

Khrushchev modern

Agency and modernization in the Soviet home

Susan E. Reid



Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/monderusse/3800>

DOI: 10.4000/monderusse.3800

ISSN: 1777-5388

Publisher

Éditions de l'EHESS

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 June 2006

Number of pages: 227-268

ISBN: 2-7132-2096-3

ISSN: 1252-6576

Electronic reference

Susan E. Reid, "Khrushchev modern", *Cahiers du monde russe* [Online], 47/1-2 | 2006, Online since 04 January 2007, connection on 02 September 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/monderusse/3800> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/monderusse.3800>

Cet article est disponible en ligne à l'adresse :

http://www.cairn.info/article.php?ID_REVUE=CMR&ID_NUMPUBLIE=CMR_047&ID_ARTICLE=CMR_047_0227

Khrushchev Modern. Agency and modernization in the Soviet home

par SUSAN E. REID

| Editions de l'EHESS | *Cahiers du monde russe*

2006/1 - n° 47

ISSN 1252-6576 | ISBN 2713220963 | pages 227 à 268

Pour citer cet article :

—REID S., Khrushchev Modern. Agency and modernization in the Soviet home, *Cahiers du monde russe* 2006/ 1, n° 47, p. 227-268.

Distribution électronique Cairn pour les Editions de l'EHESS.

© Editions de l'EHESS. Tous droits réservés pour tous pays.

La reproduction ou représentation de cet article, notamment par photocopie, n'est autorisée que dans les limites des conditions générales d'utilisation du site ou, le cas échéant, des conditions générales de la licence souscrite par votre établissement. Toute autre reproduction ou représentation, en tout ou partie, sous quelque forme et de quelque manière que ce soit, est interdite sauf accord préalable et écrit de l'éditeur, en dehors des cas prévus par la législation en vigueur en France. Il est précisé que son stockage dans une base de données est également interdit.

SUSAN E. REID

KHRUSHCHEV MODERN

Agency and modernization in the Soviet home

“The characteristics of the contemporary dwelling have been almost entirely transformed,” announced *Sovetskaia torgovlia* (Soviet Trade) in 1961. “Everything that surrounds us in our everyday lives has been modernized (*modernizirovali*). Simple, strict lines, the harmonious combination of colours and forms — that’s what distinguishes today’s tastefully furnished apartment.”¹

In the Soviet Union under Nikita Khrushchev — no less than in the West in the postwar period — the modern home and household consumption associated with it became a key site for the concrete projection of “tomorrow” and for the construction of the identity of the citizen of that bright future.² Housing vividly demonstrated the regime’s renewed commitment to realizing the promises of the Revolution on a mass scale and to achieving high living standards for all. Whole new urban regions of prefabricated housing, rising rapidly on the edges of Soviet cities in the late 1950s as the result of an intensive mass housing drive launched in 1957, were at once a highly visible symbolic pledge of future communism and a means to bring it about. All the media, including the newest, television, proclaimed the successes of the housing campaign. Mass, illustrated magazines filled pages with photographs of cranes dramatically swinging suspended prefabricated panels or, later, whole apartment units into place. They marvelled at the scale and rapidity of construction and at the new industrial methods that made this possible. Above all, they emphasized modernity: the joyous “shock of the new” was a constant motif

1. I. Odintsova, “Veshchi v nashem bytu,” *Sovetskaia torgovlia*, no. 7 (1961): 51. I am indebted to the Leverhulme Trust for the Research Fellowship “Everyday Aesthetics in the Modern Soviet Flat”; and to Kevin McDermott for his incisive comments and suggestions on the draft.

2. See the special issue on “Domestic Dreamworlds: Notions of Home in Post-1945 Europe,” edited by Paul Betts and David Crowley, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40, 2 (April 2005).

of such reportage. Television features and photojournalism celebrated the profound changes in the physical environment taking place “as if before one’s eyes,” and gasped at the overnight disappearance of familiar routes and landmarks as areas of small, wooden housing (once people’s homes!) were erased to make way for new urban microregions. Where, yesterday, had been a wasteland on the edge of the city, today there were streets and yards where children played.³

Beyond the panorama of the mushrooming urban landscape, the media panned in to focus on the “typical” individual experience of taking up occupancy in the new flats and making them into homes. Photographs of construction sites were accompanied by texts that took the reader inside the prefabricated walls to learn how to go about furnishing her own “new-type,” small scale, one-family apartment.⁴ The implication for individual lives of the reinvigorated project of constructing communism was represented in public culture by the transformative, ritual moment of *novosel’e* (house-warming). This was a common, popular experience; but unlike public festivals and mass celebrations such as the anniversary of the Revolution, it was not to be enjoyed *en masse*, in public space, but by individuals with their families and invited friends in their own homes.

Home presents a particularly intriguing space for study in an authoritarian, modernizing state with a centrally planned economy. For it is often seen as marking the limit of the state and its projects — the “borders of socialism,” to borrow the title of Lewis Siegelbaum’s recent edited volume on the problem of the elusive Soviet “private sphere.”⁵ At best a paradoxical and unpromising site for building socialist modernity, there the cogs of the daily grind turn, disengaged from the linear track of progress. In the socialist and Marxist tradition, domestic life (and the unproductive labour associated with it) was a slough of irrationality, recalcitrance and potentially even of counterrevolution: a millstone around the neck of progress.⁶ As the locus of

3. Scripts for television programmes, Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF), f. 6903, Gosteleradio, op. 26, d. 391, no. 1632; d. 449, nos. 4085, 4588; d. 468; d. 469, no. 4827. A Soviet report claimed that the extremely rapid growth of the urban population averaged 3-3.5 million per annum as compared with America’s maximum of 1.5-2 million. P. Mstislavsky, *New Times*, 22 (May 1960): 10-15.

4. Examples abound in illustrated journals such as *Rabotnitsa* and *Ogonëk*, e.g. N. Svetlova, “Tvoi dom,” *Ogonëk*, no. 3 (11 Jan. 1959): 14-16.

5. Lewis H. Siegelbaum, ed., *Borders of Socialism: Private Spheres of Soviet Russia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006); David Crowley, “Warsaw Interiors,” in David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, eds., *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 186-189.

6. “Everyday life is generally perceived as ‘spontaneous’ and ideology-free, an inert sphere beyond the realm of ‘conscious’ thought.” Catriona Kelly, *Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite Culture, and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), xviii. On Russian attitudes to everyday life (*byt*) see also Kelly, “Byt: identity and everyday life,” in Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis, eds., *National Identity in Russian Culture* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 149-167; Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), esp. chap. 1; Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); and compare Rita Felski, “The Invention of Everyday Life,” *New Formations*, no. 39 (Winter 1999-2000): 15-31. For an overview of relations between domesticity, gender and modernism see Christopher Reed, *Not*

everyday life and a site of individual consumption, home tests the jurisdiction of specialists, such as architects, acting on the state's behalf, and the effectiveness of central state planning, a defining principle of state socialism. The contradiction between centralized, planned production and decentralized, often spontaneous consumption for and in the home has been discussed by Karin Zachmann with regard to the German Democratic Republic in the 1950s.⁷ These tensions, also present in the Soviet Union — between planners/producers and users, between professional designers and amateur homemakers — came to a head in the production of the domestic interior. And as we shall see below, the issue of communication between consumers and planners began to receive attention in the Soviet Union, too, during the Khrushchev era.

In this article I seek to open up some questions of authority in and authorship of the new domestic interior. The agencies involved in producing, furnishing and equipping it, and in maintaining its day-to-day functioning were manifold and often in tension or contradiction; it was a node where numerous state bodies and infrastructures intersected — and sometimes clashed — in their struggle for authority.⁸ These bodies and their personnel had their own departmental priorities, professional agendas and battles to fight, which were not necessarily consonant either with each other, or with those of the occupant. Home was a space of negotiation between multiple agencies: architects and urban planners; factory managers, trade bureaucrats, party activists and house committees; shop personnel, builders, carpenters, painters, electricians and plumbers; ... and finally, the humble householder.

I cannot attend here to all the parties involved in making the home, nor do justice to all aspects of the complex negotiations and struggles over the interior. I shall focus primarily on the agency, on one hand, of a range of aesthetic experts or taste professionals, who, acting in the name of the party-state and its project of building a modern, communist society, set general norms of modern living and “contemporary” aesthetic regimes; and, on the other, of individual, amateur homemakers taking up occupancy in their flats. Neither “the state” nor the “homemaker-consumer” is a unified category, it must be emphasized; expert groups that represented the state were divided among themselves, while residents of new flats were very far from a homogeneous “public” or an organized lobby with a coordinated set of priorities. But first we need to look briefly at the primary factors that made housewarming and homemaking a mass practice and aspect of popular culture as well as of official mythology in the Soviet 1960s.⁹

at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture (London: Thames & Hudson, 1996); and Hilde Heynen and Gülsüm Baydar, eds., *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005).

7. Karin Zachmann, “A Socialist Consumption Junction: Debating the Mechanization of Housework in East Germany, 1956-1957,” *Technology and Culture*, 43, 1 (Jan. 2002): 73-99.

8. Some dozen ministries and state committees involved are listed in K. Zhukov, “Tekhnicheskaja estetika i oborudovanie kvartir,” *Tekhnicheskaja estetika*, no. 2 (Feb. 1964): 1-2.

9. Compare Marianne Gullestad, “Home Decoration as Popular Culture,” in M. Gullestad, *The Art of Social Relations: Essays on Culture, Social Action and Everyday Life in Modern Norway* (Oslo: Scandinavian Press, 1992): 61-92.

Happy house-warming!

The new Soviet domesticity was not only a matter of rhetoric or Socialist Realism, however pervasive the campaign to capitalize on and mediate actuality. When the party announced in 1959 that Soviet society had entered the penultimate phase of "Advanced Construction of Communism," it indexed the final transition to the radiant future to attainment of a high living standard, not just for a few "leading people," but for all.¹⁰ Pledges of abundance, comfort and modernity were underwritten by material transformations, investment of resources and expertise, and by the extension of mass industrial principles to construction and consumer goods manufacture, still surprisingly artisanal. The Khrushchev regime had already committed itself to a mass housing programme on 31 July 1957, in a decree on housing construction which, accelerating existing commitments made since the early 1950s, would transform the urban landscape and the lives of millions. "Beginning in 1958, in apartment houses under construction both in towns and in rural places, economical, well-appointed apartments are planned for occupancy by a single family."¹¹ In the Russian Republic 52,000,000 square metres of housing were built in 1960 alone, twice what had been built in the first ten years of Soviet rule taken together.¹² The newly founded design journal *Tekhnicheskaiia estetika* (Technical Aesthetics) took stock in 1964: "In the last ten years almost one hundred million people — almost half the population of the country — have moved into new homes. The USSR today builds more apartments every year than the USA, England, France, FRG, Sweden, Holland, Belgium and Switzerland altogether."¹³

Significantly, the apartments into which the many millions were moving were designed for occupancy by single nuclear families. This was not the only conceivable model for the organization of everyday life: there were also revivals, in this period, of experimental types of communal and "hotel-type" dwelling developed in the late 1920s.¹⁴ Nor should housing policy's *de facto* confirmation of the family as the fundamental unit of society be taken to indicate consensus concerning the respective role of the family and of the collective in the organization

10. "Food is big politics," announced one speaker, N. G. Ignatov, at the 21st Party Congress in 1959. "Summary of XXI (Extraordinary) Party Congress," *Soviet Studies*, 11, 1 (1959): 100. So, too, were housing and living standards in general, especially in the context of Cold War "peaceful competition."

11. TsK KPSS, Sov. Ministrov SSSR, "O razvitii zhilishchnogo stroitel'stva v SSSR (Postanovlenie, 31 iuliia 1957 g.)," *Arkhitektura SSSR*, no. 9 (1957): 1-6.

12. N. Petrushkina, *Sovetskaia Rossia* (3 June 1961): 1; translated in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 13, 23 (1961): 32.

13. Zhukov, "Tekhnicheskaiia estetika," 1-2. Between 1956 and 1960 almost twice as many people moved into new accommodation as between 1951 and 1955. Gregory D. Andrusz, *Housing and Urban Development in the USSR* (London: Macmillan, 1984), 178, table 7.5.

14. A. Riabushin, "Zhilishche novogo tipa," *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo SSSR* (henceforth *DI*), no. 2 (1963): 5; N. A. Osterman, "Stroitel'stvo pervogo eksperimental'nogo zhilogo doma s kollektivnym obsluzhivaniem v Moskve," in A. G. Kharchev, S. M. Verizhnikov, V. L. Ruzhze, eds., *Sotsial'nye problemy zhilishcha. Sbornik nauchnykh soobshchenii* (Leningrad: LENZNIIE, 1969), 63-67.

of society and upbringing of children. These had become once again a matter of debate among specialists.¹⁵ But while the debates went on, the state-initiated changes in the material environment on a mass scale made the nuclear family the norm of modern Soviet living. As a popular science magazine noted, “The main unit of contemporary society is the family. To it corresponds the primary dwelling cell — the apartment.”¹⁶

The new apartments were to be “modern” in the sense that they were equipped with their own bath, toilet, kitchen, and associated “mod cons,” providing a standard of urban comfort, convenience and hygiene that was far from universal at this time — not only in the Soviet Union, but elsewhere in Europe. Khrushchev claimed at the 21st Party Congress in 1959:

Our communal [...] housing construction, is radically transforming the everyday life of many millions of people who receive in their new, beautiful, contemporary dwelling, central heating, a well-equipped kitchen, a gas stove, garbage chute, and hot water supply, bathroom, fitted cupboards, [...] and other conveniences.¹⁷

If provision often fell short of this standard in practice, it nevertheless set a level to which all might legitimately aspire as a mass expectation and entitlement, rather than a reward for only a few Stakhanovites and “special people.” The move to mass industrial production of housing and consumer goods in the Khrushchev era marked a fundamental quantitative and qualitative shift from the Stalin era. True, the mid-1930s had already seen a turn towards consumerism and a definition of Soviet socialism based not on asceticism and self-sacrifice but on prosperity and happiness. The “cultured consumer” was supposed to exemplify the achievements of the Revolution, as Julie Hessler and Sheila Fitzpatrick have shown, while the commitment to single-family flats was already made at that time, and the importance of developing prefabricated construction had also been recognized

15. See S. Strumilin, “Rabochii byt i kommunizm,” *Novyi mir*, no. 7 (1960): 203-220; A. Kharchev, “Sem’ia i kommunizm,” *Kommunist*, no. 7 (May 1960): 53-63; Alex Inkeles, *Social Change in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), 216-219; Urie Bronfenbrenner, *Two Worlds of Childhood — U.S. and U.S.S.R.* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), 51-69; Jerome M. Gilson, *The Soviet Image of Utopia* (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 103-106.

16. I. Luchkova, A. Sikachev, “Sushchestvuet li nauka o zhil’e?” *Nauka i zhizn’*, no. 10 (1964): 22; D. P. Gorskii, “Sem’ia v sotsialisticheskome obshchestve,” in Kharchev, *Sotsial’nye problemy zhilishcha*, 68-73. After some wavering, Khrushchev unequivocally espoused the pro-family position at the 22nd Party Congress in 1961. *Pravda* (19 October 1961): 8; Gail Warshovsky Lapidus, *Women in Soviet: Equality, Development, and Social Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 232. On the one-family apartment see Steven Harris, “Moving to the Separate Apartment: Building, Distributing, Furnishing, and Living in Urban Housing in Soviet Russia, 1950s-1960s,” Ph.D. diss. (University of Chicago, 2003).

17. N. S. Khrushchev, *O kontrol’nykh tsifrakh razvitiia narodnogo khoziaistva SSSR na 1959-1965 gody* (Moscow, 1959), 59-63; L. Abramenko, L. Tormozova, eds., *Besedy o domashnem khoziaistve* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1959), 3. On existing living conditions, see Don Filtzer, “Standard of Living versus Quality of Life: Housing, Diet and the Urban Environment of Industrial Workers during Late Stalinism,” forthcoming in Juliane Fürst, ed., *Late Stalinist Russia: Society between Reconstruction and Reinvention* (London, New York: Routledge, 2006), 81-102.

before the war. However, the “Stalinist turn towards consumerism” had operated with what Hessler calls the “logic of models”: it focused on providing high-end consumer goods and apartments for a relatively privileged few, “‘model’ consumers — industrial managers, engineers, and award-winning workers — whose enjoyment of material perquisites was supposed to inform the behaviour and redeem the privations of everyone else.”¹⁸ Until the late 1950s the pace and scale of housing construction meant that, except for the elite, even apartments designed for single families were invariably under multi-family occupancy, while manufacture of furniture and other consumer goods remained artisanal and small scale. The fundamental difference in the Khrushchev era was the shift towards mass consumption and democratization of provision, with its attendant shifts in the mode of production, implications for visual style, and for the semiotic uses of consumer goods, all of which constitute the inchoate phenomenon I call Khrushchev Modern.

The new flats were modern also in their style, materials and method of construction. Mass production of housing demanded, modernizers insisted, a fundamental reorientation in design principles, aesthetics, and mode of production. In December 1954, over a year before Khrushchev denounced the Personality Cult, he condemned its architectural manifestations. In a historic speech to the All-Union Congress of Soviet Builders and Architects he denounced “excesses” (*izlishestva*) in building, demanding a radical break with the architectural practices of the Stalinist past, such as “superfluous,” historicist ornament and one-off designs. In

18. Julie Hessler, “Cultured Trade: the Stalinist Turn towards Consumerism,” in Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., *Stalinism: New Directions* (London: Routledge, 2000), 182-209 (esp. 184, 199); Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 223-236. On earlier commitment to the one-family flat, see Harris, “Moving to the Separate Apartment.” Treatments of Soviet consumer society include Vera S. Dunham, *In Stalin’s Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press 1976); Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Becoming Cultured: Socialist Realism and the Representation of Privilege and Taste,” in *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 216-237; Boym, *Common Places*; David L. Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 118-145; Kelly, *Refining Russia*; Stephan Merl, “Sowjetisierung in der Welt des Konsums,” in Konrad Jarausch and Hannes Siegrist, eds., *Amerikanisierung und Sowjetisierung in Deutschland 1945-1970* (Frankfurt am Main: campus, 1997): 167-194; Stephan Merl, “Staat und Konsum in der Zentralverwaltungswirtschaft: Rußland und die ostmitteleuropäischen Länder,” in Hannes Siegrist, Hartmut Kaelble, Jürgen Kocka, eds., *Europäische Konsumgeschichte: zur Gesellschafts- und Kulturgeschichte des Konsums, 18. — 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1997), 205-241; Julie Hessler, *A Social History of Soviet Trade: Trade Policy, Retail Practice, and Consumption, 1917-1953* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); and Jukka Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne: Common Luxury and the Ideals of the Good Life in Stalin’s Russia* (Oxford: Berg, 2003). Gronow argues that under Stalin, “formerly expensive luxury products came to play an important part in the everyday lives of Soviet citizens,” thanks to industrial mass production. Gronow’s focus is on food culture, especially “common luxuries”. In the areas on which I focus here — everyday necessities and in particular, housing, furniture, and other consumer goods to equip the home — it was only in the late 1950s that a thoroughgoing implementation of mass industrial production was undertaken, establishing the infrastructure for a rise in mass living standards and the democratization of consumption which would come to fruition in the Brezhnev era. See also Jane Zavisca, “Consumer Inequalities and Regime Legitimacy in Late Soviet and Post Soviet Russia,” Ph.D. diss. (University of California, Berkeley, 2004).

their place he called for standardized planning and industrial construction: henceforth architects must build “quickly, soundly and economically,” using prefabricated modules and progressive technology.¹⁹ Decisive action on the housing crisis waited, however, until the challenge to Khrushchev’s authority by the “Anti-Party Group” had been overcome in June 1957. The housing decree followed within a month of their defeat, amidst accusations that they had neglected the essential needs and interests of the broad masses.²⁰

The thoroughgoing industrialization of housing construction and attendant transformations in scale and style had corollaries for the manufacture of consumer goods to furnish and equip the new flats. The party acknowledged that mass provision of housing engendered a legitimate need for more consumer goods in new designs, including furniture and domestic technology. The Seven-Year Plan adopted at the 21st Congress in January 1959, and subsequent decrees promised to increase the quantity and improve the quality and assortment of consumer goods and services.²¹ This required a thoroughgoing shift to mass production of consumer goods, which in turn demanded changes in their form, materials, and production methods. Furthermore, the paradigm shift in the architectural planning and style of housing also made the formation of a new style and new types of furniture necessary, according to modernizers, for the significantly lower ceilings and small dimensions of rooms, and the plain, unadorned structures rendered heavy and ornate furniture in the styles of the past inconvenient and incongruous.²² The things that were to surround people in their everyday lives should all conform to a strict, simple, rational and modernist style — the “contemporary style” — the period style of the Khrushchev era, in which the new architecture set the keynote.²³ Hence, as the quotation with which we opened proclaimed, the domestic environment was — or should be — totally “modernized.”

19. N. S. Khrushchev, *O shirokom vnedrenii industrial'nykh metodov, uluchshenii kachestva i snizhenii stoimosti stroitel'stva: rech' na Vsesoiuznom soveshchanii stroitelei, arkhitektorov i rabotnikov promyshlennosti stroitel'nykh materialov, stroitel'nogo i dorozhnogo mashinostroeniia, proektnykh i nauchno-issledovatel'skikh organizatsii, 7 dekabria 1954 g.* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1955).

20. N. Leбина, “Zhil'e: kommunizm v otdel'noi kvartire,” in N. Leбина and A. Chistikov, *Obyvatel' i reformy: kartiny povsednevnoi zhizni gorozhan* (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2003), 175.

21. Khrushchev, *O kontrol'nykh tsifrakh*, 28-29; CPSU Central Committee and Council of Ministers Resolution, “O merakh po uvelicheniiu proizvodstva, rasshireniiu assortimenta i uluchsheniiu kachestva tovarov kul'turno-bytovogo naznacheniiia i khoziaistvennogo obikhoda,” October 1959, in *Sobranie postanovlenii pravitel'stva SSSR* (Moscow: Gos. Izd. Iurid. Lit. 1959).

22. V. Rybitskii, architect, “Metodicheskoe rukovodstvo dlia ekskursovodov: Razdel pokaza inter'ery,” Tsentral'nyi arkhiv goroda Moskvy (TsAGM, formerly TsALIM), f. 21, Tsentral'nyi vystavochnyi zal Moskvy, “Manezh,” op. 1, d. 123, l. 22-25.

23. See Iurii Gerchuk, “The Aesthetics of Everyday Life in the Khrushchev Thaw in the USSR (1954-64),” in Susan E. Reid and David Crowley, eds., *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 81-100.

Yet, the modern interior about which that author enthused was not a real, existing home in which the Soviet Everyman already dwelled, despite the basis of the mythology of *novosel'e* and urban renewal in the material facts of the housing programme. Rather, it was a model interior designed and installed by professionals, a project for mass realization in the near future. The article was reporting on the ideal homes on display at a major exhibition of prototype consumer goods for home furnishing and decorating, sponsored by the USSR Ministry of Culture, Academy of Arts, and the Unions of Artists and of Architects, which was held in Moscow's Central Exhibition Hall from April to June 1961. The exhibition's title was an injunction: to bring "Art into Life!" ("*Iskusstvo — v byt!*"). Here, viewers could admire a number of new, domestic interiors and artistic products of contemporary design intended for industrial production and eventual mass sale. As the guided tour indicated, the exhibition was to shape the future everyday environment both by promoting new styles for mass production, and by reforming the taste of producers and consumers. Perhaps contradictorily, in addition to its modernizing, educational mission it was also intended as a market research exercise, to consult the consumer.²⁴

The art of modern living modeled at the exhibition had yet to be brought into individual homes and realized in people's "private" lives and individual practice, however. To claim that "everything that surrounds us in our everyday lives has been modernized" was at best hyperbolic and premature. Millions had not yet received modern apartments; they were still, and would remain for years to come, cramped into communal apartments, cellars and barracks.²⁵ Those who had already been lucky enough to move soon found that problems of design, production and distribution stood in the way of a thoroughgoing modernization of their material way of life. Moreover, they had formed their tastes and dispositions or *habitus* in a different context: that of Stalinist notions of decent cultured living or, in many cases, of traditional rural households. As we shall discuss in the final section, people implemented and responded to official visions in variable ways.

The concern to make social housing a means to educate and reform the masses was not new in the Khrushchev era, but built, albeit with different emphasis, on the projects of the 1920s and 1930s to create the new way of life and spread *kul'turnost'*. Nor was it unique to the Soviet Union or state socialism, to be taken, in Cold War terms, as further evidence of the "totalitarian" state's exceptional aspiration to penetrate even the most private domains. On the contrary, the idea that rational town planning and architecture can engineer social harmony, health and

24. Rybitskii, "Metodicheskoe rukovodstvo," 1. 22-25.

25. For some, living space amounted to no more than a bed ("*koika-mesto*"), while many lived in conditions unfit for human habitation. In cases considered for rehousing in new apartment blocks, tuberculosis was frequently cited. TsAGM, f. 62, Moskovskii gorodskoi sovmarkhoz, op. 15, d. 267, Perepiska o zhiloi ploshchadi i zaselenii doma v Nov. Cheremushkakh kvartal 23, korpus 8, 1964; TsAGM, f. 62, op. 15, d. 266, Perepiska s Upravleniem ucheta i raspredeleniia zhiloi ploshchadi Mossovetu i zaiavki na dopolnitel'nuu zhiluiu ploshchad', 1964.

happiness is an extension of the Enlightenment project that became an essential tenet of modernist ideology and building practice, and not only under state socialism.²⁶ The paradoxes and problems of making “private life” in public housing have received much attention in studies of social housing projects in Western Europe. There, too, individuals, especially women, often encounter the “state” over matters of housing and domestic everyday life.²⁷

However, as James Scott has observed, paternalistic, “high modernist” schemes to change people’s work habits and habitus, living patterns, moral conduct and worldview, and to make the masses live better, according to standards defined for them by middle-class specialists and do-gooders, have rarely succeeded. Moreover, such projects are not repressive or dangerous in and of themselves. Whether they are benign or malign, simply oppressive or in some way progressive, depends in part on the degree of mutuality — a term Scott borrows from anarchist thought — involved in putting their plans into action: that is, the extent to which the planners have to negotiate with citizens.²⁸

In the home planners and specialists did have to negotiate. They might set the parameters within which people could act, and might bombard people with advice, but their authority and power to compel people to live in the prescribed way was limited. If home was a troublesome site for a modernizing project — at best “a turbulent sea of constant negotiation” in Daniel Miller’s words — this does not mean that the domestic interior should necessarily be seen as an oppositional space, as Henri Lefebvre suggests, if this implies conscious resistance.²⁹ It may be more accurate to see the modern Soviet home of the post-Stalin era as a space that *eluded* attempts to impose order, sometimes even in spite of tenants’ efforts to live up to public visions of rational, modern living. Rather than by strategies of direct resistance, assertions of power or claims for sovereignty, the production of

26. See Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), esp. 6-9 and 18-21; D. Hoffmann and Y. Kotsionis, eds., *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practices* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000). James Donald calls this the “overweening dream of Enlightenment rationalism; to get the city right, and so to produce the right citizens.” James Donald, “This, Here, Now. Imaging Modern Cities,” in S. Westwood and J. Williams, eds., *Imaging Cities* (London: Routledge, 1997), 182; Crowley, “Warsaw Interiors,” 182.

27. Daniel Miller, “Appropriating the State on the Council Estate,” *Man*, 23, 2 (1988): 353-372; Donna Birdwell-Pheasant and Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga, “Introduction,” *House Life: Space, Place and Family in Europe* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 28; Elizabeth Wilson, *Women and the Welfare State* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1977), 9; Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 3. For an example of analysis of the Soviet “totalitarian” collapse of *res privata* into *res publica* see Erich Goldhagen, “The Glorious Future — Realities and Chimeras,” *Problems of Communism* 9, 6 (1960): 17-18. See Susan E. Reid, “The Meaning of Home: ‘The Only Bit of the World You Can Have to Yourself,’” and Steven E. Harris, “‘I Know all the Secrets of my Neighbours’: the Quest for Privacy in the Era of the Separate Apartment,” both in Siegelbaum, *Borders of Socialism*, 145-170; 171-190.

28. James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, Ct: Yale University Press, 1998), 5.

29. Daniel Miller, ed., *Home Possessions: Material Culture Behind Closed Doors* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 4; Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991, originally published in French as *La production de l’espace*, Éditions Anthropos, 1974), 361-2.

domestic space is defined by tactics of everyday coping, spontaneous, *ad hoc* ways of getting by, muddling through, and making do, and of adapting generalized state provision to individual circumstances. As Michel de Certeau indicated in his study of everyday life practices, such “tactics of the weak” were not so much *against* the state as *in spite of*, past, or around the state.³⁰ Stephen Kotkin, discussing such forms of everyday non-compliance in the context of the building of the “Socialist City” Magnitogorsk in the 1930s, has argued that “housing emerged as an important arena in which the relationship between individuals and the state was defined and negotiated, and the confines and texture of daily life — the little tactics of the habitat — took shape.”³¹

The argument is no less applicable to the building and equipping of one-family apartments thirty years on. We shall return, in the final section, to some of these “little tactics.”

Specialist agencies

Theorists of modernity, among them Anthony Giddens and Michel Foucault, have identified the growing authority of specialists as one of its hallmarks.³² Soviet society after Stalin shared in this process. As a number of scholars including H. Gordon Skilling, George Breslauer, Moshe Lewin and Peter Hauslohner have noted, a significant shift took place in this period in the mode of governance and regime-society relations. Specialists of various types gained influence, beginning in the Khrushchev era, as a result of an expansion in consultation between decision makers and “experts”.³³ The housing campaign and accompanying attention to mass consumer goods also presented an occasion for certain types of specialists to promote themselves. The industrialization and standardization of housing construction and consumer goods manufacture, combined with the modernist emphasis on scientific knowledge concerning nutrition, hygiene, or childrearing,

30. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); originally published in French as *L'invention du quotidien*, part 1: *Arts de faire* (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1980); compare, Ekaterina Gerasimova, “Sovetskaia kommunal'naia kvartira kak sotsial'nyi institut: istoriko-sotsiologicheskii analiz,” kand. diss. (Evropeiskii universitet v Sankt-Peterburge, 2000).

31. Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 160.

32. A. Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), 53, 83; D. Hoffmann “European Modernity and Soviet Socialism,” in Hoffmann and Kotsonis, *Russian Modernity*, 245-260; Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” *Ideology and Consciousness* 6 (1979): 5-21.

33. H. Gordon Skilling and Franklyn Griffiths, eds., *Interest Groups in Soviet Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971); George Breslauer, *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders: Building Authority in Soviet Politics* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982); Breslauer, “Khrushchev Reconsidered,” in Stephen F. Cohen, Alexander Rabinowitch and Robert Sharlet, eds., *The Soviet Union Since Stalin* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 50-70; Moshe Lewin, *Political Undercurrents in Soviet Economic Debates* (London: Pluto, 1974), 264-267; Peter Hauslohner, “Politics before Gorbachev: De-Stalinization and the Roots of Reform,” in Alexander Dallin and Gail W. Lapidus, eds., *The Soviet System in Crisis* (Boulder, CO.: Westview Press, 1991), 37-63.

enhanced the position of professionals possessing specialized, theoretical knowledge in the making of the modern home.³⁴ Along with economic and technical experts, these included architects, designers and applied artists, and other accredited taste professionals. Such professionals may be seen as a set of interest groups concerned to establish their importance to Soviet society, to seek both status and influence by deploying what we might call — by analogy with Pierre Bourdieu's "cultural capital" — "expertise capital."³⁵ Acting on the state's behalf, they applied their expertise to solving its problems and executing its priorities: notably to resolve the acute housing shortage and raise living standards without requiring a huge reallocation of resources away from the military and heavy industry. In so doing they simultaneously lobbied for their own position in Soviet society among different elites and specialist groups, institutions and disciplines, and fought internal battles for or against reform and destalinization within their professions.

The volte-face in construction principles and repudiation of Stalinist "excess" can serve as an example of how, while pursuing their own agendas, specialist groups also helped shape the agendas and policies of party and state. Despite Khrushchev's record for hands-on involvement in matters of construction since the 1930s, the widespread assumption that he was the originator of the critique of Stalinist practice and of the blueprint for reform should be treated with no less scepticism than the myth of Stalin's omniscience. Many in the architectural profession already recognized, long before 1954 when Khrushchev decisively intervened, that if the acute housing shortage was to be addressed a thoroughgoing industrialization of Soviet construction was essential.³⁶ Rather than the mastermind of the architectural revolution, it is more plausible to see Khrushchev's role as that of a patron of modernizers in the planning and architectural establishment who had his ear and to whom he lent his authority.³⁷ As Stephen Cohen proposed, the social

34. Compare, on early twentieth-century America, Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 237.

35. See Skilling and Griffiths, *Interest Groups*; Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), [French ed., *La distinction: critique sociale du jugement* (P.: Ed. de Minuit, 1979)].

36. Interest in prefabrication dated back to the late 1930s. Richard Anderson, "Building America — Soviet Friendship ca 1945," paper presented at workshop "Imagining the West," Manchester, June 2006. Even in the most isolated period of the Cold War before Stalin's death, Soviet architects had made it their professional business to keep abreast of architectural and technological developments abroad, including approaches to the common European problems of postwar reconstruction through mass housing and prefabrication, and top architects participated in such international forums as the International Union of Architects where such matters were discussed. Catherine Cooke, "Modernity and Realism: Architectural Relations in the Cold War," in Rosalind P. Blakesley and Susan E. Reid, eds., *Russian Art and the West* (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006), chap. 9. Already before Khrushchev's authoritative intervention, the baroque elaborations of what became known as the Stalinist "triumphal style" had begun to be challenged. A campaign for mass housing and new construction criteria had already been launched at the 19th Party Congress of October 1952, on the same principle as was later adopted: "Industrialization is the new word in architecture [...] to it belongs the future!" "Arkhitektura — na uroven' novykh zadach," *Sovetskoe iskusstvo* (10 Jan. 1953).

37. Gerchuk, "Aesthetics of Everyday Life," 83; *Vsesoiuznoe soveshchanie stroitelei. Sokrashchennyi stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow, 1955), 163-165.

and political confrontation between the rival forces of reformism and conservatism or “innovation and tradition” played out in many institutions and at various levels.³⁸ Conflicts between the “friends and foes of change” structured the art and architectural worlds just as they did the party elite.³⁹ Whatever professional conviction might have driven reformers to repudiate recent Stalinist practice and call for a radical reorientation towards plain building, they were at the same time challenging the monopoly on power, privilege and commissions, which a handful of favoured architects had accrued under Stalin. Khrushchev’s intervention set the party’s imprimatur on the reformist — that is, at once modernizing and destalinizing — agenda. It thereby ensured that some, at least, who had formerly enjoyed power and privilege were discredited and their authority greatly diminished, to the advantage of more technologically oriented modernizers. Thus issues of style, design and construction methods are inextricable from the personal, group, and institutional power struggles within the architectural profession.

These conflicts of authority extended beyond the design and construction of the house into the interior of individual apartments. In addition to the struggles within and between professional groups over the production of the Khrushchev era home, there, “experts” also had to negotiate with lay users, amateur homemakers. Specialists were involved in the design of furniture, fabrics, light fittings and other consumer goods, such as domestic appliances, and also in defining their arrangement, use and social meanings, but their jurisdiction in the home was far from total, as we shall discuss below. First, however, we will attend to the struggle of reformist specialists for authority over the interior and their claims to be the agents of socialist modernity in domestic everyday life.

In a situation where nearly 100 million people had moved into new homes in the past ten years, *Tekhnicheskaiia estetika* noted in 1964, “The creation of the interior of the contemporary urban apartment has become one of the most important state problems, in whose resolution not only specialized architectural-design organizations take part, but also constructors of machines, appliances, furniture and other things”.⁴⁰ The mass scale of industrialized production required to provide higher living standards for all placed state-level responsibilities on the “constructor” (designer). For, the article went on to demonstrate, a mistake made in the prototype would be magnified million-fold when it went into serial production, wasting state resources. Moreover, any shortcomings would be amplified in the experience of millions of people every day.⁴¹ To get the design right was all the more crucial in light of the reinvigoration of Marxist materialist principles

38. Stephen F. Cohen, “The Friends and Foes of Change: Reformism and Conservatism in the Soviet Union,” in Cohen, Rabinowitch and Sharlet, *The Soviet Union Since Stalin*, 12.

39. *Ibid.*, 11. For examples see Susan E. Reid, “The Soviet Art World in the Early Thaw,” *Third Text*, 20, 2 (March 2006): 161-176.

40. Zhukov, “*Tekhnicheskaiia estetika*,” 1.

41. *Ibid.*; B. Neshumov, T. Astrova, “Oborudovanie obshchestvennykh zdani,” *DI*, no. 11 (1959): 44.

including the premise that material conditions determine consciousness.⁴² For, “the interior organizes everyday life,” as the organ of the Moscow Artists’ Union put it in 1959.⁴³ The correct organization of the interior was vital to the quality of life therein, and determined the mindset and behaviour of its inhabitants. Thus a highly responsible role was claimed not only for the engineer and architect of the built space but also for the designer of the mass-produced consumer goods to furnish and equip it.

The profession of industrial “designer” had to be invented and its social authority fought for, a process that began again in the immediate postwar period, resuming the interrupted initiative of the 1920s. The development of Soviet design for industry became a pressing concern by 1959, along with the new priority ascribed to consumer goods production in the Seven-Year Plan, the rise of new types of goods such as domestic appliances and light automobiles as symbols of modern prosperity, and the pledge to improve not only the quantity of output, but the quality, appearance and assortment. The requirements of mass manufacture of consumer goods, entailing a shift from hand-made, one-off objects and applied ornament to the design of prototypes for industrial production, challenged the established principles of the decorative and applied arts and created new tasks and opportunities for artists.⁴⁴

Art specialists had established the “aesthetics of everyday life” as an essential area for reform, integral to destalinization, as early as autumn 1954, even before Khrushchev’s condemnation of Stalinist “excess” in architecture. This campaign extended a traditional role of the intelligentsia that had continued during the Stalin period in the guise of the promotion of *kul’turnost’*, but linked it directly to the critique of the recent, Stalinist past: its material practices and the entrenched power of poorly educated, “uncultured” bureaucrats. Two major articles that year set many of the themes for the destalinization of taste in production, distribution and consumption of consumer goods, and in the furnishing of both public and private interiors. *Sovetskaia torgovlia* published a programmatic statement by the prominent historian of decorative arts and secretary of the USSR Artists’ Union Aleksandr Saltykov (1900-1959). Addressing retail experts, he condemned the vulgarity of Soviet consumer goods and decorative arts in production and called for a ban on “shoddy kitsch” (*khaltura*) that threatened to “spoil the taste of the broad masses.”⁴⁵ Meanwhile, in the reformist journal *Novyi mir*, illustrator Nikolai

42. K. Marx and F. Engels, *Iz rannykh proizvedenii* (Moscow, 1956); James P. Scanlan, *Marxism in the USSR* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 299; “Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s’ezd sovetskikh khudozhnikov,” *Iskusstvo*, no. 3 (1957): 14-16.

43. “Iskusstvo inter’era,” *Moskovskii khudozhnik*, no. 10-11 (June 1959): 1.

44. A. Saltykov, Secretary of board, USSR Artists’ Union, to Secretary of CC CPSU, E. A. Furtseva, “O sostoianii khudozhestvennoi raboty v promyshlennosti i o merakh po ee korennomu uluchsheniiu,” 11 September 1958: Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii (RGANI), f. 5, Apparat TsK KPSS, op. 36, d. 74, l. 27-33.

45. A. Saltykov, “O khudozhestvennom kachestve promyshlennykh tovarov,” *Sovetskaia torgovlia*, no. 9 (1954): 24.

Zhukov rallied the literary intelligentsia with a similar message: to join a crusade for good taste.⁴⁶

Neglect of the aesthetics of everyday life, reformers' argued, had resulted in the corruption of popular taste.⁴⁷ They laid part of the blame at the door of the artistic organizations, the Academy of Arts and Artists' Union. Under Stalinist leadership, these had disdained to admit utilitarian artefacts as distinct and valid objects of artistic cultural production, let alone to recognize design for industrial manufacture as a specialized profession. But artists could no longer remain aloof from the important task of shaping the everyday material environment. They "must give industry models which not only satisfy consumer demand, but which also educate their aesthetic taste and form future demands."⁴⁸ "Their task is to help in the formation of taste *both of the consumer and of the producer*."⁴⁹ Qualified artists must consciously "organize" people's behaviour and attitudes by surrounding them with beauty in their everyday material environment, both at work and at home, intervening in the material form of everything from kitchen utensils to the design of machine tools, from the arrangement of furniture to urban planning. Even household technology required the attention of aesthetic specialists.⁵⁰

It is time to go out, comrade artist, into the expanses of our powerful Soviet industry! [...] It is time to affirm the role of the artist in every Soviet concern, even if it is a plant producing road construction machines, machine tools, and trolleybuses [...] In our epoch of the construction of Communism art must penetrate all our life, all our activity. Art, aesthetics must constitute an organic aspect of social production!⁵¹

46. N. Zhukov, "Vospitanie vkusa," *Novyi mir*, no. 10 (1954): 159-176; and readers' responses, "O vospitanii vkusa," *Novyi mir*, no. 2 (1955): 247-254.

47. Saltykov, "O khudozhestvennom," 30; L. Kamenskii, "O vkusakh i bezvkusitse," *Trud* (1 June 1957): 1; V. Kostin, "O khudozhestvennosti," *Iskusstvo*, no. 2 (1956): 14-16; Victor Buchli, "Khrushchev, Modernism, and the Fight against Petit-Bourgeois Consciousness in the Soviet Home," and Susan E. Reid, "Destalinization and Taste, 1953-1963," both in *Journal of Design History*, 10, 2 (1997): 161-176; 177-202.

48. V. Shvili, "Chto daiut konkretno-sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia promyshlennosti i torgovle," *Tekhnicheskaiia estetika*, no. 2 (Feb. 1965): 1-2.

49. A. Dravkin, "Krasivoe sosedstvet s nekrasivym," *DI*, no. 2 (1962): 37 (emphasis added); K. Iogansen, "Rol' veshchi v esteticheskom vospitanii," *DI*, no. 5 (1961): 2-3; I. Rosenfel'd, "Spor o vkuse," *Sovetskaiia kul'tura*, (9 September 1961); Neshumov, Astrova, "Oborudovanie obshchestvennykh zdani," 44.

50. I. Artobolevskii, "Krasota v tekhnike," *DI*, no. 5 (1960): 3-4; K. Kantor, "Tekhnicheskaiia estetika i proizvodstvennoe iskusstvo," *DI*, no. 9 (1960): 18-19; V. Blokhin, "Khudozhnik oformliaet GES," *DI*, no. 4 (1959); Editorial, "Zerkalo epokhi. K diskussii o stile," *Tvorchestvo*, no. 12 (1959): 10-11.

51. K. Kantor, "Gde zhe granitsa prikladnogo iskusstva?" *DI*, no. 6, (1961): 23, with reference to O. Antonov, "Mimo khudozhnika," *Khudozhnik*, no. 1 (1961).

Recalcitrant bureaucrats and the battle for the interior

As the Constructivists had already discovered in the 1920s, the path of the artist into production — and thence into people's homes — was not an easy one, however.⁵² So, too, during the Thaw, the inertia or snobbish attitude of some artists and their institutions towards applying their artistic expertise to ordinary everyday things were not the only obstacles to the recognition of design and the designer in the modern socialist world, in the taste reformers' analysis. The authority of artists and aesthetic experts in industry had to be fought for in the production and distribution of consumer goods.⁵³

Between the artist and the consumer stood numerous other actors, interests, institutional instances and material obstacles. Taste professionals saw themselves as locked in battle for influence over the material environment of everyday life, pitted against industrial managers who refused to adopt innovative designs or listen to artists, and trade organizations that failed to place orders with industry for new styles or products. In spite of the best efforts of artists, they argued trade and industry still continued to present the Soviet people only with outdated styles. At the end of the 1950s furniture shops remained "museums of bad taste," as Zhukov had charged in 1954, stuffed with the ornate and heavy styles favoured by the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, which were quite inappropriate for the homes of Soviet workers. To sell such atavistic items could only corrupt the people's taste.⁵⁴ This charge was repeated again and again in the course of the Khrushchev period. Numerous articles in a range of publications complained that, far from promoting modern, socialist standards of good taste, shops continued to peddle the old, propagating bad taste and bourgeois values by inertia or default, "to the joy of their lazy and ignorant directors but to the sorrow of the consumer."⁵⁵ *Krokodil* named and shamed furniture workshops still producing models that were "great grandmother's dream" — antiquarian styles and items of furniture such as commodes that no longer had a role in the modern Soviet home. In a tale of not-so-happy housewarming, a husband wonders why his new bride is not pleased with their new home. Then the scales fall from his eyes:

Where are we? Visiting a cattle-merchant or a retired collegiate assessor? The young husband looked around and groaned. It was not heaven. Or rather, it was heaven, but some other heaven, not ours, not contemporary but remote.⁵⁶

52. Osip Brik noted in 1923: "At the moment things are hard for the constructivist-production artist. Artists turn their backs on him. Industrialists wave him away in annoyance. The man in the street goggles and, frightened, whispers: "'Futurist!'" Osip Brik, "V proizvodstvo!" *Lef*, no. 1 (1923): 108.

53. Saltykov, "O sostoianii," 1. 27-28.

54. Zhukov, "Vospitanie vkusa," 162.

55. "Mechta vashei prababushki," *Krokodil*, no. 31 (10 Nov. 1959): 14; L. Polivnik, "O pochtovykh otkrytkakh i konvertakh," *Moskovskii khudozhnik*, no. 10-11 (June 1959).

56. "Mechta vashei prababushki," 10.

Despite all the talk about the need for production according to the laws of beauty, the journal *Smena* charged, all one could find in the shops were dinner services in outmoded form, crude wallpapers, and luxurious chandeliers: all things that would satisfy only “philistine” taste and not that of a modern Soviet person.⁵⁷ Even new commodities such as television and radio sets with the latest technology came encased in cabinets that masked their modernity with a style of a bygone era. Thus, “new, rational forms struggle against ordinary, banal mass consumer goods.”⁵⁸

The continued production of tasteless and outdated things revealed the absence of qualified artists in factories, aesthetic reformers charged. Even in industries where artists were routinely and traditionally employed, such as textile production, ceramics or glassware, they were not properly empowered to introduce new designs. “(T)he artist in the factory is at best a consultant, sometimes a welcome one, sometimes only tolerated, but in general [seen as] dispensable. It cannot go on like this. Either the artist will become a fully accredited participant in the production process or our “*shirpotreb*” (“mass consumer goods”) will be abandoned to banality and tastelessness — there’s no third way!”⁵⁹

The problem, identified already in Saltykov’s 1954 critique and repeated in many subsequent considerations, was that responsibility for approving designs for production and distribution was left to, or arrogated by, trade and industry administrators. Housing architect K. Blomerius, also writing in *Sovetskaia torgovlia*, blamed the slowness of the Moscow furniture industry to introduce new forms and styles on the fact that the body responsible for approving models, the Artistic Council of the board of the Moscow *sovnarkhoz*, was dominated by representatives of industry and trade without any artistic training: out of 42 members only three or four were architects or artists. Consequently,

in evaluating proposals, the council is dominated by the views of representatives of trade. Based on false ideas about the tastes and needs of the population, which are engendered by the still unresolved insufficiency of various furniture, these judgments inevitably lead the council to incorrect decisions, which thereby predetermine industry’s wrong approach to questions of the future development of the furniture industry.⁶⁰

Bureaucrats, having little understanding of artistic matters, interposed their philistine penchant for sham and vulgar excess between artist-designers and people. “How often the caprice of the philistine behind the directors’ desk decides the fate of an artists’ great and thoughtful work, reduces his lengthy labours to naught, and wilfully deprives him of his well-earned fee!”⁶¹

57. K. Makarov, “Zhizn’ trebuet,” *Smena*, no. 4 (1961): 28.

58. Dravkin, “Krasivoe,” 36-37.

59. *Ibid.*, 37.

60. K. Blomerius, “Pochemu malo udobnoi i deshevoi mebeli (zametki arkhitekтора),” *Sovetskaia torgovlia*, no. 9 (1959): 28.

61. A. Goncharov, “Stil’ sovremennosti” (1959), Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva (RGALI), f. 2943, Moskovskoe otdelenie Soiuza khudozhnikov RSFSR, op. 1, d. 3750, l. 2; A. Varnovitskaia, “O probleme formirovaniia esteticheskogo vkusa,” *Moskovskii*

Thus good models languished in factory laboratories without being allowed into production, while “anti-artistic” ones were produced *en masse*. According to Saltykov, “deciding the fate of the assortment, the retail specialist (*tovaroved*) arrogates the role of representative of the taste of the broad popular masses who knows best what the customer needs and what won’t sell. In fact this knowledge is very often wrong, expressing the taste not of the people but of the *tovaroved* himself, oriented not toward progressive consumer demands but often towards backward ones.”⁶²

From Saltykov, Zhukov and Blomerius’s point of view, bureaucrats usurped a role that properly belonged to experts like themselves: to speak for, and act as guardians of the people’s taste. They pitted their authority as aesthetic specialists, *iskusstvovedy*, against that of the *tovarovedy*. This competition between professional groups was coloured by a large dose of social and cultural snobbery: the cultural intelligentsia’s claims to be the sole true arbiter of taste and its traditional condescension towards trade workers, industrial managers and bureaucrats, whose taste it defined as regressive and philistine.⁶³ The bureaucrats, allegedly governed by greed and self-interest, are discursively assigned the position of the class enemy of the past, against whose ignorance and regressive values the progressive and truly cultured Soviet intelligentsia must do battle in the name of the people.

As Basile Kerblay found, Soviet discourse’s ideologically determined non-admission of the intelligentsia as a class (even as social differences in consumption patterns were acknowledged) avoided the issue of differentiated access to political power and influence in the emerging social stratification. “Power too is stratified and ramified. It is important to know whether all social groups have an equal say in political decisions.”⁶⁴ Differentiated access to cultural authority — or “cultural capital” in Pierre Bourdieu’s terms — was also not fully acknowledged in terms of its sources and power implications. However, efforts to define normative taste in the Thaw were not innocent of struggles to gain or maintain power and social status. Not only in the capitalist West but also in Soviet type socialism, consumption practices, especially the manifestation of taste, played a role in the creation and maintenance of social relationships of domination and submission. Regimes of taste were a means of everyday social positioning and hegemony in which a certain part of the increasingly massive and diverse intelligentsia assumed the prerogative to define legitimate culture. If class-based, inherited differences in access to capital

khudozhnik, no. 4 (April 1959); G. L’vov, “Osteregaites’ poshlosti — borites’ za khoroshii vkus!” *Moskovskii khudozhnik*, no. 10-11 (June 1959); M. Taraev, “Pervyi vserossiiskii s’ezd khudozhnikov,” *DI*, no. 9 (1960): 3; I. Rozenfel’d, “Spor o vkuse,” *Sovetskaiia kul’tura*, (9 September 1961). An open letter from well-known artists (including sculptor Sergei Konev and painter Iurii Pimenov) blamed trade workers for barring “real artists” from furniture, ceramics, glass and other branches of industry out of greed, for example, not accepting glasses without ornament because decorated ones were sold at two or three times the price, which made it easier to fulfil the plan. Georgii Mariagin, “Avtomaty i krasota,” *Ogonëk*, no. 24 (7 June 1959): 21.

62. Saltykov, “O khudozhestvennom kachestve,” 30.

63. For further discussion see Reid “Destalinization and Taste,” 177-201; and Reid, “In the Name of the People: The Manège Affair Revisited,” *Kritika*, 6, 4 (Fall 2005): 673-716.

64. Basile Kerblay, *Modern Soviet Society* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 204.

were not an issue in the nationalized economy, the possession of cultural capital and markers of distinction nevertheless was.⁶⁵

The production of the Soviet consumer

Lazy, arrogant and even corrupt managers and bureaucrats were, of course, stock scapegoats of Soviet discourse, widely used in the Thaw to dramatise the conflict between “friends and foes of change,” and not only in discussions of the problems of “technical aesthetics.” In the fictional literature of destalinization, the anti-heroes, opposed to the impulse of youth and progress, were frequently recalcitrant bureaucrats who squashed initiative, resisted technological innovation, and overrode expert opinion.⁶⁶ Attacks on bureaucrats and ministries were also a central aspect of Khrushchev’s reformism. That the campaign against bad taste, conservatism and inertia in consumer goods production was so ubiquitous indicates that this was no isolated initiative of individual authors or editors, but had support from within the party leadership. It marked a temporary convergence of interests of reformist elements in the party-state, amongst economic specialists, and in the cultural intelligentsia.

In search of who or what was to blame and what was to be done, some critics did not stop at blaming bureaucrats but sought systemic causes, even looking to the way the central plan operated. In so doing, they introduced the concept of the consumer’s interests, constituting consumers discursively as a kind of collective actor or pressure group, an agent of change.

Khrushchev weighed in on the subject of consumer goods and luxury or “excess” (*izlishestvo*), and on the contradiction between the interests of factory directors and of the consumer in June 1959, extending his earlier condemnation of excess in architecture:

Many consumers at times don’t want to buy our Soviet furniture but look for foreign [furniture]. Why? It is more rational. The plan for furniture factories here is planned in rubles. Therefore it is more profitable for the factory to make a single massive armchair, and this big armchair will be heavier and that means also more expensive. The furniture makers stick this and that on the chair and all that costs money! The plan is fulfilled formally, but who needs such a chair? If they made simple chairs then do you know how many of them, these chairs, you’d need to produce to fulfill the plan? So at the factory they think: armchair or chairs? And the scales tip in the favour of the armchair.⁶⁷

65. Compare Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*; Fitzpatrick, “Becoming Cultured,” 216-237; Kelly, *Refining Russia*; Colin Campbell, “The Sociology of Consumption,” in Daniel Miller, ed., *Acknowledging Consumption* (London: Routledge, 1995), 103-104; Leora Auslander, *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

66. For example V. Dudintsev, “Ne khlebom ediny,” *Novyi mir*, no. 8 (1956) [*Not by Bread Alone* (London: Hutchinson, 1957)].

67. N. S. Khrushchev, *Za dal’neishii pod’em proizvoditel’nykh sil strany, za tekhnicheskii progress vo vsex otrasliakh narodnogo khoziaistva. Rech’ na Plenum TsK KPSS, 29 June 1959* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1959), 30-31.

The First Secretary did not stop at blaming recalcitrant individuals for these irrationalities. In the same speech he obliquely pointed to malfunctions in the fundamental operative method of the socialist economy, central planning. The system by which standards, pricing structures and norms were set was at fault. Norms in tons or rubles encouraged factory managers to produce unnecessarily resource- or labour-intensive goods: knives, for example, whose handles were lavishly decorated or carved, but whose blades bent when you tried to cut with them, rather than workaday cheap ones. As aesthetic and economic reformers had audaciously argued since the mid-1950s, resistance to modernization and rationalization could not be put down entirely to conservative, uneducated or lazy managers. It was endemic to the command economy.⁶⁸ The technical and economic interests of industry discouraged innovation and diversification. In the interests of the plan, enterprise directors sacrificed modernization, efficiency, and the people's needs for serviceable and affordable goods. In short, they traduced the interests of the consumer.

But the consumer was beginning to talk back and to make herself felt — if only as an absence. Shoppers' "strikes," resulting in growing stocks of outdated, poor quality, badly designed or overly expensive goods, made it clear that consumers had to be taken into account as a kind of aggregate "public." As long as supply had failed to meet demand, economic specialists argued, Soviet shops had had no trouble selling their tasteless and old-fashioned stock — to the detriment of popular taste. But once production of consumer goods and disposable incomes increased, the Soviet consumer became more discerning and demanding and would not simply buy whatever was thrown at her.⁶⁹ The limits of any analogy with the phenomenon of consumer groups in western democracies as a form of civil society must be emphasized, however. Further research is required on this matter, but this refusal to buy is unlikely to have been a coordinated action by a lobby with any independent forum for public exchange among its members, in which common agendas and action could be argued and agreed — aside from the queue, the complaints book, and, to some extent, the comments books at consumer goods exhibitions. Nevertheless, it is significant that the consumer and her/his wishes became the object of much discussion which attributed to consumers a kind of agency and ability to exert pressure on the economy, as the aggregate effect of multiple, individual consumption decisions. As Pierre Bourdieu has observed with regard to

68. Compare Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the U.S.S.R.* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), 357; Saltykov, "O khudozhestvennom kachestve," 29-30.

69. For Western commentators in the 1960s and 1970s it became axiomatic that "Russian consumers are becoming fussier shoppers." Hedrick Smith, *The Russians* (London: Sphere Books, 1976), 61; Klaus Mehnert, *Soviet Man and His World* (New York, 1962); Kerblay, *Modern Soviet Society*, 284; Jane Shapiro, "Soviet Consumer Policy in the 1970s: Plan and Performance," in Donald R. Kelley, ed., *Soviet Politics in the Brezhnev Era* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1980), 105, 123. The discerning consumer figured already in Soviet discourse on *kul'turnost'* in the second half of the 1930s as a demonstration of the achievements of the Revolution, but was not yet treated as a sociological fact whose demands should be systematically studied and factored into production plans. Fitzpatrick, "Becoming Cultured," 216-237; Hessler, "Cultured Trade," 183; Hessler, *Social History*, 197-215, 308.

modern western democracies, the “public” and its “opinion” exist only as a set of representations, but these may have real effects on social and political projects.⁷⁰ The discursive production of the Soviet mass consumer also had real effects as a rhetorical tool to promote change in arguments over planning priorities, and as such must be placed amongst reformist challenges to Stalinist doctrine and practice as an important aspect of destalinization.

“That the Soviet consumer is better off today than he was in 1950 or even 1955 is open to little doubt,” western Cold War observers admitted. “Nor is there any doubt that the gap between Soviet and American outputs of consumer goods has narrowed.”⁷¹ Indeed, by 1959, annual sales of consumer goods were approximately double those for 1952.⁷² However, they saw this progress as the source of new problems for the Soviet economy and legitimacy of its leadership. In accordance with the “Nylon War” scenario outlined with wry humour by David Riesman in 1952 and pursued in American cultural offensives such as the American National Exhibition in Moscow in 1959, they emphasized the potential which an escalation of consumer desire had to destabilize and delegitimize Soviet power, especially when exacerbated by increased flow of information about life styles in the West.⁷³ Thus, Marshall Goldman wrote in *Problems of Communism* in 1960:

While life has materially improved for the Soviet citizen, there is every reason to believe that the increased supply of consumer goods has only whetted his appetite rather than satisfied his needs. The Russians have found that new apartments stimulate demand for new furniture, that new suits create a desire for new shoes. So goes the unending process of demand generation, a phenomenon well known in the consumer-oriented economies of the West.⁷⁴

Such an infinite, insatiable escalation of demand was evidently feared by the Soviet authorities.⁷⁵ Moreover, this spectre converged with the intelligentsia’s traditional,

70. Pierre Bourdieu, “Public opinion does not exist,” in Armand Mattelart and Seth Siegelau, eds., *Communication and Class Struggle* vol. 1: *Capitalism and Imperialism* (New York: International General, 1979), 124-310 [French ed. “L’opinion publique n’existe pas”, in P. Bourdieu, *Questions de sociologie* (P.: Ed. de Minuit, 1980), 222-235]; and Bourdieu, *Distinction*, chap. 8.

71. Imogene Erro, “‘Catching Up and Outstripping’: an Appraisal,” *Problems of Communism*, 10, 4 (July-Aug. 1961): 24-25.

72. Marshall I. Goldman, “More for the Common Man? Living Standards and Consumer Goods,” *Problems of Communism*, 9, 5 (Sep.-Oct. 1960): 33; M.-E. Ruban, “Private Consumption in the USSR: Changes in the Assortment of Goods 1940-1959,” *Soviet Studies* 13, 3 (Jan. 1962): 240-242.

73. David Riesman, *Abundance for What? And Other Essays* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964), 65-77; John Gunther, *Inside Russia Today*, rev. ed. (first published 1958; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), 423; Walter Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), 168.

74. Goldman, “More for the Common Man?,” 33; referring to *Sovetskaia torgovlia* (15 April 1958): 1.

75. For fuller argumentation see Susan Reid, “Cold War in the Kitchen,” *Slavic Review*, 61, 2 (summer 2002): 211-252.

indeed self-definitional, disdain for materialism and excess, and was part of a wider European apprehensiveness concerning the impact of American models of consumerist modernity. But the Soviet person was supposed to possess a rational consciousness of the relation between his or her individual needs and the greater good of the collective, and between present satisfaction and future development towards communism and abundance for all. Armed with this consciousness and distinguished by civic self-discipline she was supposed to limit her own potential desires voluntarily within “rational consumption norms.”⁷⁶ The party sought to introduce a minimum wage, adequate for a modest standard of living for a “normal” urban family. This was both a matter of gathering data on existing consumption patterns and of prescribing a “normative consumption budget” for use in economic planning.⁷⁷ Advice literature, discourses of taste, and visual culture all propagated “rational” norms of consumption, insisting upon the “scientific” authority of such analyses and their basis in the empirical study of needs.⁷⁸

That rational consumption norms were introduced as a means to contain consumption desires and prevent them from getting out of hand and exceeding the national economy’s capacity to satisfy them is hard to refute. The management of consumption played a vital role in the maintenance of the Soviet system after Stalin’s death.⁷⁹ However, I would like to propose here that the one-way disciplining and suppression of desire was not the whole story, and rational norms were not simply an instrument of “dictatorship over needs.”⁸⁰ Rational needs were not conceived of as static but as dynamic and responsive to changing conditions: they would develop along with the economy as it progressed towards the attainment of superabundance promised under communism. According to Marx, “the satisfaction of the first need [...] leads to new needs; and this production of new needs is the first historical act.”⁸¹ Accordingly, as the national economy grew, so would the population’s rational needs and legitimate demands.⁸² The definition of “rational needs” was a means to mediate between centrally planned production and decentralized, potentially spontaneous

76. “For all their huge diversity, the requirements of people will express the sound, reasonable requirements of the fully developed person,” noted the 1961 Party Programme. Grey Hodnett, ed., *Resolutions and Decisions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, vol. 4: *The Khrushchev Years 1953-1964* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 209-210, 247; Ruban, “Private Consumption,” 246.

77. Mervyn Matthews, *Class and Society in Soviet Russia* (London: Allen Lane, 1972), 81-83.

78. For examples see Reid, “Cold War in the Kitchen,” 211-252.

79. Breslauer notes the need simultaneously to meet and depress consumer expectations of current consumption: *Khrushchev and Brezhnev*, 139-140; Zavisca, “Consumer Inequalities,” chap. 2; and see Reid, “Cold War in the Kitchen,” 211-252.

80. Ferenc Fehér, Agnes Heller, György Márkus, *Dictatorship Over Needs* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983).

81. Karl Marx, “The German Ideology,” in David McLellan, ed., *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 166; “XXII Party Congress,” in Hodnett, *Resolutions and Decisions*, 229-230: “Output of consumer goods must meet the growing consumer demand in full and must conform to its charges.”

82. K. Skovoroda, “Zadachi dal’neishego uluchsheniia torgovogo obsluzhivaniia naseleniia,” *Planovoe khoziaistvo*, no. 2 (1960): 43-53.

consumption in a situation of increased production of consumer goods: not a means to prevent change in demands but to manage it.

Soviet economists and ideologues explained the problem of unmarketable products as a legitimate consequence of success. In conditions where increased production of consumer goods meant that, quantitatively, (some) demand was now satisfied, "the consumer makes higher demands on the quality and range of goods, style (*fason*), and fashion. In the absence of the required goods, corresponding to the consumer's demands, the latter has the possibility of waiting in order to purchase precisely those goods he requires."⁸³ The Soviet person, now better educated and primarily urban, had become a more discerning consumer, more particular in his or her tastes and no longer willing to buy just whatever was offered for sale. The consumer would exercise *choice*, even if that choice was limited: to buy or not to buy.⁸⁴ Furthermore, the growing and changing demands of the Soviet consumer should be taken into account by production. They were particularly evident in regard to technology for the home, such as televisions and radios, where technical advances rendered older models obsolete. Yet outdated models still sat on the shelves. In regard to clothing it was admitted that some styles "grow morally outdated" as a result of which heaps of silk dresses languished in warehouses without demand. Thus, the desire to follow fashion, within moderation, was acknowledged not only as legitimate, but even as an entitlement.⁸⁵

Implicit in these admissions that differences in fashion and style had begun to matter, was an acknowledgement of qualitative, psychological and sociological factors rather than exclusively physiological and quantifiable dictates. Along with quantitative changes, significant shifts also began to take place in the nature and meaning of consumption that mark a watershed in the development of a Soviet mass consumer society.⁸⁶ As Victoria Bonnell rightly notes: "The toiler of the Thaw was acknowledged to be not just a producer but also a consumer, a consumer with tastes, with a sense of style."⁸⁷ As opportunities to consume and the range of

83. Skovoroda, "Zadachi," 45-46; Goldman, "More for the Common Man?" 33. As Hessler notes, however, in the mid-1950s high unsatisfied demand for consumer goods was also construed as a sign of prosperity. Hessler, *Social History*, 307-308.

84. Shapiro, "Soviet Consumer Policy," 109. Growth in consumers' disposable income was offset by the persistence of a strong sellers' market, according to Jan S. Prybyla, "The Soviet Consumer in Khrushchev's Russia," *Russian Review*, 20, 3 (July 1961): 201.

85. Skovoroda, "Zadachi," 47. See Larissa Zakaharova's article in this issue.

86. Shapiro, "Soviet Consumer Policy," 104-128; Zavisca, "Consumer Inequalities." On Soviet-type socialist societies as consumer cultures see Ina Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis: Die Geschichte der Konsumkultur in der DDR* (Köln, 1999); Merkel, "Consumer Culture in the GDR, or How the Struggle for Antimodernity was Lost on the Battleground of Consumer Culture," in Susan Strasser, Charles Macgovern and Matthias Judt, eds., *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the 20th Century* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 281-299. Merl, "Sowjetisierung in der Welt des Konsums," 167-194; Merl, "Staat und Konsum," 205-241.

87. V. E. Bonnell, "The Remaking of Homo Sovieticus during the Thaw," commentary presented at conference "The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s," University of California, Berkeley, 15 May 2005, 4.

products increased, so too did the semantic importance of consumption: in modern Soviet society consumption was not merely a matter of satisfying needs (if it ever had been), but a means of social differentiation, distinction, and self-fashioning, that is, a symbolic as much as an instrumental activity.⁸⁸

A dynamic and heterogeneous conception of consumer entitlement — one that acknowledged that “rational consumption” was not static but developed along with the economy and technological advancement, and which admitted differentiated preferences according to social or ethnic group, geographical region, individual inclination, and changes of fashion, rather than universal and quantifiable physiological needs — was much harder to forecast or systematically to satisfy than an abstract notion of needs “in general.” In the Thaw, reformers also proposed a more radical solution to the chronic crisis of central planning and satisfaction of the consumer: to make production more directly answerable and responsive to demand and thereby make the “consumer” an agent in the rationalization and modernization of consumer goods production. Khrushchev endorsed the need for greater “consumer sovereignty” in December 1963:

We should introduce a system whereby factories and firms are directly responsible to the consumer for the quality of their output, must do everything so that enterprises and firms do not work for the warehouse but for the consumers.⁸⁹

Numerous articles in *Sovetskaia trgovlia* explored ways in which shops and trade organizations should gather, analyse and respond to consumer demand, and reflect this in the orders they placed with industry.⁹⁰ Proposals that market forces — or

88. Jean Baudrillard, referring specifically to capitalist societies, characterizes modern life by consumption not so much of the *use* value of goods as of their *sign* value: that is of meanings or signs that are not fixed to a particular object, but determined by its position in a self-referential system of signifiers. Jean Baudrillard, “The System of Objects,” trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 1996), [French ed., *Le système des objets* (P.: Gallimard, 1968)]; Colin Campbell, “The Sociology of Consumption,” in Daniel Miller, ed., *Acknowledging Consumption* (London: Routledge 1995), 103-4.

89. N. S. Khrushchev, *Pravda* (15 December 1963); Breslauer, *Khrushchev and Brezhnev*, 100; Abraham Katz, *The Politics of Economic Reform in the Soviet Union* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 71; Goldman, “More for the Common Man?,” 32-41.

90. From as early as 1954, the trade journal *Sovetskaia trgovlia* (hereafter *ST*) printed discussions of how to study demand. Examples include: I. Korzhenevskii, “Metody izucheniia sprosna naseleniia,” *ST*, no. 5 (1954): 9-14; Korzhenevskii, “Opredelenie potrebnosti naseleniia v tovarakh,” *ST*, no. 8 (1961): 13-15; S. Lavrenev, “Iz redaktsionnoi pochty. Pokupateli prosiat, a promyshlennost’ ne daet,” *ST*, no. 10 (1959): 35; T. Abrasin, E. Fleisher, “Luchshe organizovat’ izuchenie sprosna,” *ST*, no. 3 (1961): 12-16; Iu. Krasnov, “Novym tovaram — massovoe proizvodstvo,” *ST*, no. 4 (1961): 13-14; S. Zorin, V. Sokolov, “V osnovu raboty — izuchenie sprosna,” *ST*, no. 10 (1961): 18-21; R. Didenko, “Izuchenie sprosna v univernmage,” *ST*, no. 7 (1962): 19-23; N. Kononov, “O metodakh opredeleniia potrebnosti v tovarakh,” *ST*, no. 6 (1963): 5-11; V. Budaragin, “Organizatsiia i tekhnicheskie sredstva izucheniia sprosna,” *ST*, no. 6 (1963): 55-60; A. Rudakov, “Tochnee opredeliat’ potrebnost’ v tovarakh,” *ST*, no. 11 (1963): 34-35. Such discussions gathered new vigour and authority from 1963, appearing in the party theoretical organ: e.g. A. Struev, “Torgovlia i proizvodstvo,” *Kommunist*, no. 16 (Nov. 1964): 39-48; and in *Tekhnicheskaiia estetika*: Shvili, “Chto daiut”; M. Subbotin,

“commodity-money relations” as they were euphemistically referred to - could play a role in the socialist economy, and that production plans might be modified by taking consumer demand into account contradicted Soviet economic doctrine as enshrined under Stalin, based on the sanctity of central planning.⁹¹ Yet by the early-to-mid-1960s, reformers were openly arguing that the systematic study of consumer demand was vital to central state planning and were seeking ways in which changing consumer demand could be factored into the central plan and economic forecasting. This agenda was part of the broader critique of the failings of the Stalinist directive economy and search for solutions to the chronic crisis of planning which, beginning in the mid-fifties around the proposals of the political economist Evsei Liberman, engendered a revival of economic thought both in the Soviet Union and in other parts of Socialist Europe. Economists and other specialists in Poland (Włodzimierz Brus) and Czechoslovakia (Ota Šik) began to discuss publicly the merits of expanding the use of market forces, making profitability of enterprises a performance indicator, and increasing enterprise autonomy. Such proposals also came under discussion even within the Soviet party apparatus.⁹² The so-called “Liberman reforms” became the basis for the decentralization of economic decision making under the Kosygin reforms introduced in September 1965, which included making sales rather than gross output the main indicator of an enterprise’s performance.⁹³ Thus the discussion of the consumer as a factor in planning was an important platform of destalinization in the context of exchanges of ideas within the Bloc.

The study of the consumer was also part of the wider revival of systematic, social science methods of information gathering concerning the moods and practices of the population which took place in the Thaw, notably the *Komsomol'skaia pravda* Institute of Public Opinion set up in 1960. In 1965 an All-Union Scientific Research Institute for the Study of the Population’s Demand for

“Izuchenie zarubezhnymi firmami trebovanii potrebitelia,” *Tekhnicheskaja estetika*, no. 4 (1965): 12-13. The gathering of data on consumer demand was not entirely new in the Thaw. See Amy E. Randall, “‘Revolutionary Bolshevik Work’: Stakhanovism in Retail Trade,” *Russian Review*, 59, 3 (July 2000): 433. What was new was the extent of interest in it as a means to resolve problems of planning, and the effort to systematize its study.

91. Philip Hanson notes that “Behind the academic debate [on economic reform] in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary and the USSR there lurked the notion of ‘market socialism.’” Philip Hanson, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Economy* (London: Longman, 2003), 101-103. According to Ota Šik, head of the Institute of Economics in Prague, the concept of “socialist market relations” originated in 1957-1958, but at that time the terms “market” and “competition” could not be used and the vaguer concept of “commodity relations” had to be substituted. H.G. Skilling, *Czechoslovakia’s Interrupted Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 119-125.

92. Katz, *Politics of Economic Reform*, chap. 5; Richard W. Judy, “The Economists” in Skilling, ed., *Interest Groups*, 209-252; Nove, *Economic History*, 356-361; Hauslohner, “Politics,” 52.

93. Katz, *Politics of Economic Reform*, 72; Basile Kerblay, “Les propositions de Liberman pour un projet de réforme de l’entreprise en URSS,” *Cahiers du Monde russe* 4, 3 (Jul.-Sept. 1963): 301-311. Similar reforms took place in Poland in the late 1950s, East Germany in 1963, and Czechoslovakia and Hungary in 1968.

Consumer Goods was established (albeit briefly) under the USSR Ministry of Trade.⁹⁴ More informal mechanisms for monitoring popular demands and discontents were also used, some of them long-standing, such as shoppers' conferences, complaints books, which by law had to be made available in shops and services, and letters to editors of popular magazines such as *Ogonëk*.⁹⁵ In 1959 *Ogonëk* invited readers to report on substandard quality and choice of goods and services. This was a mobilization of a form of "public control" consistent with the shift of emphasis from state to social organizations and "participatory government": the strong implication was that it was the public's role and even duty to monitor standards and press for improvements.⁹⁶

That Soviet consumers had, or could possibly have, any effective lobby over important matters of production and pricing has, on the whole, been denied by Western commentators; at best they might affect the more superficial aspects such as the hygiene of shops.⁹⁷ Moreover, it might be argued that rather than giving the consumer a voice, mechanisms for gathering information about the consumer merely added another layer of subjection and control. Demoscopy — the gathering of information concerning consumer behaviour and wishes — may be seen as a systematic form of surveillance or mechanism of "knowledge-power" in Michel Foucault's terms.⁹⁸ Taking the place of the rather haphazard gathering of information through denunciations, the scientific analysis and categorization of the population rendered its desires and demands visible to the regime and thereby, as abstractions, seemingly manageable. This function is not specific to state socialism, but an aspect of modern "governmentality" in general, whereby regimes shifted from reliance on physical coercion and corporal punishment to knowledge, relying increasingly on information gathering, rationality, and professional expertise.

94. Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki (RGAE), f. 375, Vsesoiuznyi nauchno-issledovatel'skii institut po izucheniiu sprosna naseleniia na tovary narodnogo potrebleniia i kon'iunktury torgovli, created and dissolved 1965.

95. Compare Randall, "Revolutionary Bolshevik Work"; Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, chap. 7. On complaints books see "O knige zhalob i predlozhenii," *Mestnaia promyshlennost' i khudozhestvennye promysly*, no. 3 (1962): 27; Elena Bogdanova, "Gazetnye zhaloby kak strategii zashchity potrebitel'skikh interesov: pozdnosovetskii period," *Teleskop: nabliudeniia za povsednevnoi zhizn'iu peterburzhtsev*, no. 6 (2002): 44-48.

96. "Khorosho li vas obsluzhivaiut?" *Ogonëk*, no. 11 (8 March 1959); Howard R. Swearer, "Popular Participation: Myths and Realities," *Problems of Communism*, 9, 5 (Sept.-Oct. 1960): 42-51; Breslauer, "Khrushchev Reconsidered," 50-70; Jeffrey W. Hahn, *Soviet Grassroots: Citizen Participation in Local Soviet Government* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1988); Theodore Friedgut, *Political Participation in the USSR* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

97. John Keep, *Last of the Empires: A History of the Soviet Union, 1945-1991* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 100-101; Alex Inkeles, *Social Change in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), 406.

98. Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," *Ideology and Consciousness*, 6 (1979): 5-21; Michel Foucault, *Power-Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980); Erica Carter, *How German is She? Postwar West German Reconstruction and the Consuming Woman* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 82-88.

At the same time, however, the other face of Foucault's diagnosis should not be forgotten. Thus, modern systems of power are not simply apparatuses of repression, but are productive of new possibilities and social identities.⁹⁹ In this vein, I would propose that gathering data about the aggregate wishes and behaviour of the consumer produced "the consumer" discursively as a rhetorical entity. Specialist attention represented this collective persona as a body with a seemingly unified will and potential for agency and with legitimate demands that should be given consideration in planning and industrial production. Thus, the ubiquitous discourse on the *potrebitel'* provided an identity for the "Soviet person" as a demanding consumer. How did this identity differ from the "cultured consumer" invented under Stalin in the late 1930s and reinvigorated in the postwar period? Julie Hessler has argued that although, under Stalin, Soviet policy makers accepted the idea of Soviet citizens as consumers, "[t]hey proved unable and unwilling, however, to imagine the autonomous formation of desires that inevitably accompanied the country's emergence from survival-threatening need."¹⁰⁰ The discourse that emerged in the Khrushchev era, for all that it sought to contain such desires within rational norms and was fraught with contradictions, differed from the Stalinist rhetoric of cultured consumption in that it implied an entitlement to *all* Soviet individuals — and not only stakhanovites or "VIPs" — to occupy the subject position of consumer, to take on the persona in which they were hailed. If existing shortcomings of production and distribution prevented them from doing so, they would have legitimate grounds for complaint and discontent.¹⁰¹

This discourse made consumers matter: it positioned them as an engine of change, a force for modernization, rationalization and the decentralization of planning. But how — if at all — did the consumer matter in practice? If sociology began, in this period, to provide knowledge that could potentially impact on the plan and policy, much further research is required to establish the actual effects either of this discourse on Soviet citizens (the extent to which they appropriated the ascribed persona of "consumer," internalized and enacted its implied entitlements), or of the information gathered on the plan and on product design. What was done with the information gathered? How and to what extent was it used, and at what level in the planning and production process? What were the organized or informal channels of consumer consultation and even pressure? Could consumer wishes in practice be a factor in changing the state standard specifications and design of furniture or household appliances? That this was not out of the question in a socialist command economy is demonstrated by Zachmann's work on the German Democratic Republic. There, housewife-consumer groups were incorporated into

99. Carter, *How German*, 87-88; Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 22.

100. Hessler, *Social History*, 328.

101. Shapiro, "Soviet Consumer Politics," 113; Demoscopy might provide the knowledge with which to regulate and control demand, but increased knowledge of consumer dissatisfaction could also provide an advance warning system of potentially dangerous levels of discontent such as had erupted in the GDR in 1953, Hungary and Poland in 1956, or Novocherkassk in 1962, thus presumably requiring the regime to respond to such signals from below.

the decision-making process in the design and adoption of household technology.¹⁰² Did, for example, the *zhensovety* (women's councils) established under Khrushchev play a similar role in the Soviet Union?¹⁰³ But whereas, in East Germany, market research was already well established, the fact that the Soviet Consumer Research Institute lasted only one year, 1965, suggests the limited extent to which "the consumer," even as an abstraction, was able to influence policy.¹⁰⁴

Work is also required to ascertain the mechanisms by which information gathered about consumers' will was fed not only into planning but also into qualitative changes in design. This could do worse than to start with an examination of the new All-Union Research Institute of Technical Aesthetics, VNIITE (*Vserossiiskii nauchno issledovatel'skii institut tekhnicheskoi estetiki*), whose foundation in 1962 as the first overarching body for Soviet industrial design signalled the latter's arrival, in the guise of "Technical Aesthetics," as a discipline and a profession.¹⁰⁵ The institute's journal *Tekhnicheskaiia estetika* was particularly active in arguing the need to study foreign methods of consumer research, including those employed in the capitalist West, and in promoting the benefits of market analysis for a socialist, planned economy. The institute was also committed to design that took account of the user and sought to factor his or her physiological and psychological needs into design specifications. Together with the *Komsomol'skaia pravda* Institute of Public Opinion, VNIITE developed a questionnaire to gather consumer opinion concerning domestic appliances, to which it received 14,000 responses. The researchers argued that their survey demonstrated the potential held by the study of consumer opinion for rational planning of production.¹⁰⁶ To a certain extent the survey also indicated the potential for the user (cumulatively rather than individually) to have an effect not only on the plan to produce a certain number of a particular model, but to shape the very design and specifications of household technology and influence the establishment of state standards.

102. Zachmann, "Socialist Consumption Junction," 73-99. For the importance of studying users see Nelly Oudshoorn and Trevor Pinch, *How Users Matter: The Co-construction of Users and Technology* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005).

103. On *zhensovety* see Melanie Ilić in M. Ilić, S. Reid and L. Attwood, *Women in the Khrushchev Era* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 18; Mary Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), 139-160.

104. On GDR market research see Mark Landsmann, *Dictatorship and Demand: The Politics of Consumerism in East Germany* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005); Marcello Anselmo, "'Der werktätige Verbraucher'. Defining the Socialist Consumer; the Market Research in GDR 1960s-70s," unpublished paper presented at conference "New Perspectives on Sovietisation and Modernisation in Central and Eastern Europe, 1945-1964," European University Institute, Florence, 26-27 May 2005.

105. Raymond Hutchings, "The Weakening of Ideological Influences upon Soviet Design," *Slavic Review*, 27, 1 (1968): 71-84; R. Hutchings, *Soviet Science, Technology, Design: Interaction and Convergence* (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); R. Hutchings, "Soviet Design: the Neglected Partner of Soviet Science and Technology," *Slavic Review* 37, 4 (1978): 567-583.

106. Shvili, "Chto daiut," 1-2.

However, even VNIITE had limited success in getting its designs realized and recommendations adopted by industry, due to the inflexibility of centralized state structures, and the overlapping competencies and sometimes contradictory interests of different ministries.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, as the author of the report on VNIITE's consultation exercise hastened to note, such analyses did not mean that industry must blindly follow the consumer. As in the establishment of normative budgets and rational consumption, cognition was inflected by prescription and improvement. The purpose of gathering information about demands and tastes was conflated with that of shaping and reforming those demands. Thus, experts still positioned themselves as "those who know best" — as mediators between ordinary consumers and production; and the channels for gathering information about the consumer were at the same time mechanisms for disseminating advice and normative taste.¹⁰⁸

This dual purpose was also ascribed to exhibitions. They had long served as an informal means of opinion gathering and monitoring public mood through the use of visitors' comments books. Major exhibitions of textiles, furniture and other consumer goods in the late 1950s and early 1960s all served this function to some extent.¹⁰⁹ The exhibition of model interiors "Art into Life!" was set up most explicitly as an exercise in both consulting and moulding the consumer. Slips of paper were provided in addition to the usual visitors' books, to invite viewers to pronounce on which models of furniture should go into mass production.¹¹⁰ But as Karl Kantor, one of the more radical theoreticians of material culture, emphasized, the exhibition's aim was not to reflect present-day taste and *byt* and the diversity of existing interiors — that would be an ethnographic exhibition. Rather, as was the established task of the Soviet arts, its purpose was to help bring about a new, better reality by showing how Soviet people *should* and *would* live.¹¹¹ The contradiction of combining the consultational role with the task of educating consumer taste was not remarked on at the time, but it is indicative of the limits of empowerment of the actual flesh-and-blood (as opposed to rhetorical) consumer. She was to be educated to appreciate the new furniture styles, in other words to share the modernist taste of the aesthetic reformers. But she would be listened to only insofar as her opinion conformed to theirs and lent them weight — "the will of the people" — in their struggles for authority. Thus Kantor could dismiss viewers' complaints about lack

107. Alexander Lavrentiev and Yuri Nasarov, *Russian Design: Traditions and Experiment 1920-1990* (London: Academy Editions, 1995), 95.

108. Shvili, "Chto daiut," 1-2.

109. N. Dzhordzhiesku, "Izuchenie sprosa na vystavke obraztsov," *ST*, no. 3 (1961): 45-46; D. Tseitlin, V. Shchenkov, "Izuchenie sprosa na vystavkakh," *ST*, no. 3 (1963): 11-15. The 1961 exhibition "Textile Wares," held in Moscow's Manège, also set out to study demand: TsAGM, f. 21, op. 1, d. 122, l. 39.

110. TsAGM, f. 21, op. 1, d. 130 (individual comments of visitors to exhibition "Art into Life," 1961).

111. RGALI, f. 2329, Ministerstvo kul'tury SSSR, op. 4, d. 1389, Stenog. sobraniia [...] po obsuzhedeniiu vystavki "Iskusstvo - v byt!" 7 June 1961.

of cupboards and storage space, or that the dining tables were too small to receive guests at, because they reflected an “incorrect” understanding of the relationship between the family home and the collective realm. Such viewers failed to grasp the principle that in Soviet society only a small part of individual needs would be provided for in the private realm. The large part would be satisfied by social means: through socialized services such as public dining, as Lenin had called for, and through public forms and spaces of leisure and entertainment.¹¹²

We should not, then, overstate the agency and influence of the consumer. The generic consumer or “public” was a rhetorical and normative figure constructed and deployed to different ends by different interests. While “the consumer” became one of the identities of the modern Soviet person, opportunities to organize a coordinated independent lobby were still non-existent, and the influence of ordinary individuals, even cumulatively, as an aggregate public, remained highly limited.

Interventions in the home

What degree of autonomy did consumers have in shaping the material environment of their “private” lives? The interventions of experts did not stop with the design and production of the walls, floor and ceilings of their new homes, or with the installation of gas pipes, electricity supply and plumbing, all of which, in any modern urban housing, hard-wire the individual, “private” home into public infrastructures and render it a node in a network of supplies and communications rather than a hermetic unit.¹¹³ After the builders moved out, another set of specialists moved in. The transformation of housing into individual homes was made meaningful in terms of Soviet modernity through discursive interventions, including visual representations, exhibitions of the ideal Soviet home, advice literature, and television. Taste professionals, health and hygiene experts used the mass media and education system — not only schools but also popular enlightenment programmes conducted by school parents’ committees, ZhEKs (*Zhilishchno-ekspluatatsionnaia kontora*, the housing maintenance office), the Znanie society, and by People’s Universities — to intervene in the ways in which individual householders furnished, decorated, and dwelled in the standard spaces of the *khreshchevka*. Advice also served a second, no less important function: it kept the moment of *novosel’e* in the public imagination, serving as a pretext to rehearse over and over again the achievements of the party’s housing campaign, and to inscribe public meanings on this private experience. After a brief discussion of such interventions we shall turn, at last, to the agency of the occupant: to the tensions between the modernist aesthetics of the “taste professionals” and the heterogeneous

112. K. M. Kantor, “Chelovek i zhilishche,” *Iskusstvo i byt*, no. 1 (1963): 30-32.

113. Compare Terence Riley, *The Un-Private House* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 11-13.

preferences and contingent possibilities of the consumer-homemaker. How did urban apartment-dwellers negotiate the multiple and often conflicting determinants, limitations, and interventions? On the basis of preliminary results of an ongoing interview project and of rare contemporaneous collections of popular responses, we will begin to excavate the reciprocal practices and voices of the householder-consumer.¹¹⁴

As Blair Ruble has observed, with millions of people moving into “new-type” apartments, “An unusual opportunity was at hand for Soviet furniture designers to reorient and to restructure the very meanings of domestic space.”¹¹⁵ Allegedly in response to readers’ and viewers’ demand (and quite possibly in fact, given the disorientating changes in the material environment of their everyday lives), the popular press, advice manuals and television offered women instruction on how to arrange their furniture, choose elements of decoration, and find an appropriate colour scheme. Such interventions in domestic aesthetics were not new — as noted, campaigns for *kul’turnost’* had been a characteristic of the Stalin era and went back to the nineteenth century intelligentsia — but the period saw a significant growth in the publication of domestic advice literature and increasing emphasis on aesthetic taste and modern style.¹¹⁶ Not only had the scale of the opportunity to intervene expanded; the ideal of good taste promoted in the Khrushchev era also broke emphatically with the aesthetic identified with “being cultured” in both the Stalinist and pre-revolutionary pasts.¹¹⁷ Taste reformers looked back across the Stalin period to the Constructivist campaigns of the 1920s and the Cultural Revolution for a modern, socialist material culture.¹¹⁸ But this wasn’t a matter of stepping into the same river twice. While they prescribed a relatively austere, modernist style of living, they now did so in a situation where one-family flats were becoming the norm and where the capacity of Soviet production made the development of mass consumer goods and rising living standards for all an imminent possibility. Thus Kantor distanced himself from the extreme asceticism of the 1920s, when “the struggle for the new way of life (*novyi byt*) against old bourgeois-philistine *byt* at times took on the form of a struggle against material comforts in everyday life, against the striving to have a separate apartment and make it comfortable

114. Interviews conducted under Leverhulme Trust Research Fellowship “Everyday Aesthetics in the Modern Soviet Flat.” I am indebted to Ekaterina Gerasimova, Alla Bolotova, Sofia Chuikina and Elena Bogdanova for their expert assistance on the project.

115. Blair Ruble, “From Krushcheby to Korobki,” in William C. Brumfield and Blair A. Ruble eds., *Russian Housing in the Modern Age: Design and Social History* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 245.

116. Deborah A. Field, “Communist Morality and Meanings of Private Life in Post-Stalinist Russia, 1953-1964” (Ph. D. diss., University of Michigan, 1996), 41; Fitzpatrick, “Becoming Cultured,” 216-237; Kelly, *Refining Russia*.

117. Buchli, “Khrushchev, Modernism,” 161-176; Reid, “Destalinization and Taste,” 177-202.

118. See Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions*; Maria Gough, *The Artist as Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

(*zanimat'sia blagoustroistvom*). Attention to the external side of life was disparaged as little short of a betrayal of the revolution.” However, Kantor made clear,

The liberation from enslavement to things, which the revolution brought with it, could not mean liberation from things themselves; the striving to collective forms of life does not presuppose a rejection of individual forms of living [...]. No one today would dream of accusing a person of betraying revolutionary ideals by taking an interest in how to furnish an apartment in a new building comfortably and beautifully.¹¹⁹

Uiut — cosiness — a central concept of earlier notions of homeliness, remained vital to homemaking in the new flat.¹²⁰ As *Izvestiia* noted, “a primary task of domestic science (*domovodstvo*) is to teach how best to furnish [the new apartment], to make it more *uiutno* to live in.”¹²¹ However, the concept *uiut* itself was modernized and socialized. Thus, *Sovetskaia torgovlia*’s account of the “Art into Life!” exhibition found that “the majority of interiors represented at the exhibition give visitors the possibility to discover the “secret” of *uiut* in the contemporary human dwelling. But it is not that *uiut* which is often accompanied by the word “philistine” (*meshchanskii*). Comfort, simplicity and elegance distinguish the interiors created by the artists and architects.”¹²²

Redefined in austere, functional and hygienic terms, modern, socialist *uiut* was explicitly opposed to an ideal of cosiness identified with the bourgeois or Stalinist past or with the provincial or rural periphery. Anathema was heaped on “rugs hung on walls on which swans, kittens, tigers, women’s heads, portraits of important people, *etcetera* are painted in oil paints. Hung on walls - that’s bad! [...] Don’t get carried away with rugs, because they collect dust.”¹²³ “Contemporary furniture must be convenient to use, compact, light and without carving and little flourishes, which are hard to wash and clean.”¹²⁴

A cardinal rule of the tasteful modern interior was unity and synchronicity. The “contemporary style” prioritized the homogeneous ensemble over individual items of disparate origin, age and style. Indeed, it was often referred to as the “unified style of contemporaneity”. The unfamiliarity of the “new type,” small-scale apartment was a constant element of the rhetoric of fundamental environmental renewal. So was the idea that one had to rid oneself of old belongings and habits, purging the last

119. Kantor, “Chelovek i zhilishche,” 29-30.

120. See Victor Buchli, *An Archaeology of Socialism* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 42-43, 84-85.

121. M. Nikol'skii, “Novyi dom — novyi byt,” *Izvestiia* (19 Dec. 1959).

122. Odintsova, “Veshchi v nashem bytu,” 51.

123. Iu. V. Sharov, G. G. Poliachek, *Vkus nado vospityvat' (besedy dlia molodezhi)*, (Novosibirsk: Novosibirskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1960), 72-73; A. Gol'dshtein, “Chto takoe uiut,” *Rabotnitsa*, no. 1 (1959): 30.

124. “Problemy formirovaniia sovremennogo stilia v sovetskom izobrazitel'nom iskusstve,” discussion in Moscow Regional Artists' Union, 27 May 1959, RGALI, f. 2943, op. 1, d. 2979, l. 54; Blomerius, “Pochemu malo,” 27. See Gerchuk, “Aesthetics of Everyday Life,” 81-100; Buchli, “Khrushchev, Modernism,” 161-176; Reid, “Destalinization and Taste,” 177-202.

traces of the past, both materially and mentally. The media propagated the image of setting up home in the new apartment as a *tabula rasa* and of people turning up at their new address in a light automobile with little more than a toothbrush.¹²⁵ The moral pressure to purge the past, rid oneself of its material culture, and start afresh was often enforced by necessity. Even if one had any significant accumulation of possessions after decades of dislocation, repression, wartime destruction and privation, it was often impossible to bring larger items along because of the physical exigencies of built space: the narrow entrances of the new flats and the small dimensions and low ceilings of the rooms.¹²⁶ At the same time, the erasure of the material culture of the past also made it necessary to begin to acquire new consumer goods for the home. Moving to a new flat and becoming a consumer of new styles and types of consumer goods were intimately identified, both in discourse and in practice.¹²⁷

The implications of the new housing for the design and production of furniture were, first, a matter of quantity: people moving into new homes in their millions needed furniture — and fast! The contemporary style of interior decorating, on which taste and design professionals insisted, was designed with the requirements of efficient, mass, machine production in mind to make modern living accessible to all. That is, it was determined by the state's priorities to improve living standards quickly and cheaply, as interpreted by designers, engineers and other experts, some of whom aspired to be modern in terms defined by international modernism. Second, housing had implications for aesthetic quality or style. Architecture, reformed by Khrushchev's edict, set the keynote for the unified contemporary style. The domestic interior was to share in the same modernist aesthetic and morality, characterized by rationality, hygiene, function, economy, and "no excess!" and by the purge of associations with the past.

The consumer-homemaker as agent

But what if the homemaker persisted in regarding rugs or silk lampshades as the essence of *uiut*? Who, in the end, made the interior? And was its participation in the project of socialist modernity guaranteed? How effective was the huge campaign of advice? As Anne Gorsuch observes, with reference to Derek Sayer: "the state may talk and talk, but we cannot be sure that the intended audience is listening. Instead, 'they may be snatching their "half-hour of pleasure" in whatever form.'"¹²⁸ Indeed,

125. Nikol'skii, "Novyi dom"; "Divan," *Krokodil*, no. 12 (30 April 1958): 12.

126. Many informants in my project "Everyday Aesthetics" refer to these issues.

127. See for example Daniil Granin, *Posle svad'by: roman* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1959). Christine Varga-Harris discusses Granin's novel in her dissertation chapter "Homemaking: Keeping Appearances and Petticoat Rule," presented at conference "The Thaw," Berkeley, May 2005. I am indebted to Dr Varga-Harris for bringing it to my attention.

128. Anne Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 62; Derek Sayer, "Everyday Forms of State Formation: Some Dissident Remarks on 'Hegemony,'" in Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent, eds., *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 370.

in an interview project with residents who moved into newly-built apartments in the late 1950s to mid-1960s, on whose preliminary results this final section will draw, I have found that informants have no recollection of any of the advice that was so ubiquitous in the media in this period. This lack of conscious recollection may tell us little more, however, than that advice was so ever-present as to be invisible, naturalized as ideology.¹²⁹

The extent to which the nature and meaning of the home was a product of interventions by the state and by specialist agents acting in its name has to be acknowledged. This is so under capitalism too, but it is especially the case in light of the planned economy, centralized state standards and design institutes, and the scale of the state-initiated building programme and welfare measures initiated under Khrushchev. Ideological interventions operated in conjunction with the material determinants of built form: architects and planners, acting for the state, called the tune and set the limits on possibilities.

Nevertheless, the production of the domestic interior did not necessarily conform to the ideal of modernity and good taste imagined for people by designers and planners. The last word belonged to the occupant. For, if the standardization and uniformity in house form tend to homogenize domestic settings, and thereby, lifestyles, nevertheless “residents often resist such hegemonic intrusions in surprising and creative ways,” adapting standard forms to their specific needs.¹³⁰ Dorothee Wierling offers a balanced definition of everyday life as: “the domain in which people exercise a direct influence — via their behavior — on their immediate circumstances. To a substantial degree, that everyday world is determined by others. Everyday action takes place under a set of overall conditions that are not subject to its influence. This fact notwithstanding, what is important is not just the filling in of this framework, but also its alteration or extension.”¹³¹ We have looked above at some of those “overall conditions” over which the ordinary person has little or no control and which structure, limit or predispose her/his actions. In this final section we will turn to ways in which the home was an arena for his or her agency.¹³²

Specialists on the home acknowledged the limits of their jurisdiction. Designers did not have the last word, interior design specialist Nikolai Luppov reminded participants at a discussion of the exhibition “Art into Life!” Notwithstanding common technical devices, norms and state standards that applied to the furniture

129. Preliminary results from interviews conducted under Leverhulme project “Everyday Aesthetics.” On the problem of assessing the effectiveness of advice see Kelly, *Refining Russia*, xv-xliv.

130. Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zúñiga, “Introduction,” *House Life*, 27-28. Compare Buchli, *Archaeology*; Aleksandr Vysokovskii, “Will Domesticity Return?” in Brumfield and Ruble, *Russian Housing*, 271-308; Daniel Miller, “Appropriating the State,” 353-372.

131. Dorothee Wierling, “The History of Everyday Life and Gender Relations,” in Alf Lütke, ed., *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, transl. Willian Templer (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 151.

132. *Ibid.*, 151, 163, n. 3.

and fittings for the home, it was wrong to presuppose some “standardized unification of its appearance.” The final touches that complete the interior “are almost always made by the occupants who obtain the things themselves in the shops.” Therefore, constant interaction with the Soviet consumer was vital, he concluded, as was the study of their demands.¹³³ Homemaking was not a matter of passive consumption. Rather, it was a matter of collaboration and negotiation, albeit not a partnership of equals.¹³⁴

Whatever the architects’ utopian aspirations, in practice the potential over-determinism of design and built space inherent in industrial production represented a limited problem in the Soviet Union of the early 1960s. There was, for better or for worse, plenty of scope for what Scott calls mutuality.¹³⁵ The production of the contemporary and rationally equipped interior required a large element of reciprocal effort from occupants. It relied on their readiness to follow the ubiquitous advice, and on their resourcefulness and skills to get hold of or produce the necessary items themselves. (Tacitly acknowledging the system’s failure to provide, domestic advice was often of a directly practical nature: to help the occupant construct or adapt cabinets, and install the recommended devices.)¹³⁶ It also depended, if they were fully to achieve the contemporary look advocated by taste professionals, on their ability to internalize and put into practice the often unstated nuances of modern good taste: the precise sense of colour, scale and composition that were essential to its sparse aesthetic.

With the best will in the world, it was no easy matter to furnish one’s interior in the contemporary style in the early 1960s. The furniture delivery plan for the third quarter of 1959 was underfulfilled by 150,000,000 rubles. The industry was still producing small quantities of labour-intensive and expensive furniture with artisanal methods.¹³⁷ Moreover, as indicated by numerous indictments of furniture workshops that “beat together new commodes and fichus stands or cactus holders,” it continued to produce obsolete styles and furniture types so that shops were full of unwanted things — luxury goods in styles more suited to the prerevolutionary

133. RGALI, f. 2329, op. 4, d. 1388, l. 51-52, Stenog. sobraniia [...] po obsuzhdeniu vystavki “Iskusstvo - v byt!” 6 June 1961.

134. Ol’ga Baiar, “Dekorativnoe ubranstvo kvartiry,” *DI*, jubilee edition (Dec. 1957): 19-20; Boris Brodskii, “Novyi byt i kamufliazh meshchanstva,” *DI*, no. 8 (1963): 25; B. Brodskii, *Khudozhnik i gorod* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1965), 65-69.

135. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 5.

136. For example, Irina Voeikova, “Vasha kvartira,” *Rabotnitsa*, no. 9 (1962): 30.

137. Skovoroda, “Zadachi,” 47; A. Vasil’ev, N. Gagloeva, “Polnee udovletvoriat’ spros na mebel’,” *ST*, no. 5 (1960): 15-16. On problems of mechanizing the furniture industry and introducing new styles and models see, for example, Tsentral’nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva Sankta Peterburga (TsGALI SPb), f. 341, Soiuz arkhitektorov SSSR. Leningradskoe otделение, op. 1, d. 458, Obshchestvennoe obsuzhdenie itogov konkursa ob’iavlenn. Len. mebel’noi fabrikoi no. 1 [...] na obraztsy massovoi produktsii (stula) dlia naseleniia, 5 Oct. 1956; RGANI, f. 5, op. 43, d. 23, l. 11-34, Otdel promyshlennosti tovarov shirokogo potrebleniia i prodovol’stvennykh tovarov, draft decree of USSR Council of Ministers for 1955, “Ob uvelichenii proizvodstva i uluchshenii kachestva mebeli dlia prodazhi naseleniiu,” 1954. My thanks to Steven Harris for pointing me to this source.

bourgeoisie than to modern Soviet people — while one could not get hold of anything one needed.¹³⁸ It took time for the increased investment in consumer goods production in the 1950s and the restructuring of production towards simple lines, synthetic materials and mass production methods to take effect, as the repeated complaints about the recalcitrance of the industry indicated. Production, particularly of the new styles that were only just being developed, could not keep pace with the rapid rise in demand resulting from the new flats. For example, an interviewee in a study of communal apartment life conducted by sociologist Ekaterina Gerasimova in 1998, recalled searching for a standard lamp in order to “make the apartment cosy,” but had been unable to find the right sort.¹³⁹ The time-lag between the promulgation of the modern style and mass provision of new flats on one hand and adequate increases in furniture production on the other could lead to a paradoxical situation whereby the would-be consumer might take a sketch or picture of the desired item seen in a magazine or exhibition to a workshop to have it made up bespoke, by hand. The irony was that the style was one expressly intended for, and determined by, the requirements of mass industrial production.¹⁴⁰

A further disjunction between blueprint and reality is that the apartments, explicitly designed for one-family occupancy, were not always in practice allocated to a single family. For example, if the number of square metres of living space to which it was legally entitled was less than that of the apartment allocated to it, another family might be moved in as a make-weight. The problems this caused can be illustrated in regard to the kitchen. The kitchens of the new flats were between 4.5 and 6 m², designed as working kitchens for a single “housewife” (*khoziaika*). According to expert advice, this compactness was a virtue, the source of efficiency if the equipment was arranged rationally, in Taylorist fashion, following the sequence of the most common tasks: wash ingredients — prepare them — cook.¹⁴¹ But if three families were housed in the same small apartment, trying to use the same kitchen at the same time? An informant who moved into a newly built apartment in Leningrad in 1959 tells how her “one-family” kitchen was shared by three families. Those who moved in first took the best spaces, while the third to arrive got the most inconvenient place by the stove and sink.¹⁴²

138. I. Chernykh, G. Dubovitskii, G. Kirpichevskii, “U moikh podshefnykh neuiutnoe novosel’e,” *Krokodil*, no. 19 (10 July 1959): 3; “Mechta vashei prababushki”; Polivnik, “O pochtovykh otkrytkakh.”

139. Ekaterina Gerasimova, interview transcript KGCA AA. 9.07.1998, St Petersburg, for “Sovetskaia kommunal’naia kvartira kak sotsial’nyi institut,” Cand. Diss. (European University, St Petersburg, 2000). I am indebted to Dr Gerasimova for sharing selected interviews from this project with me.

140. S. Gutnin, “Servant-kholodil’nik,” *Mestnaia promyshlennost’*, no. 3 (1963): 13; “Khudozhnik prishel na kvartiru,” *Sluzhba byta*, no. 6 (1963): 26; T. Fetisov, “Po vashim chertezham,” *Izvestiia* (25 July 1959).

141. For examples of this advice see S. Reid, “The Khrushchev Kitchen: Domesticating the Scientific-Technological Revolution,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, 2 (2005): 289–316.

142. “TA,” St Petersburg, female, Leverhulme, “Everyday Aesthetics.” Interviewer Ekaterina Gerasimova, February 2005.

Several of my informants talked about the difficulties of positioning gas and plumbing appliances in accordance with ubiquitous “regulations.” One had tried to move her stove slightly because it stood “irrationally,” but she found it impossible since, at the time, there were no flexible hoses for the gas pipes — it was fixed once and for all, allowing no room for manoeuvre. The kitchen furniture had to be squeezed between the fixed items, stove and sink, regardless of rationality or convenience.¹⁴³ Another had run into problems with the gas authorities, *Lengaz*, who pronounced her relocation of the stove “against regulations.” She was forced to move it back.¹⁴⁴ Others were more successful in finding ways around the problem. One Leningrader recalled that her father had moved the stove to the interior wall adjoining the bathroom and had put the refrigerator where the stove had been, in order to use the space more “rationally.” When representatives of *Lengaz* inspected and declared: “It is not in place according to regulations!” they resorted to a familiar method of getting things done. “We don’t know anything, we just moved in,” they claimed, bribing the gas man to turn a blind eye.¹⁴⁵ There were many tactics for circumventing such situations. A bottle of vodka might suffice, or an exchange of favours. One interviewee admitted that she flirted with the workman in order to get good quality parquet laid in her apartment. Before cars and dachas displaced it, making the domestic interior was perhaps one of the key ventures that bound the informal economy of goods, services, skills and favours together, thereby cementing social networks of mutual dependency.¹⁴⁶

The economy of gift and favour is more usually associated with premodern, preindustrial forms of society.¹⁴⁷ In other respects, too, the production of the domestic interior contradicted or fell short of the official image of modernity. The new apartments were mass produced with industrial methods. But they were not commodities in the sense of spanking new, ready-made items to be passively consumed just as they were. The Soviet everyday was not only a culture of shortage, but as Gerasimova and Sof’ia Chuikina have proposed, it was a “repair culture.”¹⁴⁸ Even newly purchased commodities presupposed the need for work on them — mending or alteration — by the user before they could be put into service. Similarly, the condition in which new apartments were handed over to tenants often

143. “GL,” St Petersburg, female, Leverhulme, “Everyday Aesthetics,” Interviewer Ekaterina Gerasimova, May 2005.

144. “OP,” female, St Petersburg, Leverhulme, “Everyday Aesthetics,” Interviewer Ekaterina Gerasimova, March 2005.

145. “LG,” female, St Petersburg, Leverhulme, “Everyday Aesthetics,” Interviewer Ekaterina Gerasimova, Autumn 2004.

146. Stephen Lovell, Alena Ledeneva, Andrei Rogachevskii, eds., *Bribery and Blat in Russia: Negotiating Reciprocity from the Middle Ages to the 1990s* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

147. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, transl. Ian Cunnison (London: Cohen and West, 1954).

148. Ekaterina Gerasimova and Sof’ia Chuikina, “Obshchestvo remonta,” *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* (henceforth NZ), no. 34 (2004): <http://www.nz-online.ru> (last consulted 1 November 2004).

made it necessary to invest large amounts of time, energy, resourcefulness and mobilization of networks to make them fit for habitation.¹⁴⁹ They might not yet be connected to mains plumbing, the walls needed plastering, or the doors and windows didn't fit. The wall-mounted kitchen units prescribed by efficiency experts had to be found, or more often, made and fitted.¹⁵⁰ The tenants' reciprocal labour in adapting, decorating and putting final aesthetic touches was widely assumed.¹⁵¹

Necessity aside, some tenants ignored normative advice and consciously sought to make their interior different from those of their neighbours even within their standard shell. In fact, the idea that home should be expressive of the character of its occupants was a regular component of advice.¹⁵² Some indications of popular attitudes are given in a survey of the first residents of a new cooperative apartment block in Moscow's burgeoning South-West region conducted by Elena Mikhailovna Torshilova in early 1968. Her report suggests that standardization was often identified as a problem, and twenty percent of her respondents said they did not want their apartment to look like their neighbours'. "Standard, lack of *uiut*: if one were to judge from the contemporary home it might seem that everyone has identical characters," wrote one respondent.¹⁵³ This suggests that the tenants not only wanted to customize their home to accommodate the particular needs of their household, but also to express a sense of identity and difference from others. No less than for the bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century, making the domestic interior was, for some, a work of self-fashioning and display of family status and social position.¹⁵⁴ This assertion of individuality may be an indication of the resident's social aspirations or class — in this case that of the intelligentsia and its self-conscious distinction from the "petit-bourgeois" or bureaucrat. The block where Torshilova's interviews were conducted was a cooperative house in a "prestige" area where many research institutes were located. The residents were employees of

149. *Ibid.*; Larisa Shpakovskaia, "Starye veshchi. Tsennost': mezhdru gosudarstvom i obshchestvom," and Galina Orlova, "Apologiya strannoii veshchi: 'Malenkie khitrosti' sovetskogo cheloveka," both in *NZ*, no. 34 (2004).

150. O. Baiar and R. Blashkevich, *Kvartira i ee ubranstvo* (Moscow: Stroiizdat, 1962), 15; Vysokovskii, "Will Domesticity Return?" 284; interviews conducted under Leverhulme project "Everyday Aesthetics."

151. Viewers at "Iskusstvo - v byt!" sought acknowledgement and help for do-it-yourself activities, and sales of prefabricated furniture components. RGALI, f. 2329, op. 4, d. 1391, l. 19, l. 47.

152. Voeikova, "Vasha kvartira," 30; Baiar and Blashkevich, *Kvartira i ee ubranstvo*; Lynne Attwood, "Housing in the Khrushchev Era," in Ilić, *Women in the Khrushchev Era*, 189; Miller, "Appropriating the State"; but compare Miller, *Home Possessions*, Introduction, 10.

153. E. M. Torshilova, "Byt i nekotorye sotsial'no-psikhologicheskie kharakteristiki sovremennogo zhilogo inter'era," in A. G. Kharchev and Z. A. Iankova, eds., *Sotsial'nye issledovaniia*, vyp. 7: *Metodologicheskie problemy issledovaniia byta* (Moscow: Nauka, 1971), 137-144 (143). My thanks to Elena Mikhailovna Torshilova for discussing this study with me.

154. This sense of differentiating from neighbours emerges as a common thread in interviews for the Leverhulme-funded project, "Everyday Aesthetics."

one such institute, people with higher education like the experts who defined the norms and like the researcher who conducted and analysed the survey.

We cannot, of course, generalize from one small survey, carried out in a single Moscow apartment block. Further research is required on the correlation between socio-demographic data and homemaking practices, and on the complexities of identifying cultural markers of distinction and class in a supposedly classless society. Evidence of interviews suggests that the appropriation of the dominant definitions of good and bad taste and modernized *uiut* was variable. A female respondent (St Petersburg, born 1944, highest technical education) in a recent interview project led by Timo Vihavainen on “The Intelligentsia and *meshchanstvo* (philistinism),” recalled her parents’ view that a lampshade constituted *uiut*. They would not exchange their discredited silk lampshade — a key symbol of *meshchanstvo* in the modernizing taste discourse of the Khrushchev era — for a chandelier simply because that was fashionable. For them, to do something just because others did it constituted *meshchanstvo*. Philistinism resided in a lack of independent taste, in fashion slavery, rather than in the material and form of the lampshade itself.¹⁵⁵ A male informant for the same project, recalled how, as people grew better off after the war and particularly by the 1970s, rugs began to appear. “But a rug is not *meshchanstvo*!” he insisted. “It is *byt*, normal *byt*!”¹⁵⁶ Meanwhile, a female St Petersburg respondent in my project “Everyday Aesthetics in the Modern Soviet Flat” took the injunction “no excess” to “irrational” extremes, throwing reason to the winds in favour of pleasure. In spite of the apartment’s very minimal allocation of living space and limited built-in storage, she had only one cupboard: her priority was to keep the floor free for dancing. “Since there was no wardrobe there was a completely free room. Dance!”¹⁵⁷

Popular responses to the exhibition “Art into Life!” in 1961, as inscribed in the visitors’ comments books, indicate a range of common reactions to the modernist style of furniture and interior decoration, although they do not tell us what their authors actually did in practice in their own homes. These written responses ranged from whole-hearted embrace of the new style to rejection or apparently suicidal ambivalence: “I would happily hang myself in one of the well furnished rooms,” wrote one! (Did he accidentally omit a syllable, meaning to write *povesilisia by* (have fun) rather than *povesilsia by* (hang myself)?)¹⁵⁸ Those who rejected the

155. Female, b. 1944, St Petersburg, 2001. Interviewer Ekaterina Gerasimova for Timo Vihavainen’s project, “Intelligentsia and Philistinism in Russian History and Culture,” funded by Finnish Academy of Sciences, 2000-2002. I am indebted to Prof. Vihavainen and Dr Gerasimova for access to this and other passages cited from the project. See also Timo Vihavainen, *Vnutrennii vrag: bor’ba s meshchanstvom kak moral’naia missiia russkoi intelligentsia* (St Petersburg: Kolo 2004).

156. “MV,” male, St Petersburg. Interviewed by Ekaterina Gerasimova, for Vihavainen, “Intelligentsia and Philistinism,” 2001.

157. “IaP,” Female, St Petersburg, Leverhulme, “Everyday Aesthetics,” Interviewer, Ekaterina Gerasimova, May 2005.

158. TsAGM, f. 21, op. 1, d. 125, l. 57 (double underlined in original), “S udovol’stviiem povsesilsia by v odnoi iz khorosho obstavlennykh komnat.”

contemporary style did so on a variety of grounds, many of them familiar from criticisms of modernist design elsewhere. They declared it “primitive” and impersonal, caricaturing it as “boxes”. “How I do not like one single room! How un-cosy it all is!”¹⁵⁹ A common, not unfounded, refrain concerned the loss of national character: they had seen it all before at foreign exhibitions, it imitated the Czechs, or worse, the Americans.¹⁶⁰

Some had practical objections, pitting their own embodied experience against the ideal user the designers envisaged. Elderly people worried that the chairs and beds were too low for them to get up from. The lightness and thinness of the new furniture made some anxious: “Will my Mum be able to sit on the exhibit shown (chair) without breaking the legs?”¹⁶¹ Others wanted to remind the designers that they, as users, did not necessarily conform to the norms and abstractions on which planning and design for standard production were based. Soviet society included various different constituencies: not just newly weds and young people, but the elderly; not only urban dwellers living in new flats, but peasants. “*Peasants* travel to this exhibition. But what can you offer them? How to furnish a peasant house...? In our view, almost nothing.”¹⁶² Moreover, far from everyone had yet been so lucky as to move into the new type of flat for which this furniture was explicitly designed. Many families were still squashed into a single high-ceilinged room of a communal apartment in pre-revolutionary housing stock, but they, too, needed furniture. “Dear comrade artists! You have created many fine interiors, but who for? For us? No. We live, and for some time will continue to live, in 18-20 m² rooms. A family of three or four.”¹⁶³

Many, however, accepted or warmly welcomed the contemporary style. By far the most prevalent comment on the exhibition was a backhanded compliment to the designers. Viewers declared themselves more than willing to adopt the new style and throw off the old ... *if only they could*. “I would like (after viewing the [exhibition] hall) to rid myself as quickly as possible of heavy rugs and cumbersome furniture, even if it did create *uiut*.”¹⁶⁴ “We need — more beautiful [things]! We need — cheaper [things]! We need — more of them!”¹⁶⁵ By Torshilova’s account, the look of many of the apartments in her 1968 survey and the principles that guided the tenants in their decisions about furnishing did conform in important respects to the official aesthetic of the contemporary style, regardless of the residents’ expressed

159. *Ibid.*, d. 127, l. 9-ob — 10; d. 127, l. 26.

160. *Ibid.*, d. 125, l. 102.

161. *Ibid.*, d. 126, l. 11 (female signature).

162. *Ibid.*, d. 125, l. 57 ob.

163. *Ibid.*, d. 126, l. 48. Since socio-demographic data were not gathered systematically to accompany the viewers’ comments no firm conclusions can be drawn about the relation between the viewers’ social position and their response to the contemporary style. Taking place in Moscow, the exhibition would be visited predominantly, but not exclusively, by Muscovites.

164. *Ibid.*, d. 130, l. 33.

165. *Ibid.*, d. 126, l. 10 ob.

concern to individualize and differentiate their interiors. Asked “How is *uiut* achieved?” the immediate response of 81 percent of the 85 informants rehearsed the widely promoted modernist principles: “through cleanliness” and “a small number of things,” “convenience,” “unity of style” and “harmony of the whole ensemble of the interior.”¹⁶⁶ Many of the households she surveyed apparently espoused the modernist wish to be rid of the past and to make a fresh start on moving into the new apartment. There appeared to be little sentimental attachment to old things. A mere eight percent of those interviewed gave “memory” (*doroga kak pamiat'*) as the reason for not getting rid of old furniture. As Torshilova concluded:

The new forms emerged on an entirely radical rejection of the old which was labelled eclectic, non-functional. Aesthetic negativism brought with it a general negativism: along with the tasteless frame, the photograph itself was thrown out; along with granny's bed — the memory of granny.¹⁶⁷

By late 1966, when Torshilova's informants had begun to set up home in their new apartments, it was possible for Moscow intelligentsia households to furnish their apartments in the contemporary style, if they so wished, often through acquisition of suites imported from socialist Central and Eastern Europe. But it was no easy matter in 1961 when “Art into Life!” presented the modernizers' ideal home interiors to the public. That the furniture and other consumer goods for the home were too expensive and not yet available to buy was the most common complaint at the exhibition. Viewers' written comments expressed a sense of entitlement to the new style and of its appropriateness to the present era, combined with impatience and frustration.

You could go mad! You could go mad because all these wonderful things are nowhere and never to be bought! [...] There are so many workers possessing excellent taste, yet all the same, in the shops they sell only expensive and inconvenient things that have nothing in common with our age and our contemporary materials. The important thing here is not whether one person likes one thing or another, but that in principle all the things or almost all shown here are not produced by industry. Is it possible to put that right — or not? They've been writing about it for many years already. Can it be set right or not?¹⁶⁸

Numerous angry comments indicated that people had grown impatient with the “logic of models.” “Everything here is good! And in the shops — bad.”¹⁶⁹ “The exhibition is wonderful. Things done with great taste and very good. But as a whole, strange as it may sound, the exhibition leaves a painful impression of organized mockery of people. Do we still have to live in Potemkin villages from

166. Torshilova, “Byt,” 138.

167. *Ibid.*, 143-4.

168. TsAGM, f. 21, op. 1, d. 125, l. 59.

169. *Ibid.*, d. 125, l. 40 ob.

Catherine's time? [...] disgraceful, and again disgraceful. Simply so offensive you could weep!"¹⁷⁰

Some comment writers had clearly listened to and appropriated the language of public discourse on the education of taste as an essential aspect of communist upbringing:

The exhibition makes a very good impression [...] but I leave saddened. We rarely find what we see here in our shops. If we want to inculcate good, contemporary taste in our Soviet people, then the time has long passed to [...] stop producing old styles of tableware, ancient furniture, and philistine lampshades. Yet in our shops there are no standard lamps, beautiful light fittings, or glass shades. Furniture in the contemporary style is very rare, and there is no beautiful tableware at all. I wish that "mass production," as written on the exhibits, would indeed become mass.¹⁷¹

Many more comments could be cited to similar effect. Viewers at "Art into Life!" wanted the new aesthetics of interior decorating to enter *their* lives — if only they could get hold of contemporary style furnishings!¹⁷² The exhibition was itself intended as part of the remedy. The exhibits were prototypes that were designed to go into mass production. And the positive response of many viewers to the contemporary style would be taken as ammunition by the modernizers to support their efforts to overhaul furniture production, push through the new designs, and persuade industry and trade organizations that this was the will of the people.

Conclusion

Khrushchev, confronted with the American dream of consumerist domesticity in 1959, bragged to Richard Nixon that "In Russia, all you have to do to get a house is to be born in the Soviet Union. You are entitled to housing."¹⁷³ Beyond the bluff and hyperbole, his claim referenced an important shift in the post-Stalin regime's approach to providing the good life promised by communism. "The dawn of an officially sanctioned Soviet consumerism" has been located by Julie Hessler and others in the period 1935-1938. But at that time, "it was above all Stakhanovites who came to represent the "citizen-consumer" in Stalinist depictions of the

170. *Ibid.*, d. 130, l. 35.

171. *Ibid.*, d. 126, l. 2. "Khotelos' by, chtoby massovost' proizvodstva, napisannaia na obraztsakh, byla deistvitel'no massovoi."

172. There were similar responses to the exhibition of "Textile Wares," held in the same venue, March 1961, TsAGM, f. 21, op. 1, d. 120, l. 23, 25, transcript of meeting of artists about "Textile Wares" exhibition, March 1961. East German viewers reacted in the same way to a 1956 exhibition of well-designed goods at the GDK Institute for Applied Arts that were not available in the shops. Zachmann "Socialist Consumption Junction," 74.

173. "Moscow "Kitchen Debate," 24 July 1959, CNN Interactive. <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/episodes/14/documents/debate/> (last consulted 5 May 2006)

prosperous life.”¹⁷⁴ In the Khrushchev era we see the formation of the ideological and material infrastructure for a later boom in *mass* consumption, as Jane Zavisca has noted.¹⁷⁵ That consumption is a defining feature of capitalist modernity is a point on which there is wide consensus among students of consumption in the West.¹⁷⁶ But mass consumption and images of how and what to consume were not the monopoly of capitalist modernity. They were also central to modern socialism.

The historic transformations that took place after Stalin’s death were not, contrary to a recent assertion by Hiroaki Kuromiya, limited to the end of mass terror and Khrushchev’s advocacy of “peaceful coexistence.”¹⁷⁷ Considered from the perspective of ordinary people’s everyday experience and material culture, the Khrushchev era represented a great but uneven leap forward in creating the basis for a modern way of everyday life and a radical stylistic reorientation in domestic spaces and the visual appearance of cities towards a new aesthetic of socialist modernism, called here Khrushchev Modern. The shift of style did not enter seamlessly and universally into people’s homes and way of life, however; it was only unevenly appropriated and adopted. The modernization of the Soviet everyday environment, initiated from above in the mid-fifties by specialists acting in the name of the state, raises important questions of agency — or rather, of negotiation between various agencies, differently positioned in relation to the authority of the state and to the material fabric of the home.

University of Sheffield

Department of Russian and Slavonic Studies

S.E.Reid@sheffield.ac.uk

174. Hessler, “Cultured Trade,” 184, 199.

175. Zavisca, “Consumer Inequalities,” 56.

176. Frank Trentmann, “Beyond Consumerism: New Historical Perspectives on Consumption,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, 2 (July 2004): 373.

177. Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Stalin* (London: Pearson Education/Longman, 2005), 201.