‘I wish for my life’s roses to have fewer thorns’: Heinrich Neuhaus and

*Alternative Narratives of Selfhood in Soviet Russia*

**Abstract**

Heinrich Neuhaus (1888—1964) was the Soviet era’s most iconic musicians. Settling in Russia reluctantly he was dismayed by the policies of the Soviet State and unable to engage with contemporary narratives of selfhood in the wake of the Revolution. In creating a new aesthetic territory that defined himself as Russian rather than Soviet Neuhaus embodied an ambiguous territory whereby his views both resonated with and challenged aspects of Soviet-era culture. This article traces how Neuhaus adopted the idea of self-reflective or ‘autobiographical’ art through an interdisciplinary melding of ideas from Boris Pasternak, Alexander Blok and Mikhail Vrubel. In exposing the resulting tension between his understanding of Russian and Soviet selfhood, it nuances our understanding of the cultural identities within this era. Finally, discussing this tension in relation to Neuhaus’s contextualisation of the artistic persona of Dmitri Shostakovich, it contributes to a long-needed reappraisal of his relationship with the composer.

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Dr Maria Razumovskaya
Guildhall School of Music & Drama, London

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Contact email: maria.razumovskaya@gmail.com

Short biographical statement: Maria Razumovskaya completed her doctoral thesis (*Heinrich Neuhaus: Aesthetics and Philosophy of an Interpretation*, 2015) as an AHRC doctoral scholar at the Royal College of Music in London. As well as being a concertising pianist and recording artist, she is a professor of Academic Studies at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.
‘I wish for my life’s roses to have fewer thorns’: Heinrich Neuhaus and Alternative Narratives of Selfhood in Soviet Russia

A Soviet Icon

Heinrich Gustavovich Neuhaus (1888-1964) was one of Russia’s most recognised pianists of his generation. Neuhaus’s photo-portraits graced the walls of conservatories and could be found standing on the nation’s countless pianos in apartments. His entrance onto the stage was greeted with long ovations and even ‘tears of joy’ by his devoted fans.\(^1\) Despite the fact that his strenuous and lauded pianistic career was an important feature of Soviet artistic life, it was his activities as a teacher and especially his treatise About the Art of Piano Playing, Notes of a Pedagogue [Ob iskusstve fortepiannoy igri. Zapiski pedagoga] (1958/61) which continue to define him today. Neuhaus’s unrivalled stature as a pedagogue was sealed by his charisma, sharp wit and rare oratorical gift, which attracted hundreds of students from across the USSR. As summarised by his student Sviatoslav Richter, Neuhaus was, along with Alexander Goldenweiser and Konstantin Igumnov, one the ‘three pillars of the Russian piano school’ to whom ‘all the pianists in Moscow beat a path.’\(^2\) Such was Neuhaus’s fame, that despite the era’s political tensions and limited interchange of information, students from as far afield as America defied the Cold War tensions to be admitted to join the class in the the

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\(^1\) See letter dated 14 October 1955. A. I. Katts, ed., G. G. Neygauz. Pis’ma (Moskva: Deka, 2009), 393. Note on translations and transliterations: All translations are my own unless otherwise stated. Where vernacular texts are cited Russian authors and titles are given in transliteration by a modified version of New Grove. Common Anglicised spellings are adopted, and Germanised Russian names are not transliterated. For this reason the main text will refer to Heinrich Neuhaus as he would have himself expected it, but footnote references refer to his written output as Genrikh Neygauz. It should be noted that readers may come across references to Neuhaus’s first name elsewhere as Harry and Henryk (as used by his cousin Karol Szymanowski), and Garik (as frequently used by Boris Pasternak), or Genrikh Neigauz in other Anglophone literature. Where citation is made of other authors their transliteration system is kept as given.


Sviatoslav Richter (1915-1997) was one of the most internationally famous pianists of his time. Alexander Goldenweiser (1875-1961) was a Russian pianist, composer, and one of the most important teachers based at the Moscow Conservatory. Konstantin Igumnov (1873-1948) was likewise a pianist and teacher of great authority at the same institution.
Moscow Conservatory’s legendary ‘room 29’ where Neuhaus taught up for some forty-two years.

Surveying the literature of the time it is unsurprising to find Neuhaus lauded as an epitome of the successes of Soviet culture. The image of Neuhaus as a foremost Soviet artist of the day was linked by many, such as Sofia Khentova, to his role in producing a reliable and growing trend of laureates from the USSR, namely in the politically charged arena of the international piano competitions. Similarly, the pianist and musicologist Yakov Milstein defined him as a figure who had selflessly dedicated his whole life to the service of raising the artistic standards across the entire USSR as an educator (including his role as Head of the Moscow Conservatory between 1935 and 1937, and the formal advisor for the Tbilisi and Ural State Conservatories after the Second World War) and touring examiner – thus, making his name ‘inseparable from the successes of the Soviet piano school.’

This outward notion of success, however, measured through the politicized lens of the Soviet competition machine has become one of the most difficult hindrances to a contemporary re-evaluation of Neuhaus’s wider significance. Whilst we have perhaps moved away from Cold War generalisations regarding Soviet-era pianism (epitomised by the American art critic Harold Schonberg as ‘inbred and even rather naïve […] Russian teachers such as Heinrich Neuhaus [only] produced formidable instrumentalists; […] good musical sportsmen rather than great artists’), performers have generally attracted scholarly attention as

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3 S. M. Khentova, *Lev Oborin* (Leningrad: Muzïka, 1964), 107. This was especially the case following the first International Chopin Competition in 1927 which had unexpectedly been won by Lev Oborin (1907-1974), a student of Konstantin Igumnov, with his compatriot Grigory Ginzburg (1904-1961), a student of Alexander Goldenweiser, taking fourth place. Since then the USSR maintained its strong position on the international competition circuit, with many laureates being supported by Neuhaus’s mentorship. For instance in the 1937 Chopin Competition, Neuhaus’s student Yakov Zak (1913-1976) took first prize and the Mazurka prize, and Rosa Tamarkina (1920-1950) second. Neuhaus’s student Emil Gilels (1916-1985) had by then already won second prize in the International Vienna Competition in 1936, and first at the Ysaïe (now Queen Elisabeth) Competition in Brussels in 1938.


strategic commodities in the USSR’s wider propaganda machine.\textsuperscript{6} Rigorous recent scholarly investigations, such as Kiril Tomoff’s study of Soviet instrumentalists, demonstrate in great detail that efficiency and reliability were the main criteria for selecting potential competition participants and artists permitted to accept foreign engagements at a governmental level.\textsuperscript{7} The political motivation to prove an infallible and supreme system to spectators of both the international and home stage simply could not risk implicit weaknesses of the regime through potentially of uneven performances criticism, or worse still, criticism or defection. In revealing the traumatic consequences of State bureaucracy on the careers of the country’s greatest performers (the violinist David Oistrakh, cellist Mstislav Rostropovich, and Neuhaus’s students Sviatoslav Richter and Emil Gilels) such studies can at times seem to continue to reinforce the widely accepted notion of the Soviet Union being engulfed by a ‘system of total, all-embracing control over the actions of all cultural figures’ zealously enforced by the NKVD, the predecessor of the KGB.\textsuperscript{8}

In recent years, however, the long-standing tendency to view Soviet-era music as being trapped in simplistic cycles of political coercion and submission has begun to be dispelled. Thus, we are increasingly presented us with a far more complex interactions between behavioural and aesthetic concerns related to artistic life. For instance, newly available archival materials, such as those investigated by Marina Frolova-Walker in relation to the Stalin Prize Committee Meetings, or Tomoff in relation to the Soviet Union of Composers,\textsuperscript{9} have shown that, although it would be naïve to call these meetings completely autonomous, many of the policy makers involved were not State officials, but the creative artists themselves.\textsuperscript{10} Similarly, narratives concerned with the epoch’s cornerstone musical

\textsuperscript{6} This view of the performer as a propaganda commodity is echoed in Marina Frolova-Walker, \textit{Stalin’s Music Prize. Soviet Culture and Politics} (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016).


\textsuperscript{10} Frolova-Walker, \textit{Stalin’s Music Prize. Soviet Culture and Politics}. 
figures (namely Dmitri Shostakovich, Sergei Prokofiev and Nikolai Myaskovsky) have begun to undergo radical transformation through the work of Laurel Fay, Simon Morrison and Patrick Zuk,11 those of the wider arts (Sergei Eisenstein, Ilya Ehrenburg and others) through the work of Katerina Clark. These studies have already pointed to the fact that, given the vagueness of official policy, events such as the infamous 1936 denunciation of Shostakovich were arbitrary and relatively few and far between,12 reflecting the secondary, if not tertiary, level of importance attached to music by senior Party members.13 Without wanting to in any way trivialize the harrowing consequences of life under the Soviet State, there are thus clear challenges to the case for seeing a ‘centralized totalitarian control of the arts’ whose proportions, according to Richard Taruskin, exerted a degree of ‘extreme moral duress’ mirrored only by torture victims.14

These studies, however, have not focused on performers and pedagogues. Situating an investigation of Neuhaus against this context, it becomes evident that this reappraisal is particularly apt since the abstract nature of instrumental music (unlike opera, literature, theatre or film) guaranteed a greater distancing from the outside scrutiny of the regime’s representatives who found it difficult to censor or control that which they neither understood, nor could assign a meaning to. Coupled with this, widespread confusion within the Party itself over the Communist position with regards to the merits of studying the art of performance, had drastically slowed political infiltration into this sphere. As aptly put by Fairclough: ‘When we look at Soviet musical culture in practice rather than in theory […]

12 The official denunciation followed Pravda criticisms of Shostakovich’s Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District and his ballet The Limpid Stream.
14 Taruskin, Defining Russia Musically. Historical and Hermeneutical Essays, 514; Jelagin, Taming of the Arts; Olkhovsky, Music under the Soviets: The Agony of an Art; Schwarz, Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia 1917–1970. This vision has also underpinned more recent studies of the epoch including Ian Wellens, Music on the Frontline: Nicolas Nabokov’s Struggle against Communism and Middlebrow Culture (Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002).
extreme views, by and large, did not exert a far-reaching influence on concert programming.¹⁵

Simply put, the performance of classical music was an area whose compatibility with Communist life was regarded with suspicion, and thus avoided:

So you finish the conservatory and join an orchestra where you will spend your whole life piping away on the flute. What will become of you? Would you really become a Communist? The republic needs workers for cooperatives, engineers, agronomists, pilots and social workers. Rather than do something decisively important to economic construction would you rather study a luxury, strumming an instrument for your sole listening pleasure?¹⁶

Hence, as put by Lynn Sargeant, conservatories and their faculties were of ‘little concern to the State which remained focused on the universities and technical institutions.’¹⁷ As an illustration of this, the institution with which Neuhaus was affiliated for almost half a century was able to largely exist in a sheltered microclimate of its own. Whilst Stalin’s paranoia ratcheted up the tension that escalated into to the purges of the 1930s and Great Terror of 1936–38, at the same time the Moscow Conservatory was actually undergoing a phase whereby it was returning a substantial degree of normality to the undertaking of its affairs. Neuhaus’s directorship of the institution in 1935 following the death of Stanislav Shatsky in 1934, reversed Party intervention (namely through Boleslav Pshibishevsky between 1929 and 1931) and symbolically reinstated the Moscow Conservatory’s unique position of being the only institution of higher education in the Soviet Union not presided over by Party members.

Highly influential figures like Neuhaus did not simply keep their opinions hidden in the shadows of their home or institutional microclimate. As will be seen in the course of this

article, despite being one of the most lauded performers and pedagogues of his time, Neuhaus was known for his liberal tongue and sardonic mockery of State cultural and political policy. Neuhaus openly defied bans such as that on the public performance of music of Nikolai Medtner in the 1930s, and kept close company with many of the regime’s blacklisted *persona non grata* including Osip Mandelstam, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Boris Pasternak and others. Despite informants submitting reports to the NKVD detailing Neuhaus’s anti-Soviet remarks which, exacerbated by his German name, caused his detention in Lubyanka in 1941–42 – and Neuhaus himself reiterating his vitriolic criticism of the USSR’s repressive artistic censorship, political annexation of the Baltic States, and totalitarian rule ‘with many political parallels to Nazi Germany’ during interrogation – he not only miraculously survived, but the ordeal had virtually no detrimental effect on his career.\(^{18}\)

Sentenced for offences committed under Article 58.10.2 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR – ‘anti-Soviet propaganda’ which was punishable by execution during times of conflict – Neuhaus escaped with temporary expulsion to Sverdlovsk, and thus effectively joined the same struggles of daily war-time life as all his other evacuated colleagues. Even during Stalin’s lifetime Neuhaus was never removed from his professional position, nor denied performance opportunities in the country’s most prestigious concert halls. Furthermore, whilst on file Neuhaus was an un-rehabilitated ‘enemy of the State’, he went on to receive honours including the Order of Lenin in 1954 and People’s Artist of the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) in 1956, and was even given permission to travel as a jury member and speaker-performer on several occasions to the Soviet Bloc – all privileges that routinely demanded unblemished records and were far less commonly bestowed upon non-Party members.\(^{19}\)

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\(^{18}\) This information comes from the transcripts of Neuhaus’s NKVD interrogations kindly made available for this study by the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation, which are held in the classified Central Archive. *Tsentral’nyi arkhim Federal’noy bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsiy*, Delo P-38569.

\(^{19}\) RGALI f. 379 op. 1 ye. kh. 37 l. 10.
The expression of heretical views and marked conscious loathing of State policy by Neuhaus, however, falls in an ambiguous territory. As will be seen in this article, Neuhaus’s personal agenda for defining an alternative narrative of selfhood that positioned him within a self-constructed sphere of Russian cultural heritage to eschew Socialist Realism, was never a narrative designed in essence as a statement of outward dissidence. Thus, whilst the political context may well be considered to have contributed to something of its intensification, it was a narrative that rather arose from marked personal resistance and a stance of cultural ‘otherness’. Yet, this does not detract from the fact that it does, at times, exhibit striking moments of apparent consonance with elements of wider Soviet culture. It is these paradoxes that this article seeks to illuminate through the discussion of the kind of musical and personal subjectivity that Neuhaus fashioned for himself in both private and public spheres.

**Russian, not Soviet**

Beyond Neuhaus’s image as one of the most successful Soviet pedagogues, his capacity as a performer was also likewise defined by reviewers to be marked by an apparent Soviet style. At the height of his career in 1933, this was exemplified by the prominent music critic writing under the pseudonym K. Grimikh, following an all-Beethoven recital:

[Neuhaus] remains a son of his time, one of the brightest representatives of the Soviet artistic intelligentsia. He lives our life, with our interests at heart: with us he thinks, feels, searches, falters, experiences joy and suffering — and all these thoughts and feelings are those of a Soviet man, worker and citizen which are filtered through the prism of his brightly talented individuality.\(^\text{20}\)

It was a rhetoric rooted in the 1917 Revolution which, as summarised by Jochen Hellbeck ‘promoted a new thinking about the self as a political subject […] linked to the goal of remaking the life of [a collective] society as well as of each individual [into] the perfect

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human being, human machine.”

As further outlined by Stephen Kotkin, the ability to identify oneself as Soviet was part of a process of ‘positive integration’ into a powerful new national identity that developed under Stalin. Peopled quickly learned that engagement with this ‘official society’ became more advantageous than a subordinate ethnic or national identity, such as Russian. As found by Kotkin, the process of identifying oneself as Soviet required an astuteness to ‘work the system to [one’s] minimum disadvantage’ – creating a boundary between public behaviour and private thought.

This ‘high degree of discrimination’ between the ‘true self’ and ‘public performance,’ however, has in turn been questioned with Igal Halfin suggesting it was not simply an ‘outcome of a process of coercion but one of cooptation, which drew the subject to self-destruction.’ Communist ‘self-fashioning’ therefore ‘turned the messianic aspiration of the state into [the individual’s] own intimate affair.’ Thus, as proposed by Hellbeck, rather than the participation in this ‘enlarged life of the collective’ being an official mask adopted unwillingly by Soviet citizens as ‘liberal subjects,’ who otherwise shielded their true private opinions from the intrusive gaze of the State, it became a highly desired selfhood ‘fermented’ by ideology into the minds of 1930s society. As defined by Hellbeck, the zealous upholding this vision of selfhood by all levels of society was therefore an illiberal but sincere act.

The height of Neuhaus’s career, from the mid 1920s, throughout the 1930s and into the early 1940s) took shape as the mechanisms of Soviet self-identity under Stalin were at their most intense. Yet, it is striking that despite his awareness of the socio-political pre-eminence of the new Soviet Man and its associated rhetoric, he made a deliberate point, whenever possible, to avoid defining himself as Soviet. Although he was not immune to the censor’s pen, he was irate at the ‘Bolshevik-speak’ routinely inserted into the printed word,


\[23\] Ibid., 237.

\[24\] Igal Halfin, Terror in My Soul. Communist Autobiographies on Trial. (Harvard University Press, 2003), 5.
and was not unknown to withdraw from publication certain articles that he felt were severely contaminated.25 His diaries, personal correspondence, sketches for an autobiography which he planned for posthumous publication and, as far as possible in print, he referred to himself as a ‘Russian pianist and teacher of music’ who happened to live in Soviet times.26 Applying it to his colleagues as much as himself, in his 1941 article Dmitri Shostakovich, for instance, Neuhaus hailed the composer as the ‘continuation of all the greatest classical Russian art’ – the word Russian in place of Soviet being hardly accidental.27 In this way, Neuhaus occupied a critical position where he consciously positioned himself outside what Hellbeck describes as the age’s ‘illiberal Soviet subjectivity.’28 Concurrently, in reversing the hierarchy from Soviet to Russian, his individual intent implicitly disregards the pressure to ‘play the system,’ described by Kotkin’s study of Soviet self-fashioning, to his advantage.

In calling himself a Russian musician, however, Neuhaus presents us with a non sequitur. He had essentially lived beyond Russia’s borders until the age of twenty-six. During this time his cosmopolitan lifestyle in various European cities led him to staunchly believe that ‘affection to a country etc. are all feelings which I have always found alien to me.’29 Neuhaus’s famously lisped accent and dandified manners remained perpetual reminders of his youth: the son of an émigré family who had grown up speaking and writing predominantly in Polish and German. His return to the country of his birth was in many ways a return to an alien homeland as he had hardly shown any interest in Russian music, literature, history, or other arts before the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. Indeed, upon Neuhaus’s first arrival to Petrograd in 1915, his debut recitals, including the music of Max Reger and his cousin Karol Szymanowski, had aroused the curiosity of Russian artists and

25 This can be seen in the numerous discrepancies between the hand written manuscripts of articles (RGALI fond 2775) and their eventual published version.
28 Hellbeck, Revolution on My Mind. Writing a Diary under Stalin., 9, 12.
intellectuals wanting to hear the musicianship of this foreign, Austro-German educated pianist.\textsuperscript{30} Were it not for the war to unexpectedly closed the border behind him after celebrating his graduation from the Vienna Academy of Music, and then the Russian Empire to become gripped in the violence of the Revolution, it is far more likely that he would have settled in Europe along his friends including Artur Rubinstein or extended family. Thus, it would be naïve to suggest that Neuhaus really had any claim to an instinctive inheritance of the tropes associated with constructed Russian identities that might be recognised in contemporary artists or thinkers in his milieu. It was instead a meticulous crafted, volatile amalgamation of personal circumstances and choices that drew from complex intellectual adaptations of historically displaced ideas.\textsuperscript{31}

Unlike numerous Russian artists and thinkers including Alexander Blok and the young Boris Pasternak who were in excited by the fervent revolutionary ideas that filled the air (if horrified by their violent human sacrifices), Neuhaus and his family had always maintained a deliberate and wary stance. In an early manuscript of his autobiography Neuhaus simply stated: ‘We had nothing to do with the Revolution.’\textsuperscript{32} Yet, he had weathered the unrest in the family home in Elisavetgrad (Kherson Governorate) which had seen occupation and atrocities carried out by the Bolsheviks, the Central Powers following the 1918 Brest-Litovsk Treatise, the White Army, the Ukrainian Nationalist Army of Symon Petlura, the Anarchist Black Army of Nestor Makhno, and in May 1919 had been the location of the heinous Elisavetgrad pogroms of Ataman Nikifor Grigoriev.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{30} Rabinovich, Portreti pianistov, 36—38.
\textsuperscript{31} Neuhaus’s reconstructions show similarity to the mechanisms explored in Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, 2nd ed. (Verso, 1991). In particular the idea of ‘new nationalisms’ in nineteenth-century Europe that ‘began to imagine themselves as “awakening from sleep.”’ (199).
\textsuperscript{33} For a more detailed survey of the Civil War in Ukraine following the Revolution see Paul Robert Magocsi, A History of Ukraine. The Land and Its Peoples, 2nd ed. (London: University of Toronto Press, 2010).
Amidst the growing hunger, daily violence and ruins the town which eventually succumbed to Bolshevik control. Whilst Neuhaus’s letters related to this period of his life were destroyed in conjunction with his 1941 arrest, the surviving letters of Neuhaus’s cousin, Karol Szymanowski, speak of the terror they mutually felt with regards to the harrowing ‘sacrifices’ of the Revolution and the ensuing anarchy which sought to destroy everything in its path in the name of the new social cause.\(^{34}\) Writing for the Russian newspaper *Voyna i Mir [War and Peace]* in October 1919 Szymanowski gave an indication of the extended family’s thoughts when he denounced the Revolution, seeing it not as the painful cure of the ‘Tsarist disease,’ but as its agonising consequence.\(^{35}\) Expressing himself more overtly he wrote: ‘The Russian Revolution is a fit of premortem convulsions, a rebellion of the cellular substance against the organising principle of life, a hypertrophy of collective tissue to the disadvantage of the more noble tissues such as the nerves and the brain.’\(^{36}\)

Witnessing famine and living in fear of massacre at the hands of bandits or swift-changing militia, Neuhaus observed that loyalties were severed even between old acquaintances. This was graphically demonstrated, for instance, by Neuhaus’s warning to Szymanowski about the corruption of their mutual friend Alexander Dubiansky – a prodigious pupil of Blumenfeld, and one of the dedicatees of Szymanowski’s *Masques Opus 34* (the others being Neuhaus and Artur Rubinstein) who would commit suicide a year later aged just twenty: ‘one terrible thing: Sasha has been completely Bolshevised […] a typical specimen of the functional communist – you know the background.’\(^{37}\)

\(^{34}\) See Teresa Bronowicz-Chylinska, *Karol Szymanowski Korespondencja. Pełna Edycja Zachowanych Listów Od I Do Kompozytora (1903-1919)*, vol. 1 (Krakow: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 2007). Karol Szymanowski (1882-1937) was initially a member of the late nineteenth-early twentieth century movement *Young Poland*, and went on to become Poland’s most celebrated twentieth-century composer.


\(^{36}\) From Szymanowski’s unused fragments for *Efébos* quoted in Cadrin and Downes, *The Szymanowski Companion*, 189.

Notwithstanding these hardships and concerns Bolshevik control, which Neuhaus first encountered in Elisavetgrad, had actually brought an advantageous stabilising effect. With extensive plans to put education at the heart of their campaign the Bolsheviks came with the intention of securing the cooperation of the local artistic and intellectual circles at a governmental level. Part of their ambitious plans for Elisavetgrad included the establishment of a network of schools from nursery age to higher education, and a conservatory which would provide free tuition on all instruments, research and academic subjects, and provide a pedagogical training centre. The Neuhauses, Szymanowskis and Blumenfelds were quickly given official engagements in leading the regional Elisavetgrad Music Department of the People’s Commissariat for Education. Neuhaus and Szymanowski were given positions at the helm of this initiative. Certainly the regular salary and substantially more generous ration allocations provided by such roles were welcome privileges.\(^{38}\)

Whilst the young cousins maintained that their engagement by the Narkompros was ‘not for themselves, but for the money’, they obviously undertook this work seriously.\(^ {39}\) During what was only a short-lived tenure, prompting the cousins to flee as the Bolsheviks temporarily lost control to Denikin’s White Army in the summer of 1919, Neuhaus boasted that the intensity of his work with Szymanowski led to a ‘flourishing’ of Elisavetgrad’s musical life far beyond the scale it had ever witnessed.\(^ {40}\) They were given at their disposal the best halls of the town for their concert activity and two well maintained Steinway grand pianos. Despite their acute recognition of the heavily politicized Bolshevik agendas which saw this music-making as essentially a vehicle to reinforce a new, predetermined collective identity, the cousins’ programmes nevertheless exclusively reflected their own passions as well as those of the largely ethnic-German town community: Schumann, Beethoven, Wagner, Brahms, Reger, Chopin, Tchaikovsky, Skryabin and Szymanowski.\(^ {41}\)
This complex and ambiguous relationship with Bolshevik rule, which was seen as ideologically corrupting but yet afforded beneficial privileges and a greater artistic freedom than it is customarily recognised to those of talent, was the fate of many amongst Russia’s intelligentsia. As the Bolshevik’s temporarily lost control to Denikin’s White Army in the summer of 1919, Neuhaus’s sweetheart, Militsa Borodkina, urged Szymanowski never to forget his ‘burning homeland’ as he fled to Warsaw – the ‘poor Russia’ which was shortly to be sealed by a ‘huge stone wall which even the entire magic of imagination cannot break.’\(^{42}\)

For Neuhaus – an artist of strongly cosmopolitan outlooks – it was a trauma that prompted the start of an active engagement with, and transformation of, some select aspects of Russian culture from the nineteenth century and the fin de siècle that had up until then passed him by the wayside.

Positioning himself within a self-fashioned utopic Russian cultural legacy he began to pit this historically displaced fusion of aesthetics as a nobler cultural phenomenon against the primitive crudeness of the mass culture ideologies of Socialist Realism. The intent of this process is a clear demonstration of Neuhaus’s ability to reject the mainstream ‘Bolshevised’ public discourse of his time, and instead set upon a distinct personal realm of action. Engaging with these aesthetic and philosophic territories would not simply distance himself from reality. They were part of a process to reconcile his adoption back into an idealised country of his birth, and as such provided a space for a personal defining of the self that was not inherently political. This self-constructed Russia was endowed with a wider social worth through bestowing culture and the arts with the power of healing. An important catalyst for the intensification of this conviction became his newfound friend, the equally cosmopolitan-minded poet and writer Boris Pasternak.

Silver Age reverberations: Creating ‘Autobiographicality’

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A chance encounter at a Moscow tram stop in the winter of 1928/9 ignited a lifelong friendship between Neuhaus and Pasternak. Having already formed an enthusiastic appreciation for one another’s work, the two regularly met together after Neuhaus’s recitals at the Moscow Conservatory, often in Pasternak’s home at Volkhonka, and would discuss music and aesthetics well into the small hours. It was an experience that Pasternak would describe as ‘the only joy in my existence’ and considered Neuhaus to be intellectually something of a ‘genius’ — not a word the poet threw around lightly.\textsuperscript{43} The inspiration was mutual with Pasternak convincing his friend to overcome his apathy and frequent bouts of melancholy to continue practicing the piano.\textsuperscript{44} It is evident that Neuhaus cherished these opportunities to exchange ideas and enrich the scope of the cultural fabric that underpinned his interpretative decisions, and coaxed him back to the instrument: ‘Aesthetic questions, questions of dignity, human values, of the beauty of man’s soul, of spiritual greatness [always] concerned me not less, if not more, than the most beautiful sonata of Beethoven.’\textsuperscript{45}

Pasternak’s own, albeit short, time as a student at the Moscow Conservatory abruptly ended in 1910, and the fact that the door of the Pasternak family home had always open as place of gathering for the brightest figures of the contemporary Moscow intellectual elite (its frequent guests included Sergei Rachmaninov, Alexander Blok, Andrei Beliy and Alexander Skryabin) were appealing prospects to Neuhaus’s mind.\textsuperscript{46} The rapport between Neuhaus and


\textsuperscript{44} See Pasternak’s letter to his parents from Moscow dated 24 November 1932. Ibid., 557. Neuhaus had a history of depression which could prevent him from practicing for weeks at a time, and had also made unsuccessful suicide attempts described in Arthur Rubinstein, My Younger Years (London: Random House, 1973), 373—373.


\textsuperscript{46} Boris Pasternak’s father, Leonid Pasternak was a painter and the famous illustrator of Lev Tolstoy’s books, who frequently captured musicians and music-making on his canvases and sketches (including Anton Rubinstein and Alexander Skryabin). He was in close company with Tolstoy, Mikhail Vrubel, Konstantin Korovin, Isaac Levitan, Nikolai Ge and many others. As Neuhaus’s friendship with Pasternak developed he displayed a lifelong passion for the artist’s work. Boris Pasternak’s mother, Rosa Kaufman, was a successful concert pianist who had studied with Theodor Leschetitzky and possibly attended the masterclasses of Anton Rubinstein.
Pasternak was so great that soon the pianist began adopting the poets ideas and inspirations, whilst Pasternak began to enshrine elements of Neuhaus’s personality and pianism into his poetry — including famously Ballada [Ballade] (1930); Leto [Summer] (1930); Mne Bransa sīgrayut [They’ll play Brahms for me] (1931); and Muzīka [Music] (1956).

One of the most striking offerings that Pasternak was able to encourage in Neuhaus’s already vast cultural base was the voracious study of the poetry of Alexander Blok. After showing scarcely any notable interest in the Silver Age poet in the years around the Revolution when Blok’s direct influence on the wider literary and artistic community was arguably at its most potent, Neuhaus was now almost driven to obsession, writing in 1931: ‘I have just now, nearly without a break, have read again almost all of Blok: poems, articles, diaries and notebooks. He is extremely close to me.’47 It is clear that it was around this time of Neuhaus’s and Pasternak’s close artistic exchanges that the pianist began to conceive of his most ‘sacred’ playing for which he ‘loves and lives’ as one arising from the same spiritual source as ‘Blok, Pasternak and Chopin’, and which therefore united them as ‘brothers’.48

Neuhaus’s engagement with Blok’s poetry beyond the narrative of revolution or Russian Orthodoxy had awakened in him a sense of cultural belonging which hinged not on supposed national tropes or events,49 but a sophisticated constructed kinship which rooted itself on the personal belief of a shared national temperament which allowed him to enter an artistic state of emotional outpouring that extended perilously close to the border of self-control. Such a feeling had not been new in itself to Neuhaus. Throughout his European studies and early career he had become used to being mocked by his professors, critics and friends for his near absence of emotional restraint. Although the young Neuhaus had thought

48 Letter to Zinaida Neuhaus-Pasternak from Zinovjevsk dated 1 August 1931. Ibid., 217.
of his own temperament as typical of a ‘Polish paniczyk [dandy]’, his easily moved disposition was put down by his professors to his being ‘stuck in a Russian skin,’ which needed to be shaken off if progress was to be made.\(^{50}\)

Now, however, he felt he had observed the same disposition in a Russian artist with whom he had been in awe. Neuhaus’s wife, Zinaida (soon to marry Pasternak), recalled how at this time, whether in Moscow or the holiday dacha in Irpen, she frequently would find her husband playing to Pasternak late at night whilst the latter recited Blok’s poetry, both weeping together.\(^{51}\) Speaking of the moments he felt closest to mirroring the essence of Blok’s poetry Neuhaus said: ‘I played so wonderfully [...] Boris [Pasternak] would have cried like [all those present] cried (with joy): [...] it was precisely that unique, sacred [playing] in which everything was felt-through to the very end.’\(^{52}\) He found it a painful experience when he could not give the same level of ‘sincerity’ as ‘at home [as] something stands in the way’. In those cases, Neuhaus complained, ‘one puts on a “mask”: but that is terrible.’\(^{53}\) Such instances drove him to despair as he associated them with all the faults he perceived in the attitude to pianism he encountered during his studies in Europe, including his professor’s, Leopold Godowsky, who believed that: ‘One somewhat prostitutes oneself on stage. On stage you [should only] give 25% of that which you have inside you because on stage you put on a mask.’\(^{54}\)

Whether or not it was the casual performances in Pasternak’s company where they wept at each other’s work and at the reciting of Silver Age poetry that encouraged Neuhaus to view this state as particularly Russian is difficult to tell. Critically, however, through Silver Age poetry Pasternak had introduced Neuhaus to a body of Russian art whose core aesthetic,
originating in the French visions of *modernité* epitomised by the likes of Théophile Gautier and Charles Baudelaire, sublimated the individual through the glorification of emotional expression.\(^{55}\) Within this aesthetic, as summarised by the Symbolist poet Valery Bryusov, the goal of art was beauty which elevated and ennobled man because it went beyond the limitations of reality: The real world was ‘merely a prop used by the artist to give shape to his dreams’ through his feelings and imagination, and in doing so the creative act thus gave rise to the closest spiritual reflection of that artist.\(^{56}\)

Neuhaus was so transfixed by the works arising from this distinct Russian body of thought that, with Silver Age writings being largely unavailable in print,\(^{57}\) aside from Blok he committed much of the poetry that was openly indebted to him (including that of Nikolai Gumilev, Anna Akhmatova, Pasternak) to memory and wrote it out by hand.\(^{58}\) Whether or not the deliberate nature and urgency with which Neuhaus began to explore this link was influenced by the Soviet State’s determination to expunge the Silver Age’s cult of the individual from mass consciousness and replace it with culture which aimed to unify and connect a wide audience is difficult to ascertain. What is certain, however, is that it pushed him to define these particular Silver Age goals as a core element of his practice.

Speaking of this fragile confessional state where he could dare to ‘pour out all that which is sometimes so torn, polluted, maimed and tortured’ within himself, Neuhaus was consolidating an idea which he would later call the interpreter’s ‘autobiographicality’ [avtobiografichnost’].\(^{59}\) As reported by Neuhaus’s student, Berta Kremenstein, ‘autobiographicality’ was ‘a distinctly Neuhausian idea […] undoubtedly meaning the soulfulness, genuineness and depth of feeling expressed, and all this with restraint and


\(^{56}\) Valeriy Bryusov, *Sobraniye Sochineniy v 7 Tomakh*, vol. 6 (Moskva: Hudozhvtnennaya literatura, 1975), 80–81.

\(^{57}\) Although Blok remained in print after the Revolution because of his initial support for it, after the onset of the 1920s when the avant garde became an anathema his work began to be ignored and aside from a small selection of his poetry that was considered steeped in revolutionary spirit.

\(^{58}\) RGALI fond 2775 op. 1 ye. kh. 116.

simplicity.\textsuperscript{60} Another student, Vera Razumovskaya, who was certainly influenced by her professor’s ideas talked about this state as one which the interpreter enters at his most vulnerable for he has no place to hide his personal and spiritual failings — ‘he involuntarily reveals himself in the music – gives his self-portrait.’\textsuperscript{61}

Synthesising his own understanding of Russian artistic temperament, Neuhaus sought to align himself unmistakably with Blok’s belief that ‘only that creation which is a confession and in which the artist has burned himself to ashes […] can become great.’\textsuperscript{62} Applying this to the act of performance, Neuhaus was sure to indicate that, for him, the implication of such a process was that this confession should be a deeply subjective one — tempered to the spirit of what he perceived to be the composer’s intention, but nonetheless not enslaved to it, and reinterpreted from personal experiences. The significance of such a stance in an age in which the notion of Urtext and stylistic authenticity, driven by a desire for obedience to a composer, was already showing its hold amongst the faculty of the Moscow Conservatory was striking.\textsuperscript{63} The crucial distinction here for Neuhaus was not of authenticity, but ‘truth’ which, like Blok, Neuhaus held to come not from the intellect, but from the realm of an individual’s emotional or lived experience [perezhivaniye].\textsuperscript{64}

Singling out this autobiographic quality of art as one which ought to resonate with the Russian psyche, Neuhaus maintained: ‘There is a direction – and it was born in the deepest strata of the Russian soul and the Russian people – a direction that sought truth in interpretative art: truth with which all great Russian art is marked.’\textsuperscript{65} Yet, to say that this kind

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of approach to interpretation was as unequivocally accepted in the manner Neuhaus had sought to imply, would be a mistake. The supremacy bestowed upon such emotional subjectivity by Neuhaus in his attitude to music was heavily criticized as by the musicologist Lev Barenboim, and garnered a substantial degree of resistance especially from the younger generation.66

Illustrating this point were the resulting altercations between Neuhaus and some of his students for whom the absence of objectivity in this approach of ‘autobiographicality’ led them to question its artistic validity. For instance, Emil Gilels was deeply critical of Neuhaus’s approach to Beethoven’s ‘Waldstein’ (‘Aurora’) Sonata No. 21 Opus 53: ‘The second movement (Adagio molto) according to Neuhaus, is a ‘velvet night’; a southern-Italian velvet night which is followed by dawn. It is beautiful, but it is excessively brought about by feelings – the desire to express the personally gained pleasure from this ‘velvet night’.67 Similarly, in a lesson in which Anatoly Vedernikov was playing Bach’s Prelude and Fugue in E-flat minor from the first volume of the Well Tempered Klavier, Neuhaus had proposed that he should perhaps think about the image of cypresses in an Italian cemetery.68

Vedernikov could not understand why his professor was insisting on such an image which seemed to have so little to do with Bach, and was left so irate with Neuhaus’s suggestion that he ‘left and slammed the door.’69 Whereas neither student was taken with the image of Italy, for Neuhaus this country was his self-professed spiritual homeland where he spent what he felt to be artistically the most productive years of his youth. It was a country from which he parted with a heavy heart in 1909, not least because of a never-to-be romantic attachment to a ‘widow’ (possible a euphemism) thirteen years his senior, and a country to

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67 L. A. Barenboym, Émil’ Gilel’s. Tvorcheskiy portret (Moskva: Sovetskiy Kompozitor, 1990), 69—70.
68 Anatoly Vedernikov (1920-1993) was a respected Russian pianist and teacher. He graduated from Neuhaus’s class in 1947. Later he famously performed and recorded together prolifically with Sviatoslav Richter (1915-1997), another student of Neuhaus.
69 As quoted in Grigoriy Gordon, Émil’ Gilel’s. Za gran’yu mifa (Klassika-XXI, 2008), 104.
which he hopelessly longed to return, with permission to visit Italy only being granted to him by the Soviet authorities shortly before his death.70

**Autobiographic Art as a Drawbridge into a Desired Russia**

Outside the Silver Age, notions of autobiography and truth held their own particular roles in the mechanisms of mass Soviet selfhood in the Stalinist era. As explained by Halfin: ‘Hermeneutics of the soul (inner moral disposition) emerge as a manifest, objectively verifiable way of distinguishing true revolutionaries from imposters.’71 Narrating about the self – whether as an artist, a Party member or simply as a rank-and-file worker – was to make one’s persona or lichnost’ ‘nameable and describable’ – a useful tool for authorities in a regime seeking surveillance and conditioning. With the arts identified by the political machine as a target through to project an example of a glorified Soviet self, an official triad of criteria became applied: ‘partiynost’, ideynost’, and narodnost’, terms roughly translatable as ‘serving the ends of the Party’, ‘having correct ideological content’, and ‘being accessible to all of the people all of the time.’

In conjunction with a view of pre-Revolutionary Russian culture it is clear that these are usurped abstractions. The aesthetic of art as an autobiographic practice – and the intricately related territory psycho-Realism – roots itself to the emerging Russian intelligentsia on the mid-nineteenth century where, following on from European historicism, the notion of lichnost’ and self-reflective art was taken as a barometer of society’s liberal development. As discussed by Hellbeck, in the backwardness of Nicolaevan Russia ‘personal narrative could endow loss with new meaning and certainties by anchoring the self


in [an alternative] History.\textsuperscript{72} Self-reflection was thus a means through which to create a ‘historically conscious personality’ that saw the artist carry ethical and moral obligations to affect historically progressive change. As formulated by the \textit{Peredvizhники} painter Ivan Kramskoy: artists are not “free as birds” since given the ‘backwardness and misery of the Russian people (\textit{narod}), they are obliged to take a stand on moral and political issues.’\textsuperscript{73}

For many intellectuals and artists in the Soviet era the continuing engagement with art as a psycho-Realist creation of a historically conscious personality became a drawbridge into a long-nineteenth century, and hence provided a displacement into a pre-Soviet world. So evident was its continuing presence, even as an undercurrent, that Stravinsky’s Harvard Lectures noted, albeit cynically, that not only did it exist ‘side by side with the official atheism of the Communists’, but that it played its part in ‘poisoning the whole field of art in Russia, with the famous arguments over the “meaning of Art” and of “what is Art and what is its Mission”.’\textsuperscript{74} Differentiating it from the new politicised context Pasternak of Socialist Realism, for instance, redefined it as ‘Artistic Realism’ [\textit{khudozhchestvennyiy realizm}]: ‘the depth of the biographical imprint which becomes the main driving force of the artist, and which pushes him onto the path of innovation and originality.’\textsuperscript{75} Supporting his territory of what he defined as ‘only’ Realism that should be a marker of Russian art, Pasternak was vocal in proclaiming Blok’s ability to erase the distinction between real life and its artistic manifestation — an artistic obligation to put ‘all experiences, from every aspect of life, together’ into the lyric poetry of one ‘musical chord’ — as exemplary:\textsuperscript{76}

Blok's St. Petersburg, is the most realistic St. Petersburg ever depicted by a contemporary artist. It exists equally in real life and in [Blok’s] imagination. It is full of everyday routine, which fuels the poetry with

\textsuperscript{72} Jochen Hellbeck, \textit{Autobiographical Practices in Russia}, ed. Heller Klaus (V & R Unipress, 2004), 280.

\textsuperscript{73} Hellbeck, 256.


\textsuperscript{76} Dolgopolov, ‘Iskusstvo kak samopozhertvovaniye’, 17.
tension and anxiety, and in its streets the language of the common people is heard, which refreshes the language of poetry. At the same time, the image of this city consists of features which were depicted by the nervous hand of the poet who spiritualised the city to such an extent that it was transformed into a breathtaking phenomenon of the rarest inner world.77

Blok’s vision of that the poet’s soul is tempered by the experiences and anxieties of his epoch likewise found its way into Neuhaus’s Realist understanding of art as life:

The emotional attribute (let’s call it the subconscious state of the spirit) is found in even the most rational, the most apparently unemotional movements, actions and thoughts… What a musician gains in knowledge is expressed by him in creation or interpretation. This is why I have the right to voice a paradoxical thought: everything knowable is musical (for the musician of course). Or more precisely (and tediously): any knowledge is at the same time lived experience [perezhivanye] […]. The absence of such experiences — and especially the complete lack of experiences — gives birth to un-soulful, formalistic music and empty, uninteresting interpretation. Everything […] that lives in the human soul, everything that is ‘subconscious’ (often it is ‘super-conscious’) is the kingdom of music.78

Crucially, unlike Socialist Realism and autobiographic art arising from Communist self-fashioning, the search goals of this kind of self-reflective art were not predetermined by a defined future. Because the process of defining lichnost’ was seen as more valuable than the result, there could be no limit on an artist’s individuality: the sense of unreachability rather, is glorified as proof of the profundity of the artist’s transformative vision. Urgently

trying to communicate this to his students Neuhaus cryptically remarked to his students:

‘Most of all, I wish I could give you the gift of The Demon.’

**Embodying the Demon**

Mikhail Lermontov’s masterpiece poem *The Demon* (1842) inspired many artists to respond to it in their own way from Anton Rubinstein’s six-act opera of the same name (1871), made iconic by Fyodor Chaliapin, to the series of paintings by the Silver Age artist Mikhail Vrubel. Neuhaus was gripped by Vrubel’s *The Seated Demon* (1890) [see Figure 1], and often spoke about it as the epitome of genius. What compelled Neuhaus so much about this Silver Age painting was that this was an image which had inspired Blok to set down his famous definition of the qualities of the Russian artist. In a direct allusion to the painting, Blok expressed his vision in his article *O Lirike [About the Lyric]* (1907):

> Amongst the mountain ranges where the ‘solemn sunset’ mixed the blue hues of the shadows, the scarlet of the evening sun and the gold of the dying day — mixed and poured out into one viscid and glinting violet mass — was a Man: suffering and sorrowing [he was] the owner of all the world’s riches […] yet did not know where to lay his head. This Man — the fallen Angel-Demon — was the *first lyric* [Lyric Poet].

Although, unlike Vrubel’s painting, this article was never directly mentioned by Neuhaus’s writings, interviews or lecture transcripts, it was one (along with Blok’s entire oeuvre) he undoubtedly knew intimately. This image of the Lyric Angel-Demon evidently impressed

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80 Mikhail Lermontov (1814-1841) was a Russian Romantic poet of the so-called Golden Age, and one of the founders of the psychological novel. Anton Rubinstein (1829-1894) was a Russian composer and pianist considered the only serious rival to Liszt, and founder of the first conservatory in Russia in Saint Petersburg. Fyodor Chaliapin (1873-1938) was one of the most famous Russian opera singers (bass) of his time, particularly famous internationally for his performance of the title role in Mussorgsky’s *Boris Godunov*. Mikhail Vrubel (1856-1910) was one of the most influential painters of the Silver Age, and although he protested against the label was said to be a Symbolist artist.
82 Blok, ‘Iz stat’i “O lirike”’, 68.
itself on Neuhaus’s imagination as it reappears as a various guises throughout his thoughts on music. However, where for many the obvious Orphic musician who might be seen through this mystical legend, which had such great significance to the Symbolists, would be Skryabin (whose music so often ventured into the demonic), Neuhaus offered in this place the figure of Beethoven.

<Fig. 1. Mikhail Vrubel’s The Seated Demon (1890).
Moscow State Tretyakov Gallery. Oil on canvas 117 x 214cm>

Beethoven had occupied a special place in Neuhaus’s thoughts on music. Despite himself the foremost interpreter of Skryabin in the USSR (rivalled only perhaps by Vladimir Sofronitsky and Samuil Feinberg), he was a composer whose philosophy he believed was never sufficiently challenged with the ‘sobering word of truth.’ Instead, he believed Beethoven to epitomise the greatest achievements of European philosophical endeavours. Neuhaus was keen to show his early immersion into this philosophical world, saying: ‘When I was fifteen I felt really sorry that Beethoven did not “process” his music into philosophy as I

83 Famedly in the Sixth Sonata Opus 62 which Skryabin famously refused to play in public because of its demonic influence, and which he sought to exercise with his Seventh Sonata Opus 64 ‘White Mass’; the Ninth Sonata Opus 68 ‘Black Mass’; and even the early Poem Sataniique Opus 36. Within current musicological studies referring to the Silver Age this idea of the Lyric is absent in favour of what, for instance Taruskin describes as the ‘generalized rhetoric of apocalypse of which the greatest musical exponent – and by contemporary consent, simply the greatest exponent – was Alexander Nikolayevich Scriabin.’ Richard Taruskin, ‘Safe Harbors’, in Defining Russia Musically. Historical and Hermeneutical Essays (Princeton University Press, 1997), 85–86.

84 Rebecca Mitchell’s study focusing exclusively on the final decades of Imperial Russia, argued that early-twentieth century educated Russian society became gripped with ‘a growing sense of the need for a specifically Russian culture’ that would divorce itself from Germanic models. The resultant feeling of supreme nationalism capitalised on the perception of a spiritually and socially failed Germany to claim for Russia the premier position of European culture by bringing about a theurgic, national art built on the foundations of a Russian Orthodox morality. For Mitchell, this movement was fanned on by wider anti-German sentiment in Russia that came with the outbreak of the First World War, and led ‘Nietzsche’s Orphans’ to pin their hopes to the music and rhetoric of Alexander Skryabin as an embodiment of a distinctly Russian ‘Orpheus’. With Skryabin’s untimely death the search moved on with far less success to Nikolai Medtner and Sergei Rachmaninov. Mitchell, Nietzsche’s Orphans. Music, Metaphysics, and the Twilight of the Russian Empire.

thought that his philosophy would have been better than Kant’s or Hegel’s – deeper, more truthful and more human.\textsuperscript{86} Yet, with Hegel’s philosophy (like Nietzsche’s) being ‘out of favour’ with the Soviet regime, he would first need to contend with the fierce revolutionary narrative had already been claimed for Beethoven by late Imperial Russia, and crucially for his time, as an honorary standard bearer for the Socialist Realism propaganda of Soviet Russia:

From the time of the revolution [1917], the music of Beethoven became to us one of the most loved and dear. […] Our first Soviet People’s Commissar of Enlightenment, A. V. Lunacharsky [said of] Beethoven: ‘Beethoven is closer to our day, Beethoven is a more intimate neighbour to Socialist art, than the chronological neighbours of the past decades.’ […] The Great Patriotic War [World War II] and our movement into a communist future have deepened and strengthen the Soviet people’s love of Beethoven.\textsuperscript{87}

Such visions were all the more intensified by authors, such as Romain Rolland, whose work found fertile ground in this Socialist climate. Remarkably, it was the image of the Demon which would allow Neuhaus to compose an alternate to narrative with which he privately challenged this.

Neuhaus believed the wider Russian tendency to depict Beethoven as a ‘bundle of misery,’ which arose from the work of Rolland, was overstated – and unlike his elder colleague and equally esteemed Beethoven interpreter, Alexander Goldenweiser, was vocal in sharing this opinion.\textsuperscript{88} Beethoven’s deafness, according to Neuhaus, was not an occurrence

of despair but a happiness because it compelled him to compose exclusively out of the experiences of his soul:

His spirit, which was now undisturbed by any noise of this divine and damned world, was able to be in that silence, that real silence to which other artistic people aspire and sometimes attain at such a cost. He heard only the imagined sound of the piano – but for such a person the imagination was greater and more real than actuality.89

Evoking his understanding of Hegel’s *The Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1807) — which described the spirit as undergoing three stages of evolution: the first (implied) stage is of the unconsciousness; the second sees the spirit acquiring a mind but misinterpreting that which it understands as something beyond the self; and finally, self-consciousness when the spirit understands itself as all reality (including all humanity) and that it is, in a pantheistic manner, ‘God’, or the ‘divine’90 — Neuhaus had sought to align Beethoven with the attainment of this latter superhuman state from which the composer ‘sung to the world’ his ‘monologues fort he ideals of mankind’.91

With Beethoven being the only composer about whom Neuhaus used words such as ‘divine’ or ‘otherworldly’, despite his own pronounced atheist stance, Neuhaus emphasised the strength of his desire to connect the vision of Beethoven being beyond simply human.92 What is particularly striking here — and so sympathetic to the image of the Demon — is that Neuhaus’s spiritual elevation of Beethoven was one that rested on the idea of that spirituality being flawed and hence bound to exist on earth. Mirroring Blok’s language that the Demon was ‘Man,’ Neuhaus claimed that he felt there was something that prevented Beethoven from

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92 B. B. Borodin and A. P. Luk’yanyov, eds., *Misli o Bethovene* (Moskva: Klassika-XXI, 2010), 41.
being ‘divinus’: ‘The human […] this is the strength of Beethoven, but also it is his downside (if it is even possible to talk of downsides here): there is something higher than him.’

Neuhaus closely mirrored his view of Beethoven’s late period (once his spirit had attained its Hegelian transformation) with Blok’s presentation of the Lyric as the fallen Angel-Demon: a solitary genius who, despite owning all the spiritual riches of the Earth through his reimagined experiences, and thus having the ‘clearest’ possible view of the world, was always desperately reaching out for the stars. Neuhaus even called Beethoven’s soul an embodiment of a ‘salto mortale: a fall from the sky to Earth’. Emphasizing the spiritual height and isolation of Beethoven, Neuhaus unfailingly returned to the imagery of mountains — an allegoric device strikingly absent from his critiques of other artists or thinkers — comparing his achievements to the Himalayan peaks in relation to the ravines of other composers. Furthermore, in defining his concept of the necessary atmosphere to Beethoven’s Hegelian transcendence, Neuhaus calls to mind the very colours associated with the Lyric Angel-Demon as presented in Vrubel’s famous painting: the Variations from Opus 109 (Sonata No. 30 in E minor) being a ‘majestic, solemn sunset’ in which the ‘glistening mountain peaks’, are seen through gold, bronze, scarlet and violet before mixing with the shadows of the coming ‘blue-blue night’ [sinyaya-sinyaya noch’]; and the slow movement of his Fifth Piano Concerto Opus 73 as an ‘azure-golden glow’ [lazurno-zolotistogo siyaniya].

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97 Vrubel’s painting originally would have been even more striking than it is today. The artist had mixed bronze powder, which has since oxidised, into his paints to present a stunning, glistening effect to the sunset’s rays touching the subjects depicted on the canvas.
In aligning Beethoven to the Lyric Neuhaus was also able to defend what he considered to be the most contentious aspect to Beethoven’s legacy which was almost entirely missing from the Soviet narrative: that of the greatest art should not be instantly ‘accessible.’ Neuhaus’s claim that Beethoven’s music existed at a ‘nearly inaccessible height’ had obvious resonances with the composer’s own claim that his works, namely the ‘Hammerklavier’ Sonata, were to be understood perhaps only fifty years after its publication. Unlike contemporaneous musicologists such as Yurii Keldish who actively tried to portray Beethoven as an ‘authentically proletarian’ composer who was always accessible to all people all of the time, Neuhaus was adamant that ‘a lot of stupidity was committed in the name of the ‘vseradnost’’ [literally: ‘all-peopleness’] of art.

Blok had warned that the Lyric, having the whole world, ‘will not give you, people, anything other than momentary splashes, other than far-away songs, other than a stupefying drink. […] A Lyric cannot give anything to people. But people come and take. A Lyric is “poor and bright” [nisch i svetel]; from his “bright generosity” [svetloy schedrosti] people create countless riches.’ The reason why great art therefore could not be instantly accessible was because it had never set out its aim as a communication for sharing. It was nothing short of egocentric – born and sustained through personal autobiographic experience. Defining lichnost’ through self-reflective art was a process towards the unattainable, and therefore unlike Socialist Realism could never claim definable results: Blok’s Lyric had come from Heaven, but now imprisoned on Earth was doomed never again to himself return there. Despite owning all the world’s riches (and so embodying the ultimate assimilation of lived experience) he was isolated in a prison — in the case of Beethoven’s Hegelian spirit,

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literally so though his deafness — where his eternal existence was one fated to strike at the ‘green earth and blue skies of its walls’.103

Thus, the amalgamation of Blok’s Lyric and Beethoven gave Neuhaus the ultimate example of art. Brought out exclusively from personal experience it was therefore an art that relied on a confessional outpouring of the artist, and hence answered to Neuhaus’s concept of ‘autobiographicality’ as an alternative kind of Russian Realism:

*That is how I want it.* If a Lyric loses this motto and replaces it with another — he will no longer be a Lyric. This motto is his curse — immaculate and bright. All freedom and servitude are in this motto: in it his free will, and in it his imprisonment in the walls of [his] world — ‘the blue prison’. Lyricism is ‘I’, a microcosm, and the whole world of the lyric poet lies in his process of perception.104

It was a subjectivity which underpinned his definition of himself as an artist through both appropriation and rejection of artistic thought (and presented both confluence and aversion to cultural policy around him) as much as it underpinned his volatility as a performer. Not being a politicized act of dissidence against a regime whose policies he abhorred, it was nonetheless stimulated by his desire to contextualise himself as a Russian rather than Soviet artist – driven by what he described as part of his private efforts to make his ‘life’s roses have fewer thorns.’105

**Presenting a Cultureless Soviet**

Neuhaus’s deliberate choice to forgo aligning Skryabin (or indeed another Russian or Slavic composer) with the image of the Lyric in favour of Beethoven might seen as a surprising decision in his move to define himself within a sphere of Russian, rather than Soviet, sensibilities. For a time, however, the actively sought cosmopolitan aspect in positioning

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103 Blok, 72.
104 Blok, 70.
105 Neygauz, *Ob iskusstve fortepiannoy igrî*, 205.
oneself within a national narrative was shared by many of the artistic intelligentsia of Neuhaus’s time, and had formed the backbone of much Socialist cultural policy. Indeed, as already investigated by Pauline Fairclough, the Bolshevik’s desire to ‘identify the [urban proletariat and rural peasantry making up the] Soviet masses as inheritors of the greatest traditions of Western civilization’ led to the glorification of cosmopolitan outlooks around the Revolution.\(^\text{106}\) Though cleansing of what was presented as ‘bourgeois heritage’ that went alongside this was a muddled and inconsistent policy.\(^\text{107}\)

Furthermore, as revealed by Katerina Clark, the overt manifestation of cosmopolitanism in the Stalinist epoch, traditionally seen as the ultimate insular society, played an important part of the Socialist experiment where ‘competing claims of nationalism and internationalism were a problem that neither the Soviet leadership nor the intellectuals ever really resolved.’\(^\text{108}\) On the one sense this can be discerned in the mawkish ‘hyper-nationalism’ of the State’s cultural policy which aimed to unify a multi-ethnic Soviet Union (including the distinct cultural identities of the Central Asian Republics), and which, as found by Marina Frolova-Walker, was dissected by Soviet committees such as those assembled to decide the most suitable candidates for the Stalin Prize.\(^\text{109}\)

On the other hand, as identified by Clark, the distinct coexistence of nationalism and internationalism, particularly through an indebtedness to German Romanticism, had a profound effect on those internationally recognised as some of the era’s greatest intellectuals

\(^{107}\) Ibid., 4.
\(^{109}\) Marina Frolova-Walker, *Stalin’s Music Prize. Soviet Culture and Politics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016), 90–96. As explained by Frolova-Walker, it was this mechanism of celebrating the folk music as an essential part of being a Soviet artist which had bestowed the Stalin Music Prize on so many recipients and genres from the Central Asian Republics, Caucasus region (including Armenia, Georgia) and other ethnic concentrations such as the Baltics. Thus, names which are rarely heard in Western musicology – Uzeyir Hajibeyov, Ahmed Hajiyyev, Shalva Mshvelidze, Juozas Talt-Kelpša – were rewarded for artistic merit either alongside, or even above, works by composers recognised to day such as Shostakovich, Prokofiev or Myaskovsky. Similarly, the same process prescribed alien programmes, for instance to Shostakovich’s symphonies to nonsensically justify their Soviet ideologies.
and artists such as the film director Sergei Eisenstein. In the context of either case, the appropriation of Western cultural achievement into the formation of a canon Soviet ‘classics’ went in tandem with the preoccupation of the post-Revolutionary leadership to promote ‘culturedness’ (kulturnost’) as one of the most vital components of the ideal Soviet citizen.110

With this Soviet manifestation equally resonating with Russia’s pre-Revolutionary Germanic (and French) intellectual legacies arising from both elements of both Enlightenment and Romantic philosophy,111 Neuhaus found the spirit of such ideals entirely sympathetic. In his capacity as both a performer and a pedagogue believed first and foremost in the need to instil a sense of belonging into a continuum of world culture: ‘Culture, starting with Hesiod and Homer (and even substantially earlier) up to our day, is a conceivable whole that can not only be understood, but also felt, in other words emotionally experienced.’112 It was an ideal which he advocated with mission-like zeal in official meetings, open lessons and lectures, and likewise anguished over it in private spheres: ‘I wanted to drag the student into the sphere of spiritual culture, to the sphere of moral understanding – and the only way I had to do this was through teaching how to play the piano!! [sic.] What a weak, miserly means for such challenges!’113

What separated Neuhaus’s deep-rooted inclination to define his own artistic endeavours within a cultural and historical continuum of great works from the late-Imperial, Revolutionary and Soviet narratives, was its apparent lack of agenda in relation to what Clark identified as a desire to present national ‘dominion and dominance,’ or the ‘Soviet

110 Clark, Moscow, the Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931-1941; Fairclough, Classics for the Masses: Shaping Soviet Musical Identity under Lenin and Stalin; Jelagin, Taming of the Arts.


Imperialism’ investigated by Tomoff. Rather than seek to present Soviet citizens collectively as inheritors of the greatest cultural achievements of the Western world against a perceived faltering of Western society (an embodiment of what Hans Günther had already called the ‘Soviet Superman’ in relation to literature studies), Neuhaus believed that it was folly to think of culture as an inheritance – ‘real culture does not simply come [s kondachka]’ – let alone that Soviet society could surpass the ‘Himalayas’ of Western intellectual history. For Neuhaus, culture was not a race that pitted either a Russian or Soviet nation in a premiere position in a Western world, but rather a shared international body of intellectual and artistic achievement to which admittance came through ‘reverence, will and targeted effort.’

Further repelling the notion of culture as a unifying and indeed levelling social factor that would be inherent in every Soviet citizen, was Neuhaus’s fixation on presenting ‘true’ culture as beyond the understanding of the masses and instead as the domain of artists, intellectuals and highly specialised, select audience: ‘Pushkin is less widely read than [Mikhail] Zoschenko […]. It is possible to convince that Pushkin is better than Zoschenko, or Bach and Beethoven are better than Albeniz, but one needs to be led to such a conclusion.’

Clark, Moscow, the Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931-1941, 289; Tomoff, Virtuosi Abroad, Soviet Music and Imperial Competition During the Early Cold War, 1945-1958. Similarly, the positioning of late Imperial Russia as a supreme leader of a pan-European culture was traced in Mitchell, Nietzsche’s Orphans. Music, Metaphysics, and the Twilight of the Russian Empire.

From a political aspect, Neuhaus was keenly aware of the implications of Soviet Imperialism and was outspoken about what he defined as the annexation of the Baltic States during World War II; and likewise had been critical of the way in which Central Powers and Russia had wrangled over the borders of the new Ukraine and Poland during World War I. See Tsentral’nyi arkhiv Federal’noy bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsiy, Delo P-38569.

Relating to a Schillerian notion of ‘noble minds’ or ‘men of elevated disposition,’ Neuhaus had no qualms in presenting artists as occupying a superior order of man, whatever their nationality, above the surrounding masses of ‘sheep.’ Neuhaus was so concerned about the elevation to this superior status of artist that he controversially subjected even students like Emil Gilels (who then, in the 1930s, was heralded a beacon of ‘healthy’ Soviet art by the State, and as a ‘mature artist of world class stature’ by his colleagues)\textsuperscript{120} to the rebuke of having a technical polish, but lacking culture.\textsuperscript{121} Thus, as recalled by Juri Jelagin who came to hear Neuhaus’s teaching, much to Gilels’s exasperation, ‘Often, instead of studying piano playing, Neuhaus recited his favourite poetry to [Gilels] – most often, Pasternak’s. Or, he would take him to one of Moscow’s art galleries.’\textsuperscript{122}

Few public platforms show Neuhaus’s vehement concern about the Soviet canonisation and assumption of automatic cultural entitlement more potently than his speech of 1936 during the meetings summoned by the Union of Soviet Composers on 10, 13 and 15 February in response to the denunciation of Dmitri Shostakovich in the notorious \textit{Pravda} newspaper articles: ‘Muddle instead of music!’ [\textit{Sumbur vmesto muzikii!}] (28 January 1936) and ‘Balletic Falsehood’ [\textit{Baletnaya fal’sh’}] (6 February 1936). The purpose of these meetings was to bring together ‘composers, music critics and performers’ to discuss the ‘bright and happy event’ of the vitriolic criticisms of Shostakovich’s opera \textit{Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District} and his ballet \textit{The Limpid Stream}. Both had enjoyed opulent success until Josef Stalin had come to hear \textit{Lady Macbeth} for himself, leaving in disgust before the final scene. Overnight they were pulled from the repertoire and denounced as ‘formalist’ creations. In a matter of weeks the witch-hunt across the wider artistic community for formalist scapegoats was rampant, and one whose malignant effects was witnessed by


\textsuperscript{122} Jelagin, \textit{Taming of the Arts}, 247.
Neuhaus within his own close circle of friends as he remained one of the few people to dare to continue being seen alongside his now denounced friend, Pasternak.\textsuperscript{123}

The address made by Neuhaus as the Director of the Moscow Conservatory has largely been side-lined as an opportunistic attack on Shostakovich.\textsuperscript{124} In his short speech transcribed in Sovetskaya Mužika it is apparent that he did not hide his dislike of this particular opera saying that it had ‘bored’ him, prompting him to leave immediately after the second act. Likewise he maintained at this time that ‘neither Shostakovich nor Myaskovsky are comparable with Bach or Tchaikovsky’; yet it is all too often ignored that Neuhaus held the same conviction when it came to the music of his beloved Skryabin.\textsuperscript{125} Beyond this politicized meeting and this particular work, however, Neuhaus’s admiration for Shostakovich’s later symphonic and piano output is undeniable. Not only did Shostakovich’s photograph stand on his bookshelf overlooking the piano, but he regularly performed Shostakovich’s piano works: most frequently the Piano Preludes Opus 34 from 1933 (which he chose to perform to Romain Rolland at Maxim Gorky’s dacha, alongside the music of the then banned Medtner, shortly before the 1936 Pravda publications, and which he later recorded) and the Second Piano Sonata Opus 61.

Later Neuhaus would hail Shostakovich as the new Bach (not an opinion shared by all of the Piano Faculty nor the entire Committee of the Stalin Music Prize) after hearing Shostakovich’s Preludes and Fugues Opus 87 in the winter of 1951,\textsuperscript{126} and later again in the spring of 1952 as part of the official previews before the directorship taking place at the Moscow Conservatory (more than half a year in advance of their premiere by Tatyana Nikolayeva in Leningrad). Being moved to tears he touchingly had even written out the

\textsuperscript{123} A meeting of writers was called in Moscow on 10 March 1936. The Literaturnaya gazeta followed on from the Pravda articles by denouncing Pasternak and several other writers for their ‘formalist conduct’ on 15 March (No. 14, 1-3) and 20 March (No. 17, 1). For a further summary of Pasternak’s difficulties with the regime at this time see Christopher Barnes, Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography. 1928–1969 (1998) (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 132–51.


\textsuperscript{125} Neygauz, ‘Tvorcheskaya Diskussiya v Moskovskom Soyuze Sovetskih Kompozitorov’, 27.

scores of six of these from the manuscript for himself by hand. Neuhaus regularly introduced his students to Shostakovich’s string quartets, the ‘genius’ of his Fourth Symphony and the ‘broken heartedness’ of the Fifth through playing four-handed arrangements with them, keenly showcasing his knowledge of the Seventh and Eighth from memory. All these are hardly actions that are relatable to the contemporary myth of Neuhaus being what Sheila Fitzpatrick calls the State’s ‘most articulate spokesman for the new classicism.’

Beyond the specific issue of his personal dislike of Lady Macbeth, Neuhaus’s address provides a striking but rare but public glimpse of his critical view of Soviet cultural policy – using it as a platform to condemn what he saw as the issue of erroneous ‘simplicity’ expected of Soviet art by officials and policy makers. The mockery in his speech is unmistakable. Initially avoiding the subject of Shostakovich altogether, he instead opened his speech with a somewhat long-winded account about the ‘joy’ of being sent as part of a delegation of musicians that summer to meet Rolland. Neuhaus began to explain how they talked together about a recent sports parade and how discussions turned to the issue of how it should be reflected in music. Neuhaus open dislike of Rolland would not have been a secret to his most respected colleagues: ‘I find his work is in some way distorted, even unpleasant.’ The idea that serious art music should in any way be degraded to a simplistic spectacle of the likes of a sports parade is ironic enough in itself without knowing of Neuhaus’s ardent love of Romantic philosophy, nor of his complete aversion to sports.

Given the menacing warnings in the Pravda article being discussed, Neuhaus’s direct criticism of Soviet cultural achievements would have been precarious. And yet, amidst of a climate of escalating purges, Neuhaus took the opportunity to tell his colleagues that they must not complacently view the Pravda article an attack on Shostakovich, but rather as a

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128 See, amongst others, Neuhaus’s letters dated 25 January 1944 from Sverdlovsk and 29 November 1948 from Tsaltubo. Ibid., 263, 321.
129 Fitzpatrick, The Cultural Front. Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia., 206.
130 Neygauz, Ob iskusnuye fortepiannoy igri (1961), 213.
wake-up for all serious artists to be wary of the ‘boastful nature’ of Soviet art: ‘Our arguments and quibbles here are petty and inconsequential. Art which is great, true art, is like the peaks of the Himalayas [and] we have not yet created such an art. Everything which our Soviet art brings – is not it.’\footnote{Neygauz, ‘Tvorcheskaya Diskussiya v Moskovskom Soyuze Sovetskikh Kompozitorov’, 27.} It was a bold statement to make knowing that the Soviet cultural revolution of the 1930s proclaimed to have eradicated formalist and bourgeois art, and replaced it with examples Soviet masterworks, heralded by various political agencies, including Stalin himself, surpassing all other Russian and Western art, and thus deserving emulation.\footnote{Hellbeck, \textit{Autobiographical Practices in Russia}, 290.}

In rejecting the possibility of Soviet culture to have somehow attained a perfect art whose artistic spirit might be cloned, Neuhaus had by extension refuted the existence of the age’s New [Soviet] Man who had risen from a perfect type of humanity. As described by Halfin, the ‘new self’ was part of a perfect society standing on ‘threshold of the Communist paradise’. Since it was healthy and mature ‘only the individual could be blamed for negative actions [and] those who thought otherwise were quite simply criminals.’\footnote{Igal Halfin, \textit{Terror in My Soul. Communist Autobiographies on Trial}. (Harvard University Press, 2003), 244.} With the crime of counter-revolution being seen as a state of mind more so than a course of action, expressing any doubt in the superiority and perfection of Soviet society was a dangerous move. Indeed, Neuhaus’s critique was so unwelcome that in the \textit{Pravda} summary of the meeting which appeared on 17 February 1936 it was skewed beyond recognition by the enforced transcription of State censorship. Thus, the readers (as well as numerous contemporary commentator’s of Neuhaus’s relationship with both the Shostakovich and the State) were to be made aware that in a speech ‘imbued with deep and genuine feeling Professor Neuhaus said: “We are going to the Himalayas of art. How petty and inconsequential seem those feelings and passions which are depicted in music like \textit{Lady Macbeth}.”’\footnote{\textit{Pravda} 17 February 1936, 3. This is the summarised version of Neuhaus’s speech which has underpinned certain investigations of the denunciation of Shostakovich. For example, it was presented in Fitzpatrick, \textit{The Cultural Front. Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia.}, 206.}
No matter how cosmopolitan or indeed international the Soviet State claimed its roots or its ambitions to be at this time, Neuhaus became adamant that the process of cultural assimilation into the personality was the distinguishing moment in the creation of a Russian rather than Soviet lichnost’ – hence his definition of Shostakovich as a Russian, rather than Soviet artist, in the already mentioned article of 1941. Personality, he claimed continued to claim throughout his life, could never come into being in the ideological climate of the Soviet Union:

In my opinion, the concept of man’s worth (his beauty, strength, superiority, charm, ‘effectiveness’ etc., etc., many more epithets can be added…) cannot be determined by any prepared moral, religious, philosophical, aesthetic, socio-political principles. They must be directed, or created anew.\(^{135}\)

Relating this more bluntly during his interrogations that followed his arrest for anti-Soviet propaganda in 1941/2, Neuhaus told the NKVD officer that:

[Socialist] Realism limits the creative potential of the self […] and that is why truly great culture has not and could not have been achieved during the Soviet State’s existence. Beginning from 1937-38 […] I believed that a period of cultural destruction and great suffering for people had been initiated by the All Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks and the Soviet State […] believing them amongst other things to limit the creative potential of the talented personality [lichnost’].\(^ {136}\)

Whilst Neuhaus did not openly speak about his arrest even with those closest to him, it was an event that left a deep trauma. In the remaining years of his life the event seems to have became a catalyst for his greater desire to indicate that the struggle to express the transcendence of an artistic personality, rather than capture the crude objectiveness of a mass

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\(^{136}\) Tsentral’niy arkhiv Federal’noy bezopasnosti Rossiiyskoy Federatsi, Delo P-38569, 29-30.
identity, made autobiographic art the most honourable human cause. Keenly aware of the power of public image, Neuhaus aligned himself openly with Soviet artists who had at one time or another fallen into the regime’s disapproval for the transgressions of their artistic personality against the State’s approved vision, such as Boris Pasternak, and used their image to link himself into that common cause: implied, for instance, by his choreographed colour anniversary photograph holding not piano music, but a copy of Shostakovich’s Tenth Symphony.¹³⁷

However, unlike the narratives of struggle and otherness carved out respectively by Slavophiles or Bolsheviks and which pitted Imperial Russia or the Soviet Union as morally superior subjects that disavowed foreign ‘bourgeois’ anti-personalities in contemporary Europe, that were driven by the idea of progress, Neuhaus’s narrative of selfhood looked back to the past. In using autobiographic art as a means to displace himself as a personality outside of Soviet aesthetics, he was drawn to engaging with a past Russian cultural heritage of the late nineteenth-century and individual aspects of the fin de siècle and Silver Age. But for all the nostalgia and escapism he imbued it with, it was a cultural world that in his youth he never knew, and, with all its imagined links and intricacies, one which those around him would find hard to comprehend.

Russian became for Neuhaus a personalised and idealised ahistoric moment in which there was no need to ‘march in step’ with Soviet history or aspire to a concretely defined future. Despite the Soviet ‘eschatological concept of time’ and rhetoric of progress,¹³⁸ Neuhaus saw the Soviet as barren environment for the expression of the self, and thus a historical stasis. It was a readymade world of sanctioned experiences that destroyed the need for personality. For a talented personality ahistoricism, however, was liberating. To be ahistoric meant boundaries between time and space became fluid and could be grafted together in manifold ways. Thus, like the Demon, an artist’s world was defined by the riches

¹³⁷ The Tenth Symphony was withheld from performance due to the post-1948 anti-formalism campaign until December 1953, following Stalin’s death in March that year.
¹³⁸ Hellbeck, Autobiographical Practices in Russia, 290.
of his experiences – an artist’s worth as his commitment to a confessional outpouring of these through his art.

On the surface both positions – the Soviet canonised narrative of clone-able classics, and Neuhaus’s displaced Romantic aesthetic of autobiographic art that refuses to attempt defining the future – form an ambiguous territory that may well both appear be a result of the ‘outwardly highly palatable stuff’ stigmatised by Taruskin as the by-product of ‘hothouse isolation, servile affirmation, cultural stagnation, and intellectual limitations’ that was driven by a lack of originality as a mask for the ‘indigestible’ terror faced by the artistic intelligentsia.¹³⁹ Neuhaus’s narrative of selfhood, however, is one that refuses to confirm the established mechanisms of Soviet self-fashioning. Being too outspokenly critical to become a victim of illiberal Soviet subjectivity, and too sheltered by the virtue of the State’s marginal interest in performance outside the international competition circuit to have needed to routinely ‘play the game’ of Bolshevik-speak, Neuhaus presents a unique phenomenon in Soviet era culture.

Oscillating between expressing his views in the public arena, such as through his evolving engagement with the persona of Shostakovich, or the entirely private pleasure that he felt through extrapolating the symbolism of the Demon, his enigmatic allegiance to a self-constructed Russianness requires a sympathetic understanding of Neuhaus’s own persona. To date, more than half a century following his death, despite his iconic and at times contentious status, and significance to the epoch’s greatest figures Neuhaus has escaped serious study. Yet, as we continue to move in dispelling the remaining Cold War preconceptions of the era’s arts existing in a simplistic cycle of coercion and capitulation against the State, it is increasingly evident that our understanding will come about not through monolithic surveys that seek to identify transferable concepts and trends, but rather individual case studies that will reflect the incredibly nuanced complexities of life in the USSR.

¹³⁹ Taruskin, ‘Safe Harbors’, 98.