

## CHAPTER ONE

---

### Becoming Soviet

*Tear off the masks!* is a slogan with only limited appeal in most societies, since they operate on the assumption that civilization requires a certain amount of masking. In revolutions, however, that assumption is suspended. Successful revolutions tear off masks: that is, they invalidate the conventions of self-presentation and social interaction that obtained in pre-revolutionary society. This happened in Russia after the October 1917 revolution which laid the foundations for the Soviet state. It happened again in 1991, when that state collapsed. In such upheavals, people have to reinvent themselves, to create or find within themselves personae that fit the new postrevolutionary society. The process of reinvention is at once a process of reconfiguration (a new arrangement of data about oneself) and one of discovery (a new interpretation of their significance). It always involves strategic decisions (how should I present myself in this new world?) and may also prompt ontological reflection (who am I really?). Those who are engaged in self-reinvention generally prefer not to discuss what they are doing, claiming instead that in their hearts they were always the new Soviet (post-Soviet) persons that they are now trying to become.

Yet in revolution, even as the millions of people that comprise the society are necessarily engaged in self-reinvention, the revolutionary militants tend to be obsessed with authenticity and transparency. They hunt for “double-dealers” who are trying to hide their true identity, for “careerists” and “accommodators” who have assumed a revolutionary persona for purposes of gain, in order to “unmask” them. In the first two decades after 1917, “vigilance” in identifying and exposing such enemies of the revolutionary was one of the cardinal virtues of a Communist. Purges (*chistki*) periodically conducted in the Communist Party and government and educational institutions served the same purpose of rooting out hidden enemies in the 1920s and ’30s. Half a century later, post-Soviet Russia eschewed the path of purging and loyalty checks. Yet, as political scientist

Sections of this chapter draw on my article “Making a Self for the Times: Impersonation and Imposture in Twentieth-Century Russia,” *Kritika* 2:3 (Summer 2001). I am grateful to Leora Auslander, Katerina Clark, Ronald Suny, Yuri Slezkine, Catriona Kelly, and members of the University of Chicago’s Russian Studies Workshop for perceptive critiques of earlier versions of the chapter.

Michael Urban observed, the first phase of the transition in post-Soviet Russia—when almost everyone in politics had formerly been a Communist—was riven by constant accusations that some politician or other was still “really” a Communist, or unreconstructed Soviet man at heart. Urban interpreted this as a way for the accusers to give credibility to their own new personae as post-Soviet democrats,<sup>1</sup> which, *mutatis mutandis*, may have some validity for the earlier revolutionary period as well.

This is a book about the remaking of identities in a society cast into turmoil by revolution. What I am investigating is how individuals who find themselves in such situations deal with the question of identity—basically, how they construct new personae to suit the new circumstances of life, and how those new personae are for some considerable time uncertain, vulnerable to challenge. I am also interested in the social consequences: what social practices (purging, self-criticism, denunciation) and mentalities (suspicion, identity anxieties) develop in a situation where the individuals are busy reinventing themselves and defending their newly invented selves, and moreover are aware that their neighbors are similarly engaged. My inquiry differs from many of the “identity” studies published in recent years in that it is primarily concerned with identity at the individual, not national or group, level. Once the focus is on individuals, it is immediately clear that imposture is a necessary part of the study of identity. The impostor is one who has assumed or claimed an identity to which he or she is not entitled. In a revolutionary situation, it is extremely important to unmask the impostors who are falsely claiming revolutionary identity. Yet at the same time, imposture as a practice is uncomfortably close to the more benign practices of self-fashioning or impersonation that the revolution demands of all citizens.<sup>2</sup> How this difficulty was handled, and how the two were distinguished in everyday life, is one of the subjects of this book.

The identity issue in early Soviet Russia focussed strongly on social class. The Bolsheviks had taken power in the name of the proletariat, and they assumed that proletarians were the people likely to support Soviet power and the “bourgeois” (which in the usage of the 1920s often encompassed membership of any privileged group under the old regime, including the service and landowning nobility) to oppose it. This led to a certain amount of circular thinking, whereby those who supported the revolution tended to be regarded as “proletarian” and those who opposed it to be labeled “bourgeois.” Nevertheless, the new rulers were sufficiently serious about class to undertake major statistical analyses of the class structure

<sup>1</sup> Michael Urban, “The Politics of Identity in Russia’s Postcommunist Transition: The Nation against Itself,” *Slavic Review* 53:3 (1994), p. 747.

<sup>2</sup> For more discussion and definition of “impersonation,” see below, pp. 18–19.

of the population and of various institutions in the 1920s, and also to put in place policies discriminating against “class enemies” (that is, people who were by definition enemies because of their membership of a particular social class) and providing affirmative action (the Russian term was *vydvizhenie*, which literally means promotion) for those whose class position made them natural allies of the revolution.

“Class,” alas, turned out to be an ambiguous category. It was less easily identifiable to the eye than race or gender and less readily assessed on the basis of native language and last name than ethnicity (*national’nost’* or “nationality” in Soviet terminology). Class was, of course, associated with social position—but in the Revolution, and indeed as a result of it, many people’s social position and occupation had changed. That left manners—that is, forms of self-presentation that had been learned and could be unlearned—and biography as possible markers of class identity. The last turned out to be key in Soviet determination of an individual’s class. Recounting of one’s autobiography, challenges to the account from others, and defense of it became standard Soviet practice in a variety of situations, including purging and “self-criticism” sessions; moreover, all personal files contained a narrative autobiography and a questionnaire designed to elicit both an individual’s political and occupational history and (in detail) the nature of his or her class position, including changes over time. Given the existence of legal and administrative structures that discriminated on the basis of class, it was obviously in the interest of individuals to compose an autobiography that concealed “bad” class backgrounds and presented backgrounds that were ambiguous in class terms in the most favorable possible light. Such practices of concealment and editing—inextricably linked with the broader self-reinvention required by the Revolution—became second nature to Soviet citizens, as did the counterpractices of unmasking and denunciation.

This book is a study of individual practices of identity in Soviet Russia. It does not deal with state practices of identity-molding via propaganda, the media, and educational institutions, or with peer-group socialization in schools and Pioneer and Komsomol organizations, though these are topics of interest in their own right. Nor does it say much about intellectual debates about identity or individual soul-searching of a philosophical kind. I would have been happy to include debates and soul-searching had I found them, but in fact both are surprisingly rare. The Communist Party and Soviet government made policies on such matters as class discrimination but did so almost without debate (where it existed, I have noted it) or theoretical exegesis. This silence of the Russian Revolution on key issues of social practice may be contrasted with the passionate debates and deeply felt theorizing of the French Revolution on such topics as denunciation. With regard to individual philosophical soul-searching about iden-

tity, here, too, we encounter a notable silence. Judging by diaries and memoirs, Soviet citizens worried pragmatically about presentation of identity and might also work conscientiously on developing a “Soviet” persona, but they rarely seem to have asked metaphysical questions about essences (who am I in this boundless universe?). This may be related to the unusual stresses of living in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and ’30s, which tended to produce the kinds of behavior seen in societies in wartime. Living under a political regime that was constantly directing and often punishing its citizens, people developed a sense of fatalism that may, paradoxically, have freed them of some of the neuroses and anxieties that flourished in the capitalist West at the same period.<sup>3</sup>

#### HISTORIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

This book is written by a social historian who began publishing in the 1970s. Its subject matter, however, has been associated more with cultural than with social historians in the Soviet field, particularly with the young cohort of mainly Foucauldian cultural historians that arrived on the scene in the second half of the 1990s and pioneered the study of “Soviet subjectivity.”<sup>4</sup> This combination of author and subject matter may initially be confusing for some readers—not (for once) the readers who are ignorant of the field, but rather those who know it well. It is important, therefore, to make clear from the outset that this is neither an attack on the Foucauldian “Soviet subjectivity” school nor a contribution to it, but something different. The best way I can explain what that “something different” is and how I came to engage in it is to offer a brief excursion into intellectual autobiography. Readers who are not Soviet historians are welcome to skip this section.

As a social historian, I have a long history of dissatisfaction with class as an analytical category for Soviet society and of impatience with Soviet and Western Marxist discussions of “class consciousness,” particularly proletarian consciousness, in a Soviet context.<sup>5</sup> The Russian workers

<sup>3</sup> On Soviet fatalism, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York, 1999), pp. 218–22.

<sup>4</sup> For an introduction to this field, see the “Soviet Subjectivity” issue of *Russian Review* 60:3 (2001), pp. 307–59, containing articles by Eric Naiman (“On Soviet Subjects and the Scholars Who Make Them”), Igal Halfin (“Looking into Oppositionists’ Souls: Inquisition Communist Style”), and Jochen Hellbeck (“Working, Struggling, Becoming: Stalin-Era Autobiographical Texts”).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, my “The Bolsheviks’ Dilemma: Class, Culture and Politics in the Early Soviet Years,” originally published in *Slavic Review* 47:4 (1988), and “Reply to Suny and Orlovsky” (commentators on “The Bolsheviks’ Dilemma”) in *ibid.*

whose story I knew best, though lauded as “conscious” by Soviet commentators, were primarily interested in getting themselves and their children out of the working class, something that Soviet affirmative action policies on behalf of proletarians and poor peasants made easy to accomplish in the first fifteen years after the Revolution.<sup>6</sup> Social historians in the Soviet Union were, of course, required to use Marxist class categories in their analysis and did so in an exceptionally static, reified manner. As Western social history of the Soviet Union emerged in the 1970s, I argued against the tendency to take class at face value and focus on what I saw as Marxist scholastic questions (whether Russian workers *really* had proletarian class consciousness; whether the peasants whom the Bolsheviks called “kulaks,” meaning rural exploiters, were *really* kulaks or just “middle peasants”).<sup>7</sup>

In the late 1980s, however, I began to take class seriously myself. This was not because I had become converted to the Marxist analytical framework but rather because I had suddenly realized what may seem obvious: that class was a matter of classification.<sup>8</sup> The reason to take class seriously was because *class classification* was a very serious activity in Soviet society. This had nothing to do with the actual social structure but everything to do with individual fate and opportunity. To me, debates about whether peasants were “really kulaks” or urban dwellers “really proletarian” might seem scholastic, but to millions of individuals the real-life outcome of such deliberations was crucial. To be labeled a kulak meant ruin: you were liable to expropriation and deportation. To be labeled a proletarian meant you could become one of the bosses instead of being a mere hired hand, and the road was open for your children—and even yourself—to get higher education and rise into the white-collar professional class.

That revelation lay at the root of a series of articles published in the early 1990s in which I explored the Bolshevik practices of class labeling and class discrimination and the social practices of masking and unmasking of class identities to which they gave rise. These were the years in which hitherto closed Soviet archives opened. Of all the archival discov-

<sup>6</sup> See my *Education and Social Mobility* and “Stalin and Making of New Elite,” in *The Cultural Front*.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Fitzpatrick, “New Perspectives on Stalinism” and “Afterword: Revisionism Revisited,” in *Russian Review* 45:4 (1986), pp. 357–73 and 409–13; and commentaries on “New Perspectives,” in *Russian Review*, 45:4 (1986), pp. 375–408, and *Russian Review* 46:4 (1987), pp. 379–431.

<sup>8</sup> This may have been, as Ron Suny has suggested to me, a response, albeit from afar, to the famous “linguistic turn” among Marxist social historians, stimulated by the new attention paid to language and perception in works like Gareth Stedman Jones’s *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832–1982* (Cambridge, 1983). Certainly I found more in common with Marxist historians after the turn than before.

eries of those years, the one that most interested me was the huge mounds of letters to the authorities from individual citizens. Initially, I was particularly interested in denunciations, which in the 1920s and 1930s were often attempts to discredit the class self-presentation of others. Later, my interest broadened to petitions and appeals, which involve authorial self-presentation (in the 1920s and '30s, often including a claim to a “good” class identity). Such identity claims necessarily involved the telling of life-stories, so I became interested in them as well.

As it happened, my social historian’s trajectory had landed me in territory that was simultaneously being colonized by the young cultural historians of the “Soviet subjectivity” school.<sup>9</sup> The dissimilarities between us are obvious. They are interested in discourse and ideology and have a strong theoretical orientation; I am interested in social practice and the everyday and have a low tolerance for totalizing theory, including Marxist and Foucauldian (though sharing with Marx an ingrained suspicion of ideology as false consciousness). Their focus is on the self and subjecthood;<sup>10</sup> mine on identity and identification. For me, however, differ-

<sup>9</sup> Important works in this genre include Jochen Hellbeck, “Fashioning the Stalinist Soul: The Diary of Stepan Podlubnyi, 1931–39,” in Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., *Stalinism: New Directions* (London: 2000) and idem., “Self-Realization in the Stalinist System: Two Soviet Diaries of the 1930s,” in David L. Hoffmann and Yanni Kotsonis, eds., *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practices* (Basingstoke, Hampshire, U.K., 2000); Igal Halfin, *From Darkness to Light: Class Consciousness and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia* (Pittsburgh, 2000), and *Terror in My Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003); Oleg V. Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (Berkeley, 1999); Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton, 2001); Anna Krylova, “Soviet Modernity in Life and Fiction: The Generation of the ‘New Soviet People’ in the 1930s,” PhD. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2000. A seminal work for all these authors was Stephen Kotkin’s *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization* (Berkeley, 1995), though Halfin and Hellbeck have respectfully criticized Kotkin for leaving “the Stalinist *subject* unproblematized” (Igal Halfin and Jochen Hellbeck, “Rethinking the Stalinist Subject: Stephen Kotkin’s ‘Magnetic Mountain’ and the State of Soviet Historical Studies,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 44:3 [1996], p. 458).

<sup>10</sup> The argument made by Jochen Hellbeck and others of the “Soviet subjectivity” school that the Revolution was not, as previously thought, primarily repressive of individuals’ sense of self but rather productive of it (Hellbeck, “Working, Struggling,” p. 341) makes intuitive sense. But, as noted by the *Oxford English Dictionary* in its definition of self as “that which is really and intrinsically he (in contradistinction to what is adventitious),” the concept is “chiefly *Philosophical*,” and philosophy is a realm that my kind of historian approaches with caution. In this book, I have tried as much as possible to avoid the term “self” (except in its pronominal and compound usages) in order to avoid invoking either its Foucauldian implications (the “technologies” involved in the “care of the self,” which is the subject of vol. 3 of Foucault’s *A History of Sexuality*) or the philosopher Charles Taylor’s understanding of self as, above all, a moral or ethical orientation, an “orientation to the good” (Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* [Cambridge, Mass., 1989], pp. 27–33).

ences in historical approach are what makes scholarship interesting. The new cohort's arrival on the scene was a major part of the revitalization of Soviet history in the 1990s. If I were to isolate two aspects of this revitalization that I particularly appreciate, one would be the shift of attention toward experience, and the other the definitive end of the Cold War in Soviet history (the new cohort, unlike its "revisionist" predecessor, did not attack Cold War frameworks directly, but its indifference to them proved more deadly than frontal attack). Fifteen years ago, there was still a lingering sense that "Soviet ideology" was something that the regime force-fed to a population whose atomized members were merely passive consumers. It is a great step forward to have the Stalinist subject emerge as "an ideological agent in its own right."<sup>11</sup>

#### IDENTITY: DEFINITION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Before proceeding further, we need to address the concept of "identity." This has become a catchword in social science in recent years, much over-used and invoked in a confusing multiplicity of meanings.<sup>12</sup> I am interested in social rather than personal identity, by which I mean the way people locate themselves in a social or group context rather than the way they think about themselves as individuals.<sup>13</sup> I use "identity" to mean a self-identification and/or self-understanding constructed with reference to currently accepted categories of social being. There is, of course, a difference between self-identification (a labeling process that may carry only an instrumental purpose) and self-understanding (implying belief that the self is as one understands it). My definition intentionally elides this distinction, since my assumption is that the self-understanding of subjects is accessible to historians only through practices like self-identification. In this book, "identity" is shorthand for the complex revisions of self-identification that were associated with the Russian Revolution.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Halfin and Hellbeck, "Rethinking," p. 457.

<sup>12</sup> For a recent critique on these lines, see Rogers Brubaker and Fred Cooper, "Beyond 'identity,'" *Theory and Society* 29 (2000).

<sup>13</sup> This is close to David Laitin's definition of social identities as "labels that people assign to themselves (or that others assign to them) when they claim membership (or are assigned membership) in a social category that they (and others, whether members of that category or not) see as plausibly connected to their history and present set of behaviors": David D. Laitin, *Identity in Formation: The Russian-Speaking Populations in the Near Abroad* (Ithaca, 1998), p. 16. For Rom Harré's definition, see below, p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> Note that I use an expansive definition of "the Russian Revolution" (see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 2nd ed. [Oxford and New York, 1994], pp. 2–4): not 1917 alone, but the two decades of upheaval that began in October (or, to be pedantic, November, according to our Western calendar) 1917.

In early Soviet discourse, the closest equivalent of the term “identity” was *litso* (literally, *face*). In its “identity” meaning, however, the term was used almost entirely with two qualifiers: *klassovoe* (class) and *politicheskoe* (political). The class identity (as well as the closely related political identity) had to be made manifest (*vyiavleno*, defined in Ushakov as “exposed, shown in its true colors.”)<sup>15</sup> Discussion of identity was closely linked with questions of disguise and concealment, since the Revolution had made certain social and political identities dangerous handicaps and thus fostered concealment. A disguised identity must be “unmasked” (*razoblacheno*),<sup>16</sup> a very common term in early Soviet discourse. Double identity or duplicity (*dvulichie*, *dvurushnichestvo*), the latter defined as “behavior of a person ostensibly belonging to one group but acting on behalf of the opposing side,” was regularly excoriated in the Soviet press.<sup>17</sup>

In the Soviet context, the notion of double identity presupposes misrepresentation of one’s real position on a particular axis of identity, the class/political one. But there are actually many possible axes of identity: for example, ethnic/national, familial, confessional, and gender, in addition to social and political. Individuals always have multiple identities, that is, self-identifications that mark their location in the world and relationship to other people. Assuming identities to be the classifications that a person accepts as applicable to him/herself and expects the outside world to recognize in him/her, a single person may simultaneously embrace the identities of, for example, man, worker, Communist, husband/father, Russian.

While self-identifications are grounded in real-life phenomena such as native language, parentage, and occupation, they are also fluid and subject to modification. Modification may be a product of circumstance: for example, when the Soviet Union disappeared as a state at the beginning of the 1990s, “Soviet” suddenly ceased to be a viable identity. It may also be a product of a combination of circumstance and personal choice, as in

<sup>15</sup> *Vyiavit’* = “(3) Razoblachit’, pokazat’ v podlinnom vide”: *Tolkovyi slovar’ russkogo iazyka*, 4 vols., ed. D. N. Ushakov (Moscow, 1935–40), vol. 1, and see also A. M. Selishchev, *Iazyk revoliutsionnoi epokhi: Iz nabliudenii nad russkim iazykom poslednikh let (1917–1926)* (Moscow, 1928, 2nd ed.), p. 48. For a useful discussion of terms associated with revelation of a true self, see Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia*, pp. 175–81. With regard to the word *proiavit’*, it seems to me that Kharkhordin exaggerates the frequency of its usage in the 1920s and ’30s. Ushakov characterized it in the late 1930s as “bookish” (*knizh.*), in contrast to his description of *vyiavit’* as “new newspaper” language; and the examples he gives of revelation all involve positive qualities (“*Proiavit’ geroism, khrabrost’*,” etc.). In the discourse of unmasking, *vyiavit’*, not *proiavit’*, played the central role.

<sup>16</sup> See definition in *Tolkovyi slovar’ russkogo iazyka*, vol. 3.

<sup>17</sup> *Tolkovyi slovar’ russkogo iazyka*, vol. 1: “*Povedenie cheloveka, naruzhno prinadlezhashchego k odnoi gruppe, no deistviushchego v pol’zu vrazhdebnoi ei storony (gaz. prezrit.)*.”

the case of “noble” (*dvorianin*), a disadvantageous and even disgraceful identity in Soviet times that made a comeback in the 1990s after decades of nonviability. The real-life data upon which identities are constructed can yield very different results according to circumstance and choice: consider, for example, the multiple possibilities of ethnic self-identification available to a Russian-speaker born in Russia with one Jewish and one Ukrainian grandparent. Moreover, the comparative importance to an individual of different types of self-identification (for example: wife, woman, Communist, *intelligentka*, Jew) may change radically in different external circumstances and stages of life.

Most present-day social scientists and philosophers see identities—social, national, confessional, and so on—as “constructed,” that is, learned from the surrounding culture rather than innate. Personal identities are the exception: as political scientist David Laitin notes, they are “firmly entrenched in a primordial or generic discourse,” so that anyone constructing himself a new name or credit history is generally seen as perpetrating a fraud.<sup>18</sup> All the same, there is no real consensus among scholars on this question: in his work on social psychology, Oxford philosopher Rom Harré argues that personal identities, too, are essentially fashioned by individuals on the basis of cultural norms.<sup>19</sup>

Of course, common sense requires some degree of qualification of the “constructed” view of social identity. As Laitin points out, “social solidarities are built on real foundations” and “people are limited by, [though] they are not prisoners of, their genes, their physiognomies, and their histories in settling on their own identities.”<sup>20</sup> If we think of likely Soviet identity projects, it would generally be scarcely feasible for an educated urbanite without rural connections to construct himself an identity as a “poor peasant,” but this was a perfectly plausible project for a rural resident whose family, though poor, belonged to the clerical estate or had at one time (though not the present) prospered to the point of being labeled by their enemies as kulaks.

Harré sees two kinds of identity projects: the one dedicated to constructing social identity, which involves identification with a group or category, and the one dedicated to constructing personal identity, whose purpose is to establish a degree of uniqueness within one’s category. The first, he argues, is the “primary task” for all “marginal people” who initially lack a clear social location and need to “blend . . . into a background, . . .

<sup>18</sup> Laitin, *Identity*, p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> “Our personal being is created by our coming to believe a theory of self based on our society’s working conception of a person”: Rom Harré, *Personal Being: A Theory for Individual Psychology* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), p. 26.

<sup>20</sup> Laitin, *Identity*, pp. 20–21.

acquir[e] camouflage,” the other for firmly located people—“those who have too much social identity, who have been born into families, classes or nations which provide them with a very detailed mode of social being,” whose “problem is to stand out from the crowd,” develop a sense of uniqueness.<sup>21</sup> Psychologists, Harré remarks mischievously, have been particularly interested in social identity projects because they are “themselves in one way or another marginal people.” But what about revolutionary upheavals, in which destabilization of social identity occurs on a mass scale? Harré’s approach seems to me particularly applicable to such conditions. Indeed, it could be argued more broadly that social constructionist approaches to history yield greatest dividends when the largest number of people feel themselves socially unmoored (as in revolution) and experience the greatest need to find a social category to which they can anchor themselves.

Another way of approaching the same issues is to look at the behaviors whereby people project—like actors to an audience—the roles and characters (social and personal identities) they have assumed.<sup>22</sup> This is the leitmotif of Erving Goffman’s work, beginning with *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* and continuing with *Frame Analysis*, *Stigma*, and other works; and it was Goffman’s great contribution to show that such role-playing is not fraudulent but universal, that is, to elaborate Shakespeare’s insight that “all the world’s a stage.”<sup>23</sup> In the words of Robert Ezra Park, quoted by Goffman: “It is probably no mere historical accident that the word person, in its first meaning, is a mask. It is rather a recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role. . . . It is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves. In a sense, and in so far as this mask represents the conception we have formed of ourselves—the roles we are striving to live up to—this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be. In the end, our conception of our role becomes second nature and an integral part of our personality.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, as Goffman stresses, there is no clear line between “cynical” performances—those in which “the individual

<sup>21</sup> Harré, *Personal Being*, p. 23.

<sup>22</sup> Note that the discussion of performance that follows does not draw on notions of performativity, either as formulated in the 1960s by the linguistic philosopher J. L. Austin (which focus on the speech act that does something, as when a priest pronounces a couple man and wife) or as later developed with respect to gender in queer studies, for example, in Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, eds., *Performativity and Performance* (London, 1995).

<sup>23</sup> But note the qualification in Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York, 1959), p. 254.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Ezra Park, *Race and Culture* (Glencoe, Ill., 1950), p. 249, quoted in Goffman, *Presentation*, pp. 19–20.

has no belief in his own act and no ultimate concern with the beliefs of his audience”—and “sincere” ones, in which the actors “believes in the impression fostered by their own performance.”<sup>25</sup> In fact, a performance may start off “cynical” and end up “sincere” (as Park suggests) or vice versa (if something happens to shake the performer’s sense that the persona he is projecting is “real”).

To be sure, one might add to Goffman’s sense of the ubiquity of dramatic self-presentation Harré’s qualification: that it is, so to speak, *more* universal for some people, and in some societies, than others; that marginal people do it more (and no doubt are also more interested in it).<sup>26</sup> Revolutionary Russian (Soviet) society, with its pervasive anxiety about class and political identity and rich array of practices of masking and unmasking, is surely a case in point. Self-consciousness about performance was not only widespread among the population but also strayed into official discourse. The theatrical metaphor of masks was ubiquitous in the 1920s and ’30s, and the same period saw a flowering of that peculiar form of political theater: the show trial.<sup>27</sup> Theatrical and performance imagery shows up even in such unexpected contexts as the Aesopian discussion of the 1932–33 famine (whose existence was officially denied): in newspapers and bureaucratic documents, peasants were said to be “staging” a famine and “turning on” a hunger strike; beggars to be “passing themselves off as ruined kolkhozniks.”<sup>28</sup>

Nor were the performance metaphors always negative. Stalin was interested in the concept of impersonation, the actors’s ability to “become” the character he plays.<sup>29</sup> This notion of *becoming* was central to the discourse of socialist realism in the 1930s.<sup>30</sup> If it was the society’s task to become socialist, a matter of essential transformation, the individual’s task of becoming a cultured man (*kul’turnyi chelovek*) was more a matter of behavior than essence—that is, it was akin to learning a role. It would not be an overstatement to suggest that the ubiquitous exhortations of

<sup>25</sup> Goffman, *Presentation*, p. 18.

<sup>26</sup> Note in this connection that the most interesting recent work on performance in the Soviet field concerns a quintessentially marginal group: Alaina Lemon’s *Between Two Fires: Gypsy Performance and Romani Memory from Pushkin to Postsocialism* (Durham, N.C., 2000).

<sup>27</sup> See Julie A. Cassiday, *The Enemy on Trial: Early Soviet Courts on Stage and Screen* (De Kalb, Ill., 2000); Elizabeth A. Wood, “The Trial of Lenin: Legitimizing the Revolution through Political Theater, 1920–23,” *Russian Review* 61:2 (2002), pp. 235–48.

<sup>28</sup> See Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (New York, 1994), p. 75.

<sup>29</sup> G. Mariamov, *Kremlevskii tsenzor: Stalin smotrit kino* (Moscow, 1992), p. 87. The context is a discussion of theatrical performance with the actor Cherkasov and director Sergei Eisenstein in 1947; the word used was *perevoploshchat’sia*.

<sup>30</sup> See Fitzpatrick, “Becoming Cultured,” in *The Cultural Front*.

the 1930s to “study,” “learn,” and “master culture” were part of a discourse of performance central to prewar Stalinism.

#### FASHIONING OF “FILE-SELVES” IN SOVIET LIFE<sup>31</sup>

Harré proposes a notion of “file-selves”—that is, the selves or accounts and histories of selves that are documented in bureaucratic files labeled with the person’s name—that may help in thinking about Soviet identity issues.<sup>32</sup> Such documents may include curricula vitae, applications for jobs, credit ratings, copies of birth and marriage certificates, and information on criminal records. “Since most file encounters involve some sort of assessment of a person relative to a moral order, the fate of one’s file can play an enormously important part in one’s life,” Harré writes. “Though a person has only one real-self, he or she will be accompanied through life by a flock of file-selves of unknown extent, each member of the flock representing an aspect of a person as defined by the appropriate file-master.”<sup>33</sup> This notion applies particularly well to Soviet (and Soviet-type) societies, where, in the words of a Romanian political prisoner, Herbert Zilber, “the first great socialist industry was that of the production of files. . . . In the socialist bloc, people and things exist only through their files. All our existence is in the hands of him who possesses files and is constituted by him who constructs them. Real people are but the reflection of their files.”<sup>34</sup>

The making of files was a basic project of the Soviet state from its early years. Social statistics were eagerly collected throughout the 1920s, particularly those illuminating the “social composition” or “class composition” of various institutions and populations. These statistics were in effect a collective portrait of file-selves: what they measured, strictly speaking, was not how many party members were former workers but how many party members’ files identified them as such. The purpose of such intensive statistical work may be broadly defined as surveillance and population control, though the overtones of these anachronistic terms can

<sup>31</sup> Note that, although the phenomena and processes outlined here are discussed extensively in the chapters that follow, I do not use the concept of “file-selves” in other chapters because I had not encountered it when they were written.

<sup>32</sup> Harré, *Personal Being*, pp. 69–71. Harré’s category has recently been vastly broadened by the emergence of Internet “file-selves”: that is, the collection of documents—growing vaster by the day—that one obtains by typing in one’s name and initiating a search.

<sup>33</sup> Harré, *Personal Being*, p. 70.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted Katherine Verdery, *What was Socialism, and What comes Next?* (Princeton, 1996), p. 24.

sometimes be misleading.<sup>35</sup> The statisticians who collected the data in the 1920s (many of them non-Bolshevik Marxists) thought of themselves as being engaged in a scientific enterprise. Making the population legible to government through the creation and aggregation of file-selves was understood as a deeply progressive endeavor.<sup>36</sup> When in the 1930s the regime largely ceased to aggregate and analyze the data, while continuing to collect it for purposes of individual surveillance and internal security, this was undoubtedly seen by the party's intellectuals as a regressive move.

Soviet file-selves resided in the personnel files (*lichnye dela*) kept on all wage and salary earners, trade union members, party and Komsomol members; in the questionnaires (*ankety*), filled in in a variety of circumstances and including questions on key classifications like “social position”; in the narrative curriculum vitae (*avtobiografiia*) submitted along with the *anketa* for the personnel file; in the internal passport (introduced in 1933), which included an entry for nationality and an entry for social position; as well as in the files of “compromising material” on party members obtained from denunciations and the extensive files on individuals under surveillance kept by the secret police. In the Soviet Union in Stalin's time, the almost inevitable “black spots” or gray shadows in any individual's personnel file might lie unnoticed for years, or even forever, but were always liable to be discovered and brandished as damning evidence against him.

In the comment quoted above, Zilber assumes that the file-self (being constituted by the bureaucratic possessor of the files) is inaccessible to its subject. According to Harré, similarly, “file-self memory” (unlike “real-self memory”) is “normally impervious to self-reconstruction,”<sup>37</sup> meaning that it cannot be revised and edited by the subject. This is undoubtedly true in a general sense. We shall see, however, that with respect to Soviet file selves in the 1920s and '30s, some qualifications are in order. The content of file-selves was not static and could change as a result of changes of state policy: for example, when whole categories of criminal—actually, criminal-political—convictions imposed by courts in the early 1930s were annulled by law a few years later, leading to a new entry of annulment (*sniatie sudimosti*) in individual files.<sup>38</sup> A file on one individual could be changed if another individual sent compromising information on him or her in a denunciation to the bureaucratic institution holding the file. Fi-

<sup>35</sup> See Peter Holquist, “To Count, to Extract, and to Exterminate: Population Statistics and Population Politics in Late Imperial and Soviet Russia,” in Ronald G. Suny and Terry Martin, eds., *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (New York, 2001).

<sup>36</sup> See James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State* (New Haven, 1998), pp. 76–83.

<sup>37</sup> Harré, *Personal Being*, p. 70.

<sup>38</sup> See Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants*, pp. 178, 180.

nally, individuals had some possibilities to manipulate their own files. Thus, file-making was not only a state project but also an individual one, and “self-fashioning” in the sense of fashioning a *file*-self must be part of the discussion on Soviet identity.<sup>39</sup>

How could Soviet citizens fashion their file-selves? At the crudest level, they could and did manufacture false data and false identity documents. In a cartoon of the late 1930s (see figure 2), the humorous journal *Krokodil* implied that such practices were widespread—the cartoon showed an *anketa* from a personnel file filled in with two sets of answers: “true” answers that would get the author in trouble (bourgeois origins, service with White Armies, and so on) overwritten with “false” answers that would help his self-advancement (worker, fought with the Red Army in Civil War).<sup>40</sup> It was possible to buy false passports on the black market, thus creating a set of basic personal data (for example, place and date of birth, nationality, social position) that would subsequently be entered in the individual’s various personal files. In the days before passports were introduced, it was possible for peasants leaving the village for outside wage work to bribe local officials to provide an identification document (*spravka*) that gave them a “good” social position (“poor peasant,” not “prosperous peasant” or “kulak”).<sup>41</sup>

Short of outright falsification, there were many ways in which Soviet citizens could manipulate their file-selves. It was possible to act in certain ways in order to change the file-self. For example, a woman from a privileged background might marry a worker (marrying down being the postrevolutionary equivalent of marrying up in “normal” societies) with the object of discarding her own family background and assuming his “class position.” A child of intelligentsia parents might go to work in a factory for a year or so after school in order to enter college as a “proletarian”; a child of kulaks with aspirations to higher education might try to get into *rabfak* (workers’ preparatory faculty) or get accepted for the army (formally closed to kulaks’ sons) to acquire a quasi-proletarian entitlement. Rural priests might send their children away to live with relatives of better social standing who would become their guardians or adoptive parents.

Fashioning of the file-self regularly occurred in the process of composition of two of its basic components: the narrative *avtobiografiia*, which the subject composed, and the *anketa*, which he or she filled in. The auto-

<sup>39</sup> In contrast to Jochen Hellbeck’s quite legitimate usage of the term to describe fashioning of the soul.

<sup>40</sup> *Krokodil*, 1935 no. 10, back page: captioned “The Resumé (*anketa*) and Life: How One Should Sometimes Read the Resumé.”

<sup>41</sup> Many examples of the “self-fashioning” of file selves are to be found in the essays on Class Identities in part I of this book, as well as in chapters 5 and 6 in Part II.



Figure 2. “The Questionnaire (*Anketa*).” Typed text reads: “First name, patronymic, last name? Social position before 1917? Did you participate in the revolutionary movement? Did you participate in the Civil War? Were you decorated? Do you have specialized education?” Drawing by K. Rotov from *Krokodil*, 1935 no. 10, back page.

biography could simply omit awkward aspects of the life, such as residence in territory occupied by the White Army during the Civil War. In a life that included different occupations, it could stress one and play down the others. In ambiguous social situations—for example, when a poor relative had lived with and worked for a richer relative—one interpretation (in this case, the “exploited labor” one) could be preferred to another (“member of the family”).<sup>42</sup>

Finally, it was possible in some circumstances to challenge or appeal against an undesirable social classification of a file-self. While the citizens who tried to petition the courts for a formal change of “estate” were mistaken in their assessment of what Soviet law could do, it was certainly possible to appeal against various discriminatory measures, arguing that one’s class position had been wrongly evaluated.<sup>43</sup> Such actions—in effect, efforts to edit a particular bureaucratic file-self—might be taken, for example, in cases of refusal of voting rights,<sup>44</sup> a student’s expulsion from higher education, a peasant’s classification as a kulak for tax purposes in the 1920s (making him liable to extra taxes), a harsh judicial sentence predicated on an allegedly mistaken understanding of the social position of the accused, the level of ration card issued by a rationing board, eviction from one’s apartment as a class alien, or refusal by a local housing authority to recognize one’s entitlement, by virtue of social position, to extra space.<sup>45</sup> The petitioner would explain why he or she deserved a social classification other than the one given by the institution he was petitioning, sometimes backing up the claim with documentation taken from his file-self in another institution.

## IMPOSTURE

All identity projects require impersonation, in both of the senses offered by the *Oxford English Dictionary*: (1) “to assume the person or character of; to play the part of”; and (2) “to invest with an actual personality, to embody.” But at a certain point, or in certain circumstances, impersonation becomes imposture, defined by the *OED* as “the action or practice of imposing on others; wilful and fraudulent deception.” Or, to put it

<sup>42</sup> For two cases of this kind, see below, chapters 6 (pp. 108, 111) and 8 (p. 132).

<sup>43</sup> For examples, see below, chapters 2 (p. 37) and 4 (p. 76).

<sup>44</sup> See Golfo Alexopoulos, *Stalin’s Outcasts: Aliens, Citizens, and the Soviet State, 1926–1936* (Ithaca, 2003) for discussion of the multitudes of petitions for reinstatement in voting rights of lishentsy.

<sup>45</sup> In the 1920s, “specialists” were entitled to extra living space for a study, a decision strongly supported by the education authorities, but generally uncongenial to housing authorities. See *Education and Social Mobility*, p. 80.

another way, impersonation is always trembling on the brink of imposture, and societies in which large numbers of citizens are actively engaged in impersonation may well turn out to be societies in which imposture and the fear of imposture are widespread. In the Soviet case, at any rate, it is impossible to discuss identity adequately without dealing with the question of imposture.

Two different types of imposture can be identified in Soviet prewar discourses. One may be called political imposture: the attempt to “deceive the party” as to one’s true social or political face, to hide one’s true identity from the authorities and claim a false one, but not for criminal purposes. There were regularized and institutionalized procedures for unmasking “wolves in sheep’s clothing,” and regular exhortations to party members not to relax their “vigilance.” Periodic purges were conducted in government institutions and party organizations of the 1920s and early ’30s to remove social aliens and impostors as well as other categories of undesirables like former members of political opposition groups. Among the most frequent allegations made in such contexts were concealment of clerical, bourgeois, or noble origins, misrepresentation of behavior during the Civil War, and, in the case of recent migrants from countryside to town, misrepresentation of status in the village.

There were always serious consequences to an unmasking: depending on the context, the victim was in danger of losing his/her job, status as a student, party or Komsomol membership, etc. But at periods of high political tension, the possible consequences could be much graver. At such times, the unmaskers often lost sight of what in ordinary life they knew perfectly well, namely that all sorts of comparatively harmless circumstances could lead people into impersonation. Harmless impersonation was then reconstrued as imposture, and the motives for even a trivial manipulation of biographical data suddenly became sinister. Thus, in the case of Stanislav Rataichak, an official in the chemical industry, a formerly trivial ambiguity in his *avtobiografii* as to whether his nationality of origin was German or Polish, became virtually a capital crime in Vyshinsky’s indictment when Rataichak found himself among the defendants in the 1937 Moscow show trial:

Whether [Rataichak] is a German or a Polish spy is not clear, but that he is a spy there cannot be any doubt; and as is appropriate to his profession, a liar, a swindler and a rascal. *A man who, on his own confession, has an old autobiography and a new autobiography. A man who, according to circumstances, forges and re-shuffles these autobiographies.*<sup>46</sup>

<sup>46</sup> *Report*, p. 474. Emphasis mine.

When such abrupt category switches from impersonator to impostor occurred, it is possible that those in the environment—or even the subject himself—understood them as revelations of essential evil.<sup>47</sup> But this is hard to prove one way or the other. What can be said with confidence is that watchers and the subject themselves understood that a disastrous amendment of the file-self had occurred, a fundamental reclassification as dangerous to state security that made any attempts to edit or amend it pointless, as well as putting other individuals peripherally mentioned in it at risk. This sense of a disastrous file-self change is well conveyed in the comment of one Great Purge victim (who considered herself innocent and was reporting only a reclassification): “I turned out to be an enemy of the people.”<sup>48</sup> Victims of such file-self changes and their close relatives were rarely willing to accept their reclassification: Vyshinsky’s archive, for example, is full of petitions for removal of the “enemy” classification.<sup>49</sup> When, after Stalin’s death, a mechanism of rehabilitation was officially set in place, almost all the survivors from the “enemy of the people” category of the late 1930s seem to have petitioned for rehabilitation—that is to say, for formal removal of the “enemy” label from the file-self.

The second type of imposture, criminal imposture, whereby an individual claimed a false identity for the purposes of gain, was very common in postrevolutionary Russia but provoked very different reactions from political imposture. Common confidence men (often called *moshenniki* [swindlers] or *obmanshchiki* [deceivers]) were a noticeable presence, not just in everyday life but also in contemporary journalism and literature.<sup>50</sup> A common form of such imposture in prewar Soviet times, as in the days of Nikolai Gogol’s *Inspector General* (1836), was to present oneself in the provinces as an emissary of a central government institutions, taking advantage of the tradition that such emissaries should be hospitably welcomed with food, drink, and other perquisites—even money—to encourage them to make a favorable report back to the authorities that had sent them. Ostap Bender, the lovable swindler of Ilf and Petrov’s novels, was an adept of such impostures, using his mastery of Soviet jargon and official mores to pass himself off in a variety of quintessentially Soviet roles, even including that of Soviet journalist.

<sup>47</sup> As suggested in Halfin, *Terror in My Soul*, esp. chapters 1 and 5.

<sup>48</sup> See Sheila Fitzpatrick and Yuri Slezkine, eds., *In the Shadow of Revolution: Russian Women’s Life-Stories from 1917 to the Second World War* (Princeton, 2000).

<sup>49</sup> Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF), f. 5446, op. 81a. Only some of these petitions directly requested release from imprisonment, but virtually all of them made the argument that the victim (usually the writer’s husband or son) was *not* an enemy of the people.

<sup>50</sup> This is described in detail in chapter 13.

Despite the fact that the officials were often the dupes of Ostap Bender-type confidence men, this kind of imposture was treated comparatively benignly in Soviet discourse. Newspapers in the 1930s (particularly *Izvestiia* under Bukharin's editorship) delighted in reporting ingenious confidence tricks. The Ostap Bender stories—related in a similar vein to the journalistic articles—were wildly popular with Soviet readers and generally tolerated by the authorities,<sup>51</sup> despite the fact that Bender was never properly punished, nor did the authors spend much time holding forth on the antisocial nature of his crimes. In real life, of course, confidence men who were caught were punished by the courts, sometimes severely. But, like other criminals, criminal impostors had one great advantage over political, namely that they could be redeemed or, in the terminology of the 1930s, “reforged” as new Soviet men.

The project of remaking adult and juvenile delinquents was very popular in the Soviet official world in the 1930s. Lev Sheinin, a fascinating character who was both a writer/journalist, member of the Soviet Union of Writers, and a senior NKVD criminal investigator, devoted particular attention to such reclamation projects, stimulating a short-lived but highly publicized movement whereby criminals renounced their professions, in return for which the state forgave them their offenses and helped them make a new start. Among the beneficiaries was the notorious con-man “Count Kostia,” who was trained as a topographer and sent off on an expedition to the Arctic, and “dark-eyed, well-built Avesian,” whose recitation of a monologue from Othello so impressed Sheinin that he arranged for him to be retrained as an actor.<sup>52</sup> All the more remarkable was the fact that all this was occurring in the early months of 1937, almost the same time as another enterprise in which Sheinin was deeply involved: the great show trial of Piatakov, Rataichak, and other “enemies of the people.” For people like Count Kostia, the road back into Soviet society was open at any time; they were, in effect, prodigal sons whose return to the fold caused particular joy. For people like Rataichak, by contrast, the way back was closed forever—or at least for the period that the file remained in the “dangerous to state security” category. As long as a file itself retained the classification of “enemy,” the subject was not available for reforging.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>51</sup> They were briefly out of favor in the postwar period: see below, pp. 285–86.

<sup>52</sup> For more on this episode, see Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, pp. 78–79; on Avesian, see Lev Sheinin, *Zapiski sledovatel'ia* (Moscow, 1965), pp. 108–109.

<sup>53</sup> Intellectually, this was a really untenable position for Soviet ideologists, so it is unusual to find an explicit statement, despite the unmistakable evidence of a taboo on such reclamation in practice. At the height of the Great Purges, Anton Makarenko, the educationist who more than anyone else was associated with reclamation projects, conceded (in an uneasy, embarrassed fashion) that some people were “vermin by nature” and thus beyond reach. See Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, pp. 79 and 242 (n. 57).

## OVERVIEW

The book begins with an investigation of the question that first drew me to this topic, namely class and its meaning in early Soviet Russia. These first three chapters (a reworking of several essays written in the late 1980s and early '90s, of which the best known is "Ascribing Class") investigate why the Bolsheviks thought it so important to know what social class individuals belonged to, how they tried to find this out (which brings us into the realm of the collection and interpretation of social statistics), the practical and legal forms of class discrimination that became so crucial a determinant of individual fates in the 1920s and first half of the 1930s, and the evasive and contestatory responses they provoked. I introduce here the theme of masking and unmasking that will run throughout the book. In chapter 3, I argue that, for all that many of the Bolshevik leaders were intellectuals well versed in Marxism and derived their interest in class from this source, we misread the term "class" in prewar Soviet usage if we assume that it means class in a Marxist sense. In its practical meaning in early Soviet Russia, class was only secondarily about one's place in a system of social relationships generated by a regime of production. It was primarily about the place ascribed to an individual in a system of entitlements and obligations—in short, about a relationship to the state, similar to that implied in membership of a social estate (*soslovie*) such as the nobility or clergy before the revolution.

In part 2, I turn to the impact of practices of class ascription on individual lives starting with two vignettes ("Lives under Fire" and "Two Faces of Anastasia," both written in the early 1990s) about challenges to the class identity that an individual claimed. One challenge occurred in public, in the course of an election for trade-union office held at a time of high political tension during the Great Purges; the other in private, initiated by a denunciation and subsequent investigation to which the subject of investigation responded with a vigorous attempt to ensure that her file-self corresponded to her version of her life, not her accuser's. The theme of editing and presenting lives runs through this section. "A Peasant Truth-teller" examines a rare example of a peasant life story (related in the course of a long denunciation of abuses by local bosses sent to a peasant newspaper), showing the different ways in which one enterprising and intelligent man tried to define himself against a changing background of tumultuous times. In "Women's Lives," a whole array of women's first-person narratives (both Soviet and émigré) is under examination, with emphasis on the women's sense of their autobiographical task as testimony rather than confession, their slighting of private life, and their experience of class and class identity problems in the Soviet period.

Parts 3 and 4 deal with mainly with different epistolary genres—the letters of appeal, complaint, and denunciation that individuals sent in vast numbers to the authorities in the Stalin period. Here the central theme is self-presentation: how the writers represented themselves and their lives to the authorities in their effort to win “justice” and “pity,” and more concretely to gain benefits and favors from the state, settle scores with other individuals, and so on. “Supplicants and Citizens” provides a typology of citizens’ letters to the authorities; “Patrons and Clients” examines the practice of patronage, using letters as a major source. Denunciation is the focus of “Signals from Below” (written in tandem with “Supplicants and Citizens” in the mid 1990s) and “Wives’ Tales.” Denunciations were often challenges to the identity of their subjects, involving accusations of false claims about class identity or—the ultimate reclassification attempt—assertions that someone who was passing as a good Soviet citizen was actually an “enemy of the people.” In the 1930s, spousal denunciation seems to have been rare, but in the postwar period, denunciation of husbands by wives became common. “Wives’ Tales” investigates this phenomenon, relating it to postwar tensions between the sexes and the 1944 law restricting divorce.

Part 5, on imposture, deals with criminal imposture in real life and fiction in the interwar period (“The World of Ostap Bender”) and the impact of the postwar upsurge of anti-Semitism and “anti-cosmopolitan” campaign (“The Con Man as Jew”). Underlying the discussion of imposture is the suggestion that in a society collectively involved in a revolutionary transformation project, where individual practices of impersonation are unavoidable, imposture—that close but criminal relative of impersonation—becomes a focus of societal attention. That attention may be alarmed and hostile, as in the case of political imposture, but it may also be sympathetic and even admiring, as in the case of criminal impostors like Ostap Bender who display enviable skill at performing new social roles. When Ostap Bender and his ilk (who had always tended to be read by Russian readers as non-Russian and probably Jewish) started to look unmistakably Jewish in the postwar climate of rising antisemitism, that sympathetic tolerance was temporarily suspended and the conceptual separation of the two types of imposture blurred.

While most of this book deals with identity issues and practices in the prewar period, 1917–1941, two chapters (“Wives’ Tales” and “The Con Man as Jew”) deal with the 1940s and ’50s, and the last chapter, “Afterword: Inventing a Post-Soviet Self,” moves forward to the 1990s. That means that we need to consider briefly what changes occurred in the postwar and post-Stalin periods. In the realm of identity, the most important postwar development was that class, the great focus of identity concerns in the 1920s and 1930s, became less central. The Soviet Consti-

tution of 1936 started the move away from the revolutionary rulers' former preoccupation with class as a way of "reading" the population (in James C. Scott's phrase). Most class discriminatory policies were dropped (except for the newly incorporated territories of the Baltics and Eastern Poland, as well as in Sovietized Eastern Europe, where they were introduced for the first time in the 1940s and '50s as part of the Soviet "transformation" package). It took time for the shift away from class discrimination to take root in local administrative practice. Local authorities in the Russian provinces in the late 1940s were still entering class data in personal dossiers, including parents' class and *soslovie* status and whether anyone in the family had ever been deprived of voting rights on class grounds (a practice officially discontinued in 1936).<sup>54</sup> In Moscow, however, the Central Committee had ceased to note the social origins of prospective appointees by 1952,<sup>55</sup> and the party had become markedly less responsive to class denunciations (kulak uncles, capitalist grandfathers, and so on) than it had been before the war. In 1951, after investigating a denunciation that a physician and his associates had concealed the fact that they came from families of priests, the Party Control Commission concluded that the allegations were true but irrelevant: "there are no grounds to show distrust of them."<sup>56</sup> The conclusion would surely have been different fifteen years earlier.

Distrust, however, had not disappeared; rather, it had shifted its focus. With regard to the large proportion of the Soviet population that had lived under German occupation during the war, suspicions of collaboration (with all the familiar panoply of denunciations, rebuttals, and counteraccusations) took over from the earlier suspicions that "bourgeois" origins translated into sympathy with the old regime, the Whites, or non-Bolshevik political parties. Whole ethnic groups were deported in the 1940s as alleged collaborators with the occupying forces. All contacts with foreigners were regarded with deep suspicion, and were sometimes severely punished, in the postwar years. In the late 1940s and early '50s, rising state and popular anti-Semitism gave rise to rumors (never substantiated but pervasive in the era of the "Doctors' Plot" allegations of 1953) that Jews would be next on the list for group deportation.

<sup>54</sup> Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Riazanskoi oblasti (GARO), f. R-6, op. 1, d. 1800, ll. 13, 28 (attestations from oblast soviet, 1946); Tsentral'noe khranilishche dokumentatsii noveishei istorii Samarskoi oblasti (TSKhDNISI), f. 1683, op. 16, d. 268, l. 100 (*lichnyi listok po uchetu kadrov* for Komsomol members, 1949).

<sup>55</sup> Rossiiskoi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi informatsii (RGASPI), f. 17, op. 119, d. 1090 (appointments memoranda, 1952). These memoranda still included a space for social position (*sotsial'noe polozenie*), but this was usually filled in with a standard answer "Sluzhashchii" (employee).

<sup>56</sup> Tsentral'noe khranilishche sotsial'noi dokumentatsii (TsKhSD), f. 6, op. 6, d. 1574.

The other important postwar change in the identity realm—impossible to date precisely, but certainly well established by the mid 1960s—was naturalization of Soviet identity. At a certain point, the Revolution and its destabilizing consequences for social and political became history. By the 1960s, what it meant to be “Soviet” was no longer problematic. This is not to say that a monolithic model of Soviet identity held sway: on the contrary, this was a period when the range of choices available to Soviet citizens expanded greatly and public debate about lifestyles and mores proliferated.<sup>57</sup> But the society was no longer composed of individuals learning to “speak Bolshevik,” in Kotkin’s phrase: the older generation had already learned the language, while the younger—the majority of the population—were native speakers.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, “Bolshevik” was spoken with such fluency that the whole Soviet idiom and persona was becoming a cliché. Foreigners made jokes about it; internal critics wrote disparagingly of “Homo Sovieticus”; and by the late 1980s, the contemptuous “*sovok*” had gained broad currency as a term for right-thinking Soviet citizens. Nobody talked any more about the lineaments of a future New Soviet Man: instead, there was a “really existing” Soviet Man to go along with the “really existing socialism” of the Brezhnev era.

The establishment status of the Soviet persona is indicated by its capacity to generate both parody and rejection. As long as Soviet identity was still insecure, as it was in the prewar period, articulated countercultures that played off and challenged the dominant culture were virtually unknown. The first recognizable counterculture was that of the *stiliagi*—style-conscious young men appropriating Western fashions and challenging the prevailing drabness of Soviet dress—of the 1940s and ’50s.<sup>59</sup> The *stiliagi* were followed by the dissidents of the 1960s and ’70s, who moved the arena of challenge from fashion to politics. In the 1970s, Western political scientists started to talk about the ossification of the Soviet political system, implying something that was both stable and increasingly inflexible. An analogous process surely existed in the realm of Soviet identity, though that is a story that has yet to be told.

And then came the collapse of 1991, an event no less dramatic in its consequences for individual identity than the 1917 Revolution had been. The afterword examines the process of identity change and self-reinvention in the 1990s, the discrediting of “Homo Sovieticus” and Soviet values, the embrace of capitalism, and the attempt to recover Russianness

<sup>57</sup> See Catriona Kelly, *Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite Culture, and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 312–38.

<sup>58</sup> Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, chapter 5.

<sup>59</sup> See Mark Edle, “Strange Young Men in Stalin’s Moscow: The Birth and Life of the *Stiliagi*, 1945–1953,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 50 (2002), pp. 37–61.

and/or entrepreneurial democracy (which Russians, unfortunately, tended to define as polar opposites) as a basis for post-Soviet identity. In terms of the imperative of self-reinvention, the wheel seemed to have come full circle back to the last great transition after 1917. This time, however, it was not a matter of becoming Soviet but of rooting out the Sovietness in oneself. Then came the new puzzle: what did “post-Soviet” mean, apart from something dialectically opposed to Sovietism? What were the behaviors and codes appropriate to New Post-Soviet Man, and how could Old Soviet Man remake himself? The book ends with a story of identity reconstruction that is still in progress.