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This Is Tomorrow!

Becoming a Consumer in the Soviet Sixties

Susan E. Reid

Suppose that, at the dawn of the 1960s, Soviet artist Aleksandr Laktionov had produced an updated remake of his well-known painting of 1952, *Moving into the New Apartment* (fig. 1.1), to reflect the hopes of the new decade: how might it have looked? In the intervening years Stalin had died and been denounced, the Cold War had entered a new phase of “peaceful competition,” and, in 1957, the Khrushchev regime had launched its industrialized construction program to provide separate apartments not only for exemplary citizens like Laktionov’s happy house-warmer but for all. Other measures promised further improvements in ordinary people’s lives: enhanced services, more leisure time, and increased production of consumer goods to go in their new homes.¹ One change that Laktionov’s sixties remake would surely have to reflect was that the ideal modern Soviet home was now widely envisaged as saturated with “labor-saving” technology and as already looking forward to the next generation of new improved devices. As *Izvestiia* proclaimed in 1959, with a dose of socialist realism: “Today many families have a washing machine, vacuum cleaner, and floor polisher. The majority of workers have a meat grinder, juicer, etc. But it would be much more convenient to combine them in a single ‘domestic

combine? [domashnii kombinat].”²

<FIG. 1.1 ABOUT HERE>

Despite these significant additions to the pile of possessions that marked Laktionov’s family as modern, urbane citizens, his hypothetical 1962 remake probably would *not* have looked much like the collage that British Pop artist Richard Hamilton made to publicize a London avant-garde art exhibition *This Is Tomorrow* in 1956. Entitled *Just What Is It That Makes Today’s Homes So Different, So Appealing?*, the collage commented both on contemporary American consumer culture’s self-representations and on how the brave new world of mass consumption was seen from 1950s Britain, just emerging from postwar austerity.³ Appropriating the visual style and iconography of American advertising and comics, Hamilton identified the shape of “Tomorrow” with the phenomena British writer and social critic J. B. Priestley in the previous year had labeled (more judgmentally) “admass.”⁴ “Tomorrow”—the sixties—would be a realm of images and styles; it would be overstuffed with mass consumer goods, pervaded by the media, and dominated by the entertainment industry. Domestic appliances—represented in Hamilton’s image by television, a tape recorder, and a vacuum cleaner, cut out from an ad complete with hyperbolic strap line—appear as signature artifacts of postwar modernity alongside comics, the sexualized body, and canned food.

Why begin a chapter on Soviet consumer culture of the sixties with a British 1950s view of a chimerical Americanized “Tomorrow”? The title of this book, *The Socialist Sixties*, calls for a comparative, transnational perspective and a reconsideration of the system specificity of the term *sixties*. What does it mean to qualify it with the adjective *socialist*, producing a seemingly incongruous and even oxymoronic hybrid, *socialist sixties*? *Sixties* is not merely the chronological label for the decade between the 1950s and the 1970s; it evokes a whole nexus of concepts, images, values, and social phenomena that together constitute a new consumerist stage of modernity, generally identified with capitalism. When we say *sixties* in English we think of the affluent society, the never-had-it-so-good generation of growing mass consumerism, hedonism, and leisure, youth culture and style, and the iconic commodities

of the consumer boom. Observing this culture as it emerged, Hamilton characterized it in 1957: “Popular (designed for a mass audience, Transient (short term solution), Expendable (easily forgotten), Low-Cost, Mass Produced, Young (aimed at youth), Witty, Sexy, Gimmicky, Glamorous, Big Business.”⁵ The term does not translate straightforwardly into Russian, however. For members of the Russian intelligentsia (both former Soviet and émigré), the term *shestidesiatniki* (sixties generation) traditionally references the critical intelligentsia of the 1860s and only secondarily its echoes in the intellectual ferment of the Thaw a century later. Both are characterized by high-minded seriousness and a self-defining ascetic disdain for material pleasures in favor of high culture and spiritual values. Thus there are cultural as well as systemic differences in the connotations of the term. The collocation *socialist sixties* invites us to consider how the socialist experience of late industrial modernity corresponds to or departs from paradigms that have been developed for understanding the Western, capitalist phenomenon, and thereby also to question the hegemony of a model of modernity defined in terms of occidental capitalism.

As with any such period, we can argue over the start and end dates.⁶ In the USA, the sixties began in the mid-1950s, arriving not much later in Western Europe. Priestley coined his neologism *admass* in 1955.⁷ This was also the turning point when major U.S. corporations definitively changed their marketing strategies, investing on an unprecedented scale in the visual aspects of design to induce people to spend—and keep on spending—their increasing incomes. While the rise of “merchandising”—creating a “new role for design in producing obsolescence and panic for status”—had begun already in the interwar period, as C. Wright Mills observed in 1958, it was in the postwar period that “the distributor becomes ascendant over both the consumer and the producer. . . . The salesman becomes paramount.”⁸ Consummating the innovations of the interwar period, such as the work of General Motors designer Harley Earl, the mid-1950s brought, according to Thomas Hine, “sleek, powerful, finny low-priced cars and the emergence of a sexy, urgent new kind of popular music—rock and roll.”⁹ The product was henceforth designed as if it were an advertisement, selling not only itself but much more: a lifestyle and social status.¹⁰ A new aesthetic of everyday life emerged, in which image, display, and the

perfection of surface were paramount.¹¹ The attention to image entailed functionally redundant flourishes such as tailfins, which signified speed, fun, pleasure in consumption, hedonism, and luxury for all. Dubbing this “Populuxe,” Hine explains: “‘Populuxe’ contains a thoroughly unnecessary ‘e,’ to give it class. That final embellishment of a practical and straightforward invention is what makes the word Populuxe, well, Populuxe.”¹²

This was also the time when, in the capitalist West, industrial design was consolidated as a specialist practice with distinctive functions and methods. A vital role was played by professional designers and image makers in shaping the sixties. They branded the decade so powerfully that we are still in thrall to its self-styled image. As Dick Hebdige put it retrospectively, “From now on, the shape and look of things were to play an important part in aligning two potentially divergent interests: production for profit, and consumption for pleasure.”¹³ The sixties saw the realization of a longer process: “the intercession of the image between the consumer and the act of consumption.”¹⁴ For Jean Baudrillard, consumption not so much of the *use* value of goods as of their *sign* value was a defining characteristic of modern (and postmodern) life under capitalism.¹⁵ Hamilton, reflecting on the emergent phenomena, uses the representations produced by commercial mass culture and their visual styles as the material of art—placing a world of signs, media images, and mass culture between the perceiving subject and nature—to represent the bombardment of visual images, packaging, advertising, hedonism, popular culture, glamour, sex.¹⁶ Thus, in his collage, the canned ham, perched self-importantly on the coffee table like some modern fetish, represents not the nutrition value of the food it contains but its image and its sign value.

Sovuluxe or “an Oppressive Pile of Hardware”?

All this is surely poles apart from the Soviet material and visual culture of the 1960s, the concerns of Soviet planners, and the dour image of the USSR as viewed from the Western side of the Iron Curtain?

If “the sixties” is a brand in itself, an image that comes between human consciousness and material existence, the image of the *Soviet* sixties is its opposite—*not* the Real Thing, *not* deserving the brand mark, with its connotations of swinging modernity, style, superabundance, sex, and fun. Could Populuxe have any place in the Soviet culture of goods and their presentation?

Not according to contemporary Western observers. When exposed in the international arena at expositions and world’s fairs of the 1950s and 1960s, Soviet goods and their presentation were judged not to have made it into the sixties. Hamilton’s associate, UK critic Lawrence Alloway, articulated the salient differences between socialist things and capitalist commodities, dismissing the USSR’s presentation of material abundance at recent international exhibitions as “a spectacle with a message,” overloaded with “garrulous, cumulative weight, ungraspable profusion to convey plenitude.”¹⁷ At the Soviet Trade Fair in London 1961, “the rising level of consumption in the USSR was demonstrated clearly and repeatedly, but not entirely happily. Despite the fashion show, despite a modern flat hung over the model of a modern city, the exhibition repeatedly failed to give a convincing image of the leisure in which the benefits of consumption are enjoyed.”¹⁸

Merely to present an abundance of things was not enough, in Alloway’s view; it was the extra, redundant flourishes that mattered—the “e” on “Populuxe,” as Hine put it. Consumer goods represented for Alloway a baseline of civilized living, but sixties affluence required goods not only to use but to enjoy and desire, to fashion lifestyles, and to play with. Although the Soviet Union had placeholders for such items, it had missed the point of consumer goods: “The entertainment, the styling that goes with mass-produced consumer goods is part of their value and function. The Russians, however, by denying themselves sophistication, just as they eschew advertising, reduced the fruits of peace to an oppressive pile of hardware in a bower of statistics.”¹⁹ In paying too little attention to the fun, fantasy, and magic that resided in styling, advertising, and packaging, Soviet consumer goods merely fulfilled a function, remaining utilitarian things, not objects of desire. The semiotics of consumer goods was still missing.²⁰

Such views, mapping the opposition between sign value and use value onto the

capitalism/socialism antithesis, are undoubtedly structured by Cold War polarities. These were projected conceptually onto goods and materials, supposing a First and a Second World of artifacts. While, from the Soviet perspective, capitalist commodities embodied excess, redundancy, and designed obsolescence, aiming to create “panic for status” and desires for unnecessary things, for Western observers the nature, circulation, and meanings of socialist goods were defined by shortage, uniformity, the bare satisfaction of basic need, and practices of repair and using up.²⁶

Yet Alloway’s criticisms cannot be discounted out of hand for systemic bias.²¹ The dichotomy he outlined may be observed in relation to science fiction “houses of the future,” such as the playful dwelling designed by Hamilton’s colleagues Alison and Peter Smithson for the *Daily Mail* Ideal Home Exhibition in 1956, or Monsanto’s plastic house installed at Disneyland, California (1957–68).²² The Soviets also fantasized about polymer power and all-electric homes of the future and even built their own plastic house of the future in 1958.²³ But judging from photographs taken in 1963, the Soviet model was as dour and drab as Cold War stereotypes would have one expect. Fun, glamour, and mass entertainment were not its purpose; it was a serious scientific experiment for specialists to study, and the interior was furnished with sober, modernist good taste in the “contemporary style.”²⁴

While there *was*, of course, a pervasive image culture in the Soviet Union, its object, according to conventional wisdom, was to promote communism not commodities, and rational consumption rather than consumerist lifestyles. Although ideological hostility toward the idea of fashion softened in the Khrushchev era, public rhetoric still vilified planned obsolescence and commodity fetishism as evils of capitalism and added to this a moral, aesthetic, and economic condemnation of “superfluity” (referring both to luxury and excess and to the Stalinist overemphasis on ornate facades and surface appearances at the expense of functionality).²⁵

The systemic opposition is not the whole story, however. Not only did indigenous critics of burgeoning consumerism exist in the West (and not solely on the left), but attitudes were also changing among state bureaucracies and other authorities in the Soviet Union, partly as an effect of contact with

international practices, which had increased significantly since the early 1950s. Some at least of the planners of the Soviet section at the 1958 Brussels World's Fair, for instance, were convinced that an emphasis on individual enjoyment of the fruits of progress, presented in a fun, dynamic, and engaging manner, was the best way to sell the Soviet "brand" abroad.²⁷ The shortcomings of finish and detailing, for which Western experts criticized Soviet consumer goods, were also recognized in the USSR.

Beginning in the late 1950s, there were moves to develop new specialisms such as industrial or product design, drawing energetically both on Western expertise and on that of socialist Eastern Europe. The visual aspects of design, the aesthetics of commodities and packaging, marketing and branding, all became matters of concern in the 1960s.²⁸ When a new model of plastic house was developed in 1962, the so-called Leningrad House (designed by Lenproekt), it was an experimental transparent pod on a pedestal, with futuristic dwelling possibilities for transformation and interaction by the user—such as modular extension and a variable composition—and more than a nod to Monsanto. While increased international communication and competition may be part of the explanation for these shifts, I want to suggest that they also reflect a growing concern with the nature and interests of consumers, which played a part in the production of a modern form of consumption and new Soviet consumer consciousness. Albeit with a half decade's time lag, the Soviet Union was also entering the sixties.

To unsettle the binary order of things and open up questions about Soviet styling and marketing—about the attention to the surface design and image of consumer goods that would render them "objects of desire"—I follow Hamilton's lead in focusing on domestic appliances. The normalization of these new consumer durables that began to become available in the long Soviet sixties was part of the modernizing state's project to channel and direct the people's image of socialist modernity: to shape their horizons of expectation and actual lifestyles in ways that were considered commensurate with the USSR's position as an advanced industrial power and leader of the socialist world and which were expected to promote the attainment of full communism. But there were aspects of the styling of some appliances that transcended, eluded, or even contradicted the demands of rational

socialist objects. Elsewhere I have attended to efforts, in the Khrushchev era, to shape demand in particular ways, focusing in particular on those that sought to *contain* demand within “rational” norms.²⁹ Here I turn, rather, to what I propose was a key development in the formation of a Soviet consumer culture in the sixties, beginning already under Khrushchev: the production of a need for new types of goods.

This chapter draws on research for a larger project about homemaking and becoming a consumer in the Soviet sixties, in which I use archival and published sources, both textual and visual, in combination with over seventy oral history interviews to excavate changing practices and attitudes toward homemaking, taste, and consumption.³⁰ The project examines the negotiations and accommodations between specialist discourses and practices and those of lay consumers and homemakers with regard to the new one-family apartments erected at speed on a mass scale beginning in the late 1950s: between the anonymous structures conceived by architects and planners and the agency of individuals who made home in them. The growing authority of specialists in determining the minutiae of everyday lives, which has been identified as one of modernity’s hallmarks, is a significant part of the story of the Soviet sixties.³¹ Here I focus on professional image makers and designers, but I also want to ask what part was played by ordinary consumers. In Western product design a vital role was recognized for consumer research: “Let the Consumer help,” as leading first generation industrial designer in the U.S., Harold Van Doren, put it in the 1954 edition of his manual for the new profession, *Industrial Design*.¹ The final section draws on appliance consumption biographies in the interview material to suggest answers to the question “Who made the Soviet sixties?”

I shall address three aspects: first, the meanings of appliances, both in contemporary authoritative discourse in the global Cold War context (the circulation of images “advertising” an appliance-enhanced lifestyle as a universally accessible socialist modernity) and as a way for the

¹ Harold Van Doren, *Industrial Design: A Practical Guide to Product Design and Development*, second edition (New York: McGraw Hill, 1954), 271-92.

historian to trace social and cultural changes in consumption and living standards; second, the growing role of specialists, the professionalization of Soviet design and attention to styling matters and the Soviet “brand”: and finally, the need to create a need.

Why Appliances?

Appliances are of historical interest for what they tell us both about objective changes in living standards and about shifting cultural attitudes toward consumption. Durables consumption can serve as an economic measure of rising living standards and index of the increasing spending power of the Soviet populace. According to Engel’s law of economics (ca. 1870), different types of commodities are affected in different ways by increases in disposable income: the balance of household expenditure shifts from the perishable—the contents of the refrigerator, which will be eaten up—to the durable: the refrigerator itself. In 1962 M. E. Ruban, analyzing changes in consumption patterns since 1940, found that this shift from food to durables was becoming apparent in the USSR, indicating the increased purchasing power of the Soviet public, as well as significant improvements in the supply of goods to the population.³² Other foreign observers remarked on the signs of growing prosperity and consumption levels in the midsixties, as refrigerator production doubled in two years from 1964 to 1966 and consumer durables began to be acquired by most Soviet families.³³ Statistics indicate that appliances became a normal requirement for the modern Soviet home in the course of the long 1960s. In 1960, half of Soviet households still lacked basic durable goods, only 4 percent owned a refrigerator or washing machine, and 8 percent a TV. But the proportion of Soviet households with refrigerators grew rapidly over the next decade, rising to 11 percent in 1965 and 65 percent by 1975, while television ownership rose to 24 percent and then 74 percent in the same period.³⁴ A letter to the editors of *Ekonomicheskaiia gazeta* at the end of 1962 reproduced the new, modernized image of a “typical” (in the socialist realist sense that it represented a desired tendency of development) Soviet lifestyle and implied a causal

connection between the move to a new apartment and the modernizing process of becoming a consumer:

Living conditions rise year by year, and, along with them, so do demands. Many receive new apartments to which not everyone takes along their domestic things that previously satisfied them, but often they try to acquire new furnishings. Going around town one can confirm that in every block there are many who have refrigerators, radios, televisions, washing machines, vacuum cleaners, and other items of primary necessity. . . . These items have firmly entered our everyday life and are already not considered to be luxury objects.³⁵

The purchase of electrical household appliances had additional significance over and above that of nonfood durables consumption in general, because these were entirely new types of commodities for individual use in the home. It marked a change, rather than more of the same.³⁶ Marshall Goldman defined the significance of the shifts in 1968:

The purchase of a washer or other appliances where there was none before is a major improvement. Many Soviet families have heretofore been living on a loaf-to-loaf basis; the bulk of their purchases have been for the purpose of sustaining life. Until the late 1950s there was little income left over for consumer goods of a more durable nature. Then the Soviet consumer's income increased so that he was able to spend money on products that generated enjoyment long after the initial purchase. Unlike a loaf of bread, a Soviet refrigerator provides consumptive pleasure for more than a few days. Thus an index of consumption which measures only current sales understates the enormous improvement that is taking place in the daily life of the Soviet consumer.³⁷

The appearance of major appliances in people's homes thus marked a transition to a modern form of consumption and a qualitatively different lifestyle, associated with the purchase and accumulation of industrially produced consumer goods and, in Goldman's terms, with enduring "consumptive pleasure."³⁸

This new lifestyle was also directly associated with the mass housing program launched in 1957, which provided millions of families with separate apartments with kitchens and "mod. cons." As the *Ekonomicheskaiia gazeta* reader indicated, the move to new apartments figured in public discourse as a legitimate stimulant to consumption. The move also represented the modernization of living conditions in quite concrete ways: for many, a refrigerator and even more a washing machine was thinkable only after the move, since the housing they came from often lacked mains electricity or plumbing.³⁹

Thus appliances are of special significance for the historian of this period. They also had meanings in contemporary public discourse. If, as Baudrillard proposes, it is a defining characteristic of

consumer society that in buying an appliance one buys signs rather than functions, then a demonstrable shift in this direction—in the ways people account for their purchases and in the social meanings of their durables—could be a means to calibrate the Soviet transformation into a consumer culture, in which, I propose, the 1960s were the watershed.

It was the refrigerator that became the key symbol of a new, affluent lifestyle in Europe, beginning in the 1950s, combining in a single image the promise of abundance with technological modernity.⁴⁰ Hamilton used it in another work, *She* (1958-61, Tate), where he conflated it with other objects of desire, whose visual language of advertising he also appropriated: the car, electric toaster, and reified, pinup woman's body. According to Baudrillard's definition of consumer societies, the refrigerator was important not only for its chilling properties but for its position in a semiotic system representing consumer affluence. In the capitalist West, the purchase of this signifier, the refrigerator, invoked a whole lifestyle characterized by the consumption of images rather than objects and a whole constellation of meanings encompassed by supermarkets, suburban homes, televisions, and the family automobile.⁴¹

Domestic appliances were thus a key signifier of consumer society. They were also iconic images in the Cold War struggle over representations of modernity and mass prosperity, as was made clear by the "kitchen debate" between Richard Nixon and Nikita Khrushchev, which took place at the American National Exhibition in Moscow 1959 amid the "labor-saving" appliances of a lemon-yellow General Electric kitchen. In the less confrontational international climate of "peaceful coexistence," vacuum cleaners, refrigerators, televisions, and other appliances staked a claim for the advanced nature of state socialism and its ability to benefit ordinary people.⁴² Both camps claimed that domestic technology could alleviate women's domestic drudgery and ascribed to it modernizing and liberating effects on the user, but the socialist bloc went further, claiming for it the power to promote a higher form of emancipation. In combination with expanded and improved services, appliances would help to free women from "kitchen slavery" for full self-realization in the public sphere, thereby enabling them to

become fully rounded individuals and ultimately hastening the advent of communism.⁴³ Shortly after Whirlpool's futuristic "Miracle Kitchen" was seen at the American Exhibition complete with robotic "maid," the women's magazine *Rabotnitsa* (Woman Worker) published a cartoon where a man presents his wife with a domestic robot, a "housework aggregate" (*domrabochii agregat*) (fig. 1.2). The caption established a direct relation between space exploration and the quality of women's life, ending: "A joke? No. Rockets are flying. . . . We promise that these dreams will also soon come true!" Appliances were rockets for housewives, a gift to women for managing their double burden, whereby they too would have their share of the Space Age.

<FIG. 1.2 ABOUT HERE>

A shift took place in the symbols, style, and mode of circulation of representations of the good life during the 1960s. Prosperity and abundance were no longer represented by the cornucopia or sheaf of corn but by a large streamlined refrigerator, overflowing with processed foods (fig. 1.3).⁴⁴ The technological modernization of the iconography of the good life was complemented by a shift from oil painting toward the mass-reproducible medium of photography, with its rhetoric of documentary truth, presentness, and modernity—one reason why Laktionov would not have been a good choice of visual professional to define the image of the new prosperity of the Soviet sixties. Household encyclopedias and manuals displayed the latest range of Soviet appliances attended by smiling, well-turned-out women in poses similar to the stance of "affectionate genuflexion" that Hamilton identified in Western advertising (although the differences should also be noted, the Soviet ones being less youthful and seductive and displaying less naked flesh) (fig. 1.4).⁴⁵ Such imagery offered new modern identities to Soviet women and new models of domesticity.

<FIG. 1.3 AND FIG. 1.4 ABOUT HERE>

A range of public discourses identified appliances in the home with cultured Soviet modernity and with social status. A satirical cartoon in a 1958 issue of *Krokodil* draws its humor and critical resonance from this context. It characterizes a corrupt manager as petit bourgeois by representing his

material attributes. His office is more like a boudoir than a workspace, complete with chandeliers, potted palms, gilt mirrors, ornate furniture, and heavy drapes, but also with a large curvilinear ZIL refrigerator and a Ruban television set (the prestigious brands are named in the accompanying text). The manager justifies filling his office with luxury consumer goods and home comforts by appropriating the terms of authoritative discourse; it is required by his status, he says, “to keep in step with life. Furthermore, it sets an example to others; it is visual agitation for the cultured way of life.” As a boss he is expected to be “an educator of good taste and good tone, a conductor of culture to the masses.”⁴⁶

That *Krokodil* could use the image of the refrigerator and television in this way (even if satirically) indicates that, however limited their actual penetration into homes in 1958, they had already accrued social meanings with broad enough currency among the magazine’s readership. These meanings exceeded (or even contradicted) the use value of the machines; they were signs of being modern and “cultured.” The cartoon also conveys acceptance of the idea that appliance acquisition was not a given; rather, it had to be modeled, advertised to others, to propagate the modern lifestyle—a point to which we return below.

Thus Soviet citizens were already living amid images of consumer goods and a corresponding lifestyle, which circulated even before the durables themselves entered their homes and daily routines. Even as public discourse and visual culture propagated a consumption morality based on self-restraint, moderation, and the satisfaction of “rational” needs, and warned against acquisitiveness and commodity fetishism, specialists acknowledged that the definition of “rational consumption” was not fixed for all time and that the boundary between luxury and necessity could shift. As the *Ekonomicheskaiia gazeta* reader above presented as a matter of course, consumer entitlement and rational consumption norms were dynamic; they would develop and become differentiated as the economy grew.⁴⁷ This potential for development had implications for two related sixties practices and new specialisms, more commonly identified with the capitalist West: market research—information gathering about consumer demand; and marketing—creating a need through design, image, branding, and associations with a desired

lifestyle.

The Soviet Brand: Professionalization of Industrial Design

The rhetorical connotations of appliances that were produced in public discourse—associating Soviet *byt* with Space Age science, progress, and abundance—were reinforced, in some cases, by their visual appearance. We turn here to what Van Doren would call the “millinery” aspect of design or “styling” of the external appearance of these commodities—the aspect to which so much attention was paid in the West in the long sixties.²

In the Soviet Union industrial design was in its infancy and the term *dizain* was not yet used except to refer to foreign practice. The socialist culture of goods was differentiated rhetorically from the capitalist along systemic lines similar to those drawn by Alloway, but with the valences inverted. Thus a 1965 article accused: “Knowing the psychology of the consumer and his tastes and moods, [Western] firms often create an illusory impression of high quality in their products by means of their corresponding ‘styling’ [ofornleniia].”⁴⁸ The purpose of styling, as of advertising, was to trick the consumer into buying unnecessary or poor-quality things, “speculating on his lack of expertise and human weakness.”⁴⁹ While capitalist commodities deceived and let one down, Soviet products were rational and transparent. Their surfaces could be trusted to reflect their substance with no sleight of hand. “*Soviet* means durable and reliable [prochnyii].”⁵⁰ This was the Soviet “brand.” And it seems to have been quite effective; in interviews in the mid-2000s many of my informants spoke of their Soviet appliances like trusty old friends, ascribing to them such characteristics as endurance and reliability, qualities they considered lacking in postsocialist goods.⁵¹

Market research began to occupy a range of Soviet specialists in the early 1960s, in association

² Van Doren, *Industrial Design*, 17.

with economic reformism (indeed, the 1965 article above was a survey of Western approaches to market research). Its purpose was also differentiated: while in capitalist countries studies of consumer demand were all directed toward stimulating profit, under socialism their purpose was to support central planning and enable production to meet popular requirements more efficiently. Moreover, this was to be achieved, not by “blindly following the consumer, but by educating his aesthetic taste.”⁵² Whereas in the West the vulgar excesses that Populuxe epitomized were the result of pandering to popular desire for luxury, in the Soviet Union marketing and product design had a pedagogical, enlightenment role to play in the formation of the conscious, all-round Soviet person, developing his or her rational and aesthetic faculties.

The aesthetics of machines also became a matter of concern among Soviet specialists by 1960 as part of a reengagement with international modernist issues. Architects, artists, engineers, and philosophers debated such questions as “Can a machine be a work of art?” The design journal *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo SSSR* (Decorative Art of the USSR), founded in 1957, published many an article on this issue, printing one discussion of machine aesthetics under a photograph of the Soviet limousine, the ZIL-111, complete with tailfins.⁵³ Specialists took great interest in contemporary design education (both in the West and in Eastern Europe), and in its history, including excavating the theory and practice of the Russian constructivists and VKhUTEMAS, and of the Bauhaus.⁵⁴ They lobbied for industrial design (although it was not yet called this) to be recognized as a distinct discipline requiring specialist training and central institutions that would bestow professional accreditation and control standards, and for aesthetic experts to be more involved in production and given greater authority in factories.⁵⁵

The emerging profession of Soviet design, or at least of its theoretical branch known as “technical aesthetics,” was institutionalized with the formation of the All-Union Institute of Technical Aesthetics (VNIITE) by a Council of Ministers decree of 28 April 1962.⁵⁶ Discussions about product design, production aesthetics, industrial graphics, and the professionalization of the visual world of goods also went on in artists’ organizations and government bodies.⁵⁷ The All-Union Institute of

Assortment of Light Industry (ViaLegProm), set up under Gosplan USSR in 1944, along with special design bureaux for “industrial aesthetics,” attended, in the late 1950s, to the branding (*markirovka*) of products and design of trademarks, packaging, and labels.⁵⁸ Foreign expertise on both sides of the Iron Curtain was also studied. In the socialist bloc, the German Democratic Republic was the acknowledged leader in branding, but Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary had other important lessons to teach.⁵⁹ So did the West. The growing foreign exchanges of experts that were a feature of the late 1950s included architects, designers, and design education specialists, for example from Britain’s Royal College of Art and Council of Industrial Design.⁶⁰ As Larissa Zakharova has also found with regard to Soviet fashion design in this period, the new professionals were anxious to prove themselves against international standards, which, for them, transcended the Cold War divide.⁶¹

Theoreticians of technical aesthetics also recognized the need to make appliances more attractive in appearance. Their stated reasons for attending to the aesthetics of appliances were system specific, based on Marxist materialist philosophy and on the close relation between ethical and aesthetic education in the formation of the future communist person. Attention to the aesthetics of the machine was not about selling goods through false claims to quality, nor about designing obsolescence so that the “panic for status” would force consumers to keep replacing their still functioning appliances. Rather, it was about enhancing the aesthetic level of the everyday material environment, for beauty would not only save the world but educate the new person and help bring about communism. A well-designed handle on a spade made possible the all-round person envisaged by Marx, able to labor manually in the morning yet play the violin in the evening.⁶² Domestic appliances had a specific role, for refrigerators or television sets would stand, permanently visible, in the home, and the aesthetics of the domestic interior were regarded as a major culture-building project of the Khrushchev era.⁶³

Rationality and honesty—moral principles—were key to the socialist aesthetic, just as they were to Western modernism. “What is the beauty of appliances?” asked *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo*. Reporting in 1962 on the public reception of an exhibition of domestic appliances at VDNKh (the All-Union

Exhibition of Economic Achievements), it distinguished among Soviet refrigerators on aesthetic grounds: the compact model, Sever', produced by the Moscow Gas Appliances factory; the Ukraina from Kiev, with its "convenient smooth external surface"; and "the famous Oka, object of many housewives' dreams." "But the greatest number of visitors are around the rotating stand of an apartment interior, in whose kitchen a wall-mounted refrigerator of the ZIL brand is installed. Here lies perhaps the answer to the question about the beauty of consumer goods. They should be maximally fit for purpose and minimally obtrusive."⁶⁴ A simple, modest, but commodious rectilinear box, the latest model of ZIL best answered this rationalist demand that form should follow function, with none of the redundant, attention-grabbing elaborations essential to Populuxe.⁶⁵

The design of domestic appliances as well as of industrial machines was regularly discussed in VNIITE's specialist journal *Tekhnicheskaiia estetika* (Technical Aesthetics) (fig. 1.5). Typically, a 1965 report—presenting research conducted by VNIITE on Soviet-made vacuum cleaners—treated Soviet designs as part of an international continuum in which the merits of indigenous products were considered alongside those of foreign brands such as the Siemens Rapid (West Germany) or the British Electrolux.⁶⁶

<FIG. 1.5 ABOUT HERE>

But not all was well in the kingdom of Soviet appliance production. The 1962 report in *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo* complained of the anachronistic form of some consumer durables, while a 1965 VNIITE study found problems in existing practice and identified contradictions in Soviet planning and production. It criticized the state standard (GOST) for vacuum cleaners for ignoring the basic requirements of technical aesthetics as well as other specifications that represented the "best world standards."⁶⁷ VNIITE also addressed matters of styling.⁶⁸ For styling and semiotics were not entirely absent from Soviet appliances, in spite of the continued insistence among aesthetic reformers that the guiding principles of the socialist manufactured object were rationality, economy, and fitness for purpose. Space iconography was widely used to represent the future of the Soviet home. As the

punchline of the *Rabotnitsa* cartoon exemplified, domestic “woman-operated technology” to “help women” manage their domestic burden was associated metaphorically with the dream of space flight and its triumphant realization. The association between successes in space and on the home front was established through the styling as well as the naming of appliances. A woman could have her slice of the glories of the space age as she cleaned her home with a vacuum cleaner styled and named after a rocket (Raketa) or a planet (Saturnas) (fig. 1.6). Other appliances used the trope of harnessing nature’s power, such as the vacuum cleaner Vikhr’ (Whirlwind) or the refrigerators Sever’ (North) and Sibir’ (Siberia).⁶⁹ The ZIL, Rolls Royce of refrigerators, needed only to refer to the factory where it was produced.⁷⁰

<FIG. 1.6 ABOUT HERE>

There was a contradiction, however. Although the new ZIL model praised in 1962 had gone rectilinear and rational, many Soviet fridges—such as the ZIL featured in the glossy multivolume *Tovarnyi slovar’* (Trade Dictionary) just the previous year—were still streamlined, a style intimately identified with American capitalism since the 1930s and possibly appropriated from the United States at that time along with the refrigeration technology. Presented like a royal portrait, with a red carpet and plush curtains drawn back to unveil it, the bulbous fridge represented luxury and plenty with its applied aluminum script and a large handle that metaphorically equated its door with that of a car.⁷¹ Other, lesser fridges also reproduced this streamlined style until the midsixties. Thus this stylistic materialization of capitalism entered millions of Soviet citizens’ homes and found a place in their daily routines, caressed and cared for every day. If material things shape consciousness, Soviet consumers received a dose of capitalist relations every time they opened the fridge door or ingested its contents.

VNIITE turned its critical scrutiny on such contradictions. The form of some Soviet vacuum cleaners demonstrated that “their creators strove to achieve a purely external similarity with their name” without reference to their functions and mechanisms. The “plastic” (sculptural) treatment of the Raketa imitated the form of a rocket, while the external detailing and body of the Chaika (Seagull) conveyed the

idea of flight and dynamism; yet speed was hardly one of the salient properties of vacuum cleaners!³

VNIITE was not amused by such playful excesses. “The wholly unjustified styling [lit. ‘form-creation’] in the production of such functional domestic appliances as vacuum cleaners leads to excessive expenditure of materials and complicates the technology of production. Thus nearly eight tons of metal a year are expended on the arrow-shaped decorations applied to the body of the Chaika.”⁷² The point of VNIITE’s study was to impose rationalist, modernist principles and good taste. It condemned streamlining, and styling in general, on modernist, rational grounds. These norms corresponded to the moral-economic repudiation of excess and superficial aesthetic flourishes launched by Khrushchev in 1954 with regard to Stalinist architecture and extended by reformist aesthetic experts to all aspects of the material environment.⁷³ The beauty of socialist machines resided in a transparent relation between form and function.

In the capitalist West, the report emphasized, superficial differences between products enabled consumer goods to function as markers of distinction and social stratification. Yet in the Soviet Union, too, the range of vacuum cleaners currently in production was “irrationally large,” according to the report, because it was not justified by any substantive differences among the available products. In their construction, mechanisms, and technical specifications there was little to distinguish the Buran (Snowstorm), Vikhr, Raketa, and Chaika. These models produced by different enterprises were set apart only by small variations in their external appearance. In the state socialist planned economy there was little point in competition between these brands, VNIITE admonished, since it merely wasted resources. Recommending rationalization, the VNIITE report rejected the play of difference and denied the importance of semiotics, fundamental to marketing in the West, which lay precisely in such

³ This may show awareness of Western critiques of streamlining, which Van Doren presented in order to repudiate: “‘Why,’ some critics say, ‘should static objects be streamlines? Ridiculous!’” *Industrial Design*, 196.

distinctions.⁴

Such criticisms reveal tensions between different agencies and authorities responsible for durables production, indicating a split between intelligentsia theorists, working in central research institutes, and practitioners on the ground, dealing with localized situations in individual enterprises, and between aesthetic specialists and managers or trade specialists. The latter were concerned above all with fulfilling the plan and—following the Kosygin reforms of 1965—with turnover. Although VNIITE rhetorically identified its rationalist arguments with the superiority of socialist over capitalist goods, they were not unique to socialism. In the West, too, culturally powerful lobbies objected strongly to streamlining and Populuxe. Represented by the Council of Industrial Design in Great Britain and the Museum of Modern Art in the USA, they struggled for modernist good taste against what they saw as the excess, kitsch, and vulgarity of mass consumerism.⁷⁴ They, too, like the Soviet modernizers of the material environment, sought to define and propagate principles of “good design” and for similar reasons: to raise the level of popular taste and educate the masses to appreciate what the experts appreciated. Both rested on a kind of environmental determinism: the belief that good design improved users, while bad design corrupted not only their taste but also their morals. So the modernizers on both sides of the Iron Curtain had more in common with each other than with the peddlers of Populuxe.

Yet the very fact that styling already existed in Soviet production—even to be critiqued—requires explanation. Causes may include “uncritical assimilation” of foreign models, as well as tensions between blueprint and practice on the ground and the limits of the aesthetic specialists’ authority.⁷⁵ In addition we need to know more about the work of designers embedded in enterprises, about the system of bonuses for bosses, including in defense sector enterprises, and about the implementation of Aleksei

⁴ Tomas Maldonado, future president of the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID), had similarly proposed in 1961 that Soviet design had a potential advantage over that under capitalism; free from the framework of competition and the priority of merchandizing, it could address other tasks neglected in the West. Tomas Maldonado (1961), cited by Kenneth Frampton, “The Development of a Critical Theory,” in *Ulm Design: The Morality of Objects*, ed. Herbert Lindinger (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1991) 152. With thanks to Thomas Cubbin.

Kosygin's reforms in regard to appliance design and production.⁷⁶ As these reforms raised the importance, in assessing performance, of turnover rather than fulfillment of the production plan, factory bosses also had to get consumers to buy the goods. Thus we should also consider the role of the Soviet consumer and her "consumption junctions," to use Ruth Schwartz Cowan's term for the conjunction of conditions in which choices between competing technologies are made. Even though, under state socialism, resources were planned and allocated centrally, decisions about consumption were taken by individuals in their specific, located circumstances, in ways that eluded central planning.⁷⁷ In the USSR, too, it was not only specialists and elites who made the sixties, but also mass consumers.

Creating a Need, Producing Consumers

In the West the styling and allure of commodities was about creating a market, producing consumers to fit the product, and perpetually stimulating demand through "panic for status."⁷⁸ Could there possibly be any such image culture in the Soviet sixties? Surely it was neither necessary nor desirable in the socialist shortage economy; nor was the semiotics of social stratification through consumption to be encouraged?⁷⁹

The circulation of images of the technologically saturated Soviet home and the modern Soviet *khoziaika* (housewife) operating domestic machines can certainly be explained by other reasons, including the demands of ideology and national prestige and their role in the Cold War competition over images of modernity. For the purpose of the Soviet Union's international standing it might suffice, however, to project the *image* of a Soviet appliance-enhanced lifestyle without necessarily investing in substantiating it on a mass scale: the "logic of models" that characterized Stalin-era consumer culture might continue undisturbed.⁸⁰

However, the post-Stalin regime was also committed to achieving the actual penetration of technology into the homes of the masses as part of the project of achieving abundance and building

communism in a period characterized by the party as one of “scientific-technological revolution.” The mechanization of all forms of labor was part of the Soviet state’s modernizing agenda. Appliance use in the home would develop scientific consciousness and free up women’s time and energy for productive labor and social work.⁸¹ That the penetration of technology was a priority is confirmed by investment in its production (even if inadequate) and by the assignment of production capacity in the military-defense sector to this effort.

This agenda—to get technology into everyday life—might explain increased production norms for appliances. But what need could there be in a shortage economy to promote the sale of consumer durables? If the things were produced and properly distributed, wouldn’t they sell themselves? Why should design matter in what is assumed to have been a seller’s market? Why should Soviet enterprises take the trouble and resources to brand and advertise their products? And why the range of product names, packaging, and logos? With regard to appliances, can the Cold War binaries have blinded us to a reason similar to the role of advertising in the West: the creation of a market? The production of needs is a question that is not usually asked in the Soviet context. Western commentators on the Soviet Union have traditionally focused on problems of shortage and failure to satisfy demand for consumer goods.⁸² Like all consumer goods, domestic appliances were in short supply, hard to get hold of, and expensive. This was a shortage economy, and there could be no cause to cultivate the consumer or even to study demand and consumer psychology when state production capacity was unable even to meet existing needs.

As noted, however, while consumption within rational norms (that is, within limits attainable on a mass scale in the current state of production) was promoted, these norms were conceived as dynamic. Soviet economic theorists envisaged that, as the national economy grew, so would the population’s rational needs and legitimate demands. The growth in demand for new types of goods, for higher-quality and more expensive consumer durables, was thus an important index of progress.⁸³ But in the early to mid-1960s appliances were unfamiliar and costly commodities in a culture where people possessed few

manufactured goods and were only just emerging from what Goldman calls a “loaf-to-loaf existence.” If it mattered to get technology into citizens’ homes, it was necessary to persuade them to part with their small but increasing disposable income and to become consumers of these things.

The shortage paradigm assumes a permanent seller’s market. There are indications, however, that Soviet economists did not share this confidence. Measures were introduced to stimulate demand for high-end durables. As early as 1959 the credit system for higher-priced goods was expanded to help make appliance acquisition possible.⁸⁴ Consumer behavior was also changing, as economists noted: some emerging elements of a buyers’ market were observed as early as 1960, including shoppers’ strikes and accumulations in warehouses of unwanted goods.⁸⁵ This situation engendered—or legitimated—new concern with studying consumer demand and with promotion and advertising, especially of expensive goods.⁸⁶ The so-called “Lieberman economic reforms,” discussed during the Thaw and introduced in part by Kosygin, after Khrushchev’s ouster, proposed to make production more directly answerable and responsive to demand and thereby to make the consumer an agent in the rationalization and modernization of consumer goods production.⁸⁷ While terms such as *market forces* had to be tactfully avoided by using euphemisms such as *commodity-money relations*, already by the early to mid-1960s a more prominent role was ascribed to consumers and their choices as a driver of production, at the level of both planning (quantities and assortment) and design, and the 1965 reforms made turnover and profitability a performance indicator of enterprises.⁸⁸

Significantly, VNIITE’s first research projects included a market survey of domestic appliances (in collaboration with *Komsomol’skaia pravda*’s Institute of Public Opinion Research). It gathered and analyzed consumer opinions on small electrical appliances such as radios, televisions, and vacuum cleaners, attending particularly to the external appearance rather than the technical specifications.⁸⁹ An institute specifically dedicated to market research, the All-Union Scientific Research Institute for the Study of the Population’s Demand for Consumer Goods and Market Prices (*koniunktura*) for Trade (or VNIKS) was also established in 1965 under the USSR Ministry of Trade. This was a sixties institution

par excellence, existing only from 1966 to 1972 and falling from favor after 1968, discredited along with the Kosygin reforms by association with the Prague Spring.⁹⁰

The shortage paradigm also assumes that the need for appliances was already there, fully formed, and lurking unsatisfied: a “pent-up demand” as Goldman put it.⁹¹ But that demand had first to be *produced*. The history of technology demonstrates that to achieve penetration a technology must not only be available but become necessary; a need must be created, whether for a luxury status symbol, or for a normal element of modern urban living. Appliances, like all technologies, are cultural artifacts, embedded in practices, habitus, attitudes, moral economies, and the circulation of images and meanings.⁹² A range of values, often unconsciously held, come into play that might support acquisition or resist it: aspirations to modernity and attachment to novelty or resistance to change; notions of thrift and proper housewifery, gender roles and identities; desire for distinction or fear of standing out; culinary practices and ideas of national specificity; or handed-down perceptions of the physical effort required for a good wash.⁹³ A need for consumer durables was not an inevitable consequence determined by the possibility of that technology; it required also a cultural shift. As in the West, advertising and design had an acknowledged function to increase turnover, especially of higher-end goods.⁹⁴ Was styling also a means to embed the need for appliances by making the commodity an advertisement for itself?⁹⁵

Becoming Consumers

In the USSR appliances came, in the course of the long 1960s, to be regarded as a normal need and even an entitlement. My informants’ narratives of their appliance consumption in the decade following their move to new apartments around 1959–64 indicate how, at varying rates, refrigerators and washing machines came to seem first desirable, then normal, and were later upgraded or duplicated. But we shall look at two cases that show that this was no “whiggish inexorable succession of technologies”; it had to

overcome resistance on various grounds.⁹⁶

Ivan (b. 1910), a former army officer (and as such, relatively well off and enjoying privileged access to goods), had lived in Ukraine for two years before moving to Kaluga, where he and his wife received a separate apartment around 1960–61 in a block for officers. He tells the story of acquiring their first refrigerator, a ZIL:

That was when I was still serving in the army. There was this officer from Moscow who went on leave. I say to him, “You know what—bring me back a refrigerator.” That was in 1957. In January he came back from leave and sent it by rail. So . . . he arrived and we received it. Nobody had one yet in the town. They said, “Well, what do you need that for?” That was when we were in the Ukraine, it is hot there after all. I tell them what it is for, but it was winter, January. But then they saw what it was [he laughs] and started buying [them]. They also began—to buy, that is.

The year 1957, when Ivan ordered his refrigerator, was early in the history of Soviet appliance dissemination. Domestic refrigerators were hard to get hold of and in short supply, but it would be wrong to explain this difficulty entirely as a matter of “pent-up need.” Even though the summers were hot in this Ukrainian town, there was no preexisting consciousness of a need for such equipment, according to Ivan. People continued to use the preindustrial cooling methods they were accustomed to, such as standing jars in cold water in the bathtub, or using deep cellars and the cavity between the external and internal walls or windowpanes (fig. 1.7).⁹⁷ Ivan’s purchase was met with bafflement. However, exposure to this technology taught other residents to want refrigerators too.

<FIG. 1.7 ABOUT HERE>

Ivan played the role of a vanguard of demand. It is not perhaps coincidental that he was a military officer, implying a status and obligations similar to those of a party activist or Komsomol member. Just as the army and military-industrial complex (where most appliances were in fact produced) were a technological, modernizing force, Ivan saw himself as having a social duty to carry the torch of modernization.⁹⁸

Statistics showing increasing penetration of appliances are corroborated in my informants’ “consumption biographies,” which also tell us how they experienced the material changes in their everyday lives and how these corresponded to changes in their sense of themselves. Their stories mark a

shift—for which, as in Western Europe, the sixties are the decisive decade—from what Goldman calls “loaf-to-loaf” existence to the accumulation and replacement of appliances and other consumer durables, even before they are used up. Lewis Siegelbaum cites the prediction of writer Leonid Likhodeev: “Do you have a TV, do you have a refrigerator? So there will be a car.”⁹⁹ My informants shared in this collective **ascent** of the Soviet consumer. One Kaluga woman tells about how she used to have only just enough money to pay for food on a day-by-day basis. In the course of the sixties, after moving into a new apartment, she, like many others, began to acquire appliances, starting with a television, then graduating to a vacuum cleaner, a refrigerator, a washing machine, a tape recorder, and, by the 1970s, a car.¹⁰⁰ Changing conceptions of what is necessary and what is excessive or extravagant luxury, which emerge clearly in my informants’ accounts from their first appliance acquisition to the replacement, upgrading, and duplication of appliances, mark the passage toward a consumer culture.

The process was not, however, as inexorable as Likhodeev suggested, as if the first bite of the apple of appliance consumption “led” inevitably to further purchases. Once again the question “Who made the sixties?” requires us to consider the agency of the individual consumer and the nexus of conditions at the consumption junction. The acquisition of appliances remained a matter of choices and household priorities about how to dispose income or whether to cross moral or legal lines.¹⁰¹ These choices began with the decision to prioritize the home over other spaces and objects of consumption, a choice that was conventionally gendered. Aleksandra, for example, tells how she had to make the down payment on their cooperative apartment behind her husband’s back because he wanted to save up for a car.

Many of my interviewees recall their appliance consumption junctions in precise detail. Affordability and availability—price, spending power, and production levels—were clearly important considerations here, as were quality and benefit to their everyday lives. Legislation, sumptuary taxation or pricing categories, and the designation of certain goods as eligible for purchase on credit—all means by which the state sought to direct the consumption junction—also contributed to whether or when

people would buy appliances and what they meant in the system of things (including whether they counted as luxuries or necessities).¹⁰² But there were also social and cultural or ideological reasons why some technologies took hold faster than others and why some were never fully assimilated.¹⁰³

While appliances entered the vocabulary and iconography of modern Soviet living, the line between legitimate needs and excessive desires was still contested in the Soviet sixties. In the 1950s, appliances had the aura of luxury (as we saw, as late as 1961, *Tovarnyi slovar'* was presenting the refrigerator as a VIP, giving it the red carpet treatment and associating it with a preindustrial luxury commodity, rugs).¹⁰⁴ During the long sixties its status slid from luxury to necessity, as the boundary between reasonable and excessive demands, rational and superfluous technologies, shifted, reflecting, in part, changes in the capacity of production.¹⁰⁵ That boundary remained uncertain, however, especially among older people. The elements of an emergent consumer culture were still in tension, in the 1960s, with pre-consumer society's handed-down sumptuary morality and valued practices of thrift, and with the intelligentsia's disdain for material comfort.¹⁰⁶ The sixties were a watershed, a period of struggle and negotiation between old and new cultures of consumption. My informants today often reveal continued adherence to aspects of pre-affluent society's morality of consumption, contrasting their own thrift and nonacquisitiveness favorably with that of a daughter-in-law representing the postsocialist present. In the 1960s, however, it was they who represented the young generation of new homemakers and fledgling consumers.

Technology choices were also a matter of gender and generational power relations within the household, subject to negotiations and power struggles over priorities. The acquisition of a television set was seen as a purchase for the household as a whole. Informants often say they got it "for the old people" or for the children.¹⁰⁷ Although most women in the Soviet Union worked and contributed to the household income, battles arose between the sexes and between generations over the choice of technology, and these revealed shifting attitudes toward appliance consumption. Rima, in Kazan', tells of how she and her husband came into conflict with the older generation, her parents-in-law, who lived

in the same apartment. The younger couple wanted to buy labor-saving appliances. She relates her run-ins with her mother-in-law over the purchase of a vacuum cleaner, a relatively inexpensive and accessible appliance.

Did you have a vacuum cleaner?

Not yet at that time. No. . . . We only bought one probably in the seventies. What did we buy it for first? We began to redecorate the apartment ourselves. And it was inconvenient to use brushes, it takes a long time to paint, to whitewash. But we were told that it worked well to do it with a vacuum cleaner. And we bought a spherical vacuum cleaner. I think we also got that from Moscow, you couldn't get them here. And then we started to vacuum-clean. I remember there was a whole row over it here—that a woman doesn't work and goes and buys a vacuum cleaner to boot. That it is, after all, meant to save women's labor.¹⁰⁸

Gender ideology (including a normative conception that good housekeeping, industriousness, and thrift are essential qualities of a good woman), generational differences, and resistance to the use of household finances to alleviate the younger woman's domestic labor played a part in this conflict. Although Rima worked, her mother-in-law evidently regarded her as spoiled and lazy and, in spite of widely circulating representations, also considered a vacuum cleaner unwarranted luxury rather than a necessary aid for a working woman. When they finally bought a vacuum cleaner in the 1970s it was already a "normal" item of Soviet household inventories, even if not yet readily available outside the metropolis. Even then, the primary purpose of the purchase was not to "save her domestic labor," in accordance with public discourse's rhetoric of liberating women from drudgery—meanings that Rima and her mother-in-law were evidently aware of—but to spray-paint the walls (a common use for Soviet vacuum cleaners but one that was scripted out in the West as the technology stabilized.)

The purchase of a washing machine also met with resistance. They first bought a Volga 7, a cylindrical model (fig. 1.8). It wasn't exactly conducive to laziness: "You had to heat the water, then pour it in." But her mother-in-law objected: "She can do the wash herself, why does she need a washing machine?" Rima's story demonstrates the clash between the values of two generations within a single household. Rima and her husband desired a modern lifestyle with novelties and gadgets and new technologies, but "The old people wouldn't allow anything then. . . . We tried, if some novelty appeared, to buy it. Even if it was very difficult. If we had lived separately of course it would have been better. We

could have bought anything. But as it was we had to ask permission. And she [mother-in-law] wouldn't agree. For whatever reason they were always opposed."

<FIG. 1.8 ABOUT HERE>

Moreover, the benefits of a washing machine were not convincing.¹⁰⁹ Ivan and his wife, although early persuaded of the need for a refrigerator, were more skeptical about the washing machine. It was she who resisted it. "Well, after all, that also involved manual labor, to wring it out is heavy." Ivan adds: "She kept refusing: 'Why? I'll do it all by hand.' But we said that it was necessary to make the transition [*perekhodit'*, i.e. to technology]." Ivan and his wife were not afraid of being seen as conspicuous consumers, as the refrigerator story above reveals; on the contrary, they seem to have enjoyed their status as the vanguard of modern consumption. His wife's resistance was at least to some extent due to the limitations of early Soviet washing machines and the quality of the wash; it was questionable how much or what kind of labor they saved, as they still had to be manually filled and drained of water and the heaviest part still had to be done by hand. Was the labor it saved even worth the space it took up in the small apartment?¹¹⁰ Asked whether the manual wringer washing machine was convenient, Ivan's wife replies: "No. But we were young then and I was more or less healthy, so of course I was happy." More recently, however, they had replaced their old machine by a fully automatic one that did the whole process.

If it mattered to enterprises and state authorities to get appliances into people's lives and homes, then individuals had to be encouraged to choose technology. The adoption of technology by individual Soviet consumers was not a matter of pent-up need or inexorable progress determined by technological and scientific advances. Demand was produced in part through the actions and policies of the state's agents: through the development and increased production of technologies for the home, through their increased presence in everyday life, and through their representation in public culture as an inalienable attribute of the modern Soviet person, a necessity rather than a luxury. Did styling and branding also play a part in producing these meanings and overcoming resistance? Did refrigerators and vacuum cleaners perhaps

need to change their image and become more functional and less luxurious in appearance before people like Rima's mother-in-law could be persuaded to adopt them? Did design professionals acknowledge this as part of their brief? Were appliances in the Soviet context just tools and nothing more, or was their primary function semiotic? If we can answer these questions we can begin both to define the role of the modern industrial design in the USSR and to calibrate the Soviet transformation, somewhere between the 1960s and the 1980s, into a consumer culture and to answer the question "Who made the Soviet sixties?"

Published representations and oral history provide plentiful indications that appliance consumption carried social meanings. As noted, the styling of vacuum cleaners, identifying them with the Space Age, or that of refrigerators, associating them with automobiles, suggests that semiosis was not irrelevant, even in the planned economy. The currency of appliances as signs of status, affluence, or pull—even if they failed to fulfill their nominal function—was also part of contemporary visual culture. A cartoon in *Krokodil* showed a refrigerator on a balcony in the snow, pointing to its redundancy: it added nothing to the natural chilling effect of winter weather. Its only function was for show: it had been installed on the balcony to maximize its display and status value.

From the point of view of state authorities and specialist agents (ideologues and image makers), household technologies were a necessary part of the image of modernity and prosperity. The reasons citizens might have for deciding to purchase a fridge may partly have coincided with these authoritative ones: it was seen as part of a modern lifestyle, conferring the social status associated with urbanity, and saving labor by making it no longer necessary to shop every day for perishables. But fridges also had other, demotic meanings in excess of these official ones. They were part of the coping strategies for surviving the vagaries of distribution, thus cushioning households against the lapses of the state and giving them greater control over their food supply by allowing them to buy perishables in bulk if they appeared on sale and to store privately grown produce.¹¹¹ Reasons for buying appliances also varied according to status, education, income, and geography, and they changed in the course of the 1960s to

the 1980s as Soviet consumer culture established itself. Desire for domestic technology still marked Rima, in the older generation's eyes, as lazy, selfish, and hankering after unwarranted luxury. But for Ivan, his Moscow refrigerator was associated with his social status as an officer and with his sense of himself as a force for progress and innovation; it represented his self-identification with the public values of the modernizing state. The corrupt, acquisitive factory manager lampooned in the *Krokodil* cartoon above also invoked appliances' positive associations with modernity, culturedness, and social leadership to justify his accumulation of the latest consumer durables. For Rima's generation (or some of them) machines in the home represented convenience but also novelty, sensation, and status and projected their sense of themselves as resourceful, innovative, and modern. One novelty Rima and her husband did manage to get past the older generation was a television set. Not content with merely possessing a TV, they found a way to adapt it to watch in color, to the envy of their neighbors. Typically, this novelty had to be hunted down in Moscow and involved technical know-how; a kind of film of the same format as the screen had to be installed inside the set, which had then to be reassembled and retuned. But it was worth it: all their friends would come to their apartment to watch. "It caused a real sensation."¹¹²

Values, status, and social distinctions attached to having appliances in general, but some were more equal than others. Informants retrospectively identify certain types and brands of appliances as having been more "prestigious"—a Maiak record player, for example.¹¹³ Certain technologies such as washing machines—expensive and hard to get—remained a sign of social status into the 1970s and also marked urban/rural distinctions.¹¹⁴ In the early 1960s the acquisition was a first, but subsequently my informants began to replace their first models by newer or better ones. As they grew more prosperous and as appliances became more "normal" they drew finer distinctions, of the sort VNIITE would have dismissed as "irrational." Refrigerators were particularly important because of their large visual presence in the home, and certain brands were especially desirable, not solely because of their functional qualities and reliability, but also because of their appearance and social image. Nina D., trying to recall

the name of her first refrigerator, dismissed the interviewer's suggestion that it might have been a ZIL, the beauty queen of Soviet refrigerators according to the 1962 report on the aesthetics of appliances cited above: "No that wasn't for the likes of us."¹¹⁵ The fine superficial distinctions between brands, which VNIITE criticized as irrational in a planned economy, had become markers of social stratification.

To return to my initial question, then: Laktionov would probably have been the wrong choice of artist to commission for a sixties update of his domestic interior. A photographer or graphic designer would have been more in line with emerging tendencies in Soviet visual culture, with its emphasis on technological modernity. The style would also lack Hamilton's playful identification with the visual techniques of mass entertainment, advertising, and media, favoring rather the impression of sober documentary truth.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, some at least of the same symbols of Tomorrow would be bound to appear in a Soviet sixties version: the television and vacuum cleaner, joined perhaps by a ZIL refrigerator. Two decades later, it would include not one but two: an old curvilinear cream model, purchased in the 1960s, placed on top of a new, self-defrosting model (fig. 1.9).¹¹⁷

<FIG. 1.9 ABOUT HERE>

Chapter 1

1. CPSU Central Committee and Council of Ministers Decree, “O razvitii zhilishchnogo stroitel'stva v SSSR (31 July 1957),” *Arkhitektura SSSR*, no. 9 (1957): 1–6; N. S. Khrushchev, *O kontrol'nykh tsifrakh razvitiia narodnogo khoziaistva SSSR na 1959–1965 gody* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1959), 50–59.
2. I. Izbarov, “Stoit podumat’!,” *Izvestiia*, 26 July 1959; M. Aleksandrov, “Kto voz'metsia eto delat'?” *Izvestiia*, 19 July 1959.
3. *This Is Tomorrow* was a multimedia exhibition about art as a cultural process, conceived by Theo Crosby. On the Independent Group, see Anne Massey, *The Independent Group: Modernism and Mass Culture in Britain, 1945–59* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); David Robbins, ed., *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990).
4. J. B. Priestley, *Journey Down a Rainbow* (London: Heinemann-Cresset, 1955), 51.
5. Richard Hamilton, *Collected Words, 1953–82* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), 28; William R. Kaizen, “Richard Hamilton’s Tabular Image,” *October* 94 (Autumn 2000): 113–28.
6. Cf. Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c. 1958–c. 1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London: Pimlico, 2007), 338; Gian Piero Piretto, *1961: Il Sessantotto a Mosca* (Bergamo: Moretti e Vitali, 1998); Petr Vail’ and Aleksandr Genis, *60-e: Mir sovetskogo cheloveka* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1988). Alongside affluence, youth style, and consumerism, there are, of course, darker sides to the sixties, including mass population movements and rising racial tensions, as well as innovations in social organization and social movements. Marwick divides the “long 1960s” into three distinct subperiods, and in the Soviet case too there is good reason to treat 1968 as a turning point marking significant cultural changes.
7. *Admass* designated “the whole system of an increasing productivity, plus inflation, plus a rising

standard of material living, plus high-pressure advertising and salesmanship, plus mass communications, plus cultural democracy and the creation of the mass mind, the mass man.”

Priestley, *Journey Down a Rainbow*, 51; Humphrey McQueen, *The Essence of Capitalism: The Origins of Our Future* (London: Black Rose Books, 2003), viii.

8. C. Wright Mills, “The Man in the Middle,” *Industrial Design* 5, no. 11 (November 1958): 70, 72.
9. Thomas Hine, *Populuxe* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), repr. in *The Design History Reader*, ed. R. Houze and G. Lees-Maffei (Oxford: Berg, 2010), 152.
10. Hine, *Populuxe*, 152; selection from Dick Hebdige, “Object as Image: The Italian Scooter Cycle,” *Block 5* (1981): 44–64, repr. in Houze and Maffei, *Design History Reader*, 309; Daniel Boorstin, *The Image, or, What Happened to the American Dream* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1961); Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (London: Longman, 1957).
11. Hebdige, “Object as Image,” 312; Mike Featherstone, “Postmodernism and the Aestheticization of Everyday Life,” in *Modernity and Identity*, ed. S. Lash and J. Friedman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 265–90.
12. Hine, *Populuxe*, 152. Design in the West had moved beyond the Populuxe aesthetic by the mid-1960s, but the emphasis on image remained.
13. Hebdige, “Object as Image,” 309. C. Wright Mills critically defined the new designer’s task: “By brand and trademark, slogan and package, color and form, he gives the commodity a fictitious individuality . . . confusing the consumer’s choice and banalizing her sensibilities.” Mills, “Man in the Middle,” 73.
14. Hebdige, “Object as Image,” 309–10.
15. Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 1996); Colin Campbell, “The Sociology of Consumption,” in *Acknowledging Consumption*, ed. Daniel Miller (London: Routledge, 1995), 103–4.
16. The redundancy of images is epitomized by Charles and Ray Eames’s multiscreen display *Glimpses*

of the USA at the American National Exhibition in Moscow. See Beatriz Colomina, *Domesticity at War* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 245ff.

17. Lawrence Alloway, "USSR at Earl's Court: The Image," *Design* 154 (October 1961): 44–46. Like Hamilton, Alloway (1926–90), was a member of the Independent Group. He was author of an important study of Pop Art: *American Pop Art* (New York: Macmillan, 1974).
18. Alloway, "USSR at Earl's Court," 44–46.
19. Ibid., 45; Frederick C. Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive: The Role of Cultural Diplomacy in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 88.
20. Soviet goods also lacked style and perfection of surface, according to another British design commentator, the industrial designer Frank Ashford, who described the display at Earl's Court as a "chaotic collection of poorly designed and, on the whole, badly produced articles." Frank Ashford, "USSR at Earl's Court: Products," *Design* 154 (October 1961): 47–49. See also Adrian Forty, *Objects of Desire: Design and Society since 1750* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995).
21. Photographs and surviving objects indicate some justification. Eastern Europeans, even sympathetic ones, also found Soviet consumer goods backward, poor quality, and lacking in taste. Report from representative of VOKS, Kuzmenko, "On Shortcomings of 'Moscow' Pavilion at Second Budapest Fair of Local Industries," 3 May 1958, in RGANI (Russian State Archive of Contemporary History), f. 5, op. 43, d. 23, ll. 66–68.
22. Lora Uinslou [Laura Winslow], "Novoe primeneniye plastmass," *Amerika*, no. 48 (n.d.): 50–51; Stephen Phillips, "Plastics," in *Cold War Hothouses: Inventing Postwar Culture, from Cockpit to Playboy*, ed. Beatriz Colomina, Annmarie Brennan, and Jeannie Kim (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004), 91–123; Raphaele Saint-Pierre, "Happiness in French Houses of the Fifties," in *Constructed Happiness: Domestic Environment in the Cold War Era*, ed. Mart Kalm and Ingrid Ruudi (Tallinn: Estonian Academy of Arts, 2005), 130–43.
23. Experimental plastic house, 15 Shepeliuginskaia Street, Moscow, designed by the Institute of

- Plastics and Mosproekt, 1958: photograph M. Churakov, 1963, Shchusev Museum of Architecture, Moscow; Marietta Shaginian, *Zarubezhnye pis'ma* (1964; repr., Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1977), 80–82.
24. On the contemporary style, see Iurii Gerchuk, “The Aesthetics of Everyday Life in the Khrushchev Thaw in the USSR (1954–64),” in *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe*, ed. Susan E. Reid and David Crowley (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 81–100; Susan E. Reid, “Destalinization and Taste, 1953–63,” *Journal of Design History* 10, no. 21 (1997): 177–202; Susan E. Reid, “Communist Comfort: Socialist Modernism and the Making of Cosy Homes in the Khrushchev-Era Soviet Union,” *Gender and History* 21, no. 3 (2009): 465–98.
25. Khrushchev’s December 1954 condemnation of architectural “excesses” (*izlishestva*) and “building that was only for looking at” initially associated these faults with Stalinist practice but their repudiation was extended into a general principle. N. S. Khrushchev, *O shirokom vnedrenii industrial'nykh metodov, uluchshenii kachestva i snizhenii stoimosti stroitel'stva . . . , 7 dekabria 1954 g.* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1955). On the status of fashion, see Larissa Zakharova, “Dior in Moscow: A Taste for Luxury in Soviet Fashion under Khrushchev,” in *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc*, ed. David Crowley and Susan E. Reid (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010), 95–119.
26. Ferenc Fehér, Agnes Heller, and György Márkus, *Dictatorship over Needs* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983). For the ascription of ideology to technologies and materials, see Langdon Winner, “Do Artefacts Have Politics?” (1980), in *The Social Shaping of Technology*, ed. D. McKenzie and J. Wajcman (London: Open University Press, 1985); Ray Stokes, “Plastics and the New Society,” in Reid and Crowley, *Style and Socialism*, 65–80, and “In Search of the Socialist Artefact: Technology and Ideology in East Germany, 1945–1962,” *German History* 15, no. 2 (1997): 221–39; Adrian Forty, “Cold War Concrete,” in Kalm and Ruudi, *Constructed Happiness*, 28–45. On mentalities and practices associated with Soviet goods, see essays by Ol'ga Gurova, Galina Orlova, Ekaterina

- Gerasimova, and Sof'ia Chuikina, anthologized and translated in *Russian Studies in History* 48, no. 1 (2009). On efforts to define “socialist things” in the 1920s, see Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).
27. See Susan E. Reid, “The Soviet Pavilion at Brussels ’58: Convergence, Conversion, Critical Assimilation, or Transculturation?” (Working Paper No. 62, Cold War International History Project, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, DC, December 2010).
28. For further discussion, see Susan E. Reid, “Khrushchev Modern,” *Cahiers du Monde russe* 47, nos. 1–2 (2006): 227–68. On Soviet design after Stalin, see Alexander Lavrentiev and Yuri Nasarov, *Russian Design: Traditions and Experiment, 1920–1990* (London: Academy Editions, 1995); Raymond Hutchings, *Soviet Science, Technology, Design: Interaction and Convergence* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976); Constantin Boym, *New Russian Design* (New York: Rizzoli, 1992). In Great Britain, similarly, efforts were under way to gain recognition of design as a separate discipline in the postwar period. See Judy Attfield, *Bringing Modernity Home: Writings on Popular Design and Material Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).
29. Susan E. Reid, “Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and Consumption in the Khrushchev Thaw,” *Slavic Review* 61, no. 2 (2002): 211–52; George Breslauer, *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders: Building Authority in Soviet Politics* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1982), 139–40.
30. Susan E. Reid, “Everyday Aesthetics in the Modern Soviet Flat,” forthcoming as *Khrushchev Modern: Making Oneself at Home and Becoming a Consumer in the Soviet 1960s* (working title), supported by the Leverhulme Trust and the Arts and Humanities Research Council.
31. Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 53, 83; Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” *Ideology and Consciousness* 6 (1979): 5–21. Specialists of various types gained influence in the Khrushchev era. See David Hoffmann, “European Modernity and Soviet Socialism,” in *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practices*, ed. David Hoffmann and Yanni Kotsonis (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000), 246; H. Gordon Skilling and Franklyn

- Griffiths, eds., *Interest Groups in Soviet Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971); Breslauer, *Khrushchev and Brezhnev*; Peter Hauslohner, “Politics before Gorbachev: De-Stalinization and the Roots of Reform,” in *The Soviet System in Crisis*, ed. Alexander Dallin and Gail W. Lapidus (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), 37–63.
32. M. E. Ruban, “Private Consumption in the USSR: Changes in the Assortment of Goods, 1940–1959,” *Soviet Studies*, 13, no. 3 (January 1962): 244.
33. Marshall Goldman, *The Soviet Economy: Myth and Reality* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 53 and table 4; Roger Skurski, *Soviet Marketing and Economic Development* (London: Macmillan, 1983), 5–6. Per capita consumption grew quite rapidly under Khrushchev, although it slowed down in the early 1960s. Philip Hanson, *The Consumer in the Soviet Economy* (London: Macmillan, 1968), and *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Economy: An Economic History of the USSR from 1945* (London: Longman, 2003); Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the U.S.S.R.* (London: Allen Lane, 1970).
34. Jane Zavisca, “Consumer Inequalities and Regime Legitimacy in Late Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia,” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2005), 56; V. F. Maier, *Planirovanie sotsial’nogo razvitiia* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo MGU, 1988), 45; Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Cars for Comrades: The Life of the Soviet Automobile* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 299 n. 82; David Lane, *Soviet Economy and Society* (New York: Blackwell, 1985), 58; Goldman, *Soviet Economy*, 54, table 4. By 1968 there were 27 million TV sets, 25 million washing machines, 13.7 million refrigerators, and 5.9 million vacuum cleaners for some sixty to seventy million households. Mervyn Matthews, *Class and Society in Soviet Russia* (London: Allen Lane, 1972), 84. For Western Europe, cf. Judt, *Postwar*, 338.
35. Letter to editors of *Ekonomicheskaiia gazeta*, late 1962 or early 1963, forwarded to Gosplan, in “Initsiativnye predlozheniia i pis’ma trudiashchikhsia po proizvodstvu predmetov potrebleniia, 1963,” in RGAE (Russian State Archive of the Economy), f. 4372, op. 65, d. 177.

36. Television was an exception, since it improved on the familiar technology of radio, which may partly explain the rapidity of its take-up. See Kristin Roth-Ey, “Mass Media and the Re-Making of Soviet Culture, 1950s–1960s” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2003), 268–71, and “Finding a Home for Television in the USSR, 1950–1970,” *Slavic Review* 66, no. 2 (2007): 278–306.
37. Goldman, *Soviet Economy*, 55.
38. Judt defines this shift to modern consumption: until the 1950s, most people did not shop or “consume” in the modern sense; they subsisted. This changed in the two decades after 1953 as wages and purchasing power grew and was felt most dramatically in the 1960s. Judt, *Postwar*, 338. We must beware, however, the fallacy of assuming that lack of wealth or abundance precludes sophisticated ideas about consumption. Paul Glennie, “Consumption within Historical Studies,” in Miller, *Acknowledging Consumption*, 177.
39. Interviews gathered for my Everyday Aesthetics project indicate that television was sometimes acquired sooner, while the purchaser was still in communal accommodation. On living conditions, see Donald Filtzer, *The Hazards of Urban Life in Late Stalinist Russia: Health, Hygiene, and Living Standards, 1943–1953* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
40. Reasons why the refrigerator most visibly indexed the mass rise in purchasing power and shift from subsistence to consumption in the modern sense are summarized by Judt, *Postwar*, 338–39.
41. Baudrillard, *System of Objects*; Don Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 145–47. The issues in this section are explored further in David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, “Pleasures in Socialism?” in Crowley and Reid, *Pleasures in Socialism*, 3–51.
42. Raymond Stokes, *Constructing Socialism: Technology and Change in East Germany, 1945–1990* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, *Wunderwirtschaft: DDR Konsumkultur in den 60er Jahren* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1996). See also Alfred Zauberman, *Industrial Progress in Poland, Czechoslovakia and East Germany, 1937–62* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964); Katherine Pence, “Cold War Iceboxes: Competing Visions of

Kitchen Politics in 1950s Divided Germany,” unpublished paper for workshop “Kitchen Politics in the Cold War,” convened by Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachmann, Deutsches Museum, Munich, 1–3 July 2005.

43. For the arguments, see Susan E. Reid, “The Khrushchev Kitchen: Domesticating the Scientific-Technological Revolution,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, no. 2 (2005): 289–316.
44. The All-Union Agricultural Exhibition, at which such agricultural symbolism was ubiquitous, reopened in June 1959 as the All-Union Exhibition of Economic Achievements, VDNKh, rebranded to symbolize the Soviet Union’s coming of age as an advanced industrial power. USSR Council of Ministers Decree No. 591, “Ob edinenii Vsesoiuznykh promyshlennoi sel’skokhoziaistvennoi i stroitel’noi vystavok v edinuiu Vystavku dostizhenii narodnogo khoziaistva SSSR” (28 May 1958), in RGAE/RGANTD (Russian State Archive of Science and Technology) (Samara), f. 127, introduction to op. 1.
45. The shift is exemplified by comparing the full-page spreads of vacuum cleaners in the 1959 edition of *Kratkaia entsiklopediia domashnego khoziaistva*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Bol’shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia, 1959), plate facing 508–9, with that in the third edition (Moscow: Sovetskaia entsiklopediia, 1966). Cf. Richard Hamilton, “An Exposition of \$he,” *Architectural Design* 32 (October 1962): 485–86; Pat Kirkham, ed., *The Gendered Object* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996).
46. G. Kreslavskii, “Zolotoi chelovek,” *Krokodil*, no. 23 (20 August 1958): 6.
47. For detail, see Reid, “Cold War in the Kitchen,” 211–52; Reid, “Khrushchev Modern,” 227–68.
48. M. Subbotin (VNIITE), “Izuchenie zarubezhnymi firmami trebovanii potrebitelia,” *Tekhnicheskaiia estetika*, no. 4 (1965): 113; Victor Buchli, “Khrushchev, Modernism, and the Fight against *Petit-Bourgeois* Consciousness in the Soviet Home,” *Journal of Design History* 10, no. 2 (1997): 161–76.
49. Subbotin, “Izuchenie zarubezhnymi firmami.”
50. It was also to be beautiful. Khrushchev, *O kontrol’nykh tsifrakh*, 29; “Eto dlia vas, sovetskie liudi!

Dobrotno i krasivo,” *Izvestiia*, 17 October 1959; “Bol’she, dobrotnee, krasivee!” *Izvestiia*, 23 October 1959; “Dobrotnye, krasivye veshchi—v nash byt!” *Izvestiia*, 6 October 1959. On Soviet goods as trusty friends, see Ekaterina Degot’, “Ot tovara k tovarishchu: k estetike nerynochnogo predmeta,” *Logos*, nos. 5–6 (2000): 30; and essays by O. Gurova, E. Gerasimova, and S. Chuikina, and G. Orlova in *Russian Studies in History* 48, no. 1 (summer 2009).

51. In part this is a nostalgic reflection of these elderly people’s experience of fundamental changes and present-day insecurity, expressed in the view that nothing can be depended upon anymore.

Interviews for the Everyday Aesthetics project, 2004–7, (Marina, Kaluga, 2006; Galina, Kaluga, 2005); cf. Olga Shevchenko, *Crisis and the Everyday in Postsocialist Moscow* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009) and “‘In Case of Fire Emergency’: Consumption, Security and the Meaning of Durables in a Transforming Society,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 2, no. 2 (2002): 147–70.

52. Subbotin, “Izuchenie zarubezhnymi firmami,” 13; V. Shvili (VNIITE), “Chto daiut konkretno-sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia promyshlennosti i trgovle,” *Tekhnicheskaiia estetika*, no. 2 (1965): 2; for fuller discussion, see Reid, “Khrushchev Modern,” 227–68.

53. See, e.g., the editorial, “Khudozhniku—dostoinoe mesto v promyshlennosti,” *Dekorativnoe isskustvo SSSR* (henceforth *DI*), no. 7 (1958): 17–22; Valentin Brodskii, “Forma avtomobilia,” *DI*, no. 7 (1958): 23–29; I. Matsa, “Mozhet li mashina byt’ proizvedeniem iskusstva,” *DI*, no. 3 (1961); Iu. Gerchuk, “Mashina kak proizvedenie promyshlennogo iskusstva,” *DI*, no. 2 (1962); Editorial, “K itogam diskussii: Mozhet li mashina byt’ proizvedeniem iskusstva?” *DI*, no. 12 (1963): 22–25; V. Beletskaiia, *Tekhnika i estetika* (Moscow: Profizdat, 1962); K. Kantor, “Novaia forma sviazi khudozhnika s promyshlennost’iu,” *DI*, no. 11 (1963): 20–21; Iu. Solov’ev, “Nazrevshie voprosy tekhnicheskoi estetiki,” *Kommunist*, no. 1 (1964): 122–24.

54. On VKhUTEMAS, see Sh. Boiko, “Kak gotoviat dizainery,” *DI*, no. 10 (1964): 20–21; L. Pazhitnov, “Tvorcheskoe nasledie Baukhauza,” *DI*, no. 7 (1962): 29–35 and no. 8 (1962): 16–21.

55. Terms such as *tekhnicheskaiia estetika* (technical aesthetics) and *khudozhestvennoe konstruirovaniie* (artistic construction) were used. Aleksandr Saltykov, Secretary of Board of USSR Artists' Union to CC Secretary E. Furtseva, "O sostoianii khudozhestvennoi raboty v promyshlennosti i o merakh po ee korennomu uluchsheniiu" (11 September 1958), in RGANI, f. 5, op. 36, d. 74, ll. 27–33; "SNKh SSSR: Upravlenie spetsializatsii i kooperirovaniia . . . 1964–65," in RGAE/RGANTD (Samara), f. 233, op. 3, d. 197, ll. 50–56. For further discussion, see Reid, "Destalinization and Taste," 177–202, and "Khrushchev Modern," 227–68.
56. USSR Council of Ministers Decree, "Ob uluchshenii kachestva produktsii mashinostroeniia i tovarov kul'turno-bytovogo naznacheniiia putem vnedreniia metodov khudozhestvennogo konstruirovaniia," in *Resheniia partii i pravitel'stva po khoziaistvennym voprosam*, vol. 5, 1962–65 (Moscow: Politicheskaiia literatura, 1968), 64–67. On VNIITE, see Hutchings, *Soviet Science, Technology, Design*, 147 and passim; Raymond Hutchings, "The Weakening of Ideological Influences," *Slavic Review* 27, no. 1 (1968): 71–84, and "Soviet Design: The Neglected Partner of Soviet Science and Technology," *Slavic Review* 37, no. 4 (1978): 567–83; Iu. Solov'ev, *Tekhnicheskaiia estetika*, no. 10 (1967); Paul Reilly, in *Design* (January 1963), 17; Dmitry Azrikan, "VNIITE, Dinosaur of Totalitarianism or Plato's Academy of Design?" *Design Issues* 15, no. 3 (1999): 45–77.
57. Report of Upravlenie spetsializatsii i kooperirovaniia, in "SNKh SSSR," l. 64.
58. Report for 1959, "Organizatsiia raboty khudozh: Sovetov pri ViaLegProme," in RGAE/RGANTD (Samara), f. 400 (ViaLegProm), op. 3, d. 27, l. 21. ViaLegProm was mostly concerned with textiles and fashion. Report on work of Special Design Bureau of Mosgorsovnarkhoz, 1965, to develop "technical and industrial aesthetics," in RGAE/RGANTD (Samara), f. 233, op. 3, d. 197, ll. 97–99.
59. Report for 1959, "Organizatsiia raboty khudozh," l. 21; I. Sapfirova, "Promyshlennno-prikladnaia grafika," *Iskusstvo*, no. 7 (1959). Articles in the GDR journal *Novaia reklama* were studied, on themes such as "Ob iskusstve sozdavat' khoroshie znaki," "Fabrichnye marki dolzhny

zapomniatsia,” and “Psikhologicheskoe vliianie fabrichnykh marok.”

60. There were fruitful exchanges between UK and USSR design specialists. Paul Reilly, deputy director of COID, visited Moscow in 1957, where he met the future director of VNIITE, Iu. Solov'ev. Reports to UK Foreign Office, 18 and 21 October 1957, Public Records Office, Kew, BW2/532. Reilly was followed in autumn 1959 by Sir Robin Darwin, director of the Royal College of Art. “Robin Darwin v Moskve,” *DI*, no. 12 (1959): 14. The USSR joined the ICSID (International Councils of Society of Industrial Design, founded in 1957) by 1968.
61. Zakharova, “Dior in Moscow,” 95–119.
62. Karl Kantor, “Tekhnicheskaiia estetika i proizvodstvennoe iskusstvo (O rabotakh Petra Tuhnogo),” *DI*, no. 9 (1960): 48–49; Karl Marx, *Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 82.
63. A. Dravkin, “Krasivoe sosedstvuet s nekrasivym,” *DI*, no. 2 (1962): 36–37.
64. *Ibid.*, 36–37.
65. *Ibid.*, 36.
66. A. Kolosov, “O kachestve bytovykh elektropylesosov,” *Tekhnicheskaiia estetika*, no. 4 (1965): 15.
67. Dravkin, “Krasivoe sosedstvuet,” 36–37.
68. Kolosov, “O kachestve,” 14–16.
69. Dravkin, “Krasivoe sosedstvuet,” 36.
70. Zavod imeni Likhacheva, the Likhachev Automobile Factory in Moscow.
71. *Tovarnyi slovar'*, vol. 9, ed. I. A. Pugachev (Moscow: Gos. Izdatel'stvo torgovoi literatury, 1961).
72. Kolosov, “O kachestve,” 15. Siemens's Rapid also associated the vacuum cleaner with speed. See also M. Shaposhnikov, “V Khar'kovskom khudozhestvenno-promyshlennom institute,” *Tekhnicheskaiia estetika*, no. 10 (1965): 6.
73. Khrushchev, *O shirokom vnedrenii industrial'nykh metodov*; Shaposhnikov, “V Khar'kovskom,” 6.
74. Attfield, *Bringing Modernity Home*; Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” *Partisan*

- Review* 6, no. 5 (1939), repr. in Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 3–20.
75. VNIITE had limited success in getting its designs realized and recommendations adopted by industry. Lavrentiev and Nasarov, *Russian Design*, 95.
76. On defense sector consumer goods production, beginning ca. 1953, see Julian Cooper, “The Civilian Production of the Soviet Defence Industry,” in *Technical Progress and Soviet Economic Development*, ed. R. Amann and J. Cooper (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 31–50.
77. For the “consumption junction” in technology purchase, see Ruth Schwartz Cowan, “The Consumption Junction: A Proposal for Research Strategies in the Sociology of Technology,” in *The Social Construction of Technological Systems*, ed. Wiebe Bijker, Thomas Hughes, and Trevor Pinch (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 261–80; Nelly Oudshoorn and Trevor Pinch, *How Users Matter: The Co-Construction of Users and Technology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003); Karin Zachmann, “A Socialist Consumption Junction: Debating the Mechanization of Housework in East Germany, 1956–1957,” *Technology and Culture* 43, no. 1 (2002): 74.
78. Mills, “Man in the Middle,” 70.
79. E.g., the Stiliagi youth subculture was condemned for its members’ conspicuous consumption and deliberate effort to stand out and be different. See Mark Edele, “Strange Young Men in Stalin’s Moscow: The Birth and Life of the Stiliagi, 1945–1953,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 50 (2002): 37–61.
80. Julie Hessler, “Cultured Trade: The Stalinist Turn towards Consumerism,” in *Stalinism: New Directions*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (London: Routledge, 2000), 182–209, and *A Social History of Soviet Trade: Trade Policy, Retail Practice, and Consumption, 1917–1953* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Amy E. Randall, *The Soviet Dream World of Retail Trade and Consumption in the 1930s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
81. N. S. Khrushchev, “Za dal’neishii pod’em proizvoditel’nykh sil strany, za tekhnicheskii progress vo

- vsekh otrasliakh narodnogo khoziaistva,” CC CPSU Plenum, 29 June 1959, *Izvestiia*, 2 July 1959; “Programme of the CPSU” (XXI Party Congress, October 1961), in *Resolutions and Decisions*, vol. 4, *The Khrushchev Years, 1953–1964*, ed. Grey Hodnett (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 252; R. Podol’nyi, “Tekhnika nastupaet,” *Sem’ia i shkola*, no. 12 (1959): 10–11; A. Vul’f, “Protiv nedootsenki domovodstva,” *Sem’ia i shkola*, no. 8 (1961): 47; L. Kaganov, “Tekhnika—kryl’ia semiletki,” and S. Iofin, “Luchshe ispol’zovat’ oborudovanie,” *Mestnaia promyshlennost’ i khudozhestvennyye promysli*, no. 5 (1961): 3–6 and 7–8 respectively.
82. See, e.g., Charlotte Curtis, “The Way People Live,” in *The Soviet Union: The Fifty Years*, ed. Harrison Salisbury (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1967), 41–42.
83. K. Skovoroda, “Zadachi dal’neishego uluchsheniia torgovogo obsluzhivaniia naseleniia,” *Planovoe khoziaistvo*, no. 2 (1960): 43–53.
84. Procedures for installment sales were outlined in *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, 16 August 1959, 4. Several informants for the Everyday Aesthetics project say they bought “everything” on credit.
85. Skovoroda, “Zadachi,” 43–53; V. Moiseev, R. Guz, and M. Khochinskii, “Nekhodovye tovary i ikh utsenka,” *Sovetskaia torgovlia* (hereafter *ST*), no. 2 (1961): 41–42.
86. Skovoroda, “Zadachi.” From 1954 the trade journal *Sovetskaia torgovlia* printed numerous discussions of how to study demand: see, e.g., I. Korzhenevskii, “Metody izucheniia sprosa naseleniia,” *ST*, no. 5 (1954): 9–14; N. Kononov, “O metodakh opredeleniia potrebnosti v tovarakh,” *ST*, no. 6 (1963): 5–11. Such discussions gathered new vigor and authority from 1963, appearing in the party theoretical organ: see, e.g., A. Struev, “Torgovlia i proizvodstvo,” *Kommunist*, no. 16 (November 1964): 39–48. For Stalin-era antecedents, see Randall, *Soviet Dream World*, ch. 6.
87. Khrushchev endorsed the need for greater “consumer sovereignty” in *Pravda*, 15 December 1963; Breslauer, *Khrushchev and Brezhnev*, 100; Abraham Katz, *The Politics of Economic Reform in the Soviet Union* (New York: Praeger, 1973), 71; Jane Shapiro, “Soviet Consumer Policy in the 1970s,” in *Soviet Politics in the Brezhnev Era*, ed. Donald Kelly (New York: Praeger, 1980), 104–28.

88. Katz, *Politics of Economic Reform*, ch. 5; Richard W. Judy, “The Economists,” in Skilling and Griffiths, *Interest Groups*, 209–52; Nove, *Economic History*, 356–61; Hauslohner, “Politics before Gorbachev,” 52; Basile Kerblay, “Les proposées de Liberman,” *Cahiers du Monde russe*, no. 3 (1963): 301–11; Hanson, *Rise and Fall*, 101–3; H. G. Skilling, *Czechoslovakia’s Interrupted Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 119–25. These arguments are elaborated in Reid, “Khrushchev Modern.”
89. Shvili, “Chto daiut konkretno-sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia,” 1–2.
90. VNIKS: Vsesoiuznyi nauchno-issledovatel’skii institut po izucheniiu sprosa na tovary narodnogo potrebleniia i koniunkturu togovli [All-Union Scientific Research Institute for the Study of the Population’s Demand for Consumer Goods and Market Prices for Trade], in RGAE/RGANTD (Samara), f. 375, op. 1 and 2. The term, *koniunktura* (“market prices”) was quickly dropped from its name, which was truncated to Vsesoiuznyi nauchno-issledovatel’skii institut po izucheniiu sprosa naseleniia na tovary narodnogo potrebleniia. In accordance with a 1965 decree, VNIKS started work in 1966, charged with developing methods for study of the population’s demands for consumer goods. Report of VNIKS, 1966, in RGAE/RGANTD (Samara), f. 375 op. 1 d. 6, and f. 375, op. 1, d. 13, l. 14. Reforms proposing market socialism aroused fears that they would lead to ideological heresy and political reformism, especially since Soviet economic reformism had intellectual links with that in Poland (Włodzimierz Brus) and Czechoslovakia (Oto Šik).
91. Goldman, *Soviet Economy*, 53.
92. David E. Nye, *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology, 1880–1940* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 281; Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 53; Robert Frost, “Machine Liberation: Inventing Housewives and Home Appliances in Interwar France,” *French Historical Studies* 18 (1993): 109–30; Jennifer Loehlin, *From Rugs to Riches: Housework, Consumption and Modernity in Germany* (Oxford: Berg, 1999); Joy Parr,

“Economics and Homes: Agency,” in *Gender and Technology: A Reader*, ed. Nina Lerman, Ruth Oldenziel, and Arwen Mohun (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 329–58; Elizabeth Shove and Dale Southerton, “Defrosting the Freezer: From Novelty to Convenience: A Narrative of Normalisation,” *Journal of Material Culture* 5 (2001): 301–19; Sonia Livingstone, “The Meaning of Domestic Technologies,” in *Consuming Technologies: Media and Information in Domestic Spaces*, ed. R. Silverstone and E. Hirsch (London: Routledge, 1992), 113–30.

93. Goldman, *Soviet Economy*, 51; Judt, *Postwar*, 338; Parr, “Economics and Homes.”

94. I. Morshovich, “Magazinam—khoroshie vitriny,” *ST*, no. 7 (1961): 60–64; Marshall Goldman, *Soviet Marketing: Distribution in a Controlled Economy* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963); Hanson, *Consumer in the Soviet Economy*; Philip Hanson, *Advertising and Socialism: The Nature and Extent of Consumer Advertising in the Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary and Yugoslavia* (London: Macmillan, 1974).

95. Against this hypothesis we need to consider that appliances were not purchased from showrooms where they were displayed enticingly; often they were purchased unseen when an opportunity arose. However, photographs of the latest appliances were often published in the mass press.

96. Charlotte Curtis predicted, “All the signs indicate that once [the Soviet woman] gets her refrigerator, her vacuum cleaner, her automobile, and her dacha, she may reasonably be expected to think in terms of the air conditioners she is only beginning to hear about.” Curtis, “Way People Live,” 58. On the nonadoption of the automatic washing machine in 1950s Canada, see Parr, “Economics and Homes,” 346; and on resistance to refrigerators in 1950s Western Europe, see Judt, *Postwar*, 338 n. 13.

97. My informants continued to use such methods complementing electrical chilling, even in the mid-2000s.

98. Ivan also served as a People’s Court judge. Compare the Stalin-era “culture of models” whereby certain “leading” people such as Stakhanovites were marked out not only by their labor but by their

advanced, “cultured” consumption. Hessler, “Cultured Trade.”

99. Leonid Likhodeev, *Ia i moi avtomobil'* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1972), 17–19, cited in Siegelbaum, *Cars for Comrades*, 299 n. 82.
100. The shifts were not limited to appliances; furniture also began to be acquired in the 1960s and then was replaced by new models in the 1970s as incomes, needs, and fashions changed.
101. Nye, *Electrifying America*; Roger Silverstone, Eric Hirsch, and David Morley, “Information and Communication Technologies and the Moral Economy of the Household,” in Silverstone and Hirsch, *Consuming Technologies*, 15–31.
102. In the case of TV, penetration was important enough for measures to be taken to encourage purchase, such as removing it from the category of goods subject to luxury tax. Roth-Ey, “Mass Media,” 22, 267–68. Cf. Ina Merkel, “Luxury in Socialism,” in Crowley and Reid, *Pleasures in Socialism*, 53–70.
103. Many of my informants had vacuum cleaners, but they showed little attachment to them and complained that they were too heavy or noisy, and some said they never really used them.
104. *Tovarnyi slovar'*, vol. 9.
105. See also Crowley and Reid, “Pleasures in Socialism?” 26–29.
106. Georgii Shakhnazarov, *Kommunizm i svoboda lichnosti* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1960), 48; J. K. Gilison, *The Soviet Image of Utopia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 173. There were also contradictions in authoritative discourse and practice. While appliances were promoted, Khrushchev had also expressed the suspicion of “mere gadgets” as frivolous superfluities when confronted by the appliances at the American Exhibition in 1959. “The Nixon-Khrushchev ‘Kitchen Debate,’” *Everything*, April 26, 2000, <http://everything2.com/node/515425>.
107. Interviews for the Everyday Aesthetics project.
108. Interview for the Everyday Aesthetics project, Kazan', 2005.
109. Alix Holt, “Domestic Labour and Soviet Society,” in *Home, School and Leisure in the Soviet*

Union, ed. J. Brine, M. Perrie, and A. Sutton (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1980), 29–30.

Some preferred to use public laundries, while women of lower income laundered manually at home.

Matthews, *Class and Society*, 84; N. Leбина and A. Chistikov, *Obyvatel' i reformy: Kartiny povsednevnoi zhizni gorozhan* (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2003), 189. On resistance to

automatics, cf. Slavenka Drakulic, *How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993), 43–54; Parr, “Economics and Homes.”

110. Holt, “Domestic Labour,” 29–30.

111. Jane Zavisca, “Contesting Capitalism at the Post-Soviet Dacha,” *Slavic Review* 62, no. 4 (2003): 803.

112. Rima, interview for Everyday Aesthetics, Kazan', 2005.

113. Samara informant 1, born ca. 1960, interview for Everyday Aesthetics.

114. Holt, “Domestic Labour,” 31; Matthews, *Class and Society*.

115. Nina D., interview for the Everyday Aesthetics project, Kazan', 2005; Dravkin, “Krasivoe sosedstviet,” 36; Helen Watkins, “Beauty Queen, Bulletin Board and Browser: Rescripting the Refrigerator,” *Gender, Place and Culture* 13, no. 2 (2006): 143–52.

116. The playful approach would be confined to the development of a Soviet form of Pop Art, “Sots art,” in the “nonconformist” art world.

117. Interviews for the Everyday Aesthetics project; Shevchenko, “In Case of Fire Emergency”; Nicky Gregson, *Living with Things: Ridding, Accommodation, Dwelling* (Wantage: Sean Kingston, 2007); Jennifer Patino, *Consumption and Social Change in a Post-Soviet Middle Class* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

