

**QUEUETOPIA: SECOND-WORLD MODERNITY AND THE SOVIET  
CULTURE OF ALLOCATION**

by

**Andrew H. Chapman**

Bachelor of Arts, University of Rochester, 2004

Master of Arts, University of Pittsburgh, 2007

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This dissertation was presented

by

Andrew H. Chapman

It was defended on

March 22, 2013

and approved by

David J. Birnbaum, Professor and Department Chair, University of Pittsburgh,  
Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures

Nancy Condee, Professor, University of Pittsburgh, Department of Slavic Languages  
and Literatures

Randall Halle, Klaus W. Jonas Professor, University of Pittsburgh, Department of  
German

Nancy Ries, Associate Professor, Colgate University, Department of Anthropology  
and Peace & Conflict Studies

Dissertation Advisor: Vladimir Padunov, Associate Professor, University of  
Pittsburgh, Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures

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# QUEUETOPIA: SECOND-WORLD MODERNITY AND THE SOVIET

## CULTURE OF ALLOCATION

Andrew H. Chapman, PhD

University of Pittsburgh, 2013

The social structure of the queue, from its most basic forms as a spontaneous group of people on the street, to the ordered lists of status-based priorities within society, leads to rich discussions on consumption, the behavior of crowds, and everyday life within Soviet society. By viewing how practices such as queuing were encoded in Soviet culture, the dissertation theorizes how everyday life was based on discourses of scarcity and abundance. I contend in my second chapter that second-world modernity was not predicated on the speed and calculation usually associated with modern life. Instead, it stressed a precise social ordering of allocation and a progress defined by the materiality of Soviet life. This notion of modernity operates irrespective of the temporal concerns usually associated with the first-world. In Chapter Three, I discuss how cities themselves served as the ultimate Soviet commodity, allocated to citizens who supported the Soviet project.

Central to my analysis is a conceptualization of Soviet subjectivity through the prism of the queue, in which I explore how voices of individual priority operated simultaneously amongst discourses of collectivity. Chapter Four looks at this notion, called *ocherednost'* (queue priority), which traces how authors expressed their concerns within the very same collective and allocative discourses of queuing.

The dissertation also looks at Soviet material culture and what goods meant in a culture of shortage in Chapter Five, titled "*Trofeinost'* (trophying) and the Phantasmagoria of Everyday

Consumption.” It details the fantastic, absurd, and imaginative ways in which Soviet consumer culture was depicted in fiction. Commodities themselves become objects of attention and structural devices in narrative.

Finally, the concluding chapter looks at the post-Soviet period and the proclamations of the capitalist world’s so-called “culture of abundance.” Vestiges of queuing in the post-Soviet period continued to exist, even after the connection between consumers and a state-ordered system of allocation collapsed. The legacy of second-world modernity continues to permeate the current landscape; habitual practices become transformed into cultural events and performances, such as queuing flash mobs and board games.

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## PREFACE

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION: THE END OF THE LINE<sup>1</sup>

But as a phenomenon, as a microstructure, the queue's a very curious thing, and it's curious that it hasn't been researched and analysed at all.  
— Vladimir Sorokin, "Interview" (151)

When I explain to people that I research the culture of queuing, it almost always elicits an immediate response that includes anecdotes of personal experiences, jokes, and cultural stereotypes of how a particular group waits. Queuing and waiting are common modern experiences, regardless of place, economic system, and time period. For Americans, their awareness of queuing in the Soviet Union was often related through numerous travelers' accounts of poor material conditions of everyday life and through the numerous jokes told by American politicians such as Ronald Reagan. Winston Churchill coined the term "Queuetopia" in 1950 to warn against the threat of socialism both in Great Britain and in Eastern Europe: "Why should queues become a permanent, continuous feature of our life? Here you see clearly what is in their minds. The Socialist dream is no longer Utopia but Queuetopia. And if they have the power, this part of their dream will certainly come true" (Langworth 42). The melding of the words queue and utopia highlights the double-sidedness of both optimism and

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<sup>1</sup> Note on transliteration, translation, and dates: System II will be used throughout, except in situations when authors prefer or publish under a different transliteration. English translations are cited from published volumes, when available, although I have changed the transliteration of Russian names for the purposes of uniformity and made corrections to adhere more closely to the original text, when necessary. Dates provided for primary sources refer to date of production, unless otherwise noted with relevant publication information.

disappointment that each word shares separately. The homonym utopia refers to both an ideal “good place” (“eu-topos”) but also a “no-place” (“ou topos”) that cannot exist in society. Likewise, queues offer their own promise to allocate goods fairly, but they often subject people to long periods of waiting. Both concepts present an ideal that often falls short in practice.

While queuing can be directly linked to the Soviet urban experience of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, its history dates prior to the Soviet period. The author Vladimir Sorokin traces the history of the queue back to the Khodynskoe Field tragedy of 1896, when thousands gathered for gifts from Tsar Nikolai II the day after his public coronation. Queuing became a common practice in the years following Khodynskoe, with strikes, demonstrations, and bread riots over the inability to buy goods from the turn of the century leading up to 1917, one of the factors eventually resulting in the abdication of Tsar Nikolai II.<sup>2</sup> Sorokin notes the importance of these events, calling them the birth of “the collective body” in Russia that would become so important in the revolutions in future years (“Afterward” 256). This view places the shaping of the collective body as something that arose out of the populace’s connection with the leader. The queue can thus be conceptualized in many forms away from the site of consumption, and in this case, it takes the shape of a procession. Over 100,000 people viewed Lenin’s body in the temporary mausoleum during its first months, resulting in architect Aleksei Shchusev’s construction of a more permanent granite version in 1930. Before Stalin was placed in the same mausoleum following

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<sup>2</sup> This scene of the crowd crushing itself to get within proximity of the Tsar has prevalently occurred in Russian history and culture. Lev Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* (*Voyna i mir* [1865-1869]) features a scene with the character Petia, who is almost crushed to death while trying to see Tsar Aleksandr II. Sergei Eisenstein’s *Ivan the Terrible* (*Ivan grozny* [1944-1946]) similarly constructs a scene in which boyars wait for the Tsar, imploring him to retake control and rule over the Russian nation.

his death in 1953, thousands gathered to catch a glimpse of the leader's body at a public viewing in Red Square, with many crushing one another in the process.

The practice of queuing took different forms under the leadership of Stalin. In *Everyday Stalinism* (1999), Sheila Fitzpatrick finds the shortages of the end of the 1920s and 1930s as a byproduct of the rapid urbanization and industrialization of the Five Year Plans, a course that required the newly formed, centrally planned economy to provide all material goods to its populace. Individual need was placed secondary to the country's drive towards industrialization. Likewise, deficiency and failure was just one part of the state discourse that divided citizens and enemies: "Under the First Five Year Plan (1929-1932), heavy industry was the top priority and consumer goods took a poor second place. Communists also attributed food shortages to 'hoarding' by kulaks, and when the kulaks had gone, to intentional anti-Soviet sabotage in the production and distribution chain" (Fitzpatrick 42). In *A Social History of Soviet Trade* (2004), Julie Hessler details the state's control of queues in order to limit private trade. Speculators and queue specialists were arrested beginning in 1928 and secret decrees in 1939 ordered the policing of nighttime and overnight queues in Moscow (236, 267).

The gendered aspect of queuing also becomes particularly visible during this period, as women waited in lines outside of city prisons to learn the fates of their husbands and sons and to deliver packages to them. Anna Akhmatova's *poema, Requiem (Rekviem [1935-1961/1988])*, and Lidiia Chukovskaia's *Sof'ia Petrovna (1939-1940/1965)* both serve as condemnations of the Stalinist era, particularly the purges directed under Nikolai Ezhov from 1936 to 1938.<sup>3</sup> During this time period, relatives were told by NKVD that those arrested had been sentenced to "ten

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<sup>3</sup> *Requiem* was an ongoing project for Akhmatova, written between 1935 and 1961. It was first published in the Soviet Union in 1988.

years without the right to correspond” (“desiat’ let bez prava perepiski”), despite the fact that many of those who had been arrested had already been executed. These sentences kept relatives waiting, with many making further inquiries ten years later in 1947, when they were told that their relatives had died while imprisoned. Both authors show how those who waited in lines during the Stalinist period were subjects positioned in a constant state of uncertainty, and in the control of state power.

Waiting as a form of endurance and survival was also viewed as a heroic act in the mythology of World War Two, as the geographic space of the Soviet Union was transformed into the war front and the rear. Inhabitants of Soviet cities endured lengthy blockades and sieges before the Nazis retreated from Soviet land. The city of Leningrad was cut off from the rest of Soviet territory during its almost 900-day siege. This endurance on the national level was also replicated in more intimate scenes of waiting. The popular World War Two poem by Konstantin Simonov, “Wait for me, and I will return” (“Zhdi menia, i ia vernus” [1941]), serves as a perfect example of both the temporal and spatial aspects of waiting. The poem, which is addressed by a soldier at the front to his wife at home, stresses the need for patience in waiting and enduring World War Two, but at the same time, highlights the physical separation that causes this temporal problem. The first lines of the poem, “Wait for me, and I will return,” stress that waiting will solve the problem of separation, almost as if the successful return is dependent upon the act of waiting.

The post World War Two decade again saw rationing as a means of controlling scarce goods during reconstruction. Long after the Soviet Union recovered from the effects of the war and acquired greater economic stability, queuing remained a routine everyday aspect of Soviet life: people stood in line for food and medicine, and queued symbolically in waiting lists for

commodities such as apartments, furniture, or automobiles. The period of Stagnation highlights the stability of the queue; many people view the period nostalgically, buying into the values that the state was not necessarily able to provide abundance, but rather a “guarantee of greater equality and material security” (W. Thompson 85). Products provided an illusion of stability, ignoring other undesirable features of Soviet society, such as rising crime, soaring rates of alcoholism, and other alarming demographic statistics. Delays experienced by Soviet consumers statistically pointed toward impending economic disaster, as Soviet citizens in the 1980s spent 80 billion hours per year waiting in line for goods, working only half that amount of time (Zemtsov 261). The practice of queuing for goods was interpreted as a commonplace, however, and was viewed as a nuisance of everyday life, rather than an extraordinary problem.

Soviet citizens relied on queues, amongst other means, to acquire both domestic and highly sought-after foreign goods. It is interesting to note that while scarcity was often associated with foreign goods and the rarest items in Soviet society were doled out to those on *nomenklatura* lists, it is the ever-presence of foreign capitalism in the post-Soviet period that, according to many, destroyed the queue. Konstantin Bogdanov concludes that the Stagnation period was the last era for the queue: “The queue began to lose its monolithic stature, thinned out and dissolved. New landmarks loomed. The air reeked of the West, and the Queue, having crumbled near the Mausoleum, materialized for a while by the radiant heavenly light of the walls of the newly opened ‘McDonalds’” (426).<sup>4</sup> He also points out that the queue no longer needs an ideological representation tied to its appearance (427). Sorokin similarly writes that the queue

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<sup>4</sup> “Очередь стала терять монолитность, редеть и осыпаться. Замаячили новые ориентиры. В воздухе ощутимо запахло Западом, и Очередь рассыпавшись около Мавзолея, материализовалась на некоторое время у сияющих неземным светом стен новооткрытого ‘Макдоналдса’” (Bogdanov 426).



changes form in post-Soviet Russia. It loses its system of ordering, and dissolves into the chaos of the crowd. This world, however, certainly still exists in Russia on the bureaucratic level of state provided services. All of these different forms of queuing detailed above range from the spontaneous appearing crowds to the virtual queue, an ordered list of names. The dissertation will treat both ends of this spectrum as queues, which occurred historically in practice and found artistic form in representation.

Existing scholarship on the queue has been limited almost solely to the field of sociology and economics.<sup>5</sup> Barry Schwartz's *Queuing and Waiting* (1975) highlights the inherent hierarchical meaning found in acts of waiting and the social organization of the queue. Russo-Soviet discussions of queuing are often grounded in sociology as well, beginning with Aleksandr Zinov'ev's sociological novel *The Yawning Heights* (*Ziiaiushchie vysoty* [1976]), which takes a very similar stance to Schwartz's on the queue as a social structure that allocates goods based on priority. Vladimir Nikolaev's *The Queue as a Form of Habitation* (*Ochered' kak sreda obitaniia* [2000]) views the queue as a physical manifestation that embodies various principles, feelings, and emotions, such as envy and competition, as well as fairness, across the collective.<sup>6</sup>

More recent studies that analyze the queue from cultural studies perspectives are from two Slavists, Bogdanov and Mikhail Epshtein. Bogdanov's chapter "The Soviet Queue" ("Sovetskaia ochered") in *Everydayness and Mythology* (*Povsednevnost' i mifologiia* [2001]) views the queue as both a structure and symbol that links everyday experience with ideology, a

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<sup>5</sup> For economic analyses of queue systems, which I will not treat in the dissertation, see Kornai, Kornai and Weibull, Polterovich, and Stahl and Alexeev.

<sup>6</sup> In the dissertation, the noun "the collective," as well as the adjective form, will refer to the notion of people as a social unity, and should be distinguished from the few references I make to actual workforce and administrative organizations, which I denote by the terms "collectivity" or "collectivities."

vicious circle of consumption that enforces a key concept of Soviet ideology: the delaying of the present time in favor of future success. While his study is not historically grounded within a specific period, it uses literary and folkloric examples to bolster a sociological analysis of the queue's various social manifestations. Epshtein's chapter, "The Queue" ("Ochered") in *God of Details (Bog detalei* [1998]), similarly looks at the queue from its spontaneous formation to its culmination as the ultimate expression of socialism: the Lenin Mausoleum. Both of these views are more concerned with questions of temporality than with the spatial, hierarchical ordering of queuing in Soviet culture. The topic of waiting has been actively discussed in four monographs devoted specifically to the topic from 2007 to 2010.<sup>7</sup> These studies trace modern-day instances of waiting from the everyday use of the doctor's waiting room and the airport terminal, to the life and death situations at refugee camps. As I will discuss later, these authors are largely interested in the commoditization of waiting against the backdrop of capitalism.<sup>8</sup>

The dissertation is informed by the insights from these volumes on social organization, everyday life, and the ideological encoding of everyday practices. Discourses on queuing, on the one hand, were appropriated to embody Soviet ideology, positing the populace's orientation towards the future as a feature of second-world modernity: experiences of waiting and delay, the immediate needs of making acquisitions in the present, are conflated with notions of future progress. On the other hand, queues can be considered unofficial, spontaneously forming structures that exercise their own system of order and rules. Both of these ends of the spectrum nevertheless posit queuing as a practice that placed people within subjective orientations

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<sup>7</sup> See Ehn and Löfgren, Moran, Sayeau, and Schweizer.

<sup>8</sup> Commercial spaces often attempt to fill the voids of waiting. Airport malls filled with clothing and bookstores, television monitors, computing centers and electronic charging stations are all commodities that seek to occupy us while we are in transient spaces between our everyday habitations.

necessary to the socialist project. The appropriation of the queue as both a symbol of tolerance or patience, and of equality through individual acquisition, is oriented in the same social structure.

The dissertation has the ultimate goal to explore the arena in which cultural texts depict subjective experiences of waiting and the social organization of queuing. In this project, I hope to outline the intricacies of how second-world culture was constructed out of discourses on materiality, that of scarcity and abundance, as opposed to first-world culture, which oriented itself against the overcoming of temporal gaps. The dissertation thus sheds light on how each modern society viewed time, the notion of progress, and the costs of waiting within everyday life. I contend that Soviet modernity forwarded a culture of allocation that found a place for material acquisition outside of critiques of *petit-bourgeois* consumption, which did not fit into socialist ideology. I am particularly interested in how these discourses broke down in the post-Stalinist period, and I detail how discourses of queuing shifted from a collective consciousness that operated on principles of patience to wait for a future of abundance, to a means of expressing individual priority and individual meanings in the present conditions of scarcity. This marks a revival of how everyday life was narrated in Soviet culture, as authors and other cultural producers look for and create new meaning from the material world that was allocated to Soviet citizens. The dissertation thus tracks an imaginative response to conditions of scarcity and how the absences of material goods are transcended through cultural texts' surpluses of representation.

My approach is multidisciplinary, in that I explore the sociological ramifications of queuing and waiting, the history of practices, and the narratives produced throughout the Soviet period into the present day. In my analysis, I focus both on cultural depictions of the queue, as a

social phenomenon, but more so as a contiguous sign related to other trappings of second-world modernity. The queue was a marker of scarcity that ran across different aspects of Soviet culture and life, and to reduce it to a social practice or a reflection precludes a larger picture of its place within second-world modernity. The queue is an event, a site of gathering, and a host for emerging voices and expressions.

The dissertation treats all these levels of discourse equally, considering the culture of queuing from textual representation to the level of practice. Throughout the study, I analyze orally told anecdotes and jokes alongside verbal and visual texts, reading constitutive parts all as stories, mapping out how they articulate the subjective experiences of queuing and waiting. Although the dissertation focuses heavily on Soviet culture, I do at times refer to texts and studies from the Eastern Bloc. I consider these examples to be a larger part of second-world culture and second-world modernity, whose differences I outline opposite the first-world in Chapter Two.

The texts chosen do not simply provide descriptions of lived experiences or slices of everyday life, but rather actively relate moments of waiting to each author's understanding of principles and disciplines of queuing and allocation. I will detail how cultural discourses were broken down on three levels: Spatially on the macro scale of the Soviet urban landscape (Chapter Three), institutionally through discussions of priority and social hierarchies from within the very unions and collectivities that allocated products (Chapter Four), and finally, materially, through explorations of the consumer landscape of objects, which acquired new meaning and value through new forms of distribution and uses (Chapter Five). Thus, I am describing not simply stories of people waiting and the lines that appeared on street corners, but looking more deeply

into the cultural responses that arose out of a single modern vision that sought to allocate and package ideological meaning to its populace along with the very goods and services it offered.

## 2.0 HOW WE STAND: SECOND-WORLD MODERNITY AND THE SOVIET

### PROMISE OF ALLOCATION

If a crowd is considered chaos, then a queue is cosmos, formed by rules of numerable harmony.<sup>9</sup>

— Lidiia Ginzburg, *Zapisnye knizhki* (343)

As a goal, the most important feature of this object is that, like “communism” or “utopia,” it is given, not chosen; shared, not individual (the citizen asks not “what shall I buy today?” but “What are they giving us today?”)

— Sally Laird (qtd. Sorokin, *The Queue*: 1988 ii).

## 2.1 ETYMOLOGICAL ORIGINS AND RITUALS OF WAITING

Manifestations of waiting and their derived meanings vary greatly. The dissertation follows Schwartz’s definitions for the terms queuing and waiting in order to differentiate between the emotional, physical toll of waiting and the social practices and structures that dictate how we wait. He defines “queuing” as a social structure organized in terms of priority, whereas the term “waiting” is simply the “orientation of the personalities” of the structure (7).<sup>10</sup> For Schwartz, waiting is not simply a conscious act, but rather built into our psychological makeup, as children

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<sup>9</sup> “Если толпа—это хаос, то очередь—космос, устроенный по законам исчислимой гармонии” (Ginzburg 343).

<sup>10</sup> Although I will use examples from various studies that lack a conceptualization that distinguishes between queuing and waiting, the separation of the terminology is integral to understand and to lay out the differences between the first- and second-world.

first learn delayed gratification through the anal stage of their psycho-sexual development; thus the “installation of patience becomes a central problem of socialization” (173). The queue, by contrast, is a social organization that specifically addresses problems of how social bodies are positioned and served, which through state allocation, becomes central in second-world societies. According to Schwartz, “the problem of allocation has to do not only with *how much* different persons are to be given from a finite supply of goods and services but also with the *priority* in which their needs are to be satisfied” (93; emphasis in original). Queuing emphasizes the issue of priority, and the social structural model of the queue organizes how people wait.

The word “queue” originally described the “tail of a beast” beginning in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and it later described the fashion of the ponytail, as both Russian and English borrowed the usage from French in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Barnhart 627). While the word also described rows of dancers in Middle English dating back to before 1500, it evolved during industrialization to describe lines of people and vehicles in 1837. The word queue (*ochered'/khvost*) has special connotations in both the Russian language and Soviet culture. *Khvost*, translated as tail, was primarily used up until World War One. The modern variant, *ochered'*, can best be translated into English not only as queue, but also as having the meaning turn, as in “one’s turn” (“*v svoiu ochered'*”). This dual meaning of queue and turn immediately establishes nuances of a system of ordering and priority, rather than simply signifying the spontaneous organization of people. The movement away from *khvost*, a term that describes only the queue’s physical aspect, to the word *ochered'*, also reflects this notion. In fact, plans of modernization are connected with the language of queuing, with party directives ordering tasks in queues with the most urgent at the front of the line. State speeches invoke the vocabulary of the queue with the term “first in line” (“*v pervuiu ochered'*”).

This use of the word *ochered*' implies that certain goals of modernization should be placed before others, establishing a clear order of directives based on a hierarchy of importance.

These etymological origins are reflections of how queuing was not just a physical act, despite perceptions that always associate it with the common phrase “standing in line.” When viewing the queue from other disciplines, such as information science, however, conceptualizations offer insight beyond the physical structure, and instead focus on systems of allocation that often exist virtually. Sociological studies offer a middle ground and are more appropriate for how I view the queue, in that they not only consider the queue’s ramifications for the individual who stands in line, but also treat the queue as a form of social structure that occurs both on and away from the street corner. Here, the queue’s multiple manifestations go far beyond the physical act of standing and incorporate those who serve others, and the institutions they represent. Schwartz details some of these spatial orientations in the physicality of queuing and how they relate to power structures by noting that they construct a dyad of server and client. Servers remain stationary, while those who wait in line are forced to travel to the site of the server. The server remains in his natural dwelling, while those who wait are held without these comforts of the home (17).<sup>11</sup>

I am interested precisely in how Soviet culture tried to ideally depict this server-client relationship. Existing scholarship has taken a different approach, largely focusing on how everyday practices of queuing were subsumed into a larger, ideological notion of waiting.

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<sup>11</sup> Schwartz notes how servers remain stationary, while those who wait in line are forced to move. The Russo-Soviet context of this aspect of waiting is widely experienced in customer service in both businesses and bureaucratic institutions: office spaces resemble the domestic, with amenities from home such as teakettles and kitchen utensils and glassware being commonplace. Moreover, stores and offices routinely closed for lunch breaks. While these instances are bemoaned as poor quality service in what is characterized as a working-class system, those who wait are also prevented from working.



Bogdanov's chapter "The Soviet Queue" focuses on the connections between everydayness, defined as the daily grind of everyday life, and ideology, noting how the queue sublimated experiences of waiting with ideological notions of progress: "A person's understanding of Soviet queue culture is surrounded by feeling and emotion that is expressed, on one hand in the practice of everyday life, but on the other hand, through the ideological discourse of the epoch" (380).<sup>12</sup> Bogdanov cites literary and folkloric examples from the 20<sup>th</sup> century to illustrate how representations of everyday life are conflated with Soviet notions of collectivity and progress, recasting the queue not as a line, but rather as a path ("put") (384). What is more interesting in his analysis, however, is his observation of how Soviet culture adopted elements of tolerance and patience in its notion of progress: "The future advances in accordance with an already prescribed script, and all that is needed for its approach is the ability to wait, the strength to endure" (383).<sup>13</sup> Soviet ideology's conception of history works on this premise, and Bogdanov rightfully points out slogans used by Vladimir Lenin, such as "One step forward, two steps back," that emphasize the idea of delay that comes with a promise of progress (384).<sup>14</sup> An obvious temporal connection can be made with the method of Socialist Realism, whose temporal scope viewed reality in its revolutionary development. Socialist Realism operates as a denial of the present in

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<sup>12</sup> "Для человека советской культуры понятие очереди окрашено чувствами и эмоциями, выражающими, с одной стороны, практику повседневного быта, а с другой— идеологический дискурс эпохи" (Bogdanov 380).

<sup>13</sup> "Будущее наступает в соответствии с предписанным для него сценарием, все, что нужно для его приближения, — умение ждать, сила терпения" (Bogdanov 383).

<sup>14</sup> "Шаг вперед, два шага назад" (Bogdanov 387).

favor of what should become in the future. In this way Soviet culture constantly postponed success toward the future, when communism as a terminal point could finally be achieved.<sup>15</sup>

Bogdanov's analysis is useful in that it analyzes how state-promoted discourses of queuing oriented people toward the socialist project, while concealing much of the ideology within everyday life. A workers' tale "At the Barber Shop" (*V parikmakherskoi*) [1940] by Mikhail Zoshchenko shows just how the commonplace of waiting was transformed into a pedagogical moment. Zoshchenko presents a humorous, idealized depiction of the collective nature of the queue, who patiently wait for Lenin. In the story, Lenin joins a queue at a barbershop in order to get a shave, much to the surprise of the workers who wait. Lenin's speech is colloquial, placing him on the same levels as the workers when he asks: "Well, who is last in line?" (330).<sup>16</sup> When the workers offer him a chance to skip the line, Lenin uses the opportunity to provide a lesson, stating: "There must be order to the queue. We ourselves form rules and we should carry them out even in the smallest details of life" (331).<sup>17</sup> What is interesting in the story is that despite this proclamation, the rules are not followed. The hero of the story, Grigorii, states that he would be willing to go unshaven for five years, rather than make Lenin wait. Lenin is convinced by the workers to skip them in line, as he does not want to offend them for their offer. The workers are rewarded for waiting, however, in that they are able to observe Lenin

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<sup>15</sup> In *The Soviet Novel* (1981) Katerina Clark discusses the dueling temporalities of the Socialist Realist text, noting the denial of a present time: "Many great moments have been identified in the past, and many are foreseen for the future; in the interim, a lot of ordinary time has to elapse. This problem is smoothed over by making the future goal and past glories invest the present with their significance. A hierarchy is thus established in which the present moments are not valuable in themselves but represent modest, particular instances of Great Moments" (175).

<sup>16</sup> "Ну, кто последний ожидает?" (Zoshchenko 330).

<sup>17</sup> "Надо соблюдать очередь и порядок. Мы сами создаем законы и должны выполнять их во всех мелочах жизни" (Zoshchenko 331).

being shaved: “And everyone watched, how carefully and respectfully he was shaved” (331).<sup>18</sup> The story reconciles the fact that Lenin skipped the line. The workers revel in the spectacle of the leader, yet conclude he is at the same time a normal person: “And everyone looked at Comrade Lenin and thought: ‘This is a great man! But he is so modest!’” (331).<sup>19</sup> Zoshchenko’s story conveys the idea of ritual waiting, in which deference is shown by lower-ranking people who wait and depend on positions of authority. The story depicts a harmony between the workers and leader, and while the lesson of the story is somewhat destabilized by Zoshchenko’s humor, it is representative of how Soviet culture routinely emphasized a collective that served its higher ranks through sacrifice, diligence, and patience.

The ritual of waiting for Lenin was of course played out as one of the Soviet Union’s most well known spectacles. Epshtein calls the queue a monolith of Soviet society that leads straight to the Lenin Mausoleum. He views this type of waiting, the procession, as the highest ideologically encoded everyday act. He compares the queue with the Egyptian pyramids, noting how the queue is both monumental and seemingly eternal, built from the bottom up by those under the leader’s rule. The queue is like a pyramid, constructed not from the sand of the desert, but from the sands of time (58). Epshtein’s notion of the queue posits its followers in full dedication to their pharaoh, constructing a monument in his name. In this move, he connects the path of the queue to its culminating point, the origin: Lenin. “And the highest, most monumental of these human pyramids, at its foundation is the main vault, where the main queue of the country leads. The mausoleum is the union of two monumental structures: the Egyptian tomb at

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<sup>18</sup> “И все смотрят, как осторожно и вежливо его бреет” (Zoshchenko 331).

<sup>19</sup> “И все смотрят на товарища Ленина и думают: “Это великий человек! Но какой он скромный!” (Zoshchenko 331).

its base and Soviet queue as its superstructure” (59).<sup>20</sup> Although the path of the queue leads to the cult of the leader, it is important to note how the procession is at the same time an empowering, individual experience. Bogdanov agrees with this reading, and adds that queuing to say farewell is an individual activity: “The farewell is always a queue, people, moving one behind the other, ordered by the ‘procurement’ of their portion of ‘the farewell’” (387).<sup>21</sup> This point captures an important moment. Waiting became ritual in Soviet culture, tied not only to everyday consumerism, but also to mass events experienced both individually and collectively.<sup>22</sup>

Schwartz also analyses what he calls ceremonial waiting, a type of dramatized performance that shows one’s loyalty to the social structure and leader (44). The Lenin Mausoleum was a highly structured experience of waiting. The flow of Soviet citizens who waited to see Lenin at the mausoleum was mediated by state guards to keep the procession moving. The structure of the mausoleum was designed with crowd control in mind, with a clear path constructed around the open-glass casket.<sup>23</sup> The mausoleum was not only a structure that ordered the crowd, aligning everyone in respect to the leader, but it also interrupts the fluidity of everyday life to allow for contemplation. Like a ceremonial moment of silence, another act of waiting that seemingly suspends action in time, the mausoleum transformed waiting for Lenin

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<sup>20</sup> “И самая высокая, монументальная из этих человеческих пирамид с основанием в главной усыпальнице, куда ведет главная очередь страны. Мавзолей—сращение двух монументальных структур: египетской гробницы в основании и советской очереди в надстройке” (Epshtein 59).

<sup>21</sup> “Прощание—это всегда очередь, люди, движущиеся друг за другом в порядке ‘получение’ своей порции ‘прощание’” (Bogdanov 387).

<sup>22</sup> Processions were a ubiquitous image in early revolutionary culture, from Aleksandr Blok’s poem “The Twelve” (“Dvenadtsat” [1918]), to Sergei Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin* (*Bronnosets Potemkin* [1925/26]), and Dziga Vertov’s *One Sixth of the World* (*Shestaia chast’ mira* [1926]) and *Three Songs about Lenin* (*Tri pesni o Lenine* [1934]).

<sup>23</sup> The mausoleum was later retrofitted with stands for party members to make speeches and watch parades, transforming the mausoleum into a multi-purpose structure that showed deference for the leader, but also served as a podium for the Party to literally stand alongside Lenin.

into the highest ideological form of deference. It equated waiting with a sense of permanence that can stretch time, and was further embodied through the famous slogan, “Lenin lived, Lenin lives, Lenin will live.”<sup>24</sup>

These examples largely deal with the ideological underpinnings of Soviet culture in relation to a progress that is defined temporally. As seen in Zoshchenko’s “In the barbershop,” Soviet culture also found ways to effectively sublimate the hierarchies that become entrenched in structures of waiting, passing them off as perceived collectivity. I would like to emphasize that cultural projects defined progress throughout the Soviet period by paying equally close attention to the spatial configurations of socialist modernity. It becomes apparent that Soviet culture went far beyond simply stressing patience and collective acts of waiting, but also ordered everyday life through discourses of allocation. The temporal aspects of queuing and waiting were appropriated by Soviet culture precisely to create this spatial and social order, which emphasized that Soviet modernization could fairly, but not always equally, allocate the world that it created to its populace.

## **2.2 THE COSTS OF WAITING: FIRST- AND SECOND-WORLD RECONCILIATIONS OF EVERYDAY LIFE**

Queues are not distinctly Soviet, as all modern social systems “must ‘decide’ how much different members are to be given from a collective supply of goods and services,” and the “priority in which the members’ needs are to be satisfied” (Schwartz 13). The definitions and linguistic

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<sup>24</sup> “Ленин жил, Ленин жив, Ленин будет жить.”

examples in this section will further illustrate how queuing and waiting are conceptualized differently between the first- and second-worlds. One of the largest differences is in the treatment of time as an organization of everyday life. Schwartz locates the compulsion to pass time efficiently in Western Europe within its Christian traditions, noting specifically how elements of the Protestant work ethic relate to emphases on completing tasks efficiently, with respect for one's craft, and a revulsion for idleness (154). This base acts as a prerequisite for modern European social organization in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which valued time: "More than we realize, perhaps, the ethic that found its center in that part of the West transformed the rest of it by helping to create the motivational prerequisite for fitting into and refining the time orientation of its age" (155). In *On Waiting* (2008) Harold Schweizer also writes that in the first-world, "The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is marked by the concept of time as its main organizing principle" (4). The means of serving and supplying a society reflect the economic base of the system and Schweizer notes that under capitalism the experience of time is reduced to being a commodity.

Those who stand in line become commoditized in a server-client relationship, numerated in a system of access and delay for goods and services. Henri Lefebvre notes how everyday modern life in the first-world strives to be presented as an ordered, calculated experience, and in doing so, brings the subject into the realm of the commodity: "And what of everyday life? Everything here is calculated because everything is numbered: money, minutes, metres, kilogrammes, calories...; and not only objects but also living thinking creatures, for there exists a demography of animals and of people as well as of things" (21). Lefebvre is most interested in the ways that states and industries try to colonize everyday life, but he concludes that the everyday cannot be systematized by philosophical thought. This view places the everyday at

odds with the state and industry, which try to claim this space and its inhabitants all as part of a teleologically driven system.

In his notes on the arcades of Paris, Walter Benjamin laments this very notion of the engineering of everyday life, finding that the automation of the modern world was passed on from the boredom of the elite to the toil of the laborer (106). Modern life fails in redirecting and organizing all of man's spare time and energy into its teleological paths, as the repetition of automated processes such as the factory assembly line is experienced as boredom. On the one hand, boredom can terrorize those who are busy, as much as it can those who have nothing to do. On the other hand, Benjamin notes that this type of time, the boredom of waiting, has a transformative element, in that one "takes in the time and renders it up in altered form—that of expectation" (107).

The language of the consumer world immediately reflects the differences between first- and second-world conceptualizations of what expectation meant. The English language expression, which does not exist in Russian, "First come, first serve," stresses individual opportunity, but it also recognizes that this gain comes at the expense of others who arrive later.<sup>25</sup> Again, in English, discourses of time and money are associated with the possibility of opportunity (and opportunity cost) in the phrase, "Time is money," whereas the Russian phrase, "Time provides money, but you can't buy time with money," identifies that time is not a

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<sup>25</sup> The most similar idiom to "First come, first serve" is "Кто первый встал того и тапки," which is used not in the consumer context, but more generally, along the English equivalent of "the early bird gets the worm."

commodity that can be acquired.<sup>26</sup> While first-world modernity stresses the engineering of time (to “kill” or “waste” time is to pass time unproductively), second-world modernity hides or deemphasizes this necessity of maximizing time as its organizing principle. The quote “time is money” displays an openness about the commoditization and precious nature of time and immediacy, which Soviet modernity downplayed.<sup>27</sup>

First-world modernity focused on the overcoming of time, the ability to do things efficiently and speedily; the second-world mitigated this feature by incorporating delay into discourses of allocation and procurement. The concept of delay becomes extremely important then to the study of second-world modernity and the command based economy of the Soviet Union and can be defined as the lag created between servers and clients who wait for the allocation of goods: “The study of delay is therefore a task requiring psychological as well as structural and interactional modes of analysis; it demands investigation of the subjective standpoints of clients and their servers. For, delay is not only suffered; it is also interpreted. It

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<sup>26</sup> “Время деньги дает, а на деньги время не купишь.” The phrase “time is money” has been conceptualized repeatedly by writers since ancient Greece. Sir Thomas Wilson wrote in *A Discourse Upon Usury* (1572) that “They say tyme is precious,” and Francis Bacon wrote in “Of Dispatch” (1625) “Time is the measure of business as money is of wares.” In *Advice to a Young Tradesman – Written by an Old One* (1748) Benjamin Franklin is credited with the exact wording “Remember that TIME is Money” (qtd. Cryer 274).

<sup>27</sup> The study of time usage in the Soviet Union can be placed within the context of the cultural representation of factography (*faktografiia*) as well as the drive for empirical social research in the 1920s. Tracking began in 1923 by the economist S. G. Strumlin, who measured how laborers, peasants, and cultural workers spent their leisure time. Much of this data in the 1920s was published, but political attacks made survey work more difficult. Analysis of time budgets came to a stop with the first purges of 1936. While it would at first seem paradoxical that the measuring of time would stop during the Soviet Union’s most aggressive period of industrialization, it is not surprising, since empirical data of time usage pointed out the flaws of Soviet modernization. “The short-comings of Soviet society, while freely admitted by Lenin, conflicted with Stalin’s claims of rapid advance towards socialism, and became correspondingly more embarrassing” (Matthews 4). With Stalin’s death and the ensuing cultural and political liberalization of the Thaw period, sociological studies resumed and the field flourished in the ensuing decades.



has meaning for both those who wait and those who keep them waiting” (Schwartz 7).<sup>28</sup> This definition points toward the various subjectivities formed through waiting, where one interprets the local situation of his place in line and also the macro scale socio-economic question of the allocation of socialism. Failure to allocate goods fairly or in a timely fashion, as I will show, was interpreted and criticized in a variety of ways. For example, the instability of the server-client relationship even extends into the Russian language for the verbal aspect pair “to acquire”: when asking where one can buy a particular item, only the perfective verb “*dostat*” is used, rather than the habitual, imperfective form “*dostavat*,” which would signify the item’s stable existence.

This ideology of allocation locked its populace into a server-client relationship with the state, not through commoditization, but through the interpellation of individuals into collective and communal social structures that decided priority and access to goods. Allotment created this relationship, organizing extended waiting lists for the most valuable commodities, such as apartments and automobiles. Waiting lists tracked the precise dates when citizens would receive products, placing them in a role of expectation. This relationship created a promise of allocation, and is reflected on the linguistic level, where people would ask not what is being sold, but rather, “What is being given out?” (“*Chto daiut?*”), or “What was thrown out?” (“*Chto vybrosili?*”).

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<sup>28</sup> Katherine Verdery locates this control as a feature of second-world organization, calling it the “Etatization of time.” Looking at Nicolae Ceaușescu’s rule in Romania, Verdery focuses on the state’s monopolization of time, which included the redefining of state holidays, the allocation of services such as electricity according to strict timetables, and the inducing of shortages in order to restructure the everyday lives of its citizens. While Verdery’s study is specific to the totalitarian regime of Romania, it lends insight into how the state’s official discourses on time create and convey centralized power.

The use of the third person impersonal phrase in both questions implicitly labels the state as a server and citizens as the clients who wait for state allocation of goods and services.

Allocation thus helped to construct a subject's understanding of time and delay and became a major site of contestation in everyday life. The Soviet promise of allocation sublimated expectations that could not be satisfied in the present time of everyday life, but could be resolved only when placed in the long-range teleology of Soviet modernity. One Soviet joke, famously recited by Reagan in 1988, tells the story of how only one in seven Soviet citizens owns an automobile, and how there is a ten-year wait to acquire one. Upon purchasing the car, and being notified of the car's delivery in ten years, a man asks, "Will that be in the morning or afternoon? Because I have the plumber coming in the morning." Of course, the American retelling of the Soviet joke is meant to scoff at the inadequacies of the Soviet system, but it also ridicules the micromanaging of everyday life, which central planning sought to organize.

Discourses of central allocation claimed to add a new order to everyday life. Soviet culture had always struggled against the everyday by taking in the unsystematic aspects of life and endowing it with ideological meaning. At the center of this process lies a conflict between how everyday life is experienced as lack, or as being insufficient and incomplete. This aspect of deficiency can be seen across many Russian definitions that confine everyday life, *byt*, to the material world, in contrast to its counterpart, *bytie*, which encompasses a higher realm of ideas and spirituality.<sup>29</sup> Russian definitions of everyday life have historically never been labeled neutrally and often carried negative connotations. Everyday life, I argue, is not conceptualized temporally for its repetitions and routines, but rather materially, through the binary of absence

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<sup>29</sup> Svetlana Boym echoes this definition of everyday life in *Common Places* (1994): "The major cultural opposition in Russia is not between private and public but rather between material and spiritual existence, between *byt* and *bytie*" (83).

and presence. Iurii Lotman defines everyday life simply as the ever-present. “Everyday life is the usual flow of life in its real, practical forms; everyday life is the things that surround us, our habits, and daily behavior. Everyday life surrounds us like air, and like air, is noticeable only when there is a lack of it, or it is spoiled” (10).<sup>30</sup> Lotman situates everyday life in relation to scarcity when he states that it only becomes recognizable when it is lacking in something. In the context of the Soviet culture of allocation, we can begin to construct a definition of everydayness conceptualized through material absences and the ways in which these void are transcended.

Kristina Kiaer and Eric Naiman write that this predisposition toward devaluing the materiality of the everyday was at odds with the new Soviet state, which sought to create a new everyday life (*novyi byt*): “This leads to a fundamental tension in Bolshevik Marxism, which was caught between Marxist materialism, on the one hand, and on the other, the traditional Russian dualism that pitted the devalued material realm of *byt* against the higher spiritual realm of *bytie*” (10). Transforming *byt* for the early Bolshevik state sought to reconcile these conflicting tensions, by improving material conditions and by instilling a new form of *bytie* endowed with “transcendent values of socialist community” (10). Kiaer and Naiman are interested in the early Soviet period of the 1920s when the social projects, such as those by the constructivists, sought to transcend everydayness by controlling and redefining how public and private space were used; they formulated architectural designs that forced inhabitants to live differently, such as in the communal apartment, or within closer proximity to their fellow workers. These projects all

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<sup>30</sup> “Быт—это обычное протекание жизни в ее реально-практических формах; быт —это вещи, которые окружают нас, наши привычки и каждодневное поведение. Быт окружает нас как воздух, он заметен нам только тогда, когда его не хватает или он портится” (Lotman 10).

shared the Marxist belief that physical environment dictates social relations, and new plans fashioned utopian designs that embodied socialist ideologies.

These examples of a materialist ideological positioning can be traced throughout Soviet history, where collective achievement and monumental feats transcended everyday struggle and deficiency. Material growth was emphasized by a culture of fulfilling norms to produce abundance. In his genre-bending fusion of history and novel, *Red Plenty* (2010), Francis Spufford describes how Soviet planning was firmly rooted on materiality as a marker for progress:<sup>31</sup>

Indeed there was a philosophical issue revealed here, a point on which it was important for Soviet planners to feel that they were keeping faith with Marx, even if in almost every other respect their post-revolutionary world parted company with his. There was a system that generated use values rather than exchange-values, tangible human benefits rather than the marketplace delusion...By counting actual bags of cement rather than the phantom of cash, the Soviet economy was voting for reality, for the material world as it truly was in itself, rather than for the ideological hallucination. (88)

Progress thus had a material, tangible element to it, not simply defined by the breakneck speed of modernity, not by the fulfilling of a task, but by the reaching of a norm, a number that marked a physical presence of items produced. This element was important, as ideologies that stressed material abundance countered the realities and horrors of collectivization. The famous shockworker Aleksei Stakhanov reveals this emphasis on material markers of progress when he

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<sup>31</sup> Spufford is adamant that *Red Plenty* is neither novel nor historical account. He tries to capture a moment in history of the Khrushchev era that he likens most closely to a modernization of the Russian fairy tale.

stated in “My Suggestion to Soviet Cinema” (1938) that while coal miners in the 1920s were demanding bread, they are now demanding grand pianos (qtd. Taylor and Christie 390). The statement is important, in that not only does it define Soviet progress through things, but it introduces a cultural benchmark. The grand piano is not seen as a marker of bourgeois living, but a measure of culture that the Soviet Union should acquire along with its industrial abundance.

As I will detail in the coming chapters, both Soviet planning and culture tried to overcome lack and downplay scarcity, and under Khrushchev and Brezhnev, aimed to provide a greater sense of material security in everyday life, a less romantic notion of progress than the monumental feats achieved at the same time. For example, one joke comments on the ability of Soviet technology to send man into space, but its inability to stock food shelves: “Gagarin’s young daughter answers the phone: ‘Daddy’s flying around the Earth and will be back today at 7:00 p.m., and Mommy went out to buy food, so there’s no telling when she’ll be home’” (Smolitskaia 391).<sup>32</sup>

These examples all reveal the underlying idea that second-world social organization is less dependent on the representation of efficiency and engineering of time, but rather on the representation of the order and abundance of materiality. Official Soviet culture throughout its history sought to fix space by portraying a unified collective and endowing it with the abundance of material goods. This representation, I argue, is a way of fixing social relations that are dependent upon the server-client relationship, where social structures, such as queues, offer the perception of being in a horizontally oriented structure, when in reality, subjects were positioned

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<sup>32</sup> “Дочка Гагарина отвечает по телефону: ‘Папа летает вокруг Земли и вернется в 19.00, а мама ушла по магазинам, и когда вернется—неизвестно’” (Smolitskaia 391).

into a vertical structure of distribution where they relied on the goodwill of the state. The ideals of allocation produced yet another site of communal life, where people waited together for their abundance to be “handed” or “thrown out” by the state.

### **2.3 THE QUEUE AND SOVIET SPACE: BUYING IN TO THE CROWD, PEOPLE, AND COLLECTIVE**

In order to read this idea of Soviet cultural allocation, my methodology heavily relies on sociological studies of the queue, in that the field of sociology gives insight into the queue as social structure, while cultural studies of queuing in the Russo-Soviet context have explored mostly temporal and ideological questions. While Soviet citizens were taught that waiting was a necessity of Soviet life and modernization, it was the collective process of waiting that created a notion of stability. This view of the queue expands our notion of the collective in Soviet culture that is traditionally defined as the summation of workers in collectivities: the place of labor is the site of identity formation. A reading of the queue and socialism as a system of allocation, however, redefines collectivity as a two-way street, not only emphasizing peoples’ service to the state, but rather the state’s service to the people.

The queue as a form of social organization, particularly the control of crowds, can be connected in the modernization of Europe and the commoditization of consumer goods. Benjamin’s notion of the *flâneur* relates to this view on the commoditization of modern life, stating that it is the impetus to the formation of crowds. The *flâneur*, who gazes, but does not act, himself becomes a commodity: “He seeks refuge in the crowd, as the department store draws in the *flâneur* to make use of him to sell goods” (10). For Benjamin, the formation of the crowd

beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is firmly tied to the act of consumerism and the presentation of goods in the urban space: “For the first time in history, with the establishment of department stores, consumers begin to consider themselves a mass. (Earlier it was only scarcity which taught them that)” (43). Even in the context of the showcase of consumer goods at the Paris Exhibition, Benjamin focuses on the separation between the commodity and the consumer: “They [exhibitions] are a school in which the masses, forcibly excluded from consumption, are imbued with the exchange value of commodities to the point of identifying with it: ‘Do not touch the items on display’” (18). Here it is important to note that the so-called consumer becomes reduced to his gaze, and the viewing of the item becomes more important than the actual act of consumption, which does not even happen.

The queue in Soviet society, of course, forms a different ideological connection in its server-client relationship, as people “buy into” the socialist system by joining its ranks. One of the questions the dissertation asks is how can we classify the space of the Soviet queue? Can it be considered a form of collective, or simply a collectively habited space? On the one hand, the queue is a construct, byproduct, or failure of Soviet state planning to provide its citizens with goods or services. On the other hand, a queue simultaneously forms by those who inhabit its space. It is a collective of people, but not as stable as official collectivities, the organization of people at the level of Soviet institutions such as the school or the workplace. Nikolaev writes that the queue is an ambivalent Soviet space: “The queue presents itself as a collection of people in one place, characterized by its temporary and changing composition: with the flow of time

new members join its ranks, and former people leave” (7).<sup>33</sup> Moreover, people join the queue in order to satisfy a personal goal, and once they accomplish this task at the front of the line, the goal disappears. This dynamic aspect of the queue, in which temporary individual goals exist, is what distinguishes it as a social structure from collectivities, which ideally operated under state guidance and the permanent singular shared goal of achieving communism. It can be most closely compared with a notion of communality that existed in Soviet structures, most notably in the communal apartment. Il'ia Utekhin calls one of the principles of communal life the “mechanism of the simple [living] queue” (“mechanism zhivoi ocheredi”), which regulated how inhabitants shared living space by taking turns, from daily activities of cooking, washing, and using the telephone, to the less desirable task of doing chores (44).

Despite this ambivalent positioning, the queue was a space of habitation in which different groups interacted. The individual becomes a part of the crowd through the sharing of a common fate, as all members in a queue share the same goal, which according to Nikolaev, levels all other differences:

The main and most widespread identification that arises, regardless of whether people end up in the queue day after day against their own will, regardless of which strategy they use or which benefits and privileges they have, and regardless of the competition that the queue creates, is that everyone who still ends up in the

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<sup>33</sup> “Очередь как таковая представляет собой собрание людей в одном месте, характеризующееся темпорально изменяющимся личным составом: с течением времени к ней присоединяются новые члены, а прежние выбывают” (Nikolaev 7).



queue inevitably shares a common fate, and everyone has the same chances. (38-39)<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, similar to the public location of the collective, people in queues are held to the same level of behavior amongst one another, and adhere to a system of rules based on queue discipline (Nikolaev 10). These observations allow Nikolaev to view the queue under various guises of collectivity. They unite different classes of people (minus those with privileges who avoid queues) in the same location. Likewise, the many nationalities of the Soviet republics are also represented.<sup>35</sup> While these observations are hardly novel, Nikolaev notes that the queue represents an alternative *narod*, translated here not as “nation,” but as “people.” Along with transport, the queue is one of the few areas where almost all types of Soviet society routinely gathered (156).<sup>36</sup> In this sense, the queue creates the illusions of equality and solidarity in what was itself an illusory classless Soviet society.

What is particularly interesting is that advances in queuing practices that divided the collective mass never caught on in the Soviet Union, or more importantly, were never instituted. In the 1960s, the “thinking ticket machine” was developed in Sweden (Ehn and Löfgren 15).

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<sup>34</sup> “Основной и наиболее широкой идентификацией, возникающей на этой почве, была идентификация друг с другом тех, кто волей-неволей изо дня в день оказывался в очереди —независимо от того, какими стратегиями поведения в очереди они пользовались, имели ли они какие-то льготы и привилегии или не имели, независимо от тех конкуренций, которые в очереди возникали. Для всех этих людей попадание в очередь было неизбежным, рутинным и предсказуемым фактом естественной жизни: они были равны в своей судьбе, у них были равные шансы такого попадания” (Nikolaev 38-39). He also notes how those in line are united against those who are privileged enough to avoid queues (41).

<sup>35</sup> This aspect also became the source of numerous jokes and anecdotes, especially about Georgians, who were known to have mastered the ability to queue and minimize their time spent in lines.

<sup>36</sup> Higher-ranking party members on *nomenklatura* lists were able to subvert the system of queues, buying scarce items from state-run hard currency stores beginning in the 1930s. People also avoided queuing through the gift giving exchange process of *blat*, in which items were traded based on personal needs. For a lengthier description of *blat*, see Ledeneva.

The device, which hands out a numbered ticket, allowed people to wait individually and remain mobile, rather than hold their place in line. Ehn and Löfgren note how this invention revolutionized the way people were able to wait for services, but there was also another change: “there were no orderly queues but only a seemingly disorganized crowd of people holding little paper slips with numbers, which they glanced at now and then. It was no longer possible to know who was next in line” (15). Ehn and Löfgren bring up this example to reflect how the practice of queuing across the world was transformed from a collective waiting process into an individual activity. The ticket machine never caught on in the Soviet Union, and even today is severely lacking in Russia (“Russia scores”). The practice of writing numbers on one’s hand, or on the bottom of one’s shoe did exist, but this method of keeping track of the order of the queue was instituted by those waiting, rather than by the institution itself.

Everyday life in the Soviet Union thus was heavily shaped through communal and collective social structures, which not only grouped people’s waiting as a mass, but also allowed for the state to promote discourses of allocation. While Nikolaev’s notion of a common fate seems rather deterministic, the rest of the dissertation focuses on the creative attempts to find and express distinction within a culture of mass allocation. This view traces not a breakdown of collective behavior in Soviet culture, a topic that has been explored across disciplines, but rather the breakdown of allocative influence in everyday life. The structure of the queue proliferated throughout Soviet space in different forms, perpetuating its structure into various facets of everyday life, but as I will show, it was also the site for new appropriations and transformations.

## 2.4 BOURDIEU AND CERTEAU: PERPETUATING STRUCTURES AND COUNTERING TACTICS

I am interested in how the social practice of queuing was conceived and conveyed in discourse. In all of these discourses on queuing, we see the subjective interiority of waiting and its cultural life, constructed against the backdrop of socialist modernity, which seeks to shape and form its subjects' orientations toward its own teleologies of progress. Pierre Bourdieu's notion of the *habitus* views how dispositions are created across social fields, so that these dispositions support the very structures from which they emanate: Objects of knowledge are "constructed, not passively recorded, and, contrary to intellectualist idealism, that the principle of this construction is the system of structured, structuring dispositions, the *habitus*, which is constituted in practice and is always oriented toward practical functions" (*Logic* 52).

Bourdieu's theory of practice is appropriate in many ways to view the representations and rituals of the queue, in that it sublimates the absurdities and struggle of everyday life into commonplace experiences for those who waited in lines. The phrase, "What are you waiting in line for?" ("*Za chem vy stoite?*"), was rendered useless in practice, as people would see a line and jump in it, regardless of what was being sold or what they needed. Epshtein furthers this idea on language, as the queue's physical orientation places bodies in an unnatural position. Visual ties of communication with others are severed as focus is placed solely in direction of what lies ahead: "All of communication with the world occurs face to face, through wide-open eyes, an open handshake... And then there is the queue, the 'tail,' where people stand with their

gazes fixed on each other's backs" (55).<sup>37</sup> Likewise, practices of queuing forwarded purported logic. For example, if there was no line outside of a store, people deduced that the store had nothing to sell.

All these aspects of the Soviet consumer world became normalized within everyday life. One's navigation of the consumer sphere is reduced to, as Bourdieu writes, the acting out of roles: "The social world is seen as a representation...and practices are seen as no more than the acting-out of roles, the playing of scores or the implementations of plans" (*Logic* 52). Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* reveals that while people consent to practices, there still is a perception of agency. Soviet consumers still had to invest time in procurement, even in deplorable situations of waiting, but they received gain from their actions, and took note of this. People bragged about acquisitions, and as I will show later in Chapter Five, treated shopping as a form of sport, where products of acquisition served as trophies. These improvisations and strategies, according to Bourdieu, are unknown to the agents themselves that they are actually constituted in the *habitus*.<sup>38</sup> Even if the subject thinks he is manipulating or subverting the structure, these actions are prescribed within the rules of the field. They allow for changes to be made in order to propagate the future of the system. For Bourdieu, the *habitus* operates within classes and stratifies their boundaries. While they do not cite Bourdieu, Bogdanov and Nikolaev both follow this line of thinking, and point out that the stability of the queue and its ability to operate properly came from people's hope and belief in the system: "In order to wait for

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<sup>37</sup> "Всё общение с миром стало производиться через лицо, через распахнутые глаза, открытое рукопожатие... И вот очередь, 'хвост,' где люди стоят затылок, упираясь взглядами в спину" (Ephstein 55).

<sup>38</sup> According to Bourdieu, this process occurs without a conductor, as responses are "inscribed in the present" (*Logic* 53). People are conditioned by past history that eliminates meaning in present time.

something from the queue, you need above all else the belief in that queue—to believe in the practicability that organizes its rules and imposition of trust” (Bogdanov 421).<sup>39</sup> The presupposition both of a classless society and of the Soviet command economy as a server of the populace provided a reason to believe and participate in the system.

Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* is not stifling for the subject, whose lack of consciousness or agency is subsumed within everyday life. Commonplaces are constructed from ideological channels, but made regular in their everyday occurrences. The author Iurii Druzhnikov literalizes this idea in his biographical essay, “I was born in a line... and learned how to live where scarcity was forever” (1979). The author, whose mother actually did give birth while waiting in a queue, describes what Bourdieu calls a second birth, the socialization of the individual into the social field:

And ever since, the queue became an integral part of my existence. Or more precisely, I became a part of a large, living organism, which was called the queue. Every day I stood in queues for bread, for a glass of water, in order to buy a shirt or a pair of boots, for textbooks and notebooks, for passports and my military service card, in order to file documents at the institute, in order to take a book out

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<sup>39</sup> “Чтобы чего-либо ждать от очереди, нужно прежде всего верить в саму очередь—верить в целесообразность организующих ее правил и налагаемых ими обязательств” (Bogdanov 421).

of the library, to get a tooth pulled, to get married, and to get divorced. (*Ia rodilsia* 7)”<sup>40</sup>

Druzhnikov also describes a situation, in which a foreigner asks him why the state does not hire more people to work in a shop, in order to sell products more quickly or manufacture more products. He surmises sarcastically that life without lines would be unimaginable, even frightening: “Imagine life without queues. It would be very dangerous for the state. How would people spend their days, if they didn’t have to stand in lines? What would they begin to think about? What would they want to do? Pure and simple, the queue is a gigantic state juice extractor” (13).<sup>41</sup> The quote illustrates humorously Bourdieu’s notion that *habitus* precludes subjects from thinking outside of what are perceived as an objective set of accepted conditions and rules in society.

At the same time however, Bourdieu seems to implicate subjects for their willingness to operate and commit to rules of the social field. Disposition is “always marked by its (social) conditions of acquisition and realization, ends to adjust to the objective chances of satisfying need or desire, inclining agents to ‘cut their coats according to their cloth,’ and so to become the accomplices of the processes that tend to make the probable a reality” (*Logic* 65). One can

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<sup>40</sup> “С тех пор очередь стала неотъемлемой частью моего существования. Или, точнее, я стал частью огромного живого организма, который называется очередью. Ежедневно я стоял в очередях за хлебом, за стаканом воды, чтобы купить рубашку или ботинки, за учебниками и тетрадями, за паспортом и военным билетом, чтобы подать документы в институт, чтобы взять книгу в библиотеке, залечить зуб, жениться, развестись” (*Ia rodilsia* 7). Druzhnikov originally published his essay in English in *The Washington Post* in 1979, only more recently republishing a version of the article in his memoir in Russian under the title *I was born in a Queue (Ia rodilsia v ocheredi* [1995]).

<sup>41</sup> “Представьте себе жизнь без очередей. Это очень опасно для государства. Чем люди заполнят день, если не придется стоять в очередях? О чем начнут думать? Что им захочется делать? В сущности, очередь—это огромная государственная соковыжималка” (*Ia rodilsia* 13).

follow Bourdieu's theory of practice and certainly relate it to how Soviet modernity evolved under Stalin through Brezhnev, anchoring its subjects in consumptive tracks, which, in turn, oriented them toward state ideologies of allocation.

Bourdieu's theory nicely articulates the intricacies between both mediated consumption of culture and its mediated production. His view of the dispositions created through *habitus*, however, leaves little room for cultural production outside the field of power (the economic and political realm). Production can only develop within the rules dictated by the *habitus*. Indeed, much of my argument lies within Bourdieu's conceptualization. I maintain that discourses of individual priority emanated using the very ideologies of socialist allocation. Likewise, people's appropriations of the homogenized consumer culture of the second-world created new forms of expression. Bourdieu's reading seems to undervalue these acts and expressions as being creative or unique.

According to Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980), the world of narrative and language formulates tactics and strategies. Representational spaces are created in order to find spaces of contestation in structures. Operational schemas are like a literary style for Certeau; ways of writing can be distinguished just as different ways of operating. He differentiates between strategies, which "are able to produce, tabulate, and impose these spaces, when those operations take place," from tactics, which "can only use, manipulate, and divert these spaces" (30). Both of these operations formulate, for Certeau, imaginative acts and new meaning: "He creates for himself a space in which he can find *ways of using* the constraining order of the place or of the language. Without leaving the place where he has no choice but to live and which lays down its law for him, he establishes within it a degree of *plurality* and *creativity*" (30; emphasis in original). The place of tactics and strategies can be traced to what

Certeau labels as “the narrativizing of practices,” in which texts find a “way of operating” that has its own procedures and tactics within systems of power (78). Certeau’s notion of how tactics develop is appropriate to view the queue, as its social structure emanates out of Soviet modernity’s allocation, but acquires its own rules and ways of operating by those inhabiting its space. For Certeau narrativizing tries to escape the world of dominant ideologies by encoding practice within a different rule set, that of narrative, which has its own conventions.

Certeau, like Bourdieu, notes that one can never escape this system of power relations, but must operate within it; their analyses reject the idea of representation as “reflection,” which place the work’s structural elements on the same level of social structure.<sup>42</sup> Instead narrative refracts social reality through its own media, and most importantly, its own logic. Certainly, queuing was a practice that was characterized by its tacit conciliatory nature, as people would enter a queue without even knowing what product was available, but it was also a practice that promoted strategies of local knowledge as to where and when goods were sold, how people stood in multiple lines at once, and maximized their so-called wasted time. This is also how I view the dual nature of the queue in cultural representation, and how it can simultaneously express collectivity and proper allocation, but also individuality and individual desire.

Regardless of whether one sides with Bourdieu or Certeau on how subjects operate within social structures, the queue is a structure that allowed for a voice of priority and individuation to emerge from the socialist culture of allocation. While sameness of purpose might seem to unite people standing in lines as they wait for a given product or event, people are

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<sup>42</sup> In his later volumes *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993) and *The Rules of Art* (1996), Bourdieu extended his theory to more directly discuss the production, rather than the consumption of literature and art, seeking to explore how authorship and production are shaped by political, economic, and cultural fields.



differentiated by individual concerns as well as their queue position. This tension, which I label as *ocherednost'* (queue priority) is a subjective positioning where, by standing or waiting in a queue, the individual becomes part of an unofficial collective, but at the same time is distinguished from his or her neighbor through a system of ordering and succession.

The individual nature of queuing as a numbered system also contributes to the changing dichotomy between equality and inequality.<sup>43</sup> “At any given moment, all of those waiting in line are separated in their advances toward the goal by different intervals (intervals from their own place, until, one could say, the ‘zero position’ where one achieves his goal and leaves the group)” (Nikolaev 10).<sup>44</sup> Here, I am precisely interested in the individual subjectivity of numbering, as one identifies himself by his position in line: first, second, and last; if we return to the question in Russian “Who is last?” (“Kto poslednii?”), *ocherednost'* can be seen as a form of queue discipline across different levels of Soviet society, ranging from the micro everyday consumption of goods to the macro, an individual’s official position within society.

The dissertation later focuses on this concept of *ocherednost'* to detail the subjective interiority of queuing in narratives of the post-Stalinist period, which posits the individual simultaneously as a part of a group, yet ordered within that group by queues and Soviet institutions that decide orders of priority. I contend that this becomes a defining feature of

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<sup>43</sup> Il'ia Zemtsov notes how the queue's social structure is hierarchical and reflective of the class stratification of the “classless” Soviet society: “The social structure and composition of queues reflects the hierarchy inherent in Soviet society. People who queue are on the lowest rung of the Soviet social ladder. They are workers, rank and file officials, professionals without a big reputation. Such people do not have privilege of exchanging their money for goods in closed stores” (263).

<sup>44</sup> “В каждый данный момент времени все участники очереди отделены от достижения цели разными расстояниями (расстояниями от их соответствующего ‘места’ до, так сказать, ‘нулевого места,’ знаменующего достижение цели и выход из собрания)” (Nikolaev 10).

second-world modernity. What is most interesting in this move is that the very same discourses of queuing that were used to forward the socialist project can be used to assert individual priority. It highlights the communal nature of Soviet life, which subsumed individual desire within structures of organization and power. Regardless of subjects' agency and their dispositions, which consciously or unconsciously adapted to a given set of rules (in Bourdieu's terms "the field"), the queue posited people to be able to assert their individual priority. The socialist project endowed its citizens with capital they acquired solely by waiting for the promises of the socialist system.

Certeau's writing on the tactics of narrative also lend insight into how second-world cultural production represents scarcity. Storytelling operates to create an acceptable "real," in a way compensating for material lack (Certeau 79). Stories create literary excess that steps in for scarcity, whether that was created in official state discourses that created fictional abundance, or the narration of memoirs that retold prized everyday moments, such as the procurement of rare mandarin oranges, or the first time a Soviet citizen tried an American product, such as Pepsi Cola.<sup>45</sup> These narratives offer a stockpile of substance that escapes the confines of the Soviet material world. They evolve into strategic statements that find and create new spaces of

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<sup>45</sup> Narrative often evolves out of the preconditions of scarcity. Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (*Morfologija skazki* [1928]) identifies lack as being one of the two narrative preconditions of the folktale. Perhaps it is comical that when Propp had to define this term in Russian, he specifically had to separate a literary specificity from its social meaning of his time: "We realize fully that the terms 'insufficiency' and 'lack' are not wholly satisfactory. But there are no words in the Russian language with which the given concept may be expressed completely and exactly. The word 'shortage' sounds better, but it bears a special meaning which is inappropriate for the given concept." ["Мы вполне сознаем, что термины 'недостача' и 'нехватка' не вполне удачны. Но на русском языке нет таких слов, которыми данное понятие могло бы быть выражено вполне точно и хорошо. Слово 'недостаток' звучит лучше, но оно имеет особый смысл, который для данного понятия не подходит" ("Morfologija" 29)].

representation, endowing Soviet social structures and their corresponding ideologies with new logic, and new meaning.

This personalized expression carves out new spaces from the confines of Soviet modernity. It is the ultimate simulation of second-world culture that demands a cultural sustenance despite an empty shelf of wealth. Going back to Lotman's definition of everyday life, which is only noticeable through lack, conceptions of the Soviet world rehabilitated everyday life, and rendered its material fabric with highly personalized meaning. Experiences of the everyday and the Soviet landscape could never live up to the ideological promise of waiting for a world of abundance that the state depicted in films and novels of the Stalinist period. These realms never really corresponded, but consumers began to find refuge from their alienation in other forms of self-made culture. A sarcastic joke from the Stagnation period reflected this notion. It returns to Khrushchev's proclamation that by 1980, the Soviet Union would achieve its communist transition: "We were promised communism by 1980 and *all* we received instead were the Moscow Olympics." This ideological longing no longer had real meaning for people, and the Soviet material world, no matter how impressively it was constructed, could never live up to the intangible, lofty abstract ideological promises of communism.

The prizes of Soviet allocation were simply not worth the delay. In an interview discussing his novel *The Queue (Ochered'* [1980]), Sorokin writes, "Soviet man doesn't have a present tense. He either lives on nostalgic ideas about the past—imagining the sweet, friendly life people used to live—or on an ideological notion of the future, a future he's continuously striving towards. For seventy years now people in this country have been living on hope, on constant promises" ("Interview" 149). This constant postponement is reflected in political speech, as Sorokin quotes Lenin: "At the first Congress of the Komsomol Lenin said: 'We old

folk won't live to see communism, but you young people will live to see it'" ("Interview" 150), and it was also reflected in Soviet policy, most notably in the redefining of Marxism-Leninism during the Brezhnev period, when the term "developed socialism" was added to the stages of the path to attaining true communism. For Sorokin, the postponing of goals and redefining of ideology is just one of the many disconnects between modernist teleology and lived experience:

Now of course the goal has been infinitely postponed, no one talks in terms of dates any more, but it still exists—the slogan hasn't been wiped away. And this means that our actual, real, present life is devalued—it doesn't really exist. People are continually asked to wait for something, starting from the most mundane, ordinary things... up to things on the global, mystical level: our descendents, if not we ourselves, will live to see the dawn of communism. ("Interview" 150)

The comments illustrate how the extending of abstract ideology contrasts with everyday reality. The repetition of the ideological slogan is worn out, as it rubs against the actual material reality it seeks to transform. Something else had to replace the Soviet slogan, which was itself, a dull and shoddy Soviet cultural product.

The stories I am focusing on, regardless of subject or genre, are heavily inflected by this political economy of second-world modernity. My methodology, therefore, is not to collect texts in order to tell a cultural history about queuing and waiting, but rather to offer an exploration of how the second-world political economy was inflected in narrative, transforming a world of scarcity to a cultural representation of textual excess that finds a way of expressing tactics and strategies, local knowledge, and personalized conceptions of everyday life. The dissertation seeks to explain how practices were narrativized into tactical and strategic statements, and in this

process, how the practices shaped literary and cultural texts. How do authors begin to find ways to express conditions of scarcity or the time spent waiting in queues? Likewise, what are the different ways in which texts frame the subjectivities of queuing, from the agony of the crowd, to individuation in recognizing personal distinction in the very same spaces where official Soviet culture sought collective identity formation? The queue as speech act occupies a liminal space within the official public discourse of Soviet society. It is on the one hand, out in the open, visible on the street or written on a sheet of paper. On the other hand, it is the source of circulation of voices that often run contrary to the Soviet project.<sup>46</sup> Narrative returns voice, moving away from queuing as simply a positioning of bodies, but rather as an expression that recovers communication. By tracing the presence of these pliable tropes and voices across Soviet culture, it becomes apparent that the representations of waiting, queuing, scarcity and allocation occupy a dominant, yet polysemic place in Soviet culture, rendering the presences and absences of second-world modernity. I am interested in how literature began to lay bare the contradictions of what was once a seemingly congruous teleological path, and instead featured narratives that focused on the details of the everyday material world. In doing so, these narratives all try to locate a space and time, a way of understanding the unsystematic everyday world within the ordered, representational life of modernization.

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<sup>46</sup> Seth Graham identifies the queue as one of the “marginal settings” where Soviet jokes (*anekdoty*) circulated people’s discontent with the system (9). He compares the food line to the traditional marketplace, the site of the “carnival idiom” for Mikhail Bakhtin (144). Hessler similarly describes the queue as a public source of information, where the state could gauge dissatisfaction. She cites the flour panic of 1927 as one example, during which Kliment Voroshilov toured Moscow cooperatives, met with salesclerks, and also observed behavior in queues, stating that people were calm and that “the crowd did not crush forward, and there were no malicious yells or noisy expressions of discontent” (157).

### 3.0 WAITING IN THE CITY: HABITATION AND THE REALLOCATION OF URBAN SPACE

The problem is that any utopia, be it social, political or architectural, is a u-chronia, forced atemporality, interrupted time-flow, life standing still. What architectural utopia does not take into account is history; both in the broad sense of social history and in a sense of individual history with its multiple narratives of everyday life. — Svetlana Boym, *Common Places* (130)

In our city there are way too many residents. There are too many people arriving from out of town. Way too many cars. Everyone is rushing somewhere, everyone is late for somewhere. Everywhere there are crowds, jostling, and queues. But all the same, I love my city. It is my city.<sup>47</sup> — *An Office Romance (Sluzhebnyi roman)*

### 3.1 MAPPING MOVEMENT AND STASIS: THE BUSTLE OF THE CITY AND HABITUAL ROUTINE

The utopian ideals of the city present it as a place of speed, calculation, and anticipation. Everything is accelerated, and even the unsystematic aspects of everyday life seem organized. The city offers a dreamscape for its inhabitants, mirroring the very buildings that reach toward

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<sup>47</sup> “В нашем городе чересчур много жителей. Чересчур много приезжих. Чересчур много машин. Все куда-то спешат. Все куда-то опаздывают. Всюду толкотня, давка, очереди. Но все равно я люблю этот город. Это мой город” (*Sluzhebnyi roman*).

the sky. If the city itself is the ultimate image of progress, how do we understand the delays and inconsistencies of modernization that are such an integral part of the urban experience? In his chapter “Waiting,” Michael Sayeau writes that the relationship between urban waiting and modern experience is a distinct feature of the modern novel that chooses to “wait rather than to consummate” (284). Sayeau is interested in the act of writing and narration as a reaction against the discourses of the progress of modernity: “The history of modernity has been narrated again and again as a story of speed and anticipation, of the training that informs it and the ramifications of this training... But when we brush the literature and theory of the period against its grain, we discover an alternative starting point in moments of waiting” (296). Sayeau is concerned with how cultural texts portray the notion of delay amidst rapid industrialization. We can locate these moments of waiting as reacting to the discourses of modernization throughout the Soviet period, almost as a built-in braking mechanism, or a moment to orient oneself in the middle of the chaos and speed of modern life.

A perfect example of this temporal braking can be seen in the Natal'ia Baranskaia's *A Week Like any Other* (*Nedelia kak nedelia*). The 1969 publication of the novella in the journal *New World* (*Novyi mir*) became famous for its voicing of gender inequality, namely in narrating the everyday dilemmas of a wife's double life (*dvoinaia zhizn'*) at the workplace and at home.<sup>48</sup>

Baranskaia's protagonist Ol'ga juggles her duties between the workplace and home, and the city

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<sup>48</sup> Georgii Daneliia's *Autumn Marathon* (*Osenii marafon* [1979]) would satirize this aspect of urban life from the male point of view ten years later. The main character, professor Andrei Buzykin, struggles to balance his work life with his private life, a marriage and an affair that occurs during work hours. Andrei is ruled by his alarm clock, which he uses to partition the roles of his life from husband, father, friend, and professor. The city is the arena in which this hectic lifestyle plays out, and its demands do not ease. Anna Lawton notes that the urban landscape in Daneliia's Leningrad, whose endless row of streetlights leads “to infinity,” helps create the film's elegiac tone (23).

is depicted as a vortex where cyclical time takes over. The rush of city life and its demands for punctuality are always contrasted with its delays. Ol'ga is always headed somewhere, only to be held up by the routines of everyday life, such as waiting for busses or waiting in line for food. She remarks, “In Moscow everybody always rushes. Even those, who have nowhere to go” (Baranskaya 26).<sup>49</sup> Baranskaia's novella is notable for how it employs narrative devices that stretch its short duration of time. The time frame of one week is extended through cyclical literary devices; each day is a chapter, and repetitive scenes occur day to day. Ol'ga often notes the time of day, down to the minute, for various chores, making the reader hyperaware of the importance of fleeting time. Conversely, the novella's title infinitely extends the diegesis of Ol'ga's routine outside the scope of the week. The work is representative of urban prose beginning in the Thaw period, which depicts the city routine as a never-ending battle with no finish line in sight.

Andrei Bitov similarly describes the temporal constraints of urban life in his short story, “Life in Windy Weather” (“Zhizn' v vetrenuiu pogodu” [1963-1964]), but adds a corresponding spatial dimension. Bitov's story details an urban dweller, Sergei, whose trip to his countryside dacha for the summer offers a momentary relief from the hustle and bustle of the city:

Distances too had changed. Suddenly he no longer had to be somewhere by a specified time, he no longer had to wait for buses, which sometimes were late and sometimes didn't open their doors. He was now totally independent in his movements, and distances, which in town were inescapably connected with some means of transportation, could here be traversed only on foot. In this sense he

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<sup>49</sup> “У нас в Москве все всегда спешат. Даже те, кому некуда” (Baranskaia 16).



had suddenly become the owner of his own personal means of transportation.  
("Life" 306)<sup>50</sup>

Bitov, an urban prose writer of the Moscow School (*sorokoletniki*) constructs a binary between village and city life that depicts how the intellectual is a product and creature of the urban environment.<sup>51</sup> Bitov's Sergei is liberated by his retreat to the country dacha, but the trifles of work and the office never disappear from thought, and he still longs for the city.

Although urban spaces were the pinnacle of Soviet modernity, their ensuing representations beginning in the Thaw period render cities as the hallmark of everyday life. The city is not seen as the calculated product of industrialization, but rather as a labyrinth through which its inhabitants must navigate, and become accustomed. The narrativizing of Soviet urban space recalls Certeau's essay "Walking in the City" (1984), in which he notes how cities order space and their inhabitants. They direct people where to walk and drive, when to move and when to stop, and outline the rules of habitation in everyday life. The architecture of Soviet institutions, for example, mediated crowd control, as minimal amounts of entrances were left unlocked in buildings, forcing visitors to weave through double door entrances, whose

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<sup>50</sup> "Изменились и расстояния. Ему вдруг не надо стало поспевать куда-либо к условленному часу, не надо стало ждать автобусов, которые то опаздывали, то не открывали дверей, — в своих передвижениях он уже полностью зависел от себя, и расстояния, которые в городе казались неизбежно связанными с транспортом, тут преодолевались только пешком. В этом смысле он внезапно стал владельцем личного транспорта" ("Zhizn" 100).

<sup>51</sup> This chapter will not detail the already well-documented classifications between urban prose and village prose writers (*derevenshchiiki*) of the post Stalinist period. Village prose often looked at the alien nature of the city, which represented the loss of tradition. The city was one part of the Soviet modern project that threatened the countryside.

corresponding inner entry was locked.<sup>52</sup> People, however, form a corresponding dialog in their interactions with urban spaces. They map out their own routes within the drawn out paths of the city. For Certeau, individuals carry out linguistic speech acts (*parole*) against the pervading ideological language of the city (*langue*). These narratives create a back and forth contestation between the city and its inhabitant, where the layout of the city always enacts forms of urban waiting. “The practices of spaces” are “like the tropes in rhetoric, deviations relative to a sort of ‘literal meaning’ defined by the urbanistic system” (100). From Iurii Trifonov’s “The Exchange” (“Obmen” [1969]), Venedikt Erofeev’s *Moscow—Petushki* (*Moskva—Petushki* [1969]), and to Vladimir Sorokin’s *The Queue* (*Ochered'* [1983]), the main examples discussed in this chapter, texts across the post-Stalinist period explore the urban landscape not as a destination, but as a place of habitation, a crystallization of everyday practices that are not aligned with the ideals of Soviet Modernity. Unlike Sayeau’s idea that narrative tries to escape the disorienting speed of modernity, these authors are concerned with finding a lived space of comfort within the harrowing walls of the city. The dynamics of life find their representation within courtyards, queues, trolleys, and stations, transient places in which people’s movement is multidirectional and chaotic. Yet these public places are a secondary home beyond the personal apartment flat, woven into the personal narrative.

The city is thus narrated in an asynchronous fashion that maps multiple nodes and the different paths that connect characters, places, and ideas. Urban stories are told through the movements of the city’s inhabitants, who constantly cross paths and interact with one another,

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<sup>52</sup> Sayeau similarly points out examples in contemporary architecture, such as the airport terminal shopping mall, calling it an experiment in “locked-in shopping” (279). The terminal offers only a few seats that purposely do not accommodate those who wish to wait stationary, forcing them to be mobile consumers in the halls of the terminal while waiting for departing flights.

carving out multiple stories. In this process, the story of the urban landscape is remapped by its populace through their modes of habitation. The city's automation, the speed and repetition of modernity, gives way to a static and cyclical, yet intensely lived space: those very same repetitions are no longer the crowning achievements of modernity, but are instead depicted as habitual, recurring features of everyday urban life. This chapter explores the city in texts of the post-Stalinist period, which rendered urban life not as the accelerated metropolis of modernity, but as a lived space, where routines of everyday life often operate contrary to systematic, modern design. The city as text is read against its modernist grain: life is not synchronized with the cityscape: its spaces must be negotiated, navigated, and inhabited according to its inhabitants' own rules.

The result is a complete refashioning of the city, defined by its life, rather than by its structures. The underground poet Sergei Gandlevskii plays with this idea on how urban spaces should not be represented through name and structure, but by the people who occupy them. In his poem "Here is our street, let's say" ("Vot nasha ulitsa dopustim" [1980]), he rearranges the lines to Aleksandr Blok's well known poem "Night, street, streetlight, drugstore" ("Noch', ulitsa, fonar', apteka," [1912]) to read "Drugstore, queue, shiner" ("Apteka, ochered', fonar"). By rearranging Blok's poem, Gandlevskii's version introduces a human component to the work, something markedly absent in Blok's poem. Gandlevskii's lines, As you can see, nothing special here: / "A drugstore, a queue, a shiner" / "Under a chick's eye. Everywhere a burning smell" transfers the poem's attention from the city space to the human realm, specifically in the word shiner ("fonar"), which no longer means streetlight, but is transformed in context into slang for a

black eye (Gandlevsky, “Here is our street” 42).<sup>53</sup> Gandlevskii views the typical Soviet neighborhood as the crowning achievement of urbanity. “Here is our street, let’s say” delegitimizes the city space as the model of modernity by celebrating and reclaiming the seedy spaces of the everyday world. Using Blok and other influences from Russian modernist movements to define urban life, Gandlevskii also performs another representational feat outlined in this chapter. His depiction defines urbanity through past and present, but glosses over the signifiers of the Stalinist period in his treatment of the city. Moreover, he composes an image of Moscow through the suburb. His region “Ordzhonikidzerzhinskii,” a conglomeration of the names Ordzhonikidze and Dzherzhinskii, creates the notion that the monumental gives way to the ordinary in the peripheries of the Soviet suburb.

In preparation of hosting the 1980 Summer Olympics, a 1979 cartoon in *The Crocodile* casts Moscow very similarly, hardly as the metropolitan representative of the world, but instead as a small village. The cartoon plays on the new construction of the Moscow Olympic Village, stating: “In general, Moscow always has been and remains a large village” (Figure 1).<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> “Кав видишь, нет примет особых: / Аптека. очередь, фонарь / Под глазом бабы. Всюду гарь” (Gandlevskii, “Vot nasha ulitsa” 64).

<sup>54</sup> “А в общем, Москва как была, так и осталась большой деревней” (“Olympiiskaia derevnia”).

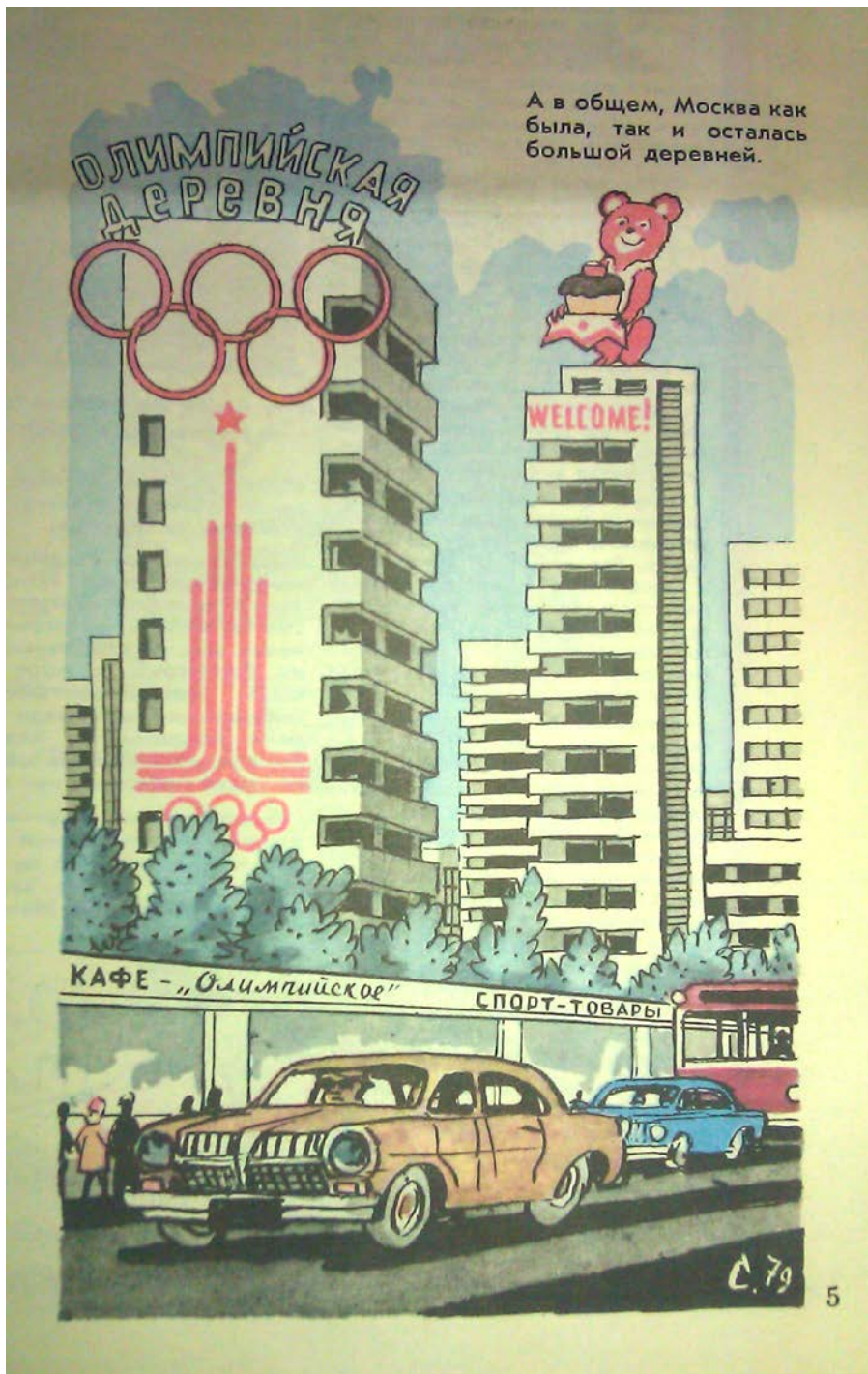


Figure 1. "Olympic Village" in *The Crocodile*<sup>55</sup>

<sup>55</sup> "Olympiiskaia derevnia." *Krokodil* 31 (1979): 5.

The cartoon conveys that while Moscow is a modern city, worthy of the Olympic games, at the same time, it shares a local, traditional meaning with its inhabitants. Its outwardly, international monumental exhibition spaces are just as important as its inwardly pointing places of habitation. While the official Olympic symbol features a silhouette of the Moscow State University, one of the seven Stalinist wedding-cake high-rises, the cartoon sees these new impressive buildings, specially built for The Olympic Games, not as great modern achievements, but as part of a lived environment. The cartoon reflects the different approaches to urban architecture between Stalin and Khrushchev. If the goal during the Stalinist era was to transform cities' identities, destroying the old and assembling new images of Soviet power, the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras sought rational designs to make these new spaces actually habitable.

### **3.2 OUT OF THE STALINIST CITY AND INTO THE HOME: PERSONABLE SPACES OF THAW AND STAGNATION**

The Soviet city was conceptualized as the height of Soviet modernity throughout Stalinist culture. The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw Moscow rise as the Soviet capital, with new architectural monuments serving as cultural wallpaper plastered over Moscow's old imperial legacy. While Moscow was city number one, the urbanization project of the Soviet Union created an ordered hierarchy of cities in Moscow's image. Stalinist culture ordered Soviet space on this macro scale, ideologically allocating its prized urban spaces to its citizens. The 1932 development of the internal passport required all citizens to have registration permits (*propiska*) for their place of living. The system established control over where people lived as well as reinforced the idea that

the capital cities of Moscow and Leningrad were the prize cities of the Soviet Union, where everyone strove to live.

Clark labels this facet of Stalinist culture the “sacralization of space”: “The entire country was organized in a hierarchy of spheres of relative sacredness, a cartography of power. It was the task of Socialist Realism, whether in art, in film, or in literature to present the public with its landmarks and its route maps” (8). Clark locates the city as the ideal of Stalinist culture. The city, symbolized by its vertical architecture, became a symbol not only for the heights of Soviet modernity, but also for the acquiring of a socialist consciousness by the individual (8). Socialist Realist narrative structures allowed heroes to pass through time and space that mirrored their social mobility, placing them in a congruous line with the progress of Soviet modernity. In Socialist Realist novels and films, the hero’s journey to the center was coupled not only with acquiring social consciousness, but also with acquisition of some kind, whether it was rank or social recognition. The city space, specifically Moscow, served dual purposes as both destination and an object of acquisition, as characters strove to reach the center. By showing this journey, the city was constructed as a place of achievement that was only worthy of its most productive citizens. Moscow was a celebratory space denoted by its monumental architecture, but city life itself was largely absent in representation. Socialist Realist texts often ended before offering the viewer any real glimpse of everyday city life. The city thus became the ideological terminus in Soviet culture.<sup>56</sup> As destination, the city was an object of desire, but there was much

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<sup>56</sup> It is no coincidence that train stations, canal terminals, and other places of arrival are heavily featured in Socialist Realist texts. A perfect example can be found in Aleksandrov’s *Volga-Volga* (1938), where the main characters celebrate their song of the motherland in a Moscow canal terminal station.

to be desired about city life itself that was not chronicled in the films, novels, and stories of the period.

The Soviet city was instead presented as a place of abundance and the peak of Soviet modernity, the locus of the economics of allocation. While Soviet culture reflected geographical allocation as an ordering principle of modern society, many texts destabilize this ordering. For example, a 1971 *kinozhurnal* episode of *The Fuse (Fitil')*, titled “Gift Set” (“Podarochnyi nabor”), satirizes the allocation of Soviet space. When a man talks to an operator at the post office to make a long distance call, stating “I’d like Moscow please,” she asks for the number in Samarkand that he would like to reach, despite the fact that he has no intention of calling there.<sup>57</sup> After explaining that he knows no one in Samarkand and refusing her offers to call there, she explains to him that someone has to call there: “Do you understand citizen, everyone asks for Leningrad, everyone asks for Moscow, but Samarkand, who will take it?” (Gaibai).<sup>58</sup> The sketch reduces Soviet space to the level of a cheap commodity that one does not intend to buy, as the operator asks the man, “And when I went to a store, and said that I only needed to buy gloves, how would you answer me?” to which he replies you can only buy it as part of a gift set.<sup>59</sup> Recognizing Moscow as just another product of shoddy socialist consumerism, the skit presents a uniform Soviet landscape with interchangeable parts.

Post-Stalinist culture also “reallocated” spaces of representation back onto the city, but this time, not as a pinnacle of urban achievement, but as an everyday space. It is apparent that not only are these stories inverting past cultural modeling of Soviet space, they extend the

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<sup>57</sup> “Мне Москву, пожалуйста” (Gaibai).

<sup>58</sup> “Между почем товарищ, знаете, что все спрашивают Ленинград, все спрашивают Москву, но Самарканд, так кто будет брать?” (Gaibai).

<sup>59</sup> “А когда я пришла к вам в магазин, и сказала что мне нужны только перчатки, что вы меня ответили?” (Gaibai).



terminus of urban representations that had gone missing in Soviet culture. Soviet culture had to depict life in the urban centers as part of the state's rebuilding effort in the post World War Two period. Cities were given mythological status and labeled "Hero Cities" ("Goroda-geroi"). This movement focused on the survival of the city and its inhabitants, incorporating the modern space of the city alongside a longstanding mythologization of the country.

Rebuilding the Soviet Union's hero cities was an effort that sought to memorialize them, but also make them habitable. Even if housing shortages were being solved through low-quality, prefabricated housing, development of new city districts was uneven. Lags existed between moving into new housing districts and the opening of local services that served these areas:

These gaps may necessitate months, even years, of interim and frequent longer-distance commuting to shop, restaurant, service centre—and even occasionally school—which not only lengthens queues for buses, trams and trolleybuses but also the queues and searches for goods and services in the city centre which often decisively concentrates a mainly inherited retail structure. (Hamilton and Burnett 266)<sup>60</sup>

A 1980 cartoon from *The Crocodile* plays with the poor quality of state services, comparing city transport with the allocating of food staples: fruits and vegetables (Figure 2). A line on a street

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<sup>60</sup> Even if cities are places that present themselves as a coherent modern whole, they are always riddled with temporal and spatial contradictions. Walter Benjamin observed this discontinuity, noting how the city was a place where old and new clash, where the modern is always constructed alongside the ancient. Benjamin cites the example of Paris and how the underground tunnels of the metro occupy a place right next to the ancient catacombs (85).

corner forms, and one friend tells another: “Shura, get in line quickly. I’m told that fresh busses are being given out.”<sup>61</sup>



Figure 2. “The Strengths of Habits” in *The Crocodile*<sup>62</sup>

<sup>61</sup> “— Шура, скорей очередь занимай, говорят, свежие автобусы выбросили” (“Sila privychki”).

<sup>62</sup> “Sila privychki.” E. Vedernikov. *Krokodil* 34 (1980): 4.

The cartoon reflects citizens' dependence on the state to properly provide services, and again, as seen in the "Gift Set" skit, depicts a cheapening commodification of city life. The systematic schedules of city planning are reduced to a chaotic scene of shopping, where food is "given out" ("vybrosili"). The engineering of urban life was an experiment fraught with delay, despite attempts beginning with Khrushchev to build more habitable environments.

Discourses of urbanization under Khrushchev moved away from monumental street squares and the equally public communal apartment (*kommunalka*), and instead emphasized the need for more private space. The ideals of Khrushchev's urbanization and rational design renewed modernist utopian visions of the 1920s of housing for all. At the 1962 Party Program the promise was made that every family would have a private apartment by 1980 (Morton and Stuart 7). The rationalist impetus of Soviet design was further articulated by Khrushchev in his famous 1957 "Kitchen Debate," in which he lambasted the lavishness of American domestic culture in comparison to the functionality of the Soviet home.

The reappearance of everyday city spaces directly coincided with the major efforts of urbanization under Khrushchev. The monumental city center was replaced with the suburban housing plan as the main area of representation. Thaw period films, such as Lev Kulidzhanov's and Iakov Segel's *The House I Live In* (*Dom v kotorom ia zhivu* [1957]), showed a more personable, private side to the city. These texts featured the interior, private spaces of the apartment instead of the monumental palaces, canals, and transportation centers of Stalinist culture. Giorgii Daneliia's *I Walk Through Moscow* (*Ia shagaiu po moskve* [1963]) went one step further by removing the teleological movement of heroes, as his young characters wander

around Moscow for the duration of one day.<sup>63</sup> The collective, monumental depiction of Moscow retreated to a more intimate, personalized depiction of public space that epitomized Thaw culture. The characters in *I Walk Through Moscow* experience the city as a place of enjoyment; they are not directed by it, but rather move freely through its spaces without hardly any repercussions to their mischievous behavior.<sup>64</sup> The close of the film conveys this freedom in public space, as one of the main characters, Kolia, sings the title song of the film while skipping through a Moscow metro station. A worker stops him and asks what he is doing, but in a trick that fools audience expectations, requests that he continue singing.<sup>65</sup> *I Walk Through Moscow* was a popular film in the 1960s, but its intimate view of Soviet urban life and the private space of the home clashed with the blemished image of the city in the ensuing decades. The city as text is riddled with spaces of negotiation, as characters become lost in its spaces or travel in conspicuous ways on their pursuits of procurement. Wandering through the urban landscape is a hallmark of the three texts analyzed closely in this chapter, but this form of urban waiting takes

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<sup>63</sup> *I Walk About Moscow* is representative of how youth culture of the Thaw period expressed freedom of movement in Soviet space. Vasili Aksekov's *A Ticket to the Stars (Zvezdnyi билет [1961])* similarly depicted this freedom, featuring a story of friends' whimsical travel to the Baltics.

<sup>64</sup> The film clearly distinguishes between the old, Stalinist generation, and the youth generation of the Thaw. Adults condemn the free-living behavior of the trio, who are less concerned with rules and social norms, illustrated in a scene in a record shop, where they hold up an angry line of people to chat with an attractive store clerk.

<sup>65</sup> There are three major themes about the city presented in the song's lyrics. The first creates the notion of a welcoming city space, where one can always spot someone they know within the crowd: "Streaking by, amongst the crowds of people, a familiar, welcoming face / merry eyes." ["Мелькнет в толпе знакомое лицо / Веселые глаза"]. The second theme emphasizes the ability to move freely: "And I move, I walk about Moscow / And I still cross / The salty Pacific Ocean / The tundra / And the taiga." ["А я иду, шагаю по Москве, / И я еще пройти смогу / Соленый Тихий океан, / И тундру, и тайгу"]. Lastly, even if one travels far and becomes homesick, Moscow remains a home, illustrated in the closing lines, "And I remember about Moscow." ["И вспомню о Москве..."] (Daneliia: *Shagaiu*).

place in unforgiving city landscapes that reflect characters' contemplation, longing, and unfulfilled desire.

The city spaces of the Stagnation period are interchangeable and indistinguishable. Its drab features show no signs of individual identity, a perfect backdrop for those who seek meaning and personal fulfillment in its endless spaces of crowds, queues, and bureaucratic institutions. The cartoon short featured at the beginning of El'dar Riazanov's *The Irony of Fate (Ironiia sud'by* [1975]) shows how this utopia of the Soviet city space was culturally reconstructed as a faceless monstrosity. The cartoon depicts an architect, whose design serves as the model that would transform the Soviet and second-world landscape. It reflects the rise of the Khrushchev apartment building, nicknamed *khrushchevki*, which proliferated throughout Soviet cities and abroad.<sup>66</sup> In the cartoon, the architect runs away from his design, and its presence relentlessly chases him everywhere as urban spaces expand.

The acted portion of the film uses the comedic genre of the New Year's film to comment on the interchangeability of Soviet space, as the main character Zhenia drunkenly and mistakenly boards a plane to Leningrad, navigating his way to an apartment flat he thinks is his own in Moscow. A similarly decorated apartment flat, which exists on an identically named street, generates a comedy of errors in which Zhenia meets Nadia, the owner of the flat, instead of his fiancée. The film is one of many examples that create the anyplace of socialism, where everyone shares the same unfulfilled desire from city to city.

This aspect of representation, which I call urban longing, describes the search for a personal fulfillment from the masses of city life. It reveals the contradictions of the city as the

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<sup>66</sup> *Khrushchevki* were prefabricated and typically five stories. As design progressed to feature taller and longer, city block-length apartments in the following decade, the new buildings were labeled *brezhnevki*.

ideologically allocated place of desire, but its lived experience can never live up to its ideals. This notion recalls the two sides of Certeau's essay, in which he begins by looking down on New York City from the World Trade Center, noting the city's design and cartography. He recognizes that this view is a different way of seeing than from the city's depths, where everything is magnified, no longer quiet and peaceful. While seeing the grandeur of the city is a viewing practice, walking the city is a spatial practice undertaken from below. In *On Longing* (1993) Susan Stewart also notes these separate experiences of the city and how they create a fracturing in subjectivities represented in city narratives: "This view remains radically outside the scene: one cannot enter into the life of the city without experiencing a corresponding change of perspective. Therefore the view from above remains a view from an elsewhere, a view which in making the city *other* must correspondingly employ metaphors of otherness" (79; emphasis in original). Waiting in the city is an act much like walking. Waiting and habitation become textual acts that represent the feeling of longing, the moments of oneself trying to find synchronization with the movements and pervading ideology of the city. This urban longing of the second-world is also a longing to build a life in the city, whose spaces were ideologically allocated as promises to its citizens.

### **3.3 BYT AND THE URBAN DILEMMA: IURII TRIFONOV'S "THE EXCHANGE"**

George Gibian discusses the urban landscape in Trifonov's writing as part of a typology of urban prose prevalent in the Stagnation period. For Gibian, Trifonov's works fall under the category of "City as Locale of Perennial Ethical Dilemmas" (49). Gibian briefly notes that the urban setting is the perfect arena to discuss daily interactions amongst the different sectors of the "urban social

pyramid” (50). The city becomes a site of decision-making for the individual, from trivial choices to pointed ethical dilemmas. “The Exchange” features a Moscow intellectual’s, Dmitriev’s, pursuit to procure an apartment at the cost of his family relations. Along with his tactful wife Lena, they seek to exchange their flat with the larger, nicer unit of Dmitriev’s dying mother, Kseniia Fedorovna. Dmitriev is a character of inaction who does not want to interrupt the status quo: “And he soothed himself with the truism that there is nothing wiser or more valuable in life than peace, and that one must protect it with all one’s strength” (256).<sup>67</sup> “The Exchange” in this sense is about the securing of happiness, and Trifonov questions how this is possible in relation to the material world.

Trifonov presents the reader with the ethical dilemmas of what it means to consume, or let objects consume one’s everyday life. In his essay “No, it isn’t about everyday life, but about life!” (“Net, ne o byte — o zhizni!” [1976]), Trifonov defended his works by stating: “We don’t write about bad people, but about bad quality [of life]” (544).<sup>68</sup> In “The Exchange,” Trifonov pays close attention to the details of Dmitriev’s apartment, initially showing its luxurious side, but then revealing that his prized objects are really not of high quality: “Dmitriev and Lena slept on a wide sofa bed of Czechoslovakian make, luckily purchased some three years before, which was an object of envy among their acquaintances ... In the evening when they were lying on their Czech bed—which turned out to be not very durable, quickly getting rickety and squeaking

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<sup>67</sup> “И успокоился на той истине, что нет в жизни ничего более мудрого и ценного, чем покой, и его-то нужно беречь изо всех сил” (“Obmen” 8).

<sup>68</sup> “Мы пишем не о дурных людях, а о дурных качествах” (“Net, ne o byte” 544).

with every move...” (258).<sup>69</sup> The modifier of distinction, Czech, is pervasive in the passage, appearing more times than is needed after its initial attribution. The furniture is more than just an object in their flat. It tells the story of a past transaction made by Dmitriev and his wife Lena, and the reader is even provided with the sofa bed’s date of procurement. Trifonov continues this ploy by using the material world to inadequately define the immaterial: the emotional, psychological, and ethical aspects of life. Dmitriev tries to describe his quality of life materially when he says to himself, “Well, how is everything at home? — But simply these emotions and feelings also have sizes, like boots and hats” (265).<sup>70</sup>

“The Exchange” is often discussed through this prism of everydayness and how it defines the urban milieu. Trifling details bog down characters, as well as the text itself, and preclude any transcendental meaning. David Gillespie views “The Exchange” through the prism of the intellectual and his place in the Moscow landscape. Trifonov’s “Moscow trilogy” “is ostensibly describing contemporary Moscow *byt*, the everyday life of people faced with an ethical dilemma: to compromise their principles and gain material benefit, or remain loyal to them and continue to live in straitened circumstances” (48).<sup>71</sup> He writes that Trifonov’s task is to detail this rise and fall of the intelligentsia in the post-Stalin era. Intellectuality, in the words of Simmel, is “thus seen to preserve subjective life against the overwhelming power of metropolitan life,” which is the hallmark of Soviet mass production (324). Dmitriev is symbolic of the intellectual crisis of

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<sup>69</sup> “Дмитриев и Лена спали на широкой тахте чехословацкого производства, удачно купленной три года назад и являвшейся предметом зависти знакомых ... Вечерами, ложась на свое чешское ложе – оказавшееся не очень-то прочным, вскоре оно расшаталось и скрипело при каждом движении...” (“Obmen” 10-11).

<sup>70</sup> “Ну, как у вас дома дела?” – но просто это сочувствие и эта проникновенность имеют размеры, как ботинки или шляпы” (“Obmen” 19).

<sup>71</sup> Trifonov’s “Moscow trilogy” is composed of his early works, “The Exchange,” “Preliminary Conclusions” (“Predvaritel’nye itogi” [1970]) and “The Long Goodbye” (“Dolgoe proshchanie” [1971]). See Partridge for a complete study of the cycle.



the period that is under attack from a culture of conformity and careerism. He is one of many of Trifonov's characters who fail to transcend the inadequacies of everyday life, but remain firmly entrenched in it. This reading places Trifonov's preoccupation with the Moscow intelligentsia at the center of the story, and reinforces scholarship on the familiar themes of the Moscow urban school. "The Exchange," as others have described, is certainly a text about material acquisition and the loss of morality, particularly amongst the intelligentsia.<sup>72</sup> The text features an intense focus and longing for things, the material objects of desire and how people relate to them.

In this section I would like to view "The Exchange" somewhat differently, detailing how the urban landscape provides a physical container that slows down the text and allows for Trifonov's lengthy literary expositions. In "No, it isn't about everyday life, but about life!" Trifonov describes the urban condition as a feeling of stasis and uncertainty, in which "we find ourselves on some kind of long transit" ("Net, ne o byte" 545).<sup>73</sup> He is extremely attentive to the evolution of the urban material landscape from Stalinism through the Thaw, into the present time as a space of loss and atrophy, a decaying space architecturally, physically, biologically, and of course, morally.

For Trifonov, the endless city landscape offers a literary space for ethical digressions that seemingly navigate the same physical space as his characters. He writes in his essay "To Choose, To Decide, To Suffer" ("Vybirat', reshat'sia, zhertvovat" [1971]) that life in any large city is full of challenges that test the individual:

Every person, living in a large city, experiences every day, every hour, unapproachable magnetic currents of this structure, which sometimes tear him

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<sup>72</sup> See Gillespie, Maegd-Soëp, and Woll (55-64; 87-118; 25-26).

<sup>73</sup> "мы находимся на каком-то длинном перегоне" ("Net, ne o byte" 545).

apart. You need continually to make a choice, to decide on something, to overcome something, to struggle with something. Are you tired? OK, go relax in a different place. But here, everyday life is a war that knows of no truce. (529)<sup>74</sup>

The city is both a place that enslaves its inhabitants and mystifies them in moments of longing. In one scene, Dmitriev looks out onto the cityscape from his apartment, finding inspiration that the city's vastness represents opportunity: "From the heights of the fifth floor he looked out onto the square with the fountain, the street, the column holding the trolley schedule, and a dense crowd around it, and further on, the park, the multi-storied buildings against the horizon and sky" (261).<sup>75</sup> In this landscape, Dmitriev zeroes in on an unknown woman in the crowd, and this act of observation, of picking out a single person in this massive landscape, fascinates him: "What was inconceivable—he didn't like the woman at all, —but the secret observation of her inspired him. He thought about how all was not yet lost, thirty-seven—that's not forty-seven, or fifty-seven and that he still could achieve something" (261).<sup>76</sup> Viewing the city provides an opportunity to forget the details that consume one's life, and Dmitriev momentarily escapes his problems. Moscow is also used to map out the cartography of Dmitriev's ethical dilemma. While at his mistress's, Tania's, Dmitriev can easily imagine a new life within the walls of a different apartment flat:

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<sup>74</sup> "Каждый человек, живущий в большом городе, испытывает на себе ежедневно, ежечасно недоступные магнитные токи этой структуры, иногда разрывающие его на части. Нужно постоянно делать выбор, на что-то решаться, что-то преодолевать, чем-то жертвовать. Устали? Ничего, отдохнете в другом месте. А здесь быт—война, не знающая перемирия" ("Vybirat" 529).

<sup>75</sup> "Он смотрел с высоты пятого этажа на сквер с фонтаном, улицу, столб с таблицей троллейбусной остановки, возле которого сгущалась толпа, и дальше он видел парк, многоэтажные дома на горизонте и небо" ("Obmen" 14).

<sup>76</sup> "Непонятно почему—женщина ему совсем не нравилась,—но тайное наблюдение за ней вдохновляло его. Он думал о том, что еще не все потеряно, что тридцать семь—это не сорок семь и не пятьдесят семь и он еще может кое-чего добиться" ("Obmen" 14).

Dmitriev got up and went to the balcony doors. There was a wonderful view from the eleventh floor of the stretching field, the river, and the cupolas of the cathedral in Kolomenskoe Village. Dmitriev thought of how he could move in to this three-room apartment tomorrow, see the river and the village in the morning and evening, breathe in the field, go to work on the bus to Serpukhovka, from there on the subway, it wouldn't take so long. (275)<sup>77</sup>

Yet the natural contours of the Moscow landscape lead Dmitriev back to reality: “He remembered that somewhere far and near, through all of Moscow, on the shore of this same river, his mother was waiting for him, his mother who was experiencing the sufferings of death” (275).<sup>78</sup>

Dmitriev's contemplations often take place during his narration of the routes he has to take, the time he has to wait for buses. Urban space provides the necessary time for Dmitriev's troubling contemplations:

And he was still thinking about it when the shuffling crowd carried him along the long hall where the air was stifling, and it always smelled of damp alabaster, and when he stood on the escalator, squeezed himself into the car, looked over the passengers, the hats, the briefcases, bits of newspapers, plastic envelopes, the flabby morning faces, the old man with the household bags on his knees, going to shop in the city center—any one of these people might be the saving variant.

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<sup>77</sup> “Дмитриев встал, подошел к балконной двери. С одиннадцатого этажа был замечательный вид на полевой простор, реку и темневшее главами собора село Коломенское. Дмитриев подумал, что мог бы завтра переселиться в эту трехкомнатную квартиру, видеть по утрам и по вечерам реку, село, дышать полем, ездить на работу автобусом до Серпуховки, оттуда на метро, не так уж долго” (“Obmen” 30-31).

<sup>78</sup> “Но тут же вспомнил, что где-то далеко и близко, через всю Москву, на берегу этой же реки, его ждет мать, которая испытывает страдания смерти” (“Obmen” 31).

Dmitriev was ready to shout at the whole car: “Who wants a good room, twenty square meters?... (264)<sup>79</sup>

While the city’s gigantic nature creates anonymity, offering a chance to start over as someone else, Trifonov presents these moments as false hopes. He always returns to history, the family, and the natural world, which stand in contrast to the artificially created city. Trifonov uses these moments to slow down the movement and development of the story. Everyday incidents offer a braking device for Trifonov to infuse “The Exchange” with history, chronicling Dmitriev’s extended family since the revolution. He maps out how Dmitriev’s family settled in Moscow, into their current apartment.<sup>80</sup> All of these details of life bear down on the text and materialize Dmitriev’s crisis of character.

Trifonov was accused of writing *bytopisanie* following the publication of his Moscow trilogy (Woll 103).<sup>81</sup> Although “The Exchange” embraces official state discourses on rationalist consumption, it transgresses these boundaries by paying too much attention to the objects of desire. Not only are characters incriminated for their commodity fetishes, but Trifonov also lashes out against the very objects that entice: state-made furniture and state-made apartments. Although the novel makes it clear that Dmitriev is stepping around the system in order to receive

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<sup>79</sup> “И все о том же—когда шаркающая толпа несла его по длинному коридору, где был спертый воздух и всегда пахло сырым алебастром, и когда он стоял на эскалаторе, втискивался в вагон, рассматривал пассажиров, шляпы, портфели, куски газет, папки из хлорвинила, обмякшие утренние лица, старух с хозяйственными сумками на коленях, едущих за покупками в центр,—у любого из этих людей мог быть спасительный вариант. Дмитриев готов был крикнуть на весь вагон: ‘А кому нужна хорошая двадцатиметровая?..’” (“Obmen” 18).

<sup>80</sup> This scope is very similar to Trifonov’s novel *The House on the Embankment* (*Dom na naberezhnoi* [1976]), which features the same museum-like exploration of the urban space of the apartment flat as a form of family history.

<sup>81</sup> Woll writes that the labeling of works as *bytopisanie* in the 1960s and 1970s was a serious charge. Critics maintained that depictions of everyday life must be grounded in a socialist context (103).

his apartment earlier, commentary on the process is almost completely absent amidst the actual details of the transaction. The bureaucratic descriptions of the various committees and jurists with whom Dmitriev must deal completely drown out the narration of Kseniia Fedorovna's death:

But this jurist was the major screw in the matter, because the claimants aren't called to the meeting, and the decision is only carried out on the basis of the jurist's conclusions and the presented documents. At the end of July, Ksenya Fyodorovna became sharply worse, and they took her to that same hospital which she'd been in almost a year before. Lena managed to get a second hearing of the claim. This time the jurist was included properly and all the documents were in order: a)... (302)<sup>82</sup>

Trifonov lists the four required documents in detail and the organization to which they should be sent. In effect, state speech precludes any meaningful moments at the novella's close. Everyday life is monopolized by the state, and it is not just Dmitriev's weakness of character that leads him to unethical solutions, but it is the constant arena of the atrophied urban landscape that points him in this direction. At the close of the novella, the material exchange becomes symbolic of Dmitriev's personal shortcomings, as the mother Kseniia Fedorovna points out, that Dmitriev "already made an exchange long ago" (301).<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> "А этот юрист был главным винтом дела, потому что заявителей на заседание не вызывают и решение выносится лишь на основе заключения юриста и представленных документов. В конце июля Ксении Федоровне сделалось резко хуже и ее отвезли в ту же больницу, где она была почти год назад. Лена добилась вторичного разбора заявления. На этот раз юрист был настроен как нужно, и все документы были в порядке: а)..." ("Обмен" 63)

<sup>83</sup> "Ты уже обменялся, Витя. Обмен произошел..." ("Обмен" 62).

Trifonov concludes “The Exchange” with one final description of the growing city. The narrator announces that the village where Dmitriev’s family dacha was located has since been cleared and replaced with a new stadium and a hotel complex for sportsmen. Dmitriev’s sister, Lora, has moved to a new region of Moscow into a nine-story building. In this very brief description, Trifonov erases the family history of the Dmitriev household. The modern cityscape expands, leaving little room for past history and memory. The work charts two different trajectories—that of the city and its inhabitants. Dmitriev expounds on existence in the world during one of his moments of urban observation from his balcony: “There is nothing in the world except life and death. And everything that is dependent on the first is happiness, and everything dependent on the second... And everything dependent on the second is the destruction of happiness. And there is nothing else in this world” (275).<sup>84</sup> The urban environment is a perfect backdrop to illustrate this philosophy. Trifonov’s static world of architecture clashes with the dynamism of life, but each operates similarly; buildings are constructed, only to be later destroyed. Places change and the physical traces are removed, just as memories are forgotten.

#### **3.4 PERIPHERAL LONGING AND URBAN VAGRANCY: VENEDIKT EROFEEV’S**

##### ***MOSCOW—PETUSHKI***

Erofeev’s *Moscow—Petushki* leaves behind the environment of Moscow, and locates most of its action within the compartment of a regional train (*elektrichka*). The *poema* features Venia, the

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<sup>84</sup> “В мире нет ничего, кроме жизни и смерти. И все, что подвластно первой,—счастье, а все, что принадлежит второй... А все, что принадлежит второй,—уничтожение счастья. И ничего больше нет в этом мире” (“Obmen” 31).

pseudo-biographical author and narrator of the story, a drunk who seeks to reach the village of Petushki, but can never find his way. He is caught in a holding pattern, somewhere between the two bookended spaces of the *poema*'s title. Dismissed from his job as a foreman for a cable-laying crew, Venia yearns for both Moscow and the social world that as a vagrant he does not fit into, and Petushki, the unattainable drunken utopia where an unnamed woman awaits him. Laura Beraha and Karen Ryan-Hayes both view the *poema* through the genre of the picaresque, in which the hero, an outcast, travels through space and expresses his dismay at the surrounding society. Beraha notes how the genre's predication of the road motif mirrors Venia's construction as a rogue (21). Many critics, such as Mikhail Ephstein, have discussed Venia, as both character and author, as a modern holy fool: "What we witness in him is the process of lumpen-ization of the Russian holy fool—from Vasily the Blessed to Erofeev" (429). My reading of the *poema* focuses on the work's sense of simultaneous transience and duration, highlighting Venia's homelessness, his incapability of inhabiting any stable space in the work. The train journey's extended length of the *poema* provides a spatiotemporal dimension to Venia's euphoric exposition, but it does not reconnect character and landscape.

Moscow is shown to be a harsh environment, one where Venia is kicked out of bars, and has trouble navigating the labyrinths of hallways and train platforms in which he always becomes lost. The opening lines of the *poema* feature this drunken vagrancy, in which Venia stumbles around searching for the center of Moscow and the Kremlin: "Take yesterday. Again I didn't see it, and I spent the whole evening wandering around those parts, and I wasn't even so

drunk” (*Moscow to the End* 13).<sup>85</sup> Looking for the Kremlin is a daily quest for Venia: “That’s nonsense—if not yesterday, then today I’ll get there” (14).<sup>86</sup> He wanders through train stations, bars, and stores, as the public space of the city is his area of habitation. Venia’s experience of the city is largely narrated though how he is subjected to its rules. He states that the worst time of the day is when stores and bars are closed, as he has to wait to restock his supply of alcohol. Likewise, his movement through space is often narrated as an involuntary experience: “I walked across the square. Rather I was drawn across it” (17).<sup>87</sup>

Beraha traces the movement of narration in *Moscow—Petushki* in relation to traditions of Russian travel writing from Radishchev to Pushkin: “What is more, by shifting from Radishchev’s travel notes *at* waystations to travel ravings *between* stops, Erofeev ‘blinkers’ his narrative, traps it into a kind of tunnel vision closed on all four sides. He strips the landscape of all but places names; the place names thus become signposts without reference, hollow traces of squeezed out signifieds” (22; emphasis in original). While Beraha astutely notes that the signposts lose their reference points with any signifying cityscape outside the train car, they more importantly shape and interrupt the narrative in a variety of ways. For example, as Venia tells his story, the novelistic discourse identifying the signpost marker interrupts his storytelling, and reminds the reader of the movement away from Moscow:

If you want to know everything, I’ll tell you, but wait. I’ll tie something on by  
Hammer & Sickle and

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<sup>85</sup> “Вот и вчера опять не увидел—а ведь целый вечер крутился вокруг тех мест, и не так чтоб очень пьян был” (*Moskva—Petushki* 17). Although I will refer to the text as *Moscow—Petushki*, all citations in English refer to the translation under the title *Moscow to the End of the Line*.

<sup>86</sup> “это чепуха: не вышел вчера—выйду сегодня” (*Moskva—Petushki* 18).

<sup>87</sup> “Я пошел через площадь—вернее, не пошел, а повлекся” (*Moskva—Petushki* 20).



Moscow—Hammer & Sickle

then I'll tell everything, everything. Be patient. Aren't I being patient? (25)<sup>88</sup>

The journey away from Moscow reinforces and adds a spatial dimension to Venia's narrative of how he is misunderstood: "I could tell you plenty about this subject, but if I start telling everything, I'll stretch it out as far as Petushki" (34).<sup>89</sup> Venia is an outcast from the space of Moscow, and thus his narration of this aspect of his life can fill the spatial gap of the train journey to Petushki. The signpost markers give a spatial dimension to his personal journey; they also materialize his problems in the physical world of the city.

Erofeev as author plays with reading conventions from the *poema*'s outset in his "From the Author" introduction ("Uvedomlenie avtora"). He states that he has self-censored one chapter "Hammer & Sickle—Karacharovo," which due to its vulgarity would cause readers, "particularly the girls" ("v osobennosti devochki"), to skip directly to that section (*Moscow to the End* 11; *Moskva* 15). Like Schweizer's description of reading as an act of waiting and expectation, the playful novelistic discourse of the introduction creates a sense of anticipation that stretches across the space of pages. When the reader does reach this section, it has indeed been edited to the reader's dismay. Erofeev's plea to the reader for a linear reading of the work is instantly destroyed by Venia's narration, which itself is disjointed, incoherent, and his nonsensical allusions to and illusions of Russian literature, the bible, and mythology completely destabilize the text. His narration maps, or acts out, a personalized history of literature, as he travels across the Soviet landscape. Venia uses different genres to describe different places:

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<sup>88</sup> "Если уж вы хотите все знать - я вам все расскажу, погодите только. Вот похмелюсь только на Серпе и Молоте и... / Москва—Серп и Молот / И тогда все, все расскажу. Потерпите. Ведь я-то терплю!" (*Moskva—Petushki* 25).

<sup>89</sup> "Я многое мог бы рассказать по этому предмету, но если я буду рассказывать все—я растяну до самых Петушков" (*Moskva—Petushki* 31).

“The devil knows in which genre I’ll arrive in Petushki. All the way from Moscow it was memoirs and philosophical essays, it was all poems in prose, as with Ivan Turgenev. Now the detective story begins” (73).<sup>90</sup>

Venia’s travel narrative through cartographic markers and literary genres is not a reliable form of narration. Vladimir Tumanov notes that the levels of narration, both oral and written, occurring both before and after Venia’s death, create the character’s “nowhereness”: “Venia’s inside-out narrative suggests a narrator for whom time has stopped: a hero who seems to exist *outside of existence* and therefore is not constrained by its temporal or sequential parameters” (101; emphasis in original).<sup>91</sup> Beraha describes the text’s annihilation of place, and that movement does not exist at all: “Nothing moves, for this is a journey in nothing but non-existent name” (22). One of Venia’s hallucinations, the Sphinx, poses a riddle that reflects this notion of time and space acquiring a sense of elsewhere: ““As is well known, in Petushki there aren’t any points A. Moreover, there are no points B, C, D, or E. There are only points F”” (137).<sup>92</sup> Experiences of time and space again become interchangeable for those who navigate through it, and Venia mentions: “And all the same, I wouldn’t wake up on Friday. I’d wake up on Saturday and not in Moscow either but under the railroad embankment in the Naro-Fominsk region”

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<sup>90</sup> “Черт знает, в каком жанре я доеду до Петушков... От самой Москвы все были философские эссе и мемуары, все были стихотворения в прозе, как у Ивана Тургенева... Теперь начинается детективная повесть” (*Moskva—Petushki* 59).

<sup>91</sup> Tumanov’s question of narration arises from Venia’s death at the end of the *poema*, which produces the impossibility of the character to narrate from the grave. More interesting is his discussion of folk and written aspects of the narration, which include Venia’s conversations, but also physical documents inserted into the text, such as the charts Venia creates to map his former coworkers’ productivity, or the so-called scientific studies of drunkenness that he cites.

<sup>92</sup> “Как известно, в Петушках нет пунктов А. Пунктов Ц тем более нет. Есть одни только пункты Б” (*Moskva—Petushki* 101)

(60).<sup>93</sup> The reversing of spatial markers creates multiple interpretations, from it being a representation of Venia's drunken visions and hangovers, to Erofeev's leveling of the center/periphery hierarchies of Soviet space, to more messianic visions of Venia's suffering and death, and finally the coming of the apocalypse.<sup>94</sup>

The travel to Petushki supports this foreboding notion of an apocalyptic journey. While naming his drink recipes, Venia remarks that he will share them, "if I get there alive, if God is gracious" (71).<sup>95</sup> Petushki can be interpreted as a biblical Eden, with Eve as the unnamed female character who waits for Venia, and this reading rightfully places the village in a different realm opposite of Moscow. Konstantin Kustanovich reads these moments as part of a larger motif of Venia's "longing for a higher meaning of existence and not finding it" (136). Petushki's surroundings are described briefly by Venia both realistically and divinely, as he points out two welfare agencies, yet simultaneously in the same sentence, calls Petushki "the resting place of departed souls" ("gnezilishche dush umershikh") (160; 116).

Venia's traveling between Moscow and Petushki ultimately reflects the fracturing of the character that occurs in the *poema*.<sup>96</sup> A scene in which Venia recalls witnessing a man cut in half by a train at Lobna station later mirrors his remarks that he was split in two by the pain of being shoved up and bloodied against the Kremlin walls. The fracturing of both landscape and character are united throughout the text, especially at the end, where both sides come together.

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<sup>93</sup> "И все-таки утром в пятницу я не просыпался. А просыпался утром в субботу, и уже не в Москве, а под насыпью железной дороги, в районе Наро-Фоминска" (*Moskva—Petushki* 50).

<sup>94</sup> The Sphinx also mentions the Soviet explorers Mikhail Vodop'ianov and Ivan Papanin, whose heroic expeditions are reduced to comical absurdity.

<sup>95</sup> "если доберусь живым: если милостив Бог" (*Moskva—Petushki* 57).

<sup>96</sup> Valentina Baslyk creates binaries to describe Venia's schizophrenic character, in categories such as the sacred versus the monstrous, the self against society, and aggressive versus gentle.

Noticing that the buildings in Petushki seem larger, Venia remarks: “Everything gets bigger with a hangover, exactly as much as everything seemed more insignificant than usual when you were drunk” (156).<sup>97</sup> Moscow and Petushki are Venia’s two sides of drunkenness, the euphoria of its heights, and the corresponding depths of the hangover, just like the sinusoidal graph that Venia displays. The two sides of the landscape, the utopia and dystopia of Soviet space, are incorporated in the monumental, yet horrific images of the Kremlin opposite the unnamed hallway where Venia is finally murdered. Two of Moscow’s most famous landmarks, Russian and Soviet, Ivan Martos’ *Monument to Minin and Pozharskii* (1818) and Vera Mukhina’s *Worker and Farmgirl* (1937), physically attack him in his delusions and realizations that he has arrived in Moscow.

Many of the articles cited here warn of the impossibility of any single interpretation of Erofeev’s *poema*. The text hovers in a nebulous space between fiction and biography, the social world of Moscow and the heavenly world, and finally literary and philosophical delusions, which incorporate Russian, Soviet and world culture. Nonetheless, all of these vacillations are afforded their place through the extended journey outside of Moscow, which again provides a literary space for Venia’s lengthy exposition. In effect, the city serves as an inhospitable place for Venia’s thoughts and desires, and it is only in the enclosed train car where they become fully articulated. The enclosed, yet public space of the train car is far different from the settings of the city. The train journey of *Moscow—Petushki* echoes Certeau’s notion of “travelling incarceration,” where the passenger’s immobility matches the static framing of the passing landscape through the window, despite the train itself barreling down the tracks: “The

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<sup>97</sup> “Все вырастает с похмелья ровно настолько, насколько все казалось ничтожней обычного, когда ты был пьян” (*Moskva—Petushki* 114).

unchanging traveler is pigeonholed, numbered, and regulated in the grid of the railway car, which is a perfect actualization of the rational utopia” (111). For Certeau, the train berth is where a “little space of irrationality,” the amusement of travel, is contained within the grid of the railroad system (111). The train allows for private thought, as isolation produces a dream space for the passenger: “Glass and iron produce speculative thinkers or Gnostics. This cutting-off is necessary for the birth, outside of those things but not without them, of unknown landscapes and the strange fables of our private stories” (112). Like standing from the heights of the city, it provides a private vantage point of spectatorship, ambivalent to the chaos of the city. This abstract position is empowering, yet melancholic. And this aspect of Certeau’s “encarceration” is what is so prevalent, albeit different in Erofeev’s *elektrichka*. It creeps through the surroundings of Moscow, making its scheduled stops, all but Eskino, holding its passengers to experience the lag of unending journeys without offering the sights of the outside world. Venia’s dreams do not come from his point of view as a spectator: he rarely, if almost never, looks out the window of the train car.

### **3.5 INTIMACIES OF PUBLIC SPACE IN VLADIMIR SOROKIN’S *THE QUEUE***

Sorokin’s *The Queue* evokes a question outlined in the previous chapter: How can we place the queue’s presence within a concept of Soviet public space? The queue is a social structure that emanates from the state’s distribution of goods, but at the same time, however, it represents an unofficial mass of people that spontaneously forms within the mediated space of the city. Sorokin’s novel provides an interesting take on this question, as it seeks to define the expressions of the public realm. Sorokin claims to have no interest in these sociological questions, and that

he was only interested in the queue as a “non-literary polyphonic monster” (qtd. Epstein, Genis, and Vladiv-Glover 276). He feels a sense of anxiety from the masses, and believes that social life “does not have the power to transform human nature” (277). Despite this partiality of private over public life, I will show how Sorokin’s text still indeed creates and celebrates a notion of intimacy within the public realm. While public space is a construct shaped and often defined by the urban landscape, the city is not the sole determinant of the interactions within its walls. Sorokin explores this notion by stripping the city of its physical markers. He creates public space solely through the voices that occupy his queue, thus placing people at the center of the work, and carving out a city vis-à-vis how his characters interact with one another.

Analyses of *The Queue* almost always begin with the text’s form, noting that it lacks any form of authorial discourse. Sally Laird writes in an introduction to the 1988 English translation, that the work can hardly be called a novel or a play, and instead classifies it as a musical score, “a bizarre street symphony” (qtd. Sorokin, *The Queue* i).<sup>98</sup> The story, told almost solely from the voices that inhabit the queue, are often composed of single word utterances or sounds. Sorokin seeks to define a mass language that exists within proximity, but separate from state language. He removes the conventions of literary language to emphasize what remains:

In principle, the conceptualist artist doesn’t have his own language—he uses only the language of others, as Andy Warhol, for example, used the language of cliché, of mass language. This idea to me seemed very natural; it had an obvious relevance to our situation here, to our attitude towards the language of the state,

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<sup>98</sup> Natal’ia Andreeva and Ekaterina Bibergan also discuss Sorokin’s connection with the sound of his text. They note that the author took part in a series of acts that experimented with recording and playing sounds with the art group Collective Actions (*Kollektivnye deistviia*) during the period when he wrote *The Queue* (154).

its literary language. I feel acutely that I can't be *inside* this language, because to be inside it, to use it, to use it as mine, means that I'm inside this state—and that's something that I always feared, I've always felt myself to be out on the edge. ("Interview" 149; emphasis in original)

Sorokin refuses to be "aesthetically involved," and although one cannot escape being "ethically involved," as he admits that we all live here, he sees a freedom in using the language solely of the queue, without interjecting his own narrative voice (149). This removal allows Sorokin's queue in a way to become autonomous from its author. The queue's representation comes solely from its ranks and those who surround it, as opposed to an authorial figure such as the writer.

Sorokin constructs a polyphony of voices that represent character types of Soviet society; men, women, children, students, and the elderly all inhabit the queue, in addition to different ethnicities and professions, from the peasant to the worker to the intellectual. Sorokin shows how different forms of speech permeate public space, from those in the line to the authorities who try to police its ranks. While these voices are distinguished from one another by individuated language, they are rarely named, and even when a voice is marked, it is difficult to identify the voice's location. Does the reader's vantage point change as the queue slowly moves forward, or does it shift amongst the stationary bodies? When do the multiple entrances and exits from the stage space of the queue happen?<sup>99</sup> All of these ambiguities destroy standard notions of narrativity, where layered levels of discourse routinely mark each character's

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<sup>99</sup> *The Queue* was adapted for the theatre, as one act of a larger play called *Claustrophobia* (*Klaustrofobiia* [1994]) by Lev Dodin and his students of the St. Petersburg Maly Drama Theater. The production featured opera and dance numbers to represent different forms of speech. The performance took place on a meta-theatrical set, a white, three-sided box (259). For a complete description of the production and the group, see Rzhevsky (256-260) and Shevtsova.

utterances, the tone of voice that is used, but also and very importantly here, characters' orientation to one another and the environments they occupy.

While they are stripped of their literary markers, Sorokin develops the background stories of featured characters. Within the text the reader locates a protagonist, Vadim, who enters the queue in search of the unknown product. The product itself is not important, and Sorokin instead explores the dense, transient social space that one must traverse in order to acquire desired items. The wait to procure objects leads to intimate exchanges between characters. After being spurned by a younger woman, Lena, Vadim meets Liuda, who invites him into her apartment. The plurality of voices once found in the queue is transformed to an intimate conversation at a kitchen table and later, a graphic sex scene composed more of sounds than words. Vadim fails to wake up in the morning to rejoin the queue's ranks, but in Sorokin's twist, the woman works for the distribution center, and he will receive his goods outside the line.

Vadim's travel to the interior mimics how Soviet culture treated public and private space. Sorokin juxtaposes the space of the woman's apartment with the outside urban environment: "This contrast between what goes on in the street and the cosy mini-world of the private apartment reflects our Soviet situation in general. That is, the street is the space occupied by ideology, while there's very little ideology in the apartment" (qtd Laird. 148). Vadim's successful procurement outside of the queue, albeit accidental, is seen as a way of preserving private life, of escaping the city and retreating into the space of the home. It reinforces the novel's celebration of a humanity that exists beyond the economic transactions and exchanges that structure and dominate everyday life. Epshtein describes this aspect of the worn down city subject, who is no longer defined through speech and communication, but through his physical collecting. He uses the term the "urban nomad" ("gorodskoe kochev'e") to describe this



lonesome behavior of the daily life of exchange and consumption in the city, devoid of communication, but filled with fleeting economic transactions. He describes a typical scene at night, when crowds of people return home from work, stopping to buy food and goods on the way:

Look at an evening crowd in the city—how sublimely and monotonously faces and shoulders drift. Hands, which usually cultivate people’s gestures, here are forever extended and retracted like those of a porter. They don’t gesticulate, signal, or intermingle—they carry. They do not enact the social horizontality of communication, but the physical verticality of gravity (60).<sup>100</sup>

Sorokin tries to rehabilitate this realm of public life by giving speech power over physical action and its representation. In their quest for procurement, Sorokin does not allow his characters moments of serious contemplation of how they fit within the larger mass of people and the city itself, but their speech is still important. According to Konstantin Kustanovich, Sorokin “enjoys language without striving to produce ideas” (304). Voice in *The Queue* is still expressive, but it only articulates immediate desires, simple utterances to pass the time by communicating with one another, and later in the apartment, the grunts and moans of Vadim’s and Liuda’s extended sex scene.

Sorokin’s absence of novelistic discourse allows for the queue to take center stage. Its characters, its objects, and its purpose are not completely defined, but its movement and life are what is most apparent. Sorokin’s queue becomes the center of its inhabitant’s lives. People

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<sup>100</sup> “Посмотрите на вечернюю толпу в городе—как высоко и отрешенно проплывают лица и плечи. Руки, окутывающие обычно человека манера жестов, здесь вечно опущены и оттянуты, как у носильщиков. Они не жестикулируют, не сигналият, не общаются—они несут. Они обращены не в социальную горизонталь коммуникации, а в физическую вертикаль гравитации” (Epshtein, *Bog detalei* 60).

leave its ranks to shop for other products or to go to work, only to return later. While the novel does not structurally map out each individual's exact movements, their multiple entrances and exits to the queue establish it as a mainstay of Soviet life. The queue is the place of habitation, replacing the home and the city. It is depicted as a living organism that negotiates its way through Soviet space. It harks back to Certeau, who describes how people's movement through the city carves out a narrative space contrary to modern discourses of the city. The queue changes directions multiple times to suit the needs of its ranks. In one scene, a character returns from making a separate purchase and reveals that *kvass* is being sold nearby:

- Aha! It is so close! Lets move the queue and let everyone drink *kvass*. And its convenient, and we will keep the same order.
- Exactly! You are pretty smart, friend! Go there, comrade!
- What's all this?
- There's a barrel of *kvass* over there!
- Really?
- Our friend here's just had some. Not a soul there. Let's move over, and we will all drink *kvass*. (28)<sup>101</sup>

The scene recalls the description of the Soviet queue as both a communal and collective organism. At first, the participants operate in a communal fashion, taking turns to leave and buy *kvass*, ensuring that they can save each other's places. They then display a collective behavior, realizing that everyone can enjoy *kvass* at once if they move the line a few buildings over to

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<sup>101</sup> “— А так! Это же совсем близко! Выгнем очередь и пусть все квас пьют. И удобно, и порядок соблюдается. / — А точно! Головастый ты парень! Двигаемся туда, товарищи! / — Зачем это? / — Там бочка с квасом! / — Правда? / — Парень пил только что. И народу нема. Подвинемся, да и квасу напьемся все” (*Ochered'* 30).

where the *kvass* barrel is located. The same scene is repeated with a different group, as they bend the queue to run through a children's playground, so that everyone can sit on benches (82; 70).<sup>102</sup>

The movement of the queue and its many episodes also conversely maps out city spaces. The queue moves through courtyards, rather than down the street as requested by the police. Inhabitants give each other directions of where to buy items, providing the few physical descriptions of the city. Street names or recognizable places are absent. While the image of the cityscape is absent, its dimensions are defined by how Sorokin's characters inhabit space. Places are carved out through the negative space of voices that occupy the street. For example, when describing how to get to a barbershop, a man gives directions by the city's surrounding features, as opposed to street names: "There is one, but it is not that close. You know... how do I explain... you need to go half a block of houses down, and then to the right. There is a narrow side-street" (16).<sup>103</sup> When asked for the street, he does not remember, and says it is "on some alleyway" (16).<sup>104</sup>

The repeating episodes identify how Sorokin's gaze wanders throughout the queue. Multiple scenes return to the *kvass* vendor, and through these continuities the cityscape is etched. In the beginning of the novel, one person observes the ugliness of urban living, singling out the asphalt surfaces that do not provide shade: "That's how it is in town never gets really fresh.

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<sup>102</sup> "— Maybe we should sit ourselves down there, comrades? What's the point of standing here? / — Good idea, why not... / — Just have to bend the queue round there... / — Yes. Let's bend round into the yard now, into the yard!" (82). ["Так, может, там рассядемся, товарищи? Чего стоять-то? / — Давайте, конечно... / — Загнемся туда и все... / — Да. Выгибаемся во двор, выгибаемся!" (*Ochered'* 70)].

<sup>103</sup> Правда, не так близко, но есть. Знаешь... как бы тебе объяснить... пройти надо полквартала прямо, а после направо. Улочка такая узенькая" (*Ochered'* 16).

<sup>104</sup> "Переулок какой-то" (*Ochered'* 16).

You need a river and fields if you want fresh air. Here all you've got is dust and asphalt" (12).<sup>105</sup>

Later, presumably a different person notices the buildings casting shadows, where the asphalt environment surrounds the line:

— We have nowhere to go out.

— That's just it. It's either asphalt everywhere or cars. (95)<sup>106</sup>

Finally, the city is rendered by its architectural legacy when people comment on the city's old buildings that the queue passes through:

— They don't make yards like this nowadays.

— Course, these are prewar buildings...

— Made them properly in those days.

— Course they did. Look at those bricks...

— Nowadays they just bung a few slabs together, completely useless.

— They get them up quickly, mind you.

— Quickly and badly. (96)<sup>107</sup>

Like Gandlevskii's poem, Sorokin pictures a suburb that could exist anywhere in the Soviet Union. There are some references to the center of Moscow, but it is only mentioned because one person heard that jeans were sold there the day before.

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<sup>105</sup> "Так в городе — какая прохлада. Для прохлады река нужна, трава. А тут пыль, да асфальт..." (*Ochered'* 17).

<sup>106</sup> "А то у нас выйти некуда. / — Точно. Или асфальт везде, или машины стоит" (*Ochered'* 81).

<sup>107</sup> "— Таких дворов щас не делают. / — Так это ж довоенные дома... / — Тогда строили хорошо. / — Хорошо, конечно. Вон, кирпичи какие... / — А щас нашлепают плит этих, а толку никакого. / — Правда, строят быстро. / — Быстро, да плохо. / — Да, плоховато" (*Ochered'* 82).

Sorokin finds further solace in public space through the queue's insular structure, which further reinforces the notion that the members of its ranks belong together. Its members recognize when something is wrong, like when people who join its ranks do not belong:

— What's going on? Don't tell me another bunch have turned up...

— I'm leaving.

— What are they shoving like that for ... watch out!

— We're not pushing, it's them pushing us.

— Look where you're going, will you... (41)<sup>108</sup>

The queue is inwardly looking, in that people become acquainted with one another in their immediate proximity. The queue's insularity recalls Sayeau's description of the intimacy of public space. Citing Georg Simmel's sociology of the city in his famous essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (1903), Sayeau describes how interactions in the modern world occur in public, yet very intimate, interpersonal spaces: "This oddly distanced intimacy of the bus queue and the train, the crowded atomization of the café, the purgatorial temporalities of the bureaucratic waiting room—each one of these are laboratories for the development of new modes of subjectivity, themselves the object of political and economic experimentation and exploitation" (291). Sorokin's queue articulates this aspect of insularity as a defense against state exploitation in a scene where the police arrive to allow a visiting group of tourists to skip the line. Sorokin differentiates the language of the police from that of the queue, and their orders are written in capital letters. The police make intermittent appearances throughout the text, always trying to calm down the crowd. They frequently repeat the same statements: "NO NEED TO MAKE

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<sup>108</sup> "— Что там? Неужели опять подъехал кто-то? / — Пойду схожу... / — Что ж так толкаются-то... осторожней! / — Да мы что ль толкаемся? Это нас толкают. / — Осторожней..." (*Ochered'* 42).

NOISE!,” “WOULD YOU PLEASE KEEP QUIET,” and “KEEP ORDER!” (23).<sup>109</sup> The idea of order (*poriadok*) carries a special connotation for Sorokin and is discussed several times throughout the text. Sorokin associates the word as a signifier for Stalinism. Not only do almost all of the police utterances repeat the call for order (“sobliudat' poriadok”), but those standing in line discuss the era of Stalinism, agreeing that while the country was run strictly, it was efficient, and products were cheap and abundant:

— And yet he won the war, strengthened the country. And everything was cheaper. Meat was cheap. Vodka was three rubles, sometimes even less.

— And there was order then. (97)<sup>110</sup>

Sorokin sarcastically comments on the Stalinist period through his characters' ignorant reminiscences of everyday life during the period, where people “worked consciously” (*rabotat' na sovest'*) and norms were fulfilled. They question what Brezhnev can do with a corrupt and inefficient system that is not policed: “And what can Brezhnev do? The system is at fault” (99).<sup>111</sup> The comment is immediately interrupted, as one man notices another queue on the street. It is apparent in the dialog that the strict micromanaging of the Stalinist period is now in the hands of the people, who must keep track of their own order in everyday occurrences, such as the queue.

Sorokin's *The Queue* thus depicts a public space in which the ideologies of the city and the state have not fully absorbed and co-opted the practices of everyday life. While they operate on completely opposite planes, they intersect in the courtyards and other transient spaces of

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<sup>109</sup> “СТОЙТЕ СПОКОЙНО!” and “ПРОШУ ВАС НЕ ШУМЕТЬ” and “СОБЛЮДАТЬ ПОРЯДОК!” (*Ochered'* 25).

<sup>110</sup> “— А он войну выиграл, страну укрепил. И дешевле все было. Мясо дешевое. Водка три рубля. Даже меньше. / — И порядок был” (*Ochered'* 83).

<sup>111</sup> “А что Брежнев сделать может? Система такая” (*Ochered'* 84).

habitation to become at times indistinguishable from one another. One joke reflects this notion, and describes a bus making a scheduled stop at the end of a queue: “A Moscow bus driver announces: ‘This stop is the liquor store. Next stop is the end of the queue for the liquor store’” (Petrosian 23).<sup>112</sup> The joke reveals that while the queue is not entirely a Soviet structure, it has been institutionally integrated to adapt to Soviet life. Sorokin’s queue finds and operates in spaces not already colonized by Soviet modernity. The queue is an everyday, public construction that forms alongside the larger, abstract notions of allocation; it enacts its own forms of order and distribution according to the way people live. The work’s vision of urban space resembles Lefebvre’s conceptualization of how the auspices of modernity have not completely colonized everyday life. Sorokin’s queue is self-policed, and establishes its own order through roll calls, personal favors, and relationships between people. This is the type of subjectivity that occurs beyond the simple numbering and ordering of a social structure. It is ordered, yet highly personal. Language acts as a means of location and distinguishing oneself amongst the crowd. According to Sorokin, he chose to represent the queue in dialog form to highlight this strategy of the individual utterance:

The queue speaks its own language. There are no attempts to make this language literary. I feel very clearly the difference between literary language and the language of the crowd. This language is absolutely not functional, it’s ritualistic

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<sup>112</sup> “Водитель автобуса объявляет: Остановка ‘Винный магазин’, следующая остановка— ‘Конец очереди’” (Petrosian 23).

by nature. Its purpose is not to exchange information or ideas—it's designed for finding one's place somehow in this gigantic mass of people. (152)<sup>113</sup>

The subjectivity of the queue is just one of the many constructs of second-world modernity, where people find ways to locate and distinguish themselves amongst others in a collective and communal society. This moment that distinguishes people from one another will be the focus of attention in the next chapter, in which I explore how Soviet society became stratified in queue-like hierarchies that were fueled by personal distinction. The crowds that constituted urban space were by no means homogeneous, collective spaces that the state proclaimed would ensure equality. This concept, defined earlier as *ocherednost'*, is crucial in understanding the ways in which individual priority is articulated in the post-Stalinist period, and specifically during the period of Stagnation.

If this chapter is about the longing to fit into the Soviet allocated city, the next chapter details the assertion of one's right to access these spaces and to find a way of operating within communal societies. Prized urban spaces, such as apartments, were historically encoded with remnants of consumer tastes and social mobility of the Stalinist period. The urban centers constructed out of a workers revolution, evolved to reflect their new inhabitants. The white collar, culturally conscious urban elite would not settle for the modest, yet utopian impulses of the Thaw period, or saw through the abuses that overlooked socialist morality and the promises of material equality.

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<sup>113</sup> The Russian phrase “Who is last?” does not necessarily emphasize priority, but serves a pragmatic aspect: it identifies exactly the attendance and order of a line, as some customers who participate in multiple lines will not always be present. Sorokin includes a lengthy scene in *The Queue*, in which people respond to roll calls.



#### 4.0 FROM *OCHERED'* TO *OCHEREDNOST'*: INDIVIDUAL PRIORITY AND THE SUBJECTIVITY OF ORDERING

I am a sovereign state.<sup>114</sup>  
— Aleksandr Zinov'ev, “The Formula of life” (“Formula zhizni” [13])

The line for grapes was almost 300 meters. If I get in the back of the line, then I'll have to slowly shuffle all three hundred meters, and I'm in a rush to see Nina. I walk straight up to the saleswoman. The saleswoman smiles and she begins to weigh the grapes, taking all the ripe bunches and plucking out all the rotten ones. She does this because I don't ask for any kind of exception for myself, and also because I look like Smoktunovskii.<sup>115</sup> — Viktoriia Tokareva, *A Day Without Lying* (*Den' bez vran'ia* [137])

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The opening scene from Leonid Gaidai's popular comedy *Operation Y and Shurik's other Adventures* (*Operatsiia Y i drugie prikliucheniia Shurika* [1965]) features the title character Shurik as he waits in line with a small group for the bus (Figure 3). When the bus arrives, he lets women and children, as well as others on before him, only to miss the bus himself. The process

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<sup>114</sup> “Я есть суверенное государство” (“Formula zhizni” 13).

<sup>115</sup> “За виноградом очередь метров в триста. Если я стану в хвост очереди, тогда мне придется пройти мелкими и редкими шагами эти триста метров, а я тороплюсь к Нине. Я подхожу прямо к продавщице...Продавщица улыбается и начинает взвешивать мне виноград, отбирая спелые гроздья и выщипывая из них гнилые ягоды. Она так делает потому, что я не требую для себя никакого исключения, и потому, что я похож на Смоктуновского” (Tokareva 137).

repeats itself with the arrival of the next two buses in the light-hearted slapstick scene. Shurik helps a man carrying a bathtub, a child, and others to the dismay of those behind him, who want to board the bus as quickly as possible (Figures 4 and 5). Finally, the man immediately behind Shurik becomes impatient, shoves him out of the way, and boards the bus, leaving the film's hero waiting yet again (Figure 6).



Figure 3. Queuing for buses in *Operation Y and Shurik's other Adventures*



Figure 4. Communal behavior in *Operation Y and Shurik's other Adventures*



Figure 5. Absurdities of communal behavior in *Operation Y and Shurik's other Adventures*



Figure 6. Impatience in *Operation Y and Shurik's other Adventures*

The scene is illustrative of what is to become a dominant feature of Stagnation culture: the call for individual priority against the monolith of collective society. Shurik is visually demarcated from the others in line; he doesn't have an umbrella or a hat. This visual hint sets up the scene and positions him against the collective mass, even though he acts in their interest. While Shurik is the hero, defined by his socially conscious good deeds, these acts get him nowhere. The scene is indicative of the cynical attitude Soviet culture begins to adopt, targeting the ideals of collectivity, communality, and social equality.

Gaidai's film was released at the crossroads of Khrushchev's liberal Thaw agenda and Brezhnev's ideology of developed socialism, commonly marked historically as the period of Stagnation.<sup>116</sup> The film, according to Saša Milić is a reprisal of Khrushchev-era economic values, providing a systemic critique of the leader's egalitarian policies. The period of Stagnation can be differentiated economically and socially from Khrushchev's Thaw by a series of observations. Khrushchev's reign is typically marked by his egalitarian reforms, such as the Virgin Lands Campaign (1954), that sought to reestablish equality between center and periphery. Economic reforms under Khrushchev also tried to enact greater equality across the social body. Brezhnev's policies sought to repudiate these changes, eliminating wage reforms and retail price stability. James Millar notes how Brezhnev's turn toward reestablishing the vertical social

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<sup>116</sup> I define the period of Stagnation (*period zastoia*), a name that was only assigned retrospectively, from 1966 to 1985, beginning with the trial of Andrei Siniavskii and Iulii Daniel', which set the tone for control over cultural production under Brezhnev. Likewise, in the film industry the period is marked by the shelving of many problematic films for distribution beginning at the end of 1966. My periodization is backed by events outside of literature and film as well, with Brezhnev's first use of the term "developed socialism" in 1967, a term that later characterized the Stagnation era officially in the fourth, 1977 Soviet Constitution (T. Thompson 207). Finally, I mark the year 1985 as the end of Stagnation, when Mikhail Gorbachev was elected General Secretary and introduced the policies of glasnost and perestroika, which mark a decisive departure from the ideology of the Brezhnev period.

hierarchies of Stalinism reflected in material inequalities: “It also chose not to reverse the policy of retail price stability that had been established and repeatedly promised ever since Stalin’s death. Hence the resource crush could not but be reflected in lengthened queues for desirable consumer goods and in decreased incentives to work hard or to work at all” (371).<sup>117</sup>

Despite these visible inequalities across the social body, the time of Brezhnev’s rule was one of the periods of Soviet history that was most stable economically. Stagnation can be viewed as a plateau of the Soviet project: Urbanization had already become a primary mode of life for most citizens by the 1960s, and by 1975 seventy percent of urban dwellers no longer lived in communal apartments (Suny 437). Living standards rose compared to previous periods, as wages increased by fifty percent and consumption of goods by seventy percent (W. Thompson 84). While these markers of material affluence point towards an increase in wellbeing of the average citizen, Ronald Suny writes, that unlike the Stalinist period and its fluid social mobility, Soviet society under Brezhnev had become crystallized, entrenched in a conservative bureaucracy that prevented access to the privileges of the social elites. He views the period as a frozen society, one that could not integrate and pass on the project of building socialism to the waiting generation: “Basically Stalinism and the post-Stalinist bureaucratic economic system had created an educated, mobile, expectant society. But the possibility of realizing one’s ambitions,

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<sup>117</sup> The famous mock-slogan, “they pretend to pay us, and we pretend to work” perfectly captures the cynicism toward the benefits of labor during Stagnation.

of fully expressing one's opinions and interests was precluded given the undemocratic political order and the petrified ideology of Marxism-Leninism" (439).<sup>118</sup>

The time period features a particularly interesting clash between the abstractness of ideology and the pragmatic aspects of everyday life; the illusion of stability under Brezhnev, a reassertion and reclassification of Soviet ideology, is pitted against the material conditions of reality, particularly towards the end of the era. The Soviet ideology of developed socialism, an extra step in Marxist-Leninist development, continued to lose much of its meaning for many individuals. As the teleology of Soviet modernity was delayed, and extended into the future on the level of official state discourse, people still embraced Soviet culture collectively through empty rituals and practices that guaranteed individual wellbeing. Moreover, in order to maneuver through the increasingly entrenched social bureaucracy, the principles people were taught did not always function in society, requiring one's local knowledge, tact, and private disavowal of communal behavior.

This chapter specifically focuses on cultural production of the Stagnation period by selecting a group of texts that negotiate the conflicts between the egalitarian ideals of collectivity and individual desires of material acquisition. I will focus on how authors interpret these conditions, and how their narratives voice concerns of material inadequacies, social inequalities, and the breakdown of communal living. Works depict the queue as a social ladder across a wide variety of genres and media to offer a critique of everyday life in the Soviet Union and of the individual's harsh existence amidst social pressures. Erofeev's rogue, Venia, in *Moscow*—

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<sup>118</sup> Oleg Kharkhordin further develops this notion in his study, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia* (1999), by detailing how in the post-Stalinist period, social control from central state institutions gives way to increased manifestations of collectivity, which can enact similar pressures (280). Kharkhordin's analysis highlights a new role of the collective in maintaining official standards.

*Petushki* voices this exact concern, defiantly stating: “I’ll remain below and from below I’ll spit on their social ladder. Right, spit on every rung of it. In order to climb it, it’s necessary to be kike-faced without fear of reprimand; it’s necessary to be a pervert, forged steel-assed from head to toe. And this I’m not (41).<sup>119</sup> Venia’s refusal to conform to the social world reflects the central problem presented in this chapter, the simultaneous voicing of individual and collective concerns. Analyzing Vladimir Voinovich’s *The Ivankiad* (*Ivan’kiada* [1976]), Aleksandr Zinov’ev’s *The Yawning Heights*, and El’dar Riazanov’s *The Garage* (*Garazh* [1979]), I follow how cultural producers begin to articulate different individual subjectivities carved out of the stratification of Soviet society: the social structures, institutions, and professional collectivities that were scattered across its landscape.

## 4.2 OCHEREDNOST' AND THE PRIVILEGE OF TASTE

A telling cultural icon from Brezhnev’s reign was not the leader himself, but of the excessive number of medals he wore, visibly displaying his status of General Secretary. Brezhnev’s visual display was the terminus of an increasingly atrophying bureaucratic chain of social mobility that could no longer fulfill the needs of the populace. Soviet culture, even predating the official adoption of Socialist Realism in 1934, featured a teleological path of stages, linear movement

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<sup>119</sup> “Я остаюсь внизу и снизу плюю на всю вашу общественную лестницу. Да. На каждую ступеньку лестницы—по плевку. Чтоб по ней подыматься, надо быть жидовскою мордою без страха и упрёка, надо быть пидорасом, выкованным из чистой стали с головы до пят. А я—не такой” (*Moscow—Petushki* 36). Venia’s obscenity toward the Jew was left out of the English translation quoted here. He invokes the stereotype of the greedy Jew in order to show his disgust of all of society and their aspirations to climb the social ladder.

with clear stops that displayed character development, rewards, and higher rankings. Vera Dunham's influential article "The Big Deal" discusses the post-Great Patriotic War state under Stalin, which struck an agreement with the emerging middle class, providing affluence as a reward to social order:

The middle class wanted careers backed by material incentives—housing, consumer goods, luxuries, and leisure time. Neither the regime nor the middle class was interested in ideology or further revolutionary upheavals. Neither objected to a stratified society. Both proposed to build on the basis of what was there already. Both were interested in stabilization, normalization, and material progress. Both were interested in social mobility. The new careerism satisfied the upwardly mobile individual, who was then expected to be loyal to those who permitted him to be such. (204)

Dunham traces "The Big Deal" culturally as well, making a brief observation that the Soviet hero changes after 1945: "Slowly the paragon of the forward-striding communist took on a new form. Someone resembling a middleclass careerist replaced the revolutionary saint of the twenties and the party vigilante of the thirties... He drove his own private car. He was disinterested in touchy matters of ideology and higher policy" (205). She ultimately concludes that "The Big Deal was a giant shift that aligned *meshchanstvo* (*petit-bourgeois* behavior) with *kul'turnost'* (culturedness)" (205).<sup>120</sup>

Dunham's observation on *kul'turnost'* reveals the height in which Soviet ideology was materially encoded under Stalin. Soviet material culture provided more than a visual, everyday

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<sup>120</sup> Amy Randall details how the origins of *kul'turnost'* coincided with the rapid industrialization and urbanization, which attracted peasants into cities (39). State guided consumerism was initially meant to educate rural people about modern ways of life in the city.

correspondent to the numerical, scientific successes of state modernization. It becomes apparent that earlier signifiers of ideological correctness under Stalin, the acceptance of the individual into the collective whole, had been replaced by other forms of inclusiveness, namely material acquisitions that legitimized and visibly displayed one's place in society. It was precisely this area that was denounced immediately by Khrushchev after Stalin's death. Khrushchev's attack on the "varnishing of reality" (*lakirovka*) simply stated that culture must be truthful to the material conditions of Soviet society. Vladimir Pomerantsev's influential, Thaw-era essay "On Sincerity in Literature" ("Ob iskrennosti v literature" [1954]), echoes the attacks on the "varnishing of reality" lead by Khrushchev. The essay gives great attention to the topic of shortage, describing the act of literary production in these terms:

And what is over-insurance? At a minimum it contains ten vices. It is self-interest, cowardice, blind pragmatism, lack of ideas, and so forth, including underhandedness. It is clear that overcoming these vices will demand far more effort and time than, let's say, ending the lack of livestock or the shortage of goods. (49)<sup>121</sup>

Stalinist cultural representation sought to mask shortages, claiming that abundance across different spheres of life was the markings of a successful socialist system. Pomerantsev stresses that the successes of production can only accomplish so much, and that literature needs to transcend material accomplishments, which he relegates to the world of everyday life. Literature must instead lead straight to the soul of the person:

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<sup>121</sup> "А что такое перестраховка? Это, по меньшей мере, целых десять пороков. Тут эгоизм, трусость, слепой практицизм, безидейность и прочее, включая и подлость. Ясно, что изживание этих пороков потребует куда больше усилий и времени, чем, скажем, ликвидация бескоровности или нехватки товаров" (Pomerantsev 49).



We have now built many homes with bathrooms and refrigerators; we have declared war on the housing shortage and all sorts of shortages; we will be a hundred times more concerned about the human person. Houses for factory workers should be built at the same time as the factory; in any town you should be able to buy everything. Yes, this is necessary. Yes, we shall live well. And all the same... all the same, while struggling for a comfortable everyday life, we must remain *above* everyday life. (52; emphasis in original)<sup>122</sup>

Pomerantsev's call to rise above everyday life stands in sharp contrast to Stakhanov's statement from the 1938, in which he states that factory workers earlier demanded bread, and now that their quotas are fulfilled, they are demanding grand pianos. For Pomerantsev, material acquisition does not equate to a higher sense of cultural literacy. What Pomerantsev instead describes is one of the defining features of Thaw culture: the move inward that privileges personal space as opposed to the public, material realm.

While this trend continues into the period of Stagnation, especially in the writings of popular authors, I will argue and show how much of Stagnation culture and beyond performs an exact opposite movement. It reintegrates the material landscape of Stalinism as a site of identity formation, where one's relation to this world became one of its defining features. Many of the heroes of Stagnation culture define themselves by their misfortunes and failures to access this

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<sup>122</sup> “Теперь мы построили много домов с ванными комнатами и холодильниками, мы объявили войну жилищной нужде и нехваткам всякого рода, мы будем во стократ больше заботиться о человеке. Дома при заводе должны строиться вместе с заводом, в любом городке должно всё продаваться. Да, так и нужно. Да, мы будем жить хорошо. И всё-таки... всё-таки, борясь за благоустроенный быт, нам надо оставаться *над* бытом” (Pomerantsev 52; emphasis in original).

space, whereas in the Thaw, they were championed for their ability to escape it or criticized for their cunning ability to exploit it.<sup>123</sup>

Vasilii Aksenov's "The Steel Bird" ("Stal'naia ptitsa" [1965]) perfectly illustrates the concerns over social mobility of the Stalinist period. The story depicts an individual's despotic rise to run a communal apartment building. The mysterious, half-human outsider, Popenkov, is initially adopted by the apartment dwellers, and they let him sleep in the elevator provided all the residents are home for the night. As the apartment inhabitants nurse Popenkov back to life, he is extended privileges, namely a state operation and the right to skip queues to buy medicine, spurring his rise to power. The apartment dwellers' socially conscious behavior leads to their enslavement by Popenkov, and this decision is mocked by those who realize what is happening: "We'll do whatever we can...So that's how it was, chaps! We went on with what we were doing. Bottoms up! Salute. Oh yes, we carried the furniture in for him, and that evening he nailed up the main entrance. Since then the tenants have been using the back entrance" (29).<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> For example, in Vladimir Dudintsev's Thaw-era text *Not By Bread Alone* (*Ne khlebom edynim* [1956]), a grandfather clock is not simply an object that shows the high-ranking Drozdov's wealth, but is rather a divisive object that separates and isolates him from less fortunate characters. When his wife Nadia asks him if she can invite some of the workers to her birthday party, he singles out the looming clock, and says: "Because they, how do I explain to you... are slaves of things. They will see and identify you and I with all of these things that surround us. They don't have a grandfather clock. They will always envy you for this reason and will carry that over to unsuspecting people. It will happen the same way that it did with Mozart and Salieri." ["Потому что они, как бы тебе сказать... рабы вещей. Увидят и отождествят тебя и меня с теми вещами, которые нас окружают. У них нет таких вот часов, которые стоят на полу. Они всегда по этой причине будут свою зависть переносить на ничего не подозревающего человека. Как у Моцарта с Сальери получилось" (20)].

<sup>124</sup> "Вот такая была история, ребята. Поехали дальше. Рюмки на уровень бровей! Салют. Ну да мебель мы ему занесли, а вечером он заколотил парадный подъезд. С того времени жильцы стали ходить через черный ход" ("Stal'naia ptitsa" 604).

“The Steel Bird” is a curious allegory for Stalin’s rule. While Popenkov is a Stalin-like figure, the work does include the leader Stalin separately, mentioning the event of his death.<sup>125</sup> Popenkov’s rise to power from a modest background of poverty eventually culminates in his reckless control over the apartment complex, which begins to crumble as it grows into a monstrosity. Popenkov, however, hardly serves as a representative of the usual characters who were criticized in texts warning against *meshchanstvo*. He is unique, powerful, and despite embodying negative characteristics, is curiously celebrated by Aksenov. Popenkov’s move through the social ranks is depicted as an act of villainy, and Ryan-Hayes rightly describes this process as an act of consumption (Ryan 32). Although the apartment dwellers drive away Popenkov at the story’s close, he is not dead, and flies off to lurk for future generations, the legacies of Stalinism still imposing on future generations.

These commentaries on material acquisition find their way into many texts of and discourses of the post-Stalinist era. Works begin to discuss and to condemn unequal socialist illusions of allocation and equality, yet at the same time, begin to desire these privileges within Soviet society. This idea, which I label *ocherednost'* (queue priority and queue discipline), describes literature’s and other cultural products’ emphasis on individual distinction amidst collective allocation. The queue posits the individual simultaneously as a part of a group, yet ordered within it. I contend that this becomes a defining feature of individual subjectivity in much of literature and culture in the post-Stalinist period, and especially during the period of Stagnation. What is most interesting in this move, is that the very same discourses of queuing that were used to forward the socialist project and collective sharing are later used to assert

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<sup>125</sup> Ryan-Hayes notes the references to Stalin in the work, namely the title and Popenkov’s unidentifiable language, whose sounds resemble Georgian (see Ryan, 30-33).

individual priority, individual distinction, and immediate individual needs against the backdrop of scarcity.

*Ocherednost'* can be theorized alongside Bourdieu's notion of distinction, which views cultural practice and taste as a means for people to distinguish themselves from the common masses. Bourdieu is interested how difference across social, economic, and cultural spheres give social formations their structures (*Distinction* 163). This is particularly relevant for a discussion of queuing, as Bourdieu's analysis of tastes, interactions with one another, and social orientations reveals how institutions position individuals within groups. Similar to the ways I theorized the queue as a conciliatory, collective space in Chapter Two, Bourdieu details the illusion of how power structures accommodate the social body and placate it by satisfying its needs, but only through delayed action: "Especially when they compare their present conditions with their past, the dominated groups are exposed to the illusion that they have only to wait in order to receive advantages which, in reality, they will obtain only by struggle" (164).

A 1978 cartoon in *The Crocodile* plays with this notion of social hierarchy in its depiction of chess pawns queuing for the position of the queen (Figure 7). The cartoon, printed in a small section of the journal on a back page, interestingly interprets Soviet society through the feudal monarchy of the chessboard.

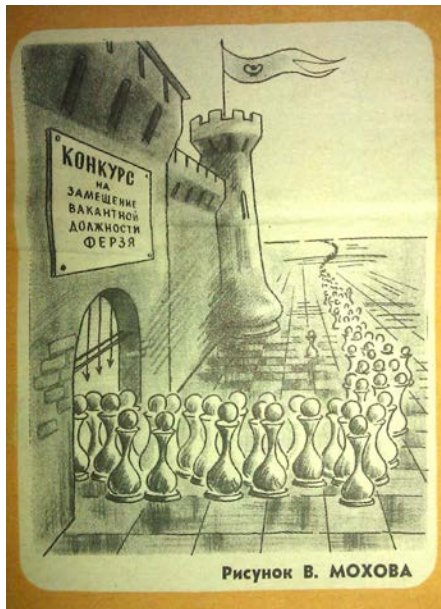


Figure 7. “Competition for the vacant position of the queen” in *The Crocodile*<sup>126</sup>

Of course, for every eight average pawns, there can only be one queen, and the cartoon makes light of this by depicting a mass of pawns lining up for the distinction of queen. While the cartoon uses the feudal rankings of the chessboard, the language of the sign features common Soviet bureaucratic language “Competition for vacant position” (“Konkurs na zameshchenie vakantnoi dolzhnosti”).

Bourdieu finds that in the stratification of society, delay is a defining feature of social control. In his study on queuing, Schwartz likewise identifies the connection between the queue and stratifying institutions. He notes that queuing theory is in essence a stratification theory of institutionalization (93). The queue is a social structure that enlists its users in an inverted “take and give” relationship. Whether or not the time put in is worth the product or service eventually

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<sup>126</sup> “Konkurs na zameshchenie vakantnoi dolzhnosti ferzia.” V. Mokhov. *Krokodil* 19 (1978): 13.

received, the queue is an institution of urban life that takes people's time and effort and subsumes it within its calculated space and time.

Lag, frustration, and satisfying needs are some of the driving features of distinction for Bourdieu. As people try to move into more desirous positions, the order of society is constantly changing, dictating new tastes that maintain exclusivity:

Collective and individual delay has social consequences which further complicate this process [of social mobility]. Relatively late arrival not only reduces the duration of enjoyment; it also implies a less familiar, less "easy" relationship to the activities or asset in question, which may have technical consequences—e.g., in the use of a car—or symbolic ones—in the case of cultural goods. It may also represent the disguised equivalent of pure and simple privation when the value of the asset or activity lies in its distinguishing power (which is clearly linked to exclusive or priority access) rather than in the intrinsic satisfaction it gives. (164)

Bourdieu's discussion is relevant for discussions of the culture of Stagnation, as texts begin to concentrate on the individual and his access to privileged areas of Soviet society. During the Stagnation period, authors and artists alike actively begin to evaluate their status in society, using this issue as the basis for narratives. The ways that social structures allocate and impose on cultural practices is particularly relevant, and what is unique about works of this period is that the voices of discontent among cultural producers begin to voice the economic ramifications of artistic censorship. Groups of cultural producers, such as the *dvorniki*, who had to support their artistic ventures through low-level menial work, discuss their lack of access to the exclusive world of high-ranking officials.

George Faraday examines the Soviet film industry during the period of Stagnation similarly through the prism of Bourdieu, detailing how artists were rewarded and punished for their compliance and noncompliance with state aesthetic codes and subject material. Calling it a process of “unofficial stratification” and a structure of “informal prestige,” Faraday details the valuation process of art under Brezhnev, which was torn between moral-artistic integrity and conformity to official demands (23-24). Faraday’s study is more concerned with the historical factions in artistic unions, particularly the film industry’s revolt in 1986, which resulted in dismantling the systems of administrative control. Similarly, Maurice Friedberg identifies the precarious cultural situation between authorship and censorship as emblematic of the socio-economic contradictions of the time, where the unofficial, second economy offset the inadequacies of central planning: “Most writers and artists gain security and benefits from adhering to the system, which skillfully blends privileges with selective repression to insure outward conformity” (vii). My chapter instead focuses on similar concerns and their representation in narrative. Texts feature the battles over Soviet space, the mediation of taste, and those who occupy positions of ownership and power.<sup>127</sup>

Bourdieu is interested in class struggle, where taste is the product of class identity that further divides people. Societies divide people through organizations such as educational institutions, where people are allocated to places of prestige, and others to devalued positions of service: “The effect of ‘allocation’...mainly operates through the social image of the position in question and the prospects objectively inscribed in it, among the foremost of which are a certain

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<sup>127</sup> Friedberg makes a brief observation on the first half of the 1980s about this conflict and its dominance in contemporary Soviet culture: “Cultural products such as literature of mass appeal, theatre, cinema, and television that reflect as well as try to influence popular values and attitudes show increasingly rigid class distinctions and great lust for material possessions” (1).

type of cultural accumulation and a certain image of cultural accomplishment” (25). Stagnation culture begins this battle at the institutional landscape, attacking those who inhabit bureaucratic structures. As artists proclaim their talent in the cultural sphere, they lament their inability to translate this cultural capital into economic access. Artists can only distinguish themselves through their intellect and cultural prowess, as opposed to the bureaucrat who can easily access the closed-off material world of the Berezka, a hard currency store.

Distinction was created vis-à-vis the system that gave power not to those people who controlled the means of production, but of distribution. A famous skit, “The Deficit” (“Defitsit”) written by Mikhail Zhvanetskii and acted out by Arkadii Raikin illustrates this process. Featured in the 1974 television variety show *People and Mannequins* (*Liudi i manekeny* [1947]), Raikin plays a man from the Caucasus on an airplane, who tells the flight attendant how the culture of scarcity creates “respected people” (“uvazhaemye liudi”). Raikin’s character imagines a world of abundance, but emphatically decides against these ideal conditions: “The warehouse manager comes—we don’t pay attention to him. The store director—we spit on him! The stock clerk of the shoe department—like a simple engineer! Is this good? Quite the contrary! Let there be abundance, let there be everything! But leave a shortage of something!”<sup>128</sup> While the skit criticizes the Soviet system of allocation and how it creates distinction in a collective society,

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<sup>128</sup> “Завсклад идет—мы его не замечаем. Директор магазина - мы на него плюем! Товаровед обувного отдела—как простой инженер! Это хорошо? Это противно! Пусть будет изобилие, пусть будет все! Но пусть чего-то не хватает” (Raikin)!



Raikin's over the top ethnic caricature sidetracks and softens this critique.<sup>129</sup> Nonetheless, Raikin and Zhvanetskii go beyond ridiculing the behavior of people in a deficit economy, stating: "Shortage is the great motor driving the distinction of societal relations."<sup>130</sup>

The evaluation of distinction thus operates through several fields, occurring socially and aesthetically: "It should not be thought that the relationship of distinction (which may or may not imply the conscious intention of distinguishing oneself from common people) is only an incidental component in the aesthetic disposition. The pure gaze implies a break with the ordinary attitude towards the world which, as such, is a social break" (*Distinction* 31). A defining feature of Stagnation culture is the strategic maneuvering that can be found in texts, as they attempt to assert nonconformist ideas in the public arena. Alexei Yurchak discusses the difficulty of defining discourse during the period of Stagnation, specifically in analyzing the time period through binary categories such as "official/unofficial," "conformist/dissident," or "state/people":

What tends to get lost in the binary accounts is the crucial and seemingly paradoxical fact that, for great numbers of Soviet citizens, many of the fundamental values, ideals, and realities of socialist life (such as equality, community, selflessness, altruism, friendship, ethical relations, safety, education, work, creativity, and concern for the future) were of genuine importance, despite

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<sup>129</sup> Sergeui Oushakine writes that Raikin's comedic performances feature the intersection and disconnect between the aural and ocular, which operate on different planes ("Laughter Under Socialism"). The appearance, gestures, and expressions of performance often produced the impetus to laugh for Soviet audiences of Raikin, which at times destabilized the content of a skit. Indeed, this aspect of Raikin's comedy is present in "The Deficit," even more so in a live performance of the segment, where the loudest laughs in the audience come not from controversial material, but from Raikin's garbled pronunciations of Russian language.

<sup>130</sup> "Дефицит—великий двигатель общественных специфических отношений" (Raikin).

the fact that many of their everyday practices routinely transgressed, reinterpreted, or refused certain norms and rules represented in the official ideology of the socialist state. (8)

Yurchak points towards a disjuncture between ideology and everyday practice, which often resorts to pragmatic solutions that transgress various value systems. In the examples that follow, authors and filmmakers still embody socialist principles of equality, using similar state discourses, but they do so to make major breaks with current societal practices: they seek individual distinction in the name of justice, even if it comes at the cost of greater collective need.

In finding this voice of distinction, I contend that many literary representations of the queue during this period hinge on common uses of satire, humor, and sharp ridicule in order to examine more closely the systemic structures of socialist allocation and how they are abused in everyday practice. Satiric modes of writing flourished during the period of Stagnation. Although many of these works were never published in the Soviet Union, a wide range of satiric works were produced, even with an increase in censorship under Brezhnev. Satire helped to reshape the voice of dissent that was unleashed during the Thaw. Anatoly Vishevsky writes that irony was the defining tone of the 1970s, voicing the disappointment of many authors disillusioned with the end of the Thaw (4). He also notes, that irony was only affective because Soviet readers, especially urban intellectuals, were attuned to it: “Their texts came as a direct response to the public’s taste. In this way the distance between the horizon of expectations and the works was nonexistent—the texts made no demands on the receiving consciousness to make a change on the horizon of unknown experience” (6).

As Stagnation culture begins to satirize and cynically discuss the role of individuality in a collective society in both popular and unpublished works, the dichotomy between groups lies not only in the relationship between people, but also between individual and collective priority, and the access to goods and services. The three texts closely analyzed in this chapter are representative of other texts in the following ways: satiric tones used by authors construct sharp individualized voices that do not simply comment on societal flaws, but rather are used to assert individual claims. While the texts present the satirist as a civic spokesperson for others, they simultaneously exist for the individual orator, who fights for his own wellbeing. Satiric modes of writing seek to subvert social norms and existing social hierarchies, juxtaposing the behavior of those in positions of power with those who are held powerless. Lastly, by satirizing the experience of the queue, authors infuse life into a social condition of immobility and decay, while still referencing the severity of an ever-present reality. Satire provides effective and biting commentary on the present time, as it often reaches outside of the text and contrasts the literary text against a known social reality.

The literary and filmic texts chosen for this chapter can also be considered as representative in that the producers do not celebrate the everyday for its chaos and irreducibility to a single path, but rather construct a variety of narratives through which the individual views the complex ordering of everyday Soviet life. Authors begin to find ways to express individuation, recognizing personal distinction and access to exclusive privileges that opposes what official Soviet culture tried to present as a seemingly uniform material world. They envision everyday life as part of an imagined ordered society, pitting individual heroes against the collective, which is often viewed as a vertical, rather than horizontal system of relations. In this exploration, individual subjectivity is often defined through one's priority within the state

allocation of socialism, creating a conflict between individual and collective need.<sup>131</sup> Here, I am most interested in carving out a distinct space for Stagnation culture separate from the period of the Thaw. Many studies of late Soviet culture describe how texts begin to lay bare the contradictions of what was once a seemingly congruous teleological path. My study instead looks at texts as they begin to break down official discourses of Soviet allocation, a more specific area imbedded within Soviet second-world social organization. In doing so, works focus on and challenge the inadequacies of everyday life, interpreting scarcity not as a local problem, but rather as a result of systemic inequalities and as the result of the poor behavior by those who fill society's ranks.

#### **4.3 HAIL TO THE QUEUE: DISCOVERING THE SOVEREIGN STATE OF THE INDIVIDUAL IN ALEKSANDR ZINOV'EV'S *THE YAWNING HEIGHTS***

In order to detail the relationship of the individual against the social pressures of the collective, Aleksandr Zinov'ev theorizes the rules of Soviet communal space. Zinov'ev is interested in Soviet bureaucratic space, and he examines the absurdities of how individuals operate according to and not according to its rules. Trained as a logician and sociologist, Zinov'ev's multifaceted career across literary and scientific fields was nonetheless directed at a primary goal: to describe the contradictions between abstract understandings of communist ideology and its lived practice. Beginning with his 1954 dissertation on the flaws in logic in Marx to his literary works of the

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<sup>131</sup> Stalinist culture was able to sublimate tendentious topics such as envy and competition amongst and within labor collectivities, packaging these concerns in a teleological narrative structure that showed collective progress alongside individual initiative.

1970s, which expedited his expulsion from the Soviet Union, Zinov'ev sought to describe the rules by which Soviet institutions operated, proliferated, and instilled purported ways of living. This section will look at two works by the author: *The Yawning Heights* and *The Reality of Communism* (*Kommunizm kak real'nost'* [1980]). While Zinov'ev has already outlined the majority of, if not his entire theoretical framework within his fiction prior to *The Reality of Communism*, for the purpose of clarity I will refer to this volume for these points, which are presented in a non-fiction form. Also, although Zinov'ev does not explicitly discuss queuing in *The Reality of Communism*, he outlines what he calls the “laws of communality” (“zakony kommunal'nosti”). In his novel *The Yawning Heights* Zinov'ev applies these laws to describe the system of communism as a queue-like hierarchy.

Zinov'ev's *The Reality of Communism* outlines his theory on the laws of communality, which have been scattered throughout the author's numerous novels. Zinov'ev's study views how collective societies operate in conditions of shortage. This analysis is less concerned with physical acts of waiting in line, and instead focuses on communal behavior in dealing with questions of allocation, such as social mobility and state control over the access and delay of goods. Zinov'ev states that in any society, regardless of its economic base, a set of communal laws exist, by which individuals must abide.<sup>132</sup> Communal laws favor individual existence, as people will always try to improve their standing. Humans operate by laws such as, “give less and take more; minimal risk and maximum gain; minimal personal responsibility and maximum distinction” (*Reality* 61).<sup>133</sup> Zinov'ev believes that the goal of civilization throughout history has

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<sup>132</sup> Zinov'ev notes that these aspects of communal behavior are natural to humans as physical beings, deriving from man's biological evolution (*Reality* 62; *Kommunizm* 65).

<sup>133</sup> “меньше дать и больше взять; меньше риска и больше выгоду; меньше ответственности и больше почета” (*Kommunizm* 64).

been to create institutions and beliefs that limit these laws.<sup>134</sup> Constructs such as government, law, morality, and religion curb this instinct in favor of rewards based on self-sacrifice and service. While communism stresses the collective need over the individual impulse, its lofty goals and governing principles fail in practice:<sup>135</sup>

The difference between how a humane or inhumane society forms in this country or a foreign one, depends not on the laws themselves, but rather on the ability of the population to develop institutions, that stand up against these laws and limit them. Only where these [institutions] do not exist in a society or where they are weakly developed, will the forces of communality gain great strength and determine the physiognomy of the society, and indeed the character of the institutions notionally designed to protect people from their effects. What will then develop is a type of society in which there will flourish hypocrisy, together with violence, corruption, bad management, irresponsibility, poor workmanship,

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<sup>134</sup> Bourdieu's writings on social mobility and class struggle highly resemble Zinov'ev's observations: "Reconversion strategies are nothing other than an aspect of the permanent actions and reactions whereby each group strives to maintain or change its position in the social structure, or, more precisely—at a stage in the evolution of class societies in which one can conserve only by changing—to change so as to conserve" (*Distinction* 157).

<sup>135</sup> According to Zinov'ev, communist ideology only provides the illusion that exploitation has been eliminated. "Various forms of social and economic inequality are not eliminated under Communism but only change their forms" (*Reality* 25). ["Различные формы социального и экономического неравенства не уничтожаются при коммунизме, а лишь меняют свои формы и в каких-то отношениях еще более усиливается" (*Kommunizm* 24)]. Moreover, communism denies the existence of laws of communality, instead ascribing these features to capitalist societies.

cheating, boorishness, idleness, disinformation, deceit, drabness and a system of work privileges. (*Reality* 62)<sup>136</sup>

This model of relations views communism as a state controlled entity, but where the individual behavior of the people subverts the ideology of the system. Communism cannot act as an abstract science when it is actually ruled from the bottom, where it is the people's individual actions that build social institutions throughout society. Thus, society is not governed under the auspices of an overarching ideology.

Zinov'ev's laws of communality thus provide an appropriate analysis of how individuals operate within hierarchies and various orderings of society, especially amidst conditions of scarcity; if all positions in a social hierarchy become saturated, an individual must displace another in order to move up the social ladder. According to Zinov'ev, laws of communality create perverse valuations of worth: one must satisfy authority to get ahead. As people vie for position, the non-threatening, non-entity improves his standing, while significant, talented individuals are eliminated.

Zinov'ev's views, while being the most systematized of any author discussed in the dissertation, are presented in an extremely distorted, kaleidoscopic form in his fiction. The "sociological novel" *The Yawning Heights* is an allegory of Soviet history from Lenin to Brezhnev that takes place in the society Ibansk, and details the absurdities of communism,

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<sup>136</sup> "А человеческий или бесчеловечный тип общества сложится в той или иной стране, зависит не от самих этих законов как таковых, а от способности населения развить институты, противостоящие этим законам и ограничивающие их. Лишь в том случае, если ничего подобного в обществе нет или это развито слабо, коммунальные законы могут приобрести огромную силу и будут определять всю физиономию общества, в том числе— определять характер организаций, по идее призванных ограждать людей от них. И тогда сложится особый тип общества, в котором будет процветать лицемерие, насилие, коррупция, бесхозяйственность, обезличка, безответственность, халтура, хамство, лень, дезинформация, обман, серость, система служебных привилегий" (*Kommunizm* 65).

particularly the role of human behavior within this system.<sup>137</sup> In *The Yawning Heights*, the word is much more powerful than the image. Zinov'ev's sociological novels offer little description, imagery or even action.<sup>138</sup> Instead, he focuses on conversations or speeches, presenting one idea through various speaking subjects. Zinov'ev thus presents a logo-centric alternative world that, like Soviet culture, depends on the power of the word.

The novel is a drawn out series of titled episodes that illustrate Zinov'ev's sociological points, most notably, the laws of communality. All the citizens of Ibansk can be divided into two characters types: intellectuals, who openly articulate how society operates in a dysfunctional manner according to individual impulses, under the guise of communal ideology, and bureaucrats and party members, who do not speak out about these ideas, but carry them out in everyday practice. Of course, those who are smart enough to understand the situation are denied positions of power and are relegated to low-status jobs. Each of the misfit characters theorizes how marginalization occurs in society. Zinov'ev celebrates these characters, as pathetic and weak as they are, in that they understand and voice their opinions of the state.

The novel includes ten chapters titled "The Queue." In these chapters, Zinov'ev outlines his theoretical framework on communal living through the image of the queue, detailing how the complicit act of queuing leads to the marginalization of the individual. Throughout the ten chapters, the queue proliferates, spontaneously beginning from the base of innocent, yet selfish

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<sup>137</sup> Zinov'ev's sociological novel uses literary devices to expound sociological principles. His novels, all written in this self-proclaimed genre, generally follow a simple structure of titled chapters, which are not necessarily dependent on one another, and can stand alone as individual texts. His novels offer a compromise in which Zinov'ev claims to follow a sociological methodology, yet colors his findings, sarcastically subverting the tenets of Soviet ideology.

<sup>138</sup> The genre of the sociological novel is devoid of superfluous language. Zinov'ev does not describe the setting or description of characters in a particular episode unless it contributes to the message conveyed in the scene.



individual desire, but culminating in an absurd, institutionalized structure. The proliferation of the queue in *The Yawning Heights* directly parallels the epidemic growth of bureaucracy in Ibansk, a comparison used by Zinov'ev to reflect the purported teleological path of communism. For example, when asked why there are so many meetings in Ibansk, the character Neurasthenic (Nevrastenik) responds that meetings, yet another place of waiting in Ibanskian society, will evolve along with the development of communism: “‘They are the greatest invention of civilization,’ said Neurasthenic, ‘the highest form of social democracy for individuals who are the lowest rungs of the social hierarchy. When the total Ism is established, mankind will move into a new cycle of progress whose pinnacle will be the transformation of society into a permanent meeting’” (Zinoviev, *Yawning* 634).<sup>139</sup> After establishing that the meetings will ensure a voice for individuals, Nevrastenik adds that the permanent meetings will then evolve to permanent committees, and then to honorary committees. The passage shows one of Zinov'ev's primary occupations in the novel: to strip the meaning away from ideological language and its structuring power. He empties meaning from the Soviet term “permanent revolution” and casts it off as a barren purgatory of waiting in a meeting.

The educated characters of *The Yawning Heights* realize, however, that this added bureaucracy does not ensure equality, but only further relegates lower class members of society down the social ladder. In one episode the character Blockhead (Balda) discusses how queuing is an act of complicity, where the individual becomes a passive, marginalized non-entity amongst the collective. Drawing a diagram on the asphalt as they wait in line, Blockhead notes that of all

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<sup>139</sup> “Величайшее изобретение цивилизации, говорит Неврастенник. Высшая форма социальной демократии для индивидов, находящихся на низших уровнях социальной иерархии. После установления полного изма человечество начнет новый цикл развития, который завершится превращением всего общества в постоянно действующее собрание” (*Ziiaiushchie* 429).

goods available for consumption, only the worst quality and minimum quantity is made available to those who wait:

The best part of it, the part which is in shortest supply, goes into the system of outlets reserved for the privileged. So this part doesn't come into the queue system. The rest, in principle, is for everybody else. But is this so in actual fact? You know perfectly well that a large part of this remainder, and its best part, is distributed among the second-rank authorities. There's no law about it, but it's a custom which is religiously observed by those responsible for distribution. (Zinoviev, *Yawning* 782)<sup>140</sup>

Blockhead concludes that those who queue only receive the worst quality products, and that they are reduced to waiting for crumbs. While Zinov'ev is not well versed in western studies of sociology, it is interesting to note that his views on the queue are strikingly similar to Schwartz's notion of allocation.

Conditions of scarcity arise because society does not actively solve its problems, but instead takes the easy path and does nothing. The character Sandal (Lapot') asks Blockhead why people do not work more instead of waiting in line? “‘But it would seem a lot simpler,’ said Sandal, ‘to make people work instead of standing around in queues. There'd be more goods and shorter queues’” (Zinoviev, *Yawning* 782).<sup>141</sup> This point illustrates that the citizens of Ibansk do

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<sup>140</sup> “Самая лучшая часть его и самая дефицитная по закону идет в систему закрытых распределителей. Эта часть в систему очереди не попадет. Остальная часть идет как будто бы для всех. Но так ли на самом деле? Вы прекрасно знаете, что значительная доля продукта для всех, а именно—его лучшая часть, распределяется среди начальства более низкого уровня. Закона такого нет. Но есть обычай, который свято соблюдается теми, кто осуществляет распределение” (*Ziiaiushchie* 528).

<sup>141</sup> “А ведь кажется, куда проще, говорить Лапоть, вместо стояния в очередях заставить людей работать. Продуктов будет больше—очереди меньше” (*Ziiaiushchie* 528).

not consider waiting in line as an act of effort, but rather a leisure activity. Blockhead responds that queuing is peaceful, and if queues did not exist, then people would begin to think and demand better leisure activities. He concludes, “malcontents begin to appear” (783).<sup>142</sup> Thus, the queue is just one of the many conciliatory spaces in Soviet culture, only constructed because people accept their fate out of self-interest in order not to overexert themselves.

Zinov'ev thus outlines a theoretical framework for communism through the image of the queue, detailing how the marginalization of the individual occurs in Soviet society, as well as how the system proliferates, beginning from the base of selfish individual desire, to the creation of institutionalized structures that pretend to govern the system. Zinov'ev illustrates this growth absurdly through the example of the queue, which begins spontaneously only to become institutionalized. As it multiplies, members of the queue draft waiting lists that secure a future member's right to join. Another example details the queue's election of officials, and its plans for its one-year anniversary celebration. These examples do not occur all in one scene, but rather grow in absurdity repeating in section after section interspersed throughout the novel.<sup>143</sup>

Zinov'ev's queue sections reach their pinnacle of institutionalization with the inclusion of the “Anthem to the Queue” (“Gimn ocheredi”), one of seven outlandish anthems in the novel. The text provides an extreme level of cynicism, moving away from the realm of Zinov'ev's

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<sup>142</sup> “недовольные появятся” (*Ziiaiushchie* 528).

<sup>143</sup> Zinov'ev's writing of these sections display reflexivity to the subject matter. In one scene, two characters observe a fight with a salesperson, that of course in Zinov'ev's world sets off a chain reaction down the line: “That lad over there has just got served out of turn and now he's hanging about with nothing to do. In a moment someone in the queue will say something to the ones who've gone out of turn...Now someone's beginning to sound off at the sales staff. Someone else is starting to tell him off” (*Yawning* 375). [“Вот парень получил без очереди и теперь стоит без дела. Сейчас, кто-нибудь из очереди сделает замечание тем, кто лезет без очереди...Теперь кто-то начнет ругать продавцов. Кто-то начнет ругать тех, кто ругает продавцов” (*Ziiaiushchie* 257)].

sociologically based discussions in favor of emotional outburst. The anthem curses the queue, addressing it in the familiar second person form (“ty”), a sardonic way to show the commonplace nature of the practice. The anthem establishes the connection of dependency between the structure and its inhabitants:

I am your life, the queue replies,  
Without me, not a step you move,  
Without me, no one sells or buys,  
Without me, nothing you can do. (Zinoviev, *Yawning* 758)<sup>144</sup>

By the end of the novel, Zinov'ev adds another queue leading to a crematorium, where each individual is incinerated. As the queue measures the duration of each person's life, the front of the line culminates in his death. The crematorium's sign above the entrance illustrates Zinov'ev's main point: “REMEMBER! NO-ONE AND NOTHING IS FORCING YOU TO TAKE THIS STEP!” (828).<sup>145</sup> The sign emphasizes that it is the individual's choice to preserve or erase his own identity. Before entering, another character, Chatterer (Boltun), requests to cease to exist, so that he will not have to witness how people treat each other. Throughout his life, his actions have been directed by petty self-interest to advance through the system, instead of toward anything independent or worthwhile. At the conclusion of the novel, Zinov'ev mourns the loss of this person, simply because he becomes aware of his behavior. Zinov'ev does not provide any solution or hope for Ibansk, but he calls for greater self-awareness from people, stating that individuals must live by their own laws, and not by the ones that seek to take advantage of a flawed society.

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<sup>144</sup> Жизнь я твоя. / Без меня ни на шаг. / Ни дать и ин взять. / Без меня ни шиша. (*Ziiaiushchie* 511)

<sup>145</sup> “ПОМНИ! К ЭТОМУ ТЕБЯ НИКТО НЕ ПРИНУЖДАЕТ!” (*Ziiaiushchie* 560).

#### 4.4 CASHING IN QUEUE CAPITAL: SOCIAL RECOGNITION, WAITING, AND STRATEGIC MANEUVERING IN VLADIMIR VOINOVICH'S *THE IVANKIAD*

The other two texts in this chapter offer more strategic renderings for the individual to navigate the atrophied social spaces of bureaucratic structures. Voinovich's *The Ivankiad* is an account that details the author's competition with a high-ranking Soviet bureaucrat, Ivan'ko, to procure an apartment in Moscow. Petr Vail' and Aleksandr Genis analyze the text as a documentary novella, calling it Voinovich's battle for truth (23). More insight into the novella can be gleaned from its dedication, to the very bureaucrat Ivan'ko and his comrades, whose actions gratuitously gave the author a rich source of material ["bogateishii fakticheskii material" (434)]. Voinovich's dedication is revealing of the author's intentions to convert the idle, useless time spent fighting against the bureaucratic system into useful, artistic material. The novella is thus a strategic exercise that not only examines problems of privilege and corruption, but also displays the author's ability to fight and at the same time produce a text.

The novella is composed of two main strands: the strategies and tactics Voinovich adopts to procure the apartment, and all of the bureaucratic steps he must go through to do so, and, secondly, the author's obsessive preoccupation with Ivan'ko, who is sarcastically labeled the hero of the story. These two strands drastically oppose one another, the first consisting of meetings, telephone conversations, and formal written documents inserted into the texts, all told in a rationally, calmly stated format. The second voice is an intense scrutiny by Voinovich of Ivan'ko consisting of humor, dream sequences, and hyperbole. Both modes of narrative really accomplish the same task, as they are lengthy extrapolations on the Soviet bureaucratic system, but they are told in radically different ways.

The novella begins by outlining Voinovich's wait for his apartment. Voinovich reveals that he is socially conscious of his peers, as he initially gave up his spot in line to a colleague looking for an apartment, on the condition that he is next to receive another two-room apartment. When discussing how he received his previous apartment, he explains why he deserved it: "My wife's and my patience was rewarded. Five years we had waited for a one-room apartment, five years we waited in line... Our one-room apartment was everything to us. We waited longer than others waited, we needed it more than others, and we received the apartment" (440).<sup>146</sup> The point I want to emphasize here in the quote is the second to last line, where Voinovich distinguishes himself from others because he waited. In Bourdieu's terms, Voinovich has built up enough capital, from queuing, to exchange it for something of material value. Voinovich relates his experience of waiting, not as a common fate, but as an ordeal that gradually differentiates him from others and gives him higher priority over them. It is because he has waited that he deserves an apartment, and therefore can assert his priority over others who have not. Voinovich presents himself as a modest, law-abiding, socially minded citizen: "Simple food, modest clothing and a roof over my head, is everything that I've only needed for my wellbeing. Its true though, that over that roof I always wanted a separate room for myself, but that could probably be considered too lavish a wish" (434-435).<sup>147</sup> Voinovich's statement, while on the surface is presented humbly, quietly condemns those who would not agree with such a simple request.

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<sup>146</sup> "Наше с женой терпение вознаграждается. Пять лет мы жили в однокомнатной квартире, пять лет ждали своей очереди...Наша однокомнатная квартира в доме—единственная. Мы дольше других ждали, мы больше других нуждаемся, мы эту квартиру получим" (*Ivan'kiada* 440).

<sup>147</sup> "Простая пища, скромная одежда и крыша над головой—вот все, что мне нужно по части благополучия. Правда, под крышей мне всегда хотелось иметь отдельную комнату для себя лично, но вряд ли такое желание можно считать чрезмерным (*Ivan'kiada* 434-435).

Juxtaposing this modest characterization, Ivan'ko is brought into the text. Upon the departure of a Jewish writer who leaves for Israel, Voinovich is in line to receive the apartment, only to have the mysterious bureaucrat, previously unknown in his cooperative, step in and take the place. Not only has Ivan'ko not waited on the list for apartments, but he already has a three-room, lavishly decorated place, and only wants the new place to expand the existing apartment to four rooms. While the central plot of *The Ivankiad* deals with the apartment procurement, the novella uses this discussion of queuing and priority as a satirical commentary on the Writers' Union. Voinovich touts himself as a talented writer who can mold even the dullest reality into useful material, whereas Ivan'ko is likened to a saucepan: "That night I slept poorly. I dreamt of a white, long-handled saucepan used for milk, and I was trying to solve the question, could this saucepan be considered a writer? And for some reason, I decided for myself, that it could never be a writer, and excuse me, could never be allowed in the union" (449).<sup>148</sup> Because Voinovich considers himself a talented writer, he asserts his social worth opposite Ivan'ko. In two sections titled "The Communist Ivan'ko" ("Kommunist Ivan'ko) and "The Writer Ivan'ko" ("Pisatel' Ivan'ko"), Voinovich details the careers of his nemesis, revealing that the communist has a full resume, but the writer only has a sole publication of a 44-page book, with illustrations, on Taiwan. Cynically relating this discovery back to his personal situation, Voinovich quips: "With these facts it was difficult to form an idea about the level of giftedness of our writer, but to the

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<sup>148</sup> "В ту ночь я спал плохо. Мне снилась белая, с длинной ручкой кастрюля для молока, и я пытался решить вопрос, можно ли ее считать писателем. И почему-то решил для себя, что писателем ее, пожалуй, и нельзя, но принят в союз можно" (*Ivan'kiada* 449).

extent that can be surely confirmed, that on the topic of territorial aspirations, he certainly isn't a first-timer" (458).<sup>149</sup>

The book can also be read as a step-by-step manual for how to deal with Soviet bureaucracy. Although he presents the ordeal as a source for artistic production, Voinovich is sharing local knowledge, presumably addressed to the local reader who is familiar with all of the bureaucratic people, institutions, and procedures.<sup>150</sup> His inserted letters even include calculations of the square meters that should be afforded to him by Soviet law. Voinovich also conveys what *not* to do. While he extends criticism beyond Ivan'ko to include other committee members, Voinovich is fully aware of the way one should operate in the public realm of Soviet society. He includes passages of letters that were never sent, as they contain insulting language that would do only harm (515).

The excess of letters recreates and conveys the frustrations of the author, as the reader is forced to endure the repetitive language and foregone conclusions that each letter will deny Voinovich. The letters thus perform the act of waiting through the process of tedious storytelling. It establishes the back and forth correspondence of the bureaucratic system, where nothing is accomplished, but much effort is expended. The title itself conveys this sense of the epic journey. The reader can trace the narrative's duration of seven months from the dates of the letters, but it is only in the epilogue of the novella that Voinovich reveals that to procure the apartment, he needed to fight another two years.

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<sup>149</sup> “По этим данным трудно составить представление о степени дарования нашего писателя, но зато можно уверенно утверждать, что по части территориальных притязаний он вовсе не новичок” (*Ivan'kiada* 458).

<sup>150</sup> Voinovich directly addresses the reader throughout the text and relates the situation to the reader by calling Ivan'ko “our writer” (*Ivan'kiada* 458).



While *The Ivankiad* dramatizes the scarcity of the situation that drives the story—the lack of apartments and the waiting time that one must endure—the novella ultimately is about Voinovich’s fight for distinction at Ivan’ko’s expense. The apartment becomes a trophy in this battle of distinction between a talented intellectual and a hack bureaucrat. While Voinovich’s voice dominates the text, Ivan’ko is largely absent, denied direct speech, yet he is the proclaimed hero of the story.<sup>151</sup> Voinovich has used the narrator’s position to take center stage, only to illuminate one important point on those who act silently:

And while you plan great reforms, build castles in the sky, find mistakes in Hegel, brood over lines of poetry or try to find the X chromosome under a microscope, our modest drudge, with his shrewd little eyes, carefully follows you to see if, under the guise of struggling against alien ideology, he can get something from you: your apartment, wife, cow, invention, a position, or an academic title. Gradually, in leisurely fashion, he heats up the atmosphere, and then you notice, on that modest face there won’t be a smile, but a wolfish grin (524).<sup>152</sup>

Voinovich only reveals at the end of the novella that the constant presence of the narrator throughout acts as a trick, a distraction from a behind-the-scenes look at how Soviet society operates. There is always at least one Ivan’ko quietly lurking for every outspoken Voinovich.

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<sup>151</sup> Ivan’ko rarely speaks in the work, aside from a few short statements at cooperative meetings.

<sup>152</sup> “И пока вы намечаете программы великих преобразований, строите воздушные замки, ищете ошибки у Гегеля, вынашиваете строчки стихотворения или пытаетесь рассмотреть в микроскоп X-хромосому, наш скромный трушеник своими востренькими глазами бдительно следит, нельзя ли под видом борьбы с чуждой идеологией что-нибудь у вас оттяпать: квартиру, жену, корову, изобретение, должность, или ученое звание. Постепенно и исповедь накаляет он атмосферу, и вот на скромном лице вы замечаете уже не улыбки, а волчий оскал” (*Ivan’kiada* 524).

#### 4.5 THE COLLECTIVE REVOLTS: EL'DAR RIAZANOV'S *THE GARAGE*

*The Garage* comically treats the problem of Soviet allocation, as the film takes place in a cooperative meeting that must decide those who will receive the few remaining garage spots from a state construction project. The film employs a satiric tone that it mischievously purports does not exist in contemporary Soviet culture. When one character Marina explains that she is studying contemporary satire, the response she receives from a high-ranking bureaucrat's son questions her decision: A specialist in Soviet satire? What a wonderful profession. You study something that does not exist.”<sup>153</sup>

*The Garage* is a chamber film, shot almost solely in one meeting room in the Institute for the Protection of Endangered Species (Institut po okhrane zhyvotnykh ot okruzhaiushchei sredy), a name chosen that clearly reflects on the precarious situation at hand (Figures 8 and 9).



Figure 8. Endangered animals in *The Garage*



Figure 9. Endangered animals in *The Garage*

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<sup>153</sup> “Специалист по советской сатире? Удивительная профессия. Вы занимаетесь тем, чего нет” (*Garazh*).

Despite the film's claustrophobia of being trapped in the institute, *The Garage* does not utilize this space to make time drag on. The movement in the room is dynamic, with characters making animated speeches, animatronic creatures moving around the room, and tensions always running high. Although the situation of the garages is firmly grounded in social reality, the exotic setting of the museum lends to the absurdity that ensues.

There is little sense of the importance of time. This is established at the beginning of the film, as several jokes are made that comically render time. A mother, Natasha, mentions that her seven year-old son is left home, and the joke is made, "When we get out, he will have already turned eight. Or perhaps ten."<sup>154</sup> Another woman has a fresh chicken that will soon rot, but again the importance of this trifle is unimportant, as the legs of the chicken, prominently sticking out of the bag, are simply a source of laughter. Only one character in the film really has to be somewhere important, the newlywed husband, but his misfortune and complaints are comically undercut. The immediacy and importance of time is thus removed when the character Khvostov locks everyone in the room until the problem is solved justly. Time is stripped of its value in favor of finding the proper solution and the proper social order.

Riazanov actually attended a collective garage-construction project in preparation for the film: "I returned home after the meeting absolutely deafened. Many of my friends were among those present, people I once considered perfectly decent. At the meeting, though, they showed an entirely different side of themselves. I saw a herd of people devoid of conscience. They'd forgotten about fairness and become both indifferent and cowardly. It was as if their masks of convenience had fallen away revealing the ugliness and monstrosity of their faces" (qtd. MacFadyen 65). *The Garage* certainly is about exposing the methods of evaluating social worth

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<sup>154</sup> "Пока мы отсюда выйдем, ему стукнет всего восемь. А то и десять" (*Garazh*).

within the collective environment, as the group bickers over the remaining garage spots. The film consistently breaks down discourses on allocation and collective behavior, challenging the will and social pressures of the collective majority. The character Aleksandr Grigor'evich initially identifies this task as being useless: “Those who are not excluded outnumber us. And everyone one of them will vote against us.”<sup>155</sup> Riazanov’s task throughout the film is to break down the social pressures of the collective and transform it into a reasonably, justly acting mass, and he does so through individualized characters and their convincing speech acts in the public arena.

The film establishes a cynical tone from its outset, showing the ugly underbelly of Soviet material culture, namely the dingy, still not finished garages over which everyone will fight. During the title credits, the camera focuses on the bleak construction site and the overcast skies of Moscow, much like Riazanov’s portrayal of Moscow and Leningrad in *The Irony of Fate*. The lifeless panning shots of the urban landscape are contrasted with the images of the casts of characters, who are all introduced individually with headshots of them smiling in their cars. Moreover, characters are identified by both personal names and their nicknames such as the Trombone Player (Trombonist), The Newlywed (Zhenikh) and Ponytail (Khvostov), who happens to be bald. This juxtaposition identifies a hierarchy that places individuals and their personalities above the everyday material world, the urban space, for which the characters inhabit and fight. As the characters fight for spaces and recognition from the cooperative, Riazanov poignantly explores a common theme of moral loss through the act of material acquisition. One character, Fetisov, states that he has sold out his country (“prodal rodinu”) to

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<sup>155</sup> “Бесполезно. Тех, которых не исключили вон их на сколько больше. И каждый естественно проголосует против нас” (*Garazh*).

acquire the garage. When asked to clarify how he has betrayed his land, Fetisov describes how he sold his home in the village, not just a typical Moscow suburban dacha, in order to buy an automobile. He has sacrificed the most, losing the house that his grandfather built, and therefore according to his logic should be awarded a garage.

David MacFadyen notes that *The Garage* is a film absent of lyricism: “The system as Other defines the behavior of many characters, and their speech is often heard, not as a brave means of self-definition, but as a long series of ideological clichés or formulaic phrases” (66). Here, I would disagree with MacFayden in his claim that this is not an expression of self-definition. As I have discussed in this chapter, the voice of cultural producers and subsequent representations become extremely entrenched in official forms of discourse, appropriating it for their own purposes. This strategic move begins to assert an individual voice of priority that is defined within discourses of state allocation, but adapted to promote the interests of the underappreciated.

While some characters, such as the cooperative leader and villain Anikeeva speak in this ideologically loaded language, others are quite individualized. The other institute leader, Sidorin, for example, combines the commonplace speech of the cooperative with diminutives, producing a curious sounding state discourse. Sidorin addresses the constituents at times as “my tender one” (“laskovaia moia”), and “my golden one” (“zolotoi-moi”), and his inappropriately used diminutives add a biting, ironic tone to his task of taking away the four garage spots. When he begins to introduce the question of the garage spaces, he begins, “I read the list with a grieving heart.”<sup>156</sup> He repeats the phrase “with a grieving heart” three times before Anikeeva bluntly interrupts him, telling him to read (“Zachitivaite!”). This scene is representative of how

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<sup>156</sup> “Зачитываю список с болью в сердце” (*Garazh*).

*The Garage* treats language and self-expression, placing individualized speech at odds with coldhearted state discourse. However, this does not mean that characters in the film are not able to express both positions simultaneously, or even to combine the two together. Moreover, the film consistently uses layered speech: the audience can hear the business discussed by the cooperative in the background, yet at the same time hears personal conversations about relationships and everyday problems in the foreground. The characters' numerous dialogs provide a repetitive, although effective means of self-expression. As the character Khvostov protests losing his spot, Sidorin thus calls for the end of these outbursts, stating: "This lyrical performance needs to be ended."<sup>157</sup>

Riazanov's film is dangerous in that it reverses the hierarchies of power in the end. Only the extremely negative character Narpukhin upholds the bureaucracy at the end, saying: "I am against anarchy. I am for order and discipline. I am from the majority. And for you, the most important thing are personal interests."<sup>158</sup> His statement is rendered false by this point in the film, as Narpukhin is now in the minority, and order has been reestablished by other means outside of social status and privilege. Those who received spaces through connections ("po blatu") are denied spots, while those from below win against the bureaucracy. A separation between the groups is evident throughout the film, and is directly stated by Aleksandr

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<sup>157</sup> "Это лирическое отступление надо бы кончать" (*Garazh*). Khvostov is cast near the outset of the film as a heroic character. He has lost his voice from a cold he caught when jumped into a chilly pool to help a colleague. The character cannot speak during nearly the whole film, but is still able to assert himself through his actions, gestures, and outbursts, as he interrupts votes by sitting on the table, eating official documents, and locking everyone in the room. While he is positively characterized as one of the most socially conscious characters, his highly individualized behavior is set off by self-interest, and is also celebrated in the film.

<sup>158</sup> "Я против анархии! Я за порядок и дисциплину! Я из большинства...А для вас—самое главное, личные интересы" (*Garazh*).

Grigor'evich when he tells Sidorin: “I am not dear to you.”<sup>159</sup> The film ends, however, without completely resolving the last garage space, as one person will still be denied a spot. Everyone draws straws, a method deemed by the group to be the most fair, satisfying both the higher-ups and the lower-ranking members of the cooperative. The only person who misses out on a garage is the forgotten character who has been sleeping in the back of the room for the whole film, the Director of the Insect Division (“Nachal'nik otdela nasekomykh”). The bureaucrat Sidorin identifies his complacency and values it, stating “Here is someone who is satisfied.”<sup>160</sup>

If Riazanov's film tries to right the moral flaws and bad behavior that corrupt the Soviet system of allocation, the film's conclusion still identifies a problem that remains. *The Garage* gives characters individual opportunities to voice their concerns, and the chamber format of the film is the perfect setting to allow each to do so. Sympathy for characters is built as the camera cuts and zooms on individual reactions of concern during the proceedings. It is only fitting then, that the one person who shows the least interest in his wellbeing loses out at the end of the film. As the members of the cooperative push the hat toward the insect director for him to draw what everyone knows is a short straw, the film cuts away to the closing credit sequence, denying the viewer even a moment to see his reaction.

MacFadyen concludes his analysis of *The Garage* by observing that Riazanov's world is one where “the self is claimed by the material world of trade” (70). I have already traced this theme throughout many of the texts presented in this chapter, but Riazanov, along with Voinovich, Zinov'ev, and others, seems to be exploring something beyond simple critiques of *meshchantsvo*. Soviet culture becomes increasingly interested in the loss of self through the

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<sup>159</sup> “И вам я не дорогой” (*Garazh*).

<sup>160</sup> “Вот кому-то хорошо” (*Garazh*).

exchange of goods and the maneuvering for positions of status. The official position claims that one should maintain civility, reinforcing state power structures and the status quo. A dissenting position, however, begins to claim a greater social responsibility, as well as social worth for those who are underappreciated by the Soviet system. In turn, a claim to material access surfaces. Voices from below bemoan unequal access to the privileges of the social elite.

The culture of the Stagnation period emphasizes the question of *ocherednost'*, the problem of succession and individual priority within a collective society. The queue is no longer viewed as strictly a physical, spontaneous phenomenon that changes from day to day. Rather, it is a pervading order for all social positions and relations, which subsequently controls an individual's access to certain goods and services, but also reflects on the individual's value to the collective. As I have shown in the three texts above, the acts of queuing and waiting are interpretive tasks, as those who wait contemplate their place within power structures and the allocation of socialism. In this evaluation, discourses of queuing begin to articulate an individual identification, which is based on the subjectivity of numbering. In turn, I find that this study can produce a deeper understanding of cultural production in this period, which has often focused on the plight of the individual author amidst censorship and artistic conformity. I think these narratives, however, produce a more complicated picture: they articulate the material consequences that come with the plight of the cultural producer. As much as narratives of queuing and waiting tell stories of economic scarcity and the endurance of waiting, we see that they also express far more important concerns about individual distinction within the socialist project.

This chapter seeks to define the individual "I" of the Stagnation period as a voice that attempts to assert individual priority, even when it is sometimes at odds with the voice of



collective need. Zinov'ev's quote, "I am a sovereign state," a variation on the famous quote by Louis XIV, reveals this interesting contradiction (13). He maintains that while an individual's nature is to act out of self-interest, it is often done so only in relation to one's communal pressures. Zinov'ev thus states that what must be done is the seemingly impossible: to successfully live independently from the society that surrounds us.

In the three textual examples, we see the voice of individual priority being formulated in Soviet culture, but it is being done so within the same moral framework of how the queue was conceptualized throughout the Soviet period. Zinov'ev's, Voinovich's, and Riazanov's characters remain "true" to the socialist values of the queue, where it is the corrupt society around them that acts in self-interest and subverts the equality of the social structure. However, I think it is important to note here that these same heroes, while being socially conscious, are very much individuals in how they voice their concerns.

As authors begin to assert claims to greater social recognition and the material access that comes with higher status, the quality of everyday life is drawn into greater focus. Chapter Five will detail the rendering of Soviet material culture amidst conditions of scarcity, redefining the images of objects and removing ideological anchors of consumption that were established under Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev. Even though the state created the illusion that it could provide affluence with both domestic and foreign goods, outside strategies for procuring items dominated the late Soviet period. Strategic procurements and creative forms of consumption find fantastic and phantasmagoric appearances, providing unique and individualized expressions to socially endemic problems.

## 5.0 *TROFEINOST'* AND THE PHANTASMAGORIA OF EVERYDAY CONSUMPTION

And if anyone were to think seriously about a monument to that period, I would suggest that the empty mausoleum (should Lenin's body ever be finally consigned to the earth) be filled with those deficit, prestige items for which Soviet citizens suffered torments standing in line.

— Vladimir Sorokin, "Afterword: Farewell to the Queue" (253)

Things don't like me... Things like him.<sup>161</sup>

— Iurii Olesha, *Envy* (*Zavist'* [6])

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

A common riddle told during the Soviet period begins: "What is long and green and reeks of sausage?" The answer: "The long-distance train from Moscow." The riddle describes the excursions to other cities that many people took to shop for rare items not available at home. It also points toward the many discourses constructed around shopping in the Soviet Union, giving

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<sup>161</sup> "Меня не любят вещи... Вещи его любят" (*Zavist'* 16).

the train a grotesque depiction, snake-like in shape and unpleasant.<sup>162</sup> This chapter will look at what I label the phantasmagoria of everyday consumption in late Soviet culture, detailing the cultural milieu of the Stagnation period into perestroika and its discourses on conspicuous consumption. Grotesque forms of material culture emerge from Soviet consumerism, as the state-ideologically defined tastes of *kul'turnost'* are deconstructed in texts. While the Soviet material world was often said to be lacking in quantity and quality, a more personalized, pragmatic attitude compensated for the ugliness of scarcity and shoddiness, and instead conveyed a sense of dearness in deficit culture.

Benjamin noted the value of the commodity at world exhibitions and arcades throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, describing the phantasmagoric relation between *flâneur* and commodity: “Exhibitions glorify the exchange value of the commodity. They create a framework in which its use value recedes into the background. They open a phantasmagoria which a person enters in order to be distracted” (7). In this process the person is elevated to the level of the commodity, where “he surrenders himself to its manipulations while enjoying his alienation from himself and others ... He ends in Madness” (7).

Benjamin’s notion of phantasmagoria is stifling, describing a society ruled by the commodity. Margaret Cohen writes that Benjamin’s phantasmagoria was constructed as the opposite of allegory: “Allegory’s etymology implies the possibility of redemption and as such

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<sup>162</sup> Olesha has an extended passage mocking the grotesque, yet virtuous sausage invented by the Soviet state in his novel *Envy* (1927): “He, the ruler, the communist, was building a new world. And in this new world, glory sparked because a new kind of sausage had come from the sausage maker’s hands. What did it mean? Biographies, monuments, history had never told me of glory like this” (40). [“Он—правитель, коммунист, он строит новый мир. А слава в этом новом мире вспыхивает от того, что из рук колбасника вышел новый сорт колбасы. Я не понимаю этой славы, что же значит это? Не о такой славе говорили мне жизнеописания, памятники, история...” (*Zavist'* 34-35)].

contrasts with the etymology of the phantasmagoria, which substitutes ghosts for the *allos* that signifies allegory's transcendence. Appearing as allegory's *Doppelgänger*, the phantasmagoria remains firmly footed in the haunted realm of commercial exchange" (96). Benjamin's theorization of the arcades and the *flâneur* is primarily interested in Marx's notion of commodity fetishes, and while this discussion is certainly appropriate to a discussion of Soviet consumer culture during the Stagnation period, when prestige Western goods were sought after by many citizens, I would like to use it as a departure point to discuss the Soviet culture of scarcity and how the commodity was envisioned amongst these conditions.

In the following cartoon from *The Crocodile*, cucumbers wait in line for the canning factory, and by the time they make it, they are already rotting (Figure 10). Seeing that the cucumber at the front of the line is still fresh, the others deduce, "the Green one must have cut the line!"<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> "Зелен еще без очереди лезть" ("Iz zhizni orgurtzov.")

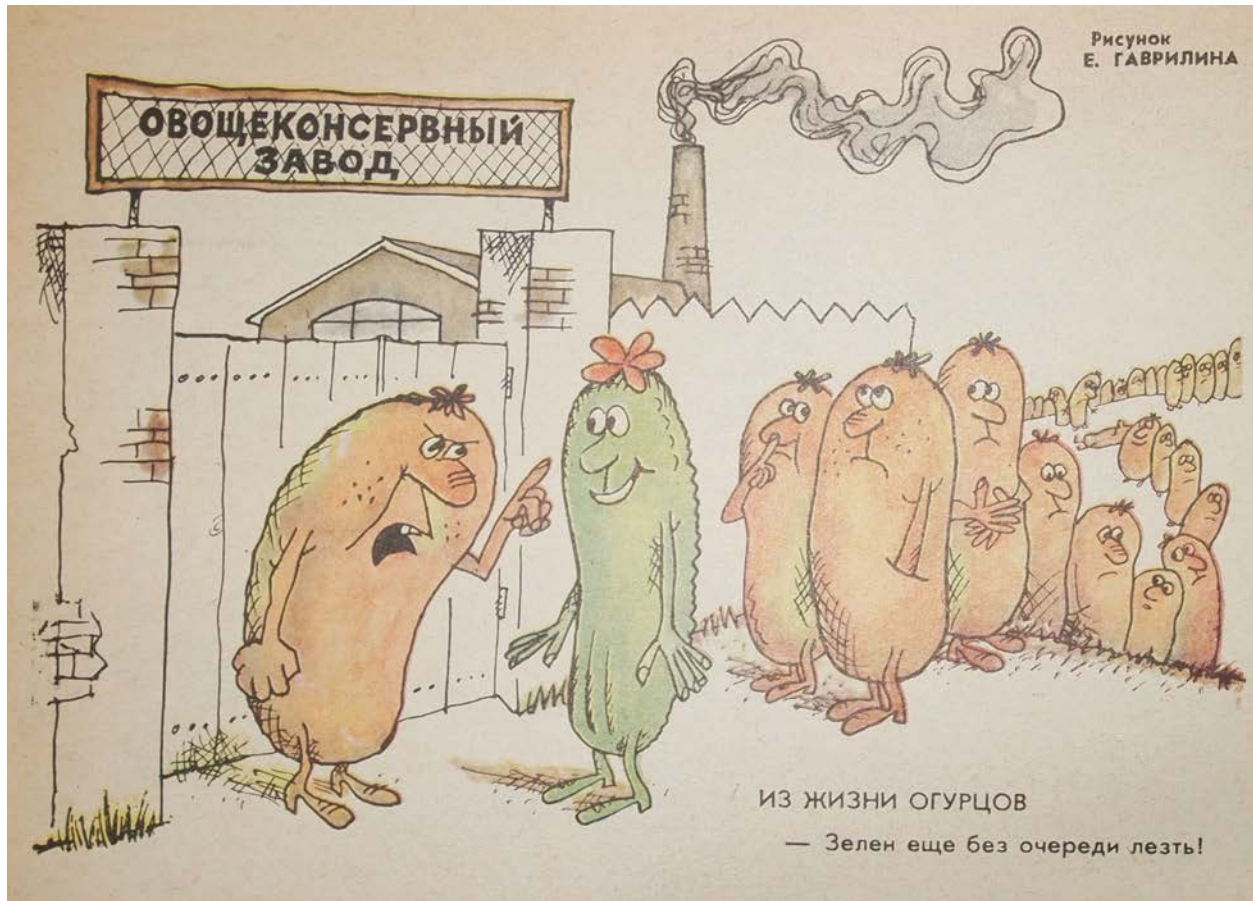


Figure 10. “From the Lives of Cucumbers” in *The Crocodile*<sup>164</sup>

The cartoon comments on the quality of Soviet goods, which by the time they reach the consumer, are already past their prime. More importantly though, the cartoon conflates goods with their consumers by anthropomorphizing the product. The act of waiting is compared with the biological process of rotting, endured by both the low quality product and those who wait for it. Another joke depicts people waiting in line for blood sausage (*krovianka*). When one person gets in line, he asks what is being given out (“Chto daiut?”). The person in front of him

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<sup>164</sup> “Iz zhizni orgurtzov.” E. Gavrilin. *Krokodil* 29 (1978): 4.

identifies that the line is for blood sausage, and then proceeds to ask him if he has stood in the other line to first donate blood.

The cartoon and joke both recall Benjamin's notion of the "debasement of things" (qtd. Cohen 96) that occurs with the commodification of modern life. Whereas in the first-world the debasement of things occurred by their price as commodities, in the context of the second-world and Soviet command economy, an analogous debasement occurred through shortages caused by inefficiencies in state allocation. People were forced to find personal connections, which were just as, if not more important, than the money used to buy goods. Discussing his novel *The Norm* (*Norma* [1979-1983]), Vladimir Sorokin comes to similar conclusions about Soviet produced material culture: "It's a curious fact, but if you look around you'll see that we're living in a realm where the culture of *things* is not respected at all ("Interview" 150; emphasis in original). Sorokin's critique describes the shoddiness of Soviet products, but although they were deficient, they became just as dear to Soviet citizens as prized foreign goods. Ol'ga Gurova describes this connection between Soviet consumers and goods through a play on the two words: "In general under the conditions of shortage, the thing was not a commodity but quickly became a comrade" ("Ot tovarishcha" 41).<sup>165</sup> As the "commodity" is lifted to the status of "comrade," the exact opposite movement that Benjamin described in his notion of phantasmagoric relations, the "haunted realm" of shortage becomes rehabilitated. In order to describe this attitude toward Soviet material culture, I will use the term *trofeinost'*.

The term, translated here roughly as "trophying," describes the act of sacralization of an object, the practices in which scarce items or even their remnants, such as wrappers and empty

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<sup>165</sup> "Вообще в условиях дефицита вещь очень недолго являлась товаром, быстро становясь 'товарищем'" ("Ot tovarishcha" 41).

boxes, take on added meaning in Soviet culture amidst conditions of scarcity. Products were divided into names that signified their availability (“available goods” [*dostatocnyye tovary*] and “branded goods” [*firmennyye tovary*]).<sup>166</sup> People went to great extents to procure goods. There are numerous anecdotes of people jumping into queues without knowing what item was available, or hoarding certain products, not knowing when they would become available again. Likewise, shoppers developed tactics of local knowledge to try to outwit other shoppers. The *avos'ka* was a great example of material culture that served as a tactical, malleable object of the late Soviet era. The mesh shopping bag could easily be carried around in case one stumbled upon a kiosk or store with something worth buying, and would expand to carry products home. The name derives from the word, *avos'*, meaning “on the off chance,” and indicates the ways in which Soviet shopping forced the consumer to adapt to uncertain situations.

The concept of *trofeinost'*, according to Vladimir Nikolaev, relates to the ways that behavior is changed by economic shortage, which encourages people to hoard products, devise strategies that increase the chances of acquiring a product, as well as minimizing the time spent in lines. He views product procurement and all its acts, from queuing to unofficial forms of distribution such as a *blat*, as a form of sport. *Trofeinost'* thus describes how both acquired domestic and foreign goods acted as trophies that demonstrated an individual's tact (23). Typical conversations during the Soviet period dealt with how one procured an item, but according to Nikolaev, these conversations, were simply about boasting, as the details of procurement, the what, where, and how, were no longer pragmatic pieces of information on a

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<sup>166</sup> Yurchak defines *firmennyye tovary* not for their specific brand name, but rather by their western origin: “Something was *firmennyi* because it was manufactured elsewhere and therefore established an authentic link with the Imaginary West” (196). His definition argues that people were not concerned with specific brands, but rather “authentic Westernness” (196).

deal already long gone: “The demonstration to another of one’s ‘strategic stockpiles’ (shown visually or told orally) also wielded a specific quality to the exhibition of trophies” (24).<sup>167</sup>

Nikolaev’s analysis deals almost solely with social practices and their behavioral implications in the commodity-consumer relationship. Shortages did dictate people’s activities, social exchanges, and the social strategic networks they created in order to obtain goods. But shortages also placed due attention on consumer products themselves. Nikolaev describes this aspect of *trofeinost’* as an opportunity for the Soviet citizen to experience an “existential holidays of life” (“ekzistentsial’nye prazdniki zhizni”) through rarity; he notes a number of incidents that citizens would remember, such as the first time Cuban bananas appeared in the USSR, the appearance of Pepsi-Cola in 1973, or taking turns to chew gum (24). I would like to expand his analysis in this chapter, however, to also reflect the changing role of the consumer product, especially in its cultural representation, which acquires new meaning in a deficit economy. These “trophies” meant more than their intended manufactured use, and reflect on the many imaginative uses of Soviet commodity culture.

The topic of consumption has been widely discussed throughout the Soviet period across a variety of disciplines. While ethnographic studies of consumption under socialism typically draw attention to social relations and networks of distribution, Liviu Chelcea’s article “The Culture of Shortage during State-Socialism” instead views consumption through practices that stem from objects themselves. Her study looks at how the “culture of shortage” in Romania led to practices such as hoarding, rationing, intensive recycling, and extensive repairs (16). She

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<sup>167</sup> “Демонстрация другому человеку своих ‘стратегических запасов’ (визуальная или устная) также обладает специфическим качеством выставки трофеев” (24).



notes that studies have focused on means of procurement rather than discuss possession of things, which in itself is a personalized, “unique activity” (19).

Chelcea also notes that consumer items in second-world economies acquired new meanings: “Goods that would have been commodities in a market economy acquired the features of gifts or rarities” (20). Products were used in ways contrary to their manufactured intentions, used to repair other items, or residual packaging served as decorations, in what Chelcea calls “bricolage activities” (36): “Unlike the *flâneur*-like, browsing consumer of the malls, the socialist consumer searched for useful contacts, made careful preparations and was hyperaware of how goods were used. The socialist shortage made most consumers spontaneous *bricoleurs*, by forcing them to combine, recycle, repair and trade goods or parts of them” (Chelcea 38). Appearing on one of the covers of *The Crocodile* in 1978, a cartoon plays exactly with this notion, as abundant carpets are recycled, hung on every wall and ceiling, and recycled into presumably a deficit product: drapes (Figure 11). Likewise, another cartoon shows a crying child who is forced to read scientific literature because the store is out of children’s books, but at least requests a copy with pictures, making do with what is available (Figure 12).

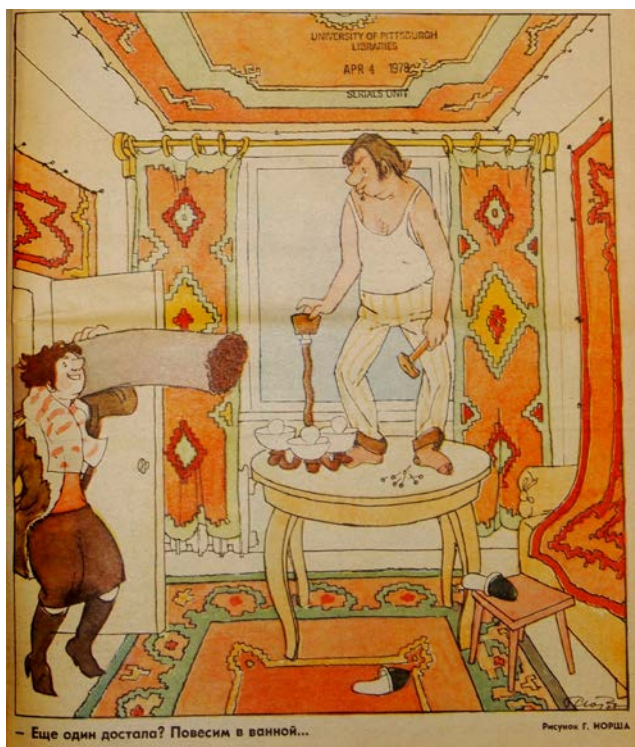


Figure 11. “You got another one? Let’s hang it in the bathroom...”<sup>168</sup> In *The Crocodile*



Figure 12. “You can even give me quantum mechanics, as long as it has pictures.”<sup>169</sup> In *The Crocodile*

Chelcea’s discussion of social practices serves as an appropriate departure point to view the discourses surrounding consumption, shopping, and item procurement in fiction. The center of attention in these curious cases of consumption in literature is not specific to the late-Soviet era, but can be traced across Russo-Soviet literature, even dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century with

<sup>168</sup> “Еще один достала? Повесим в ванную...” (“Eshche odin dostala?.” G. Iorsh. *Krokodil* 2 [1978]: cover).

<sup>169</sup> “Дайте хоть квантовую механику, но с картинками” (“Daite khot' kvantovuiu mekhaniku, no s kartinkami.” *Krokodil* 12 [1979]: 8).

Nikolai Gogol's *Dead Souls* (*Mertvye dushi* [1842]).<sup>170</sup> Likewise, Mikhail Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita* (*Master i Margarita* [1935/1966]) depicts the magical and grotesque side of Soviet consumer culture in numerous satirical scenes involving foreign currency, which had great purchasing power in Torgsin stores.<sup>171</sup> The magical possibilities of money literally materialize out of thin air, as Woland tosses money out to the theater audience, and rubles magically transform into foreign currency, incriminating the theater director Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoi. In the chapter "The Last Adventures of Korov'ev and Behemoth" ("Poslednie pokhozhdeniia Korov'eva i Begemota"), the two characters wreak havoc in a Torgsin store, devouring scarce goods such as mandarins and Kerch' herring. Bulgakov's interest in a culture of shortage extends across his works, as he satirizes the scarcity of apartments in both *Heart of a Dog* (*Sobach'e serdtse* [1925]) and *The Fatal Eggs* (*Rokovye iatsa* [1925]). I have chosen to look at this aspect in Soviet literature towards the end of Stagnation and into perestroika, where problems surrounding consumer culture are documented and satirized in a variety of media, from periodicals and film to literature. Vladimir Makanin refers to this time as "the furniture era" ("mebel'noe vremia"), reflecting the prized pieces people sought to acquire, but also the domestication of Soviet culture rooted in the details of everyday life.

Goods in late-Soviet culture are rendered with multifaceted, malleable representations, reflecting the social reality of their uses. Material culture, however, also becomes more than just

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<sup>170</sup> Andrei Rogachevskii's chapter "The Representation of Bribery in Nineteenth Century Russian Literature" looks at a related topic of informal economies, beginning with Gogol's *The Inspector General* (*Revizor* [1836]).

<sup>171</sup> Torgsin stores were state-run and accepted hard currency (foreign money) from Soviet or foreign citizens. The acronym is a short form for "trade with foreigners" ("torgovlia s inostrantsami"). They existed during a five-year period from 1931 to 1936, until they were outlawed, and only reappeared in 1964 under Brezhnev, when the stores, now called Berezka, sold prestigious and scarce goods, but only to foreigners. The dates listed for Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita* are the manuscript's completion and the first complete Soviet publication.

an object of representation, serving as the main structuring element of works and acting as a container for ideas. More authors began to explore the role of material culture in Soviet society and what objects' existence or absence meant. I am most interested in how texts comment on the acquisition of goods amidst scarcity by developing comedic or fantastic plots surrounding these products, as seen in popular films such as El'dar Riazanov's *Beware of the Car* (*Beregis' avtomobilia* [1966]). Similarly, texts create absurd new uses for goods, as seen in Venedikt Erofeev's *Moscow-Petushki*, which features grotesque forms of consumption as Venia concocts drinks from shoe polish, perfumes, and other household items. Finally, some of the texts already discussed in previous chapters, such as Vladimir Sorokin's *The Queue* (1980), strip the identity of the consumer product, completely obscuring the representation of objects. The unnamed product in Zinov'ev's *The Yawning Heights*, for example, is referred to as "shirli-myrlī," appropriately translated in the English edition as "thingammyjig" (Zinov'ev, *Ziiaiushchie* 496; Zinoviev, *Yawning* 735).<sup>172</sup>

The chapter will explore the move away from state discourses of consumerism, showing how material culture maintained a central role in Soviet culture, but deviated from its materialist grounding in Soviet ideology. The main texts analyzed in this chapter, Vladimir Voinovich's novella *The Fur Hat* (*Shapka* [1989]), Georgii Danelia's film *Kin-dza-dza!* (1986), and Sergei Dovlatov's autobiographical collection of stories *The Suitcase* (*Chemodan* [1986]) feature the consumer product and its distribution as a structuring element of the stories, deconstructing

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<sup>172</sup> This use of a word that can act as a floating signifier to describe anything is not uncommon in Russian culture, with other variations such as "figli-migli," which has equally little meaning by itself. One joke about queuing deals precisely with this ambiguous word, as a man queues in line and asks the server for "figli-migli," only to be told that "figli" has sold out, but there is some "migli" left. When he buys what remains, he arrives home and opens the package only to notice he received the product "figli."

universal, Soviet notions of *kul'turnost'* in favor of malleable representations that celebrate the consumer's tact to procure his trophy. In analyzing these texts, I will show how this state-allocated identification between consumers and products was broken, producing new textual representations for both sides. Soviet culture begins to readdress the meanings of acquisitiveness under socialism, reifying items with new meanings: objects became trophies, not as signifiers of social status, but of the ordeals citizens went through for their procurement.

## **5.2 PERSONALIZING CONSUMPTION: *KUL'TURNOST'* AND THE REPRISAL OF STALINIST ACQUISITIVENESS**

In *Thinking Through Things*, Amiria Henare, Martin Holbraad, and Sari Wastell build off recent trends in anthropology that focus on the essential qualities of objects as opposed to traditional approaches to material culture, which interpret and separate meaning from objects. In exploring the connection between materiality and culture, their “ontological breakthrough” seeks to destabilize the “*a priori* distinction between persons and things, matter and meaning, representation and reality” (2). Similarly, in their chapter “Waiting” Billy Ehn and Orvar Löfgren provide an example illustrating that while people wait, objects do as well:

Some objects—the life vest under the seat, for example, or the emergency ladder on the wall—fall into the standby category. Other things inhabit a mode of alert passivity—the fire station, the rocket on the launch pad, the bottle of vintage wine being saved for a special occasion. Still others, among them certain electrical appliances, must never go out; they must rest with one eye open, watchful technological wild beasts. (14)

This notion of the waiting object is extremely interesting, as it focuses on the value of the object at times irrespective of its subject. It separates an array of values the object simultaneously possesses, both intrinsically and in the exchange of a future event or occasion. While the bottle of wine may be rare and acquire value in age, its act of waiting coincides with the special occasion not yet celebrated.

Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell's approach is particularly appropriate to analyze how objects were simultaneously conflated, yet separated from their state-encoded definitions in Soviet culture. Since the Stalinist period, Soviet everyday commodities were heavily conflated with ideology. Objects acquired meaning beyond their intrinsic qualities because the state controlled their distribution: people not only had to wait for rare items such as automobiles and apartments, but also be productive and compliant workers to make these acquisitions. As detailed in the last chapter, *kul'turnost'* established a firm anchor of Soviet subject and commodity, as one's consumption was often equated with complicity to the state. Soviet culture thus ontologically encoded its items with an ideological value that often transcended their practical uses.

By looking at the representation of objects in late Soviet culture, singular ontological paths of their procurement and consumption are broken down, with objects acquiring new value. Products derived value not only from state distribution, but also from personalized forms of consumption and private exchanges. Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell view objects as having "multiple ontologies," creating a heuristic value that incorporates local knowledge, strategy, and individualized conceptions of the material world. This scope immediately draws ties to the late Soviet period, as people adapted consumer products for their individualized needs. Looking at Soviet material culture through this framework, it becomes apparent how a second economy

developed out of the first economy of socialist allocation, and how cultural meanings were re-imagined within this socio-economic movement.<sup>173</sup>

James Millar's "little deal," a political-economic interpretation of the Brezhnev years, finds continuities with Dunham's "big deal." While Dunham addressed how the Stalinist regime appeased the middle class (what would become the bureaucratic elites) through the promise of social mobility, Millar views a similar process through the growth in private forms of trade that increased individual gain. The "little deal" describes the tacit contract between Brezhnev's state regime and the population of the USSR's urban centers in order to expand petty private economic activities (372). Millar writes that Stalinism had provided the same material incentives, but at the same time had relied on the non-economic disincentive, where failure was not an option (370). Rather than rely on the same forms of coercion, the Brezhnev regime turned toward the private sector to accomplish these tasks: "As a general proposition, true for the Brezhnev years at least, Soviet citizens have been able to collect these kinds of economic 'rents,' attributable to scarcity of desirable properties, because the state does not" (374).

The "little deal" was a glance away from the mainstays of socialist allocation and centrally organized economy: "The critical element has been the state's willingness to permit an expansion throughout Soviet society of the quest for an individual's, but especially of the individual household's, gain, as opposed to the collectivist and traditionalist socialist aims" (378). Millar highlights how individuals took advantage of what the state failed to allocate, offering services in an economy starved for services and making a profit by queuing for others,

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<sup>173</sup> Steven Sampson's article "The Second Economy of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe" develops the notion of how cultural practices and meaning emerged out of the second economies of late socialism. The privacy of consumption in the second, or shadow economy, created according to Sampson, new notions of "us" vs. "them," developed not along the lines of borders, but between official and private networks of distribution (134).

as they literally bought and sold time (374). Moreover, with new methods of acquisition, networks outside of state channels became more important, with the family becoming a major unit of authority, employment, and distribution (378).

Millar's description of the "little deal" highlights why many believe that *blat*, the practice of personal social exchanges, was most prevalent during the Stagnation period. Alena Ledeneva views *blat* similarly to Millar, noting that the Soviet state needed the practice to account for its deficiency: "*Blat* should be considered as the 'reverse side' of an over controlling centre, a reaction of ordinary people to the structural constraints of the socialist system of distribution – a series of practices which enabled the Soviet system to function and made it tolerable, but also subverted it" (3).<sup>174</sup> Through practices such as *blat*, objects became untethered from state controlled ideological meanings: products that exhibited their owner's tastes no longer only came from state-distributed systems of allocation. Moreover, goods were more fluid in their exchange and acquired new worth in trade, extending their pragmatic value.

Gaidai's film *Ivan Vasil'evich Changes Professions* (*Ivan Vasil'evich meniaet professiiu* [1973]) serves as an appropriate illustration of the privatization of economies and consumption. The comedy depicts a scientist, Shurik, inventing a time machine in his own apartment flat instead of a state-run laboratory, much to the dismay of his neighbors, who experience repeated blackouts from power surges. The film includes a scene with a black-marketeer (*fartsovshchik*) on the street who sells transistors in his trench coat that are used to fix Shurik's invention.

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<sup>174</sup> Ledeneva also notes the interesting paradox in how *blat* both created material inequalities, yet reinforced egalitarian ideals of Soviet society: "*Blat*-like phenomena resulted from the particular combination of shortages and, even if repressed, consumerism; from a paradox between an ideology of quality and the practice of differentiation through privileges and closed distribution systems. In so far as those who had no privileges in the state distribution system could by-pass rationing and queuing [sic] it had an equalizing as well as stratifying effect. It therefore had a bearing on the society's egalitarian claims and its actual inequalities" (36).



Before Shurik buys from him, he visits a number of state technological stores that are either closed for inventory, repair, or are out of the item (Figures 13, 14, and 15).



Figure 13. Closed for inventory in *Ivan Vasil'evich Changes Professions*



Figure 14. Closed for repair in *Ivan Vasil'evich Changes Professions*



Figure 15. Out of stock in *Ivan Vasil'evich Changes Professions*



Figure 16. *Fartsovshchik* in *Ivan Vasil'evich Changes Professions*

Upon seeing that none of the stores can serve his needs, Shurik ponders new ways of procuring the part. Shurik finally deals with the *fartsovshchik*, who carefully looks out for authorities while showing his wares (Figure 16). The scene creates absurdity around the character of the

*fartsovshchik*, who deals in highly specialized products that one would not need in everyday situations. At the same time, the scene also ridicules official state stores and their poor service.

Another feature of the privatization of everyday life under Brezhnev dealt with state attitudes toward consumption. Gurova labels these state discourses the “ideology of dematerialization” (“razveshchestvlenie”), which stressed that the individual was free of commodity fetishism. She notes that in his speech at the Twenty-Fifth Party Congress, Leonid Brezhnev cited an increased supply of consumer goods and growth in ideological, ethical, and cultural consciousness toward consumer goods:

This statement allowed consumer goods to appear in the everyday life of Soviet people because the negative connotations associated with the volume of consumer goods on shops’ shelves, one’s apartment or wardrobe were officially removed from official discourse, and shifted to personal attitudes. It is important to emphasize that attention has been moved to the person's attitudes toward material objects: the person him/herself should be conscious about them. (“Ideology” 96-97)

Gurova differentiates the state’s position under developed socialism from the attitudes toward consumption of the Thaw. The state sought to ensure social compliance by providing economic stability and supply, rather than actively control the consumer’s taste: “As a matter of fact, the aim of the Soviet state was to create a socialist post-materialistic world in which there would be plenty of consumer goods, but they would not have any excessive significance for the person. The Soviet person was not supposed to be obsessed with or adoring of things, rather, he should look upon them in a functional way” (“Ideology” 97). Despite these calls for a decrease of significance in the commodity, the once signifying world of Soviet consumerism becomes a

nebulous space that can be appropriated for one's individual needs. In personalized representations of the act of consumption, the image of the commodity also changes, acquiring imaginary characteristics. Another cartoon in *The Crocodile* illustrates this trend, with a three-room apartment depicted as a turtle-shell (Figure 17).



Figure 17. “I got a three-room...” In *The Crocodile*<sup>175</sup>

The Soviet apartment, in this case endowed again with animalistic characteristics, is viewed as a biological extension of the consumer. The cartoon conveys at the same time the intimacy, yet also the silliness of the Soviet commodity.

Another factor that destabilized the state's influence to dictate taste was the increased presence of western goods. Yurchak writes in his chapter, “Imaginary West: The Elsewhere of Late Socialism,” that Soviet values were caught between the “internationalist and outward looking, yet at the same time insular, restricted to the boundaries of the Soviet Union” (159). He

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<sup>175</sup> “A ia poluchila trehkomnatnuiu.” V. Bokovnia. *Krokodil* 33 (1978): 11.

traces the creation of the imaginary West within the Soviet Union through foreign consumer goods, stating that it was an “imaginary place that was simultaneously knowable and unattainable, tangible and abstract, mundane and exotic” (159). An example of this can again be found in *Ivan Vasil'evich Changes Professions*. The film plays with this notion of the imaginary west by inverting abundance with scarcity: In the medieval feast scene, Ivan Bunzha, who is masquerading as Ivan the Terrible after traveling through time, is served the Soviet staple eggplant caviar (*baklazhannaia ikra*), which in the past was a foreign delicacy available only in small portions, whereas Russian caviar was abundant. The film also features an analogous scene in the present time. When the thief Miloslavskii breaks into an apartment owned by the dentist Shpak, he finds an impressive liquor collection, money, and other riches. The camera even zooms in quickly in a series of shots that identify a video camera and tape player, amongst other valuables. Miloslavskii, however, is immediately drawn toward a foreign floaty pen, a novelty for the average Soviet citizen who does not travel abroad (Figure 18).



Figure 18. “Prized” commodities in *Ivan Vasil'evich Changes Professions*

Yurchak mainly uses examples from fashion and music to illustrate his notion of the imaginary West. He covers the craze over western products such as jeans, and how consumers would copy and recreate western products. He also looks at strategic forms of distribution in the music world of *rentgenizdat* and *magnitizdat*, which recycled used items such as x-rays for recordings.<sup>176</sup> All of the objects he describes formed a link to the West, constructing an image of their origin: “A diverse array of discourses, statements, products, objects, visual images, musical expressions, and linguistic constructions that were linked to the West by theme or by virtue of their origin or reference, and that circulated widely in late socialism, gradually shaped a *coherent and shared object of imagination* – the imaginary West” (161; emphasis added). I would like to expand his notion beyond the limits of how a faux Western culture was constructed, which created in Yurchak’s words, an “internal deterritorialization,” and extend this imaginary capability to include how Soviet culture viewed its own consumer world and its own products (159). While foreign products had an aura due to their otherness outside the confines of the Soviet experience, domestic consumer products shared similar attributes that arose out of their scarcity and remarkable means of distribution.

Anatoly Vishevsky notes how newspapers and journals were permitted to make fun of consumer problems in the late 1960s and 1970s, as the humor of cartoons and short stories did not enter into systemic critiques of the Soviet economy. They mostly dealt with lighthearted scenes from everyday life or were printed in unusual genres such as children’s rhymes on the back pages of many periodicals (71). One rhyme “The Orange,” tells how to get more oranges, a foodstuff that was constantly in short supply:

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<sup>176</sup> The products of *rentgenizdat* perfectly illustrate the phantasmagoria of objects in the late Soviet period. Their construction combined the use value of a functioning record, but with the visual appearance of the human body inscribed on disc that was left over from developed x-rays.

If you need  
An orange  
Go to  
A store  
And buy yourself  
Some play dough  
And make yourself  
An orange out of it. (71)<sup>177</sup>

Another rhyme tells the child how to make more soup:

If there is little soup in the bowl,  
You need a big magnifying glass.  
Look into this magnifying glass,  
And there will be a lot of soup! (72)<sup>178</sup>

The rhymes both play with the boundaries of the social reality of shortage and literary representational excess, which is able to transcend the physical world of absence and endow this space with an imaginative, humorous solution. Neither rhyme, however, offers an actual solution, but instead offers a playful activity as a consolation.

Yet another example that creates imaginary situations of abundance is the skit “The Warehouse” (“Sklad” [1988]). The skit, by the comedians Roman Kartsev and Viktor Il'chenko, constructs an unanticipated opportunity where a Soviet consumer is given a pass (*propusk*) for

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<sup>177</sup> Если нужен / Апельсин – / Вы зайдите / В магазин, / И купите / Пластилин / И слепите / Апельсин (qtd. Vishevsky 71).

<sup>178</sup> Если в миске мало супа, / вам нужна большая лупа. / Поглядите в эту лупу, / Будет много-много супу! (Vishevsky 72).

one day to visit a warehouse, where everything is available. The consumer is initially skeptical, first asking what he is actually seeing, and secondly questioning the availability of everything in the warehouse: “I am told that you have everything here. I don’t believe this of course.”<sup>179</sup>

The skit emphasizes the question, “What do I need?” to which the answer is everything. The character played by Il'chenko does not know how to react to the situation, at first asking for one of each item, and then increasing the quantity until the server becomes impatient with his indecisiveness:

“How about eight?”

“Yes, ten.”

“Ok”.

“... fifteen.”

“Ok.”

... and two more”

“You may.”

“... and one more.”<sup>180</sup>

The rapid back and forth dialogue creates an antagonistic relationship between server and customer. The server always speaks abruptly, asking the same questions, “What do you want?” (“Chto vam?”) and “How many?” (“Skol'ko?”). His stern behavior contradicts the euphoria of the opportunity that the customer has, with statements such as: “Hurry up, the working day is ending” (“Bystree, rabochii den' konchaetsia”). The communication between the two also is disjointed, in that the server refuses to describe which items he has in stock and instead repeats

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<sup>179</sup> “Мне сказали, что здесь всё есть. Я не верю конечно” (Kartsev and Il'chenko).

<sup>180</sup> “Ну что, восемь?” / “Да. Десять.” / “Хорошо.” / “Пятнадцать.” / “Хорошо.” / “Еще две.” / “Можно.” / “И еще одну” (Kartsev and Il'chenko).

the same questions. Likewise, the customer's requests are also bewildering. He asks for a large quantity of each item of fish, jeans, and so forth, but when asked what kind he wants, can only qualify them with general descriptions such as "the freshest" or "the best," but cannot provide exact types or brands. He is not accustomed to such wealth.

The skit highlights what the customer wants as opposed to what he can actually consume. When the server tells him the high quantities that he requests will spoil, the customer immediately replies, "Well, then let it spoil."<sup>181</sup> The skit turns the jokes of the customer's greed on its head when he asks for vodka in the quantity of 100. The server assumes he wants 100 bottles, to which the customer replies that he wants only a couple of shots worth, 100 grams. In the end of the skit, fantasy is grounded by reality, when the customer realizes he does not have room for all of the things he just ordered: "Where am I to have all this stuff delivered?"<sup>182</sup> These examples all show a refashioning of discourses around consumerism. A playful attitude toward fetishism and acquisitiveness becomes apparent, no longer carrying cautionary tones that existed from Stalinism through the Thaw period.

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<sup>181</sup> "Пусть испортится" (Kartsev and П'chenko).

<sup>182</sup> "Куда мне это все везти?" (Kartsev and П'chenko).



### 5.3 THE ABSURDITIES OF FETISHISM: VLADIMIR VOINOVICH'S *THE FUR*

#### *HAT*

In *The Fur Hat*, Voinovich continues themes from *The Ivankiad*, creating a simple comedic narrative that satirizes how society ranks and judges individuals.<sup>183</sup> The novella depicts the Writers' Union's allocation of goods, as it gives out a variety of different hats according to each writer's ranking. The list allocates goods in order of privilege, where the most renowned authors receive the best goods from the state. Voinovich continues themes discussed in Chapter Four of how the individual perceives his social worth vis-à-vis this system. The Union awards Efim Rakhlin, the main character of the story, a hat, cheaply made from cat fur, despite his numerous publications of adventure novels. Efim's quest to procure a hat of better quality from the union marks the main conflict in the story and leads to his madness. His futile attempt to secure his trophy is a gesture that seeks state recognition as an author. Efim's fetishism of the hat and its inscribed social meaning is rendered absurd, as Efim's wife points out that he could easily buy a better one at the market.

*The Fur Hat* almost seems to parody Voinovich's personal quest in *The Ivankiad*. By parodying his own text, Voinovich does not show the plight of the deserving Soviet author whose talents are not rewarded by the Writers' Union, as he did in his autobiographical novella, but instead lampoons the main character for his obsession with trifles of Soviet consumerism. Nonetheless, both stories serve as satires on privilege. In *The Fur Hat*, Voinovich continues to criticize the culture of state allocation, but this time does so through creating an absurd world of

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<sup>183</sup> *The Fur Hat* was published only following Voinovich's emigration from the Soviet Union in 1980, but the novel's details about Soviet culture in the 1970s are reminiscent of the other works I will discuss in this chapter. The novel was adapted into a film in 1990, directed by Konstantin Voinov and written by Voinovich.

commodity fetishes. The hats acquire anthropomorphic characteristics, with their animal qualifiers serving as fixed epithets and extensions of the characters who possess them. Ranging from Efim's tomcat to the other authors' reindeer and badger furs, the hats receive as much attention in the text as the characters themselves, creating a ridiculous commodity-consumer relationship. Fittingly, while waiting in line outside an office at the Writers' Union, Efim's colleague Vas'ka Treshkin quips: "If we sit here long enough, doing nothing, they'll make hats out of us, too" (57).<sup>184</sup>

Voinovich initially constructs this convoluted relationship by detailing how the individual perceives his own worth. Efim equates his success through his acquisition of material wealth, and the narrator mentions Efim's numerous awards, his nice apartment, and foreign goods: "His three-room apartment was packed with imports: a Rumanian living-room set, an Arabian bed, a Czechoslovakian upright piano, a Sony Japanese television, and a Finnish Rozenlev refrigerator" (1-2).<sup>185</sup> Voinovich notes all of the rare items Efim has acquired through his work travels, and emphasizes that he prominently displays these trophies in his apartment:

His apartment was decorated with a collection of exotic objects brought back from his many expeditions. The objects were hung [rasvesheny] on the walls, spread [rassteleny] on the floor, arranged [rasstavleny] on the windowsills, bookshelves, or special stands were antlers, a walrus tusk, a stuffed penguin, a polar bear skin, a giant tortoise shell, dried starfishes and sea urchins, skeleton of

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<sup>184</sup> "Если мы будем ушами хлопать, они из нас шапок надедают" (*Shapka* 383).

<sup>185</sup> "Его трехкомнатная квартира была забита импортом: румынский гарнитур, арабская кровать, чехословацкое пианино, японский телевизор 'Сони' и финский холодильник Розенлев" (*Shapka* 340-341).

deep-sea fish, Nanai moccasins, Buriat or Mongolian clay figurines, and all other sorts of things. (2)<sup>186</sup>

The repetition of the prefix “ras” hints at Efim’s fixation with these possessions. Voinovich lists this inventory in the introduction of the work, and it is one of the first pieces of information the reader learns about Efim.

Just as the novella presents Efim’s prestigious items, it also reveals other not so flattering personal distinctions. The narrator sarcastically points out Efim’s war decorations, which he did not receive in actual combat at the front, but only when his unit was attacked on the way there: “For his failure to participate in the war he was given the Victory over Germany medal” (4).<sup>187</sup> The caustic mention of the medal is doubled and tripled when the narrator reveals that he received anniversary medals twenty and thirty years afterward. The narrator also inventories Efim’s medals for his book *Oiler (Skvazhina)*, mentioning that while the book was dedicated to oil workers in Baku, he was awarded the “Opening Up the Oil and Gas Deposits of Western Siberia” medal (4; 343). Voinovich lists these so-called accomplishments, diminishing the character of Efim, but at the same time stripping the value of state distinctions. This diminishing of state value is most apparent, when on Efim’s resume, he would often cross out “by the government” (“pravitel’stvennye”), and replace “by the army” (“boevye”) (4; 343).

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<sup>186</sup> “Квартиру, кроме того, украшала коллекция диковинных предметов, привезенных хозяином из многих экспедиций. Предметы были развешены по стенам, растелены на полу, расставлены на подоконниках, на книжных полках, на специальных подставках: олени рога, моржовый клык, чучело пингвина, шкура белого медведя, панцирь гигантской черепахи, скелеты глубоко-водных рыб, высушенные морские ежи и звезды, нанайские тапочки, бурятские или монгольские глиняные фигурки и еще всякая всячина” (*Shapka* 341).

<sup>187</sup> “Это его неудачное участие в войне было отмечено медалью ‘За победу над Германией’” (*Shapka* 343).

Efim's resume is pitted against the narrator's opinion of his writing. The narrator identifies the weaknesses in his mediocre writing and his groveling to have his books published. Voinovich adds to this disapproval, introducing other voices of criticism, such as Efim's friend Kostia, a writer, who unlike the narrator always voices his displeasure to Efim about his poorly written passages. Voinovich also provides critical responses to Efim's writing, adventure novels that tell heroic stories of Soviet explorers, but are reviewed and acclaimed only by explorers themselves, and not literary critics. The most damning criticism of Efim's writing is delivered by a director in the Writers' Union, who refuses Efim's copy of his book *Avalanche* (*Laviny*) as a bribe, and calls Efim's book a "thing." Efim becomes outraged: "But this isn't a thing!" Efim said in a voice almost tearful. "It's a book—it has spiritual value." (49).<sup>188</sup>

The novella creates a disjuncture between one's perceived worth and the corresponding, signifying material world in which one lives. The two opposing views are brought together when Efim is awarded the lowest quality hat. The fur hat itself receives much attention throughout the novella. While it is a fetishized object of desire, Voinovich breaks down the value of the object through the storyline and the repeated appearances of hats everywhere. The situation surrounding the hats is itself introduced at length. When Kostia calls and tells him the Writers' Union is giving out hats, Efim immediately hangs up, interpreting the sentence as double speak, the coded language the two would use over the telephone:

If for example, Efim told Kostia that according to granny (babusia) in London they would be getting a large shipment of aperitifs, Kostia knew immediately that aperitifs meant operatives and granny meant the BBC, that, in other words, a large

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<sup>188</sup> "Но это же вовсе даже не вещь!" закричал уже почти истерически Рахлин. "Это книга, это духовная ценность" (*Шапка* 377).

group of Soviet spies were being expelled from London... Or if, for another example, Kostia called and said he had some fresh veal for him, Efim immediately ran out, grabbed a taxi, and set off for the distant sticks of Beliaevo-Bogorodskoe—not because his mouth watered for a chop or a roast. No, the desired object was a book, Solzhenitsyn’s *The Oak and the Calf* (24-25).<sup>189</sup>

Efim and Kostia deliberately codify their language to avoid potential surveillance and do so through the linguistic registers of consumption. Important pieces of information that would be absent from Soviet media are described as rare pieces of meat. Likewise, banned books are described as rare commodities, precisely at a time when the circulation of *samizdat* was so important during the Stagnation era. Efim’s misunderstanding leads to an ironic conversation in which the two speak on different levels, with Efim trying to draw out scandalous political meaning from everyday conversation (26; 359). Upon realizing that Kostia is not tipping him off on important news, he asks if Kostia is talking about “ordinary winter hats” (26; 359). The use of the word ordinary (“obyknovennye”) conveys the character’s initial ambivalent attitude toward the hat, which will be contrasted with his obsession later.

The novella’s representation of Efim’s madness over the hats is created through the ever-present image of the object. The strategy is very similar to Vsevolod Pudovkin’s and Nikolai Shpikovskii’s film *Chess Fever* (*Shakhmatnaia goriachka* [1925]), in which the whole city of

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<sup>189</sup> “И если, например, Ефим сообщал Бараному, что, по словам бабуся, в Лондоне наметился большой урожай грибов, то Баранов, заменив в уме ‘грибы’ ‘шампиньонами’, а шампиньонов—шпионами, понимая, что под ‘бабусей’ имеется в виду Би-би-си, делал вывод, что по сообщению этой радиостанции из Лондона высылаются большая группа советских шпионов. А когда, например, Баранов позвонил Ефиму и сказал, что может угостить свежей телятиной, тот немедленно выскочил из дому, схватил такси и поперся к Бараному к черту на кулички в Беляево-Богородское вовсе не в расчете на отбивную или ростбиф, а приехав, получил на очень короткое время то, ради чего и ехал,—книгу Сольженицына *Бодался теленок с дубом*.” (*Шапка* 358-359)

Leningrad's fanaticism with the game of chess is shown visually through the game's ubiquitous appearances: chess is referenced everywhere, away from the game board, with checkered patterns on clothing and furniture. *The Fur Hat's* literary zoom likewise always catches glimpses of everyone's hats. These moments interrupt action in the story in favor of still portraiture, with Efim salivating over his acquaintances' prized possessions. This sort of quasi-direct discourse conveys Efim's madness. With every chance encounter Efim has, the reader stumbles upon a hat: "It was Myl'nikov, chasing after him with his unbuttoned fur coat, his hat in his hands" (49).<sup>190</sup> After the two characters meet up, the conversation is interrupted and the attention is placed on Myl'nikov's hat: "'Listen,' Myl'nikov said, fanning himself with his badger hat" (50).<sup>191</sup> Myl'nikov eventually gets to his point, which is to brag to Efim that he was featured in an article in a foreign journal, but these details do not provide any real causal relevance to the story. The encounter with the minor character exists almost solely in order to feature the badger hat.<sup>192</sup>

Efim's obsession is also conveyed on the psychological level by how he interprets his interactions with various Soviet officials while trying to procure the hat. While talking with one official Lukin, Efim dissects his party clichés, creating relevance out of nonsense: "Today people

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<sup>190</sup> "В расстегнутой шубе, с шапкой в руках за ним тяжело бежал МЫЛЬНИКОА" (*Шапка* 377).

<sup>191</sup> "'Слушай,' переволя дыхание, махал своей барсучьей шапкой МЫЛЬНИКОВ" (*Шапка* 378).

<sup>192</sup> Two more chance encounters occur in the novella, in which Efim's gaze is drawn toward the hats: "He was ready to surrender, but just then the poet and songwriter Samarin dropped by, fox-fur hat in hand" (*The Fur Hat* 66). ["И он уже готов был сдаться, но в это время в кабинете с лисьей шапкой в руке заглянул поэт-песеник Самарин" (*Шапка* 390)]. "Efim did not reply; he was staring open-mouthed at Pyotr Nikolaevich Lukin running past toward the exit, at Lukin's reindeer fawn collar, at Lukin's reindeer fawn hat" (*The Fur Hat* 69). [Ефим не ответил. Открыв рот, он смотрел на пробенгавшего к выходу Лукина, на его пыжиковый воротник, на богатую шапку" (*Шапка* 392)]. In both cases, the characters of Lukin and Samarin rarely appear in the rest of the text.

understand that our children... are our children. We still worry about them, work to get them into institutes and graduate schools, buy them shoes, jeans, gloves, hats... Efim was confused, taken aback. It struck him as very strange that Petr Nikolaevich himself had broached the subject of hats” (64).<sup>193</sup> Later, we see Efim’s fixation taken to illogical new extremes, as he asks himself about Lukin, if he could trust a man who owned not a hat, but a beret (65; 388).

Through Efim’s meetings up and down the social hierarchy of Soviet officials, Voinovich depicts a Soviet state that outfits its citizens with poor products that do not suit them, giving everyone grotesque appearances. One official, Cherpakov, is described as having a smiling face like a horse: “The smile never left his face, because the system, providing him with his government teeth, had made them a little too long and wide” (60).<sup>194</sup> Voinovich further destabilizes the importance of consumer goods, by articulating the discourses of *kul'turnost'* through the character Karetnikov, a mouthpiece for the state. Karetnikov explains the implications of Efim owning the same quality hat as a high-ranking official: “You want to worm your way into a better category, a higher class. You want to be given the same kind of hat I have, to be treated as an equal with me, with me, who am a secretary of the Writers’ Union, a member of the Central Committee, a deputy to the Supreme Soviet, Lenin Prize Laureate, vice president of the World Peace Council” (83).<sup>195</sup> Karetnikov states that while Efim’s writing

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<sup>193</sup> “Теперь, каждый понимает, что наши дети... есть наши дети, мы все равно о них беспокоимся, устраиваем их в институты, в аспирантуры, достаем им ботинки, джинсы, перчатки, шапки... Ефим замялся, заволновался. Ему показалось вдруг странным, что Петр Николаевич сам упомянул слово ‘шапки’” (*Shapka* 389).

<sup>194</sup> “Улыбка не сходила с лица, потому что органы, вставляя ему казенные зубы, сделали их чуть длинее, чем они должны были быть” (*Shapka* 385).

<sup>195</sup> “Ты хочешь дуриком в другую категорию, в другой класс пролезть. Хочешь, чтобы тебе дали такую же шапку, как мне, и чтобы нас вообще уравнили. Тебя и меня, секретеря Союза писателей, члена ЦК, депутата Верховного Совета, лауреата Ленинской премии, вице-президента Всемирного Совета Мира” (*Shapka* 402).

depicts Soviet heroes, it is ambivalent towards the state, and that one earns recognition and material wealth from the state by going out of one's way to promote Soviet values. In articulating this system of evaluation, Voinovich sets the table for the most ironic moment in the novella, when Efim gains recognition by becoming a dissident.

Efim's quest of procurement and social recognition ironically leads him down the path to become a dissident writer, as his final work conveys the talent he was missing his whole career as a hack adventure novelist. He attacks the official Karetnikov, biting him on the finger, for which he receives foreign recognition on BBC radio, which calls him a "leading Soviet writer" (95; 411). Likewise, Efim becomes a fearless, talented writer when he abandons his obedience to the state. This change is reflected in the genre in which he begins to write: the feuilleton. The narration also shows approval of his writing, describing his works as "Gogolian" ("pogogolevski") (93; 410). The reflexivity of the novella shows some deference toward the character as well, as Efim is writing a story with the very same plot of *The Fur Hat*.

Efim receives his hat not through official state recognition for his writing, but through the connections of his wife, who has routine affairs with high-ranking officials. The comic reappearance of the hat is removed at the end of the work, as Efim points to the hat he has finally received, but it is on his deathbed in the hospital. Ironically, his head is covered not by the hat he has been awarded, but by bandages. Voinovich's text recalls all the dangers of commodity fetishization, but seeks redemption in Efim's rebellion and madness. The text brings together many familiar themes from other authors of the Stagnation and perestroika eras. Voinovich's fiction is similar to Zinov'ev's, in that he concludes that strong talent and individuality should be valued by the state, even if those who are mediocre can easily ascend the social hierarchy. Efim's character is pathetic, but Voinovich does not provide a moralistic, Trifonovian tone



surrounding the main character's material desires, as seen in earlier Stagnation fiction such as "The Exchange." In Voinovich's world, it is only when Efim goes against the system and becomes a dissident that he can truly be appreciated and awarded as a talented writer. For the émigré Voinovich, this valuation of the cultural producer is inverted of course; Efim gains foreign recognition for his writing before any Soviet recognition by his peers at his funeral.

#### 5.4 BLAT AND (IN)ALIENABLE OBJECTS: GEORGII DANELIIA'S *KIN-DZA-DZA!*

*Kin-dza-dza!* is an intergalactic travel-filled narrative that is thematically and formally centered on objects. The film, whose script was originally titled "Cosmic Dust" ("Kosmicheskaia pyl"), was made at the tail end of the Stagnation period and released in 1986, in the first years of perestroika (Pustynskaia 86).<sup>196</sup> It can be read as a fantastic representation of procurement and the social practice of *blat*, revealing a satire on Soviet consumer goods and how their value dictated human relations. *Blat* as narrative can be conceptualized as a distancing of procurer

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<sup>196</sup> In a 2005 memoir, Danelia writes how the film relates to Stagnation culture, admitting the parallels between Pliuk and 1970s Soviet society. The leader in the film, PZh, is supposed to resemble Brezhnev, with his numerous medals. The film took so long to write, that when Brezhnev died, they ran into problems with some of the film's references: "And three days after the funeral, Levan Shengeliia came to the group and said that it was important that the word in the script, 'Ku' had to be changed immediately to something else! And he showed the newspaper *Pravda*, where on the first page in bold fonts many times was printed: 'К. У. Черненко.'" ["А дня через три после похорон в группу пришел Леван Шенгелия и сказал, что главное слово сценария—'Ку' надо срочно заменить на какое-нибудь другое! И показал газету 'Правда', где на первой странице жирным шрифтом было много раз напечатано: 'К.У.Черненко'"] (*Tostuemyi* 319).

with the procured vis-à-vis other objects in between.<sup>197</sup> The film features the journey of a Russian, nicknamed Uncle Vova, and a Georgian, Gedevan, who become stuck on the Planet Pliuk and are forced to find their way home by exchanging matches, an extremely valuable commodity in the galaxy, for transportation home.

*Kin-dza-dza!*'s many repetitions and cyclical structure enact both the experiences of waiting and its physiological affect for the audience. The film's looped soundtrack is a device that shows the tedious actions of the characters on screen. It begins during the film's opening credits and is always played against the backdrop of travel scenes, which are presented not as a heroic, epic journey, but a tedious crawl across desert landscapes in order to exchange goods.<sup>198</sup> A reading of the film as a fantastic narrative of procurement can be supported by the film's use of the setting of Moscow. The journey is bookended by two scenes in Moscow, where Uncle Vova is initially asked by his wife to run to the store to buy noodles. This seems like a minor detail that opens the film, as Vova never makes it to the store before being accidentally teleported to Pliuk, but it establishes a chain of exchanges, transactions, and negotiations that structure the film. Moreover, when Vova returns to Earth, sent back into time directly preceding his adventures, the opening scene is repeated: Vova's wife again requests that he go out and buy noodles, completing the circular structure of the plot. The film ends in the streets of Moscow, with the noodles never acquired. The film uses the location of Pliuk as a mirror for Soviet

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<sup>197</sup> Theorized from a first-world perspective in capitalist economies, Anthony Giddens writes that monetary exchanges in modern life create "disembedding mechanisms" that emphasize presence and absence (25). Money creates a spatial distance between the individual and his possession. The second-world practice of *blat* increases this distance, as people would buy items, only to trade them for others, adding another step in the act of consumption.

<sup>198</sup> Danelia's vision of Pliuk is of a lethargic society, opposing visions of advanced technology and modern life that is usually found in the science fiction, dystopian fiction genre. The film was shot in Turkmenistan near the Caspian Sea, but resembles the environmental catastrophe of the drying up regions of the Aral Sea in several scenes that feature moored ships.

society, satirically exposing the greedy behavior of a society in a desert wasteland, where products such as fuel and water are scarce. Possessing certain deficit goods allows the crafty citizens of Pliuk to acquire status-wielding products in exchange, as they all seek differentiate themselves from one another through luxury. While the two aliens, Mr. B and Uef initially are mistaken by Vova and Gedevan for being street peddling musicians from capitalist countries (“iz kapstrany”), their behavior epitomizes Soviet citizens’ fetishes for rare commodities in the Brezhnev era.<sup>199</sup>

The film breaks down the prestige value of the commodity through an exploration of Pliuk’s material world. Vova and Gedevan are forced to wear little bells hanging from their noses, called “tsak,” which denote their race and status. The alien Uef spends much of the first half of the film extolling the virtues of Pliuk’s prestigious items, yellow pants that give the owner status over others who must “ku,” bowing to them in deference, or purple pants that force others to “ku” twice, and prevent the police from harassment at night. Mr. B proclaims the importance of such items in society during a heated argument: “When a society does not have color differentiated pants, then it has no telos”<sup>200</sup>! The pants are never shown in the film until one of the final scenes, where an owner of a yellow pair happens to be a dwarf, comically small in stature, but still demanding social respect (Figure 19).

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<sup>199</sup> This satirical mode of comparison is common to the genre of science fiction, and specifically dystopian fiction, where alternative worlds share similarities to the external social conditions of the reader.

<sup>200</sup> “Когда у общества нет цветовой дифференциации штанов, то нет цели” (Danelia, *Kin-dza-dza!*)!



Figure 19. “Yellow Pants, Ku twice” in *Kin-dza-dza!*

Social practices and norms that arise out of the dominant consumer culture are turned on their heads throughout the film. At the close of the film, Gedevan reverses the social hierarchy by taking the tsak bell from the great leader PZh’s servant, and placing it on the leader himself, who does not take action to stop Gedevan’s disruption of accepted social norms.

Just as objects of status such as the yellow pants are stripped of their ideological importance and socially encoded value throughout the film through absurd, illogical representations, other items are endowed with more favorable pragmatic values. Vova and Gedevan look for pragmatic items such as food, water, fuel, and ship parts, and acquire them by trading matches, the most valuable commodity on Pliuk, but also something Vova needs in order to smoke. The criticism of acquisitive behavior and greed, which satirically lampoons the alien Uef, is contrasted with Gedevan’s curiosity and impulse to hoard alien products. An ordinary spoon becomes the source of one joke, as Gedevan wants to steal the “exotic Martian metal object,” but is caught and derided by Uef, who calls him a pathetic kleptomaniac, hardly the “first Georgian Cosmonaut” he envisions himself to be. Gedevan’s acquisitiveness saves the duo

toward the end of the film, as he unknowingly steals the curious-looking ship part they have been searching for the whole time (Figure 20).<sup>201</sup>



Figure 20. *Gravitsappa* in *Kin-dza-dza!*

The film shows the imaginative use of objects in playful ways. Many of the vehicles in the film appear to be rusted hodge-podge constructions of recycled low quality items, yet possess technological advancement, speeding through the desert and through space (Figures 21 and 22).

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<sup>201</sup> In a review of the film, Nikita Braginskii writes that buying parts for Uef's ship served to create a parallel with Soviet life in the 1980s. Those who were lucky enough to own a car were nonetheless on a constant hunt for parts to make frequently needed repairs (395).



Figure 21. Transportation in *Kin-dza-dza!*



Figure 22. Interstellar ship in *Kin-dza-dza!*

More interestingly, the film’s extremely complex linguistic register estranges the viewer from the Soviet consumer world. The film’s linguistic register is extremely complex, as new words are created for both familiar and fantastic objects. The film, which features two halves, includes a dictionary at the outset of the second part, recapping the alien language (Figures 23 and 24).



Figure 23. “A short version Chatlanin-Patsak dictionary” in *Kin-dza-dza!*

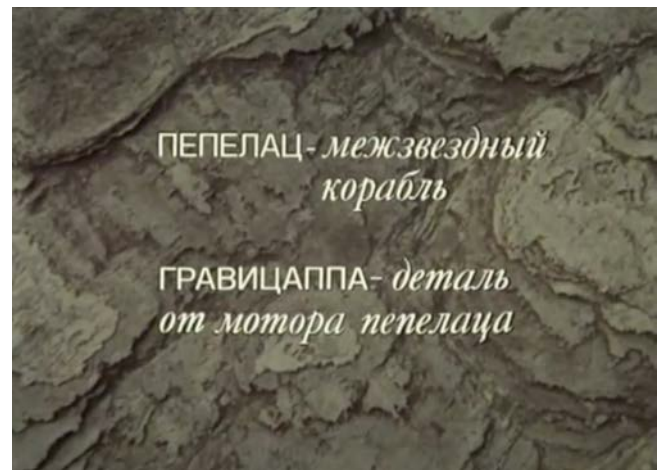


Figure 24. “Pepelats – Interstellar ship”  
“Gravitsappa – a part from the motor of the  
Pepelats” in *Kin-dza-dza!*

The dictionary acts more as a comedic device than a legitimate source that aides the viewer. Its humor stems from the meshing of the Russian and alien languages. The superfluous inclusion of the dictionary epitomizes the film's use of language, which teaches the audience that on Pliuk there are only two words, and that all thought is transmitted telepathically, yet then introduces new words for all of the goods in the film. The dictionary at first defines items in Russian, but then freely uses the new alien terms alongside the Russian to define other objects (Figure 24).

The narrative structure of procurement and *blat* is further reinforced at the film's conclusion. While Gedevan and Vova have no physical evidence for their adventure, the film celebrates their personal bond with each other and their bond with the aliens Uef and Mr. B. Vova does not come away with his noodles, but does reunite with Gedevan on the streets of Moscow, where they recognize one another and "ku" as a sign of friendship and respect. The film in this way shows that the need for connections triumphs over the desire for commodities, allegorically depicting the personal side of Soviet consumption.

## **5.5 THE NARRATIVE PRESENCES OF LACK: SERGEI DOVLATOV'S *THE SUITCASE***

Sergei Dovlatov's *The Suitcase* is an autobiographical collection of stories told through the personal items that the author is allowed to take with him upon his emigration. The stories inscribe the nostalgic absence of leaving the Soviet Union onto the author's remaining possessions. While the opening lines state that Dovlatov was allowed to take only two suitcases with him out of the Soviet Union, the lack of possessions that he owns becomes immediately present, as he only has enough items to fill one; the suitcase contains various items of clothing

with little pragmatic value, such as women's socks, but rather serve as reminders of his past. It is from these items that a narrative of his life is constructed by the author.

The title immediately conveys a reflexivity for the narrative that stems from the objects themselves. Dovlatov surmises how to name the work, picking between *From Marx to Brodsky* (*Ot Marksa k Brodskomu*), *What I Acquired* (*Chto ia nazhil*), and *The Suitcase* (*Chemodan*) (8; 7). The suitcase is of course a container of memories, a container for narrative. It is only fitting that the closing lines state that every book resembles a suitcase in its construction. Objects become the structuring skeleton for the work, as each story is named after a possession and its escapade of procurement.

The narration of *The Suitcase* recalls what Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell separate as the “conceived versus the remembered,” the act of conceptualizing through the expression of objects rather than thought (23). The suitcase is a forgotten item post emigration. It is only when it is found and unpacked that all of the objects begin to tell the story: “At that point, memories engulfed me. They must have been hidden in the folds of those pathetic rags, and now they had escaped” (7-8).<sup>202</sup> Dovlatov's description endows a material quality to the memories, which become embedded in the items. Thus, the acquisition and possession of objects serve as remnants, loaded with memories of past Soviet lived experiences.

*The Suitcase* fits well into a discussion of Soviet material culture and its intersections with scarcity. In the story “The Driving Gloves” (“Shoferskie perchatki”) Dovlatov participates in the filming of an underground movie, playing the role of Tsar Peter the Great: “Tsar Peter finds himself in modern Leningrad. Everything is disgusting and alien. He goes into a grocery

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<sup>202</sup> “И тут, как говорится, нахлынули воспоминания. Наверное, они таились в складках этого убогого тряпья. И теперь вырвались наружу” (*Chemodan* 7).



store. He starts shouting, ‘Where’s the smoked venison, the mead, the anise vodka? Who bankrupted my domain, the barbarians?’” (120-121).<sup>203</sup> The filmmakers direct Dovatov to join a queue for beer, where dressed as the Tsar, he is supposed to address the crowd and gesture disapprovingly. Dovatov comments on the ridiculousness of the situation and his embarrassment, but his appearance as the Tsar seamlessly fits right into the everydayness of the beer line of alcoholics: “I joined the end of the line. Two or three men glanced at me without the slightest curiosity. The rest simply paid no attention at all” (125).<sup>204</sup> He is accepted into the queue’s ranks, and fits in amongst the Georgians, Armenians, and bums next to him: “I just stood in line, and quietly moved along to the counter. I heard the railroad man explain to someone, ‘I’m behind the bald guy. The Tsar’s behind me. And you come after the Tsar’” (125).<sup>205</sup> Dovatov’s experience in the queue inverts the reader’s expectation of the absurd appearance of the Tsar. His inability to make the scene more dramatic for the sake of the film gives the passage of everyday life a comic futility. It is only when the filmmaker approaches to complain that the line becomes restless, but only because they think he has cut into the line.

In her analysis of the collection, Jekaterina Young discusses these inclusions of the Soviet shadow economy and the practice of queuing, and treats these moments in the story as Dovatov’s commentary on ownership in Soviet life: “the ownership of a thing is reduced to a trivial and absurd event. It is testimony to the narrator’s personal history and not to the history of the revolution. Dovatov turns the value of ownership upside down; he uses elements of

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<sup>203</sup> “Царь Петр оказывается в современном Ленинграде. Все ему здесь отвратительно и чуждо. Он заходит в продуктовый магазин. Кричит: где стерлядь, мед, анисовая водка? Кто разорил державу, басурмане” (*Chemodan* 102)?!

<sup>204</sup> “Я присоединился к хвосту очереди. Двое или трое мужчин посмотрели на меня без всякого любопытства. Остальные меня просто не заметили” (*Chemodan* 106).

<sup>205</sup> Стою. Тихонько двигаюсь к прилавку. Слышу—железнодорожник кому-то объясняет: — Я стою за лысым. Царь за мной. А ты уж будешь за царем... (*Chemodan* 106).

parody and irony in his stories to repudiate the value of owning the objects that were coveted in the Soviet Union” (157). Young’s analysis rightly locates Dovlatov’s bitter irony in the Soviet context of ownership. In the OVIR bureau, Dovlatov’s wit is displayed as he mocks the official: “What am I supposed to do with all my things?” “Like my collection of race cars” (5).<sup>206</sup> But for every one of these statements, an underside of regret is revealed: “I almost wept with self-pity. After all, I was thirty-six years old. Had worked eighteen of them. I earned money, bought things with it. I owned a certain amount, it seemed to me” (5).<sup>207</sup>

Young’s argument however, that ownership itself should be considered absurd, removes agency from the Soviet consumer, who has worked and waited to procure items. In Dovlatov’s case, not one object in the suitcase was bought or earned from work as a writer or other state jobs. Rather, most of the items were acquired through *blat*, or some scheme at the state’s expense. He reminisces about outwitting a local politician by stealing his boots, or buying shipments of rare foreign crêpe socks with his friend Fred, only to have the state flood the market with similar items and ruining one of many plots to make money. These events, which nonchalantly characterize Dovlatov as a trickster, are rendered as universal Soviet experiences:

After that, many things happened. The operation with the “Bologna” raincoats. The resale of German stereos. A brawl in the Cosmos Hotel over a case of American cigarettes. Carrying a load of Japanese cameras and fleeing a police squad. And lots of other things.

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<sup>206</sup> “Как же быть с вещами?” “Например, с моей коллекцией гоночных автомобилей?” (*Chemodan* 5).

<sup>207</sup> “Я чуть не зарыдал от жалости к себе. Ведь мне тридцать шесть лет. Восемнадцать из них я работаю. Что-то зарабатываю, покупаю. Владею, как мне представлялось, некоторой собственностью” (*Chemodan* 5-6).

I paid off my debts. Bought myself some decent clothes. Changed departments at college. Met the girl I eventually married. Went to the Baltics for a month when Rymar' and Fred were arrested. Began my feeble literary attempts. Became a father. Got into trouble with the authorities. Lost my job. Spent a month in Kaliaevo Prison. (21)<sup>208</sup>

Dovlatov juxtaposes major life events, such as becoming a father and meeting his wife, with second economy transactions. The events are told in a stream of consciousness narration in sentence fragments, compressing the events together, and grounding them in the material realm of Soviet experience. *The Suitcase* thus features a materiality and abundance that surge forward in the narrative *through* objects, but refer back to a time of scarcity *without* objects, which is embraced by the author even in its deficiencies.

The suitcase itself as an object is just as important as the items it contains. Dovlatov tells its back-story in far greater detail than its contents in the foreword, noting that it dates back to when he was a pioneer. The suitcase also can be viewed as a *bricolage* piece; it is personalized in numerous ways by Dovlatov. Its inscription, “Serezha Dovlatov,” conveys a sense of the dearness attached to the item. The suitcase has pictures fastened to it, adding personal layers on top of the ubiquitous book of Marx that sits at the bottom: “Inside, the lid was plastered with photographs: Rocky Marciano, Louis Armstrong, Joseph Brodsky, Gina Lollobrigida in a

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<sup>208</sup> “После этого было многое. Операция с плащами ‘болонья’. Перепродажа шести немецких стереоустановок. Драка в гостинице ‘Космос’ из-за ящика американских сигарет. Бегство от милицейского наряда с грузом японского фотооборудования. И многое другое.

Я расплатился с долгами. Купил себе приличную одежду. Перешел на другой факультет. Познакомился с девушкой, на которой впоследствии женился. Уехал на месяц в Прибалтику, когда арестовали Рымаря и Фреда. Начал делать робкие литературные попытки. Стал отцом. Добился конфронтации с властями. Потерял работу. Месяц просидел в Каляевской тюрьме” (*Chemodan* 18).

transparent outfit. The customs agent tried to tear Lollobrigida off with his nails. He succeeded only in scratching her” (6).<sup>209</sup>

The objects in the suitcase have no exchange value for Dovlatov either in the Soviet Union or post-emigration, but that is what makes them so valuable because they stay where they are. They are not consumed, but sit diligently and serve as signifiers of a bygone time. This static depiction of things, which renders objects almost as artifacts, compensates for a lack of the real object of Russia. Dovlatov’s displacement of his lost world onto his leftover possessions is an example of Stewart’s conception of the miniature, souvenirs, and nostalgia from *On Longing*:

Nostalgia is a sadness without an object, a sadness which creates a longing that of necessity is inauthentic because it does not take part in lived experience. Rather, it remains behind and before that expanse. Nostalgia, like any form of narrative, is always ideological: the past it seeks has never existed except as narrative, and hence, always absent, that past continually threatens to reproduce itself as a felt lack. (23)

Dovlatov’s lack is initially represented twofold at the outset of the collection, but from the depths of lack, emerges what is dear to the author. In his epigraph to the collection, he cites Aleksandr Blok’s poem “To Sin Shamelessly, without Awakening” (“Greshit’ besstyдно, neprobudno” [1914]), finding solace amidst disappointment: “But even like this, my Russia, / You are most precious to me.”<sup>210</sup> T.V. Tsiv’ian interprets Dovlatov’s tone similarly, writing: “And the last exclamation ‘I don’t want it!’ in a new, completely different setting does not signify a battle with

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<sup>209</sup> “Изнутри крышка была заклеена фотографиями. Рокки Марчиано, Армстронг, Иосиф Бродский, Лоллобриджида в прозрачной одежде. Таможенник пытался оторвать Лоллобриджида ногтями. В результате только поцарапал” (*Chemodan* 6).

<sup>210</sup> “... Но и такой, моя Россия, / ты всех краев дороже мне...” (*Chemodan* 5).

‘thingism,’ but rather, something that burns into us much deeper, the ugly traces of the Soviet model of the world” (657).<sup>211</sup> This trace comes into much sharper focus during perestroika, as texts begin to take on once forbidden topical issues and to engage in systemic critiques of the Soviet Union.

This chapter has sought to detail the phantasmagoric discourses of Soviet consumption. Moving from Stagnation into perestroika, a renewed importance of materiality emerges, one no longer defined by the state, but now shaped by the consumer, who personalized his use of products to conform to the economic conditions of scarcity, his needs, but also his evolving tastes. While Benjamin described a phantasmagoria that enslaved the consumer and created an aura around commodities, transcending their use value, we are seeing something different here in the consumption of the second-world. Both cultural and consumer products begin to create spaces of excess that account for the inadequacies of what the state was able to provide. Narratives find new value and expression amongst the deficiencies of Soviet material culture. Ultimately, literary and cultural production becomes an outlet of excess that counters material absence. They transform a phantasmagoria that haunts the consumer, to a fantastic, imaginative world where the consumer creates new meanings and new narratives out of his everyday surroundings and possessions. In all of these examples, a central focus on material culture becomes a driving force that shapes narrative, an untapped source in a society that routinely struggled with the lines drawn between *petit-bourgeois* consciousness and socialist morality.

The final chapter will view the remnants of the queue in Russia, the former republics of the Soviet Union, and Eastern Bloc socialist countries. With the arrival of small-scale private

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<sup>211</sup> “И последний вскрик ‘Не хочу!’ в новой, совершенно иной ситуации означает не борьбу с ‘вещизмом,’ а то, насколько глубоко врезались в нас уродливые следы... советской модели мира” (Tsiv’ian 657).

ownership during perestroika, the Soviet landscape was flooded with new products, but also new opportunities for consumption and production.<sup>212</sup> Many anthropological studies have viewed the signification of the new consumer world. Serguei Oushakine discusses the ways in which Russian students construct an imaginary of excess in their descriptions of “New Russians” in his article “The Quantity of Style.” Oushakine’s interviews reveal that many students conceptualized the differences in Soviet and post-Soviet life with facets of consumption across both periods: queues, empty shelves and cheap prices versus full stores, but an absence of money. More importantly, he analyzes the ways in which students conceptualized these differences, and how they conveyed their views on the past through personal experience: “The political (as well as the economic) is merged here with the personal, or is at least perceived in personalized terms of everyday practice” (100).

Likewise, Jennifer Patico remarks that “consumer goods and their qualities played an important role in the imagination of a global hierarchy of lifestyles and privileges,” and did not “stand as simple metonyms of East and West” (116). She describes the extensive process of shopping in post-Soviet Russia, where the act was drawn out not by shortages, but by consumers painstakingly trying to save every last ruble, as their salaries no longer had the same purchasing power. She notices that in St. Petersburg, the initial consumer draw to try all the new products quickly wore off, in favor of the smarter, strategic shopping of the Soviet era: “Shortly—some

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<sup>212</sup> Looking at food culture in Eastern Europe, Joe Smith and Petr Jehlička note that consumption of diverse and novel Western goods and the introduction of choice was a main symbolic break from the state allocated culture of shortage: “Conspicuous consumption of Western goods has not only become an important part of people’s identity and social status, but has also acquired an important symbolic meaning at the level of CEE societies as a whole” (400). The pervasion of Western goods into post-socialist and post-Soviet societies provided a greater level of normalcy in everyday life, legitimizing Western consumptive models through “tangible experiences” (400).

say within just a few months—the novelty wore off, as consumers gained experience and compared imports. Often unfavorably, with more familiar, locally produced goods, which were generally also less expensive. Indeed, domestic foodstuffs were considered by many to be, on the whole, healthier, fresher and tastier than foreign counterparts” (103).<sup>213</sup>

Vladimir Sorokin tells the story of the coming of abundance that the free market provided, using the familiar image of the sausage: “Entrepreneurial citizens who wanted to open their own stores and sell sausage, rather than stand in line for it, immediately left its ranks. They were followed by those active citizens who wanted to make money in the stores of the new sausage entrepreneurs” (“Afterword” 260). This nostalgic and playful glance by Sorokin reinforces the breaking of the connection between consumers and an ordered system of state allocation. The once grotesque description of the sausage, with its casing now removed, marked new opportunities to move beyond the Soviet material landscape, yet recall this lost space in new ways.

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<sup>213</sup> Patico’s analysis also reiterates another important point that I covered in chapter 4, namely how people voice their concerns of what they deserve. As people in higher education, namely teachers, could not afford basic staples, they sought to legitimize their social worth through their consumption. For Patico, the postsocialist subject’s dilemma is encapsulated here in book’s opening line: “It is offensive that a PhD scientist cannot afford to buy bananas for her family” (1).

## 6.0 VNE OCHEREDI AND NEW ORIENTATIONS OF WAITING

Here I stand quietly in line / And think to myself: / What if Pushkin  
were in a queue / And Lermontov in a queue / And Blok also in a queue  
/ What would they write about? About happiness.<sup>214</sup>  
— Dmitrii Prigov (*Napisannoe* 11)

They even stand in a line during their leisure hours. And if there weren't  
more queues, people would begin to think! They'd then begin to demand  
a better type of leisure-time activity.<sup>215</sup>  
— Aleksandr Zinov'ev (*The Yawning Heights* 783)

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

In Sorokin's cycle of stories *Sugar Kremlin* (*Sakharnyi kreml'* [2008]), Russia's citizens in 2028 are lined up to buy sugary cakes in the shape of the Kremlin. The cakes are a structural device for the novel's numerous short episodes. The opening story is about a little girl, Marfa, who is sent out on a shopping trip by her family, and the work includes yet another episode and homage titled "The Queue" ("Ochered"), a conversation in line between a man and a woman who wait for the cakes. The cakes, whose "tower" pieces are more highly desired compared to the ordinary "wall" sections, reflect the commodification of Russian and Soviet culture. Similar to

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<sup>214</sup> "Вот в очереди тихонько стою / И думаю себе отчасти: / Вот Пушкина бы в очередь сию / И Лермонтова в очередь сию / И Блока тоже в очередь сию / О чем писали бы? — о счастье" (Prigov 11).

<sup>215</sup> "Стоять ведь во вне рабочее время. А если очереди не будет? Думать начнут! Развлечений потребуют более высокого класса" (*Ziiaishchie* 528).



his dystopian temporal scope in *Day of The Oprichnik* (*Den' oprichnika* [2006]), Sorokin seems to be illustrating a future Russia that is composed of its worst elements: the vestiges of tsarist and Soviet authoritarian regimes coupled with the commodified globalizing world of the present. While his dystopian vision in both works is overloaded with obscenity and violence, there is a more intricate examination that takes place, in which the mixture of Russian tradition, Soviet modernity, and the influence of the once imaginary, yet all too present West, all seem to boil over.

Following the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc in 1989 and the Soviet Union two years later, the second-world as a geographical orientation officially no longer existed, yet second-world culture remained deeply infused in everyday practice. The past experiences of second-world modernity are continually simulated and recreated in second-world culture, which recreates itself in the ephemeral spaces of the globalizing world. Remnants of the mentalities and everyday routines shaped by second-world life certainly still exist, as opposed to many of the social structures themselves. Regardless, second-world culture continues to operate without the base of its socialist command economy.

Why is a culture of shortage continued in the wake of Soviet modernity; why are certain aspects of it still celebrated? Why are the vestiges of a castoff social structure, the queue, simulated as cultural artifacts in contemporary post-Soviet and post-socialist cultures? This chapter concludes the dissertation by looking at attempts that recreate everyday second-world practices in the post-Soviet and post-socialist world, despite the fact that they are no longer essential. Konstantin Axenov, Isolde Brade, and Evgenij Bondarchuk discuss the complexities of modernization in Eastern Europe in their term “the post-transformation city,” which posits that Eastern European cities have certain peculiarities left over from socialist urban organization.

Rejecting the idea that post-socialist cities caught up and modernized, they find the process of transformation not fully complete: “First modernization was not the only process that took place during transformation. At the very least, transformation also included the process of restructuring/adaptation of the old socialist economy and society” (27). They find not only the continued operation of past socio-economic structures, but also ones that are unique to the process of transformation itself. Axenov’s, Brade’s, and Bondarchuk’s discussion highlights the place of the local within globalization. Likewise, Peter Jackson refers to the unfinished product of globalization (globalizing as opposed to globalized) that is shaped and individuated by local specific practices. Not only are global brands adapted according to local tastes by their producers, but local populations ascribe their own meaning to products as a form of cultural contestation (167). This creation of localized meanings within a universal globalizing culture can be seen in a joke that plays with the orthography of the Colgate brand of toothpaste. The brand name is written in Latin characters, but when read as cursive Cyrillic letters, they produce the word “soldier” (Figure 25).

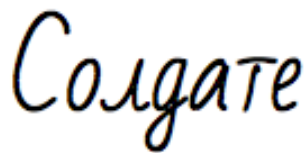


Figure 25. Cyrillic/Latin ambiguities and advertising

“Two newly drafted soldiers buy toothpaste. They choose Colgate: ‘Look here, it’s made just for us! Colgate—that means it’s for us soldiers!’” The joke reflects a site of contestation in the Russian Federation and post-Soviet republics, where citizens create their own localized meanings, whereas states try to reaffirm national identity. The Duma, for example, in 2002

passed a law requiring all official languages to use Cyrillic orthography. The bill requires Russian officials, journalists, and advertisers to use Russian and specifically not use foreign words when a Russian synonym exists.<sup>216</sup>

Many anthropological studies have traced these incomplete transformations in the post-Soviet consumer world. For example, in an unpublished 2007 roundtable titled “Everyday Life and its Paradigm of Meanings,” Yurchak analyzed the role of the 24-hour store in contemporary Russia, noting its differences from its Western counterparts. One of the more interesting differences that Yurchak highlighted between the Western and Russian 24-hour stores was that while most of the Russian stores were advertized as being open “around the clock” (“*kruglosutochno*” or “*24-chasa*”), many in fact followed old Soviet work practices, closing for a short lunch break. Likewise, Nancy Ries’ 2009 article “Potato Ontology” looks at the ways in which past social practices become embedded in contemporary everyday life, despite outside changes in socio-economic conditions. In tracing Russian citizens’ stubborn insistence to grow potatoes in their personal gardens (*ogorod*), even if they are less expensive and labor intensive to buy at the store, she finds that the potato has become more than a food staple, but has grown its roots deeper into Russo-Soviet culture. While the potato itself functioned as a survival mechanism during economically unstable times, the narratives surrounding the cultivation of the potato simultaneously encapsulated local knowledge, historical and personal memory, and the devolution of state-society server model.<sup>217</sup> These types of studies identify how incomplete

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<sup>216</sup> For a discussion of Russia’s language laws and an overview of former Soviet republics switching to Latin alphabets, see Mark Sebba’s “Ideology and Alphabets in the Former USSR.”

<sup>217</sup> Ries’ opening of the article includes a historical account of the potato’s adoption in Russia, which only occurred at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century under Peter the Great (184).

transformations and adaptations occur within modernization, with local traditions and practices still informing global processes, and multiple modernities reflecting on one another.

Even as the connection between consumers and a state-ordered system of allocation broke, the legacy of second-world modernity continued to permeate the current landscape.<sup>218</sup> While the presence of queues is not nearly as much of a visible mainstay and eyesore across post-Soviet and post-socialist countries, this does not mean they have completely disappeared. Conditions of shortage in consumer products were indeed transformed by the new capitalist market, which proclaimed abundance and choice, but remnants of the old system still exist. Despite the privatization of housing after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which transferred housing stock and related services to local municipalities, housing shortages are ongoing and endemic. Satisfying the total current need for those requesting subsidized government housing has been estimated at twenty years (“Dostup k zhil’iu otkryt”). Likewise, the state still must allocate certain public services to its populace, and subsidized services, such as public schooling, remain in high demand. The job of the speculator (*spekulant*) has become professionalized, with lawyers advertising their services to minimize waiting times and to skip queues. The phrase to go “outside the queue” (“vne ocheredi”) has become just as ubiquitous in current advertising as the visible queues that were mainstays of the Soviet era.

Looking at the *topos* of waiting in contemporary culture reveals how the local, in this case, heavily informed by past Soviet influence, plays out against the backdrop of Western modernization and globalization. For example, Russian-American Gary Shteyngart’s satirical novel *Absurdistan* (2006) presents a journey from the modernized first-world of New York to

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<sup>218</sup> With the collapse of a centrally planned economy, consumers no longer need to rely on state distribution of goods. Queues certainly still exist on the bureaucratic level of many state-provided services such as pensions and official documents.

“St. Leninsburg” and finally to the fictional, yet all too realistic, Caspian republic Absurdsvani. The novel illuminates the simultaneous presence of multiple modernities through the geographical displacement of its hero, Misha Vainberg, who travels to Absurdsvani in order to obtain illegally a Belgian passport. The novel features an extended scene in a queue for passport control where the intersections, or incomplete transformation, between first- and second-world are rendered painfully obvious:

As the flight was announced, the most olive-skinned people in the terminal rushed the gate, and soon a jostling mass of mustached men and their pretty dark wives, each wielding bags from Century 21, the famed New York discount emporium, had laid siege to the poor Austrian Airlines personnel. This was my first introduction to the Absurdistan mob—a faithful re-creation of the Soviet line for sausages, fueled by the natural instincts of the Oriental bazaar. (111)

Shteyngart does more than just satirize the uneven aspects of first-world, commercialized modernization and its social, political, and economic ramifications, which he labels “the trappings of modernity” (113). Instead, he depicts a world where the crossroads between first- and second-world modernity are just as harmonious as they are chaotic. Misha is confronted by a series of locals, who declare their brotherhood with his Jewish ancestors. They offer to help him skip the queues at the passport control, but also at the same time opportunistically mention the plight of their relatives who are in financial need: “A Jew shouldn’t have to wait in line to have his picture taken. Let me do it for you right away. Smile, mister!” (114). This scene plays out continually in the novel, as the national brotherhood of Soviet peoples becomes a euphemism for begging and bribery.

*Absurdistan* is representative of many of the texts and performances explored in this chapter that evaluate the afterlife of Soviet second-world modernity. They explore the operation of old and new social structures and cultures that exist simultaneously. The traditions of the Soviet-era culture of shortage smack up against a culture of abundance and immediacy trumped by globalization. Finding ways to narrate the spaces of uneven growth, and unequal distributions of wealth in the globalizing world, the queue, is again appropriated as a space of equality as it was envisioned in Soviet times. It also becomes a space of novelty and entertainment, where within the confines of the queue, people act out performances, such as flash mobs and fake advertising campaigns, that subvert the rules of the newly adopted consumer world. This suspension of the global narrative, away from the inequalities of modernization and globalization, then moves to the local, that of a temporary utopian world of community. These acts and performances reconfigure engrained traditional practices, and offer a moment to situate oneself within the chaos and incongruities of the globalizing world. It is not surprising to see then, that the social structure of the queue becomes more of a cultural structure through local expressions. This process can best be explained through reflexive modernization theories, which view the shaping of new expressions beyond the institutional turns of modernization and globalization.

## **6.2 WAITING AND REFLEXIVE MODERNIZATION: FROM SOCIAL TO CULTURAL STRUCTURES**

In their volume *Reflexive Modernization* (1994), Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck, and Scott Lash conceptualize late modernization as a process that constantly reassesses itself as an object of

reflection: “The reflexivity of modern social life consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character” (Giddens, *Consequences* 38). Giddens states that the characteristic of modernity is not “an embracing of the new for its own sake,” but rather “the presumption of wholesale reflexivity,” which is an act of expression that brings about new directions (*Consequences* 39). Giddens’, Lash’s, and Beck’s essays on the topic are important in that they offer a constructive reading of how modernity continues to operate and become inflected in new ways, rather than simply forwarding a deconstructive stance familiar in postmodern narratives. Inversions of modernity, according to Lash, are not simply binarized into a modern/postmodern division, but instead feature self-reflexive movements that resituate the trajectories of modernism. He points out that while modernization always had a haunting double, for example the free market of capitalism turning into hierarchically structured monopoly of the firm, or in the Soviet case, the state bureaucracy of the Communist Party, late modernization also features a reflexive side: one that inverts or reflects previous movements to create new spaces outside these institutions. Lash examines reflexive modernization for the ways in which social actors create agency in relation to existing structures, opening up new spaces beyond the consequences of modernism’s dystopian turn.

While Giddens theorizes reflexive modernization almost solely in relation to the evolving, but not disappearing social structures, Lash’s analysis takes this one step further in describing the potential aesthetic expressions that came out of late modernity.<sup>219</sup> Objects

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<sup>219</sup> Giddens notes that everyday experience, or as he labels them “experiments,” highlight the intrusiveness of the abstract systems of modernity: “The global experiment of modernity intersects with, and influences as it is influenced by, the penetration of modern institutions into the tissue of day-to-day life” (Giddens: “Living in a Post-traditional Society” 59).

represent not only the commercial world in which they originate, but also serve as conceptual symbols that articulate the conditions of reflexivity:

The same is true of the “mimetic” symbols, of the images, sounds and narratives making up the other side of our sign economics. On the one hand as the commoditized, intellectual property of the culture industries they belong to the characteristically post-industrial *assemblage* of power. On the other they open up virtual and real spaces for the popularization of aesthetic critique of that same power/knowledge complex. (Lash 135)

Lash sees this movement as another inversion, as a way for communities to express individuation, operating within and alongside the dominating social structures of modern life. In the globalizing world, where shrinking time-space distantiations disrupt stable definitions of community, individuation often occurs in the improvisational and contingent responses to modernization, rather than as an essentialized identity. What is then needed, according to Lash, is a notion of involvement in communal practices out of which the self grows (164).

Lash’s, Giddens’, and Beck’s conceptualizations are central to how I view the queue in contemporary post-Soviet and post-socialist culture. The revival and continued presence of the second-world often acts in ways to negotiate the fractured and uneven spaces of modernization and globalization. New communities emerge, no longer within the communal responsibilities associated with the Soviet system, which bound people together through their service to and reliance on the state, but rather through playful simulations and performances of shared past experiences. For example, Wolfgang Becker’s *Good Bye, Lenin* (2003) humorously plays with this idea of second-world simulation after Germany’s unification, capturing both the euphoria people in the former East had as products came flowing in from West Germany, but also at the



same time, people's grasping onto the old and disappearing culture of East German products that were gradually replaced. The film features a son's attempt to recreate that past culture for his Communist Party mother, who was in a coma during the collapse of the Berlin Wall: he repackages West German and other European food products with old East German labels, reshoots news programs, and dresses in old clothing in order to simulate second-world life.

The main examples in this chapter epitomize the notion of reflexive modernity in that they are all products created within the current consumer world, yet go against the rules of this sphere by calling attention to its presence. They simultaneously reaffirm the structures in which they emanate, but cast off their value as commodities or the act of commodification in favor of performative elements, opening up new areas of interpretation. Discourses of queuing and waiting are recast in novel ways. While the contemporary culture of abundance and immediacy that came with the world of Western advertising proclaimed that anyone can skip the queue, an exact opposite movement emerges: a willingness to embrace the stability of queuing and waiting over the inequalities of market capitalism.

Texts find new ways to narrate modernization, beyond critiques of the institutions that shaped modernity. Instead, they narrate on the level of the habitualized social practices that equally characterize modernity from the bottom up. Lash looks at Bourdieu, noting that the logic of practice in modern life "takes place not through institutional organization but through the force of shared meanings and habits" (166). This constitutes a shift, where the struggle with modernity is no longer based on production or consumption, but is rather driven by information that informs people on social practices. Going back and reformulating Lotman's definition, everydayness is still the ever-present surroundings; it is, however, experienced not only when it

is lacking in something, but also when its abundances become just as upsetting and disappointing as its shortages.

The recovery of everydayness, thus, occurs as the usual is transformed into the unexpected. Communities organized online, such as flash mobs, transform public spaces into performance stages. The queue as a half-dead social structure is transformed and revitalized, from its tradition as a symbol of the drudgery of everyday life to a place of opportunity and novelty. Furthermore, the queue is transformed and celebrated as a cultural structure, a place where local communities find and create expression, rather than as a social structure, where it was once used to delineate the needs of the populace.

### **6.3 THE HYPERMARKET OF THE EUROPEAN UNION: VÍT KLUSÁK'S AND FILIP REMUNDA'S *CZECH DREAM***

*Czech Dream* (*Český sen* [2004]) is a documentary film, in which the directors Vít Klusák and Filip Remunda, students at The Film and Television School of the Academy of Performing Arts (FAMU), created a hoax: the opening of a new hypermarket in the suburbs of Prague. The directors call their project a “hypermarket film,” as the production involved not only shooting, but also the actual manufacturing of a fictional business. The filmmakers created intricate ad campaigns, enticing their customers through negative reinforcement. *Czech Dream*'s anti-advertising campaign aimed to attract customers, with slogans like “Don't come,” “Don't spend,” “Don't rush,” “Don't wait,” and “Don't skip ahead.” The film intimates that although advertising is a form of manipulation, people willingly follow its cues, as they need a stable footing, or a promise, which the ads provide. *Czech Dream*'s negative ads perform the opposite

task, further supporting the idea that people's habits have become so entrenched that they will follow ads even if they do not positively reinforce the consumer. The ad campaign drew over 3,000 people to the market's parking lot, where many waited hours behind a barrier for the store to open. The *Czech Dream* experiment tested its hypothesis in the crowd's reaction, as the people who showed up approached the fictional store, whose outside rainbow-painted walls were only a façade.

*Czech Dream* offers a fascinating look at how local everyday practice is conditioned by the globalizing market system. The film opens with archival footage of life in Eastern Bloc Czechoslovakia. The first shot is a close-up of a butcher's knife chopping meat, surely reminiscent of Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*, a film whose famous shot of rotting meat conveyed oppression over the sailors who consumed it. The introduction features three distinct time periods identified through intertitles. First, under a rainy day, a despondent line stretches around the outside of a department store in 1972 (Figure 26). The shot clearly focuses on the Soviet consumer product and its ideological packaging in the store window (Figure 27). Next, the introduction identifies two more dates, first showing the unrest of the crowd in 1989 during the Czechoslovakia's independence, and later in 2002, with the crowd becoming complacent again, awaiting the opening of a new hypermarket (Figures 28 and 29).



Figure 26. A queue in 1972 in *Czech Dream*



Figure 27. Socialist storefront in *Czech Dream*



Figure 28. Protest in 1989 in *Czech Dream*



Figure 29. A store opening in *Czech Dream*

In all of the scenes, there is a focus on crowd control. In the 1989 footage, authorities are seen cracking down on protests, whereas in the 2002 shots, store managers are seen managing the lines, saying “Let in two-hundred,” and local police arrest those who are unruly, all taking place under the banner for the store that says “We Welcome You!” By juxtaposing shots of the people who lined up under socialism with shots of the crowd who appeared for the hypermarket’s opening, Klusák and Remunda create a lineage of bleakness for the Czech consumer. Just as the

people who waited in lines were dependent because of shortages, the consumers in the present day are slaves to modern forms of advertizing that entice them to show up to the market.<sup>220</sup>

It is also not surprising that one of the reactions to the fake store opening was to read the empty promise of the store as an allegory to the Czech nation's relationship with the European Union. Many news programs posed much larger questions about the Czech Republic's role within European politics, as the opening coincided with that the nation's aggressive advertising campaign to join the European Union. Just as many questioned the public financing of Klusák's and Remunda's film, which they received from a cultural grant, they also questioned the nation's spending on ad campaigns instead of directly investing in the Czech Republic's infrastructure.

The format of the hypermarket film allows its directors to take center stage. When they stand in front of the camera at the empty store site, they state that this introduction is an ad, not for the store, but for their film, which they identify as their final project for the Film Academy in Prague. They directly state their agenda for the ad campaign and their motive, saying that the film will answer the following question: "Why fool thousands of people into going to a fake hypermarket?" They do not answer the question outright, as they claim to not know the answer. They simply figure the experiment will provide some result and surmise, "we'll see," and "you'll

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<sup>220</sup> In their article "The ABC of Russian Consumer Culture" (1995), Nancy Condee and Vladimir Padunov come to similar conclusions about the new packaging of consumerism, as layers of advertising were plastered onto the Soviet tradition. They cite the example of the change from the Soviet era *avos'ka* or Berezka store bag, which was replaced by the advertisement laden plastic bag (*paketik*), which the consumer had to buy. The bags performed the dual function of holding goods, but also told you "what to buy next" (131). Condee and Padunov's analysis looks at the difference between what it means to carry these bags, as one serves as "an icon" of central planning and the other represents the new world of the commodity: "the latter celebrates the act of commodification, presenting its surface, congenial to endless recommodification, as a portable billboard, which the consumer carries at no charge to the company. In fact, the consumer pays extra for the privilege to carry it" (132).

see.” The statement identifies that the directors are intensely interested in how we transmit and receive advertisements in media.

The directors go into the project knowing their precarious position and the risks of the project, and this is reflected in their adoption of a new identity: the store manager. When they are initially being shot by a photographer, they seem uneasy in front of the camera, stating: “We are looking for a certain expression: the ability to act and look honest in front of the camera.” Finding that they do not “have the right look yet,” the directors get haircuts and get made up by cosmeticians in order to look like managers, who are deemed “respectable and trustworthy.” Just as fashion designers redress Klusák and Remunda, in adjacent shots the advertising agency repackages products such as orange juice, bananas, milk, beer, and bread under the “Czech Dream” label (Figures 30 and 31).



Figure 30. Becoming managers in *Czech Dream*      Figure 31. Product packaging in *Czech Dream*

Klusák and Remunda walk out of the store, transformed by their new suits, and are filmed in a panoramic shot that revolves around them. Mirrored similarly are the products, which revolve

on a spinning plate in front of the stationary camera. Their designer tells the directors: “Now you are a perfect, semi-finished product.”<sup>221</sup>

The transformation from filmmaker to manager, or from film to advertisement, is pretty much seamless. The concept of the hypermarket film allows the world of advertising to become woven into the fabric as an inseparable part of the film. The Czech Dream product jingle serves not just as an ad for the store, but becomes a soundtrack for the film. Likewise, the title screen of the film is the branded logo of the Czech Dream store. Commercials air in the middle of the film, forcefully breaking up and pausing the documentary-like, behind-the-scenes action to which the viewer has become accustomed. While the forms of the documentary film and the advertisement clash, at the same time they mesh perfectly together to form the directors’ message. The directors view both genres not as documenting reality, but rather as constructs of a new, and often false, image of everyday life.<sup>222</sup> The world of advertising, like film, presents the dream world of utopia, where everything can be attained for the cheapest price. Thus, the goal of the film is to construct that dream and have it crash back down to reality.

The scene of the store’s opening switches between shots of the crowd approaching from the vantage point of the store and the crowd’s point of view shot, as cameramen race toward the rainbow colored opening with the customers (Figures 32 and 33).

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<sup>221</sup> After being approached and berated by customers at the store’s grand opening, the directors unmask themselves when responding to the claim that good businessmen do not dupe their customers: “But we’re not businessmen... We’re filmmakers” (Klusák and Remunda).

<sup>222</sup> In one scene, the directors get into an argument with their advertising team, who are uneasy with slogans that make promises to shoppers that they will not come away empty-handed. One advertising agent accuses Klusák and Remunda of being dishonest, saying: “I mean if you filmmakers are used to lying to people, we don’t lie in advertising. It is surprising, but we don’t.” The director’s response is that while they will not be able to buy any material thing, they will have an experience.



Figure 32. Vantage point from the store in *Czech Dream*



Figure 33. Running with the crowd in *Czech Dream*

The setup of the store's location, far in the distance, certainly is shot symbolically, with people racing toward the Czech Dream, only to find nothing behind the banner-draped façade. The cameramen follow two different groups of people: those who walked back immediately, not even bothering to go through the opening of the Czech Dream, and those who gathered around the structure and admired the trick. Many reacted angrily, finding that the stunt was pulled only to humiliate those involved by revealing their greediness. Others, however, saw through the trick and still showed up, satisfied to have their suspicions confirmed.

The film is interested in public behavior and how it can be mediated. The store opening, advertised as a “can’t-miss opportunity,” is reminiscent of the crowds that develop in the United States and Western Europe outside stores that announce their sales ahead of time for the holidays, with people willing to wait overnight in order to be first in line. The film takes the past conditions of scarcity under socialism and compares them with the new problems that now exist for the first-world consumer. As one of the advertising agents in the film claims, “Our ads work even if the product sucks or doesn’t exist at all.” All of the products being sold in the film were commonplace, readily available elsewhere, albeit at a higher cost. The film perfectly illustrates



Barry Schwartz's findings in *The Paradox of Choice* (2004), which studied how consumers are presented with shopping challenges even as product abundance continues to grow.<sup>223</sup>

In *Czech Dream*, the business-model oriented first-world is not so much unlike its socialist predecessor. One customer concluded after realizing the opening was a prank: "I thought the era of lies was over, but it is not." *Czech Dream* makes the connection between consumerism in first- and second-world economies, not to compare the differences of practices, but rather to explore consumer awareness and complicity. The brief moment of 1989 in the film's opening is a fleeting but important scene. By showing the uprising of the crowd, the directors focus on acute moments of collective consciousness that arise in the marketplace. The directors seemingly try to recreate this political awareness by shocking their subjects out of their daily routine, which is constructed and dictated by mass advertising. The final shots of the film show all of the Czech Dream store ads taken down, replaced by posters for Lucky Strike cigarettes and MasterCard. The ads are ubiquitous and replaceable; they hold no real value beyond their manipulative power.

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<sup>223</sup> Sorokin touches on the topic of product choice and command economies in *Day of the Oprichnik*. He depicts a future Russia, where the state has retaken control over product distribution: "His Majesty's father, the late Nikolai Platonovich, had a good idea: liquidate all the foreign supermarkets and replace them with Russian kiosks. And put two types of each thing in every kiosk, so the people have a choice. Because our God-bearing people should choose from two things, not from three or thirty-three. Choosing one of two creates spiritual calm, people are imbued with certainty in the future, superfluous fuss and bother is avoided, and consequently – *everyone is satisfied*. And when a people such as ours is *satisfied*, great deeds may be accomplished" (88). ["Хороша была идея отца Государева, упокойного Николая Платоновича, по ликвидации всех иноземных супермаркетов и замены их на русские ларьки. И чтобы в каждом ларьке — по две вещи, для выбора народного. Мудро это и глубоко Ибо народ наш, богоносец, выбирать из двух должен, а не из трех и не из тридцати трех. Выбирая из двух, народ покой душевный обретает, уверенностью в завтрашнем дне напитывается, лишней суеты беспокойной избегает, а следовательно — *удовлетворяется*. А с таким народом, *удовлетворенным*, великие дела со- творить можно." (102-103; emphasis in original)]

The film in the end celebrates the ploy, even if it was controversial and angered some. The fake opening was a community-building event that gave people something they did not expect outside of the advertisements' promises. It took the everyday routine of shopping, and opened it up into a world beyond the confines of the hypermarket building. While some saw nothing beyond the façade and the opening under the rainbow as an empty promise, the building's openness can be read in the exact opposite way: it opened up to a world of possibilities, whereas the confines of the traditional shopping center have their limits. Many of the subjects in the film found solace in the fact that the ploy brought together so many people, even in dissatisfaction, because it broke up the routine of people's everyday lives, and brought them outside for a unique event. One elderly couple remarked that the cameramen should go back if they want to find disappointed people and that "we will keep walking forward."

#### **6.4 SHOPPING STRATEGY AS BOARD GAME: THE INSTITUTE OF NATIONAL REMEMBRANCE OF POLAND'S "THE QUEUE"**

"The Queue" ("Kolejka") is a venture by the Institute of National Remembrance of Poland (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej [IPN]) as part of a series of historical games created since 2009 that memorialize moments in Polish history.<sup>224</sup> On 5 February 2011 The IPN released the game in a limited number of 1,000 copies. The press release emphasized the conditions of scarcity, stating the exact release time of 11:00 AM and a warning for the consumer: "In view of the planned rise of paper prices as well as the threat of speculators, you are advised to stock up on the game now."

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<sup>224</sup> The institute has released other historical board games, such as World War Two strategy games.

Only on 5 February will the merchandise not be subject to rationing, though its quantity is limited. After the premiere, the merchandise will be sold in the above-mentioned retail trade establishment until supplies run out” (“The Queue Board Game”).<sup>225</sup> “The Queue” was so popular that later in the year IPN released an additional version of the game, titled “The Tail” (“Ogonek”), which added the possibility of playing with a sixth person.<sup>226</sup>

Everything about “The Queue’s” production and advertising displays a level of textual reflexivity, not only in that people were encouraged to queue for a game about queuing, but also because the organization induced conditions of scarcity by releasing the game in such a few number of copies. The game immediately sold out and increased levels of supply in further installments of 3,000 copies were sold out in later months. Unlike the low-quality consumer goods of Poland’s socialist period, “The Queue” game is of solid construction. The box, for example, mimics that of a packaged product, with stamped logos, a ration card, and a signature from the head of the store, the game’s author, Karol Madaj (Figure 34).

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<sup>225</sup> “Z uwagi na planowane podwyżki cen artykułów papierniczych oraz możliwe zagrożenie ze strony spekulantów radzimy już teraz zrobić zapasy gry. Tylko 5 lutego towar nie będzie reglamentowany, choć jego ilość jest ograniczona. Po premierze sprzedaż będzie prowadzona w w/w jednostce handlu detalicznego aż do wystąpienia pierwszych trudności z zaopatrzeniem” (“Gra ‘Kolejka’”).

<sup>226</sup> Despite using numerous personal contacts in Poland, it took me almost six months to procure the game, receiving a version of the original edition in its second run of production.



Figure 34. “The Queue” packaging. Photograph by author.

While the game is a humorous and nostalgic glance back to times when people waited in lines, it also has the stated goal of educating the younger generations in Poland, who did not have to endure the queue on a daily basis. According to Margaret Hofer, the board game, which was once a medium for installing Christian morality in America and Great Britain, became a valuable teaching tool for capitalist materialism. She describes how the golden age of American board games encapsulated the growth of the nation around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, directly incorporating themes of economic growth, prosperity, and urbanization.<sup>227</sup> Hofer notes how board games allowed users to act out temporarily new roles, as they become the banker,

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<sup>227</sup> Board games find their origins in cartography, and it is not surprising that they increased in popularity during major periods of industrialization and modernization. The interest in moving across the map in calculated movements, either in turns or by the role of the dice, shows a direct correlation with exploration and transportation, which sought to fix travel through organized timetables and routes.

speculator, or broker (82). This roleplay is an example of Giddens' notion of how scientific discourses, concepts such as "capital," "investment," and "markets," become seamlessly inserted into everyday life within reflexive modernity: "They could not, and did not, remain separated from the activities and events to which they are related. They have become integral to what 'modern economic life' actually is and inseparable from it" (*Consequences* 41). He cites the layperson, who cannot necessarily define these terms or understand their intricacies, but demonstrates an "implicit and practical mastery of those notions" when he makes a simple banking transaction (41). The simulation of the economic sphere in the world of gameplay brings the meanings of these transactions to greater attention, educating the user through the game environment, where risk is minimized. "The Queue," while providing a similar simulation that educates, also allows users to capitalize on local knowledge already acquired from past-lived experience. Strategies of shopping and the rules of the queue become of use again, albeit for entertainment and competitive value.

The invoking of the queue by a Polish government organization establishes an anti-communist discourse through the exploration of Eastern Bloc life. The cause of furthering democracy and capitalist ventures in the present day is performed through a virtual experience of the past. The instructions clearly identify that queuing was a condition imposed by Soviet economic organization: "This time we want to familiarize players with the effects of an experiment imposed on Poles by the communists who, backed by the Soviets, took over power in

Poland 1944. The economic system they introduced in Poland was patterned on the Soviet system” (Madaj, “Queue: Instruction” 5).<sup>228</sup>

The mission of the game is for the players to acquire all the goods on their shopping list. Players take turns drawing cards that will decide which items are on their shopping list, and use cards that allow them to change their position in line (Figures 35 and 36). The game is designed for five players, and the sixth color, black game pieces, represent speculators (Figure 37).



Figure 35. Product cards of “The Queue.”

Photograph by author.



Figure 36. Strategy cards of “The Queue.”

Photograph by author.

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<sup>228</sup> “Tym razem chcemy przybliżyć efekty eksperymentu, zafundowanego Polakom przez komunistów, którzy dzięki Sowietom zdobyli władzę w kraju w 1944 r. Wprowadzili oni w Polsce system gospodarczy wzorowany na sowieckim” (Madaj, “Kolejka: Instrukcja obsługi” 5).



Figure 37. “The Queue” gameplay. Photograph by author.

The gameplay is designed with verisimilitude in mind. For example, each round of the game represents one day, split into multiple activities, such as queuing, the delivery of products, speculating, and queue jumping. The genre of the board game features incrementality: game pieces are moved back and forth into distinct places that convey a progression to the game, much like a queue. Participants always take turns, thus waiting for others in front of them before acting. In this sense, the rules of the game are not unlike the rules that were locally instituted in actual social practice to ensure proper order.

In an article on central planning and shortage in the People's Republic of Poland from 1944 to 1989 that is included in the game's instructional booklet, economic historian Andrzej Zawistowski describes the practice of queuing in exactly this same language, as the "rules" of the "game": "Through much of the communist era, in an effort to acquire the basic means of existence for themselves and their families, Poles were forced to participate in a peculiar game whose rules were devised by the ideologically motivated authorities. Over time, they became hardened by the game and accustomed to the daily grind" (Zawistowski, "The Socialist Approach" 38).<sup>229</sup> The board game's play is of course voluntary, but the manual makes a point to warn the user repeatedly: "It is our unpleasant duty to inform you that the subject matter at hand may evoke negative emotions in sensitive individuals. Rare instance of tears of exasperation, the gnashing of teeth, as well as manifestations of gratuitous malice have been observed. The authors take no responsibility for unwarranted uses of the game" (Madaj, "Queue: Instruction" 9).<sup>230</sup> The warning thus reiterates a familiar reading that the queue is a conciliatory space that draws in its inhabitants, despite the frustrations it elicits.

Although the game seeks to recreate the experience of queuing, there is something else going on here that is in stark contrast to the defeatist attitude of the Soviet queue. The act of waiting becomes a point of departure for new experiences, a place where novelty and random

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<sup>229</sup> "Przez znakomitą część istnienia PRL Polacy zmuszeni byli do udziału w swoistej grze zaserwowanej im przez kierującą się ideologicznymi pobudkami władzę, starając się zapewnić sobie i swoim rodzinom minimum egzystencji. Zaprawieni w tej grze z czasem przystosowywali się do trudnej rzeczywistości" (Zawistowski, "O socjalistycznym podejściu" 39).

<sup>230</sup> "Z przykrością zawiadamiamy, że z uwagi na poruszany temat, u osób wrażliwych emocjonalnie gra może wywoływać negatywne emocje. Stwierdzono rzadkie przypadki łez bezsilności, zgrzytania zębami oraz objawy bezinteresownej złośliwości. Autorzy nie ponoszą odpowiedzialności za nieuzasadnione użycie gry" (Madaj, "Kolejka: Instrukcja obsługi" 9).



acts occur, recasting the time and space of the queue outside the narrow confines of the consumer-product relationship. The press release for the game emphasizes this very attitude:

For persons queuing up to purchase “The Queue,” the IPN cultural-educational instructors have prepared a free educational program, including: a documentary film “Everyone Knows Who They Are Standing Behind,” popular queue music, a lecture on the economy of the People’s Republic of Poland from the “Standing” series, a competition with valuable prizes for the most experienced queuer, as well as civic training in the rules of “The Queue” Board Game. (“The Queue Board Game”)<sup>231</sup>

The press release, of course, covers absurd, fictional activities that never took place, but their very inclusion shows a fascination with the queue that goes beyond unconscious, habitualized social practice. The event list is playful because it actually describes the contents of what is inside “The Queue” package. Inside, in addition to the board game, is included the very same documentary film. Likewise the instructional booklet includes a section with Polish queue jokes, songs, and the “lecture on the economy” by Zawistowski. The list of things customers will receive is very similar to the ploy of the *Czech Dream* advertising campaign, which promised that its customers will not go away empty-handed, only to hand out trinkets like keychains and flags at the hypermarket’s opening.

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<sup>231</sup> “Dla oczekujących w kolejce po ‘Kolejkę’ instruktorzy kulturalno-oświatowi z IPN przygotowali bezpłatny program dydaktyczno-rozrywkowy, a w nim między innymi: pokaz filmu ‘Każdy wie kto za kim stoi’, odtwarzanie popularnej muzyki kolejkowej, wykład o gospodarce PRL z cyklu: ‘Na stojąco’, konkurs z cennymi nagrodami na najbardziej doświadczonego stacza kolejkowego oraz szkolenie obywatelskie z reguł gry plaszowej ‘Kolejka’” (“Gra ‘Kolejka’”).

“The Queue” board game, like *Czech Dream*, celebrates the unexpected experiences that can be gleaned within the confines of the everyday. The press release asks, “Are you brave enough to confront the everyday life of the 1980s?” (“The Queue Board Game”).<sup>232</sup> The game is just one example of the unlimited possibilities of narrative that emanate from the drudgery of everyday reality, and become rehabilitated in artistic representations. The fantasies of opulence found in many other board games is absent in “The Queue,” but the simulation of everyday practice is proven to be just as exciting. While the “rules of the game” still correspond as the anchor point between two different spaces, that of the consumer world and its representation, the transposition into the board game genre removes the deception of *habitus*, the engrained and concealed social practices that define everyday life. Game play simulates everyday life, but divides it into distinct incremental turns where the player consciously acts out his strategy to fruition or failure.

## 6.5 CROWD CONVERGENCE REVISITED: QUEUING FLASH MOBS

On 28 February 2004 the group Flash Mob Latvia staged a flash mob appearance in the Old Town section of Riga, in which they formed a queue in the middle of Livu Square. The performance, titled “The Queue to Nowhere” (“Ochered' v nikuda”), featured a group of over fifty people and was joined by a few outsiders. The Flash Mob Latvia group had planned to stand in their line for ten minutes, but lasted for only two minutes before dispersing. Their line

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<sup>232</sup> “Czy masz odwagę zmierzyć się z codziennością lat 80?” (“Gra ‘Kolejka’”)

started and ended in the middle of the square, where there are noticeably no businesses, no products, and no servers.

Flash Mob Latvia's queue was a live public performance and they also uploaded a video of the event onto online media hosting sites such as *YouTube*. Their videos, titled by the group as "Flash mob-Films," are often intercut with a variety of media.<sup>233</sup> The title screen to "The Queue to Nowhere" features a quotation from Vladimir Bort'ko's film *Heart of a Dog (Sobach'e serdtse* [1988]) lamenting queues. Sharikov's lines "To the queue, you sons of bitches, to the queue!" frame the ensuing action.<sup>234</sup> Western film genre music, as well as James Brown's classic "I Got You" (1965) is also played over the performance. The overlaid sounds convey a mixture of emotions, from the vulgarity of *Heart of a Dog*, to the desolate atmosphere created by the music of the western film genre, to the sarcastic elation conveyed by James Brown's lyrics "I feel good!"

The phenomenon of the flash mob began in June 2003 in Manhattan, where 100 customers descended upon a Macy's department store, becoming a nuisance for sales clerks as they pretended to be a commune looking for a "love rug" (Shmuell). The acts are highly symptomatic of changing practices of communications, with more and more people communicating online, by cellular phones, and text messaging. Flash mobs are usually organized through particular online groups and rapidly mobilize people to a singular location.<sup>235</sup> Flash mobs grew rapidly in popularity over that summer across the United States, Europe, and

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<sup>233</sup> Some of their other performances splice Soviet-era media. One performance, titled "Flamingo" features the voiceover of the famous Soviet educational nature show "In the World of Animals" ("V mire zhivotnikh" [1968-present]).

<sup>234</sup> "В очередь, сукины дети, в очередь!" ("RIga [sic] – FlashMob").

<sup>235</sup> This quintessential aspect of flash mobs is particularly appropriate for a representation of queuing, which is also a spontaneously forming mass.

Asia, with mobs occupying stores and other public spaces. It is important to note that the origins of the flash mob occurred mostly in stores, subverting the authority of commercial spaces.<sup>236</sup> Flash mobs have since evolved into intricate theatrical acts, featuring choreographed dance routines that do not typically occur in everyday places. The performance space of the mob interrupts the unpredictability of everyday life by uniting people together; whereas everyone bustles about with their own business in urban areas, flash mobs suspend these individual goals for a common act.

The performances by Flash Mob Latvia resemble the earlier traditions of flash mobs that recreate scenes of everyday life, but subvert the intentions and locations of the social practices depicted. Their performance articulates a number of different meanings, but they all seek to estrange how we experience and interact in public space. In an interview, one of the group members, Vadim Chirkov, explained how flash mobs are a form of estrangement: “The main goal is to show those surrounding you, that they can view the usual but from a completely different side.”<sup>237</sup> In “The Queue to Nowhere” the act itself is not remarkable. However, because queues are not as widespread anymore, the performance reinfuses the half-dead phenomenon and it becomes a novelty. The remnant of the queue returns to the public space, and it does not matter that it occurs in an empty form that does not lead to a purchase.

Chirkov looked back on the practice of queuing in the Soviet Union both with great nostalgia and disdain:

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<sup>236</sup> The concept of the “cash mob” appeared in 2012 in the United States. It was developed to mobilize crowds online to support local businesses that are often in stiff competition with large megastores. Often groups will descend upon a local store, offering an extraordinary amount of purchases for struggling businesses. On Saturday, 24 March 2012, the first International Cash Mob day was promoted online (Palmer).

<sup>237</sup> “Главной целью было любой ценой показать окружающим, что можно смотреть на привычные вещи совсем с другой стороны” (Chirkov).

There was a purpose, there was movement, take your place in line and live. People were born in lines and died in them. And everyone stood, waiting, and hoped that their time would come and they would receive something, that there was not enough of for everyone. This is a positive side to the social life of queuing that cannot be underestimated. It is satisfying to be part of something, a living, unified organism. (Chirkov)<sup>238</sup>

He additionally identified how post-Soviet life is still organized on the principles of queuing, noting how corporations follow vertical hierarchies of structures and how current education stresses passing specific steps as the key means of achievement in life. What was more interesting, however, is that he found the remnants of the queue particularly damaging for current post-Soviet society:

The life of these half-dead structures is stamped out in the beliefs of whole classes of people, for the most part remaining in the older generation, in their inviolable valuing of life priorities, and the formations in society of the last century. This happened under the influence of various socio-economic processes occurring in the Soviet Union and in the world. The change happened very quickly. I think we all see it. But unfortunately the mentality of the majority of us is constructed, such that we are not always capable of picking up on these little changes in the

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<sup>238</sup> “Есть цель, есть движение, занимай свое место и живи. В очередях рождались, в них умирали. И каждый стоял, ждал, надеялся, что придет и его время получить нечто такое, чего хватает далеко не на всех. К тому же позитивную сторону социальной жизни в очереди нельзя недооценивать. Это же так приятно являться частью такого, живого, объединяющего организма” (Chirkov).

surrounding environment, and they continue to dictate a drawn out script of old rules, that in the present time the game has ceased to exist. (Chirkov)<sup>239</sup>

Chirkov's comments reflect the ways in which modern societies evolve, yet practices are retained that often do not align. The flash mob performances are meant to estrange the viewer, so that he realizes the inconsistencies and contradictions between the habitual mentality of people and the present realities of everyday life. After the performance, Chirkov related just how much he realized the practice of queuing was engrained in the group members: "Now I understand, that in our queue there was a deep subtext. It was already possible to feel it intuitively. So the majority of our script planning was the result of happenstance, intuition, and possibly collective unconsciousness."<sup>240</sup>

Flash Mob Latvia's "The Queue to Nowhere" is one of several queuing flash mobs documented in streaming videos online. The group 29 City FM queued in a supermarket in Arkhangel'sk in 2010, producing a long line at a checkout register ("FLASHMOB 'Ochered'"). They purposely stood only in one line, avoiding the empty adjacent registers in the store. Other queues have taken place in Aktau, Kazakhstan ("fleshmob 'Kto krainii'"), Cahul, Moldova ("Ochered' na vzveshivanie"), and in Iarolsavl', Russia. In Iarolsavl', the queue was part of a festival called "The Architecture of Movement" ("Arkhitektura dvizheniia"). The call for

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<sup>239</sup> "Жизнь этих полумертвых структур обеспечивает вера целого класса людей, в основном старшего поколения, в незыблемость ценностей и жизненных приоритетов, сформированных в обществе в прошлом веке. Это происходило под влиянием разных социально-экономических процессов, происходящих в стране и в мире. Изменения происходят очень быстро. Думаю, мы все их видим. Но к сожалению ум большинства из нас устроен так, что не всегда сразу способен уловить тонкие изменения в окружающем мире, продолжая диктовать избитые сценарии, старые правила игры, в то время как игра уже перестала существовать" (Chirkov).

<sup>240</sup> "Сейчас я понимаю, что в нашей очереди есть куда более глубокий подтекст. Возможно уже тогда мы ощущали его интуитивно. Так что по большей части выбор сценария был результатом случая, интуиции и возможно коллективного бессознательного" (Chirkov).

participants on the festival website stated that the basic goal was to entice people passing by to join the line: “At one of the entrances to the building is a line, which gradually grows and doesn’t think about solidifying. People stand for something, waiting for something. There is nothing morose or irritating about it, no one elbowing one another, but instead they are happy, communicating and smiling to one another” (“Ochered”).<sup>241</sup> The press release also reveals a new attitude towards the Soviet city that enables the citizen: “The new movement and mood of the city is in your hands!”<sup>242</sup>

These new formations all mark a drastically different mood beyond the drudgery of everyday life, recasting the practice of queuing as an upbeat cultural activity. It is not surprising that the largest lines that exist in Russia today are for cultural events. In a recent 2012 issue of *Iskusstvo kino* Ol'ga Andreeva writes that it is precisely within the Russian national tradition where queuing will remain. Many of the visible queues left are in the cultural arena, where new exhibits at national art galleries attract long lines at their openings. Daylong lines are found for religious ceremonies, most notably in November 2011, when hundreds of thousands waited to see a relic belt of the Virgin Mary at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow. She notes that queues in the post-Soviet period have moved away from the “common suffering” (“obshchee stradanie”) and have fashioned a “common voice” (“obshchii golos”) (48). This act

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<sup>241</sup> “У входа в одно из зданий стоит очередь, которая постепенно все больше разрастается и не думает сворачиваться. Люди стоят за чем-то, чего-то ждут. При этом они не угрюмы и не раздражены, не давят друг другу ноги и не толкаются локтями, им весело, они общаются и улыбаются друг другу” (“Ochered”).

<sup>242</sup> “Новое движение и настроение города – в ваших руках (“Ochered”)!”

of waiting shifts belief away from the queue as an allocating mediator and places it in the realm of a ritual with higher meaning.<sup>243</sup>

In Chapter Two I described the queue as a communal structure, in which everyone waits his own turn. These new acts transform the communal responsibility of the queue to that of a local community, one that begins to dictate its own identity and culture, very much aware of the conventions established by modernization and globalization. The performances and simulations, on which this chapter focused, are all part of a new aesthetics of community building. They echo Lash's notion of the aesthetic-expressive meaning-creating subject, whose presence in late modernity is ubiquitous. As Giddens and Lash describe, this refashioning works within the confines of the institutionalization of modernization, but creates a new space of local expression. Localness becomes constructed through common meanings and the engrained practices of the Soviet past serve as a stable bond of a community's identity. What was once a social practice that defined the subject's lack of agency, waiting becomes recast as the subject displays his choice to freely occupy space.

This notion has much more serious applications than the frivolous and playful flash mob and has been evident in political protests in Ukraine and Russia in 2011 and 2012. Following the "Occupy Wall Street" movement, protesters staged similar demonstrations. In downtown Kiev in October 2011, supporters of jailed former Prime Minister Iuliia Tymoshenko constructed a tent village on the sidewalks of Khreshchatik Street, while in Moscow in the summer of 2012,

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<sup>243</sup> Numerous articles on the event compared the act of waiting for the relic to waiting in line at the Lenin Mausoleum. For an example, see Sophia Kishkovsky's article in the 24 November 2011 edition of *The New York Times*.



citizens staged their own demonstrations at Chistye prudy.<sup>244</sup> The movement “Occupy Abai” (“Okkupai Abai”) was named after the Kazakh poet Abai Qunanbaiuli, whose statue became the meeting place for protesters against Vladimir Putin. As Russian police began to arrest those who possessed banners and white ribbons, considering their actions part of illegal unsanctioned rallies, the demonstrators changed tactics and began “city strolls” and “sit-ins” in the park (Astrasheuskaya).

All of the movements described in this chapter feature the act of mobilizing the collective body. The people taking part in these ventures are mostly a younger generation united by social media. Although the majority of the participants never fully experienced the Soviet period, they simulate a bygone era in their performative acts. From *Czech Dream*’s fake advertising campaign, IPN’s mock press releases, and to Flash Mob Latvia’s online roll call, cultural groups are organizing masses of people through public activities that restore the lost collectivity of the Soviet era. Moreover, just like the flash mob movements, the recent demonstrations camouflage their meaning within the guise of everyday practices. They become profound forms of communication that emanate out of the simple act of occupying space. All of these gatherings stand in sharp contrast to the Soviet queue, which was organized around its inhabitants’ complicity to wait for the state to provide for its wellbeing. Occupation becomes an aggressive act. It is an inhabitation that takes over the public space of the city, rewriting its ideologies and sending new messages of discontent that in the past remained within the whispers of the queue’s ranks.

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<sup>244</sup> Protesters also constructed a much larger tent village on Khreshchatik Street in 2004 during the Orange Revolution.

## 7.0 CONCLUSION: THE FRONT OF THE LINE

In his study *On Waiting*, Schweizer casts waiting as a desolate state of being: “Waiting is neither interestingly melancholy nor despairingly romantic. Between hope and resignation, boredom and desire fulfillment and futility, waiting extends across barren mental and emotional planes. Those who wander in it or through it find themselves in an exemplary existential predicament, having time without wanting it” (2). This stance elicits several questions: How is waiting endowed with value in societies and what does it say about the modern condition if waiting is often ascribed with negative value? What does it say about the acts of production and consumption, which have become so ephemeral and often virtual experiences in a globalizing world? What is the role of culture and how can it operate alongside desires of such immediacy, where attention is just as fleeting as the transactions that structure our everyday life?

In response, we seem to always return to an idea introduced by Sayeau that I detail in the third chapter: what happens when the notion of waiting is read against its modernist grain? Cultural expressions through waiting find places of stability, where distinct meaning and voices can be created, in a world where either are no longer possible. Its representational power can invent an acceptable real that Certeau desires, or construct relationships of reflexivity within modern structures that Lash champions. In this sense, narrative does what the modern project could not do. It moves freely through time and space in ways that the auspices of modern states could never actualize. Reading and writing themselves can be viewed as acts that traverse time, but often do so through deliberate moments of waiting and suspense as narratives unfold. It is

not surprising that modern-day waiting rooms often provide magazines and other reading materials as a means to pass time while waiting for appointments. Cultural production is a creative process that produces new spaces, thus filling spatial constraints such as the waiting room and temporal voids between the hectic moments of everyday life that need to be filled.

The rich and diversified cultural life that was built out of the uniformity of Soviet modernity is only scratched in the narratives explored in my study. While Churchill's *Queuetopia* was the no-place of utopia, the failure of modernity, the Soviet response to scarcity created a positive valence within the drudgery of everydayness. The communal social structures of Soviet life still have great resonance in the post-Soviet world, especially as older generations' nostalgic glances lead back to the perceived stability of the Soviet Union, when prices were low and services were almost free. This memory of everyday life precludes and ignores the details of systemic critiques, but remembers that although the quality of life was poor, central allocation ensured that if one was willing to wait, basic needs would be met. This utopia of Soviet modernity, which was always in view but never in reach, is still found by many to be preferable to the chaos and upheaval of uneven wealth distribution of Russia and the CIS today. This accepted no-place of developed socialism trumps the capitalist system that openly admits inequality and lacks the safety net to ensure for everyone's wellbeing. As I have illustrated in the previous chapter, newer generations are finding their own impetus to return to the past and to simulate second-world practices, rendering them with new cultural meaning. Curiously, what we see in all of these cultural expressions, past and present, is a celebration of the peculiarities of waiting as much as the lamentation of them.

These expressions in the present time are extensions of the sarcasm, humor, and wit that flourished during the late Soviet period. In trying to account for all of the meanings derived out

of Soviet discourses on queuing and waiting, it becomes apparent that the polysemic nature of representation had a transformative quality. The communal structure of the queue, and the subjective orientations it posits, are the site of a number of different expressions that seek to find new meaning outside of state ideology and its culture of allocation. The aspirations and dreams of second-world modernity, which evolved from the monumental construction of new Soviet spaces to its more mundane, yet more difficult, task of allocating and ordering this new world, was met by creative responses to fill in for its shortcomings. I have sought to explore the ways in which new voices and representations arose out of conditions of scarcity, thus redefining the Soviet and post-Soviet landscape. In essence, these were ways to reread the promises dictated by the modern projects of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Tangential to the topic is the question of how second-world cultural production operated amongst its constrictions. Much of scholarship on Soviet culture has been overwhelmingly concerned with how authorship was constructed vis-à-vis the state's pressure to enforce conformity and centralize meaning, but my study approaches the topic from a slightly different angle. How did cultural production find expression opposite the deficiencies and uniformity of the Soviet constructed and allocated material world? This is not just a question about how representation finds a way to articulate lack, but rather a question that asks how culture constructs a surplus of taste and meanings in societies whose allocative structures promote cultural austerity. To further explore second-world cultural production, it will be necessary to continue to filter further questions through the economic structures that shaped and influenced these artistic discourses.

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