Intelligentsia Self-Fashioning in the Postwar Soviet Union

Revol´t Pimenov's Political Struggle, 1949–57

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At the 20th Party Congress in 1956, Nikita Khrushchev denounced Stalin for developing a *kul´t lichnosti,* a "cult of personality" or "cult of the individual." Less often noticed but equally important was a very different cult of personality that developed in the same years. A cult-like belief in the liberation of the personality was a central principle of the Thaw, the post-Stalin liberalization spearheaded by intellectuals and artists. According to autobiographical writing on the Thaw, the distinct conjunction after Stalin's death—characterized by the dismantling of the terror apparatus, the slow opening of the country to the outside world, and the stumbling efforts of the post-Stalin leadership to address the place of dictatorship in the communist project—encouraged educated citizens to claim a more autonomous and hence authentic understanding of the self.[1] Furthermore, discovery of self was synonymous with a rebirth of the moral and cultural bearings of society after Stalinism. "Our generation had a psychological, spiritual, perhaps even a physiological need to discover our country, our history, and ourselves," writes the dissident Liudmila Alekseeva with regard to the milieu of young Moscow intellectuals after Stalin's death.[2] As this statement suggests, generational divisions are highly interconnected with the theme of renewed post-Stalin

[1] For the idea of an "inner Thawing" as characteristic of the period, see Vladimir Bukovsky, *To Build a Castle: My Life as a Dissenter,* trans. Michael Scammell (New York: Viking, 1979), 138. For other memoirs that depict the liberation of personality as the central development of the period, see Yevgeny Yevtushenko, *A Precocious Autobiography,* trans. Andrew R. MacAndrew (London: Collins and Harvill, 1963), 89–92; and Andrei Amalrik, *Notes of a Revolutionary,* trans. Guy Daniels (New York: Knopf, 1982), 4–5.

[2] Liudmilla Alexeyeva and Paul Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation: Coming of Age in the Post-Stalin Era* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990), 83.

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selfhood. In the generally accepted view, it was precisely a need for self-expression and individuality among postwar youth that spurred the creation of a critical, liberal, and Western-minded intelligentsia in the USSR.[3]

The personality narrative of the Thaw has become complicated by recent work that questions the tidy division between late Stalinism and post-Stalinism in the realm of social and cultural life.[4] It is now clear that many activists of the Thaw, especially critically minded educated youth, opposed Stalinism in the name of ideas firmly within the Soviet ideological world such as an idealized Leninist democracy, the struggle against bureaucracy, or the creation of a cultured society.[5] Indeed, some young intellectuals repressed by the Khrushchev leadership saw themselves as facilitators and would-be allies of the post-Stalin party-state. But despite this emergent picture of ideological flux, the underlying theme of the attainment of genuine and natural selfhood continues to inform writing on the intellectual life of post-Stalinism and particularly on the young intellectuals and students who constituted one of the Thaw's essential social bases.[6] The personality narrative of the

[3] Elena Zubkova, *Obshchestvo i reformy, 1945–1964* (Moscow: Rossiia molodaia, 1993), 137–45. A more nuanced presentation of the view is Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2009), which follows Zubkova in positing "intellectual and artistic emancipation" as characteristic of many of what he calls "Zhivago's children," the spiritual heirs of the old Russian intelligentsia (20).

[4] As a range of recent literature shows, attachment to conceptual frameworks of the Stalin era—and not least to the figure of the dictator himself—was widespread in Khrushchev-era Soviet society and, in some contexts, was compatible with opposition to the post-Stalin leadership. See Miriam Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime, and the Fate of Reform after Stalin* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009); and V. A. Kozlov, *Mass Uprisings in the USSR: Protest and Rebellion in the Post-Stalin Years,* trans. and ed. Elaine McClarnand MacKinnon (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2002), 5. For the multiple and open-ended responses of Soviet citizens to de-Stalinization, see *Redefining Stalinism,* ed. Harold Shukman (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 127-48. A presentation of late Stalinism and the Thaw as periods of attempted renewal of the Soviet project is presented in a special issue of the *Slavonic and East European Review,* "The Relaunch of the Soviet Project, 1945-64," ed. Polly Jones et al. (86, 2 [2008]).

[5] Gennadii Kuzovkin, "Partiino-komsomol′skie presledovaniia po politicheskim motivam v period rannei 'ottepeli,' " in *Korni travy: Sbornik statei molodykh istorikov,* ed. L. S. Ereminaia and E. B. Zhemkova (Moscow: Zvenia, 1996), 96; Juliane Fürst, "The Arrival of Spring? Changes and Continuities in Soviet Youth Culture and Policy between Stalin and Khrushchev," in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era,* ed. Polly Jones (London: Routledge, 2006), 139–41; Benjamin Tromly, "Re-Imagining the Soviet Intelligentsia: Student Politics and University Life, 1948–1964" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2007). A pathbreaking article on late Stalinist youth that points in a similar direction is Fürst, "Prisoners of the Soviet Self? Political Youth Opposition in Late Stalinism," *Europe–Asia Studies* 54, 3 (2002): 353–75.

[6] This applies to Zubok's book, despite its attention to important and often overlooked factors in the Thaw like Soviet idealism and optimism (*Zhivago's Children*, 66–67). See also

Thaw is so widespread that it figures in scholarly explanations for several key developments in late Soviet history, such as the decline of ideological conformity in Soviet society during the Brezhnev years, the coalescence of movements of intellectual dissent, and the emergence of Gorbachev's team of reformers within the party-state apparatus.[7]

The construct of the Thaw as the liberation of personality needs to be questioned. To be sure, the dismantling of Stalinism created a less regimented and more ideologically diverse environment that allowed citizens and especially impressionable youth to pursue more independent intellectual agendas. Yet the construct of the organic, liberated, and progressive Thaw personality—a narrative that reflects the considerable sympathy of Western and post-Soviet interlocutors for reformist intellectuals in the Soviet Union—is overdetermined and too simplistic. [8] By providing the period with a clear and collective hero, it threatens to obscure the specific contours of change during this time. Ironically, by emphasizing personality as an explanatory category, it obscures the diverse trajectories and motivations of participants in the Thaw and their complex origins. This article treats the role of personality in the Thaw differently by exploring a single activist of the period in microcosm.[9] The Leningrad mathematician Revol´t Pimenov clashed with party authorities while a student in Leningrad in the late Stalin years, then emerged as a key

Philip Boobbyer, *Conscience, Dissent, and Reform in Soviet Russia* (London: Routledge, 2005), 56–74. Denis Kozlov's interesting treatment of Stalinist-inflected rhetoric during the Thaw stresses the temporary nature of the phenomenon ("Naming the Social Evil: The Readers of *Novyi mir* and Vladimir Dudintsev's *Not by Bread Alone,* 1956–59 and Beyond," in *Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, 80–98).

[7] Alexei Yurchak's innovative study of late Stalin youth culture proposes its own model of a genuine Soviet selfhood with his description of how young people lived "outside (*vne*)," finding meaning in the stagnant late Soviet public life without becoming controlled by its strictures (*Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006], 126–57). For the revival of selfhood during the Thaw and among the Gorbachev reformers, see Zubok, *Zhivago's Children;* and Robert D. English, *Russia and the Idea of the West: Gorbachev, Intellectuals, and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press 2000), chaps. 1–3.

[8] A work that highlights the creation of a Thaw mythology is Stephen Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw: Experience and Memory in Moscow's Arbat* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008). For an interpretation of Anglo-American views of Soviet subjectivity and dissent in particular, see Anna Krylova, "The Tenacious Liberal Subject in Soviet Studies," *Kritika* 1, 1 (2000): 185–88.

[9] Insightful biographical explorations of Soviet intellectuals in the period include Benjamin Nathans, "The Dictatorship of Reason: Aleksandr Vol´pin and the Idea of Rights under 'Developed Socialism,'" *Slavic Review* 66, 4 (2007): 630–63; and Reginald E. Zelnik, *Perils of Pankratova: Some Stories from the Annals of Soviet Historiography* (Seattle: Herbert J. Ellison Center for Russian, Eastern European, and Central Asian Studies, University of Washington, 2005), 12–84.

figure in the nascent oppositional politics of 1956. After protesting Soviet actions in Hungary and attempting to form a revolutionary organization, Pimenov was tried along with four people connected to him on charges of counterrevolutionary activities. Pimenov's story casts light on a relatively unexplored phenomenon: the deliberate nature of identities in the Thaw.[10] Pimenov's opposition to the Soviet state was rooted in a prolonged effort to fashion himself as a revolutionary figure.[11] Rather than a clear rejection of Stalin-era mental strictures, Pimenov's self-fashioning continued the distinctly Soviet practice of treating the self as a politicized subject of history.[12] Many of Pimenov's distinct and seemingly incongruous commitments—including his obsession with projecting a virtuous and transparent personality in the public sphere and his fervent belief in the role of an intelligentsia in articulating the interests of society—also drew on aspects of Soviet culture. Pimenov's radicalism can hardly be taken as representative of educated youth in the period, but his story depicts the role of long-standing modes of Soviet subjectivity in confronting and protesting post-Stalinism.

The files for Pimenov's KGB case—which include many of his theoretical and historical tracts from the period, extensive testimony given by himself, co-defendants and witnesses involved in his case, and a smaller number of personal documents like letters—offer, along with an extensive memoir written years later, a picture of his development as a thinker, political activist, and person.[13] A number of circumstances mitigate the obvious risks of using self-incriminating documents to reconstruct events and thought processes. Detailed later analyses by Pimenov and his co-conspirator Boris Vail´ leave no

[10] Accounts of identity construction in the Soviet intelligentsia include Barbara Walker, "On Reading Soviet Memoirs: A History of the 'Contemporaries' Genre as an Institution of Russian Intelligentsia Culture from the 1790s to the 1970s," *Russian Review* 59, 3 (2002): 327–52; Alexander Zholkovsky, "The Obverse of Stalinism: Anna Akhmatova's Self-Serving Charisma of Selflessness," in *Self and Story in Russian History,* ed. Laura Engelstein and Stephanie Sandler (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 46–68.

[11] Self-fashioning can be defined as a process through which individuals construct identities by drawing on the diverse repertoire of ideas and social identities available in the society. For an application of self-fashioning in the Russian context, see Laurie Manchester, "The Secularization of the Search for Salvation: The Self-Fashioning of Orthodox Clergymen's Sons in Late Imperial Russia," *Slavic Review* 57, 1 (1998): 50–76.

[12] The definitive work on subjectivity as a problem in the history of Stalinism is Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006). See also Igal Halfin, *From Darkness to Light: Class, Consciousness, and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000).

[13] Documents from the Archive of the Administration of the Federal Security Service for St. Petersburg and Leningrad Province (Arkhiv upravleniia federal´noi sluzhby bezopasnosti po Sankt-Peterburgu i Leningradskoi oblasti, henceforth UFSB SPb), were kindly made available to me by the Memorial Society in St. Petersburg.

doubt that the case created by the KGB was not fabricated.[14] Operating against the background of a campaign for socialist legality in the country, the KGB sought to find evidence of the charges of "anti-Soviet and counterrevolutionary propaganda and agitation" and formation of a counterrevolutionary group that would stand up in court.[15] Another difficulty is that documents like interrogation records—as opposed to the personal documents like diaries that have primarily been used to study self-fashioning in the Soviet context—shed more light on a historical subject's public behavior than on his or her private existence. Moreover, they reconstruct for the historian only the parts of an individual's life that came under the magnifying glass of the institutions of state security. Careful juxtaposition of different kinds of evidence can alleviate these problems of omission and bias. But it is also bears emphasis that public behavior, rather than personal reflection alone, was integral to Soviet self-fashioning. For postwar intellectuals as for the better-studied Soviet citizens of the interwar period, the Soviet notion of personality (*lichnost´*) referred to the individual as a carrier of universal values, and therefore blurred the public and the private.[16] Indeed, Pimenov's story suggests the critical importance

[14] Revol´t Pimenov's careful and accurate account of his case was written in 1969 and published nearly a decade later as "Odin politicheskii protsess," *Pamiat´,* no. 2–3 (1977–78). I draw on a reprinting of this text as well as his other memoirs published in Revol´t Pimenov, *Vospominaniia,* vol. 1, in *Dokumenty po istorii dvizheniia inakomysliashchikh* 6, ed. Nikolai Mitrokhin (Moscow: Panorama, 1996). I accessed the second volume of his memoir (henceforth *Vospominaniia* 2) online at www.chronos.msu.ru/RREPORTS/pimenov_vospominaniya_2.html#_ftn1, last accessed 26 August 2009. See also Boris Vail´'s *Osobo opasnyi* (London: Overseas Publications Interchange, 1980).

[15] Pimenov emphasizes that his interrogators' main goal was to extract confessions that would confirm information the KGB had already gathered through extralegal means—planted microphones, unofficial searches, and tips from informers and denouncers—so that they could be presented in court. Although they sometimes tried to mislead the defendants in putting together the protocols, the interrogators did not resort to coercion or threats. See Pimenov, "Odin politicheskii protsess," 95–147.

[16] *Lichnost´*—a word that referred to both an individual and his or her unique and elevated set of human features—was a hallowed principle in Soviet discourse, for it was axiomatic that communism and only communism could bring about the full and harmonious development of the individual. A standard late Soviet definition of *lichnost´* is a "distinct human self, a human individuality as a carrier of distinct social and subjective signs and characteristics" (*Tolkovyi slovar´ russkogo iazyka Ushakova,* accessed in October 2008 at slovari.yandex.ru/dict/ushakov). See also Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 184–90. To emphasize the word's difference from Western notions of individualism, I translate *lichnost´* as personality. It should also be pointed out that all sources, including diaries, can present interpretive pitfalls and biases. For instance, the diary of Stepan Podlubny, analyzed to great effect by Jochen Hellbeck, fails to mention the author's affiliation with the secret police ("Diary of Stepan Filippovich Podlubny," in *Intimacy and Terror: Soviet Diaries of the 1930s*, ed. Véronique Garros et al., trans. Carol Flath [New York: New Press, 1995], 293–95).

of public modes of self-fashioning and representation in the postwar intelligentsia.

In Pimenov's case the line between intelligentsia myth and individual reality was blurred from the start. In 1931, the veterinary doctor Ivan Shcherbakov and the schoolteacher Larisa Pimenova gave their child the unusual name Revol´t. Their name choice was a take on *La Révolte,* a newspaper published by Petr Kropotkin; the anarchist prince was a figure held in high esteem by Ivan, a Civil War-era Cheka worker who had grown disillusioned with Soviet socialism during the 1920s.[17] The name was prophetic. In his memoirs, Revol´t Pimenov recalls a childhood dominated by an eccentric urge to stand apart from his peers.[18] As a chronicle of his own development of oppositional consciousness, Pimenov's memoirs must be used carefully, especially where they lack corroboration from other sources. But it is clear that by the time he became a student at the Leningrad University Mechanics and Mathematics Department in 1947, Pimenov had become immersed in oppositional political ideas that placed him at the extreme fringes of Soviet society. The teenaged Pimenov reached a surprising conclusion when reading Stalin's *Anarchism and Socialism.* Responding to Stalin's formulation that anarchism saw emancipation of the individual as a precondition for that of the masses while Marxism held the opposite, Pimenov decided to become an anarchist.[19] He clearly saw in anarchism a path to the liberated and self-conscious personality, an ideal that would become the cornerstone of his thought in the following decade. Between February 1948 and August 1949, Pimenov wrote a piece titled "On 'My Notes,' Part II, or 'What Is to Be Done?'" which described the state as an "octopus" which "tenderly and solicitously takes us into its arms, lulls us to sleep and sings us lullabies while feeding us the blood sucked from our fathers, mothers, relatives, loved ones—from everyone!"[20] Self-emancipation from the deceptions of the state would lead to general freedom: "The kingdom of light will establish itself on

[17] The All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counterrevolution and Sabotage, the first incarnation of the Soviet security services. As Shcherbakov had learned during a visit to Moscow's Kropotkin Museum in 1930, the anarchist had referred to the paper as a baby in coded correspondence from jail (Pimenov, "Dela semeinye," in *Vospominaniia,* 1:335–36).

[18] Revol´t Pimenov, "Leningrad—shkola obshchestvennoi zhizni," in *Vospominaniia,* 1:489–91.

[19] Pimenov, "O stroitel´stve kommunizma v kontse sorokovykh godov," in *Vospominaniia,* 1: 461–62.

[20] See the handwritten manuscript in UFSB SPb arkh. no. P-81390, t. 3, l. 291.

earth only when all octopuses are destroyed … jails demolished, judges and law faculties extirpated, governments driven away…. Long live anarchy!"[21]

Rather than hiding his oppositional ideas as one might expect of a Stalin-era subject, Pimenov seems to have been determined to communicate them to the public. At an official demonstration in 1949, a classmate asked him how a "person with his views could remain in the Komsomol," the Young Communist League to which it was virtually mandatory to belong. Thinking that she had a point, Pimenov took the inconceivably dangerous step of submitting his voluntary resignation from the organization to the university Komsomol Committee, explaining that his convictions clashed with the demands the organization made of its members. Perhaps due to the political calculations of embattled local elites during the "Leningrad Affair," Pimenov was not arrested by state security agencies but rather interned for a few months in a hospital for mental patients with a diagnosis of schizophrenia.[22] After yet another run-in with authority—this time primarily for demonstrating a "lack of study discipline" by refusing to sit quietly through dull ideological lectures on political economy and dialectical materialism—Pimenov finished his studies in the spring of 1954.[23]

Pimenov's very public clashes with authority during his student years made him an unlikely figure during late Stalinism. So too did his interest in non-Marxist ideas. But this should not obscure the ways that Pimenov's revolt reflected broader political trends of late Stalinism. Pimenov's view of the Soviet state as a deviation from true revolution—and his critical reading of the Marxist-Leninist canon to arrive at this conclusion—was common to other educated youth discouraged by the ideological rigidity of the late Stalin period.[24] Pimenov's rebellion also drew on Soviet culture in its foregrounding of revolutionary heroism. Despite embracing anarchism, Pimenov was influenced by the notion of the "complete and harmonious personality" of the future promised by Marx.[25] Indeed, Pimenov's studenthood rebellion involved the projection of an idealized historical personality. Writing years later, Pimenov explained his political agenda in 1948. At a Komsomol hearing in front of peers, he would pronounce his verdict on the regime in a dramatic speech that would change the course of history. "It seemed to me," he recalled

[21] Ibid., l. 297.

[22] This is Pimenov's plausible hypothesis ("Odin politicheskii protsess," 57).

[23] Pimenov was expelled from the university but later readmitted after he and his relatives appealed to the Ministry of Higher Education. See the appeals reproduced in Pimenov, "Leningrad—shkola obshchestvennoi zhizni," 520–23.

[24] Fürst, "Prisoners of the Soviet Self?"

[25] Pimenov, "O stroitel´stve kommunizma," 453.

in his testimony to KGB in 1957, "that almost everyone thought the way I did, but was afraid to speak out"; therefore, it would take only "one dramatic example" to rouse his fellow students to "reject the yoke of injustice."[26] Here one sees Pimenov writing himself into history as an agent of revolutionary development, a tendency common among the scattered anti-Soviet youth groups of the early postwar years.[27]

But the extreme oppositional mold of Pimenov's personality requires explanation. What had driven Pimenov to a potentially life-threatening confrontation with party authority? Like the subjects of the interwar period analyzed by Jochen Hellbeck, Pimenov interacted with Soviet socialism out of psychological and personal impulses as well as intellectual ones.[28] The personal context makes Pimenov's seemingly fantastical after-the-fact account of his own motives—that he sought to present a "rousing example" to his cowed peers through open protest—more plausible. There is little reason to think that Pimenov internalized his father's doubts about communism.[29] Nonetheless, Pimenov's family background was crucial. His father and mother, a graduate of a prerevolutionary "Institute for Noble Girls" in Novocherkassk, raised Pimenov with near-religious reverence for the learning and "culturedness" (*kul´turnost´*) that was so important to the old intelligentsia and its Soviet successor.[30] The young Pimenov was a model of Soviet culture, reading serious literature from an early age and pleasing adults by doing virtuoso public poetry readings. The adult Pimenov's prudish and categorical opposition to swearing showed the extent to which he imbibed the intelligentsia's commitment to bringing cultured behavior to everyday life.[31] Pimenov's efforts at self-improvement took on radical oppositional forms during his teenage years, when the breakup of his parents led him to emotional meltdown and at least two attempts at suicide.[32] After one violent

[26] UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 1, l. 336.

[27] Juliane Fürst, "Stalin's Last Generation: Youth, State, and Komsomol, 1945–53" (Ph.D. diss., London School of Economics, 2003), chaps. 3–4.

[28] This is emphasized in Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*, chap. 4.

[29] The distance of Shcherbakov from Pimenov's radical views is suggested by Pimenov, "Dela semeinye," 390. See also Shcherbakov's testimony to the KGB in UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 3, ch. 1, ll. 75–6.

[30] For instance, Pimenov's mother forced him to copy out pages of literary classics by hand whenever he made grammatical mistakes (Pimenov, "Dela semeinye," 350–54).

[31] Ibid., 354–55, 303, 385–87; Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

[32] In the following years, his attitude toward his father softened, but he soon clashed with his mother, who had joined him in Leningrad in 1946 (Pimenov, "O stroitel´stve kommunizma," 434).

episode with his father, he left his family in Moscow for Leningrad, where he lived with relatives.[33] Pimenov's own recollections as well as other fragmentary sources suggest that he lived in extreme and willful social isolation during his student years, viewed by his classmates alternatively as a hopeless eccentric or a political heretic.[34] Social isolation fueled self-fashioning; as he recalled in his memoirs, intellectual activities—both amateur research in revolutionary history and his mathematical studies—served as an escape from a troubled external reality.[35]

Pimenov's abortive political rebellion was rejected or misunderstood by everyone from family members to peers. Yet this only deepened the dynamic connection between alienation and grandiose self-fashioning.[36] Pimenov's final years of study remain mysterious: the anticosmopolitan campaign and the cultural campaigns of the so-called Zhdanovshchina that were convulsing the postwar universities simply "passed him by," he later claimed, as he became preoccupied with his studies.[37] Pimenov's activism was limited to academic affairs, where he sought to defend a beloved professor against the ideological criticisms of the party organization.[38] In the same period, however, Pimenov continued his project of radical self-fashioning in private through extensive writing on revolutionary history. In a series of plays, articles, and historical fiction, Pimenov challenged the party's carefully controlled historical narrative by championing non-Bolshevik revolutionaries of the past. His pantheon of unlikely revolutionary heroes included the priest-revolutionary Father Gapon, the revolutionary terrorist Andrei Zheliabov, the double agent Sergei Degaev, and the terrorist-turned-Provisional-Government-bureaucrat Boris Savinkov—all, with the exception of Zheliabov, figures forgotten or

[33] Pimenov's correspondence with his mother in 1945–47 is published in Pimenov, "Dela semeinye," 386–434, esp. 422–27.

[34] UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 1, l. 337. Pimenov's psychiatric evaluation stated that his peers had noticed "strangeness in his behavior," including his inability to make friends. It bears emphasis that the diagnosis of schizophrenia given to Pimenov in 1949 was a politicized verdict generated by party and Komsomol leaders in Leningrad to discredit his decision to leave the youth league. See the form titled "History of Illness" (*Istoriia bolezni*) in UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 9, l. 35.

[35] He reports having felt a "need to prove to himself" through academic success (Pimenov, "Dela semeinye," 435).

[36] UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 1, l. 337.

[37] Pimenov, "Odin politicheskii protsess," 22.

[38] In this episode, Pimenov sought to bring his cause to the public sphere by printing letters of protest. See the detailed reconstruction, together with contemporaneous documents, of the campaign against N. A. Shanin as well as that of student opposition to the teaching of F. P. Otradnykh in Pimenov, "Delo N. A. Shanina" and "Delo Otradnykh," in *Vospominaniia,* 1:486–510.

maligned by Bolshevik textbooks.[39] Pimenov's valorization of non-Marxist revolutionaries in his writings had a clear psychological origin: the tragic rebels against the Bolshevik-dominated course of history were metaphors for his own outcast status in Soviet society.

Even more subversive of the canons of Soviet history were Pimenov's efforts to write explicitly non-Marxist revolutionary history. Pimenov deliberately placed heroic individuals, not the workers or the party, at the center of revolutionary history. As he explained to KGB interrogators in 1957, Marxist historiography did a disservice to revolutionary history by emphasizing the class struggle instead of the "temperaments of different actors."[40] Pimenov's attack on Marxism in the name of great personalities brought him to Nietzsche, whose ideas he had first encountered indirectly through Maksim Gor´kii's bombastic Nietzsche-inspired piece, "Chelovek" (The Person). In a 1954 work commemorating the 110th anniversary of Nietzsche's birth, Pimenov explained his rejection of scientific socialism by comparing Marx to Nietzsche's hero Zarathustra. Both were iconoclasts who had freed themselves by "rejecting the old and destroying strongholds." But Marx had placed "economic laws" on the throne vacated by God rather than "looking at the world with his own eyes." In the process, the "average" had taken precedence over the "personal," the herd over the individual.[41] Interest in Nietzsche's superman made a certain sense. As work on the reception of Nietzsche in Russia has noted, the ideal of a self-creating humanity bore some resemblance to Soviet Prometheanism.[42] Yet Pimenov's attachment to the great individual was also part of his strategy of self-fashioning. As a solitary figure isolated from society by his efforts to transform values, Nietzsche's superman seemed to offer Pimenov a model for reconciling dreams of greatness with social isolation. For instance, bitter that he had not gained admission to graduate school, presumably in connection with his clashes with authority, Pimenov complained in a 1953 letter to his father about being "paid 20 percent less than the diploma-carrying lackeys of socialism."[43]

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[39] Pimenov, "Odin politicheskii protsess," 22.

[40] UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 9, l. 101.

[41] Archive of Revol´t Pimenov, NIITs-Memorial-SpB-Pimenov raz. 3, pap. 3.5, RIP 1954, ms. on Nietzsche, 14.3–14.4. I would like to thank Benjamin Nathans for providing me with a copy of this source. In testimony, Shcherbakov recalled Pimenov's fascination with the idea that "history is moved by supermen" (UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 3, ch. 1, l. 75).

[42] Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, ed., *Nietzsche and Soviet Culture: Ally and Adversary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[43] This letter was cited by interrogators (USFB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 3, ch. 1, l. 79).

A critical part of Pimenov's efforts to distance himself from the Communist Party and its historical perspective was the notion of the intelligentsia. As recent work on the topic has shown, the traditional ideal of an intelligentsia as a body of thinkers devoted to articulating the interests of the people continued to hold a place in Soviet culture despite the Stalin regime's remaking of the intelligentsia as an intellectual service class. The tenacity of an activist intelligentsia ideal in Soviet culture reflected the overlap between the ideological agendas of the Soviet state and the prerevolutionary intelligentsia from which it had sprung and was strengthened by the reevaluation of the tsarist past during Stalin's so-called "Great Retreat." Having usurped the old intelligentsia's mission of liberating humanity for itself, the Communist Party nonetheless called on highly educated citizens to further the construction of communism by bringing their superior level of culture and consciousness to the masses.[44] In the intelligentsia of the past Pimenov found a collective actor with universal aspirations that was distinct from the Communist Party. This was an extension of self-fashioning. Pimenov defined himself according to the revolutionary intelligentsia's mission of liberating the people and even reproduced the alternating selflessness and elitism with which Russian revolutionaries had viewed the masses. After graduation, Pimenov undertook a solitary journey through the Caucasus Mountains, during which he worked drying fruit at a local collective farm. His agenda was to connect with real life, "in some sense [like] an imitation of Gor´kii," as he explained to the KGB.[45] He was dismayed to discover poverty and humiliating subservience among the people. Recounting the experience in a letter to his father, Pimenov struck a Nietzschean pose, describing himself as a "nobleman by breeding" who could not "abase himself by socializing with plebs." The people (*narod*), he explained, "deserved only the whip and vodka" and were "merely of use as a weapon in the struggle against the idiocy of the government."[46]

As the unhappy outcome of this experiment suggested, Pimenov's faith in a non-Bolshevik revolutionary narrative was difficult to sustain during late Stalinism. Indeed, a few years before his trip Pimenov attempted what

[44] Works that have explored the muted persistence of the old idea of the intelligentsia in Soviet culture include Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 256–57; and Timo Vihavainen, *The Inner Adversary: The Struggle against Philistinism as the Moral Mission of the Russian Intelligentsia* (Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2006), chap. 9.

[45] USFB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 1, l. 107b. In his memoirs, Pimenov states that he "went to the people" under the influence of Zaslavskii, who had become convinced through his experiences in Siberia that simple people could be recruited into "partisan divisions" in armed opposition to the state ("Leningrad—shkola obshchestvennoi zhizni," 529).

[46] See the letter in UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 6, not numbered.

Vissarion Belinskii had once called "reconciliation with reality," an acceptance of the dialectical necessity of current society.[47] Pimenov's 1952 "Fates of the Russian Revolution" argued that the Bolsheviks represented a dialectical synthesis of previous trends in the Russian revolutionary movement, namely populism's revolutionary voluntarism and classical Marxism's acceptance of materialism and the inevitability of capitalism.[48] The acceptance of Stalinism as historical necessity sat awkwardly with Pimenov's romantic treatment of his revolutionary heroes. Pimenov wrote that Savinkov, who died in Bolshevik custody, was one of the "purest and most exalted revolutionaries," and explained the failure of the masses to support him against the Bolsheviks with the quixotic statement that the people "believe in Christ only if he is crucified."[49] Ironically, Pimenov's fascination with great individuals allowed for a certain respect for Stalin, even while he labeled the dictator a bloody tyrant.[50]

The death of Stalin encouraged Pimenov to set aside the historical pessimism represented by his reconciliation with reality. Like several critically thinking young intellectuals of the first postwar decade, Pimenov was genuinely excited by the political possibilities of post-Stalinism and, in particular, the partial rehabilitation of Stalin's victims—a group to which he felt that he belonged.[51] Yet the end of Stalinism only strengthened Pimenov's commitment to the concept of a radical intelligentsia and the personalities that would comprise it. Pimenov's view of the revolutionary potential of post-Stalinism was spelled out in a conclusion to "Fates of the Russian Revolution" written in 1954. Scientific socialism could never be implemented, Pimenov wrote, as it was a contradiction in terms: a state that sought to guarantee the people's freedom by external means was bound to violate it. Lenin, he

[47] On the "reconciliation with reality" as a phenomenon in Russian intellectual history, see Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism,* trans. Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1979), 115–34.

[48] Pimenov, "Odin politicheskii protsess," 64–65; UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 3, l. 202.

[49] This is from a draft of Pimenov's "Fates of the Russian Revolution" (UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 5, l. 255 [*konvert*]).

[50] Pimenov explained in testimony to the KGB that "even without Stalin things would not have changed but might even have worsened, because Stalin is nevertheless a genius" (UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 1, l. 337). This testimony is consistent with Pimenov, "Odin politicheskii protsess," 22, 337.

[51] Pimenov's testimony and memoirs are consistent on this point (UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 1, l. 378; Pimenov, "Odin politicheskii protsess," 23–25). A comparable example was Lev Krasnopevtsev, a critically thinking young historian in Moscow who joined the party in 1955 out of optimism for the new regime. See "'Delo molodykh istorikov' (1957–1958 gg.)," *Voprosy istorii*, no. 4 (1994): 107–9; and interview with Lev Krasnopevtsev, Moscow, 2005.

would argue a few years later, was a demagogue and opportunist who had gambled on popular moods to seize power and then abandoned the Marxist program of workers' power, social equality, and world revolution to keep it.[52] But a truly free socialist society could be built by reviving the revolutionary intelligentsia: a cohort of "Russian revolutionary intellectuals [*intelligenty*] of the 20th century" would lead society by creating an independent "public opinion" (*obshchestvennoe mnenie*).[53]

Pimenov's renewed faith in the intelligentsia as the hero of history reflected the emergence of a broader milieu of critically thinking intellectuals that emerged on Soviet campuses in the 1950s. Already during Stalin's last years, Pimenov had befriended a small group of fellow mathematics students at Leningrad University. The group shared an ethos of intellectual creativity and originality, as was suggested by the semi-ironic names the students gave themselves: "The Society of Madmen at Liberty" (Obshchestvo sumasshedshikh na svobode), "The Library of the Russian Revolution," "The Einstein Club," and "The Free Russian University."[54] Like other unorthodox youthful friendship circles (*kompanii*) that appeared in the same period, Pimenov's circle was a gathering of distinct personalities rather than a group unified by a cohesive worldview. Pimenov's classmate Viktor Zaslavskii, who had become disillusioned with the Soviet leadership after the arrest of Beria, criticized Pimenov's heroic conception of the intelligentsia as elitist.[55] Ernst Orlovskii shared Pimenov's passion for revolutionary history but was himself a strict adherent to legal forms of political action. But it was precisely the divergent personalities of the circle that seemed to mark it as a harbinger of the revolutionary intelligentsia Pimenov prophesized. In 1955, when an acquaintance from Moscow commented in a letter that Pimenov and his friends had divergent interests, he commented, "may God forgive you if you think one can make a unified group out of intellectuals [*iz intelligentov*]."[56]

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[52] See the text "What Is Socialism?" in UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 3, l. 337.

[53] UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 5, l. 255 (*konvert*).

[54] A recent account of the company in the Khrushchev period is Juliane Fürst, "Friends in Private, Friends in Public: The Phenomenon of the Kompaniia among Soviet Youth in the 1950s and 1960s," in *Borders of Socialism: Private Spheres of Soviet Russia,* ed. Lewis H. Siegelbaum (New York: Palgrave, 2006), 229–50.

[55] Pimenov, "Odin politicheskii protsess," 32, 65. Nevertheless, Zaslavskii looked to the intelligentsia past for his signposts, namely to the Russian Constitutional Democrats. See the excerpt from Zaslavskii's diary, later called a "political questionnaire," that played a role in his prosecution (UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 6, ll. 218–22).

[56] See Pimenov's August 1955 exchange of letters with Ariadna Mashianova, an acquaintance from Moscow, in UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 6, ll. 229–30.

Campus youth circles like Pimenov's—only some of which survived the institutionalized hostility of the party-state to informal groupings of students—were the breeding ground for political opposition movements in the mid-1950s, when the official campaign of de-Stalinization created ideological upheavals throughout Soviet society. Khrushchev's so-called "secret speech" on Stalin's cult of personality and its consequences at the 1956 20th Party Congress confronted Soviet citizens with a bewildering set of ideological hurdles: Stalin had decimated honest Communists and even entire nations while remaining a great Marxist; the Soviet leadership had upheld the correct party line while being terrorized by Stalin. The report's confusing status as a widely disseminated yet unpublished report of a closed session of a party congress further complicated the question of what a loyal response to the congress could mean.[57] As a budding literature on youth in 1956 demonstrates, de-Stalinization brought about ideological confusion and debate on college campuses across the USSR. One critical outcome of the campus discussions was the emergence of a minority of youth oppositionists determined to press the party-state toward further articulation of the line of the 20th Party Congress.[58]

Pimenov was sympathetic to the main ideological developments in the emergent sphere of critical intellectual exchange in the universities. He supported the dominant trend of the period, which might be called "Soviet humanism," the embrace of creative engagement in the arts and scholarship as a way to overcome the ethical failings of cruelty, callousness, and bureaucratic indifference that seemed to underpin the period of Stalin's rule.[59] Although himself not a Marxist, Pimenov was also sympathetic to the agenda of doctrine-based reformism that gained the name "revisionism": namely, the efforts of a small number of ideologically fervent intellectuals to elaborate on Khrushchev's analysis of the cult of personality using Marxism-Leninism as a conceptual tool.[60] Pimenov was also characteristic of his milieu in his excitement about liberalizing regimes in Eastern Europe,

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[57] K. Aimermakher et al., eds., *Doklad N. S. Khrushcheva o kul´te lichnosti Stalina na XX s"ezde KPSS: Dokumenty* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2002), 253, 278.

[58] Thorough accounts of these groups are Kuzovkin, "Partiino-komsomol´skie presledovaniia"; and L. V. Silina, *Nastroeniia sovetskogo studenchestva, 1945–1964* (Moscow: Russkii mir, 2004).

[59] Pimenov's attachment to Soviet humanism is demonstrated in his "On the Tasks of Russian Literature" (UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 5, ll. 62–66).

[60] The term "revisionism" is a problematic one, as it arose from an official campaign to associate the individuals involved with previous cohorts of Marxist heretics. See Karl Reyman and Herman Singer, "The Origins and Significance of East European Revisionism," in *Revisionism: Essays on the History of Marxist Ideas,* ed. Leopold Labedz (Plainview, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1974), 215–22.

which seemed to provide models for the reform of communism in the Soviet Union.[61] In 1956, Pimenov, along with his friend Ernst Orlovskii and wife Irena Verblovskaia, herself a specialist in Polish history, translated materials from Polish newspapers and distributed them among their circle of friends. Polish newspapers, freely sold in Leningrad at the time, offered access to political discussions and literary debates underway in Poland and far more information about the crises that enveloped Poland and Hungary in the fall than was available in the Soviet press.[62]

Pimenov's approach to post-Stalin changes, however, has to be understood in terms of his self-fashioning as a revolutionary personality. Pimenov's curious initial response to Khrushchev's secret speech was that he would join the party as a candidate if Trotskii were rehabilitated—not because he felt any particular connection to him, but because it would be a sign that the revolution was restoring justice to its maligned heroes (on these grounds he decided that only the rehabilitation of Savinkov would be grounds enough to enter the party as a full member).[63] To be sure, naïve optimism in the reformist credentials of the post-Stalin leadership was common to many young intellectuals in 1956. So too was a sense of living in historic times. As the Ukrainian literary critic Ivan Svitlychnyi recalled wistfully in a later speech to his peers, it had seemed immediately after the 20th Party Congress that "all problems in life will be decided with one fell swoop, and nothing will be left but to solemnly march toward communism with flags raised.[64] But for Pimenov, an alliance with a reformed new regime could only come at the cost of a vindication of his view of revolutionary history.

Like many enthusiasts for de-Stalinization, Pimenov turned to independent political action when the regime turned toward a more reactionary political line in 1956. Beginning in discussions with peers in 1954, Pimenov developed a political strategy for post-Stalinism, which he called "legal methods of struggle." The Soviet state had presented citizens with the "opportunity to speak out in the press and at meetings, to act on one's opinions," which could serve as a means to push the regime toward

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[61] For a broader look at this phenomenon, see the rich set of interviews published in Tat´iana Kosinova, "Sobytiia 1956 g. v Pol´she glazami sovetskikh dissidentov," in *Korni travy.* See also Patryk Babiracki, "Imperial Heresies: Polish Students in the Soviet Union, 1948–1957," *Ab Imperio,* no. 4 (2007): 199–236.

[62] Interview with Irena Verblovskaia, St. Petersburg, 2005; Vail´, *Osobo opasnyi,* 113; UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 3, ch. 1, l. 382.

[63] Pimenov, "Odin politicheskii protsess," 21–22.

[64] *Ukrains´kyi visnyk,* no. 4 (1971): 112.

democratization.[65] The strategy of openly disseminating ideas in a public sphere reflected a belief in the autonomy of the individual and the value of popular participation. But it was also a vehicle for Pimenov's self-fashioning. Pimenov associated "legal methods" with precedents in revolutionary history. In the revolution of 1905, Father Gapon's Union of Factory Workers of St. Petersburg had shown the revolutionary power of legality, Pimenov argued in his 1955 work *Gapon: Byl´ v dvukh chastiakh* (Gapon: The True Story in Two Parts).[66] Moreover, Pimenov saw legality as a political tool, not an absolute value—a fact that explains how he held respect for both the legal methods of Gapon in 1905 and the use of revolutionary terror against the autocracy in the 19th century.[67] Pimenov's political goals and strategies cannot be distinguished from his efforts to imagine himself as part of a revolutionary historical narrative.

Pimenov's espousal of legal methods placed him at the forefront of the activism that emerged on Soviet campuses in 1956. His first major attempt at engaging the regime in debate came in the spring when he and his friends created and distributed a samizdat copy of Khrushchev's unpublished secret speech along with an explosive afterword by Pimenov indicting the current political leadership for Stalin-era crimes.[68] Pimenov took legal methods to their logical conclusion at the end of the year, when the Soviet leadership's opposition to the Polish October and military action to suppress revolution in Hungary seemed to mark a final betrayal of the 20th Party Congress. On 22 October, *Pravda* published an article called "Anti-Socialist Statements on the Pages of the Polish Press" attacking recent criticisms of Socialist Realism by Jan Kott, Julian Przyboś, and Antonin Słonimski, some of which Pimenov had read. Pimenov shot back with a signed letter to *Pravda*'s editors titled "Anti-Democratic Statements on the Pages of the Soviet Press." Pimenov spoke of the Polish intellectuals in the morally charged language he used to describe his revolutionary heroes: they were "seekers" who strove to make "socialism

[65] The quotation is from Pimenov's words at a meeting of the Library Institute soon to be discussed (UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 3, ch. 1, l. 11, 379; Vail´, *Osobo opasnyi,* 140–41).

[66] See the first chapter of the work, titled "Restoring the Truth about the Ninth of January" (UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 5, ll. 63–66). For Pimenov's presentation of these points to his network of friends, see the testimony of Orlovskii in ibid., t. 3, ch. 1, ll. 128–29.

[67] In this sense, Pimenov's legal methods were distinct from the steadfast legalism of later Soviet human rights activists. See Nathans, "The Dictatorship of Reason."

[68] "The party turned out to be bankrupt" and the country had "arrived at fascism" during Stalin's rule, it alleged; only a broader "spiritual reconstruction" of all citizens could ensure the construction of a free Soviet society. This quote from the speech was read by prosecutors to Pimenov during his interrogation, and he did not question its authenticity (USFB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 1, l. 15; Pimenov, "Odin politicheskii protsess," 9, 25–27).

a bright kingdom of freedom and creativity" by "effacing from memory" the "shameful" years of Stalin's rule.[69] The anonymous author of the *Pravda* article was a "guard" (*storozh*)—presumably of the established order—whose effort to speak for the toilers was demagogic.[70] Even more provocatively, Pimenov sent a series of "open letters" to deputies of the Supreme Soviet, the rubberstamp Soviet parliament, that demanded they use the assembly's next session to demand the removal of troops from Hungary and the "retirement of those members of the [Soviet] government who were responsible for interference in the internal life" of the country.[71]

Pimenov also used the political turmoil of late 1956 to place his radical intelligentsia self into the view of a wider public. He chose for the purpose the 10 November discussion at Leningrad University of Vladimir Dudintsev's *Not by Bread Alone,* a novel about an inventor's struggle with evil bureaucrats that became a celebrated cause of critical intellectuals in 1956. Pimenov—who had not read the book—made a dramatic speech condemning the Party's control of public opinion and scientific truth. Even more controversially, Pimenov lodged a personal attack on the rector of Leningrad State University, A. D. Aleksandrov, his former mentor at the Mechanics and Mathematics Department, who was present at the meeting. While not mentioning him by name, Pimenov recalled a conversation in 1949 in which the rector had expressed sympathy for the antisemitic campaign then underway in the country. Pimenov alleged that the anonymous conversation partner had showed "baseness" in 1955 by refusing to recant these words.[72] When, as Pimenov no doubt hoped he would, Aleksandrov took the floor, admitted having made the statements and justified his decision to expel Pimenov from the university years earlier, parts of the crowd drowned out the rector with "screams, noise, and stomping of feet."[73] The public ruckus gave Pimenov instant fame and notoriety at the university and in educated circles in

[69] See the work in UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 6, l. 161. On Pimenov's reading of the "awakening Polish Social Thought," see also his work "K sporu o sotsialisticheskom realizme" that was seized during his arrest (ibid., l. 129).

[70] UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 6, ll. 161–62.

[71] See the letter in UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 6, 170.

[72] In testimony to the KGB, Pimenov recalled having clashed with Aleksandrov over the latter's comments at the time, one reason for Pimenov's temporary expulsion from the university (UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 1, ll. 104–104 ob.).

[73] Aleksandrov stated in a private conversation with reference to the response of Soviet Jews to Israeli ambassador Golda Meir's trip to Moscow, "of course, it is repugnant that they are repressing Jews, but what can be done when some sort of madam came and they ran along behind her." See the stenographic account that was compiled by Ernst Orlovskii in Pimenov, "Odin politicheskii protsess," 45–46.

Leningrad. Pimenov had finally found public confirmation of the virtuous intelligentsia personality that he had long sought; in his memoirs, he recounts that he was "at the height of his own conceptions of victory."[74]

This was a pyrrhic victory. Pimenov understood that his direct challenges to the Soviet establishment and its representatives would not go unpunished, talk of newfound opportunities for public expression notwithstanding. In sharp contrast to loyal forms of self-fashioning in the USSR, Pimenov's attempt at revolutionary selfhood carried the virtual guarantee of self-destruction. Remarkably, Pimenov's will was not only not weakened but perhaps encouraged by the threat of arrest. In Verblovskaia's interpretation, Pimenov "wanted to be put in jail": "otherwise, what kind of hero would he be? … He had something from Dostoevskii's *The Devils* in him."[75] This statement holds some truth, even if it exaggerates Pimenov's single-mindedness—for instance, he had taken a hiatus from politics in the summer of 1956 to work on a paper for a mathematics conference. Pimenov's unrelenting pushing of the boundaries of public action was a conscious emulation of the radical intelligentsia tradition of mobilizing the public through revolutionary spectacle and daring acts.[76] As Pimenov explained to Nikita Dubrovich, a secondary-school student who began attending discussions at his apartment, "during revolutions the best people perish," but the "highest human instinct is not self-preservation but self-sacrifice." As he elaborated, the "self-sacrifice of Christ brought much more benefit than if he had remained alive."[77] The risk of political repression only cemented Pimenov's self-conception as a revolutionary figure pushing the development of history.

How representative was Pimenov's self-fashioning in the context of the activism in educated society in the 1950s? Other intellectual rebels of the period grappled with the ongoing demands of Soviet subjecthood—the need to rationalize one's actions in world-historic terms and to project a morally pure and "civilized" self to others. But the operation of these mental habits within the political context of de-Stalinization did not follow a single pattern. In most cases, the principle of embodying historical personality suggested that

[74] Ibid.

[75] Interview with Irena Verblovskaia, St. Petersburg, 2005.

[76] Tom Trice, "Rites of Protest: Populist Funerals in Imperial St. Petersburg, 1876–1878," *Slavic Review* 60, 1 (2001): 50–74. For the distinct student culture of rebellion, see Susan Morrissey, *Heralds of Revolution: Russian Students and the Mythology of Radicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[77] This is from Pimenov's testimony during a confrontation with the witness N. A. Dubrovich, 30 May 1957 (UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 4, ch. 2, l. 375). At one point during his interrogations, Pimenov justified his refusal to answer a question with the comment, "I did not go to jail in order to help with the investigation" (ibid., t. 5, l. 2).

one should side with the political status quo, just as Pimenov had sought to do with "Fates of the Russian Revolution" before Stalin's death. Igor´ Dedkov, a journalism student at Moscow University, spearheaded an unprecedented effort to democratize a Komsomol organization from within in 1956–57. He broke off a passage in his diary criticizing the authoritarianism and violence of the Khrushchev regime with a seemingly discordant statement: "Or is everything that exists reasonable?"[78] Dedkov resisted this pressure to conform to existing reality, but other freethinking youth answered the question he posed in the affirmative.

Pimenov's own friendship circle suggested the differing stances that young intellectual critics of the regime could adopt with regard to the party-state. During the Soviet military campaign in Hungary, Pimenov wrote a set of "theses" interpreting the Hungarian events as a genuine socialist revolution rather than a counterrevolutionary putsch (the line taken by the Soviet press). But when Pimenov read the document to his close friends on 8 November 1956, four days after the massive second Soviet invasion of Budapest, he ran into boisterous opposition. In Pimenov's recollection, Zaslavskii "considered reactionary forces a real political force in Hungary," and warned of "the restoration and victory of fascism and Horthyism." Verblovskaia took Zaslavskii's side in the argument, arguing that the Hungarian revolutionaries "had permitted the death of innocent people and bloody excesses."[79] The objections to Pimenov had a distinct logic: if, whatever its flaws, the Soviet project embodied the Marxist historical mission—an assertion that was not widely challenged in 1956—popular revolt against it could not constitute progressive historical development. The need to bow to perceived historical necessity was one reason why Soviet intervention in Hungary silenced all but the most ardent critics of the Party on Soviet campuses.[80] Pimenov's rebuttal to his friends—that the "death of innocent people, atrocities, and the flowing of blood are inevitable in any revolution"—was an exceptional one for all but the most ardent Soviet domestic critics.[81]

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[78] Igor´ Dedkov, entry for 4 July 1957, in *Dnevnik 1953–1994* (Moscow: Progress-Pleiada, 2005), 16.

[79] This is based on Pimenov's recollection of the conversation in testimony to the KGB. UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 1, ll. 165–6; t. 1, l. 207. Compare with Orlovskii's similar testimony ibid., t. 3, ch. 1, ll. 126–126ob.

[80] On this general pattern of domestic critics falling in with the Soviet cause in late 1956, see Zubok, *Zhivago's Children*, 78–79; Tromly, "Re-Imagining the Soviet Intelligentsia," 293–95; and M. R. Zezina, *Sovetskaia khudozhestvennaia intelligentsiia i vlast´ v 1950-e–60-e gody* (Moscow: Dialog MGU, 1999), 175–76.

[81] UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 1, ll. 165–66; t. 1, l. 207.

Pimenov's relationship with his wife Verblovskaia also underscored the differing ways that Soviet selfhood could be interpreted during de-Stalinization. Verblovskaia's unwillingness to accept Pimenov's endorsement of the Hungarian Revolution was symptomatic of a chasm between them on the broader question of the latter's self-fashioning. Although convicted along with Pimenov for anti-Soviet acts, Verblovskaia was a decidedly unwilling conspirator who had limited knowledge of her husband's activities.[82] Rather than being driven by fear alone, Verblovskaia was highly critical of her husband's extroverted political persona, accusing him of seeking stardom among the members of his discussion circle.[83] Verblovskaia also had personal reasons to reject her husband's political activities. Pimenov was reluctant to acknowledge Verblovskaia as an equal member in his political discussions and schemes; when she wrote down objections to his "Hungarian Theses," he mockingly dismissed them, driving her to tear them to pieces.[84] Instead, Verblovskaia took part in Pimenov's activities in a supporting and technical capacity by reproducing and translating literature. In relegating Verblovskaia and the few other women in his network to menial tasks, Pimenov reproduced the gendered division of labor that had characterized Bolshevik culture.[85]

Pimenov's political activities outside his friendship circle also highlighted the divisions among the selfhood practices of young intellectuals. Soon after his notorious speech at the Dudintsev discussion, Pimenov was approached by a circle of young historians who were developing revisionist critiques of the Soviet state. The historians, though rejecting his non-Marxist approach, were intrigued by Pimenov's extensive and unorthodox knowledge of the Russian Revolution; Pimenov, in turn, was attracted to the members of the circle as "theoretically thinking personalities."[86] But Pimenov's bombastic intelligentsia persona was far removed from the historians' attempts at sober analysis

[82] See Orlovskii's testimony in UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 3, ch. 1, l. 132.

[83] Pimenov, "Odin politicheskii protsess," 91, 93–94.

[84] From Pimenov's words at the January 1958 trial in UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 9, l. 101.

[85] Pimenov's efforts to shield his wife from prosecution, although well intentioned, struck her as condescending and only deepened her sense of belittlement. During the trial, Pimenov angered Verblovskaia when he claimed that she was driven by love of him alone, not political opposition. See the section "Vtoroe sudogovorenie—prigovor 4 fevralia," in Pimenov, *Vospominaniia* 2. Pimenov, "Odin politicheskii protsess," 81–82, 99. When Irina Zuber-Yanikun expressed a desire to take part in Pimenov's conspiratorial organization, she was instructed to cut out individual letters from a newspaper for use in leaflets (Pimenov, "Odin politicheskii protsess," 82). On comradeship and masculinity in early Bolshevik culture, see Eliot Borenstein, *Men without Women: Masculinity and Revolution in Russian Fiction, 1917–1929* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

[86] UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 3, l. 502; Pimenov, "Odin politicheskii protsess," 65.

of current realities according to Marxism-Leninism. While both viewed themselves according to revolutionary history, their political approaches—and the forms of selfhood that drove them—were diametrically opposed. The association broke off in scandal when Pimenov printed and distributed among his friends one of the historians' texts—a Marxist account of the Hungarian Revolution that was given the title "The Truth about Hungary"—after promising not to do so.[87] Both sides explained the acrimonious split in terms that straddled the personal and the political; in testimony to the KGB, Pimenov called the historians cowards who "became afraid" when they "saw what kind of person" he was; the historian Irma Kudrova, in turn, dismissed Pimenov as a "conceited lad" and an "adventurer" (*avantiurist*).[88]

Differences in political personality also plagued Pimenov's interaction with a seemingly more promising part of the Leningrad intellectual milieu: students.[89] In early December, Pimenov sought out a first-year student at the Leningrad Library Institute named Boris Vail′, who had recently been criticized in *Leningradskaia pravda* for his role in the creation of an underground literary journal named *Eres′* (Heresy).[90] An alienated 17-year-old who had already flirted with creating a revolutionary organization in his native Kursk, Vail′ was immediately captivated by Pimenov; in his memoirs, Vail′ recalled thinking at their first meeting, "here is a person who can answer all my questions, who will introduce me to real people, to some sort of an organization!"[91] The two arranged for Pimenov to read his treatise on the depiction of the Russian Revolution in Soviet fiction to students at the Library Institute.[92] But unbeknownst to Pimenov, Vail′ spiced up the event by advertising it among his fellow students as a lecture on "legal methods of

[87] Pimenov, "Odin politicheskii protsess," 69.

[88] See Pimenov's testimony of 16 July 1957 in UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 5, l. 7. Of course, Kudrova and her friends had every reason to distance themselves from Pimenov following his arrest. But they had broken off all contact with Pimenov months before, a circumstance that suggests that Kudrova's characterization of him under interrogation was genuine (ibid., l. 18; Pimenov, "Odin politicheskii protsess," 67–69).

[89] Under the impression of his boisterous reception at the Dudintsev event and contact with a few young people who began frequenting discussions at his apartment, Pimenov decided that youth, and students in particular, were deeply estranged from the regime and constituted a ready constituency for opposition ("Odin politicheskii protsess," 92–93).

[90] *Heresy* was devoted to experimentation with modernist poetry and prose. See Igor′ Adamatskii, "Vse nachinaetsia s eresi," in *Samizdat: Po materialam konferentsii "30 let nezavisimoi pechati, 1950–80 gody" Sankt-Peterburg, 25–27 aprelia 1992 g.,* ed. and comp. V. Dolinin and B. Ivanov (St. Petersburg: Memorial, 1993), 34–36; and Vail′, *Osobo opasnyi*, 129–32.

[91] Ibid., 139. On Vail′'s political activity in Kursk, see ibid., 46–49.

[92] This article had recently been rejected for publication by the liberal journal *Novyi mir.*

struggle" to be delivered by a "comrade from the center."[93] The six students who accepted Vail´'s invitation were impressed with the orator's conspiratorial credentials but skeptical of his seemingly ineffective and politically dangerous strategy of open opposition. On the spur of the moment, Pimenov accepted Vail´'s fiction of a mythical center and asked the students for monetary contributions, thereby adopting the path of illegal conspiracy that he had previously eschewed.[94]

Pimenov struggled to define the purpose and direction of his conspiratorial group. The **s**tudents viewed "legal methods of struggle" as naïve and implausible—a reading that seemed vindicated when the Leningrad police and the KGB put down with force the "open discussion" of the recent exhibit of Pablo Picasso's paintings planned for 21 December at the Square of the Arts, an event that several of the Library Institute students attended.[95] Pimenov bowed to pressure and turned to illegal methods, but the group's decision to produce revolutionary leaflets was crippled by the mysterious inactivity of the student designated as head the organization's "photographic section," Vladimir Vishniakov. Pimenov later alleged that Vishniakov was a KGB infiltrator, a claim that is not proven by the evidence but cannot be ruled out given the latter's role as a central witness in the case.[96] Regardless, the failure to produce leaflets destroyed Pimenov's stature in the eyes of his followers, who began to suspect that the emperor had no clothes—that is, that there was no organization standing behind the mysterious "comrade from the center."[97] At a meeting in February from which Pimenov was absent, all the students but Vail´ renounced the organization.

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[93] Vail´, *Osobo opasnyi,* 141.

[94] See Pimenov's characterization of the students' response to his message of legality in testimony to the KGB (UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 9, l. 106 ob.; Pimenov, "Odin politicheskii protsess," 71). Pimenov would later claim to the KGB that he misled the students about the existence of a "center" to keep them from volunteering information if he were arrested, but this assertion makes little sense given that he had just met the Library Institute students (UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 1, l. 142 ob.).

[95] From the 9 May 1957 testimony of Iurii Grekov (UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 3, ch. 1, l. 379 ob.; Eleonory Gilburd, "Picasso in Thaw Culture," *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* 47, 1–2 [2006]: 91–93).

[96] The case was initiated by a denunciation by one Koba Kobidze, who reported to the KGB that Vishniakov had mentioned the existence of an underground group to him—a denunciation that Pimenov suspected to be a fake designed to protect Vishniakov's identity as a KGB informer ("Odin politicheskii protsess," 88–90). If Vishniakov was in fact an infiltrator, the KGB gave no indication of this in their interrogation of him as a witness (UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 3, ch. 1, l. 17). Pimenov also failed to convince the other members of the group that Vishniakov was an agent.

[97] Vail´, *Osobo opasnyi,* 169–70.

Perhaps expressing a sentiment common to others, Vishniakov explained to the KGB that he had thought the organization a "childish fancy" that would "come to a bad end."[98] The statement demonstrated the willingness of erstwhile rebels against the system to return to the party fold after the Hungarian Revolution.

Like other youth conspiratorial groups in the mid-1950s, the Library Institute Group was quickly dismantled by a KGB that was unleashed on Soviet society by the skittish post-Hungary Soviet political leadership. To be sure, Pimenov's modest organization was unique for the period in developing a rudimentary samizdat network (called simply "information") of broadsheets passed from hand to hand; this included copies of articles from the Yugoslavian and Polish press, literary works of the Thaw, and, most originally, communications about unreported political events like strikes and arrests that were gathered by word of mouth.[99] Nonetheless, the gap between Pimenov and the participants in his organization was near-total. This was underscored by the differing behavior of the participants during the KGB investigation. The Library Institute students, like most other young rebels swept up by the KGB in the 1950s, were quickly persuaded to cooperate with experienced interrogators. In contrast, Pimenov's arrest and incarceration brought the climax of his self-fashioning efforts. Not only did Pimenov engage in a long and grueling battle to hide incriminating information about his friends from the security apparatus; he also challenged his interrogators to debate. In July 1957, after months of interrogations, the investigator Pravdin asked Pimenov why he did not want to give truthful evidence and received the answer: "Maybe because you are closing your eyes to facts from the political life of the country and the acts of the government and you are blindly defending it."[100] Like the 19th-century revolutionaries he idolized, Pimenov used his trial as

[98] UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 3, ch. 1, l. 15; ibid., t. 4, ch. 2, ll. 316–23. Likewise, fear seems to have plagued the efforts of Pimenov and Vail′ to expand the organization to other institutes in Leningrad and even to youth in other cities. For the failed attempt to establish a new group in the Leningrad Engineering and Construction Institute, see Pimenov, "Odin politicheskii protsess," 94; and UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 9, l. 110.

[99] Vail′, *Osobo opasnyi,* 164–5. Vail′ and Pimenov portray the endeavor as a forerunner of the dissidents' *Chronicle of Current Events,* but the political rather than strictly human rights focus of the "information" makes the comparison unconvincing. See the list of literature passed on to the new recruit Iu. Grekov in UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 3, ch. 1, l. 382.

[100] See the separate "act" on the incident dated 16 July 1957 in UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 5, l. 14. In the end, Pimenov confessed to his actions but argued that they had an antigovernment, not anti-Soviet, character and therefore were not punishable under law. See "Vtoroe sudogovorenie—prigovor 4 fevraliia," in Pimenov, *Vospominaniia* 2.

a propaganda opportunity, going so far as to embellish his own biographical story for greater effect.[101]

Pimenov's oppositional activity highlights the role of subjecthood—understood as the ways that Soviet citizens thought about the role of the individual in society and the mental habits that went along with this—during the Thaw. Pimenov embodied core traits of Stalin-era subjectivity, specifically the practice of seeing one's actions according to historical development and the related imperative to embody in oneself personal traits of progressive consciousness, moral transparency, and cultured behavior. Pimenov employed these Soviet practices of selfhood in new ways and for new ends. Rather than looking forward in time to communism as most Soviet citizens did, Pimenov had an obsessive connection to the revolutionary past. And instead of "working on himself" to make himself part of the revolution, he forged a self that could change history independently through the mediating collective construct of the intelligentsia.

Pimenov's persona as a public intelligentsia hero—whether as theorist, conspirator, or activist—attracted a fairly wide circle of educated youth in Leningrad.[102] This was no anomaly. Young intellectuals in the period did not abandon the postulate that the individual should treat him or herself as an actor in a broader revolutionary drama. It was only natural for them to do so: early postwar products of Soviet higher education were imbibed with a greater degree of fluency in Soviet culture than their parents were. Moreover, many young intellectuals of the Thaw sought to project the ideal qualities of a intelligentsia personality type—bravery, culture, virtue, truthfulness—in the nascent public sphere of the Thaw. Pimenov was not the only young intellectual to emerge from obscurity to become a de facto leader of the expanding public sphere enabled by de-Stalinization.[103] To be

[101] At his trial Pimenov created stories about his witnessing of the Gulag during his childhood years in Magadan ("Dela semeinye," 382–83).

[102] All told, 57 people were called as witnesses in the case, many of whom were later persecuted through administrative and party–Komsomol channels. See the list of witnesses in Pimenov, "Odin politicheskii protsess," 220–25; and the section "Ia raskaivaius′ v svoei umerennosti," in *Vospominaniia* 2.

[103] For instance, Mikhail Beletskii at Moscow University became the popular leader of a 1956 conflict between students and authorities at the Moscow Mechanics and Mathematics Department surrounding the publishing of an unauthorized student newspaper. Like Pimenov, Beletskii led crowds of students to voice mass discontent with government figures at a public

sure, revolutionary conspiracy would become rare during the Thaw, while the gradualist cultural agenda of Soviet humanism would come to form the central platform of critical intellectual life. However, Pimenov's effort to create a transparent intelligentsia personality foreshadowed the dissident movement of the late Soviet period, which relied on extreme moral commitment, dubbed in some instances "overcoming the self," in order to oppose a powerful regime in the name of abstract ideals.[104] In this sense, the Pimenov story suggests the lasting power of modes of Soviet selfhood on educated elites.

Pimenov's story also speaks to the challenges of Soviet selfhood during the Thaw. The politicized norms of Soviet selfhood were difficult to transpose to the post-Stalin situation, when the party line moved tentatively and inconsistently toward rejecting past practices even while ostensibly moving to communism. How could the virtuous *lichnost´* fulfill its role in a time of flux and confusion? Like Pimenov, many activists of the Thaw sought to understand the present through the lens of the past.[105] But the past was open to different interpretations, and even the determined and intellectually disciplined Pimenov had difficulty constructing a historically rooted personality fit to tackle de-Stalinization. During his final few months of freedom, Pimenov reimmersed himself in study of revolutionary history by delivering a series of eccentric historical papers at his apartment to his old mathematician friends. Pimenov delivered spirited accounts of both the legalism of Father Gapon and the notorious conspiratorial manipulations of Sergei Nechaev, sparking his friends to ask him where he himself stood.[106] Pimenov's actions in 1956—his simultaneous commitment to "legal methods" as well as conspiratorial organization—suggested that he was unsure about how his beloved revolutionary history was relevant for the present. The contrast between the reflexes of Soviet selfhood and the messy realities of post-totalitarianism helped to give the Thaw some of its characteristic aspects: an uncertainty about the direction of historical change, an endless and

meeting. See Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii (RGANI) f. 4, op. 16, d. 1098, ll. 44–47, reproduced in Iu. G. Burtin, ed., "Studencheskoe brozhenie v SSSR (konets 1956 g.)," *Voprosy istorii,* no. 1 (1997): 10.

[104] On "self-overcoming" as a concept and reality in Soviet dissent, see Boobbyer, *Conscience, Dissent, and Reform*, 61, 66, 81–93.

[105] On this theme, see Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw,* 15; and Denis Kozlov, "The Historical Turn in Late Soviet Culture: Retrospectivism, Factography, Doubt, 1953–1991," *Kritika* 3, 2 (2001): 577–600.

[106] UFSB SPb, arkh. no. P-81390, t. 3, ch. 1, ll. 129–129 ob.

sometimes destabilizing probing of the past, and an uncertainty about the prospects of Soviet socialism.

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