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'Loose Girls' on the Loose?: Sex, Propaganda and the 1957 Youth Festival

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In the summer of 1957, the Soviet Union invited tens of thousands of foreigners to Moscow for a grand fête known as the Sixth International Festival of Youth and Students. Today, the 1957 Youth Festival is commonly referred to as a turning point in post-war Soviet history: the first major break in the 'iron curtain' and as such, the beginning of the end for an autarkic Soviet cultural system.[1] Commentators recall the festival as a moment when not only the Soviet state, but also the Soviet people opened up to and embraced the world community. More often than not, there is a romantic or sexual tinge to these visions of a new Soviet openness. And more often than not, it is young Soviet women who feature most prominently. Mention the 1957 Youth Festival to Russians today, and you are likely to be met with a wry smile and comments about the so-called *deti festivalya* – the alleged cohort of biracial children born to Soviet women after the festival. This chapter examines the relationship between this representation of the festival – its distinctively risqué historical mystique – and 1950s mass media culture and popular sensibilities. Romance and sex prove critical not only to how the festival has been remembered, but also to how it was represented and interpreted by its contemporaries. Moreover, conflicts over adolescent female sexuality and femininity constitute the heart of festival stories, then and now. The figure in the eye of a shameful storm at the festival – or on the barricades of its 'sexual revolution', depending upon your perspective – is the 'loose girl' (*devushka legkogo povedeniya*) who failed to guard her 'maidenly honour' with the foreign guests. This image of a sexually active Soviet girl can be understood, irony in hand, as a distorted reflection of Soviet propaganda – the directive to

embrace foreigners at the festival run amok. At the same time, it is a vision that conveys many contemporaries' hopes and fears about foreign cultural influence and the consequences of opening up to the outside world. While certainly not new to Soviet society, these issues were crystallised in controversy and celebration in the summer of 1957, and so helped establish for the festival its potent historical mystique.

The 1957 Youth Festival brought more than 30,000 foreigners from 131 countries to Moscow in late July and early August. As the largest, most expensive and most ambitious in a series of post-war international festivals sponsored by the communist-dominated World Federation of Democratic Youth, the Moscow festival was a blowout – a two-week cultural, political and athletic extravaganza the likes of which no Soviet city had ever seen. There were multiple mass rallies and group excursions, carnivals and parades, and performances and meetings too numerous to count. More than 2 million people flooded the streets for the opening day festivities.[2] Yet the Moscow festival was distinguished not only by its size and scope, but also by its freewheeling, informal spirit. Soviet authorities in charge of the festival did attempt to organise their guests by national delegations, to bus them from event to event, and generally to fill up their days with official activities. However, the festival invitation had gone out to individuals, not to nationalities, and many guests chose to ignore their delegations and schedules and, instead, to plunge into Moscow on their own.[3] By all accounts, delegates who struck out independently had no trouble meeting Soviets. With the weather particularly fine that summer, foreign guests and their hosts thronged Moscow's recently refurbished streets and spruced up parks. Tverskaya – then Gorky Street or, in the argot of stylish Muscovite youth, 'Brodvei' – located in the heart of Moscow and brilliantly illuminated for the festival, was transformed every night into a mass street party and informal dance hall, as was Red Square. According to Soviet and foreign press accounts, many delegates found themselves literally surrounded by crowds of Soviets, some with questions, some looking for an autograph or to exchange a pin or shake hands, and some, perhaps many, just looking.[4]

In 1957, after all, the sight of foreigners on the streets was itself a visceral shock for many people. International tourism inside the USSR had only just begun, and most young Soviets' experience of foreigners was entirely limited to Soviet and foreign mass media sources. Soviet screen star Lyudmila Gurchenko, then a teenager, recalled her amazement in the mid-1950s when she spotted her young director freely

associating with a group of French visitors on the set of a film. 'Personally, I knew foreigners from the movies. And not just me. They lived by themselves in their countries, and we lived in ours. There was no [live?] contact with them. ...'[5] Another teenager, jazz saxophonist Aleksei Kozlov, recalls how surprised he was at the festival to see that foreign delegates were young and often casually dressed; they were neither the bourgeois fat cats and racist thugs of *Krokodil* cartoons nor glamorous movie stars. They were, instead, thrillingly ordinary. Exotic, and yet familiar, and, suddenly, present and approachable.

The openness of ordinary Soviets to contacts with ordinary foreigners is one of the most remarkable features of the Moscow youth festival. Although a Gurchenko or a Kozlov may have been too young to have experienced it personally, the virulent xenophobia of late Stalinism was, in historical terms, only a heartbeat away. Just ten years prior to the festival, marriage to foreigners had been a criminal offence; in 1947, another Soviet screen star, Zoya Fedorova, was arrested and sentenced to 25 years in prison for her marriage to an American naval captain.[6] And Fedorova was not alone: in the context of late Stalinism, people with even the most tenuous of ties to foreigners and foreign culture were open to persecution in the USSR.[7]

The atmosphere of the 1957 festival – and, indeed, the mere fact of its having taken place – testifies to the tremendous changes under way in the Soviet Union after Stalin's death. Fedorova and others like her were amnestied in 1954 and 1955; marriage to foreigners was relegalised. And on a broader scale, the USSR embarked in 1955 on an extensive campaign to promote cultural exchanges with the non-socialist world.[8] Certainly, events in Hungary, Poland and at home in the wake of Khrushchev's 1956 secret speech gave Soviet leaders pause.[9] The year 1957 was marked overall by a tightening of ideological controls on literature and the arts and increased surveillance of youth – a partial rollback of the previous year's liberalisation.[10] Yet despite their concerns about the ideological stability of some segments of Soviet society, and particularly the young, when it came to Moscow's youth festival, the Soviet authorities went ahead full throttle. In the world arena, the festival was seen as a terrific opportunity to showcase the achievements of the USSR, including its vibrant, forward-looking and high-minded populace. With any luck, images of young people in Moscow making friends, talking peace and marvelling at Soviet successes would blot out those of Soviet tanks in the streets of Budapest that had so tarnished the USSR's reputation abroad.

One component of Moscow's gambit on the festival was, therefore, international media attention: to ensure widespread coverage, the Soviets welcomed a record number of foreign correspondents – nearly 1000, with roughly half from capitalist countries – and relaxed censorship restrictions for the duration of the festival.[11] No less important, however, was the interpersonal dimension of the event. Although the festival programme itself was structured on collective lines (delegations, interest groups, teams) and featured many mass events (parades, meetings, competitions), festival organisers believed their success depended in large part on personal interactions and actively encouraged the kind of one-to-one contacts that would become the hallmark of the event. Komsomol head A. N. Shelepin spelled out the strategy to Moscow-based activists succinctly: '… we must run the festival in such a way that the overwhelming majority of participants who come, and preferably all festival participants, leave Moscow as our friends. That's our main task, that's our general line.'[12] In the months leading up to the festival, Soviet domestic propaganda waged an extensive campaign to prepare Soviet citizens, psychologically and culturally, for their contacts with foreign guests. In effect, Soviet propaganda cast ordinary people in a starring role: they were to be the hosts and informal ambassadors of the Soviet Union and the Soviet way of life. And it is precisely this model of interaction – horizontal or peer-based rather than hierarchical, individual rather than mass, and (relatively) freewheeling and unpredictable rather than controlled – that so distinguished the Moscow youth festival from the earlier, Stalinist model of public celebrations, as described most recently by Karen Petrone.[13]

Contemporary accounts of the festival frequently emphasised not just the personal and the informal nature of people's interactions, but also their emotional expressiveness and physicality. American writer Kim Chernin, then a 17-year-old unofficial delegate from California, provides a prototypical description of the festival experience:

> Day and night people thronged the boulevards in national costumes, with instruments, with flowers, with arms full of gifts. The Russians threw themselves into this festival as if every stranger were a kinsman, returning home. They flocked around our buses, they forced the buses to stop, they rushed to the windows, took our hands, pressed them and shouted out to us: MIR I DRUZHBA, 'Peace and Friendship', that ritual call no one who attended the festival has ever been able to forget.[14]

In Soviet and foreign press accounts, every bus is always thronged by crowds reaching out to *touch* foreign guests through the windows.[15] Contemporary reports also describe non-stop handshaking, hugging, kissing and dancing. Tears of joy were apparently quite common as well. *Le Monde* reported with some amusement that young people were playing what they called the 'French kissing game' on Red Square, in which girls hid their handkerchiefs, and the boys who found them won the right to a kiss.[16] Soviet newspapers published countless photographs of people embracing or posing with their arms around each other. On 27 July, for example, a *Komsomol'skaya pravda* photo of a young woman who had thrown her arms around a beaming delegate bore the caption: 'Common scenes these days'. Typically, as in this example, the images were of single-sex and comradely in spirit, very much in keeping with the festival's official themes of 'peace' and 'friendship'. Yet not all images were single-sex. Khrushchev himself was photographed in the arms of a young female delegate from England.

The Soviet press, in particular, delighted in hints of romance between delegates. The youth magazine *Yunost'* featured a photo of a Russian girl standing on tiptoe to kiss a foreign athlete sitting with his teammates on the back of a truck: the caption reads 'These French guys are ready to kiss all Muscovites (*rastselovat' vsekh moskvichei*)'[17] (Figure 4.1). *Komsomol'skaya pravda* published a playful '*Festival'naya azbuka*' ('ABC of the festival') in which every letter of the alphabet was assigned a word. 'F' for '*festival''*', of course, and 'm' for '*mir*' (peace), but also 's' for '*svad'ba*' (wedding), 'l' for '*lyubov''*' (love), and 'zh' for '*zhenit'ba''*' (engagement). As for actual weddings at the festival, *Komsomol'skaya pravda* reported two, and hinted broadly that others were to follow.[18]

In general, although friendship was the official slogan of the day, *love* was a surprisingly prominent theme in festival planning and propaganda. The city of Moscow temporarily renamed one of its byways 'Street of Love' in honour of the festival and erected statues there of Romeo and Juliet.[19] Press accounts featured swooning foreigners. In their testimonials (a staple of festival coverage), delegates often declared that they had 'fallen in love' – with Moscow, with their Soviet hosts and with the festival experience. *Komsomol'skaya pravda*'s feature article on opening day answered, 'We feel your love' ('*My chuvstvuem vashu lyubov''*'):

> We often heard that people in different corners of the globe were dreaming of Moscow. We felt it in the letters we got, in the sound of

Figure 4.1 'These French guys are ready to kiss all Muscovites', *Yunost'*, September 1957, p. 66

> Russian songs sung by strangers thousands of kilometres from the USSR, and in the warm words of welcome addressed to our emissaries everywhere. … But only now, when the festival flag has risen and thousands of young guests have filled the streets of Moscow, when buses with terse signs – 'Sweden', 'France', 'Ceylon' – move about, and all of Moscow has broken out in smiles and people's songs in many languages, only now does each and every one of us feel the love of the world for Moscow so fully and clearly.[20]

Love was not a new theme in Soviet mass media culture. The people's relationship to Lenin and, especially, Stalin was often cast in terms of love.[21] Love of labour and of one's work collective, factory or even furnace were critical categories, too, as was love of the motherland.[22] Romantic love between individuals was also a common theme in Soviet culture, and frequently a problematic one: in romance lay the potential for conflict between self and loved one – that is, the romantic couple – and the collective. Stalinist culture played out and resolved this struggle repeatedly, as in, for example, the popular 1953 film *Lyubov' Yarovaya*, in which a wife overcomes her personal affections for her kulak husband in order to denounce him.[23] Propaganda for the 1957 Youth Festival sounded these traditional notes, representing love as purposeful, responsible and essentially civic or collective in nature. It also reverberated with new tones of playfulness and emotion. Love, hinted festival propaganda, was not a mere extension of the official slogan 'friendship', but something new, physical and unpredictable.

In retrospect, the most striking thing about editorial lines such as 'We feel your love' is how powerfully they resonate with the festival's historical mystique. Russian journalists writing in 1997 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the festival echoed contemporary Western accounts in their celebration of the event as a watershed in post-war Soviet history – the first, long-awaited 'injection of freedom' into Soviet veins.[24] They also invariably mentioned love and sex at the festival, most often in ironic tones. For many people today, the 1957 Youth Festival is associated with these themes far more than with culture or politics. When poet Yevgenii Yevtushenko was asked about the festival (for the CNN documentary series *The Cold War*), the first thing that came to his mind was kissing:

> How could I forget Moscow Youth Festival? For the first time in my life, my socialist lips touched so-called 'capitalist lip(s)' because I kissed one American girl, breaking any Cold War rules. Not only

> me, many of my friends, too, they're doing the same too on the streets of Moscow, in all the parks.[25]

Other commentators have argued that what happened in Moscow that summer was nothing less than a spontaneous sexual revolution. For Aleksei Kozlov, the festival was a moment when young people, especially young women, 'broke the chains' of puritanical Soviet morality. Here is how he has described the revolutionary front line:

> At night, as it was getting dark, crowds of young ladies from all over Moscow converged on the places where foreign delegates were staying – various student dorms and hotels on the outskirts of the city. … Events developed with maximum speed. No wooing, no fake coquettishness. Couples who had just met quickly distanced themselves from the buildings, in the dark, in the fields, in the bushes, knowing perfectly well what they would soon be doing. [26]

Kozlov mentions (with a hint of regret) that he did not personally take part in the revolutionary struggle. Like most other accounts, his is drawn from festival lore dating back to summer 1957, when rumours of widespread sexual contact between Soviets and foreign delegates first coursed through Moscow.[27] One popular story has it that young women caught with foreigners had their heads shaved on the spot by roving Komsomol patrols.[28] A 1993 feature film set at the festival, *The Road to Paradise* (*Doroga v rai*), offers a highly stylised version of this popular tale. In an opening scene of the film – a love story, as befits a festival film – Komsomol patrollers on motorcycles chase several teenage girls down a flight of stairs, along a river embankment and corner them against a wall. As the girls cower and sob, protesting that they are high school students, not prostitutes, the patrollers insult them and shave their heads. In another version of the popular head-shaving story, dozens (or hundreds) of unfortunate girls were not only shaved, but deported from Moscow. It is also said that 'loose girls' were shipped off to the Virgin Lands projects – as in the version told to Sally Belfrage, a young American living in Moscow in 1958.[29] Finally, rumour has it that there was widespread interracial sex at the festival, resulting in a large number of biracial babies born to Russian mothers in 1958 – the so-called '*deti festivalya*' (children of the festival).[30]

Some of these rumours are far easier to substantiate than others. There is no doubt that Komsomol brigades patrolled public spaces at the festival. Komsomol patrols and other civic policing groups were a

familiar sight on the Soviet urban landscape of the mid-late 1950s and 1960s. With Khrushchev's enthusiastic and vocal backing, Soviet officials in this period promoted civic policing as a progressive form of popular participation in governance and an essential step on the road to communism. Tens of thousands of civic groups, most loosely connected to the police and the Komsomol, were charged with patrolling public areas to maintain 'order'. In practice, 'order' proved a flexible concept; civic groups detained people for public drunkenness, hooliganism, black marketeering and prostitution, but also for dressing or dancing in a supposedly flashy and demonstrably non-Soviet manner – that is, for being a '*stilyaga*'.[31]

In the months leading up to the festival, civic police groups were mobilised to conduct anti-*stilyaga* dance raids and to rid Moscow of 'criminal elements' and 'loose women'.[32] Nearly 20,000 Komsomol members joined a massive contingent of professional and volunteer law enforcement forces to maintain order during the festival itself.[33] In their daily reports to the Moscow Party Committee, Komsomol leaders repeatedly voiced their concerns about the large number of 'random' (*sluchainye*) people flocking to the foreigners' hotels in the evenings, including 'loose girls', *stilyagi* and black marketeers, and called for reinforcements. Evidently, 'comrades' from fellow socialist countries 'were offended' by the hotel crowds – 'not the sort of people who should represent and personify Soviet youth' – and were pressing the local authorities 'in a friendly way' to remedy the matter.[34] For their part, Komsomol activists claimed to be actively patrolling and expelling 'unworthy conversational partners' (*nedostoinye sobesedniki*) from areas where foreigners congregated.[35]

Tales of Komsomol activists rounding up 'loose'-looking young Soviet women, shaving heads and hounding couples are not altogether far-fetched. Dissident Boris Vail' reported meeting a group of women in a remote Siberian village who had been exiled during the festival.[36] In recent years, the Russian daily *Moskovskii komsomolets* published an interview with a woman who was accused (accurately, as it turns out) of selling sex for cash to a Yugoslav delegate in the first days of the festival and exiled immediately to a village on the 101st kilometre rim outside Moscow.[37] There was also a clear cultural context for the head-shaving stories: shaving or cutting the hair very short was a common procedure in the Komsomol anti-*stilyaga* raids of the day, although in these cases, the victims were more typically male than female. As for hounding couples, there were reports in the foreign press after the festival about Soviet interference in romantic contacts between foreign

men and Soviet women.[38] Couples of the opposite mix – foreign woman, Soviet man – were also prey to prying eyes, as American visitor Kim Chernin found late one night, half-undressed with a young Russian 'Tolya' on the banks of the Moscow River. Chernin recalled that the patrollers who spied them checked their documents (and her American sandals) with bright flashlights, 'laughed suggestively' and then left them alone. As Tolya explained to her, there was 'no problem' because she was the foreigner. 'If Soviet girl, American boy, big trouble,' he said, without further elaboration.[39]

Big trouble for some Soviet young women also figures in the archival record for the festival. Police (MVD) reports to the party's Central Committee mention 107 girls detained for 'dishonourable behaviour' (*nedostoinoe povedenie*) during the festival, and at least two girls who had their heads shaved by 'a group of Soviet young men'. [40] The police also reported taking about 50 girls into custody at a Shcherbakovskii raion hotel for 'entering into intimate relations with foreigners'.[41] The majority of the accused were Komsomol members and students, and there is no indication of their fate in the police reports. Sex also made its way into the final report from festival organisers to the Central Committee, albeit in typically bloodless bureaucratic terms. In their words, 'individuals among our girls (*otdel'nye nashi devushki*) did not value their own reputations highly at the festival and behaved frivolously'. On the basis of the festival experience, the organisers recommended that Komsomol organisations 'raise the question of maidenly honour and the dignity of girls' at their meetings and establish special clubs, celebrations and activities for girls.[42]

It is impossible to pin down just how much sex there was and how sex was punished at the 1957 Youth Festival. That there was something out of the ordinary about young people's interactions at the festival is clear and not terribly surprising. What could be ordinary about life in a Soviet city in 1957 when there were tens of thousands of foreign guests in town, essentially uncontrolled, and when the Soviet government itself had encouraged its people to embrace foreigners and befriend them? One of the reasons for the 'romantic' mystique of the festival experience, then as now, is that Soviet coverage of the event was itself shot through with love, romance and at times, even slyly sexualised references. The idea of the 1957 Youth Festival as a great, glamorous international 'mixer' – easy acquaintances, dancing in the street, hugs and kisses with strangers, 'falling in love' with Moscow and Muscovites – all of this was part of the *official* propaganda for the festival. Consider, for example, the similarity between Kozlov's description of

how couples paired up cited above, and this depiction of socialising at the International Student Club from a *Yunost'* article called 'Outstretched arms'. (Note, too, that the couple consists of the archetypal Russian woman and non-white, foreign man.)

– What's your name? (The question is asked in gestures, with a handshake and a smile)
– Galya. And yours?
– Ali. Egypt. You?
– Moscow. Chemistry? Agronomy? Law?
– Biology. Shall we dance?

The article continued: 'They didn't try to find out a lot about each other right away; there were practically no groups that stayed talking for a long time, even among those who spoke the same language. But everyone rushed to exchange simple words and be arm-in-arm, to be near each other for a time – to be with as many countries as possible.'[43]

The quotation feels heavy with the weight of double entendre to us now, thanks, in no small measure, to the historical reputation of the festival itself. In 1957, passages such as these may not have raised eyebrows. Nevertheless, they surely contributed to a sense of the festival as an exciting and exotic social experience, and they do hint at romance, if not sex. If people have remembered the festival in terms of romance and sex, it is at least in part because Soviet mass media represented the festival in those very terms.

The influence of official media culture is particularly significant in this instance because interpretations of the 1957 Youth Festival tend to cut in the opposite direction: the festival is celebrated as that moment when Soviet young people first *escaped* the claustrophobic world of Soviet culture and, inspired by foreign youth, took their initial steps towards freedom. The 'sexual revolution' narrative, of course, fits nicely into this overall interpretation; as one journalist put it in 1997: 'Thanks to the 1957 festival, the older generation discovered not only the free world, but the world of sex. … Free people put pressure on the local population (in both a literal and a figurative sense) and brought about a revolution.'[44] I am not proposing that Soviet mass media replace foreign influence as the single causal spark for Soviet passions at the festival. What official media culture did do was establish a context for festival romance – an atmosphere, if you will – and launch a mode of interpretation already in the summer of 1957 (and, in fact, somewhat earlier, with their extensive pre-festival propaganda). This

context cannot be ignored if we are to understand either the festival's meaning for contemporaries or its historical mystique.

With official propaganda setting the tone, romantic and sexual readings of the festival experience flourished in wholly unofficial quarters: the realm of rumour. Already at the time of the festival, Komsomol leaders fretted that Muscovites were 'gossiping a lot, especially about girls' and blowing the problem of 'loose girls' out of proportion.[45] Festival organisers made similar observations in their summary report, complaining that Moscow residents had 'excessively exaggerated' a few cases and drawn invidious conclusions about Soviet youth as a whole.[46] These were predictable complaints; the conception of deviants as exceptions to the rule of excellence – the 'few' in the midst of an overwhelmingly healthy majority – was nothing if not a trope of Soviet discourse. Moreover, as we have seen, some aspects of the festival rumours did have a basis in existing social practices.

Yet while round-ups, head shaving and even deportations were not, in and of themselves, fantastical, the stories about sex and punishment at the festival do veer into the excessive and the spectacular. What the rumour mill purveyed were tales of mass couplings and mass consequences: not a few trysts, but parklands paved with amorous couples, not one biracial child, but a cohort, the '*deti festivalya*'.[47] Fundamentally visual in nature, festival rumours played on notions of what should (and should not) be publicly exposed. In the Soviet context, the idea of biracial children immediately calls to mind *Tsirk* (*Circus*), a classic 1930s musical melodrama that also plays on themes of visibility. In *Tsirk,* the heroine is a white American circus star who had been forced to hide her biracial baby in the racist United States. In the USSR, in the light of the radiant future, the child is publicly embraced (he can, at last, be seen); the circus star finds true happiness, and it is American racism that is exposed and shamed. Rumours about interracial sex at the festival also construed the biracial baby as a form of public exposure – and, notably, as something rather more negative and shameful than the celebratory vision in *Tsirk*. In festival rumours, a biracial baby stands as a mark not of racial tolerance, but of sexual 'looseness'.

Tales of head shaving, too, can be read as fables of exposure and public shaming. In the anti-*stilyaga* raids of the day, forcible hair cutting (or, less often, shaving) was used to rid young people of offending hairstyles such as the *kok* ('DA' or pompadour). Ostensibly, the goal was less to brand people as miscreants than to remake *stilyagi* in the image of 'healthy' Soviet youth. (In reality, the common practice of

posting or publishing photographs of *stilyagi* undermined the idea of raids as simple 'correction'.) The head-shaving stories from the festival, however, are indisputably tales of public exposure, shaming and retribution. The bald women of festival gossip recall *les tondues* of liberated France who suffered shaving as punishment for their relationships with Germans. The Soviets' tales of large-scale deportations after the festival take the notion of retribution one step further by narrating not just a moral, but also a physical expulsion from the community.

With their distinctly didactic and spectacular sensibility, festival rumours bear the marks of a Soviet 'moral panic'; the festival rumour mill expressed widespread anxieties in the majority culture about perceived threats to its values and norms.[48] Much has been written about the 'sexophobic' nature of Soviet public life, and festival rumours certainly confirm this general assessment.[49] At the same time, they also betray the extent to which it was not merely sex, but adolescent female sexuality that pushed the panic button. Common to all the rumours is a vision of young women who actively pursue sexual contact; 'loose girls' are the central figures of festival gossip.

The 'loose girl' image was, needless to say, utterly at odds with Soviet values and norms in the 1950s and 1960s. Much like her counterparts in the US and Europe, the ideal Soviet young woman was 'modest'; she did not pursue.[50] Contemporary etiquette manuals and advice literature promoted these ideals in a chivalric vision of gender polarity, invoking, in Catriona Kelly's apt formulation, 'a world in which politeness was enacted by men as a tribute to women'.[51] The perfect metaphor for this idealised gender behaviour was the dance – and in the 1950s, dancing was also the most widespread (often, the only) form of organised youth recreation in the Soviet Union. As portrayed in countless period films, dancing was understood to be a female passion; women loved to dance, and a woman without a partner had two choices: wait for a man's invitation 'Shall we dance?' or take a spin with another woman.[52] Etiquette manuals pointedly reminded readers of their proper roles and the importance of politesse: 'a girl may decline without giving a reason', conceded one, 'but she must say thank you for the invitation'.[53]

Given its central role in Soviet chivalry and youth culture, it is no surprise that the centrepiece of the festival's 'Holiday of Girls' was a grand ball for 17,000 participants at the Central House of the Soviet Army. During the day (the festival's ninth), female delegates were escorted to visit local factories, offices, schools and maternity wards. 'The evening was even more interesting', reported *Komsomol'skaya*

pravda breathlessly; the House of the Soviet Army was transformed into 'a female kingdom [*zhenskoe tsarstvo*] in the full sense of the word'.[54] In one room, composers performed songs in honour of women, while in another, poets read their verse. There was a fashion show with advice to delegates 'on what they are wearing this season and what flatters the face'. There was also a restaurant area called 'My favourite dish' where delegates might sample and learn to prepare regional cuisines of the USSR.[55] And, of course, the evening was filled with music and dancing.

The 'Holiday of Girls' was an extremely popular event – so popular, in fact, that it was thronged by thousands of people without tickets, prompting the authorities to call in more than 1500 additional police and military troops to guard the entrances to the House of the Soviet Army.[56] With its focus on beauty and domesticity, the official topography of the festival's 'female kingdom' is a telling reflection of Soviet ideals for young womanhood in the 1950s. Moreover, the presence of armed forces protecting Soviet women and their foreign guests resonates symbolically with contemporary chivalric ideals.

Yet the 'Holiday of Girls' was, like all dances, a kingdom apart. In the everyday world of Soviet schools and workplaces, young women were expected to work hard at guarding their 'maidenly honour'. Soviet mass media culture promoted this concept unstintingly, as in the Leningrad Radio programme *Beregi chest' smolodu!* (Guard your honour in your youth!), which, despite its name, addressed itself exclusively to girls.[57] In this sense, while generically sexophobic, Soviet culture did tacitly acknowledge male (hetero) sexual desire. The idea that young women might themselves be interested in sex was off the table. Seven years after the festival, an official with the Ministry of Health declared that there was, in fact, no such thing as adolescent female sexuality: it had been 'scientifically established' that women did not develop any interest in sex until their early twenties (22–24). Since physical need (*potrebnost'*) was impossible for younger women, adolescent sex was unnatural and 'incited only by dissipation and curiosity'.[58]

Ironically, this negation of adolescent female sexuality was made at a high-level meeting to discuss rising teen pregnancy and abortion rates. Given the absence of sociological surveys in this period, it is extremely difficult to track the evolution of sexual mores among young Soviets. Some anecdotal evidence suggests that the most significant liberalisation in attitudes took place in the mid- to late 1960s, and it was also around this time that Soviet schools took a few cautious and ineffectual steps towards sex education.[59] Yet already in the mid-1950s, officials in charge of the mass agricultural and construction projects in

Siberia were registering their concerns about widespread 'debauchery' among young volunteers.[60] In the early 1960s, the Soviet Union's top venereologist sounded the alarm to his colleagues about the high rates of syphilis among Soviet youth.[61]

At no point in the 1950s and 1960s did Soviet official culture address these issues comprehensively as social problems. (There were no published statistics on teen pregnancy or VD, for example.) Still, beginning in the mid-1950s, Soviet media did make space for stories of troubled youth as personal dramas – in radio programmes, such as *Beregi chest' smolodu*!, and on the pages of youth-oriented publications, such as *Yunost'*, *Komsomol'skaya pravda* and even the rather official monthly for young activists, *Molodoi kommunist,* which launched a regular column about family and love, 'Very personal'. There was nothing revolutionary about these programmes and publications per se; in editorial line, they were the standard bearers for 'maidenly honour' and other Soviet gender ideals. Yet by introducing a forum for discussing, however obliquely, sexuality, gender and generational conflict, they helped Soviet audiences see themselves and their society in a new light. Not only did these stories reflect actual changes in social practices and the many conflicts they generated, they also contributed to a new and often alarming vision of Soviet youth in crisis.

Festival gossip was far more extreme in its depiction of sexual anarchy than Soviet official culture and perhaps more explicitly focused on female sexual behaviour as well. Yet on the whole, the rumour mill resonates strongly with the surrounding contemporary culture and its concerns about Soviet youth. What is more, festival rumours suggest an earlier moment in Soviet cultural history: the 'moral panic' of the NEP period as recently described by Eric Naiman and Anne Gorsuch.[62] In both cases, fears about uncontrollable youth sexuality came wrapped up with anxieties about Western cultural influences. Soviet critiques of Western popular culture did not substantially change from the NEP era to the 1950s (although there were periods of greater and lesser tolerance); leaders of both eras condemned the popular music and dance of the West as lascivious and seductive – an incitement to immoral behaviour.[63] By the time of the 1957 Youth Festival, Soviet officials had come to a kind of rapprochement with big-band-style jazz; boogie-woogie and rock 'n' roll were the new cultural tricksters.[64] Yet these were the fine points. In the long run, the idea of Soviet youth as vulnerable to seduction by nefarious outside influences was a perennial facet of the official Soviet worldview.[65]

In some respects, the rumours about sex and punishment at the 1957 Youth Festival mesh well with this way of imagining Soviet youth. Festival rumours are about not just sex, but sex with foreigners; these are stories about what happens when outsiders are introduced into Soviet space. In this schema, Soviet young people are construed as receptive and fundamentally vulnerable. In the months leading up to the festival, Soviet officials betrayed considerable concern about how people would react to the presence of foreigners in their midst and interpret their role as personal ambassadors of the 'Soviet way of life'. Pre-festival propaganda encouraged ordinary Soviets to eschew passivity in their dealing with foreigners and go on the offensive to protect 'our Soviet honour'. Komsomol and party activists were also exhorted repeatedly to stand their ground against anticipated foreign criticism. 'Comrades, we have reason to be proud of ourselves', declared Komsomol chief Shelepin to a June meeting of activists in Moscow. 'We don't have to bow down before anyone.'[66]

That Shelepin found it expedient to promote Soviet pride before even an audience of young activists is one indication of the uncertainty in many quarters about Soviet youth at this time. In their fixation with foreigners and with the notion of honour, popular rumours about the festival echoed these concerns in striking fashion. However, their echo is interpretive rather than strictly mimetic: in festival gossip, unlike festival propaganda, Soviet honour is linked almost exclusively with young women. The 'loose girl' emerges as the leading lady and, importantly, she is cast in the role of an active agent rather than victim. As official culture struggled to counteract the passivity and vulnerability of Soviet youth faced with foreign influence, self-assured Soviet girls flocked to hotels in order to seduce the foreign guests – or so the rumour mill had it.

In both official and non-official space, the *idée fixe* is that the presence of foreigners in Soviet space upsets the balance of the social and moral order: 'Sovietness' is threatened by 'foreignness'. Rumours about sex at the festival evince a level of anxiety among the population about the consequences of Soviets' opening up to the world culturally – including an obvious uncertainty about whether Soviet officialdom would take a punitive tack in response (that is, would there be head shaving, or worse?) At the same time, they also acknowledge enthusiasm for greater interaction with the outside world (the girls themselves) and betray hints of sympathy for it. Even in the late 1950s, rumours about sex at the festival could have a positive valence. Certainly Aleksei Kozlov and his friends were impressed and delighted,

if not a bit intimidated, by the girls they thought led a Soviet 'sexual revolution'. Yet either way, negative or positive, it is images of young women, and of female sexuality, which carry the most meaningful symbolic freight. At the heart of gossip about 'loose girls' at the 1957 Youth Festival is the very meaning of Sovietness, and of the Soviets' evolving and conflicted relationship to the non-Soviet world.

The festival rumour mill is a vivid manifestation of the cultural turbulence brewing in post-war Soviet society. By listening to rumours, we can hear the rumblings of change, and of the anxieties and the exhilaration that accompanied it. Propaganda, too, offers evidence of new thinking. The 'romantic' or 'sexual' version of the festival got its first footing in the dusty precincts of Soviet mass media culture, as did the heart of the festival's historical mystique – the notion of Moscow 1957 as a watershed event in Soviet history and a challenge to 'Sovietness'. In this sense, to tell the story of the 1957 Youth Festival is not only to speak of the Soviets' opening up to the outside world, but also to consider new, embattled openings within Soviet society itself.

Notes

1 See, for example, A. Adzhubei, *Te desyat' let* (Moscow, 1989); Y. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia* (Cambridge, 1998); R. Stites, *Russian Popular Culture* (Cambridge, 1992); A. Troitsky, *Back in the USSR* (Boston, 1988); W. Taubman, *Khrushchev: the Man and His Era* (New York, 2003), pp. 382–3; E. Zubkova, trans. H. Ragsdale, *Russia after the War* (Armonk, NY, 1998).

2 According to official statistics, there were 791 concerts at the festival (excluding 63 'mass concerts'), 67 performances of dramatic, opera and puppet theatres, and 99 circus performances. Festival organisers claimed an audience of around 10 million for these events. RGASPI–m, f. 3, op. 15, d. 84, l. 3.

3 *Courtship of Young Minds: a Case Study of the Moscow Youth Festival* (New York, 1959), p. 19. While some delegates clearly came to Moscow intending to explore on their own, others may well have been prompted by the Soviets' numerous organisational problems (missing buses and interpreters, postponed and cancelled events, etc.).

4 For examples of foreign coverage, see '"B" et "K" n'oublient pas la politique', *Le Monde*, 31 July 1957; 'La jeunesse muscovite s'émancipe de plus en plus', *Le Monde*, 1 August 1957; 'Youngsters Fill Moscow for Fête', *New York Times*, 28 July 1957; 'Youth from 102 Lands Swarms over Moscow', *Life,* 12 August 1957; 'Leaven of Western Youth in Russia", *Manchester Guardian*, 16 August 1957; 'The Red Cue-Softer', *Newsweek*, 12 August 1957; 'I Baited the Reds in Red Square', *New York Mirror*, 9 September 1957; 'Free Speech in Moscow', *Manchester Guardian*, 1 August 1957.

5 L. Gurchenko, *Aplodismenty* (Moscow, 1994), p. 299.

6 M. Popovskii, *Tretii lishnyi* (London, 1985), pp. 346–53. One of Fedorova's sisters was sentenced to ten years in a labour colony, while another was

exiled to Kazakhstan with Fedorova's Soviet-American baby daughter, born in 1946. See also F. Razzakov, *Seks-simvoly Rossii* (Moscow, 2000), pp. 30–47.

7 The widespread promotion of foreign language study in the weeks and months preceding the festival (including on radio and television) is one indication of how much the cultural climate had changed by 1957. In Stalin's waning years, an interest in foreign languages was regarded with great suspicion. See V. Shlapentokh, *Soviet Intellectuals and Political Power: the Post-Stalin Era* (Princeton, 1990), pp. 70–1.

8 M. R. Zezina, *Sovetskaya khudozhestvennaya intelligentsiya i vlast' v 1950-e–60-e gody* (Moscow, 1999), pp. 236–42.

9 Soviet leaders had special reason to be wary of the youth festival format as the last World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY) festival, held in Warsaw in 1955, was considered by some to have helped trigger unrest in Poland. See the comments of a Polish delegate to this effect in 'Youth from 102 Lands Swarms over Moscow', *Life,* 12 August 1957, p. 23. See also Radio Liberation's analysis of the festival, 'Radio Liberation and the Moscow Youth Festival' (Open Society Archives, Box 300-81-1-1 /Analysis Reports 1957–68), p. 6. The Soviets were predictably inclined to attribute unrest to 'ideological subversion' by outsiders, and in this case, their suspicion that Western governments, the US in particular, would use the relative openness of the festival format to their advantage was not altogether wrong. According to a long-time CIA operative, the US government sponsored students (via its covert funding of the National Students Association) to do propaganda work at international youth festivals. The CIA established its first contacts with dissidents in the USSR during the 1957 Youth Festival. See H. Rositzke, *The CIA's Secret Operations: Espionage, Counterespionage, and Covert Action* (New York, 1977), pp. 159–63.

10 Zezina, op. cit., pp. 242–60.

11 For figures on journalists, see RGASPI–m, f. 3, op. 15, d. 2, l. 105. According to the *Manchester Guardian,* 1 August 1957, dispatches on the festival were transmitted abroad uncensored. The US State Department reported a temporary lifting of the ban on bringing undeveloped film out of the USSR. See *State Department Intelligence Reports,* 'The Soviet Bloc Exchange Program in 1957' (February 1958).

12 RGASPI–m, f. 4, op. 104, d. 7, l. 126.

13 K. Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades: Celebrations in the Time of Stalin* (Bloomington, 2000).

14 K. Chernin, *In My Mother's House* (New Haven, 1983), p. 267.

15 Although this essay refers primarily to the Soviet press, the festival was a major topic for broadcast media as well. The festival was the first event in Soviet history to receive extended live television coverage. Central Television in Moscow was given over entirely to the festival for 15 days and broadcast 221 hours and 30 minutes of coverage, including live reports on all the major meetings such as the opening ceremony, the Kremlin ball, and the Holiday of Girls. TsAODM, f. 4, op. 104, d. 30, l. 172. Central TV also worked feverishly to distribute footage to foreign and domestic stations (via train and airplane). On 4 August, *Komsomol'skaya pravda* reported that filmed segments of the festival were already being shown on local TV in Kiev, Minsk, Tblisi, Riga, Tallin, Kharkov, Omsk, Sverdlosk, Barnaul and

Vladivostok. There were also several full-length films made about the festival. What I have seen of Soviet footage suggests that print and broadcast media were, unsurprisingly, very similar in their tone and approach. The camera loved hugged and dancing couples as much as the page.

16 'La jeunesse muscovite s'émancipe de plus en plus', *Le Monde*, 1 August 1957, p. 12.
17 *Yunost'* (September 1957), p. 66.
18 *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 28 July 1957, p. 4.
19 J. Gunther, *Inside Russia Today* (New York, 1957), p. 36. *Komsomol'skaya pravda* printed a poem entitled 'Street of Love' on 4 August.
20 'My chuvstvuem vashu lyubov'', *Komsomol'skaya pravda,* 28 July 1957, p. 1.
21 For a discussion of eroticism in the mythology of Stalin, see I. C. Kon, *Seksual'naya kul'tura v Rossii: klubnichka na berezke* (Moscow, 1997), p. 161, and T. Cherednichenko, *Tipologiya sovetskogo massovoi kul'tury* (Moscow, 1994), pp. 34–43.
22 See S. Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe* (Cambridge, Mass., 2000), pp. 180–2, 195–7. Buck-Morss draws heavily on S. Kotkin's *Magnetic Mountain* (Berkeley, 1995).
23 *Lyubov' Yarovaya,* a filmed theatrical performance, was the most popular Soviet picture at the box office in 1953. For an interesting discussion of love in Soviet cinema, see the interview with Naum Kleiman in *Lignes d'ombre* (Paris, 2000), p. 25.
24 'Povorot', *Itogi,* 27 May 1997; 'Ot korki do korki', *Novaya gazeta – Ponedel'nik*, 9 August 1997.
25 Interview with Yevtushenko for CNN's *Cold War* series published online at http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchive/coldwar/interviews/episode-14/yevtushenko1.html.
26 A. Kozlov, *Kozel na sakse* (Moscow, 1998), pp. 106–7.
27 TsAODM, f. 4, op. 104, d. 31, ll. 161–2; RGASPI-m, f. 3, op. 15, d. 2, l. 133.
28 A. Rubinov, *Intimnaya zhizn' Moskvy* (Moscow, 1991), p. 224.
29 S. Belfrage, *A Room in Moscow* (New York, 1958), p. 40. M. Popovskii reports that women punished for their relations with foreigners during the festival were forced outside a 100 kilometre radius from Moscow. Popovskii, op. cit., p. 310.
30 Rubinov attributes interracial sex to 'ordinary female curiosity' about 'the anatomy and physiology of healthy men with unusual skin tones and strangely shaped eyes' and claims that patrols were particularly harsh with the Soviet women involved. Rubinov, op. cit., p. 224.
31 By 1960 there were over 80,000 squads in the Soviet Union with more than 2.5 million participants. See H. Ritvo, 'Totalitarianism without Coercion?', *Problems of Communism*, no. 6, 1960, p. 24, citing *Kommunist*, no. 10, 1960. For a description of a dance raid in Moscow in 1956, see TsAODM, f. 4, op. 113, d. 23, ll. 136–7.
32 RGASPI-m, f. 3, op. 15, d. 2, ll. 60–1.
33 The MVD reported it had about 60,000 people on hand to keep public order, including 11,275 police, 4000 police academy students from other cities, 8500 soldiers and MVD officers, 32,000 members of *brigady sodeistviya militsiya*, as well as workers from the firefighting service of the MVD and *dvorniki*. GARF, f. 9401, op. 2, d. 491, l. 427.

34 TsAODM, f. 4, op. 104, d. 31, l. 95.
35 TsAODM, f. 4, op. 104, d. 31, l. 20.
36 Boris Vail' quoted in Popovskii, op. cit., p. 310.
37 'Na bolote, na snegu – ya mogu, mogu, mogu!', *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 14 February 2000. The sentence was three years, and the woman reported she soon had a brisk business (especially among young Komsomol volunteer labourers) in her new residence.
38 See *Courtship of Young Minds*, p. 17.
39 Chernin, op. cit., p. 277.
40 GARF, f. 9401, op. 2, d. 491, l. 433.
41 GARF, f. 9401, op. 2, d. 491, l. 379.
42 RGASPI-m, f. 3, op. 15, d. 2, l. 133.
43 *Yunost'*, September 1957, p. 72
44 *Novaya gazeta – Ponedel'nik*, 28 July 1997.
45 TsAODM, f. 4, op. 104, d. 31, ll. 161–2.
46 RGASPI-m, f. 3, op. 15, d. 2, l. 133.
47 Although I have no way of knowing how many biracial children were born from festival liaisons, it seems safe to say that there was no cohort. Kara Lynch, producer of a 2001 documentary film on people of African descent in the USSR (*Black Russians*), has told me that while many of her subjects are mistaken for '*festival'nye*' by fellow Russians, she herself has never met such a person in her many years of interviewing in Russia. Personal communication, June 2002.
48 The classic work on 'moral panic' is S. Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: the Creation of the Mods and the Rockers* (Oxford, 1972; rev. edn 1980).
49 'Sexophobia' is Igor Kon's term.
50 On the post-Stalin ideal of 'the modest girl without makeup', see N. Azhgikhina and H. Goscilo, 'Getting under their Skin: the Beauty Salon in Russian Women's Lives' in H. Goscilo and B. Holmgren (eds), *Russia – Women – Culture* (Bloomington, 1996), p. 99. For an insightful account of the American experience of young womanhood in the 1950s, see S. Belfrage's memoir, *Un-American Activities: a Memoir of the Fifties* (New York, 1994).
51 C. Kelly, *Refining Russia* (Oxford, 2001), p. 347.
52 Young men with a passion for dancing were apt to be labelled *stilyagi*. Like their fashion sensibilities, their 'unnatural' interest in dance operated as a mark of their alienness in Soviet culture.
53 *Estetika povedeniya i byta: metodicheskie rekomendatsii* (Moscow, 1963), p. 10.
54 *Komsomol'skaya pravda,* 6 August 1957.
55 S. Vladimirova, 'Prazdnik devushek', *Rabotnitsa*, no. 7, 1957, p. 3.
56 GARF, f. 9401, op. 2, d. 491, l. 329. *Le Monde* reported that 'an entire neighbourhood in Moscow was cordoned off' and 'thousands of police and soldiers … had to hold back several thousand people who were trying to penetrate the immense block of buildings and gardens …' 'Le festival de Moscou suscite toujours une incroyable animation', *Le Monde*, 8 August 1957, p. 3.
57 S. I. Golod, *XX vek i tendentsii seksual'nykh otnoshenii v Rossii* (Moscow, 1996), p. 40.
58 RGASPI-m, f. 1, op. 5, d. 1009, l. 100.

59 Popovskii, op. cit., p. 217.
60 For a report on Bratskaya GES and other mass construction sites in 1957, see RGANI, f. 5, op. 34, d. 24, ll. 1–17.
61 Golod, op. cit., p. 106.
62 E. Naiman, *Sex in Public: the Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology* (Princeton, 1997); A. Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington, 2000).
63 Soviet leaders were, of course, far from alone in their anxieties about commercial popular culture. For a recent work on the problem in the Germanies of the 1950s, see U. G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley, 2000). For a study of the Italian communists' approach, see S. Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow* (Durham, Nc, 2000).
64 According to S. Frederick Starr, by the mid-1950s, there were jazz bands in every little town in the Soviet Union, and 'the jazz evening was firmly established as a community rite of the younger generation'. S. Frederick Starr, *Red and Hot: the Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union* (New York, 1983), p. 251.
65 On the notion of youth vulnerability, see H. Pilkington, *Russia's Youth and Its Culture: a Nation's Constructors and Constructed* (London, 1994), pp. 66–71.
66 TsAODM, f. 4, op. 104, d. 7, l. 129.