

Afterword: Cultures of Food in the Era of Developed Socialism

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The study of consumption has been so embedded in notions of market exchange and individual choice that the concept of a socialist consumer regime can still seem strange and counter-intuitive. As Victoria de Grazia has pointed out, “ideologues of the capitalist order averred that people instinctively sought variety and pleasure” and that the “right” to acquire consumer goods was “best fulfilled by free enterprise.”¹ Consumer theorists note that this search for variety and pleasure in turn endow consumer goods with a dual function: they possess undeniable utility but they also serve to connote distinction.² A Ford and a Cadillac each transports a Chicagoan from point A to point B, but the Cadillac signals higher social status. Socialism’s rationality and egalitarianism, by contrast, ought to obviate the need for status, and utility, one might assume, should be the only purpose of socialist consumption. Yet as the burgeoning number of studies of socialist consumption attests, consumption was the goal of socialist production, and socialist states actively promoted a consumer culture of individual agency and choice. We need not ask whether a consumer regime existed in the Soviet Union, but how the distinctive economic and social realities of late socialism shaped a particular consumer regime.

¹ Victoria de Grazia, “Introduction,” *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, ed. Victoria de Grazia with Ellen Furlough (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 2.

² Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions* (New York: Macmillan, 1899); Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, trans. George Ritzer (London: Sage, 1970); Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* (New York: Basic Books, 1979).

The consumption of food offers an especially appetizing menu for the exploration of Soviet consumer culture. The use-value of foods – their calories and vitamins, their health-giving properties – are undeniable, and Soviet planners and officials obsessed mightily over the optimal mix of nutrients, flavor, and costs of a Soviet citizen’s daily intake.³ But as the essays in this book demonstrate, the procuring, preparing, and consumption of food produces social meaning even more than fuel. Food reveals and constitutes social relationships most intimately because of the sensory qualities of food, their tastes, aromas, and textures. As Melissa Caldwell has written, these qualities “evoke visceral responses that transform external, anonymous, social processes into intimate, immediate, and personal experiences.”⁴

If socialist consumption still seems a bit oxymoronic, the reality of the Soviet woman’s double-shift in the workplace and in the home is far better known and acknowledged. Taking a gendered approach to late Soviet foodways contributes new complexities to our understanding of how Soviet women negotiated and sometimes even celebrated their double burden. In my words to follow, I would like emphasize three conceptual aspects of the work represented here. The first is the question of class, of whether and how the Soviet shortage society contributed to social leveling or social stratification, and how such distinctions might have varied for men and for women. The second area of comment concerns the balance between work and leisure in the world of food, and I want to consider particularly what happens when “food service” is

³ See for example, chapter 1, “Ratsional’noe pitanie,” of the Ministry of Trade’s *Sbornik Retseptur bliud dlia pitaniia rabochikh i studentov* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo torgovoi literatury, 1956), 9-92.

⁴ Melissa L. Caldwell, “Introduction,” *Food and Everyday Life in the Post-Socialist World*, ed. Melissa L. Caldwell (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 3.

professional work. Finally, these essays help us to think about the nature of Soviet socialism as an ideology, whether to be embraced or resisted or both.

Class in the Classless Society

Two features accentuate the hypothetical egalitarianism of late Soviet society, not to mention the utopian projections contained in the 1961 Communist Party program that promised full communism by 1980. The Soviet state's dominant discourse, as Anastasia Lakhtikova and Angela Brintlinger point out in their introduction, addressed all citizens as equals. The duty of the Soviet citizen was first of all to produce, and consumption served primarily to enable better production. State prescriptive advice, whether on gender roles, work ethics, nutrition or consumption, whether through film, literature, or official directives, targeted everyone equally. Second, the deficit economy, write the editors, imposed food shortages on all. They question whether Pierre Bourdieu's model of distinction can even be applicable to a society lacking plenty. "A curious sense of 'equality' emerged from this lack of choice which felt like a lack of freedom in equal degree for everyone." (19) Olena Stiazhkina notes the universal scarcity of meat. Still, penury might affect men and women differently. As Ksenia Gusarova suggests, scarcity makes it convenient for women to diet in aid of beauty, a privilege not as applicable to men. Brintlinger's analysis of the literary treatments of cabbage – the food of poverty – notes that male and female authors encoded their ideas differently for different audiences: men used cabbage to emphasize Russian national values, women to highlight domestic family values.

These essays, however, go farther and suggest myriad ways in which food and the gendering of food signified and even produced difference along what we might label class lines. Soviet as well as western sociologists paid considerable attention to stratification in the USSR, in part due to the underlying dogma that the industrial working class was the source of all virtue. Vladimir Shlapentokh, an emigre Soviet sociologist, argued for just two classes, superiors and subordinates, a binary echoed by Gusarova, who invokes Bourdieu's concepts of dominator and dominated.⁵ In official Soviet statistics, however, by the late Soviet period, society consisted of three major social groups: the working class, the peasantry, and an intelligentsia.⁶ The subjects of almost all of the essays in this volume are the intelligentsia, women "with careers" in Lakhtikova's chapter on personal cookbooks, seekers of "humdrum middle-class normalcy" in Adrienne Jacobs's analysis, the "dominating classes" who consumed Polish beauty advice in Gusarova's study. They are political prisoners, factory managers, and Soviet officials, as observed by poets, film directors, and writers.

Factory workers, whatever the official pronouncements, occupied an inferior position by late Soviet times, especially in the eyes of the intelligentsia. In the 1956 film, *Springtime on Zarechnaia Street*, a factory worker is discouraged from pursuing a romance with a teacher, because she would never deign to go out with him. In the same film, a "good worker" is one who aspires to become an engineer, an "ordinary worker" is

⁵ Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People: Changing Values in Post-Stalin Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 217.

⁶ Mervyn Matthews, *Class and Society in Soviet Russia* (New York: Walker and Company, 1972), xv.

a gossip, a womanizer, and a drinker.⁷ A study of high school graduates in the city of Novosibirsk in 1963 revealed that careers in physics (for boys) and medical sciences (for girls) were the most highly esteemed. (Male and female students in Novosibirsk oblast preferred careers as pilots.) Mineworking, the highest ranked laboring occupation, was rated in 24th and 25th place for urban and rural boys. For girls, electrical fitters landed in 47th place, well above retail sales work in prestige.⁸ The dominated classes – the workers -- in Wędrowska’s beauty advice book do not appreciate food for pleasure, only as fuel. The consuming habits of the laboring classes are especially linked to alcohol, both in the Trifonov novella analyzed by Benjamin Sutcliffe and the drinkers discussed by Lidia Levkovitch, citing studies that “indicate that the majority of Soviet alcoholics came from the ranks of blue-collar workers.” (247)

Agricultural workers emerge scarcely at all in these studies, except as the source of Russian tradition, whether the folk wisdom represented in *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears* or the linking of cabbage to a romantic (patriarchal) peasant past by the writers William Pokhlebkin, Petr Vail’ and Aleksandr Genis. The dachniki food producers observed by Melissa Caldwell are solidly middle class.

In the 1930s the Soviet regime constructed privilege through access to food distribution networks, and the editors suggest that “social classes, formed differently from those in the free market economy, emerged specifically in relation to their proximity to the power that controls food distribution, ‘the trough.’” (19-20) Yet by the 1960s, there did exist stratification through wage differentials, and consumers could choose how

⁷ *Vesna na Zarechnaia ulitsa*, dir. Feliks Mironer and Marlen Khutsiev, Odessaika kinostudiia, 1956.

⁸ V. N. Shubkin, ed., *Trudiashchiasia molodezh’: obrazovanie, professiia, mobil’nost’* (Moscow: Nauka, 1984), 80-81.

to spend their rubles. Soviet budget studies from the period analyzed by Mervyn Matthews pegged the poverty level at 50 rubles. A monthly income of 75 rubles separated the “comfortably off” from the “highly provided for.” The technical intelligentsia in 1966 had an average salary of 150 rubles. Budget studies from 1966 calculated that the Moscow poor spent more than half their income on food – say, 25 rubles a month, while the rich allocated 40 percent of their much greater income to food, 60 rubles a month for the normative technical intelligent.⁹ Such differentials provided ample opportunity to pursue distinction and choice.

Rich or poor, it was woman’s work to convert these rubles to purchased and prepared foods, as the chapters by Jacobs and Irina Glushchenko emphasize. But income made the difference in where to shop. Leaving aside the special stores for the nomenclatura and the black market in melons and other exotic fruit, the collective farm markets had become by the 1970s accessible and legitimate sites in which to express consumer choice. If as Stiazhkina shows, only those with illicit income could afford to shop here regularly, all Soviet people might shop here from time to time. These markets also served to highlight gender differences: Stiazhkina notes that while women did most of the shopping there, men performed their masculinity by purchasing high quality “men’s foods” – meat, fish, greens, and fruit.

The Soviet middle class staked its claim to privilege not only through money and access but in using its cultural capital to define normative consumption. Potato work “shouts peasant,” as Nancy Ries has written.¹⁰ In Marlen Khutsiev’s 1965 film, *I Am*

⁹ Matthews, *Class and Society*, 90-91, 95.

¹⁰ Nancy Ries, “Potato Ontology: Surviving Postsocialism,” *Cultural Anthropology* 24, no. 2 (2009):193.

Twenty, a bowl of steaming potatoes highlights the clash of values between Moscow's golden youth and the film's earnest working-class protagonist. The young partyers have obtained the lowly potatoes from the upscale Hotel Metropol's restaurant, and they compound the irony by proposing a toast to the potatoes even as they tumble out of the bowl onto the floor. But our hero remembers the devastating experience when his family's precious potato ration coupons went missing during the war, and he refuses to join the fun.¹¹ Cabbage was also a lower class food item, its distinctive smells evocative of communal kitchen poverty, as Sutcliffe and Brintlinger note. But it could also be culturally appropriated to signify both nationalism and domesticity. Stiazhkina offers many examples of how the middle class distinguished itself through the consumption of "prestige goods" not usually available through normal channels, such as sturgeon caviar and champagne. Prestige also inhered to the full refrigerator and the laden holiday table. (This is something that carried over to the post-Soviet 1990s. I remember a hostess, an academic, proudly declaring, "There is nothing in the shops, but here we have everything.") The nomenclatura also demonstrated its status through its normative consumption: meals made fresh everyday, noon dinners with first and second courses and dessert. The choice to limit one's consumption in order to enhance one's appearance, noted by both Stiazhkina and Gusarova, constitutes yet another element of Soviet middle class distinction.

Eating in public serves as an additional marker of status. From its earliest years, note several authors, the Soviet Union sought to liberate women by getting both them and men out of the kitchen and into the network of public canteens. Dining out was meant to

¹¹ *Mne dvadtsadt' let*, dir. Marlen Khutsiev, Kinostudiia im. M. Gor'kogo, 1965.

be utilitarian, a cheap and efficient conveyer of calories.¹² By the 1960s and 1970s, however, a well-defined public catering table of ranks had emerged. At the top stood the Restaurant, with its starched tablecloths, a dazzling array of crystal and cutlery, orchestra, and vodka (mostly vodka). Glushchenko, however, notes that an evening in a restaurant was out of the reach of most consumers. Even Katia, the successful heroine of *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears*, is never shown eating in a restaurant. For Svetlana, the heroine of Raisman's *The Season to Make Wishes*, restaurants are places to conduct business, and the food is incidental (although she tries to pass off carry-out mushrooms as her own). Likewise, Stiazhkina points out how restaurants came to be sites for power-brokering and business deals, a masculine space where women were primarily decorative. Beginning in the late 1950s, officials attempted to popularize a less formal, less expensive place to eat in public, the youth café, serving only light snacks and fizzy drinks. The film *Give Me the Complaint Book* illustrates the transformation of a pompous restaurant into a lively café, replacing the classical décor with international style, and the soprano singing Russian romances with a jazz combo.¹³

At the other end of the spectrum were the execrable railway buffets and the canteens, the quality of which Glushchenko points out was “generally very low”(75). Even here, food service was stratified. A 1955 recipe book for worker and student canteens offers two tiers of menus: Category A includes a dessert course and more meat; Category B provides the same nutritive benefits with only a first and second course and

¹² See Mauricio Borrero, “Communal Dining and State Cafeterias in Moscow and Petrograd, 1917-1921,” in *Food in Russian History and Culture*, ed. Musya Glants and Joyce Toomre (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 162-176.

¹³ *Daite zhalobnuiu knigu*, dir. El'dar Riazanov, Mosfil'm, 1965; Gleb Tsipursky, *Socialist Fun: Youth, Consumption, and State-Sponsored Popular Culture in the Soviet Union, 1945-1970* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015), ch. 7.

with cheaper ingredients.¹⁴ I will return in a moment to these public dining facilities as sites of paid labor, which was after all the primary shift for Soviet men and women.

Work and Leisure

Is preparing and serving food work or leisure? Can the obligation to provide meals for one's family or friends become an opportunity for self-expression, whose reward is pleasure and self-esteem? It is clear from many of the chapters in this book that the kitchen was a female space and that cooking was women's work. When men entered the kitchen, as Glushchenko asserts, their cooking was extraordinary and performative. The daily routine fell to women. Yet as many of these authors note, making the table happen was an important way to claim one's femininity. Sutcliffe gives the example in the Trifonov novella *The Exchange* of the importance of baking one's own cake. The planners of the Soviet economy might have believed that purchasing a commercial cake at a local bakery was the best social use of time, ingredients, and resources, but only a woman who baked was a real woman. Similarly in Glushchenko's recounting of *The Season to Make Wishes*, a smart, independent woman has to pretend that restaurant food is really home-made in order to attract a traditionally minded husband.

In offering hospitality under conditions of shortage, Soviet women could demonstrate their triumph over the challenges of daily life and derive real pleasure from the effort. Lakhtikova's analysis of private cookbooks emphasizes the feelings of accomplishment and self-esteem earned by foraging for the ingredients to provide lavish holiday meals as well as the daily satisfactions of preparing fresh meals for their families.

¹⁴ USSR Ministry of Trade, *Sbornik Retseptur bliud dlia pitaniia rabochikh i studentov*.

A similar pride in triumph over adversity can be found in Ona Renner-Fahey's account of female political prisoners who defy prison rules to preserve the ritual of tea-drinking; if they could maintain their table, they retained their humanity. The closing scene of Kira Muratova's film *Brief Encounters* depicts this hospitality as a gift from one female lover in a triangle to the other. Having tracked down her geologist Romeo to the home that turns out to belong to a woman who has loved him longer, the newcomer silently but lovingly sets a table for two, and then she departs.¹⁵ Caldwell notes how the work (or pleasure) of food preparation extends to the emotional work of hospitality: the sense of purpose and accomplishment comes not only from making the table happen but in sharing intimacies and exchanging advice.

Caldwell's chapter and her other work on dacha culture perfectly encapsulate the blurring of lines between work and hobby when it comes to food. The dacha is a site of intense, gendered labor – digging, weeding, cooking, construction, and renovation. In her example of mushrooms, men are the expert gatherers, and women process and prepare. Women cook indoors, and men grill outside. Accomplishing these tasks is necessary for the dacha to survive, but pride in the work provides pleasure as well as sustenance. The social labor carried out primarily by women – hospitality and caretaking – also offers both utility and pleasure. Yet she also notes the changing meanings of work and leisure, with the older generation unable to see any difference, and the younger generation finding identity in working less and relaxing more.

The work of procuring food products was not restricted to the dacha, of course. Nancy Ries identified the “shopping tale” as a standard litany in perestroika Moscow. “I

¹⁵ *Korotkie vstrechi*, dir. Kira Muratova, Odesskaia kinostudiia, 1967.

often heard shopping portrayed as a feat of perspicacity, patience, cunning, connection, and endurance, or characterized as a sport.”¹⁶ I recall a male friend’s own tale in 1989 of his heroic quest for a Hungarian chicken (which a female friend had agreed to prepare for his fortieth birthday party), not so different, though, from the recounting of a similar masculine exploit in obtaining *farsh* in 1974. Shopping was hard work throughout the entire Soviet period, no doubt, and it had not become easier with economic growth. Stiazhkina’s chapter provides the fullest analysis of gendered shopping work. Men excel at procuring privileged food products, whether through black market earnings, official business trips, or unofficial connections. As we have already seen, men had their shopping specialties: meat, fish, vegetables, and fruit in the collective farm markets. The four alcoholics in the “Gray Mouse” story analyzed by Levkovitch perform their heroic shopping in pursuit of more alcohol. Glushchenko describes the successful female manager who will terminate a business meeting in an instant if caviar is to be had, and she uses the company car to dash from one food store to another. Lakhtikova lists procuring food for the table as one of the elements of Soviet superwomanhood. Even children did shopping work: the girls queuing for cabbage in Lyudmila Ulitskaya’s “Cabbage Miracle.”

Curiously, the experiences of Soviet people who earned their livelihoods in the food sector receive much less attention. Where are the waiters and cooks in canteens, snack bars, and restaurants, the sales clerks in food stores, or the sellers of ice cream and hot chebureki on Soviet street corners? State trade officials complained in 1965 to the Communist Party Central Committee of the negative stereotyping of these occupations in

¹⁶ Nancy Ries, *Russian Talk: Culture and Conversation during Perestroika* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 59.

the press, theater, film, and literature, who portrayed them all as swindlers and thieves. It demanded the Committee instruct the cultural ministries to begin to represent these “builders of communism” in a more heroic light.¹⁷ My survey of *Krokodil*’ images in the 1960s reveals a gendered pattern of dishonesty: overcharging is invariably carried out by a corpulent man in a white smock and cap, pressing his thumb on the scale to record a higher weight for the sausage or fruit being measured. In one image, the weight itself takes the form of the country cottage the swindler will buy with his ill-gotten gain.¹⁸

Sociologists also registered the popular disdain for these service occupations. A large measure of their unpopularity lay in the low wages for such unskilled work as cooking and waiting on tables, but Soviet service work in general suffered from a value system predicated on the production of goods, not their distribution.¹⁹ In the 1963 Novosibirsk study of young people’s occupational preferences mentioned above, jobs in the food service sector ranked among the least desirable for both boys and girls. Boys ranked work in public catering as 2.55 on a scale from 1 to 10, superior only to retail sales, bookkeeping, office work, and municipal services. Girls valued public catering work slightly higher than boys, 3.06, but still preferable only to clerical work,

¹⁷ Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomii, f. 195 (State Committee of the USSR Council of Ministers on Trade), op. 1, d. 171 (dokladnye zapiski), ““O nepravil’nom osveshchenii obraza rabotnikov sovetskoi torgovli v pechati, literature i iskusstve,” ll. 112-118.

¹⁸ *Krokodil*’, no. 5 (20 February 1965): 6; no. 26 (20 September 1957): 15; no. 8 (20 March 1961): 10; no. 13 (10 May 1963): 15; no. 15 (30 May 1961): 14; no. 9 (March 1967): 1; no. 28 (October 1968): 15. In this last one, the canny male shopper places his own thumb on the other side of the scale to even the score.

¹⁹ See, e.g., Liubov’ Iunina, “Tak li strashny chaevy?...”, *Literaturnaia gazeta*, no. 7, 12 February 1969: 10-11.

bookkeeping, municipal services, woodwork, blacksmithing, and housepainting. Being a pilot, by contrast, was rated 7.97 for boys and 8.17 for girls.²⁰

The trade journal of the public catering sector, *Obshchestvennoe pitanie*, was well aware of these attitudes and devoted many articles to the problem of recruiting and training cadres, to the provision of “cultured service.”²¹ Some of these featured the many good people in the food industry who loved their work and formed collegial collectives, but others acknowledged that young people who pursued a career in cooking received little training and less encouragement. One Tania from Kolomna detailed her miserable experiences as a junior cook in a local restaurant, amidst drunk and boisterous customers, receiving no training and no possibilities to study. After a year and a half she followed her many classmates who had signed up to become cooks but who left the profession; she found a factory job that provided training, cultural and sporting opportunities, and an enthusiastic peer group of young people. Still others acknowledged the widespread belief that only worthless or dishonest people entered the service professions.²² Contributors emphasizing the pride they found in their work – whether skilled waitering or creative culinary mastery – tended to be male. For young women, food service was an entry level position, demanding no training, skills, or aptitude, and the resulting revolving door out of the profession reinforced the public’s negative opinions of it. But perhaps the linkage between the caring and nurturing work of service, the “natural” realm of women, would always code these professions as less prestigious than the manly work of making things or giving orders.

²⁰ V. N. Shubkin, *Sotsiologicheskie opyty* (Moscow: Mysl’, 1970), 280-287.

²¹ E.g. *Obshchestvennoi pitanie (OP)* no. 2, 1965: 12-15; no. 2, 1968: 9-11. On cultured service, no. 9, 1969: 34-36; no. 6, 1970: 2-4.

²² *OP*, no. 9, 1968: 10-15; no. 1, 1969: 11-12.

The 1961 short film *Enjoy Your Meal* conveys another example of the gendered experience of food service. Set in a modern café (signified by an espresso machine on the counter), the waitresses are young, blond, and indifferent to their customers. A party of men are sitting at one table, publicly drinking fruit juice but secretly toasting under the table with a hidden cache of vodka. Of the items on the menu, only borsch is available, and a waitress resents even having to serve this. At the counter, a barmaid uses a pie server as a mirror for applying lipstick. The waitress admits to her complaining male client she would rather have no customers at all, but she has to fulfill her plan. At the end of his meal, the man pays his bill and then breaking into song and dance, says he will show the staff how to properly serve their customers. He shines the wine glasses, makes sure the flowers are fresh, coaxes the kitchen to prepare ragu, salad, and cutlets, which are presented with a flourish. The moral: anybody, whatever their trade, should be treated with care, but notably it is the man who instructs and the women who require tutelage.²³

Food, Gender, and Socialist Ideology

In exploring the meanings of food and gender in late Soviet socialism, do these essays confirm any such thing as a “socialist ideology”? Or had the rote performative function of Soviet discourse identified by Aleksei Yurchak become so empty that the only particularity of “late socialism” was the shortage economy, and nothing else? The distinctiveness of the Soviet experience emerges both in the ways that this gendered

²³ *Priatnogo appetita*, dir. V. Semakov, Mosfil'm, 1961; part of a five-part series *Sovershenno ser'ezno. Komediiinyi al'manakh No. 1*.

approach to food studies reinforces an overarching ideology, and also in the ways that food practices signified a rejection of the socialist project.

Many of the essays explore the range of attributes that have been defined as “socialist modern.” Some of these attributes include industrialization, social mobilization, bureaucratism, surveillance, and discipline.²⁴ Industrialism in particular would prove the superiority of the socialist system, providing housewives with labor saving devices like food processors, and mass-produced convenience foods canned, concentrated, and frozen, as illustrated in Katia’s shopping trip in *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears*. But Katia only becomes a real woman, as Jacobs notes, when she gives up her convenience foods and cooks again from scratch. Socialist modernity also relies on science and rationality; thus the good housewife is advised to be a scientist and a physician as part of her domestic duties, as both Jacobs and Glushchenko point out. Her mastery of beauty secrets also derives from her scientific and not traditional approach to nutrition.

Socialism also endorsed internationalism over nationalism. Officially, Soviet cookbooks and magazines promoted the multinational contributions to Soviet cuisine, as I have written elsewhere.²⁵ Reflecting this value, Vail’ and Genis’s homage to Soviet cuisine cited by Brintlinger, *Russkaia kukhnia v izgnanii*, embraces the culinary variety from the Soviet Union’s many peoples. Cabbage, seen by many as quintessentially Russian, was even celebrated by the nationalist food writer Pokhlebkin as a foreign

²⁴ For one consideration of the elements of the concept, see Katherine Pence and Paul Betts, “Introduction,” *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics*, ed. Katherine Pence and Paul Betts (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 1-34, esp. 10-11.

²⁵ Diane P. Koenker, “The Taste of Others: Soviet Adventures in Cosmopolitan Cuisines,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, forthcoming Spring 2018.

import. The ubiquitous Olivier salad earned much of its cachet from its foreign origins, writes Anna Kushkova, prompting Vail' and Genis to claim, "in our homeland, the idea of internationalism was implemented only in the culinary sphere."²⁶

Among the most distinctive "alternate modernities" offered by socialism was its self-organized collectivism, illustrated most palpably in Lakhtikova's discussion of the ways in which women fostered *obshchenie* at work through shared meals and shared recipes. The kind of networking she describes was both a response to the inefficiencies of the Soviet economy but also a social behavior congruent with socialist values of self-actualization and communalism. Similarly one can see evidence of this collectivism in the community responses to the town alcoholics in Levkovitch's chapter: "small conflicts can be handled by the community as long as everyone maintains a shared understanding of boundaries." (259) By contrast, Vadim Glebov, Trifonov's failed Soviet man discussed by Sutcliffe, is unable to find community in food rituals.

A final element of socialist ideology illustrated in these chapters is more ambiguous: the choice between asceticism and abundance. The lessons imparted by the Trifonov novella suggest that materialism – represented by the napoleon pastry consumed by Professor Ganchuk but also by the evil Glebov's coveting of Ganchuk's material pleasures – was antithetical to socialism. Late socialism had produced a culture "where consumption becomes a goal that perpetuates a craving invidious to self and others." (136) On the other hand, the cornucopia of abundance had always played a central role in Soviet images of the good life, whether the groaning tables depicted in the 1949 film

²⁶ Petr Vail' and Aleksandr Genis, *Russkaia kukhnia v izgnanii*, 3d ed. (Moscow: Nezavisimaia gazeta, 2001), 55, cited in Anna Kushkova, "At the Center of the Table: The Rise and Fall of the Olivier Salad," *Russian Studies in History*, vol. 50, no. 1 (Summer 2011): 54.

Cossacks of the Kuban or the stuffed refrigerator depicted in the publication *Tovarnyi slovar'*.²⁷ Yet Gusarova and Renner-Fahey emphasize the ways in which “elective asceticism” is turned into a virtue, as a sign of distinction for the dominating classes, and resistance for political dissidents. Is this a return to the self-restraint of the early socialist years or a rejection of the appeal of plenty?

These essays also suggest a scenario in which late Soviet society is modern but not socialist. The home offered an escape from the official project, Jacobs writes: “Real happiness could be found instead in personal relationships and the home, which became a refuge from the gray monotony of workaday life and the disappointments of attempting take part in a rapidly ossifying political climate.” (69) Similarly, life at the dacha offered a kind of timelessness focused on family and friends, outside of regime requirements. Amelia Glaser also argues that writers like Nonna Slepakova increasingly sought the domestic in order to escape stultifying Marxist rhetoric. Rejecting the path to the radiant future, writers used food to emphasize cyclical tradition.

The late Soviet embrace of traditional recipes and home-cooked meals can be interpreted as direct resistance to the socialist idea of efficiency, speed, and science. The goal of the public catering industry was to get factory workers in and out of their canteens in fifteen minutes in order to optimize space and reduce queues. But what kind of meal was that, even it included cabbage soup? The kind of slow cooking that Pokhlebkin

²⁷ *Kubanskii kazaki*, dir. Ivan Pyr'ev, Mosfil'm, 1949; Susan E. Reid, “This Is Tomorrow! Becoming a Consumer in the Soviet Sixties,” in *The Socialist Sixties: Crossing Borders in the Second World*, ed. Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P. Koenker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 36, and Serguei Alex Oushakine, “Against the Cult of Things!: On Soviet Productivism, Storage Economy, and Commodities with No Destination,” *Russian Review*, vol. 73, no. 2 (April 2014): 198-236.

called for was “as much a gesture of anti-Soviet (or anti-official) sentiment as it was a promotion of deep-rooted Russian culture,» suggest Brintlinger (335) and Jacobs. The practitioners of the shadow economy used access to black market foodstuffs that “evolved not only into symbolic freedom from the authorities, but also more generally into relative personal freedom, “ writes Stiazhkina (195). Resistance emerges most sharply of all in the practices and memories of political prisoners, maintaining their gardens, refusing prison food, recalling only their own daily food practices and (unlike male Gulag witnesses) not those of the camp system.

We might also see the cultivation of a socialist feminine mystique that centers in the kitchen and the home as another form of resistance or rejection of socialist values. To the regime’s official and never-realized “liberation” of women and the erasure of differences between the sexes, the women described in these pages instead asserted what some label a neo-traditionalist “philosophy of the quotidian,” to cite Glaser (383).

Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears serves as a prime example of this feminine mystique for several of our authors: an upwardly mobile, self-made woman executive cannot have it all until she lands herself a man who will be her lord and master. Only cultivating her feminine side and submitting to a man will bring Katia true happiness. The popularity of Zofia Wędrawska’s beauty advice reflected this desire as well. By the end of the Soviet era, writes Glushchenko, “it became acceptable to express discontent with the kind of work that interferes with a woman’s ability to care for her husband and home and takes away her femininity and her right to call herself a member of the ‘weaker sex’” (96).

Let me conclude with my original question: how did the distinctive economic and social realities of late socialism shape a particular consumer regime? The reality of scarcity dominates the story of Soviet consumerism, which meant that Soviet consumers had to make a virtue of making do. And within the sharply divided gender system, the primary food preparers – women – gained status by becoming experts at making do. They did so through applying the scientific knowledge and familiarity with foreign languages, foods, and cultures that late Soviet culture developed and encouraged. They also used Soviet social capital to enable their culinary successes: networks, collectives, friendships, and family were all essential to the art of the Soviet kitchen. The thought leaders in this process were the large numbers of Soviet people who came to be defined as the Soviet middle class, the intelligentsia, but they did not hoard their knowledge. Instead – through the cookbooks and advice columns they wrote as well as read – they propagated this art of coping as a skill that could be acquired by women and men of every social stratum. And as perhaps inevitable in an economy based on Marxist principles, it was the material that possessed the most value. This consumer regime valued things above all – whether mushrooms, chickens, or cabbage. Paradoxically, the feminine role of serving -- providing, preparing and hosting -- earned respect within the domestic sphere, but not in the social world of the Soviet market.