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Chapter 10

Conclusion

Simo Mikkonen and Pekka Suutari

Studies on East–West cultural exchanges reveal the contradictory roles of art in individual lives and governmental systems of activities. The ideological borders set obstacles to interactions between peoples on both sides of the conflict, but the case studies in this volume show the power and intensity some individuals and institutions have laid on the interactions across political boundaries. The Soviet Union continued to be the alien, an entity whose ways of operating were generally difficult to grasp in the West. However, ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union opened up archives and made it possible to reassess Soviet actions, the impacts of East–West interaction have been understood from several new important levels mutually. One of the primary tasks of *Music, Art and Diplomacy* has been to address the issue of East–West cultural diplomacy from the Soviet point of view as well as from the perspective of the opposite bloc. The focus has been not only on explaining the political approach to cultural diplomacy, but also implications of East–West cultural diplomacy in practice and to raise up the effects of the reactions in different countries – not least in the Soviet Union.

Music, Art and Diplomacy concentrates on the two first decades following the end of the Second World War, but the chapters dealing with the period after Khrushchev in the late 1960s and 1970s suggest that, although the period of the Thaw came to an end, connections with the West remained in place. Soviet cultural diplomacy was not scaled back, although the attention probably turned more towards Western Europe than the United States. This, however, calls for more detailed studies in the future. Based on the case studies presented in *Art and Diplomacy*, we can safely say that there was a period of 10 years after Stalin's death when the Soviet Union actively sought to engage with countries in the West, even the United States, in many areas of art. While not willing to open its doors completely in order to exchange works of art or let artists travel freely, the Soviet Union was confident enough to seek agreement on reciprocal cultural exchange with the West during a period ranging from the mid-1950s until at least the mid-1960s. Anyway, it

was not only the Soviet Union that imposed restrictions on exchange projects; the United States was particularly wary at first, seeing few benefits in costly cultural exchange projects. However, as it turned out, the Soviet Union was ready to accept sizable artistic troupes from the West. Such events were seen by the US officials as a way of reaching ordinary people in the Soviet Union. Indeed, as Scholl and Koppes in particular point out, those who participated in such events took advantage of these chances, even if the US participants turned out to be difficult to control; they had their own personal and professional interests that were sometimes, but not always, compatible with those of the government.

Nor was the cultural diplomacy of the Soviet Union under the total control of the authorities. The contributions of Herrala, Costanzo and Gonçalves point out several occasions where the participants, having gone through rigorous selection processes of the security organs in order to get abroad, put their own professional and personal agendas first. It was the Soviet approach to cultural diplomacy that necessitated the use of artists on a large scale. Whole opera and ballet companies were sent abroad, and giving Soviet artists access to the West was considered a reasonable price to pay as the Soviet Union could now demonstrate its artistic prowess in the West. The Soviet Union was confident that it would not lose the competition in the artistic field to the United States. However, the reciprocity enshrined in state agreements on cultural exchange ensured that Western artists and artistic trends and processes would reach the Soviet Union and Soviet artists better than before. Costanzo's chapter points out that there was also an increasing trend within Soviet artistic circles of accessing Western art currents through socialist countries closer to Central Europe, such as Poland, where restrictions vis-à-vis the West were not as strict.

The limitations and restrictions were most stringent during the first decade after the Second World War. The chapters by Fairclough and Wiggins and Oliver Johnson point out that, despite a number of attempts, the Soviet authorities were not ready for broad-scale exchanges before the death of Stalin in 1953. Their priorities lay elsewhere, and the risks were considered to be too high. Policies emphasising isolation from the West that had been in place before the war were reintroduced. The majority of Soviet artists consequently remained without direct contact with the trends of contemporary Western art for almost a quarter of a century, mainly as a result of Soviet policies that condemned Western influences as harmful to Soviet art. Apart from a few major international exhibitions and musical competitions, there was little exchange between the Soviet Union and the rest of the world. Artists were seldom sent abroad, and any kind of direct links with the West were rare. Particularly the movement of artists between the United States and

the Soviet Union from 1930 to the mid-1950s was negligible. In this respect, the change after Stalin's death turned out to be a remarkable watershed in Soviet art exchanges with the West.

Even though this change did not take place overnight, little by little it became possible to follow Western art trends through magazines, recordings, the radio and – for those not allowed to travel – even in occasional discussions with foreigners. While the mid-1950s can be seen as a period when East–West connections notably increased, this only applied to certain forms of art, and others were allowed fewer chances for contacts abroad. For example, while music and dance were definitely among the more active art forms and were at the forefront of East–West exchange activities, the fine arts, by contrast, had far fewer contacts, despite considerable high-level involvement in some of the attempts and their important role within the Soviet Union.[1] The cases introduced in this volume reinforce the perception that music and dance were indeed areas in which successful exchange projects were more common than in other fields, despite attempts to realise large-scale exchanges in theatre, film, the fine arts and architecture.

The Soviet logic behind changing its approach to cultural diplomacy reflects the fact that foreign political decision making in the democratically governed countries became increasingly dependent on popular opinion. The Soviet leadership saw a chance to exploit this, which it considered to be a central weakness of Western democracies. By culturally influencing foreign populations, it believed that it could persuade the electorates to pressurise their governments into looking more favourably on Soviet objectives. The Soviet Union had previously sought to influence foreign communists, but now the growing middle classes became the new target. The aim was not so much to spread communism as to use cultural influencing to make the Soviet Union look less a threat and appear in a more positive light.[2] The Soviet government believed it could use the best Soviet artists and works of art in the same way it used Sputnik, to prove both the superiority and the goodwill of the Soviet Union to the world.

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[1] There are examples of unsuccessful US–Soviet projects and very few successful ones in the fine arts in the late 1950s. See Simo Mikkonen, 'Soviet–American Art Exchanges during the Thaw: From Bold Openings to Hasty Retreats', in Merike Kurisoo (ed.), *Art and Political Reality* (Tallinn: Art Museum of Estonia, 2013).

[2] Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Jonathan Haslam, *Russia's Cold War: From the October Revolution to the Fall of the Wall* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

It should be further remembered that Soviet cultural diplomacy was designed and controlled by the Communist Party. Agreements were sanctioned by the Party, and all projects and participants had to be approved by it. What the Party could not fully control, however, was what took place when Soviet troupes travelled to the West, and not even when Western troupes travelled to the Soviet Union. Unofficial encounters, discussions and cordial meetings took place all the time without the Soviet security organs or the Communist Party being able to supervise all the goings-on, which is not to say that they did not try. However, it was not only the Communist Party that tried to limit East–West interaction. Sometimes it was images and prejudice that played that role. The chapter by Näripea, Mazierska and Kristensen points out that the role of images should not be forgotten when East–West interactions are considered. The dichotomous perception of the Soviet Union that sees the Communist Party and the citizens as completely opposed to each other simply does not stand up to scrutiny. Soviet citizens did not blindly believe the Communist Party's propaganda; but neither were they ready to totally embrace the West if only given the chance.

Interactions across the border and across the ideological frontlines increased after the wake of perestroika in the Soviet Union. This optimal state of affairs – transnational relations between the travelling people, enterprises making business deals, and artistic contacts seeking new audiences and influential ideas – is antidote to increased governmental prejudice and discourses that aim to maintain tension and hostile preparation for war. While high-level politics underlined the possibility of danger in order to maintain military capability, the direct cultural contacts seem to speak the opposite discourse: the face-to-face meeting of people tends to create mutual understanding.[3]

The East–West cultural exchanges tried to control this state of affairs. Its primal aim was not to stop the Cold War, or even to relieve the securitisation discourse that ensured the strong military investments and security organisations. Its aim was to show the competitiveness of either bloc in their cultural state of affairs – the proof of high-quality artistic achievements. All the participants succeeded in this aim, and as a result, maybe unexpectedly, a more natural state of cultural contacts in which political limitations were reduced

[3] The Copenhagen School on security studies have developed the constructivist approach to hostile discourses by referring to the concept of *securitisation*. Its opposite, desecuritisation, may be developed by 'normal' relations in which transnational encounter across the border is a basis for the peaceful progress – not least in cultural matters. Ole Wæver, 'Politics, Security, Theory', *Security Dialogue* vol. 42, no. 4–5 (2011), 465–80. Michael Williams, 'Words, Images, Enemies: Securitization and International Politics', *International Studies Quarterly* vol. 47, no. 4 (2003), 523.

started to become reality, and desire to maintain this level of transnational relations increased. This finally proved to be one of the solutions to the end of the era, the end of the Cold War.

The major point of *Music, Art and Diplomacy*, therefore, has been to underline the interplay of government with the different parties and agents of cultural diplomacy. Individuals, groups and organisations at times played a fairly instrumental role not just in implementing policies of cultural diplomacy but also in articulating and even formulating those policies. These people perceived the Cold War very differently from the traditional foreign political establishment. For them, the Cold War and competition with the adversary was not the point. Rather, the Cold War provided them opportunities that might not have arisen otherwise. Cases in this book point out that private actors in Cold War era cultural diplomacy deserve scholarly attention. East–West cultural diplomacy was an area in which several stakeholders were involved, a field of international relations where individuals outside the foreign political establishment could play important and influential roles. The cultural Cold War did not just consist in government activities and attempts to influence foreign populations; it was also about different interest groups and organisations aiming to realise their own plans and intentions.

Furthermore, it needs to be borne in mind that although the United States was a bloc leader its policies towards its allies were not as restrictive as those of the Soviet Union towards the socialist countries in Eastern Europe, and many Western European states had their own policies towards the Soviet Union. The United States made a deal with the Soviet Union on cultural exchanges only after France, Britain and many other Western European countries had done so. Furthermore, the Soviet approach towards all Western countries was similar in that after the agreements were signed the Soviet authorities sought to transact with private partners rather than with governments, which they often saw as more hostile. This point is actually quite an important one which deserves a closer look in future studies. In this volume, Gonçalves underlines the relationship between the public and private sectors especially in the West. The Soviets preferred to deal with powerful private individuals and organisations instead of foreign governments when it came to art exchanges. In Soviet–American music exchanges Sol Hurok, a famous Broadway impresario, was the man of choice for the Soviets. In Europe, similar persons can be found in many countries:, for example, Victor Hochhauser in Britain. These impresarios were well-connected patrons, but also businessmen, who aimed at benefiting economically from the foreign exchanges. It seems that the Soviets quite readily adapted to the capitalist system in foreign environments when it came to cultural operations.

The cultural Cold War and the relationship between the arts and diplomacy during the Cold War era in particular remain areas that call for further attention from scholars. Despite the growing body of literature tackling the complex relationship between the arts and the Cold War, there are a number of issues that remain poorly understood and little researched. Particularly, the role of individuals, groups and organisations in cultural diplomacy during the Cold War era is fertile ground for further studies. Through interviews, oral history and the careful selection of archival materials it is possible to gain a better understanding not only of the processes of cultural diplomacy but also of the role of actors at different levels and the effects of cultural diplomatic activities.

Looking at the years from the 1940s until the 1980s we can see heightened international military tension and consequently strong mistrust between the states and people of each bloc. This state of affairs, called the Cold War, became for many a normal state of affairs in regard to economic, cultural and personal transnational relations across the ideological borderline in Central Europe. Even a tiny breath of wind from the other bloc was an eye-opening experience with long-lasting influence on the people on either side. New visions, opening of unexpected influences and new ways of presenting artistic traditions and ideas, were influential in spite of scant existence without clear continuity of these affairs. Even so, people kept the dream of coexistence alive, struggling for the change for a better world – entirely regardless of their political views.