

Crossing Soviet Thresholds

Privacy, Literature, and Politics

in Late Soviet Russia

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Every book is more than just a manuscript—it's a journey. One on which you grow as a person and a researcher. And walking the whole road is impossible without the help of people you meet on the way.

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I remember the first day I entered the University of Toronto library to work again with Soviet magazines and revise the dissertation text—Friday, March 13, 2020. I was finally settled, was done with bureaucratic hurdles in Toronto, and so eager to work. But that Friday the 13th they announced that the library would close due to Covid-19 pandemic starting Monday. Two weeks—or so I hoped—turned into months, turned into a year; you know the story. It would not be until a year-and-a-half later that the library would open again for readers. In September 2021, I finally walked into the building again, for the first time in many months, collected everything I needed and moved to Potsdam, since my postdoc was over in just a few days, and I had a new job in Germany.

At the University of Potsdam, the teaching hustle, apartment search, and the bureaucracy of being a foreigner (yet again), engulfed me from the moment I arrived, so I looked forward to the end of teaching in February to go back to revising the manuscript. When the semester was over, I went to Prague for a couple of days, to reset. “I would have two months of freedom to finally finish the manuscript once I am back,” or so I thought. My first day in Prague was February 22, 2022. On the day I was going home, I found out that my country, Russia, had started a full-scale invasion into Ukraine. Soon, the main train station in Berlin, from which my apartment was just a few minutes away, was flooded with Ukrainian refugees who desperately needed help in navigating the new reality into which they were thrust. No project is more important than real people whom you can help—and whom I knew I owed to help because of what my country was doing.

Truly, a book is more than just a manuscript. While writing my dissertation was a joy, revising it into a book became a mental struggle against the nothingness and darkness of the pandemic and the war, and the holes they left behind in my psyche. They shattered me, and they shattered any meaning this book could have, over and over again. Finishing the revisions has therefore been the biggest challenge. But every journey comes to an end. And now, this one is over, too. I thank everyone named above and those I couldn’t thank by name who accompanied me on this journey. I am most grateful to my family—my mom Irina, my sister Nastya, and my now late Grandpa Anatoly who all made this journey possible in the first place by supporting my pursuits in Yaroslavl.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	III
TABLE OF CONTENTS	V
NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION, TRANSLATION, AND STYLE.....	VII
INTRODUCTION: OPENING A DOOR	1
The Private Turn in the USSR	5
Soviet Literature in Search for and Control of Privacy	7
Overview of Chapters	14
CHAPTER 1 WHAT IS PRIVACY AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?.....	16
The Rise of Privacy.....	16
What is Privacy?.....	18
Why Does Privacy Matter?.....	20
Privacy across Cultures and Political Regimes.....	22
Theorizing Soviet and Russian Privacy	28
CHAPTER 2 INSIDE: PRIVATE SPACES IN LATE SOVIET LITERATURE	33
Domesticity in Russian Literature	33
The Eye of the Storm: Dudintsev and Pasternak	37
Women between the Home, Work, and the Home: Baranskaia	46
The Heart of a Conflict: Trifonov, Makanin, Arro	49
An Erotic “Me-Space”: Voinovich, Amlinskii	61
CHAPTER 3 UNDERSTANDING THE INHABITANTS: “PEOPLE WHO WORK, LOVE, AND LIVE”	66
Breaking the One-Dimensional Socialist Realist Character	66
Here Comes the Thaw: Ehrenburg.....	71
Private and Public Languages: Iashin, I. Grekova.....	77
In Bed with Lenin: Privacy on the Pages of <i>Oktiabr</i> ’	80
CHAPTER 4 CROSSING THRESHOLDS: PRIVACY AS THE WRITER’S WAY OF LIFE	90
Discipline and Publish: Understanding Soviet Censorship	90
Writing under and against the Censorship	97
Writer’s Boundaries and Privacy Caveat: Disattendable Literature, Inattentive State.....	100
Literary Private Kitchens	109
Codes of “Creative” Privacy: Truth, Inner Freedom, and Apoliticality	117

DOORS WIDE SHUT: PRIVACY AND LITERATURE IN PUTIN’S RUSSIA	127
REFERENCES	133
Primary Sources	133
Bibliography	135

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION, TRANSLATION, AND STYLE

Throughout the text, I used Library of Congress system for transliteration of Russian without diacritics. For some names commonly used in English (like Joseph Stalin, or Alexander Solzhenitsyn), I used their conventional spelling familiar to broader audiences instead of a direct academic transliteration. All translations of foreign texts into English are mine, unless specifically indicated. For the text that I translated into English, original versions of each quote are provided either in respective footnotes or in the body of the text. For citations and referencing, I used Chicago Manual of Style.

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INTRODUCTION: OPENING A DOOR

In late May 2013, a young computer intelligence consultant smuggled a USB flash drive out of the NSA offices in Hawaii. Mere days later, international newspapers exploded with publications that covered the depth and breadth of the NSA surveillance into lives of not just criminal suspects, but also ordinary Americans. What came to be known as the NSA, or Snowden affair (after the name of the whistleblower),¹ gave rise to a new awareness of contemporary cultures as cultures of massive and often vulnerable data about an individual. With the understanding of this vulnerability, there also came a call for protecting this data, with the concept of privacy occupying a prominent place in the discussion since the early days of the scandal—so much so that “privacy” was named the word of the year in 2013 (Dictionary.com 2013).

I started writing this book just briefly after the Snowden-induced privacy fever took over the world. Researchers and public intellectuals in the global West engaged in ardent debates about why privacy mattered and how it could be safeguarded. These discussions were strongly informed by deep shock at overreaching practices of security services across the globe that the leaked documents revealed.² Originating from Russia, I first treated these reactions with amusement, having grown up with KGB jokes that were just as much jokes as they were not. But increasingly, the whole privacy turmoil of the day made me wonder, what privacy could mean and how it worked in a society shaped not by liberal principles but by Communist ideology and non-democratic rule for the larger part of the twentieth century—in the context, where I came from?

¹ On Snowden’s case, see, for instance, Fidler (2015) and Greenwald (2015).

² I review some of these debates in Chapter One. For the details of the affair, see footnote 1.

My interest was particularly driven by the late Soviet era—the roughly three decades between Joseph Stalin’s death in 1953 and the onset of perestroika in 1985. During this time, a perceptible political change—from a totalitarian form of power toward a milder, authoritarian model—took place. The cessation of the criminal case of the alleged doctors’ plot in the spring of 1953³ signaled new regimes of political management by the Politburo that began to increasingly deviate from the previously harsh line—a departure that would culminate in Nikita Khrushchev’s famous secret speech to the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party on February 25, 1956—“On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences” [O kul’te lichnosti i ego posledstviia]—which debunked Stalin’s idolization.

Numerous studies of what came to be known as the Thaw era (1953–1964), published during the past decades, reveal that however “daring and bold” Khrushchev was as a reformer (McCauley 1995, xi),⁴ his attempts at transforming the Soviet state were neither entirely original (many of them had their origins in the Stalin era; see Ilić and Smith 2009; Kelly 2013), nor were they comprehensive enough to encompass the whole socialist system.⁵ Multiple controversies of this period show that the Party’s decision-making continuously oscillated between liberalism and conservatism. From the resolute denunciation speech in 1956 to a violent suppression of the Hungarian uprising just a few months later; from shutting down the publication of the almanac *Literary Moscow* [Literaturnaia Moskva] in 1956 to greenlighting Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* [Odn den’ Ivana Denisovicha] for the press in 1962; from the removal of Stalin’s body from the Mausoleum on Red Square in 1961 to the relentless backlash against the avant-garde-like exhibition in the Moscow Manege in 1962 and the trial of Joseph Brodsky in 1964—all these events exemplify the instabilities that held the Soviet regime in tight grip in the decade following Stalin’s death.⁶

³ On the alleged doctors’ conspiracy and its aftermath, see Brent and Naumov (2003).

⁴ McCauley sees Khrushchev as a forerunner of Gorbachev and ascribes him an equally important role in reforming the Soviet state (Khrushchev “was as daring and bold as Gorbachev”; McCauley 1995: xi).

⁵ See, e.g., Gibian (1960); Burlatsky (1991); McCauley (1995); Pyzhikov (2002); Taubman (2003); Medvedev (2006); Alekseeva and Goldberg (2006); Bittner (2008); Ilić and Smith (2009); Aksiutin (2010); Kozlov and Gilburd (2013a); Hornsby (2013); Lebina (2014; 2015a); Swain (2016). The limitations of reforms are often discussed in reference to the continuous development of the Gulag system and the repercussions of being a Gulag returnee after Stalin’s death; see, e.g., Adler (2004); Dobson (2009); Elie (2013); Hardy (2016). On the challenges of rethinking the Stalinist past in late Soviet society, see Polly Jones’s (2016) study of memory discourses and revisions of the Gulag legacy after Stalin’s death as well as her book on the dilemmas of de-Stalinization (Jones 2005; cf. Filtzer 1993; Dobson 2011). Additionally, Kathleen Smith’s (2017) exploration of ups and downs of the year 1956 provides an in-depth perspective onto the halted Thaw.

⁶ Several waves of the Thaw are usually distinguished: 1953–early 1954, early 1956 until the Hungarian Revolution later that year, and from 1961 when Stalin’s body was removed from the mausoleum on Red Square until 1964 (see, e.g., Terras 1991: 508–9). On the Manege exhibition (including interviews with participants), see Gerchuk (2008).

In 1964, the search for stability led to the replacement of Khrushchev as the General Secretary of the Communist Party with Leonid Brezhnev, whose team would engage in tightening the “screws” that had been “loosened” by the previous administration. The trial of writers Andrei Siniavskii and Iulii Daniel’ in 1966, which marked the beginning of the human rights movement in the USSR,⁷ and the military invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 clearly demonstrated that previous reforms had been nothing but a “courageous failure” (McCauley 1995: 90).⁸ Although in the late 1960s–early 1980s the state did not make a complete turn back to totalitarianism, it nevertheless strove for harsher regulation of everyday life than in the Thaw era.⁹ In the eyes of historians, “vegetarian attitudes” of the state under Khrushchev [*otnositel’no vegetarianskie povadki vlasti*; Vail’ and Genis 2013: 8] gave way to the “time of velvet terror” [*vremia barkhatnogo terrora*; Papernyi 2011: 8] under Brezhnev, to which the infamous bulldozer exhibition in 1974 and multiple exiles of writers throughout the 1970s bore witness.¹⁰ Authoritarianism stopped “shimmering” and entered a “steady” phase: the years of vigorous but inconsequential action gave way to years of apparent “total inaction.” “On August 21, 1968, the sixties were over in the USSR—they gave way to the years of nothingness,” Petr Vail’ and Aleksander Genis wrote in their history of this period (Vail’ and Genis 2013: 362).¹¹

⁷ Prior to the writers’ trial, on December 5, 1965, a demonstration was held on Pushkin Square in Moscow which was organized by Aleksandr Esenin-Vol’pin and became known as a “Protest for Glasnost” [Miting glasnosti]. Protestors demanded a fair and transparent trial, as well the observance of the rights of citizens proclaimed in the Soviet Constitution that had its anniversary on the day of demonstration. This demonstration (that was repeated in the subsequent years) was the first event dedicated to the protection of human rights in the USSR and as such, marks the beginning of the history of the human rights movement in the country. See Alekseeva (1992: 205–326) for the detailed history of the human rights movement in the USSR. See also Ginzburg (1967) for the transcript of Siniavskii and Daniel’'s trial.

⁸ Cf. Jörg Baberowski, who calls Khrushchev “a reformer without power” (Baberowski 2017: 134).

⁹ For instance, Robert Hornsby sees the signal of political shift from totalitarianism to authoritarianism in the way that the state dealt with actions deviant to its ideology—in particular, mass protests and activities of dissenters (2013). See also Chapter Four of this book for the overview of state mechanisms to delineate the borders of action in the late Soviet cultural field.

¹⁰ See Glezer (1977) for the account of the 1974 open-air exhibition of non-conformist art in Beliaevovskii that was forcibly interrupted by the authorities who used bulldozers and water-cannons. The 1970s are often seen as an era of the third wave of emigration from the USSR, both voluntary and forced. Among the most famous literary migrants of this era are Joseph Brodskii (1972), Aleksander Solzhenitsyn (1974), and Vasilii Aksionov (1980). On the third wave of emigration, see Iontsev (2001: 85–6, 127–31); Genis (2010). Interestingly, while the Khrushchev era is traditionally considered a more relaxed period, and the Brezhnev years a period of a more rigid authoritarianism, the situation regarding domesticity and private life presents an opposing paradigm in light of discoveries made by scholars of everyday life. According to researchers, there were more attempts to control the private sphere under Khrushchev as opposed to a relative alienation of the Party from this area in the 1970s–1980s (Buchli 1997; Gerchuk 2000; Alekseyeva 2017). For attempts of the state to guide the citizens in the private sphere, see also Chuikina (2002); Castillo (2010).

¹¹ “Двадцать первого августа 1968 года [...] в Советском Союзе досрочно закончились шестидесятые и начались – никакие.” Cf. Mikhail Brashinskii who indicated a similar effect of “timelessness” in his article “A Romance with Stagnation” [Roman s zastoem]: “The 1970s will be over only in 1985, when Gorbachev comes to

From an inchoate Thaw, Soviet society transitioned into Brezhnev’s seeming timelessness, where it was “living outside of history” (Groys 1992: 75). The Brezhnevian state relied heavily on mitigating disturbances that could shake the system instead of forcing its path into the “undeniable and glorious Communist future” that had been the doctrine of the Soviet state from the moment of its foundation. In recent years, the stagnation era has been revisited by scholars who have challenged the myth of the “long seventies” as the years “when time stood still” in the USSR.¹² Boris Belge and Martin Deuerlein, for instance, frame the Brezhnev era in terms of “hyperstability” [*Hyperstabilität*], thereby implying that the situation was not stable as in “solid” but rather progressively moving closer to a break as in “at the brink of nearly falling apart” (Belge and Deuerlein 2014a: 13).¹³

This “breaking” scenario took place in March 1985, when, after a successive parade of leaders that followed Brezhnev’s death in 1982,¹⁴ Mikhail Gorbachev was named Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union—an appointment that eventually resulted in massive changes to the Soviet political and social system.¹⁵ While Gorbachev’s reforms did not start immediately with his appointment,¹⁶ I find March 1985 to be a convenient landmark that, however

power. The song ‘Nadezhda’ will disappear from the radio: the verses about the necessity ‘to wait, to be calm and to persevere in order to see life send a rare telegram of joy’ would no longer be relevant. Brodskii’s words (that he said in 1972) that ‘one can live here easily without a calendar’ will not be applicable to the Soviet reality. The scariest thing for a private person will start—the clock will be ticking again. The time will start. It will be the end of timelessness that seems to have settled here forever. ‘Forever’ is the only category that timelessness uses to measure time.” [“70-е окончательно завершатся в 1985 году, с приходом к власти Горбачева. Песню ‘Надежда’ перестанут гонять по радио – куплеты про то, что «надо только выучиться ждать, надо быть спокойным и упрямым, чтоб порой от жизни получать радости скупые телеграммы», потеряют свою актуальность. Словами Бродского «здесь можно жить, забыв про календарь», написанными в 1972 году, советскую действительность будет уже не описать. В ней начнется самое для частного человека страшное – затикают часы. Начнется время. Закончится безвременье, которое, казалось, утвердилось уже навсегда. «Навсегда» – единственная категория, которой безвременье измеряет время”; Brashinskii 1999].

¹² See, e.g., Derbyshire (1987); Thompson (1988); Rogov (1998); Bacon and Sandle (2002); Il’ina (2007); Ward (2009); Chernyshova (2013); Klumbyte and Sharafutdinova (2013); Smolkin-Rothrock and Rutland (2014); Belge and Deuerlein (2014b); Crump (2014); Fainberg and Kalinovsky (2016); Kaspe (2018).

¹³ Belge and Deuerlein suggest the term “hyperstability” to define social and cultural construction of “normality” and “stability” under Brezhnev through the state and popular discourse mechanisms (Belge and Deuerlein 2014a: 13). In his study of the late Soviet era, Alexei Yurchak speaks about another “hyper” dimension of late Soviet life—a “hypernormalization” of authoritative discourse. He understands it as a transformation of the language in which forms and structures dissociate from their constative meanings and preserve only ritualistic performative functions (Yurchak 2006: 47–50).

¹⁴ Brezhnev was succeeded by Iurii Andropov (1982–1984) and Konstantin Chernenko (1984–1985).

¹⁵ On Gorbachev reforms and the fall of the Soviet Union, see Graffy and Hosking (1989); Satter (1996); Malek and Schor-Tschudnowskaja (2013); Zubok (2017); Gabelia (2017); Taubman (2017). See also the discussion in *Slavic Review* (2004, issue 3) with contributions by Cohen (2004b; 2004a); Brown (2004); Kramer (2004); Dawisha (2004); Hanson (2004); Derluguian (2004).

¹⁶ Thus, in the literary field, even in 1985 and 1986 censorship was still holding culture in its grips, as a collection of Glavlit documents from these years demonstrates (Blium 2004).

artificially, signals the end of the era of late socialism and the beginning of the time of glasnost and perestroika. At this time, the hyperstability of the “stagnation era” begins to disintegrate under the pressure of daring new reforms, signaling the halting point of the authoritarian late Soviet society and a transition to democracy building, thereby marking the end of the period which I examine in this book (1953–1985).

THE PRIVATE TURN IN THE USSR

During these roughly three decades, new modes of interaction developed between the state and Soviet citizens. One of the shifts that I regard as most paradigmatic was the emergence of many areas of life over which the state gradually relinquished its control. A critical step in this direction was the regulation “On the Development of Civil Construction in the USSR” [O razvitiu zhilishchnogo stroitel'stva v SSSR] that the Central Committee of the Communist Party passed on July 31, 1957. It emphasized the necessity of increasing state investment in housing industry to ensure the continuous rise of Soviet citizens' welfare (TsIK SSSR 1957). This regulation served as a top-level mandate for the widespread construction of housing that foresaw individual (family-unit-based), and not communal (based on co-habitation of multiple families) forms of residence.¹⁷ These revisions of civil construction policy led to a dramatic increase in individual housing across the country, particularly in Soviet cities: in the span of five years of the Sixth Five-Year Plan (1956–1960), more apartments were built than in the years 1918 to 1940 (Umanskii 1987: 508), and, in 1961, for the first time in Soviet history, the urban population of the USSR outstripped that of the countryside (Varlamov 1972: 385).¹⁸

While *khreshchevki* and *brezhnevki*¹⁹ were changing the faces of Soviet cities, light industry committed to the diversification and enlargement of the range of products that were delivered to state-run malls. It thereby provided Soviet people with more varied choices in clothes, food, furniture, electronic gadgets, and other elements indispensable in making one's *byt* [everyday life] comfortable. This, in turn, helped transform the increasingly widespread individual apartments and

¹⁷ In his detailed examination of this decree, Mark Smith points to the fact that the housing reform should not be ascribed only to Khrushchev's impetus, for its beginnings date back to the late 1940s (although they definitely lacked the massive scale that the program took in the post-Stalin era; 2009). On the mass housing project of the late Soviet era, see also Steven Harris (2013).

¹⁸ On urban development in the USSR, see Sosnovy (1954); Morton and Stuart (1983); Andrusz (1984); Brown (2015).

¹⁹ The houses that were built around the country were mostly based on standardized plans [*tipovye proekty*], with the main difference lying in the number of floors and internal plans of apartments that were reviewed under Brezhnev. Apartments built under Khrushchev received the name *khreshchevki*, and those built under Brezhnev—*brezhnevki* in popular parlance.

houses into inviting and highly competitive retreats for citizens alongside the well-established public institutions like houses of culture, city parks, theaters, and cinemas.²⁰

In Western scholarship, the terms “private” and “public” have been traditionally reserved for spheres of life distinguished by their subjugation to the state or the lack thereof, which is also the way I am going to designate them in this book. However, two remarks are due here. First, when framing something as “private” or “public,” we should not forget about the limitations of this dichotomous division. When Norberto Bobbio speaks about “the great dichotomy” of the public and the private as “[...] two spheres which together are exhaustive in the sense that every element of that world is covered, and mutually exclusive in the sense that any element covered by the first term cannot simultaneously be covered by the second [...]” (Bobbio 1989: 1), processes and activities that lie on the border of the two spheres or that belong to both or neither of them at the same time elude our view.²¹ Instead of the dichotomy of the two unique spheres, I find it imperative to speak about a *multiplicity* of spheres that demonstrate either public or private features and are additionally accompanied by mixed forms that arise at the intersections of the private and the public—the forms that came to be known as “informal-public” spheres in Russian studies.²² I will mean precisely this manifold constellation whenever I use terms like “the private/public division” and “the private and public spheres” in this book, and will also resort to the term “non-state spheres” in situations when I want to extend the understanding of the private sphere to include the spheres lying in-between the two.

Second, despite a certain semblance of functions that these late Soviet spheres may demonstrate in correlation to their Western liberal-democratic counterparts, no direct transfer of meanings is or could be implied here. The liberal-democratic heritage does not properly translate into the context of the late socialist Soviet Union. The private sphere falls short of exemplifying a

²⁰ On luxuries of life in socialism, see, e.g., Crowley and Reid (2010). Although these strategies of the Soviet state may seem unsocialist in nature, they remind of a similar turn in the mid-1930s, which Nicholas Timasheff framed as the “great retreat” from the socialist agenda in 1946 (Timasheff 1946). David Hoffmann later explained this change in state policies by the apparent conviction of the state that socialism had been attained (Hoffmann 2004: 672–74). Similar to the 1930s, when Stalin proclaimed that the country had achieved socialism, Brezhnev’s constitution of 1977 affirmed the arrival of “developed socialism” in the USSR which was seen as an intermediary stage on the path toward Communism. In light of changed social policies, Amir Weiner speaks about a “retiring Revolution” that relinquished some of its earlier ideals, and characterizes the 1960s as the years when “life without terror but with refrigerators was the [Revolution’s] perfect retirement package” (Weiner 2008: 231). In his address to the Soviet cultural elites in May 1957, Nikita Khrushchev argued that the constant rise of welfare [neuklonnyi pod’em blagosostoianiiia trudiashchikhsia] is the primary concern of the Communist Party. He explicitly listed bread, meat, butter, and milk among the products that should be available in necessary quantities to all Soviet citizens and underscored the efforts of the Party to provide the workers with *comfortable* housing [blagoustroennym zhil’em; Khrushchev 1963c: 15, my emphasis].

²¹ Dichotomous approaches as a tool of conceptualization were heavily criticized by poststructuralists, see, e.g., Derrida (2001: 351–70).

²² See Chapter Four, especially the section “Literary Private Kitchens.”

“perfect twin sister”—a distinction, caught, for example, by Oleg Kharkhordin, who states that the Russian phrase “*lichnaia zhizn*” should not be translated as “private life,” because the Bolshevik self can only emerge under the public gaze—in opposition to the Western idea of privacy that argues that one of preconditions for self-realization of an individual is closing off from the public (Kharkhordin 1997: 343).²³ Equally, the idea of the public sphere inspired by the Habermasian model (who imagines an arena where individuals strengthened by the private sphere come together and deliberate freely; Habermas 1991) is also hard to apply to non-democratic states (in this case, late Soviet Russia).²⁴ In an authoritarian state, possibilities of freely expressing one’s opinions and thoughts are heavily curtailed, and instead of a liberal-democratic type of public sphere, a different entity arises in which the State strives to reign undividedly—a “state” sphere, in Alexei Levinson’s wording:

It was clear that we did not have this [Habermasian] type of public sphere in our society. An infinite ceiling of the “state sphere” was the only thing above one’s head. It was also clear that our private sphere was small, compressed down to a tiny room in a communal apartment or even to a bed, if not to a bunk in the Gulag. (Levinson 2009: 568)²⁵

Neither the Soviet private nor the public spheres seem to comply with their Western counterparts—*nor should they*, as I will argue throughout this book. The striking difference from a democratic model should not prevent us from questioning how the late Soviet society was figuring out a path toward *its own* forms of private and public life, because identical forms can never be achieved in culturally and temporally different contexts. And in a society where freedom of speech was heavily curtailed, literature became a primary site of negotiating privacy.

SOVIET LITERATURE IN SEARCH FOR AND CONTROL OF PRIVACY

As political elites, architects, engineers, designers, and ordinary citizens were co-constructing and exploring the new rising spheres of agency through languages of their respective fields—by

²³ See Chapter One for approaches to integrating the concept of privacy into Russian and Soviet studies.

²⁴ It is important to note here that the Habermasian liberal model of the bourgeois public sphere been criticized for the lack of egalitarianism: it reserves opportunities to participate in the discussion for white middle- and upper-class men and prevents minoritized groups (e.g., women, people of color) from joining it (Fraser 1990). On socialist forms of the public sphere, see, e.g., Beyrau (2002); Rittersporn, Behrends, and Rolf (2003a); Rittersporn, Behrends, and Rolf (2003b). On the role of intelligentsia in the formation of the Soviet public sphere after the Revolution, see Finkel (2007).

²⁵ “Ясно было, что у нас такого публичного в социальном пространстве нет. Над головой каждого сразу начинался бескрайний потолок государственного. Ясно было, что и приватное наше – маленькое, суженное до комнатенки в коммуналке, а то и до коечки, если не шконки.” Cf. Matt Killingsworth’s concept of the “totalitarian public sphere” (Killingsworth 2012: 3).

producing regulations and laws, designing and erecting new types of buildings, and developing new everyday objects and integrating them into private and public spaces—the cultural sphere was also experimenting with new meanings, codes, and forms to give shape to novel and revised spheres of experience: “every political change first and foremost affected culture, and only through the latter, the social fabric as a whole” (Lipovetsky and Wakamiya 2015: 17). According to Boris Kagarlitsky, the softening of the political regime after Stalin’s death led to the “emancipation” of one cultural zone after another from ideological control: “The cultural sphere, though, is less easy than any other to confine to one-dimensional space: on the contrary, new dimensions begin to appear in it as a result of the specific nature of the artistic activity, every time external pressure slackens even a little” (Kagarlitsky 1988: 86).

Among all arts, literature was exceptionally vocal in advocating a change, which is not surprising considering its unparalleled role as a social institution in Russian culture, known for its literature-centricity [*literaturotsentrichnost*]. Publications like Vladimir Pomerantsev’s essay “On Sincerity in Literature” [Ob iskrennosti v literature, 1953] or Ilya Ehrenburg’s story “The Thaw” [Ottepel’, 1954], as well as outspoken pieces of literary criticism²⁶ marked a decisive departure from the hegemonic doctrine of socialist realism by inviting to explore characters primarily through their private lives and not public commitments. Pomerantsev (1953) condemned seeming alienation of contemporary authors from reflections on the real life of ordinary people in favor of the construction of non-existent utopias that lacked connection to the readers and only pleased the censors. The absence of a direct backlash against the essay—even more, rather positive comments in the press²⁷—indicated that the state was willing to give more leeway to the cultural sphere: “Soviet literature was so heavily monitored by party censorship that even slight variations in themes, imagery, or tone, barely visible to an ordinary reader, could signify enormous changes in political direction” (Kahn et al. 2018: 549).

²⁶ Pomerantsev’s contribution was followed by other critical essays that *Novyi mir* published in the following year, all of which pointed at the developments that were deemed deleterious for Soviet literature, such as Lifshits (1954); Abramov (1954); Shcheglov (1954). See also Lidiia Chukovskaia’s article “The Sense of Truth of Life” [Chuvstvo zhiznnoi pravdy] in *Literaturnaia gazeta* [Literary Newspaper], where she condemns hypocritical directions that literature has taken which she finds particularly deleterious in children’s literature (Chukovskaia, December 24, 1953).

²⁷ For reactions to Pomerantsev’s article, see Zezina (1999: 130–39). Although Pomerantsev’s essay mostly passed uncriticized in the short run, a *posteriori* criticism would often use the terms employed by Pomerantsev to demonstrate “the mistakes” made by writers who “condemned socialist realism.” Thus, in 1957–1963, Khrushchev would iteratively blame “certain writers” (without mentioning Pomerantsev’s name, or any other name, for that matter) for inventing a derogatory term “*lakirovshchik*” to falsely define people “who wrote truthfully about the reality, about the creative work of the people and its great victories, who created positive images of the Soviet people in the works of literature and art” [кто правдиво писал о нашей действительности, о созидательном труде народа и его великих победах, кто создавал положительные образы советских людей в произведениях литературы и искусства; Khrushchev 1963c: 33]. See also: Khrushchev (1963a: 79; 1963b: 183).

However, the instability of political life in the socialist world soon translated into the instability of cultural life more broadly and literary life in particular. The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 exacerbated the Party's concerns about preventing "counter-revolutionary" and "anti-Soviet" tones in literary works.²⁸ In 1956, Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* [Doktor Zhivago] was rejected by the editors of the thick journal *Novyi mir*, who "wrote to the author that 'the spirit of your novel is the spirit of nonacceptance of the socialist revolution'" (Brown 1978: 261), whereas the main character of the novel, doctor Zhivago, was described by literary authorities as the "absolute negation of the traditional Soviet 'positive hero'" (Brown 1978: 262). The publication of the novel abroad in 1957 and the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature to Pasternak set off a wide campaign that the state waged against the writer to minimize negative effects of the publication.²⁹

After the Fourth Union of Writers' Congress in 1967, a relative freedom in the literary field gained during the Thaw years gave place to an increasing control of literature.³⁰ By the late 1960s–1970s, although some groundbreaking works had been published and the doctrine of socialist realism was "nearly moribund," institutionalized control of cultural production was more than alive (Woll 1991: 4). The situation would only change with perestroika when the censorship was first minimized and then finally abolished in 1990, and hundreds of prohibited texts reached their readers.³¹

²⁸ Khrushchev explicitly mentions these concerns in his speech to the Soviet intelligentsia in 1957: "Under current dispensations, our ideological weapon should be in order and act seamlessly. The lesson taught by Hungarian events, when counter-revolution used the writers to attain its dirty purposes, reminds us where a reckless, unscrupulous, and weak attitude to the schemes of forces hostile to socialism can lead us" [В этой обстановке наше идейное оружие должно быть в исправности и действовать безотказно. Урок венгерских событий, когда контрреволюция использовала в своих грязных целях писателей, напоминает о том, к чему может привести беспечность, беспринципность и бесхарактерность в отношении к проидам сил, враждебных социализму; Khrushchev 1963c: 47].

²⁹ For the story behind the publication of the novel, see Mancosu (2016). For the scandal that ensued out of it and its affect on Pasternak's life, see Hingley (2021).

³⁰ Vladimir Lakshin, an editor of *Novyi mir*, recalls growing difficulties on pushing journal issues through the censorship already from the mid-1960s (Alpatova 2005: 136). Grigorii Svirskii also indicates an increase in conservative tones and strategies in the cultural sphere shortly before and after the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution (Svirskii 1979: 319–33).

³¹ On September 4, 1986, *Glavlit* issued Order 29c that prescribed the censors to focus on the matters of protection of state and military secrets and only inform the Party about major breaches of ideology. The publication of Nikolai Gumilev's poems in 1986 edition of *Ogonek* [The Flame] was one of the first signs of the new era of glasnost. In the late 1980s, *Novyi mir* published Andrei Bitov's *Pushkinskii dom* [Pushkin House, 1987, issues 10–12], Andrei Platonov's *Kotlovan* [The Foundation Pit, 1987, issue 6], Iurii Dombrovskii's *Fakul'tet nenuzhnykh veshchei* [The Faculty of Useless Things, 1988, issues 8–11], Boris Pasternak's *Doktor Zhivago* [Doctor Zhivago, 1988, issues 1–4], and chapters from Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Arkhipelag Gulag* [The Gulag Archipelago, 1989, 8–11].

During these years, privacy may not have had a specially dedicated manifesto, like sincerity, so prominently elevated by Pomerantsev,³² but as I will show in chapters that follow, it got inscribed into the culture of late socialism alongside and through such cultural codes as “*byt*,” “home,” “sincerity,” “person,” or “truth.”³³ The analytical framework of this book is built around a journey to understand mechanisms and architecture that powered the imagination of these and other models of distancing oneself from the state and society at large—a search for privacy, as we would call it today.

On this journey, I focus on literary texts published between 1953 and 1985—primarily, on prose and drama. In choosing texts for analysis, I was guided by an inspiration to collect a polyphony of voices, each providing an insight into the late Soviet idea of privacy, and to follow how this idea transformed throughout the thirty years following Stalin’s death.³⁴ My primary interest was in literary works that in this way or another deal with non-state dimensions of Soviet life. “Non-state” was the key criterion for my choice of stories, short stories, novels, plays, and sometimes, poems for analysis: in order to understand what sorts of meanings of privacy were voiced by late Soviet authors, I did not look for literary works that offered visions of what we might label “private” today, but rather followed an *ex negativo* approach to find out what remained when the things that stood in obvious connection to the state or the society at large were discarded.

³² The infamous absence of the lexical equivalent for “privacy” in the Russian language barely needs any mentioning. The concept best situates itself at the crossroads of the terms *chastnyi* [private] and *lichnyi* [personal], accompanied by a respective noun, such as *chastnaia zhizn’* [private life]. What is imperative to mention though, is that Russian is not the only European language that lacks a single term for “privacy.” Germanic languages, such as English and German, have “privacy” and *Privatheit* respectively, however, *Privatheit* is used much rarer in German than its counterpart in English, mostly in scholarly and media discourses. Romance languages, for instance, are closer to Russian in that they demonstrate a preference for the descriptive approach to the expression of “privacy”—*vie privée* (French), or *vita privata* (Italian) would be equivalents here. The fact that it comes to nobody’s mind to speak about the absence of privacy in France or Italy while both countries equally lack a broadly used term to describe it, indicates a profound political influence of the Cold-War-era tensions on the theories of the lack of privacy in Russia.

³³ “В обществе постепенно сменялся культурный код. Если с оттепелью вошли ключевые слова «искренность», «личность», «правда», то теперь опорными стали другие – «родина», «природа», «народ»” (Vail’ and Genis 2013: 275).

³⁴ Alongside *literatura byta*, specific dimensions of daily life were covered by other emerging literary currents: the human dimension of war was the focus of *leitenantskaia proza* [Lieutenants’ prose] that was predominantly written by the writers who had participated in the Great Patriotic War in their twenties; everyday life in penitentiary environments was covered by *lagernaia literatura* [the Gulag literature], whereas *derevenskaia literatura* [village literature] paid close attention to non-urban routines of Soviet life. While it would also be fascinating to research the questions of privacy within these texts, the fact that their main focus was not on private life but on other issues (human costs of the war or the Gulag system, environmental issues and the decay of village life and agriculture) makes me focus mostly on the texts that deal with characters that are placed into the setting of cities and towns (in the 1970s, the upsurge of texts that discussed the life of a person in the city led to the rise of the term “urban prose” to define literary works that engaged in this pattern; I study some of these texts in my book).

Many of these works can be roughly categorized as *literatura byta*—the literature of the everyday life:

The Russian language knows no word that is more mysterious, multi-layered, and obscure. What is *byt* really? Is it everyday life, domestic routine, the fuss with cooking, shopping, and washing? Dry cleaners and hairdressers? Yes, it is *byt*. But family life is also *byt*. The relations between husband and wife, parents and their children, closer and distant relatives—are in it, too. The birth of a new person, and the death of the elderly, illnesses and weddings—they are *byt*, too. Relations between friends, work colleagues, love, arguments, jealousy, envy—all this is *byt*, too. But that’s exactly what life is about! (Trifonov 1985b: 102)³⁵

Literatura byta zoomed into the lives of millions of people who populated cities like Moscow and passed by each other every day without noticing those around them. Writers paid attention to lives that otherwise would have slipped away unnoticed and imagined them on paper. Whereas Iurii Trifonov’s definition above is quite broad, Benjamin Sutcliffe defines *byt* in a narrower way: “The European quotidian is an arena for escape from control (particularly that of the state), where individual choice redeems tedious materiality” (Sutcliffe 2009: 7). His understanding of *byt*, therefore, loosely overlaps with the idea of privacy as an area of life separated from the state. I understand *byt* as a concept that is broader than privacy and includes practices of privacy to the same extent as it covers practices of publicity. While *literatura byta* has been extensively studied,³⁶ the evolution of the idea of privacy as a component of *byt* within Russian literary imagination has yet to be traced—a task I undertake in this book.

Texts I examine mostly come from the officially published Soviet literature. In 1969, just a year after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, the writer Len Karpinskii wrote the article “A Word is Also Deed” [Slovo tozhe delo], where he argued that the time had come for a revolution that would be done not through force but through a debate, thereby pointing at the power of words in effecting a change in the world (Karpinskii 2000 [1969]).³⁷ Indeed, the onset of stagnation was marked by an upsurge in the dissident and human rights movement in the USSR that generated a sizeable amount of writing that advocated for a necessity of transformation in Soviet society. Such

³⁵ “В русском языке нет, пожалуй, более загадочного, многомерного и непонятного слова. Ну что такое быт? То ли это – какие-то будни, какая-то домашняя повседневность, какая-то колготня у плиты, по магазинам, по прачечным. Химчистки, парикмахерские... Да, это называется бытом. Но и семейная жизнь – тоже быт. Отношения мужа и жены, родителей и детей, родственников дальних и близких друг другу – и это. И рождение человека, и смерть стариков, и болезни, и свадьбы – тоже быт. И взаимоотношения друзей, товарищей по работе, любовь, ссоры, ревность, зависть – все это тоже быт. Но ведь из этого и состоит жизнь!”

³⁶ For studies of *byt* in Russian literature, see, e.g., Sutcliffe (2009); Graf (2014).

³⁷ The article was written under the pen name L. Okunev and disseminated in samizdat. Later confiscated by the KGB from the historian Roi Medvedev’s apartment, it led to Karpinskii’s expulsion from the Communist Party (Remnick 1993: 169–79).

landmark texts as Andrei Sakharov's *Reflections on Progress, Peaceful Co-existence, and Intellectual Freedom* [Razmyshleniia o progresse, mirnom sosushchestvovanii i intellektual'noi svobode, 1968] or Andrei Amal'rik's *Will the Soviet Union Survive until 1984?* [Prosushchestvuet li Sovetskii Soiuz do 1984 goda?, 1969] fueled intellectual debates of this era. They did so alongside another emergent type of writing—collections of texts that documented violations of Soviet codes of law or the constitution by the authorities. Born out of political trials over late Soviet culture, this genre was represented by such groundbreaking initiatives as the periodical *Chronicle of Current Events* (Khronika tekushchikh sobytii, 1968–1983) or transcripts of trials over Soviet writers and dissidents, such as *The White Book* [Belaia Kniga], edited by Aleksander Ginzburg, that revealed the details of the case against the writers Andrei Siniavskii and Iulii Daniel'. Joined by literary texts that had been rejected by editors of Soviet thick journals and publishing houses or that were written for unofficial consumption right from the start, they all constituted the layer of late Soviet culture that came to be known as “underground” literature.³⁸

The political context of the Cold War stimulated a rise of a “hero narrative” about these texts that has to some extent persevered until today: it centralizes the idea of “muteness” and “silence” of this type of literature in the Soviet public sphere, and presents the emergence and dissemination of these texts by means of unofficial circulation as a feat of overcoming silence by raising one's voice despite all odds.³⁹ Consequently, such texts have often been studied as indisputable and often, the only loci of agency in the late socialist USSR and the privacy in which they were created—as an exclusive site of freedom and autonomy.⁴⁰

³⁸ Literature that existed outside of the official Soviet public sphere received many different names from people who partook in its production. The editors of *Metropol'* speak about *vnekomplektnaia literatura* [literature beyond the set] and *bezdomnyi plast literatury* [homeless literature] in their preface (Aksenov et al. 1979: 1). Other terms include *nepodtsenzurnaia literatura* [uncensored literature; Ivanov and Roginskii 2000]; *literatura andegraunda, neofitsial'naia literatura* [underground, unofficial literature; Savitskii 2002]. The term *vtoraia literatura* [second literature] is also often used.

³⁹ Thus, Cornelia Gerstenmaier (1972) titled her book *Die Stimme der Stummen* [The Voice of the Mute], and Viacheslav Dolinin and Dmitrii Semeriukhin (2003) speak about *preodolenie nemoty* [overcoming muteness] in their research on samizdat. In the studies of Soviet literature that were written during the Cold War, denominations like “counter-culture” (Biddulph 1972) or “resistance” (Kirk 1975) were also prominent. Andrei Siniavskii equally speaks of samizdat as the first sign of hope for Russian literature in his article for the *Index of Censorship*: “Russian literature after Stalin was like a forest that had been felled and then set on fire until the earth was scorched, and then the remaining stumps had been gouged out and burnt in their turn. Samizdat strikes me as the first return of some young green shoots to that scorched landscape, with fresh buds and the beginnings of foliage. It will take a long time for the trees to grow again [...]” (Sinyavsky 1980: 13).

⁴⁰ Studies of dissent in the late Soviet era include Brumberg (1970); Tökés (1975); Derbyshire (1987: 113–26); Beyrau (1993: 209–55); Vaissié (1999); Kulavig (2002); Boobbyer (2005); Horvath (2005); Shubin (2008); Brier (2013); Nathans (2014); Baran (2016), Martin (2019; 2024). Personal testimonies on dissident activities are rendered in Alekseeva and Goldberg (2006); Martin and Sveshnikov (2017); Morev (2017); Arkhangel'skii (2018). On samizdat, see Feldbrugge (1975); Ivanov and Roginskii (2000); Savitskii (2002); Dolinin and Severiukhin (2003); Kind-Kovács and Labov (2013); Komaromi (2015); Alber and Stegmann (2016).

While “underground texts” certainly demonstrate more authorial audacity than their counterparts that were officially published (albeit at the cost of limited audiences and often, severe political implications for authors), treating them as the only source of agency in the late Soviet era would mean to overlook the ways in which literature that came into the official public sphere also opened up spaces of non-conformity. Late Soviet thick journals that were extremely reputable among writers because they reached the broadest audiences (but for that very reason were also heavily censored), as I argue, were a vital site of negotiating imaginaries of privacy during this era. Relatively liberal *Novyi mir* [A New World] that published Pomerantsev’s essay and other groundbreaking works that came to define the late Soviet era⁴¹ offers a plethora of works that engage with privacy. But as I will show in this book, so does its nemesis—the highly conservative journal *Oktiabr’* [October] that was a bulwark of socialist realism throughout the Soviet years.⁴² Privacy was a strategy deployed by writers across the political spectrum, including in publications that could not make it into the official public sphere, like Boris Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago* (1957) or Joseph Brodsky’s “In a Room and a Half” (1985). Notwithstanding their limited readership in comparison to publications in thick journals, they, too, present powerful insights into the late Soviet idea of privacy, and I include such texts in this book.

Considering that the authoritarian late Soviet state could and often would perceive any deviations from the established ideology (e.g., the focus on the private life rather than eulogies to the bright Communist future) as politically subversive, I theorize privacy not only in relation to the contents of literary works, but also to writers’ creative reality, for which they had to fight during the late Soviet era. While individual mechanisms of power assertion employed by the state or literature in the late Soviet era are well-researched (e.g., censorship or punitive measures ranging from forced psychiatric treatment to exile on the side of the state, and the Aesopian language or samizdat on the side of literature—see Chapter Four for details), a framework that would capture the shifts of borders between the private and the public under the influence of these actors is still missing. I elaborate an approach to grasp the nuances of their interaction by extending Erving Goffman’s theories about the construction and negotiation of borders in everyday situations of socialization toward studies of literary politics and in so doing, challenge the liberal premise of

⁴¹ The role of *Novyi mir* in the evolution of the cultural sphere in post-Stalinist times has been examined by Frankel (1981); Spechler (1982); Skarlygina (2012: 63–76); Kozlov (2013). According to Igor’ Vinogradov, one of the editors of *Novyi mir* in the 1960s, [...] it was the only legal oppositional journal [...], it was and remained the only “crack” for any free or semi-free word, and, of course, anything that was more or less oppositional, liberal, or democratic, any thought that was looking for freedom of reflection strove toward this “crack.” (“[...] это был единственный легальный оппозиционный журнал [...], он был и оставался основной «щелью» для свободного или полусвободного слова, и все более или менее оппозиционное, либеральное, демократическое, всякая вольная, ищущая мысль, естественно, в эту «щель» устремлялась.”; Vinogradov 2000: 124).

⁴² I would like to thank Sanna Turoma for prompting me to explore this direction.

privacy as an absolutely positive practice. I also show that by envisioning scenarios of a private retreat and bringing them into officially published editions, literature normalized privacy as a late Soviet imaginary, thereby expanding the borders of the private sphere within the realm of public literature.

The concept of privacy has a complicated history, ever more so in the Russian context (as I show in detail in Chapter One), and my book attempts to bridge the gap between Western liberal theorizations of privacy that view it as a concept that “delineates a protected sphere or dimension of action and responsibility where individuals can act in a way that is independent of decisions and influences from the public realm of state institutions and society at large” (Rössler 2005: 6), and the late Soviet context, which, as I demonstrate, often offers similar models. I argue that vigorous engagement of late Soviet literature with non-state spheres of life turned it into a laboratory for ideas of privacy which was increasingly sought in a society disillusioned by the Communist doctrine and progressively alienated itself from active participation in the public sphere. At the same time, it also endowed literature with the power of a cultural subaltern that defied the status quo and was vocal in negotiating the borders between the private and public spheres in the 1950s–1980s.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

My analysis opens by exploring the idea of privacy as a Western imaginary and possibilities of accommodating it within late Soviet cultural imagination in Chapter One. While reviewing the foci of theories of privacy inspired by liberal democratic thought, I also examine directions that Western studies of privacy have not yet taken or have rarely explored and outline advances in the studies of the private and public spheres in the Russian context.

Chapter Two focuses on the concept of the “home” as an important part of the imaginary of privacy in many societies and inquires how “home” and “privacy” correlate in late Soviet literature. I analyze meanings that writers incorporated into new and old forms of domesticity—private apartments that became progressively widespread throughout the 1950s–1980s, rooms in communal apartments, individual houses—to determine the spectrum of concepts that nurtured the idea of privacy in the late Soviet era. In so doing, I focus on the works of Vladimir Dudintsev, Boris Pasternak, Natal’ia Baranskaia, Iurii Trifonov, Vladimir Makanin, Vladimir Arro, Vladimir Voinovich, and Vladimir Amlinskii.

In Chapter Three, I move from fictional homes to characters who populated them and examine the rise of a new type of character in the late Soviet era—one, in whose portrayal privacy plays a key role. Here, I explore not only canonical works of this time, like “The Thaw” by Ehrenburg or

Alexander Iashin's "Levers" [Rychagi, 1956] and I. Grekova's "Hairdresser" [Damskii master, 1963],⁴³ but also show how the turn to privacy in character portrayal also affected the representation of the most important Soviet character—Vladimir Lenin—on the pages of *Oktiabr'*, where privacy came to be used to strengthen Lenin's iconicity long before celebrities rediscovered this strategy in the era of the social media.

What did it mean to have these kinds of privacy discourses in the public sphere? What role did they play? In Chapter Four, I explore these questions starting with a review of Soviet mechanisms of censorship and ways writers interacted with them. Building upon Erving Goffman's sociological theories on self-presentation and control of one's behavior in everyday life (specifically, on the conceptual pair of disattendability and civil inattention), I proffer a framework to analyze the interaction of actors in late Soviet literary field and argue for seeing in literature a site for a democratic model of the public sphere—an agora done through literary performances of privacy in public. What often seems so conspicuously lacking in the framework offered by Soviet political institutes was therefore created and developed by the cultural subaltern who slowly but firmly turned the "state sphere" into a public one by pushing its own agenda through publications that tested and gained ground for bolder visions of Soviet life that are not predicated on the commitment to the public sphere but were defined by concepts like "sincerity," "truth" "and "apoliticality."

In my research, privacy, literature, and politics are bound together to reveal a vibrant spectacle of the continuous interaction between the state, cultural elites, and citizens, in which thresholds were erected and crossed incessantly, thus inviting researchers to cross a threshold, too, and step onto this dynamic arena to examine it closer. Fictional private sites were battlefields for the production and contestation of ideologies, and the exposure of these literary wars to the public eye played a fundamental role in shifting the borders between the private and the public spheres in authoritarian late Soviet Russia. Patterns of relations between the state and culture that I uncover in this book came to live much longer than the era that gave them birth, and uncannily resonate in twenty-first-century Russia, which is why in the conclusion, I draw parallels between the late Soviet era and the contemporary context of Putin's Russia, where privacy in the cultural field once again re-emerges as a powerful site of negotiating boundaries of agency.

⁴³ Here and further I always spell I. Grekova's name with the abbreviated "I" preceding her surname (without expanding it to "Irina")—just like she, a mathematician by training, made up as her pseudonym ("igrek" is how Russian math reads "y"; real name: Elena Vetsel').

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS PRIVACY AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

THE RISE OF PRIVACY

Ideas about the distinction of what we call today the “private” and the “public” spheres have been present in various cultures in this or other form since Antiquity.¹ Yet, it was not until the end of the 19th century that the specific discourse on privacy started to take shape in the global West. Privacy entered anglophone debates in 1890 in the powerful wording of lawyers Samuel Warren and Louis Brandeis: “the right to life has come to mean the right to enjoy life,—the right to be let alone” (Warren and Brandeis 1890: 193). Their affirmation came as a response to the emergence of portable photographic devices—good old Kodak cameras well-familiar to us today that were just conquering the world in the late nineteenth century—and their abuse by photojournalists who eagerly furnished modern-era newspapers with material for their gossip columns.² By objecting to this practice from the standpoint of the value of individual’s life, these two lawyers who would eventually both become US Supreme Court Justices tapped into the spirit of liberal ideologies that placed strong emphasis on the importance of the individual and adhered to the principle of the strict separation of the private sphere from the public sphere (that is, non-involvement of the state into citizen’s private lives) to ensure the unhindered development of the individual.³

¹ The multi-volume edition *A History of Private Life* offers a comprehensive perspective on the development of the private and public spheres in Western societies, see Ariès and Duby (1987–1991).

² On the impact portable cameras made on media landscapes, see Lake (2019).

³ See, e.g., Mill (2002); Hobbes (2003); Locke (2014). The commitment of democracies to this principle was so unequivocal that it required a wave of feminist protests in the 1960s under the motto “the private is political” to reconsider the irrevocability of the non-involvement of public bodies into private matters under certain

The idea voiced by Warren and Brandeis that going about one's business is not just a *privilege*, but a legitimate *right* has guided discussions about privacy in the anglophone world ever since. In the early decades since the publication of this landmark essay, the discussion was spearheaded by American lawyers who would publish their pieces on what came to be known as “the right to privacy” by the early 20th century and would thereby inscribe this new concept into American culture.⁴ The years after WWII witnessed further growth of interest in privacy agenda: in part, it was sparked by a new understanding of catastrophic repercussions of the Nazi ideology that had stomped upon human dignity; in part, it was fostered by the rise of mass media and consumer culture in the global West and the growing concern about the influence that new technologies could have on a person. The further technological progress went, the more charged the debates became with the rhetoric of protecting the individual from the “ever-more-pervasive” machines and the possibilities with which they endowed individuals or organizations who control them.⁵

The arrival of the internet and the upsurge in information produced by individuals that came to be known as Big Data made information the most valuable currency in the digital world—the “new oil” of humanity (Hirsch 2013). Unsurprisingly, it did not take long for this currency to be abused. Snowden's revelations about the pervasiveness of digital surveillance into private individuals by the NSA and other security agencies launched a new era of discourses about privacy that have now been woke to the real and not hypothetical idea of data collection in contemporary societies. While even prior to Snowden's revelations, the debate on privacy was strongly driven by the focus on the protection of personal data in digital contexts,⁶ the scandal added new dimensions to the discourse, with issues of *accountability* and *transparency* coming into the foreground. It also drew attention to the changing power landscapes in which the State had ceased to be the omnipotent “Big Brother” and became one of the “Brothers” alongside global

circumstances (such as battery or assault in family). On feminist critique of privacy, see Pateman (1983); Gavison (1992); Landes (1998); DeCew (2015).

⁴ See, e.g., Speed (1896); Hand (1897); O'Brien (1902); Adams (1905); Thompson (1937); Mehaffy (1938); Davis (1959); See also an overview of one hundred years of the history of this concept in Gormley (1992).

⁵ Concerns in this regard were voiced already in the 1960s–1970s (Long 1967). Quite famous is the decision of the German Constitutional Court that upheld the law suit of a group of citizens against the planned popular census that in their view, would collect too much information about them; the unprecedented court decision established a category of “informational self-determination” [*informationelle Selbstbestimmung*] as a derivative right in German law (BVerfGE 1983). See also the survey made in the early 1980s in the United States that reflected growing concerns of Americans over the invasion of their privacy by technologies (Harris and Westin 1981). In the 21st century, the rhetoric of the “end of privacy” became ubiquitous (Garfinkel 2000; Schaar 2007; Heller 2011; Grimm 2012; Sarat 2014).

⁶ On privacy in digital spaces, see, e.g., Simitis (1987); Regan (1995); Lyon and Zureik (1996); Agre and Rotenberg (1997); Nissenbaum (1997); DeCew (1997); Regan (2002); Solove (2004); Moore (2007); Acquisti (2008); Kerr, Steeves, and Lucock (2009); Wacks (2010); Trepte and Reinecke (2011); Papacharissi (2011); McCarthy (2012); Cohen (2012); boyd (2014); Lane et al. (2014); Busch (2015); Marx (2016).

corporations like Google, Microsoft, X (Twitter), Amazon, or Facebook. This new era of privacy discourse has been marked by a revision of major legislative mechanisms that regulate the framework of access to individual users' data, such as the introduction of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the EU.⁷

Throughout all these years, the discourse on privacy has mainly focused on two questions: *why* privacy should be protected and *what* it is exactly that should be protected. While the former has fostered reflection on the value of privacy, the latter has produced its multiple definitions. In this chapter, I explore various understandings of privacy and theorizations that underpin arguments for upholding privacy. As these debates mostly take place within and in relation to Western contexts, I offer an overview of studies of privacy beyond this part of the world—beyond privacy's "comfort zone." Since the Soviet Union was a system not only culturally but also politically different from the West, I also examine how privacy functions across various political landscapes—from democratic to authoritarian and totalitarian states. Finally, I come to review approaches to privacy in the Soviet and Russian context, before setting on to explore how privacy was performed in late Soviet literature.

WHAT IS PRIVACY?

Putting the concept of privacy into a tangible lexical formula has proved to be a task far from easy. The Warren-Brandeis essay inspired numerous theories of privacy that connected it to *solitude*, including one of the early definitions of privacy by the Parliamentary Assembly of the European Union that described it as "the right to live one's own life with a minimum of interference" (Parliamentary Assembly 1970). It has also often been linked to *information* about a person or fact. Thus, Martijn Blaauw describes the state of privacy as the absence of knowledge about the individual by others. In his opinion, we can speak about privacy when "other persons do not stand in significant epistemic relations to those truths one wishes to keep private" (Blaauw 2013: 167). His definition echoes an earlier idea voiced by Anthony Giddens that privacy has two aspects: "privacy as the 'other side' of the penetration of the state, and privacy as what may not be revealed" (Giddens 1991: 153).

Other theories have grounded the idea of privacy not in the information *per se* but in the possibility of *access* to the individual, spaces, or to the information. For example, Ruth Gavison frames privacy as "a concern for limited accessibility" (Gavison 1980: 423), and Gary Marx defines it as a concept that "involves a *subject* who *restricts access* to personal data" (Marx 2015:

⁷ For a detailed analysis of the GDPR and the way policies it contains apply in digital contexts, see Sharma (2019).

33, original emphasis). However, what these conceptualizations often failed to regard was the role that the person themselves played in achieving solitude or restricting access to something or to themselves. Thus, being on a desert island or in a prison cell also guarantees solitude and limited accessibility, but these situations are rarely one’s choice, as Charles Fried (1968) justly pointed out. Such borderline cases inspired scholars to reflect further on the condition of privacy, which led to the introduction of the *control* factor into the equation: Alan Westin was one of the first to voice this argument in 1967, when he defined privacy as “the claim of individuals, groups, or institutions to determine for themselves when, how, and to what extent information about them is communicated to others” (Westin 1967: 7).⁸

In the twenty-first century, Beate Rössler bound control and access together in her understanding of privacy that went beyond information alone: “Something counts as private if one can oneself control the access to this ‘something’” (Rössler 2005: 8). She singled out three dimensions of privacy—local, decisional, and informational—that each corresponds to different elements of human life that privacy should protect.⁹ While Rössler’s framework did not account for specific conditions of the mediatized environment, Helen Nissenbaum came forward with an argument of understanding privacy as an “*appropriate* flow of information” and suggested a model of privacy protection that was grounded in “contextual integrity” (Nissenbaum 2010: 127, my emphasis).

The approach to privacy as a conceptual field rather than a single meaning that Rössler’s theory signaled received development in the works by Daniel Solove and Annabelle Lever. Thus, building upon Ludwig Wittgenstein’s idea of a family of related concepts, Solove sees privacy not as “one thing, but a plurality of many distinct, yet related things” (Solove 2015: 74). Lever (2015),

⁸ See also similar definitions by Fried 1968; Gavison 1983.

⁹ “I speak of *decisional* privacy when we claim the right to protection from unwanted access in the sense of unwanted interference or of heteronomy in our decisions and actions. I speak of *informational* privacy when people claim the right to protection against unwanted access in the sense of interference in personal data about themselves, in other words access to information about them that they have no desire to see in wrong hands. And I speak of *local* privacy in a completely non-metaphorical sense when we claim the right to protection against the admission of other people to spaces or areas” (Rössler 2005: 9, original emphasis). Rössler’s classification is in line with earlier scholarly efforts to identify possible dimensions of privacy. Thus, Ruth Gavison speaks about privacy in reference to information known about an individual, attention paid to an individual, and physical access to an individual (Gavison 1980: 429–33). Adam Moore defines privacy right as “a right to control access to, and uses of, places, bodies, and personal information” (Moore 2010: 27), which echoes Daniel Solove’s theory about three privacy practices: family, body, and home (Solove 2002). Helen Nissenbaum also refers to three dimensions: the dimension of actors (government and private actors), the dimension of realm (including space, subdivided into private and public), and the dimension of information (Nissenbaum 2010: 102). Stanley Benn and Gerald Gaus single out four dimensions of access to an individual: physical access to spaces, access to activities and intercourse, access to information, and access to resources (Benn and Gaus 1983: 7), which can be compared to the four dimensions distinguished by Zureik and Stalker: informational, territorial, communicational, and bodily (physical) privacy (Zureik and Stalker 2010: 16).

in turn, connects privacy to three main groups: seclusion and solitude, anonymity and confidentiality, intimacy and domesticity.¹⁰

Neither these definitions nor a plethora of others that would require a separate study just to be mentioned¹¹ can be declared as correct or wrong—their service to privacy research and practice lies in their elaboration on their predecessors, in their mutual disjunctions, and in the polyphony created by multiple disciplines that are part of the debate. What they have achieved is identifying a variety of dimensions of life to which privacy can be connected (such as information or spaces), as well as a wide range of triggers that can set off one’s anxiety about the disturbance of these dimensions (e.g., loss of control, access by others, etc.). While definitions listed here are just a fraction of the voluminous privacy research, they provide a core idea of the “skeleton” of the concept of privacy in the global West, which is further reinforced through discussions about values connected to privacy.

WHY DOES PRIVACY MATTER?

Many scholars have argued that privacy is valued as “a means to an end,” because of the activities and practices that we manage to carry out if we have privacy (e.g., Solove 2008: 174–75). Some have seen benefits of privacy in its possibility to provide a retreat, a shelter from the judgment of others where one can reflect on the events of the day in peace. Thus, Erving Goffman speaks about the importance of “backstages” (which is Goffman’s equivalent for “privacy”) in one’s daily routine as the only places where masks are torn off, and the “true self” is revealed (Goffman 1959; cf. Johnson 1989a). Westin puts emphasis on the connection of privacy to freedom by declaring science and privacy as “two conditions of freedom in the twentieth century” (Westin 1967: 399), and is joined by Ruth Gavison and Jeffery Johnson who argue for privacy as a guarantee of the freedom of action and self-development (Gavison 1983; Johnson 1989b).¹²

¹⁰ A commonality that arises from these definitions is that approaches to defining privacy are highly discipline-specific in terms of narrowness or broadness: whereas philosophers have tried to provide as general conceptions of privacy as possible so that the latter could be applied to a wider range of cases, law scholars have looked for precision which would allow arguing privacy cases in court. Technological developments of the 20th and the 21st centuries have made privacy issues a cornerstone of many other disciplines, such as economics, medicine, information science, or genetics (see, e.g., Allen 2015; Bruynseels and van den Hoven 2015; Acquisti et al. 2016).

¹¹ Zureik and Stalker made an attempt to harmonize privacy research by singling out six groups of privacy definitions: the right to be let alone, limited access to the self, secrecy, control of personal information, personhood, and intimacy (Zureik and Stalker 2010: 10).

¹² See also Weinstein (1971); Benn (1984; 1988). The connection of privacy to freedom in the 20th century takes origin in philosophical ideas of freedom of the previous epochs: thus, Michel de Montaigne claims that “[w]e must reserve a back shop, all our own, entirely free, in which to establish our real liberty and our principal retreat and solitude” (Montaigne 2013 [1580]: 44). John Stuart Mill, too, advocates for seeing privacy as a necessary condition

Another value that has been tied to privacy is personal autonomy, which can be defined as an ability to make decisions and undertake actions self-consciously, being aware of them as one's own decisions and actions.¹³ Scholars have seen the dangers of privacy violation in the risks of sliding into heteronomously guided behavior and thereby losing one's "true self." For instance, already in the 1970s, Robert Gerstein posits that in the presence of others, we become self-conscious of our own intimate experience, we become self-watchers, the objects of our own, supposed-to-be-subjective actions (1978). In this regard, privacy has also been interpreted as a wall that "protects the individual's interest in becoming, being, and remaining a person" (Reiman 1976: 44) and has been seen as a precondition of personal growth (Newell, Metoyer, and Moore 2015) and a necessity for personal self-determination (Bruynseels and van den Hoven 2015).

Privacy has also been declared instrumental in establishing and developing interpersonal relations, such as love, friendship, respect, and trust—not only because of the intimacy for two or more people that it can foster (Inness 1992), but also because it can endow a person with a possibility to reflect in peace on the experiences that they have had with other people and come to understand the nature of one's relations with others in due time (Fried 1968).¹⁴ Moreover, the close connection of intimacy to privacy has also been underscored in cases of experiences that are based on exposure and shame, where the special role of privacy lies in the protection of human dignity (Bloustein 1984; Schneider 1977; Floridi 2016).¹⁵

All these deliberations on privacy are grounded in the framework of liberalism and the focus on benefits for the *individual*. However, this direction of privacy advocacy has proved imperfect: as Kirsty Hughes indicates, the right to privacy as it is stated, for example, in Article 8 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is not an *absolute* right (which has to be adhered to under all circumstances) but a *qualified* right—it has to be balanced with and weighed against other rights that come into play (Hughes 2015). This aspect became particularly clear in the aftermath of 9/11,

for many freedoms to thrive, including the freedom of conscience, tastes and pursuits, and the liberty of unions (Mill 2002 [1859]: 96–97).

¹³ For the concept of autonomy, see Dworkin (1988); Christman (1989; 2015); Rössler (2017). On the connections of autonomy and privacy, see Beardsley (1971) on autonomy and selective disclosure; Benn (1975) on autonomy and the concept of a person; Kupfer (1987) on the connection of autonomy to the concept of the self; Cooke (1999) on the connection between privacy, autonomy, and liberty. The connection between the two concepts has also been examined by Gross (1971), Henkin (1974), Oshana (1998); Cohen (2004).

¹⁴ See also Rachels (1975); Benn (1984), Karen and Schneier (2020).

¹⁵ Thus, it is considered indecent to expose certain parts of the human body and perform certain intimate functions in public in European cultures; the concept of shame often serves as a guideline for exclusion of such activities from public places. Norbert Elias argues that the transfer of practices from one sphere into the other should be seen as part of the civilizing process, whereby the two spheres work together and civilize a person. The practices that were learned because of the public sphere are interiorized to such extent that they also become part of one's private routine, although the person is no longer in presence of the others and is not obliged to follow the rules (Elias 2000).

when the NSA received a very broad mandate to access individuals' data—the protection of individual privacy was wavered in the face of potential benefits that a violation of privacy could bring to society. The impetus to overcome communitarian arguments in privacy advocacy led to a “social turn” in privacy studies, which has shifted the focus from the individual-centered advocacy toward the emphasis on the value of individual privacy for the whole society (effectively bringing in the advocacy strategy used in the protection of rights of minoritized groups like LGBTQ+ or racialized persons—the rights of all are protected only when everyone's rights are protected).¹⁶

While both the understanding of privacy as an idea and the value of this idea to society have deepened since the late nineteenth century, history of privacy has not been without limitations. First, it can hardly be seen as a linear development, with the case of *Roe v. Wade* that delivered a groundbreaking verdict in the USA in 1973 by upholding women's right to abortion and thereby establishing a foundation to affirm women's right to make decisions about their bodies for five decades to come—only to be overturned in 2022, serving as a good example. Moreover, the context I outlined here is barely representative of global debates, since it only reflects histories of less than ten percent of the world's population—the countries of the global West. Liberal democracies have been what we could call a “comfort zone” of privacy studies, with most anglophone debates focused on Western contexts and debates in national languages less accessible to scholars outside of specific Area Studies. The job of examining privacy beyond the West has been in the hands of experts in particular regions, who have theorized privacy as a culturally and politically variable idea.

PRIVACY ACROSS CULTURES AND POLITICAL REGIMES

Most of twentieth-century privacy studies beyond the global West were made by anthropologists and ethnographers who quite often held “primitive” societies as an object of exploration.¹⁷ The way these disciplines functioned for a long time had a Western scholar venture into “exotic” lands and offer his (for these were most often male researchers) observations about it to domestic audiences. Needless to say, such approach harbored a danger of producing an account grounded

¹⁶ First steps in this direction were made by Priscilla Regan, who spoke about social value of privacy as early as 1995, and several years later came to define it as a “common good” (Regan 1995; 2002). Solove echoes her in his *Understanding Privacy*, advocating that privacy of one should be an agenda for all: “protecting privacy should not be at society's expense – [it] [...] should be justified by [...] social benefits” (Solove 2008: 91). Their theories were further developed in the early 2000s—2010s (Seubert 2012; Hughes 2015; Parsons, Bennet, and Molnar 2015).

¹⁷ See, for instance, studies of privateness and publicness in relation to law in primitive societies (Krygier 1983), research of social patterns in Mexican Indian villages (Haviland and Haviland 1983), and studies of privacy in Tuareg societies (Murphy 1984).

in Western concepts and therefore overlooking important cultural categories and connections between the objects of study when looking at them through the Western prism (cf. Krygier 1983). As a result, many of these scholars-travelers who went to study privacy (among other practices) in “primitive” societies returned with the claim that no privacy was to be found there.¹⁸ As I show later in this chapter, a similar fate was bestowed upon Soviet Russia by foreign travelers in the 1920s–1930s.¹⁹

Misleading perceptions about the absence of privacy in a certain society are caused by the fact that persons who made them failed to uncover the concept of privacy of the same strength as the one in their home countries. They failed to see *a* privacy, for they had been looking for *the* privacy. In 1971, John Roberts and Thomas Gregor suggested differentiating not between the absence and presence of privacy, but between its different levels, which they ranged from very low to very high (Roberts and Gregor 1971: 201). It is, however, imperative to remark that in Roberts and Gregor’s research, the classification according to levels of privacy strength was done on formal criteria that pertained to the organization of domestic spaces and was done from *their* point of view, without taking into account the meanings of exposure or closedness *within* the societies that they studied. Yet, in comparison to many other accounts of privacy in non-Western context that were voiced before and after them, their idea was quite progressive.

Every society has certain mechanisms that can be interpreted as privacy mechanisms *within the context* of that culture. Therefore, an efficient way to advance privacy research does not lie in building hierarchies of societies who allegedly have privacy or not, but in inquiring what patterns of privacy these societies offer. Privacy is “culturally unique” and “culturally universal,” wrote Irwin Altman in the 1970s (Altman 1977: 66), thus foregrounding the fact that all societies have similar practices that they may perform in dissimilar ways. To succeed in privacy research that focuses on a novel cultural, social, or political context, it is, therefore, imperative to be aware of the tools that one intends to use (e.g., privacy as it is conceived in the West), but in addition, have an open mind and willingness to see the difference.

Indeed, the contrast can be drastic among societies that populate regions of the planet lying far from each other—but it is also present among cultures that have developed in each other’s proximity.²⁰ Moreover, pluralities of privacy across cultures are additionally matched by *internal*

¹⁸ Adam Moore provides several examples of societies, which, according to him, lack privacy: the Tikopia of Polynesia, the Tlingit Indians of North America, the Java of Indonesia, and some others (Moore 2010: 49–51). The application of the individualist concept (that privacy has come to be over the years) to cultures where collective values often prevail has proved to be difficult (Zureik and Stalker 2010: 11).

¹⁹ See the subchapter “Theorizing Soviet and Russian Privacy.”

²⁰ On differences between U.S. American and European ideas of privacy, see, e.g., Spiro (1971), on differences between countries of Western Europe, see Westin (1967: 27–29) and Ariès and Duby (1987–1991).

pluralities of every culture. Not every social group and not every person practices privacy in the same way. Therefore, it is imperative to underscore that there exists neither *the* “Western idea of privacy,” nor, by extension, *the* “socialist idea of privacy” that I could discover in the texts I analyze in this book. So, whenever I speak about late Soviet ideas of privacy, I will imply a diversity of ideas that vary across genders, ages, classes and social roles—privacy as an intersectional and therefore rich conceptual field.

Privacy does not just vary within and across cultures—it has come to be seen as one of the key determinants that allows to distinguish between political systems. When Colin Bennett and Charles Raab define privacy as “a right or interest that citizens possess by virtue of their citizenship within liberal democratic states” (Bennett and Raab 2006: xxiv), they signal an understanding of privacy as part of a package deal that one “automatically” receives together with their membership in liberal democracies. Privacy is so closely connected to democracy that both are often regarded as a single whole, and the absence of one has come to mean the absence of the other, as we have seen in the case with the inequalities in the treatment of different countries with lexical gaps of privacy.²¹

The original idea of democracy is based on the principle of a strict separation of the private and the public spheres. Hannah Arendt traces the dichotomous division into the private and public spheres as far back as Ancient Greece, arguing that daily life at the time evolved between *oikos* (the realm of one’s home) and *polis* (the agora, where the politics was made; Arendt 1958b: 33). Connected to private property, *oikos* was a precondition for participation in the life of *polis*. Arendt asserts that from the Athenians’ point of view, participation in public life was the highest skill of a person, since it required the talent of using rhetoric instead of brute force that characterized the private sphere. Violence in the latter was inevitable in her view, for it was the only way to overcome the bare necessities of life and fulfill the conditions of entering the public sphere by establishing one’s dominance over other members of the *oikos* (women and slaves). Whereas *oikos* in Arendt’s opinion was a site of inequality, *polis* was the place where equals met to discuss the problems of the city-state. She saw equality as a sign that the public sphere was a sphere of freedom: “to be free meant to be free from the inequality present in rulership and to move in a sphere where neither rule nor being ruled existed” (Arendt 1958a: 33).

In Ancient Rome, Arendt continues, the division into private and public was even more pronounced, since the Romans “never sacrificed the private to the public, but on the contrary understood that these two realms could exist only in the form of coexistence” (Arendt 1958a: 59). The Roman distinction between the private and the public seems to lie close to the Greek one, and

²¹ See Introduction, footnote 32.

is easily traceable by the etymology of the word “private,” which comes from Latin *prīvātus*—“apart from the state” (Merriam-Webster 1991).²² In the Middle Ages, both spheres started to intertwine: while the rise of the nobility triggered a re-affirmation of private property and hence a strive toward a stronger private sphere, the development of trade boosted small-scale home-production of goods, turning one’s home into a working place. From this time on until the industrial revolution, the border between the private and the public seems to have been less accentuated in Western societies.²³

Ancient division into the private and public spheres re-asserted itself in Western nation-states, where the public sphere was again closely connected to politics. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, democratic movements in Europe swept away monarchies in a mighty wave of revolutions that cleared space for building new societies. The bourgeois public sphere that emerged in these new conditions became an arena for debates on the organization of society and the principles of its governance (Habermas 1991), and as such, provided a robust model for the structure of contemporary Western societies. From this time on, the discursive paradigm of these societies has increasingly normalized an ever-growing distance between the cores of the private and public spheres. Certain practices were more and more associated with only one of two spheres, and this ascription crystallized in everyday behavior, customs, and norms (Ariès and Duby 1990). By the mid-20th century, it seemed that it was quite clear what should be called private, and what—public: home and family life were the core of the private sphere, and the state and society—the very heart of the public realm (Ariès and Duby 1991). A giant leap in technological development at the turn of the century and even more so, in the post-WWII era, brought confusion into the established pattern and marked a new era in the history of mankind—information society—which introduced new patterns of private/public division. The failure of “the great dichotomy” to re-assert itself in a mediatized world, where the dimensions of the private and the public multiply within virtual realities, made clear that a sharp separation of spheres had never been possible, and the borders had always been porous.

With this strong tradition of thinking of democracy in terms of separated spheres, it is unsurprising that the conceptualizations of authoritarian and totalitarian societies that originates *from within* liberal democracies (for no authoritarian or totalitarian regime would present itself as such) have evolved with the view of this separation as flawed.²⁴ In totalitarian states, the private sphere is considered, in Hannah Arendt’s words, “a permanent threat to the public sphere, because the public sphere is as consistently based on the law of equality as the private sphere is based on

²² On the private and public spheres in Ancient Rome, see also Veyne (1987).

²³ See, e.g., Rouche (1987); Ariès and Duby (1988–1989).

²⁴ See, e.g. Kamenka (1983); Garcelon (1997).

the law of universal difference and differentiation” (Arendt 1958b: 301). The private sphere breeds variables that the state cannot control and that may directly contradict the ideology that it tries to enforce (in the case of the Soviet Union—Communism). Logically, the state mobilizes its full potential to eliminate the uncontrollable odds by getting rid of the private sphere (in part achieved in the USSR through specific housing policies that fostered communal forms of living, in part through state-sponsored terror and extreme ideologization of everyday life that, among others, advanced spying forms of behavior amidst citizens).²⁵

Theories of totalitarianism generally emphasize the scale of pervasiveness of the state within the life of ordinary people that is achieved through “an ideology, a single party typically led by one man, a terroristic police, a communications monopoly, a weapons monopoly, and a centrally directed economy” (Friedrich and Brzezinski 1966: 21). These tools do not only shape the private sphere but also mold the public sphere according to the state’s policies: in totalitarian states, the public sphere is quite far from resembling “an arena in which collective concerns can be articulated and public policy debated and formulated openly” (Lukes 1985: 20). Instead, scholars have seen it as replaced by an ideologically saturated variant that is not directed toward free discussion, but toward the production and assertion of the hegemonic power of the state.

Authoritarianism has been viewed as totalitarianism’s milder form (Cf. Brooker 2014: 106).²⁶ In his study of Franco’s Spain, Juan Linz provides a now classical definition of authoritarian regimes as

[...] political systems with limited, not responsible, political pluralism: without elaborate and guiding ideology (but with distinctive mentalities); without intensive or extensive political mobilization (except some points in their development); and in which a leader (or, occasionally, a small group) exercises power within formally ill-defined limits but actually quite predictable ones. (Linz 1970: 255)

He elaborates on them in this and later works (Linz 1970; 1975) and explains in detail multiple aspects that turn authoritarianism into a distinctive political form. The two that may be most relevant for the process of conceptualizing the private and public spheres in such societies are the lack of legitimation of the system via a common ideology but rather a rhetoric of values and political apathy instead of mobilization. In both cases, participation in the public sphere becomes purely symbolic, as the regime rules on “appearances” rather than the enforcement of deep

²⁵ On pervasive surveillance practices in the Stalin era and possibilities of private life, see Figs (2007). On the housing policies of the early Soviet years in general, and the communal apartment as a distinctive housing arrangement, see Stites (1992); Schlegel (1998); Gerasimova (2002; 2003); Obertreis (2004); Pott (2009); Evans (2011); Lebina (2015b), Willimott (2016).

²⁶ On differences between totalitarianism and authoritarianism, see Arendt (1958b: 405); Linz (1975; 2000); Brooker (2014: 106–8); Márquez (2016).

convictions through terror (as was the case under totalitarianism), which is why it has been widely acknowledged that there is much more leniency in these systems toward the existence of the private sphere, than in totalitarianism—studies of late Soviet Russia testify to that, too.

Whereas the term “totalitarianism” was developed by Western scholars with the Stalinist Soviet Union and Nazi Germany in mind, the legitimacy of a continued application of this framework to the Soviet Union after Stalin’s death 1953 has been a source of debates which emerged already during the Cold War. Up to this day, there is no agreement among scholars on how to identify this period in terms of the political organization of society. Many scholars, both those who conducted research in the Cold War era as well as their contemporary colleagues, tend to continue to identify the post-Stalinist Soviet state as totalitarian (Shlapentokh 2001; Killingsworth 2012)—a definition, with which I disagree as it flattens out the differences between the two eras, which scholars unanimously acknowledge.²⁷ Linz calls the Soviet-type regimes of the post-war era “post-totalitarian political systems” (Linz 2000: 3) and thereby supports the definition offered by Václav Havel and other Czech intellectuals who also spoke about a “post-totalitarian system” in occupied Czechoslovakia: “I do not wish to imply by the prefix “post-“ that the system is no longer totalitarian; on the contrary, I mean that it is totalitarian in a way fundamentally different from classical dictatorships, different from totalitarianism as we usually understand it” (Havel 1985: 27). Prefix neo- is also used quite often: for example, Adam Ulam (1960) speaks about the “new face of totalitarianism,” whereas John Keane calls Soviet-type regimes “neo-totalitarian” because they remain, “like their Stalinist predecessors, systems of state control of all areas of human life” (Keane 1985: 8), and Vladislav Zubok (2014) defines the states of the Eastern Bloc as “neo-Stalinist” countries.

²⁷ Thus, Leonard Schapiro argues that the Soviet regime under Stalin was distinct from the rule of Lenin and from that of his successors (Schapiro 1972: 16). Geoffrey Hosking points to a drastic decrease in terror practiced by the police that should render the term “totalitarianism” inapplicable to the Soviet society after Stalin’s death: “Since 1953 [...] [a] totalitarian society has been evolving, not as a result of external pressure, but from its own internal contradictions, to a point where it becomes questionable whether the term is applicable any more” (Hosking 1992: 326). With Soviet Union and its socialist satellites in mind, John Keane equally concludes that “some things have changed in Soviet-type regimes, that the brutal and monstrous delirium of ‘classical’ totalitarianism has, since the death of Stalin, given way to regimes of power whose systematic repressiveness is less openly brutal and more calculated” (Keane 1985: 8). He, therefore, denies these systems the use of terror that Hannah Arendt identified as totalitarianism’s main characteristic (Arendt 1958b). The persecution of individuals in the post-Stalinist USSR may be framed, in Arendt’s own terms, as “dictatorial” rather than “totalitarian terror”: “Dictatorial terror—distinguished from totalitarian terror insofar as it threatens only authentic opponents but not harmless citizens without political opinions [...]” (Arendt 1958b: 322). Arendt also underscores the difference between totalitarian and non-totalitarian states in respect to the intention of the former to abolish freedom rather than simply restrict it: “authority, no matter in what form, always is meant to restrict or limit freedom, but never to abolish it. Totalitarian domination, however, aims at abolishing freedom, even at eliminating human spontaneity in general, and by no means at a restriction of freedom no matter how tyrannical” (Arendt 1958b: 405).

I prefer to define the Soviet state between Stalin's death and perestroika in terms of authoritarianism in order to register the fact of a departure from totalitarianism and in consonance with the general framework of political science and Soviet studies. Thus, in discussing the examples of totalitarian and authoritarian states, Xavier Márquez defines the USSR after Stalin's death as an authoritarian regime with institutional control: "executives may or may not be elected (though without opposition) but are significantly constrained in their actions by elites and other institutions. Society is tightly controlled in pursuit of an elite-endorsed project" (Márquez 2016: 10).²⁸ Although Linz himself demonstrated reticence about applying this term to the Soviet-type states (Linz 2000: 3, 5–7), his criteria fit well with late Soviet realities as we know them today, after decades of studying materials that were not available during the Cold War. Thus, Yurchak's study (2006) serves as a perfect example of discussing the replacement of Communist utopian ideology by double-oriented mentalities, ritualistic reproduction of authoritative discourses, and increasing political apathy in the post-Stalinist USSR. The intensity of these debates about the proper political denomination of the late Soviet regime has resulted in no less polarized discussions about privacy and agency in this society, with Cold-War viewpoints holding a lasting influence over visions of private and public spheres in Russia and the Soviet Union.

THEORIZING SOVIET AND RUSSIAN PRIVACY

Russian culture and mentality have often been analyzed through the prism of collectivism,²⁹ which stands in opposition to individualism and has therefore often found itself in a strained relationship with the Western idea of privacy. For instance, the incompatibility of Western cultural models with the Soviet habitus resulted in a one-sided interpretation of the early Soviet condition by foreigners who traveled to the country in the 1920s–1930s (Klepikova 2015). Telling is a quote by Walter Benjamin, who visited the young Soviet state in the late 1920s and claimed that "Bolshevism ha[d] abolished private life" (Benjamin 1927/1928: 81).³⁰

²⁸ Márquez additionally distinguishes between authoritarian dictatorships (authoritarian regimes with individual control), where "executives may or may not be elected, but political competition for power is tightly restricted, and independent organization for political purposes is very difficult," and totalitarian dictatorships, where "executives may or may not be elected (though without opposition), but the elite cannot constrain the ruler, and society is tightly controlled in pursuit of an elite-endorsed ideological project" (Márquez 2016: 10). He places the USSR of the Stalin era into the latter category. On late Soviet state as an authoritarian regime, see also Janos (1976); Vanderhill and Aleprete (2013).

²⁹ See, e.g., Binns (1979); Binns (1980); Kharkhordin (1999); Rolf (2006).

³⁰ "Der Bolschewismus hat das Privatleben abgeschafft." Foreign visitors were mostly shocked by a widespread solution that the young Soviet state had for the housing problem—the creation of *kommunalki*, that is, the distribution of rooms in one apartment between multiple, not related families. For an extensive study of *kommunalka* as a cultural phenomenon, see Pott (2009). The discussion of private and public spaces in

While differences between the liberal-democratic and Communist ideologies became one of the cornerstones in the alienation of the Soviet Union from the Western countries after the October Revolution in 1917, the cleavage in their relations mostly grew with the rise of totalitarianism in the 1930s and solidified with the onset of the Cold War—factors which strongly influenced patterns of thinking about the socialist world in the West. In his analysis of private life in the GDR, historian Paul Betts voices an important concern that during this time, “the place—and defence—of privacy became a common ideological yardstick with which to measure the differences between the ‘free West’ and the ‘totalitarian East’” (Betts 2010: 7).

Particularly deleterious for Russian studies had been the tradition of framing the relationship between socialist states and their citizens in terms of opposition of rule and obedience (which had been nurtured by the myth of the “passive totalitarian subject” oppressed by the “almighty” state). This practice withered away in the past decades due to multiple insightful contributions that underscore the *dynamic* rather than *static* nature of these relationships.³¹ Insightful perspectives on the Stalinist totalitarian state that had room for agency of citizens and not only the Communist Party, were offered, among others, by Christel Lane (1981), Sheila Fitzpatrick (1994; 2000), Stephen Kotkin (1997), and Karen Petrone (2000).³² These influential works were accompanied by inspiring revisions of the post-Stalinist authoritarian context in studying the 1950s–1980s’ everyday life,³³ consumption and material culture,³⁴ tourism,³⁵ and youth culture.³⁶ Although these attempts to reframe earlier approaches may have endowed socialist citizens with more tenacity than they probably had and, therefore, have been legitimately questioned (Krylova 2000), they have also provided novel lines of thinking about late socialism and have opened avenues for even further revisions in Soviet and Russian studies. For instance, appeals for reconsidering the

kommunalka is provided by Gerasimova (2002; 2003). For studies on the visits of foreigners to the early USSR, see Stern (2009); David-Fox (2012); Klepikova (2015). It is important to notice that such points of view are neither exclusive to Westerners, nor limited to that decade: for instance, when interpreting the Stalinist 1930s, Viktor Voronkov writes that in this decade, “the border between the public and the private was almost gone, and, therefore, we can assert that private life had been abolished” [практически стерлась граница между публичным и приватным пространством, и, соответственно можно утверждать, что частная жизнь была ликвидирована; Voronkov 2010: 29].

³¹ Choi Chatterjee and Karen Petrone (2008) provide a comprehensive overview of what they call “totalitarian” and “revisionist” schools of thought in their approach toward Soviet subjectivities of the first half of the 20th century. On individual dimensions of action under socialism, see Lüdtke (1994); Lindenberger (2007).

³² See also Davies (1997); David Lloyd Hoffmann (2000); Viola (2002); Hellbeck (2003; 2009); Figes (2007); Belodubrovskaya (2017).

³³ See, e.g., Harris (2005); Penn and Massino (2009); Chatterjee et al. (2015).

³⁴ On consumption in the USSR, see, e.g., Reid (2002); Siegelbaum (2011); Chernyshova (2011; 2013); Zakharova (2013); Ivanova (2017). On material culture, see Reid and Crowley (2000); Roberts (2017); Ivanova (2023).

³⁵ See, e.g., Gorsuch and Koenker (2006); Gorsuch (2011); Koenker (2013); Noack (2016); Roe (2020).

³⁶ See, e.g., Fürst (2010; 2021); Swain (2013); Tsipursky (2016).

application of Western terminology to non-Western contexts, particularly socialist ones, were made. A pioneer in this field was Svetlana Boym, who in the early 1990s argued that socialist modernity provided a unique setting that could only be effectively grasped if research assumptions were re-contextualized, whereas a direct transfer of Western conceptual imagery onto the socialist context would lead to misperceptions (Boym 1994: 2–3).

The theorization of the private/public spheres in the Russian and Soviet contexts is a framework that greatly benefited from these revisions. In the past four decades, inspiring research on the private and public spheres in Soviet and post-Soviet society has broadened our frames of thinking about Russia. One of the earliest attempts was Serge Levitsky’s overview of “the statutory framework of the Soviet law of privacy” in 1983, in which he identified the rights of Soviet citizens that could be perceived as parts of the right to privacy in the Soviet Constitution of 1977 and various Codes of Law at the time. Although he justly doubted actual ability of Soviet citizens to enforce this right against the state and indicated special provisions of the Constitution of the USSR and the Civil Code of the RSFSR that would hinder such claims (Levitsky 1983: 211), his study also provides an interesting palette of ideas about how privacy could be conceptualized in Soviet society.³⁷

Vladimir Shlapentokh singled out three levels of privatization in Soviet society that range from private institutions, like family and friends, to civil society and the pursuit of private goals in public life (Shlapentokh 1989).³⁸ Oleg Kharkhordin followed a similar direction in positing that the constructionist sphere of the social replaced privacy in the post-Stalinist era, whereas intimacy

³⁷ The Constitution of 1936 that was valid until 1977 (when it was replaced by the new edition) outlined in Article 10 that “The right of personal property of citizens over their earnings and savings, their house and household items, everyday commodities, as well as the right to inherit personal property are protected by law” [Право личной собственности граждан на их трудовые доходы и сбережения, на жилой дом и подсобное домашнее хозяйство, на предметы домашнего хозяйства и обихода, на предметы личного потребления и удобства, равно как право наследования личной собственности граждан – охраняются законом]. In the Constitution of 1977, Article 13 preserved the concept of private property and reiterated the state’s duty of its protection. While mostly preserving the text of 1936, it complemented this Article by a limitation: “The property that citizens own or use may not serve to gain earning outside of employment and to harm interests of society” [Имущество, находящееся в личной собственности или в пользовании граждан, не должно служить для извлечения нетрудовых доходов, использоваться в ущерб интересам общества], thus integrating a backdoor for violating the privacy of citizens suspected of “harming interests of society.” The Constitution also prescribed inviolability of one’s personality (1936, Art 127; 1977, Art. 54) and of housing, as well as secrecy of correspondence (1936, Art. 128; 1977, Art. 55 and 56).

³⁸ In Kharkhordin’s view, “the public-private paradigm postulates society as hierarchically organized, and containing at least four levels, with higher levels controlling lower ones. It is the scope of this control, and consequently the autonomy of each level and its influence on the activity of the higher level, which determines to a very great extent the nature of social and political order. The individual can be regarded as the lowest level of this hierarchy; primary groups consisting of immediate family members relatives, friends, neighbors, and lovers can be considered as the second; private, voluntary organizations (secondary groups not controlled by the state) and the human interactions based on them can be considered the third, and the state, with its agencies and apparatus of coercion, as the last level” (Kharkhordin 1999: 7).

“was reestablished as the secret but the pervasive underside of the social, as the invisible sphere of the most intimate compartment, carefully hidden by individual dissimulation” (Kharkhordin 1997: 359–60). Lewis Siegelbaum framed private spheres of Soviet Russia within three large fields that included private enterprise and private property, domesticity and domestic space, and behavior and private life in his edited volume *Borders of Socialism* (2006), while Debora Field (2007) explored private and public life in Khrushchev’s Russia through the lens of Communist morality and revealed divergences in the application of the official ideology of personal life by state institutions and by individuals. Anthropologists have shed light on constructions of privacy as social practices, with Alexander Manuylov defining privacy as “the field of relationships, contacts, and things (in their functions and meanings) where actors interconnect in their capacity as unique persons” (Manuylov 2012: 132). Meanwhile, Il’ia Utekhin’s research on communal apartments challenged their traditional understanding as places deprived of privacy and called instead for the exploration of practices that serve to delineate borders even within the public realm (Utekhin 2004; 2007).

These and other studies³⁹ have contributed to questioning the alleged directly proportional relation between physical space and privacy (that was often implied in the writings of early travelers to the Soviet Union) and have suggested novel approaches to the conceptualization of the idea of privacy beyond this relation, thereby paving way for thinking differently about privacy in a culture that infamously lacks the terminology to define it.⁴⁰ Anna Alekseyeva’s argument serves as a perfect example of this development:

While the term “privacy” is widely acknowledged to be inapplicable to the Soviet context, one could argue that the withdrawal of the Party’s active ideological manipulation of the home during the 1970s and the 1980s nevertheless introduced an element akin to privacy to the domestic realm. (Alekseyeva 2017: 67)

Alexeyeva’s statement hints at an important discussion that has emerged in Slavic studies—about an active role not only of citizens who (re)claimed their privacy, but also of the state that allowed for this reclamation and, sometimes, was even pro-active in creating private escapes. The efforts of scholars to rethink the rise and fall of borders within state socialisms have led to novel understandings of power relations between the states and peoples of the Eastern Bloc.⁴¹ Thus, in the Soviet context, Alexei Yurchak underscores the tolerance of the state toward possibilities of

³⁹ See, e.g., Gotlib, Zaporozhets, and Khasaev (2004); Levinson (2009); Zubkova (2008); Kaspé (2009; 2010); Cherepanova (2012).

⁴⁰ On Russian equivalents for “privacy,” see footnote 30.

⁴¹ See, e.g., Verdery (1991); Bren (2002; 2010); Pence and Betts (2008); Penn and Massino (2009); Fulbrook (2009); Betts (2010); Koleva (2012); Fehérváry (2013); Brunnbauer (2016), Klepikova and Raabe (2020).

being “*vnye*” (i.e., “outside the system”), of creating the circles of “*svoi*” (i.e., “our people”) and of the practices of “*obshchenie*” (i.e., “personal communication,” “chatting”). In his argument, he elucidates the paradoxical effects of these policies that stabilized the system while simultaneously undermining it and thereby guaranteed that “everything was forever, until it was no more” (Yurchak 2006).⁴²

In examining the spheres that enjoyed little or no direct control by the state at all, scholars have developed multiple ways of addressing them: beyond Yurchak (2006) with his paradigm of being “*vnye*,” Cathleen Giustino, Catherine Plum, and Alexander Vari (2013) speak about “escapes,” and Juliane Fürst and Josie McLellan (2017) resort to the term “dropping out.” Notwithstanding diverse approaches in terminology, there has been a unanimous understanding that although such forms of existence may have provided certain freedom, they could never be seen as completely disconnected from state socialism. Rather, acts of “withdrawal” should be interpreted as inherent parts of the system that elucidate its previously unknown traits. As Alexander Vari writes, “leisure pursuits and countercultural ways of life allowed people to ‘escape’ socialism without leaving it” (Vari 2013: 3). Even activities that foresaw direct opposition to the system, such as *samizdat*, were inextricably tied to it by using the same language and thereby unwillingly mimicking the system (Oushakine 2001).

While these concepts define forces that strive beyond the system in implying the crossing of an imaginary border and a separation from the system, I see the concept of privacy as a chance to reflect on the reverse currents, too—on possibilities of remaining within the system and carving out “private niches” in its very heart. This argument is rooted in my understanding of privacy as a state of balance achieved between the private and public spheres when one’s withdrawal to the private sphere in any form (be it staying in one’s room, voicing one’s concerns about certain things, experiencing an emotion, or sharing data about oneself, etc.) is unchallenged by external others. Without necessarily being dichotomous (in Bobbio’s understanding) and making a hard choice for either the public or the private sphere, I see privacy as a product of a negotiation, an interaction between actors that relies on the ability to balance multiple spheres that co-exist with each other rather than compete against each other. And one of sites of carving out such space for oneself across cultures has been the home, which is why I start my explorations of privacy in this book by examining the meanings of home in late Soviet literature.

⁴² See also Vladislav Zubok’s (2014) argument on how porous boundaries between official and dissident thinking did not erode ideology but replaced it with a different form which was closer to its liberal analogue.

CHAPTER 2

INSIDE:

PRIVATE SPACES IN LATE SOVIET LITERATURE

DOMESTICITY IN RUSSIAN LITERATURE

Across the centuries, Russian literary works have repeatedly come to explore domesticity. Whether we think of mansions of nobility in the novels of Lev Tolstoy and Ivan Turgenev or of dilapidated rooms and darkest corners of Saint Petersburg portrayed by Fyodor Dostoevsky—settings like these have been central to stories of human tragedies and happy moments shared by families. This is not unusual, for the concept of home has traditionally been aligned with explorations of national and personal identity. Thus, in his famous study of the house image as the “topography of our intimate being” (1994: xxxvi), Gaston Bachelard claims the centrality of the house to the concept of the self: “[...] house is our corner of the world. [...] it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word” (Bachelard 1994: 4).

After 1917, the idea of the home and its role in Russian (now Soviet) society changed beyond recognition; it expanded beyond the walls of one’s cubicle, room, or apartment (not to say mansion, which no longer could be anyone’s home in the logic of Communist ideology) to embrace the whole country.¹ Throughout the eras of early and high socialism, the Soviet Union (personified by

¹ For the transformations of home and architecture in the period between the pre-revolutionary years until perestroika, see Brumfield and Ruble (1993); Crawford (2022) examines shifts in urban planning by diving into case studies of three Soviet cities: Baku, Magnitogorsk, and Kharkiv; Friedman (2022) examines connections between domestic spaces and temporalities from the pre-Revolutionary era until contemporary Russia.

the idealization of industrial and agricultural archetypes) was one's home: factories, plants, and fields became the metaphorical "four walls," in which the lives of Soviet literary characters predominantly evolved. Domesticity almost became an atavism: eulogies to the family life *à la* Tolstoy gave way to praises of an enlarged Soviet family built up by the union of the collective and the Party. Just as the literature of the nineteenth century discovered the type of the "superfluous man," the 1920s–1940s seem to have made an emergence of the "superfluous home" possible: the home dissolved in the official discourse dominated by the ideal of life in public, shared with others.² In these years, most works of literature and art dealt with characters that were placed in the setting of the public sphere: they portrayed people at work, at schools, at mass celebrations and meetings—almost invariably together with the collective.³

As the uniform space of a country-wide home developed, the private and public spheres nearly merged into one, and the spatial dimension that had previously prevailed in culture gave way to its temporal counterpart as a dominant in the life of society.⁴ "Where" no longer mattered, for "when" became the motto: five-year plans had to be implemented in four-years' time; if quicker—all for the better. The pace of the Revolution was swift and carried the Soviet society in its whirlpool toward a bright Communist future that seemed closer with each passing day. This race against time, which dominated Soviet cultural and political life in the first half of the twentieth century, was interrupted in March 1953, when the leader who had set the pace for decades suddenly died, and the promised future that had seemed so clear became questionable in an instant. The break led to a reconsideration of the current state of affairs by both the Party and society and resulted in a crucial transformation: the frenetic fixation on time—the "when"—was set aside to give way for spatiality—the "where"—that resurfaced and became culturally and politically dominant.

From the newly built residential blocks in Moscow to the pristine steppes of Central Asia, the ice planes beyond the Polar Circle, and the vast forests of Siberia and the Far East, and even toward the expanse of the outer space—finally subdued by the Soviet man in 1961, the society of the late 1950s–1980s lived under the motto of rediscovering old spaces and conquering new ones. Settings that had so far remained in the shadows on canvases, screens, and book pages now became center stages of Soviet experience in the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras. Amongst these settings were

² Eliot Borenstein, for example, argues that "[d]omesticity and traditional femininity have no place in the world of factories and battlefields" (Borenstein 2000: 3).

³ Although there were artists who pursued explorations of landscapes beyond the borders defined by socialist realism, most creative works that entered the Soviet *public* sphere in Stalin's time were invariably marked by the dominating doctrine in art. See, e.g., Taylor and Bown (1993); Lahusen and Dobrenko (1997).

⁴ This rule did have its exceptions, and Vera Dunham's work on the Stalinist "Big Deal" and its representations in Soviet literature of the post-war decade (Dunham 1990) or Katherine Zubovich's brilliant study of the project of building Moscow skyscrapers in the 1930s (Zubovich 2020) are examples of how space (even private, in case of Dunham, was still an element of the Stalinist culture).

not only distant places, representations of which were inspired by space exploration, the Virgin Lands campaign, or expeditions to the Polar Circle, but also spaces lying in the average citizen's vicinity—local and private ones—that had been equally marginal in the previous years. This shift was perfectly grasped by Iurii Trifonov in his short story “A Journey” [Puteshestvie, 1969], where the main character—a journalist by profession—confesses to a fellow colleague that he is in search of a big story that would reveal to him the dramas of people's lives against the backdrop of the production setting (“I told him that I would like to get to know some conflicts, passions, production dramas that would harbor people's fates and their different perspectives on life” [Trifonov 1985d: 596]).⁵ A young colleague who overhears their talk and is sympathetic of his search for a good story advises him to give up his large-scale aspirations and to aim for scenes that remain unexplored in the vicinity of the capital:

—If you need impressions,—he said—then you don't have to travel somewhere far away, to Tiumen' or Irkutsk. Go somewhere closer, like Kursk or Lipetsk—it's no less interesting there than it is in Siberia, I swear.

—You really think so?—I asked, hiding my delight. He had just echoed my own thoughts.—Well, of course, you're right, it's not kilometers that matter...

When I left the building, the sunny afternoon street was busy with people. [...] I looked into their faces [...] and thought: why should I go to Kursk or Lipetsk, if even Moscow's suburbs are a total mystery to me. I have never been to Naro-Fominsk. I have no idea, what Mytishchi looks like. And even in Moscow there are streets to which I am a total stranger. (Trifonov 1985d: 596)⁶

Once the “telescope” was replaced by a “microscope” (Bondarenko 1980), people realized that the sublime could be found not only in the highest, farthest, or any other “superlative” place that served as a backdrop for many socialist realist texts under Stalin and continued to define the fabric of the

⁵ “Я намекнул, что мне хотелось бы познакомиться с какими-нибудь конфликтами, страстями, производственными драмами, в которых скрывались бы судьбы людей и разные точки зрения на жизнь.”

⁶ “— Если вам нужны впечатления, — сказал он, — тогда вовсе не обязательно ехать куда-то далеко, в Тюмень или в Иркутск. Поезжайте поблизости, в Курск, в Липецк, там не менее интересно, чем в Сибири, ей-богу. — Вы так думаете? — спросил я, втайне обрадовавшись. Он высказал мои собственные мысли. — Конечно, вы правы: дело не в километрах...”

Когда я вышел на улицу, солнечный полдень был в разгаре. [...] Я всматривался в лица [...] и думал: зачем ехать в Курск или в Липецк, когда я как следует не знаю Подмосковья. Я никогда не был в Наро-Фоминске. Не знаю, что такое Мытищи. Да и в самой Москве есть улицы и районы совершенно мне неведомые.” A similar position is voiced by Vladimir Voinovich in his *The Ivankiad* [Ivan'kiada, 1976]: “To study life, you do not need to go into trips organized for artists and waste the state's money. Study life where you live, it is much cheaper and more efficient. Look into our yard, for example. Look at these people, these types, these fates! Probably, you can find interesting people at the Kamaz plant or at the BAM as well, but not in the proportions that you have here.” [Для изучения жизни не надо ездить в творческие командировки и напрасно расходовать казенные деньги. Изучайте жизнь там, где живете, это гораздо продуктивнее и дешевле. Загляните хотя бы в наш двор. Посмотрите, какие люди, какие типы, какие судьбы! Наверное на КАМАЗе или на БАМе тоже встречаются интересные люди, но не в такой пропорции; Voinovich 1976: 9].

official literature in the Khrushchev era, but that the quotidian could equally inspire fascinating scenarios of life.

Katharina Hansen Löve studies the continuity and change of narrated space in Russian literature through the prism of two “poles”: “an occurrence of archetypes” and “semiotisation based on interpretation.” She argues that while elements of spatial experience mostly remain constant, their interpretation changes depending on the sociohistorical context and personal experiences of the author and the reader (Hansen Löve 1994: 157). In line with these views, she interprets “literary evolution” as “a shift in dominance between codes, as well as various constitutive elements of the text and their functions, and not a process of disappearance and exclusion” (Hansen Löve 1994: 162). We can, therefore, think of the Stalin era as a time when the private briefly stepped into the backstage to re-appear in the second act of the play: the late Soviet era reignited the archetype of the private and imbued it with new meanings. This “private turn”—in culture in general and literature in particular—manifested in two ways: in a partial transfer of the setting back into private spaces that invigorated imaginary Soviet homes with action that they had long forgotten (which I explore in this chapter), and in a new approach to the portrayal of characters (which I examine in the chapter that follows).⁷

In the late Soviet era, the private apartment is pervasive in literature, and it also becomes a recurrent setting in film and in visual art.⁸ At the same time, many other homes take a prominent place in literary texts to tell the stories of the late Soviet *byt*: communal apartments, private houses, dachas, huts, and barracks. Individual apartments engendered by the Khrushchev era were true Bakhtinian chronotopes of late socialism: they were spatial embodiments of the Communist tomorrow in the late socialist now.⁹ Designed and brought into being to increase the quality of life

⁷ Situation varied throughout arts: as Claire McCallum (2018) demonstrates, visual arts actively dealt with representations of home already throughout the Great Patriotic War, and in the post-war years.

⁸ Think here, for instance, of the operetta film *Cheremushki District* [Cheremushki, 1962, dir. Gerbert Rappaport], *July Rain* [Iul'skii dozhd' 1967] and *I am Twenty* [Zastava Il'icha, 1965, both dir. Marlen Khutsiev], or *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears* [Moskva slezam ne verit, 1980, dir. Vladimir Men'shov], or of paintings like Iurii Pimenov's *A Lyrical Housewarming Party* [Liricheskoe novosel'e, 1965].

⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin's application of the concept “chronotope” to literature implies the intertwining of the space and time, their mutual reflection in each other, and their intensifying each other that is embodied in the fictional text: “In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope” (Bakhtin 1981: 84). [В литературно-художественном хронотопе имеет место слияние пространственных и временных примет в осмысленном и конкретном целом. Время здесь сгущается, уплотняется, становится художественно-зримым; пространство же интенсифицируется, втягивается в движение времени, сюжета, истории. Приметы времени раскрываются в пространстве, и пространство осмысливается и измеряется временем. Этим пересечением рядов и слиянием примет характеризуется художественный хронотоп; Bakhtin 2012: 341].

of Soviet men and women, they also had a profound effect in crafting novel perceptions of privacy, Jörg Baberowski argues:

The apartment was not only the location of comfortable life. It also turned into a retreat, where everything was possible—even if it would have been otherwise unconceivable outside one’s own four walls. The apartments created a form of privacy that most Soviet citizens had never experienced before. The family, rather than the state, became the most important focal point of everyday life. (Baberowski 2017: 131)

However, they did not only insert themselves onto Soviet geographical and mental coordinates as new sites for an experience of being away from the state and society: as a new model of home, they also inevitably affected the imaginary of home as such.

In Russian cultural studies, the ups and down of domesticity have been examined from multiple angles. Amy Singleton (1997), for instance, looks at several novels of late-nineteenth—early-twentieth-century Russian literature to explore the artistic search for home and cultural identity. Joost van Baak (2009) analyzes the house as a social, emotional, and ethical concept and traces the realizations of the myth of the house in the works of Russian literature from *Domestic Order* [Domostroi, 16th c.] to post-modernist novels by Vladimir Sorokin and Vladimir Makanin. The 2015 contribution to the field by Christine Varga-Harris (2015) focuses on the Khrushchev era and uncovers how the concepts of house and home may not only become instrumental in our understanding of Soviet subjectivities, but also contribute to elucidating larger political shifts of the Thaw era. However, while research of domesticity in the Russian context has traversed many paths, it has not yet come to examine domesticity as a site of *privacy*.

Meanwhile, Daniel Solove declared home one of the essential privacy practices alongside the family and the body (Solove 2002: 1093), which prompts me to focus in this chapter on works that explore single-family domestic settings. To examine which experiences authors connected to this form of living and in so doing, identify concepts that form the semantic field of the idea of privacy in the late Soviet era, I explore what meanings late Soviet writers attribute to private settings and how their portraits of private spaces can help capture the value and functions of privacy in late Soviet society.

THE EYE OF THE STORM: DUDINTSEV AND PASTERNAK

Traditionally, many cultures have viewed the home as a secure and safe space where a person achieves maximal comfort due to a relative isolation from the outside world. This perception of private spaces has found its reflection in the famous British proverb “My home is my castle” that

has been successfully adopted by many other languages.¹⁰ Vladimir Dudintsev imagines a similar scenario for the engineer Dmitrii Lopatkin, the protagonist of his novel *Not by Bread Alone* [*Ne khlebom edinym*] that *Novyi mir* published in 1956. Lopatkin's ardent desire to improve the pipe foundry process by designing a better founding machine brings him into conflict with ossified Soviet bureaucrats at work who vehemently oppose his invention.¹¹ Lopatkin is pressured into leaving his job at the factory and is left without any prospects to design his invention at the scientific institute to which he had been transferred. He thus abandons the world of the industrial sublime that has rejected him to grow stronger in what can be defined as "the private sphere"—a room that his friend, Petr S'ianov, provides him at his home:

He [S'ianov] held the sheet open, and Nadia, her head down, walked into a narrow, clean room with whitewashed walls and no windows. She had to close her eyes for a moment to get accustomed to the incredibly bright light of a lamp that was hanging at the eye height. She turned around and gasped slightly. Lopatkin was sitting on a narrow bed right in front of her and was eating potatoes, his legs crossed. [...] Nadia looked around and saw the drawing board leaned against the wall. It had a sheet of Whatman paper with contours of some machine on it. (Dudintsev 1957: 30)¹²

Dudintsev's novel has often been analyzed from the perspective of taking a stand and portraying Party members in the negative light, while his approach to foregrounding the private sphere and emphasizing its merits in the development of the socialist personality has thus far evaded scholarly focus.¹³ The merger of working and living spaces depicted in this passage is reminiscent of the era before the Industrial Revolution when people worked in the same spaces where they lived. The mechanization and division of labor accompanied by the consolidation of small places of

¹⁰ Cf. Russian: "Мой дом – моя крепость," or German: "Mein Haus ist meine Burg."

¹¹ The criticism of ossified bureaucracy that prevents innovation and favors conservative approaches to the development of literature was a frequent topic in thick journals of the Thaw era. Thus, Pomerantsev's essay "On Sincerity in Literature" featured a story about a kolkhoz that was only successful because its chairwoman arranged alternative ways of securing uninterrupted work process that had not been foreseen by the Soviet law. Similarly, the same issue of *Novyi mir* that featured Dudintsev's *Not by Bread Alone* also published Daniil Granin's short story "A Personal Opinion" [*Sobstvennoe mnenie*] that presents a conflict similar to that of Lopatkin's. However, in Granin's story, it is solved unfavorably for the protagonist: Ol'khovskii, who pleads for innovative ways of engineering, clashes against the wall of bureaucracy. Minaev represents the hand of the system that could have saved Ol'khovskii's project by delivering it to higher levels of hierarchy who can overrule the decision made by lower-level bureaucrats; however, the system is engrained in him too deeply, so, in the end, he does not take the measures that he promised to take (Granin 1956).

¹² "Он отвернул простыню, и Надя, наклонив голову, прошла в узкую, чисто побеленную комнатку без окон. Ей пришлось зажмуриться, чтобы привыкнуть к свету очень яркой лампы, подвешенной на уровне глаз. Она повернулась и чуть слышно ахнула: перед нею, на узкой кровати, положив ногу на ногу, сидел Лопаткин и ел картошку. [...] Надя огляделась и увидела за столом чертежную доску, поставленную к стене. На ней был приколот лист ватмана с контурами непонятной машины."

¹³ See, e.g. Gibian (1960: 54–59); Leiderman and Lipovetskii (2003b: 183–89).

production into bigger factories led to the re-sharpening of the border between the private and public spheres by separating home from work.¹⁴ Scholars argue that the gradual separation of the realms of work and life outside of work stimulated the emergence of the notion of “home” and “the private sphere” in early modern Europe (Kumar and Makarova 2008; Trull 2013). Therefore, Lopatkin’s situation—reminiscent of the conditions typical of at least a hundred years before—can be interpreted as Dudintsev’s attempt to render a mocking image that challenges the typical propaganda vision of the USSR: in “the most progressive country in the world” that strives into the future, Lopatkin makes his groundbreaking steps in a tiny room of several square meters that comes directly from the very past that the Party has tried to escape.

Lopatkin is a typical socialist realist character—one who unconditionally devotes his life to serving the Soviet society—in an atypical setting that defies the canon. Public spaces that are supposed to provide best conditions for fostering the progress of Soviet society are revealed by Dudintsev as bureaucratized obstacles: instead of undertaking a guiding function, the Party members who are supposed to see how useful and effective Lopatkin’s machine is, put spokes in his wheels out of mere jealousy, which leads to his voluntary self-expulsion from the collective and makes him persevere alone:

You ask me, why I have never applied for an official job. I haven’t, because I had to write reports daily and try to prove that Columbus was wrong. [...] I insist that it is not only possible but imperative to cast pipes without gutter!—Lopatkin continued to speak without looking at her,—And I have to prove all that, this is why I cannot apply for an official job. Moreover, I am designing a new version, which contains one thousand four hundred parts and twelve thousand sizes, all interconnected. Clearly, it is hard to do it all alone. This a job for a design team or for such a crazy one as me. Uncle Petr is helping me, but he is also a bit crazy. (Dudintsev 1957: 35)¹⁵

As a result, truly effective achievements, as Dudintsev’s novel postulates, happen in private spaces, where, despite the small size of the room and the lack of light, Lopatkin devotes his days and nights to designing his machine, which, as he believes, will change the life of an ordinary worker at the foundries for the better. The private sphere becomes his shelter from the hostile, deeply bureaucratic world of Soviet engineering that refuses to accept him. It also provides the necessary

¹⁴ See Ariès and Duby (1990).

¹⁵ “Вы спрашиваете, почему я не поступил на работу. Не поступил потому, что я должен был ежедневно писать, доказывать, что Колумб не прав. [...] А я заявляю, что отлить трубы без желоба не только можно, а нужно! – не глядя на нее, упрямо продолжал Лопаткин. – И мне приходится все это доказывать – вот почему я не могу поступить на работу. И, кроме того, я разрабатываю новый вариант, а это - тысяча четыреста деталей и двенадцать тысяч размеров, увязанных между собой. Конечно, одному это все сделать трудно. Это может сделать конструкторская группа или такой сумасшедший, как я. Да вот еще помогает мне дядя Петр. Он тоже немножко с ума сошел.”

conditions and calm for him to delve into his project. It is *in spite of* the collective that the protagonist comes to triumph at the end of the novel. In Dudintsev's text, home overtakes the function of the field where one confronts life challenges and overcomes them, thereby representing an important locus of self-development and self-realization—very similar to the functions that Western scholars attribute to privacy in the liberal-democratic context.¹⁶

In a similar key, Boris Pasternak imagines escaping from the public sphere into a private realm in his novel *Doctor Zhivago* [Doktor Zhivago] which he finished by 1955. Many episodes of the novel depict the protagonists, doctor Iurii Zhivago and Lara, as well as their immediate family members, on the move: they travel to the front of WWI, take a train to Siberia, wander around in the taiga, move to Moscow, emigrate. The movements of these characters stand for the migrations of larger groups of the population within the Russian Empire and later, Soviet Russia, as well as metaphorically define major shifts in Russian history brought about by WWI and the revolutions. The more everything in the novel moves and changes, the more drastic becomes the contrast with the episodes where the characters are rewarded by settling down, even if just for a while. The setting for such withdrawals from the “raging” reality in Pasternak's novel is Varykino, a village in the forests near the Ural town of Iuriatin.¹⁷

Varykino may be interpreted as one of the novel's “knots”—a term that Nikolai Poseliagin suggests for analyzing the complex structure of Pasternak's text. According to the scholar, “a knot is always a place, a scene, as well as a situation” (Poseliagin 2011: 28)¹⁸:

While the knots are built typologically close to the principle of constructing scenes in theater and preserve two classical unities—the unity of place and the unity of action, they seem to intentionally disrupt the unity of time. Within one knot, events may take place that are separated by time periods of varied length. (Poseliagin 2011: 29)¹⁹

Varykino is a perfect example for Poseliagin's theory, since Pasternak brings Zhivago to this place twice: first, in the company of his actual family (his wife Tonia and their son Sasha), and for the second time, with Lara and her daughter Katia. The two visits separated by years pursue one aim—to escape from the dangers that regime changes bring about—but are drastically different in the

¹⁶ See Chapter One, especially the section “Why Does Privacy Matter?”

¹⁷ Scholars tend to interpret Pasternak's Iuriatin and Varykino as fictional representations of Perm' and Vsevolodo-Vil'va, a place 200 km away from it (Abashev 2008b). See also Abashev (2008a) for the analysis of spatial poetics in Pasternak's work.

¹⁸ “Узел – всегда место, сцена, а также ситуация.”

¹⁹ “Узлы, строясь типологически близко к принципам классического построения театральных эпизодов, сохраняют два единства: места и действия, – но при этом, казалось бы, принципиально не следуют закону единства времени. В пределах одного узла события могут происходить через временные промежутки различной протяженности.”

atmosphere that “two families” experience in the village, thereby emphasizing the difference in Zhivago’s relationships with Tonia and Lara respectively.²⁰

When the doctor’s family travels to Varykino for the first time, they are driven there by the hunger that rages in post-revolutionary Moscow, which they hope to avoid in the former countryside estate of his wife’s family. Zhivago defines his hopes for Varykino by the word “calm” [tishina] in his talk to Strel’nikov, the revolutionary general (and Lara’s husband, as the reader will find out later) who questions him during the journey:

–Zhivago, Zhivago,—Strel’nikov would repeat over and over again in his carriage, where he moved together with the doctor.—It sounds merchant. Or aristocratic. Oh, well, a doctor from Moscow. On his way to Varykino. This is weird. To travel from Moscow into such a forgotten place.
–Well, that is precisely why I go there. *To find calm*. In the middle of nowhere, in the unknown. (Pasternak 1957: 257, my emphasis).²¹

Zhivago hopes for the calm from everyday hustle of procuring food in the city, the calm from the capital, the calm from the rapid pace of events that one cannot control—and calm is precisely what the family discovers as soon as they step out of the train: “The newly arrived were stunned by the *calm* at the station, lack of crowds, tidiness. They were not accustomed to the lack of fuss and arguing around them” (Pasternak 1957: 274, my emphasis).²²

Pasternak presents Varykino as a quiet corner in the middle of nowhere, at the brink of the civilized world—a transitory point between the old history and the new order: “The provincial life lagged behind history here, it was slow” (Pasternak 1957: 274).²³ Varykino is, therefore, set as a liminal point in the geography of the novel and lives up to play this role in Zhivago’s life, too, by serving as a biographical liminal point: his abduction by the revolutionary partisans draws a sharp line between his past and future by separating him forever from his legal family. Before it happens, however, Zhivago is to live an intense life of a village dweller who only survives harsh winters if he works hard in summers. The calm that the newly arrived experienced at the station lasted only until the moment they got to their permanent dwelling, where Zhivago’s everyday life came to be split between the household, the farming, and performing his duties as a doctor for the inhabitants of the surrounding villages (Pasternak 1957: 286–97).

²⁰ On the representation of Lara and Tonya in the novel, see Clowes (1995).

²¹ “– Живаго, Живаго, – продолжал повторять Стрельников у себя в вагоне, куда они перешли. – Что-то купеческое. Или дворянское. Ну да: доктор из Москвы. В Варыкино. Странно. Из Москвы и вдруг в такой медвежий угол.
– Именно с этой целью. В поисках *тишины*. В глушь, в неизвестность” [my emphasis].

²² “Приезжих поражала тишина на станции, безлюдие, опрятность. Им казалось непривычным, что кругом не толпятся, не ругаются.”

²³ “Жизнь по-захолустному отставала тут от истории, запаздывала.”

As Naum Leiderman and Mark Lipovetskii argue, this juxtaposition of greater History with histories of everyday life is Pasternak's strategy for "demystifying social history" and elevating the quotidian:

Such a ratio between well-known historical events and facts of private life is highly typical of the epic event which is built up by a confluence of two streams of histories [*so-bytie*] in the novel *Doctor Zhivago*. It *demystifies* the importance of social history and its traditional scale and criteria of interpretation above the personal. At the same time, the everyday existence of a person filled with small details of everyday routine that are as tiresome as they are necessary, for life is impossible without them, acquires a highly epic meaning. (Leiderman and Lipovetskii 2003b: 55, original emphasis)²⁴

The Varykino of the time of the first visit, therefore, emerges as a place that stands for the personal side of the balance of history—against the backdrop of the Civil War, the protagonists are focused on day-to-day survival questions. The idea of the private sphere is thereby loosely linked here to the experience of security—the certainty about the abilities of the family to live to see another day and not to die of hunger. Also, Zhivago's life in Varykino instils a sense of purpose—a very pragmatic feeling of living to work to prolong one's life or to help other people.

The distinction of the village from the public sphere of the post-revolutionary turbulence resides in both the relative physical remoteness of Varykino from other populated areas and in the countryside mode of life, which requires full dedication from the village's inhabitants in general, and from Zhivago in particular, leaving no space for distraction. Both factors contribute to an illusion of living in a closed world that is guided by its own laws. The feeling of closedness, however, never becomes claustrophobic—quite to the contrary, there is a certain aura of a rewarding existence that emanates from the passages dedicated to the doctor's first stay in Varykino that is informed by Zhivago's self-realization in his social functions—as a father who should ensure his family's good life and as a doctor.

While Zhivago's first trip to Varykino is driven by precarious living conditions in the capital, the second escape to Varykino is motivated by political reasons of danger for both Zhivago and Lara because of their personal histories (Zhivago's desertion from the Red Army and Lara's legal

²⁴ “Подобное соотношение между общепризнанными историческими явлениями и фактами приватной жизни в высшей степени характерно для эпического со-бытия в романе «Доктор Живаго». Тем самым *демистифицируется* значимость социальной истории и характерных для нее надличных масштабов и критериев. Зато высокий эпический смысл приобретает обыденное существование человека, заполненное мелкими повседневными хлопотами, столь изнурительными, сколь и необходимыми, ибо без них невозможна жизнь.” Vorotyntseva and Tiupa equally point out that “the quotidian is eventless, whereas catastrophe is extremely eventful” [Если повседневность асобытийна, то катастрофа – сверхсобытийна; Vorotyntseva and Tiupa 2014: 113]. They, therefore, argue that against the backdrop of a catastrophe each minor event acquires a deeper meaning.

status as the wife of Antipov/Strel'tsov, a general now in disgrace). Varykino's desertedness becomes the key criterion for Zhivago and Lara that drives their decision to escape there:

–Well, let's think. What can be done here? Can we thwart this blow? It is fate, in the end.
 –We cannot run, and we have nowhere to run. But we can step back into the shadow, to the background. Leave for Varykino, for instance. I have been thinking about the house in Varykino. It is quite far and completely deserted. (Pasternak 1957: 419)²⁵

With the civil war roaring around them, this house in Varykino becomes their “eye of the storm”—a perfect shelter from the turmoil in the outside world. This impression is particularly stark against the scenes of serenity with which Pasternak describes Zhivago's stay in Varykino:

Iurii Andreevich was surrounded by a blissful calm that sweetly breathed of happiness. The soft yellow light of the lamp fell upon white pages and reflected in the ink inside the inkpot. A frosty winter night reigned behind the blue window. [...] Doctor's soul was in peace. (Pasternak 1957: 447)²⁶

Yet again, house in Varykino is linguistically framed as a place of calm: “blissful calm,” “soft yellow light,” “frosty night,” “soul in peace.” It is hard to imagine a place more serene than this wooden house in the heart of the Urals, where it seems that the time has stopped, Pasternak implies. The comfort and security of this home is reinforced by the three “W”s on the outside—the war, the winter, and the wolves that pervade the narrative.²⁷ All of them represent the might of history that comes crushing upon the ordinary men. Against these uncontrollable odds, the house in Varykino becomes the last outpost of salvation, the only site where Zhivago holds control of his life, however ephemeral it may be. In this way, Pasternak elevates this place from a house to a home—a space of comfort and security, where all the evils of the world seem to fade away.

In distinction to the first visit, the second time in Varykino Zhivago gets a chance to *enjoy* calm, because the temporariness of their retreat is obvious and does not require them to invest much time in household work. Meanwhile, winter spares them from fieldwork. In this way, their flight to Varykino is not only an escape *from* but also an escape *to*: Lara and Zhivago use the time

²⁵ “– Давай подумаем. Чем тут можно помочь? В силах ли мы предотвратить этот удар? Это ведь вещь роковая.

– Бежать нельзя и некуда. Но можно отступить куда-нибудь в тень, на второй план. Например, уехать в Варыкино. Я подумываю о Варыкинском доме. Это порядочная даль и там все заброшено.”

²⁶ “Юрия Андреевича окружала блаженная, полная счастья, сладко дышащая тишина. Свет лампы спокойной желтизной падал на белые листы бумаги и золотистыми бликами плавал на поверхности чернил внутри чернильницы. За окном голубела зимняя морозная ночь. [...] Мир был на душе у доктора.”

²⁷ Berezina also points out at the contrast between the raging external element (the snowstorm, the snow, etc.) and the light that is inside of the house (the candle) which symbolizes warmth, light, and life (Berezina 2015: 68).

in the house to finally get to know each other, explore their feelings for each other, and “play the family life” in the way they would never be able to have elsewhere:

In the rush of some work their hand would find each other and remain like that for some time; the weight they were carrying would go down on the floor long before it reached the place where they were taking it, and they would succumb to the overwhelming tenderness that came over them. Again, everything would fall of their hands, and they would forget what they wanted to do. Minutes passed and turned into hours, suddenly it was late, and both would realize in shock that Katen'ka had been abandoned, the horse had neither been fed nor watered, and would run to catch up with the chores, riddled with remorse. (Pasternak 1957: 450)²⁸

Another “to” that Zhivago comes toward in the secluded privacy of this Siberian home apart from personal relations is his literary talent. Liberated from the constant participation in war, revolution, and medical duties, Zhivago uses the quiet time in Varykino to submerge himself into self-reflection and pour his reflections out on paper. He enjoys quiet night hours to indulge in writing:

When they woke up, Iurii Andreevich could not take his eyes of the desk by the window. He wanted to get to writing. [...] In dreaming about his evening tasks, he was not setting any major goals. He was taken by the passion to take the ink and the quill and write. He wanted just to drop some lines, scrawl something. At first, it would be enough to remember some of the old things that had not yet been put in writing and put them down on paper just to awaken his stiff and still dormant writing skills. And later, as he hoped, they would stay here a bit longer, and he would have enough time to start writing something new and substantial. (Pasternak 1957: 442)²⁹

Just like Lopatkin, Zhivago benefits from privacy to uncover and capitalize upon his inner inspiration and thereby give some freedom to another Zhivago—Zhivago “the writer”—who stays in the shadow next to Zhivago “the doctor” or Zhivago “the ordinary person busy with everyday duties” for the most part of the novel. This representation and realizations of Zhivago’s poetic inclinations at the house in Varykino echo the motif of “poeticization” of the domestic setting that serves as “a shelter that the poet searches in art and for the sake of the art” that Aleksander

²⁸ “Снова в разгаре какой-нибудь работы их руки сблизились и оставались одна в другой, поднятую для переноски тяжесть опускали на пол, не донеся до цели, и приступ туманящей непобедимой нежности обезоруживал их. Снова всё валилось у них из рук и вылетало из головы. Опять шли минуты и слагались в часы и становилось поздно, и оба с ужасом спохватывались, вспомнив об оставленной без внимания Катеньке, или о некормленной и непоенной лошади, и сломя голову бросались наверстывать и исправлять упущенное и мучились угрызениями совести.”

²⁹ “Когда встали, Юрий Андреевич стал с утра заглядываться на соблазнительный стол у окна. У него так и чесались руки засесть за бумагу. [...] В мечтах о вечерней работе он не задавался важными целями. Простая чернильная страсть, тяга к перу, к письменным занятиям владела им. Ему хотелось помарать, построчить что-нибудь. На первых порах он удовлетворился бы припоминаньем и записью чего-нибудь старого, незаписанного, чтобы только размять застоявшиеся от бездействия и, в перерыве дремлющие, способности. А там, – надеялся он, – ему и Ларе удастся задержаться тут подольше и времени будет вволю приняться за что-нибудь новое, значительное.”

Averbukh identifies as one of the strongest in Pasternak's poetry (Averbukh 2016: 2).³⁰ He also underscores the idea of the dominance of the private in the hierarchies of Pasternak's poetic aesthetics, as it is only within the private realm that the characters of his poems achieve self-realization, which is equally valid for the novel—at the end of it, “Zhivago's” poems are revealed. This other side only obtains a chance to thrive when all other conditions fall in place: winter, Lara, Varykino, freedom from household duties. This is particularly clear because Pasternak draws the reader's attention to the desk where Zhivago desires to write so eagerly already during his first visit to Varykino:

Whenever he would pass the study, Iurii Andreevich would drop a look of excitement at the window, from which a glorious view opened, at the large and well-placed desk, and at the spaciousness of the well-furnished room. It was the first thing that he couldn't help telling the host when Aleksandr Aleksandrovich and he approached the tea table in the dining room: You are lucky to live at such a great place. And your study is amazing, it motivates and inspires to work. (Pasternak 1957: 283)³¹

However, as the reader knows, Zhivago fails to act on the inspiration engendered by the desk at this time due to his high occupation with the household and incoming patients from the surrounding villages. It is only during the second visit that his creative self obtains enough freedom to evolve in the serene winter nights of Varykino—a development that is only made possible by privacy for himself, and not just privacy for his family as he needed during his first visit, that Zhivago comes to find in this house.

Pasternak's novel thus draws inspiration from the same model as Dudintsev's text and imagines the privacy of one's home as a space for the development of one's personality and achievements that will serve the public some day: just as Lopatkin's invention was eventually implemented, Zhivago's poems, short stories, and his scholarly ideas on diverse topics would be published shortly before his death.³²

³⁰ “Домашняя обстановка при этом выступает в качестве опозитизированного пространства, она то убежище, которое поэт ищет в искусстве и для искусства.”

³¹ “Теперь, минуя кабинет, Юрий Андреевич снова с завистью отметил окно с обширным видом, величину и положение стола и поместительность хорошо обставленной комнаты, и это было первое, что в виде восклицания хозяину вырвалось у Юрия Андреевича, когда он и Александр Александрович подошли к чайному столу, войдя в столовую.
– Какие у вас замечательные места. И какой у вас кабинет превосходный, побуждающий к труду, вдохновляющий.”

³² Other examples of the “lonely Soviet cowboy” who is rejected by the public sphere and perseveres in the private realm against all odds are also present in Il'ia Ehrenburg's “The Thaw” [Ottepel', 1954] and in Iurii Trifonov's *The Long Goodbye* [Dolgoe proshchanie, 1971]. In Ehrenburg's text, this type is embodied by the figure of the painter Saburov who is condemned by the critics for the excessive formalism of his style and can only paint for himself, without a chance to ever show his art to the broader public. Trifonov, in turn, envisions the character of Grisha Rebrov, an unsuccessful playwright whose works remain unpopular with theater directors, who pursues his

With these novels, both writers offer a seditious idea that the outer world can be thought of as something that characters can and, maybe even, should escape from—in direct opposition to the Communist ideology that fosters a movement out of the private into the public. Unlike in socialist realist works, where the character reveals themselves through the process of close interaction with the collective, the late socialist character does not necessarily need the collective for a successful self-realization. Only a conscious withdrawal from everyday life³³ presents them with an opportunity to succeed. In such situations, private spaces are allocated a specific role to strengthen the protagonist's motivation and to inspire him or her to work toward the deeds that he couldn't fathom of achieving in public.

While these characters manage to enjoy their retreat into the private sphere, it is not a privilege that is bestowed upon many other late Soviet heroes. Interestingly, this model only engages men: in a sort of romanticist tone, they retreat into the private sphere to re-emerge in the public more glorious than ever as a result of their retreat. A woman who would leave the public realm and single-handedly produce something in the private sphere that could be of value for society does not seem to be a plausible scenario that writers, even female ones, would explore in the late Soviet era. Instead, women are either presented as having equal success in the public sphere as men do,³⁴ or as sharing time between the spheres that overly consumes them and renders their home nothing more than just a stop on their race through life.

WOMEN BETWEEN THE HOME, WORK, AND THE HOME: BARANSKAIA

Natal'ia Baranskaia's "A Week Like Any Other" [Nedelia kak nedelia] that came out in *Novyi mir* in 1969 features Ol'ga Voronkova, a young female scientist who works at one of numerous Soviet scientific institutions. Narrated as a first-person diary, this story is divided into seven parts, each describing one day of a week in Ol'ga's life from the moment she wakes up until she goes to bed. Set after 1968,³⁵ it puts Ol'ga into a variety of settings—from her three-room apartment, where she has been living with her husband and two children for a couple of years; to her recently built

true passion—the creation of a historical play—within the four walls of his private dwelling. Both are presented as talented men and their work as undoubtedly meriting public attention.

³³ See also comparative analysis of withdrawals from everyday life in the section "the Heart of a Conflict: Trifonov, Makanin, Arro," and in Falchikov (2007).

³⁴ This signal of the Soviet strive toward egalitarianism is traceable, for example, in Vera Panova's "Farewell to the White Nights" [Provody belykh nochei, 1961], Anna Mass "Liuba's Wedding" [Liubkina svad'ba, 1965], or I. Grekova's "The Testing Ground," 1967].

³⁵ On one of the days that the story presents, Ol'ga reads Vasilii Aksionov's "Overstocked Packaging Barrels" [Zatovarennaiia bochkotara] in *Iunost'* [Youth] which was published there in 1968.

mikroraion [city block], to an institute where she is working, to the shops, where she has to go during the lunch break or after work, and back to her apartment where she falls asleep until a new day comes.

Every day in Ol'ga's life is built on the same pattern that irrevocably involves running:

Oh, spare time, spare time... What a clumsy word, "spare time"... "Women, fight for dedicating your spare time to cultural education!" Well, that is nonsense... Spa-re ti-me. My spare time is given to sports, my hobby is running. I run here, and then I run there. (Baranskaia 1969: 25)³⁶

It is no coincidence that diverse actions, in which Ol'ga engages during the day are called "activities": in order to perform them, she has to run around, be on top of her game, strive to succeed. Everything in her life is on the run [*begom*]: from the moment she wakes up until the time she falls into her bed, and there is hardly any time for "passivities" on her schedule. To emphasize that, Baranskaia predominantly uses verbs to describe Ol'ga's routine:

Today I get up on time, at ten past six I am already ready, only my hair has not been done. I peel the potatoes, getting them ready for cooking dinner later, cook the porridge, make coffee, warm up milk, wake Dima up, go to wake up kids. I turn on the light in children's room, say loudly, "Morning, sweeties," but they are sleeping. I pat Kot'ka, try to wake up Gul'ka, then take their quilts off them [...]. I call Dima to help me, but he is shaving. I leave Kot'ka alone, put a shirt, tights, and a dress on Gul'ka who is still sleeping as she slides off my knees. Something is hissing in the kitchen, oh, I forgot to turn off the milk! I put Gul'ka on the floor and rush into the kitchen. (Baranskaia 1969: 31)³⁷

The usage of many verbs in asyndetic constructions escalates the tension in the representation of Ol'ga's life and evokes the effect of a race without a break. Ol'ga's morning run around her apartment continues when she leaves home to take a bus for the work: the neighborhood where her family lives still lacks infrastructure and transportation is poor, so people have to fight for a place on a bus that will take them to the nearest metro station (Baranskaia 1969: 31). Unsatisfying commuting conditions nearly always result in Olga's being late for work. Her daily stress that begins at home is not only over but is further instigated by reprimands from her superior, small office tasks that are long overdue, and by the need to continuously run down to the laboratory to

³⁶ "Эх, досуг, досуг... Слово какое-то неуклюжее «досуг»... «Женщины, боритесь за культурный досуг!» Чушь какая-то... До-суг. Я лично увлекаюсь спортом – бегом. Туда бегом – сюда бегом."

³⁷ "Сегодня я встаю нормально – в десять минут седьмого я уже готова, только не причесана. Я чищу картошку – заготовка к ужину, – помешиваю кашу, завариваю кофе, подогреваю молоко, бужу Диму, иду поднимать ребят. Зажигаю в детской свет, говорю громко: «С добрым утром, мои лапушки!» – но они спят. Похлопываю Котьку, тормошу Гульку, потом стаскиваю с обоих одеяла [...]. Я зову Диму – помогать, но он бреется. Оставляю Котьку в покое, натягиваю на обмякшую Гульку рубашонку, колготки, платье, а она скользит с моих колен на пол. В кухне что-то шипит – ой, я забыла выключить молоко! Сажаю Гульку на пол, бегу на кухню."

beg for a working slot. She does not even have time for a lunch break: this pause is reserved for shopping. During the day, the lines in the shops are shorter, so the predominantly female office where Ol'ga works adjust their lunch break to times when the shops are less crowded, and the women “on duty” then go shopping for the rest of the team (Baranskaia 1969: 30).

In this whirlpool of everyday activities that echoes the turmoil of History described by Pasternak, how perfect would it be for Ol'ga to have her own Varykino where she could rest and have some “me-time,” and how striking is the lack of such place in Baranskaia's story. Once she has run through all the shops and the working day is over with many tasks still unfinished, Olga runs back home to make sure her husband and children have not yet spoilt their appetite: “I hurry along the paths, cross the empty fields between the newly built houses, run up the stairs...” (Baranskaia 1969: 35)³⁸—and engages again in cooking, washing, cleaning...

Focused on one female character who represents a multitude of working women in the Soviet Union, Baranskaia's story reflects upon the hardships of juggling work and private life in the late Soviet era—the infamous “double burden.”³⁹ In doing so, it takes Ol'ga's example to the extreme by making her home routine a part of the intense cycling pattern that defines her everyday life. Leiderman and Lipovetskii point to the timeless aspect of such existence that “neither has a beginning nor an end”:

If we use theoretical terminology, then this text is an example of what Pospelov calls “ethologies”—the descriptions of behavior, or, “physiologies” in the Russian literary tradition. They are not semi-documentary stories, but they bear some marks of this genre. They portray a constant existence, everyday routine that neither has a beginning nor an end, a sort of present indefinite. (Leiderman and Lipovetskii 2003b: 335)⁴⁰

In fact, not only is Ol'ga's life a “present indefinite,” it is also a “present infinite”—an endlessly repeated routine. She toils like a true *stakhanovets* [Stakhanovite], but, as Benjamin Sutcliffe justly remarks in linking Baranskaia's character to Mar'ia Vladimirovna, the protagonist of I. Grekova's story “A Hairdresser” [Damskii master, 1963], “unlike the socialist realist protagonist,” Mar'ia Vladimirovna “experiences no moment signaling the end of the struggle: her immature grown sons and naïve young secretary need constant care” (Sutcliffe 2009: 39). By exposing daily tasks that Ol'ga performs for others, the story highlights that she has no personal time. Her private apartment in a newly built house guarantees her some physical privacy, but she does not have any mental

³⁸ “Я бегу по тропкам, пересекая пустыри, взлетаю по лестнице...”

³⁹ On double burden in the USSR, see Buckley (1981), Lakhtikova et al. (2019).

⁴⁰ “Если использовать теоретическую терминологию, то перед нами то, что Г.Н. Поспелов относит к этологиям – нравоописаниям, а по русской литературной традиции – это «физиологии». Не будучи очерками, они несут на себе печать «очеркового» видения. Описывается постоянное существование, бытовая круговерть, у которой нет ни начала, ни конца, некий present indefinite.”

space in which to carve out a niche for herself. She is, in Sutcliffe's words, a "self-effacing" character (Sutcliffe 2009: 53). The paragon of her self-sacrifice to others comes in the tiny detail that Baranskaia weaves into the story: every night when Ol'ga falls asleep, she remembers that she has once again forgotten to sew a hook on her damaged bra.

Despite five out of the seven weekdays predominantly taking place in the setting of Ol'ga's workplace, the reader never has a feeling that the public sphere dominates the narrative. Even at work, Ol'ga's thoughts remain with her family and with the chores that she still has to do when she comes back home. From the moment she steps out of her apartment, she "carries her home with her": she privatizes the public sphere by saturating it with problems that have no connection to her work. This "overdose" of the private largely predefines the feeling that the reader develops throughout the story: that Ol'ga never has any rest apart from the time when she is sleeping. For, even when work duties step aside, the problems of the private sphere linger on the horizon, never letting her out of their grips.

Instead of an "eye of the storm" that Zhivago or Lopatkin experience, Baranskaia only entitles Ol'ga to *moments* of peace. Although her home is a private place, it does not provide her with a possibility to have much privacy for herself (unlike the homes of Zhivago with Lara or Lopatkin's), thus evoking Zhivago's first visit to Varykino when he also had no break in his daily routine. Ol'ga never manages to enjoy some qualitative rest by stepping out of the current that rushes her throughout her life. Instead of self-realization, the privacy of her home provides her with a short, overnight possibility of recuperating some strength before a new day comes—a pit stop; for on this new day, her life will again be devoted to her family, everything done on the run. Ol'ga's example shows that privacy does not necessarily equal idyll and guarantee comfort, peace, and pleasure for the character.⁴¹ It may serve as a harbor for love, but Baranskaia puts a twist on it by substituting the serene scenes of affection that we have seen in Pasternak's novel with moments of tenderness that Ol'ga can only grasp during the morning and evening hours when she is not engaged into daily chores—moments that give her life a purpose.

THE HEART OF A CONFLICT: TRIFONOV, MAKANIN, ARRO

Just as the privacy of home was portrayed nurturing relations between characters and stimulating their successes in public life (even if through brief respites), it also served as a magnifying glass

⁴¹ For other works that tap into "pit stop" motifs, see Irina Grekova's "A Hairdresser" [Damskii master, 1962], Varvara Bornycheva's "A Day in the Life of an Insurance Broker" [Den' strakhovogo agenta, 1969], or Maia Ganina's "Hear Your Moment" [Uslysh' svoi chas, 1976], all published in *Novyi mir*.

for the cracks in these relations and the failings of the person—a motif that was extensively explored by writers of urban prose and the Soviet New Wave drama [dramaturgiia novoi volny] who questioned the premise of the home becoming a safe refuge from the storms of everyday life and implied instead that it could be a carrier of such storms itself.

Among these writers, there's hardly any name that stands for privacy and conflict more vocally than Iurii Trifonov's. Gaining broad acknowledgement already under Stalin with his novella "Students" [Studenty] that won him the Stalin Prize in 1950,⁴² covering Central Asian and sports themes in the 1950s—early 1960s, by the late 1960s, Trifonov arrived to practice and excel in the genre that later would become known as "urban prose" for its focus on the middle-class city dwellers and their everyday life. Trifonov's works are home to a plethora of more or less private settings: private apartments (e.g., "The Exchange" [Obmen, 1969], *Taking Stock* [Predvaritel'nye itogi, 1970], *Another Life* [Drugaiia zhizn', 1975], *The House on the Embankment* [Dom na naberezhnoi, 1976]); private houses (*The Long Goodbye* [Dolgoe proshchanie, 1971]); dachas ("Vera and Zoika" [Vera i Zoika, 1966], "In an Autumn of Mushrooms" [V gribnuiu osen', 1968]), and communal apartments ("Vera and Zoika," "The Death of Doves" [Golubinaia gibel', 1968]). What distinguishes these private settings in Trifonov's work is the absence of artificial optimistic tones characteristic of socialist realism. While looking at private spaces, Trifonov reveals the double nature of domesticity: intended as an advancement of comfort of individual families, homes can also act as a catalyzer for conflicts or can enhance negative character traits of family members, thereby turning into sources of their isolation and alienation. His homes are almost never connected to warmth, love, and intimacy (cf. Woll 1991: 104–7), and instead of delivering a joyful image, his works often present a "study in gray": a somber picture of a not very happy life that visualizes problems that the private spaces can harbor.

In order to convey this impression, Trifonov fills his texts with dismal events that set the tone of loss, pain, and pessimism. Many of his stories and novellas are marked by a death or an illness as a defining event of the plot that either triggers or uncovers a change in the value system of his protagonists.⁴³ These events mark a definitive turn in the lives of protagonists, triggering the onset

⁴² In the last two decades of his life, this text came to serve as a bitter reproach for his choices as a writer, he would often confess. In his interviews that Trifonov gave in the 1970s, he frequently mentions his dissatisfaction with the fascination with socialist realism during his youth and the regrets about writing the novella in the way he did (Trifonov 1985a).

⁴³ For instance, "The Exchange" and "In an Autumn of Mushrooms" open with news about grave illness or sudden death of the protagonist's mother. *Another Life* follows the life of the family shared with the mother-in-law after the death of her son—the family's father. *Taking Stock* features the illness of housemaid Niura as one of its central events that reveals the unpleasant truth about the protagonists' son; "The Death of Doves" culminates in the death of birds, killed by an old man in order to stop the pointless bureaucratic persecutions by the neighbors and the house officials.

of their moral fall or serving as evidence that it had long been underway. For families hit by a tragedy, private spaces often become an additional stress factor. Thus, in “In an Autumn of Mushrooms,” which centers around the death of Nadia’s mother, the guests at the funeral reception avidly discuss the family’s current living situation and make suggestions for re-arranging the apartment in view of recent changes. Trifonov uses the setting of the loss of a family member—the mother—to expose human callousness and materialism. Just like he will do later in “The Exchange,” he introduces a character that, instead of sympathy to the family, is only able to show her egoistic interests. Evgeniia Glebovna, a friend of the family who comes to the funeral, alternates her sympathetic comments with hypocritical questions about the protagonists’ apartment:

- Naden’ka,—Zina’s mother, Evgeniia Glebovna, began.—It is actually my first time here, in your little apartment. Is it the result of your exchange of those rooms on Mytnaia street?
Nadia nodded.
- If I remember correctly, you had two rooms in a communal apartment, didn’t you? In an old building?
– Yes,—Nadia said.
- And this one is a one-room apartment, isn’t it?
Nadia nodded.
- Well, how many square meters have you got here?
As Nadia was not answering, but was just staring blankly at the salad bowl, Volodia said:
– I think, around twenty-four.
- Well, Volodia, the reason I am asking all this,—Evgenia Glebovna uttered,—is that we have also decided to do an exchange. In the end, we have two beautiful rooms. But let’s leave this for some other time, for later.—Suddenly she waved her hand and whispered: I’ll ask you later, some other time. Yes, later!
- And where did Tonia sleep?—asked the elderly Mar’ia Davydovna.
– Here,—said Volodia.
- Well, where else should she have slept?—said Evgeniia Glebovna.—Their children are over there, and they both are there, too. And this is a nice separate room. The only thing is that one can smell some gas, but ventilation is possible. (Trifonov 1968b: 73–74)⁴⁴

⁴⁴ “– Наденька, – сказала мать Зины Евгения Глебовна. – А ведь я в этой вашей квартирке первый раз. Это вы выменяли свои комнаты на Мытной?
Надя кивнула.
– Там у вас, кажется, были две комнаты в коммунальной квартире? В старом доме?
– Да, – сказала Надя.
– А тут однокомнатная?
Надя кивнула.
– Сколько же метров тут?
Так как Надя не отвечала, а сидела как бы в оцепенении, глядя на блюдо с салатом, Володя сказал:
– Двадцать четыре вроде.
– Я почему спрашиваю, Володя, – сказала Евгения Глебовна, – потому что мы тоже загорелись меняться. У нас ведь прекрасные две комнаты. Ну, я потом, потом! – Она вдруг замахала рукой и зашептала: – Потом спрошу! Как-нибудь. Ладно, потом!
– Тоня-то где спала? – спросила старушка Марья Давыдовна.

The woman can only focus on what matters to her—the details of their seemingly successful exchange. This practice—of swapping one’s apartment for another—was among the most popular Soviet “hobbies” of the 1960s–1970s. While during this era, many families moved from communal into individual apartments, the square meters allocated to them depended on the family situation at the moment of application. Therefore, when ten years later the family which had only a husband and a wife at the moment of application ended up in one-room apartment with two children of different sexes, the urgency of exchange clearly emerged before them, and an endless process would begin. Evgeniia Glebovna represents a typical pragmatist of late socialist times who seizes the opportunity when she notices one. She shows no consideration for Nadia and Volodia’s loss, ready to step across the dead body toward her personal triumph of comfort. As Benjamin Sutcliffe argues in his exploration of material worlds portrayed by Trifonov, for his characters “[t]he problem was desiring what one lacked and then sacrificing morality to obtain it” (Sutcliffe 2023: 5). For Evgeniia Glebovna, there is a great difference between a dead *stranger*, and a bigger apartment of her *own*: an inanimate object prevails over a human being, exposing darker sides of human nature.

Trifonov further accentuates these moral failures in “The Exchange,” where the news of the mother’s grave illness prompts her son and daughter-in-law to rush with the execution of their plan to exchange their one-room apartment and the mother’s room for a more spacious housing. In some way, “In an Autumn of Mushrooms” can be seen as a forerunner of “The Exchange,” which exploits a similar plot, but this time focuses on family members rather than strangers, for it is the daughter-in-law, Lena, who makes her husband Dmitriev talk his dying mother into an exchange. While both stories explore Trifonov’s signature dilemma—moral vs. material values—they are different in their intensity, for “The Exchange” dives deeper in exploring the moral fall and demonstrates how callous not only strangers, but even one’s closest relatives can be: they regard the death of a family member not as a tragedy, but as an opportunity to improve their housing situation.

Another way that Trifonov uses the home is to expose the problems that a family has been experiencing. Thus, in the short story “Vera and Zoika,” two poor women, Vera and her friend Zoika, are hired by the well-off Lidiia Sinitsina to help her clean her dacha after the winter. When they come to her place to travel together to the dacha, both women are impressed by the richly

– Здесь, – сказал Володя.

– Где же ей спать? – сказала Евгения Глебовна. – Там у них дети, и их двое. А здесь очень хорошо и отдельно. Только, конечно, газом чуть отзывает, но можно проветривать.”

decorated entry hall, with “a big oval mirror, [...] like in the theatre” (Trifonov 1966: 77).⁴⁵ The well-to-do status of the family is underscored by the ride to the dacha in a taxi and by a relatively spacious dacha house itself, with four rooms spread across two floors. However, behind this façade of material wealth there hides a tragedy: the family members are deeply alienated from each other. First, the son fails to offer to help his mother carry her heavy bags downstairs to the taxi, then neither he nor his father appear at the dacha that is being so thoughtfully prepared for the summer season by the mother. On the other hand, both Vera and Zoika—who live in the old barracks in the middle of the newly built *mikroraion* (city block) and work hard to earn every extra ruble—seem to have more rewarding emotional attachments to their families and loved ones. The cleaning of the dacha is Lidiia Sinitsina’s symbolic act of saving the family that is falling apart—in vain.⁴⁶

In this short story, the stark contrast between the comfort of the living conditions and the individual happiness of the female protagonists is essential for Trifonov’s message about the primacy of moral values over material ones. Despite Lidiia’s being relatively well-to-do, especially by Soviet standards (her family owns a private apartment and a dacha), she is obviously unhappy in her family life. Both her husband and son ignore her, as well as each other. They are a family of three strangers who just happen to live under one roof—a definition that another Trifonov’s character provides in a similar situation:

When everything was over, melancholy set in. Here’s the thing. Rita and I did not fight anymore, we just exchanged opinions. She would say, “When three egoists live together, nothing good comes out of it.” I would counter, “Yes, but every egoist has a choice. One can find a kind person who would forgive everything to him.”—“Oh, that’s such a mess, to look for a kind person. I am tired. I am an old woman already.”—“Well, don’t you worry. There’s someone out there for everyone.” (Trifonov 1970: 132)⁴⁷

These lines come from *Taking Stock* (1970)—a story of a family that, unsurprisingly for a Trifonov’s text, falls apart. What starts as a generational conflict between the father, Gennadii Sergeevich, and his son, Kirill, develops into a journey of the family’s moral fall. The latter manifests in the callousness of the family toward an elderly housemaid, in the parents’ deception by the son who lies to everyone around him, and in the son’s ingratitude for his father’s efforts to

⁴⁵ “[...] с большим овальным зеркалом, [...] как в театре.”

⁴⁶ The motif of veneration of an object created by one’s own hands and its symbolic interpretation as the past that one wishes to preserve is present even more vividly in Vampilov’s play *Last Summer in Chulimsk* [Proshlym letom v Chulimsk, 1971], where, as Svetlana Kozlova argues, the fragile fence of the garden is constantly repaired by Valentina as a sublimation of attempts to arrange her life (Kozlova 2013).

⁴⁷ “Когда все кончилось, наступила тоска. Вот в чем дело. Мы больше не ругались с Ритой, мы просто обменивались мнениями. Она говорила: «Когда три эгоиста живут вместе, ничего хорошего быть не может». – «Да, но у каждого эгоиста есть выход, – говорил я. – Найти доброго человека, который будет ему все прощать». – «Это такая волынка – искать доброго человека. Я устала. Я уже старая женщина». – «Ничего, охотники на тебя найдутся.»

organize his studies at an institute. Small quarrels and everyday problems result in the disintegration of the family. At the end of the story, the father leaves for Central Asia, where he enjoys solitude combined with bitter disappointment in his family members' lack of interest in him. Home is anything but home, it is elsewhere that Trifonov's characters look for a retreat.⁴⁸

Almost a decade later, Vladimir Makanin explores similar possibilities of escape from the loathed private sphere in his story "Safety Valve" [Otdushina, 1979]:

As a way of escaping the circle of failures in life, Makanin offers a recipe popularized by Trifonov—to solve the problems by getting away from them, leaving for a different home or city, a different family or woman. A "safety valve" becomes one of "escape" options in Makanin's prose. (Selemenewa 2013: 20)⁴⁹

Makanin's story follows a love triangle between Alevtina, a single woman-poet with a private apartment where she entertains her fans and lovers; Iurii Strepetov, professor of mathematics; and Pavel Vasil'evich Mikhailov, an engineer at a furniture factory. Both men seem to be happily married and successful in their respective careers, but they regularly experience a desire to escape from the routines of their lives, and Alevtina provides them an opportunity to do so. Her apartment is portrayed as an ahistorical experience of a salon of the nineteenth century, where a female patron would entertain her guests who come from various spheres of life—very similar to the story's trio. Strepetov introduces the term "*otdushina*" (safety valve) to grasp his experience in Alevtina's apartment, and employs it to define the time between work and returning home, when he can relax: "[...] he tries to use this break between the working day and the home to relax and distance himself from everything—at least once a week, at least on a rare occasion, at least some time. This break is what he calls a safety valve." (Makanin 1980: 323)⁵⁰

Unlike the safety valve that is Alevtina's space, Strepetov does not see his home as a place that can perform this function: "Home is the place where he heals. It is the place where he lives. At home, he hands his psyche to his wife with great trust" (Makanin 1980: 322).⁵¹ Yet it is not the place where he feels comfortable, which is why he repeatedly runs away from it. In her analysis

⁴⁸ In another Trifonov's short story, "In Summer Noon" [Byl letnii polden', 1966], the woman escapes Moscow, where her family now lives and where there is no place for her anymore, to come back to the other home—her native Riga, where she reconnects with the memories of the past. In the aforementioned "Vera and Zoika," Lidia's luxurious apartment is just a beautiful mask over the unbeautiful life that she has there, whereas her dacha, on the other hand, seems more of a home to her where she feels free and happy.

⁴⁹ "В качестве способа вырваться из круга жизненных неудач Маканин предлагает трифоновский рецепт «убега» – способ решить проблемы, удалившись от них, убежав в другой дом или город, в другую семью или к другой женщине. Одним из вариантов «убега» в прозе Маканина становится «отдушина»."

⁵⁰ "[...] промежуток меж рабочим днем и домом он старается использовать так, чтобы хорошенько расслабиться и забыться – хотя бы раз в неделю, хотя бы редко, хотя бы иногда. Этот-то временной промежуток он и называет отдушиной."

⁵¹ "Дома он лечится. Дома он живет. Дома он вручает свою психику жене с великим доверием."

of the story, Nadya Peterson draws attention to alternative possibilities of the interpretation of the word *otdushina*:

In the one-word title of this novel (*Otdushina*) Makanin manages to encapsulate the absurdity of the situation played out in the text. Although the literal meaning of the word is “safety-valve” the prefix “*ot*” implies moving away, distancing oneself from the “*dusha*” (“the soul”), in fact imparting the sense of “despiritualization” to the title. (Peterson 1988: 351, note 8)

At home, Makanin’s characters are just like Trifonov’s—in conflict with others and with themselves. They are, as Peterson’s interpretation of the term indicates, in conflict with their soul, which they may have already started to lose due to their moral failures. Whereas Peterson sees an escape into a safety valve as a possible loss of soul, it may be equally explained as a soul-regaining procedure: *ot dushi* does not only stand for running from the soul, but it also means putting soul into the things you do and giving part of it to others. If the home is a place for their bodies to rest, Alevtina’s apartment is a chance to recharge the soul by sharing it with others through intellectual or poetic discussions, or simply by being in the presence of others and being a passive observer to their talks. Perhaps an important difference between the home and the safety valve is that, in the privacy of the former, neither Strepetov nor Mikhailov are in control over their day or their soul. As Strepetov indicates, his wife commands his routine there. Which is why Alevtina’s safety valve acquires such importance for both men: it is a place where they can for several hours take control over their lives.⁵²

The loss of control over one’s private space is a motif that receives strong articulation in Vladimir Arro’s plays that explore an emerging reality of possessing a private property and class shifts in Soviet society attendant to it. In *Five Ballads in an Old House* [Piat’ romansov v starom dome, 1981], the Kas’ianovs family intend to renovate their apartment when a sudden visitor disrupts their plans. Bronnikov, a literary scholar, claims that the apartment used to belong to a now late poet whose legacy has remained largely unknown to the public, and since the apartment is one of the few memories left of him, any renovation should be prevented until a due exploration of the apartment has been undertaken by a cultural-historical organization. Yet, his claims clash with the family’s robust self-identification as owners of private property:

Bronnikov. Well, in this case... (*Disappointed, he collects his papers.*) There was a reason I couldn’t make myself come in... Private life... I understand... I thought it would be awkward... Moreover, you are right, old apartments should be renovated from time to time... Sometimes even walls should be broken... (Arro 1987a: 133)
[...]

⁵² Think here of the framing of privacy via control or the lack thereof, suggested by Rössler (see Chapter One for details).

Kas'ianov. [...] And now you, with your poet, as if life should stand still now, and I have no choice, just because a poet used to live here. So what now, that a poet used to live here; everyone has lived somewhere. Composers, artists... Governors-General. Does it mean that we should now break into all private homes and start changing everything there? (Arro 1987a: 140)⁵³

What is important in these lines is that not only the owners of the apartment are aware of the violation, but even the intruder himself acknowledges his evident *faux pas*. Bronnikov is portrayed as a man who is self-conscious and incredibly guilty of his actions, yet the pangs of remorse are outweighed by his sense of duty and commitment to protect what he believes to be cultural legacy. He is a testament (rare for late Soviet literature and therefore, all the more remarkable) that in late Soviet society, there was an understanding of *privacy* because there was also an understanding of its *violation*—even though Bronnikov is not able to put it into a lexical formula (thus resorting to “private life” to express it).⁵⁴

What exactly does Bronnikov violate? Kas'ianov is outraged about the intrusion onto his property, and envisions his house as a “refuge and bastion” of “peace and the sanctity of life” that have been disturbed:

Kas'ianov. [...] It is all falling apart, Polina! (*He walks around the room, lost and agitated, and constantly takes off and puts back on his turban.*) I don't understand what is going on in my house... You think you are the owner, the master. My house is my castle. A closed space... A refuge and a bastion. (*He mumbles.*) A tiny universe... The sanctity of life and peace... (*Struck by this thought, he climbs the stepladder, and speaks from its top.*) And suddenly it turns out that no-oo! You are not alone! People are walking under your windows! They are peeking inside! They know everything about you! There's no-oo peace! (*He shouts.*) Where's my house, Polina? Where's my safe harbor? Noah's ark... (*He puts his palm on the side of his body, gets off the stepladder.*) Just picture it, we've lived together thirty-five years, so much effort... And nothing has been done... No-thing... Oh, the simple sorrows we have... (Arro 1987a: 144)⁵⁵

⁵³ “Бронников. В таком случае... (*С сожалением собирает бумаги.*) Я недаром не решался зайти... Частная жизнь... Я понимаю... Я предчувствовал всю неловкость... К тому же вы правы, старые квартиры время от времени нуждаются в ремонте... и даже в перепланировке...
[...]

Касьянов. [...] А вы со своим поэтом вроде того, что жизнь теперь должна замереть, и ты как хочешь, раз тут жил поэт. Что ж, что поэт жил, все где-нибудь жили. Композиторы, артисты... генерал-губернаторы. Что ж, выходит, врваться во все частные дома и все там переделывать?”

⁵⁴ A similar scene is depicted by Izrail' Metter in a short story “An Intern” [Praktikant] that was published in *Novyi mir* in 1965 (issue 2). The story relates a police search in a room of a communal apartment that was caused by an offense committed by the man who lives there. When the policeman and his young intern arrive at the room to make the search, the man is away, and only his elderly blind mother with impaired hearing and his little daughter are at home. Although the police have a warrant for the search, the intern feels uneasy about their searching the room without the owner, only in the presence of the elderly woman who cannot control them because of her health issues (Metter 1965).

⁵⁵ “Касьянов. [...] Все рушится, Полина! (*В растерянности и волнении ходит по комнате, то снимая, по повязывая чалму.*) Я не понимаю, что творится в моем доме... Мнишь себя хозяином, владыкой. Мой дом

Indeed, everything that Kas'ianov claims to feel about his house falls perfectly in line with Western ideas of privacy, but, paradoxically, does not at all reflect the fictional reality of the play: Bronnikov's invasion does not bring destruction into the family—the destruction is already there, and Bronnikov's arrival only serves to reinforce and unveil tensions that have been there for a long time. The parents do not understand each other anymore and do not want to notice the tensions between Ol'ga, their daughter, and Leonid, her future husband, whose chances to marry her increasingly dissipate as the play progresses and equal zero by its end. As Ol'ga Bagdasarian remarks, the setting itself is key to understanding the condition in which Bronnikov finds the family: “The discomfort of the characters’ *byt*, their ‘lack of connection’ to the space that is traditionally viewed as the lived space of home exteriorizes their attitude to everyday life and correlates with their perception of the selves” (Bagdasarian 2006: 234–35).⁵⁶ The Kas'ianov's “home” lacks all attributes of home, which is immediately obvious to the eye of the external observer (represented by Bronnikov): it is an apartment where the scarce furniture and the perennial renovation atmosphere emphasize the lack of the “home feeling,” which reveals the lack of warmth between family members. It is a “neglected space that a person has rejected, and therefore a site of closedness, lack of comfort, and some internal inconsistency” (Bagdasarian 2006: 234)⁵⁷ that none of the members of the family can see and that is as invisible as their alienation from each other—both become clear only through the outsider Bronnikov. Kas'ianov's climbing the stepladder in an attempt to regain power by gaining height over the people in the room is nothing else but the last desperate gesture available to him before his world comes crumbling down around him.

In another play, *Look Who Is Here!* [Smotrite, kto prishel!, 1981], the sensibility of private property owners instigates a conflict between the old intelligentsia and the rising class of entrepreneurs. Arro's text thereby enters in direct dialogue with Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* [Vishnevyi sad, 1903], as Ludmila Parts argues: “[...] both plays [*Smotrite, kto prishel!* and *Vishnevyi sad*] are saying farewell to the vanishing aristocracy, real in one case, spiritual in

– моя крепость. Замкнутое пространство... Прибежище и оплот. (*Бормочет.*) Вселенная в миниатюре... Незыблемость и покой... (*Уязвленный своей мыслью, вдруг взбирается на стремянку и – оттуда.*) А однажды оказывается – не-ет! Ты не один! Под твоими окнами ходят! В них заглядывают! О тебе все знают!.. Покоя-то не-ет! (*Кричит.*) Где мой дом, Полина? Где моя тихая пристань? Ноев ковчег... (*Держась за бок, слезает со стремянки.*) Подумать только, тридцать пять лет живем, сколько усилий...И еще ничего не устроено... Ни-че-го... Заботы наши простые...”

⁵⁶ “Бытовая неустроенность героев, их «неприкаянность» в пространстве, которое традиционно рассматривается как домашнее, обиходное, овнешняет отношение персонажей к повседневному течению жизни, коррелирует с их самочувствием.”

⁵⁷ “[...] пространство запущенное, отчужденное от себя человеком, оттого и теснота, бытовая неустроенность, какое-то внутреннее несоответствие.”

the other. In both cases the approaching capitalist reality and mentality renders their existence and values unnecessary” (Parts 2008: 124). Arro’s play is centered around Nikolai Tabunov’s family dacha which belongs to the widow of his deceased brother (Arro’s successors to Chekhov’s Gaev and Ranevskaja). She is selling the house since she does not go there anymore, and the family is spending what promises to be their last summer here. They stay at a smaller cottage (*dom-vremianka*) that is located at the forefront of the garden, closer to the road, and the action evolves on its veranda and the lawn between the cottage and the street. The family are surprised by the arrival of a young man, Korolev (called “King” throughout the play in a direct reference to the English “king”),⁵⁸ who presents himself as the future owner of the house. He is supposed to meet the current owner at the dacha here to sign the documents and close the deal. He is later joined by his two friends, Robert and Levada, who seem to have come to visit him. While awaiting the owner of the dacha, the three friends install a tent on the lawn to spend the night. As they engage in conversations with the family, these lead to ardent disputes and result in the revelation that Robert and Levada have already bought the house behind King’s back, and in actuality are the rightful owners of the property.

At the very beginning of the play, King is shown as a considerate and humble young man who feels awkward about disrupting the family’s routine with his intention to buy the house (reminding of Bronnikov in *Five Ballads in an Old House*). He frequently apologizes (“No, thank you. By the way, I apologize but... would you mind my staying here a bit longer? Marina Anatol’evna should come soon”; Arro 1987c: 169)⁵⁹ and even offers that the family could keep the small cottage for themselves after he buys the dacha so that they can continue their tradition of coming there in the summer (1987c: 188–89). The family meanwhile behaves slightly arrogantly, with an expression of their domination that is powered not only by their current symbolic ownership of the place but also by their class attitude: as representatives of intelligentsia, they despise King for his profession of a hairdresser and are angry about the money he earns (think here, for example, of Tabunov’s harsh line: “We are the society, not them. They are parasites!”; Arro 1987c: 172).⁶⁰

As the family learns about King’s offer to leave them the use of the cottage, Tabunov is willing neither to receive nor to accept such an offer (“[...] my family and I do not need your charity”;

⁵⁸ The nickname also reflects late Soviet fashion for appropriating foreign names that was popular among young people.

⁵⁹ “Благодарю, нет. Да, простите... вы не возражаете, если я еще побуду? Должна подъехать Марина Анатольевна.”

⁶⁰ “Общество – это мы, а они – паразиты!”

Arro 1987c: 194).⁶¹ For him, the type of person who will own the place is an important factor, as is clear from his words to King: “Young man, I have too many memories connected to this place. And I do not need you to concede me a-ny-thing here. Anything, do you hear me? On the contrary, I concede everything to *you*” (Arro 1987c: 194, my emphasis).⁶²

Privacy is thus strongly connected here to ownership over the place and also to class domination. The disruption of the status quo and family’s dissatisfaction serve as signals to recognize a situation of privacy, even though no physical borders are in place. As the play progresses, the intrusion into the family’s privacy grows stronger, with young guests consistently invading upon further areas of the family’s life: they turn on loud music or have breakfast on the veranda (after requesting the family’s permission to do so). These small gestures serve to assert the power of the young men over the dacha space. A sound intervention that is impossible to escape (turning on the cassette recorder with loud music) is complemented by physical appropriation of territory: first, they mark the lawn next to the house as “theirs” by putting up a tent there, then they acquire an additional piece of space—the veranda—by having breakfast on it. This scheme is so obvious that even the family sees through it, and Tabunov compares the situation at the dacha to the plot of the Russian fairy-tale about the fox and the hare, where the hare who pitied the fox and invited her into his home ends up being thrown out of it (Arro 1987c: 205).

The culmination of this power struggle comes in a fierce monologue King reads when he stands up to the family’s arrogance:

King (*to everyone*). I apologize. For inconvenience. (*A pause.*) I understand what kind of company we may seem to you! A barista. A bath attendant... A coiffeur. Here, in the haven of peaceful muses... of scholarly achievements... (*He stands up and walks back and forth before the family.*) But you have to understand... most of these people have a bone to pick with you... dear ladies and gentlemen! (*A pause.*) Yes, a bone. You owe them big time. (Arro 1987c: 220)⁶³

King blames the older generation for the establishment of the rigid order that does not let young people develop in accordance with their drives and inspirations. Instead, as King asserts, they are forced into a prefabricated mold composed of the expectations and demands voiced by the older generation. King claims that the main talent of young generation—commerce—has been wasted

⁶¹ “Но меня и мою семью увольте от благодеейний.”

⁶² “Молодой человек. С этой дачей у меня слишком многое связано. И мне не надо здесь ни-че-го уступать. Ничего, слышите? Это я вам уступаю.”

⁶³ “Кинг (*всем*). Приношу извинения. За причиненное беспокойство. (*Пауза.*) Я понимаю, что это для вас за компания! Бармен. Банщик... Куафер. Здесь, в приюте тихих муз... учености... (*Встает, прохаживается под взглядами хозяев.*) Поймите только... что у большинства этих людей – свой счет к вам... милостивые государи! (*Пауза.*) Да-да, счет. Вы им крупно задолжали.”

due to constant interventions of the older clique. This outburst raises King over the family as a strong character—his monologue dominates the pages with only rare remarks inserted by the family in-between his longer ardent condemnation passages. His indisputable domination is additionally reinforced by the decision of Tabunov’s daughter, Alina, to have him cut her hair—an offer of his that she has repeatedly declined throughout the play. King thus establishes a robust presence in the dacha space and encroaches upon the family’s privacy not only through his charisma but also through his creations (apart from Alina’s, he has earlier cut the hair of a girl who works for the family, Masha). Moreover, an ambiguous scene in the forest where Alina kisses King after the haircut and then takes him into the woods for a possible continuation of this intimate experience (never unveiled to the reader, Arro 1987c: 224–25) is also a model of a symbolic surrender of the family (represented by Alina) to King (and thus, by extension, to the younger generation).

When it is revealed that Robert and Levada are the actual owners of the dacha, the privacy of the family legally becomes the privacy of the young people—one group has to give the place to the other one, and it is now the family who seem to be merely guests in others’ private space:

Sof’ia Ignat’ievna. Please, do not worry. In the end, how long can it last? They will have breakfast and leave.

Tabunov. No, we will leave. And they will stay. And wherever we are, they will keep coming and taking our place. (Arro 1987c, 206)⁶⁴

Tabunov’s words sound prophetic in predicting the fall of his class and lifestyle and their replacement by a new formation of people—ones like King, Robert, and Levada. His generation is being edged out, it is moving through history and is just a liminal step on the way to a new society. The liminality motif, underscored by the setting of the garden, stands for the *ephemeral* character of any dominance. The very house around which the disputes evolve in the play is deeply symbolic—although the reader receives multiple references to it, neither it nor the widow who owns it ever appear on stage: like the infamous Godot from Samuel Beckett’s play, they are constantly spoken about, but never come.⁶⁵ The house thus serves as a myth, a symbol of the idyll that never existed in the first place and is now slipping away from the family, or, if one imagines a larger picture—from a whole class of people like Tabunov and Shabel’nikov, the intelligentsia. It is also reminiscent of a similar motif of the past slipping away, which we have already seen in *Five Ballads in an Old House*, where the legacy of the dead poet whom no one had heard of

⁶⁴ “Софья Игнатъевна. Прошу тебя, не нервничай. Ну, сколько это продлится? Позавтракают и уедут. Табунов. Нет, это мы уедем. А они останутся. И где бы мы ни оказывались, они будут приходить и занимать наши места.”

⁶⁵ For parallels between Arro and Beckett, see Zyrianova, Mazurova, and Tishevskaja (2012).

becomes the source of problems for the family and ultimately reveals that the closeness of their relationships is nothing but an illusion.

The coming generation is agile and mobile—the qualities underscored by their cars and mobile homes (tents) by Arro—and sets different priorities in life. They are prototypes of the future “new Russians” who would come to dominate the country in the entrepreneurial 1990s. In the late Soviet society, where personal connections, the ability to be quick on one’s feet, and money increasingly predetermine the level of personal comfort that is crafted by participation in the “second” rather than official economy,⁶⁶ the formation of this new type had been in the air long before Arro “popularized” it in his play, as Beumers and Lipovetsky point out (2009: 72).⁶⁷ And an important feature of this new generation is their openness to intimacy and sexuality, which is already alluded in Arro’s text but also comes to shine through other literary works of this era.

AN EROTIC “ME-SPACE”: VOINOVICH, AMLINSKII

From the first cautious scouting trips onto the terrain of the private sphere that took place in the 1950s, writers moved toward more audacious representations the further late socialism progressed. This shift is particularly noticeable in the recurrent framing of the home as a space where the exploration of the intimate self takes place. Vladimir Voinovich’s story “Two Comrades” [Dva tovarishcha, 1967] is one of earlier examples of such texts that place matters of maturity, including sexual development, at the center of the narrative. His story examines the lives of two young men, Valerii and Anatolii, both around twenty years old, who live in a typical Soviet city where everything public is “the largest” in the country (factories, plants, etc.), but the private apartment, where Valera lives with his mother and grandmother, is far from large:

Actually, there were many of those things that belong to the category of “the largest” in our town. The largest cooper plant, the largest flour factory, and the largest factory of soft packaging, where sacks and bags were produced. The six-story house where we lived used to be the largest in our town, but then new ones came that were even larger. Our apartment, however, was not the largest: it consisted of two adjacent rooms. There were three of us living in it. (Voinovich 1967: 87)⁶⁸

⁶⁶ For the second economy, see Chapter Four, footnote 61.

⁶⁷ See Zyrianova, Mazurova, and Tishevskaiia (2012: 86–87) on the conflict of social types in Arro’s play as well as Lipovetsky (2003) on the genealogy of the cultural myth of the “new Russian.”

⁶⁸ “Вообще в нашем небольшом городе было много чего крупнейшего. Крупнейший бондарный завод, крупнейший мукомольный комбинат и крупнейшая фабрика мягкой тары, где делали мешки и авоськи. Шестиэтажный дом, в котором мы жили, был когда-то крупнейший в нашем городе, потом появились

The grandiose design of the socialist city contradicts the precarious living reality, thus hinting at the obvious disbalance between production concerns and social welfare in the Soviet society. As a result, “[i]f mundane things in life seem rather chimeric, anything more grandiose appears absurd,” Robert Porter asserts in arguing that Voinovich’s story creates an effect of fictionality of Soviet life (Porter 1989: 90–91). Porter therefore defines “Two Comrades” as a “social comedy” in that “it gives a comic picture of social attitudes and behavior [...] but when the moral element breaks through [...] the comedy turns sour” (Porter 1989: 90).

Meanwhile, the mocking of the superiority of major social objects in the city does not only serve Voinovich to start a narrative that questions the socialist project, but it also encourages an introspection into Valera’s inner world against the backdrop of the largeness of social life. The private apartment where he lives becomes the first site where his cognizing and embracing the sexual side of his life takes places and where he faces his first challenges on this path, and its size and layout strongly interfere with his pursuits of intimacy and autonomy:

My morning would start with a small scandal. First, the alarm clock that stood on the chair next to the bed would ring, but I would turn it off. Then my grandmother would rush to assist the alarm clock in waking me up, and she would not turn off, unfortunately. [...] I would gladly stay in bed until she leaves, but at this moment, Mom would appear in the room, a resolute expression on her face. She wouldn’t waste time on talking, she would just pull my comforter off of me. Further resistance was useless, I jumped off the bed and went to the toilet wearing nothing but my underpants. (Voinovich 1967: 88–89)⁶⁹

Valera’s sharing the apartment with his mother and grandmother is not something extraordinary—such a situation was ubiquitous in the Soviet Union. Moreover, his living conditions can even be considered luxurious, for he has his own room in the flat, and his mother and grandmother share an adjacent one.⁷⁰ However, what makes Valera uncomfortable is the inability to have *control* over his seemingly private room. The decisions on who enters his room and when are not his to make. His daily routine is under constant surveillance by his family members. Moreover, their intrusion

новые, покрупнее. Квартира наша была не крупнейшая – она состояла из двух смежных комнат. В ней мы жили втроем.”

⁶⁹ “Утро мое начиналось всегда с небольшого скандала. Сначала звонил будильник на стуле возле кровати, но я его выключал. Потом из соседней комнаты на помощь будильнику спешила бабушка, которая, к сожалению, не выключалась. [...] Я бы не встал, пока она не уйдет, но тут в комнате появлялась мама с решительным выражением на лице. Не тратя времени на разговоры, она стаскивала с меня одеяло. Дальнейшее сопротивление было бесполезным, я вскакивал и тащился в трусах в уборную.”

⁷⁰ Joseph Brodsky (1995) made the precariousness of establishing private space for young men clear in his essay on a room and a half, of which the half belonged to him and he had to demonstrate marvels of ingenuity in his attempts to turn it into something even slightly resembling a proper room.

in his private life is not only restricted to his room and routine, but also includes their incessant interest in Valera's relations with girls:

I was nineteen, but I was patronized as if were a little boy. Smoking was out of question. Not to mention drinking alcohol. I was allowed to go out with girls, but not later than eleven thirty p.m.

– If this is a good girl, – my mother would say, – she should understand that your family will be worried about you. You can bring her here, and you can stay as long as you like.

Girls, even good ones, preferred to sit with boys on the benches or to make out at the porch or on the stairs. I did not have a girl. I had only my mother and my grandmother, who wanted all events of my personal life to happen in front of their eyes, for the sake of their own peace of mind. (Voinovich 1967: 89)⁷¹

In this passage, Valera draws a direct connection between privacy and possibilities of intimacy that he is eager to have. Tiny everyday violations of Valera's privacy by his family members trigger his reflections on paths of sexual development that he could take, or, more precisely, on the limitations of the former.

Valera's first love experience comes to life only when he deviates from his traditional daily routine and meets Tat'iana at a police precinct where he has been brought in for an attempt to sneak into a dance party without a ticket. After the police let them go, Valera walks Tat'iana back home and kisses her in the darkness on the stairs in front of her apartment. Solitude and invisibility become his allies in finding a chance to explore the sexual world—the two things unavailable to him under the surveilling gaze of his family. The precariousness of his living situation, independently of how good it may seem in comparison to the situation of many others, becomes his stumbling block on the path to living his desires.

Privacy has long been viewed as a harbor for testing, redefining, and strengthening these connections between individuals,⁷² which is why Joost van Baak argues that “the idea of intimacy is connected to the idea of home as a center of human life and history and as a symbol of stability and security” (van Baak 2005: 45).⁷³ Domesticity had a strenuous path of development under Communism, which favored communal spaces over private ones; sexual culture was also within the focus of the authorities—the ideological battle achieved its crescendo in the 1930s and had

⁷¹ “В девятнадцать лет меня опекали, как маленького. Ни о каком куренье не могло быть и речи. Не говоря уже о питье. С девушками гулять разрешалось, но не позже чем до половины двенадцатого.

– Если девушка хорошая, – говорила мама, – она поймет, что у тебя дома будут волноваться. Ты можешь привести девушку сюда и сидите здесь сколько угодно.”

Девушки, даже хорошие, предпочитали сидеть с парнями на лавочках или обниматься в подъездах. У меня никакой девушки не было. У меня были только мама и бабушка, которым для полного спокойствия хотелось, чтобы все процессы моей личной жизни протекали на их глазах.”

⁷² See Chapter One, especially the section “Why Does Privacy Matter?”

⁷³ “[...] идея интимности связана с идеей дома как центра человеческой жизни и истории и как символа стабильности и надежности.”

long-lasting consequences for Soviet ideas of intimacy and sexuality (Kon 1997: 149). During this time, the pervasive shortage of privacy made it difficult for many people to explore and practice sexuality and intimacy—a situation that changed significantly under Khrushchev and Brezhnev with the upsurge in individual housing. Yet it would be naive to assume that communal apartments deprived people of sex and private living arrangements guaranteed complete liberty of intimate adventures—although the lack of private space definitely complicated the situation, as Iurii Trifonov’s observes through his characters in the already familiar to us story “Vera and Zoika.” Both women live in barracks, but their living conditions are quite different. Zoika perceives the barracks as her burden, for she shares her room with her children and elderly mother and is therefore unable to invite men for a visit. Zoika’s dissatisfaction with her current living conditions transpires from her confrontation with Vera during a conversation that the two women strike up with their employer, Lidiia Alexandrovna, when they are having a break at the dacha. Vera believes that Zoika is jealous of her because Vera has a room to herself in the barracks and can entertain different visitors there:

- Don’t you listen to her, Lida Alexandrovna! She is lying. She is just jealous.
- If I had anything to be jealous of...
- Of course, she is jealous, because men come to visit me, and she has no one to come to her, once a year tops. Men respect me, Lida Alexandrovna, they respect me a lot, because I am like a comrade to them. I can drink with them, well, not much, why should I drink much, right? I can have a bite after sharing alcohol and lend them some money till they have their paycheck. Well, how much do I lend? A ruble and a half, or three, usually. I am like a comrade to them, I swear to God, Lida Alexandrovna.
- You, fool, you have a separate room!—Zoika said.—And I have four people on twelve square meters. (Trifonov 1966: 81–82).⁷⁴

Just like Valera in Voinovich’s story, Zoika draws a direct connection between the privacy of one’s room and a chance of a sexual life and regards the former as an indispensable condition for the latter.

A breakthrough in the wall of silence around the topic of sex seems to arrive in the 1980s, with the turn toward embracing sensual and sexual Soviet citizens visible in Vladimir Amlinskii’s novel *The Craft* [Remeslo], published in *Novyi mir* in 1983. The second part of the novel, published

⁷⁴ “– Да не слушайте вы ее, Лида Александровна! Врет она. Она вообще такая завистная.

– Уж чему завидовать...

– Конечно, завистная, потому что меня навещают, а к ней – раз в год по обещанию. Меня мужчины уважают, Лида Александровна, очень даже уважают, я с ними как товарищ: я и выпить могу – ну, немного, конечно, зачем много пить, правда же? – и закусить, и одолжить, если до полочки. Конечно, сколько одолжить? Ну, полтора рубля или три, как обычно. Я с ними как товарищ, ей-богу, Лида Александровна.

– Дура, у тебя комната отдельная! – сказала Зойка. – А нас четверо на двенадцати метрах.”

in issue 11 of the journal, opens with the description of the morning after sex between the characters:

First time in my life I woke up next to a woman. I saw her as if for the first time—her pale face that was anxious even when she was asleep, with light blue color under the eyes, arch-like thick brows that were coiffed to the latest fashion. Now I saw her as a sick child, or, maybe, a sister. It was weird: we’ve just had this short night, full of tenderness, passion, embarrassment, fight, complete liberty and strange awkwardness, and now I didn’t have neither disappointment, nor alienation, only some sort of pity toward her, and, maybe, to myself, because everything that would come next was unclear and complex, because I felt some new connection to her and dependence on her... All these feelings were rolling inside me as a lively sharp thing that was coming to my throat and making me catch my breath. (Amlinskii 1983: 11)⁷⁵

The fact that this passage went through multiple levels of censorship and editing and could still appear not just on the pages of a major thick journal, but on the very opening page of the novel (its second part) testifies to the increasing acceptance of sexuality and intimacy as a discursive entity in the late Soviet public sphere. Although the sexual experience that the protagonist had is out of the ordinary for him (“First time in my life I woke up next to a woman”), the very fact of having sex is not presented as something extraordinary. He talks about it as if were a part of the routine by focusing on the woman and not on the act itself. By not turning sex into the object of discussion, Amlinskii thus asserts its normality within the space of one’s own apartment: making love to another person is nothing out of the ordinary, just a way of spending the time within the four walls of one’s home. The scene, therefore, stands in the text as a loud affirmation of the home as a place where intimacy is experienced and celebrated.

Homes where people escape from the troubles of the world, or from the trouble of which people escape, spaces of re-invigoration or conflict, and sites of exploring the intimate self—all these varied private settings proliferate on the pages of late Soviet journals and books. Their presence there owes not just to material transformations in the Soviet world but also to a new type of character who comes to dominate the landscape of late Soviet literature—one whose portrait relies on privacy as a representational strategy that I explore in the next chapter.

⁷⁵ “Первый раз в жизни я проснулся рядом с женщиной. Я увидел ее как бы в первый раз – бледное, тревожное даже во сне лицо с легкой синевой под глазами, с арочными линиями густых, но тщательно выщипанных по моде бровей. Сейчас она виделась мне большим ребенком, может быть, сестрой. Странно было: только что прошла эта короткая ночь, переполненная нежностью, страстью, смущением, борьбой, полнейшей свободой и странной скованностью, а сейчас не было ни разочарования, ни отчуждения, только какая-то жалость к ней, а может быть, и к себе, оттого, что все дальнейшее было неясным, запутанным, оттого, что я чувствовал какую-то новую связанность с ней и зависимость от нее... Все это ворочалось внутри меня живым острым комком, поднимавшимся к горлу и запиравшим дыхание.”

CHAPTER 3

UNDERSTANDING THE INHABITANTS: “PEOPLE WHO WORK, LOVE, AND LIVE”

BREAKING THE ONE-DIMENSIONAL SOCIALIST REALIST CHARACTER

The early Soviet era fostered the rise of the concept of a “new Soviet Man,” which represented the “ideal” Communist personality, distinguished by perseverance, strength, and passion for the socialist project that manifested in one’s firm commitment to the matters of the collective.¹ The discourse around this archetype has fascinated researchers of the early Soviet culture by its rigid collectivist agenda and a strong fixation on the body: specifically, on the highly masculine representations of the latter that often disregarded the actual gender of the portrayed person.² Muscle Ivans and Mar’ias marched hand in hand, hardly distinguishable from one another, into the radiant Soviet future, paving the way therein with their hard work—think here, for example, of Vera Mukhina’s epic monument Worker and Kolkhoz Woman [Rabochii i Kolkhoznitsa, 1937] that still dominates the entry point to Moscow from the north.

Apart from “gender-ignorant” masculinity, the “new Soviet man” was also defined by a certain mechanization that echoed the spirit of the Revolution and industrialization eras and emphasized the characters’ machine-like tenacity and endurance. The industrial sublime guided the person’s surroundings and elevated the characters *together* with the machines that they

¹ On socialist realism, see Lahusen (1997); Dobrenko (1997: 1999); Clark (2000). On totalitarian art, see also Groys (1992); Golomshtok (1994).

² On the conceptions of masculinity in the early Soviet and Stalinist eras see, e.g., Borenstein (2000); Kaganovsky (2008); Vujošević (2017).

operated, thus glorifying industrial progress in addition to the mastery of the Soviet people, who “steered it in the right direction.” This aesthetic is key for Dziga Vertov’s film *Enthusiasm: The Symphony of the Donbass* [Entuziazm: Simfoniia Donbassa, 1931] and in the opening frames of the film *The Cossacks of Kuban* [Kubanskiie kazaki, 1950], where the images of an army of tractors, harvesters, and other machines appear on the screen in a constant exchange with the images of similarly organized groups of kolkhoz workers, male and female.³ Moreover, mechanization was often presented as a constant companion of the “new Soviet man” not only on the outside but also on the inside: it penetrated deep into one’s heart and body, thereby forging an inseparable bond, as imagined in the famous song “The March of Aviators” [Aviamarsh, 1923] that depicted its protagonists with the “arms of steel that should serve as wings and fiery motors instead of hearts” (German and Khait 1988).⁴

This type of a “new Soviet man” largely developed within the normative context of socialist realism, which was introduced in 1934 as the dominant method of literature and the art at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers. The Great Soviet Encyclopedia defines this style as

the principal artistic method of Soviet socialist art. Socialist realism is a method that has deep roots in life and science and is the most progressive artistic method that has developed as a result of successes in building socialism and in the upbringing of Soviet citizens in the spirit of Communism. [...] Truthful depiction of reality, deep insight into current events, and historical concretism are the main features of socialist realism as an artistic method. (“Sotsialisticheskii realizm” 1947: 239)⁵

The mythology of socialist realism asserted the birth of this ideology as a fruit of the process of transition to Communism, and, therefore, presented it as a logical and indispensable tool in stimulating this very transition through culture and the arts. Subsequently, “truthful depiction of reality, deep insight into current events, and historical concretism,” as the Encyclopedia affirms,

³ Interestingly, this film that seems to perfectly follow the canons of socialist realism was criticized by Khrushchev for its “smarmy and overly sweetened character” [susal’nye, podslashchennye kartiny; Khrushchev 1963c: 43].

⁴ “We were born to turn the fairy-tale into reality, / to cross expansive spaces; / our Mind gave us arms of steel that should serve as wings / and powerful motors instead of hearts.” [Мы рождены, чтоб сказку сделать былью, / Преодолеть пространство и простор, / Нам Разум дал стальные руки-крылья, / А вместо сердца – пламенный мотор].

⁵ “[...] основной художественный метод советского социалистич.[еского] искусства. С.р. [Социалистический реализм] является глубоко жизненным, научным и самым передовым художественным методом, развившимся в результате успехов социалистич.[еского] строительства и воспитания советских людей в духе коммунизма. [...] Правдивое изображение действительности, глубокое раскрытие смысла происходящих событий, историч.[еская] конкретность являются основными чертами С.р. как художественного метода.” On socialist realism, its roots, and implementation, see Günther (1984); Dobrenko (2011).

only made sense for the state (that had launched the myth of socialist realism)⁶ as long as they upheld the rhetoric of successes of the socialist project and motivated Soviet people to engage in it. As Katerina Clark’s (1986; 2000; 2011) insightful research into the ritualized world of the socialist realist novel demonstrates, this ideology relied on the standardization of characters and the plot—a technique that forged a robust spine of the narrative and mitigated any possibilities of multiple interpretations of the text. In this way, it served two functions: “first, it had to recapitulate the conventional myths for maintaining the Stalinist status quo; second, it had to affirm that future progress toward communism as defined by Lenin is assured under the present leadership” (Clark 1986: 232). As Clark argues, these aims were achieved by the presence of two orders of chronotopes in literary works: ordinary characters and events represented the present time of the novel, while extraordinary characters connected the reader to the glorious Leninist past and the radiant Communist future (Clark 1986: 232–33).

Designed to serve one purpose, characters thus only required one dimension that would perfectly translate their role in the narrative to the readers—their positive or negative influence on the success of the socialist project. The *personality* of the character, therefore, mostly dissipated behind the *social role* they played, since only negative or positive execution of the role mattered for the plot. The absolute commitment of text to the message of a fight for Communism that socialist realism demanded forced to sacrifice the portrayal of the person that participated in this fight—an observation that prompted Iurii Galanskov to chant somewhat of a “requiem for a person” in his 1960 “Human Manifesto” [Chelovecheskii manifest]:

The person has disappeared.	Человек исчез.
Insignificant as a fly,	Ничтожный, как муха,
He barely stirs in the lines of books.	он еле шевелится в строчках книг.
I will go out onto the square	Выйду на площадь
and into the city’s ear	и городу в ухо
I’ll thrust my cry of despair!	втисну отчаянья крик!

(Galanskov 1996: 97)

One of the frames that could help perfectly capture the mechanisms that underlie this seeming “dissipation of a person” is the private/public lens. The message of socialist realist texts required the centrality of the public sphere in the narrative and a minimalist (if any) intervention of the private sphere. Therefore, while not necessarily being machines deprived of all feelings, characters of canonical socialist realist texts such as Fedor Gladkov’s *Cement* [Tsement, 1925], Aleksander

⁶ Although launched by the state and highly politicized, socialist realism was not produced only by the state and should rather be regarded as a co-production of the state, cultural elites, and the audiences, who all shaped this current throughout over fifty years of its existence.

Fadeev's *The Rout* [Razgrom, 1927] and *The Young Guard* [Molodaia Gvardiia, 1945], Nikolai Ostrovskii's *How the Steel Was Tempered* [Kak zakalialas' stal', 1932], or Vsevolod Kochetov's *The Zhurbins* [Zhurbiny, 1955] are "married to an idea" [obruchennyi s ideei; Anninskii 1989] and live to work rather than work to live.⁷ The private part of characters of this type stepped back into the background and awaited its time, which was to come again only in the 1950s. This era witnessed a rise of "new sentimentalism" in Russian literature—a renewed interest in the exploration of the characters' emotional world. Whereas socialist realism of the 1930s–1940s sought to preach what united Soviet people (unequivocally, their commitment to the Communist cause), late Soviet literature examined differences between people in order to establish what makes each person unique. The "new Soviet man" thus gave place to a new type of character—the "late Soviet man."

Instead of heroes, writers increasingly looked for the type of character that Natal'ia Ivanova defines as a "contemporary average man" [sovremennyi srednii chelovek]—a person "with paradoxes instead of feelings, with internal instabilities," who "admires themselves even when exposing themselves to us, and the author empathizes with them and invites the reader to join him in doing so." Moreover, Ivanova indicates that this average man comes from everyday life: *srednii* can also stand for *sreda*—society, milieu (Ivanova 1988: 236).⁸ The hero was dethroned, converted into an "urban anti-hero, or morally compromised man" (Dalton-Brown 1994: 218) only be re-discovered in this function as the hero writers had always searched for: as Sergei Starodub asserts in his novel *Father's Fate* [Sud'ba ottsa], "[w]e tried to copy heroes of literature, and we did not notice the heroes that were next to us" (Starodub 1966: 122).⁹

⁷ Well-known, for example, is the quote from Nikolai Ostrovskii's novel *How the Steel Was Tempered* [Kak zakalialas' stal', 1932] by Pavel Korchagin: "Tonia, we've been through this. You know, of course, that I loved you, and my love can return, but for that to happen, you have to be with us. I am not the Pavlusha you used to know. And I will be a bad husband to you, if you think that I should first belong to you, and then to the Party. I will be there for the Party first, and then for you and other people close to me." ["Тоня, мы уже говорили об этом. Ты, конечно, знаешь, что я тебя любил, и сейчас еще любовь моя может возвратиться, но для этого ты должна быть с нами. Я теперь не тот Павлуша, что был раньше. И я плохим буду мужем, если ты считаешь, что я должен принадлежать прежде тебе, а потом партии. А я буду принадлежать прежде партии, а потом тебе и остальным близким..."]; Ostrovskii 1947: 160].

⁸ "Идет защита «современного среднего человека» с его парадоксами вместо чувства, с его внутренней неустойчивостью. Герой любит себя – даже обнажаясь; автор сочувствует и приглашает к сочувствию читателя. [...] Прислушаемся: современный средний человек... Есть в этих словах какое-то оправдание, защита. Чего с него взять, если средний? [...] Средний – это однокоренное слово со словом «среда». Помните, у того же Достоевского, возмущение из-за кивка на среду – мол, «среда заела»?"

⁹ "Мы старались походить на героев литературы и не замечали героев рядом с нами." It is not only in literature that authors turn toward writing about average people for average people. As Simon Huxtable suggests, it was also a trend in journalism of the stagnation era. His findings reveal that many newspapers allied with sociologists to receive more information about their readers, which resulted in the rise of what Huxtable (2013) calls "sociological aesthetic," i.e., diversion from romantic heroes of the Thaw toward average citizens. The turn toward de-heroization in literature was condemned by literary critics, e.g., in Vadim Kozhevnikov's article "Bring the

Being vulnerable and emotional turned out to be as heroic as being tough and ascetic, as Elena Prokhorova writes:

[f]or a short time, Thaw celluloid men seemed to regain wholeness: while not giving up on their heroic public image, they acquired a positive private side. They were allowed to cry and show personal weakness; they adopted children and were generally softer than women. (Prokhorova 2006: 132)

By choosing ordinary people as their subjects and portraying them as such, authors defied the heroic and monumentalized approach to characters that was dictated by socialist realism, and thereby both subverted the ostentation and intended grandeur of Soviet representation and produced new archetypes of a typical Soviet citizen. In many fictional works of the late Soviet era, mundane actions remained mundane in their representation, and it is exactly this ordinariness and the possibility of ascribing these ordinary actions of anyone’s life that lies at the heart of *literatura byta*—the literature of everyday life. Those who come across such works of literature may recognize themselves in the characters, with “this could be me”-effect serving as a hook designed to build the connection between the reader and the author’s message.¹⁰

If the previous chapter focused on portrayals of private settings, in this chapter, I look at how private life (that included private settings but was not limited to them, also encompassing feelings,

Heroism of Life into Literature” [Geroiku zhizni—v literaturu], where he argues that “we shall never consent to the portrayal of an ordinary person as a ‘small man,’ we shall not accept the trend of de-heroization of literature. Such trend is perceivable in recent literary practice. Some writers seem to be afraid to speak loudly about the beauty of the Soviet man, they are afraid to overpraise Soviet reality. This trend in literature is harmful.” [мы никогда не согласимся на изображение простого человека как маленького человека, не примем тенденции дегероизации литературы. А такая тенденция ощутима в литературной практике последних лет. Иные писатели как бы боятся сказать в полный голос о красоте советского человека, боятся, как бы не перехвалить советскую действительность. Это вредная тенденция в литературе; September 19, 1961]. Criticism of *literatura byta* as a genre, specifically of the works of the younger generation of writers of Moscow school is voiced by Igor’ Dedkov in his article “When the Lyrical Mist Cleared” [Kogda rasseialsia liricheskii tuman], where he mocks the writers’ interest to minor details of everyday life by labeling their perspective not as microscopic but “pettyscopic” [*melkoskopicheskii*] perspective (he does, however, recognize the mastery of older representatives of *literatura byta*, such as Vitalii Semin, Vasilii Shukshin, and Iurii Trifonov; Dedkov 1981: 32).

¹⁰ Writers’ decision to elevate the private sphere and give it a more dominant role in the narratives did not escape criticism. Authors who followed this path were condemned of slipping into “*bytovism*,” or “the obedience to the static character of *byt*, the humility before its backward sides; and sometimes their one-sided portrayal, underestimation of the spiritual, ideological contents of *byt*, of its steady development” [послушание быту в его статичности, покорность его отсталым сторонам, а иногда их одностороннее живописание, недооценка духовной, идейной содержательности быта, его поступательного развития; El’sberg, December 11, 1968]. In this particular article, the criticism was directed at the one-sided representation of *byt* in Baranskaia’s “The Farewell” [Provody], published in *Novyi mir*’s issue 5 in 1968, stories of Vasilii Shukshin, and works of Andrei Bitov.

emotions, and desires)¹¹ was turned into a powerful vehicle of character representation in late Soviet texts—from more familiar to us works that clearly disrupted socialist realist patterns to such flagships of Soviet ideology as the journal *Oktiabr*'.

HERE COMES THE THAW: EHRENBURG

Published in 1954, the first part of Ilya Ehrenburg's groundbreaking novella "The Thaw" [Ottepel']¹² opens with a fictional public debate characters lead about the necessity of endowing socialist characters with feelings that would go beyond the purpose of portraying them within their social role:

Dmitrii Sergeevich was talking with passion; everyone was listening to him. [...]
 – I'll be honest, the only thing that I did not like was how the author showed Zubtsov's personal life. The events that he describes are, first of all, highly improbable. And there is certainly nothing typical about them. The reader does not believe that an overly confident but honest agronomist fell in love with the wife of his comrade, a woman who is flirty and fickle, who shares no spiritual interests with him. It seems to me that the author made a cheap attempt at exciting the reader here. Seriously, our Soviet people are much purer and more serious spiritually, whereas Zubtsov's love seems to be mechanically transferred onto the pages of the Soviet novel from the works of bourgeois writers. [...]

Katia voiced an opinion, opposite to Koroteev's:

– I do not understand comrade Koroteev. I cannot say that this novel is written in a classic style, like, for example, *Anna Karenina*, but it does captivate the reader. I have heard it from many people. What does it have to do with the "bourgeois writers"? I think a person has a heart, and therefore, suffers. What is wrong with it? I will be direct, I have also had such moments in my life... (Ehrenburg 1956: 6–7)¹³

¹¹ Cf. Lynne Attwood who, in examining how housing policies have informed Soviet understandings of the private life and the home, argues that "intimacy, domesticity, and the chance to achieve some sense of solitude are not necessarily confined to a separate private sphere" (Attwood 2010: 11).

¹² The novel was published in the journal *Znamia* [Banner] in two parts: in 1954 and in 1956, full edition of the novel that comprised both parts appeared in 1956 at *Sovetskii pisatel*'.

¹³ "Дмитрий Сергеевич говорил живо, его слушали. [...]"

– Скажу откровенно, мне только не понравилось, как автор раскрывает личную жизнь Зубцова. Случай, который он описывает, прежде всего мало правдоподобен. А уж типического здесь ничего нет. Читатель не верит, что чересчур самоуверенный, но честный агроном влюбился в жену своего товарища, женщину кокетливую и ветреную, с которой у него нет общих духовных интересов. Мне кажется, что автор погнался за дешевой занимательностью. Право же, наши советские люди душевно чище, серьезнее, а любовь Зубцова как-то механически перенесена на страницы советского романа из произведений буржуазных писателей... [...]

Катя ему возражала:

– Не понимаю товарища Коротеева. Я не скажу, что этот роман классически написан, как, например, «Анна Каренина», но он захватывает. Я это от многих слышала. А при чем тут «буржуазные писатели»? У человека, по-моему, сердце, вот он и мучается. Что тут плохого? Я прямо скажу, у меня в жизни тоже были такие моменты..."

These words reflect Ehrenburg’s vision of characters as “human beings, who work, fight, love, kiss; read books, dream, sometimes do crazy things, and get jealous—they live” (Ehrenburg 1965, 520),¹⁴ which he had voiced already in 1934, at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers where socialist realism was called into being. Articulated by the young character Katia, they may also stand for Ehrenburg’s hope for a change that a younger Soviet generation could make in crafting and perceiving the “socialist person.”

This fictional call for exploring characters through their private worlds of emotions and feelings represents an early sign of a larger cultural transition toward the “embrace of femininity,” which, in Helena Goscilo and Andrea Lanoux’s view, overpowers masculinity and increasingly conquers its place on the pages of literary works in the post-Stalinist era:

Not only the label, which evokes the fabled fluids of female imaginary but also the rehabilitated qualities of smallness and interiority (i.e., sentiment and domesticity) pointed to the nation’s embrace of femininity. Everyday issues—of personal morality, romance, family life, and children—invaded literature, film, and song, while lyric poetry became the most popular genre. [...] the Thaw witnessed the feminization of males, or, more precisely, their co-optation of refurbished values “with a human face.” Literature and film focused on the sensitive, caring man who now could legitimately indulge in hesitation and uncertainty, pen passionate lyrics about his private world and his affinity for nature, and shed tears of ecstasy or despair—a protagonist most fully realized in Boris Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago*. (Goscilo and Lanoux 2006: 17)¹⁵

Katia’s female voice thus embodies Ehrenburg’s call for the softening of Soviet characters and the rise of femininity in the narrative that Goscilo and Lanoux indicate. But so does the character of Koroteev—the femininity of the “late Soviet man,” to which Goscilo and Lanoux draw attention, is genderless, or gender-encompassing, in the sense that it does not distinguish between men or women. An atypical character for a sensitive type, Koroteev represents a type of an engineer who not only has golden hands, but also a “heart, which makes him suffer,” just as Katia argued about engineer Zubtsov at the readers’ conference.¹⁶ In the aftermath of this scene, the plot organically shifts from the depiction of a discussion about the representation of feelings in a book to the representation of the feelings experienced by female and male characters—Koroteev prominently among them. In doing so, Ehrenburg defies the imperative of removing discussions about feelings that are not directed to the Party and the Communist cause from the pages of a Soviet novel (that

¹⁴ “Наши рабочие – живые люди, они трудятся, борются, любят, целуются, читают книги, фантазируют, иногда чудачат, ревнуют, они живут.”

¹⁵ On the development of visions of masculinity in Soviet art of the post-war era, see McCallum (2018).

¹⁶ This contrasting model—a representative of a technical profession who is portrayed as a lyric rather than a physicist on the pages of a fictional text—is quite popular in late Soviet literature. Works like Natal’ia Davydova’s “Engineer Izotov’s Love” [Liubov’ inzhenera Izotova, 1960] or I. Grekova’s “Behind the Factory Gates” [Za prokhnodnoi, 1962] depict the world of feelings and emotions that dominates over work matters.

underpins socialist realism). He might also be mocking debates of the era, that frequently criticized such texts, unaware yet that his own work will face such fate.¹⁷

Alongside the plot lines that explore the revision of the Stalinist past (e.g., an episode that refers to the doctors' plot, exemplified by doctor Vera Grigor'evna Sherer, or to Great Terror, represented by engineer Sokolovskii's turbulent past), discussions of excessive bureaucracy and the inability of the Party clique to attend to the actual needs of the population (Zhuravlev's reluctance to prioritize the construction of homes for the workers over building a new furnace for the plant), love themes in the text made it an iconic contribution to Soviet culture. In the neosymbolist manner, the natural thaw that gave name to the text and occupies a prominent place in it, stands for larger political shifts: in the first part of the book, the political change is portrayed against the backdrop of the change of seasons, and severe snowstorms at the beginning of the text slowly give way to the degrading frosts and rare spring sunshine that finally yield to a vibrant spring, marked by the bright sun, melting ice, and singing of birds. The text has thus been central to the analyses of late Soviet literature and of the eponymous period ever since it was published.¹⁸

Alongside political and natural epiphanies, there is also an emotional one taking place throughout the first part of the novel: the growing love between the schoolteacher Lena (Zhuravleva) and the engineer (Dmitrii) Koroteev.¹⁹ Just as the political change in the novel is synchronized with the weather, so is the emotional, too. The protagonists are tormented by doubts about each other's feelings during snowstorms; they become cold toward each other and interrupt their contact during the winter's cold months; and finally, they "wake up" and reveal their feelings to each other in spring, once the nature also reveals itself to the increasingly present and warmer sun.

¹⁷ Thus, Khrushchev criticized Ehrenburg's book for "a wrong, one-sided depiction of phenomena and events, connected to the personality cult, and the nature of the fundamental, dramatic changes that have happened in the social, political, and cultural life of the Soviet people after the Twentieth Party Congress" [неправильное, одностороннее освещение явлений и событий, связанных с культом личности, и существа тех принципиальных, коренных изменений, которые произошли и происходят в общественной, политической и духовной жизни народа после XX съезда партии; Khrushchev 1963b: 223–24]. See also an equally critical commentary of the novel by TsK KPSS (1956) in their memorandum on the development of contemporary Soviet literature.

¹⁸ See, e.g., Kozlov and Gilburd (2013b). However, it has also been recognized that the novel may be "much less exceptional than some critics would have us believe" due to "its avoidance of real conflicts, its flatness of psychological characterization, its many declamatory passages [that] clearly link it to the Soviet mainstream" (Rollberg 1998: 280).

¹⁹ In Ehrenburg's novel, female characters are all introduced and addressed by the narrator with their first name and patronymic, or with a short name only (Lena, Sonia, Vera Pavlovna), whereas male characters are mostly referred to by their surname (Koroteev, Savchenko, Pukhov). In Russian, short names are a tender and soft way to address a person and, therefore, they epitomize femininity, whereas surnames are a relatively coarse and abrupt way to refer to someone and thus serve to underscore the masculinity of the male characters.

Similar thaws also happen in the relations of other couples that have feelings for each other but struggle to express them throughout the novel: Vera Pavlovna Sherer and Sokolovskii, young Pukhov and Tania, Savchenko and Sonia—all of them serve as mirrors for Lena and Koroteev’s romance, thereby intensifying the motif of love struggles and victories in the text. With his novella, Ehrenburg makes first steps toward the spirit of a new time, in which writers make a journey back to the person and, instead of the “new Soviet man,” produce the “late Soviet man.” For this new type of characters, their relationships rarely serve as just a decoration for the production plot—instead, they often become the source that feeds the development of the narrative. In recognizing the value of relations between the characters, Trifonov calls for writers’ close attention to them:

Of course, the worker’s labor is not as picturesque as the one done by the peasant. But which things build the worker’s life? The worker does not only live by making monotonous moves by his hands, polishing details with a file—he lives through his relations with people around him, with colleagues from the factory, with his superior, with the neighbors and the family. Therefore, if one wants to write about workers truly, one has to write about the most important thing that should be the focus of literature—about the relations between people. Moreover, it should all be naked [only relations], no painting, no landscapes. Yes, it is hard, in this case, everything should be done with butter, nothing can be achieved with margarine. (Trifonov 1985c: 82)²⁰

As Natalia Borisova writes, after 1956, “love as a central narrative was not only one of the most *frequent* but also one of the most *important* themes” in literature and film (Borisova 2013: 11, original emphasis).²¹ She posits that “one of the most vivid and important changes in the aesthetic of Soviet love that took place in the 1960s–1980s was the shift from ‘love as virtue’ to personal and personalized love” (Borisova 2013: 233)²² and argues that from the 1950s on, love becomes “self-referential” and “tautologic”²³ by coming to only mean love (love is love, and a love betrayal only concerns the matters of heart and should not be interpreted as high treason; Borisova 2013: 233). The fact that she mentions betrayal is crucial: late Soviet characters often stray from the

²⁰ “Конечно, труд рабочего не столь красочен, как крестьянский. Но чем живет рабочий? Он живет не одним тем, что делает однообразные движения руками, «пиляет» напильником, он живет взаимоотношениями с окружающими, с товарищами по цеху, с мастером, со своими соседями, с семьей. То есть, если по-настоящему писать о рабочих, надо писать о самом главном, чем должна заниматься литература, о взаимоотношениях между людьми. Причем все оголено, никакой живописи, никаких пейзажей. Да, это трудно, тут все должно быть, как говорится, на сливочном масле, на маргарине ничего не сделаешь.”

²¹ “Denn in dieser Zeit wurde das einstige Begleitnarrativ »Liebe« nicht nur zum *häufigsten*, sondern auch zum *wichtigsten* Sujet.”

²² “Eine der sichtbarsten und wichtigsten Veränderungen im Code der Sowjetischen Liebe, die im Laufe der 1960er bis 1980er Jahre stattfinden, betrifft den Übergang von der »Tugendliebe« zur individuellen und individualisierten Liebe.” On the love theme in late Soviet literature, see also Gibian (1960: 74–105); Cherepanova (2012); Hooper (2018).

²³ “Die Haupteigenschaften dieser neuen Liebe sind ihre Autoreferentialität und Tautologie.”

“radiant and cheerful” path and are tested through failures in the private life as much as they are rewarded with love in it.²⁴ Konstantin Paustovskii asserts the necessity of such diversion in his paradigmatic article “Indisputable and Disputable Thoughts” [Besspornye i spornye mysli], published in 1959 in *Literaturnaia gazeta* [Literary Newspaper]:

It is not common to write about shortcomings, not matter how detrimental they may be to our social life, without making an apologetic “compliment” first and mentioning our successes. [...] It is the first tradition that has outlived itself, which is needless and onerous. Another detrimental tradition is the lack of willingness to write about suffering, the fear to have even a slight sign of sorrow, as if all our life should pass under a caramel sky, accompanied by a cheerful (cheering) laughter of “enthusiastic” men and women. (Paustovskii, May 20, 1959).²⁵

His words seem to have found response among writers, since the researcher Cynthia Hooper (2018), draws attention to the fact that late Soviet characters were often portrayed not as happy people who are satisfied with their life but as ones in search of happiness—and literary texts are a field where this process evolves. “The Thaw” well exemplifies this pattern, too, and Deming Brown observes that Ehrenburg’s text “pays what would previously have been considered an inordinate amount of attention to love affairs (there are four of them) and the problems of marriage” (Brown 1978: 287).

While Lena’s marriage (symbolized by the winter) is strained and eventually falls apart when the spring (a connection to Koroteev) comes, the shifts in the relationship between these protagonists are also performed through forms of address. The first part of the novel ends with a scene that depicts Koroteev calling Lena by her first name when seeing her on the opposite side of the street:

Later she would ask herself, what happened? And she couldn’t answer. One word made all the difference—the simplest one, which she had heard so many times before.

Dmitrii Sergeevich spotted her on the corner of Sovetskaia Street, next to the bus stop. He was walking on the opposite side of the street and shouted out:

– Lena!

And the fact that for the first time, he called her Lena, and not Elena Borisovna, made all the difference. (Ehrenburg 1956: 134)²⁶

²⁴ Research on the love theme mentioned above (see footnote 22 in this chapter) also engages with the stresses of family life that are portrayed in literature. See also Shneidman (2015).

²⁵ “Не принято писать о недостатках, как бы они ни были вредны для нашей общественной жизни, не сделав перед этим извинительного «комплимента», не упомянув о наших достижениях. [...] Это – один предрассудок, одна ненужная и обременительная традиция. Вторая вредная традиция – нежелание писать о страдании, боязнь даже намека на грусть, будто вся наша жизнь должна нестись под карамельным небом, под бодрый (бодряческий) смех «боевитых» мужчин и женщин.”

²⁶ “Потом она себя спрашивала: что же произошло? И не могла ответить. Все решило одно слово, самое простое слово, которое она так часто в жизни слышала.

The forms of address in Russian offer ample possibilities to indicate different types of relations between people: one can be called by a surname, by the first name, by a name and a patronymic, or by a short name—each of these forms has its own sphere of application. The tacit norms of social etiquette mandate a default use of the person’s name and patronymic—and this is precisely how Lena and Koroteev address each other throughout the novel until this scene (Elena Borisovna and Dmitrii Sergeevich). Language thus serves to construct borders and maintain distance between interlocutors, but the gap between the protagonists is nullified when the informal way of address—Lena—that is common only among friends and family is used by Koroteev. It serves as a metonymy for opening up about his feelings for her and leads to their first kiss in the lobby of a nearby house and transitions their relationship to a new stage.

In the second part of the novel, which follows the development of their family idyll, Lena also starts to refer to Koroteev as “Mitia” (the short version of Dmitrii) whenever she thinks of him: “Lena sewed the paw to the teddy bear; and for a moment, she felt relief: nothing had changed—Shurochka, Mitia, happiness” (Ehrenburg 1956: 148).²⁷ Importantly, only Lena calls Koroteev “Mitia” and only Koroteev calls Lena “Lena” in the novella, thereby creating a relationship of exclusivity between them. The latter, as Schamma Schahadat suggests, is a key component to intimacy: “Intimacy and proximity seem to be a pair of twin concepts that belong to the ‘intimate field,’ although intimacy is distinguished from proximity through the concept of exclusivity—to be intimate means to have an exclusive relationship of proximity to others [...]” (Schahadat 2005: 6).²⁸

The distinction between the private and public forms of language (address by shortened first name or by the name and patronymic) that plays an important role in portraying the relationship between Lena and Koroteev in “The Thaw” is also used by other writers of the late Soviet era as a critical strategy in representing their characters.

Дмитрий Сергеевич ее увидел на углу Советской улицы, возле остановки автобуса. Он шел по другой стороне улицы и громко крикнул:
– Лена!

И то, что он впервые назвал ее не Еленой Борисовной, а Леной, решило все.”

²⁷ “Лена пришила лапу плюшевому медвежонку; на минуту ей стало легче: ничего не изменилось – Шурочка, Митя, счастье...”

²⁸ “Intimität und Nähe erscheinen so als Zwillingsbegriffe eines ‚intimen Feldes‘, wobei Intimität sich durch eine Nuance der Exklusivität von der Nähe unterscheidet – intim zu sein bedeutet ein exklusives Verhältnis der Nähe zum anderen zu haben [...]”

PRIVATE AND PUBLIC LANGUAGES: IASHIN, I. GREKOVA

Differentiation between the official Soviet discourse and what could be called a language of the non-state sphere, or the language of privacy becomes a crucial lens on the characters in Aleksander Iashin's "Levers" [Rychagi, 1956] published in the almanac *Literaturnaia Moskva* [Literary Moscow].²⁹ His short story depicts a meeting of four friends at a kolkhoz and begins most conventionally: "they were sitting for quite long, enjoying talking a little about everything, trusting each other, without any back thoughts, like old friends" (Iashin 1956: 502).³⁰ The characters lament a shortage of products in the kolkhoz pantry, an irrational planning of the harvest norms and of the kolkhoz development perspectives that are sent from the top organizations without consulting the people who actually work at the places where all these ideas should be implemented (Iashin 1956: 506). Soon joined by a local teacher, the friends start a regular meeting of the kolkhoz Party members. Petr Kuz'mich Tsipyshev, who is set to open the meeting, undergoes a visible transformation: "His beard straightened up and became longer; his eyes turned stern, and the lively sparkle that would appear there during the friendly conversation disappeared" (Iashin 1956: 509).³¹ His language follows this change:

When the door after quiet Marfa closed, Tsipishev rose and uttered the same words that the secretary of the district Party committee would say on such occasions; he even used the same strict, unemotional and even a seemingly conspiratorial voice, which the secretary of the district party committee would use:

– Let's start, comrades. Is everyone present?

Once he said these words, it is as if he turned on a switch of some miraculous mechanism: everything in the house started to transform beyond recognition—people, things, it seems that even the air became different. [...] The earthly and the natural disappeared, the other world was not the setting for this meeting—the conditions that were complex and to which these simple, hearty people were not yet accustomed, and thus, which they did not completely understand. (Iashin 1956: 510)³²

²⁹ Published in two volumes in 1956, the almanac was discontinued because of the heavy Party critique. Thus, in his speeches to the literary intelligentsia, Khrushchev criticized it for its collection of "works that demonstrate ideologically corrupted views" [*porochnye v ideinom otnoshenii proizvedeniia i stat'i*; Khrushchev 1963c: 40].

³⁰ "Сидели долго, разговаривали неторопливо – обо всем понемногу и доверительно, без всяких оглядок, как старые добрые товарищи."

³¹ "Борода его расправилась, удлинилась; глаза посуровели, в них исчез живой огонек, который поблескивал в минуты простой дружеской беседы."

³² "Когда за притихшей Марфой тихо закрылась дверь, Ципышев встал и произнес те самые слова, которые в подобных случаях произносил секретарь райкома партии, и даже тем же сухим строгим и словно бы заговорщическим голосом, каким говорил перед началом собраний секретарь райкома:

– Начнем, товарищи! Все в сборе?

Сказал он это и будто щелкнул выключателем какого-то чудодейственного механизма: все в избе начало преобразаться до неузнаваемости – люди, и вещи, и, кажется, даже воздух. [...] Все земное, естественное исчезло, действие перенеслось в другой мир, в обстановку сложную и не совсем еще привычную и понятную для этих простых, сердечных людей."

Petr Kuz'mich is portrayed as no longer Petr Kuz'mich: for this brief moment of time that demands his Communist self over his everyday self, he takes on a role of the chief of the kolkhoz. His social duty prevails over his personal opinion about the matters that he has just voiced at the table. His language turns into a main signal of this change alongside the transformation of his posture; he points out that the members of the Party in rural areas are “levers” (Iashin 1956: 511)³³—“mechanisms” responsible for encouraging people to follow the Party and explaining its policies to “the masses.” In this way, Iashin revives the mechanized image of the new Soviet man of the Stalinist era and juxtaposes it with the opposing developments of his fictional reality, which envisions “simple, hearty men” who experience problems in understanding their roles as “levers.” Meanwhile, the “lever” in Petr Kuz'mich obscures his “simple and hearty” self to the extent that friends even start wondering if it is not a different person standing before them now:

Do you see what's going on? Can you even recognize him now?
Konoplev also smiled, but his smile looked more like a grin.
– Alright, let the man talk. It has to be this way. Petr Kuz'mich is now performing his duty.
He speaks now the same way as they do in the district Party committee. Like priest, like people.
(Iashin 1956: 511)³⁴

When the meeting is over, the characters return to their everyday selves: “‘Well, let's see now what the Twentieth Party Congress tells us!,’ they would repeat. And again, they were pure, warm-hearted, direct men; men, and not levers” (Iashin 1956: 513).³⁵ By portraying a split between the expectations of the Party expressed in the talks at the meeting of the kolkhoz Party members and the intuitive understandings of things that the characters voice directly before and after the meeting, Iashin encapsulates a phenomenon that will later be declared by researchers as a “signature mark” of *homo sovieticus*—a schizophrenic existence between the state- and life-defined realities:

The doublespeak of the characters (their switching between the lively folk language and the state-defined formulaic language) is Iashin's way of documenting a psychological phenomenon of an immense scale that is frightening at its core—double-thinking that

³³ “[...] мы являемся рычагами партии в колхозной деревне.”

³⁴ “Видел, что делается? Узнаешь ты его сейчас?”

Коноплев тоже улыбнулся, но криво, недобро.

– Ладно уж, не мешай ему выговориться. Так надо. Петр Кузьмич сейчас в своей должности. Как в районе, так и у нас. Каков поп, таков и приход.”

³⁵ “Теперь что двадцатый съезд скажет! – то и дело повторяли они. И снова это были чистые, сердечные, прямые люди, люди, а не рычаги.”

penetrated deep into the people’s consciousness, especially the individuals who used to be at the forefront of social change. (Leiderman and Lipovetskii 2003b: 101–2)³⁶

The characters are portrayed as masters of the infamous Orwellian “doublespeak” from *1984*: they live in two worlds, switching their posture and language depending on the situation, adapting, like chameleons, to the changing condition. In their private language, the characters, in Iashin’s view, live out their true selves, whereas the usage of the official language deprives them of individuality (the author points out that all voices of the Party talk alike, be it the kolkhoz functionary or the secretary of the district Party committee).

Whereas Iashin’s characters are already mature adults, I. Grekova voices concerns about the effects that such formulaic language may have on young people in her story *Damskii Master* [A Hairdresser, 1962]. She makes use of this technique—the juxtaposition of the officialese and the everyday, private language—to portray Vitalii, a talented young man whom the female protagonist meets while trying to get her hair cut. Vitalii offers his service to her, and while he is working with her hair, they strike up a dialogue, during which Vitalii shares some details about his life:

I did not finish school. Life made its claims on me. My father drank a lot, and my mother was overly religious. Not to be a burden to them, I could not complete my education and, essentially, I only have incomplete seven classes of the school, but to finish my education is on my plan. However, I cannot tackle this issue head-on because of a housing matter, but I am constantly elevating my level by reading various literary works according to the plan. (Grekova 1963: 98)³⁷

Vitalii’s language is caught in the nets of bureaucratic stamps (“tackle the issue head-on,” “elevate my level”). In I. Grekova’s universe, Vitalii emerges as someone who has not yet found his individuality and is leaning on the rhetoric of the Soviet public sphere to pose as a person who should matter. Unlike Iashin’s village dwellers, he resorts to the official language in all situations, private *and* public, and is therefore presented as incapable of withstanding the pressure of the Party language.

³⁶ “В этом двуязычии своих персонажей – в переключении из регистра живой народной речи в регистр речи казенной, шаблонизированной, Александр Яшин первым запечатлел страшное по своей сути психологическое явление огромного масштаба – двоемыслие, поразившее сознание самого народа, особенно той его части, которая считалась самой передовой.” On social schizophrenia, see Shlapentokh (1985; 1989: 97–98); see also Havel (1985: 80) on “schizophrenic life ‘within a lie.’” See also Yurchak (2006) on the development and maintaining of double codes of behavior as a conscious strategy of the separation of the spheres.

³⁷ “Мне школу не удалось закончить. Жизнь предъявила свои требования. Отец у меня сильно пьющий и мачеха слишком религиозная. Чтобы не сидеть у них на шее, мне не удалось закончить образование, я, в сущности, имею неполных семь классов, но окончание образования входит в мой план. Пока не удастся заняться этим вплотную из-за квартирного вопроса, но все же я повышаю свой уровень, читаю разные произведения согласно плану.”

As a researcher of I. Grekova’s texts notes,

[s]he said on more than one occasion that it was her scientific background that was responsible for her abhorrence of superfluous words and highly charged rhetoric. In stories such as her classic *Damskii master*, she pokes fun at the Party rhetoric that infiltrated everyday speech in the Soviet era. (Barker 2013: 68)

Vitalii’s “use of the stilted ideological jargon he has picked up in school and from the media is the author’s delicate way of showing her hero’s obtuseness, intellectual deprivation, and somewhat retarded emotional growth” (Brown 1978: 149). It also resonates with his standing at the crossroads in his life, for he is unsure which field of studies he should choose and, consequently, of the profession that he would like to pursue. Meanwhile, alongside depicting Vitalii’s language immaturity, I. Grekova also indicates that there is something beyond the Party-molded character in Vitalii: at the end of the story, his language increasingly shifts toward liberation from official clichés. As Leiderman and Lipovetskii argue, the multidimensionality of Vitalii’s hero type is enshrined in his “contradictory character,” which is obvious in his use of the formulaic language on the one hand, and on the other, his sincere and open-hearted reactions to the fallacies of the Soviet system (Leiderman and Lipovetskii 2003b: 334).

For both Iashin and I. Grekova, language of their characters serves as an indispensable tool to explore and construct their individuality within and simultaneously against the surrounding world. The private world of their characters, revealed through their use of language in the public matches Ehrenburg’s approach to his characters through their private world, represented by their emotions. While this representational strategy came to proliferate on pages of liberal journals and in definitively non-socialist-realist publications that made it into the official public sphere, like *Literaturnaia Moskva*, it would be erroneous to think that these were the only locations where privacy as a vital technique in portrayal of Soviet characters could appear—even staunchly pro-Soviet literary journals like *Oktiabr*’ surrendered to privacy as a new approach to character depiction.

IN BED WITH LENIN: PRIVACY ON THE PAGES OF *OKTIABR*’

Privacy imagined on the pages of *Oktiabr*’ first came to my attention in the short story “In January 1918” [V ianvare vosemnadsatogo] penned by Nina Krutikova:

Vladimir Il’ich was sleeping, the comforter pulled over his head. The dark Petrograd morning was hardly different from the night, just in the mornings, he wanted to sleep more than in the evening; yet, there was no time to sleep. Nadezhda Konstantinovna was in doubt—should I wake

him up or not? They were very tired. Came back from the New Year’s celebration at 2 a.m., went to bed even later. Meanwhile, the day ahead was not an easy one. (Krutikova 1984: 3)³⁸

It was unsurprising for me to come across Vladimir Lenin as a character in *Oktiabr’*—I had even very much expected such encounter on the pages of this leading voice of Communist literature founded just a year before *Novyi mir*, in 1924, and consistently advancing socialist realist agenda throughout the Stalin and late Soviet eras.³⁹ Yet, alongside stories that narrated industrial plots (*proizvodstvennyi siuzhet*) like one of extraordinary successes of chief engineer Ivanov in artificial insemination of dairy cattle at a kolkhoz (and many others I had to go through before I found such portraits of Lenin), I had prepared myself for a very different Lenin than the one *Oktiabr’* offered to me.

When I was little, I would slide open the glass panel of the sideboard that stood in the bedroom and leaf through the two books that were kept there—because they were at a height easy to access for an eight-year-ish-old me. Both of them came from my maternal grandmother, who had been a kindergarten teacher and had died before I could get to know her well. One of these books was older, with a few pages falling out of it already; the other one was newer. What united them apart from the fact that they were collections of texts a Soviet kindergarten teacher was supposed to read to kids was that both opened with short stories and poems about Vladimir Lenin.⁴⁰

As a kid who read these books, I knew that Lenin was some kind of an important old man (or why else would they sometimes refer to him as “*dedushka*—Grandpa—Lenin”?) during some revolution. In one of the stories in these books, Lenin gave away his mittens to an unsuspecting soldier in the middle of the winter—the soldier was guarding the Winter Palace and had none because of the Revolution-era shortages. Lenin was important, but he also was generous and cared about ordinary people, I learned from this and other texts in these books. The importance of Lenin was also impressed on me, a child growing up in a post-Soviet city, by the huge Lenin monument that stood on one of the central squares and was inescapable for anyone heading to the city core of

³⁸ “Владимир Ильич спал, натянув на голову одеяло. Темное петроградское утро ничем не отличалось от ночи, только спать по утрам хотелось больше, чем с вечера, а спать было некогда. Надежда Константиновна колебалась – будить или не будить? Устали вчера очень. Вернулись со встречи Нового года в два часа ночи, уснули позже, день предстоял нелегкий.”

³⁹ To be fair to *Oktiabr’*, in the 1970s–1980s, the journal did publish not only openly socialist realist literature but also some key texts of the late Soviet era, such as in Svetlana Alexievich’s *The Unwomanly Face of War* [U voiny ne zhenskoe litso, in the February issue of 1984, just months before Krutikova’s story], or Ales’ Adamovich, Ianka Bryl’, and Vladimir Kolesnik’s “I Come from a Village on Fire” [Ia iz ognennoi derevni, in September 1974, which would inspire Elem Klimov’s famous film *Come and See, Idi i smotri*, 1985].

⁴⁰ Compare with Sergei A. Oushakine’s analysis of literature for children about Lenin in his article on photomontage, where he mostly focuses on how this new visual language developed in the USSR and analyzes its use in the compilation *Children and Lenin* [Deti i Lenin], which was a book published shortly after Lenin’s death that aimed to showcase children’s grieving over the loss of Lenin (Oushakine 2019).

Yaroslavl. This “monumental Lenin,” as I will call him, loomed large over Soviet and then post-Soviet cities in the form of ubiquitous gigantic statues and wide avenues bearing his name. This image was reinforced by the awe and reverence of Lenin’s body, carefully preserved and guarded by security at the mausoleum in Moscow, on the Red Square. While scholars have eagerly studied the techniques and logic underpinning the monumental aura of this essential “Communist protein,” as Alexei Yurchak designates Lenin,⁴¹ much less is known about other imaginaries of the first Soviet leader—and nothing at all about how this major Communist journal portrayed him.

Krutikova’s story in *Oktiabr’* invites readers to discover a special kind of Lenin. Her Lenin, just like many other Soviet people, is reluctant to wake up in the morning (especially after the New Year celebrations), loves to keep warm in bed and prefers to limit access of the morning light by pulling over the comforter (who hasn’t done it at least once?). He also is, just like many other men, subjected to the commands of a woman who is his partner—the ever-vigilant Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaja. The most amazing thing about this passage is that it is not tucked somewhere in the middle of the story—although, even in the depths of the narrative, it would still be an extraordinary couple of lines—but belongs to the very first paragraphs, with which Krutikova’s story opens. Meanwhile, across many publications in the much more liberal *Novyi mir* between 1953 and 1985, I discovered only one text that opens with a scene with characters in bed—Amlinskii’s novel *The Craft* that I reviewed in the previous chapter. To put none other than Lenin in bed and do so in the opening paragraphs of a story was a bold move, even for 1984. Even more so, this story came out in issue 4 of the journal and therefore, was part of a special block of texts dedicated to Lenin on occasion of his birthday—April 22. It was, therefore, an officially *approved* and *endorsed* portrait of the leader of Russian revolution—a Lenin that I will call “intimate.”

This story made me curious—was Krutikova’s Lenin a one-timer? Did this portrait owe to 1984 and, just like Amlinskii’s 1983 publication in *Novyi mir*, signal a new era of more open conversations about intimacy and sexuality on the eve of perestroika? Was this an image of Lenin I could find in other issues of *Oktiabr’* across the late Soviet era? And thus, my search began. True to its image of a leading Communist literary journal (it suffices to say that its editor in 1961–1973 was Vsevolod Kochetov), *Oktiabr’* abounds in texts about Lenin in the late Soviet era. They were prominently featured by the journal in a special block at least three times a year—in January (in the opening issue of each year), April (on occasion of Lenin’s birthday), and in October (to

⁴¹ See, for example, the chapter by Maria Brock on the iconization and de-iconization, re-iconization of Lenin in the edited volume on cultural icons (Brock 2021), a comprehensive analysis of Lenin’s body in Russian culture by Alexei Yurchak (2015), or Karen Petrone’s examination of struggles artists faced when portraying Lenin’s monumentality in films and theater performances on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the October Revolution (Petrone 2000: 149–74).

commemorate Lenin’s role in the Revolution), with a February issue now and then also publishing such blocks on anniversary dates of the February revolution. And interestingly enough, many of these Lenins resembled one in Krutikova’s story.

Thus, just four years earlier, another April issue of *Oktiabr’* featured Iurii Iakovlev’s story “Waiting” [Ozhidanie] which also opens with an image of Lenin in bed:

Even in the winter, Vladimir Il’ich would keep the window ajar for the night. He liked waking up to the sound of snow crunching under the boots of the Kremlin guard and to their singing. Their young voices agitated him. And although they would sing “We would all give our lives [for the Soviet power],” it just made his desire to live ever stronger.

In the winter of 1919, Vladimir Il’ich had to give up his custom—wood was scarce, they had to save heat. However, as soon as he would wake up, he would come up to the window, open the ventilation fly, and his breast would fill with the frosty minty air. He would breath deeply and with pleasure, as if quenching the thirst.

Usually, Nadezhda Konstantinovna would show up in this moment and remind him of his lung wounded by a bullet. Today she wasn’t there, and he would breathe as long as he wanted to. But Vladimir Il’ich promptly stepped away from the window. (Iakovlev 1980: 13)⁴²

Iakovlev’s text, just like Krutikova’s story, relies on intimacy in the portrayal of Lenin from its very first lines. Both authors talk about him a way that cuts the distance between the reader and the gigantic political icon of Russian history. Images of Lenin in his bed, under the comforter, with insight into his sleeping routine and small things that make him tick in the mornings—like that rebellious desire to breathe in some fresh frosty air that runs contrary to his health recommendations by doctors—draw the reader into Lenin’s space. In these stories, Lenin is not presented as a distant monumental figure that is part of History with a capital “H.” Instead, authors use privacy as a conscious representational strategy to depict Lenin as a common person, a man from the crowd, living the same desires and joys like everyone else.

This privacy is put in service of Communism—to popularize Lenin, to strengthen connection of the masses to the leader of the Revolution by offering—even if fictional—a portrait of his “real” life. Putting it in terms of the twenty-first century, before the Kardashians or many other celebrities of the television and digital entertainment eras came to exploit privacy as a commodity to sell their

⁴² Даже зимой Владимир Ильич приоткрывал на ночь окно. Он любил просыпаться от согласного хруста шагов и песни кремлевских курсантов. Их молодые голоса волновали его. И хотя они пели «И как один умрем», сильнее хотелось жить.

Зимой девятнадцатого года Владимиру Ильичу пришлось отказаться от своей привычки – дров не хватало, надо было беречь тепло. Однако, поднявшись ото сна, тут же подходил к окну, открывал форточку, и грудь наполнялась морозным мятым воздухом. Он дышал с удовольствием, словно утолял жажду.

Обычно в эти мгновения появлялась Надежда Константиновна и напоминала о простреленном легком. Сегодня же ее не было рядом и можно было дышать сколько угодно. Но Владимир Ильич поспешно отошел от окна.

image and lifestyle to millions of fans,⁴³ authors of *Oktiabr*’ were nailing privacy as a unique strategy of celebrity representation to strengthen and expand Lenin’s Soviet “fandom.” Lenin was *the* Communist celebrity par excellence, and his fictionalized private life was one of key approaches to portraying him in this journal.

“The literature of private life is essentially a literature of snooping about, of overhearing ‘how others live,’” writes Mikhail Bakhtin in his 1937 essay “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel” [Formy vremeni i khronotopa v romane; Bakhtin 1981 (1937): 123].⁴⁴ And if *Oktiabr*’ was ever close to becoming a platform for the literature of private life, it is in its texts about Lenin that offered unparalleled access to the Soviet leader, even if imagined. Details of Lenin’s private life that were shared on *Oktiabr*’s pages focused on well-known facts of his biography and took a closer look “behind the scenes.” Yet, all of it served a larger purpose: it did not only deepen the links between Lenin and the readers of the journal, but also advanced broader Soviet values, like the commitment to the Communist project, by setting Lenin as an example that embodies them. Thus, the relationship between Lenin and Krupskaja in these two texts is hardly limited to the two of them and rather reminds of what Sarah Ashwin (2012: 2) described as “a triangular set of relations in which the primary relationship of individual men and women was to the state rather than to each other.” Both Lenin and Krupskaja think of each other, but also of their duties to the project of the Revolution that the coming day harbors.

A rare exception to this triangular pattern is the poem “Winter in Gorki” [Zima v Gorkakh], authored by Egor Polianskii. It opens the first issue of *Oktiabr*’ in 1969 and imagines the comradeship between Lenin and Krupskaja as a tender connection:

Here, at a pond next to a Russian village
kids fuss around from the morning on.
Il’ich passes by in the company of Krupskaja,
His collar raised, to protect him from the wind.
[...]
And Lenin is as young is ever,
and right in front of everyone,
he kisses a lock of hair
of his beloved Nadezhda Konstantinovna.

Здесь у пруда деревни русской
с утра ребячий гвалт и крик.
Ильич шагает рядом с Крупской,
подняв от ветра воротник.
[...]
И молод Ленин, как и прежде,
и на глазах округи всей
целует прядь волос Надежды —
свет-Константиновны своей.

(Polianskii 1969: 3)

⁴³ For the use of privacy by celebrities in their interactions with fans, see, for instance, Jurgenson and Rey (2013); Kim and Kim (2020).

⁴⁴ “Литература приватной жизни есть, по существу, литература подсматривания и подслушивания – «как другие живут»” (Bakhtin 2012: 379).

Unlike two previous examples, where Lenin and Krupskaja were depicted as a team working together for the Communist cause, this poem foregrounds Lenin's feelings for Krupskaja, thereby making Lenin one of those people who, as Ehrenburg said, "work, love, and live." Polianskii offers readers a story that sells best when celebrities are concerned: an insight into the romance. This fictional Lenin is feeling young because he is in love with Krupskaja, and many readers can well relate to this portrait of a "real" Lenin that is *made* real through the component of emotion and affection added to it.

Lenin's "realness" also shines in the texts that imagine his life and working conditions, like Mark Lisianskii's series of poems that appeared in the April issue of *Oktiabr'* in 1961. In "Rue Marie-Rose," he takes the readers into Lenin's apartment during his years in Paris:

Rue Marie-Rose,
Paris.
In house no. 4, the lamp is still on.
The windows are lit up.
Midnight. Silence.
Lenin is at work in that apartment.
[...]
People visit it to see,
How Mr. Ulyanov lived.
And this mister lived like a simple worker,
Did not succumb to everyday struggles.
He would take a steep, narrow, creaky stairs
To his apartment, a bunch of books in his hands.
His office looks more like a janitor's room.
A table with no polish,
Books on the sofa...
Now, there's neither a table, nor a sofa:
Both were nearly falling apart.
He had an old lamp,
And used a cup as a tin holder.
Only Lenin knew
How hard Lenin's life was.

Улица Мари-Роз,
Париж.
Лампа не гаснет в доме четыре.
Светятся окна.
Полночь. Тишь.
Ленин работает в этой квартире.
[...]
Люди приходят сюда посмотреть,
Как жил господин Ульянов.
А жил господин, как рабочий простой,
Бедам житейским не поддавался.
По лестнице узкой, скрипучей, крутой
С кипюю книг к себе поднимался.
Похож на каморку его кабинет.
Некрашенный стол.
На диване – книжки...
Теперь ни стола, ни дивана нет:
Они были дряхлыми слишком.
Старая лампа светила ему,
Служила чернильницей чашка.
Известно лишь Ленину одному,
Как Ленину было тяжело.

(Lisianskii 1961: 68)

The poem meticulously details the scarcity of objects in Lenin's apartment that is the size of a cubicle, furniture nearly falling apart—a move to present Lenin as unpretentious and focus on the bare necessities to complete his work. In this story echoing Jesus' ascent to his crucifixion, Lenin daily takes a trip to his personal Golgotha, piles of books in his hands replacing the cross, rocky narrow stairs guaranteeing a strenuous trip—all the suffering taken voluntarily for the cause of the

Revolution and the bright future of the Soviet people: “Only Lenin knew // how hard Lenin’s life was.”⁴⁵

Just as the case is with many celebrities in the twenty-first century, their fans are eager for the content that would offer insight not only in how their apartments look like, but other details of their private lives, too. Today, videos like “What I Eat in a Day” or “What I Always Carry with Me” trend on YouTube and other social platforms alongside home tours that influencers and celebrities offer to their followers and fans.⁴⁶ Back in 1961, Lisianskii does not disappoint in foretells the importance of this side of celebrity portrait in crafting his texts about Lenin to address this aspect. In the other poem in the same issue, “A Canteen in Smolny” [Stolovaia v Smol’nom], he dives into Lenin’s eating habits:

Picture this for a moment:
The canteen at the Smolny.
The dining hall is packed.
In the corner, at a long and wide table,
On the very edge, there sits Vladimir Il’ich.
Next to him—a soldier,
Across the table—a worker,
Il’ich is cleaning the Caspian roach.
The soldier smiles:
By the way, it would be nice,
If a glass of beer went with that...
The roach is skinny and dry,
As if it were on starvation ration.
Porridge, dreaming of butter,
Steams in a polished pot.
A mustached worker in a blue shirt
Carries pots to his comrades in fight.
Just yesterday they were storming the Winter Palace.
And today went in a bayonet attack on Champ de Mars.
[...]
Sailors go down the stairs,
Line up: the room is full.
– Comrade Lenin is hungry,
Look, how eagerly he is eating the porridge!

Представьте себе на минуту картину:
Столовая в Смольном.
Зал набит.
В уголке, за столом, широким и длинным,
С краю Владимир Ильич сидит.
С ним рядом – солдат,
Напротив – рабочий,
Ильич обдирает вобле бока.
Солдат улыбается:
– К ней, между прочим,
Неплохо бы кружку пивка...
А вобла тощая и сухая,
Как будто была на голодном пайке.
Пшеничная каша, о масле вздыхая,
Дымится в начищенном котелке.
Усатый путиловец в блузе синей
Дружкам боевым несет котелки.
Еще вчера штурмовали Зимний,
Сегодня на Марсовом шли в штаны.
[...]
Матросы спускаются по ступеням,
Становятся в очередь: нету мест.
– Проголодался товарищ Ленин,
Кашу, гляди, с аппетитом ест!

(Lisianskii 1961: 67)

⁴⁵ While these religious parallels may not be implied by the author, Communism in general heavily relied on Christian discourses and rituals in the invention of a new ideology for the masses. See Ryklin (2009).

⁴⁶ For the analysis of new practices in mediating private food cultures in digital environment, see, for instance Pfender et al (2023).

Portrayed during a lunch break, Lenin in this poem consumes the same food as soldiers, workers, and sailors—the holy Trinity of the Revolution. A skinny and dry fish or porridge that has hardly seen any butter due to the shortages are both dishes Lenin eagerly eats, alongside other heroes who fight (literally) for the revolution. Their fight is thus equaled to Lenin’s fight through this depiction of a shared meal.

This use of privacy as a strategy in portraying Lenin in *Oktiabr’* should not be seen as going against Communist principles—on the contrary, authors maintain the balance between the private and the public in such a way that privacy in these representations is never taking over Lenin’s life but rather, is always imagined as a vital source of energy for his public commitments and his contribution to the cause of the Revolution. Unlike Dudintsev’s Lopatkin who could only succeed in the privacy of his home (see Chapter Two), fictional Lenin’s privacy in *Oktiabr’* serves to advance the cause of the Revolution. Lenin enjoys his sleep under a warm comforter—to master a hard day ahead; his habit of sneaking in moments in front of an open window on winter morning is only brought in to underscore his sacrifices—namely, pre-history of an assassination attempt against him by Fanny Kaplan. The evocation of his apartment in Paris should remind the readers of Lenin’s work in exile before the Revolution could take place, and so on. *Oktiabr’* authors use privacy in Lenin’s depiction to create an image of a “celebrity” as human and quotidian as it is monumental.

Yet, make no mistake—the “monumental” Lenin did not get fully replaced by his “intimate” counterpart and was still very much present in the journal. Even, in best socialist realist traditions, grotesquely so, like in the description of Lenin in Il’ia Sel’vinskii play *The Man Is Above His Destiny* [Chelovek vyshe svoei sud’by]—a tragedy published in the April issue of *Oktiabr’* in 1962:

Lenin—Classical Greek forehead, Mongolian cheekbones, Russian face. It seems like the whole history of humanity is embodied in this symbol, dressed in a standard gray suit.⁴⁷ (Sel’vinskii 1962: 3)

Selvin’skii’s description of Lenin that should serve as an instruction for theater directors to their selection and preparation of actors brings together the “monumental Lenin” and the “intimate” Lenin. The former, in the spirit of the friendship of peoples, is as Greek as he is Mongolian as he is Russian, whereas the latter, despite this very distinguished look that testifies to his extraordinariness, sports a suit that any Soviet citizen can buy. This attempt to speak to different

⁴⁷ “Ленин – античное чело, монгольские скулы, русский облик. Кажется, будто вся история человечества воплотилась в этом символе, одетом в серый губсоюзковский костюм.”

nationalities across the Soviet Union⁴⁸ in portraying Lenin also shines through the lines of Aleksei Shlygin's poem "Il'ich's Portraits" [Portrety Il'icha] that appeared in issue 4, 1971:

All paint his portrait
In their own way
Across the Union—
Kazakh, Buryat, Yakut;
Some make his eyes look narrower,
Others put the emphasis on his cheekbones.

Some portraits imagine him in the plains,
Others—among high rocks.
For some, he is a fairytale hero [bogatyř],
For others –
A revered elder [aksakal].

Рисуют, всяк по-своему,
В Союзе
Его портрет –
Казах, бурят, якут:
Одни – глаза немного больше сузят,
Другие – скулы резче подчеркнут.

Он на одних портретах – среди равнины,
А на других – среди высоких скал.
Он для одних – как богатырь былинный,
А для других –
Почтенный аксакал.

Shlygin 1971: 5

The monumentalism of Lenin in Sel'vinskii and Shlygin's texts lies in the ability they ascribe to their character to fit everywhere, in every cultural and ethnic context across the USSR. Their Lenin is not just a celebrity that readers get to know closer through digesting portions of his private life—he is a superhero. And his superpower is his Sovietness that is imagined as carrying the traits, concerns, and hopes of the many various groups populating the Union. This Lenin as an imaginary figure is close to any and to all readers of *Oktiabr'* simultaneously, as Sergei Smirnov imagines in the poem "Nash Lenin" (1970, no. 2):

.There's a Lenin
 surrounded by names
Of his fellow fighters and enemies.
There's one
In film chronicles and memoirs,
In the documentary
 authenticity they bear.
There's a Lenin
 who limitlessly aspires
into the future world – atop an armored
 car.
There's a Lenin
 submerged into the routine
 of the Leninist cause,
There's one
 embodied in bronze
 for centuries to come.

Есть Ленин, –
 окруженный именами
Соратников и недругов своих.
Есть –
В кинокадрах и воспоминаньях,
В документальной
 подлинности их.
Есть Ленин, –
 устремленный без предела
в грядущий мир – с брони
 броневика.
Есть Ленин –
 в буднях
 ленинского дела,
Есть –
 в бронзе воплощенный
 на века.

⁴⁸ Similar images of nationalities and peoples united through the Soviet project underpin Dziga Vertov's film *One Sixth of the World* (1926), see Sarkisova (2007) and Turoma (2016).

There's a Lenin
 who reflects in
 silence,
 A teacher, who became
 our destiny.

There's a Lenin
 in the depths of the solar system
 and in everyday intimacy with you.

Есть Ленин, –
 думающий
 немо,
 Наставник, ставший
 нашенской судьбой.

Есть Ленин –
 в безднах солнечной системы
 И в повседневной близости с тобой.

Smirnov 1970: 12

Spread across genres ranging from poems, short stories, stories or novellas, film scripts to dramas—truly, there was Lenin for every reader, independent of their genre preferences—the distance between the reader and Lenin is cut in a number of ways to inculcate in the Soviet reader the perception of Lenin as “the guy next door.” Readers of *Oktiabr'* wake up in one bed with Lenin, seat at the table with him as he enjoys his lunch, kiss Nadezhda Konstantinovna's lock of hair while no one is watching, schlepp books up the stairs, and work through the night for the success of the Revolution. And if ever Lenin emerges as some kind of Soviet superman, he is immediately brought back to the reader's level as someone who is not invincible, , who eats the same food and wears the same kind of suit, who has weaknesses—although, obviously, all of the latter are exclusively results of his sacrifices for the revolution (such as his shot lung).

This kind of Lenin joins characters like Koroteev or Iashin's village dwellers in their emerging femininity. Privacy takes a strong hold over their portraits and becomes a vehicle of delivering their stories to readers in a way that makes them more human, more like the readers themselves, thereby bringing them closer and strengthening their impact. They are just a glimpse into a much broader late Soviet literary universe, where privacy came to reign in the 1950s–1980s. Stories like these became a signature mark of the late Soviet era, coming to proliferate in publications from vocally pro-Soviet outlets, like *Oktiabr'* to texts that were banned publication, like Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*. Since many of them made it through the censorship, what was their role and impact in the late Soviet literary field? And how, in their intention to write about such kinds of privacy, did writer advocate for their own, creative privacy?

CHAPTER 4

CROSSING THRESHOLDS: PRIVACY AS THE WRITER'S WAY OF LIFE

DISCIPLINE AND PUBLISH: UNDERSTANDING SOVIET CENSORSHIP

In 1953, just before the political change propelled by Joseph Stalin's death was about to set foot in the Soviet Union, the émigré journal of humor and satire *Satirikon* [Satirikon, which can be loosely translated as "A World of Satire"] published a sketch on a "dangerous" advertisement. The sketch tells a story of a young writer who gets a job in an advertisement department of a Soviet journal and is excited by his first assignment to create an advertisement for a toothpaste. In trying to make it appealing to readers, he comes up with a romantic story of a young man and a girl whose kiss in the park is disrupted by the smell from the man's mouth. The girl advises her partner to buy a certain brand of toothpaste that is sold in "all the shops around the USSR." When the writer presents his piece to the editor-in-chief, the latter criticizes it beyond limits: the love that the young man and the girl have for each other in the story seems to prevail over their love of the Party; the detail that the author added to create a romantic atmosphere—a falling leaf—is read by the editor-in-chief as a message of socialist nature being in a state of decay; the protagonist's desire to sink into the ground [*provalit'sia skvoz' zemliu*] is met with skepticism, as in such case he would appear on the other side of the Earth—in a capitalist country. Discouraged by all the criticism, the writer leaves and returns to the editor-in-chief with a revised version that reads: "Buy the toothpaste A! Buy the toothpaste B! Buy, buy, buy!"—that was accepted and published without any reprimands (Zorin 1953).

This sketch was clearly mocking the excessive and often arbitrary censorship in the Soviet Union, where anything could be misinterpreted as something (read: something anti-Communist).¹ In Russia, censorship has a long history that began long before the Soviet era—in the Tsarist times (in fact, researchers point out that many mechanisms of censorship implemented throughout the Soviet years existed even before the Revolution and transitioned into the new regime with little or no change at all).² A significant difference between the two eras is the stage at which the work was subjected to control, as Vera Dunham points out: while the Tsarist system predominantly focused on the word that had already been written and published, the Soviet successor strove to prevent potentially harmful words from appearing altogether (Dunham 1990: 27–28). Throughout the Soviet years, both modalities of censorship—preventive (before the publication) and punitive (after)—proliferated across all arts. Yet, writers had a particular standing within this system that assigned them the leading role in shaping the new Soviet man and went as far as to designate them “engineers of human souls”.³

At the heart of the Soviet State’s “ideological apparatus” (Althusser 1971: 141–48) in the literary field was Glavlit [Main Administration for Literary Affairs and Publishing, *Glavnoe upravlenie po delam literatury i izdatel'stv*] that was created in 1922 “to unite all forms of censorship in published texts” (“Polozhenie o Glavlite” 2004: 32).⁴ Together with the Union of Soviet Writers, Glavlit was a vehicle for enforcing the state’s cultural politics in the field of literature and to a great extent shaped the relationship between the state and Soviet intellectuals.⁵ In addition to Glavlit, the State Committee for the Press was established in 1963 to monitor newspapers.

Glavlit was responsible for most mechanisms of preventive censorship. Before a text could be published, it had to go through multiple stages of revision: from the editor of an appropriate

¹ Although the Soviet state is notorious for its censoring practices, it is important to underscore that censorship is not only a characteristic of non-democratic states, but it is also present in varied forms across different types of societies, democracies included. For example, it can take the form of restriction of the freedom of speech (see, e.g., a study on the broadcasting ban in Ireland by Corcoran and O’Brien [2005]), or is also quite often connected to secrecy that the state has to preserve to protect the current social and political order (see, e.g., Smyth and Hazelkorn [1993]; Marx [2001]).

² See, e.g., Blium (2009); Ruud (2009); Swift (2009); Kahn et al. (2018: 368–73). Censorship in the Soviet era has been studied by Dewhirst and Farrell (1973); Venclova (1978; 1983); Shanor (1985); Choldin and Friedberg (1989); Ermolaev (1997); Gorjaeva (2009); Blium (2003; 2005); Bock (2011); Choldin (2011); Sherry (2015).

³ On the origins of this term, see Rappaport (1999: 81–82).

⁴ “[...] в целях объединения всех видов цензуры печатных произведений.”

⁵ Scholarly research has shed light onto multiple aspects of this relationship, see, e.g., Kamenka (1963); Churchward (1973); Kagarlitsky (1988); Shlapentokh (1990a; 1990b); Kretzschmar (1993); Eggeling (1994); Zezina (1999); Gudkov and Dubin (2009); Zubok (2009; 2014). These relations have also been zealously documented in the Party files that became available after the opening of the archives, see, e.g., Gorjaeva and Vodop’ianova (1997); Artizov and Naumov (1999); Blium (2004); Iakovlev and Maksimenkov (2005); Makarov (2006).

department of the journal to the All-Union Goskomizdat [State Committee for Publishing; Garrard and Garrard 1990: 175].⁶ Topics prohibited from publication were communicated by Glavlit channels through secret internal memos [*tsirkuliary*], together with blacklists of writers who could not be published or were not allowed to travel abroad (Svirskii 1979: 311). However, even the absence of a forbidden subject matter in a specific text did not guarantee smooth progress to the next stage of control. To be published, the text usually had to be overtly pro-Soviet, which was not the case for many writers of the late Soviet generation, as Igor' Volgin affirms:

I knew that they were incredibly talented, but I also knew that the publication of their poems was almost impossible. There was nothing explicitly dissident in them, but their tone, the values that they voiced, and their internal integrity made clear that it was an absolutely different kind of poetry that could not be published until perestroika. It simply did not fit in. (Volgin 1996: 47)⁷

Apart from monitoring and filtering texts, preventive censorship was also performed through the limitation of channels through which writers could deliver their work to readers. The writer Vladimir Makanin recalls that thick journals always had a higher status among writers than book publications, for they ensured a broader outreach. For this very reason, they were under a stricter control by the Soviet state:

In our country, literature is generated by journals. A novel or a short story should first appear in these so-called “think” monthlies. That is where critics and readers alike find one’s work. After that a novel or stories might be published in a book form as a separate edition. Then it would be put on a bookshelf and forgotten. Nobody would read it, certainly not without a film adaptation. [...] During the Stalinist years, the Communists cleverly adapted this tradition to their own needs and aims. To control a dozen journals was easier than to pursue hundreds and even thousands of books. Each journal appeared on schedule, after careful review. Every page of every issue was duly stamped and signed by the censor, who had an assigned twenty or thirty pages to read each month. The authorities concentrated their efforts. (Makanin 2007: 19)

The human factor was also an important—if not the most decisive—part of the censoring system. On the one hand, a censor could forbid a work that did not actually imply anything even slightly

⁶ According to Garrard and Garrard, there were altogether nine stages that a manuscript could go through in the process of acceptance for publication: “the editor of the appropriate department of the journal (e.g. prose or poetry); the head of the journal’s editorial department; the journal’s “responsible” editor [*otvetstvennyi redactor*]; the journal’s deputy chief editor; the journal’s chief editor; the censor (a representative of *Glavlit*), who could work only on manuscripts sent on by journals and publishing houses; the district or regional party committee; the Russian republic branch of *Goskomizdat* (the state committee); the All-Union *Goskomizdat*” (Garrard and Garrard 1990: 175).

⁷ “Я понимал, что они очень талантливы, но понимал также и то, что напечатать их стихи практически невозможно. Там не было ничего явно диссидентского, но по тональности, по ценностным категориям, по внутреннему достоинству это была совершенно другая поэзия, которая до перестройки не могла быть напечатана. Не вписывалась.”

anti-Soviet (as is the case in the fictional example with the “dangerous” advertisement), thus eliminating texts that could be perceived as such. On the other hand, “[...] the censors were also Soviet people, and they were also affected by the crisis of Soviet ideology” Mark Lipovetsky and Lisa Wakamiya argue (2015: 22). Resolute individuals who were in a position to advance even a clearly controversial text into print therefore played an immense role in changing literary culture under socialism. Probably, the most famous example here is that of Alexander Tvardovskii, the editor-in-chief of *Novyi mir* in 1950–1954 and 1958–1970, who, according to Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, “ha[d] this unsoviet trait: not to stay away from a chastised thing but to love it more than before” (Solzhenitsyn 1975: 276).⁸ Tvardovskii led *Novyi mir* to becoming a bulwark of liberalism in the late Soviet era, even though, starting from the late 1960s, it was increasingly hard to push unconventional texts into publication. And people who managed to do it were also often the ones to be punished for it first. Thus, Tvardovskii was removed from his editor-in-chief position in 1954 after the publication of Pomerantsev’s “On Sincerity in Literature” and some other critical articles,⁹ and reinstated in 1958, after Konstanin Simonov, his successor, let Dudintsev’s *Not by Bread Alone* go in print.

When controversial works made it into the official public sphere and attracted the attention of the authorities, punitive mechanisms were set in motion. These were highly diverse in nature and could be enacted through various channels. The Soviet state’s preoccupation with its image on the international arena during the Cold War made the State diversify and soften its penal policies (that had previously been mostly limited to imprisonment in GULAG or execution by a firing squad).¹⁰ Pulling the already published books back from libraries (like it happened to the almanacs *Literaturnaia Moskva* and *Tarusskie stranitsy*) and stripping writers of their membership in the Writers’ Union—a status that came with financial and publishing guarantees (as was the case of Viktor Erofeev and Evgenii Popov after they partook in the creation of the almanac *Metropol*) were among the milder forms of censorship. Efim Etkind describes this change quite laconically: “They don’t put us in prison, they strangle us. They don’t kill, they exterminate” (Etkind 1979:

⁸ “У Твардовского есть эта несоветская черта: от ругаемой вещи не отшатываться, а любить больше прежнего.”

⁹ See the Introduction, esp. footnote 34.

¹⁰ Growing concerns about the image of the Soviet state abroad transpire, for example, from the Party’s own documents. When the news of the forthcoming publication of *The Gulag Archipelago* abroad reached Moscow, a session of Politbiuro was held to discuss the strategies of dealing with Solzhenitsyn. Brezhnev considered options of sanctioning the writer heavily for his “horrible anti-Soviet libel” [grubyi antisovetskii paskvil’]. However, he expressed concern of the reaction in the West and the possibility of using any sanctions against Solzhenitsyn for the anti-Soviet propaganda: “If we use sanctions against him now, will it be beneficial to us? How will bourgeois propaganda use it against us?” [Если мы применим сейчас в отношении его санкции, то будет ли это нам выгодно, как использует против нас это буржуазная пропаганда?; Politbiuro 2006].

10),¹¹ whereas under “extermination” he must have meant further forms of removing a person from the official field of cultural production that complemented the penitentiary system, such as punitive psychiatry, denaturalization (stripping a person of their Soviet citizenship), and exile.

By and large, Etkind’s words were correct. Indeed, forced admittance to a psychiatric ward became a popular punitive measure in the 1960s–1970s.¹² Until 1960, the Criminal Code (CC) of the RSFSR considered the admittance of a healthy person to psychiatric treatment a crime against a person’s life, health, freedom, and dignity, and the punishment for it involved a prison sentence from one up to three years.¹³ Up until 1953, this article was no nuisance to the Soviet state, since most of the convicted went to the GULAG camps. However, after 1953, when the USSR set out to improve its international image, psychiatry increasingly became a more popular solution to deal with offenses of what the state saw as political nature. The updated Criminal Code of 1960 introduced Art. 58, which allowed forced psychiatric treatment as a measure against “people who committed an act dangerous to society” [*litsa, sovershivshie obshestvenno-opasnye deiania*], with Art. 59–63 regulating individual aspects of this type of punishment (accordingly, Art. 148 that explicitly prohibited such acts was removed from the Code). No trial was required, just a medical examination—an approach that reduced possible international noise of the case: the state thus emerged not as a punisher of freedom of speech but as a caring institution that provided medical help to those who needed it. Also, once included in the psychiatric database, the person could be recommitted to a ward at any time under the pretext of a relapse.¹⁴

If the psychiatric mechanism did not work in the way the authorities had intended it and the person continued engaging in what the Soviet state deemed as disruptive practices, the next step was often the placement in the penitentiary system.¹⁵ The articles of the Criminal Code under

¹¹ “Не сажают, но душат. Не убивают, но истребляют.”

¹² On punitive psychiatry in the USSR, see Artemova, Rar, and Slavinskii (1971); Medvedev and Medvedev (1971); Fireside (1979); Podrabinek (1979); Smith and Oleszczuk (1996); Fireside (2001); van Voren (2009); Reich (2018). See also the overview of history of approaches to madness in Russian culture in Brintlinger and Vinitsky (2007).

¹³ See Articles 161, CC 1922; later Art. 148, CC 1926 for RSFSR. There was no unified Criminal Code in the USSR, every Union Republic had its own legislation that was more or less coherent to that of other republics. The RSFSR had three Criminal Codes throughout its history, adopted respectively in 1922, 1926, and 1960. While the last two were valid for more than 30 years, they witnessed numerous changes introduced into their texts along the way.

¹⁴ Liubov’ Polikovskaia recalls that Iurii Galanskov’s presence in the psychiatric database allowed the authorities to send him back to the asylum any time under the pretext of a relapse (Polikovskaia 1996: 346, note 1).

¹⁵ For instance, Vladimir Bukovskii was arrested in 1963 for the dissemination of Milovan Djilas’ *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System* (1957) and was convicted to forced psychiatric treatment, which he underwent until 1965. Upon release, he continued his activities and in 1967, he was arrested again for organizing a protest event at Pushkin square in Moscow. He was convicted for three years of imprisonment on Art. 190-3, and upon release, iteratively convicted for seven years in 1972, two of which he spent in prison and five—in an internal exile (General’nyi Prokuror SSSR 2006: 53).

which writers and other intellectuals were convicted most often were Art. 70 (anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda),¹⁶ Art. 190-1 (slander of the socio-political system),¹⁷ and Art. 190-3 (organization of protests or participation in protest activities).¹⁸ All of them had a punishment of several years of prison that, upon the court's decision, could be replaced or complemented by an internal exile (a temporary ban to return to the previous place of living after release from prison). These articles of the Criminal Code upheld the state's narrative of a transparent and just judicial system, which in actuality bent legal norms and interpreted them favorably for the state. In his *Power of the Powerless* (1978), Václav Havel criticized this pseudo-legality of the socialist order that equally characterized his home Czechoslovakia: "Like ideology, the legal code functions as an excuse. It wraps the base exercise of power in the noble apparel of the letter of the law; it creates the pleasing illusion that justice is done, society protected and the exercise of power objectively regulated" (Havel 1985: 73).

If "wall-therapy" and "cell-therapy" [*stenoterapia* and *reshetkoteratia*] in Anatolii Ivanov's wording (Ivanov 1996: 238) did not help or were not an option to pursue due to the individual's international fame, exile was yet another method that became quite popular in the late Soviet era. Like punitive psychiatry, this mechanism was based on the removal of the person from the eye of the Soviet public to prevent disturbances that one could cause inside the country. The wave of self-exiled in the 1960s–1980s formed the basis of the "third wave of emigration," which included such landmark names for Russian culture as Joseph Brodskii, Vasili Akseiov, Georgii Vladimov, Vladimir Voinovich, and others.¹⁹ According to Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, who also became the victim of this strategy of "pacification" by the state, "the state's plan to turn dissent down a bit through the third wave of emigration worked quite well" (Solzhenitsyn 1975: 369).²⁰ The active interest of the state in forcing intellectuals out of the country is evident also in the fact that it would remove obstacles that normally prevented the person from leaving the country (for example, by

¹⁶ Replaced Art. 58-10 of the 1926 CC (updated version of October 1, 1953).

¹⁷ Replaced Art. 58-18 of the 1926 CC (no change was made to this article in 1953).

¹⁸ The article was introduced in 1966 after a rally held by the SMOGists (SMOG was a group of young poets in 1965–1966, the name of the group is an abbreviation for *Smelost', Mysl', Obraz, Glubina* [Audacity, Thought, Image, Depth]). They walked to Dom Literaturov [House of Workers of the Literary Sphere] in Moscow to commemorate *Maiakovka*, which is the name used by *shestidesiatniki* to denote poetry readings in Maiakovski Square in Moscow between 1955 and 1961. On the history of *Maiakovka* and for interviews with its participants, see Polikovskaia (1996).

¹⁹ On emigration from the USSR, see Matich and Heim (1984); Iontsev (2001); Genis (2010).

²⁰ "Расчет властей на «сброс пара» посредством третьей эмиграции вполне оправдывался."

arranging an invitation from a foreign state that would accept the exiled or by providing a fast-track exit visa).²¹

By actively monitoring and structuring the field of literary production through all these measures, the state created a whole network of censoring mechanisms, which Marianna Tax Choldin designates “omnicensorship” (Choldin 2011: 294), thus pointing at the inescapability of this institution. This climate of ineludible control led to a proliferation of yet another mode of censorship—self-censorship. Even though restrictions that an author imposes upon themselves are often an integral part of their process of writing, the socialist type of self-censorship was different from its standard variant in that it did not come with an intention to improve the work, but involved its adaptation to what the writer considered the vision of the censor, Andrei Siniavskii writes: “The terrible thing is that censorship is carried out by the entire apparatus of the Soviet publishing and printing establishments so that the writer ends up by censoring himself. He knows what is forbidden and what isn’t and adapts his work accordingly” (Sinyavsky 1980: 8). The ultimate goal of such adaptations was to see the work published, despite its lower quality or complete abandonment of the original idea. In his open letter to the 1967 Congress of the Writers’ Union, Aleksander Solzhenitsyn blamed censorship mechanisms for the detrimental effect it had on the contents of literary works and the writer’s imagination:

Many members of the [Writers’] Union and even delegates of this Congress remember how they also used to surrender in view of the censorship pressure and changed the structure and idea of their books, replaced chapters, pages, paragraphs, sentences, entitled them with bleak names, only to see them published, and, in this way, irreparably distorted the contents of the work and their own artistic method. (Solzhenitsyn 1975: 487)²²

Solzhenitsyn’s open letter marks one of the ways authors pushed back against this elaborate framework of limitation to their creative freedoms, which were no less creative than the paths censors sought out.

²¹ Thus, at the already mentioned Solzhenitsyn session (footnote 10 in this chapter), Andropov suggested exiling the writer and offering to contact the governments of “respective countries” [sootvetstvuiushchikh stran] through Soviet ambassadors to find out whether they could accept him (Politbiuro 2006: 29). Svirskii opens his book with the KGB note to the TsK KPSS, which officially recommends not to obstruct his leaving the country for Israel due to his “provocative activities” [ne prepiatsvovat’ vyezdy v Izrail’ v sviazi s “provokatsionnymi deistviiami”]; Svirskii 1979: 6].

²² “Многие члены Союза и даже делегаты этого Съезда знают, как они сами не устояли перед цензурным давлением и уступали в структуре и замысле своих книг, заменяли в них главы, страницы, абзацы, фразы, снабжали их блеклыми названиями, чтобы только увидеть их в печати, и тем непоправимо исказили их содержание и свой творческий метод.”

WRITING UNDER AND AGAINST THE CENSORSHIP

In late Soviet years, writers resorted to several options of giving a fight to the censorship apparatus. The attempts to publish a text in the official Soviet literary realm would most often include the utilization of the so-called Aesopian language—a framework of diverse linguistic and structural means that were implemented by the author to integrate a controversial covert message into the text. Lev Loseff characterizes it as “a special literary system, one whose structure allows interaction between the author and reader at the same time that it conceals inadmissible content from the censor” (Loseff 1984: x). Aesopian language was thus a means of creating a private world whose linguistic code was ideally only shared by the writer and the reader, but not by the state. Iurii Trifonov’s work exemplifies this strategy—the author is well-known for his skill to say much with just a few words:

Over the years Trifonov developed a narrative technique which, like Chekhov’s, relied on the active collaboration with the reader. By his use of “Aesopian” language, metaphors, symbols, questions, stressed key words and open endings he was able to sail between the Scylla and Charybdis of the censorship. The reader is prompted to discover the “subtext” or underlying sense hidden beneath the functional meaning of the words. (Maegd-Soëp 1990: 7)²³

For instance, in the short story “The Death of Doves” (1968), it is enough for Trifonov to put a few words about the family that lives in one of the rooms of the communal apartment into the mouth of the representative of the house committee—“they won’t stay long here” [*ne zhil’tsy oni tut*; Trifonov 1968a: 86]—to reference Stalinist repressions, when individuals and families disappeared from their rooms and apartments in the middle of the night.

Aesopian language flourished in the 1960s—the years that, according to Petr Vail’ and Alexander Genis, “created an extensive polemical system that lived long beyond its era and influenced the whole Soviet society. The point of this system was that the truth, the main and the most important one, could not be told directly” (Vail’ and Genis 2013: 189).²⁴ Loseff theorizes that to mask the controversial, the writers employed “screens” and “markers”—devices that were meant to conceal the author’s message from the censor and mechanisms that emphasized the author’s idea for the reader, respectively (Loseff 1984: 50–52). Allegories, pretense translations, and historical displacements were among the most popular strategies that writers used to “cover

²³ On the Aesopian language in Trifonov, see also Seifrid (1990).

²⁴ “60-е создали разветвленную полемическую систему, пережившую свою эпоху и оказавшую влияние на все советское общество. Суть этой системы в том, что правду, великую и главную, нельзя было высказать прямо.”

their tracks.”²⁵ Meanwhile, multiple ellipses represented the unsaid that was the heart of communication between the author and the reader in the Soviet culture of the 1970s that Mikhail Brashinskii calls the culture of the “unnamed, unshown, unsaid”, a culture of paradox, where “[e]xactly because nothing is called by its name [...]—everyone understands everything” (Brashinskii 1999).²⁶

To make Brashinskii’s comment more precise, this shared code was not universal, but rather, brought together certain audiences while blocking out others from understanding the implied meanings—ideally, alert readers and profane censors and not vice versa. Yet, independent of its successes or failures, this language shaped censored late Soviet literature, leaving a mark on most texts published in official journals. Soviet periphery, where local issues and opinions took precedence, often presented more leeway to pushing a text through censorship:

However, was it so easy to monitor hundreds of journals and publishing houses that were active all across the country with tens of thousands of editors, many of whom were honest people tired of their censoring duties? Suddenly, Siberian *Angara* and *Baikal* went AWOL. *Prostor* in the steppes also allowed itself to do more than it should sometimes have done. (Svirskii 1979: 347)²⁷

Although it never was a straightforward axiom that the periphery would offer a more relaxed treatment than the center, many writers who wanted to take chances of publishing their work the way they had written it, with minimal or no interference from the editors, did benefit from the existence of this semi-opened door.²⁸

²⁵ On the system of devices that builds up Aesopian language, see Loseff (1984: 50–84).

²⁶ “Именно благодаря тому, что ничего не названо что ничего не названо – и в этом блестящий парадокс советской культуры 70-х, – все всё понимают. Культура неназванного, непоказанного, недосказанного (от Жванецкого до Тарковского – один шаг) – это культура метонимическая и оттого насквозь эротизированная (непоказанное всегда эротично, показанное – порнографично).”

²⁷ “Однако легко ли угледеть за сотнями разбросанных по всей стране журналов и издательств, за десятком тысяч редакторов, среди которых немало людей честных, измученных своей дозорной службой? Вдруг отбились от рук сибирские «Ангара» и «Байкал». Пошаливал степной «Простор».” Defined by the intertwining of aspirations to domination and subversions, the relationship between the center and periphery in the USSR and in the Eastern Bloc have been studied extensively. See, e.g., Berend (1996); Kempton and Clark (2002); Weiner (2006); Waldstein and Turoma (2013).

²⁸ Thus, Vasilii Belov’s “The Usual Thing” [Privychnoe delo] was published in 1966 in the provincial journal *Sever* (issue 1), brothers Strugatskii’s “Tale of the Troika” [Skazka o troike] came out in *Angara* (1968, issue 4), the same as Vampilov’s *Elder Son* [Starshii syn], published under its first title *The Suburb* [Predmest’e, 1968, issue 2], whereas their “Snail on the Slope” [Ulitka na sklone] appeared in *Baikal* (1966, issues 1–2). Vampilov’s *Duck Hunting* [Utinaia okhota] also appeared in *Angara* (1970, issue 6), the same as Valentin Rasputin’s “Money for Mariia” [Den’gi dlia Marii, 1967, issue 4], whereas Vampilov’s *Last Summer in Chulimsk* [Proshlym letom v Chulimске] was published by *Angara*’s successor—*Sibir’* (1972, issue 6). Nevertheless, Vitalii Skuratovskii recalls: “...children could have some [...] fun. However, the situation was like this only in the capital, whereas in the former cradle of the Revolution, the city of Leningrad, my cousin Boris Edel’shtein was immediately expelled from the university for the simple reason that he hang the banner ‘Corn is our bread!’ [plays with the pun

If publication through official Soviet channels was not an option, the stage of last resort was samizdat (self-publication)—the production of the text on a typewriter using charcoaled paper to create several copies that were later disseminated through friends. Like the censorship it was hiding from, samizdat also had deep roots in Russian history.²⁹ After Stalin’s death, the active phase of samizdat’s existence began (according to Grigorii Svirskii), with literature that had been prohibited under Stalin finding its way around the country through hand-written and typed copies.³⁰ Samizdat did not only involve the dissemination of works by Russian writers and philosophers of the pre-Revolutionary, early, and late Soviet eras, it was also a platform for translations of foreign fiction and non-fiction, as well as for the dissemination of self-printed journals, which grew in number throughout the 1960s–1980s.³¹ The studies of samizdat have registered many forms of its existence that included magnitizdat,³² khamizdat,³³ tamizdat (texts published abroad that made it back to the USSR), and vnutriizdat.³⁴ Grigorii Svirskii points out that the circumstances under which literary

‘bread’ as an English word and ‘bred’ as Russian word that stands for ‘nonsense,’ omophonically to it] at a traditional university concert during the ubiquitous infatuation with corn in the USSR” [... детям дозволялось немножко (...) пошалить. Но это в столице. А уже в бывшей колыбели революции, городе Ленинграде, мой двоюродный брат Борис Эдельштейн был мгновенно исключен из вуза только за то, что на очередном капустнике он во времена повального и повсеместного внедрения кукурузы Хрущевым вывесил лозунг «Кукуруза – наш bread!»; Skuratovskii 1996: 116].

²⁹ For instance, Daphne Skillen names Aleksandr Radishchev’s *Journey from Saint-Petersburg to Moscow* [Puteshestvie iz Peterburga v Moskvu, 1790] as one of the first examples of samizdat, for the copies of his book were circulated among people interested in it despite the ban made by the Imperial censorship (Skillen 2017: 9–12). The word “samizdat” was presumably introduced into Russian by the poet Nikolai Glazkov in the 1940s–1950s, who printed his poems on the typewriter and wrote “samsebiaizdat” on the title page [self-publication of one’s own text; Polikovskaia 1996: 335, note 23].

³⁰ “Сразу после смерти Сталина – почти на другой день – усилилось шуршание листов самиздата. То, что лежало в тайниках, уцелело после чисток 37-го года, стало множиться и расползаться по стране” (Svirskii 1979: 87).

³¹ The most famous samizdat journals were *Veche* [Popular Council, 1971–1974], *Sintaksis* [Syntax, 1959–1960], *Bumerang* [Boomerang, 1960], *Feniks-61* [Phoenix, 1961]. Tamizdat journals included, e.g., *Sintaksis* [Syntax, a namesake of the Russian *Sintaks*, 1978–2001]; *Grani* [Edges, since 1946], *Kontinent* [Continent, 1974–2013], *Strelets* [Sagittarius, 1984–1999].

³² On cultural significance of *magnitizdat* and its practices, see, e.g., Daughtry (2009); Sosin (1975). Daughtry also reflects on the connections between *magnitizdat* practices of the late Soviet era and contemporary Internet file-sharing mechanisms and argues for the understanding of the connections between the two in terms of continuities rather than ruptures.

³³ Stephen Lovell and Rosalind Marsh define *khamizdat* as the printing of a limited number of copies of controversial works for the use of the central Committee or just the Politbiuro. According to the scholars, these works sometimes found their way to the broader public through children of these officials (Lovell and Marsh 1998: 69). *Khamizdat* as a form of literature dissemination is also mentioned in Moser (1992: 596); van de Water (2006: 250); Feuer (1976: 4, footnote 7). In his interview to Liubov’ Polikovskaia, Eduard Kuznetsov recollects an acquaintance of his, who was a son of a Party member, who had access to the books “for special use only.” He used to take these books from home and give them to his friends to read for a day or two (Kuznetsov 1996: 217).

³⁴ Il’ia Bokshtein uses the term *vnutriizdat* [internal publishing] in his interview to Polikovskaia to define texts disseminated inside a Gulag camp (Bokshtein 1996: 205).

texts appeared in tamizdat varied a lot: some texts, like Solzhenitsyn's or Vasilii Grossman's works, first acquired fame within the country after their dissemination in samizdat, and as such, earned their right to be published by foreign publishing houses. Meanwhile, texts by young and unknown authors mostly went abroad first and, if they gained popularity abroad, resurfaced in samizdat in the USSR, as it happened to Andrei Amal'rik's works (Svirskii 1979: 212). With tamizdat publications increasing, in 1973, the USSR joined the International Copyright Convention and created The All-Union Copyright Agency [Vsesoiuznoe agentstvo po avtorskim pravam] to monopolize the selling of authors' rights to foreign publishers and create a legal ground for prosecuting writers for tamizdat publications.³⁵

These mechanisms of preventive and punitive censorship that the late Soviet state employed, as well as strategies that intellectuals adopted to overcome state mechanisms of control were not always put in motion—it is precisely the moment when either was triggered that the writer's privacy was being negotiated. It is in this interaction that writers' privacy emerged in the late Soviet literary field, yet a framework has been lacking to theorize the position of each of the actors who participate in it. In developing one in this book, I draw on the findings of sociology, which has been long preoccupied with unraveling the mystery of human interaction—specifically, on the works of Erving Goffman.

WRITER'S BOUNDARIES AND PRIVACY CAVEAT: DISATTENDABLE LITERATURE, INATTENTIVE STATE

In the late 1950s, Erving Goffman, a recent Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Chicago, joined the team of the National Institute for Mental Health in Bethesda, Maryland. Patient observation that he made there during just a few years of his tenure would be a turning point for the whole discipline of sociology. It changed the way this discipline approaches interactions between individuals or frames the role of institutions—and, as I argue here, have also long overgrown the limits of sociology and can serve as a valuable tool to study interactions not only in the social realm—between individuals and groups,—but also in the political realm—between the state and diverse actors.

Goffman was interested in identifying the laws that govern human behavior in public life, which he framed as the sphere that refers to “persons co-mingling and to places and social

³⁵ Importantly, according to Solzhenitsyn, the concern of the state lay not with any publications of texts by Russian writers abroad but only with the ones that happened in the Russian language (Solzhenitsyn 1975: 227–28).

occasions where face-to-face contact occurs” (Goffman 1971: xv).³⁶ His works are centered around the idea of any action as “information” that is transferred to others. Information may be transmitted pointedly, as it happens in conversations between a speaker and a recipient—“the expression one gives,”—or be simply exuded by the individual into his environment without the objective to reach a certain recipient—“the expression one gives off” (Goffman 1959: 2). Whereas the former is usually meticulously planned by the individual to produce a certain impression on others, the latter often lies beyond their control: one can stop giving expressions, but one cannot stop giving them off (Goffman 1959: 238–40). Goffman theorizes that once the person finds themselves in the presence of others, they are inevitably exposed to the expressions that others give off, and sometimes also to the ones that they give. In order not to be overwhelmed by the sizeable amount of information that one gets via what Goffman called “focused” and “unforced” social interactions in public (Goffman 1963a: 24),³⁷ societies—Goffman affirms—have developed a tacit standard of considerateness, which consists in attempts *not to attract others’ attention or thought in public spaces*:

The rule of behavior that seems to be common to all situations and exclusive to them is the rule obliging participants to “fit in.” The words one applies to a child on his first trip to a restaurant presumably hold for everyone all the time: the individual must be “good” and not cause a scene or a disturbance; he must not attract undue attention to himself, either by thrusting himself on the assembled company or by attempting to withdraw too much from their presence. He must keep within the spirit or ethos of the situation; he must not be *de trop* out of place. (Goffman 1963a: 11)³⁸

Goffman saw the primary reason for this strategy in the desire to maximally approximate public spaces to the private ones, where individuals feel comfort and safety—creating bubbles, in which

³⁶ I find it important for this research to introduce Goffman’s view on the concepts of private and public. Goffman claimed that “traditionally, ‘public places’ refer to any regions in a community freely accessible to members of that community; ‘private places’ refer to soundproof regions where only members or invitees gather—the traditional concern for public order beginning only at the point where a private gathering begins to obtrude upon the neighbors” (Goffman 1963a: 9).

³⁷ Unfocused interaction is “the kind of communication that occurs when one gleans information about another person present by glancing at him, if only momentarily, as he passes into and then out of one’s view” (Goffman 1963a: 24). Focused interaction is “the kind of interaction that occurs when persons gather close together and openly cooperate to sustain a single focus of attention, typically by taking turns at talking” (*ibid.*). When no focused interaction occurs, Goffman suggest using the term “unfocused gathering” (*ibid.*).

³⁸ Georg Simmel develops a similar argument in his “The Metropolis and Mental Life” (2010 [1903]), where he writes that abstaining from expressing everything about oneself to everyone is a social convention to which everyone in the metropolis sticks for the sake of self-preservation—reserve being the primary mental state of the people in the metropolis. Under this perspective, being disattendant in the Goffmanesque way is crucial for self-protection, so that people do not learn too much about another individual: “If the unceasing external contact of numbers of persons in the city should be met by the same number of inner reactions as in the small town, in which one knows almost every person he meets and to each of whom he has a positive relationship, one would be completely atomized internally and would fall into an unthinkable mental condition” (Simmel 2010: 106).

one navigates through the hustling and bustling world. When leaving the private space, one gives up these comfort and safety, and expects to see strangers as well as to be approached by them—dealing with anticipated others is the price one pays for being in public. However, although everyone in public places should be ready to pay this price, nobody wishes for the payment to be inevitable. It might happen that the person does not see anyone in the street, or that nobody approaches them for an interaction. The person obviously cannot avoid being in others' attention—it happens automatically when one is in others' presence. What the person can do—and this is what Goffman argues is the heart of the tacit deal between individuals that guides their behavior in public places—is to abstain from doing so *actively*, from *forcing* oneself into others' daily routine when it is not necessary, while also expecting the same behavior from others in return:

These two opposing tendencies [obligation to keep oneself available for face engagements and confronting the dangers of so doing] are reconciled in society [...] by a kind of implicit contract or gentleman's agreement that persons sustain: given the fact that the other will be under some obligation, often unpleasant, to respond to ouvertures, potential initiators are under obligation to stay their own desires. (Goffman 1963a: 106)

This “implicit communication contract” (Goffman 1963a: 106) results in the behavior that Goffman frames as being “disattendable” (Goffman 1971: 279), or avoiding to attract others' attention in public. Building on Goffman's theories, William Ian Miller developed the term “disattendability” to address the efforts that an individual undertakes in public not to attract attention to oneself, which I will use in this book to describe this type of conduct in the interaction between the late Soviet state and the writers.³⁹ But before we get there, there is another important component to any interaction that Goffman theorized.

Although he underscored the importance of disattendability in an interaction, he also believed that disattendability alone did not suffice to make an unfocused interaction successful. In his view, not only should one abstain from attracting undue attention, but others should also reserve their overzealous attention to themselves—a concept, which he defined as “civil inattention” (Goffman

³⁹ In his book *The Anatomy of Disgust* (1997), Miller dwells on origins and contexts of disgust and in connection to this topic discusses “the Goffmanesque moral duty of maintaining disattendability, of being safely ignorable, in certain social orderings” (Miller 1997: 181). Miller upholds Goffman's rhetoric of certain norms of civility that individuals are to obey: “There are norms of civility which should so hold us in their grip that we could not conceive relaxing them even when alone, let alone in the presence of our loved ones” (Miller 1997: 139). Furthermore, he claims that it is mutual self-awareness about one's own disgusting nature that “should engender a certain respectfulness, a willingness to mind the other's territory and claims to inviolability” (Miller 1997: 51). In Miller's view, disgust “recognizes and maintains difference” (Miller 1997: 50) by guaranteeing the inviolability of the oppositions “us vs. them,” “me vs. you,” as it “prevents *our* way from being subsumed into *their* way. [...] The closer *you* get to me without my consent or without readily discernible justification or excuse, the more alarming, dangerous, disgusting you become, even without considering your hygiene. [...] Contamination, pollution, and the capacity to disgust are inherent in your youthness” (*ibid.*).

1963a: 83). Under this term, Goffman understands a reciprocal process that takes place in public and consists in abstaining from paying attention to others beyond the necessary border:

What seems to be involved is that one gives to another enough visual notice to demonstrate that one appreciates that the other is present (and that one admits openly to having seen him), while at the next moment withdrawing one's attention from him so as to express that he does not constitute a target of special curiosity or design. (Goffman 1963a: 84)⁴⁰

In this way, during social interactions (focused as well as unfocused), disattendability and civil inattention work in tandem, the former representing the strategies of not attracting the attention of others and the latter describing the tactics employed to ensure that no undue attention is paid by the individual to others.⁴¹

Based on Goffman's framings, what would being disattendable *politically* mean? And what role does civil inattention play in this process? I suggest that in a political context, disattendability refers to one's abstaining from any action which might be interpreted as hostile to the present regime within the framework of current ideology. Although this definition is quite broad, as any action might be considered hostile under certain circumstances, it is the state's ideology that

⁴⁰ This concept also surfaces in Miller's theory, building an intrinsic part of what he calls "the minimal moral demand in the Goffmanian order: accord to others civil inattention and behave yourself so as to be civilly disattendable by those about you" (Miller 1997: 199). When attending to the principle of disattendability, Geuss also refers to the concept of civil inattention, but mistakenly uses it as a synonym for disattendability: "many societies, including, notably, most contemporary Western European societies, are governed by a tacit principle about how one is to comport oneself in public places that has been called the principle of 'civil inattention' or 'disattendability'" (Geuss 2001: 13).

⁴¹ The tandem couple of disattendability and civil inattention resurfaces in Goffman's work in multiple contexts, sometimes under other names, although the meaning as well as their reciprocal function is preserved. In his *On Face Work*, he refers to them as the rule of self-respect and the rule of considerateness, respectively: "The combined effect of the rule of self-respect and the rule of considerateness is that the person tends to conduct himself during an encounter so as to maintain both his own face and the face of the other participants. This means that the line taken by each participant is usually allowed to prevail, and each participant is allowed to carry off the role he appears to have chosen for himself. A state where everyone temporarily accepts everyone else's line is established. This kind of mutual acceptance seems to be a basic structural feature of interaction [...]. It is typically a 'working' acceptance, not a 'real' one, since it tends to be based not on agreement of candidly expressed heart-felt evaluations, but upon a willingness to give temporary lip service to judgements with which the participants do not really agree" (Goffman 1967b: 11). In *The Nature of Deference and Demeanor*, good demeanor serves as an analogy of disattendability, whereas deference stands for the idea of civil inattention: "Each individual is responsible for the demeanor image of himself and the deference image of others [...]. While it may be true that the individual has a unique self all his own, evidence of this possession is thoroughly a product of joint ceremonial labor, the part expressed though the individual's demeanor being no more significant than the part conveyed by others though their deferential behavior toward him" (Goffman 1967c: 84–85). A similar constellation of mutually dependent models of behavior also appears in works of other scholars, like Georg Simmel (see footnote 38 in this chapter); Thomas Nagel (who discusses the importance of reticence as a behavioral norm that regulates concealment and exposure and is under stress in contemporary American society; Nagel 1998); or Talcott Parsons et al. (who present the idea of double contingency as a paradigm that underlies ego's and alter's choices in the process of interaction (Parsons et al. 1962) that is further elaborated by Niklas Luhmann in his *Social Systems*; Luhmann 1995: 103–36).

defines the degree to which actions of the citizens are limited. Civil inattention, in turn, should be understood as the state's abstaining from paying attention to citizens. I understand the "attention" of the state as a wide range of measures that it might apply to citizens as a reaction to their actions, varying from surveillance to a harsher response, such as criminal prosecution. In the case of both disattendability and civil inattention, every interaction is defined by these rules, which turns these principles into normative configuration of everyday *routines*, and not only individual actions.⁴² When I speak about the state's concession of civil inattention to its citizens, I refer to its abstaining from applying such measures.

Within the late Soviet literary sphere, instruments that the state had in its arsenal—censorship, punitive psychiatry, imprisonment, and exile—were all tools of civil *attention* that was exercised when disattendability border was crossed. They served as signals of what *should not* happen or appear in the late socialist Soviet public sphere, thus indicating the lines where the latter began and disattendability had to be exercised. For instance, Galina Manevich sees Pasternak affair as an example of such "drawing the line not to cross":

The situation with Pasternak's novel *Doctor Zhivago* marked the line not to cross. It appeared in the biography of a whole generation of poets and artists who preferred the freedom of creativity in the "underground," or "secret freedom," in Pushkin's words, to the faltering possibility of social adaptation. (Manevich in Alpatova 2005: 55)⁴³

These mechanisms that the state uses to communicate its vision of the socialist "reality" limit the field of unrestrained action of writers to a certain space—a private sphere. While Goffman left the aspect of privacy aside in his writings (due to his focus on the interaction process and behavior of individuals in public), building off of his writings, the public sphere can be theorized as a space where disattendability is to be uninterruptedly exercised to earn civil inattention, while the private sphere is a space defined by the lack of these limitations, a realm where there is no need to perform disattendability.

⁴² See also Alexei Yurchak (2006: 77–125) on the importance of performing ritualized routines in public in order to secure a possibility "to become engaged in other creative and unanticipated meanings and forms of everyday life that these ritualized acts and utterances enabled but did not determine in full" (Yurchak 2006: 80).

⁴³ "История с романом Б. Пастернака «Доктор Живаго» очень четко обозначила непереходимый рубеж. Он возник в биографии целого поколения поэтов и художников, которые предпочли половинчатой возможности социальной адаптации свободу творчества в «подполье», то есть «тайную свободу», говоря словами Пушкина."

Raymond Geuss was first to connect the idea of disattendability to privacy in his work on shame as a practice of privacy.⁴⁴ Quite importantly, he underscored the routinized character of disattendability and civil inattention that Goffman never explicitly mentioned:

The principle of disattendability states that in such [public] contexts and places I am to be unobtrusive or, at any rate, to avoid being *systematically* obtrusive. In other words, I am to allow the other whom I may encounter to disattend to me, to get on with whatever business he or she has without needing to take account of me. I am not to force myself on anyone's attention. (Geuss 2001: 13–14, my emphasis)⁴⁵

The expectation of disattendability can thus be taken as a demarcation line for the public sphere, beyond which (in the private) no such expectation is made. Disattendability belongs to the realm of the public, the same as its violation can only be registered within the public sphere. Civil inattention shapes the public sphere together with disattendability, where it has to be constantly exercised, and also spans into the private sphere whenever disattendability principle is violated and the intruder has to be punished. Therefore, in the private sphere, late Soviet authors were allowed not to exercise disattendability: “keep writing whatever you want, just do not show it to anyone—but if you do, then make sure it conforms to the norms,” seems to read the message sent by the state.

An important part of Goffman's social model is mutual agreement of participants on the adherence to disattendability and civil inattention.⁴⁶ However, the scholar posits that although

⁴⁴ In speaking about the Ancient World, he takes the example of Diogenes of Sinope, who in 4 B.C. would masturbate in the Athenian Agora and analyzes why his act was considered offensive by his co-citizens, grounding their indignation over his behavior in the violation of the tacit principle of disattendability that he adopts from Goffman.

⁴⁵ Drawing on Geuss' analysis, Axel Gelfert develops a “disattendability/civil inattention model of privacy,” in which “what constitutes a breach of privacy is neither the acquisition of new information *per se*, nor the formation of judgments by others, but the fact that undue attention is being paid to routinized (or otherwise unobtrusive) aspects of the target's everyday life” (Gelfert 2014: 151). Therefore, he bridges the idea of privacy with the observance of civil inattention that others concede to the individual if he behaves routinely (“A state of privacy [...] is a state of affairs where disattendability on the part of the individual is matched by the civil inattention the social environment accords him or her” [Gelfert 2014: 177]) and diagnoses a violation of privacy if civil inattention has stopped to be exercised *before* any breach of disattendability has occurred. In doing so, he implicitly upholds Goffman's characterization of deference (which Goffman interprets as a synonym of civil inattention) as a privilege that cannot be obtained by the individual independently of others: “the individual may desire, earn, and deserve deference, but by and large he is not allowed to give it to himself, being forced to seek it from others” (Goffman 1967c: 58). The difference between the positions of the two scholars lies in the fact that Goffman only theorizes about civil inattention under conditions of interaction in public (“To behave properly and to have the right to civil inattention are related: propriety on the individual's part tends to ensure his being accorded civil inattention; extreme impropriety on his part is likely to result in his being stared at or studiously not seen” [1963a: 87]), whereas Gelfert's theory extends civil inattention toward the private sphere, too, and thus resonates with the iconic formula of privacy by Warren and Brandeis—“the right to be let alone” in that it makes privacy “the right not to be attended to.”

⁴⁶ Goffman resorts to the categories of symmetry and asymmetry to describe two categories of the rule of conduct, to which the individual is subdued in the presence of others: symmetrical rules of conduct prescribe the individual to have obligations or expectations regarding others that these others have with regard to him; asymmetrical rules

ideally the person should excel in both aspects—perform disattendability and concede civil inattention—the failure to adhere to either of them should not necessarily be the reason for the reciprocal disavowal of such aspects of behavior by others:

The failure of an individual to show proper deference [civil inattention] to others does not necessarily free them from the obligation to act with good demeanor [perform disattendability] in his presence, however disgruntled they may be at having to do this. Similarly, the failure of an individual to conduct himself with proper demeanor does not always relieve those in his presence from treating him with proper deference. (Goffman 1967c: 84)⁴⁷

In the political sphere, the asymmetry of performing disattendability/conceding civil inattention does not function: any act of political disattendability provokes the relinquishment of the duty of civil inattention by the state and triggers certain punishment for the individual.⁴⁸ The stakes in the political field are much higher than those in social interactions: here, the violation of disattendability puts the foundations of the state and society in danger. The important difference between democratic and non-democratic states is that in the former, protective measures that come as a result of the violation of the principle of disattendability by individuals usually lie within legal boundaries, whereas in non-democratic states, many actions of the state against certain individuals or whole groups may seem arbitrary. Dmitrii Kozlov registers this situation in the late Soviet Union:

Despite the fact that the principle “everything is forbidden that is not permitted” started to change to a reverse formula “everything is permitted that is not forbidden” during the Thaw, the border between the forbidden and the permitted remained flexible and porous. It was another ideological discovery of the era: arbitrariness in the choice of methods of punishment and reward was a no less effective tool of governing than the strict repressive politics. Thus, jazzmen were no longer persecuted for their performances but every concert, festival, concert tour or music record became the subject of negotiations and compromises, the result of which was not clear to any part of the process at its start. (Kozlov 2018)⁴⁹

lead others to treat and be treated by an individual differently from the way he treats and is treated by them (Goffman 1967c: 52–53).

⁴⁷ “Improper conduct, however, does not automatically release others from the obligation of extending civil inattention to the offender, although it often weakens it” (Goffman 1963a: 87).

⁴⁸ Although the gravity of the punishment may differ depending on the regime, the dissipation of civil inattention is inevitable. Even in democracies the “toleration of the intolerant” (Rawls 1999: 190–94) only lasts as long as the debates do not hit political keys. Dorota Mokrosinska calls it the “liberal tolerance paradox”: “the commitment to equal freedom commits liberals to tolerate the intolerant as long as their intolerant views are kept off the political realm” (Mokrosinska 2015: 189).

⁴⁹ “Притом, что принцип «запрещено все, что не разрешено» в период оттепели начал меняться на обратный: «разрешено все, что не запрещено», – граница между запрещенным и разрешенным оставалась принципиально подвижной и проницаемой. Это было еще одним идеологическим открытием эпохи: волюнтаризм в выборе методов наказания и поощрения оказывался не менее эффективным инструментом управления, чем строгая репрессивная политика. Так, джазменов перестали преследовать за исполнение

The diversity of strategies employed by the state to indicate the border of disattendability points at a component that echoes Goffman's idea of asymmetrical behavior in exercising disattendability and civil inattention—different *levels* of civil inattention are possible in the interaction. In our social encounters with others, we also allow some leniency toward others' failures at disattendability, forgive certain missteps, and continue to concede civil inattention. In the political sphere, the palette of censorship instruments that the late Soviet state operated indicated the existence of several “thresholds of tolerance” that were exercised by the state toward “misbehaving” writers or political activists. The violation at one level did not necessarily exclude the person from the interaction—it just redefined the rules for upcoming interactions and set another bar of disattendability. It also placed the person within the focus of the state, heavily reducing civil *in*attention to him. Vladimir Bukovskii's example serves as a perfect illustration of such restructuring, with forced psychiatric treatment employed as a measure of the first degree, and imprisonment serving as the next step of responding to the repeated case of violated disattendability.⁵⁰ Such flexibility was vital for the late Soviet state that struggled to preserve its legitimacy in the changing global contexts (where connections of the Soviet private sphere to the outer world that often bypassed the official public sphere were increasing) and sought to ensure continued communication with citizens.⁵¹

In this regard, as Siniavskii (1980) explains, the rise of samizdat to a force to be reckoned with had major repercussions for official literature. The appearance of a direct opposition to the regime pushed the latter toward becoming more lenient with less oppositional writers out of the fear that they might also join samizdat and turn into dissidents. The border of disattendability shifted, if ever slightly, since in light of “straightforward abnormality,” “slightly deviant” became grudgingly re-coded as “normal.” The state was willing to allow more, as long as “more” was not going to become a disturbance—a political course in culture that led to the rise of “Brezhnevian pluralism”:

This is how a completely new style of Soviet culture was crafted—the style of Brezhnevian pluralism. It does not have a unified aesthetic—it is solemnly and proudly faceless and, therefore, all-allowing, omnivorous. Even more importantly, ideology does not weigh on it—it is hanging somewhere beside and over the culture, as a gigantic portrait of the leader. It has

музыки, но каждый концерт, фестиваль, выезд на гастроли и запись пластинки становились предметом торгов и компромиссов, итог которых изначально не был ясен ни одной из сторон.”

⁵⁰ See footnote 15 in this chapter.

⁵¹ Cf. Mal'tsev (1980: 316): “The state needs at least some points of contact with the population.” [Режим нуждается хоть в каких-то точках контакта с населением].

accepted its uselessness and allows to deceive itself; its only wish is to be let alone to live the rest of its days in peace. (Brashinskii 1999)⁵²

In line with Goffman's scheme, the requirement of disattendability placed by the state onto cultural actors who wish to be part of the public sphere that Brashinskii identifies here is a call for privacy, but on the side of the state—its desire “to be let alone.” At the same time, the very fact that the state uses privacy as a tool to limit writers' actions raises a question about repressive functions that privacy could perform in late Soviet society. While the state did guarantee a sphere or a possibility of free action within the borders of the principle of disattendability, the privacy that it conceded to citizens in general and writers in particular was not intended to foster their personal development—rather, it served as proof that the state was performing its duties toward the citizens in bringing them closer to the construction of Communism. It served as a bargaining tool in a deal, in which both the state and the citizens abstained from reciprocal destruction to be able to enjoy the peace of being “let alone” by the other side. From this perspective, late Soviet state was like a typical “gardening state,” a “therapeutic-surgical state,” a “space-managing” state theorized by Zygmunt Bauman,⁵³ and in this state, privacy was not a positive thing, for it came with a caveat—it was handed over to the writer with a list of small print demands that needed to be observed.

Responses of the literary intelligentsia to the controlling mechanisms and to the disattendability border can be interpreted from the point of view of “primary” and “secondary” adjustments to the system which strives to exercise dominance over its subjects that Goffman describes in his study of the functioning of asylums as complex organizations built up by groups that pursue opposite aims and, thus, are often in an antagonistic relationship with each other—a model that fits perfectly with the late Soviet context, too. According to Goffman, primary adjustments reflect the commitment of individuals to the aims of the institution (Goffman 1961b: 202), thus contributing “to institutional stability: the participant who adapts to the organization in this way is likely to keep on participating as long as the organization wants him to, and, if he leaves

⁵² “Так вырабатывается принципиально новый стиль советской культуры – стиль брежневского плюрализма. В нем нет единой эстетики – он торжественно и гордо безлик, а следовательно, разрешителен, всеяден. Еще существенней, что над ним не довлеет идеология – она висит где-то рядом и над культурой, как гигантский портрет вождя, – смирившаяся с собственной бесполезностью, позволяющая себя обманывать, желающая только одного – чтобы ее оставили в покое и дали мирно дожить свои дни.”

⁵³ “[...] [i]t was a gardening state in so far as it usurped the right to set apart the “useful” and the “useless” plants, to select a final model of harmony that made some plants useful and others useless, and to propagate such plants as are useful while exterminating the useless ones. It was a therapeutic/surgical state, in so far as it set the standard of “normality” and thus drew the borderline between the acceptable and the intolerable, between health and disease, fighting the second to support the first—and in so far as it cast its subjects in the role of the patients: the sites of ailments, yet not themselves agents able to defeat the malady without the instruction of a knowledgeable and resourceful tutor. It was a space-managing state, in so far as it was busy landscaping the wasteland (it was the landscaping intention that cast the operating territory as wasteland), subjecting all local features to one, unifying, homogenizing principle of harmony.” (Bauman 1992: 178–79).

before this, to leave in a way that smooths the transition for his replacement” (Goffman 1961b: 199). In the context of late Soviet culture, primary adjustments may be seen as unconditional adherence of writers to the style of socialist realism and perpetuation of its codes in their literary work.

Primary adjustments are complemented by secondary adjustments, which Goffman metaphorically defines as the “underlife” of an institution—mechanisms of response to institutionalized practices of control that are characterized by some or significant deviation from the institution’s aims (Goffman 1961b: 199–200). Goffman subdivided secondary adjustments into two categories—disruptive and contained. Disruptive adjustments demonstrate the intention of participants to abandon the organization or radically alter its structure, in either case leading to a rupture in the smooth operation of the organization—*samizdat* and *tamizdat* exemplify this type of behavior in the late Soviet literary field. An important aspect of disruptive adjustments is that they can only be considered disruptive if the state is aware of their existence. Sheila Fitzpatrick develops a similar argument in her introduction to the edited volume on sedition, or *kramola*: “Kramola, in short, is not fully kramola unless the regime is listening” (Fitzpatrick 2011: 4). To be a disruption, the action, however banal it may sound, needs to disrupt—it needs to intervene into a certain fabric to the extent of failing to be disattendable and turning civil inattention into civil *attention*. The disruption will never rise to the level of disruption until the state notices it and starts to engage in reparatory procedures. Therefore, although disruptive adjustments are antagonistic to the institution, they cannot exist without it—they need the regime to withstand and to nurture their disruptive potential.

Contained adjustments “share with primary adjustments the characteristic of fitting into existing institutional structures without introducing pressure for radical change, and which can, in fact, have the obvious function of deflecting efforts that might otherwise be disruptive” (Goffman 1961b: 199–200). Aesopian language or publishing on periphery emerge as such forms of adjustment to the censorship practices of the Soviet state. They were part and parcel of *promezhutochnaia literatura* that navigated between the borderlines of disattendability and civil inattention to carve a niche within the “state sphere,” where it could offer a platform for subaltern public discussions even within the officially controlled space—a kind of a literary private kitchen.

LITERARY PRIVATE KITCHENS

Promezhutochnaia literatura, or the type of literature that “neither praises the Soviet authorities and the wise Party nor denounces the Soviet order,” to which many texts that I discussed in this book belong, received its name—in-between literature—from an article penned by Iurii Mal’tsev

for the émigré journal *Kontinent* [Mal'tsev 1980: 285].⁵⁴ Although Mal'tsev recognizes the efforts of such authors to distance themselves from the tenets of socialist realism, he vehemently criticizes what he believes to be the writers' inability to preserve their integrity, which he sees in their failure to bring the texts to another level by discussing "fundamental" problems of Soviet society (Mal'tsev 1980: 289).⁵⁵ Therefore, by calling this type of literature *promezhutochnaia literatura*, Mal'tsev not only characterizes it in terms of the level of dissent that it performed; his article also implies that only dissident literature is "true" literature worthy of bearing the name of this category of arts, while socialist realist texts arise as non-literature (*neliteratura*) in his writing. As a result, the term *promezhutochnaia literatura* acquires a second meaning: that of *nedoliteratura*—not-literature-enough—something that lies in-between literature and non-literature. Despite the fact that Mal'tsev labeled this kind of texts unworthy of praises given by Western critics (Mal'tsev 1980: 285), this literature that existed between conformism and opposition, between

⁵⁴ "[...] не славят советскую власть и мудрую партию, и не обличают советский режим."

⁵⁵ Similar criticism is voiced by Andrei Amal'rik in his letter to Anatolii Kuznetsov, where he diagnoses a lack of independence that this type of literature experiences: "However, I believe that the important thing here is not that writers serve the KGB, but that literature performs, just like the KGB, service functions. So, it is not about whether your hints are just or not, but about the fact that all this poetically-political posturing that flourished in the Khrushchev era and seemed superfluous to his successors has as little relation to independent art as Kochetov's texts. I even think, that Kochetov's sincere obscurantism deserves more respect than the pretense rebellion of writers, who alongside vodka and black caviar served as an export item for the regime [Но, мне кажется, главное не то, что писатели служат КГБ, а что литература выполняет, подобно КГБ, служебные функции, не то, справедливы или нет Ваши намеки, а то, что все это поэтически-политическое филярство, которое расцвело в эпоху Хрущева и показалось не особенно нужным его преемникам, имеет столь же мало отношения к независимому искусству, как и писания Кочетова. Мне кажется даже, что искренний обскурантизм Кочетова заслуживает большего уважения, чем мнимое бунтарство тех, кто наряду с водкой и черной икрой был долгое время нужным режиму экспортным товаром; Amal'rik 2005: 381]. At the same time, Roi Medvedev criticizes Mal'tsev for his one-sided criticism of in-between literature that does not take into account the failings of other types of literature: "Some theoreticians and émigré activists treated Trifonov with hostility. Even a term was coined [for writers like him]—'in-between literature.' It implied that there also exists émigré literature that tells only the truth and always does it out loud. There is also official Russian Soviet literature that only tells what the Soviet state wants to hear. Among them, there sits an in-between literature that does not have much value for the people and its culture. In actuality, the situation was much more complex. Quite often, émigré literature would only say what its powerful western sponsors wanted to hear, for they provided a significant financial support to Russian and other émigré publishing houses and journals. Unfortunately, only few writers who had emigrated could preserve their personal and creative independence" [Некоторые теоретики и деятели эмиграции относились к Юрию Трифонову крайне враждебно. Был даже изобретен термин – «промежуточная литература». При этом имелось в виду что есть русская эмигрантская литература, которая говорит обо всем только правду и во весь голос. Есть также официальная русская советская литература, которая говорит только то, что хочет слышать советская власть. А между ними находится и какая-то «промежуточная литература», которая большой ценности для народа и его культуры иметь не может. В действительности все обстояло гораздо сложнее. Очень часто эмигрантская литература говорила лишь то, что хотели слышать от нее влиятельные западные круги, оказывавшие русским и другим эмигрантским издательствам и журналам немалую финансовую помощь. К сожалению, мало кто из писателей, оказавшихся в эмиграции, сумел сохранить как личную, так и творческую независимость; Medvedev 2005: 301–2].

disattendability and civil inattention, was vital for people who may not have had access to samizdat but were only feeding off of the realm of official literature, as Roi Medvedev posits in his analysis of the Soviet reading culture:

During “stagnation,” Trifonov’s books, Vysotskii’s songs, Shukshin’s films, Okudzhava’s novels, theatrical productions by Liubimov and Tovstonogov were a very important factor in the life of ordinary people and intelligentsia that ensured continuity and preserved hope. All these and many other people continued to work within the system that existed in the country, which is precisely why they could influence many people: ordinary teachers, engineers, doctors, and officials. (Medvedev 2005: 301–2)⁵⁶

Many people who read Ehrenburg and Dudintsev, discovered Trifonov, I. Grekova, and Baranskaia, sympathized with the characters of Panova, Voinovich, Rozov, and others, often voiced their thoughts publicly in an unprecedented debate that Denis Kozlov (2013) studied closely in his book on the readers of *Novyi mir*. The works that now build the core of the post-Stalinist literary canon were also conceived, devoured, and discussed in tiny kitchens of the newly built apartments. Therefore, while not necessarily following through with the straightforward deviation so desired by Mal’tsev, *promezhutochnaia literatura* rendered a service of a different kind, in my opinion: it diversified late Soviet literary landscapes by offering a chance of thinking alternatively but not antagonistically. It was a site of *raznomyslie* [diversified thinking], and not a symptom of *inakomyslie* [antagonistical way of thinking], if we use Boris Firsov’s terminology who interpreted Stalinist society as a space of forced *edinomyslie* [the only way of thinking] and viewed the post-Stalinist era as a time when additional, “less constrained forms of social conscience” developed that were distinguished by the preservation or rupture of a connection to the current guiding idea of society.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ “В годы «застоя» книги Трифонова, песни Высоцкого, фильмы Шукшина, романы Окуджавы, спектакли Любимова и Товстоногова были очень важным фактором в жизни народа и интеллигенции, сохранившим преемственность и надежду. Все эти и многие другие люди продолжали работать внутри существующей в стране системы, но именно поэтому они могли оказывать влияние на очень многих людей: на рядовых учителей, инженеров, врачей, да и на чиновников.”

⁵⁷ “Разрушить монолит единомыслия, сформировавшийся к концу сталинского правления, значило прийти к распространению в обществе раскрепощенных форм общественного сознания, какими правомерно можно считать разномыслие и инакомыслие. В первом случае человек приступает к реконструкции картины мира, не порывая с конституирующей этот мир идеей, что не мешает ему быть ее серьезным критиком. Во втором случае ментальная картина мира радикально меняется под влиянием другого типа устройства общественной жизни” (Firsov 2008: 10). Firsov distinguishes several periods of *raznomyslie* in the USSR: a catacomb period (the last years of Stalinism and the Khrushchev era); the time of structural transitions and stagnation; and perestroika and glasnost (Firsov 2010). Viktor Voronkov disagrees with him on the Stalinist times and postulates that *raznomyslie* did not exist under Stalin and one can only speak about this phenomenon starting after Khrushchev’s Secret Speech, claiming that under totalitarianism, “*raznomyslie* would not become public” [*ne stanovilos’ faktorom publichnosti*; Voronkov 2010: 31]. Aleksandr Daniel’ differentiates *inakomyslie* and *raznomyslie* on the basis of the subject who experiences it: he sees *inakomyslie* as a characteristics of a person and *raznomyslie* as a characteristics of society (Daniel’ 2010).

Under such conditions, this literature turned into a bizarre “private kitchen” that performed both private and public functions simultaneously—similarly to the kitchens in newly-built individual apartments that were popular loci of socialization in the late Soviet era. On the one hand, literature turned into a place where one could escape—a much-needed private sphere—and became one of the “niches of privacy” where it was possible to discuss and negotiate the world where society lived or to which it should strive. On the other hand, it assumed the role of a surrogate for the public sphere within the “state” sphere, echoing the idea of the popular Russian intellectual of the 19th century Aleksander Gertsen (1812–1870): “For the nation that has lost its public freedom, literature is the only tribune that is high enough for the outcry of resentment and conscience to be heard” (Gertsen 2012: 145).⁵⁸

The in-between literature was therefore part of a larger field that scholars have called the “informal-public sphere”—a transitory area that demonstrates the features of the private and the public spheres.⁵⁹ Built up by social,⁶⁰ economic,⁶¹ and cultural practices,⁶² it could be seen as an example of what Michel Foucault defined as a heterotopic space (Foucault 2008)—a site of otherness within the ritualized late Soviet public realm defined by conventions and traditions. Goffman speaks of such forms of existence within asylums that were his study ground as “free places,” by which he understands “bounded physical spaces in which ordinary levels of surveillance and restriction were markedly reduced, spaces, where the inmate could openly engage

⁵⁸ “У народа, лишённого общественной свободы, литература – единственная трибуна, с высоты которой он заставляет услышать крик своего возмущения и своей совести.” Well-known are the quotes by Nikolai Nekrasov (“You may not be a poet, but you have to be a citizen” [Поэтом можешь ты не быть, но гражданином быть обязан]; Nekrasov 1979: 228) and Evgenii Evtushenko (“Poet in Russia is more than just a poet” [Поэт в России больше, чем поэт]; Evtushenko 1998: 364) where they call upon civic duties of writers.

⁵⁹ The term “informal public sphere” belongs to Zdravomyslova and Voronkov (2002) and will be used in this thesis to refer to such transitory areas. Other terms that describe similar developments in state socialisms include “the underlife” (Zdravomyslova and Voronkov 2002; Goffman 1961b); “quasi-public sphere” (Zdravomyslova 2002); “private-public sphere” (Voronkov and Chikadze 2002), “alternative public sphere” or “second society” (Hankiss 1988), “alternative sphere of socio-political interaction” (Hankiss 1988; Rotkirch 2000), “gray area” (Amal’rik 1970; Šiklová 1990; Nešpor 2014; Zubok 2014).

⁶⁰ Yurchak speaks about practices of *obshchenie* [social mingling; (Yurchak 2006: 148–51)] and also distinguishes spaces within the official realm where alternative communication was possible, such as literary club *Derzanie* [Dare], archaeological club in the Palace of Pioneers, research institutes, where theoretical physicists worked, and café Saigon on Nevski Avenue, as examples in Leningrad (Yurchak 2006: 134–46). Late Soviet era also witnessed the rebirth of salon practices of the pre-Revolutionary era. Many apartments converted into welcoming harbors for intellectual discussions, such as apartments of Elena Stroeveva, Lidiia and Ülo Sooster, Iurii Nolev-Sobolev’s apartment, madame Frida’s salon, etc. Newly opening cafes, such as café Artisticheskoe [Artistic] or Siniia ptitsa [Bluebird] increasingly became places of attraction in the 1960s.

⁶¹ See, e.g., Goehrke’s elaborations on the invisible network [das unsichtbare Netzwerk; Goehrke 2005: 371]; Hankiss’ work on the “second economy” (Hankiss 1988: 18); Grossman (1984); and studies of *blat* [nepotism] by Ledeneva (1998) and Kiess (2007).

⁶² For example, many apartments turned into sites of artistic exhibitions, where non-conformist art and photography would meet their viewers (Alpatova 2005).

in a range of tabooed activities with some degree of security.” He thereby points at their potential to provide extended freedom within a system marked by repression (Goffman 1961b: 230).

The emergence of such islets of freedom coincides with Stalin’s death and the Thaw, according to Viktor Voronkov and Jan Wielgohs (2004: 116). Elena Zdravomyslova (1996b) suggests that throughout the first decade of their existence, alternative types of communication were located only within the private sphere, whereas, starting with the Brezhnev era, they could also exist within the public realm.⁶³ The reason behind Zdravomyslova’s periodization is quite logical, for she grounds her research in the studies of physical sites of informal-public communication, mostly focusing on café Saigon in Leningrad.⁶⁴

Meanwhile, if we distance ourselves from the focus on spaces as *physical* places and conceive of them as *mental* sites, the texts of Dudintsev, Ehrenburg, and Panova, to name just a few, will clearly indicate that the roots of the public existence of private niches were also present in the Khrushchev era. In the previous section, the analysis of privacy as an interaction between the state and the writers has demonstrated how literary texts could turn into the private sphere by carving out niches of privacy by pushing the disattendability border ever slightly further. Many of the works that I studied in this book that belong to *promezhutochnaia literatura* should be seen as simultaneously performing such a role of a private institution in the public, a space where a freer discussion of diverse topics becomes possible.⁶⁵ Such an approach could significantly expand the timeline of practices of building niches of privacy within the public sphere by putting the Khrushchev era onto the maps of informal-public histories of Russia and stimulate interest in the revision of the Stalin-era practices and sites of communication under totalitarianism through the informal-public lens.

Voronkov describes the informal-public sphere as “a specific public sphere where everything, or almost everything could be discussed” (Voronkov 2010: 33),⁶⁶ thus connecting this realm to the Habermasian idea of the bourgeois public sphere, where deliberations between citizens took place.

⁶³ Zdravomyslova’s argument also echoes Habermas’ thoughts on this topic, who also located the informal-public sphere within the private realm. In his *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, he distinguished between the sphere of public authority and the private realm and divided the latter into two coexistent components: the intimate sphere that embraces “the realm of commodity exchange and of social labor” and the “authentic ‘public sphere,’” which he understood as “a public sphere constituted by private people” (Habermas 1991: 30).

⁶⁴ Indeed, the “gray zone” owes its expansion in the late Soviet era to the “cultural renaissance” of the 1970s–1980s, which manifested in the growing number of “state institutions where intellectuals could congregate and interact among themselves” that were sponsored by the state (Zubok 2014: 336–37).

⁶⁵ Analyses of informal-public institutions of the late Soviet era in terms of the public sphere are numerous, e.g., Zdravomyslova (1996) analyzes café Saigon in Leningrad as a public sphere and a prerequisite of civil society in the USSR. However, official Soviet literature has not yet been examined from this perspective.

⁶⁶ “[...] специфическая публичная сфера в которой можно было обсуждать все, или практически все.”

According to Habermas, bourgeois public sphere originated in the informal-public settings—salons, where

[...] [t]he heirs of the humanistic-aristocratic society, in their encounter with the bourgeois intellectuals (through sociable discussions that quickly developed into public criticism), built a bridge between the remains of a collapsing form of publicity (the courtly one) and the precursor of a new one: the bourgeois public sphere [...]. (Habermas 1991: 30)

In a historical parallel, the informal-public sphere is also often viewed as a bridge between the collapsing socialist order and the emerging proto-democracy of the perestroika era.⁶⁷ I argue that Karpinskii's idea of words as deeds that I recalled at the beginning of this chapter should not only be seen as a call for action but also as a testimony to a transformation that was *already* underway due to the efforts of late Soviet literature—not only dissident texts but also many official publications in thick journals or separate editions of individual texts and collected works—it is not a coincidence that Habermasian salons are institutions of “an early public sphere in the world of letters”; Habermas 1991: 30). *Provezhutochnaia literatura* served as an *ersatz* public sphere—a subaltern counterpublic (Warner 2002) that performed the functions of a liberal public sphere within the authoritarian “state sphere” by contributing heavily to the creation of what I call “a democratic circle” in the late USSR.

The issues upon which *provezhutochnaia literatura* dwells were discussed in private kitchens in Soviet apartments—a sort of the “hidden public sphere” of the Soviet Union. At the same time, these kitchens can be seen as “privacy niches,” parts of the retreat into the private sphere that housing programs launched by Nikita Khrushchev (and continued, though on a smaller scale, in the Brezhnev era), made possible. When authors decided to problematize some of these issues in their work, they stepped into the “democratic circle” by bringing in their private visions of the discussion to the table. The influx of topics that focused on the realm of the private that I discussed in previous chapters is intriguing as it signals changing patterns in the field of cultural production. Neither explicitly subversive nor perfectly fitting the mold of socialist realism, they tested the borders of the official literary realm and made a step toward broadening them, if they succeeded to be published. The agency of literature thus resides in the new meanings and forms that it developed not only outside but also *within* the official culture. With socialist ideology deeply grounded in the celebration of the public space and collective forms of life, these texts—including portraits of Lenin in *Oktiabr'*—undermine the monopoly of the hegemonic aesthetic by offering alternative visions of existence that are presented as no less socialist in nature—perhaps, the texts in *Oktiabr'* even more so than ones in *Novyi mir*.

⁶⁷ See the research on the informal-public sphere in footnote 59 in this chapter.

Henri Lefebvre regarded space as a perfect tool for a hegemonic class to produce and enforce its ideology: “(Social) space is a (social) product [...]. [T]he space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action [...]. [I]n addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power” (Lefebvre 1991: 26, original emphasis). His words could be applied both to the production of physical spaces (urban planning and architecture) and the production of fictional spaces (ones imagined in official culture). Socialist spaces of all kinds served as vehicles for the transportation of modes of behavior and ways of thinking about the reality that the socialist state strove to embed within people to foster the rise of the “new Soviet man” (discussed in Chapter Three). However, if space can serve as a means of enforcing domination, it can then also be used to subvert this domination. The production of private spatialities in literary works may thus be regarded as a manifestation of “transcripts of resistance” (Scott 1990)—forms of subaltern reaction to socialist realist cartographies of fictional realities, a counter-production of ideology *within* ideology. It is imperative to emphasize that without the possibility to read the minds of these texts’ creators, we cannot be sure about their *intention* to produce *a different space* rather than just *a space* that would serve to satisfy their creative aspirations in a particular work. It is this uncertainty that makes these texts epitomes of *raznomyslie* and not *inakomyslie*—they are primarily results of an artistic search for diversity rather than deliberate subversion. At the same time, their presence in the official literary field makes them open transcripts of resistance that attempt to override public transcripts of power from below, thereby demonstrating a version of the “weapons of the weak” (Scott 1985).⁶⁸ Their power was predicated on the precariousness of information sources in late Soviet times that endowed printed texts with many levers of influence, in view of the sociologist Igor’ Kon:

The press was very important at that time. We could not get foreign newspapers, and Western radio was jammed. In fact, the thing was not in the information *per se*, but in the types of questions and the degree of openness that could be present in the public discussions. Newspapers and journals were bound by strict limits of official ideology, but many of them tried to expand the boundaries of the allowed. Every new publication moved the bar of the possible to the next level—not only for the writer but also for the readers. (Kon 2000: 143)⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Under weapons of the weak, Scott understands the “prosaic but constant struggle between the peasantry and those who seek to extract labor, food, taxes, rents, and interest from them [that] stop well short of outright collective defiance (Scott 1985: xvi). In his later work, he elaborates the idea of hidden and public transcripts of resistance that both the dominating group and the subordinates are using in order to gain and preserve power. Whereas the former represent instruments that neither of the groups uses openly, the latter stands for the “open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate” and “is unlikely to tell the whole story about power relations” (Scott 1990: 2).

⁶⁹ “Пресса была тогда очень важна. Иностранные газеты были нам недоступны, западное радио приходилось слушать через глушилки. Да и дело было не в информации, а в том, какие вопросы и с какой степенью откровенности можно было обсуждать публично. Газеты и журналы были связаны жесткими рамками

Thick journals were sites of “ideological battles” (Prokhanov 2009: 16),⁷⁰ and articulations of privacy in officially published literary texts are testimonies of small-scale moments of empowerment: every single text that made it into the “state sphere” through a printed book or thick journal wove new tones into the canvas of socialist realism, thereby transforming it into a literary current “with a human face.”⁷¹ As Roi Medvedev recollects, authors like Iurii Trifonov were committed to publishing their works in the USSR for exactly this reason, although not every author was in the position to put this philosophy into practice:

Iurii Trifonov was deeply convinced that an honest book published in the USSR is much more useful for the people and culture of the country than many good books that at that time were only published in emigration and of which no person in the country knew. I did not always agree with him, as for me, as a historian, and for many other people, there was no choice at all. I did not plan to emigrate but could only publish my works abroad. Vladimir Vysotskii who stayed and Aleksandr Galich who left the country were each right in their own way. (Medvedev 2005: 301–2)⁷²

Despite unconventional visions of the late Soviet reality that authors present in their texts, many of the texts that I analyzed were published and reached the larger Soviet readership. Thick journals and book editions made it back into the private kitchen where they were first conceived of by the writers. Discussions held about them—either self-reflection in the process of reading, dialogues with friends and colleagues, or letters to the editor and debates in the press—constructed an imperfect, but invaluable analog of the public sphere within the “state sphere.”

What this “democratic circle” represents to me are the early signals of the public sphere that came into full swing later, in the times of perestroika and glasnost. Small successes of the repertoires of privacy amounted to a large contestation of Soviet ideology, similarly to the totalitarian practices of agency by Soviet citizens, which Christel Lane described as “silent revolutions”—less obtrusive changes that left the existing social structure intact (Lane 1981: 2). *Promezhutochnaia literatura* played an important role in transforming the relations between Soviet

официальной идеологии, но многие из них пытались расширять границы дозволенного. Каждая новая публикация поднимала планку возможного не только для автора, но и для читателей.”

⁷⁰ “Общество развивалось через толстые журналы и книги, где происходила схватка идеологий.”

⁷¹ Geoffrey Hosking calls these developments in late Soviet literature “renewed realism” (Hosking 1980: x), thus hinting at a hiatus between the nineteenth-century Russian realism and the post-Pomerantsev literature and removing socialist realism from the Russian realist tradition.

⁷² “Юрий Трифонов был глубоко убежден, что честная книга, которую удастся издать в самом СССР, гораздо полезнее для народа и для культуры страны, чем многие хорошие книги, которые издавались тогда только в эмиграции и которых в стране никто не знал. Я не всегда мог с ним согласиться, так как и для меня как историка, и для многих других людей выбора вообще не было. Я не собирался эмигрировать, но мог издавать свои работы только за границей. По-своему были правы и Владимир Высоцкий, который остался, и Александр Галич, который эмигрировал.”

literature as a creative realm, on the one hand, and Soviet literature as an organization and a “finger on a ruling hand” that points into the direction of Communism, on the other, while also fostering novel models of thinking within ordinary citizens. While the texts of *promezhutochnaia literatura* did not directly argue for any specific change, their cumulative effort did lead to one: it seems that by the mid–1980s, the rightful presence of topics related to the private life in the public realm of the officially printed literature was beyond question. An indication of this situation is, for example, the fact that most literary works published in *Novyi mir* in the 1970s–1980s engaged predominantly with the characters’ private and not public world throughout most of the plot in comparison to their predecessors from the 1950s–1960s.⁷³ With public spaces increasingly becoming not only sites but also symbols of and reasons for protests in the 1960s–1970s all around the world (Fürst, Oseka, and Reynolds 2016), *promezhutochnaia literatura* can be seen as a part of this global movement to the transformation of the public sphere that took place globally. These major shifts involved bolder, louder, and securer articulations of a need for creative privacy—the right to be let alone—by writers, whose advocacy throughout these years can be consolidated under three codes—truth, inner freedom, and apoliticality.

CODES OF “CREATIVE” PRIVACY: TRUTH, INNER FREEDOM, AND APOLITICALITY

The driving force behind writers’ raising their voice to advocate for their “creative privacy” in the late Soviet era was the rhetoric of “truth” and “sincerity.” It came in response to the idea of “socialist truth” that was shaped by socialist realism and that, starting from the 1950s, met growing criticism in literary circles, most vividly expressed in Pomerantsev’s famous essay “On Sincerity in Literature.”⁷⁴ Not able to bluntly criticize socialist realism, Pomerantsev focused his essay on the misinterpretation and misapplication of this guiding style by most writers and censors. He singled out two types of insincerity: “artificiality” [*delannost’*] and the “embellishment of reality” [*lakirovka deistvitel’nosti*] and blamed both the writers who decided to “stick to the standard” [*proizvoditel’ standarta*] and the critics who were reluctant to look for novelty for the tedious contemporary literary works that one was condemned to read. Calling for “confession” [*ispoved’*] instead of “preaching” [*propoved’*] in literature (Pomerantsev 1953: 218), he insisted on “writing honestly” [*pisat’ nuzhno chestno*], understanding honesty as “not thinking about the faces of high- or not so high-ranked readers” (Pomerantsev 1953: 226).⁷⁵ Pomerantsev deemed it essential for

⁷³ These statistics are based on my reading of *Novyi mir* publications from March 1953 to March 1985.

⁷⁴ See the Introduction on the essay, its publication, and the reaction of the Soviet literary field to it.

⁷⁵ “[...] не думать о выражении лиц высоких и невысоких читателей.”

the future of Soviet literature that it should “raise true questions of life and introduce conflicts, in which people engage in everyday life” (Pomerantsev 1953: 245).⁷⁶

Following Pomerantsev's essay, authors began to condemn socialist realism for alienating the author from the reality of life. Aleksander Solzhenitsyn even went as far as to call this style an “oath of abstaining from the truth” (Solzhenitsyn 1975: 13).⁷⁷ This criticism was not only grounded in elevating the feats of ordinary Soviet people to the grotesque standard of “superbuilders of Communism,” it was also a reaction to the disappearance from literature of a whole layer of life that was not directly associated with the commitment to the socialist project—that included author's calls for closer attention to “ordinariness.” Writers wanted to start producing the standard—just different from the one socialist realism offered to them. They wanted to look at “standard” places, “standard” people, and their “standard” feelings, which, as it turned out by the early 1950s, were visible much less than “extraordinary” places, people, and feelings.

I understand this emergent late Soviet rhetoric of “sincerity” as a call for a more balanced distribution of the writer's attention between the characters' social roles and the circumstances of their personal life, feelings, and motives—a creation of a *union*, rather than an *opposition*, of the public and private spheres on the pages of literary works that sought to elucidate the “standard” within the “extraordinary” or to show that no “extraordinary” was obligatory in literature and that the standard was “enough” to deliver equally or maybe even more meaningful and powerful messages to the reader.

In the 1950s–1970s, many writers wove private aspects of life into the fabric of their literary texts, as Chapters Two and Three in this book show. “Privacy” thus came to symbolize “truth” in late Soviet literary culture, and its representation on the pages of literary works was viewed as authors' “sincerity.” It was part of a larger debate on “living in truth” that increasingly gained momentum across different socialist regimes—not only in the Soviet Union.⁷⁸ It drew direct connections between “truth” and the role of the writer in a society: “In the field of literature it [socialist realism] forbids what has in every age been the writer's essential task—to look at the world from his own independent viewpoint, to tell the truth as he sees it, and so to keep watch and ward in the interest of society as a whole” (Miłosz 1953: xii).

“Truth” encapsulated Zhivago's retreat to Varykino and Strepetov and Mikhailov's escape into a safety valve, it resonated in love confessions of Voinovich's teenagers, it raised its voice

⁷⁶ “[...] поднять подлинную тематику жизни, ввести в романы конфликты, занимающие людей в быту.”

⁷⁷ “[...] клятва воздержания от правды.”

⁷⁸ See, e.g., Havel's reflections on “living within the truth” and “living within the lie” (Havel 1985) which resonates with Solzhenitsyn's 1973 essay “Do Not Live within the Lie!” [Zhit' ne po lzhi!], where he calls on writers not to subdue to the censorship and operate following their integrity (Solzhenitsyn 1998 [1973]).

through family tensions between Trifonov's characters and was articulated in the language of Iashin's kolkhoz workers in "Levers." "Truth" was embodied in Lenin's bed habits and the fact that even the leader of the Revolution needs to eat, sleep, and sigh now and then about his duties ("Only Lenin knows, how hard Lenin's life was!"). "Truth" also referred to the effect that literary texts should have on the reader. The "truth" of a literary work rendered the characters that it brought onto its pages "truthful," or, at least, as Trifonov writes, made them come close to seem authentic: "I am striving to one thing—and it happens subconsciously—to find true characters that I have seen in the real life, I am striving to create them in a way that they have inner authenticity" (Trifonov 1985e: 248).⁷⁹ According to the him, the reader should have a feeling of the "authenticity of the characters' lives that I describe" [*oshchushchenie pravdivosti opisyyvaemoi zhizni*; Trifonov 1985f, 77]. This authenticity, and therefore, convincing the reader of live, real characters, was impossible to achieve with half-lives, lived only in the public sphere.

Yet, not only "truth" stood in direct connection to writing about privacy: privacy also turned into truth's refuge and retreat in many ways. Thus, the kolkhoz men from Iashin's "Levers" lament the dire status of truth in the contemporary society:

The one-armed man whom everyone called by his name and patronymic, Petr Kuz'mich, countered:

– Well, the truth—we do need it. It is only by the truth that we stand. However, guys, there's something I don't understand. [...] They have again dismissed our plan. Here's the truth, get it! They don't trust us.

– In our district, they only give the truth an honorary seat at the presidium's table, not to offend it and to make it keep its mouth shut, pale Konoplev said and threw his cigarette roach into a pot.

Shchukin also had something to say:

– Truth is only needed for meetings and on holidays, like criticism and self-criticism. It seems not to apply to reality—do I understand it correctly? (Iashin 1956: 503–4)⁸⁰

Iashin's characters emphasize the ritualistic character that truth has acquired in the country, in their opinion: it has become the concept that has preserved the signifier but has lost the signified, especially in everyday life. Iashin thereby creates a reality, where truth lives *in* and *through*

⁷⁹ "Я стремлюсь лишь к тому – и это происходит бессознательно, – чтобы находить абсолютно достоверные, в жизни увиденные характеры, стремлюсь к какой-то внутренней их правдивости."

⁸⁰ "А одорукий, которого все называли по имени и отчеству, Петром Кузьмичом, возразил:
– Ну, правда – она нужна. На ней все держимся. Только я, мужики, чего-то опять не понимаю. [...] От нашего плана опять ничего не осталось. Вот тебе и правда! Не верят нам.
– Правду у нас в районе сажают только в почетные президиумы, чтобы не обижалась да помалкивала, – сказал бледный Коноплев и бросил окуроч в горшок.
Ввернул свое слово и Щукин:
– Правда нужна только для собраний, по праздникам, как критика и самокритика. К делу она неприменима, – так, что ли, выходит?" See Chapter Three for the analysis of this literary text.

everyday language of the men but is endangered by the official formulaic vernacular, the “Sovietspeak.” It has no place in the public sphere full of empty signifiers that *reproduce* “truth” without *producing* truth. The private world becomes its refuge in the text. As a result, *promezhutochnaia literatura* in general and the texts that I studied in particular (ones that were published) serve as mediators between the private and the public spheres by “smuggling” small portions of truth into the official literary public realm and diversifying the idea of socialist truth that reigns there.

On both levels on which truth connects to the idea of privacy in the late Soviet era, the connection to freedom is also vivid: only in the private can freedom be exercised without the limits of disattendability weighing over them. At the same time, writing about privacy can be viewed as an opportunity to exercise another form of freedom in the official public sphere. The question of freedom and its connection to privacy was an important nexus point of many discussions of late Soviet intellectuals. Thus, Alexander Solzhenitsyn draws direct connections between the freedom of writing and the retreat into the private sphere in his autobiography *The Oak and the Calf* [Bodalsia telenok s dubom, 1975]: “A huge advantage of the underground writer is the freedom of his writing: he does not have to think about the censors or the editors, nothing stands in his way but the material with which he has to work, nothing looms over him but the *truth* (Solzhenitsyn 1975: 16, my emphasis).⁸¹ He thereby also reaffirms the connection between truth and the private sphere, as well as suggests that “creative privacy” (when the writer is let alone with their characters) is only possible if the writer works within the private sphere, i.e., intends his text for the private sphere, for they do not have to look back at censorship and necessity of being disattendable.

While Solzhenitsyn saw the possibility of freedom only within the private sphere, Leonid Ionin argued that the setting of the informal-public sphere can be equally regarded as “spaces of freedom.” He pursues this argument to challenge the conceptions of an unfree totalitarian individual that were predominant in the 1980s–early 1990s when his article was written (Ionin 1997: 10–12). He builds upon George Bataille’s theory of prohibition and transgression to emphasize the role of borders that are established by the state in the subjective experiences of freedom and calls for a relative approach to the notion of freedom in politically unfree states: “With regard to Soviet life, it means that however unfree Soviet life may seem according to the universal

⁸¹ “Сильное преимущество подпольного писателя в свободе его пера: он не держит в воображении ни цензоров, ни редакторов, ничто не стоит против него, кроме материала, ничто не реет над ним, кроме истины.” Solzhenitsyn, however, regretted that the situation had to be this way: “It is bitter that we have to go underground not for a revolution but for normal literature” [Горько, конечно, что не для революции надо спускаться в то подполье, а для простой художественной литературы; Solzhenitsyn 1975: 10].

standards, it could be perceived and often was subjectively perceived as free, or, let's say, as one that had enough levels and possibilities of freedom" (Ionin 1997: 27).⁸²

Ionin's argument brings us back to the idea that civil inattention and disattendability were not uniform, monolithic concepts but had various levels of practice and tolerance. Freedom, too, had a spectrum of forms and shapes: writers of *promezhutochnaia literatura* may not be considered completely free in comparison to their Western colleagues who may have enjoyed fewer obstacles in bringing their texts to the readers, but they nevertheless enjoy other forms of freedom. Naomi Roslyn Galtz suggests the term of "small freedoms" to encapsulate Ionin's idea:

While freedom, according to liberal theory, is cohesively engendered across a given population through a framework of inviolable legal protections, small freedoms—following Ionin—arise in fragmentary ways, atomistically, in the course of daily life, and they are spiked with meaning by their position within wider systems of impossibility. (Galtz 2004: 176)⁸³

Small freedoms went hand in hand with external and internal freedom about which Andrei Amal'rik speaks in his open letter to Anatolii Kuznetsov:

You are always talking of freedom, but of external freedom, freedom that is around us, and you never say a word about internal freedom, i.e., the freedom which may not preclude the authorities to do quite many things to a person, but that prevents them from depriving him of his moral values. However, it seems that such freedom and the responsibility connected to it is a prerequisite of external freedom. Maybe, in some countries, freedom of expression is as easy to get for a person as the air that one breathes. But in places, where the situation is different, such freedom, as I believe, may only arise as a result of constant and tenacious protection of one's internal freedom. (Amal'rik 2005: 376)⁸⁴

⁸² “Применительно к советской жизни это означает, что несвободная по всем универсальным стандартам советская жизнь могла восприниматься и часто воспринималась субъективно как свободная или, скажем так, имевшая достаточно степеней и возможностей свободы.”

⁸³ Galtz points out that, although Ionin's idea may reflect a uniquely Soviet experience, it may also be valid within the context of a market economy (Galtz 2004: 187–88). She tests Ionin's theory of freedom that he formulated with the Soviet intelligentsia in mind against a real-life case of a woman-owner of a *dacha*, who represents a different gender and class stratum of the Soviet society. In analyzing responses from oral interviews, she identifies the *dacha* as a site of “small freedom” that is not separated from the public sphere but serves as “a relatively smooth linkage between private and public realms” (Galtz 2004: 187). Cf. Noack's idea of “little freedoms” under Brezhnev (Noack 2016).

⁸⁴ “Вы все время говорите о свободе, но о свободе внешней, свободе вокруг нас, и ничего не говорите о свободе внутренней, то есть свободе, при которой власть многое может сделать с человеком, но не в силах лишить его моральных ценностей. Но, видимо, такая свобода и связанная с ней ответственность есть обязательная предпосылка свободы внешней. Быть может, в некоторых странах свобода выражения своих мыслей достается человеку так же легко, как воздух, которым он дышит. Но там, где этого нет, такая свобода, я думаю, может быть только результатом упорного отстаивания своей внутренней свободы.” The letter was written on November 1, 1969, as an answer to Kuznetsov's speech “To All the People” [Vsem liudiam] and his article “The Russian Writer and the KGB” [Russkii pisatel' i KGB]. Both were broadcast in the Soviet Union by foreign radio stations and provoked Amal'rik's response. On the discourse on inner freedom among Soviet dissidents, see Boobbyer (2005: 94–113).

The character of external freedom which was constructed through physical and legal means and which Amal'rik seems to imply here contrasts with the meaning of integrity that he envisions in connection to internal freedom. As such, the latter echoes Havel's and Solzhenitsyn's arguments of "living in truth" (with oneself, above all). Internal freedom stands for a refusal to compromise with the system instead of making an effort and being disattendable at the cost of quality of one's literary work. The decision to preserve internal freedom equals for the writer to an inevitability of writing "into the table"—for the drawer—if they choose to write for the sake of the art and not for the sake of the system.⁸⁵ Thus, Amal'rik writes that he

[...] would prefer to be expelled from the university and give up the hope of becoming an historian than to correct anything in the work that I considered accurate. I have chosen not even to submit my poems and plays to Soviet publishing houses for consideration instead of mutilating them in hope to be published (Amal'rik 2005: 376–77)⁸⁶

As a result, in the contexts where freedom and privacy are conceded rather than guaranteed, scholars and intellectuals have developed a tendency to speak not about the freedom *for* but about the freedom *against* something: "[T]he writer should always be someone who's against something, against the norm in both content and style. [...] [P]sychologically the writer must be against everybody" (Sinyavsky 1980: 10).⁸⁷

Moreover, Ionin argues that the experience of freedom can be deeper in such contexts of a truncated private sphere, as individuals experience the deprivation of freedom—similar to privacy, which one comes to notice and cherish more if one has experienced its violation. We can never know how late Soviet literature would have looked like and what kind of turns literary works that I discussed in this book would have taken if it had not been for the extensive censorship that the late Soviet state put in place to safeguard the border of disattendability. However, due to all restrictions imposed on literature, it managed to develop such bypasses as Aesopian language and

⁸⁵ Aleksander Solzhenitsyn describes similar feelings about his writing in *The Oak and the Calf* [Bodalsia telenok s dubom, 1975, where he dwells on his decision to write "into the table" [pisat' v stol].

⁸⁶ "Я предпочел быть исключенным из университета и расстаться с надеждой стать историком, но не исправлять ничего в работе, которую я сам считал правильной. Я предпочел вообще не носить свои стихи и пьесы в советские издательства, чем уродовать их в надежде, что меня напечатают."

⁸⁷ Isaiah Berlin elaborates on two notions liberty—positive and negative: "The first of these political senses of freedom or liberty (I shall use both words to mean the same), which (following much precedent) I shall call the 'negative' sense, is involved in the answer to the question 'What is the area within which the subject—a person or group of persons—is or should be left to do or be what he is, able to do or be, without interference by other persons?' The second, which I shall call the positive sense, is involved in the answer to the question 'What, or who, is the source of control or interference that can determine someone to do, or be, this rather than that?'" (Berlin 1969: 121–22). Berlin, however, situated his argument within the context that previews a strict separation of the private and public spheres.

benefited from the confluence of writers to spheres where they may not have otherwise gone (for example, children's books were a "safety valve" for writers who preferred to explore less conventional topics, for censorship there was less rigorous).⁸⁸

As a result, during perestroika and after the fall of the Soviet Union, Russian society bore witness to a phenomenon that I would like to call "disattendability paradox": in trying to be disattendable during the Soviet era, the texts of *promezhutochnaia literatura* acquired a certain finesse that made the writers' craft shine on the literary landscape when the cultural sphere got rid of its constraints in the late 1980s. In the late Soviet era, a low level of disattendability guided the late Soviet public sphere, and the official literary field was nurtured by the influx of texts that were "convenient" for the state, which brought the overall level of literary culture in the country to a lower level, as Leonid Batkin argues in his article for *Metropol*:

With such an approach to culture, there is not a single inner logical necessity [for the system] to conceptualize culture as creativity. Contrarily, the structure of the conservative-defensive approach inevitable pushes out everything that is inconvenient for the order, everything uncompromisingly critical, edgy, and excitingly new—where one is not sure what will come out of these things; everything odd and wrong, everything [un]ordinary, everything that is hard to eliminate, that is problematic, open, tragic. (Batkin 1979: 2).⁸⁹

However, this "tragedy of culture" (Batkin 1979: 2) also gave reasons for *promezhutochnaia literatura* to be noticed and to shine in the late Soviet literary public realm. The juxtaposition of voices that came from two different social orders (socialist realism and realism "with a human face," or, as Deming Brown calls it, "critical realism"; Brown 1978: 286) created a vivid heteroglossia [*raznorechie*; Bakhtin 1975], which emphasized the contrast between the two directions of literature and attracted readers' attention to unconventional texts. Socialist realist texts were highly disattendable to the state throughout the late Soviet era and therefore, "invisible" to the regimes of privacy on the level that was experienced by *promezhutochnaia literatura* or by the texts that were denied publication in the 1950s–1980s. However, in this case disattendability also coincides with an invisibility of a different kind—cultural invisibility of the text in *longue durée*. Meanwhile, the texts of *promezhutochnaia literatura* and ones that were circulated in *samizdat* and *tamizdat* became canonical works after glasnost arrived.

⁸⁸ On children's literature in the Soviet Union and its subversive usages by authors, see Beckett (1999); Balina and Rudova (2010).

⁸⁹ "При подобном подходе к культуре не возникает ни малейшей внутренней логической необходимости в обосновании культуры как творчества. Напротив, структура консервативно-охранительного подхода неизбежно выталкивает напроць все, что неудобно для порядка, все бескомпромиссно-критическое, угловатое и запальчиво-новое, из которого еще неизвестно, что получится, все странное и неправильное, вообще все [не]однозначное, все, что остается неустраимо-проблемным, открытым, трагическим."

By disidentifying with socialist realist truth and forwarding instead their own idea of life within and beyond socialism, writers put the former in question and thereby undermined the legitimacy of the official socialist discourse. As a result, although they may not have pursued any political aims in writing their works, the results of their efforts could be interpreted as such by the state, which is clearly vivid in *Metropol's* case considered by its editors an experiment in creativity that aimed at extending the limits of literature:

Metropol' was an important milestone, the last major literary scandal of the bygone era [...]. I have to emphasize that this scandal was literary, and not sociopolitical. [...] It was a fight within the system that did not intend to question the system. We just wanted to broaden the limits, as artists managed to do after Bulldozer exhibition. (Popov 2009: 57)⁹⁰

The texts that I studied in this book did not explicitly pursue an agenda of criticizing the system but focused on the elaboration of cultural codes to deal with the “non-state” spheres of life from the position of an artist—similar to Craig Whitney’s definition of Iurii Trifonov for the title of his article (1977) for *The New York Times*: “Russian Writer, Not a Dissident, Critic of Society.” However, they were equally often criticized, as we have seen throughout in critical remarks that the Party and literary critics directed to different texts. This raises the question of the connections between privacy, politics, and apoliticality in the late Soviet context.

In Western liberal thought the idea of the private sphere is strongly grounded in its separation from the realm of politics and the non-intervention of the state or society into certain areas of the person’s life (see Chapter One). In this context, apoliticality is a characterization of the private sphere that comes as a result of the demand placed by the citizens from *within* the private sphere onto the public realm, which reads as “do not intervene here.” Quite importantly, it is a *successful* demand, observed by the state. Authoritarian late Soviet landscape was home to apoliticality of a different type: instead of coming as a demand from the citizens, apoliticality arrived as a condescension of the state which demonstrated its willingness to refrain from direct interventions in the private realm. The matters of the latter only became of interest to the state if disattendability principle was violated. Apoliticality for a writer in the late Soviet era meant abstaining from talking about political issues in a literary work intended for publication. Although the level of civil inattention was located at a significantly high level in comparison to the Stalin era, many things, including the discussion of political issues, were only allowed in the private realm and could not happen in public, as Il’ia Bokshtein recollects: “In Brezhnev’s time, everyone freely talked about

⁹⁰ “«Метрополь» – важная веха, последний крупный литературный скандал канувшей эпохи [...]. Скандал, подчеркиваю, литературный, а не общественно-политический. [...] И все же это была борьба внутри системы, вовсе на систему не посягавшая. Хотели расширить рамки, как это удалось художникам после бульдозерной выставки.”

politics, told jokes—if you don’t go out into the square, if you don’t create an organization, talk as much as you want” (Bokshtein 1996: 208).⁹¹

The state strongly discouraged the appearance of any works that would represent the Soviet system in the negative light, although individual failings of persons or problems that were presented as occasional would increasingly appear on the pages of novels, stories, and plays. Thus, Vladimir Shlapentokh argues that “[i]n their communication with the masses, the leadership always assumed the existence of the two-level mentality. They tolerated people’s critique of individual officials and various specific flaws in everyday life, but mercilessly punished those who criticized the regime using generalizations” (Shlapentokh 2001: 129), which explains why in spite of small criticisms of certain moments of socialist existence that are easily identifiable in each of the works that I discussed in previous chapters, such as miscommunication between the upper-ranked bureaucrats with lower-level ordinary workers in Iashin’s “Levers,” Dudintsev’s *Not by Bread Alone*, and Ehrenburg’s “The Thaw” to moral failures of human beings portrayed by Iurii Trifonov, to shortages of goods and lack of proper urban infrastructure in Natal’ia Baranskaia’s “A Week Like Any Other,” etc., most of them were published.

To be published, one had “not force oneself on anyone’s attention” and *actively* abstain from meddling into politics. In this sense, the principle of disattendability echoes one of the most famous maxims of Epicurus (341–270 BC)—*λάθε βιώσας* [*lathe biōsas*, “live unnoticed”]; as Raymond Geuss justly noticed (Geuss 2001: 116, note 4). The maxim is generally perceived as a concise summary of the philosophy of Epicureans who chose to stay away from polis and live in the Garden at the outskirts of Athens to enjoy philosophical disputes. According to Geert Roskam, the motto “advocated a life far away from all of the troubles of politics and free from the disorders caused by ambitious but empty desires” (Roskam 2007: 1).⁹²

Considering the difficulty of analyzing the maxim directly due to the absence of original sources, Roskam suggests interpreting it in the context of other Epicurus’s philosophical ideas. He singles out three components, which he considers vital for the understanding of the maxim. Teachings of Epicurus should be therapeutic, providing “the therapy of the soul” (Roskam 2007: 34). They are based on the trichotomy of desires: natural and necessary, natural though not necessary, neither natural nor necessary. Epicurus’ advice is to follow the first, because they are limited and easily fulfilled. “Those who pursue an unnoticed life remain within the limits of nature

⁹¹ “При Брежневe все свободно говорили о политике, травили анекдоты – если ты не выходишь на площадь, не создаешь организацию, трепись сколько угодно.”

⁹² “It implies an avoidance of participation in politics, a career as an orator and more generally of any action that is motivated by ambition and love of honour. As a general rule and for the same reasons such an ‘unnoticed life’ should come to an end in an ‘unnoticed death’ (*λάθε αποβιώσας*)” (Roskam 2007: 146).

and are able to enjoy the present” (Roskam 2007: 35). Those, who disregard the maxim, inevitably postpone their pleasure, as the desires of the third group are unlimited and hard to satisfy. Finally, Epicurus’s philosophy is based on the principle of rational calculus: “Every choice and aversion should be evaluated by the pleasure it gives, but this evaluation requires comparative reasoning. Even if it is true that all pleasure is good as such, one would sometimes prefer pains because they will lead to greater pleasures” (Roskam 2007: 35). The maxim, thus, is not based on personal taste, but on rational arguments. Keeping away from political life as not putting oneself in opposition to politics agrees with these principles, as it guarantees one an easier life, deprived of troubles.

Roskam made it clear that it is important not to understand the maxim as subversive, anarchistic or solipsistic: “The Epicureans are neither interested in ambitious social reforms nor in abolishing legislation and social establishment. They also attempt to respect social *decorum* and avoid giving offense” (Roskam 2007: 147–48). Neither does the maxim imply that one should completely ignore the polis and its institutions, for one might be affected by them, as the Garden was. In addition, unnoticed life does not mean complete exclusion of interest in political life (Roskam 2007: 51). Roskam claims that Epicurus formulated the advice “because he was convinced that it was generally the best road to a pleasant life.” (Roskam 2007: 66). A sequestered life ensures personal security, allows one to avoid enmities and passions of the polis. Voluntary limitation of desires plays a vital role in achieving the tranquility of life, unavailable for politicians and public persons, who spend their life trying to satisfy unnecessary and unnatural desires. The maximization of pleasures balanced by the minimization of pains could only be guaranteed through a withdrawal from public life, so eagerly demonstrated by the Epicureans.

To some extent, writers of *promezhutochnaia literatura* can be considered Soviet Epicureans just as likely, or, maybe even more so, than the writers who opted for samizdat. In disidentifying from the mainstream aesthetic, they strove to find pleasure for themselves in their craft without breaking the ties to the official public sphere. Apoliticality was their code of privacy, consonant with truth and freedom. They wanted to be unnoticed by late Soviet political bodies to continue doing what they loved the most—writing. At the same time, the peculiar character of late Soviet authoritarian regimes of privacy turned the object of their interest—the private sphere—into a topic of high political relevance. Which is why it may be unsurprising that texts that I examined in this book did participate in politics without striving to participate in it, and as a result, contributed to massive shifts in late Soviet landscape that soon resulted in the collapse of the regime that could no longer contain these and other voices of privacy.

DOORS WIDE SHUT: PRIVACY AND LITERATURE IN PUTIN’S RUSSIA

Every writer hopes that their book will resonate with the present day. Yet, I could never even consider a possibility that the late Soviet era that I chose to examine in my dissertation would become as relevant as it is today, when I am finishing this text in late 2023. When on August 25, 1968, the famous “demonstration of the seven” walked onto the Red Square to protest against the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and were later forced into multi-year psychiatric treatment or imprisoned, hardly could they have imagined that half-a-century later, their future compatriots would again be walking out onto real and virtual squares, protesting Russia’s full-fledged invasion into Ukraine in February 2022, and would be facing much harsher punishment for their actions. When in 1966, the writers Iulii Daniel’ and Andrei Siniavskii stood before the Soviet court for authoring works that “besmirched the Soviet state and society” [*porochashchikh soverskii gosudarstvennyi i obshchestvennyi stroi*; as the charge against them went], they certainly did not think that in 2023, the artist Sasha Skorchilenko would be sentenced for anti-war art that allegedly “discredited the Russian army,” and the theater director Zhenia Berkovich together with the playwright Svetlana Petriichuk would be accused of “justifying terrorism” for a feminist play they created and put under infinite arrest. In 2023, parallels between the late Soviet era and contemporary Russia are so tangible that the lines the writer Lev Ventsov wrote in an essay in 1973 read not as testimony to Brezhnev’s rule but as an uncanny prophecy for the future:

A dull haze of mediocrity has enveloped one-sixth of the planet. The state has set out to eradicate cultural values—instinctively, though, rather than with intention (it is quite problematic to say whether they [the authorities] can think rationally at all)—and is trying to find a more solid base for itself that feeds on the spiritual devastation and moral savagery of ordinary people. [...] Literature is replaced by utter garbage. [...] Exciting performances are banished from the stage. Talented directors are persecuted. Our cinema lies in ruins, and half-

empty cinema theaters show patriotic nonsense, fiction about Chekists and the worst foreign mass-produced trash that is at least a decade old.¹

The revived role of culture as a target of Soviet and now Russian authorities and renewed “ideological homogenization of the public sphere” (Smola and Lipovetsky 2018: 3) that defines contemporary Russian context did not originate in 2023. Already in 2016, Dmitrii Travin was asking the question “Will the Putin Regime Exist in 2042?” [Prosushchestvuet li putinskaia sistema do 2042 goda] in the title of his book (Travin 2016), thereby leaning on Amal’rik’s iconic text to indicate evident political parallels between the late Soviet and the Putin eras.² These parallels come as a result of a “distinctly authoritarian turn” (Silitski 2009: 42) that Vladimir Putin’s regime made in the mid-2000s and from which it has since never veered away.³ They make the Soviet experience ever more valuable by the day, since the era between the Stalin’s death and perestroika may provide insights into questions that are arising today.

In this book, I looked back at that period to study privacy as an imaginary that emerges at the nexus of interaction between culture (the literary field, in particular) and the authoritarian regime. While the leniency of the late Soviet regime enabled a flourishing of spheres of life that were increasingly disconnected from the engagement with the state sphere, writers resorted to imagining such spheres in their works in order to re-negotiate boundaries imposed by the Soviet state on their creativity through the doctrine of socialist realism and the censorship that policed its observance.

¹ “Унылая мгла заурядности обволакивает одну шестую часть планеты. Руководство – скорее, правда, инстинктивно, чем с обдуманым намерением (способно ли оно мыслить – проблематично!) – принялось с корнем драть культурные ценности, нащупывая более прочную для себя опору в духовной опустошенности и нравственном одичании обывателей. [...] Литература подменяется заведомой макулатурой. [...] Изгнаны со сцены будоражащие спектакли. Талантливых режиссеров травят. Кинематография наша – в руинах, а вместо нее при полупустых залах показывают патриотические бессмыслицы, небылицы про чекистов и десятилетней давности заваль зарубежной массовой дешевки.” Lev Ventsov, “Dumat’!”. In *Sobranie dokumentov samizdata* 1973. T. 7, 1–15. AC № 497, p. 1. (Lev Ventsov is a pseudonym that the Russian philosopher and human rights activist Boris Shragin (1926–1990) used for some of his publications in samizdat.)

² Travin also read a series of lectures under the title “Welcome to the Stagnation Era” [Dobro pozhalovat’ v zastoi] in Sep–Dec 2017 in Dom evreiskoi kul’tury [House of the Jewish Culture] in Saint-Petersburg, where he elaborated on the Soviet past and drew connections to the present (Dom evreiskoi kul’tury 2017). Yet, he was not alone in making notice of these increasing parallels. Another interesting parallel between the two eras is the revival of *Khronika tekushchikh sobytii* [A Chronicle of Current Events]—the samizdat periodical that reported violations of civil rights in late Soviet Russia, as an online edition *Novaia khronika tekushchikh sobytii* [A New Chronicle of Current Events, <http://www.ixtc.org>] that was active in 2015–2020. The editorial board was comprised of the members of the original Soviet human rights movement. See also the discussion in *Kritika* 2018 (19:3) on the intertwining of Soviet and contemporary Russian histories, especially editors’ foreword *Back in the USSR?* (2018) and the special issue of *Russian Literature* (2018) that juxtaposes non-conformist cultures of both eras.

³ On the Putin era, see, e.g., Sakwa (2008); Wegren and Herspring (2010); Horvath (2013); Sakwa (2014); Tsygankov (2014); Zimmerman (2016); Knight (2017); Treisman (2018); Greene and Robertson (2019); Frye (2022).

Privacy became a character in itself on the pages of late Soviet works, spanning from Trifonov's homes-conflicts to the portrayals of the most important Soviet celebrity—Vladimir Lenin. Privacy was something writers ardently advocated both for the sake of their characters and themselves—to expand the boundaries of their creativity. But every leeway they received from the Soviet state which was desperately trying to preserve its existence also gave another meaning to privacy—as a framework for a line not to cross. Soviet literary authorities thereby turned privacy into a repressive tool—a reading of this concept that I offer and that is rarely considered. While staying within these boundaries came to mean writing truthfully and sincerely for writers, and apoliticality—a virtue of not engaging with the constraints of the state sphere, for the late Soviet authorities, apoliticality of the authors was also of benefit. It kept the fragile and ever-increasingly cracking state sphere from new shocks that audacious literary texts inevitably brought. And in this way, it kept the Soviet machine running, until the cracks were too large to mend, and the system fell apart in 1991.

The turn toward market economy in the late 1980s, the privatization processes that swept through Russia in the 1990s, and the attendant increase in individual housing swayed Russian idea of privacy closer toward its liberal counterpart.⁴ During this time, the engagement with these new privacy contexts was taken over from *literatura byta* by a new kind of literature that explored darker sides of post-socialist society. According to Eliot Borenstein, “popular culture in the 1990s both condensed and magnified the anxieties that gripped the nation” (Borenstein 2008: 23), thus producing an aesthetics that he calls the “overkill”⁵ and giving rise to the detective genre and *chernukha* [“black” literature, one that is pessimistic and often focused on violence].

The changes in the Russian economy of the early 2000s (mostly sponsored by sky-rocketing oil and gas revenues) brought about new modes of everyday life and a renewed interest in the

⁴ Studies of the private sphere in the post-Soviet context include Lynne Attwood's exploration of how privatization has affected the understanding of “home” (her conclusion is that it had provided many of respondents whom she interviewed with the sense of autonomy they had lacked in Soviet times—particularly, women who could now live alone), and had encouraged some to demonstrate a stronger interest in community matters (Attwood 2012). Maksim Trudoliubov explores private property in his monograph *People behind the Fence: The State, the Property, and the Private Space in Russia*, [Liudi za zaborom: vlast', sobstvennost' i chastnoe prostranstvo v Rossii; Trudoliubov 2015]. Although some of his ideas are controversial, his approach to the possibility of a private life in the culture of communalism that emerges through architecture and the institution of private property provides thoughts for further discussion (for instance, he writes that pre-Revolutionary Russian society “did not see any ethical value in private property and therefore nonchalantly relinquished it during the October Revolution” (Trudoliubov 2015, 13) and thereby fails to consider at least the question of class with regard to the this issue). Martina Ritter's (2006; 2008) sociological studies of privacy examine the role that gender, class and age play in the constructions of privacy in the post-Soviet Russia.

⁵ Borenstein defines overkill as “an insistence on patently excessive details of collapse, rooted in doubts about any example's capacity to be truly *exemplary*. Only through the endless accumulation of appalling details can an adequate picture emerge” (Borenstein 2008: 6, original emphasis).

private sphere. *Novaia literatura byta* [new literature of everyday life], as we could call it, was inevitably also *literatura novogo byta* [literature of a new everyday life]: of new Moscow, new Saint Petersburg, and new life in the provinces. Writers like Evgenii Grishkovets, Maia Kucherskaia, or Liudmila Ulitskaia, among others, explored the daily lives of ordinary people in a renaissance of the urban prose. The new *byt*, however, was not only about new people of the twenty-first century living in their newly built apartments: it also examined new modes of life that developed in a society driven by a new ideology—the oil ruble. They found their place in the prose of “a new utopia” (Goscilo and Strukov 2012b: 4)—literature of glamour penned by authors like Oksana Robski or Kseniia Sobchak, as well as of the anti-glamour as its double, emerging in the works of writers like Viktor Pelevin or Sergei Minaev (Goscilo and Strukov 2012b: 19–21).⁶

The normalization of privacy undertaken by literature during late socialism seems to have finally arrived at its goal during the 2000s–early 2010s: against the backdrop of the 1990s overkill texts that talked about abortions, alcoholism, criminality, and prostitution, a portrait of a daily life that *novaia literatura byta* offered far from all these problems was more than normal—it was ordinary, maybe even a bit boring. In a society that had learned to demand privacy louder and had often received it (with privatization campaigns as just one example), privacy lost its symbolical meaning of a subversive entity that it used to carry in the ideology nurtured by the spirit of Communism. If writing privacy into texts meant taking a political position against socialist realism in the Soviet era, doing so in the new millennium meant completely disengaging from politics. In fact, as the Russian state took its time to negotiate a new robust ideological identity after the fall of the Soviet order, the turn to privacy as a topic of the narrative (and therefore, away from discussing politics) became particularly encouraged by the state.⁷ In the early Putin era, Lev Rubinstein (2005) argues, apolitical literature became a “contemporary mainstream” [*nyneshnii meinstrim*] that [wa]s consciously incited by the Kremlin due to “the huge, gaping deficit of ideology” [*ogromnyi, ziiaiushchii deficit ideologii*].⁸ Aesthetic sensibilities that emerged in the Russian culture in 2010s—often summarized under denominations like “new sincerity,” “new emotionalism,” or “Russian metamodernism”—all entailed an escape from participating in a

⁶ On literature of glamour, see Rudova (2011); Goscilo and Strukov (2012a).

⁷ Thus, Skillen attributes the rise of glamour in the early 2000s in the press to the intention of the mainstream media to distract the public from the Chechen war (Skillen 2017: 268).

⁸ This trend falls well in line with the general interest of authoritarian states to coerce disinterest in political life as a strategy of their soft politics: “Widespread political apathy is the grease that helps any authoritarian system hum. And in the smoothest-functioning authoritarian systems, the regimes have gone to great lengths to turn disinterest in political life into a public virtue” (Dobson 2012: 71).

political conversation.⁹ Apoliticality was still a code for privacy, but of a completely different league than in the late Soviet years.

Throughout these decades, a “key locus for exploring taboos and sensitive social issues” was displaced from literature to arthouse cinema, performance art, and documentary theater, Justin Wilmes argues (Wilmes 2018: 298). Pussy Riot and Voina, Teatr.doc, films by Zviagintsev, Bykov, and others became new voices in arguing for the sovereignty of the cultural field.¹⁰ With the annexation of the Crimea in 2014 and increased pressure on minoritized groups (LGBTQ+ in particular) by the Russian state under Putin’s third and fourth terms (2012–2024), literature has regained its voice alongside these new sites of advocacy. While new independent publishing houses like No Kidding Press and Popcorn Books that came onto the publishing scene to advance queer and feminist texts in Russia may no longer do so due to the expansion of the law against the propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations among minors in late 2022, other forms of literary private kitchens have come to be in their place, and the digital sphere that was absent in the late Soviet era has been instrumental in raising voice and advancing new modes of connection between authors and their audiences.

The internet has been a game changer in the interaction between literature and the newly authoritarian regime in the twenty-first century. Its Russian-speaking segment, the Runet [the Russian internet] was quick from its very early days to provide users with digital “private kitchens” (Gorny 2007) and offer ever-expanding opportunities for agency (with the caveat of the just as ever-expanding capacities by the state to surveil digital activities or cut them off, if needed).¹¹ While Russian literature was increasingly expanding into this new digital sphere in the twenty-first century (Schmidt 2011; Howanitz 2020), in the post-invasion context, literature online took on new forms of agency. Digital poetry projects like *Roar* magazine launched by Linor Goralik (Roar-review n.d.) or new publishing line started by the independent Russophone media Meduza that offers books like Elena Kostiuhenko’s *The Country I Love* [Moia liubimaia strana 2023] through their app broadens our perspectives on actors in the literary field and on the modalities of advocating for creative privacy and connecting to audiences.

⁹ For the concept of “new sincerity” [novaia iskrennost’] see Prigov (1986) and Epshtein (1990: 359–60). See also Rutten (2017) on the rhetoric of sincerity in Russian society in the 1990s–2010s. “New emotionalism” is a concept present in writings of the poet Kirill Medvedev (2006–2007). For metamodernism in contemporary Russian culture, see Engström 2018.

¹⁰ On the protest function of the art in the 2000s–2010s, see, e.g., Jonson (2015); Beumers et al. (2016); Jonson and Erofeev (2017).

¹¹ For studies of the Runet, see Oates (2013); Gorham, Lunde, and Paulsen (2014); see also the open-access journal Digital Icons: Studies of Russian, Central-European, and Eurasian New Media that counts over 20 special issues on varied topics as of 2023. For private/public spheres on the Runet in particular, see Schmidt, Teubener, and Konradova (2006); Panchenko (2011); Klepikova (2018).

These processes have taken place against the backdrop of a crisis of symbolic orders diagnosed by Il'ia Kukulin, who argues that instead of “the idea of a plurality of ethical and aesthetic norms [...] widespread in the Russia of the 1990s, now the image of a single common and united Norm is being established” in contemporary Russian culture (Kukulin 2018: 223). Shaped by the discourses of “traditional values” and, since the mass-scale invasion, additionally Z-patriotism, this norm is mediated by the state through a variety of cultural institutions within the country, many of which rely on the state funding to survive.¹²

Contemporary Russian culture faces what seem to be ever harsher times by day. But as the experience of its late Soviet counterpart that I studied in this book demonstrates, under every regime, literature finds opportunities to create spaces of agency, resilience, and freedom. The powers of the state are not infinite, and there always emerge new ways of crossing thresholds that the state erects. And it is our duty as researchers to be “snooping about and overhearing,” in a Bakhtinian way, how this new literature lives and crosses these thresholds.

¹² See, for instance Tuoma, Ratilainen, and Trubina (2018) and Tolz and Hutchings (2023).

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¹ These sources were used for text analysis in Chapters 2–3. For scholars researching late Soviet literature, in 2019–2020, the electronic platform ImWerden uploaded all issues of *Novyi Mir*, starting from the first issue in 1925 until early 2000s (fully scanned, OCR). They are available under the link <https://imwerden.de/periodical-2115-page-1.html> (accessed 15-Nov-2023).

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