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The Politics of Culture Under Gorbachev

Cultural fronts - like meteorological and military fronts - are notoriously unstable.

Here I must make an отступление (a retreat, to continue the military side of my comparison; or digression; but also corresponding to the term intrusion, as in "narrative intrusion") and it takes the form of a warning to students of Soviet culture or to audiences patiently enduring someone's discussion of that culture. Namely: beware of easy-going translations. Terminological equivalents from Russian to English or English to Russian frequently conceal conceptual categories that are in no way similar, often are diametrically opposed. Not to see this/not to understand these conceptual differences is to ensure that only misunderstandings will remain after we step out of that culture, back from the typewriter, or away from this newsletter.

Specifically: merely to translate отступление as retreat, digression - or especially intrusion - is to ignore the enormous cultural and conceptual differences that surround and define the aesthetic object that is called an "artistic text." An intrusion signifies a breaking into, a stepping into something - a something, that is, from which the breaker or stepper into was absent until the moment of breaking or stepping; a virginal something that was unoccupied, even if preoccupied with problems of form and content. Invariably the breaker or stepper into is the artist, the maker. Western literary theory over the last forty years (from Erich Auerbach's publication of Mimesis in 1946 through Jacques Derrida's work today) has done much to convince the converted that an artistic text is always filled with the presence of its maker, even if the presence is hidden behind an illusionist's absence.

Neither the Soviet state, nor Soviet literary theory has ever needed to engage in this kind of unmasking of the magician precisely because the conceptual field signified by the term отступление is opposed to the one signified by

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intrusion. Отступление means a stepping out of or away from, and this presupposes that until that moment the stepper had already stepped into it. "Stepped into it" in both meanings: first, that it/the text is filled with the palpable presence of the maker, that any examination of the text is an interrogation of the maker, that the ideas in the text are the concrete utterances of its ideologue-maker. To discuss either Alesha or Ivan Karamazov is to polemize with Dostoevsky; to refer to Ivan Denisovich is to engage Solzhenitsyn's view of Stalin and Stalinism; to read Doctor Zhivago is to condone Pasternak's condemnation of the Revolution. Second, "stepped into it" also carries the meaning of being guilty of, and therefore, answerable for something.

I stress these two points because the text is both the evidence of its maker's guilt and guilty itself because it contains the maker. Guilty makers can produce only guilty texts. This leads to the tradition of removing from libraries, museums, movie theatres, and record stores all works by artists who emigrated to the West or were "illegally repressed." Guilty texts (by innocent, though misguided makers) are jailed: films are shelved (Alexei German's Операция "С Новым годом"/Проверка на дорогах - Operation "Happy New Year"/Trial By Road - for 15 years; Elem Klimov's Агония/Распутин - Agony/Rasputin - for ten), books are either never published in the first place or are never reissued/alluded to in their maker's bibliographies (for example, Oles' Honchar's 1968 novel Собор - The Cathedral - was not included in the six-volume collection of his works published in 1978-79 and was not listed in the bibliography at the end of the last volume. It is noteworthy that an announcement was issued in April, 1986 to the effect that this novel will be republished in the near future in Moscow, rather than in the provincial capital, Kiev).

None of this is a Soviet innovation; it is not a post-1917 code of irrational or arbitrary behaviour on the part of the Soviet state. Quite the contrary: this view of the artistic text as a charged ideological presence in society and this tradition of cautiously monitoring and carefully prescribing its destiny extend back to the Romanov dynasty. The need to stabilize the cultural front is not a uniquely Soviet need; the need to control those in the cultural trenches could be attested to by both Pushkin and Dostoevsky (who were on the receiving end of these controls) and by Goncharov and Aksakov (who worked as tsarist censors). Historically, the forms of cultural control have changed, but never the presence of these controls. It is naive and absurd to assume that Gorbachev and the new Soviet leadership will relinquish the need for these controls; but it is equally naive and absurd not to see that the forms will be and are being radically redefined.

Let me finish up this отступление so that I can hurry back to the cultural front. Loose lips and tongues sink ships and play havoc with those damned fronts. My отступление is intended to deal with the meteorological, not the military side of my introductory comparison. Since Khrushchev, every new Soviet leadership has been measured by the "thaws" and "frosts" that characterized its relations with the United States and Western Europe, on the one hand, and with its "cultural workers" (to use the Soviet cliché), on the other. Indeed, among Slavists the term "thaw" is very specific, if not univocal, in its meaning: it refers to the so-called liberalization or loosening of cultural restraints that occurred sometime between 1954 and 1965. Some argue for the presence of only one "thaw," dividing the post-Stalin era into a period of liberalization followed by a more normative, that is, repressive period (1965-1985). Others argue for the existence of two "thaws": 1954 (the publication of Ilya Ehrenburg's novel, The Thaw) through 1957 (the publication of Boris Pasternak's novel, Doctor Zhivago, in Italy and the beginning of his villification in the Soviet press) and 1962 (the publication of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich in the journal Новый мир - The New World) through 1965 (the arrest and subsequently the trial and sentencing of "Abram Tertz" and "Nikolai Arzhak"). Still others point to the existence of three "thaws": 1953 (Stalin's death) through 1954 (the dismissal of Alexander Tvardovsky as editor-in-chief of The New World), 1956 (Khrushchev's secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress denouncing Stalin) through 1958 (Pasternak's refusal of the Nobel Prize for Literature), and 1961 (Khrushchev's launching of the de-Stalinization policy) through 1964 (the arrest, trial, and conviction of the Leningrad poet Joseph Brodsky for parasitism).

By the summer of 1985, the Moscow intelligentsia very cautiously (боялись оглянуть - they were afraid to jinx) began to whisper about a new "thaw"; by the summer of 1986 even the politically conservative Radio Liberty/Radio Free Europe began to broadcast and publish stories about the "Manifestations of a 'Thaw' in Soviet Cultural Policy" (RS 115/86; RL 266/86). Much of what follows will be a critique of this view; not because I want to argue that there is no loosening of restraints (on the contrary, there has been a radical overhaul of the entire system of restraints) and not because I want to claim that this loosening will be of short duration (again, on the contrary, I shall stick my neck out and argue that the current reorganization of the economic and social spheres in the Soviet Union carries with it a long-range and much more durable reorganization of the entire spectrum of cultural controls). It is the very metaphor of the "thaw" itself that I want to challenge because under it lies a conceptual swamp that is deeper and more determining than the one that underlies отступление/intrusion.

So, to begin again: Cultural fronts - like meteorological and military fronts - are notoriously unstable. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the rigid socio-economic and political controls, which form the basis of state power in the Soviet Union, often have been implemented to enforce stability on the cultural front. The historical roots of the present policy extend back to 1934, to the First All-USSR Writers' Congress and to the release of the first socialist-classic film, Chapayev. These two events signalled the imposition of "socialist realism" as the sole acceptable kind of culture by and for the working-class state and the canonization of the view that the content of a work of art always overdetermines the corresponding artistic form. Since then, the logical extension of this policy has been used effectively to intimidate all official artists in the USSR: better no culture (or a dead one), than a culture that challenges or undermines the structure of political power.

"Yoghurt, at least, is a living culture," declared dissidents and émigrés in the 1970s whenever they discussed Soviet cultural life. By the early 1980s, newspapers and journals throughout the Western world also began to proclaim the imminent demise of Soviet culture. Though this prediction had been made more than once in the past, this time it seemed to be grounded in historical reality rather than in East-West political maneuverings. The newspapers and journals relied on the best available sources to substantiate their prognosis. These included both eminently qualified "outsiders" from among the Western specialists in various aspects of Soviet culture (Slavists, Sovietologists, Kremlinologists, etc.) and "insiders" from among the 360,000 Soviets who emigrated to the West by 1980 (the so-called "Third Wave").

Certainly the facts appeared to make the prognosis incontrovertible: the 1970s and early 1980s had witnessed the decimation of Soviet intellectual-artistic circles. Except for a handful of names, virtually every major Soviet cultural figure known in the West had died, defected, emigrated, or been expelled. No sphere of cultural production in the Soviet Union was left untouched. In Western eyes, the USSR, with the exception of Valentin Rasputin, lost all of its important writers: Varlam Shalamov, Mikhail Sholokhov, Vasilii Shukshin, Vladimir Tendriakov, and Yuri Trifonov had died; Vasilii Aksenov, Yuz Aleshkovsky, Sergei Dovlatov, Naum Korzhavin, Yuri Kublanovsky, Yuri Mamleev, Vladimir Maximov, Alexander Sozhenitsyn, Georgii Vladimov, Vladimir Voinovich, and Alexander Zinoviev ended up in the West (the list is by no means exhaustive; for a more complete list of writers who emigrated in this period, see Olga Matich's "Russian Literature in Emigration: A Historical Perspective on the 1970s" in The Third Wave: Russian Literature in Emigration, edited by Olga Matich and Michael Heim, Ardis, Ann Arbor, 1984). Both major art collectors, Georgii Kostakis (Futurist, Suprematist, Constructivist art) and Alexander Glezer (Non-Conformist art), emigrated and the larger parts of their collections disappeared into state archives. Painters and sculptors left in large numbers, including Bakhchanian, Komar and Melamid, Kosolapov, Neizvestny, the Rabins (father and son; a new twist to Turgenev). Ballet, opera, and classical music were changed forever by the absence of Baryshnikov, Godunov, the Panovs, Rostropovich, Vishnevskaya, and Shostakovich. Even the seemingly flourishing tradition of Russian

"bards" was almost extinguished: Galich emigrated and died in Paris; Visbor and Vysotsky died in Moscow; Tokarev emigrated to America; Kim and Okudzhava rarely perform any more. Dozens of stage and cinema figures moved to the West, including the Soviet Union's most famous film director (Andrei Tarkovsky) and theatrical director (Yuri Liubimov).

The death announcements, though they continue to this day, proved to be premature. Admittedly, Soviet cultural life suffered severe losses. The writers, actors, musicians, artists, and directors who continue to produce excellent material in the Soviet Union are aware that they are working in the shadow cast from the West by their former colleagues. The cultural landscape, however, is far from being a wasteland; in fact, there are many reasons to argue that the Soviet Union is beginning to undergo a vast and exciting cultural revival. In part, this revival is connected with the appearance of an entire generation of new and talented artists: Sergei Esin, Nina Katerli, Ruslan Kireev, Anatolii Kim, Vladimir Krupin, Vladimir Makanin, Tat'iana Tolstaya in prose (for an excellent translation of Tolstaya's short story "Sonia," see Nancy Condee's Institute newsletter, NPC-18); Liudmilla Petrushevskaya (see NPC-14 and Alma Law's translations, Four By Liudmila Petrushevskaya, Institute for Contemporary East European Drama and Theatre, 1984), Liudmilla Razumovskaya, and Viktor Slavkin in drama; Alexander Eremenko, Marina Kudimova, Alexei Parshchikov, Tat'iana Shcherbina, Elena Shvarts, and Ivan Zhdanov in poetry; Svetlana Bogatyr', Grisha Bruskin, and Yuri Kononenko in painting; Vasilii Kravchuk and Valerii Plotnikov in photography; Vadim Abdrashitov, Alexei German, and Nikolai Gubenko in cinema (see NPC-5; "Recent Soviet Cinema and Public Responses: Abdrashitov and German" in Framework, #29 and "Children at War: Films by Gubenko, Evtushenko, and Bykov" in Framework, #30-31, co-authored by Condee and Padunov). In part, this revival cannot be separated from the reappearance of artists banned (totally or partially) for decades: Nikolai Gumilev, Nikolai Glazkov, Sergei Klychkov, and Evgenii Rein (see NPC-7) in poetry; Konstantin Vaginov and Vladimir Nabokov in prose; Vladimir Tatlin in painting; Moisei Nappelbaum and Alexander Rodchenko in photography; Elem Klimov and Kira Muratova in cinema. In part, the revival has taken strength from the development and recently acquired dominance of artistic forms, methods, and subjects that were considered secondary (or were forbidden) in the preceding decades. In part, it is a result of the long overdue re-examination of the role of the state in the arts. And finally, in part, the revival has been brought about by the shift of political power to a younger generation, which, like General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, is university-trained and a part of the urban intelligentsia.

Chernenko's death and the (literally) overnight announcement of Gorbachev's appointment signalled major internal changes for the Soviet Union, as much in industrial and agricultural production as in technology (the shift to computer training in schools and the opening of video-cassette film rental centers throughout the country), in cultural production, and in party personnel. Western observers frequently make the mistake of assuming that the presence of new personnel presages a new set of policies. No direct (that is, unmediated) relationship exists between the two. On the other hand, Gorbachev's relatively brief tenure as General Secretary already has been marked

by radical departures and innovations in personnel and policy - in the Politburo, in the departments of the Central Committee, and especially in the field of cultural administration. The Director of Gosteleradio (the state agency supervising all broadcasts in the Soviet Union) and the Director of Glavlit (the state censorship agency) have been replaced by younger and more adventuresome figures; Alexander Yakovlev, for many years the USSR's ambassador to Canada, has been appointed as an alternate member of the Politburo and as the Party Secretary in charge of propaganda; Yuri Voronov has been appointed as the new head of the Central Committee cultural department; Vasilii Zakharov, the former secretary for ideology of the Leningrad Oblast Party Committee, during whose tenure the non-conformist "Klub-81" and the underground journal Часы (The Clock) made their appearance, has been designated as the new Minister of Culture; Gennadii Gerasimov, for many years a Novosti correspondent in New York and subsequently the editor-in-chief of Moscow News, has been appointed the head of the newly created Information Sector of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Even the ultra-conservative, émigré Russian-language newspapers have (grudgingly) taken note of this overhaul of the cultural administration. In doing so, they have called attention to the fact that under Gorbachev new appointees to cultural posts are receiving major political promotions, whereas under earlier General Secretaries all such appointments marked a substantial political demotion (the most recent article appeared in the 30 October 1986 issue of the daily newspaper Новое русское слово - The New Russian Word).

In December 1985, Alexander Chakovsky, a famous war novelist and the editor-in-chief of the weekly newspaper Литературная газета (Literary Gazette) since 1962, was rebuked (reportedly by Gorbachev himself) for the awful layout of the paper and its tedious articles ("А вы свою газету читаете, товарищ?" - "Do you read your own newspaper, comrade?"); since then there have been minor changes in format and major ones in content. Anatolii Sofronov, a leading cultural conservative in the Soviet Union and since 1953 the editor-in-chief of Огонёк (The Flame), one of the largest mass-circulation weekly magazines, was dismissed from his position beginning with the now-famous issue of 17 April 1986, which carried a portrait of Lenin speaking into a telephone on the cover and inside poems by Gumilev (shot in 1921 by the Soviet government for his alleged participation in an anti-Revolutionary conspiracy). It is reported that the editorial offices of The Flame were closed for three days after the announcement of Sofronov's dismissal because the rest of the board went on a drinking spree to celebrate - this at the height of the anti-alcohol campaign. The Moscow intelligentsia launched a complex joke to mark the occasion: "Расстреляйте, пожалуйста, товарища" ("Shoot the comrade, please" - supposedly Lenin's words to Felix Dzherzhinsky, the head of the Cheka, as the KGB was then known), "если ни Ленин, то Зиновьев" ("if not Lenin, then Zinoviev" - who gave the order to execute Gumilev), "если ни Гумилева, то Софронова" ("if not shoot Gumilev, then shoot Sofronov"). On August 10, 1986 the writer Sergei Zalygin was appointed the new editor-in-chief of the journal The New World, one of the most respected "thick" journals. Zalygin is neither an apparatchik, nor a literary hack; no less than Alexander Solzhenitsyn (who is rarely guilty of making generous comments about his fellow writers) placed Zalygin second (after Yuri Kazakov) on the list of writers representing the

"core of contemporary Russian prose," in an interview he gave to the Associated Press six months before his expulsion from the USSR in 1973.

Perhaps the most spectacular events occurred during the Fifth Cinematographers' and Eighth All-USSR Writers' Congresses this past summer. In May, 1986, the Union of Cinematographers voted out its entrenched dinosaurs, led by Lev Kulidzhniov (whose speech at the 27th Party Congress was interrupted by Gorbachev with the caustic remark: "Let's stop declining 'Mikhail Sergeevich'," that is, "Let's stop toadying"), and elected a new First Secretary: Elem (L-M: Lenin-Marx) Klimov. Despite the acronymic first name, Klimov is a director who has encountered difficulties with all of his films except the last (Иди и смотри - Go and See). As I have mentioned already, Agony (released as Rasputin) was shelved for ten years because its somewhat generous portrayal of Nicholas II was not acceptable to Goskino. The film was completed in 1975 and was shown for the first time (to restricted audiences) at the 1981 Moscow Film Festival, prior to being shown at festivals in Venice and Berlin. It was released for general distribution in the USSR only in 1985. His second film, Прощание (Farewell), which he took over after the death of his wife, the director Larisa Shepitko, was based on a story by Valentin Rasputin - "Farewell to Matera." It was released almost immediately in the Soviet Union, but was rejected by Goskino for submission to the 1982 Cannes Film Festival despite the request of the festival's organizers.

Significantly, Klimov was nominated for the position of First Secretary by none other than Alexander Yakovlev, the new head of propaganda for the Central Committee. The officially sanctioned reform of the film-making industry sent shock waves through the Soviet Union, as did Klimov's announced intention to set up a commission to review and suspend Goskino's bans on films. To date, the commission has recommended that bans on seventeen films be lifted, including Gleb Panfilov's The Theme, Shepitko's Homeland of Electricity (based on a story by Andrei Platonov), and both of Kira Muratova's films - Brief Encounters and The Long Good-byes.

In describing the current state of cultural policy with regard to cinema, however, three cautionary notes are in order. First, the official sanction given to the reorganization of the film-making industry has not been matched by any attempts to reorganize Goskino, the agency that controls the fate of all films. Klimov and his commissions can only make recommendations; all actions on these recommendations is left to the discretion of Goskino, the very agency that imposed the bans in the first place. So far there are no indications that the Chairman of Goskino, Filipp Ermash, is in any danger of losing his position or control. Despite the dozens of articles that have criticized Goskino (its policies and organization, the quality of the films it approves and those it bans, its selection of video-cassettes, etc.) no official comments have been made and no action has been taken. On the contrary, at least in the military press and journals, Ermash frequently receives top billing; Klimov's name occasionally appears in a footnote.

Second, the procedure for reviewing bans on films was implemented more than two years before Klimov's election. An excellent example is

provided by Alexei German's films. In 1984 German, the son of the very popular Stalin-period writer Yuri German, was known only as the director of the highly successful 1977 film Двадцать дней без войны (Twenty Days Without War). In January 1985, that is, even before Gorbachev was elected General Secretary, his film Мой друг Иван Лапшин (My Friend, Ivan Lapshin) - completed in 1981, but not passed by Goskino - received its premiere to great critical acclaim. Though popular with the intelligentsia, the film was not a box-office success by Soviet standards (according to Vladimir Baskakov, the new Director of the State Institute for Cinema); it was televised in 1986 and received greater popular attention. And in February 1986 (that is, after Evtushenko's speech at the Sixth RSFSR Writers' Congress in December 1985 and three months before Klimov's election) German's first film, Operation "Happy New Year" was released under the title Trial By Road. Or take the case of Sergei Paradjanov's film Легенда о сурамской крепости (The Legend of the Suram Fortress). The fact that he had the opportunity to make the film less than two years after being discharged from his second prison conviction defies explanation; the fact that the film had its Moscow premiere in April 1985 (that is, one month after Gorbachev came to power and thirteen months before Klimov was anything other than a minor thorn for Goskino) simply (as they say in the new jargon) "does not compute." So I feel compelled to repeat my earlier warning: in the Soviet Union, it is not new personnel that make new policy; more often new policies result in new personnel.

Third, and perhaps most important: the politics of culture is only rarely concerned with art, but it is always political in the profoundest sense - economic and propagandistic. On the one hand, shelving any film marks an automatic loss of approximately \$650,000 (the average cost of making a film in the Soviet Union) with no possibility of recouping the state's investment. Let us not forget that in a non-profit making society, the returns on state investments in films are not calculated in weeks or months, but in years. On the other hand, shelving provides home-made ammunition for use against the Soviet Union in the Western media. The new policy (quite apart from the personalities involved) seems to be to release problematic films in very few prints (as few as five). This enables at least a slow return of revenues and permits the government to deny that films are censored, while at the same time insuring that the film will be seen by only a tiny portion of the population of the country with the greatest number of movie theatres in the world. A concrete example: for its premiere, German's film My Friend, Ivan Lapshin was given one advertised screening in one movie theatre - more specifically, in one hall of one theatre - and tickets were not for sale.

Not surprisingly, a similar tactic is being pursued in the publishing industry, where the possibility of mini-printings of 200-500 copies (as compared with a normative printing of 10-15,000 or the massive printings of 50,000 and above) of new collections of poetry and prose are openly discussed on the pages of the Literary Gazette and Литературная Россия (Literary Russia). This would enable publishers (especially Sovetskii pisatel' and Khudozhestvennaia literatura) to clear out their massive backlogs of manuscripts, most of which, according to their editors, are by as yet unpublished poets, playwrights, and prose writers. In Leningrad, plans are progressing for the



establishment of a vanity press (250 roubles for 250 copies). Among the first writers to be approached by the press were Elena Shvarts and Vladimir Krivulin - two poets who had been published only by the émigré presses until the appearance of Круг (The Circle) in 1985. The Circle itself is truly an oddity: it is the official literary almanach of the semi-official, non-conformist "Klub-81," which sponsors readings by unofficial writers. Several publishers (Molodaia gvardiia and Sovremennik) have started issuing pamphlet-books by new writers. Since these pamphlet-books do not have to be accounted for in the publishing houses' "five-year plans," they can be type-set, printed, and distributed with minimal delays in a matter of weeks, rather than the four to seven years that is typical of the industry.

The Eighth All-USSR Writers' Congress (July 1986) provided as spectacular a show as the Cinematographers' Congress. On the eve of the opening session of the Congress, Gorbachev personally met with those writers who are also delegates of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. He stressed "the need for a deep-rooted and many-sided reorganization" of the Union." Once again, the official sanction resulted in dramatic changes: the appointment of a new First Secretary (Vladimir Karpov replaced Georgii Markov), the establishment of a Pasternak museum in Peredelkino (less than two years after his family lost the final appeal and was evicted from the dacha), calls for the rehabilitation of Evgenii Zamiatin and the publication of Doctor Zhivago (one year after the publication of the most complete Soviet edition of Pasternak's poems, which includes all of the Zhivago poems, but does not even allude to the existence of the novel), and demands for a total reorganization of the publishing industry and a review of editorial decisions.

Within weeks of the Congress, the major Soviet journals announced their publication plans for 1987. These include the publication of works by famous, official writers that have been held up for decades: the journal Нева (Neva) will publish Vladimir Dudintsev's Белые одежды (White Clothes); the journal Дружба народов (Friendship of the People) will issue Tendriakov's Чистые воды Нитежа (The Clear Waters of Kitezh), Trifonov's Исчезновение (The Disappearance), and the second part of Shukshin's novel Любавины (The Liubavins). In addition, the prestigious series Библиотека поэта ("The Poet's Library") has filed its new five-year plan, in which it lists a volume by Vladislav Khodasevich, who emigrated in 1922 and was declared to be the "greatest poet of our time" by Vladimir Nabokov. It is fitting to end this particular list with the name of Nabokov, since 1986 may well be the turning-point (turning-year) for him in the Soviet Union: in Leningrad a doctoral dissertation (кандидатская) has been scheduled on his translation of Pushkin's Eugene Onegin, the journal Вопросы литературы (Problems of Literature) has commissioned a major article on his prose to appear in the December issue. Since the Writers' Congress, the chess journal 64 has published excerpts from his memoirs (with an introduction by Fazil Iskander) and the editor of Москва (Moscow) has announced that the journal will serialize Nabokov's Защита Лукина (The Defense) in 1987. I do not claim that Lolita will be published in the Soviet Union in the next few years (or that Edvard Limonov's erotic work, Это я - Эдичка - It's Me, Eddie, - will appear in my life-time); I do maintain that it is inevitable given the present course of Soviet cultural policy. Lolita has already been cited more than once in footnotes to scholarly

articles (for example, Viktor Erofeev's article in Problems of Literature on Sologub's Petty Demon - two forbidden texts in one article).

The plan to publish the greatest poet and the greatest prose writer of the first emigration is (in my view) inseparable from the fact that leading cultural representatives of the third emigration (including Tarkovsky, Liubimov, Rostropovich, Vishnevskaya, and Aksenov) have been approached unofficially by former Soviet colleagues with invitations to "return home for a visit" (see Liza Tucker's article in the 24 June 1986 issue of The Washington Post). In all such cases, these colleagues are merely couriers, conveying official messages that are the result of policy decisions made within the Central Committee, if not the Politburo itself. "Homecoming" and reintegration of Russian culture seems to be high on the agenda of present-day cultural policy in the Soviet Union; additional demonstrations of this fact can be provided by the return of Chaliapin's remains to the USSR, by the elaborate wooing of Svetlana Alliluyeva-Stalina that resulted in her disastrous return, by the invitation to Vladimir Horowitz to perform several concerts. Repatriation is probably not the ultimate goal of this policy (the embarrassment suffered by the Soviet government because of Alliluyeva-Stalina is a lesson that will not be forgotten quickly); more likely, the goal is to reintegrate the culture of the external émigrés (for example, an invitation to Rostropovich or Vishnevskaya to give concerts in Moscow and Leningrad) and internal émigrés (the publication of unofficial writers) into the official history of Soviet culture. It is almost as if the answer to the great émigré question: "Одна литература или две?" ("One literature or two?") - meaning, in essence, is there only one, universal Russian culture or is there a genuine, émigré (oppositional) culture as well - has been given a political resolution. This, too, is not a uniquely Soviet tradition; its roots go back to the Romanovs. Simply recall the careers of Alexander Herzen, Feodor Dostoevsky, or Ivan Turgenev (among others): much (some would argue most or all) of their contribution to the history of Russian culture was made while they were outside the territorial boundaries of the Russian Empire.

I could extend this examination of policy changes through every one of the cultural fields - theatre (the right to independent choice of repertoires, the right to independent review of new scripts); the experimental theatrical-studios (the granting of permanent locations and, in the cases of the South-West Theatre and the Theatre on the Boards, the granting of their own хозрасчет, that is, accountability systems, which enable them to pay salaries to actors, designers, and other employees, all of whom survived for years as unpaid "amateurs"); painting (the right to sell oil canvases for hard currency and to retain a portion of the fee); art history (at this very moment there are more "forbidden" paintings from the Russian avant-garde hanging on permanent display in the New Tretyakov Gallery than were included in the famous Paris-Moscow exhibition); music (the Melodiya Record Company has begun to issue Western rock albums, including two by the Beatles, and Soviet rock is being encouraged - the rock-group Autograph participated in the 1985 Band-Aid extravaganza).

Measured by any standard (let alone the repressive Brezhnev years) these are all radical departures. They are the result of long and careful planning by the younger generation of political and cultural leaders who are now coming to power in the Soviet Union. For the past few years, almost every one of the institutes dealing with the arts has been debating ways to redefine the relationship between the state and the arts. Although this process will take several more years to work itself out, some substantial changes are clearly in the offing. At least two of the fundamental (and oppressive) injunctions that have been dominant for more than half a century are now in the course of being rethought: art must provide answers to social issues and the demonstration of these answers must be the "positive hero." There are fewer and more caustic references to artistic answers, and more of a return to the view that art must provide a correct (artistic) posing of the question. This is a return to the position taken by Georg Lukács in his essays on Tolstoy, written in the 1930s. Lukács points out that the social answers provided by Tolstoy, a reactionary nobleman, are always false answers. Lukács' search for a compensatory justification for reading Tolstoy brought him to the view that Tolstoy is a great "realist" writer not because of the false social answers he offers the reader, but because of the artistic questions he raises in his attempts to arrive at answers. From the vantage point of present-day cultural policy in the Soviet Union, whether the question posed is an artistic one (which would lead to a re-evaluation of Russian modernism and the reintegration of the art and literature of the first quarter of this century into the official history of Soviet culture) or whether the question is a social one (which would result in the reappraisal of the tendentious art of the last fifty years and the reintegration of Russian émigré art and literature into Soviet culture) is an issue that is still being discussed. I have tried to point out that elements of both can be traced in examining the cultural policy taking shape under Gorbachev. As yet, however, there are no official signs that the Stalinist classics are in any jeopardy.

Similarly, the conception of the "positive hero" is changing markedly in both cinema and literature; demonstration by "negative" models is becoming quite acceptable. Or, as the former First Secretary of the Writers' Union complained in his speech at the 27th Party Congress in February 1986 (in a passage that was deleted from all transcripts subsequently published): "Our readers too rarely encounter the image of the 'positive hero' in contemporary fiction, and too often they are faced with the image of a difficult character (тяжелого характера)."

Those in Moscow who heard the live radio broadcast of Markov's speech assumed (I believe correctly) that the speaker was making a guarded attack on the сороколетники (literally, the "forty-year-olds"). This term, purportedly coined during a meeting of young, unpublished writers after the fiascos surrounding the unofficial literary almanachs Метр<sup>о</sup>поль (Metr<sup>o</sup>pole) in 1979 and Каталог (Catalogue) in 1980, does not define a specific movement within either the official or unofficial literary establishments. It covers writers as disparate as Vladimir Krupin (a quasi-деревенщик, village-prose writer), Sergei Esin (the master of the new genre - публицистика - somewhat akin to Tom Wolfe's "new journalism"), and the московская or городская-школа (the Moscow or urban-school) - a group that includes Vladimir Makanin and Anatolii Kim (both of whom teach prose-writing at the Gorky Literary Institute)

and considers itself to be the literary heir of the late Yuri Trifonov. The term is significant not because of whom it signifies, but because of what: the "next" generation, which, like the new generation of political leaders around Gorbachev, is anxiously awaiting and preparing for the inevitable transfer of power into its hands. Not surprisingly, an even younger generation of writers, the тридцатилетники (the "thirty-year-olds") is now beginning to attract attention.

To be fair to Markov, the "forty-year-olds" have indeed moved far away from the "image of the 'positive hero'," whether that hero be defined as a "Stakhanovite factory worker" (found in the still flourishing tradition of the производственный роман, the novels about production) or the truthful plain-speaker and keeper of ethical values (in the village-prose writers). Instead, the "forty-year-olds" focus on the shallow and alienated lives of mid- and low-level office workers in the cities (Kireev and Makanin), on the loss of identity and communal memory (Kim), on drunkenness in the countryside (Krupin), or on the emptiness of soul and fraudulence that lie at the center of a successful official artist (Esin's portrait of the painter Ilya Glazunov in "Имитатор," "The Imitator"). Fairness to Markov should be balanced by fairness to the village-prose writers. Gorbachev's emphasis on self-criticism and гласность (openness) has been instrumental, though again in a mediated way, in breaking the editorial log-jams that have held up publication of Rasputin's novella Пожар (The Fire) - published in the journal Наш современник (Our Contemporary) in 1985 - and Viktor Astafiev's short story "Печальный детектив" ("The Sad Detective") - published in Октябрь (October) in 1986. These works by classic village-prose writers, with their stark description of alcoholism, inertia, and corruption in the countryside, mark a new departure for this school of Soviet prose. Whatever remains of the "positive hero" is not enough to sustain him in society, let alone to effect any changes within it.

The demise of the "hero" is especially evident in the Soviet cinema. Though certain cinematic clichés continue to remain in force - "good guys" never die, unless, of course it is for their country in a war movie - over the last half dozen years they have taken quite a beating on the big screen. In German's Trial By Road (a war movie structured along the laws of American Westerns), the hero of the film is a Soviet soldier-prisoner-defector to the Nazis, while the villain (ethically, if not criminally) is the political officer attached to a partisan unit. It is precisely for this reason that the film was held up for so many years. Rolan Bykov's Чучело (Scarecrow) - the film sensation of 1984 and 1985 - presents the audience with a powerfully negative portrait of Soviet society as a whole, and of schoolchildren in particular; the "positive heroine," all that remains of the provincial town's intelligentsia, is forced to flee at the end of the film (see NPC-6 for a detailed examination of this film and its reception in the Soviet Union).

But it is the quiet, understated films of Vadim Abdrashitov and Alexander Mindadze (a director-screenwriter team) that have done the most to confuse the categories of "positive/negative" heroes in the way their films address social problems. In particular, their film Остановился поезд (The Train Stopped) - a feature film that is always discussed as if it were a documentary - ends with the "hero," a rail-

road investigator looking into the causes of a train collision that resulted in the death of the engineer, totally isolated from and ostracized by the social collective. Where he finds shoddy workmanship, the collective sees self-sacrifice; what he proves is mismanagement, the collective calls necessity; what he identifies as wanton loss of human life, the collective proclaims as a подвиг (a heroic feat). In all six of their films - Поворот (The Turning Point), Слово для защиты (Speech for the Defense), Охота на лис (Fox Hunting), The Train Stopped, Парад планет (Parade of Planets), and Плюмбум (Pliumbum) - the hero stands outside of the social collective, alienated and alone. Moments of social integration are brief and illusory; they are always followed by another moment - expulsion (from the family or the work place or the prison or the military, etc.).

Sadly, although Abdrashitov-Mindadze's films have been distributed in Western Europe (Parade of Planets was given a special premiere at the 1985 London Film Festival), the International Film Exchange (the organization responsible for importing films from the Soviet Union) has decided that Abdrashitov-Mindadze's films are not worth the investment of \$40,000 for importation rights. The politics of cultural production in the Soviet Union has made no impact on the economics of cultural distribution in the United States. Alexei German's films Twenty Days Without War and My Friend, Ivan Lapshin have never been shown in this country, though Trial By Road is currently touring the US. Vladimir Makanin, Anatolii Kim, and Ruslan Kireev are known to a handful of American specialists, but virtually nothing of their work has been translated into English (while in West Germany a four-volume collection of Makanin's stories and novels has been published). I suspect that many, if not most, of the names mentioned in this newsletter are unknown to the reader. The problem, however, is not that they are all new; as I have pointed out, this "next" generation of cultural figures has been around and visible even before Gorbachev's portrait began to be displayed (that is, before his appointment to the Politburo as an alternate member in 1979). It is simply that none of this is newsworthy, it does not warrant the investment of space or dollars.

It is precisely in the failure to call attention to or to analyse the roots of this cultural revival that the Western media have been less than helpful. It should be emphasized, however, that the fault is not entirely of their making. The media rely not only on their correspondents in the field, but also on the expertise of the "outsiders" and "insiders" that is readily available in the United States and Western Europe. Unfortunately (for the media), the numerous changes of the past seven years (since the gates of the "Third Wave" closed) have contributed significantly to make the expertise of the "insiders" out-of-date and, in some instances, misinformed. For the same reasons, the expertise of the "outsiders" has come into question. Since 1979 the Soviet Union has become a much more opaque country to American observers for reasons that have as much to do with domestic events (the rapid series of power successions from Brezhnev to Andropov to Chernenko to Gorbachev, and the attempts to rejuvenate the economy and the party machinery) as with foreign policy (the end of detente, the invasion of Afghanistan, the mutual boycott of Olympic games, the Korean Airlines flight, the

renewed arms race, Reagan's bellicosity towards the Soviet Union). Examinations of political and socio-economic issues have taken precedence over an analysis of cultural life and politics in the USSR. This has resulted in a paradoxical situation that is not especially flattering to the US: while much of the world is examining and analysing the changes that are occurring in the Soviet Union (political and cultural), most of this information continues to be unavailable to the average American because it remains frozen behind that "iron curtain," at which we so much enjoy pointing our fingers. It is almost as if we are the frozen snowmen of the cold-war, pointing our broomsticks somewhere "over there." Looked at from this perspective, a "thaw" would be a devastating event to the vested interests of both sides.

And so, I shall end as I began: with an отступление. It would be easy at this point merely to turn the tables - any talk of a "thaw" in cultural policy in the USSR remains a fatuous exercise until and unless there is a "thaw" in the American media (in the way they explain, report on, and present the Soviet Union to Americans) and in the economics of cultural distribution in the US. There is no possibility to discuss cultural policy or changes in that policy until the material available to Soviet (and West European) readers and viewers is available to American audiences as well. Economic censorship is still a form of censorship - and is a political fact.

The point I am trying to make is that the earlier so-called "thaw" or "thaws" were essentially political and economic events that took cultural objects (stories, novels, films) as their justification; they were never cultural events - either in the Soviet Union or in the West. For us, on the one hand, they made good copy and increased circulation, they were profitable to translate and publish, and they gave maximum political mileage. In the Soviet Union, on the other hand, though these cultural objects occasioned a lot of talk among the intelligentsia, they led to no fundamental changes within the cultural industries. In essence, each decision to release one of these cultural objects (whether we have in mind Khrushchev's intervention to publish Solzhenitsyn's One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich in 1962 or Brezhnev's authorization to "unshelve" Shukshin's film Налина красная - Snowball Berry Red - in 1973) was an ad hoc decision that simply overrode the opposition of cultural control managers at lower levels. Each cultural object was unique, each was stamped by the personality and "personal taste" of the reigning General Secretary, each raised a host of expected and unexpected problems; none of them exerted any effect on the established boundaries demarcating official from unofficial art, the permissible from the forbidden.

My second point is even less flattering to us. Gorbachev's twenty months in power have been long enough for three studies to appear about him (Thomas Butson's Gorbachev: A

Biography; Zhores Medvedev's Gorbachev; and Christian Schmidt-Häuer's Gorbachev). Each of them stresses (correctly in my view) that Gorbachev is a new type of Soviet leader because he lacks the ability and strength to control the entire Soviet bureaucracy that all earlier leaders had. In keeping with the "law of diminishing General Secretaries," Gorbachev must rule collectively, by a kind of Soviet consensus. He lacks the power to impose unilateral decisions or, at any rate, for him to do so would jeopardize his control of political power.

The Gorbachev period so far has been characterized by the delegation of responsibility and authority, not by centralizing them. This feature can be traced through the political hierarchy (Dobrinin allegedly formulates foreign policy, which is represented by Shevardnadze, the Foreign Minister), as well as the cultural one. In addition to overhauling much of the party machinery in the field of cultural administration, greater power (and answerability) to make decisions concerning their own enterprises has been delegated to editors of journals and publishing houses, directors of theatres and films, and curators of museums. As a result, it would be ludicrous to claim that Dmitri Prigov, the undisputed "king" of unofficial writers, was published in the journal Teap (Theatre) because of Gorbachev's intervention, or that unofficial poets and poetry became a topic that official journals could deal with (see Problems of Literature, 5, 1986) because of a decision made by the political верхушка (top echelon).

There is nothing spontaneous or improvised about these events. They are well organized and controlled, and have been carefully prepared. They do not deal with individual, unique cultural objects. Instead, they entail a major re-charting of the entire cultural landscape, as a result of which the boundaries between official and unofficial art have begun to be dramatically redrawn.

At this juncture, to speak of a "thaw" in Soviet cultural policy is no different from referring to Roosevelt's New Deal as a "thaw" in American economic policy.

So, to conclude again: A "thaw" would be a devastating event to the vested interests of both sides.



Vladimir Padunov