“Dear Television Workers...”

TV Consumption and Political Communication in the Late Soviet Union*

« Chers travailleurs de la télévision... » : consommation télévisuelle et
communication politique en Union soviétique tardive

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- 1 voiced a male Muscovite viewer in a letter to Central Television in 1971.¹ Many other viewers were similarly enthusiastic about Soviet television's programmes. Even *Vremia* [Time], Central Television's nightly news programme, reached considerable viewing figures until the 1980s, in contrast to its East German counterpart *Aktuelle Kamera* [Current Camera].² What do these viewers' letters tell us about the role television played in Soviet people's leisure habits and about their viewing practices? What do they reveal about the question of how "ordinary"³ citizens made use of television programmes and how they assessed television content? Assuming that television staff, the audience, and the regime engaged in an altered field of communication, the article examines the specificity of letters sent to television's editorial departments.⁴ However, it is important to stress that these letters should not be taken as being representative of the TV audience as such. There are no comprehensive statistics on the letter-writers. Yet letters offer a variety of values and preferences well worth examining, because these values and preferences were mostly voiced by Soviet individuals. Individual viewers referred to their "personal and private history,"⁵ as American political scientist Ellen Mickiewicz aptly put it. Historical research has demonstrated that in fact a rather small portion of the Soviet population addressed party elites, government representatives, or the mass media.⁶ But research has also established that letters formed part of the regime's stabilising communicative mechanisms. They did so at least to some extent because letter writing normally entailed response. Letters sent to Soviet television thus conveyed the impression of a protected space of communication between the public and the private sphere.⁷ Generally, the Soviet 1960s and '70s witnessed a reinterpretation of the relation between the "public" and the "private." Contemporaries perceived that people were retreating from the politicised public sphere into "their" private spheres.⁸ Recent research questions the conventional binary model that emphasised an antagonistic demarcation of these spheres of action. This shift in research perspective has also drawn

attention to the mechanisms that contributed to the stability of the socio-political system which has otherwise been understood from the point of view of its collapse.⁹ In a similar way to Alexei Yurchak, I would argue that Soviet stability had much to do with new or revised communication practices. Picking up on this idea of changing communication, this article asks to what extent the new key medium, television, might have engaged its audience in political communication. How might the involvement of the audience have even facilitated the communicative stabilisation of the Soviet regime up to 1985?

- 2 I will argue that one has to reconsider the impact of leisure practices such as watching TV in order to rethink "political" communication with respect to what has traditionally been understood as politics in dictatorial regimes.¹⁰ Perhaps it comes as no surprise that the majority of letters to the authorities contained positive evaluations of socialist values, communist party representatives, and the Soviet social order. Nevertheless, I suppose a part of the letters to TV's editorial department to reveal how viewer-writers evaluated television as a lifestyle practice in qualitative and emotional terms. This perspective also tests the relation between lifestyle, viewing practices and attitudes towards content and meanings. Examining the specificity of these letters allows us to probe television's capacity to trigger emotional commitment among viewers in its presentation of Soviet popular culture, societal values, and lifestyles.
- 3 My use of the term "political" derives from the constructivist approach of the new political history. It focuses on the historically changing boundaries, mechanisms, media, and people constituting a "communicative space of the political." It pays special attention to practices and discourses apart from decision-making processes concerning questions of the social order, rules of living together, power relations, or the limits of what can be said or done. The communication covering these aspects should transgress individual interests. It refers to imagined or real collectives and aims at having, or even has, a wider impact on others. In this sense, the "political" should be recognised as sustainable or obligatory.¹¹ The question of how audience letters may have contributed to the regime's stabilisation concerns these political implications of communication. As a result "political" never simply means "oppositional." The notion of "political" also exceeds the communication of political decisions, talks, or audience responses to broadcasts of party or trade union meetings. Communication should be seen as highly political as well, if it reveals that people at least did not refuse or – on the contrary – accept the regime. My supposition is that this kind of communication contributed to the regime's durability.

Watching TV, political communication, and emotional bonding

- 4 The change of political communication with the rise of the new medium seems obvious but at the same time hard to judge. In the Soviet Union, TV sets spread as quickly as in the GDR and West Germany.¹² Already by the late '50s, the residents of Moscow, Leningrad, and some Soviet republic capitals admitted that watching TV had become daily routine.¹³ It comes as no surprise that contemporary empirical studies found that Soviet people were spending increasing time watching TV from the '60s on. From the beginning, watching practices were highly gendered and severely dependent on the professional and educational background of the viewers. Contemporary sociological studies show that women watched TV more often while doing housework, whereas men

often watched TV without engaging in any distracting activities. According to an often cited study focusing on Pskov located in the North-West of the RSFSR, employed men watched TV 5.9 hours per week in 1965 in comparison to employed women who only watched 3.7 hours per week. According to another study on workers in big cities of the European Soviet Union the respondents indicated that they watched TV and listened to the radio between 3.9 and 6.2 hours per week depending on their education. Generally, both sexes reported spending about half of their leisure time sitting in front of the TV set.¹⁴ For urban employed men in particular, watching TV became a more and more absorbing practice.¹⁵ Another survey claiming representativeness found that blue-collar workers in the Ukrainian SSR and in the Russian city of Kostroma in the late '60s watched between seven and ten hours per week.¹⁶ Boris Grushin demonstrated in a study claiming representativeness for the whole Soviet Union that TV consumption had on average become the most important leisure activity besides meeting friends in the mid-'60s.¹⁷ In the mid-'80s Soviet citizens only spent more time sleeping and working than watching TV.¹⁸ The long-term study on Pskov proved the generally rising share of TV consumption. In 1986 urban employed men now watched 14.5, women 10.6 hours per week.¹⁹

- 5 Moreover, watching television depended on educational background. The better educated the people, the smaller the scale of respondents who reported about their TV consumption. The fact that the time budget studies relied on self-reported behaviour could have distorting effects on the share of TV consumption in the everyday life of the better educated groups, because not few deliberately displayed a critical stance towards TV and preserved anti-TV snobbery.
- 6 Already by the mid-'60s, male and female blue-collar workers watched more than male and female white-collar workers.²⁰ Also time expenditure for reading and watching TV generally changed after the late '60s with regard to education: especially less educated men favoured watching TV over reading the daily press, journals, or books from the '70s onwards.²¹ Another important factor that influenced TV consumption was geographical milieu. Although fewer people owned TV sets in the countryside, village people watched even more television than did their urban counterparts because, Soviet sociologists believed, they lacked access to other leisure activities. Contemporary studies found that, after the 1960s, villagers spent more time watching TV than urbanites.²²
- 7 Thus, the renowned media sociologist Boris Firsov spoke of an "expansion" of TV sets during the '60s.²³ At the same time, the TV programme was steadily expanding. Party leaders who had kept a distance from the new medium during the '50s and early '60s gradually realised the propaganda potential of television, as Kristin Roth-Ey convincingly argues.²⁴
- 8 As a popular consumer good, TV sets also transformed domestic material culture and Soviet lifestyles: people furnished their living rooms with the new home entertainment technology.²⁵ The basic changes in material culture were boosted by television's cultural impact. Kristin Roth-Ey has strongly stressed television's ambivalent influences on political communication, the cultural education of the "masses," and the reluctant attitude of old media elites towards TV from its early days in the '50s. She, therefore, explored the interaction and negotiations between TV producers and the party in the process of establishing television as the Soviet key medium.²⁶ However, we still do not know much about viewers' perceptions of television. The fact that TV programmes brought about tremendous changes in leisure habits raises questions about the TV audience, its consumption practices and habits. More generally, the role of TV

consumption in the social, political, and cultural communication of authoritarian regimes requires explanation. Recent research on TV consumption in the GDR, the CSSR, and the Soviet Union has given initial insights into how TV was involved in vertical communication between the audience, TV staff, and the party.²⁷ Christine Evans focused on the negotiations between the audience and TV producers in the context of musical holiday programming and game shows. She convincingly demonstrated how changes in the format of these shows made them more contest-based entertainment genres. These changes mirrored the regime's search for new ways of engaging Soviet citizens. The aim was to increase citizens' and, in particular, young citizens' commitment to the Soviet socio-political order.²⁸ This complex aim, however, made it even more important to engage viewers in communication with the regime. The easiest way to track their opinions on TV programmes, to assess their tastes, or to compare ordinary viewers' wishes with intellectual ideas about TV was to encourage them to write letters.²⁹

- 9 Indeed, Central Television's editorial offices received rising numbers of letters from the '50s to the demise of the Soviet Union. And perhaps unsurprisingly, viewers often expressed different points of view about the medium than did scientists, artists, or party leaders. Much of this correspondence addressed the departments of information, entertainment, and youth broadcasting that were in charge of game shows and musical programming.³⁰ The rise of quiz and game shows, and of musical request programmes changed the nature of communication between viewers and television. On the one hand, television was supposed to be part of the missionary project to inculcate the "New Soviet Person" with "proper" tastes. On the other hand, after the late '60s, the regime saw the role of television as meeting people's demands for pleasure, entertainment, and rest in their free time. This meant taking viewers' persistent – and perhaps not ideologically ideal – preferences into consideration.³¹
- 10 Christine Evans describes the years after 1968 as a turning point in Soviet Central Television's communication strategies. The year 1968 witnessed major political threats to the communist system in the CSSR. In 1970 Sergei G. Lapin was appointed as head of the State Committee for Television and Radio (Gos-teleradio) and set Soviet TV on a new path. He stifled the ambitious intellectual ideas of TV's staff and envisioned a TV programme aligned with the preferences of ordinary viewers. Official statements underlined this reorientation of Soviet television after the early '70s. Christine Evans showed how, from this time on, programming focused on worker biographies.³² Another new strategy related to audience participation. The editors of game show and musical programming now started to integrate viewers' letters into their broadcasting, and so bring viewer input directly on air.³³
- 11 This shift should be assessed against the background of shifting party attitudes to the medium: although many party leaders had been reluctant to praise television during the '60s, in the '70s, they granted people an unwritten "right to relax in front of the television after a day's work."³⁴ Moreover, in the mid-'70s, Lapin confirmed Gosteleradio's claim on TV's leading societal impact: In the *Bolshaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia* he asserted that "TV broadcasting" helped to "organise people's leisure time."³⁵ Soviet media scholar Nikolai Shonin explained in an international journal in 1977 that TV genres should be especially "designed for recreation, for people resting after a day of hard work under a tight schedule dictated by the scientific and technical revolution and the need to fulfil the economic assignments of the State plan."³⁶ Hard work for the benefit of Soviet society and watching TV became two sides of the same coin ideologically.

- 12 Although TV producers ascribed to the audience a more active role during the '70s, contemporary western observers with few exceptions suspected Soviet media consumers of being mostly passive recipients. Nevertheless, western social and media scientists made considerable efforts to study the Soviet system of political communication, as they deemed communication, propaganda, and mass media as core tools of authoritarian government.³⁷ Although academic interest in these topics lessened after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the opening of Russian archives should give fresh insights into the growing exchange between audience and television. This again should help to understand the functioning of political communication, to outline the role and perceptions of media consumers.³⁸
- 13 Television offered new possibilities of communication. However, letter writing as a form of exchange with elites and political authorities had a long tradition going back to pre-revolutionary times. With regard to the political culture, most scholars emphasised "whistle blowing" letters because the very act of writing a denunciation helped to legitimise the Soviet regime.³⁹ However, denunciations were only one, albeit politically very important practice of writing. Although the newest mass medium also received "whistleblowing" letters or petitions expressing private interests, the "ordinary" media consumer addressed TV's editorial departments much more often to negotiate on media issues. At first sight many letters covered "unpolitical" themes related to entertainment, film or serial aesthetics, or the hairstyle, clothing, or linguistic styles of female announcers. However, I will argue that these were the topics TV editors wanted to use to communicate with the audience. Soviet media scholars depicted direct contact and audience response as important for learning how best adjust artistic and entertainment strategies. The method, however, turned out to be contested. By far not all TV staff members involved in the audience research considered letters seemed to be "the most perfect channel of communication" in order to analyse viewers' reactions.⁴⁰ Although positive audience feedback was definitely needed to legitimise the high costs of entertainment genres, news, and documentary productions to the communist party and the State Planning Committee (Gosplan), many representatives of the just emergent Soviet sociology proved to be disdainful of letters as a scientific source. Since only viewers' acceptance of the programme prepared the ground for establishing television as the key media of information and entertainment, the postbag never lost its significance: After all, letters often represented emotions and said more about TV's popularity than statistics for internal use. Letters thus corresponded with Lapin's new programme strategy that aimed to normalise Soviet lifestyles and to trigger viewers' emotional bonding with it. This strategy was bolstered by the more qualitative audience research, whereas scientific analysis claiming to provide representative data and solutions for programme designs lost ground again. This was partly due to its worrying findings. In 1970, Soviet TV's Scientific-Methodological Department (Nauchno-metodicheskii otdel: NMO) concluded that television worked with "emotional means." This was surely a very welcome result. However, the NMO also underlined that radio addressed people's intellect, whereas TV attracted a less educated strata who were interested in "entertainment and satisfaction of emotional needs." The NMO even supposed television viewers to be generally "more passive" in life.⁴¹ In contrast to the NMO, Central TV's letter department contented itself with a kind of "thick description." The overviews widely cited from viewers' post and presented the pleasure grateful viewers felt in flowery words.⁴²

- 14 There are many theories concerning the question of what emotional effects television has on the viewer.⁴³ However, historical research has still much empirical investigation to do in order to explain these effects. This is especially true with regard to the state socialist societies. Although emotional connections to concrete TV programmes are undoubtedly important and need to be examined for past societies, I am interested here in the more general emotional bonding of viewers to TV and the impact of this process on viewers' relations to the Soviet system. The investigation of state socialist television needs to explore the scope between Elihu Katz's classical questions: "what do people do with media?" and "what does media do to people?".⁴⁴ To conceptualise the question of emotional bonding, I draw on a basic assumption of many media culture theories. They aim to explain how mass media contribute to societal integration. With this, mass media appear as the central agent of societal reproduction and communitarisation: they can generate social commitment and credibility, initiate communication, and help to synchronise individual and collective perceptions.⁴⁵ Some media scholars try to grasp this kind of societal medialisation in its two dimensions of cognition and emotionality. To analyse the affective-emotional involvement of viewers in relation to cultural codes of interpretation, they introduced the term "media culture of emotions" ("Medien-Gefühlkultur").⁴⁶ Among other aspects the negotiation about "shared emotions" contributes to this highly complex process of communitarisation.⁴⁷ Thus, the socio-political context framed TV users' practices and emotional bonding within both an officially and societally accepted popular culture.⁴⁸ This should be seen as a dynamic, perhaps even ambivalent process that in the end achieves acceptance of certain societal values and attitudes. Television thus framed an intermediate space where actors negotiated interpretations, meanings, and in the end socio-cultural balances of power. However, hegemonic rules of framing did not only exist in an authoritarian regime that made certain interpretations more likely than others.⁴⁹
- 15 My thesis based on these assumptions is that the majority of TV viewers emotionally accepted the Soviet lifestyle and the way television presented the Soviet way of life in entertainment programming. Contemporary sociological studies of the late '60s and early '70s indicated that the majority of the audience regarded television as a medium of after-work entertainment. One of these Soviet studies underlined that viewers mostly reported to appreciate programmes that satisfied their "emotional-aesthetic" demands.⁵⁰
- 16 The renewal of popular culture and the new visualisation of consumerist lifestyles across time zones and urban borderlines on Soviet screens showed how strongly intertwined TV consumption was with material consumption: the first step in becoming a TV consumer was to buy a TV set. This effect is interesting in so far as Nikita Khrushchev's proclamation to overtake America made consumption a central factor of legitimising the Soviet regime. From this time on, consumer practices and private interests belonged to the core set of themes on which the Soviet regime invited people to communicate in order to gain acceptance.⁵¹ Recent research strongly suggests that the consumer culture of the '60s and '70s – embracing goods, services, taste, and mass media – became a cohesive factor that held the regime and society together. It did so not least because it offered a new field of communication.⁵² Television became perhaps the most constitutive part of this ambiguous change. Officially it remained the "mouthpiece of communist education" – a designation that seemed to contradict a consumerist lifestyle.⁵³ Challenging this contradiction, I further argue that the popularity of televised Soviet lives somehow promoted viewers' adherence to a societal consensus and lastly to the political order. The

stabilisation of an authoritarian regime is certainly much more complex than this argument alone, but it offers a component of this process. The crucial point is not the achievement of consent, as cultural studies have proposed, but rather the provision of topics by television, which acts as a device for amplifying, simplifying, and familiarising certain issues, ideas, values or feelings that viewers can relate to in their daily lives. To address the audience by giving views on "normal" life was the only way for the regime and TV producers to convey messages, offer identification models, and evoke commitment.

- 17 Niklas Luhmann explained a mechanism of keeping a social order stable with regard to the way the audience deals with media contents. In his view, television enables the public to negotiate about presented topics without necessarily agreeing on them: nobody is obliged to agree to the reality constructed by the mass media.⁵⁴ Luhmann's point is that the mechanism for stabilising the social order works as long as media users do not openly oppose the interpretive frames. The research question for those who do not deny agency is then who generated and negotiated these topics, how and why. Viewers' letters to Soviet television can be seen as one example of the constitutive practices of such negotiations.
- 18 Paulina Bren provides excellent examples of how Czechoslovak TV presented identification models and interpretive frames of late socialist everyday life. She explains the great popularity of Jaroslav Dietl's TV serials by arguing that they became Czechoslovakia's "shared common places"⁵⁵ during the '70s and '80s. They were symbols of the "banality of normalization"⁵⁶, in Bren's formulation. The banality of normal life, one could argue, sowed the seeds of emotional commitment to the Soviet regime. Today, these seeds are to be found in nostalgic sentiments about late socialist lifestyle.⁵⁷

Audience mail : Engaging viewers in political communication ?

Letters and audience research

- 19 The question is to what extent audience post referring to films, theatre features, or documentaries on travel and animals, newscasts, or consumer advice programmes may have contributed to the Soviet regime's stabilisation. Several viewers consciously wrote to TV departments instead of other possible addressees in order to discuss rules of social order and living together in their letters. As both the party and scholars regarded television as medium of communist education, the idea of audience participation was especially ideologically charged. From the outset, TV producers tried to use audience feedback to research audience tastes. However, at this point the conceptualisation of audience research was only randomly framed by scientific demands. This only changed in the 1960s, with the re-emergence of Soviet sociology —a re-emergence closely intertwined with the first studies of mass media and public opinion.⁵⁸
- 20 Audience participation relied on Soviet logics of getting directly in touch with the "masses" in order to propagate ideological messages.⁵⁹ Letters underlined the regime's claim that television was a public forum and accessible to all. However, the internal use of audience response was diverse and ambivalent. Some of the artistic staff as well as the early "enthusiasts" tended to ignore audience responses out of intellectual arrogance, as

they thought their TV work was valuable in itself.⁶⁰ Being aware that letters were not representative of the audience, many others, nonetheless, considered audience responses of considerable importance.⁶¹ This was the case, when letters could be used to highlight the propagandist influence of television on its consumers in order to get more financial sources.⁶² Furthermore, programme coordinators, editors, and announcers were interested in audience responses to grasp ephemeral "public opinions" and to improve the programme. Hence, the processing of incoming post changed towards the end of the '50s. In 1957, Moscow Central TV opened a letter department of its own, separate from the corresponding radio letters office. It was transferred to the corresponding department of the newly founded Central Television's main editorial office in 1960. The letter department was an independent unit within Central Television from 1962 to 1970. Its work was time-consuming and required staff. Letters normally had to be answered by TV staffers within four weeks or be forwarded to responsible party or government institutions. From the audience's point of view, letters were the main way to get in contact with television and to submit any concerns. Until mid-'60s, Central Television also tried to complement the information gathered by letters rather unsystematically with the help of viewers' roundtables in factories and kol-khozes, and via small scale surveys.⁶³

- 21 Right from the start, the letter bureau drew up a model audience in order to tackle who watched which show and which programme received which kind of audience response.⁶⁴ However, the theoretical approach towards audience analysis remained contested within the different divisions. The main issue was the impact of the social sciences. As Central Television tried to catch up with international standards, it promoted a more scientifically-based approach to audience research. In this context, the Scientific-Methodological Department (NMO), whose predecessor had already been established in 1944, gained more money and influence after the late '50s.⁶⁵ It could be seen as a third interest group that closely observed theory and practice of audience research in foreign state socialist, as well as capitalist countries.⁶⁶ Not surprisingly, it contested the significance of letters in order to legitimise supposedly scientific research. Its message was that programmes would gain quality if their producers knew their audiences better.⁶⁷ The NMO insisted that Soviet TV could only gather "objective data" by scientific analysis. By contrast, letters only offered vague or even misleading conclusions.⁶⁸
- 22 The importance of communicating with the audience rose within internal discussions of TV staff during the '60s and especially the '70s. Soviet media scholar Boris Firsov painted a very idealistic picture of the communication between television producers and the audience. He argued that television had "the possibility of communicating with all people regardless of profession, education, age, or any other feature."⁶⁹ He adopted the idea of the diversity of opinions that was gaining popularity in the early '60s. Increasingly, sociological audience research saw the viewer more as an individual and not obscured in a collective.⁷⁰ A new, ambitious programming policy related to this new theoretical approach by attempting to strike a balance between reaching the largest audience and satisfying specific sub-groups.⁷¹ In 1967, the NMO strongly believed that a uniform standard program schedule had become anachronistic because the audience's educational level had risen considerably.⁷²
- 23 This discussion reflected a contest between the traditional way of analysing viewers' taste by letters and the scientifically-based approaches of the new media scientists. The staff dealing with viewer post considered letters as statements of the "progressive and active

part of the audience": letters helped to improve the programme, they thought, and were even included in certain broadcasts.⁷³ These staffers obviously adhered more to the theory of individuals than of representatives of collectives in front of the screen and led them to value responding to audience post. Responding meant sustaining the communication and aimed to tightly bind viewers to the medium. From this perspective, television became another important communicator of vertical communication between the people and the regime.

- 24 Like all other institutions receiving letters, TV had to report on its postbag management within the internal administration and to party organs. In its own interest, the letter department of Central Television recognised post as an important indicator of viewers' preferences and always pointed out the high amount of incoming post in its summaries. However, the reader can only get an impressionistic interpretation of the contents because the department seldom classified the number of letters in relation to representative information about the writers and issues. The staff of the letter department only referred to details they gathered by analysing the viewer post.⁷⁴ Furthermore, the reports relied on random samples and only sometimes presented information about the social background of viewer-writers. Social scientists deliberately touched upon this obvious weakness of the letter department's analysis. In the late 60s, Soviet media scholar Rudol'f Boretskii asserted that mainly disabled persons, pensioners, and viewers expressing either very negative or extremely positive judgements addressed the television.⁷⁵ This statement obviously contradicted the letter department's repeated claim that letters were sent by people of rather diverse professions.⁷⁶ Indeed, in the late '50s and early '60s the data the department presented revealed a much broader social background of letter writers than Boretskii suggested.⁷⁷ According to an analysis by the letter department in April 1964, fifty-five per cent of the letter writers were blue and white collar workers, twenty per cent were pupils and students and fifteen per cent were pensioners and veterans.⁷⁸ In 1973, of the viewers who addressed the editorial office of propaganda, thirty-eight per cent were in unskilled work, nineteen per cent were in rural labour, and fourteen per cent were white collar workers.⁷⁹ There are similar examples indicating that the social background of "ordinary" viewer-writers became more diverse during the '70s.
- 25 Gender was not considered a significant analytical category, and thus letter reports mainly used masculine nouns or the seemingly neutral plural. The department staff seldom singled out women writing letters to TV. If they did, they only tentatively suggested that working women constituted a specific interest group of viewers. For example, in 1966 "quite a lot of women" asked for more entertainment features and films after nine PM. These female viewers wanted to relax in front of the television after their jobs, finishing their housework, and putting the children to sleep.⁸⁰ The editorial offices for music, literature, and cinema programming seem to have received slightly more letters from female viewers than those of information or propaganda.⁸¹ We should not suppose the sample of letter writers to be generally representative of all viewers. But judging by these differences, women apparently had different preferences and seemed to have been slightly more interested in entertainment formats than in news. The programme schedulers, however, were reluctant to pick out women as a special target group. Furthermore, given that contemporary sociological research found women on average had much less time to watch TV, it does not come as a surprise that women wrote fewer letters than male viewers.

- 26 Generational, geographic, and social background had far more influence on the picture the letter department painted of the Soviet viewer than did the category of gender. As early as 1963, Central Television launched *Sel'skii chas'* [Village hour], a weekly feature focusing on village viewers. It was complemented by others like *Selo: dela i problemy* [The village: issues and problems]. With the spread of TV sets, writing letters to the television did not remain an urban practice. In 1966, the internal report still mentioned that village viewers rarely wrote letters and when they did, they criticised the airtimes of entertainment broadcasts and demanded more movies or music programmes.⁸² Although the letter department staff gave no concrete figures, they emphasised that village viewers increasingly participated on a low level in the communication with television.⁸³
- 27 As letter writers normally did not indicate their age, the question of how TV consumption varied by generation is difficult to answer. The relatively high numbers of letters going to the editorial offices of children and youth programming may tell us something about the rising interest of young viewers in the medium especially addressing their concerns. Some shows like KVN [Club of the Merry and Quick-Witted], *Ot vseï dushi* [From the Bottom of My Heart] or *Chto? Gde? Kogda?* [What? Where? When?] were popular with viewers of all ages, but especially triggered very enthusiastic responses among young viewers.⁸⁴
- 28 The percentage of viewers who chose to write to TV editors is hard to assess. There are no representative statistics regarding the number of TV sets, the audience size, or viewing figures for the different Soviet republics and regions. The reports create the impression that letters were registered foremost for the sake of counting. This does not come as a surprise, as any increases of incoming post underlined the department's importance. A certain use of language seemed to imitate what Simon Huxtable has called a "sociological aesthetic."⁸⁵ It was characterized by descriptions of constant progress in regards to the increase in letters received, of TV's steadily growing popularity, or programme improvements resulting from viewer participation. The editors of the reports often employed adjectives like "many" and "numerous," adverbs like "more often," or phrases like "in respect of the further development of TV, letters came in from all over the country."⁸⁶ This style concealed questions of representativeness of the letters, of the relation between quantity and quality, or TV's specificity compared with the press or radio.
- 29 According to my own cautious estimation, not more than three percent of all viewers wrote letters to TV's editorial departments. Moreover, as historians, we are reliant on the selections made by the letter department for their reports. These aspects constitute severe heuristic constraints: viewer post cannot be regarded as representative of viewers. Nevertheless, I would argue that even this small sample offers some informative value in two respects. The first relates to our understanding of public communication: generally, letters to mass media interconnected private and public communication in a new way. Contemporary Soviet sociologists found that people included television content, in particular, into their family talks.⁸⁷ Letters, thus, almost naturally drew on private life experiences, on relations or contradictions between private and public life. My second point as to why it is worth studying audience post refers to the above mentioned observation of Boretskii. The media scholar underlined the extreme diversity of opinions presented in letters. A brief glance at the letter reports shows that they indeed comprised a broad range of views. This should not be seen as fault from our point of view but rather as a challenge for contemporary Soviet ideas on collective consensus. Furthermore, it

does not come as a surprise that people holding rather moderate points of view often did not feel the need to express their opinion.

Letter reports : A swelling mailbag and changing topics

- 30 Central Television had more than ten editorial offices that received audience mail including, for example, the editorial offices of propaganda, information, youth programming, literature, music and sport. Each of them had to forward the figures of incoming letters to the letter department that registered them for every office. It usually compiled and often even published reports about every month and year. For the purpose of analysis, I summarised the numbers from the different reports according to the given classifications. To compile the table below, I selected some of these editorial offices to show the quantitative development of letter distribution.

Table 1. Letters to selected editorial offices of Central Television in absolute numbers and percentage⁸⁸

Years	total	Infor- mation	Propa- ganda	Cinema TV Film	Literature Drama	Music	Children Youth	Letters without reference to TV/ complaints
1960	41.632	n/s	ca. 7.000 ca. 17.0	n/s	n/s	n/s	n/s	n/s
1964	75.016	2.936 3.9	9.156 12.2	14.419 19.2	5.922 7.9	10.214 13.6	20.519 27.4	6.449 8.6
1965	148.966	5.429 3.6	6.558 4.4	26.171 17.6	44.972 30.2	16.416 11.0	30.008 20.1	13.475 9.0
1966	210.070	8.028 3.8	47.759 22.7	n/s	38.446 18,3	21.962 10,5	59.212 28,2	28.259 13.5
1968	195.973 ⁸⁸	8.325 4,2	5.377 2,7	n/s	30.303 15.5	49.126 25.1	60.420 30.8	19.777 10,1
1971	1.781.090	36.912 2.1	26.867 1.5	2.379 0.1 (TV film)	51.371 2.9	1.283.355 72.1	230.821 13.0	7.470 0.4
1973	1.270.757	109.424 8,6	124.465 9,8	61.333 4,8	8.158 0,6	308.070 24,2	401.096 31,6	5.370 0,4
1977	2.056.696	29.834 1,5	197.517 9,6	865.586 42,1	6.615 0,3	230.440 11,2	208.730 10,1	10.249 0,5

1978	1.558.295	19.677 1.3	197.763 12.7	465.109 29.8	7.957 0.5	325.181 20.9	236.869 15.2	9.245 0.6
1980	1.498.835	30.669 2.1	235.152 15.7	337.850 22.5	38.742 2.6	189.311 12.6	215.619 14.4	14.108 0.9
1984	1.197.957	27.220 2.3	75.667 5.3	261.687 21.8	29.496 2.5	61.619 4.3	448.811 37.5	25.467 2.1

- 31 The quantitative development of the audience post addressed to Soviet mass media reflected the rising importance of television towards the beginning of the '70s. As TV was not yet the key medium during the '60s, some of the important national newspapers as well as Central Radio received considerably more letters than television. National newspapers like Pravda, Komsomol'skaia Pravda or Trud got between 300,000 and 700,000 letters a year, although they reached a much smaller audience than television. The letter office of Central Radio counted ten times as many letters as Central Television in 1963 (675,000 letters compared to 67,990).⁸⁹ After this, Central Television's mailbag began to swell quickly. With the growing audience, the amount of viewers-writers also grew in absolute terms.⁹⁰ The amount of letters multiplied tenfold up to 400,000 from 1960 to 1970. At the same time, the amount of letters going to the radio slightly decreased, so that in 1970 Central TV registered almost as many letters as Central Radio: 405,984 compared to 421,000.⁹¹ TV's incoming post continued to rise during the following years until it stagnated at a level of 1.3 to 1.8 million letters after the late '70s, a time when nearly all Soviet households were equipped with TV sets.
- 32 The reports show that the topics and the amount of letters going to certain editorial departments varied. In TV's early days, viewers often wrote about the new audio-visual experiences TV offered. In the '50s, there were obviously few characteristic protagonists, so that viewers rather addressed TV as an anonymous medium, similar to an acting person. The interest in reflecting upon its capacities and deficiencies as a medium remained an important motive of writing at least until the early '70s. In 1959, with party officials in mind a viewer hoped that "TV technology is in trustful hands" because it reached millions of viewers. Others deemed television as having an important impact on building communism and stressed its greater propagandist possibilities in comparison to the press and radio.⁹² Comments such as these which bore on matters of content and ideology easily tended to criticism of the technical equipment, organisation, and design of the TV programme. Especially in the '60s, viewers complained about technical faults, the small scale of transmitting power, inaccurate newspaper reporting about the daily TV programme, the shortcomings of announcers and moderators or simply boring programmes. These letters give us an idea of how troublesome it may have been in TV's early days for the staff to satisfy both viewers' demands and the party-state's claims to ideological accuracy. In 1963, workers at a sovkhoz (state farm) in the Lipetsk region mourned that they worked a lot and wanted to relax at home watching television. The programme, however, they argued, had a narcotic impact. An engineer from Kaluga observed that the programmes evoked discontent among many viewers because they lacked content and meaning. In his view, television was on its way to becoming a "television newspaper" (Televidenie prevrashchaetsia v telegazetu).⁹³ Another typical complaint also referred to the impression that television too often ignored its specific capability of

visualisation. A viewer from Kalinin complained that "the majority of TV programmes are more to be listened to than to be watched." Programmes that offered lectures should be broadcast on radio: "You need to consider the specificity of television," he claimed.⁹⁴

- 33 The attempts of producing and editing staff to improve TV programmes seem to have had considerable success during the '60s. A viewer from Lugansk mirrored these comments considering TV's special capacities. In 1969 he wrote:

We obviously watch your programmes, like millions of other viewers, with great attention and interest. In comparison with other sorts of information, they are easily understood and impressive because they do not only tell a story, but also explain events well. We certainly understand that this is not only a question of technical possibilities, but also depends on the art of selecting, representing, and commenting on interesting and important events. Even the youth, who normally do not like to listen to radio news, watch your programme with interest.⁹⁵

- 34 By and by, the visible protagonists on screen as well as the unknown producers in the background found more interest among viewers. Often, coverage of political events quickened interest on the part of the audience. Such events included the Congress of the Communist Party in 1971, international talks, trips of party and state representatives to foreign states or of foreign government representatives to the Soviet Union, the enactment of the new constitution in 1977, or the disarmament summit in Vienna in 1979. Not surprisingly, the overviews of viewers' letters happily picked out these replies that were close to official propaganda. By the '70s many letter writers explicitly perceived television as the best facilitator of party politics.⁹⁶

- 35 The reports also observed an increase of letters to the editorial departments that were in charge of entertainment programmes. This was the case, for example, when Central Television introduced new features, released new films, aired music programmes, quiz shows or international sport events. In 1964, for example, the office for the propaganda editorial department received more than 9,000 letters and in 1966 more than 47,000. In 1964, almost half of the post referred to a sports quiz rising to eighty-five percent in 1966, something one would not perhaps expect to be supervised by the propaganda department.⁹⁷

- 36 In the '60s, topics like World War II, in particular, triggered viewers' feelings and prompted them to write to the editors. In 1965 the amount of letters almost doubled in comparison to the previous year. This was due to the new feature *Podvig* [Heroic Deed], a TV almanac on the defence of the Brest fortress in 1941. It was led by the very popular writer Sergei S. Smironov and received a quarter of that year's mailbag. In the case of *Podvig*, the party made deliberate use of the capacities of television as an unprecedented instrument of memory politics. Twenty years after the end of the war, television vividly visualised the radical turnaround in the Soviet regime's memory politics in films and documentary features. The new strategy anticipated Lapin's idea that TV should represent normal biographies because *Podvig* not only focused on the victory over fascist Germany, but also deliberately glorified ordinary war veterans. Veterans sent their memoirs that were included in the script. Many viewers highly appreciated *Podvig* for praising the unknown war heroes and presenting authentic stories. Viewers also applauded other programmes on World War II illustrating "patriotism, bravery, and the humanism of the Soviet people."⁹⁸ However, this interest in *Podvig* somewhat weakened from the late '60s on after Smirnov had been criticised for his work and resigned.⁹⁹ After that the feature used less material sent by veterans.¹⁰⁰

- 37 As of the early '70s, the letter reports stressed the increasing volume of letters, in the characteristic Soviet style of "higher-faster-further." The rise was said to indicate that Central TV's programmes "more and more 'conquer' the viewer, they enter the life of any working person in the country." Further, TV's growing acceptance was said to have altered the content of viewer post. Critical letters grew more factual and offered more advice. The letter department also insisted that viewers generally expressed more respect for television staff than before.¹⁰¹
- 38 An invariable claim of most viewer-writers, however, remained the appreciation of television as the most important source of entertainment. Until the end of the '60s, viewers repeatedly called for more entertainment shows, more motion pictures, programmes of art and music, or quiz shows. A majority of these critics complained that television aired too many societal-political programmes and newscasts. In 1959, viewers typically complained that Central Television aired too few "happy" broadcasts and comedies.¹⁰² Blue collar workers from Sverdlovsk Oblast described watching TV as "a way of passing time when there is nothing [else] to do" that brought "enjoyment." Many eagerly strove to schedule their working days in order not to miss interesting programmes.¹⁰³
- 39 TV, however, was not only an entertaining leisure practice. Corresponding viewers increasingly perceived it as source of information and facilitator of political communication. In 1962, the letter department categorized almost eighty percent of all letters as requests concerning motion pictures, stage plays and music, whereas the share of this kind of material fell to eleven percent in 1965. In comparison, the volume of letters that the department characterized as a "continuation of the conversation" with the audience on news, social, and political issues went up to thirty-three percent.¹⁰⁴ The statistics which the editors compiled for their reports do not immediately suggest this ideological interpretation. They relied on content analysis from all the editorial departments. Looking at individual topics, however, this interpretation becomes comprehensible: viewers responded to themes that touched upon socialist values, societal cohesion, or propagated the achievements of the Soviet Union. They seem to have associated media consumption with the right to comment on the social order, problems of living together, and to point out flaws in societal issues.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, the letter department saw the reason for the rising amount of viewers' letters as the steadily growing "socio-political activity of the working people." To underline this interpretation, editors paid special attention to comments, questions, and letters of thanks that referred to Soviet domestic and foreign policy.
- 40 Apart from politics, editors were most interested in viewer-writers' interpretations of modern Soviet life and socialist morals and education. Letter editors gathered viewers' comments on motion pictures, newscasts, advice programmes for consumers, and documentary features.¹⁰⁶ More or less all of the editorial offices received letters that touched upon social life. The letter department did not, however, classify its reports systematically by topics, but rather according to Central TV's organisational structure. If we scan the reports according to these classifications, those letters commenting on the social order in its broadest sense accounted for, in my estimation, approximately twenty to twenty-five percent of the post after the mid-'60s.
- 41 One of the most striking characteristics of the post, in my view, is its insights into how television caught many viewers' fancy on an emotional and intellectual level. The letter department staff tried to illustrate audience commitment by quoting relevant statements

from viewer mail. The staff must have been happy about the contents of a letter sent by a paralysed and housebound war veteran. In 1959, he wrote about his wife's "great idea to buy a television." It had become his friend, assistant, and best medicine, he declared. The television had pushed apart the apartment's walls, so that his apathy, pessimism and despair faded away. The television enabled him to believe in life again.¹⁰⁷

- 42 The letter department assessed letters that referred to politics in its broadest sense as "stimulation of societal-political activity of the working people in our country."¹⁰⁸ The reports highlighted viewers' positive response to TV's broadcasting on official state and party affairs. They emphasised the close connection between the television as facilitator of politics, the audience, and the Soviet party state.¹⁰⁹ In a ritual fashion, all published letter reports started with quotes illustrating how viewers praised the role of the party and the Soviet government. They never failed to mention that viewers were thankful to television "for the splendid elucidation of all important events this year in the country and abroad, of visits of party and governments leaders."¹¹⁰ The message of the letter department was clear: the images of Soviet politics that TV spread all over the country involved viewers in the socio-political order. Winning their support seemed hardly possible without TV broadcasting. We can obviously trace the self-representation of the letter department in these representations. To survive the internal rivalry over the question of who provided the most meaningful information on the audience, the letter department could best rely on its capacity not only to illustrate but also to build an emotional relationship with the audience. More than a few writers stressed that television strengthened a feeling of social cohesion and trust through letter communication. In 1973 a woman wrote:

I only needed to write a letter with the request to answer my question and you immediately responded. That touched me deeply. Your answer has given me back the belief in people, humanity and sympathy.¹¹¹

- 43 Indeed, this direct communication with viewers by responding to letters constituted the trump card of the letter department within the internal discourse of TV staff on the audience. Although the letter department relinquished "objective" categories, Soviet TV as a whole benefitted from viewers' emotional connections to this communication channel.
- 44 Because letters revealed the subjective insights of their authors, some editors considered them a means to research the composition and interests of the audience. Unsurprisingly, the letter department's assessment of audience post changed little until perestroika. Still, the letter report of 1980 insisted that the post was "an inexhaustible source of topics for the programme" because the writers commented on all sorts of everyday issues and proposed programme changes.¹¹² TV producers, therefore, deliberately encouraged letter writing in quiz and music shows.¹¹³ Moreover, they developed new features based on viewers' letters, such as *About Your Letters*, *A Minister... Responds to Viewers' Questions* and *Person and Law*. Many viewers provided feedback on these features, and the letters department took this as a reason to judge them to be very popular.¹¹⁴ One viewer from Moscow even praised the programme led by political commentator A. Potapov as "the best and perfect."¹¹⁵ Consumer problems, in particular, became a favourite topic on Soviet television, including local TV. Programmes such as *Our Post, You Asked – We Respond to your Table*, *Hostess*, and *Let's Talk About Your Letters* reported on flaws in local services, the food industry, and retail trade. Also local TV stations aired such programmes.¹¹⁶ Representatives of industrial enterprises were called in to TV studios to account for faulty

consumer items that had been signalled in viewer post. It was common for these programmes to display Central TV's postal address and invite the viewers to send complaints, to write about their troubles and problems.¹¹⁷

- 45 It should be emphasised that central and local TV stations regularly used letters to visualise the direct involvement of the viewers. It occasionally even presented letters to the camera, thus suggesting close contact between viewers and medium.¹¹⁸ All this did not serve to present "objective" findings about the audience. Rather it suggested that letter writers, the television staff, and the viewers watching these features formed a community in the first instance bound together by common interests in the topic. Extrapolating from the case of the female viewer quoted above who felt touched by letters as a form of communication, we can suppose that presenting physical letters on screen even reinforced the impression of emotional relations between the audience and TV. The emotional connection probably had two overlapping dimensions. The TV set had its place in the living room, where it became a reference point of communication with family and friends. Moreover, because viewer-writers normally got a "private" response to their letters, they might have perceived letters initially as a purely "private" communication channel. When TV editors chose to screen physical letters, they interconnected the private and the public by promoting private interests and embedding them in societal references.
- 46 With the help of audience post, Soviet television appeared as an authority speaking for viewers' interests. The screening of letters kept the communication with the writing part of the audience going and, into the bargain, involved non-writing viewers who watched these features. The letter department itself put forward the opinion that the "broad use of letters" contributed to the general increase in the volume of post in the early '70s.¹¹⁹
- 47 The postal communication between TV and its viewers demonstrated another interesting aspect of the development of media use in the late Soviet Union. We should see this communication in the broader context of writing to party-state institutions and local and national deputies, all of which were accepted ways to get in contact with the regime on personal terms. If we take this alongside evidence of committed readers writing to newspapers and journals, we have a portrait of TV's letter-writers as enthusiastic media consumers.¹²⁰ A good deal represented themselves as active, demanding, and self-confident media consumers, who deliberately used information presented by Soviet media. In particular, letter writers addressing state and party representatives often referred to information they gathered from newspapers, radio and television.¹²¹ In these cases they perceived the mass media as an objective observer. The letter writers obviously held the view that media consumption implied a right to employ the presented information in order to complain or to make proposals. Again, the fact that they inscribed themselves into official discourses interconnected mass media coverage with communication based in the private sphere.
- 48 In several respects, television thus conveyed the impression that it responded to viewers' private concerns. Thanks to the possibility to put forward personal wishes referring to programmes or broadcasting times, television provided a platform for seemingly "unpolitical" topics of communication and gave a new emphasis to private life. Due to most viewers' perception of TV as an entertainment medium, it became a communicator on values, morals, and taste. That TV's rapidly rising impact on popular culture contributed to a predominantly positive emotional assessment of Soviet life might also be concluded from the rather small amount of letters criticizing motion pictures and serials.

This capacity to involve viewers, to familiarise and normalise topics, was something that concerned only a small number of viewers, however. A letter from a female viewer from Penza is representative of how viewers criticised Soviet TV. In 1969, she complained that many programmes gave the impression that "life was easy. There are few programmes on problems or serious broadcasts that inspire you to think."¹²² Some contemporaries seemed to think that television involved the audience in a special way. This Penza viewer obviously saw a relation between watching television and people's attitude towards the social order. She suspected that light entertainment distracted the audience from serious deliberations about societal improvements. Her point of view also revealed strong criticism of contemporary popular culture, a view that might not have been very common among an "ordinary" TV audience. The majority of the viewers did not accuse television broadcasts or films of being far from reality.

- 49 I would argue that until perestroika, television absorbed communication and kept negotiations on airtimes, programmes, or the outfit of a newsreader within the unpolitical realm. Television expanded the space and topics of communication by picking up everyday questions, observing and reflecting the Soviet lifestyle. Features like More good products or cinematic representations of taste and lifestyles offered viewers topics of conversation. Further, the letters, at least, seemed to have functioned as a channel of ritualised criticism. Even if many of them pointed to consumer or other grievances, they should not be interpreted as being in basic disagreement with the existing order. Rather, letters affirmatively strengthened the socialist order of values because they engaged with the emotional community of viewers and TV. The entry threshold was even lower and more informal than for participation in other more ritual acclamations. In this sense, participation in Komsomol meetings, elections, parades, or voting for resolutions in order to confirm being "a good Soviet citizens" has been described as a complimentary phenomenon.¹²³
- 50 Thus, the medium of letter-writing was a perfect way to prevent people from discussing problems with each other in a manner that could have led to demands for systematic and binding solutions.¹²⁴ However, one should consider that even ritualised criticism had the capacity to stir change and generate publicity. This was the case when letters were used in TV features as the impetus to visit factories in order to report on defective goods or to invite politicians for interviews.
- 51 At this point I would like to recall Niklas Luhmann's argument that an audience contributes to the stability of a social order as long as it does not openly oppose interpretation frames. Following this argumentation, Soviet television's impact on political communication probably built upon negotiations of the social order, socialist values, or domestic politics. As oral history interviews, openly nostalgic, reveal today, television in the first instance contributed to people's commitment to their Soviet lifestyle. Its narratives and interpretation frames were ambivalent enough to obey ideological limits and to allow the majority of viewers to feel entertained.¹²⁵
- 52 This article asked foremost how and why viewers addressed Soviet television. Viewers' letters touched upon a wide variety of topics, such as TV programmes, ideological conformity, air time, aesthetics, technological developments, and the pedagogical aspects of how to use the new medium. The audience post suggests that television opened up new sites of negotiation between the regime and audience. Being in touch with the TV audience became more and more important for the TV staff as well as for the party that regarded television as the most powerful propaganda tool after the late '60s. Letters that

praised party politics and the Soviet system referred to television as a reliable facilitator of information. Television responded to this perception and sustained the letter communication by using letters in documentary features. By steadily suggesting close contact with the audience, television positioned itself in the field of political communication not only as a medium of entertainment, but also as agent of societal interests and improvements.

- 53 Viewers responded to television as being an influential facilitator of politics and the new post-Stalinist consumerist lifestyle. The post also shows that TV inspired communication dynamics between the separate segments of the public. The regime could hardly control this bridging between different spheres and communicators. But the letters give us a notion as to why this broadening of communication did not destabilise the Soviet regime. Communication between the audience and television is typical for all mass media regardless of the political system. Yet letters to Soviet TV suggest that TV consumption in an authoritarian system also interconnected, diversified, and modified private and public communication after the late '50s. This is surely a topic for further investigation. One effect of the re-connecting of the private and public sphere seems to have been a positive emotional commitment among viewers towards the Soviet regime. Or, to argue on the side of caution, watching television and talking about its content did at least not provoke negative emotions among a majority of the Soviet people. In contrast, watching TV became the most popular of a variety of leisure practices and thus part of a "normal" or "quiet" life.¹²⁶

NOTES

1. *First I would like to thank the editors for including my text in the special issue. Further, I am greatly indebted to the anonymous peer reviewers who disclosed several weaknesses and faults in my argumentation. They helped me much to improve it.

GARF (Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii – State Archive of the Russian Federation), f. 6903, Gosudarstvennyi komitet SSSR po televideeniiu i radioveshchaniuu [State committee of the USSR for Television and Radio], op. 36, Central'noe televideenie. Otdel pisem [Central Television. Letter department], 1971-1975 gg., d. 1, 1971, Godovoi obzor pisem i obzory pisem telezritelei za ianvar'-dekabr' 1971 [Annual overview of letters and overviews of television-viewers' letter from January to December 1971], l. 168.

2. Ellen Mickiewicz, *Split Signals : Television and Politics in the Soviet Union* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1988), 8 ; Jost-Arend Bösenberg, "Die Aktuelle Kamera : Medienpolitische Untersuchungen zu den Lenkungsmechanismen im Fernsehen der DDR, in der Zeit von 1952 bis 1990" (PhD manuscript Berlin, 2002), 273-285 ; Franka Wolff, *Glasnost erst kurz vor Sendeschluss : Die letzten Jahre des DDR-Fernsehens (1985-1989/90)* (Köln, Weimar, Wien : Böhlau, 2002), 147.

3. In my understanding an "ordinary" citizen is someone who did not enjoy access to the elites' system of distribution. He or she is defined by his or her lack of formal political power. In contrast "regime" refers to official representatives of organisations such as the party, government, trade unions etc.

4. Ellen Mickiewicz was the first to point to the fact that Soviet TV fundamentally changed the system of communication in the Soviet Union : Cf. Mickiewicz, *Split Signals*, 179.
5. Mickiewicz, *Split Signals*, 197.
6. On the late Soviet period see Stephan Merl, *Politische Kommunikation in der Diktatur : Deutschland und die Sowjetunion im Vergleich* (Göttingen : Wallstein, 2012), 82–110.
7. Denis Kozlov recently analysed the debates that were argued out between the literary journal *Novyi Mir*, its readers, and writers via letters. Cf. Denis Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir : Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past* (Cambridge/MA, London : Harvard University Press, 2013).
8. See my own attempt to describe the new dynamics that characterised private life after the Khrushchev era : Kirsten Bönker, "Depoliticalisation of the Private Life ? Reflections on Private Practices and the Political in the Late Soviet Union," in Willibald Steinmetz, Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, eds., *Writing Political History Today* (Frankfurt a.M. : Campus, 2013), 207–234.
9. Alexei Yurchak was one of the first researchers who rejected binary models and strived to explain the Soviet Union's longevity : Cf. *Everything was forever, until it was no more : The last Soviet generation* (Princeton, NJ : Princeton University Press, 2006). See also Lewis H. Siegelbaum, Introduction, in *ibid.*, ed., *Borders of Socialism : Private Spheres of Soviet Russia* (New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 1–21, esp. 3 ; Ekaterina Emeliantseva, "The Privilege of Seclusion : Consumption Strategies in the Closed City of Severodvinsk," *Ab Imperio : Studies of New Imperial History and Nationalism in the Post-Soviet Space* 2 (2011) : 238–259, esp. 238–244 ; see on the CSSR, Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and his TV : The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring* (Ithaca, NY and London : Cornell University Press, 2010) ; on the GDR, Mary Fulbrook, *The people's state. East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven, CT : Yale University Press, 2005).
10. Leisure time practices have long been integrated in a narrative of a retreat into privacy in the sense of a depoliticalisation of private life. Cf. Bönker, "Depoliticalisation of the Private Life ?..."
11. Cf. Bielefeld University, Collaborative Research Centre (SFB) 584 : The Political as Communicative Space in History. Research Programme (Manuscript : University of Bielefeld, 2007) (http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/%28en%29/geschichte/forschung/sfb584/research_program/index.html).
12. Statistics counted one TV set per seven persons in 1970, one per 4.5 persons in 1976, one per 4 persons in 1980, and one per 3.2 persons in 1988, *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR, 1922–1972* [National economy of the USSR, 1922–1972] (M. : Statistika, 1972), 314 ; *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR za 60 let. Iubileinyi statisticheskii ezhegodnik* [National economy of the USSR for 60 years. Anniversary statistical yearbook] (M. : Statistika, 1977), 513 ; *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1988 g. Statisticheskii ezhegodnik* [National Economy of the USSR in 1988. Statistical yearbook] (M. : Statistika, 1989), 119 ; Thomas Lindenberger, "Geteilte Welt, geteilter Himmel ? Der Kalte Krieg und die Massenmedien in gesellschaftsgeschichtlicher Perspektive," in Klaus Arnold and Christoph Classen, eds., *Zwischen Pop und Propaganda : Radio in der DDR* (Berlin : Christoph Links, 2004), 27–44, 37 ; Stephan Merl, "Staat und Konsum in der Zentralverwaltungswirtschaft. Rußland und die ostmitteleuropäischen Länder," in Hannes Siegrist, Hartmut Kaelble, and Jürgen Kocka, eds., *Europäische Konsumgeschichte, Zur Gesellschafts- und Kulturgeschichte des Konsums (18.–20. Jahrhundert)* (Frankfurt a.M., New York : Campus, 1997), 205–241, 227.
13. Cf. the contemporary description of NBC's Moscow correspondent Irving R. Levine, *Main Street, U.S.S.R.* (Garden City, N.Y. : Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959), 152–153 ; GARF, f. 6903, op. 31, 1955–1971 gg., *Tsentral'noe televidenie. Glavnaia direktsiia programm* [Central television. Main programme board], d. 2, 1956, *Stenogramma konferentsii telezritelei zavoda "Optika" g. Krasnogorska* [Shorthand report on the viewer conference of the factory "Optics"], l. 17.

14. Most of the contemporary research focused on cities located in the RSFSR. See Boris T. Kolpakov, Vasilii D. Patrushev, *Biudzhety vremeni gorodskogo naseleniia* [Time budgets of the urban population] (M.: Statistika, 1971), 209, 212; Leonid A. Gordon, Eduard V. Klopov, Leon A. Onikov, *Cherty sotsialisticheskogo obraza zhizni: Byt gorodskikh rabochikh vchera, segodnia, zavtra* [Features of the socialist lifestyle: The way of life of urban workers yesterday, today, tomorrow] (M.: Izdatel'stvo Znanie, 1977), 59-66, 149-150.
15. Again referring to Pskov Vasilii D. Patrushev, "Osnovnye izmeneniia v sfere svobodnogo vremeni gorodskogo naseleniia v posledniuiu tret' XX veka [Principal changes in the field of leisure time of the urban population in the last third of the 20th century]," in Tat'iana M. Karakhanova, ed., *Biudzhety vremeni i peremeny v zhiznedeiatel'nosti gorodskikh zhitelei v 1965-1998 godakh* [Time budget and changes in the life activities, 1965-1998] (M.: Izdatel'stvo Instituta sociologii RAN, 2001), 34-44, 37-39.
16. Leonid Gordon, Eduard Klopov, *Der Mensch in seiner Freizeit* (M.: Progress, 1976), 14, 300, 309-313.
17. Boris Grushin et al., *Die freie Zeit als Problem: Soziologische Untersuchungen in Bulgarien, Polen, Ungarn und der Sowjetunion*, ed. by Arnold Harttung (Berlin: Berlin Verlag, 1970), 48-49.
18. Boris Sapunov, "Televidenie v sisteme sotsialisticheskoi kul'tury [The television in the system of the socialist culture]," in Eduard Efimov, *Televidenie vchera, segodnia, zavtra: '86* (The television yesterday, today, tomorrow: '86] (M.: Iskusstvo, 1986), 17.
19. Patrushev, "Osnovnye izmeneniia v sfere svobodnogo vremeni gorodskogo naseleniia...", 38.
20. GARF, f. 6903, op. 3, Nauchno-tekhnicheskii otel [Scientific-Methodological Department], 1917-1970, d. 289, 1965, Dokumenty o provedenii ezhdnevnogo operativnogo oprosa zhitelei Moskvy i Mosk. obl. o peredachakh Vsesoiuznogo radio i CT [Documents of the realisation of everyday situation poll among residents of Moscow and Moscow region], t. 2, l. 5-6.
21. Lev N. Kogan, "Buch und audio-visuelle Medien," in Hansjürgen Koschwitz, ed., *Massenkommunikation in der UdSSR: Sowjetische Beiträge zur empirischen Soziologie der Journalistik* (Freiburg, München: Verlag Karl Alber, 1979), 148-166, 158-163; Rosemarie Rogers, "Normative Aspects of Leisure Time Behavior in the Soviet Union," *Sociology and Social Research* 58 (1974): 369-379; Gordon, Klopov, Onikov, *Cherty sotsialisticheskogo obraza zhizni*, 151. Concerning the mid-1960s, Firsov found out that the majority of his Leningrad respondents still read newspapers. In fact 65 percent of the respondents read at least three. See Boris Firsov, "Srednego zritel'ia net," *Zhurnal'ist*, 12 (1967): 42-45, 43.
22. Rozalina V. Ryvkina, *Obraz zhizni sel'skogo naseleniia: Metodologiya, metodika i rezul'taty izucheniia sotsial'no-ekonomicheskikh aspektov zhiznedeiatel'nosti* (The way of life of the village population. Methodology, methods, and results of the research of socio-economic aspects of the life activities) (Novosibirsk: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka" Sibirskoe otdelenie, 1979), 215-216.
23. Boris Firsov, *Televidenie glazami sotsiologa* [The television with the sociologist's eyes] (M.: Iskusstvo, 1971), 105. Firsov was an interesting figure of the Soviet media landscape, because he also worked as director of the Leningrad TV studio from 1962 to 1966. At the same time he accompanied the development of Soviet television since he had been a young researcher working for the audience research division of Central Television.
24. Kristin Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire that Lost the Cultural Cold War* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2011), 208-222.
25. Kirsten Bönker, "'Muscovites are frankly wild about TV.' Freizeit und Fernsehkonsum in der späten Sowjetunion," in Nada Boškowska, Angelika Strobel, and Daniel Ursprung, eds., *Arbeit und Konsum im "entwickelten Sozialismus"* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2015), 173-210; Susan E. Reid, "The Meaning of Home: 'The only bit of the world you can have to yourself,'" in Lewis H. Siegelbaum, ed., *Borders of Socialism: Private spheres of Soviet Russia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 144-170, esp. 164; Eadem, "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.

26. Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, 176-280.

27. Bren, *The Greengrocer and his TV* ; Michael Meyen, *Einschalten, Umschalten, Aus-schalten ? Das Fernsehen im DDR-Alltag* (Leipzig : Leipziger Universitäts-Verlag, 2003).

28. Christine E. Evans, "From Truth to Time : Soviet Central Television, 1957-1985" (PhD manuscript University of Berkeley, 2010) (<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/2702x6wr>), 115-183 ; Christine Evans, "Song of the Year and Soviet Culture in the 1970s," *Kritika : Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 12, 3 (2011) : 617-645.

29. The Soviet press faced similar problems of information about the specific reader. Cf. Simon Huxtable, "In Search of the Soviet Reader : The Kosygin Reforms, Sociology, and Changing Concepts of Soviet Society, 1964-1970," *Cahiers du Monde russe* 54, 3-4 (2013) : 623-642.

30. At the beginning, the editors compiled an overview of the incoming mail for party organisations and internal use. From 1970 onwards, Central Television published them, however with a relatively low number of copies. Cf. with regard to the published overviews e.g. *Obzor pisem telezritelej za 1970 god* [An overview of television-viewers' letters from 1970], (M. : Gosudarstvennyi komitet po teledeniiu i radio, 1971).

31. Evans, "From Truth to Time," 10.

32. *Ibid.*, 9.

33. Evans, "From Truth to Time," 11, e.g. 166-183.

34. The phrase, probably apocryphal, was attributed to none other than Leonid Brezhnev. Cited from Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, 201.

35. Sergei Lapin, "Televizionnoe veshchanie [Television broadcasting]," *Bolshaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopedia* [Great Soviet Encyclopedia] (M. : Sovetskaia entsiklopedia, 3rd ed. 1976), 378-380.

36. Nikolai Shonin, "Radio and Television as Art Forms in the Soviet Union," *Cultures* 4, 3 (1977) : 83-92, 91.

37. Cf. e.g. Gayle Durham Hollander, *Soviet Political Indoctrination : Developments in Mass Media and Propaganda since Stalin* (New York, Washington, London : Praeger, 1972) ; Alex Inkeles, *Public Opinion in Soviet Russia : A Study in Mass Persuasion* (Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press, 5th ed. 1967) ; Paul Roth, *Die kommandierte öffentliche Meinung : Sowjetische Medienpolitik* (Stuttgart : Seewald 1982) ; Mickiewicz, *Split Signals* ; *Idem.*, *Media and the Russian Public* (New York : Praeger, 1981) uses more sophisticated arguments on the subject of Soviet viewers than the scholars mentioned before.

38. For an exception, see the recent description outlining the communicative structure of the Soviet system : Stephan Merl, *Politische Kommunikation in der Diktatur*.

39. Merl, *Politische Kommunikation in der Diktatur*, 82-110 ; for a longer perspective Margareta Mommsen, *Hilf mir, mein Recht zu finden : Russische Bittschriften von Iwan dem Schrecklichen bis Gorbatschow* (Frankfurt a.M. : Propyläen Verlag, 1987) ; with special regard to petitions and denunciations since the 17th century see Valerie A. Kivelson, *Autocracy in the Provinces : The Muscovite Gentry and Political Culture in the Seventeenth Century* (Stanford/CA : Stanford University Press, 1996) ; Svetlana Boym, *Common Places : Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge/MA : Harvard University Press, 1994), 168-173 ; Jeffrey Burds, "A Culture of Denunciation : Peasant Labor Migration and Religious Anathematization in Rural Russia, 1860-1905," in Sheila Fitzpatrick and Robert Gellately, eds., *Accusatory Practices : Denunciation in Modern European History, 1789-1989* (Chicago, IL : University of Chicago Press, 1997), 40-72 ; recently with regard to post-Stalinist times see Gleb Tsipursky, "'As a Citizen, I Cannot Ignore These Facts' : Whistleblowing in the Khrushchev Era," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 58 (2010) : 52-69.

40. Shonin, "Radio and Television as Art Forms in the Soviet Union," 87-88.

41. GARF, f. 6903, op. 3, d. 563, 1970 : Otchet NMO ob issledovanii temu : "Éffektivnost' tsentral'nykh i mestnykh programm radioveshchaniia i televideniia po chetyrem oblastiam. Zaprosy i trebovaniia radioslushatelei i telezritelei v zavisimosti ot urovnia intellektual'nogo razvitiia" [Report of the NMO about the research topic : "The efficiency of the central and local radio and TV broadcasting in four regions. Inquiries and demands of radio listener and TV viewers depending on the level of intellectual development"], l. 72.
42. For example : GARF, f. 6903, op. 10, 1952-1970 gg., Otdely pisem. Tsentral'nogo televideniia. Tsentral'nogo vnutrisoiuznogo radioveshchaniia. Tsentral'nogo Radioveshchaniia na zarubezhnye strany [Letter departments. Central Television. Central Radio broadcasting for foreign countries], d. 64, 1965, Obzor pisem telezriteli za ianvar' 1965 [An overview of television-viewers' letter from January 1965], l. 1 ; GARF, f. 6903, op. 10, d. 101, 1970, Godovoi obzor pisem telezritelei za 1970 g. [Annual overview of television-viewers' letter from 1970 g.], l. 4.
43. For a fundamental overview : Katrin Döveling, *Emotionen—Medien—Gemeinschaft : Eine kommunikationssoziologische Analyse* (Wiesbaden : VS Verlag, 2005) ; Katrin Döveling, Christian von Scheve, and Elly A. Konijn, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Emotions and Mass Media* (London, New York : Routledge, 2010).
44. Elihu Katz, "Mass Communication Research and the Study of Popular Culture : An Editorial Note on a Possible Future for This Journal," *Studies in Public Communication*, 2 (1959) : 1-6, 2.
45. Cf. the inspiring ideas of Siegfried J. Schmidt, "Medien, Kultur : Medienkultur : Ein konstruktivistisches Gesprächsangebot," in idem, ed., *Kognition und Gesellschaft : Der Diskurs des Radikalen Konstruktivismus* (Frankfurt a. M. : Suhrkamp, 1992), 425-450. In relation to liberal systems it is admittedly not uncontested. Some media scholars note that current media cultures also create contradictions and social disintegration. These phenomena are surely not new. See the critical remarks of Andreas Hepp, *Medienkultur : Die Kultur mediatisierter Welten* (Wiesbaden : VS Verlag, 2nd ed. 2013), 16-21.
46. Cf. Ulrich Saxer and Martina Märki-Koepp, *Medien-Gefühlskultur : Zielgruppenspezifische Gefühlsdramaturgie als journalistische Produktionsroutine* (München : Oelschläger, 1992), 51. This term has also not remained uncontested. Cf. for a critique Andreas Hepp, *Netzwerke der Medien : Medienkulturen und Globalisierung* (Wiesbaden : VS Verlag, 2004), 74-75.
47. Döveling, *Emotionen—Medien—Gemeinschaft*, 183.
48. Knut Hickethier argues that East German television offered viewers a cosy image of the GDR characterised by a specific sentimental culture of familiarity. He states that sports programmes, in particular, might have ensured "identification" with the state. See Knut Hickethier, "Das Fernsehen der DDR," in Stefan Zahlmann ed., *Wie im Westen, nur anders : Medien in der DDR* (Berlin : Panama-Verlag, 2010), 119-130, 123, 128.
49. Stuart Hall, "Kodieren/Dekodieren," in Ralf Adelman et al., eds., *Grundlagentexte zur Fernsehwissenschaft. Theorie – Geschichte – Analyse* (Konstanz : UVK, 2001), 105-124, 106-110, 115-117, 121-123.
50. Valerii G. Sesiunin, "Funktionen der Massenkommunikationsmittel," in Hansjürgen Koschwitz, ed., *Massenkommunikation in der UdSSR : Sowjetische Beiträge zur empirischen Soziologie der Journalistik* (Freiburg – München : Verlag Karl Alber, 1979), 46-47.
51. Stephan Merl, "Konsum in der Sowjetunion : Element der Systemdestabilisierung?," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, 58 (2007) : 519-536 ; Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen..."
52. Concerning the question of how consumption contributed to stability, see the convincing arguments of Emeliantseva, "The Privilege of Seclusion..."
53. GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 612, 1959, l. 2.
54. Niklas Luhmann, *Die Realität der Massenmedien* (Wiesbaden : VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 4th ed., 2009), 77, 112, 115, 121-122. From a theoretical point of view, these

negotiations need not to suffice democratic or liberal requirements. Luhmann's perspective on societal systems is independent from the actual political order ruling a society, because his basic assumption refers to a functional differentiation of "modern society."

55. Bren, *The Greengrocer and his TV*, 202.

56. *Ibid*, 206.

57. For studies especially referring to the phenomenon of nostalgia see e.g. Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York : Basic Books, 2001) ; Kirsten Bönker, "Watching Television and Emotional Commitment in the Late Soviet Union," in Peter Collmer, Julia Richers, Carmen Scheide, Ulrich Schmid, eds., *Pop-Up Culture : Popular and Mass Culture in late Soviet Society* (forthcoming 2015) ; Ekaterina Kalinina, "Multiple faces of the nostalgia channel in Russia," *VIEW. Journal of European Television History and Culture*, 3 (2014), 5 : 108-118. With regard to nostalgic TV consumption in the Czech Republic : Veronika Pehe, "Responses to The Thirty Cases of Major Zeman in the Czech Republic," *VIEW. Journal of European Television History and Culture* 3, 5 (2014) : 100-107 ; Maria Todorova, Zsuzsa Gille eds., *Post-communist nostalgia* (Oxford, New York : Berghahn Books, 2012).

58. Early Soviet sociologists started with surveys on the readership of *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* in 1960 whereas Polish sociologists had first analysed the audience of radio and television years before. Vladimir Shlapentokh, *The Politics of Sociology in the Soviet Union* (Boulder/CO : Westview Press, 1987), 167-170 ; Elizabeth Ann Weinberg, *The Development of Sociology in the Soviet Union* (London, Boston : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 82-107.

59. Kogan, "Buch und audio-visuelle Medien," 151 ; Alex Inkeles, *Public Opinion in the Soviet Union : A Study in Mass Persuasion* (Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press, 1951), 122.

60. Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, 270-271.

61. Mickiewicz, *Split Signals*, 81.

62. GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 623, 1960, *Pis'ma v TsK KPSS o rabote komiteta* [Letters to the CC CPSS], l. 4, 53, 67.

63. GARF, f. 6903, op. 3, d. 185, 1962, *Spravka NMO o neobkhodimosti izucheniia auditorii radioslushatelei i telezritelei Vsesoiuznogo radio i televideniia* [Inquiry of the NMO about the necessity to study the audience of radio listener and TV viewers of the Allunion radio and television], l. 1-12. The deliverance of letters and surveys are incomplete. Letters addressed to the television are completely missing for the years of 1957, 1959, 1961 and 1962, and partly for 1963 and 1965 to 1967. See the survey in : GARF, f. 6903, op. 10, 1952-1970 gg., l. 1.

64. For further details see also Christine Evans's instructive remarks concerning the Soviet audience research : Evans, "From Truth to Time", chapter 2.

65. GARF, f. 6903, op. 3, d. 219, l. 1. The actual influence on the programming is, however, hard to assess.

66. GARF, f. 6903, op. 3, d. 185, 1962, l. 1-12. Soviet sociologists generally studied the theory and research of bourgeois sociology to establish their own distinct approach on the basis of Marxist ideology. Cf. Weinberg, *The Development*, 12-20. The famous Pskov study of 1965 was linked to the UNESCO international time budget research. See the decision of the TsK of communist party published in L.N. Moskvichev et al., eds., *Sotsiologiia i vlast'. Sbornik 1. Dokumenty 1953-1968* [Sociology and power. Collection 1. Documents 1953-1968] (M. : Academia, 1997), 71.

67. GARF, f. 6903, op. 3, d. 185, 1962, l. 1 ; GARF, f. 6903, op. 3, d. 403, 1967, l. 3.

68. GARF, f. 6903, op. 3, d. 320, 1966, *Stenogramma sovместnogo soveshchaniia NMO i sotsiologicheskoi gruppy Akademii obshchestvennykh nauk pri TsK KPSS na temu "Izuchenie radio- i televi. auditorii i éffektivnosti veshchaniia"* [Shorthand report on the joint conference of the NMO and the sociological groups of the Academy of social sciences by the CC CPSS on the topic "Research of the radio and television audience and the efficiency of the broadcasting"], l. 5, 7, 8.

69. Firsov, *Televidenie glazami sotsiologa*, 108.
70. Weinberg, *The Development*, 82-83. A similar development could be observed for Soviet press journalism : Huxtable, "In Search of the Soviet Reader," 624. With regard to TV, this development is analyzed by Mickiewicz, *Split Signals*, 196-199. Mickiewicz, however, observes the 70s.
71. Evans, *From Truth to Time*, 83.
72. GARF, f. 6903, op. 3, d. 403, 1967, Programma sotsiologicheskogo issledovaniia NMO po teme "Struktura zaprosov i trebovanii radiosl. i telezr. po printsipu intellektual'noi vertikali" [The programme of the sociological research of the NMO on the topic "The structure of inquiries and demands of radio-listeners and television-viewers according to the principle of intellectual vertical"], l. 18, 19.
73. GARF, f. 6903, op. 3, d. 277, 1965, Itogovaia spravka o rezul'tatakh soc. issledovaniia populiarnosti radio i telev. program, provedennogo na predpr. g. Moskvy [Final information about the results of the sociological research of the popularity of the radio and television programme], l. 16.
74. As a typical example : GARF, f. 6903, op. 10, d. 101, 1970, l. 4-34ob.
75. Rudol'f A. Boretskii, *Televizionnaia programma : Ocherk teorii propagandy* [The television programm : An outline of the propaganda theory] (M. : Gosudarstvennyi komitet SSSR po televideniiu i radio, 1967), 82-83.
76. GARF, f. 6903, op. 10, d. 44, 1963 : Obzor pisem radioslushatelei i telezritelei, postupivshikh v dni podgotovki k plenumu CK KPSS 18 iiunia 1963 g. [An overview of radio-listeners' and television-viewers' letters incoming during the days of preparing the plenum of the CC CPSS], l. 1 ; *ibid.*, d. 101, 1970, l. 4.
77. E.g. GARF, f. R-6903, op. 10, d. 18, 1959, Obzory pisem telezritelei i spravki o rabote s pis'mami za 1958-1959 gg. [Overviews of television-viewers' letters and information about the work with letters from 1958 to 1959], l. 1-13.
78. GARF, f. 6903, op. 10, d. 70, 1966, Analiz pisem telezritelei za period s 1964 po 1966 [Analysis of viewers' letters from 1964 to 1966], l. 3.
79. Obzor pisem telezritelei 1973 g. [An overview of television-viewers' letters from 1973] (M. : Gosudarstvennyi komitet po televideniiu i radio, 1974), 17.
80. GARF, f. 6903, op. 10, d. 70, 1966, l. 32.
81. See for example Obzor pisem telezritelei za 1979 god [An overview of television-viewers' letters from 1979] (M. : Gosudarstvennyi komitet SSSR po televideniiu i radio, 1980), 11-42, 88-116, 134-145.
82. GARF, f. 6903, op. 10, d. 70, 1966, l. 31.
83. See GARF, f. 6903, op. 10, d. 101, 1970, l. 4.
84. Christine Evans explains how the show "From the Bottom of My Heart" created emotional bonds with the younger audience. Cf. her article in this issue.
85. Huxtable, "In Search of the Soviet Reader," 624.
86. GARF, f. 6903, op. 10, d. 101, 1970, l. 4, 7.
87. Kogan, "Buch und audio-visuelle Medien," 162. A study on rural viewers found out that already in 1971 more than 40 per cent of the people who also regularly read literature discussed the programmes after watching. The survey, however, was only interested in the relation between watching television and reading. Its aim was to prove that TV did not have any negative influence on reading practices and that reading TV users were more critical than non-reading ones. One could probably suppose that actually more people talked about the programmes and that talking about TV became even more involving with the increasing amount of TV sets and the growing popularity of TV movies and serials during the 70s.
88. Obzor pisem telezritelei za 1971 g. [An overview of television-viewers' letters from 1971] (M. : Gosudarstvennyi komitet SSSR po televideniiu i radio, 1972), 3.

89. GARF, f. 6903, op. 3, d. 404, 1967, Otchet o sotsiologicheskome issledovanii na temu "Ob éffektivnosti informacii i propagandy na vneshnepoliticheskie temi po radio i televideniiu" dlia naseleniia Sovetskogo soiuzia [Report on the sociological research on the topic "About the efficiency of the information and propaganda on foreign policy on the radio and television], l. 11, 14.
90. Ibid.
91. Obzor pisem radioslushatelei za 1970 god [An overview of radio-listeners' letters from 1970] (M. : Gosudarstvennyi komitet po televideniiu i radio, 1971), 5 ; Obzor pisem telezritelei za 1977 g. [An overview of television-viewers' letters from 1977] (M. : Gosudarstvennyi komitet po televideniiu i radio, 1978), 3.
92. GARF, f. 6903, op. 10, d. 18, 1959, l. 3.
93. GARF, f. 6903, op. 10, d. 46, 1963, Obzor pisem telezritelei ob uluchshenii programm Tsentral'nogo televideniia, podgotovlennii nauchno-metodicheskim otdelom [An overview of television-viewers' letters about the improvement of Central television's programme prepared by the scientific-methodological department], l. 3.
94. Ibid., l. 6.
95. GARF, f. 6903, op. 10, d. 89, 1969, Obzory pisem telezritelei za ianvar'-dekabr' 1969 g. [Overviews of television-viewers' letters from January to December 1969], l. 112 ob.
96. Obzor pisem telezritelei 1973 g., 3-5.
97. GARF, f. 6903, op. 10, d. 70, 1966, l. 7.
98. GARF, f. 6903, op. 10, d. 66, 1965, Obzor pisem telezritelei za aprel'-avgust, oktiabr' 1965 [An overview on televisionviewers' letters from April to August, October 1965], l. 132ob, 148 (quote) ; ibid., d. 70, 1966, l. 7 ; ibid., op. 1, d. 883, 1965, Spravka otdela pisem Komiteta o rabote s pis'mami zritelei, poluchennykh Tsentral'nym televideniem v 1965 g. [Information of the committee's letter department] , l. 1.
99. See Roth-Ey, Moscow Prime Time, 271-272.
100. GARF, f. 6903, op. 10, d. 101, 1970, l. 9, 10.
101. GARF, f. 6903, op. 36, d. 1, 1971, Godovoi obzor pisem i obzory pisem telezritelei za ianvar'-dekabr' 1971, l. 461 (quote), 462.
102. GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 612, 1959, l. 23 ; GARF, f. 6903, op. 10, d. 46, 1963, l. 3.
103. GARF, f. 6903, op. 10, d. 46, 1963, l. 7.
104. GARF, f. 6903, op. 1, d. 883, 1965, l. 2.
105. For example GARF, f. 6903, op. 36, d. 18, 1973, l. 1, 4-17 ; Obzor pisem telezritelei za 1979 god [An overview of television-viewers' letters from 1979] (M. : Gosudarstvennyi komitet SSSR po televideniiu i radio 1980), 6.
106. GARF, f. 6903, op. 36, d. 1, 1971, l. 461 ; Obzor pisem telezritelei za 1981 god [An overview on television-viewers' letters from 1981] (M. : Gosudarstvennyi komitet po televideniiu i radio, 1982), 167.
107. GARF, f. 6903, op. 10, d. 18, 1959, l. 26.
108. GARF, f. 6903, op. 36, d. 1, 1971, l. 461.
109. GARF, f. 6903, op. 10, d. 89, 1969, l. 57, 57 ob.
110. Obzor pisem telezritelei 1973 g., 5.
111. GARF, f. 6903, op. 36, d. 18, 1973, Obzor pisem telezritelei za Apriel' 1973 g, l. 15.
112. Obzor pisem telezritelei za 1980 [An overview of television-viewers' letters from 1980] (M. : Gosudarstvennyi komitet SSSR po televideniiu i radio, 1981), 9.
113. Evans, "Song of the Year and Soviet Culture in the 1970s," 635-636.
114. GARF, f. 6903, op. 36, d. 1, 1971, l. 462.
115. GARF, f. 6903, op. 10, d. 89, 1969, l. 130ob.
116. GARF, f. 6903, op. 36, d. 1, 1971, 462 ; GARO (Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rostovskoi Oblasti – State Archive of Rostov Region), f. R-4237, op. 1 (prod.), Rostovskii oblastnoi komitet po

televideniiu i radioveshchaniiu [Rostov regional committee for television and radio broadcasting], d. 1051, Materialy televizionnykh peredakh redaktsii otdela pisem, tom III [Materials of televisual programmes of the letter department's editorial office, volume III], 1964, l. 142-146.

117. GARO, f. R-4237, op. 1 (prod.), d. 876, Materialy redaktsii pisem, tom II [Materials of the editorial letter office, volume II], 1963, l. 114, 116, 120; GARO, f. R-4237, op. 1 (prod.), d. 877, Materialy redaktsii pisem, tom III [Materials of the editorial letter office, volume III], 1963, l. 99; GARO, f. R-4237, op. 1 (prod.), d. 1051, 1964, l. 147.

118. See a typical example of the popular music programme *Utrenniaia pochta* [Morning post]: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e5s_-MdQrHI [15 :20] (accessed 19 October 2015).

119. *Obzor pisem telezritelei 1973 g.*, 15.

120. Cf. Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir*.

121. RGANI (Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Noveishei Istorii – Russian State Archive of Contemporary History), f. 5, Apparat TsK KPSS [Body of CC CPSS] (1949-1991 gg.), op. 90, Otdely TsK KPSS [Departments of CC CPSS] (1984), d. 90, 1984/85, l. 40-41, 48, 65, 69, 99-100.

122. GARF, f. 6903, op. 10, d. 89, 1969, l. 169.

123. Alexei Yurchak, "Soviet hegemony of form : Everything was forever, until it was no more," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, 3 (2003) : 480-510, esp. 499-504; Merl, *Politische Kommunikation in der Diktatur*, 12-14, 83-86; Bren, *The Greengrocer and his TV*, 206.

124. See for a thorough discussion of the letters' function, Merl, *Politische Kommunikation in der Diktatur*, 82-100.

125. See footnote 47 above.

126. Stephen E. Hanson, "The Brezhnev Era," in Ronald Grigor Suny, ed., *The Cambridge History of Russia. vol. III: The twentieth century* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2006), 292-315, esp. 305; Fulbrook, *The people's state*; Bren, *The Greengrocer and his TV*, 85-89.

ABSTRACTS

In the 1970s, Soviet television was a key medium. This article asks to what extent it engaged its audience in political communication and emotional bonding. How did "ordinary" Soviet citizens make use of television programmes? Assuming that the television staff, the audience, and the regime engaged in a new field of communication, the article examines the specificity of audience letters sent to television's editorial departments. These letters allow us to probe television's capacity to trigger emotional commitment among viewers in its presentation of Soviet popular culture, societal values, and lifestyles. The article proposes that the majority of TV viewers emotionally accepted the Soviet lifestyle and the way television presented the Soviet way of life in entertainment programming. By steadily suggesting close contact with the audience, television positioned itself in the field of political communication not only as a medium of entertainment, but also as an agent of societal interests and improvements. Viewers responded to television as to an influential facilitator of politics and the new post-Stalinist consumerist lifestyle. Letters to Soviet TV suggest that TV consumption interconnected, diversified, and modified private and public communication after the late 1950s. The re-connecting of the private and public sphere seems to have triggered a positive emotional commitment among viewers towards the Soviet regime.

Dans les années 1970, la télévision soviétique est devenue le principal média du pays. Dans quelle mesure a-t-elle pu avoir une incidence sur la communication politique et la formation de liens affectifs chez les téléspectateurs ? Quel usage le citoyen soviétique lambda faisait-il des programmes télévisés ? Prenant pour postulat que le personnel de la télévision, le public et le régime s'engageaient dans un nouveau mode de communication, l'auteur analyse la spécificité du courrier adressé par les téléspectateurs aux départements éditoriaux de la télévision. Ces lettres permettent d'explorer la capacité de la télévision à déclencher un engagement émotionnel chez les téléspectateurs lors de la diffusion d'émissions relatives aux modes de vie, aux valeurs sociétales et à la culture populaire soviétique. L'auteur avance que la majorité du public a émotionnellement accepté le mode de vie soviétique et la façon dont il était présenté dans les programmes de divertissement. En se positionnant constamment au plus près du public, la télévision s'est placée dans le champ de la communication politique en tant que média de loisir mais aussi en qualité d'agent des intérêts sociétaux et du progrès. Le public a réagi à la télévision comme à un intermédiaire influent de la politique et correspondant au nouveau mode de vie consumériste poststalinien. Le courrier adressé à la télévision soviétique suggère que la consommation télévisuelle a connecté la communication publique à la communication privée à partir de la fin des années 1950, et qu'elle les a diversifiées et modifiées. La reconnexion du domaine public et du domaine privé semble avoir déclenché un engagement affectif positif des téléspectateurs envers le régime soviétique.

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