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Cultural Life in the 1960s in the USSR as Reflected in *Tout compte fait* (1972), the Autobiography of Simone de Beauvoir

Kultūras dzīve PSRS 20. gadsimta 60. gados un tās atspoguļojums Simonas de Bovuāras autobiogrāfijā *Tout compte fait* (1972)

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Summary The article aims to discuss cultural life in the USSR in the context of the changing cultural policy in the 1960s as reflected in Simone de Beauvoir's memoirs. During the period from 1962 to 1966, de Beauvoir was visiting the Soviet Union regularly together with Jean-Paul Sartre, spending several weeks in different parts of the country. Unlike Sartre, she left a written account of the political, economic, and cultural situation in the USSR. De Beauvoir captured the transition from the so-called Thaw to the Stagnation that occurred during that decade. During their first visits, the atmosphere was still rather liberal and a desire to communicate with the West was still present, but soon the persecution of dissidents and the antisemitic trials began. This article emphasizes the importance of autobiographical books in de Beauvoir's oeuvre, highlighting, on the one hand, the narrator's accuracy and attention to detail and, on the other hand, her efforts to shape the narrative at will, bypassing uncomfortable aspects (such as tensions in her relationship with Sartre and the real role of some people in their life). De Beauvoir's most important sources of information were the liberal writers of the time such as Ilya Ehrenburg and Yefim Doroch, as well as translator Lena Zonina and others. De Beauvoir's sympathy for the Soviet system, like Sartre's, is still a source of controversy, while her description of the changes in cultural life of the Soviet Union in the 1960s can be a valuable resource for researchers of the Soviet era.

Kopsavilkums Šī raksta mērķis ir aplūkot PSRS kultūras dzīvi 20. gs. 60. gadu kultūrpolitikas pārmaiņu kontekstā un tās atspoguļojumu Simonas de Bovuāras memuāros. Laikposmā no 1962. līdz 1966. gadam de Bovuāra regulāri apmeklēja Padomju Savienību kopā ar Žanu Polu Sartru, uzturoties pa vairākām nedēļām dažādās šīs valsts vietās. Atšķirībā no Sartra, viņa ir atstājusi rakstiskas liecības par PSRS politisko, ekonomisko un kultūras situāciju. De Bovuāra ir fiksējusi attiecīgajā desmitgadē norisinājušos pāreju no t.s. Hruščova atkušņa uz stagnācijas laikmetu. Pirmajās reizēs, kad de Bovuāra un Sartrs ieradās PSRS, atmosfēra tur vēl bija samērā liberāla un pastāvēja arī vēlme uzturēt kontaktu ar Rietumiem, taču drīz vien sākās disidentu vajāšanas un antisemītiskās tiesas prāvas. Šajā rakstā uzsvērta autobiogrāfisko grāmatu nozīmība de Bovuāras literārajā mantojumā. No vienas puses, tiek izcelta viņas kā stāstītājas precizitāte un uzmanība pret detaļām, bet no otras puses – viņas vēlme veidot naratīvu pēc savas gribas, apejot neērtos aspektus (tādus kā saspīlējumi viņas attiecībās ar Sartru un dažu cilvēku patiesā loma viņas dzīvē). De Bovuāras svarīgākie informācijas avoti PSRS bija tālaika liberālie rakstnieki, tādi kā Iļja Ērenburgs un Jefims Dorohs, kā arī tulkotāja Ļena Zoņina un citi. De Bovuāras un arī Sartra simpātijas pret padomju režīmu joprojām tiek vērtētas pretrunīgi, taču viņas vērojumi par 20. gs. 60. gadu pārmaiņām PSRS kultūras dzīvē var būt vērtīgs materiāls pētniekiem.

Introduction

The autobiographical books[1] of Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986) – philosopher, writer of fiction and nonfiction works, and a social critic, one of the central figures of the second wave of feminism in the 20th century – are of interest to scholars in several ways.

First of all, these books document de Beauvoir's own life project of becoming a female intellectual in a previously male-dominated world. Secondly, as Jean-Paul Sartre's lifelong companion, de Beauvoir documented their shared experiences, so Sartre's biographers refer to her autobiographical books as sources for his biography alongside their correspondence and her account of Sartre's last years, *La Cérémonie des adieux* (Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre, 1981). Thirdly, de Beauvoir's work, both fiction and nonfiction, sheds light on the lives of French intellectuals and the development of philosophical, political, and literary thought over half a century. One more impetus for reading de Beauvoir's texts may be her legacy as a witness not only to her own French culture, but also as an observer and appreciator of other cultures. It is precisely this area of her work – and more specifically, a part of one of her volumes of autobiography – that is the subject of this article. Although de Beauvoir did not dedicate a separate publication to the Soviet Union, unlike China and the USA, her descriptions of the couple's trips to the USSR attract the attention of scholars. Nicol Dziub distinguishes de Beauvoir's case from other 20th-century French writers' descriptions of their trips to the USSR which mark "a turning point, when the 'honey-moon' turns into the 'age of suspicion': the beautiful dreams of Soviet communism are gone, and travelers 'bump into' the brutal reality of Stalinism" (Dziub 2022: 3). De Beauvoir differs, as Dziub points out, from many other authors by the fact that she visited the USSR decades after them. When in 1955 de Beauvoir first arrived in Moscow, the authority of socialism had been undermined by the irrefutable knowledge of the existence of labor camps. It is worth adding that, unlike many other writers, de Beauvoir's intensive contacts and visits occurred throughout almost the entire 1960s, and thus allowed her to witness the constant changes in cultural life and cultural policy.

De Beauvoir's trips to the USSR and her interactions with Russian cultural figures are also captured in her fiction. Her novella *Malentendu à Moscou*, written between 1966 and 1967, did not appear until 1992. Éric Levéel points out that, in relation to

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1 *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* (Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter, 1958), *La force de l'âge* (The Prime of Life, 1960), *La force des choses* (Force of Circumstance, 1963; sometimes published in two volumes in English translation: "After the War" and "Hard Times"); and *Tout compte fait* (All Said and Done, 1972).

the regime, "the story remains quite critical, and one can already feel the ideological and personal crack" (Levéel 2022: 10) and draws parallels between the novella and the final volume of de Beauvoir's autobiography, which was written a few years later. This article will be limited to the nonfiction work *Tout compte fait*.

Temporal distance changes the reader's relationship to the text. It is conceivable that readers in the last century, especially those living in the USSR, would have found inaccuracies. Today, life in the USSR in the 1960s is more often of interest only to a small group of curious readers, such as scholars who were researchers at the time. Modern readers with no first-hand experience of the period have other privileges, in particular more information and analysis about the so-called Thaw period. However, de Beauvoir's overview of the period provides a generalized, compatible, but also detailed panorama of life in the USSR in the 1960s. Thanks to de Beauvoir's talent as a writer, the reader can feel, through the details provided, what is romantically called "the spirit of the times".

Controversial autobiographer Simone de Beauvoir

Although de Beauvoir's autobiographical books primarily reflect the development of her own personality and views, travelogues are only one of the subjects of these books. Nevertheless, travelogues play a special role in the narrative because, as Simone Fullagar points out, "travel has a metonymic relation to the passage of Beauvoir's life, in which the existential extremes of anguish and ecstasy are played out in a (feminine) quest for self-knowledge" (Fullagar 2001: 289). Since de Beauvoir loved to travel, her autobiographical books reveal how the geography of her travels expanded over the years, and she devoted separate books to her visits to China and the USA. Although autobiography, according to Philippe Lejeune's classic definition, tells the story of the writer's existence "where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality" (Lejeune 1989: 4), de Beauvoir's aim in writing her autobiographical books was to be accurate in documenting political and social events. In this fourth and final volume of her autobiography, recording her life from 1962 to 1971, her travels in foreign countries occupy a large part of the text.

Like any autobiographer, de Beauvoir decides which facts are worth mentioning and which, for one reason or another, should be glossed over in the narrative of her life. This is a conscious choice on the part of the author, and the omissions may be worthy of a separate study. Like in the previous autobiographical books, some details of her personal life known from other sources are not mentioned in this book. For example, Sartre's biographers indicate that one of the reasons for his frequent visits

to the USSR in the 1970s was personal, because Lena Zonina was not only his translator but also his lover, to whom Sartre dedicated his autobiographical novel *Les Mots* (1963) "*À madame Z.*", which was later translated in Russian as *Slova* (1966) by Zonina herself. De Beauvoir does not mention this aspect, although she calls her "our closest friend [..] a handsome dark woman of about forty, exceptionally cultivated and intelligent" (De Beauvoir 1993: 284). All the more so as the text does not directly mention the other functions that were routinely performed by USSR officials working with foreigners.[2] Protecting her own privacy and that of others, de Beauvoir does not mention the other circumstances of the trio's relationship: the couple's biographer points out that de Beauvoir's ("ever-obliging chaperone") presence in the USSR was necessary to distract outsiders from the connection between Sartre and Zonina (Rowley 2006: 273). This distinction between reality and text only reaffirms the conventionality of the distinction between fiction and documentary literature.

While this volume offers a glimpse into de Beauvoir's views after her direct encounter with Soviet reality and thus provides valuable material for Soviet studies, in the context of de Beauvoir's own autobiographical books it has been viewed with reservations by some scholars. In Toril Moi's opinion:

> The power of Beauvoir's writing .. is directly dependent on the degree of disavowal she engages in. When she refuses to confront – to name – the sources of her pain, her texts read like laundry lists [..]. In her published memoirs, such 'writing of disavowal' is particularly noticeable in *All Said and Done* [..]. So much disavowal turns the volume into a lifeless ghost of an autobiography, a mere chronicle of official duties, rather than an exploration of lived experience (Moi 2008: 250–251).

Jo-Ann Pilardi also distinguishes this volume from the others, noting:

> The reader senses that this autobiography will raise no questions for the author; she thinks there is only one important question left: how and when she will die. Indeed, she sounds finished (Pillardi 1999: 116).

It is possible that the general mood of disillusionment may have been compounded by disillusionment with communism as a project for the betterment of the world, a project that was admired in the mid-20th century by both Sartre and other left-wing French intellectuals. However, her links with Soviet (mainly Russian) culture and its figures were significant for her in the last decade, and naturally left a human and cultural rift.

De Beauvoir's autobiographical books provide insights into Sartre's life and work but raise valid questions about their relationship. Sartre was her lifelong companion (from 1929 until his death in 1980), and de Beauvoir's association

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2 Excerpts from six Zonina's reports to the USSR Writers' Union in her capacity as a consultant to the Foreign Literature Commission of the USSR Writers' Union were published in 1991 (see: Zarzycka-Bérard 1991, 161–168).

with him helped her to remain in the epicentre of French intellectual life. Although de Beauvoir's autobiographical books are primarily about her own life experiences, in this volume her first-person narrative is often replaced by the plural "we" and "our". This reflects the reality of the situation: they travelled extensively in that decade precisely because of the socio-political activities of Sartre, who was heavily involved in many international events (especially the pro-Soviet peace movement) and who was a member of the so-called Russell Tribunal, which was investigating the crimes of the US during the Vietnam War. Sartre was one of the vice-presidents of the European Community of Writers (COMES), which "was founded in 1958 at the proposal of the Italian National Union of Writers just to counteract the action of the Pen Club which had adopted a closed-door policy towards the Soviet Bloc writers"[3] (Sicari 2019: 142). However, de Beauvoir's autobiographies give a one-sided view of these relationships. She hid some of her feelings, including tension and resentments, especially in old age, and tolerated Sartre's macho behavior. As Michael Walzer points out:

> Writing about philosophical opinions and political commitments that they shared, she almost always describes herself walking a step or two behind Sartre, sometimes dragging her feet, sometimes hurrying to catch up" (Walzer 1988:153).[4]

She has described her relationship with communist regimes according to this model: "As for our relations with the Communist Party and the socialist countries, there I followed Sartre in his fluctuations" (De Beauvoir 1993: 27). Sartre, whose relationship with Communist regimes was constantly evolving, became active in the pro-Communist International Peace Movement from 1952 onwards. His sympathy for the socialist states and his support for the USSR's foreign policy at international events, as well as his and de Beauvoir's visits to the country in the 1960s, was criticized both during Sartre's lifetime and after his death in 1980, and even more so after the "death of communism" in 1989 (Birchall 2004: 4). According to French Sovietologist Cécile Vaissié who studies Sartre's relations with the USSR:

> Sartre did not want to understand that .. he was arriving at societies that were severely traumatized by decades of extreme political violence. He hardly perceived the traces of this violence and did not fully appreciate the ideological control surrounding him. He probably did not want to undermine his philosophical and political constructs by overly pragmatic realities (Vaissié 2017:11).

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3 The European Community of Writers ceased its activities in 1968, as did the visits of de Beauvoir and Sartre, due to the criticism of Western writers against the USSR for its suppression of the Prague Spring.

4 However, despite the insistence on Sartre's superiority in autobiographical books, in some areas she undeniably surpassed him. In Walzer's opinion, "[a]s as social critic [..], de Beauvoir undoubtedly comes first. [..] And for all his influence, the first of her critical books, *The Second Sex*, has touched more lives and started more arguments than everything he wrote" (Walzer 1988: 154).

Although the KGB archives are closed to researchers, biographer Carole Seymour-Jones is of the opinion that Zonina was used as a decoy by Soviet Security: "Manipulated by the KGB, Sartre was a puppet on a string" (Seymour-Jones 2009: 424). De Beauvoir's books hardly delve into Sartre's complex, contradictory relationship with the communist reality. It is worth pointing out that, while believing in it as an idea in the 1960s, Sartre was an anti-Stalinist. De Beauvoir's assessment of Soviet cultural figures, too, divides them into anti-Stalinists and Stalinists. Among the latter, she included Mikhail Sholokhov for whom she immediately felt antipathy.

Being Sartre's travel companion, de Beauvoir rarely attended public events, except for meetings with local intellectuals. With a more relaxed schedule, she devoted her time to preparing for her travels and learning about the culture of the region, primarily by reading but also by watching films. She seemed to enjoy not only seeing new places, but also recognizing what she knew extramurally. For example, she compares an object in reality with its image in a classic Soviet film from 1925 by Sergei Eisenstein:

> Odessa. For me it meant above all the famous flight of steps of Battleship Potemkin. From above they are not very striking: from below, although a few have been taken away to leave room for the road running along the quays and although it no longer plunges straight into the sea, it is as impressive as it was in the film (De Beauvoir 1993: 322).

De Beauvoir visited many regions of the Soviet Union, including Uzbekistan, Georgia, Armenia, Estonia, Lithuania, Ukraine, and Moldova. She knew Russian and some East-Central European cultures not only from books, but also from her friends' stories. One of them was Stepha Awdykowicz-Gerassi who many years ago told her friend Simone de Beauvoir about her childhood in Lviv, then part of Poland. This is probably why de Beauvoir found herself in Lviv feeling a connection to her past, and why the city made a good impression on her, reinforced by her recognition of European culture in the landscape. She wrote:

> How remote it seemed to me in those days! And how the world has shrunk since then, seeing that I found it so natural to be there! The town is more akin to central Europe than to Russia. Its finest buildings were in the Austrian baroque manner, and they had lovely double-hipped green roofs. We went into a Catholic church; it was full of people all singing beautiful hymns, many of them young (De Beauvoir 1993: 323).

Personal connections seem to have influenced de Beauvoir's assessments. Of the Soviet republics visited, Estonia (and Tallinn in particular) is perhaps the one described with the greatest admiration. De Beauvoir admires the architecture, the culture of service and the understanding, tactful nature of the Francophile Sempers couple who accompany her. As Marek Tamm points out, it was Jean Cathala (1905–1991)

who persuaded Sartre and Beauvoir to visit Estonia.[5] Lacking emotional relationships and close sources of information, she often approaches these republics from a more touristic point of view, presenting their history with little or no insight into their literary and cultural situation. For example, she mentions the placenames of both Lithuania and Georgia, but does not mention the names of the people who, alongside Zonina, accompanied her on her travels in these republics. She refers to the president of the Georgian Writers' Union by his nickname, Prince, "because he came from a princely family" (De Beauvoir 1993: 297). Naturally, de Beauvoir could recall the nickname easier than the Georgian surname. Alexia, whom Beauvoir met in Paris and who was writing a thesis on Sartre, was the only Georgian whom Beauvoir addressed by her first name. Not knowing the local language, Zonina could not translate the Georgian table ceremony, which seemed long and boring to the guests. De Beauvoir did not question the relationship between the center and the periphery, although she notes that "[t]he Russians deported many Estonians immediately after the war merely because they were Estonians" (De Beauvoir 1993: 310). When writing about Lithuania, she mentioned that "it was not incorporated into the USSR without difficulty" and that "[a]t present it does not appear that Russians are much loved in Lithuania" (De Beauvoir 1993: 315). We know from the memoirs of disillusioned Lithuanian writers that Sartre, who was sensitive to the damages of colonialism, was expected to give at least symbolic support to their national culture, and that instead they were encouraged to write in the so-called "great languages" (Russian, English, or French).[6] This is just one detail that shows how different the expectations and interests of the two sides were.

Sartre was not an authority for everyone in the USSR either. In 1966, Solzhenitsyn refused to meet him, explaining that Sartre was being published and he was not, and that it would be too painful. According to de Beauvoir, this answer "surprised" them and was not quite clear; what they "did see quite clearly was the fact that for a writer the greatest curse of all was being condemned to silence, to darkness" (De Beauvoir 1993: 321). It is difficult to tell whether de Beauvoir did not see in this answer a diplomatic but categorical subtext that the Russian writer considers Sartre a henchman of the Soviet government persecuting writers.

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5 Jean Cathala, an acquaintance of Sartre's from the *École normale*, had taught French in Estonia from 1929 to 1941 and was now working in Moscow as a journalist and translator.

6 More on de Beauvoir's and Sartre's visit to Lithuania: Daugirdaitė 2015; Daugirdaitė 2018.

The rise and fall of the Thaw period By the time she wrote *Tout compte fait*, de Beauvoir and Sartre had already become disenchanted with the Soviet Union, both in terms of its foreign and domestic policies, and therefore felt no longer loyal to the country whose advocates and agents of influence on the global political stage they had been for almost two decades. However, they had never turned away from the people they had met in the USSR. The friends who remained behind the Iron Curtain, both in the USSR and Czechoslovakia, are the subject of de Beauvoir's regret with which she concludes Chapter 6 of *Tout compte fait*:

> I am writing these lines in May 1971 [..]. The Russians have finally disappointed all our hopes. Never has the situation of the intellectuals been so critical. None of our friends can obtain permission to come and see us anymore, and we know that they all feel completely powerless. Amalric[7] , for having told the truth about his country, has once again been sent to Siberia [..]. The Leningrad trial[8] has clearly shown the antisemitism that is so rife at government level in the USSR. Not without regret, I believe I shall never see Moscow again (De Beauvoir 1993, 336–337).

However, it would be too one-sided to suggest that de Beauvoir did not understand the difficult situation of the people living in the USSR. After denouncing the crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968, Sartre and de Beauvoir were no longer wanted in the USSR. Thus ended a decade of intensive communication not only with the country but also with specific people. It is likely that it was the realization that the friends who stayed in the USSR needed to continue living under the regime's conditions that prevented the writer from openly criticizing the Soviet system.

De Beauvoir's autobiographical narrative focuses on life events, countries, and people, as if accepting reality as it is. As de Beauvoir's concluding words in Chapter 6 of *Tout compte fait* make clear, it is not so much the failure of the hope of "communism with a human face" that is regretted, but the bonds of friendship she had formed with the people over the course of that decade of visits.

She paid the most attention to Moscow somewhat less to Leningrad, where the events that determined the general direction took place and where the guests from France spent the most time. Naturally, she identified with Russian literati and evaluated situations based on their positions. One of the most important sources of information was the writer Ilya Ehrenburg, who "told us all about Russian cultural life and its hidden sides" (De Beauvoir 1993: 282–283). De Beauvoir presents Ehrenburg as an intellectual who had lived in France for a long time between the two world

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7 Andrey Amalric (1938–1980) – Russian dissident. Forced to emigrate from the USSR in 1976.

8 In 1970, a group of 16 people planned to hijack a plane and escape to the West, but were intercepted. Although all were imprisoned, the case received international attention and Jews finally were allowed to emigrate from the USSR.

wars, who knew the Parisian artists of the time, and who had amassed an art collection that included works by Chagall, Léger, and Matisse. De Beauvoir and Sartre visited him both at his home in Moscow and at his dacha, were he "was very proud of having introduced a plant unknown in Russia: the artichoke" (De Beauvoir 1993: 283). In her portrayal of Ehrenburg, de Beauvoir mentions his views that are not close to her own, such as his restrained appreciation of modernist writers such as Kafka, Proust, and Joyce, and even his "no more than partial appreciation of Sartre's work" (De Beauvoir 1993: 283). Observing the material situation and even the health conditions of Russian writers, she draws wider conclusions about life in the USSR. Noting that Ehrenburg has "only one tooth left" and does not have dentures, de Beauvoir wonders why Russian dentists make their patients suffer. It is not clear whether de Beauvoir was aware of Ehrenburg's controversial articles as a Soviet propagandist during the World War II calling for the ruthless killing of Germans, which could have led to the Red Army's violence against civilians on German territory.

Another direct source of information on the situation was Jean Cathala in Moscow. Yefim Doroch, an art critic interested in agriculture who wrote about it in *Novy mir*, was more sympathetic to literary modernism than Ehrenburg, but did not speak French. It is difficult to be more precise about Lena Zonina's role in shaping the French visitor's view of Soviet reality, although it must have been very significant, if not the most significant. She accompanied the guests on their travels, offering her own interpretations of what they saw. De Beauvoir admired her organizational skills in navigating the complex situations that inevitably arose when foreigners travelled as individual tourists in a country full of prohibitions and restrictions. Zonina had a collaborative relationship with Ehrenburg: first she became his secretary, then Ehrenburg found her a job with the Writers' Union (De Beauvoir 1993: 285). Feeling threatened as Jews, Ehrenburg and Zonina made a significant contribution by informing guests about the manifestations of antisemitism in the USSR.

De Beauvoir captured the transition from the Thaw period to the Stagnation that occurred during that decade. During her first visits, the atmosphere in the country was still rather liberal and a desire to communicate with the West was still present: "Khrushchev asserted the necessity of a coexistence based upon peaceful competition" (De Beauvoir 1993: 282). De Beauvoir used to start with a panoramic view of literary events and would then go into the details. Her first visit is described optimistically:

> The liberalization of culture went on during the autumn of 1962. In October, with Khrushchev's consent, *Pravda* published Yevtushenko's poem *Nasledniki Stalina* (The Heirs of Stalin), which denounced the continuing existence of Stalinism – the poet called for the tripling of the guard over Stalin's tomb to prevent him from coming to life again. Khrushchev also allowed *Novy mir* to publish Solzhenitsyn's

book *Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha* (One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich), which described his experiences in the Stalinist camps (De Beauvoir 1993: 286).

Although Khrushchev had already cursed modern artists at the exhibition in the Manege, they still saw the exhibition and enjoyed modernist artists such as Falk, Tishler, and sculptor Ernst Neizvestny, whose works were soon withdrawn. Next year, in 1963, she again presented an overview:

> The cultural situation had deteriorated since the winter. On 8 March 1963, Khrushchev addressed an audience that included party and government leaders, writers and artists; it was a speech twenty thousand words long in which he [..] made a vehement attack on formalism and abstraction in writing and the fine arts, firing several broadsides at Ehrenburg, Nekrassov, Yevtushenko and even Paustovsky (De Beauvoir, 1993: 288).

In the following year, 1964, de Beauvoir presented subsequent events: the "cursed" painters were no longer exhibited, and only a few of them sold their paintings to foreigners "who were allowed to take photographs, ancient or modern, from outside the country for as long as the Tretyakov Gallery confirmed that they had no commercial value" (De Beauvoir 1993: 304). These and similar absurdities of Soviet reality are mentioned by the writer mostly without comment, but the very choice to mention them can be seen as a kind of criticism of the regime. There is also a subtle irony in her remarks on the constant changes in translation policy. She describes the situation of 1964 as follows:

> One of Kafka's stories, *A Report for an Academy*, had been translated, and there was talk of publishing *The Trial* – talk that came to nothing, however. In 1962 Brecht had been suspect: he strayed too far from socialist realism. In 1964 the theaters were opening to him: in Leningrad there was an excellent production of *Arturo Ui*. Lena had translated Sartre's *Words* (De Beauvoir 1993: 304).

The following year's account of a visit to the USSR continues this story: "Kafka was still not translated, although indeed he was now presented as a victim of capitalism and not as a decadent pessimist" (De Beauvoir 1993: 313). Contrary to the current image that life in the Soviet Union was monotonous, planned, and predictable, de Beauvoir presents it as chaotic, unpredictable, and constantly creating new obstacles to artists' work. She mentions the constantly changing situation of people who were important to her, such as Ehrenburg whose writings were being printed and withheld. She focuses on cinema that flourished in the post-war Europe. De Beauvoir noticed that local intellectuals and students, both in Lithuania and in Lviv, were asking questions about French *nouveau roman* and Italian neorealist cinema. During the Thaw period, a new wave of directors came to Soviet cinema, trying to introduce a more modern cinematic language.

The complexities of the filmmaking process were known only to a small circle of people involved, but the knowledge of the tortuous working processes circulated among intellectuals. Interest in the intricacies of film production was seen as an indicator of censorship activity, and de Beauvoir and Sartre were periodically informed of developments. It is worth noting in advance that the films whose production de Beauvoir retells are considered to be groundbreaking in the history of USSR cinema. On a visit in 1963, de Beauvoir recounts:

> Friends had told us of a film about the conflict between the generations called *The Lenin Barrier* that they had seen at a private showing; and they praised it very highly. Khrushchev tore it to pieces (De Beauvoir 1993: 288).

Writing about her visit to the USSR the following year, de Beauvoir notes the complicated history of the film: "*The Lenin Barrier* was still under the censors' ban: The film only came out much later, and then in a deformed and mutilated version" (De Beauvoir 1993: 288). In 1964, another talented young filmmaker comes to the attention of Moscow's intellectuals, including de Beauvoir: "Tarkovsky was making a film about Rublov: They forced him to rewrite his script, and he foresaw that there were going to be great difficulties" (De Beauvoir 1993: 304). Writing about her visit to the USSR in 1965, she returns again to the story of this film: "And Tarkovsky still could not get permission to make his film of Rublov. But it did seem that hope was allowable" (De Beauvoir 1993: 313).

De Beauvoir admired neither Khrushchev's policies nor him personally, so the changes at the top of political hierarchy in the autumn of 1964, when Leonid Brezhnev took over the country, initially even gave hope that culture would be able to develop more freely. She wrote of the perhaps "happy consequences" for culture: Solzhenitsyn, Akhmatova, and Pasternak were released. The improving situation of Joseph Brodsky was probably also encouraging for a while. As early as 1964, Ehrenburg gave a detailed account of Brodsky's case:

> He gave us the inside story of the Brodsky affair: it was one that all our friends found very painful indeed – some went so far as to speak of a 'return of Stalinism' – but they did not know the details. Brodsky was a young red-haired Jew who lived in Leningrad and who wrote poems; he earned his living as a translator, but he was not part of any state organization, and he did not belong to the Writers' Union (De Beauvoir 1993: 304).

De Beauvoir recites Brodsky's speech in court, emphasizing the anti-semitic and anti-intellectual nature of the case. In 1965, Sartre signed a petition to Anastas Mikoyan, Chairman of the Supreme Council of the USSR. The academic Vyacheslav Ivanov recalls that, in an attempt to rescue Brodsky from exile, he asked Zonina to talk to Sartre: "It seems that it was his appeal that played a decisive role" (Ivanov 2009: 33). However, other anti-semitic dissident trials, notably of Andrei Sinyavsky

and Yuli Daniel who were accused of having published anti-Soviet works abroad under pseudonyms, and finally the events in Czechoslovakia brought to an end their period of travels to the USSR once and for all.

Conclusion

From the post-Soviet perspective, de Beauvoir has been and continues to be criticized for being too tolerant of the Soviet reality in *Tout compte fait*. Nevertheless, she managed to capture the contradictions of the 1960s – the constant and unpredictable changes in cultural policy, the optimism mixed with a sense of the absurd, and the efforts of people to create under the most adverse conditions. These qualities of the people made de Beauvoir admire them despite the ambiguity of her relationship with the USSR.

This last volume of her autobiography shows Beauvoir's own aestheticized way of traveling: She seems to follow literary and cinematic texts and the sentiments of close people and friends, having formed a preconceived image. Although critics point to a certain stagnation of her personality during this period, *Tout compte fait* reveals the evolution of her views on the Soviet system. Although the socialist state impressed left-wing intellectuals, a first-hand encounter with it led to a gradual disintegration of the Soviet myth, as they observed the details which, for the philosopher and cultural critic, eloquently testified to the contradictory nature of the Soviet system.

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