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Amateur Theatres and Amateur Publics in the Russian Republic, 1958–71

SUSAN COSTANZO

IN 1966 the city of Ivanovo's komsomol newspaper *Leninets* recounted the tribulations of the acclaimed Ivanovo Youth People's Theatre and its director Regina Grinberg. Sponsored by the Balashov textile factory, the amateur troupe performed in the factory's dilapidated club, but the relationship was strained. When the club began renovations, the troupe could not rehearse a new play. Because few factory employees participated, trade union leaders did not feel justified supporting the company. They also did not appreciate the troupe's recent attraction to poetic theatre and to Vladimir Maiakovskii's work. The trade union chairman complained to the reporter about Grinberg's 1962 production of Maiakovskii's *The Bathhouse* (*Bania*): 'We'd like something simpler. Our workers won't understand it. And in general we don't need any kind of theatre. There used to be a drama circle, a nice thing, no troubles ...' In light of these problems as well as the troupe's popularity outside the factory, the correspondent proposed that the troupe be transformed into 'an independent city youth theatre'.¹ According to a subsequent article, the newspaper received approximately forty letters in support of the recommendation. Urging the textile trade union 'to heed the voice of the readers', the editors quoted one of the letters that favoured the new venture: 'Civic spirit [*grazhdanstvennost*], professionalism, creative searching [and] enthusiasm — these are the distinctive qualities of the collective's best work.'²

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¹ G. Serebriakov, 'Teatru — byt'!', *Leninets*, 17 April 1966, p. 3.

² 'Teatru — byt'!', *Leninets*, 14 May 1966, p. 3. *Grazhdanstvennost* 'can also be translated as 'civic duty', but 'spirit' more closely captures the intention of amateurs whose problematic performances might be explained away as immature, youthful exuberance, rather than social or political criticism that was intentionally provocative. Performances were often exuberant and provocative.

The conflict surrounding Grinberg's troupe reveals efforts by the public and the press to support innovative, non-realist theatre. The fan's description provides a neat characterization of high-quality amateur productions in the post-Stalin era and points to tactics that were used to overcome the political and economic challenges faced by the arts in general and amateurs in particular. In order to defend problematic productions, proponents revitalized the term *grazhdanstvennost'* in reference to loyal criticism of Soviet society. Calls for professionalization offered one means to improve troupes' material conditions and status with the goal of securing permanent sites for those critical views. These activities show that members of the intelligentsia outside the cultural elite were working to shape a cultural environment that suited their own preferences, if not necessarily state priorities.

This agenda for expanded theatrical options was supported by various groups and individuals on behalf of a given troupe. Together, they comprised what I term an 'amateur public'. This public included troupe members, who were usually youth in their late teens and twenties, and the director. It also incorporated enthusiastic spectators as well as prominent members of the local or national arts community, including critics and newspaper editors. Fortunate troupes also relied upon sympathetic and resourceful officials in the government, the Communist Party, the Komsomol, or trade unions. These publics were not institutionalized or organized, and individuals usually acted as individuals, although the Ivanovo case suggests the potential for concerted action. The number of participants in this activity fluctuated, and the number of troupes or members cannot be measured with precision. The theatres examined here were located in cities of the Russian republic. Because amateur activities were often deemed unimportant, documentation was usually not preserved. As a result, the evidence provided here represents the minimum level of these activities. Not all amateurs were interested in aesthetic and administrative innovations. Many followed official recommendations or offered non-ideological entertainment, although the latter created a different but equally vexing concern for cultural officials. Such troupes are not addressed here. Nonetheless, the breadth of these amateur publics suggests that the efforts to alter the cultural landscape were not limited to a small number of keen performers but encompassed a broader segment of society.

Amateur publics operated within accepted paradigms of Soviet artistic life, including censorship, even as they tried to change expectations. Although they sometimes pursued informal solutions that flouted regulations, they did so within official institutions. These efforts correspond to Michel de Certeau's concept of 'making do' (*bricolage*), an unusually apt term for *samodeiatel'nost'*, which is usually translated as

'amateur activity' but literally means 'the act of doing or making for oneself'. According to de Certeau, individuals took orthodox practices and 'subverted them from within — not by rejecting them or transforming them (though that occurred as well), but by many ways of using them' not as originally intended.³ As a result of this approach, neither amateurs nor the state identified their activities as 'oppositional' well into 1968.

This 'making do' was more assertive than the practice of 'speaking Bolshevik' that Stephen Kotkin describes for the Stalin era. He argues that many Soviet citizens had to learn a new lexicon in order to navigate the enormous changes and the new expectations that developed in the 1930s. By the early 1960s, many of these practices were well-established, but my study shows that these amateur publics sought to change some of the 'rules of the game', an option not available in the Stalin era, according to Kotkin.⁴ While some activities reflected cynical motives, others demonstrated a genuine belief that loyal criticism would benefit Soviet art and society and would be tolerated as a logical extension of Nikita Khrushchev's 1956 denunciation of Stalinist excesses and subsequent de-Stalinization. The sincere and the cynical often coexisted in the efforts to nurture innovative theatre.

This study bridges two areas of scholarship on the post-Stalin era. It adds to the growing body of work that attempts to understand the changes in society and culture by analysing developments outside the elite who dominated central institutions. This scholarship addresses a diverse array of organizations, including the Komsomol, student and environmental groups, literary and archaeological clubs and rock music.⁵ Amateur theatre adds the perspective of the non-elite in the cultural world but, unlike most rock musicians, amateur theatres were already engaging in these activities from the 1960s onwards. The focus on amateurs also contributes to scholarship on the arts, which has emphasized professionals and their relationship to central Communist

³ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall, Berkeley, CA, 1984, pp. xv, 32.

⁴ Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*, Berkeley, CA, 1995, pp. 198–237.

⁵ A. G. Borzenkov, *Molodezh' i politika: vozmozhnosti i predely studencheskoi samodeiatel'nosti na vostoke Rossii 1961–1991 gg. V 2 chasti*, Novosibirsk, 2002, 2003; Thomas Cushman, *Notes from Underground: Rock Music Counterculture in Russia*, Albany, NY, 1995; Bella Ostromoukhova, 'Le Dégel et les Troupes Amateur: Changements politiques et activités des étudiants 1953–1970', *Cahiers du Monde russe*, 47, 2006, 1–2, pp. 303–26; Douglas Weiner, *A Little Corner of Freedom: Russian Nature Protection from Stalin to Gorbachev*, Berkeley, CA, 1999; Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More*, Princeton, NJ, 2006; Boris Gladarev, 'Formirovanie i funktsionirovanie milieu (na primere arkheologicheskogo kruzhka LDP-DTlu 1970–2000 gg.)', <<http://www.indepsores.spb.ru/boriss.htm>> [accessed 29 August 2007]; Elena Pudovkina, 'Klub "Derzanie"', *Pchela*, 26–27, 2000, <http://www.pchela.ru/podshiv/26_27/club.htm> [accessed 29 August 2007].

Party officials. Since Priscilla Johnson's work on shifting Party priorities for the arts and divisions within the arts community, numerous studies have broadened and deepened our understanding of the complex dynamics that shaped artistic production in the 1960s.⁶ In these studies, amateurs and cultural consumers are usually depicted as passive spectators who occasionally reacted to events in higher circles but had little independent role or influence. By omitting the contributions of these marginal groups, these scholars neglect a valuable source for cultural change that also made an impact in the professional realm.

Creative searching: the troupes and their productions

As these scholars have documented, 'the Thaw' after Stalin's death in 1953 was characterized by new opportunities and old frustrations for artists. The state expanded cultural services, including professional journals, publishing houses, professional theatres and exhibitions and festivals of foreign art. At the same time, Communist Party leaders continued to insist that art should serve 'the people', a euphemism for censorship and for the ongoing role of socialist realism, although they allowed for a greater variation in themes and styles. These changes did not resolve all tensions between officials and artists who favoured socialist realism's monopoly and those who sought greater freedom. Liberal periods were punctuated with backlash, such as the campaign against Boris Pasternak in 1958 when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature and Khrushchev's denunciation of modernist art after the 1962 Manezh exhibit. In spite of the setbacks, the overall circumstances for artists had improved after brutal post-war restrictions, and developments in the arts world demonstrated that the state was engaged in a dialogue with artists regarding the role of the arts in Soviet life.

These changes were welcomed in the amateur realm. Since the late 1930s, amateur troupes had been nestled at the bottom of a hierarchy that incorporated all theatre. At the top was the Moscow Art Theatre (MKhAT), followed by other professional theatres. A small number of 'model' amateur troupes sought to copy the professionals, but the vast majority of amateur circles occupied the bottom rung. All theatres were expected to aspire to MKhAT's supposed pinnacle: an adherence to socialist realism, with its emphasis on conformity to the Communist Party's political and ideological goals, and professional craftsmanship based in an ossified understanding of Konstantin Stanislavskii's

⁶ Priscilla Johnson, *Khrushchev and the Arts: the Politics of Soviet Culture, 1962-1964*, Cambridge, 1965; Vol'fram Eggeling, *Politika i kul'tura pri Khrushcheve i Brezhneve, 1953-1970 gg.*, trans. L. Molchanov, Moscow, 1999; Dina R. Spechler, *Permitted Dissent in the USSR: 'Novy mir' and the Soviet Regime*, New York, 1982; M. P. Zezina, *Sovetskaia khudozhestvennaia intelligentsia i vlast'*, Moscow, 1999.

methods of psychological realism. Contemporary dramas were encouraged, although many amateurs continued to perform apolitical entertainment. This arrangement represented a significant departure from the 1920s, when amateurs often embraced distinct genres, including living newspapers, blue blouses and theatres for young workers. They also wrote their own scripts and engaged the audiences in performances.⁷ Like many professionals in the post-Stalin era, ambitious amateurs sought greater independence from ideological strictures and the creative limitations of psychological realism.

Amateur theatres provided an important cultural service throughout the country in the late 1950s. Many cities had no professional company, and only the largest cities had more than one drama troupe.⁸ Amateur companies were numerous, but precise numbers are difficult to determine because of the ephemeral nature of many amateur troupes, which were often established but quickly disintegrated. According to the Soviet Ministry of Culture, roughly 150,000 amateur troupes dotted the country in 1958, more than half of them in the Russian Republic.⁹ Housed in local clubs and houses of culture, they were poorly funded by local soviets or trade unions. The director received a salary, but the cast performed gratis. They had no means to generate revenue because ticket sales were prohibited. In 1959, the Ministry of Culture and trade unions permitted a small fraction of those troupes, known as people's theatres, to hire a second staff member and sell tickets, but the proceeds went directly into house of culture coffers and usually did not improve the troupe's financial circumstances. The most ambitious groups experimented with forms and techniques from the 1920s as well as recent Western trends. Their repertoires were diverse and did not replicate plays in local professional troupes. Their productions usually fell into three categories: traditional drama, poetic theatre and *estrada*. Some troupes, such as the Moscow University (MGU) Student Theatre and the Cheropovets Poetry Theatre concentrated on one type, while others, including the Ivanovo troupe and a people's theatre in Vyborg, were more eclectic.

⁷ A. P. Shul'pin, 'Samodeiatel'nyi teatr v gorode', in K. G. Bogemskaia et al. (eds), *Samodeiatel'noe khudozhestvennoe tvorchestvo v SSSR. Ocherki istorii 1930-1950 gg. Kniga II*, Moscow, 1995, pp. 165-236.

⁸ In 1960, the Russian Republic supported 288 professional theatres. The number increased to 310 by 1971 but remained well below the high of 465 in 1940. See *Narodnoe khoziaistvo RSFSR v 1984 g.*, Moscow, 1985, p. 347. For locations of professional theatres in the Russian Republic, see A. Iufit (ed.), *Ekonomika i organizatsiia teatra*, Moscow, 1971, pp. 158-71.

⁹ Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva (hereafter, RGALI), f. 2329, op. 2, d. 690, l. 156. Statistics for amateurs are inconsistent across sources and time. In some cases, only Ministry of Culture figures are provided. In others, both Ministry and trade union statistics are presented.

Traditional dramatic texts presented one option for creative experimentation and social criticism. Innovation in this genre was dominated by the MGU Student Theatre whose proximity and long-standing reputation attracted untried directors and semi-retired veterans. These amateurs were early proponents of synthetic theatre with its creative use of sets, lights, music, costumes and non-linear plots as an alternative to orthodox realist staging and structure. Rolan Bykov's production of Pavel Kohout's *Such a Love* (*Takaia liubov'*, 1958) was an early success in this direction.¹⁰ Acting styles also diverged in efforts to stage Bertolt Brecht's alienation technique in such productions as Mark Zakharov's and Sergei Iutkevich's *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (*Kar'era Arturo Ui*, 1964) at MGU and a Novorossiisk people's theatre's productions of *Arturo Ui*, *Fear and Misery in the Third Reich* and *Mother Courage and her Children*. Although Iurii Liubimov's production of *The Good Person of Szechwan* (1964) garnered greater acclaim in professional theatre circles, amateurs were drawn to Brecht's more political plays. MGU chose a cabaret style to depict the rise of fascism set in the world of Chicago gangsters. Parallels to recent Soviet history were evident, but university officials allowed the production anyway.¹¹ Another MGU director, former actor Ivan Solov'ev, introduced Muscovites to the docu-drama, an emerging style in Europe, with *The Diary of Ann Frank* (*Dnevnik Anny Frank*, 1960). This play challenged heroic depictions of the Second World War and hinted at ongoing antisemitism in Soviet society.¹² Mark Zakharov received additional praise for Evgenii Shvarts's *The Dragon* (*Drakon*, 1962), whose fifteen performances represented the longest run yet of the controversial satire that examines society's toleration of tyranny. He also directed Vladimir Voinovich's much maligned *I Want to be Honest* (*Khochu byt' chestnym*, 1966), a story of a construction foreman who refuses to compromise the quality of his work at the expense of future apartment dwellers while most other characters act out of greed, laziness or personal advancement.¹³ Other noteworthy productions outside Moscow include Regina Grinberg's aforementioned production of *The Bathhouse* which added to

¹⁰ For detailed analysis, see Susan Costanzo, 'Conventional Melodrama, Innovative Theater, and a Melodramatic Society: Pavel Kohout's *Such a Love* at the Moscow University Student Theater', in Louise McReynolds and Joan Neuberger (eds), *Imitations of Life: Two Centuries of Melodrama in Russia*, Durham, NC, 2002, pp. 232–58.

¹¹ Henry Glade, 'Major Brecht Productions in the Soviet Union since 1957', in Betty Nance Weber and Hubert Heinen (eds), *Bertolt Brecht: Political Theory and Literary Practice*, Athens, GA, 1980, pp. 88–99 (p. 92). On the Novorossiisk productions, see I. Sidorina, M. Korbina, 'Razgovor o samom vazhnom', *Teatr*, 1967, 11, pp. 109–13 (hereafter, 'Razgovor') (p. 111).

¹² A. Rubenshtein, 'Slovo-zriteliu', *Moskovskii universitet*, 16 November 1960, p. 4.

¹³ See, for instance, A. Gorev, 'Eto fal'sh', *Trud*, 24 March 1963, p. 4; Larisa Kriachko, 'Pozitsiia tvortsa i besplodie meshchanina', *Oktiabr'*, 1964, 5, pp. 208–19. For a review of the production, see V. Frolov, 'Prorab Samokhin i ego zhizn', *Teatr*, 1966, 9, pp. 17–20.

her national reputation.¹⁴ The Urals Polytechnical Institute (UPI) Satire Theatre in Sverdlovsk performed Shvarts's *The Naked King* (*Golyi korol'*, 1962), based on the Anderson fable, and *On the Open Sea* (*Na otkrytom more*, 1967), perhaps the earliest Soviet productions of absurdist Slawomir Mrozek.¹⁵

In spite of its primacy on professional stages, traditional drama was not the only option for amateurs in the post-Stalin era. Some troupes performed poetic theatre by stitching together a number of poems with common themes. Rather than being mere copies of Liubimov's work at the Taganka Theatre from the mid-1960s, poetic productions by amateurs had already appeared in the early 1960s in response to its enormous popularity.¹⁶ The most popular poets for dramatization were contemporary, and they included Evgenii Evtushenko, Andrei Voznesenskii, Robert Rozhdestvenskii and Bella Akhmadulina. Some troupes incorporated poems by classic authors, such as Maiakovskii's *Good! (Khorosho!)* at the Perm Youth People's Theatre, while the Cheropovets Poetry Theatre also presented works by more controversial authors, including Boris Pasternak, Marina Tsvetaeva and Sergei Esenin.¹⁷ A poetry troupe in Omsk also made one of the earliest attempts to include Bulat Okudzhava's songs in its lyrical production *I Love (Ia liubliu)*, 1967.¹⁸ Poetic theatre also facilitated trends away from psychological realism. Productions often had no discernible characters or plot development. Set designs favoured minimalist stages that enhanced the metaphorical elements in the poetry, best exemplified by Ivanovo's acclaimed *Parabola* (1966), based on Andrei Voznesenskii's poems. Ernst Neizvestnyi, who had been kicked out of the Union of Artists after his confrontation with Khrushchev, designed the set, and it reflected the artist's modernist style with a large mask that hung on the back wall and a parabola-shaped ramp. The play also featured 'Neizvestnyi — A Requiem', a poem that recounts the sculptor's near-death experience in the Second World War and hints at his recent battles with political and artistic conservatives.¹⁹ Although the total number of troupes that performed poetic productions is unknown,

¹⁴ E. Elizarova, 'Maiakovskii nastupaet', *Teatr*, 1963, 7, pp. 42-44 (hereafter, 'Maiakovskii nastupaet').

¹⁵ E. Orlova, 'Teatr — ne otobrazhaiushchee zerkalo, a uvelichivaiushchee steklo!', *Studenteskii meridian*, 6, 1972, pp. 37-39 (hereafter, 'Ne otobrazhaiushchee zerkalo').

¹⁶ On poetry's importance, see Petr Vail and Aleksandr Genis, *60-e. Mir sovetskogo cheloveka*, Moscow, 1996, pp. 29-36.

¹⁷ A. Zemnova, 'Pochemu vedushchii ne pokhoz na Maiakovskogo...', *Teatr*, 1967, 2, pp. 116-18 (hereafter, 'Pochemu'); A. Andreev, 'Poeticheskii teatr', *Klub i khudozhestvennaia samodeiatel'nost'*, 1968, 16, pp. 18-19 (hereafter, 'Poeticheskii teatr').

¹⁸ Programka, 'Ia liubliu', archive of Dramaticheskii teatr studii L. Ermolaevoi (formerly the Omsk Oilworkers Palace of Culture Poetry Theatre).

¹⁹ Z. V., 'Preodolevaia krutiznu', *Teatr*, 1967, 2, pp. 114-16 (hereafter, 'Preodolevaia krutiznu'); 'Razgovor', p. 113.

an entire day at the 1967 national amateur arts festival was devoted to poetic productions, and a dozen theatres, including those from Vologda, Tambov, Saratov and Volgograd, participated in a conference in Cheropovets.²⁰ Poetic theatre provided a means to bring the words to life in provincial cities whose citizens only had access to written versions, and the productions allowed them to participate in the ferment that gripped Moscow, where poets recited their work in packed stadiums. These troupes also filled an important gap in the theatrical world, since few professional troupes staged poetic productions.

Like poetic theatre, *estrada* productions avoided multi-act dramas, but favoured sketch comedy and variety theatre. Interest in this genre blossomed on campuses across the country from the mid-1950s, and at least seventy troupes were operating in the mid-1960s.²¹ Some of them lampooned institute and university life, while more audacious theatres graduated to social and political criticism. Amateurs often wrote their own texts or created scripts based on prose. The most respected troupe was the Our Home (Nash dom) *estrada* studio theatre at Moscow University, and its work offers a good overview of the genre. Formed in 1957, the troupe satirized not only student life but the Virgin Lands campaign, bureaucratic inefficiency and indifference, conformity, materialism and the KGB. Their earliest productions reintroduced constructivist set designs and costumes from the 1920s for a new generation of Soviet audiences. They also championed pantomime and attempted absurd theatre, a forbidden genre at the time. Their productions were praised by critics and reviled by the university's party committee. More controversial, Moscow Aviation Institute's *estrada* troupe Television (Televizor, also known as MAI) scandalized Komsomol leaders at the 1966 student *estrada* festival. One skit called 'Snowball' ('Snezhnyi kom') follows the progress of a growing snowball as it rolls downhill. Individuals close to the top refuse to stop it, lower groups make a failed attempt to divert it, and the snowball crashes into a group of people. The snowball can be interpreted as either the party, the bureaucracy or one of their campaigns that gets out of control. Another sketch criticized Soviet foreign policy by suggesting that the money spent on military advisors in Africa might be better used to feed its starving people.²² A less controversial but also evocative piece was performed by Cheliabinsk Polytechnical Institute's Mannequin (Maneken). In 'Blind Man's Bluff' ('Zhmurky'), actors and spectators are instructed by an MC to close their eyes. When a series of violent

²⁰ N. Filin, 'Prodolzhenie sleduet', *Klub i khudozhestvennaia samodeiatel'nost'*, 1969, 12, pp. 6–9 (hereafter, 'Prodolzhenie').

²¹ Arkadii Raikin, 'Studenty i teatry', *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 1 February 1966, p. 2.

²² Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (hereafter, RGASPI), f. M-1, op. 39, d. 17, l. 18.

acts occur on stage and participants open their eyes, the MC demands that they close their eyes because the heinous action is none of their business. The sketch demonstrated the ease with which society obeys a leader and tolerates reprehensible behaviour.²³ Unlike many MAI and Our Home sketches, Mannequin's works usually concluded on a positive note which softened the criticism.

All amateur productions were subject to censorship, but the outcomes were unpredictable. For instance, Liudmila Zotova, who worked in the Ministry of Culture and reviewed professional productions, observed in her diary that neither the Voinovich production nor Our Home's *Evening of Russian Satire* (1966) would have been approved for performance in a professional theatre.²⁴ This good fortune was, however, not assured for amateur theatres. In deliberations at the 1966 *estrada* festival, one jury member illustrated a different double standard: 'When we see pointed things in Raikin's programme, a stock opinion arises: "That's Raikin, he's allowed". When the same thing, maybe once in awhile even more pointed and more interesting, is done by "Television", it's easy to say: "Listen, comrades, what are you up to? You're not Raikin [...] Mind your own business"'.²⁵ Because of the lack of uniform response to controversial subjects, individual circumstances played a key role for amateurs. Whether amateurs had greater latitude or were more innovative in content and style than their professional counterparts is less important than the practical outcome: amateurs were legitimizing non-realist approaches for all theatregoers.

Grazhdanstvennost'

Although all the plays mentioned above were approved for public performance, troupes were not immune from subsequent criticism, and some productions were never approved. In order to minimize obstructionists, proponents of innovative amateur theatre identified creative risks, especially in terms of content, as a necessary function of 'civic spirit'. Most individuals addressed only one facet of the term's potential meanings, but taken together, their arguments presented an alternative vision for the arts and socialist realism as well as citizenship.

Grazhdanstvennost' and *grazhdanskii* (except in reference to the Civil War) were relatively unused terms by party leaders in speeches on art and ideology in this period. From the Manezh exhibit in 1962 through 1965 after Khrushchev's ouster, *grazhdanstvennost'* did not appear in the numerous speeches on culture by Khrushchev, head of ideology Leonid

²³ 'Pred'iavite vashi serdtsa', *Molodezhnaia estrada*, 1966, 3, pp. 74-77 (p. 76).

²⁴ L. V. Zotova, *Dnevnik teatral'nogo chinovnika*, Moscow, 2003 (hereafter, *Dnevnik*), p. 94.

²⁵ RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 39, d. 15, l. 96.

Il'ichev, or Minister of Culture Ekaterina Furtseva. *Grazhdanskii* occurred infrequently, usually just a single reference, such as civic 'feeling', 'enthusiasm' or 'obligation'.²⁶ Their absence did not necessarily signify opposition to the concept. When civic concerns were invoked, they were regarded as secondary to the tenets of socialist realism with its clear subordination to party priorities. The limited emphasis by party leaders allowed amateur publics to use the term in ways that, on the surface, did not conflict with party goals. This relatively open definition led to some contradictory applications. In separate 1965 articles in *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, one reviewer praised the 'lofty note of civic spirit' in Liubimov's innovative work; a different critic observed the same quality in *The Zhurbins* (*Zhurbiny*), a production based on the 1952 novel by Vsevolod Kochetov, a notorious conservative.²⁷ This disparity suggests that conservatives also valued civic spirit, and individuals with radically different views could agree that *grazhdanstvennost'* reflected a positive quality in artistic expression.

Particularly in the early attempts to explain apparently problematic behaviour as a civic virtue, cautious adherents sometimes buttressed their case with party platitudes. Bykov, for instance, used the term to characterize his work with the MGU Student Theatre in 1959. Mimicking a propaganda slogan of the day, his civic spirit included 'high political principles, an active attitude toward life, a tendentious and polemical theatre'.²⁸ This definition was intended to create an impression that his troupe adhered to orthodox standards, but his *Such a Love* was ground-breaking in its staging and its condemnation of the destruction of individuals in the supposed interest of the collective. Bykov was still 'speaking Bolshevik', but other advocates did not bother with this window-dressing because they discovered that the term was generally accepted without references to these orthodox assumptions.

Civic spirit was most commonly used to defend controversial content. Critics praised *The Bathhouse* and *I Want to be Honest* for their 'lofty civic spirit'.²⁹ In both plays, the term referred to the troupes' willingness to present unvarnished social criticism and to suffer unpleasant consequences for it. The term was more often applied to poetic theatre and *estrada*. The most concentrated use of the term

²⁶ See, for instance, Leonid Il'ichev, 'Tvorit' dlia naroda, vo imia Kommunizma', *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, 22 December 1962, pp. 1-2 (p. 2); 'Teatr — pomoshchnik partii!', *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, 21 May 1963, p. 2; 'Iskusstvo geroicheskoi epokhi', *Kommunist*, 1964, 10, pp. 25-48 (p. 35).

²⁷ Vladimir Valutskii, 'K voprosu o teatre na Taganke', *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, 30 March 1965, p. 2; I. Georgiev, 'Chto takoe sovremenno?', *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, 2 September 1965, p. 3.

²⁸ Rolan Bykov, 'Teatr — eto teatr!', *Teatr*, 1959, 6, pp. 55-57 (hereafter, Bykov, 'Teatr') (p. 56).

²⁹ 'Maiakovskii nastupaet', p. 43; TsALIM, f. 82, op. 1, d. 152a, l. 13 (transferred after my viewing to Tsentral'nyi arkhiv goroda Moskvy [hereafter, TsAGM]).

occurred during the controversial 1966 national student *estrada* festival, during which fourteen troupes from cities such as Odessa, Tomsk, Novosibirsk, Kharkov and Kazan' gathered at MGU. Comedian and jury chairman Arkadii Raikin publicly and privately described all *estrada* work as suffused with *grazhdanstvennost'*, but MAI required a special defence. In closed jury deliberations, he and some other jury members emphasized the necessity to support MAI's civic goals while pointing out specific, isolated missteps, and Raikin flatly refused to succumb to pressure by Komsomol leaders to censure the troupe.³⁰ In the press, Raikin commended MAI for its unrivalled civic platform, but acknowledged that lapses in good taste and judgment marred its usual *grazhdanstvennost'*. This single public scolding of the troupe appeared in an obscure student publication a year after the festival, long after the scandal subsided.³¹ Raikin's approach encouraged troupes to take chances and make mistakes without fear of retribution. Examples of civic spirit in poetic theatre were less charged, but they also defended risks. Introducing reviews of Ivanovo and Perm productions, the editors of *Teatr* defined civic spirit as a necessary component of good poetic theatre.³² Arnol'd Andreev, Cheropovets Poetry Theatre's director, praised the 'uncompromising' civic spirit in Ivanovo's *Parabola*.³³ In these views, the performance of controversial material was presented as an obligation, rather than as a thrill or challenge. Proponents explained amateurs' daring as a valid dedication to the author's intentions. This integrity gave amateurs a moral authority in the minds of their supporters, and the emphasis on the troupe's commitment to a text shifted the control of meaning away from outside forces, such as censors or state institutions. These arguments were renegotiating the extent that artists rather than the state could determine what aspects of society warranted humorous or critical scrutiny.

Because controversial themes and uncompromising positions might be viewed as oppositional or indifferent to Communist party priorities, advocates of civic spirit linked this behaviour to patriotism. Both Raikin and a *Teatr* critic made this connection not just for individual troupes but for the entire genres of *estrada* and poetic theatre.³⁴ Others, such as Leonid Futlik in Perm and Grinberg in Ivanovo, argued that amateur theatre provided the means to develop civic qualities in performers.³⁵

³⁰ RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 39, d. 15, ll. 97-98, 115, 117; Arkadii Raikin, 'Tsena ostrogo slova', *Studencheskii meridian*, Moscow, 1967, pp. 16-17 (hereafter, 'Tsena ostrogo slova') (p. 17).

³¹ Ibid.

³² 'V narodnykh teatrakh', *Teatr*, 1967, 2, p. 114.

³³ 'Poeticheskii teatr', p. 19.

³⁴ A. Raikin, 'Dobryi chelovek satirik', *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 22 February 1966 (hereafter, 'Dobryi chelovek'), p. 2; 'Preodolevaia krutiznu', p. 116.

³⁵ L. Futlik, 'Budni i perspektivy', *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, 26 January 1965, p. 3; R. M. Grinberg, 'Poiski aktivnosti aktera', in *Vospitanie aktera*, Moscow, 1964, pp. 19-38 (p. 19); 'Prodolzhenie', p. 9.

In these instances, the development of civic spirit had valuable benefits for society both in the productions and in the cultivation of good citizens. In this context, *grazhdanstvennost'* emphasized amateur troupes' educational function, a task that many officials considered more important than the quality of the productions. This concern for the collective value of civic spirit complemented the Communist party's expectation that individuals serve society. These statements claimed that artists could serve as loyal critics of the state, and officials had nothing to fear from this development.

Raikin took this understanding of civic spirit to its logical end: society should defer to satirists-patriots who would accept 'responsibility for every word'. He remarked, 'Today we can bravely speak our minds [*vyskazyvat' svoe mnenie*] on any problem of our life'. When asked if student satirists had any 'prohibited subjects', he equivocated but concluded, 'Our stage censor [*repertkom*] is our heads and our hearts'.³⁶ Although this statement might be understood as a disingenuous claim that censorship did not exist in the Soviet Union, his words suggest another meaning in the context of the festival. Raikin was proposing a system of self-censorship for individuals who demonstrated loyalty. His approach would obviate the need for socialist realism since individuals would decide what constituted appropriate content. Raikin made this case in an obscure student almanac, which made little impact on officialdom. But it sent a message to students that they deserved this responsibility, he trusted them with it, and the subject warranted public discussion.

Some proponents attempted to address the concern that performers were not yet mature enough for that responsibility. These perspectives connected civic spirit in amateurs and established artists. Critics reminded readers of the civic spirit of Maiakovskii and Voznesenskii in light of productions from Ivanovo and Perm, and this link corresponded to remarks that lauded the civic motifs of a number of contemporary poets at meetings between artists and party leaders in June 1964.³⁷ Raikin also used this strategy by arguing that *grazhdanstvennost'* was not limited to *estrada* performers but was epitomized by Dmitrii Shostakovich and Sergei Prokof'ev, who were vilified in the press in the late 1940s but had been recently exonerated.³⁸ This strategy established a kind of civic patronage by using respected artists to create greater legitimacy for amateurs. This association was also meant

³⁶ 'Tsena ostrogo slova', pp. 16-17.

³⁷ 'Razgovor', pp. 112, 113; 'Maiakovskii nastupaet', p. 42; 'Sluzhenie narodu — vysokoe prizvanie iskusstva sotsialisticheskogo realizma', *Sovetskaiia kul'tura*, 9 June 1964, pp. 1, 3 (p. 1).

³⁸ 'Dobryi chelovek'; Arkadii Raikin, 'Tsena otsenki', *Izvestiia*, 20 February 1966 (hereafter, 'Tsena otsenki'), p. 2.

to reassure by providing role models, another nod to orthodox expectations for amateurs. At the same time, the musicians' experiences reminded both supporters and detractors that civic spirit could lead to short-term persecution, but that artistic bravery would eventually prevail.

Raikin's extensive discussions of *grazhdanstvennost'* did not focus solely on troupe members. He and others believed that spectators should not be passive witnesses to civic spirit, but should embrace civic spirit in their own lives. He pointed to music critics who supported Shostakovich and Prokof'ev in the Stalin era. Unlike Raikin's views of self-censorship, these remarks appeared in *Izvestiia* and demonstrated his own *grazhdanstvennost'*.³⁹ Such a display was not especially daring, given the comedian's status, but Raikin was not alone in this assessment. Another *estrada* festival jury member encouraged fellow members to exercise *grazhdanstvennost'* by defending MAI.⁴⁰ In a discussion that followed the performance of *I Want to be Honest* at the 1967 amateur arts festival, one woman characterized Voinovich's perspective as 'the most needed civic position today'. She accused jury members of 'the usual playing it safe [*perestrahovka*] and an unwillingness to be honest' because they had refused to allow the performance as an official selection of the festival.⁴¹

In order to increase public expression of civic spirit, amateurs also reached out to their audiences. Our Home, Ivanovo and Perm all encouraged audience discussions, but substantive evidence of these activities has survived only for Our Home. In an interpretation of theatre of the absurd, Mark Rozovskii dedicated 'Act Two' of *An Entire Evening as the Damned* (*Tseli vecher kak proklatie*, 1964) to an open forum of the issues in the play. He wrote in the mid-1970s that discussions were meant 'to elucidate [*vyiasnit'*] the spectators' civic position'.⁴² Another founding director of Our Home, Il'ia Rutberg, noted that university party officials particularly disliked these second acts, because censors had no control over theatregoers' impromptu 'scripts'.⁴³ This inclusion of genuinely spontaneous audience reactions as an official part of the spectacle had been highly unusual since the agit-trials of the 1920s.⁴⁴ The disputes, as they were called, gave theatregoers an

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 39, d. 15, l. 91.

⁴¹ RGALI, f. 970, op. 22, d. 1524, ll. 16, 17.

⁴² Mark Rozovskii, *Samootdacha. Iz opyta raboty odnoi studii*, Moscow, 1976 (hereafter, *Samootdacha*), p. 46. On Perm and Ivanovo, see 'Pochemu', p. 116; 'Maiakovskii nastupaet', p. 42.

⁴³ Il'ia Rutberg, Interview, Moscow, 25 September 1991. All interviews conducted by and in possession of the author.

⁴⁴ Elizabeth A. Wood, *Performing Justice: Agitation Trials in Early Soviet Russia*, Ithaca, NY, 2005; Julie A. Cassiday, *The Enemy on Trial: Early Soviet Courts on Stage and Screen*, DeKalb, IL, 2000.

opportunity to practise citizenship by using the production to articulate their attitudes toward society.

Not all audience members were keen on speaking, however. It is not possible to gauge the extent of the audience's role and the degree of openness of their remarks. Although the troupe transcribed the comments from all 'performances', only three transcripts have survived.⁴⁵ At one of the first performances in December 1964, most participants were arts community professionals who had frequently played this 'role' at dress rehearsals with censors, and everyone understood that their remarks might determine the production's existence. Average theatre-goers with no previous experience were less forthcoming. At a January 1965 performance, no one initially wanted to speak, and Rozovskii and the discussion leader had to coax the spectators. Although this hesitancy might have been a throwback to the Stalin era that became more acute after the recent ousting of Khrushchev, it could also be argued that spectators did not feel confident to evaluate the production or its ideas in spite of the discussion leader's assertion that everyone had an opinion on philistinism (*meshchanstvo*), and the theme itself was not especially controversial. The first speakers admitted that they felt awkward about sharing negative reactions to the production, and ultimately more than half asked to remain anonymous. No one raised issues of either the professional level of the performance or its civic spirit, but all practised stating publicly their views on society.⁴⁶ It cannot be assumed that this hesitation always occurred, but both silent and speaking audience members gave legitimacy to the discussions and the production through their presence.⁴⁷

Efforts to reframe *grazhdanstvennost'* were not an empty monologue addressed to indifferent party and governmental organizations, and some individuals in these institutions embraced this concept. For instance, a local *estrada* jury consisting of representatives from the Theatre Society, the Moscow trade union organization, the Moscow Komsomol, and professional *estrada* performers, praised MAI's production for its civic spirit and recommended that the troupe advance to the national festival for that reason.⁴⁸ Although the ensuing scandal seems to reveal a discrepancy between the views of local and national officials, the local jury was upholding central priorities, as revealed in the festival slogan, no doubt approved by national Komsomol leaders:

⁴⁵ Two transcripts remain in Mark Rozovskii's personal archive, and a third transcript was preserved by the All-Russian Theatre Society (RGALI, f. 970, op. 21, d. 3040). Additional excerpts from transcripts are published in *Samootdacha*, pp. 46–56.

⁴⁶ 'Stenogramma disputa o meshchanstve 30/1-1965 g.' Personal archive of Mark Rozovskii.

⁴⁷ See *Samootdacha*.

⁴⁸ RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 39, d. 17, l. 10.

'*Grazhdanstvennost*' is the main demand that we make of this art.'⁴⁹ Although the term's meaning is ambiguous here, the label could be interpreted as a sanction for social criticism. The slogan reveals the Komsomol's dilemma. One representative admitted that the festival had been undertaken because *estrada* was immensely popular among students.⁵⁰ Officials understood that the medium would reach youth more effectively than dull lectures and speeches, but they assumed that if they benevolently allowed the festival, grateful satirists would target only subjects that national officials deemed appropriate or lower-level juries would exclude undesirable content. Furthermore, national leaders did not share a uniform view. In order to circumvent Komsomol leaders' opposition to an award for MAI at the festival, Raikin visited the Party's Central Committee headquarters and received assurances from unnamed individuals that MAI should receive an award for its 'civic position'.⁵¹ These disagreements suggest a pronounced lack of uniformity on the limits of tolerable criticism and the potential for negotiation, and amateur publics at all levels exploited the resulting opportunities.

Regardless of the intentions of Komsomol officials, MAI's recognition provided legitimacy to both an expanded definition of civic spirit and the controversial subject matter that resulted. This victory is particularly interesting in light of events that were unfolding at that very moment in another Moscow neighbourhood. In February 1966 Andrei Siniavskii and Iulii Daniel' were tried and sentenced to labour camps for their unapproved, supposedly anti-Soviet works published in Western Europe. At the time, Soviet leaders received letters that invoked civic duty to justify the behaviour of Siniavskii, Daniel' and the letter writers' themselves.⁵² Even in this highly charged moment, Raikin succeeded in obtaining an award for MAI's performance, and this sanction suggests an acquiescence to a certain level of criticism from Soviet citizens. Although there are numerous explanations for the central response to MAI, the exact motivations of Soviet officials are unclear. Neither Raikin nor the Central Committee interpreted MAI's behaviour as oppositional or dangerous, and that message was transmitted to the public. It is also clear that amateur publics did not view their activities as oppositional. Given the controversial material at the festival, it does not appear that troupes changed their material in light of the trial.

⁴⁹ RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 39, d. 15, l. 19.

⁵⁰ Ibid., ll. 123-24.

⁵¹ Ibid., l. 117.

⁵² Steven Bittner, 'A Turning Point but in which Direction? Dissidence and the Thaw', paper presented at the conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, November 2003 (hereafter, 'A Turning Point').

The use of *grazhdanstvennost'* to legitimize controversial artistic content and to encourage members of the public to support it reveals a changing role for citizens in the post-Stalin era. James von Geldern has argued that the passive spectator became a model for Soviet citizens in the 1930s.⁵³ The environment of the Thaw led amateur publics to present a model of an engaged citizen. That citizen might be an amateur performer who offered new, sometimes uncomfortable ways to understand Soviet society, or that citizen could be a member of the broader public who defended this activity. This alternative suggested not an oppositional stance but an interest in cooperation with existing institutions. Although the state's cooperation was unpredictable during the 1960s, amateurs were not deterred.

Professionalization and other strategies

The desire for new directions in amateur theatre was not limited to the productions. Amateurs also wanted to function differently than in the recent past. By the early 1960s some amateur companies were receiving critical acclaim in the press for performing as well as if not better than their average professional counterparts. They also increasingly operated much like established repertory companies with stable casts and long-running productions. Throughout the decade, resourceful amateurs and their publics worked to change the administrative restrictions that limited their ability to share their creative vision.

In order to offset inadequate subsidies, amateurs took advantage of the pervasive Soviet phenomenon that allowed individuals and organizations to negotiate informally for exceptional treatment in order to circumvent onerous regulations. Illegal ticket sales were the most prevalent form of disregard for rules. The widespread problem was discussed in the Theatre Society, the Soviet Ministry of Culture, and the cultural wing of the trade union.⁵⁴ These transgressions often occurred with the approval of houses of culture staff. Controversial productions were lucrative, and both parties benefited. In 1959, for instance, all performances sold out at the MGU Student Theatre, and at the end of the year, the troupe gave its 200,000-ruble profit to the club.⁵⁵ The revenue gave troupes a measure of independence, and the income was shared with cash-strapped house of culture.

⁵³ James von Geldern, 'The Center and the Periphery: Cultural and Social Geography in the Mass Culture of the 1930s', in Stephen White (ed.), *New Directions in Soviet History*, New York, 1992, pp. 62–80 (p. 71).

⁵⁴ RGALI, f. 970, op. 21, d. 2954, l. 80; f. 2329, op. 10, d. 507, l. 23; f. 2329, op. 10, d. 515, l. 19, GARF, f. A-628, op. 2, d. 463, ll. 31, 48–49, 53; f. 5451, op. 28, d. 1799, ll. 8, 11, 13–14, 16.

⁵⁵ V. Khachaturov, V. Donchenko, 'I samodeiatel'nyi i professional'nyi — takim dolzhen byt' nash', *Moskovskii universitet*, 5 February 1959, p. 4.

A similar restriction prevented amateur troupes from opening bank accounts. By the mid-1960s an unspecified number of people's theatres had established independent accounts with club directors' permission. A Ministry of Culture representative admitted that the practice occurred and the ministry was reconciled to it, but officials rebuffed requests to sanction the activity for all people's theatres.⁵⁶ Bank accounts further eroded troupes' dependence on houses of culture, because amenable club staff no longer monitored the troupe's petty business. Although not all troupes sought these arrangements, central officials opposed regulations that would be adaptable to local needs. The unwillingness of central authorities to accommodate them encouraged illegal behaviour and weakened clubs' adherence to central priorities. This inflexibility rendered central officials out of touch while the informal financial arrangements gradually altered the balance of power between troupes and their supervisory organizations by creating a symbiotic relationship.

Troupes not only sought to improve their financial circumstances. Some of them tried to change their legal status. Although officials insisted that people's theatre would not have a future option of converting into professional theatres, some amateurs remained hopeful for historical and contemporary reasons. In the 1930s, some Theatres of Working-Class Youth (*Teatry rabochei molodezhi*) converted into professional troupes. More recently, the Ministry of Culture demonstrated a renewed interest in the expansion of professional troupes with the creation of the *Sovremennik* Theatre in Moscow and the gradual expansion of theatres for young spectators in a few oblast' capitals.⁵⁷

A small number of troupes sought professional status. The MGU Student Theatre, Our Home, Perm Youth People's Theatre, and a Leningrad people's theatre negotiated with local organizations on the matter.⁵⁸ These troupes promised to support themselves through ticket sales. They would pay a small number of actors, who would provide a 'professional' core. Other cast and crew members would remain

⁵⁶ GARF, f. A-628, op. 2, d. 531, l. 28.

⁵⁷ For an analysis of the TRAM movement, see Lynn Mally, *Revolutionary Acts: Amateur Theater and the Soviet State*, Ithaca, NY, 2000. For new professional theatres for young spectators, see *Kul'turnaia zhizn' v SSSR 1951–1965. Khronika*, Moscow, 1979, pp. 535, 563, 596.

⁵⁸ Ol'ga Lun'kova, 'Krov', pot i slezy na ulitse Gertsena', *Ogonek*, 1998, 19, pp. 50–52 (p. 50); A. P. Shul'pin, *Molodezhnye teatry Rossii*, St Petersburg, 2004, p. 12; Il'ia Ol'shanger, 'Vospitanie iskusstvom', *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 5 June 1964 (hereafter, 'Vospitanie'), p. 2; 'Predlozhenie o sozdanii v Moskve komsomol'sko-molodezhnogo teatra-kluba "NASH DOM" na baze Estradnoi Studii MGU "NASH DOM"' (hereafter, 'Predlozhenie'), personal archive of Mark Rozovskii.

unpaid 'amateurs'.⁵⁹ This hybrid arrangement would require troupes to remain popular in order to survive, but, as MGU's experience shows, some troupes had established strong reputations.

Calls for professionalization offered another opportunity for amateur publics to practice civic engagement. In the press, Il'ia Ol'shvanger, who directed both a professional and an amateur troupe in Leningrad, and Our Home's Mark Rozovskii advocated greater professional recognition for the best amateur troupes. In 1967 Rozovskii wrote,

The main contradiction comes from the fact that in practice we became a theatre long ago but in essence remain on the level of a drama circle. The creative side has outstripped the organizational side. Enthusiasm arises in order to reduce that gap [...] The time has come for an official decision to end this compulsory enthusiasm forever.⁶⁰

Supporters for the higher status included spectators, including those in Ivanovo, who advocated the new status even when the troupe itself did not openly seek this alternative. Prominent critics also called for professional status for the MGU troupes.⁶¹ In discussion of *An Entire Evening*, a number of speakers, including Viktor Shklovskii, praised the professional qualities of the Our Home production.⁶² Some supporters may have invoked 'professionalism' much like *grazhdanstvennost'* in order to persuade officials to sanction problematic productions. Regardless of whether an individual believed that a troupe warranted the higher status, references to professional qualities added legitimacy and respectability to an amateur production. On occasion, newspaper editors contributed their perspective. In addition to efforts in Ivanovo, *Vecherniaia Moskva* praised the overall quality of more than ten satire troupes in the city and called for the creation of a 'Komsomol satire theatre' in 1962.⁶³ A correspondent in *Sovetskaia kul'tura* went as far as recommending in 1967 that the founding resolution for people's theatres be updated to address those troupes that were 'more serious and more professional' than originally envisioned.⁶⁴ Although scholars tend to view the press as the mouthpiece of the state, these cases reveal that the press sometimes advocated in favour of increased artistic heterodoxy.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ See Bykov, 'Teatr', pp. 57; 'Predlozhenie'; 'Vospitanie'; L. Futlik, in 'Tri voprosa', *Teatr*, 1964, 2, p. 106.

⁶⁰ 'Vospitanie'; Mark Rozovskii, 'Razmyshleniia v seredine sezona No. 8', *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 19 January 1967, pp. 2-3 (p. 3).

⁶¹ Aleksandr Svobodin, 'Ne radi ovatsii!', *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 11 October 1964, p. 3; Iu. Smelkov, 'Oni postroili svoi dom', *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 25 December 1968, p. 4.

⁶² RGALI, f. 970, op. 21, d. 3040, ll. 16, 22; 'Stenogramma obsuzhdeniia spektakliia "Ves' vecher kak proklatie"', 18 dekabria 1964 g., pp. 9, 11, 14, 20, 26. Personal archive of Mark Rozovskii. By January, the play's name had been changed.

⁶³ M. Dubovskii, 'Chtob kritika drian' kosila!', *Vecherniaia Moskva*, 7 April 1962, p. 3.

⁶⁴ G. Uzhova, 'Lichnoe delo goroda Ivanovo', *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, 11 February 1967, p. 3.

⁶⁵ See, for instance, Thomas C. Wolfe, *Governing Soviet Journalism: The Press and the Soviet Person after Stalin*, Bloomington, IN, 2005.

Unlike the Ministry of Culture's initiative to create people's theatres, discussions of professional status suggest that some amateur publics were attempting to expand their role from spectators and critics to active participants in decisions regarding the state's cultural priorities. In effect, they believed that theatres, regardless of status, could be initiated from below.⁶⁶

Although there is evidence that the Ministry of Culture was considering professional status for the MGU Student Theatre in 1968, no amateur troupes in fact received that status, for numerous reasons.⁶⁷ One concern was money. Although proposals called for self-support, the popular *Sovremennik* Theatre had failed to keep the same promise. Cultural assumptions also played a role. Most members of the theatrical world made clear distinctions between professional and non-professional productions, and most amateur performers did not meet the higher standards. Although professionals were obviously protecting their resources and privileges with this argument, many amateurs agreed.

Mark Rozovskii also offered another explanation for the state's unwillingness to professionalize a troupe: to open a new troupe was 'unbelievably difficult, but once open it was even more difficult to close'.⁶⁸ Such decisions would present concrete evidence of censorship, which officials had always denied. Furthermore, officials would have to find jobs for the newly unemployed cast members, crew and administrative staff. It was preferable to leave a troupe intact while banning a production or removing a troublesome director such as Anatolii Efros, who was forced out of Moscow's Lenin Komsomol Theatre in 1967. Amateurs rarely had such security. Most of them could be easily dispersed by party or trade union committees. As one member of *Mannequin* recalled, an official told the troupe, 'I've disbanded more than one [*estrada* troupe] and will disband you'.⁶⁹ This vulnerability helps explain why some troupes sought to join the professional establishment. They wanted access to 'the patronage contract' between artists and the state, but they were prepared to accept some level of censorship in exchange.⁷⁰ Finally, the state's inaction can also be explained by its unwillingness to allow the public to decide which troupes merited support.

⁶⁶ By contrast, the *Sovremennik* was an unusual initiative by professionals to set up a new troupe.

⁶⁷ *Dnevnik*, p. 92.

⁶⁸ Mark Rozovskii, interview, Moscow, 25 October 1991.

⁶⁹ Iurii Luchko, in A. P. Shul'pin, *Teatral'nye opyty 'Manekena'*, Cheliabinsk, 2001, p. 14.

⁷⁰ Barbara Walker, 'Kruzhok Culture: The Meaning of Patronage in the Early Soviet Literary World', *Contemporary European History*, 11, 2002, 1, pp. 107–23 (p. 121).

Denouement

The question of alternative models for theatre remained unresolved into 1968, when the Communist party determined that critically-minded intellectuals were potentially too disruptive to political stability. The 1968 Prague Spring and the Soviet Union's subsequent crackdown there led central officials to re-examine activities of Soviet youth, especially on university and institute campuses. Central officials revealed an ongoing suspicion of young people's preferred leisure activities, and this problem gained importance with the party's plan to shift to a five-day work week, which would lead to more free time.⁷¹ Some students' increased access to dissidents and their ideas only exacerbated these concerns.

In this environment of heightened conservatism, individuals who opposed liberal trends in theatre went on the offensive. In 1968 Georgii Mdivani, a literary hack, denounced the use of *grazhdanstvennost'* in *Teatr* reviews: 'In the past two-three years it's rare to find the words "party-spirit of art", "high ideology", "socialist realism". More often is found "*grazhdanstvennost'*". This word is lofty, but of course it cannot replace the understanding of Marxist-Leninist aesthetics.'⁷² In a subsequent review of the journal, a local party organization reiterated Mdivani's accusations and added further condemnation: *grazhdanstvennost'* 'is a tendentious attitude toward Soviet reality, the over-emphasis of its negative sides'.⁷³ They claimed that *grazhdanstvennost'* did not reflect positive qualities, and this shift signalled a reassertion of party priorities at the expense of public preferences.

Although these attacks focused on professional theatres, the implications for amateur troupes were clear. The change is evident in a 1969 Moscow University Komsomol resolution. In it *grazhdanstvennost'* is surrounded by orthodox language that highlights conformity and party priorities: 'It is necessary to carry out differentiated ideological-political work, [and] to develop in each person ideological conviction, high moral and aesthetic qualities, orderliness and discipline, an intolerance toward anti-social behaviour, and a civic responsibility to society.' Among its goals, the Komsomol planned 'to strengthen the ideological direction of amateur activities'.⁷⁴ Around this time, amateurs stopped

⁷¹ On youth, see RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 39, d. 96, ll. 20, 32-33; op. 32, d. 1219, ll. 15, 26. On the five-day week, see TsAGM, f. 718, op. 1, d. 1045, l. 20.

⁷² Georgii Mdivani, 'Zhurnal "Teatr" i ego pozitsiia', *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, 9 May 1968, p. 18.

⁷³ S. Mokushin, 'Na oshibochnykh pozitsiakh,' *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, 22 August 1968, p. 2. For other arguments opposing this use of *grazhdanstvennost'*, see D. Avrov, 'Predosterezhenie ot ... ideii', *Ogonek*, 1968, 34, pp. 22-23; M. Tolchenova, 'Na ezopovom iazyke', *Ogonek*, 1968, 33, pp. 27-29.

⁷⁴ 'Tsentral'nyi arkhiv obshchestvenno-politicheskoi istorii Moskvy, f. 6083, op. 1, d. 148, ll. 25-26.

using the label to press their claim for a role as critical voices in Soviet society, and it almost disappeared from public and private discourse in the 1970s.⁷⁵

The consequences at MGU were particularly severe. A KGB memo described a variety of 'anti-social' events at the university in 1967 to 1968. Although not yet labelled 'dissident', unacceptable activities involved unsanctioned publications, letter-writing campaigns and foreign students with links to hostile Western radio stations. The report also identified two 'politically dubious' amateur directors: Mark Rozovskii and Petr Fomenko, a talented, young, professional director who led an amateur troupe on the Lenin Hills campus.⁷⁶ Fomenko was dispatched by April 1969.⁷⁷ Scrutiny of Our Home intensified that summer when the Central Committee issued a resolution that blamed the *partkom* for numerous shortcomings, including dissident activity, conditions in dormitories and cafeterias, inadequate academic preparation of students, and unproductive faculty.⁷⁸ By the end of the year, Our Home was liquidated.⁷⁹

The crackdown on amateur theatres was not confined to Rozovskii and Fomenko. The Student Theatre had already suffered a series of setbacks prior to 1969. Zakharov and Iutkevich had left for non-political reasons, and the troupe was languishing. Over the next few years, a series of directors presented mediocre productions in spite of the efforts of Anatolii Vasil'ev, one of the most acclaimed directors in the 1980s. While studying at the State Institute for Theatrical Arts, he briefly directed at the Student Theatre, but none of his works received permission for public performances.⁸⁰ MAI was neutralized, although it is unclear whether its decline resulted from political pressure or natural turnover, and *estrada* troupes were reclassified as agitbrigades, as if to erase the genre.⁸¹ The demise of student satire was complete in 1972 with the elimination of KVN (Klub veselykh i nakhodchivyykh), a television programme devoted to student humour. In Leningrad, a thorough review of all amateur troupes led to a ban on a stage version of Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* and to the dismissal

⁷⁵ The exceptions are individuals who came of age in the 1960s. See *Samootdacha*, p. 46; R. Grinberg, 'Teatr poeticheskogo predstavleniia', in E. D. Uvarova (ed.), *Narodnye teatry*, Moscow, 1981, pp. 137-54 (p. 137); L. Futlik, L. Tregubov, 'Shestnadsat' voprosov', in *ibid.*, pp. 173-91 (pp. 177, 182, 184).

⁷⁶ Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii (hereafter, RGANI), f. 5, op. 60, d. 51, ll. 189-97 (l. 196).

⁷⁷ *Dnevnik*, p. 241.

⁷⁸ 'Vstrecha predstavitelei profkoma i partkoma MGU s chlenami Soveta estradnoi studii MGU "Nash dom", 24 noiabria 1969 g. Stenogramma', p. 8. Personal archive of Mark Rozovskii; RGANI, f. 5, op. 61, d. 67, ll. 203-08.

⁷⁹ 'Zakrytie estradnoi studii MGU "Nash dom"'. Personal archive of Mark Rozovskii.

⁸⁰ Anatolii Vasil'ev, in Viktor Buriakov, 'Byl teatr...', *Teatr*, 1987, 3, pp. 110-18 (p. 115).

⁸¹ RGALI, f. 970, op. 22, d. 1335, l. 121.

of one director.⁸² In spite of the inhospitable atmosphere, some heterodoxy survived. For instance, Cheliabinsk's Mannequin premiered a production that incorporated the music of Vladimir Vysotskii, and the UPI Satire Theatre performed Shvarts's *The Dragon*.⁸³

In the 1960s amateur publics were engaged in changing the parameters of artistic life. They used *grazhdanstvennost'* to justify greater social criticism and a more independent role for artists in Soviet society. More critical theatre appeared in the process, and the emphasis on civic spirit and non-realist productions helped undermine the hegemony of socialist realism.⁸⁴ Although social criticism became muted for a time after 1969, it was not silenced. Professional status was not granted, and amateur publics lost faith in their ability to change the rules of the game at the central level. However, formal and informal mechanisms were gradually altering the relationship between amateurs and supervisory organizations, and this trend continued to facilitate creative heterodoxy in the 1970s.

The efforts by amateur publics to create sanctioned sites for criticism of the state and society raise the question of whether or not a public sphere was emerging in the Soviet Union at this time. Although most scholarship on this question has relied upon Western historical models that presume that the public sphere originates in autonomous and oppositional practices, a growing body of political science literature analyses the contemporary development of civil society in Eastern Europe on its own terms. Such an approach, as George Hudson argues, begins by recognizing that some civil societies develop in response to governmental encouragement, rather than in opposition to it. West Germany after the Second World War and Gorbachev's Soviet Union offer two examples of this 'top-down' process.⁸⁵ The Communist Party of the 1960s had no policy that supported these types of civic organizations, but individuals in various state organizations sometimes encouraged, or merely did not discourage, this

⁸² Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Sankt-Peterburga, f. 422, op. 1, d. 160, ll. 3, 5.

⁸³ RGALI, f. 970, op. 22, d. 1601, ll. 7–8. Programka, 'Poka my zhivem!..'; 'Ne otobrazhaiushchee zerkalo', p. 38.

⁸⁴ See, for instance, Geoffrey Hosking, *Beyond Socialist Realism: Soviet Fiction since Ivan Denisovich*, New York, 1980.

⁸⁵ See George E. Hudson, 'Civil Society in Russia: Models and Prospects for Development', *Russian Review*, 62, 2003, 2, pp. 212–22. For additional proponents of this approach, see Alexander N. Domrin, 'Ten Years Later: Society, "Civil Society", and the Russian State', *Russian Review*, 62, 2003, 2, pp. 193–211; Henry E. Hale, 'Civil Society from Above? Statist and Liberal Models of State-Building in Russia', *Demokratizatsiia*, 10, 2002, 3, pp. 306–21; Norbert Gotz and Jorg Hackmann, 'Civil Society in the Baltic Region: Towards a Hybrid Theory', in Norbert Gotz and Jorg Hackmann (eds), *Civil Society in the Baltic Region*, Aldershot and Burlington, VT, 2003, pp. 3–16. For a recent example of analyses based in Western experience, see Alfred B. Evans, Jr., Laura A. Henry and Lisa McIntosh Sundstrom (eds), *Russian Civil Society: A Critical Assessment*, Armonk, NY, 2006.

development. Amateur participants interpreted such signals as a positive step and expected that greater heterodoxy could occur within official institutions, as De Certeau's approach suggests.

Their activities represent a significant change from the letter-writing to newspapers and officials that Sheila Fitzpatrick has identified as a Stalin-era 'public sphere'. As she points out, some of these letters appealed to civic duty, but they rarely reached an audience beyond the recipient and perhaps the subject of the author's concern.⁸⁶ In this environment, the public sphere remained atomized. In the post-Stalin era until 1968, these letter writers were reinforced by participants in amateur publics, who were fewer but more public. They continued to write letters, but they also advocated more freedom of expression in additional public and private venues. This development was not confined to the theatrical world, but involved other members of educated society who invoked *grazhdanstvennost'* to assert their right to challenge the status quo as engaged members of society.⁸⁷

The inability of amateur publics to withstand the conservative turn after the invasion of Czechoslovakia, however, reveals the fragility of public spheres that depend on the state. As events in 1969 as well as more recent developments in post-Soviet Russia show, the lack of autonomy does not resolve the insecurity for amateur publics that have sought greater input into social and political developments. However, their experiences as engaged citizens facilitated their survival in less hospitable political climates. This study focuses on a small slice of Soviet society, but it suggests a different approach to the search for a public sphere in the 1960s and the need for further study of this phenomenon.

⁸⁶ Sheila Fitzpatrick, 'Suplicants and Citizens: Public Letter-Writing in Soviet Russia in the 1930s', *Slavic Review*, 55, 1996, 1, pp. 78-105.

⁸⁷ In addition to its frequent use in the professional theatre world, see 'A Turning Point'; Polly Jones, 'Memories of Terror or Terrorizing Memories? Terror, Trauma and Survival in Soviet Culture of the Thaw', in this issue; Aleksandr Masliakov, *My nachinaem KVN*, Moscow, 1996, p. 14.