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**Making Oneself at Home in Late Soviet Modernity**

In the late 1950s and early 1960s the Soviet media were filled with the themes of construction, housewarming celebrations, and furnishing new flats. After decades of underinvestment in mass living conditions under Stalin, in 1957 the Khrushchev regime launched a campaign to erect millions of standard, prefabricated apartments, intended for single nuclear families. In the context of utopian discussions around the Third Party Program, adopted 1961, the ‘great transmigration’ to mikroraiony was represented as a leap forward into socialist modernity, beginning the final thrust towards Communism. Home was expected to take its place alongside the public sphere and workplace as a building site of ‘socialist community’ (obshchezhitie) and the ‘communist way of life,’ and as a nursery for the future citizens of Communism. Rationally designed, technologically enhanced, hygienic, and even (so champions claimed) beautiful in a modern way, the new housing would promote the formation of the fully self-actualized ‘new Soviet person’ and nurture the harmonious social relations, voluntary participation and self-regulation that would allow the eventual withering away of the state and arrival of Communism. While the new apartments were intended for allocation on a one-family basis, the private space of home and the personal life lived there were envisaged as an arena for socialist education, given meaning and historical purpose by being aligned with public goals. The mesto zhitel’stva was to become a site for productive leisure, self-improvement and self-realization (the ‘all-round development of the individual’), in which a significant role was ascribed to the everyday practice of aesthetic taste.

The hero of these new times was at once a builder – the ‘Constructor of Communism’ – and a homemaker, the ‘novosel’. A set of positive identities associated with the home and neighborhood - modernized avatars of the ‘new Soviet person’ - was elaborated in the media. Those on which I will focus here included the rational, tasteful and discerning consumer; and the ‘artist in the home’, producer of aesthetic value in domestic space.

For millions of historical subjects who experienced the relocation to modern separate apartments in actuality - as distinct from the fictional paragons of idealized representations - the move also began a qualitatively new period in their lives. In retrospect it marked the beginning of a new stability; as novosely moved in and obzhivalis’ in the new flats, they entered the most settled and materially comfortable
period in their own lives, and indeed in all Soviet history. Yet in the immediate term, this settled-ness was born in conditions that were deeply unsettling. The construction and inhabitation of novostroiki accelerated the process of urbanization, effecting the Soviet Union’s final transition from a predominantly rural to urban society. The move to a separate apartment offered unfamiliar material spaces to inhabit, along with the new subject positions delineated in public discourse. While the break with the past was neither so clean or total as the media portrayed it, nor was the housing as machine-perfect as the emphasis on modern industrialized construction promised, the relocation challenged received norms of ‘proper’ homemaking and the aesthetic of homeliness [uiutnost’]. It often entailed the separation of nuclear families from the older generation, as younger couples set up home for the first time, furnished the flat from scratch, and cooked in separate kitchens no longer under the watchful eye of neighbors and older relatives.7 Thereby it hastened generational shifts and loosened the grip of tradition in the notoriously recalcitrant realm of byt. Notwithstanding constraints on individualization imposed by regulations, standardized construction, and shortage, the separate apartments afforded greater possibility for agency, self-determination and private life than communal apartments and hostels had done, along with growing opportunities for consumption, home-based leisure and elective sociability.

Authoritative advice, widely circulated in the mass print media, supported by visual media including television and exhibitions, emphasized the bewilderment of the novosel faced with unfamiliar decisions. It also stressed the individual moral and aesthetic responsibility of the consumer-homemaker to make the right choices, as Cynthia Hooper, also discusses in her [chapter] for this volume: choices that were tasteful, rational, and progressive, and that avoided the ideological and aesthetic sins of ‘meshchanstvo’, which Bella Ostromoukhova’s chapter also discusses in regard to theatre. Specialist authors of advice embraced the opportunity to realize, at last, the revolution in byt begun in the 1920s but put on hold during the Stalin era. They called on novosely to abandon the material culture and daily practices of the past, and to make a fresh start, including buying new furniture and even electrical appliances for the apartment and adopting a new modern lifestyle. These discourses reconstituted Soviet subjects as consumers, amongst other identities; the new-person-as-novosel was an individual facing decentralized consumption junctions and taking aesthetic decisions alone, behind closed doors. The choices they made for their everyday material surroundings mattered because they also defined who they were.9
This chapter explores the subjectivities that were produced in this post-Stalinist material and discursive environment. Here ‘subjectivity’ refers to the historically created subject or individual produced in dialogue with more or less dominant political, social, and cultural institutions and phenomena. At base this is a question about whether and to what degree authoritative values were internalized by Soviet citizens. Recent studies have advanced our understanding of the complexities of relations between individuals with the post-Stalin state, and between the public and the private, building on research concerning the Stalin period. Nevertheless, paradigms adopted for the Stalin period are not necessarily the most useful ones for understanding developments in the later Soviet decades. As indicated, the ideal new person itself was not static but subject to change. Work remains to understand ‘ordinary’ people’s subjective and emotional experience of the transformations that took place in the Soviet Union’s last decades, how these changes changed them, and how they ‘made themselves’ at home in this new phase of socialist modernity. This essay asks about individuals’ responses to the physical and discursive structures of the new residential environment that mediated relations with the state. What did Soviet citizens make of the new spaces and subject positions presented to them, in which the agency and intentions of others—specialists acting in the name of the party-state—were invested? If they formed (or performed) a new sense of self, did this late Soviet subjectivity correspond in any way to the modernized ideal of the New Person, which the living environment and complementary discursive interventions were supposed to engender? If a new, post-Stalinist sense of self emerged, what was its relationship to the party-state’s authoritative structures, material and discursive?

The pioneering research conducted on Stalin-era subjectivities turned to self-writing such as diaries, memoirs, letters, and autobiography. Scholars of the Khrushchev era have the advantage of being able to supplement contemporaneous egodocuments by generating their own data in the form of oral history testimonies. This chapter draws on my interview project ‘Everyday Aesthetics in the khrushchevka’, in which the new everyday environment of mass housing in separate apartments and mikrorayony serves as the setting for an exploration of social and cultural transformations in the Soviet Union’s last decades. The project investigates how people who moved into khrushchevki in the early 1960s ‘made themselves at home’ - in the dual sense of this intended pun - in these standard spaces and housing regions. Over seventy semi-structured oral history

1 NOTE for translator: I’m not sure what equivalent you can find, but the reflexive nature of ‘obzhivat’sia’ goes some way towards the reflexivity and reciprocity implied in the Eng.]
interviews were conducted for the project by young female Russian sociologists. The informants, mostly women, were, with a few exceptions, born between the 1920s and early 1940s. In the 1960s they had moved to new, separate apartments in a range of cities across the former Soviet Union. Most had dwelled in the same flat ever since, and the interviews were conducted in their homes amidst their accumulated possessions and displays. These individuals had lived through collectivization and dekulakization, survived purges, wartime devastation and the austerity of postwar reconstruction. Many had also experienced in microcosm the macro-historical process of urbanization; either they had moved to the city or they had seen the city move to them as it spread to absorb and urbanize former villages. Some had migrated from the impoverished rural South West to the new industrial cities of the Far North (Kovdor, Apatity) to participate in intensive industrialization there. Finally, by the time they were interviewed in the mid-2000s, they had seen the collapse of the USSR, the formation of post-Soviet consumer society, and the discrediting of Soviet values, including the norms of good citizenship, consumption morality, and the ideal Soviet self that had been part of their upbringing. Although the interviews were framed in terms of homemaking, domestic roles were, of course, only part of the informants’ identities, and some resisted defining themselves in regard to the home, answering more in terms of clothes consumption or of their workplace roles and relations.

Oral history can open up dimensions unavailable to scholars of earlier periods. Moreover, the narrative nature of oral history responses is particularly significant (and problematic) in light of the centrality which theories of the modern self and consumer culture accord to narrativization of the self. Nevertheless, the historical study of subjectivity still operates at the limits of history; the question of internalization, in particular, presents significant epistemological problems and challenges. Like all oral history, my informants’ accounts of the Soviet past are subjective. This circumstance is precisely why they are of interest here—we are not seeing an objective self presumed to exist prior to and outside of language or material objectification—but it foregrounds the role of historical interpretation and triangulation. They are also inflected by the conditions of the post-Soviet present in which they are told, and by the social situation of the interview.

Moreover, a reliance on verbal narratives tends to prioritize conscious and already narrativized intentions over motives and emotions that are harder to articulate verbally. Self-identity is not only worked out and articulated in verbal narratives, however; it is also objectified and produced in relations with things, material
environments and practices. This essay seeks to contribute to the study of late Soviet subjectivity by combining oral history with material culture. Historians have belatedly turned to material culture to address the lack of a written record in relation to everyday history and the experience of ‘ordinary people’. But objects are not only the effects or traces of historical events. They are also active agents, ‘tools through which people shape their lives’. As Leora Auslander has put it, they do not simply ‘reflect’ but ‘create social positions and even (some argue) the self itself’. In regard to western consumer society, the home, as the ‘private’ sphere and a key site of consumption, has been ascribed a privileged status in the material objectification and production of subjectivity; people ‘make themselves’ in the process of making home and dwelling there. In the Khrushchev-era USSR, Marxist aestheticians, utopian architects and authors of popular advice ascribed considerable ideological and moral significance to the material environment as a means to structure consciousness and social relations.

This chapter proposes that in socialist modernity, no less than in the capitalist West, the acquisition, arrangement, maintenance, and ridding of domestic furnishings and displays played a crucial role in the production and maintenance of self-identity, even in surroundings which - as was the case with the khrushchevki - represented the agency of others. Housing and consumer goods played a significant role in structuring and mediating relations both vertically, between the individual and the state, and also horizontally, between members of society. Thus domestic material culture--including both things and practices--may serve as an objective source through which we can try to understand historical subjectivity.

By attending to material self-presentation and aesthetic practices of display in the late Soviet home, in combination with listening to how the authors of these displays account for them in oral narratives, I aim to open up some of the complexities and contradictions of how historical subjects experienced this period of rapid but uneven state-led modernization, how they accommodated and made sense of (or mitigated) these changes, and how they negotiated between plural and heterogeneous norms. It is necessary to historicize the normative conception of socialist subjectivity. As the new avatars I introduced at the outset exemplify, the ideal of the New Person underwent revision and modernization in the postwar and post-Stalin era. Stalinist norms of taste and cultured byt were also repudiated in regard to the built environment from 1954, led by Khrushchev. Nor were new norms and models of virtuous Sovietness entirely consistent and homogenous. On the contrary, the zigzags of destalinization of which these reforms were part, engendered what Brian LaPierre has described as ‘a confused and unsettled socialism [...] of unresolved opposites, within whose Janus face Soviet
citizens saw both a past and a future filled with penalties and limits as well as promises and possibilities. Authoritative Soviet discourse was far from homogeneous, consisting of multiple, often contradictory models (notably in regard to gender roles), and contentions between conservatism and reform. Moreover, many aspects of material culture did not live up to the ideal of industrial modernity, machine-made newness, and standardization, but required tuning and apparently anachronistic craft adjustments. Even if one aspired wholeheartedly to refashion oneself as the new person, to negotiate this complex field of action was no stroll in the park. If, in making home in the new apartments, one also made oneself, then the self the new settlers made there was complex, transitional, contingent and negotiated.

**Home/homelessness and self-possession**

Studies of material culture, from various disciplinary perspectives, have attended to how domestic things and interior ensembles help to stabilize identity. Some accounts have focused on the role of relations with things in the production of identity as difference, through the separation of self from others, whether on the basis of psychoanalysis, or of social distinction. Others have highlighted the role of everyday things in producing and maintaining a sense of sameness – an enabling fiction of a continuous, constant self-by providing points of reference and continuity. In Hannah Arendt's eloquent formulation: 'they give the human artifice the stability and solidity without which it could not be relied upon to house the unstable and mortal creature which is man.' Thus, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi proposed, 'the things that surround us are inseparable from who we are [...]; they constitute the framework of experience that gives order to our otherwise shapeless selves.' But things and homes - like that other physical house for the self, the body - can also betray the trust placed in them to ensure sameness. What if material conditions prevented rather than furnished continuity and sedimentation, such that an individual lacked the resources for a coherent narrative of self? Many of my informants had been rolling stones that gathered no moss until they came to rest in the khrushchevka, when they entered a long period of stability. Continual change and repeated dislocation had been the only constant in their lives, as also in the wider historical and ideological environment. In thinking about the effects that settling into the new apartments exercised on the novosel's sense of self, before we turn to the accumulation and sedimentation of self that ensued in the course of the 1960s-70s, it may be illuminating first to consider the converse: the effects of displacement and homelessness, which were part of the psychological 'baggage' they brought with them,
even as their material baggage was often reduced to almost nothing.37

Already in Tsarist times, a connection had been established between having a fixed abode and enjoying full rights of citizenship and civic personality. Conversely, homelessness was identified with disenfranchisement and loss of those rights. The social and legal effects of homelessness reemerged in the Stalin era along with the stigmatization of ‘non-persons’ and the relation between registered addresses, passports, and social organization. In the postwar Soviet Union, after half a century of dislocation, rupture, flux and instability, homelessness was once again associated with disorder, instability, and marginality, and with elements of the population that were not ‘organized’; that is, they were not integrated into the life of the collective.38 To have no fixed abode deprived one of civic personhood and rendered one socially marginal. The effects were not only legal, but ontological and psychological. Nadezhda Mandelshtam expressed the subjective sense of loss of personality as a result of homelessness: ‘The “I,” shrunk and destroyed, sought refuge anywhere it could find it, conscious of its worthlessness and lack of a housing permit.”39

Figure 1

If loss of a home deprived an individual of social and even ontological identity, could the process also work in reverse, so that finding a place to make oneself at home also provided some anchors that enabled the flourishing of an ‘I’, a ‘framework’ that gave order to ‘otherwise shapeless selves’ as Csikszentmihalyi proposed above?

Jochen Hellbeck, in his important work on Stalin-era subjectivity, argued that his subjects used the writing of a diary, a private narrative, to work on the self in order, paradoxically, to achieve (re)integration with the collective and to give their lives historical purpose and meaning.40 This reintegration, Hellbeck wrote, was: ‘the source of true subjecthood. It promised vitality, historical meaning, and moral value, and it was intensely desired. By contrast, a life lived outside the collective or the flow of history carried a danger of personal regression stemming from the inability to participate in the forward-thrusting life of the Soviet people.’41 Could material and aesthetic work on the ‘private’ space of home operate analogously to this work on oneself in the pages of their diaries? Was there a similar relationship between making home and (re)constituting an ‘I’ that was integrated in the collective, helping to align the private sphere of home and everyday life with public values?

The dialectics of homelessness and homemaking, of disenfranchisement and becoming a fully self-realized and socially integrated Soviet Person, were at the center of both public discourse and individual experience in the Khrushchev era. Several of the individuals I
shall discuss here had suffered exclusion from the Soviet collective in their youth through dekulakization or purges, or their family home had been expropriated as bourgeois property. Anetta’s (Kaluga, born c. 1940) family was dispossessed of their home in Kaluga during the Revolution, along with their privileged social status (her grandfather was a respected doctor). She speaks of how she and her siblings grew up ‘cowed’ because of her family’s class-alien status. She had only a few treasured possessions such as an old icon and a penal’ to represent that past, and even those were stand-ins from her husband’s grandmother, not her own. Others—displaced during the war or fleeing the impoverished countryside in search of self-improvement, education, better wages and social advancement—recalled wandering in search of living space and propiska.42

Inna (Leningrad, born in the mid 1930s, higher education) had experienced the effects of repression and displacement in her youth. Her father, an old Bolshevik, was purged in the Great Terror and her family was exiled to Petushki outside the 100 km perimeter of Moscow. There she grew up, she says, amidst the ‘beau monde of exiled intelligentsia’.43 Inna’s father was rehabilitated after Stalin’s death, and her mother, as the wife of an Old Bolshevik, received a khrushchevka flat in Leningrad in 1963, when Inna was thirty years old. The move to a separate apartment confirmed their full restoration to the collective. Although some ideologues feared that separate flats would potentially harbor petit-bourgeois privatizing tendencies,44 for Inna and her mother the chance to create a private, personal space was associated with their reintegration into the social body. Inna, unmarried and without children, threw herself into making it into home. Both she and her mother were librarians, an intelligentsia profession that commanded respect but was poorly paid. In spite of limited disposable income and limited availability, Inna had loved to shop for the home.

**Inna:** Я бросилась обустраивать. [...] мои самые любимые магазины всегда были - это хозяйственные. Я страшно любила хозяйственные магазины. До сих пор люблю ходить. Вот, с Женей ходили (соседка), там ей надо было, я с ней ходила, я просто получаю массу удовольствия. А раньше- “1000 мелочей” (магазин) - там всякая ерунда была. Хотелось этого, хотелось этого... Как я представляла? [...] Ну, хотелось какие-то покрывала красивые, какие-то занавески красивые. Тюль красивый. Чтоб это все, так сказать, сочеталось.

Inna had precise ideas about how she wanted to furnish and decorate the apartment, and she was prepared to invest significant effort to achieve this ideal home.
the center of Orenburg. Outcast both spatially and socially to the edge of the city to live among social marginals and criminal elements [urki/urkagany], for thirty years Anna had never had so much as a corner of her own. When, at last, she received a separate apartment she wanted to ‘do something’ to beautify it. She draws a causal connection between her past experience of spatial and social displacement and the special significance which home decorating held for her:

Понимаете, приходилось что-то чего-то придумывать, как-то... тем более, после 30 лет, когда заимела свое, хотелось что-то чего-то сделать. Ну вот, между прочим, может быть, это не нужно говорить, но во всяком случае что-то где-то чего-то украсить...

Anna spoke eagerly about her response to the new apartment and the material choices she had made, representing herself to the interviewer as a person of aesthetic sensibility and creative talent, which she had developed in her youth before her family's fall from grace. Despite the disadvantages of her youth, branded as the daughter of an ‘enemy of the people,’ Anna had the cultural benefits of her intelligentsia upbringing, and she presented these credentials. Although she lacked space and money, Anna was, like Inna, relatively rich in cultural capital through her early introduction to the deep rules of intelligentsia taste; the resources for self-fashioning were not limited to material ones. As an adult, too, she engaged in amateur creativity including drawing and florizm, the products of which were displayed on the walls and formed part of her interior and presentation of self.

‘Show Me Your Room and I Can Tell Who You Are’

Taste and everyday aesthetic choices figured prominently in Anna and Inna’s accounts. They also mattered to a perhaps surprising degree in the authoritative public discourse around the new housing and the all-round development of the individual.

It was axiomatic, both in popular advice literature and in party ideological pronouncements, that the domestic interior was an ‘index of the soul’. Adapting a familiar aphorism, the authors of a manual on taste declared: ‘show me your room and I can tell who you are’. In accordance with Marxist materialism and the Hegelian dialectics of subject-object relations that underpinned it, the material environment not only reflected but also conditioned attitudes and behavior. Marx’s early writings on the role of material making in becoming truly human received renewed attention in the late 1950s-60s: while animals might also build dwellings they only produced to satisfy immediate needs, whereas ‘man fashions things according to the laws of beauty’. The new Party Program of 1961 proposed that the development of aesthetic sensibilities
was as important as that of ethical judgment in the all-round development of the Constructor of Communism.49

This was not only a matter of art appreciation but also of everyday aesthetics. As noted above, one of the Khrushchev-era avatars of the New Person was the ‘artist in the home’, an identity that encompassed both the development of amateur creativity and the inculcation of new norms of modernist taste. Home furnishing was an aesthetic-identity project that made manifest who they were or who they aspired to be. Consumption, consumer taste and homemaking mattered because this was a sphere in which individuals could, in their small personal domain, ‘work over the material world in accordance with the laws of beauty,’ which was a route to full self-actualization. 50 According to the dialectics of subject and object, in making home they made themselves.

The problems and contradictions of making home in modern, industrially-built housing have been widely noted; the task of fashioning a personalized, unalienated place that both objectifies and produces a unique self seems incompatible with standard housing, built for faceless statistics. 51 Although the problem is common to both socialist and capitalist modernity, western Cold War accounts have often represented the alienating and homogenizing effects of industrial production as a more insurmountable and invasive agent of hegemony in the state socialist planned economy than in the West. This is in line with stereotypes of life under socialism as gray and drab, and of the state socialist subject as a faceless clone lacking personality.52 Thus, the subject under socialism was the antithesis of the western liberal subject, being formed through lack; 53 lack of choice resulting from standardization was (they assumed) exacerbated by lack of consumer goods. Some have even argued that shortage was deployed systematically as a means of subjection. 54 This lack of resources and choice appears particularly problematic in light of the central place accorded to consumption in influential accounts of identity formation in the ‘post-traditional order’ of late modernity. According to Anthony Giddens, in late modernity’s conditions of rupture and deracination, the modern self, cut loose from past certainties by the loosening hold of tradition, is constituted through choices and reflexivity about those choices; it is an ‘ongoing reflexive project in which actions, events, and choices are ordered into a coherent, socially acceptable narrative of individuality’. 55 Nicolette Makovicky draws out the implications: ‘Implicitly, consumer choice becomes understood as a vital ingredient in identity formation, thus providing the connection between home decoration and the self found in studies of domestic consumption.’ If socialism failed to provide opportunities for choice, as is claimed, she asks, ‘can one still read the interior as a mode of self-
The Cold War assumption that the USSR was not a consumer society of any sort and that questions about consumer culture and consumer agency under state socialism were not misguided, is no longer tenable in light of work conducted over the last 15-20 years which has placed consumption at the heart of socialist modernity. But the implications of the specificity of Soviet consumer culture in the study of Soviet subjectivities have yet to be fully elaborated.

The relation between mass, standardized production and individual self-objectification was recognized as a problem by Soviet specialists on the material environment in the 1960s. Advice literature assumed that residents could, and even should, inscribe their individuality upon the plan and walls of their apartment and would seek to make the givens of the standard architecture distinctive, personally meaningful and communicative of self-image and worldview. Even as utilitarian everyday processes would be rationalized and homogenous, one expert in the new field of Tekhnicheskaia estetika argued, ‘the personal will still be present unconditionally in the character of the décor [ubranstvo] and artistic appearance [oblik] of the apartment, and in the choice of this or that type of standard equipment.’ While investing in the modernization of the material environment as an agent of historical change, architects, aesthetic theorists and others also recognized the limits of environmental determinism and of their jurisdiction in citizens’ homes; it was a process in which individual citizens had a part to play, as rational consumers, homemakers, stewards [khoziaeva] of the state’s property, and as ‘artists in the home’. Even the centrally planned command economy could not command consumption.

The Contemporary Style

Acceptance that the novosel-consumer had to make choices and that they would wish to express individuality in the interior did not mean, however, that ‘anything goes’. An individual’s aesthetic choices manifested their successful socialization or, conversely, their recalcitrant, class-alien (petit-bourgeois) failure to align themselves with the progressive tendencies of history, as defined by the party and its specialist intelligentsia agents. Aesthetic experts sought to ensure that individuals would voluntarily make the ‘right’ choices. These were identified with a new, modernist aesthetic for the domestic interior, the ‘Contemporary Style’ [sovremennyi stil’]. Widely propagated through exhibitions, magazines, and homemaking manuals, the image of the Soviet ‘ideal home’ formed part of ‘the structures’ or ‘field of action’ within which actual flesh-and-blood novosely made home.
The keynote was set by the functionalist, unadorned style of the new industrially built housing. Its minimalism bore the imprimatur of Khrushchev who, beginning in 1954, had repeatedly demanded that Soviet architects repudiate the wasteful display and dysfunctional ornament of Stalin-era architecture in favor of plain building. Characterized by functionalism, efficient use of materials and space, transparency, and by the rejection of applied decoration, the Contemporary Style was vaunted as rational, socialist and modern. New furniture designed in this style would fit both the minimalist aesthetic and the small proportions of the architecture. Moreover, since the new aesthetic was appropriate for machine production, its widespread adoption would enable the eventual achievement of abundance for all, enabling the needs of the individual to be reconciled with those of the collective. Minimal means were to be used to maximal effect, and there was no place for non-essential clutter or for anything that disrupted the overall visual composition and stylistic unity. Modernizing experts called for the conscious production of a stylistically unified ensemble through a series of well-judged choices; the whole interior should achieve a coherent modern 'look'.

Adoption of the Contemporary Style in place of traditional 'petit-bourgeois' notions of coziness would demonstrate Soviet virtue. A room furnished in this way would show that one was a proper modern Soviet person who had internalized the norms of socialist modern lifestyle, good taste and rational consumption, as these were defined by intelligentsia aesthetic specialists. Failure to do so left one open to the charge of vulgar bad taste and meshchanstvo, a class-based pejorative that implied disengagement from Soviet society's collective forward march to socialist modernity. Thus, advice addressed to the novosel made his/her aesthetic choices a moral and ideological matter, on which their status as true 'Soviet person' stood or fell. These choices implicated the self; they were 'decisions not only about how to act but who to be.' The maxim 'show me your room and I can tell who you are,' placed the onus on 'you' to make yourself right by making the right choices. In line with the Khrushchev-era emphasis on self-regulation rather than direct intervention and coercion by state and party agents, novosely were supposed to internalize and voluntarily adopt the modernized norms of taste.

But even if they set out to achieve the normative Contemporary Style, novosely still had to negotiate contradictions between blueprint and reality, including the slowness of producers of furniture and other consumer durables to reorient production to the new style, materials and serial production methods. While novosely were bombarded with advice insistently promoting the Contemporary Style, in the end they were left on their own to achieve it – if, that is, they heard the call at all and chose to follow it.
To achieve the Contemporary Style’s requisite unity, minimalism, and sense of proportion and composition was also easier for some than for others, and not only because of differences in spending power, blat or other access to goods. It demanded cultural as well as material resources: a practiced ‘eye’ and apparently effortless ‘good taste’, for example, in the exact asymmetrical placing of a single well-chosen vase to create a visual accent. Reflecting the notions of good taste and consumption morality of the metropolitan intelligentsia specialists who defined it (including their dislike of ostentation, non-functional ornament, acquisitiveness, and clutter), the new style was arguably more readily assimilated by people who had grown up in intelligentsia households and who had imbibed their notions of good taste in infancy. Inna’s and Anna A.’s aspirations accorded to a large extent with this normative aesthetic of socialist modernity. Others, with different (mostly rural) upbringing, had to unlearn the practices, habits and norms with which they had grown up (as ideals even if they had never had the means to realize them) and to acquire instead the nuances of this unfamiliar style.

The call to adopt the Contemporary Style placed homemakers at a crossroads, confronting them with contradictory norms: between the authority of the past (inscribed in childhood homes) and the reformist modernizing authority of the state. The modernist minimalism and transparency, which the Contemporary Style demanded, contradicted the traditional requirement for уютность, involving ubiquitous decoration, confinement, padding and occlusion, and the use of textiles of various sorts: napkins, antimacassars, curtains, and rugs, hung horizontally on walls behind a divan. Galina (Petersburg), describes from memory a typical traditional interior from her Leningrad childhood in the 1950s-60s: ‘На стенке был ковер, это было положено, считалось, что холодно спать или еще что-то такое. […] Еще какие-то картинь были. Фотографии.’ While the new dictates of the Contemporary Style prescribed a radical reform of domestic material culture, homemakers had to negotiate between its new norms, their own unconsciously acquired dispositions and assumptions about homeliness and propriety, as well as with the idea of other authorities closer to hand, about ’как положено’. Homemakers had to make numerous conscious or unconscious choices, to mediate between different sets of norms and structures, and to negotiate between new ideals, hardwired into the architecture, and older notions of a proper home. The clash of authorities and the tensions between modernizing and traditional forces in this period of rapid reform and modernization were played out between and within households and between generations.
If the self is made both through narrative and through material practice and reflexive household choices, then the need to engage in such negotiations render it inherently social and relational. Yet accounts of subjectivity and self-fashioning often seem to assume a culture in which choice, taste and identity are individualized, denying the sociality of choice and the intersubjectivity of the self that is made at home. As historian of material culture Alison Clarke has charged, Giddens, for example, neglects the inherently social nature of the self, treating the modern individual as ‘an individual wrestling with his or her own angst in the face of perceived risks’, as if he or she acts, chooses and constructs narratives alone. Recent sociological approaches to identity challenge the perception of identity as located within the person, arguing instead that it is produced and negotiated between persons; the self is formed intersubjectively, in dialogue with others, produced through social relations, and does not exist outside of language and relations with others. As philosopher Nikolas Kompridis proposes, ‘personal identity is constituted in, and sustained through, our relations with others, such that were we to erase our relations with our significant others we would also erase the conditions of our self-intelligibility.’

Accounts of Soviet subjectivity, including Hellbeck’s treatment of diaries, have also been accused of ‘desocializing’ the person. Despite their anxiety to reintegrate themselves with the collective, Yasuhiro Matsui finds that Hellbeck’s Stalin-era diarists appear as ‘lonely, confronted with the regime and its socialist construction projects without any real human relations or interaction with others.’ Neglecting the individual’s relations to other people, and focusing only on vertical relations between individual and regime, Hellbeck’s account recalls, Matsui charges, the atomized individuals posited by the totalitarian school. He proposes, instead, to treat the Soviet self as shaped not only by Soviet ideology, but by a web of interpersonal, intersubjective relations between fellow citizens.

Matsui’s charge may not be entirely justified in regard to Hellbeck’s approach; Hellbeck emphasized the ways in which his subjects sought social connection and reintegration in the collective, and he used his subjects’ letters as well as their diaries to explore this. Nevertheless, Matsui directs us to an important consideration. Even the seemingly private, self-directed narrative of the lone diarist is a dialogue that anticipates its other, the future reader, and is answerable to them. The self that is narrativized in oral history responses is also produced in dialogue with the interviewer, as well as operating with language and narrative conventions. Domestic displays, likewise, are socially meaningful, semiotic practices. Domestic material culture and everyday subjectivities
are formed within networks of social relations, which are both enabling and constraining. Moreover, like Matsui’s collective diary, domestic interiors are constructed collectively; while, in most of the homes in my project, a single individual (usually the senior woman of the house) took primary responsibility for the décor and displays, as well as for household consumption decisions, these nevertheless reflect and mediate between the interests and lives of all household members and involve negotiation and reconciliation. At the same time, they also register associations beyond the walls of the apartment and take account of the actual or anticipated views of a broader circle of potential ‘second persons’. The self that is presented in the interior is composed for others: for an audience of actual or potential ‘judges’. Rachel Hurdley sums this up in the apt phrase: ‘being ourselves for you’.

These ‘second persons’ included both representatives of state authority and peers, in relations that were horizontal as well as vertical: a mix of friends, neighbors, parents-in-law, hygiene or gas safety officials, maintenance workers from the ZhëK (housing administration), busybodies from the domkom, and the various experts working for central planning and design bodies or writing in the press. They were also not limited to synchronic relations, but included diachronic ones: the authority of older generations and traditions, perpetuated in material culture and habitus, and in echoes of remembered injunctions (‘mother would turn in her grave’), and in the afterimage of repeatedly observed gestures. The anticipated views of the younger generation and of posterity, could also play a part. The self that was produced in the private ‘backspaces’ of the home was not an island, engaging only with state authority, but was embedded in social relationships.

Curtains, rugs, and pictures

The intersubjective production of self in the interior, negotiated within a network of relations, is best exemplified in two forms of domestic display and in the ways informants talk about them: cabinet displays (which I have discussed elsewhere); and in the decoration of windows and walls, to which the remainder of this paper is devoted. Both walls and windows presented very visible areas for treatment that was ‘aesthetic’ in that it was elevated out of the horizontal plane of everyday utility. I will consider briefly curtains, rugs, and pictures, notably reproductions and photographs.

The large windows of the new flats presented an opportunity to objectify oneself aesthetically by choosing fabric for curtains. Participants in the oral history project had fond memories of selecting fabric for the window, recalling in detail their feelings about the color and texture, and the affective, sensuous response. Inna describes the huge
efforts she put into finding curtain fabric in the right shade of ‘bordo’. Marina’s parents, whose homemaking she describes, were still young, around 26, when they received their new one-room apartment in 1966. Marina refers to their interior as ‘avant-garde’ and ‘stilnyi’ and emphasizes her parents’ originality, inventiveness, and license with convention. In 1970 they made curtains and a matching bedcover from dressmaking fabric because they could not find anything among the designated upholstery fabrics available that would allow them to achieve their desired look. Marina recalls that it was dark brown with a pattern in silver-grey. And it was in nylon, or its Soviet equivalent ‘porolon,’ the modern textile par excellence.

Authoritative prescriptions were mixed, however, concerning curtains. On one hand ideal home settings at exhibitions and in the press used the new windows as an opportunity to exhibit new textile designs. Yet at the same time, advice insisted on the principles of openness and transparency. Images of Contemporary Style interiors usually showed the curtains drawn aside to reveal the window and the view beyond to hundreds of other identical apartments. To hang or not to hang curtains – whether to compartmentalize and regionalize the space of the interior in order to provide for privacy and decency among household members, or to cover the external windows - was a question that divided people along generational lines. While many still considered curtains in windows to be essential for decency and privacy, some began to question whether they were really necessary. Ivan, an army officer and an early adopter of household technology, was also a modernizer in regard to curtains. He and his wife eschewed curtains to make North-facing apartment brighter, in line with the modernist emphasis on light, although they did have nets for privacy.

Figure 2 <IA1>

Irina A. (Leningrad, Высшее образование, 1927 г.р.) even rejected nets as well as curtains:

О: [...] тюль вешали... я-то не повесила. Да, что еще здесь поражает, это я должна обязательно сказать: вот мы жили на 6-м этаже, и окна у нас были - вот внизу какая-то крыша, и в колодец. А здесь вот такой свет! И все бросились сажать вот всякие деревья там, кустарники. Сами люди! Тут и официальные были там тополя. У нас были здесь и черемуха, и яблоки, и сирень, ну...я не знаю, откуда. Может быть у людей уже и дачи были или что-то. С таким удовольствием все здесь засадили. Сейчас кое-то уже повырубили, ну видимо, старые. А то у нас тут сплошной лес. И березы, ну все. И кроме тополей, это все люди посадили с удовольствием.

Irina’s choice not to curtain off the apartment from the outer world is directly associated, in her account, with her engagement with nature, public space and community, and with her sense of beauty. She valued the interconnectedness between
her apartment and the outside space of the dvor, consisting of both the visual connection through the uncovered window, and her social connections through involvement in the collective work of greening the yard. ‘Мне просто почти — наверное, у 90% тюль висит. А мне так нравилось, я говорю: “Ну смотри, какая красота, ну зачем я буду завешивать тюль?”’

How does this relate to the question of subjectivity? Irina’s rejection of curtains accorded with the Contemporary Style, which aimed at transparency, permeability, and social interconnectedness of private and public spheres in spite of allocation of ‘private’ space. Marina’s parents also accepted the modernist demand for maximum openness and transparency. While they did hang curtains in the window – the unconventional nylon ones - they rejected common uses: to screen areas of the apartment to create privacy and manage appearances in the multifunctional living room. To reject such screens while maintaining the uncluttered order of the Contemporary Style required continual effort in a one-room flat, where the living room also served as the bedroom for them all. This is an instance of the contradictions that authoritative ideals sometimes created and which ordinary individuals had to work to overcome. The image of effortless elegance and a leisured lifestyle that representations of the Contemporary Style interiors invoked was underpinned by daily work Marina describes the daily tidying away that differentiated daytime and night-time uses of the same space. This routine was necessary because, she explains, to fragment space by sectioning off an area with curtains ‘wasn’t their style’. When the interviewer suggests that it was common to hang curtains to separate off a niche she says emphatically: ‘No we never had anything like that. No, no, that wasn’t their style. You see, it eats up the space and gives too much detail.’ [Нет, вот этого никогда не было. Нет, нет, это не их стиль был. Это, понимаете, это съедает пространство, и лишняя деталь.]

Marina, a cultural industries professional, shows a strong awareness of the difference between her parents’ interior and others. She describes the interior they had shared with her grandmother before they moved to the new flat. There, her mother and grandmother’s needlework played a prominent part, with various doilies and napkins, which, she says, had ‘gone out of fashion’ by the 1960s-70s. By the time she and her parents moved to a one-room khrushchevka apartment in 1966 they had left this handed-down aesthetic of cozy homemaking behind and begun to live ‘in style’.

Marina: In the sixties you see there was a tendency for such a style.... I don't know, do you have anything to do with art?
Qu.: In what sense? Were you going to say 'Stiliagi'? Or what?
M: Yes, Stiliagi, yes, yes.
Qu.: That's not only art.
M: Well yes, but everything there was kind of, everything was laconic [minimal], kind of, well in terms of brush marks, colour. Well they were like that. They were kind of guided by that. My parents, in any case.

О.: Ну 60-е, это, понимаете, вообще, тенденция такая стил... я вот не знаю, вы к искусству имеете отношение?
В.: Ну, в каком смысле? Вы хотели сказать "стиляги"? Или что?
О.: Да, стиляги, да, да
В.: Это не только в искусстве...
О.: Ну да, вот, а там же, как бы, все лаконично, как бы, ну, на уровне штрихов там, света. Ну, они вот такие. Они так, как бы, этим руководствовались. Мои родители, во всяком случае.

Marina’s description of her parents’ interior gives a vivid sense of their having an idiosyncratic style of their own, of which she was aware because of its difference from the norm of received and still common practice, even as it accorded with Contemporary Style precepts. She refers to their style as ‘avant-garde’ or ‘hipster’. For example, they painted the walls in plain colors rather than using patterned wallpapers (as most people preferred), and they used contrasting colors – pink and pale emerald green on different walls. This kind of combination was advocated in published interior design advice but, judging from my interviews, was rarely adopted. Marina comments: ‘Well my parents were fashionable’. […] Well it was the Sixties. They thought of themselves as kind of stylish [stil’nyi].’ [Ну, родители модные были. […] Ну, это 60-е. Ну, они, как бы, стильными себя чувствовали.]

Although they had some priority access to consumer goods because her mother was an officer with the Ministry of Interior and her father was a konstruktor, the style-conscious Marina and her hipster parents also overcame shortage through resourcefulness in order to achieve the original and modern style they consciously sought. Paradoxically, to realize the approved model of socialist modernity in their own lives they were prepared to transgress socialist legality by resorting to the black market, an example of the way it was necessary to negotiate between different norms.91

Marina’s parents’ selective adoption of and playful license with received norms, both traditional and modern, was exemplified in the way they hung a rug on the wall. At face value this would seem to be a conventional thing to do, in line with handed-down norms rather than the new modernist ones. Rugs were still sought after by almost all my homemakers, as obligatory material of homeyness and markers of prosperity in accordance with traditional norms of proper homemaking [uiutnost’]. They were hung horizontally on walls behind a divan as a prominent element of the interior. Another of my younger, well-educated informants, Galina, describes from memory a typical
traditional interior from her Leningrad childhood in the 1950s-60s. 'На стенке был ковер, это было положено, считалось, что холодно спать или еще что-то такое.[...] Ещё какие-то картины были. Фотографии.' However, modernist advice in the Khrushchev era rejected rugs as atavistic, oriental dustcatchers. Some of my informants concurred with this view. Perhaps surprisingly then, when Marina was about eleven years old (around 1971), her parents acquired a rug. However, they demonstrated their difference and originality more dramatically than if they had simply omitted rugs from the interior entirely: by breaking with the convention of hanging rugs horizontally and instead hanging it vertically. Occupying the vertical axis usually taken by portrait painting, the ornamental rug was presented as if it was a wall hanging or abstract painting, drawing attention to its formal qualities. Through the play of difference from convention, this became meaningful as an arty gesture that defines them as hip, cool, modern, youthful, stylish or, as she puts it, 'avant-garde'.

Marina and her youthful, style-conscious parents had some privileged access to goods via her mother’s job in the MVD, and living alone as a nuclear family in their one-room flat, they were relatively free to define their style for themselves. Other informants had to take more account of the immediate authority of older relatives. Many spoke of familial contentions over the aesthetics of the home, display, and markers of household identity and prosperity, and of how they had to accommodate their own desire for a modern interior with the preferences and notions of propriety of the older generation. They represented themselves as modernizers in their households, as early adopters of innovations and a new generation that was more modern and urbane. Thus they distinguished themselves from the two negative identities, the rural and the philistine.

Rugs were the subject of contentions among family members. Roza, a Tatar’ woman living in Kazan’, rejected the practice of hanging rugs on the wall, in accordance with the authoritative prescriptions of contemporary good taste. However, in spite of her own preference to adopt the modern, she had to hang rugs to accommodate her Dagestani mother-in-law’s criteria of a proper home.

In addition to rugs, there were further negotiations and differences within and between households over the choice of what to hang on one’s walls and how to hang it. Photographic display practices emerge from the interviews as a matter of self-defining significance and social anxiety to my informants. They materialize diachronic and synchronic, self-other relations in terms of sameness or difference. Even as their content – photos of family members dead and alive – was directed at continuity and preservation of memory, photographic displays also mark changes through time.
My oldest informants recalled that it was ‘fashionable’ in their lifetime to have photo ‘iconostases’: formal arrangements of a large number of framed family photographs on the wall. Anna F. (Kovdor), born in 1919, had left her impoverished village in the South West when she was 18 to move to the Far North in search of income, self-betterment and opportunity, and had trained as an aircraft engineer. She still had photos of family members on the wall, hung in frames that her husband had made. Raisa (Kaluga), like Anna F., came from a very poor rural background, but was a generation younger. She recalls that photographs of family – grandparents, aunts, parents – mounted on card or board, in wooden frames of different sizes, had been ‘fashionable’ in the postwar period. However, some time before 1968 they had ‘suddenly disappeared’. Similarly, Zinaida (also in Kovdor) associated the practice of hanging photographs with her childhood home where she remembered ‘oklad’ (iconostases) of photos on the wall. As an adult this was something she never practiced, she emphasizes; it had no part in her homemaking or her self-construction.

Z: I never hung photos. Although when I was a child we had these big oklady and all the photos were there on the wall.
Qu: But you didn’t want to do it here?
Z: No.
Qu: You didn’t like it? Why?
Z: I don’t know. Evidently things had changed, so to speak... it was mother’s apartment. Well, how to put it, everybody had them and clearly everyone imitated one another. I don’t know. Here we didn’t. We didn’t hang any pictures at all.

What does this changing practice tell us about changes in the sense of self? Zinaida and others explain the disappearance of foto-oklady in terms of ‘fashion’, implying that it was a matter of imitation of others. Petersburg intelligentsia informants, such as Anna A. with her educational capital, and cultured, modern tastes, emphatically denied that they had ever had iconostases of photographs representing the family tree on the wall. Her daughter insists: ‘There were definitely never any photos ... Somehow it wasn’t done [to put them] on the walls.’

Qu: So why weren’t there any photos? In your family back when you lived in Orenburg, did you have photos?
A: Never, never.
Daughter: Well it depends on the family.
Qu: Because in a lot of people’s [homes] they’ve kept whole iconostases.
A: Well you know, no. [...] I remember of course that on the buffet there were very fine frames. There were photos there, I suppose, of father
Daughter: they were displayed...
A: But never on the walls.
B: А почему фотографий не было? В вашей семье, вот вы жили тогда в Оренбурге, у вас были фотографии?
О: Никогда, никогда.
Дочь: Ну от семьи зависит.
В: Потому что у многих, конечно, сохранились целые такие иконостасы.
О: А вы знаете, нет. [...] Я помню, конечно, что на буфете были в красивых очень рамках. Были фотографии там, предположим, отца...
Дочь: выставляли.
О: А на стенках никогда.

Emphasizing that the rejection of photos on the wall was something that was never done in their household, Anna and her daughter represent themselves as more advanced than others. They make clear the social stigma attached to display practices: putting photos on the wall was the kind of thing that other people did - those who also hung rugs on the wall; it was a lower class or ‘rural’ practice and as such, backward, old fashioned. Anna A.’s neighbor, Inna, also says she did not like the practice of hanging photographs, and changes the subject to talk about a painting and decorative arts from Japan, which her father, a diplomat in the 1920s, had brought back. “Нет, фотографий у меня не было. Я не любитель этого. Нет. На стенах... наверное, вот эта вот картина У меня папа когда-то работал в Японии, вот это вот оттуда картинка, еще по-моему, одна была. Что еще? Тарелки были, вот там у меня сервиз, папа тоже из Японии привез. Тарелки такие были.”

Figure 3 Inna’s picture (P1010449.JPG).

Asked why she did not hang photos on the walls, Tat’iana K., who moved to Kaluga from a village, replied unequivocally: ‘That’s in the countryside; there were my mother’s photos hanging there. She came here, my mum died here, and I left the photograph of her, of course, but I hung it in my own bedroom, my own. There, in the girls’ room, I didn’t hang anything.’ [Это в деревне, были там фотографии висели мамины. Она приехала сюда, у меня мама здесь умерла уже, и её фотографии, конечно, я оставила, но я её повесила в своей спальне, в своей. А там уже у девчонок я ничего не вешала.] Rejecting the practice, she separated her self from her rural mother and from her own rural origins, thus shoring up her sense of herself as a modern urban dweller. To hang photos was a rural practice and, she says, ‘after all, it’s the city here.’
Thus, the mode of display of photographs emerges as a divider between past and present and between self and others, along generational and urban/rural lines, as well as those of class and education. Although class distinctions were supposed to have been erased (informants refer rather to social strata, as official discourse did, or to income, as well as to urban-rural distinctions), the ways they discuss their own and other people’s aesthetic and consumption decisions indicates a strong sense of hierarchical stratification or distinction on the basis of cultural capital.

However, given the close connection between photos, memory and self-identity, Tat’iana K.’s account also suggests another process at work. This was not so much to do with large categories such as class as the basis of identity, but more with personal relationships and subjective sense of self. The single photograph - of her mother – that survived this purge now hung in her personal space, the bedroom. The iconostasis of photos that had once hung on the walls of the shared space, the zal (living room), had laid out family identity in terms of genealogy and generations for all household members and visitors to see. With its removal, the ‘public’ display of dynasty, defining who one is through one’s relations to past generations, was replaced by a more selective, immediate and intimate display of a single photo of her mother, which migrated to the more ‘private’ space of her bedroom. In other cases, photos were kept, unframed, behind the glazed doors of the cabinet, to be taken out occasionally, shown and held. The disappearance of the family tree from the wall coincided approximately with the period of moving to new flats designed for single nuclear families, and its consequences: the separation (in some cases) from the older generation, loosening hold of tradition, and purge of old material culture.

‘Simple People’

Many interviewees were diffident about claiming to seek any coherent aesthetic or unique personal style in the interior, whether or not it was the legitimate Contemporary Style. Even Anna A., who above professed great interest in homemaking, hesitated before saying that she was trying to make her apartment beautiful, as if this was too immodest a claim for her own domestic creativity. Nina, a postal worker in Kazan’, refused to be drawn out concerning reasons for her choices for the interior, and about whether she aspired to achieve a particular aesthetic or consulted home decorating advice in magazines. She represented the process of buying household items as a natural one simply based on need, without any social or cultural connotations, negotiations between priorities, or possibility of irrational consumerist desire:
Why take advice? After all there were shops – hardware shops, furniture shops. If I need a saucepan I go to the hardware shop. I choose what I want. If I need furniture I also go and start to look. I need a table - I've already bought a bed so that doesn't interest me any more - so as soon as I've saved up enough money I go and buy a table.

Зачем советоваться? Ведь существовали магазины – хозяйственные, мебельные. Надо мне кастрюлю, я иду в хозяйственный. И я выберу то, что мне нравится. Надо мне мебель – я тоже прихожу и начинаю смотреть. Мне нужен стол. Вот я купила кровать, так, она меня больше не интересует. Дальше как деньги сэкономила – я сразу бегу покупать стол.

Dmitrii, born 1928, and his wife Valentina, residents of Kazan', denied having had any interest in home decorating or in choosing an aesthetic style and lifestyle that would distinguish them and their apartment. They insisted that they were 'simple people'. Both had suffered major dislocation and deprivation in their youth in the 1930s-40s until they came to rest in Kazan'. Dmitrii’s father had been a prosperous farmer and supplemented his income by seasonal work in the metal industry, but he was ‘dekulakized’ during Collectivization, his property was seized, and the family moved to the city. Valentina grew up in Moscow but was evacuated in 1941 during the war. Starting life with these disadvantages, they had very limited education and low income as workers in the sewing industry (a low-paid sector), Dmitrii as a grinder (tochilshchik) and Valentina as a seamstress.

Interviewer: А вот в шестидесятые годы? Как обставляли квартиры тогда? [...] Было ли желание выделяться как-то у людей?
Dmitrii: Да нет. Мы же люди простые.
I. Я имею в виду – хотелось ли сделать оригинальной квартиру?
D. Нет. Нет.
I. А украшения были в квартире? Хотели украсить?
D. Нет. Тоже не нравится. Вот обои сменяем ещё раз, если силы хватит. Обои надо менять. Они становятся старыми.

Dmitrii and Valentina, along with Nina and other provincial informants (mostly, but not always, the poorest and least educated), emphasized the ‘choice of the necessary’ and the contingency of their home making - ‘we did what we had to live’. They also reveal the continued hold of propriety, a conservative force that required one to do ‘as it is done’. This was a more immediate authority for them than the Contemporary Style, which the state’s accredited specialists, far away in Moscow and Petersburg, promoted as the only legitimate style for the modern Soviet home. They showed little awareness of the precepts of that style. Moreover, to choose it would set this couple apart from the prevailing norms of their own social milieu. While for Inna, Anna A., or Irina, adoption of the Contemporary Style might demonstrate alignment with the progressive collective, confirming their belonging in the metropolitan intelligentsia, in Dmitrii’s immediate
everyday habitat it would constitute a form of conspicuous consumption and deviance from social norms. Claiming to be ‘simple people,’ Dmitrii and Valentina did not want to stand out from their peers, but to fit in. The meaning of home, and how they present themselves there, was defined through reciprocity and relations with others.

Many of my informants indicate that it was important to them that the separate apartment was a place to which one could invite guests, and that those guests would recognize it as a homey, accommodating place. For Inna, the ‘success’ of her interior was marked not by its uniqueness – which might reflect back a sense of herself as a unique individual - but by the fact that others found it hospitable and felt ‘at home’ there. Inna replies to a question about whether her apartment had an individual character (‘А была какая-то индивидуальность? За счет чего вы создавали ее?’)

Inna: Ну я не знаю. Я только знаю, что моя квартира нравилась всем. В ней было уютно вроде бы, хорошо. Во всяком случае, то, что мне всегда говорили, и ко мне любили приходить. Так что я понимаю, что было нормально, нормально, так скажем.

This other-defined, peer group normativity of domestic aesthetics is not peculiar to my Soviet homemakers. Studying the role of home decoration for women in Norwegian society, Marianna Gullestad also found that it was aimed at making one’s interior conform to an accepted notion of home in which others will also feel at home. Home improvements were a way for her Norwegian housewife informants to keep in tandem with each other, rather than about competing or standing out. Thereby, ‘individuals create a material frame within which they can socialize. This socialization is the basis for normativity – that is, deciding the moral parameters by which they will determine their own behaviour and judge others.’102 Homeyness involved being recognizable to others as a good, cosy home.

Figure 4<Fig: Dmitrii and Valentina: arrangement on cabinet top>

Notwithstanding Dmitrii and Valentina’s cultural diffidence and self-identification as ‘ordinary folk’ - and although their arrangements of decorative items did not correspond to the ‘contemporary’ norms of taste - their interior contained a number of ‘aesthetic’ objects and arrangements. Two oval landscape paintings, depicting stereotypically Russian scenes of a forest and a wide river valley - the Volga that flows through their adopted home-city Kazan’ - hang symmetrically on either side of an antique pendulum clock in an ornately carved case on the wall to the left of the window. Dmitrii’s responses indicate that he does not think of his two oval landscape paintings primarily as decorative elements and he does not mention the paintings in response to the question about elements of ‘decoration’. Although they are original paintings, he talks
about them not in terms of aesthetic appreciation but in relation to personal associations and leisure time he had shared with their author, his boss, who was an amateur artist. Dmitrii explains that the pictures were gifts that represented their special relationship. They would go on fishing trips together to a lake in his boss’s car. His boss had painted pictures of those places and given them to Dmitrii as a token of their companionship, a friendship that crossed the social divide of their differing status.

Still prominently displayed after many years, they index an aspect of his life he still holds dear. The pictures on Dmitrii’s wall are not an expression of his individual aesthetic preference, but materialize his social relations both outside the home. If the picture says anything about him, it is about his social being and relationships: who he is for others, and how others see him.

The pictures also reference a sense of place: both the specific places he would visit with his boss and, more broadly, the archetypally Russian landscape of the Volga. They manifest a sense of home and belonging which, for Dmitrii, is broader than the apartment, encompassing also the communal space of the yard, where he was a good khoziain and respected neighbor, and the Russian homeland. Dmitrii’s identity is defined through his relationship with significant others including his former boss, his wife, and neighbors, and with meaningful places. His sense of place and of self is also defined through relations with neighbors and by participation in collective place-making work in the common yard shared by apartment residents. Although he showed little interest in talking about aesthetic choices in the apartment interior, failing to engage with the ideal of Soviet person as tasteful artist in the home, he was keen to reminisce about the work he put into the communal yard. Valentina confirms: ‘Everyone would come to him. He is such a kind person.’ [Все сюда идут к нему. Он ведь такой доброжелательный.] But although neighbors would often ask him for help in home improvements, Dmitrii’s priority was community space: ‘If they asked I never had time. I had a lot of work to do in the yard.’ [Если бы они обратились, мне было бы некогда. Вот во дворе, там работы моей много.] Here, Dmitrii presents himself as an essential part of collective, a good neighbor and citizen. For him, material work on community space - more than on his
own or others’ apartment - was a source of positive identity and status. He was not merely an anonymous statistic in a standard box, but a respected figure in the local community, the good khoziain of public discourse concerning how to live and who to become in the novostroiki. Dmitrii may have claimed to be a ‘simple person’ but the sources of his sense of self were multidimensional and complex.

Conclusion

This chapter began with the actions and intentions of the party-state which sought (via its authorized agents and institutions) to shape a modernized material environment and, thereby, to engender an updated ‘New Soviet Person’ fit for the era of advanced construction of Communism. In this new stage of modernity, not only labor or social work but also the home, consumption and everyday aesthetics became terrain for aligning oneself with public ideals. I asked whether the new housing environment and accompanying discourses of socialist modernization fostered the formation of new subjectivities and interpersonal relations, just as they were supposed to do. Taking both oral history narrative and material evidence into account, I proposed that aesthetic appearances and display practices in the modern separate apartment could provide a way to develop a historical account of changing subjectivity, since domestic material culture does not merely reflect or express an existing self but plays a role in producing and maintaining that self from day to day.

Some of my informants appropriated the new aesthetic norms of Soviet modernity in the form of the Contemporary Style and, in certain respects, aligned themselves with the authoritative paragons of virtue which the new material and discursive environment were intended to produce. However, others showed little or no awareness of the prescriptions, despite their ubiquitous presence in the media, seeing the aim to define a coherent style in ones interior as ‘not for them’. Moreover, the ‘structures’ within which homemakers exercised agency and choice were far from coherent and unitary. The narrative of self and its material production were not limited by the normative subject positions proffered in authoritative discourses, nor by the preferred aesthetic of the modern Soviet ideal home. They were produced within more complex networks of relations, horizontal as well as vertical, diachronic as well as synchronic, modernizing and conservative. Although the move to new apartments and mikroraioni in many ways hastened the loosening of tradition’s hold in everyday life, the 1960s and 1970s, were still a transitional period during which established norms and practices remained tenacious. Homemakers negotiated between the authorities of tradition and (socialist) modernity. If people made themselves in the process of making home, then the subject
was a hybrid and more or less successful reconciliation between contradictory forces, past and present.


7 E.g. the novel by Daniil Granin, *Posle svad'by* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1964); for other examples see Reid, 'Happy Housewarming.'


27 Krylova, ‘Soviet Modernity’ Check.

28 N. S. Khrushchev, O shirokom vnedrenii industrial’nykh metodov, uluchshenii kachestva i snizhenii stoimosti stroitel’stva: rech’ na Vsesoiuznom soveshchanii stroitelei, architektov i rabotnikov promyshленnosti stroitel’nykh materialov, stroitel’nogo i dorozhnogo mashinostroenia, proektmykh i nauchno-issledovatel’skich organizatsii, 7 dekabria 1954 g. (Moscow: Politizdat, 1955).


38 E.g. Saime, Tartu, interview for Everyday Aesthetics.


40 Nadezhda Mandel’shtam, Kniga vtoraia (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1990), 12-13, Boym’s translation, Common Places, 92-93. As Boym notes, ‘The “I” could be taken away as well as one’s home.’

41 Hellbeck, Revolution on My Mind, 10.

42 Ibid, 10.

43 Interviews with Rimma (Kazan’), Fatyma (Kazan’), Diana (Kaluga) for Everyday Aesthetics.

44 Inna, interview for Everyday Aesthetics. Unattributed quotes are taken from interviews for this project.

45 According to Shlapentokh, such fears were realized. Vladimir Shlapentokh, Public and Private Life of the Soviet People: Changing Values in Post-Stalin Russia (Oxford University Press, 1989), 153-64.
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47 Western studies of material culture, consumption and homemaking in relation to the self are also largely underpinned by Hegel’s dialectical conception of subject-object relations as a process of mutual constitution of subject by object and object by subject. See Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity*, 102-104.


49 ‘Programme of the CPSU,’ 249. 255-6.


55 Makovicky, ‘Closet,’ 290; Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity; Giddens, Consequences of Modernity*.

56 Makovicky, ‘Closet,’ 290; 304, n. 2 of 287-310.

57 The literature on consumer culture in state socialist Eastern Europe as well as USSR has grown too extensive to cite fully here. Regarding the post-Stalinist USSR see Reid, ‘Cold War in the Kitchen’; essays in D. Crowley and S.E. Reid, eds, *Pleasures in Socialism* (Northwestern, 2010); Timo Vihamnen and Elena Bogdanova, eds, *Communism and Consumerism: The Soviet Alternative to the Affluent Society* (Brill, 2015).


60 Fuller argumentation in Reid, ‘Khrushchev Modern;’ and in Reid, ‘Cold War Binaries and the Culture of Consumption in the Late Soviet Home,’ *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing* 8, no. 1 (2016), 17-43.

and the Aesthetic and Moral Perimeters of the Soviet Home during the Khrushchev Era,’ *Journal of Social History* 41, no. 3 (2008).


65 For detail see Reid, ‘Khrushchev Modern,’ 227-68. On furniture see also Gerchuk, ‘Aesthetics of Everyday Life,’ 81-100; Harris, *Communism on Tomorrow Street*.

66 On the hiatus between blueprint and reality, between advice and its adoption see e.g. Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*; Field, *Everyday Life*.


68 Bourdieu, *Distinction*.

69 Marina (Samara, born 1960) says of her parents’ modern interior, it was ‘laconic’, functional and ‘everything was subtle’.

70 For Bourdieu’s concept (via Mauss) of habitus, the ‘structuring structure’ see Pierre Bourdieu *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1980). For further exploration of the ambiguities and tension see Reid, ‘Communist Comfort’.


78 Matsui, ‘Soviet Diary,’ 389, 392; Summary, 417.

79 See also Anna Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).


81 Like all cultural objects, domestic displays and interior decorating must signify through common codes and conventions of meaning-making that both producer and reader or spectator


My informants deny that these bodies would enter and inspect their aesthetic choices, contra Buchli’s claims, Archaeology of Socialism, 138; and also contradicting Kharkhordin’s notion that the ‘grid of surveillance’ was perfected in the Khruščhev era: Kharkhordin, Collective and Individual; and more recent arguments by LaPierre, Hooligans.

According to Habermas, ‘In the everyday world we encounter one another as second persons: we disclose and justify ourselves before others’. Habermas, The Future of Human Nature, 107-8. 


E.g. Photographs of model interiors in Biair and Blashkevich, Kvartira i ee ubranstvo.

For the ‘Faustian bargain’ or paradoxical co-dependence of legal norms and illegal or semi-legal practices in the shadow economy see Lewis Siegelbaum, Cars for Comrades (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2008), 238-47; Judd Stitziel, ‘Shopping Sewing, Networking, Complaining: Consumer Culture and the Relationship Between State and Society in the GDR,’ in Pence and Betts, Socialist Modern, 253-86. 

By the mid-60s advice had become less insistent on unified newness and industrial aesthetic and often recommended the introduction of a few well-chosen elements of traditional folk craft into the industrially produced interior to provide strategic patches of colour and faktura, e.g. Voeikova, ‘Uiut – v prostote’.

Analyzing similar conditions under late socialism in Slovakia, Makovicky denies that choice played any part for her informants, or that aesthetic choices in the home were a matter of negotiation. Makovicky, ‘Closet,’ 2007. 

Battles between the old and the new were also waged over the adoption of new technologies for the home, which were widely promoted by specialist agents of the party-state, as well as over gender roles in the home. Reid, ‘This is Tomorrow: Becoming a Consumer in the Soviet Sixties,’ in Anne Gorsuch and Diane Koenker, eds, The Socialist Sixties: Crossing Borders in the Second World (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 25-65.


Tat’iana, Kovdor. 

Svetlana in Apatity also explains the passing of this practice in the same way: ‘later it wasn’t fashionable’: ‘72-ogo goda, vot tam nemnozhko, nebol’shie tam. Potom tam k liudiam poidi, u nikh ne bylo. I kak to, znaete, vse snimali.’

E.g. Anneta takes out her ‘nenagliadnaia’, an old photo-postcard of Brigitte Bardot, to show the interviewer.

Photographs, once a prestigious commodity, became commonplace, part of mass visual culture. I. Narskii, Fotokartochka na pamiat': semeinye istorii. Fotograficheskie poslaniia
100 According to Bourdieu, the ‘choice of the necessary’ is made by the working class not because they are unable to afford aesthetic choices but out of habitus – the structure of cognitions or dispositions formed by long, collective, transmitted experiences of the economic limitations of their class position. Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 1984, 376; and Don Slater’s critique: *Consumer Culture*, 163.

101 Nina, Samara: *Everyday Aesthetics*.


105 On the good *khoziain* see Reid ‘Building Utopia’.