Making selves through making things

Soviet do-it-yourself culture and practices of late Soviet subjectivation

*La réalisation de soi par la création : Culture et pratiques soviétiques du « faire
soi-même » de la subjectivation à la fin de l'ère soviétique*

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MAKING SELVES THROUGH MAKING THINGS

Soviet do-it-yourself culture and practices of late Soviet subjectivation*

At the turn of the 1950s, when the postwar reconstruction of Soviet industry, agriculture and infrastructure was still far from complete, the Soviet state insurance company *Gosstrakh* started publishing advertisements for property insurance in the Soviet illustrated magazine *Ogoněk*. The imagery of these advertisements was strikingly different from what the magazine's readers could see in Soviet postwar realities.¹ In one of them, a private car, a motorcycle and a motor boat were engaged in a speed contest, while a yacht was heading towards the endless horizon.² In another, a woman was playing piano in a domestic interior which featured all sorts of beautiful things, such as vases, clocks, paintings and statuettes.³ In yet another, a group of people were enjoying their leisure time on a shore of a forest lake, brought there by a private car and having fun riding a motorcycle and sailing in a sailboat.⁴ Several years before the famous "consumer

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1. For historical accounts of the post-war Soviet Union, see Elena Zubkova, *Russia After the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945-1957* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1998); V.F. Zima, "Poslevoennoe obshchestvo: golod i prestupnost' (1946-1947) [Post-war society: hunger and criminality (1946-1947)]," *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, 5 (1995): 45-60; V.L. Popov "Stalin i sovetskaia ekonomika v poslevoennye gody [Stalin and Soviet economy in post-war years]," *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, 3 (2001): 61-76.

2. *Ogoněk*, 37 (1950), the inside page of the back cover.

3. *Ogoněk*, 32 (1952), the inside page of the back cover.

4. *Ogoněk*, 38 (1952), the inside page of the back cover.

turn” initiated by Khrushchev,⁵ these and multiple similar images⁶ were creating the collective imagery which informed Soviet people that to be modern meant to be fashionable and stylish, to possess nicely decorated apartments and to own cars, motorcycles and even yachts.

The emphasis on the consumer sector associated with both Khrushchev’s and Brezhnev’s periods exploited exactly this imagery, rooted in the Stalinist social contract, of the modern Soviet person who was imagined as possessing natural rights for personal housing (hence the programme of large-scale construction of prefabricated panel buildings), private cars (hence the expansion of the car industry, especially with the launch of the production at the VAZ factory in Tol’iatti in 1970), modern furniture, convenient kitchen appliances, radio and TV-sets, or elegant clothes.⁷ Yet there always were more Soviet people willing to materialize their modern identities than there were consumer commodities available in stores. This problem of commodity deficit was aggravated by the fact that Soviet consumers were often unwilling to accept Soviet commodities as “stylish” or “of good quality,” thus challenging their ability to objectify Soviet visions of modernity — a problem acknowledged and addressed, somewhat unsuccessfully, by the Soviet leadership.⁸

It was at this disjuncture between people’s desires to express themselves as modern Soviet subjects and the inability of the state economy to satisfy their desires that home-made things and related do-it-yourself practices came into play. The Brezhnev’s period saw a dramatic rise in the circulation of magazines and the number of brochures and books which offered all sorts of advice of how to make

5. On the Soviet policies of the mid-1950s from the perspective of a discontinuity, see: Susan E. Reid, “Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev,” *Slavic Review*, 61, 2 (Summer, 2002): 211-252; Eadem, “Khrushchev Modern: Agency and Modernization in the Soviet Home,” *Cahiers du Monde russe*, 47, 1-2 (January-June 2006): 227-268.

6. For a discussion of Stalinist fashion as a social myth contradicting the social reality — a myth to be consumed visually see Djurdja Bartlett, *FashionEast: The Spectre That Haunted Socialism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), 5-7, 84-98. On the imagery of both prewar and postwar Soviet advertisements, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism. Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York — Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 89-114; Steven Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 123-129; Julie Hessler, *A Social History of Soviet Trade: Trade Policy, Retail Practices, and Consumption, 1917-1953* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 212-214.

7. This turn to consumer industry was reflected in all official resolutions on Soviet economic development. For the Brezhnev era, which is the focus of this article, see: A.N. Kosygin, *Direktivy XXIII s’ezda KPSS po piatiletnemu planu razvitiia narodnogo khoziaistva SSSR na 1966-1970 gg.* [The directives of the Twenty-third Congress of the CPSU on the Five-Year Plan of economic development of the USSR for 1966-1970] (M.: Politizdat, 1966), 17-18, 31-32, 56; *Direktivy XXIV s’ezda KPSS po piatiletnemu planu razvitiia narodnogo khoziaistva SSSR na 1971-1975 gg.* [The directives of the Twenty-fourth Congress of the CPSU on the Five-Year Plan of economic development of the USSR for 1971-1975] (M.: Politizdat, 1971), 5-9, 24.

8. See, e.g.: L.M. Badalov, *Ekonomicheskie problemy povysheniia kachestva produktsii* [Economic problems of the output quality increase] (M.: Ekonomika, 1982). The institute of *gospriemka* [state acceptance] that Mikhail Gorbachev’s team introduced in 1986 was an attempt at an institutional solution of this problem. The extreme popularity of Western consumer commodities in the USSR was another side of this problem.

things with one's own hands using simple technologies and available materials.⁹ Ownership of a car required throughout this period competence in doing at least basic maintenance and repairs by oneself,¹⁰ and the composition of the Soviet car journal *Za rul'm* [Behind the wheel] was symptomatic in this respect, since up to a half of its space was occupied by advice and instructions on how to repair cars without a trip to a service station. In a similar fashion, *Radio* published circuits of popular electronic devices produced in or imported to the USSR, so that at least certain basic repairs could be done at home. The number of building, garage and *dacha*¹¹ cooperatives grew throughout this period, through which Soviet citizens pooled together their resources, including manual labour, to struggle through chronic shortages of materials and paid labour during the Brezhnev's period.¹² The success of these cooperatives depended on skills of its members who made much of construction and infrastructure works themselves.

The Soviet do-it-yourself culture was, however, much more than just a pragmatic solution to the commodity deficit. First of all, the late 1960s became the time when a close connection between schools and industries, advocated by Khrushchev, was replaced with labour education in the classroom (*uroki truda*) which was separate for male and female students.¹³ After this reform was introduced, between the 4th and 8th grades schoolboys had to master industry-related skills (which, in the case of one of the authors of this article included working on a turning lathe, basic operations of metal and timber processing and manufacturing of some basic furniture like shelves and stools), while schoolgirls focused on cooking and sewing. Compulsory

9. The circulation of *Modelist-Konstruktor*, a journal for amateur engineering and replica design, grew from 140,000 copies in its first year (1966) to 850,000 copies in 1982 and further to 1,800,000 copies in 1989, the peak year. The first issue of *Katera i lakhty*, a journal for amateur boat and yacht builders, was published in just 10,000 copies (1963), and by 1982 its circulation grew to 165,000 copies. The circulation of *Rabotnitsa* [Working woman], a women's magazine with a free appendix featuring different do-it-yourself designs (usually clothes) grew from already impressive 4,600,000 monthly copies in 1964 to monstrous 13,580,000 in 1982. Another Soviet women's magazine *Krestianka* [Peasant woman], also with a do-it-yourself appendix, boasted an increase in circulation from 3,500,000 copies in 1964 to 6,800,000 copies in 1982.

10. Lewis Siegelbaum in his book *Cars for Comrades* cites remarkable statistics: in 1963, there were eight service stations in Moscow for its ca. seventy thousand privately owned cars; in 1980, there were thirteen service stations for ca. 250,000 cars owned by Muscovites. Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Cars for Comrades: The Life of the Soviet Automobile* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 244.

11. Functionally, the closest equivalent of a Soviet *dacha* might be a summer cottage or vacation home, but this translation loses all cultural connotations associated with this phenomenon of post-Stalinist Soviet history. See: Stephen Lovell, *Summerfolk: A History of the Dacha, 1710-2000* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003).

12. See, e.g.: E. Vlanskii, "Voprosy planirovkii i vybora tipov kvartir v domakh ZhSK [Questions of the planning and selection of apartment types in the houses of house building cooperatives]," *Zhilishchnoe stroitel'stvo*, 1 (1970); N.S. Miloslavskaiia, "Zhilishchno-stroitel'nyi kooperativ v selskoi mestnosti [House building cooperatives in the countryside]," *Zhilishchnoe stroitel'stvo*, 11 (1970).

13. Catriona Kelly, "'Shkol'nyi val's': povsednevnaia zhizn' sovetskoi shkoly v poslestatinskoe vremia [School waltz: Everyday life of the Soviet school in the post-Stalin time]," *Antropologicheskii forum*, 1 (2004): 128.

school education was complemented by a complex network of school hobby groups (*kruzhki*), including those of knitting, aircraft and ship replica modelling or radio engineering, which spread to the farthest corners of the USSR.¹⁴

In a wider socio-cultural context, one's ability to make nice, stylish and reliable things was generally a marker of positive identification used in such epithets as "*master na vse ruki*" and "*masteritsa*" for men and women, respectively.¹⁵ These epithets were neither innocent nor passive, since references to people's skills in do-it-yourself culture established a social norm and divided people according to their correspondence to this norm, as well as implied a certain place in social hierarchies and worked as moments of condensed historicity by providing a fixed and recognisable framework for people's life stories. In many ways, they acted analogous to what Louis Althusser and Judith Butler conceptualized as interpellations, or speech acts responsible for the social being of people.¹⁶ To use Slavoj Žižek's paraphrase of Althusser's definition of interpellation:

[T]he subject as such is constituted through a certain misrecognition: the process of ideological interpellation through which the subject "recognizes" itself as the addressee in the calling up of the ideological cause implies necessarily a certain short circuit, an illusion of the type "I was already there."¹⁷

Used to identify Soviet people as men or women capable of certain skills, these and similar epithets evoked exactly this mechanism of subjectivation. This made practices of Soviet do-it-yourself culture important acts through which Soviet identities were performed.

Due to its wide-spread character, the making of things at home became an important activity through which Soviet people materialized their identities and social relationships, defined their private space and time, created communities (e.g., through mail correspondence or on the basis of garage cooperatives) and even imagined geographies — when, for example, Soviet women copied dress designs spotted in Western films.¹⁸ Soviet do-it-yourself culture provided the multiplicity of styles, wishes, fantasies which formed the social fabric of Soviet life. It also redefined, to a certain extent, the relationship between Soviet people and their

14. In 1981, ca. 179,000 hobby groups (*kruzhki*) involved in their activities more than three million Soviet schoolchildren: *Planovoe khoziaistvo*, 7 (1982): 28.

15. Of course, epithets could be negative as well, as in the case of such a derogatory term as "*bezrukii*" (unable to do something with one's own hands, literally "without hands"). We verified the contexts in which these words and phrases were used through a search in the National Corpus of the Russian Language (<http://www.ruscorpora.ru>).

16. Louis Althusser, "Ideological State Apparatuses," *Althusser, Louis: Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 85-126; Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 3-37.

17. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008), xxv.

18. On the imitation of dress designs from western films, see the documentary *Negotovoe plat'e* [An unsewn dress], dir. Lev Lur'e, 5-TV, 2010 (available online at <http://www.5-tv.ru/video/504636/>).

material world. In the culture where life cycles of material things were extended to the extreme and nearly any possible thing could be used to make something else, the material world acted in a different manner than in societies oriented towards consumption of a much wider variety of manufactured commodities.

This article explores Soviet do-it-yourself culture as a field of interplay between patterns and practices of subjectivation, in which engagement in making things with one's own hands became part of the process constituting Soviet subjects. In our analysis of certain forms of knowledge regarding home-made things, we will trace how power structures and discourses of late socialism pervaded through persuasion and care the Soviet social body to the degree that practices of making things at home became part of the Soviet symbolic order. We will then illustrate how these practices made way into the Soviet private space and time. We will focus, in particular, on how Soviet do-it-yourself culture provided symbolic forms for performing Soviet gender. In the end, we will try to shift our angle of sight from above to below to show how Soviet people used these practices and the material world around them to make, with their own hands, their homes, their clothes and their selves.

Women's homemade culture of self-surveillance

In 1979, when the Soviet Union actively prepared to host the 1980 Summer Olympics in Moscow, the Russian-language edition of the magazine *Sovetskaia zhenshchina* (*Soviet Woman*) introduced a slightly changed format: each article was now preceded by a question supposedly asked by women from different countries and answered by the magazine's team. The range and focus of these questions allow for an assumption that this was a way in which the magazine gave to its female readers ready answers to potentially provocative questions that could be asked by foreign tourists, as well as possible topics for politically safe conversations.¹⁹ This format continued after the Olympics: for example, the September 1981 issue placed a question from a Hana Suleiman from Syria asking what kind of needlework was popular among Soviet women. The answer that *Soviet Woman* published comprised black-and-white photos featuring a satin stitch towel, a woven wall hanging, a woolen crocheted shawl and a patchwork shawl, as well as a short accompanying text:

In their free time Soviet women, just like many other women in the world, are, of course, delighted to make things with their own hands: they sew, embroider,

19. In this way, the magazine acted in similar way to a reference book *USSR: 100 Questions and Answers*, which represented an attempt to create an official interpretation for most obvious discrepancies between Soviet and Western realities. Published in twenty-seven languages, it had the largest circulation in Russian, in which it was reissued seven times between 1978 and 1987. As was indicated in its introduction, the primary audience of Russian language editions was Soviet tourists travelling to Western countries: it had to supply Soviet tourists with ready answers to such tricky questions as "Why do Soviet consumers prefer imported commodities?" or "Why are there so few privately owned cars in the USSR?" See, e.g.: V. Proshutinskii, ed., *SSSR: 100 voprosov i otvetov* [USSR: 100 questions and answers] (M.: APN, 1980).

knit and crochet, make lace... Here [*u nas*] one can often see a dress or a blouse made and decorated by oneself in a traditional style [*po folklornym motivam*]. Friends, neighbours and colleagues never fail to praise such a skilled woman [*masteritsa*] and to ask the pattern or the embroidery design [...] We also retained the tradition to decorate the home with things made with one's own hands: nicely embroidered towels or small cushions. For it enlivens the modern interior, brings a unique folk flavour, demonstrates a hostess's excellent taste.²⁰

This text is an example of the multiple ideological meanings the magazines ascribed to do-it-yourself practices. Firstly, framed as an answer to a question from abroad, it simultaneously invoked the concept of “the Soviet woman” and defined her by mentioning practices in which she was supposedly involved: sewing, embroidery and lace-making. Secondly, these practices established a normative basis of social communication: the norm was to exchange designs and patterns, as well as to ask each other's advice. Thirdly, it delegated the function of creating a social norm from the authoritative voice to that of everyday communication: Soviet people were encouraged to praise each other's skills in making things with their own hands (evoked in the term *masteritsa*) which were represented as part of their Sovietness. Finally, the discourse of Soviet women's magazines transferred do-it-yourself practices from the traditional rural domain to the normative urban culture, since ethnic patterns in one's dress or apartment proved, as the magazine claimed, “an excellent taste”: not a sign of backwardness, but that of the Soviet modern.

While recent research into official languages of late socialism focused on how increased inflexibility and formalism undermined their ability to reproduce the established social order,²¹ this imagined dialogue between a foreign and a Soviet woman represents a reverse example of an official discourse which was internalized by Soviet people and remains influential now, as our observations of the everyday language use demonstrate.²² Soviet state propaganda defined the Soviet woman as being skilled in producing things with her own hands, which was not only important pragmatically, as it decreased the demand in the permanently shortage-stricken market of consumer commodities in the USSR, but also provided her with a self-fashioning tool. Involved in needlework, she transformed her leisure time into time usefully and rationally spent; her own “delight” (“Soviet women [...] are delighted to make things with their own hands [...]”) and the praise of her “friends, neighbours and colleagues” was a reward for participation in practices which the discourse of women's magazines defined as essentially Soviet.

20. *Sovetskaia zhenshchina*, 9 (1981): 33.

21. Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), esp. chapters 7 and 8, 279-354; Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Willibald Steinmetz, “New Perspectives on the Study of Language and Power in the Short Twentieth Century,” in Willibald Steinmetz, ed., *Political Languages in the Age of Extremes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), esp. 26-31.

22. See also footnote 15.

This focus on becoming a modern Soviet subject through do-it-yourself practices was not immanent for Soviet culture: the active cultivation of these practices both in women's and men's (see the next section) domains started in the 1960s. While Soviet magazines had always been an important venue in the production of normative images of the Soviet woman²³ and the making of things at home was propagated as part of the Soviet way of life,²⁴ until the turn of the 1960s fashion sections in the most popular Soviet women's magazines, including *Sovetskaia zhenshchina*, *Krestianka* and *Rabotnitsa*,²⁵ did not imply the self-making of designs featured in their pages: instead, they served as ideas for professional tailors working in a shop or unofficially at home. Models of clothes featured in the Soviet women's magazines in the 1950s were represented as sketchy images with accurate geometric proportions and short accompanying descriptions in the professional jargon; however, no patterns were printed that could help women who did not possess professional tailoring skills produce these models.

The situation gradually changed in the course of the 1960s. The introduction of labour education in Soviet schools in 1958, first in the form of internship training and since the second half of the 1960s as a compulsory in-school subject led to the popularization of skills and professional language of sewing and related activities. So, while a young woman of the late 1950s was most likely puzzled by a description of the design of a dress in *Rabotnitsa* or *Krestianka*, her daughter in the 1970s was likely to be able to "read" them as an instruction to make a dress with her own hands. The circulation of Soviet women's magazines also grew fast in this period, as did their audiences. This process was accompanied by a dramatic increase in the number of good housekeeping books, which devoted large sections to the making of clothes in home conditions: while in 1956 only one such book was published in the USSR, in 1958 their number rose to fifteen titles. In 1959 and 1960, thirty and twenty-nine good housekeeping books, respectively, were published in the USSR. Their press run, numbering hundreds of thousands and, in the case of A.A. Demezer and M.L. Dziuba's *Domovodstvo* (reprinted five times between 1957 and 1965), millions of copies, saturated the Soviet market with advice to women of how to make things — primarily clothes and interior decorations — at home.²⁶

This expansion of discourse on do-it-yourself practices occurred against the background of continuing urbanization of the USSR: the early 1960s became the

23. Lynne Attwood, *Creating the New Soviet Woman: Women's Magazines as Engineers of Female Identity, 1922-53* (Houndmills, UK, – New York, N.Y.: Macmillan; St. Martin's Press, 1999), 11-17, 66-71, 163-167.

24. Emma Widdis, "Sew Yourself Soviet: The Pleasures of Textile in the Machine Age," Balina, Marina and Evgeny Dobrenko, eds., *Petrified Utopia: Happiness Soviet Style* (London: Anthem Press, 2009), 115-132.

25. See footnote 9.

26. Olga Smolyak, "'Abazhur', 'abort', 'abrikos': representatsiia sovetskoi povsednevnosti v knigakh po domovodstvu ['Abat-jour,' 'abortion,' 'apricot': A representation of the Soviet everyday life in good housekeeping books]," in O.L. Leibovich, A.V. Chashchukhin, O.A. Smolyak, eds., *Razryvy i konventsii v otechestvennoi kul'ture* [Discontinuities and conventions in Russian culture] (Perm: PGIK, 2011), 142.

time when the Soviet urban population exceeded the rural, with this process only intensifying further into the 1970s and 1980s.²⁷ Rural migrants came with a baggage of traditional aesthetics and cultural practices, which had to be accommodated to the modern urban lifestyle. In the 1930s, the state effort to direct this accommodation into appropriate cultural form gave birth to *kul'turnost'* (culturedness), a constitutive conception of Stalinist culture which, in particular, rehabilitated consumption as pleasure;²⁸ the 1960s became the time when these efforts evolved further,²⁹ as the ubiquity of discourse on do-it-yourself practices encouraged the making of aesthetically and culturally appropriate things at home, thus internalizing the official aesthetics and directly participating in its materialization. In January 1973, for example, *Rabotnitsa* published a text about the department store GUM in Moscow which organized daily fashion shows for its customers:

Three times a day an orchestra plays here, and charming models demonstrate new designs of clothes from fabrics that can be, as a rule, purchased directly here, in the store. Perhaps this explains the huge popularity of GUM's fashion hall. It never stands empty — numerous customers of the main Soviet department store come here, so that later at home — in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, in Irkutsk or Tashkent — they would sew themselves a dress or a suit using a design that they saw in Moscow.³⁰

This text apparently referred to the actual practice of Soviet women coming to GUM to see and then imitate fashionable designs;³¹ what it and innumerable similar texts did, however, was to appropriate this practice and integrate it into the dominant visual regime, in which the practice of making clothes was preceded by the practice of seeing normative fashion and of imagining oneself from a position of an outside observer. Indeed, in the course of the 1960s Soviet women's magazines underwent a significant transformation: whereas the first pages of *Krestianka* and *Rabotnitsa* kept on featuring women as workers, kolkhoz farmers, peoples' delegates, Komsomol and party members, their last pages became dominated by models (usually as rough pencil drawings) wearing fashionable designs and posing

27. According to the 1959 Soviet census, 48 percent of the Soviet population lived in urban areas and 52 percent in rural. According to the 1979 Soviet census data, this proportion changed to 62 percent and 38 percent, respectively. Data provided online by the Institute of Demography of the Higher School of Economics (Moscow): <http://demoscope.ru>.

28. Vera Dunham, *In Stalin's Time: Middle class Values in Soviet Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism. Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Vadim Volkov, "The Concept of Kul'turnost': Notes on the Stalinist Civilizing Process," in Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed. *Stalinism: New Directions* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 210-230.

29. Catriona Kelly, *Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite Culture, and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 319-321.

30. "Chego zhdat ot mody [What one should expect from fashion]," *Rabotnitsa*, 1 (1973): 32.

31. This text is all the more curious, as it serves to virtually "knit together" Soviet space in a centralized manner, as Soviet women even from the most remote peripheries are represented as coming to Moscow to know the modern Soviet fashion.

in ways that, without too big a stretch of the imagination, can be characterized as sexualized, accentuating the spectator's gaze on the woman's hips, shoulders, neck, waist and breast, making her a normalized object of observation.³²

Ill. 1 – Fashion models in *Rabotnitsa* and *Krestianka*, late 1960s to early 1970s.³³
Courtesy of *ID Rabotnitsa* and *IDR-Format*.

The appeal to the making of things at home thus became a means to incorporate the female body into what might be characterized, borrowing from Tony Bennett, as part of the “exhibitionary complex” of Soviet culture, that is, a set of institutions which

were involved in the transfer of objects and bodies from the enclosed and private domains [...] into progressively more open and public arenas where, through the representations to which they were subjected, they formed vehicles for inscribing and broadcasting the messages of power [...] throughout society.³⁴

Late Soviet do-it-yourself practices became increasingly colonized by the visual regime, which forced their practitioners to precede the act of actual homemaking of things with the act of looking at models who wore these things and to imagine themselves as being looked at. As early as 1958, *Krestianka* demanded that a woman had to “think of herself self-critically and be capable of seeing herself through other people’s gaze,”³⁵ a motif that was implied by the very practice of making things at home after having seen them worn by other women, be them professional models or, like in the first example in this section, “friends, neighbours and colleagues.”

32. On the normalization of women’s bodies as an object of modern (and predominantly male) gaze, see: *John Berger*, *Ways of Seeing* (New York: Viking, 1973), 35-64.

33. From left to right: *Rabotnitsa*, 9 (1967); *Rabotnitsa*, 6 (1969); *Krestianka*, 9 (1970). All images from the reverse side of the back cover.

34. Tony Bennett, “The Exhibitionary Complex,” *New Formations*, 4 (Spring 1988): 74.

35. “Umenie odevatsia [A skill of dressing oneself properly],” *Krestianka*, 6 (1958): 30.

By emphasizing the visibility of ways in which the Soviet woman acquired information about how to make things at home, Soviet magazines immersed her in the space where she was simultaneously an observer and observed, a connoisseur and an object of a connoisseur's gaze. Advice on how to make things with one's own hands as published in Soviet magazines imposed on women normalizing frameworks by arguing what ways of dressing were decent and what were indecent or, at least, improper for certain occasions. This transformation of the woman into the object of the gaze was not a specifically Soviet phenomenon, but apparently part of the general pattern of modernity; a specifically Soviet aspect of it was that do-it-yourself practices, due to their ubiquity in the Soviet society, became one of the primary venues which taught the Soviet woman that she had to exist in a panoptic space where she could at any moment become observed, evaluated and classified according to her skills in the mastering of homemade things.

Soviet masculinity, garage-built

The first issue of *Modelist-Konstruktor*, the would-be cult journal of Soviet amateur engineering, appeared in January 1966. Initially, it was founded as a youth journal for replica designers, particularly aimed at hobby groups (*kruzhki*) which existed in many schools, specialized technical after school clubs (*stantsii iunogo tekhnika*), and palaces and houses of Young Pioneers. From the very beginning, however, designs of models did not fully dominate on its pages, as numerous publications focused on successful amateur designs of cars, small aircrafts, snowmobiles, farm machinery, etc. Already the very first editorial address promised to the journal's readers that

the journal will tell you how to build [...] real small airplanes, helicopters, motor gliders, which will take you to the sky. As for future conquerors of the ocean, *Modelist-Konstruktor* will [...] supply them with blueprints and technical characteristics of yachts, catamarans, motor boats [...] Car and bike fans will find on the journal's pages detailed materials about amateur designs of sport models and personal cars [...]³⁶

The journal fulfilled its promises: in the next decades it published hundreds of blueprints and instructions of how to make virtually everything with one's own hands ranging from kitchen appliances to light aircrafts with motorcycle or motor boat engines. *Modelist-Konstruktor* was not the only cultural venue which popularized amateur engineering in the USSR. Starting in 1963, *Katera i Iakhty*, a specialized periodical³⁷ for amateur boat- and yacht-building, published hundreds

36. *Modelist-Konstruktor*, 1 (1966), back side of the front cover.

37. In 1963 only one issue was published, since 1964 it was published bi-annually, since 1967 quarterly and since 1969 bimonthly, reflecting the growing interest to amateur boat and yacht building.

of designs ranging from small river boats to ocean-worthy yachts. Since the 1960s, another widely circulated technical magazine, *Tekhnika-Molodezhi* started popularizing home-built cars. *Radio* published electronic circuits and blueprints which could be used to assemble sophisticated electronic devices or to repair virtually everything produced by Soviet radio-electronic industry. Apart from periodicals, from the 1960s to the 1980s books were published in hundreds of thousands of copies which advised how to build summer cottages (*dachas*), cars, boats or electronic appliances.³⁸ The mid-1960s became an important landmark in this production, with *Katera i Iakhty* launched in 1963 and *Modelist-Konstruktor* in 1966. Also in 1966, the editorial board of *Tekhnika-Molodezhi* organized the first Soviet exhibition of amateur cars,³⁹ an event which became regular during the 1970s and 1980s.⁴⁰ Since the early 1970s and until 1991, the central Soviet television broadcasted a TV-show *Eto vy mozhete* [You can make it], which introduced to a multi-million television audience different amateur designs ranging from kitchen appliances to cars and small aircrafts.

The pragmatic dimension of Soviet do-it-yourself (repair-it-yourself) culture was apparently important: in a state where consumer demand grew much faster than the consumer industry or service sector, making or repairing things at home could be a solution to shortages in stores. Yet at the same time, Soviet do-it-yourself culture also placed a visible emphasis on much less pragmatic things such as home-built cars, yachts, motor boats or planes. While thousands of people read about them, few actually ventured to build them, judging by the fact that even “national” (*vsesoiuznye*) exhibitions of garage-built cars or planes never gathered more than several dozens of vehicles,⁴¹ a miniscule quantity compared to the scale of the Soviet Union. Amateur engineering could not also overcome the problem of infrastructure, especially when it came to airfields or ports which were ill-suited for private aircrafts or yachts; besides, their owners were often forbidden to use these

38. K.N. Kurdenkov, *Suda: stroim sami* [Ships: build yourself] (M.: Sudostroenie, 1964); B.S. Ivanov, *Elektronika svoimi rukami* [Electronic devices with one's own hands] (M.: Molodaia gvardiia, 1964); D.I. Novikov, V.A. Shishakov, *Samodel'nye astronomicheskie instrumenty i nabliudeniia s nimi* [Self-made astronomical devices and their use for sky observations] (M.: Nauka, 1965); V.M. Gesler, *Avtomobil' svoimi rukami* [A car with one's own hands] (M.: DOSAAF, 1970); M. Mishin, *Samodelki dlia sada i ogoroda* [Self-made appliances for home and garden] (M.: Moskovskii rabochii, 1970); A.M. Shepelev, *Izgotovlenie mebeli svoimi rukami* [Making furniture with one's own hands] (M.: Rosselkhozizdat, 1977); G.M. Novak, *Katera, lodki i motory v voprosakh i otvetakh: spravochnik* [Motorboats, boats and motors in questions and answers: a reference book] (M.: Sudostroenie, 1977); A.M. Shepelev, *Kladka pechei svoimi rukami* [Making stoves with one's own hands] (M.: Rosselkhozizdat, 1983).

39. Z. Fomina, dir., *Novosti dnia / Khronika nashikh dni*, 45 (1966). *Studiia dokumental'nye filmov*.

40. “Molodost' plus umeniia [Youth plus skills],” *Za rulem*, 12 (1967): 17-18; V. Demchenko, “Marsh-parad v 3000 kilometrov [A 3,000-km long march-parade],” *Za rulem*, 2 (1972): 18; O. Iaremenko, “Ser'eznye samodelki [Impressive self-made cars],” *Za rulem*, 12 (1982): 12-13.

41. “Avtofestival-82 [Car Festival-82],” *Modelist-Konstruktor*, 12 (1982), inlet between 16 and 17; “V nebe Tushino – SLA [Light aircrafts in the sky of Tushino],” *Modelist-Konstruktor*, 3, 4, 5 (1988); see also the previous footnote.

state-owned facilities.⁴² Enthusiasts of homebuilt cars faced fewer problems of this kind, but had to struggle with a shortage of parts, which plagued the Soviet car market during its entire existence.⁴³ As a result, garage-built yachts and cars were something more typical of the Soviet collective imaginary than the Soviet real-life landscape. Large circulation of Soviet technical magazines and the TV-show *Eto vy mozhet* secured a wide distribution of images of modern-looking garage-built vehicles, aircrafts and ships. Catching the eye of the Soviet audience, these images immersed it into the accompanying discourse. Amateur engineering was something to be looked at and read about; that is, it was a discursive field which turned the materiality of self-made things into a spectacle and which totalized scattered experiences of their producers into a governing text with a dominant idea: human mastery over the space:

Sometimes we receive questions asking why the journal *Tekhnika-Molodezhi* organizes collective trips of amateur cars through dozens of Soviet cities. Does [Soviet] industry produce cars of poor quality? This is not the case. Romantic aspirations of young masters to build a car of their own using plastic and aluminium, an amphibious car capable not only of driving, but also of sailing, should be supported. This is also a search for new discoveries.⁴⁴

This short excerpt from an article written by the editor-in-chief of *Tekhnika-Molodezhi* highlights several nodal points which connected discourse of Soviet technical journals into one whole. It associated amateur engineering with the romanticism of exploration — or, if put in Foucault's terms, with the will to knowledge,⁴⁵ that gnostic drive which defined people involved in this culture as subjects of knowledge, as explorers who, in the course of exploration, would fashion themselves into conquerors of land (homebuilt cars), water (yachts and motor boats) and air (small aircrafts)⁴⁶ — and who, due to their position of subjects of knowledge, would become objects of power relations. The discourse of amateur engineering worked all the more effectively, since in most cases this conquest of the elements was imagined: to use a metaphor, Soviet technical journals “abducted” the actual practice of building vehicles in garage

42. *Katera i Iakhty*, 2 (1975): 30; V. Kondratiev “Idei novye, problemy starye [New ideas, old problems],” *Modelist-Konstruktor*, 2 (1990): 3.

43. Siegelbaum, *Cars for Comrades*, 244.

44. Vasilii Zakharchenko, “Molodoe dykhanie veka [A young breath of the century],” *Nauka i zhizn'*, 5 (1978), 79.

45. See, e.g.: Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Vol.1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), esp. the part *Scientia Sexualis*, 53-73.

46. Readers of Soviet technical journals were also offered to conquer the space, although in an indirect manner: by observing the night sky, playing space-related games or constructing replicas of spaceships, both existing and from the imagined future. See: *Modelist-Konstruktor*, 10 (1973): 30-31, 41; *Modelist-Konstruktor*, 4 (1974): 46; *Modelist-Konstruktor*, 7 (1974): 18-19.

conditions and travelling in them. It was then represented to their readers as texts and images which constructed them as one large audience, joining this effort to conquer nature and to transform it with travel from a wilderness into a landscape.⁴⁷ Transforming Soviet space, travellers in homebuilt cars, boats or planes simultaneously transformed themselves, joining the ranks of mythologized, almost archetypal Soviet explorers who rose to social prominence in the 1930s and who made the conquest of nature a very Soviet affair.⁴⁸ Ideological interpellation in the discourse of amateur engineering could be disguised in the language of opportunities or reveal itself through the use of imperative sentences (Build! Assemble! Create!), but in both cases they worked by seducing readers into imagining themselves at the steering wheel of a motor boat or a car reaching into the wilderness inaccessible otherwise, or driving a propeller sleigh through Arctic plains, or observing the landscape from a light aircraft, or touring the countryside in a motorhome:

[The motor boat] *Salamander* can enter even very shallow rivers that are especially attractive for tourists and fishermen [...] The boat is designed for long economical trips with big loads and in places which do not usually indulge tourists with good sunny weather [...] Since it has a cabin, a tourist can stay for a night at any place [...]⁴⁹

Letters to our editorial board show that the number of enthusiasts of light aircrafts increases every year [...] Once a thick package was delivered to the editorial office. We opened it and could not believe our own eyes as we saw in photos inside the package a motor boat *Progress* with attached wings and tail – in flight! [...] The editorial board considers this project worth [publishing], because the construction of light hydroplanes and amphibious planes opens rich opportunities for the use of water areas in which we [the Soviet Union] are very rich [...]⁵⁰

To travel in your homeland [*po rodnomu kraiu*], you can make with your own hands a sectional kayak; here are its main specifications [...]⁵¹

47. On the role of travel in the transformation of nature into a landscape, see: Christof Mauch, Thomas Zeller, eds., *The World Beyond the Windshield: Roads and Landscapes in the United States and Europe* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2008), esp. "Introduction" by Christof Mauch and Thomas Zeller, 1-13.

48. Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 100-141, 225; Emma Widdis, *Visions of a New Land: Soviet Film from the Revolution to the Second World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); John McCannon, "Tabula Rasa in the North: The Soviet Arctic and Mythic Landscapes in Stalinist Popular Culture," in Evgeny Dobrenko, Eric Naiman, eds., *The Landscape of Stalinism: The Art and Ideology of Soviet Space* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 241-260; Diane P. Koenker, *Club Red: Vacation Travel and the Soviet Dream* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013).

49. V.V. Vasil'ev, "Stroim 'Salamandru' [Building 'Salamander']," *Katera i Iakhty*, 1 (1969): 12.

50. G. Stepanov, "Lodka-samolëtka [A flying boat]," *Modelist-konstruktor*, 4 (1975): 30.

51. V. Stroganov, "Baidarka 'peskar'" [Kayak 'Peskar'], *IuT dlia umelykh ruk*, 4 (1977): 5.

“For what Russian does not love to drive fast?” This beautiful modern [homebuilt] car can make it so fast that, “rent into a thousand shreds, the air roars past you, for you are overtaking the whole world”—the magnificent performance of this car allows for it.⁵²

This discourse needed the actual practices of building cars, boats or planes only inasmuch as they provided examples to be incorporated into its corpus in order to make it more convincing and tempting — in other words, in order to create a desire to make things with one’s own hands. As Michel Foucault wrote in *The History of Sexuality*, “where there is desire, the power relation is already present,”⁵³ a statement which is apparently true not only for the sexual desire, but also for a much more particular desire to create garage-built vehicles in order to travel and, through travel, to master the space. No actual mobility was needed, as it was the text and not travel itself that created desire. Offering an optical and imagined control over space, homebuilt cars and boats, as captured in the discourse of Soviet technical magazines, turned into figures of alienation, entities lying between the human and the natural worlds, into “a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real condition of existence,” in Louis Althusser’s definition of ideology.⁵⁴

It is important to remember that Soviet do-it-yourself discourse did not act as the only source of this gnostic drive to conquer Soviet space. Multiple other advertisements and materials urged Soviet people to travel in order to know their own country.⁵⁵ Texts of Soviet technical magazines exploited this discourse of travel by offering a fantasy of building something with one’s own hands to satisfy this gnostic drive of “travelling in your homeland,” as a source quoted above framed it. Publications on how to make such things acted as traps which effectively lured people into established patterns of subjectivation due to their seemingly pragmatic, apolitical and deideologized character: by suggesting how people should make certain things, articles in *Katera i Iakhty* and *Modelist-Konstruktor* — just like those in *Rabotnitsa* and *Krestianka* — inculcated in their readers socially structuring tastes, as well as the knowledge of what skills they should master (or, if they could not, then at least to recognize as socially valued) in order to become a proper Soviet man or woman. Their persuasive force originated exactly from a figure of misrecognition in which the pragmatic aspect of do-it-yourself culture disguised the fact that publications on

52. *Modelist-Konstruktor*, 10 (1971), back cover. In-text quotations from Nikolai Gogol’s *Dead Souls*, translated by D.J. Hogarth. See the image to which this text served as a caption in the illustration below.

53. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Vol.1*, 81.

54. Althusser, “Ideological State Apparatuses,” in *Althusser, Louis: Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*, 163.

55. See Koenker, *Club Red*; Anne E. Gorsuch, *All this is your World: Soviet Tourism at Home and Abroad after Stalin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), especially chapter 1 “‘There’s No Place Like Home’: Soviet Tourism in Late Stalinism,” 26-48.

how to sew a dress, furnish an apartment or make an electronic device brought with them another message: that of equalizing Soviet femininity and masculinity with certain areas of expertise in mastery over the material world, a vision of gender as constitutive of certain skills in do-it-yourself culture.

Doing things with one's own hands thus became a performance of one's gender, a practice all the more effective, for it was distributed in a decentralized manner, from below. A large share of 'do-it-yourself' publications constituted of materials and letters sent by their readers in which people shared successful designs, pieces of advice or tricks. The designs printed in *Modelist-Konstruktor*, for example, were not developed in a centralized manner, by Soviet research institutions; instead, the journal employed a bottom-up approach, as nearly all of them were initially developed by individuals for themselves, and then successful amateur solutions were shared through the journal. Readers were thus supposed to take and, indeed, voluntarily took the responsibility of power to address other readers ("you can make this...") and by addressing to identify them as men or women capable of certain skills. The Soviet TV-show *Eto vy mozhete*, which featured people who made all kinds of intricate and wonderful designs in home conditions, is just one example of how this mechanism worked. Its very title ("You can make it") brought a direct implication that the skills which its guests demonstrated were also skills — at least potential, not needed to be realized directly — of its many-millions-strong audience. In doing this, it addressed its big Soviet audience as one collective amateur engineer capable of producing the most wonderful things at home.

Creating themselves as loci of desire, Soviet technical journals functioned very much like Western illustrated magazines,⁵⁶ abducting the materiality of the world they purported to describe, and creating through textual and visual representations mythologies of a skilled and rational Soviet subject. And the Soviet subject in this context was always the Soviet man. These journals rarely depicted female figures and when they did, it was usually in passive roles — those of passengers or housewives waiting their husbands and sons to return from yet another adventure. Discourse of Soviet technical journals thus offered to its readers two rewards if they imagined themselves (or actually turned into) rational constructors of the Soviet technical world: mastery over space and mastery over the woman, and whereas the former was mostly imagined, the latter was more real, as it was incorporated into social structures and materialized in Soviet bodies.

56. Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983); Daniel Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), esp. 171-175. On role of magazines in the making of gendered social roles, see: Lynne Attwood, *Creating the New Soviet Woman: Women's Magazines as Engineers of Female Identity, 1922-1953* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, and New York: St Martin's Press, 1999); Daniel A. Clark, *Creating the College Man: American Mass Magazines and Middle-Class Manhood, 1890-1915* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2010).

Ill. 2 –Visualization of blueprints of a garage-built sports car (left) and a sectional motorboat in *Modelist-Konstruktor*.⁵⁷ Courtesy of *Modelist-Konstruktor*

In the illustration above, the sports car in the left-hand image — a product unavailable for Soviet car owners unless home-built — brought its driver to a historical cityscape near the Moscow Kremlin, whereas the right-hand image built a relationship between a self-made motor boat and the notions of leisure and female sexuality. Both landscape and women submitted themselves to the Soviet amateur engineer; both became objects of his gaze and desire. The Soviet landscape — be it modern, historical or natural — unfolded its beauties before his eyes in numerous illustrations similar to the left-hand image, as well as in travel notes published in technical journals;⁵⁸ other images depicted Soviet women as an object of his activity, showing them as passengers in self-built cars, boats or yachts, with their emotions reflecting the emotions of men behind the steering wheel and reinforcing the seductiveness of their vehicles. Self-built cars and boats thus became a form in which both Soviet masculinity and femininity could be invested and materialized, the former as the subject of desire and the latter as its object. Whereas the man ventured into the outside world, the woman stayed inside at home to take care of the household and herself, an almost archetypal plot in travel notes published by Soviet technical magazines, in which it is male collectives (father and sons, or brothers, or friends) that travel in home-built vehicles and return the domesticity of their homes with mothers, wives, or daughters waiting for them there.

The result of the work of discourse of Soviet technical journals was the social normalization of one particular⁵⁹ version of masculinity: technocratic, rational

57. Race car design: *Modelist-Konstruktor*, 10 (1971), back cover. Motorboat design: G. Malinovskii, “Seksionnye lodki – turistam [Sectional boats for tourists],” *Modelist-Konstruktor*, 2 (1970): 25-27.

58. *Katera i Iakhty* published in each issue a special section titled “Stories, travels.” Small travel sketches were also irregularly published in other technical journals.

59. Of course, it was not the only version of Soviet masculinity; yet at least for Soviet technical intelligentsia it was arguably among the normative ones.

and socially extroverted. Since this discourse operated through innumerable texts dispersed in multiple journals, books, as well as in oral communication such as in school hobby groups, it could not give any kind of coherent vision of how a genuine Soviet man should look like and worked instead by making a register of places in which a man had to be or practices which he had to engage in order to exercise this version of Soviet masculinity.⁶⁰ Soviet technical journals thus created a social topography⁶¹ which oriented a man to certain places in the Soviet social space that he needed to occupy to realize his masculinity and become a rational and disciplined Soviet subject in the process.

A self-made subject in the world of flexible materiality

One of the most famous Soviet cinematographic characters belonging to the world of Soviet amateur engineering is metalworker Gosha from the 1979 film *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears* (dir. Vladimir Menshov), an admirer of the film's protagonist Katerina who is an executive director of a large factory in Moscow. Despite her extremely successful career, Katerina is framed in the film primarily as a single woman who still seeks for happiness — something which her high-ranking position, her perfect home and her daughter cannot presumably give her. In the beginning of their romance, Gosha organizes his birthday party at which, in order to impress Katerina, he asks his friend to praise him. One of them then pronounces the following monologue:

I propose a toast in honour of his hands. At first glance they are average human hands, but all that is just an illusion. Actually, they are golden hands. We're in the presence, my friends, of Master Machine Tool and Die Maker. In our research institute, there are scientists and PhDs who could have retired ten years ago without anyone ever noticing that they are gone. But when Gosha was away last year and sent to hospital... then half of the lab stopped dead. As for me, if I'm lucky enough to have received a doctorate, at least seventy percent of it comes from the apparatus that Gosha made all by himself...⁶²

When Gosha learns that Katerina has a much higher professional standing, social position and even salary than he does, he abruptly leaves. Katerina spends the next eight days in her perfectly furnished apartment crying incessantly; in the end of the

60. See a discussion of this form of cultural negotiation of gender in: Sergei Ushakin [Oushakine], "'Chelovek roda on': znaki otsutstviia ['The human of the male sex': signs of absences]," in Serguei Oushakine, ed., *O muzhe(n)stvennosti* [On masculinity (femininity)] (M.: NLO, 2002), 21-23.

61. This was, of course, only one of alternative (or competing) topographies through which gender was performed. Another example of Leningrad yards as a site in which a different version of Soviet masculinity was performed and reproduced was discussed in Aleksandra Piir, "Dlia chego nuzhen dvor? (Vozrastnye soobshchestva leningradskikh dvorov) [What of the yard for? (Age communities of Leningrad yards)]," *Antropologicheskii forum*, Iss. 5 (2006): 355-358, 365-370.

62. *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears*, Part 2. Directed by Vladimir Menshov, Mosfilm, 1980.

film, after one of her friends is finally able to find Gosha and convince him to return, she completely cedes her autonomy and individualism to be with her perfect man.

Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears provides exemplary representations of what the new Soviet man and woman were supposed to be by the early 1980s. She could have a highly successful professional career, her personal space could look exemplarily modern, but without a man the Soviet woman of late socialism was interpreted as inherently unhappy and incomplete⁶³ — a drastic, if not dreary, contrast with the emancipatory ideals of early Soviet theorists and practitioners of feminism like Alexandra Kollontai. This new Soviet woman took responsibility for domestic space and family relations, but venturing outside of it was the prerogative of men: in the end of the film, Katerina does not find Gosha herself; it is a husband of her friend that searches all over Moscow for her runaway admirer.

Gosha is a similarly highly gendered character: his room in a Soviet *kommunalka* (communal apartment) looks neglected, with piles of books and no touch of design, but remarks of his friends (see the quotation above) allow for an inference that he is the actual master of the technical infrastructure of an entire Soviet research institute. His negligence of domestic space is conspicuous, for he is a man of the outside world who invests his time and effort in socially important affairs, leaving the domestic sphere to his woman. Together with Katerina, they make a perfect Soviet couple.

III. 3 – Contrasting representations of female and male domestic space in *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears* (1979). To the left, Katerina's apartment (and female practices of mourning); to the right, Gosha's room in a *kommunalka* (and male practices of mourning). Courtesy of *Mosfil'm*

Do-it-yourself practices were an important medium which facilitated the making of this highly gendered cultural space of late socialism. With all differences between practices targeting women and men, Soviet do-it-yourself culture had a universal

63. Another prominent example of this female figure — a highly successful professional who is, however, personally unhappy until the right man turns up — is the 1977 film *Office Romance* (dir. El'dar Riazanov).

effect, namely the production of rationally organized social space, in which gender was defined through and, to a certain degree, equalized with the reciprocally exclusive social functions men and women were supposed to perform. The highly gendered social roles created by practices of Soviet do-it-yourself culture inevitably encountered each other in the family when two individuals had to overcome the opposition of their practices and tastes, to reconcile and negotiate them in the development of their joint home. Soviet good housekeeping books and women's magazines, on the one hand, and technical journals, on the other hand, worked in a kind of alliance, creating gendered spheres of expertise which did not generally overlap, but rather complemented each other. Whereas the former gave advice on how to organize domestic space in general,⁶⁴ the latter provided tips on how to make the furniture or certain appliances; in this logic, the planning of the domestic space was a female competence, while the implementation and maintenance of this planning, whether by producing it at home or by earning a large salary enough to purchase everything needed,⁶⁵ was a male competence:

A home without a man [*khoziain*] resembles a neglected hotel suite [...] It does not matter how experienced a mistress [*khoziaika*] may be, how good at cooking, washing, cleaning, there are always household chores that are justly reputed to be a man's duties. A man is much better at repairs of the entire apartment, furniture or household appliances, he will also cope with smaller domestic problems, such as malfunctioning plumbing or electricity.⁶⁶

If a man wanted to carve within this female domestic world a space of his own, the only legitimate way for it was to create a "reservation" designated specifically for his hobbies: shelves packed with radio components, overhead cupboards cram-full with spare parts for bicycles and cars, or tables with innumerable drawers. Ideally, this man's corner had to be invisible in the grand scheme of the domestic space as planned by the woman, where possible it was to be hidden into a separate room or closet located marginally to the home's heart, the living room;⁶⁷ in smaller urban

64. Lynne Attwood, "Housing in the Khrushchev Era," in Melanie Ilic, Susan E. Reid, and Lynne Attwood, eds., *Women in the Khrushchev Era* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 177-202; Reid, "Khrushchev Modern," esp. 156; Susan E. Reid, "Happy Housewarming: Moving into Khrushchev-Era Apartments," in Dobrenko, eds., *Petrified Utopia*, 133-160.

65. A wife exploiting her husband's salary to create perfect interiors was another frequently reproduced object of criticism and satire in late Soviet culture as part of a quintessential trend to struggle all manifestations of petty-bourgeois life style. In the same film *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears*, one of Katerina's friends, Liudmila, is represented as an ambivalent character, with one of her negative features being her consumerism, a desire which she satisfies with money from her husband, a promising hockey player. See also: G.E. Glezerman, et al., eds., *Sotsialisticheskii obraz zhizni* [The socialist way of life] (M.: Politizdat, 1980), 71-71, 300-302.

66. "Svoemu domu khoziain [A master of the house]," *Rabotnitsa*, 3 (1982): 30-31.

67. Such organization of domestic space is featured in a number of late Soviet films, including *Live Happily Ever After* (*Zhivite v radosti*, dir. Leonid Millionshchikov, 1978) or *The Adventures of the Electronic* (*Priklucheniia Elektronika*, dir. Konstantin Bromberg, 1980).

apartments, such workplaces were located in ordinary rooms, but on the periphery (hence the shelves and cupboards) or, if all else failed, were disguised, where possible, as “normal” furniture, as in the illustration below.⁶⁸

III. 4 — “Table-Workshop,” a transformable design offered in *Modelist-Konstruktor* for small domestic spaces of Soviet panel blocks of apartments.⁶⁹ Courtesy of *Modelist-Konstruktor*

Soviet cinematography often used this highly gendered understanding of the Soviet domestic space to produce a certain comical or dramatic effect. In the 1973

68. For practical advice on how to organize a space for technical (that is, male) hobbies in a woman-dominated home, see: “Masterskaia v tumbochke [A workshop inside a table],” *Iunyi tekhnik*, 7 (1957): 42; G.A. Bortnovskii, *Rabochee mesto radioliubitelia* [A workplace of an amateur radio engineer] (M. – L.: Energiia, 1964); R.G. Varlamov, *Masterskaia radioliubitelia* [A workshop of an amateur radio engineer] (M.: Radio i sviaz', 1983).

69. V. Kholopov, “Stol-masterskaia [Table-Workshop],” *Modelist-Konstruktor*, 9 (1975): 42.

film *Ivan Vasilievich Changes Profession* (dir. Leonid Gaidai), the apparatus invented by the male protagonist looks weird and alien in the pointedly neat and cozy apartment, where the interior is apparently designed by his wife;⁷⁰ in another case, in the 1984 film *Love and Pigeons* (dir. Vladimir Menshov), another male protagonist, a skilled master from a Siberian village, himself becomes a strange (if not estranged) and alien (if not alienated) object in the feminine — that is, ideally organized, furnished and decorated — interior of an urban home.

By occupying their designated places in this gendered zoning of the Soviet domestic space,⁷¹ Soviet people realized practices of subjectivation in the never-ending process of becoming Soviet men and women, thus bringing power to the most intimate corners of the Soviet personal space. Sewing a fashionable jacket for a daughter or making a bedside table for a bedroom, they were interpellated into a social order of skilled and rational Soviet subjects performing their predetermined social functions, a state they then took for granted as the normal order of things.

Soviet do-it-yourself culture was an important field for the decentralization of practices of subjectivation, because it resonated with another discursive trend constitutive for Soviet official culture and ideology: discourse on the Soviet person as a creative subject, a representative of the species *homo creativus*. The official Soviet theory interpreted “mass creativity” as a compulsory trait of a socialist personality; starting with Lenin who argued that “vital, creative socialism is a creation of the popular masses themselves,”⁷² Soviet philosophers, political writers and activists amassed writing which argued that an ability to create new meanings and new things was a characteristic feature of people living in a socialist society,⁷³ and Soviet press characterized manual labour with the same epithets it used to describe creative activities of artists, poets and composers.⁷⁴ Practices of making things at home perfectly fit this ideological demand on the Soviet

70. A modification of this episode is featured in the 1984 animated film *Winter in Buttermilk Village* (*Zima v Prostokvashino*, dir. by Vladimir Popov), where father and son repair a car inside their small apartment, which causes the outrage of the wife/mother.

71. A similar argument can be made regarding personal time, which was also structured through hobbies, social rituals and routine practices along gendered lines. This question is, however, beyond the scope of this article.

72. V.I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* [Complete Works], Vol. 35 (M.: Politizdat, 1962), 57.

73. Just a few examples of such writing in the 1970s and early 1980s: M.T. Ėvchuk, L.N. Kogan, eds., *Dukhovnyi mir sovetskogo rabocheho* (M.: Mysl', 1972); D.M. Aptekman, *Formirovanie ateisticheskoi ubezhdenosti rabocheho klassa v razvitom sotsialisticheskom obshchestve* [The formation of atheistic worldview of the working class in the developed socialist society] (L.: Izd-vo Leningradskogo un-ta, 1979), esp. 27; T.I. Snegireva, *Dukhovnaia kul'tura razvitogo sotsialisticheskogo obshchestva* [Spiritual culture of the developed socialist society] (M.: Nauka, 1981), esp. 125-127; N.D. Kosukhin, *Tekhnicheskoe tvorchestvo rabocheho klassa v SSSR* [Technical creativity of the working class in the USSR] (M.: Znanie, 1982).

74. Anna Paretskaya, “A Middle Class without Capitalism? Socialist Ideology and Post-Collectivist Discourse in the Late-Soviet Era,” in Neringa Klumbyté, Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, eds., *Soviet Society in the Era of Late Socialism, 1964-1985* (New York: Lexington books, 2013), 46-50.

subject as a “creative” personality, all the more that they directly implied human mastery over the material world. Not surprisingly, both *Modelist-Konstruktor* and *Tekhnika-Molodëzhi* alike appealed to their readers as to the generation of “creators and explorers.”⁷⁵

This last aspect is important, for it locates Soviet do-it-yourself culture squarely in the context of general visions of modernity, Soviet or Western alike, as a process in which human society strove to take agency from the nature and reduce it to a passive recipient of the human will.⁷⁶ “Creation” in the Soviet context implied full agency on behalf of people and lack of thereof on behalf of the material world, a Promethean⁷⁷ vision of the transformative human role in the world waiting to be transformed.⁷⁸ If things can be interpreted as “embody[ing] goals, mak[ing] skills manifest and shap[ing] the identities of their users” and people’s selves as “to a large extent a reflection of things with which [they] interact,”⁷⁹ then the wide-scale support of Soviet do-it-yourself culture and amateur engineering on the level of discourse brought Promethean implications, for it aimed to shape the Soviet subject as the master over the material world itself. Soviet technical journals published blueprints of a car to be made of plywood⁸⁰ and an electric generator mounted on a kite to provide electricity during tourist trips;⁸¹ the combination of bearings, metal pipes and plastic could be used to make virtually everything ranging from a velomobile

75. “Uchit’ tvorchestvu! [To teach creativity!],” *Modelist-Konstruktor*, 1 (1978): 1-3, 25; Iu. Gerbov, “Pokolenie tvortsov i iskatelei [The generation of creators and explorers],” *Modelist-Konstruktor*, 10 (1982): 3-4, 32; D. Filippov, “V edinom stroiu [In uniform ranks],” *Tekhnika-Molodezhi*, 11 (1977): 2.

76. Henri Lefebvre, “Ninth Prelude. Nature and Nature Conquered,” in Henri Lefebvre, *Introduction to Modernity: Twelve Preludes, September 1959-May 1961* (London – New York: Verso, 1995), 132-156; for a more specific account of the discourse and practices of “conquering” nature in the making of modern states, see, e.g. David Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany* (New York – London: W.W. Norton, 2006).

77. Prometheus was an important symbol of the official Soviet culture and ideology: for example, a youth-oriented Soviet publisher *Molodaia Gvardiia* published under this title, starting since 1966, an almanac with biographies of famous (at least in the Soviet system of coordinates) people.

78. It is hardly surprising that post-modernist criticisms of the modernist models of interaction between the human society and the nature (in particular, the application of critical theory to studies of material culture) brought to life a radically opposing political, ontological and even epistemological agenda: that is, to return agency to the material world. Among the most remarkable works pursuing this agenda, see: Daniel Miller, ed., *Home Possessions: Material Culture behind Closed Doors* (Oxford – New York: Berg Publishers, 2001); Diana Coole, Samantha Frost, eds., *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

79. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 1.

80. “Valga-Kombi: avtomobil’ iz fanery [‘Valga-Kombi’: A car made of plywood],” *Modelist-Konstruktor*, 8 (1980): 4-8 and a colour inset between 8 and 9.

81. “Pokhodnaia elektrostantsiia [A mobile power generator],” *IuT dlia umelykh ruk*, 3 (1980): 1.

(a bicycle car) to boat engines to gliders to tractors to all-terrain vehicles to snowmobiles.⁸² There was virtually no technical equipment or home appliances that Soviet amateurs could not theoretically assemble using the innumerable circuits and instructions published in Soviet technical journals, using only the basic radio components sold in Soviet stores. The list ran right up to computers⁸³ and even, albeit humorously, a time machine.⁸⁴

The very spirit of Soviet do-it-yourself culture thus implied that human ingenuity should not be limited by the material resources at hand; instead, the only limitation was the human imagination — hence the many different methods to “develop” and “stimulate” imagination which became popular in the discourse of Soviet amateur engineering.⁸⁵ Drawing on the passivity of matter, this discourse created an illusion that Soviet subjects, by immersing themselves in the do-it-yourself culture, would become in this process self-aware, rational and free actors, whose technocratic “ethos of subjectivist potency” made them deem themselves capable of manipulating and reconfiguring matter in any possible way.⁸⁶ While Soviet women’s magazines focused on domestic space and the female body, their discourse with its infinitely repeating advice on how to reuse or remake old things brought the same connotations: the idealized Soviet subject through do-it-yourself practices had to perform mastery over the material world.

Soviet materiality as it was formed through this discourse was, indeed, flexible: in late Soviet culture, any given thing could become anything else and thus *a priori* performed the function of raw material even if it was brand new. The very first

82. Velomobiles: “Vita – lastochka velomobilei [Vita, a velomobile swallow],” *Modelist-Konstruktor*, 7 (1976): 24; K. Bavykin “Velomobil’,” *Iunyi tekhnika*, 8 (1977): 41-48; boat engine: A. Katushenko “Pedal’naia lodka [A pedal-driven boat],” *Iunyi tekhnika*, 5 (1977): 78-80; gliders: V. Bugrov, “Del’taplan kluba Vympel’ [A glider of the club Vympel],” *Modelist-Konstruktor*, 11 (1977): 27-29 and 1 (1978): 7-8; “OKB Del’taplan [Public construction bureau ‘Glider’],” *Modelist-Konstruktor*, 10 (1982): 12-16 and the color inset between 16 and 17; tractor: “Mini-traktor: ot skhemy do pakhoty [A mini-tractor: from a blueprint to plowing],” *Modelist-Konstruktor*, 2 (1982): 4-5; all-terrain vehicle: “Amfitrak ‘Ob’” [Amphibious crawler ‘Ob’],” *Modelist-Konstruktor*, 4 (1978): 14-16; snowmobile: “Chuk i Gek – snegokhod [Snowmobile ‘Chuk i Gek’],” *Modelist-Konstruktor*, 1 (1978): 9-10.

83. *Modelist-Konstruktor*, 2-3, 5-7 (1987); *IuT dlia umelykh ruk*, 2-8 (1988).

84. The film *Ivan Vasilyevich Changes Profession* plays on this: in the end of the film when the time machine breaks and its inventor is unable to return Tsar Ivan the Terrible back from the twentieth into the sixteenth century, he hurries to the electronics store to buy certain basic radio components, of which, as we learn, the time machine is made.

85. R. Nudelman, “Voobrazhenie po pravilam [Rules of imagination],” *Iunyi tekhnika*, 1 (1968): 58-59; D. Bilenkin, “Voobrazhenie – sila [Imagination is power],” *Iunyi tekhnika*, 6 (1977): 78-80; see also: Genrikh Altov, Valentina Zhuravlieva, *Letiashchie po vselennoi* [Flying through the Universe] (M.: AST, 2002), a book which includes science fiction stories between the late 1960s and early 1980s and dealing artificially improved imagination of people which allows them to make incredible scientific breakthroughs.

86. Diana Coole, Samantha Frost, “Introduction,” in Coole, Frost, eds., *New Materialisms*, 19.

editorial of *Katera i Iakhty* explained why the journal would publicize extensively do-it-yourself practices by appealing to its audience:

We are far from believing that everyone involved in sailing as tourism or sport should build a yacht or a motor boat by himself. One can use an [industrially] produced vessel. But what enthusiast [of sailing] would refuse a pleasure of remaking [*peredelat'*] it in his own taste?⁸⁷

In another case, *Rabotnitsa* advised its readers that they might use scarves, which were offered in abundance in Soviet stores, to make from them a jacket, a skirt or a vest of “bright colours and interesting texture.”⁸⁸

This accent on uniqueness of material possessions was a leitmotif of Soviet do-it-yourself culture. Both women’s magazines (together with good housekeeping books) and technical journals immersed Soviet people in the process of never-ending customization and adjustment of the material world around them. In their discourses, identical industrially produced commodities were supposed to become unique once they were purchased and turned into private possessions, so that to reflect the individuality of their owner.

And here, as a concluding remark, we would like to suggest that the wider importance of do-it-yourself culture in the Soviet symbolic universe — the one which overcame its gender aspects — was that it became an essential technique of individualization in a culture which had always officially emphasized and prioritized collectivity over individuality. As Oleg Kharkhordin noted in his study *The Collective and the Individual in Russia*, material culture in the late socialist period came to represent an important field of individualization, yet his argumentation overlooked the genealogy of practices of distinction by possessions. This made this technique of individualization look alien (that is, external or non-Soviet) to the genealogy of the Soviet subject,⁸⁹ hence his and other authors’ emphasis on Western commodities and cultural forms as the material basis of new techniques of late Soviet personhood.⁹⁰ Yet our analysis of Soviet discourses of do-it-yourself culture suggests that these techniques were actually rooted in the domestic cultural milieu. People of late socialism were never supposed to be a grey mass of identical subjects, as contemporaneous Western stereotypes

87. “K chitateliu [To the readers],” *Katera i Iakhty*, 1 (1963): 3.

88. N. Golikova, “Iz sharfov i palantinov [From scarves and stoles],” *Rabotnitsa*, 12 (1972): 2 of appendix.

89. Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia*, 340.

90. See, e.g.: Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, esp. 126–207, where he discusses the concept of “living *vne*,” that is, “outside” of the system of Soviet meanings; Sergei I. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, identity and ideology in Soviet Dnepropetrovsk, 1960–1985* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press – Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2010).

might have had it.⁹¹ Just the opposite, they were taught on the daily basis, through pervasive “do-it-yourself” discourses, that their material possessions had to be unique and that their selves, materializing in this uniqueness, had to become true Soviet individualities.

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91. In reverse, in Soviet cultural imagination it was the capitalist society that looked grey and identical, whereas socialist (or communist, in the case of science fiction) travellers were bright and colourful people. See, e.g.: Ivan Efremov, *Chas byka* [The Bull's Hour] (Petrozavodsk: Karelia, 1991), 91-92, esp. the scene when astronauts from Communist Earth discuss how they should appear in the capitalist world of planet Tormance.