the possibility of exit: in 1963, the KGB recorded almost 500 cases of people twenty years of age or younger attempting to flee the country. This number, it was claimed, was higher than in previous years.[89]

Ironically, the ideological possibilities of the West grew with Khrushchev's ideological pronouncements, and particularly the promise that economic production in the USSR would soon surpass that of the United States, whose "sun was setting."[90] As at least one member of the leader's inner circle feared, the ratcheting-up of expectations in the Cold War proved a dangerous move for the government.[91] An economic downturn in 1962 forced the government to take the dangerous and humiliating steps of raising prices on staple foods and buying grain abroad, while instances of mass unrest more severe than anything the country had seen for decades further discredited the party-state's promises of plenty.[92] Disappointment with the failure of Khrushchevism was clearly at work in the case of Churkin, who told his Komsomol interrogators that he and many Soviet citizens "agreed with the Molotovs" – that is, Khrushchev's conservative opponents whom he had removed from power in 1957 – that "communism can't be built in twenty years" and that the program's claim to this end was "all talk."

Although frustration with the course of Khrushchev's rule was widespread among students, Churkin's idealization of the West was hardly a widely held position. Rather, student thinking about the West was multidimensional and uncertain, as the experiences of the student exchanges make immediately clear. Even though they read Hemingway and Salinger with bated breath, Soviet students bombarded the American graduate students with hostile questions about racism and unemployment; they might eagerly befriend American classmates while discrediting everything the latter said on the assumption that their companions surely belonged to the exploiting class.[93] At the root of such ambivalence was a simple fact:

[88] GANISO f. 652, op. 1, d. 6, ll. 134–35. [89] RGANI f. 2, op. 1, d. 626, ll. 101–10.

[90] N. S. Khrushchev, "On the Program of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union: Report by Comrade N. S. Khrushchev at the 22nd Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Oct. 18, 1961," *Pravda*, 19 October 1961, in *CDSP*, 13, no. 44 (1961): 5–6.

[91] See O. V. Kuusinen's comments on the draft of the Party Program in Pyzhikov, *Khrushchevskaia ottepel'*, 341–45.

[92] Erik Kulavig, *Dissent in the Years of Khrushchev: Ten Stories about Disobedient Russians* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 125–53.

[93] For a sense of such diverse responses, see "Interview with an American Student Who Spent an Academic Year at the University of Kiev," BR# 8–63, 25 March 1963, RFE/RL, HIA, 530/5, 2 and Loren R. Graham, *Moscow Stories* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 32–40.

students perceived the West according to their own values and ideas, and these frequently proved conflicted. And one important issue in this context was the social identity of the intelligentsia, a factor that influenced Soviet perceptions of the exchange students in disparate ways.

Intelligentsia thinking was crucial with regard to an issue central to the cultural Cold War: wealth and living standards. A member of the first cohort of American graduate students in Moscow reported that he handed out Sears Roebuck catalogues to his Soviet classmates, and recalled that they were "particularly effective" propaganda tools.[94] While surely awe-inspiring to Soviet students, images of plenty and the wide scope for unflattering comparisons they generated rarely produced principled pro-Westernism like that expressed by Churkin above. The obvious response – that material deprivations would evaporate en route to communism – is only part of the story. The Sears catalogue approach might fall flat for another reason: the values of the intelligentsia. One of the first French students to spend an academic year at MGU recalled that his Soviet peers "were aware that Americans live better than they do but qualified this by the fact that Americans were interested in the material but not in the spiritual aspects of life" – that is, the very sphere the intellectuals claimed as their own.[95] Indeed, intelligentsia identity provided a clear vantage point from which to decry the West, and America especially. An American graduate student felt that Soviet students – including those he called "anti-regime people" – looked at the luxuries of American life "with contempt and consider[ed] it a waste of time," citing as an example the contemporaneous American student fad of telephone booth cramming that had been lampooned in the Soviet press.[96] The poet Evtushenko took the idea to its natural conclusion in his autobiography (published in the West) by arguing that the rich nations showed a "grosser spirit and a weaker hold on moral principles" than Russia, which had been ennobled by suffering.[97] As these sentiments show, the intelligentsia's idealism and distaste for all things "petty-bourgeois" both contributed to – and, no doubt, fed off – the geopolitical divide of the Cold War.

[94] "Aspects of Soviet Life as Seen by American Exchange Student," BR # 39–59, 21 August 1959, RFE/RL, HIA, 529/3, 7.

[95] "Attitude and Mood of some Young Soviet Citizens," 6.

[96] "American History Student Who Spent an Academic Year at Moscow University," BR # 35–55, 23 July 1959, RFE/RL, HIA, 529/3, 3. See also the discussion of the trope of America as an uncultured parvenu in Susan E. Reid, "Who Will Beat Whom? Soviet Popular Reception of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959," *Kritika*, 9 (2008): 896–900.

[97] Yevgeny Yevtushenko, *A Precocious Autobiography*, trans. Andrew R. MacAndrew (London: Collins and Harvill, 1963), 40–41.

The perception of superior Western wealth also played into a defensive stance toward the West among Soviet students. Whether many students held what a French student called "black envy and deep distrust" directed toward the West is unclear.[98] However, there can be no doubt that Western wealth and self-confidence threatened the claim to culturedness that was so central to the identities of Soviet students. Indeed, the capitalist exchange students served as a lightning rod for this more pervasive sense of insecurity in student identities. In 1957, three Soviet students wrote a piece in *Moskovskii universitet* attacking French exchange students who had allegedly conveyed a sense of their "superiority over uncultured Russians." The authors turned the tables on the French by alleging that the latter were the ones lacking in culture; Georges Niva, they alleged, did not clean his room and even swore at members of the sanitary commission who asked him to rectify the situation.[99] Though the publication was highly censored and the material was tendentious – many Soviet students were no more polite to the invasive sanitary commissions that Niva was, nor more "cultured" in their behavior in the dormitories generally – the article reflected the threat that the West posed for the students' core commitment of *kul'turnost'*.

There were, however, points of elective affinity between the West and intelligentsia ideals, particularly in the politicized way that Thaw activists viewed them. Western exchange students struck a raw nerve among Soviet citizens by emphasizing their enjoyment of many freedoms the latter lacked. An American graduate student thought he had impressed his Soviet contacts with his "assurances" that closed divisions did not exist in American libraries and that Soviet newspapers and magazines were available for purchase at newsstands.[100] More specifically, the "bourgeois freedoms" of information, conscience, and travel held obvious appeal for young adherents of the Thaw. Connecting the ideological clash of the Cold War to Thaw culture explicitly was the party's attack on Boris Pasternak, who was awarded a Nobel Prize for Literature after publishing *Doctor Zhivago* abroad in 1957. Very few Soviet students actually read the novel, which was not published in the USSR; exchange students who arrived with suitcases full of copies of the novel were reluctant to distribute them for fear of spurring political reprisals against their Soviet classmates. Nonetheless, Pasternak's real-life drama could hardly fail to appeal to students used to seeing writers

[98] "Report by a Frenchman," 3.

[99] Z. V. Kormanov, "Uvazhaemye gosti, davaite ne budem!" *Moskovskii universitet*, 6 April 1957: 3. On the defensive side of *kul'turnost'*, see also Eleonory Gilburd, "Picasso in Thaw Culture," *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Soviétique*, 47 (2006): 80–82.

[100] "Programming Suggestions," 3.

as moral authorities. In discussions on the subject with foreigners, some students expressed respect for Pasternak as someone who "dared to speak his mind right to the very end" – even if many others "took the Pravda line" by condemning *Doctor Zhivago* as slander against the revolution.[101] As this shows, identification with the intelligentsia produced mixed reactions to the West, complicating the usual emphasis in the literature on the unquestioned attractiveness of the latter in either its imaginary and real manifestations.

A complex pattern of attraction and rejection was also evident in the most widespread form of direct contact with the West for Soviet society: foreign radio broadcasts. It is clear that tuning in to what were popularly called "the voices" – mainly Voice of America and BBC – became widespread in the period and played a major role in popularizing American music. Yet the ideological ramifications of foreign broadcasting for students, as for other social groups, are more open to interpretation.[102] It is indisputable that "the voices" figured prominently in a series of KGB prosecutions of educated youth for anti-Soviet propaganda and agitation in the period; moreover, some of the defendants in these cases spoke the Western language of the Cold War in condemning Soviet "totalitarianism." (On the other hand, it also seems possible that the KGB had a vested interest in exaggerating the ideological dangers of Western radio for Soviet society.)[103] Obstacles to foreign broadcasting's ideological influence, however, were substantial. Most of all, it seems doubtful that the political material conveyed by Western radio reached student ears in the first place. While Soviet jamming of foreign radio broadcasters softened in the Khrushchev years, programs in Russian and other Soviet languages that dealt with domestic political affairs were usually blocked in the major cities; meanwhile, language skills muted the impact of English-language news on VOA

[101] "Interview with Frenchman Recently Returned from USSR," BR # 21–58, 12 September 1958, RFE/RL, HIA, 529/3, 6. See the extensive discussion of letters supporting Pasternak in Denis Kozlov, "'I Have Not Read, But I Will Say': Soviet Literary Audiences and Changing Ideas of Social Membership, 1958–66," *Kritika*, 7 (2006): 564–74. See also "Some Observations by a French Graduate on his Return from a Year's Study in the USSR," BR # 15–59, 13 May 1959, RFE/RL, HIA, 529/3, 1.

[102] For differing evaluations for the period in question, compare Vladimir Tolz with Julie Corwin, "Soviet Reactions to Foreign Broadcasting in the 1950s," in A. Ross Johnson and R. Eugene Parta (eds.), *Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe: A Collection of Studies and Documents* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010), 293–96 and V. A. Kozlov et al. (eds.), *Kramola: Inakomyslie v SSSR pri Khrushcheve i Brezhneve, 1953–1982 gg.: rassekrechennye dokumenty Verkhovnogo suda i Prokuratury SSSR* (Moscow: "Materik," 2005), 130.

[103] GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 96675, l. 16 and Robert Hornsby, "Voicing Discontent: Political Dissent from the Secret Speech to Khrushchev's Ouster," in Ilič and Smith (eds.), *Soviet State and Society*, 175. For the argument about the KGB's inflation of risk, see Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, 141–44.

and BBC.[104] Even when more ideologically driven programming did find its target, it is far from clear that most Soviet students were open to what they heard. According to an American graduate student, the majority of student listeners "were inclined to discount much of the VOA news, regarding it as American propaganda."[105]

In a broader sense, however, foreign radio did have an impact on student minds, and the ways it did reflected the concerns of the student Thaw. Limited access to foreign radio crystallized the issue of freedom of expression and presented a tangible symbol of the limits of the Thaw. Indeed, even students who mistrusted the Western broadcasts often disagreed with censorship of them.[106] A group of students at the Belarus Polytechnic Institute arrested in 1963 had constructed a plan to blow up a nearby radio tower that was used for jamming foreign broadcasting. S. N. Khanzanov explained that the tower was a "direct violation of the individual personality"; his co-conspirator V. I. Khrapovitskii called it a "minimizing of human dignity."[107] In an indirect way, foreign radio had provided support for the Thaw and its ideals of virtuous freethinking and the liberated personality.

The idea of a Thaw offered Soviet citizens a powerful narrative on the Soviet project. Soviet history was poised between the Stalinist past and a more hopeful future, as forces for renewal confronted Stalinist stalwarts. Presiding over the drama was the Khrushchev leadership, which seemed to embody the transitional and basically unsatisfactory present with its espousal of novel policies rooted in archaic Bolshevik conceptions. The means to move history forward seemed simple: in order to dispel the ghosts of the cult of personality, one had to value the truth and act decently.

Inevitably, this blueprint for transforming society through free thought and expression proved difficult to implement in practice. The Thaw project seemed destined to create divisions, one cause of which this chapter has identified as student social identities. Ostensibly universal, the ideas of the Thaw in fact were bound up with the interests of a relatively narrow part of society: intellectual elites who had long been confident in their mission to civilize society and felt particularly duty-bound to assign themselves this

[104] The jamming policies of the Soviet leadership fluctuated with the major developments of the Cold War. See Michael Nelson, *War of the Black Heavens: The Battles of Western Broadcasting in the Cold War* (Syracuse University Press, 1997), 91–106.

[105] "Aspects of Soviet Life," 6.

[106] For articulations of student opposition to jamming of foreign radio, see RGANI f. 2, op. 1, d. 626, ll. 120–21.

[107] See the judicial conclusion (*zakliuchenie*) on the case sent by head of oversight over KGB in the Belarusian Procurator's Office. GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 95626, ll. 14, 19.

role in the wake of the Stalin period. Accordingly, the Thaw represented the transposing of idealized characteristics of intellectuals – intellectual integrity, willingness to debate, and autonomy – onto the rest of society and even onto history itself. An MGU student who wrote to Khrushchev to condemn his curbing of young writers in 1963 conveyed this link between intellectual identities and the march to communism. "We are trying to awaken creativity in every person – think, create and only then will communism be built," he stated; accordingly, the current "campaign against creativity" in the arts stunted history itself.[108] The notion that creative thought would bring communism – and, conversely, that ignorance was the root of reactionary tendencies – provided a neat illustration of the Thaw's inherent connection to educated society.

The problem was that not everyone accepted this conflation of intellectuality and historical progress. In fact, the limiting social content of the Thaw lifted its head at inopportune moments, complicating the students' seemingly straightforward agenda for Soviet society. While supporting the reformist moment in the Soviet leadership, young intellectuals despised its architect, a reaction that was understandable given his populist rhetoric but also conveyed a strain of cultural snobbishness. When struggling to produce a new and more genuine Soviet culture, they discovered that the masses might not share their tastes or even approve of their right to have them. And as they came into contact with real and imagined manifestations of the West, students made sense of them in ways that reflected the cultural assumptions and status concerns of Soviet intellectuals as much as the ideological underpinnings of Soviet discourse. The presentation of the Thaw as a struggle between new and old, good and bad, post-Stalin and Stalin – binary oppositions that scholars have too often reproduced in an unreflecting way – papers over thorny questions about the particular identities and interests of Soviet intellectuals. In the coming years, young educated citizens would begin to sense the social limits of the Thaw, and some would search for new ways to embrace the intelligentsia's cultural mission.

[108] "'My sobralis' dlia togo, chtoby iskrenne vyskazat' svoi mysli' (K istorii vstrech N. S. Khrushcheva s tvorcheskoi intelligentsiei v 1962 i 1963 gg.)," *Izvestiia TsK KPSS*, no. 11 (1990): 214–15.

CHAPTER 8

Higher learning and the nationalization of the Thaw

In 1961, a Radio Liberty official interviewed N. I. Sereda, a 24-year-old Ukrainian electrical engineer and recent graduate of the Kyiv Polytechnic Institute. Given the circumstances – Sereda had defected to the West during a tourist trip to Vienna just months before – Radio Liberty expected to meet a staunch anti-communist.[1] Instead, they discovered someone who accepted "as gospel truth many of the tenets of Soviet propaganda" and was cynical about the freedom of the "free world." To be sure, the young Kyivan railed against the party, alleging that it consisted "primarily of opportunists and people who are using it for the advancement of their own personal interests." However, he espoused a "democratic socialism" in which the second concept seemed to predominate: in the future, only socialist parties would exist, he asserted, and the only difference between them would be "the methods and techniques which they would use to implement socialism." Despite having recently fled the country, Sereda was optimistic that this future society would be built, since "the overwhelming majority of the population" and especially youth believed staunchly in socialism and, being "sophisticated politically," would transform the system from within.

If these views caught Radio Liberty off-guard – in fact, confronting a communist revisionist led the author of the report to conclude that the radio staff was striking the wrong tone in its anti-communist messaging – Sereda's treatment of the national question might have seemed more in line with the agency's expectations for Soviet youth. Sereda criticized the Russification of

[1] Sereda is not named in the report but his identity can easily be established. See "Red Scientist Defects, Says Vienna Report," *The Deseret News*, 22 August 1961 and "Glimpses on World Outlook and on Ukrainian Related Topics by the Kind of Listener RL Attempts to Reach," BR # 35–61, 20 November 1961, RFE/RL, HIA, 530/2, 1–5. The interviewer "Mr. Diakovsky" was almost certainly Morris Diakowsky, a Ukrainian-Canadian aficionado of traditional Ukrainian music who worked at Radio Liberty in the period. See Geoffrey T. Hellman, "The Bandurist," *The New Yorker*, 27 September 1958.