

THE CULTURAL COLD WAR

THE CIA AND THE WORLD
OF ARTS AND LETTERS

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PREFACE TO THE 2013 EDITION

It took five years to complete this book, a period I remember with mixed emotions. For some inexplicable reason, I did most of the archive research in the spring and summer months, and so condemned myself to a netherworld of neon lighting and air-conditioning set permanently to morgue temperature. In Abilene, Kansas, I would drive back to my motel from the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library just as the sun was dipping over the horizon, accompanied by a stack of photocopied documents that wobbled on the passenger seat beside me—my catch of the day, landed with the net of curiosity (obsession?) and the single hooked line of luck. In Austin, Texas, I became the sole twilight pedestrian on the dusty fringe of the busy road leading from the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center to the overpass that shouldered my gloomy downtown lodgings. In this motel all the bath plugs had been removed to prevent people killing themselves by introducing a toaster or other electrical appliance to their bathwater. I never felt suicidal, but the lack of any contact with the natural world did feel, at times, like some kind of cosmic rebuke for my enterprise.

There was exhilaration, too, moments of table-thumping joy at some unexpected treasure thrown up by a piece of paper to which I was paying only cursory attention. These accidental finds are a compelling argument for the importance of primary over online research. If I can advertise one serious advantage to being welded to a desk in an archive, while all the world seems to be sunbathing outside, it is this: the thrill of connections made, of strings pulled in the tangle that result not in loose ends or Gordian knots but in “evidence” and strong lines of inquiry.

Anxiety often followed. As I bundled up blocks of documents to send home (there were simply too many to carry about with me), I fretted they would go astray. They went by freight, as airmail was too expensive, and I always arrived home months before they did. But every package was delivered in due course. The archive grew and grew and was stored in boxes under my bed for many years until Professor Scott Lucas of the

Department of American and Canadian studies at Birmingham University kindly agreed to take it. There it can be consulted rather more conveniently than in the previous arrangement.

There was also fear. Not of the kind my mother experienced (she was convinced I would be kidnapped by the CIA, though it was my impression they were busy with other things). It was the fear of being manipulated or played. Some deceptions are so gristly they can't be swallowed; others beguile the palate and are more easily digested. Many of the people I interviewed were professional persuaders, trained in the art of the lie ("necessary," "noble," "patriotic," or otherwise)—it follows that their claims to be speaking the truth would be hard to assess. Alongside the easy patriotism, the scruples about oaths of secrecy and codes of honor, the betrayals came easily too: So-and-so didn't know his ass from a hole in the road; So-and-so couldn't keep his pants on; So-and-so's wife had an affair with the president and then she was murdered. Office tittle-tattle. But occasionally, there was a more sinister side, indiscretion aimed like a *Flammenwerfer* to scorch reputations.

Conversely, those who had contracted themselves to a deception against their better nature and without any formal training were often transparently bad liars. Is this too strong? Who was I to put myself in the position of inquisitor? How could I properly represent this history that I had not lived through or understand the urgent and fearful realities of the postwar world, the intricate and competing realignments in culture, politics, and the politics of culture? Writing to me after the book was published, Irving Kristol dismissed my "whole political-ideological perspective" as "sanctimonious." Another correspondent reported jubilantly that "Walter Laqueur hated [the book] and suspected that it had been written by a Catholic priest."

I am equipped with none of the certainties of that role. My sympathies are with Voltaire, who argued that anyone who is certain ought to be certified. I believe that Milan Kundera's "wisdom of uncertainty" is a touchstone for all intellectual inquiry. *The Cultural Cold War* could be characterized as a polemic against conviction (which can be distinguished from faith or belief or values) and the strategies used to mobilize one conviction against another. In the highly politicized context of the cultural cold war, this refusal to take sides was designated, pejoratively, as relativism or neutralism. It was not a position or sensibility tolerated by either side—both the Soviet Union and the United States were committed to undermining the case for neutralism, and in the theater of operations which is the focus of this book, Western Europe, that campaign devolved from very similar tactics.

This is not to draw a moral equivalence between the two sides. I do not accept, as some critics have argued, that this book is soft on Communism, that it underestimates the lack of freedom, the permanent menace, the grim headlocks placed on culture in the Soviet Union and its satellite states. Shostakovich was depressed? He had every reason to be. But when a portrait bust was commissioned by the Soviet Committee for the Arts, its chairman decreed, “What we need is an optimistic Shostakovich.” (Privately, the composer was delighted by the oxymoron.) My interest is in intellectual freedom, and the totalitarian state cannot countenance the Shostakovich who broods on death and mocks false hopes; it demands an officially regulated intellectual—indeed, existential—orthodoxy. Democracy does not. By its very nature, it is open to all ideas, and for this reason it will inevitably find itself containing some degree of totalitarian ideas.

There is a difference between the penetration of democratic debate by a rival ideology and takeover by a totalitarian regime. Joseph McCarthy and those anti-Communists who furnished his crusade with intellectual justification were blind to this distinction. As Hugh Trevor-Roper put it when I interviewed him in 1994, “The statement that whoever is not for us is against us, [that] we must take as allies anyone who is sufficiently opposed to Communism, and that political virtue must be measured by the extent and depth of people’s opposition to Communism—well, in that case, Hitler would’ve been an ally.” In the name of democracy, McCarthyism reached for totalitarian tools. Is it pious or lofty to suggest that this was a stain on the American conscience? After all, there were no gulags in the United States. Or so runs the defense of lesser-evilism. As an argument, I think it proceeds from what Isaiah Berlin termed “counter-enlightenment,” as in irrational, thought. Why would a democracy congratulate itself on not having gulags?

The counterfactual imagination thrived in the Cold War. George Orwell’s concept of “doublethink” (a cliché now, but only because it was so apt in the original) exposed the mechanisms by which ideologues tamper with reality. Doublethink is, *inter alia*, “to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies . . . to use logic against logic, to repudiate morality while laying claim to it.” Orwell, of course, was warning of the compromising manipulations by which the totalitarian state asserts itself. Yet it was doublethink that gave us a Congress for Cultural Freedom that was sponsored, managed, and ultimately decapitated by a CIA that was simultaneously supporting and installing right-wing dictatorships; that commanded credibility for a campaign called “Militant Liberty”; that saw the insistence on paying any price for

freedom plunge the anti-Communist cause into the jungles of Vietnam; that conjured the Nobel Peace Prize for Henry Kissinger in 1973 (prompting Tom Lehrer to say he would retire from comedy, for there was no way he could out-satirize the Stockholm committee).

The Cold War was frighteningly real—it was not a protracted argument about a shop window. But it produced false realities, and *The Cultural Cold War* asks to what degree intellectuals became embroiled in these counterfeits and, more controversially, enlarged them. It is not so much an intellectual history as a history of intellectuals, and of New York intellectuals in particular, that powerfully strange mix of men and women who supplied the front ranks of the cultural Cold War. They inhabited a hothouse of ideological and literary debate out of which grew a number of important works (Daniel Bell's *The End of Ideology*, Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*, to name a few). At first their arguments were restricted to the cramped pages of the *Partisan Review*, *Commentary*, and the other "little magazines." Then, as part of the cultural consortium put together by the CIA (with or without their knowledge), they suddenly acquired an international audience.

These cold warriors, unable to shrug off the habit (and intellectual style) of radical dissatisfaction, unwilling to reach out beyond this identity, were not mellowed by the collapse of Communism. Meeting with them was always an invigorating experience, sometimes a bruising one. The object of their arguments was gone, and they entered old age grimmer for the loss of this adversary. Now, creaking in their saddles, they tilted their rusty lances at new targets—the women's movement, the New Left, Black Power, single mothers, immigration, people who failed to stand up when the national anthem was played. This wave of "liberation" was not the freedom they had hoped for; it crashed over them and left them stranded. I remember Cord Meyer chewing through a fillet steak (and my last dollars) at a Washington restaurant, pausing only to spit out a peevish remark about how the sole achievement of multiculturalism was to make it impossible to find a waiter who could speak proper English. A few days later, Irving Kristol apologized to me for the "stupid" menu—"Mexican Week"—on offer in the canteen of the American Enterprise Institute, before pointedly ordering a hamburger.

Democracy had become too democratic and was no longer responding to the advice of its wise men. The new generation didn't need them. They had argued the world and lost. When I think of them, I think of Gertrude Stein's observation that "America's the oldest country in the world, because it was the first to enter the twentieth century."

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The Cultural Cold War has had its share of adventures. Publication in the UK in 1999 kicked off with a current affairs radio program whose guests were a prominent barrister, Henry Kissinger, and me. I was moved to silence by nerves and became fixated on Kissinger's fingernails, which were bitten down to the quick. He left the studio mid-broadcast, apparently unhappy with the suggestion that the bombing of Cambodia and the overthrow of Salvador Allende were illegal. In the United States, the book was rejected at final draft stage by the original publisher, who argued that I had given insufficient weight to the notion that "America's cause was just" and "the CIA et al were on the side of the angels." And so it finally appeared not under the imprint of The Free Press (another oxymoron?), but under the good auspices of André Schiffrin at The New Press. At a presentation of the book in Rome, I was sandwiched between two speakers who became so enraged that they lunged at each other. My publisher intervened before shirt collars were torn. At a reception in London in 2007, I was introduced to then-Prime Minister Gordon Brown, who said he had read the book with great interest and thought that a program of cultural warfare would be a very good thing in the current circumstances. As the reader of this book will understand, it was not my proudest moment.

Since it was first published in English in 1999, *The Cultural Cold War* has appeared in French, German, Italian, Arabic, Turkish, Bulgarian, Chinese, Portuguese, Greek, and Spanish. A Russian edition is currently being prepared. I am greatly indebted to all the editors and translators who have made this possible.

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INTRODUCTION

The way to carry out good propaganda is never to appear to be carrying it out at all.

Richard Crossman

During the height of the Cold War, the U.S. government committed vast resources to a secret program of cultural propaganda in Western Europe. A central feature of this program was to advance the claim that it did not exist. It was managed, in great secrecy, by America's espionage arm, the Central Intelligence Agency. The centerpiece of this covert campaign was the Congress for Cultural Freedom, run by CIA agent Michael Josselson from 1950 until 1967. Its achievements—not least its duration—were considerable. At its peak, the Congress for Cultural Freedom had offices in thirty-five countries, employed dozens of personnel, published over twenty prestige magazines, held art exhibitions, owned a news and features service, organized high-profile international conferences, and rewarded musicians and artists with prizes and public performances. Its mission was to nudge the intelligentsia of Western Europe away from its lingering fascination with Marxism and Communism towards a view more accommodating of “the American way.”

Drawing on an extensive, highly influential network of intelligence personnel, political strategists, the corporate establishment, and the old school ties of the Ivy League universities, the incipient CIA started, from 1947, to build a “consortium” whose double task it was to inoculate the world against the contagion of Communism and to ease the passage of American foreign policy interests abroad. The result was a remarkably tight network of people who worked alongside the Agency to promote an idea: that the world needed a *pax Americana*, a new age of enlightenment, and it would be called the American Century.

The consortium the CIA built up—consisting of what Henry Kissinger described as “an aristocracy dedicated to the service of this nation on behalf of principles beyond partisanship”—was the hidden weapon in America's Cold War struggle, a weapon which, in the cultural field,

had extensive fallout. Whether they liked it or not, whether they knew it or not, there were few writers, poets, artists, historians, scientists, or critics in postwar Europe whose names were not in some way linked to this covert enterprise. Unchallenged, undetected for over twenty years, America's spying establishment operated a sophisticated, substantially endowed cultural front in the West, *for* the West, in the name of freedom of expression. Defining the Cold War as a "battle for men's minds," it stockpiled a vast arsenal of cultural weapons: journals, books, conferences, seminars, art exhibitions, concerts, awards.

Membership of this consortium included an assorted group of former radicals and leftist intellectuals whose faith in Marxism and Communism had been shattered by evidence of Stalinist totalitarianism. Emerging from the Pink Decade of the 1930s, mourned by Arthur Koestler as an "abortive revolution of the spirit, a misfired Renaissance, a false dawn of history,"¹ their disillusionment was attended by a readiness to join in a new consensus, to affirm a new order which would substitute for the spent forces of the past. The tradition of radical dissenter, where intellectuals took it upon themselves to probe myths, interrogate institutional prerogative, and disturb the complacency of power, was suspended in favor of supporting "the American proposition." Endorsed and subsidized by powerful institutions, this non-Communist group became as much a cartel in the intellectual life of the West as Communism had been a few years earlier (and it included many of the same people).

"There came a time . . . when, apparently, life lost the ability to arrange itself," says Charlie Citrine, the narrator of Saul Bellow's *Humboldt's Gift*. "It had to *be* arranged. Intellectuals took this as their job. From, say, Machiavelli's time to our own this arranging has been the one great gorgeous tantalizing misleading disastrous project. A man like Humboldt, inspired, shrewd, nutty, was brimming over with the discovery that the human enterprise, so grand and infinitely varied, had now to be managed by exceptional persons. He was an exceptional person, therefore he was an eligible candidate for power. Well, why not?"² Like so many Humboldts, those intellectuals who had been betrayed by the false idol of Communism now found themselves gazing at the possibility of building a new Weimar, an American Weimar. If the government—and its covert action arm, the CIA—was prepared to assist in this project, well, why not?

That former left-wingers should have come to be roped together in the same enterprise with the CIA is less implausible than it seems. There was a genuine community of interest and conviction between the Agency and those intellectuals who were hired, even if they didn't know it, to fight

the cultural Cold War. The CIA's influence was not "always, or often, reactionary and sinister,"³ wrote America's preeminent liberal historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. "In my experience its leadership was politically enlightened and sophisticated."⁴ This view of the CIA as a haven of liberalism acted as a powerful inducement to collaborate with it—or, if not this, at least to acquiesce to the myth that it was well motivated. And yet this perception sits uncomfortably with the CIA's reputation as a ruthlessly interventionist and frighteningly unaccountable instrument of American Cold War power. This was the organization that masterminded the overthrow of Premier Mossadegh in Iran in 1953, the ousting of the Arbenz government in Guatemala in 1954, the disastrous Bay of Pigs operation in 1961, the notorious Phoenix Program in Vietnam. It spied on tens of thousands of Americans; harassed democratically elected leaders abroad; plotted assassinations; denied these activities to Congress; and, in the process, elevated the art of lying to new heights. By what strange alchemy, then, did the CIA manage to present itself to high-minded intellectuals like Arthur Schlesinger as the golden vessel of cherished liberalism?

The extent to which America's spying establishment extended its reach into the cultural affairs of its Western allies, acting as unacknowledged facilitator to a broad range of creative activity, positioning intellectuals and their work like chess pieces to be played in the Great Game, remains one of the Cold War's most provocative legacies. The defense mounted by custodians of the period—which rests on the claim that the CIA's substantial financial investment came with no strings attached—has yet to be seriously challenged. Amongst intellectual circles in America and Western Europe there persists a readiness to accept as true that the CIA was merely interested in extending the possibilities for free and democratic cultural expression. "We simply helped people to say what they would have said anyway," goes this "blank check" line of defense. If the beneficiaries of CIA funds were ignorant of the fact, the argument goes, and if their behavior was consequently unmodified, then their independence as critical thinkers could not have been affected.

But official documents relating to the cultural Cold War systematically undermine this myth of altruism. The individuals and institutions subsidized by the CIA were expected to perform as part of a broad campaign of persuasion, of a propaganda war in which "propaganda" was defined as "any organized effort or movement to disseminate information or a particular doctrine by means of news, special arguments or appeals designed to influence the thoughts and actions of any given group."⁵ A vital constituent of this effort was "psychological warfare," which was defined

as “[t]he planned use by a nation of propaganda and activities other than combat which communicate ideas and information intended to influence the opinions, attitudes, emotions and behavior of foreign groups in ways that will support the achievement of national aims.” Further, the “most effective kind of propaganda” was defined as the kind where “*the subject moves in the direction you desire for reasons which he believes to be his own.*”⁶ It is useless to dispute these definitions. They are littered across government documents, the *données* of American postwar cultural diplomacy.

Clearly, by camouflaging its investment, the CIA acted on the supposition that its blandishments would be refused if offered openly. What kind of freedom can be advanced by such deception? Freedom of any kind certainly wasn’t on the agenda in the Soviet Union, where those writers and intellectuals who were not sent to the gulags were lassoed into serving the interests of the state. It was of course right to oppose such unfreedom. But with what means? Was there any real justification for assuming that the principles of Western democracy couldn’t be revived in postwar Europe according to some internal mechanism? Or for not assuming that democracy could be more complex than was implied by the lauding of American liberalism? To what degree was it admissible for another state to covertly intervene in the fundamental processes of organic intellectual growth, of free debate and the uninhibited flow of ideas? Did this not risk producing, instead of freedom, a kind of ur-freedom, where people think they are acting freely when in fact they are bound to forces over which they have no control?

The CIA’s engagement in cultural warfare raises other troubling questions. Did financial aid distort the process by which intellectuals and their ideas were advanced? Were people selected for their positions, rather than on the basis of intellectual merit? What did Arthur Koestler mean when he lampooned the “international academic call-girl circuit” of intellectual conferences and symposia? Were reputations secured or enhanced by membership of the CIA’s cultural consortium? How many of those writers and thinkers who acquired an international audience for their ideas were really second-raters, ephemeral publicists, whose works were doomed to the basements of secondhand bookstores?

In 1966, a series of articles appeared in the *New York Times* exposing a wide range of covert action undertaken by America’s intelligence community. As stories of attempted coups and (mostly botched) political assassinations poured onto the front pages, the CIA came to be characterized as a rogue elephant, crashing through the scrubland of international politics, unimpeded by any sense of accountability. Amidst these more

dramatic cloak-and-dagger exposés came details of how the American government had looked to the cultural Brahmins of the West to lend intellectual weight to its actions.

The suggestion that many intellectuals had been animated by the dictates of American policy makers rather than by independent standards of their own generated widespread disgust. The moral authority enjoyed by the intelligentsia during the height of the Cold War was now seriously undermined and frequently mocked. The “consensocracy” was falling apart, the center could not hold. And as it disintegrated, so the story itself became fragmented, partial, modified—sometimes egregiously—by forces on the right and left who wished to twist its peculiar truths to their own ends. Ironically, the circumstances which made possible the revelations contributed to their real significance becoming obscured. As America’s obsessive anti-Communist campaign in Vietnam brought her to the brink of social collapse, and with subsequent scandals on the scale of the Pentagon Papers and Watergate, it was hard to sustain interest or outrage in the business of Kulturkampf, which in comparison seemed to be fluff on the side.

“History,” wrote Archibald MacLeish, “is like a badly constructed concert hall, [with] dead spots where the music can’t be heard.”⁷ This book attempts to record those dead spots. It seeks a different acoustic, a tune other than that played by the official virtuosi of the period. It is a secret history, insofar as it believes in the relevance of the power of personal relationships, of “soft” linkages and collusions, and the significance of salon diplomacy and boudoir politicking. It challenges what Gore Vidal has described as “those official fictions that have been agreed upon by all together too many too interested parties, each with his own thousand days in which to set up his own misleading pyramids and obelisks that purport to tell sun time.” Any history which sets out to interrogate these “agreed-upon facts” must, in Tzvetan Todorov’s words, become “an act of profanity. It is not about contributing to the cult of heroes and saints. It’s about coming as close as possible to the truth. It participates in what Max Weber called the ‘disenchantment of the world’; it exists at the other end of the spectrum from idolatry. It’s about redeeming the truth for truth’s sake, not retrieving images that are deemed useful for the present.”⁸

Exquisite Corpse

Here is a place of disaffection
 Time before and time after
 In a dim light

T.S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton"

Europe awoke to a freezing postwar dawn. The winter of 1947 was the worst ever recorded. From January to late March, it opened a front across Germany, Italy, France, and Britain, and advanced with complete lack of mercy. Snow fell in St. Tropez, gale-force winds building up impenetrable drifts; ice floes drifted to the mouth of the Thames; trains carrying food supplies froze fast to the tracks; barges bringing coal into Paris became ice-bound. There, the philosopher Isaiah Berlin found himself "terrified" by the city's coldness, "empty and hollow and dead, like an exquisite corpse."

Across Europe, water services, sewage disposal, and most other essential amenities collapsed; food supplies dwindled and coal reserves slumped to an all-time low as miners struggled to operate winding gear which was frozen solid. A slight thaw was followed by a further freeze-up, locking canals and roads under a thick layer of ice. In Britain, unemployment rose by one million in two months. The government and industry stalled in the snow and ice. Life itself seemed to freeze: more than 4 million sheep and 50,000 cattle died.

In Berlin, Willy Brandt, the future chancellor, saw a "new terror" grip the city which most symbolized the collapse of Europe. The icy cold "attacked the people like a savage beast, driving them into their homes. But there they found no respite. The windows had no panes, they were nailed up with planks and plasterboard. The walls and ceilings were full of cracks and holes, which people covered over with paper and rags. People heated their rooms with benches from public parks . . . the old and sick froze to death in their beds by the hundreds."¹

In an emergency measure, each German family was allotted one tree for heating. By early 1946, the Tiergarten had already been hacked down to stumps, its statues left standing in a wilderness of frozen mud; by the winter of 1947, the woods in the famous Grünewald had been razed. The snow drifts which buried the rubble of a bombed-out city could not conceal the devastating legacy of Hitler's mythomaniacal dream for Germany. Berlin, like a ruined Carthage, was a desperate, cold, haunted place—defeated, conquered, occupied.

The weather cruelly drove home the physical reality of the Cold War, carving its way into the new, post-Yalta topography of Europe, its national territories mutilated, the composition of its populations fractured. Allied occupation governments in France, Germany, Austria, and Italy struggled to cope with the 13 million people who were displaced, homeless, demobilized. The swelling ranks of Allied personnel arriving in the occupied territories exacerbated the problem. More and more people were turned out of their homes, to join those already sleeping in halls, stairways, cellars, and bomb sites. Clarissa Churchill, as a guest of the British Control Commission in Berlin, found herself "protected both geographically and materially from the full impact of the chaos and misery existing in the city. Waking in the warm bedroom of some Nazi's ex-home, feeling the lace-edged sheets, studying his shelf of books, even these simple experiences gave me a warning tinge of conqueror's delirium, which a short walk in the streets or a visit to an unheated German flat immediately dissipated."²

These were heady days for the victors. In 1947, a carton of American cigarettes, costing fifty cents in an American base, was worth 1,800 Reichsmarks on the black market, or \$180 at the legal rate of exchange. For four cartons of cigarettes, at this rate, you could hire a German orchestra for the evening. Or for twenty-four cartons, you could acquire a 1939 Mercedes-Benz. Penicillin and *Persilscheine* (whiter than white) certificates, which cleared the holder of any Nazi connections, commanded the highest prices. With this kind of economic whammy, working-class soldiers from Idaho could live like modern tsars.

In Paris, Lieutenant-Colonel Victor Rothschild, the first British soldier to arrive on the day of liberation in his capacity as bomb-disposal expert, had reclaimed his family house on Avenue de Marigny, which had been requisitioned by the Nazis. There he entertained the young intelligence officer Malcolm Muggeridge with vintage champagne. The family butler, who had continued to work in the house under the Germans, remarked that nothing seemed to have changed. The Ritz Hotel, requisitioned by millionaire intelligence officer John Hay Whitney, received

David Bruce, a Princeton friend of F. Scott Fitzgerald, who turned up with Ernest Hemingway and a private army of liberators, and put in an order for fifty martini cocktails from the manager. Hemingway—who, like David Bruce, had served in America's wartime secret service, the Office of Strategic Services—set himself and his whisky bottles up at the Ritz, and there, in an alcoholic daze, received a nervous Eric Blair (George Orwell), and the more forthright Simone de Beauvoir with her lover Jean-Paul Sartre (who drank himself to oblivion and recorded the worst hangover of his life).

The philosopher and intelligence officer A.J. “Freddie” Ayer, author of *Language, Truth and Logic*, became a familiar sight in Paris as he sped about in a large chauffeur-driven Bugatti, complete with army radio. Arthur Koestler and his lover Mamaine Paget “got tight” dining with André Malraux on vodka, caviar, and blinis, balyk and *soufflé sibérienne*. Also in Paris, Susan Mary Alsop, a young American diplomat's wife, hosted a series of parties in her “lovely house full of Aubusson carpets and good American soap.” But when she stepped outside, she found that the faces were “all hard and worn and full of suffering. There really is no food except for people who can afford the black market and not much for them. The pastry shops are empty—in the windows of teashops like Rumpelmayer's, one sees one elaborate cardboard cake or an empty box of chocolates, with a sign saying ‘model’ and nothing else. In the windows of shops on the Faubourg St. Honoré are proudly displayed one pair of shoes marked ‘real leather’ or ‘model’ surrounded by hideous things made of straw. Outside the Ritz I threw away a cigarette butt and a well-dressed old gentleman pounced for it.”³

At much the same time, the young composer Nicolas Nabokov, cousin of the novelist Vladimir, was throwing away a cigarette butt in the Soviet sector of Berlin: “When I started back, a figure bolted out of the dark and picked up the cigarette I had thrown away.”⁴ As the super race scavenged for cigarette ends or firewood or food, the ruins of the Führer's bunker were left unmarked and barely noticed by Berliners. But on Saturdays, Americans serving with the military government would explore with flashlights the cellars of Hitler's ruined Reichs Chancellery and pocket their exotic finds: Romanian pistols, thick rolls of half-burned currency, iron crosses and other decorations. One looter discovered the ladies' cloak-room and lifted some brass coat tags inscribed with the Nazi eagle and the word *Reichskanzlei*. *Vogue* photographer Lee Miller, who had once been Man Ray's muse, posed fully dressed in Hitler's bunker bathtub.

The fun soon wore off. Divided into four sectors and sitting like a crow's nest in a sea of Soviet-controlled territory, Berlin had become “the

traumatic synecdoche of the Cold War.”⁵ Ostensibly working together in the Allied *Kommandatura* to achieve the “denazification” and “re-orientation” of Germany, the four powers struggled against strengthening ideological winds which revealed a bleak international situation. “I felt no animosity to the Soviets,” wrote Michael Josselson, an American officer of Estonian-Russian extraction. “In fact I was apolitical at that time and this made it much easier for me to maintain excellent personal relationships with most of the Soviet officers I came to know.”⁶ But with the imposition of “friendly” governments in the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence and the mass show trials and swelling gulags in Russia itself, this collaborative spirit was severely tested. By the winter of 1947, less than two years after American and Russian soldiers had hugged each other on the banks of the Elbe, that embrace had dissolved into a snarl. “It was only after Soviet policies became openly aggressive, and when stories of atrocities committed in the Soviet zone of occupation became a daily occurrence . . . and when the Soviet propaganda became crudely anti-Western, that my political conscience was awakened,”⁷ Josselson recorded.

The headquarters of the Office of Military Government U.S. was known as “OMGUS,” which Germans initially took to mean “bus” in English because it was painted on the sides of double-decker buses requisitioned by the Americans. When they were not spying on the other three powers, OMGUS officers found themselves behind desks piled high with columns of the ubiquitous *Fragebogen* every German seeking a job was obliged to fill in, answering questions relating to nationality, religion, criminal record, education, professional qualifications, employment and military service, writings and speeches, income and assets, travel abroad, and of course political affiliations. Screening the entire German population for even the faintest trace of “Nazism and militarism” was a deadly, bureaucratic task—and often frustrating. Whilst a janitor could be black-listed for having swept the corridors of the Reichs Chancellery, many of Hitler’s industrialists, scientists, administrators, and even high-ranking officers were being quietly reinstated by the Allied powers in a desperate effort to keep Germany from collapsing.

For one intelligence officer, the filling out of endless forms was no way to deal with the complex legacy of the Nazi regime. Michael Josselson adopted a different approach. “I didn’t know Josselson then, but I had heard of him,” recalled the philosopher Stuart Hampshire, who at that time was working for MI6 in London. “His reputation had spread across Europe’s intelligence grapevine. He was the big fixer, the man who could get anything done. *Anything*. If you wanted to get across the Russian

border, which was virtually impossible, Josselson would fix it. If you needed a symphonic orchestra, Josselson would fix it.”⁸

Speaking four languages fluently without a hint of an accent, Michael Josselson was a valuable asset in the ranks of American occupation officers. Furthermore, he knew Berlin inside out. Born in Tartu, Estonia, in 1908, the son of a Jewish timber merchant, he had arrived in Berlin for the first time in the early 1920s, swept along in the Baltic diaspora which followed the 1917 revolution. With most of his close family murdered by the Bolsheviks, return to Tartu was impossible, and he became a member of that generation of men and women whom Arthur Koestler referred to as the “scum of the earth”—the *déracinés*, people whose lives had been broken by the twentieth century, their identity with their homelands ruptured. Josselson had attended the University of Berlin but left before taking a degree to join the Gimbels-Saks department stores as a buyer, becoming their representative in Paris. In 1936 he immigrated to the States and shortly thereafter became an American citizen.

After he was inducted into the Army in 1943, his European background made him an obvious candidate for either intelligence work or psychological warfare. He was duly assigned to the Intelligence Section of the Psychological Warfare Division (PWD) in Germany, where he joined a special seven-man interrogation team (nicknamed “Kampfgruppe Rosenberg,” after its leader Captain Albert G. Rosenberg). The team’s mission was to interrogate hundreds of German prisoners every week, for the purpose of “rapidly separating strong Nazis from non-Nazis, lies from truthful responses, voluble from tongue-tied personalities.”⁹ Discharged in 1946, Josselson stayed on in Berlin with the American military government as a cultural affairs officer, then with the State Department and the U.S. High Commission as a public affairs officer. In this capacity, he was assigned to the “screening of personnel” in the German press, radio, and entertainment media, all of which were suspended “pending the removal of Nazis.”

Assigned to the same division was Nicolas Nabokov, a White Russian émigré who had lived in Berlin before immigrating to the United States in 1933. Tall, handsome, expansive, Nabokov was a man who cultivated friendships (and wives) with great ease and charm. During the 1920s, his flat in Berlin had become a center of émigré cultural life, an intellectual goulash of writers, scholars, artists, politicians, and journalists. Amongst this cosmopolitan group of exiles was Michael Josselson. In the mid-1930s, Nabokov went to America, where he wrote what he modestly described as “the first American ballet,” *Union Pacific*, with Archibald MacLeish. He shared a small studio with Henri Cartier-Bresson in New

York for a while, when neither had any money. Nabokov later wrote that “to Cartier-Bresson the Communist movement was the bearer of history, of mankind’s future. . . . I shared many of [his] views, but, despite the gnawing longing for my Russian fatherland, I could not accept nor espouse the philo-Communist attitude of so many Western European and American intellectuals. I felt that they were curiously blind to the realities of Russian Communism and were only reacting to the fascist tides that were sweeping Europe in the wake of the Depression. To a certain degree I felt that the philo-Communism of the mid-thirties was a passing fad, cleverly nurtured by a mythology about the Russian Bolshevik Revolution shaped by the Soviet Agitprop Apparatus.”¹⁰

In 1945, alongside W.H. Auden and John Kenneth Galbraith, Nabokov joined the Morale Division of the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey Unit in Germany, where he met psychological warfare personnel, and subsequently got a job in the Information Control Division alongside his old acquaintance Michael Josselson. As a composer, Nabokov was assigned to the music section, where he was expected to “establish good psychological and cultural weapons with which to destroy Nazism and promote a genuine desire for a democratic Germany.”¹¹ His task was “to eject the Nazis from German musical life and license those German musicians (giving them the right to exercise their profession) whom we believed to be ‘clean’ Germans,” and to “control the programmes of German concerts and see to it that they would not turn into nationalist manifestations.” Introducing Nabokov at a party, one American general said, “He’s hep on music and tells the Krauts how to go about it.”¹²

Josselson and Nabokov became a congenial, if unlikely, pair. Nabokov was emotionally extravagant, physically demonstrative, and always late; Josselson was reserved, high-minded, and scrupulous. But they did share the same language of exile, and of attachment to the new world, America, which both believed to be the only place where the future of the old world could be secured. The drama and intrigue of postwar Berlin appealed to something in both men, giving them scope to exercise their talents as operators and innovators. Together, Nabokov later wrote, they both “did a good deal of successful Nazi-hunting and put on ice a few famous conductors, pianists, singers and a number of orchestral musicians (most of whom had well deserved it and some of whom should be there today).”¹⁵ Often going against the grain of official thinking, they took a pragmatic view of denazification. They refused to accept that the actions of artists under Germany’s Nazi past could be treated as a phenomenon *sui generis*, with judgment meted out according to the rendering of a *Fragebogen*. “Josselson genuinely believed that the role of intellectuals in

a very difficult situation shouldn't be decided in an instant," a colleague later explained. "He understood that Nazism in Germany had all been a mixed grotesquerie. Americans had no idea, in general. They just waded in and pointed the finger."¹⁴

In 1947, the conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler was the subject of particular opprobrium. Although he had openly defied the branding of Paul Hindemith as a "degenerate," he later arrived at a mutually beneficial accommodation with the Nazi regime. Furtwängler, who was appointed Prussian state councillor, as well as holding other high posts bestowed by the Nazis, continued to conduct the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra and the Berlin State Opera throughout the Third Reich. By December 1946, a year and a half after his case had first been brought to the attention of the Allied Control Commission, the conductor was due to appear before the Tribunal for Artists assembled in Berlin. The case was heard over two days. The outcome was vague, and the tribunal sat on his file for months. Then, out of the blue, Furtwängler learned that the Allied Kommandatura had cleared him and that he was free to conduct the Berlin Philharmonic on May 25, 1947, at the American-requisitioned Titania Palast. Amongst the papers left by Michael Josselson is a note which refers to his part in what insiders referred to as the "jumping" of Furtwängler. "I played a major role in sparing the great German conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler the humiliation of having to go through the denazification procedure despite the fact that he had never been a member of the Nazi Party," Josselson wrote.¹⁵ This maneuver was achieved with Nabokov's help, though years later both were vague about the details of the case. "I wonder whether you remember when was the approximate date that Furtwängler came to East Berlin and gave a press conference there threatening to go to Moscow if *we* would not clear him at once," Nabokov asked Josselson in 1977. "I seem to remember that you had something to do with bringing him out of the Soviet sector (hadn't you?) to my billet. I remember General McClure's [chief of Information Control Division] gentle fury at Furtwängler's behaviour then . . ."¹⁶

One American official reacted angrily to the discovery that figures like Furtwängler were being "whitewashed." In April 1947, Newell Jenkins, chief of theater and music for the American military government of Württemberg-Baden, angrily demanded an explanation for "how it happens that so many prominent nazis in the field of musicology are still active." As well as Furtwängler, both Herbert von Karajan and Elisabeth Schwarzkopf were soon to be cleared by Allied commissions, despite their murky records. In von Karajan's case, his Nazi connections were virtually undisputed. He had been a party member since 1933 and never hesitated

to open his concerts with the Nazi favorite “Horst Wessel Lied.” His enemies referred to him as “SS Colonel von Karajan.” But despite favoring the Nazi regime, he was quickly reinstated as the king of the Berlin Philharmonic, the orchestra which in the postwar years was built up as the symbolic bulwark against Soviet totalitarianism.¹⁷

Elisabeth Schwarzkopf had given concerts for the Waffen SS on the eastern front, starred in Goebbels’s propaganda films, and was included by him on a list of artists “blessed by God.” Her National Socialist Party membership number was 7548960. “Should a baker stop baking bread if he doesn’t like the government?” asked her half-Jewish accompanist Peter Gellhorn (who himself had to flee Germany in the 1930s). Obviously not. Schwarzkopf was cleared by the Allied Control Commission, and her career soared. She was later made a Dame of the British Empire.

The question of how, if at all, artists should be held to account for an engagement with the politics of their time could never be resolved by a hit-and-miss denazification program. Josselson and Nabokov were keenly aware of the limitations of such a program, and as such their motivation in leapfrogging its procedures could be viewed as humane, even courageous. On the other hand, they were victims of a moral confusion: the need to create symbolic anti-Communist rallying points introduced an urgent—and hidden—political imperative to clear those suspected of accommodating the Nazi regime. This produced a tolerance of suspected proximity to Fascism if the subject could be put to use against Communism—someone had to wield a baton against the Soviets. Nabokov’s 1977 letter to Josselson reveals that they actually had to wrest Furtwängler from the Soviets (who had approached the conductor with an offer to take over the Staatsoper Unter den Linden), whilst Furtwängler himself was playing both sides against each other. His appearance at the Titania Palast in May 1947 clearly signaled that the Allies were not going to be upstaged by the Soviets in “the battle of the orchestras.” By 1949, Furtwängler was listed amongst German artists traveling to foreign countries under American-sponsored cultural programs. In 1951, he conducted at the reopening of the Bayreuth Festival, which had been handed back to the Wagner family, despite the official ban on Richard Wagner (for “nationalism”).

William Donovan, head of America’s wartime intelligence service, once said famously, “I’d put Stalin on the payroll if I thought it would help us defeat Hitler.”¹⁸ In an all-too-easy reversal, it was now apparent that the Germans “were to be our new friends, and the savior-Russians the enemy.” This, to Arthur Miller, was “an ignoble thing. It seemed to me in later years that this wrenching shift, this ripping off of Good and

Evil labels from one nation and pasting them onto another, had done something to wither the very notion of a world even theoretically moral. If last month's friend could so quickly become this month's enemy, what depth of reality could good and evil have? The nihilism—even worse, the yawning amusement—toward the very concept of a moral imperative, which would become a hallmark of international culture, was born in these eight or ten years of realignment after Hitler's death.”¹⁹

Of course, there were good reasons for opposing the Soviets, who were moving in swiftly behind the cold weather front. Communists came to power in Poland in January. In Italy and France there were rumors of Communist coups d'état. Soviet strategists had been quick to grasp the potential of the widespread instability of postwar Europe. With an energy and resourcefulness which showed that Stalin's regime, for all its monolithic intractability, could avail itself of an imaginative vigor unmatched by Western governments, the Soviet Union deployed a battery of unconventional weapons to nudge itself into the European consciousness, and soften up opinion in its favor. A vast network of fronts was established, some new, some revived from a dormant state since the death in 1940 of Willi Munzenberg, the brain behind the Kremlin's secret pre-war campaign of persuasion. Labor unions, women's movements, youth groups, cultural institutions, the press, publishing—all were targeted.

Experts in the use of culture as a tool of political persuasion, the Soviets did much in these early years of the Cold War to establish their central paradigm as a cultural one. Lacking the economic power of the United States and, above all, still without a nuclear capability, Stalin's regime concentrated on winning “the battle for men's minds.” America, despite a massive marshaling of the arts in the New Deal period, was a virgin in the practice of international Kulturkampf. As early as 1945, one intelligence officer had predicted the unconventional tactics which were now being adopted by the Soviets: “The invention of the atomic bomb will cause a shift in the balance between ‘peaceful’ and ‘warlike’ methods of exerting international pressure,” he reported to the chief of the Office of Strategic Services, General Donovan. “And we must expect a very marked increase in the importance of ‘peaceful’ methods. Our enemies will be even freer than [ever] to propagandize, subvert, sabotage and exert . . . pressures upon us, and we ourselves shall be more willing to bear these affronts and ourselves to indulge in such methods—in our eagerness to avoid at all costs the tragedy of open war; ‘peaceful’ techniques will become more vital in times of pre-war softening up, actual overt war, and in times of post-war manipulation.”²⁰

This report shows exceptional prescience. It offers a definition of the

Cold War as a psychological contest, of the manufacturing of consent by “peaceful” methods, of the use of propaganda to erode hostile positions. And, as the opening sallies in Berlin amply demonstrated, the “operational weapon” was to be culture. The cultural Cold War was on.

So it was that amidst the degradation an unnaturally elaborate cultural life was dragged to its feet by the occupying powers as they vied with one another to score propaganda points. As early as 1945, “when the stench of human bodies still hung about the ruins,” the Russians had staged a brilliant opening for the State Opera with a performance of Gluck’s *Orpheus*, in the beautifully lit, red plush Admiralspalast. Stocky, pomaded Russian colonels grinned smugly at American military personnel as they listened together to performances of *Eugène Onegin* or to an explicitly anti-Fascist interpretation of *Rigoletto*, the music punctuated by the tinkle of medals.²¹

One of Josselson’s first assignments was to retrieve the thousands of costumes belonging to the former German State Opera (the Deutsches Opernhaus Company, the only serious rival to the Russian State Opera), which had been safely stored by the Nazis at the bottom of a salt mine located outside Berlin in the U.S. zone of occupation. On a dismal, rainy day Josselson set off with Nabokov to retrieve the costumes. On their way back to Berlin, Josselson’s jeep, which preceded Nabokov’s requisitioned Mercedes, hit a Soviet roadblock at full speed. Josselson, unconscious and suffering from multiple cuts and bruising, was taken to a Russian military hospital, where Soviet women medical officers stitched him together again. When he was well enough, he was retrieved back to his billet in the American zone, which he shared with an aspiring actor called Peter van Eyck. But for the care of his Soviet doctors, Josselson might not have survived to become the Diaghilev of America’s counter-Soviet cultural propaganda campaign. The Soviets had saved the man who was, for the next two decades, to do most to undermine their attempts at cultural hegemony.

In 1947, the Russians fired another salvo when they opened up a “House of Culture” on the Unter den Linden. The initiative dazzled a British cultural affairs officer, who reported enviously that the institute “surpasses anything the other allies have done and puts our poor little effort right in the shade. . . . It is most luxuriously appointed—good furniture, much of it antique, carpets in every room, a brilliance of lights, almost overheated and everything newly painted. . . . the Russians have simply requisitioned all they wanted. . . . there is a bar and smoking room. . . . which looks most inviting and almost Ritzy with its soft carpets and chandeliers. . . . [This is a] grandiose cultural institute which will

reach the broad masses and do much to counteract the generally accepted idea here that the Russians are uncivilized. This latest venture is depressing as far as we are concerned—our contribution is so small—one information centre and a few reading rooms which have had to be closed down because of lack of coal! . . . We should be spurred on by this latest Russian entry into the Kulturkampf to answer with an equally bold scheme for putting over British achievements here in Berlin.”²²

Whilst the British lacked the coal to heat a reading room, the Americans were emboldened to return fire at the Soviets by opening the Amerika-Häuser. Set up as “outposts of American culture,” these institutes offered respite from the bitter weather in comfortably furnished reading rooms and gave film showings, music recitals, talks, and art exhibits, all with “overwhelming emphasis on America.” In a speech entitled “Out of the Rubble,” the director of education and cultural relations emphasized to Amerika-Häuser personnel the epic nature of their task: “Few people ever have been privileged to be a part of a more important or more challenging mission, or one more replete with pitfalls than you who have been chosen to aid in the intellectual, moral, spiritual and cultural reorientation of a defeated, conquered and occupied Germany.” But he noted that “in spite of the great contribution which has been made by America in the cultural field, it is not generally known even to Germany or the rest of the world. Our culture is regarded as materialistic and frequently one will hear the comment, ‘We have the skill, the brains, and you have the money.’ ”²⁵

Thanks largely to Russian propaganda, America was widely regarded as culturally barren, a nation of gum-chewing, Chevy-driving, DuPont-sheathed philistines, and the Amerika-Häuser did much to reverse this negative stereotype. “One thing is absolutely certain,” wrote one enthusiastic Amerika-Häuser administrator, “the printed material brought here from the United States . . . makes a deep and profound impression upon those circles in Germany which for generations have thought of America as culturally backward and who have condemned the whole for the faults of a few parts.” Old clichés based on a historic “presupposition about American cultural retardation” had been eroded by the “good books” program, and those same circles who had upheld these slurs were now reported to be “quietly and deeply impressed.”²⁴

Some clichés were harder to dispel. When one Amerika-Häuser lecturer offered a view of the “present-day position of the Negro in America,” he was met with questions, “some of which were not inspired by good will.” The lecturer “dealt vigorously with the questioners, who may or may not have been communists.” Fortunately for the organizers,

the talk was followed “by songs performed by a colored quintet. The Negroes continued to sing long after official closing time and . . . the spirit of the occasion seemed so congenial that it was decided to invite this Negro group for a repeat performance.”²⁵ The problem of race relations in America was much exploited by Soviet propaganda and left many Europeans uneasy about America’s ability to practice the democracy she now claimed to be offering the world. It was therefore reasoned that the exporting of African Americans to perform in Europe would dispel such damaging perceptions. An American military government report of March 1947 revealed plans “to have top-rank American negro vocalists give concerts in Germany. . . . Marian Anderson or Dorothy Maynor appearances before German audiences would be of great importance.”²⁶ The promotion of black artists was to become an urgent priority for American cultural Cold Warriors.

The American response to the Soviet cultural offensive now began to gather pace. The full arsenal of contemporary American achievement was shipped to Europe and showcased in Berlin. Fresh new opera talent was imported from America’s most noble academies: Juilliard, Curtis, Eastman, Peabody. The military government took control of eighteen German symphony orchestras and almost as many opera companies. With many native composers banned, the market for American composers was exponentially increased—and exploited. Samuel Barber, Leonard Bernstein, Elliott Carter, Aaron Copland, George Gershwin, Gian Carlo Menotti, Virgil Thomson—these and many other American composers premiered their work in Europe under government auspices.

In consultation with American academics, playwrights, and directors, a massive theater program was also launched. Plays by Lillian Hellman, Eugene O’Neill, Thornton Wilder, Tennessee Williams, William Saroyan, Clifford Odets, and John Steinbeck were offered to enthusiastic audiences huddled in freezing theaters where icicles hung menacingly from the ceiling. Following Schiller’s principle of theater as “moralische Anstalt,” where men can see presented the basic principles of life, the American authorities devised a hit list of desirable moral lessons. Thus, under “Liberty and Democracy” came Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt*, Shaw’s *The Devil’s Disciple*, and Robert Sherwood’s *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*. “Power of Faith” was expressed in the drama of Faust, Goethe, Strindberg, Shaw. “Equality of Man” was the message to be extracted from Maxim Gorki’s *Lower Depths* and Franz Grillparzer’s *Medea*. Under “War and Peace” came Aristophanes’s *Lysistrata*, R.C. Sherriff’s *Journey’s End*, Thornton Wilder’s *Skin of Our Teeth*, and John Hersey’s *A Bell for Adano*. “Corruption and Justice” was deemed to be the theme of *Hamlet*, Gogol’s *Revisor*;

Beaumarchais's *Figaro's Wedding*, and most of Ibsen's oeuvre. And so on, through "Crime Does Not Pay"; "Morals, Taste and Manners"; "Pursuit of Happiness"; to the darker imperative of "Exposure of Nazism." Deemed inappropriate "for the present mental and psychological status of Germans" were "all plays that accept the blind mastery of fate that unescapably [*sic*] leads to destruction and self-destruction, as the Greek classics." Also blacklisted were *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus* ("glorifications of dictatorship"); Prinz von Homburg and Kleist (for "chauvinism"); Tolstoy's *Living Corpse* ("Righteous criticism of society runs to asocial ends"); all Hamsun plays ("plain Nazi ideology"); and all plays by anybody else who "readily shifted to the service of Nazism."²⁷

Mindful of Disraeli's injunction that "a book may be as great a thing as a battle," a vast books program was launched, aimed primarily at "projecting the American story before the German reader in the most effective manner possible." Appealing to commercial publishers, the occupation government ensured a constant flow of "general books" which were deemed "more acceptable than government-sponsored publications, because they do not have the taint of propaganda."²⁸ But propaganda they were certainly intended to be. Translations commissioned by the Psychological Warfare Division of American Military Government alone ran to hundreds of titles, ranging from Howard Fast's *Citizen Tom Paine* to Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.'s *The New Deal in Action* to the Museum of Modern Art's *Built in the USA*. There were also German editions of books "suitable for children at their most impressionable age," such as Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Wonder Tales*, Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, and Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie*.

The postwar reputations of many Americans in Germany (and the other occupied territories) were significantly helped by these publishing programs. And America's cultural cachet soared with distribution of works by Louisa May Alcott, Jacques Barzun, Pearl Buck, James Burnham, Willa Cather, Norman Cousins, William Faulkner, Ellen Glasgow, Ernest Hemingway, F.O. Matthiessen, Reinhold Niebuhr, Carl Sandburg, James Thurber, Edith Wharton, and Thomas Wolfe.

European authors were also promoted as part of an explicitly "anti-Communist program." Suitable texts were "whatever critiques of Soviet foreign policy and of Communism as a form of government we find to be objective, convincingly written, and timely."²⁹ Meeting these criteria were André Gide's account of his disillusioning experiences in Russia, *Return from the Soviet Union*; Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* and *The Yogi and the Commissar*; and *Bread and Wine* by Ignazio Silone. For

Koestler and Silone, this was the first of many appearances under the wing of the American government. Approval for publication was withheld for some books. One early casualty was John Foster Dulles's by-now anachronistic *Russia and America: Pacific Neighbors*.

In art, Mrs. Moholy-Nagy appeared before German audiences to talk about the work of her late husband, László, and the new and exciting direction taken by the "New Bauhaus" in Chicago. Her lecture, wrote one sympathetic journalist, "was a very informative contribution to the incomplete conception we have of American culture and art."⁵⁰ This conception was further enhanced by an exhibition of "Non-Objective paintings" from the Guggenheim Museum. This was the first appearance under government sponsorship of the New York School, otherwise known as Abstract Expressionism. Lest the new be thought too shocking, audiences were nursed with lectures on "Fundamental Thoughts on Modern Art" which used comfortably familiar medieval paintings to introduce "the abstract possibilities of artistic expression."

With the memory of the *Entartekunst* exhibitions and the subsequent exodus of so many artists to America still painfully fresh, the impression now was of a European culture broken up by the high tides of Fascism and washed up on the shores of the new Byzantium—America. Audiences who had experienced the mass rallies of Nuremberg were reportedly awed by one lecturer who "told of immense symphonic concerts in the open air at night attended by audiences equalling in numbers those which usually only attend special sport events in our stadiums."⁵¹

Not all efforts were of the highest caliber. The launch of the German edition of Ellery Queen's *Mystery Magazine* left people like Michael Josselson stone cold. And not everyone was convinced that the Yale Glee Club was the best vehicle for proving beyond all doubt "the tremendous importance of the arts in the curriculum of the universities as an antidote against collectivism."⁵² Even the Darmstadt School got off to a shaky start. A bold initiative of the American military government, the "Darmstadt Holiday Courses for New Music" nearly ended in a riot after disagreement about radical new music spilled over into open hostility. One official evaluation concluded: "It was generally conceded that much of this music was worthless and had better been left unplayed. The over-emphasis on twelve-tone music was regretted. One critic described the concerts as 'The Triumph of Dilettantism.' . . . The French students remained aloof from the others and acted in a snobbish way [and] their teacher, Leibowitz, represents and admits as valid only the most radical kind of music and is openly disdainful of any other. His attitude is aped by his students. It was generally felt that next year's [course] must follow

a different, more catholic pattern.”⁵³ Darmstadt, of course, was to become the citadel of progressive experimentation in music within a few years.

But all the symphony concerts and plays and exhibitions could not hide the one stark truth of that long, harsh winter of 1947: Europe was going broke. A rampant black market, civil unrest, and a series of crippling strikes (largely orchestrated by Communist trade unions) produced levels of degradation and privation equal to anything experienced during the darkest moments of the war. In Germany, money had lost its value, medicine and clothes were impossible to obtain, whole families were living in underground bunkers with no water or light, and young girls and boys offered sex to American GIs in exchange for a bar of chocolate.

On June 5, 1947, General George Catlett Marshall, the U.S. Army’s wartime chief of staff and now Truman’s secretary of state, announced a plan to deal with the “great crisis.” Delivered at the 296th Harvard Commencement, which was attended by atomic physicist Robert Oppenheimer, D-day commander General Omar Bradley, and T.S. Eliot (all of whom, like Marshall, were receiving honorary degrees), Marshall’s ten-minute address marked a catalytic moment in the fate of postwar Europe. Warning that “the whole world [and] . . . the way of life we have known is literally in the balance,” he called upon the New World to step into the breach with a crash program of financial credits and large-scale material assistance, and thus prevent the collapse of the Old World. “There is widespread instability. There are concerted efforts to change the whole face of Europe as we know it, contrary to the interests of free mankind and free civilization,” Marshall declared. “Left to their own resources there will be no escape from economic distress so intense, social discontents so violent, and political confusion so widespread that the historic base of Western civilization, of which we are by belief and inheritance an integral part, will take on a new form in the image of the tyranny that we fought to destroy in Germany.”⁵⁴

As he spoke these words, General Marshall surveyed the faces of students gathered in the spring sunshine and saw, like John Crowe Ransom before him, “the youngling bachelors of Harvard/Lit like torches, and scrambling to disperse/Like aimless firebrands pitiful to slake.”⁵⁵ It was no coincidence that he had decided to deliver his speech here, rather than on some formal government podium. For these were the men assigned to realize America’s “manifest destiny,” the elite charged with organizing the world around values which the Communist darkness threatened to obscure. The fulfillment of the Marshall Plan, as it became known, was their inheritance.

Marshall’s address was designed to reinforce President Truman’s

ideological call to arms of a few months earlier, which had been immediately enshrined as the Truman Doctrine. Addressing Congress in March 1947 on the situation in Greece, where a Communist takeover threatened, Truman had appealed in apocalyptic language for a new age of American intervention: "At the present moment in world history nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life," he declared. "The choice is too often not a free one. One way of life is based upon the will of the majority. . . . The second . . . is based upon the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. It relies upon terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio, fixed elections and the suppression of personal freedoms. I believe that it must be the policy of the U.S. to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjection by armed minorities or by outside pressure. I believe that we must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way."³⁶

After Truman's speech, Secretary of State Dean Acheson told congressmen: "We had arrived at a situation unparalleled since ancient times. Not since Rome and Carthage had there been such a polarization of power on this earth. Moreover the two great powers were divided by an unbridgeable ideological chasm."³⁷ Joseph Jones, the State Department official who drafted Truman's appeal to Congress, understood the enormous impact of the president's words: "*All* barriers to bold action were indeed down," he said. Among policy makers it was felt that "a new chapter in world history had opened, and they were the most privileged of men, participants in a drama such as rarely occurs even in the long life of a great nation."³⁸

The heightened sense of the classical dimensions of America's postwar role evoked by Truman's address gave the rhetorical context to General Marshall's later, less conspicuously anti-Communist speech. The combination of the two—a package of economic assistance coupled with a doctrinal imperative—delivered an unambiguous message: the future of Western Europe, if Western Europe was to have a future at all, must now be harnessed to a *pax Americana*.

On June 17, the Soviet daily *Pravda* attacked Marshall's proposal as an extension of Truman's "plan for political pressures with dollars and a program for interference in the internal affairs of other states."³⁹ Although the Soviets had been invited by Marshall to participate in his all-European recovery program, the offer was, said George Kennan, "disingenuous, designed to be rejected."⁴⁰ As anticipated, they refused to be part of the plan. Their objection may have been overstated, but in essence the Soviets were right to conflate the humanitarian intentions of the plan with a less obvious political agenda. Far from envisioning cooperation

with the Soviet Union, it was designed within the framework of a Cold War ethos which sought to drive a wedge between Moscow and its client regimes.⁴¹ “It was implicit all along that it was important that we didn’t give the Communists the opportunity to stick their oar into these places,” Marshall planner Dennis Fitzgerald later wrote. “There was always the argument advanced that if we failed to fully appreciate the requirements of X, Y, and Z, that the Communists would take advantage of this situation to promote their interests.”⁴² The plan’s deputy director Richard Bissell supported this view: “Even before the outbreak of the Korean War, it was well understood that the Marshall Plan was never meant to be a wholly altruistic affair. The hope was that strengthening their economies would enhance the value of the Western European countries as members of the NATO alliance, eventually enabling them to assume a defense responsibility in support of cold war efforts.”⁴³ Secretly, these countries were also expected to assume other responsibilities “in support of cold war efforts,” and to this end, Marshall Plan funds were soon being siphoned to boost the cultural struggle in the West.

On October 5, 1947, the Communist Information Bureau held its first meeting in Belgrade. Formed in Moscow the previous September, the Cominform was Stalin’s new operational base for political warfare, replacing the defunct Comintern. The Belgrade meeting was used to deliver an open challenge to the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, both of which were denounced as “aggressive” ploys to satisfy America’s aspirations to world supremacy.”⁴⁴ Andrei Zhdanov, architect of Stalin’s ruthless cultural policy, told the Communists of Western Europe that “[i]f they are prepared to take the lead of all the forces prepared to defend the cause of national honor and independence in the struggle against attempts to subjugate their countries economically and politically, then no plan for the subjugation of Europe can succeed.”⁴⁵ Just as Marshall had chosen to address the intellectual heartland of America, so Zhdanov called upon the intelligentsia of the world to rattle their pens under the banner of Communism and hurl their ink against the American imperium. “The Communist parties of [Europe have] achieved considerable successes in conducting work among the Intelligentsia. Proof of this is the fact that in these countries the best people of science, art, and literature belong to the Communist Party, are heading the movement of the progressive struggle among the intelligentsia and by their creative and tireless struggle, are winning more and more intellectuals to the cause of Communism.”⁴⁶

Later that month, the Cominform’s ideological storm troops were gathered at the East Berlin Writers’ Congress at the Kammerspiele Theater.

As the “debate” (it was nothing of the sort, of course) wore on, a young American with a pointed beard and looking strangely like Lenin stormed the platform and grabbed the microphone. Speaking in flawless German, he held his position for thirty-five minutes, praising those writers who had had the nerve to speak up against Hitler and exposing similarities between the Nazi regime and the new Communist police state. These were dangerous times. To disrupt the proceedings and queer the pitch of a Communist propaganda exercise was an act of either madness or courage, or both. Melvin Lasky had arrived.

Born in 1920 in the Bronx, Melvin Jonah Lasky grew up in the “looming presence” of his Yiddish-speaking grandfather, a bearded, learned man who nourished the young Lasky with passages from the legends of the Jews. As one of the “best and brightest” graduates of City College of New York, Lasky emerged from its seething ideological debates a staunch anti-Stalinist with a taste for intellectual—and occasionally physical—confrontation. He joined the civil service and worked as a travel guide at the Statue of Liberty before joining the staff of Sol Levitas’s anti-Stalinist magazine, the *New Leader*. Drafted into the service, he became a combat historian with U.S. 7th Army in France and Germany, and was later demobbed in Berlin, where he became German correspondent for both the *New Leader* and the *Partisan Review*.

A short, stocky man, Lasky was given to drawing his shoulder blades back and pushing out his chest, as if primed for a fight. Using his almond-shaped eyes to produce deadly squints, he had acquired from the brusque atmosphere of City College an ill manner which rarely deserted him. In his militant anti-Communism he was, to use an epithet he bestowed on somebody else, “as unmovable as the rock of Gibraltar.” Lupine and grittily determined, Lasky was to become a force to reckon with as he stormed his way through the cultural campaigns of the Cold War. His explosive protest at the East German Writers’ Congress earned him the title “Father of the Cold War in Berlin.” His action even upset the American authorities, who threatened to throw him out. Appalled by the timidity of his superiors, he compared Berlin to “what a frontier-town must have been like in the States in the middle of the 19th century—Indians on the horizon, and you’ve simply got to have that rifle handy or [if] not your scalp is gone. But in those days a frontier-town was full of Indian-fighters. . . . Here very few people have any guts, and if they do they usually don’t know in which direction to point their rifle.”⁴⁷

But Lasky knew the sheriff, and far from being run out of town, he was now taken under the wing of the military governor, General Lucius Clay. To him, Lasky protested that whilst the Soviet lie was traveling around

the globe at lightning speed, the truth had yet to get its boots on. He made his case in a passionately argued document submitted on December 7, 1947, to Clay's office, which called for a radical shake-up in American propaganda. Referred to as "The Melvin Lasky Proposal," this document constituted Lasky's personal blueprint for staging the cultural Cold War. "High hopes for peace and international unity blinded us to the fact that a concerted political war against the USA was being prepared and executed, and nowhere more vigorously than in Germany," he claimed. "The same old anti-democratic anti-American formulas on which many European generations have been fed, and which the Nazi propaganda machine under Goebbels brought to a peak, are now being reworked. Viz., the alleged economic selfishness of the USA (Uncle Sam as Shylock); its alleged deep political reaction (a 'mercenary capitalistic press,' etc.); its alleged cultural waywardness (the 'jazz and swing mania,' radio advertisements, Hollywood 'inaneities,' 'cheese-cake and leg-art'); its alleged moral hypocrisy (the Negro question, sharecroppers, Okies); etc. etc. . . ." ⁴⁸

In extraordinary language, Lasky went on to define the challenge: "The time-honored U.S. formula of 'Shed light and the people will find their own way' exaggerates the possibilities in Germany (and in Europe) for an easy conversion. . . . It would be foolish to expect to wean a primitive savage away from his conviction in mysterious jungle-herbs simply by the dissemination of modern scientific medical information. . . . We have not succeeded in combatting the variety of factors—political, psychological, cultural—which work against U.S. foreign policy, and in particular against the success of the Marshall Plan in Europe." What was needed now, continued Lasky breathlessly, was an "active" truth, a truth bold enough to "enter the contest," not one which behaved like "an Olympian bystander." Make no mistake, he warned, the substance of the Cold War was "*cultural* in range. And it is here that a serious void in the American program has been most exploited by the enemies of American foreign policy. . . . The void . . . is real and grave." ⁴⁹

The "real and grave" void to which Lasky referred was the failure "to win the educated and cultured classes—which, in the long run, provide moral and political leadership in the community" to the American cause. This shortcoming, he argued, could be partly addressed by publishing a new journal, one which would "serve both as a constructive fillip to German-European thought" and "as a demonstration that behind the official representatives of American democracy lies a great and progressive culture, with a richness of achievements in the arts, in literature, in philosophy, in all the aspects of culture which unite the free traditions of Europe and America." ⁵⁰

Two days later, Lasky submitted a “Prospectus for the ‘American Review’ ” whose purpose should be “to support the general objectives of U.S. policy in Germany and Europe by illustrating the background of ideas, spiritual activity, literary and intellectual achievement, from which the American democracy takes its inspiration.” The review, he argued, would demonstrate that “America and Americans have achieved mature triumphs in all the spheres of the human spirit common to both the Old and the New Worlds,” and thereby constitute the first really serious effort in “winning large sections of the German intelligentsia away from Communist influence.”⁵¹

The result was *Der Monat*, a monthly magazine designed to construct an ideological bridge between German and American intellectuals and, as explicitly set forth by Lasky, to ease the passage of American foreign policy interests by supporting “the general objectives of U.S. policy in Germany and Europe.” Set up with General Clay’s backing on October 1, 1948, under Lasky’s editorship, it was printed initially in Munich and airlifted into Berlin aboard the Allied cargo planes on which the city depended during the blockade. Across the years, *Der Monat* was financed through “confidential funds” from the Marshall Plan, then from the coffers of the Central Intelligence Agency, then with Ford Foundation money, and then again with CIA dollars. For its financing alone, the magazine was absolutely a product—and an exemplar of—American Cold War strategies in the cultural field.

Der Monat was a temple to the belief that an educated elite could steer the postwar world away from its own extinction. This, together with their affiliations with the American occupation government, was what united Lasky, Josselson, and Nabokov. Like Jean Cocteau, who was soon to warn America, “You will not be saved by weaponry, nor by money, but by a thinking minority, because the world is expiring, as it does not think (*pense*) anymore, but merely spends (*dépense*),”⁵² they understood that the dollars of the Marshall Plan would not be enough: financial assistance had to be supplemented by a concentrated program of cultural warfare. This curious triumvirate—Lasky the political militant, Josselson the former department store buyer, and Nabokov the composer—now stood poised at the cutting edge of what was to become, under their guidance, one of the most ambitious secret operations of the Cold War: the winning over of the Western intelligentsia to the American proposition.