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Directed Desires: *Kul'turnost'* and Consumption

Catriona Kelly and Vadim Volkov

As was clear in our account of late imperial consumer culture, Russian intellectuals have a long and sturdy tradition of contempt for what is understood as commercialism. The Bolsheviks, who as Marxists recognized capitalism as a historically logical and unavoidable stage in the country's evolution, at the same time fully shared the intelligentsia's contempt for trade as a degrading and immoral activity. The writings of Lenin and other major Bolshevik thinkers abound in splenetic denunciations of *meshchane* (petits bourgeois) and *lavochniki* (small shopkeepers), terms used indiscriminately to brand those engaging in commercial activities, and their supposedly self-serving and philistine mentality.[126] Some utopian thinkers associated with Bolshevism dreamed that the future would belong to communal forms of living that would leave no place for market economics. The essentials of life—housing, lighting, heating, food, clothing—would be provided without the need for monetary systems of exchange. Living in state-run communes equipped with canteens, nurseries, and washing facilities, dressed in rational workwear, citizens of the future would have no need of shops, markets, or traders of any kind. The consumer would disappear along with the capitalist; producers and users of goods would be engaged in perfectly rational relations based on the supply of immediate and genuine needs.

It follows that the onset of NEP, whose effects were most far-reaching in the consumption sector, rather than the production sector, was widely seen by Russian observers, and not only by Bolshevik supporters, as a disgraceful reversal of revolutionary ideals. The poet Aleksandr Blok, for example, was reduced to extreme distress by hearing once more the 'crawling noises of the foulest vulgarity, repulsive foxtrots, pseudo-gypsy music', that he thought 'had disappeared from our life long ago'.[127] Blok was one of many observers to see the NEP period, with its proliferation of street-traders, beggars, balladeers, and NEP-men (entrepreneurs grown rich on the profits of trade) as treachery to the Revolution; the sense of betrayal in him and others was enhanced by the fact that the corralled capitalism of NEP was so conspicuously successful. The most glamorous and elegant shops in major cities remained in private hands until economic centralization began again in the late 1920s, and privately made films and other entertainments were in wide circulation during NEP. The Soviet state attempted to compete with private enterprise by encouraging co-operative ventures, by launching a vociferous agitprop campaign to preach the virtues of state-manufactured goods, and by sponsoring commercial or semi-commercial cultural

objects—films such as Perestiani's *The Little Red Devils* (*Krasnye d'iavoliata*, 1923), Ermler and Ioganson's *Kat'ka the Reinette Apple Seller* (1926), and Eggert's *The Bear's Wedding* (*Medvezh'ia svad'ba*, 1926) and popular fiction, such as the 'Red Pinkerton' detective novels. However, such ventures had only limited success. Many Soviet citizens continued to watch foreign films, just as they continued to buy foreign and privately made goods and to patronize private doctors, and Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks were infinitely better known than their Soviet competitors, though films such as those mentioned above attracted decent audiences without such 'star actors' as draws.[128]

The high standing of the products of private enterprise, if not of entrepreneurs (NEP-men were universally detested) with Soviet consumers tempered the assault on commercialism that began with the First Five-Year Plan. It was one thing to clear the flea markets, such as the notorious Sukharevka in Moscow, a cornucopia of stolen, defective, and insanitary wares, in order to make room for more 'dignified' public spaces, and to nationalize private firms and shops. It was quite another to put an end to trade altogether. As the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* succinctly stated in 1975, 'the persistence of goods and money relations under socialism makes the preservation of the market inevitable'.[129] Even after NEP had ended, the *rapprochement* with capitalism continued to have its effects on the way that the state organized the commercial sector. As late as 1940, state-owned shops were responsible for only 66.8 per cent of retail transactions; co-operative ventures made up 24.5 per cent and collective farm markets 8.7 per cent.[130] Certainly, the activities of non-state ventures were rigidly controlled, making many co-operatives (such as village shops) indistinguishable in all but name from state enterprises. But the recognition of non-state participation in retailing was ideologically significant, especially when set against the dissolution of co-operatives in the production sector (such as building co-operatives) during the late 1930s.

What was more, the institutions of Soviet retailing directly aped capitalist institutions, rather than offering new-world alternatives. The Upper Trade Rows, nationalized in 1921 as the flagship GUM (State Department Store) continued to function like a bazaar, with rows of separate stalls selling state goods in the manner that private ones had been sold before the Revolution. And Muir and Merrilies, nationalized as TsUM (the Central Department Store), became the pattern for new Soviet department stores, a concerted programme for building which was launched in 1933. Like their capitalist equivalents, Soviet department stores were grandiose structures, with plate-glass display windows, solid masonry, and architectural flourishes, positioned at the cynosures of squares or main streets. The intention was that they should make shopping a pleasurable experience: studios for dress and suit fittings, cafeterias, and goods ordering points (*otdely zakazov*) were all provided. Admittedly, what was available in the stores often did not live up to the elegant surroundings: many Soviet-made goods remained of low quality, and shortages were persistent (rationing systems were in operation between 1930 and 1936, and again between 1941 and 1947). But the intention was that the appearance of Soviet shops, like the advertisements carried in Soviet periodicals, such as *Ogonek*, for watches, perfumes, and later cars and ice cream, should generate a feeling of security and plenty. In time,

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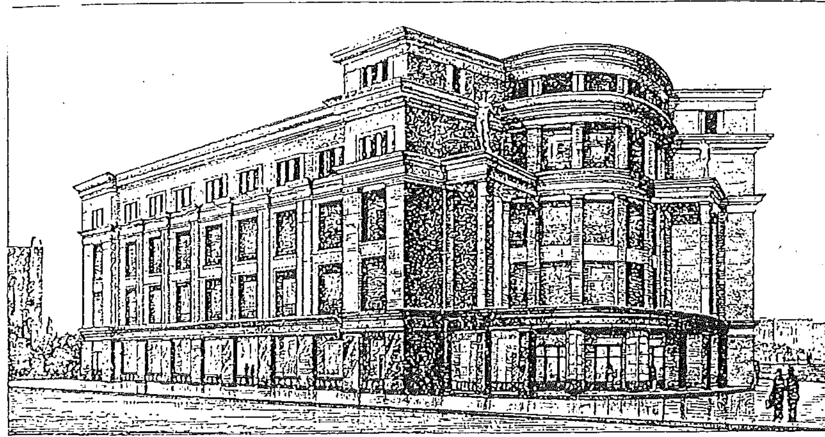

Design for a department store in the model city of Stalingrad, 1936.
The building is far closer to pre-Revolutionary commercial buildings such as that for Muir and Merrilies (see illustration 4) than to constructivist projects, though the opulence of the decoration (complete with pinnacles and caryatids) exceeds that of the Muir and Merrilies building by quite some way. Such *univermagi*, located at the cynosures of main streets, emphasized the growing importance of consumer goods in Soviet society, and promised a 'bright future' of commercial prosperity, even if the goods themselves remained poor-quality and subject to shortages in the meantime. (Reproduced from *BSE*, 1st edn., *Univermag*.)

Soviet citizens were supposed to think (and often did think, according to much of the memoir literature), there would be goods worthy of the shops that had been built to hold them. The new glamour was also propagandized by some Soviet films of the 1930s and 1940s, such as Aleksandrov's massively popular *Circus*, which aped the production values of Hollywood: in this case, a properly socially conscious subject (the emigration of an American circus star to Russia with her small mixed-race son to escape American racism) was turned into a glittering vehicle for Liubov' Orlova, the 'Soviet Greta Garbo'.

Consumption as a Way to Culture: *Kul'turnost'* and the Creation of a New Middle Class

The evolution of Soviet commercial culture, then, was as much to do with the manipulation of desires as with their satisfaction. In order to understand this process, it is important to look more closely at the other side of industrialization—not at the social problems caused by the construction of a new proletariat, but at the rapid growth of a new administrative and managerial hierarchy, made up of Party officials, technocrats, doctors, official writers, artists, and artistic administrators. The enormous programmes of educational opportunity set in motion

during the 1920s had created a pool of literate and ambitious Party members who had been recruited from below, educated in colleges and high schools, promoted to command positions in the economy or cultural and social spheres, and granted vast material benefits and privileges. The 1930s were characterized by sudden reshufflings in the top leadership, purges of the old cadres, and consequent spectacular promotions of the new proletarian-peasant intelligentsia. Many members of the new elite were workers or peasants by origin, but upper-middle class in terms of their newly acquired place in the social hierarchy and the material benefits available to them. The contrast between these two formal attributes had to be resolved in practice—without questioning the basic ideological tenets of the 'worker-peasant's socialist state'.

When, in 1935, the right to a prosperous life (*zazhitochnaia zhizn'*) was officially sanctioned, Soviet existence was linked to new, higher standards of individual consumption. While, in reality, material well-being and civilized life were mainly accessible to the new administrative elite, the ideology of *kul'turnost'* stressed that the possibility of a prosperous and cultured life was available to everyone in exchange for efficient work. As Sheila Fitzpatrick puts it: 'One of the great advantages of the concept of *kul'turnost'*, in a post-revolutionary society burdened by the hangovers of revolutionary puritanism, was that it offered a way of legitimizing what had once been thought of as "bourgeois" concerns about possessions and status: one treated them as an aspect of *kul'tura*.'[131] The policies of *kul'turnost'* met at least two complementary objectives, pragmatic and ideological: to discipline the new masses by shaping everyday behaviour in accordance with uniform social, 'cultured' norms, and to integrate the values of the lower strata with those of the elite. In what follows it is the pragmatic dimension that will principally concern us.

Kul'turnost' was never a clearly defined concept, and no Party authority gave coherent instructions on how to become cultured. Concrete applications of the term, scattered across the pages of official and popular texts and periodicals between 1935 and 1938 as they sought to answer the question 'what should one do to become cultured?', do not conform to a single pattern. Rather, they point to a complex of practices aimed at transforming a number of external and internal features of the individual. If we put them together, we can arrive at a model of the cultured person (*kul'turnyi chelovek*). In itself this model is nothing new; many of the hints on behaviour could have been taken from any etiquette manual going back to Erasmus's famous *De civilitate morum puerilium* (1530). The campaign for *kul'turnost'* represented a Soviet variation of the process described in Norbert Elias's classic analysis, *The Civilizing Process*, which described the evolution of a concept of the individual needed in a modern society. Externally, this individual would conform to normative patterns of behaviour; internally, he would be committed to the values required by the state. What is unique is the way that this model functioned in the particular social conditions of Soviet culture.

The simplest and least demanding aspect of *kul'turnost'*, and the first to be associated with the concept, in 1933–4, was dress. The once popular military uniforms and their derivatives, such as leather jackets, manifestations of a style

engendered by a combination of scarcity and early Bolshevik 'revolutionary' values, gave way to civilian clothes. The ascetic ideal was dropped as official propaganda endorsed smart clothes, clean shaving for men, the use of perfumes and make-up for women.[132] By 1937, a young male worker could dream of a 'Boston' suit, yellow shoes, and nice shirts, while a young *udarnitsa* (female shock-worker) from the Kirov plant in Leningrad might plan to spend her salary on a *crêpe de Chine* dress, beige shoes, an 'Oxford' suit, and a nice winter coat.[133] In January 1936, the new trend was supported by the opening of the first Soviet House of Fashions in Moscow and the publication for the Soviet market of a number of French fashion magazines, *Saison Parisienne* (*Parisian Season*), *Grande Revue des Modes* (*Grand Review of Fashions*), and *Votre Goût* (*Your Taste*), as well as their Soviet equivalents, *Zhurnal doma mod* (*The Journal of the House of Fashions*), *Mody oseni* (*The Fashions of Autumn*), and *Vesna 1936* (*Spring of 1936*).[134]

Care for one's appearance came to include other aspects of the public self. At the beginning of 1936, the press claimed that the Soviet Union had surpassed France in the gross production of perfumes, and had moved up to third place in the world after the USA and Britain. Towards the end of 1936, the Institute of Cosmetics and Hygiene was opened in Moscow, its ostensible purpose 'to satisfy the great interest of the population in the hygiene of facial and bodily skin'.[135] Regular use of perfumes and facial massage was perhaps not quite the working-class pattern. Nonetheless, there was no ideological problem with advertising these and other 'cultural skills', as long as they remained part of the ideologically positive notion of *kul'turnost'*.

Concern with appearance at a superficial level was followed by the need to keep the body clean and to wear fresh underwear. 'Cleanliness and tidiness are rightly considered attributes of *kul'turnost'*. A person cannot be referred to as cultured if he does not keep his body clean.'[136] As more attention was paid to bodily hygiene, practices underwent gradual modification. The traditional public bathhouse with large communal washing-rooms gradually evolved into a more complex washing space, partitioned and equipped with individual showers. In official language this tendency, which also involved installation of 'individual bath-shower complexes' in new apartment blocks, was referred to as 'the substitution of individual bath-shower washing for the communal bath'.[137]

Bodily hygiene was part of a wider practical framework of personal care. The latter also required 'equipment', such as bedlinen, underwear, and handkerchiefs. A study of young Leningrad workers conducted between 1934 and 1936 took the use of bedsheets and underwear as the main indicator of *kul'turnost'*. It found that all the workers surveyed had, in 1936, at least one set of bedlinen; 5 per cent of respondents had two, 38 per cent three or four, and 57 per cent five or more sets. This, the study claimed, indicated a steady growth of *kul'turnost'* in comparison with 1934, when 2 per cent of the workers used no bedlinen, 17 per cent had only one set, 34 per cent two sets, and 47 per cent three to four sets. A similar tendency was discovered in possession and use of underwear.[138]

It was no accident that the growing attention to personal hygiene coincided with the campaign for labour efficiency, the Stakhanovite movement, which reached its peak in 1936. Cleanliness testified to self-discipline and efficient

organization of one's activities. *Kul'turnost'* in private life (*v bytu*) corresponded to efficiency and discipline at the workplace. 'Strict discipline, elimination of sloppiness [*raspushchennost'*]' characterized the true Stakhanovite, who 'must be the model of cleanliness, tidiness, and culturedness at work and in private life'.[139] The connection between personal hygiene and the culture of production (*kul'tura proizvodstva*) was central to press discussion of *kul'turnost'* in April 1936. As *kul'turnost'* was persistently associated with individual achievement, personal dignity, and pride, it was, at the same time, integrated into the system of industrial labour as one of the major conditions of its efficiency: 'The white collar and the clean shirt are the necessary working instruments providing for the fulfilment of production plans and the quality of products.'[140] Georgii Ordzhonikidze, the Minister for Heavy Industry, underscored the need to look tidy and to shave regularly. Thereafter, a number of enterprises issued orders compelling all engineers and managers to make sure that they were clean-shaven and their hair was appropriately styled. Some factories were specially provided with mirrors so that the personnel could monitor their appearance. In the last of a series of articles on the topic, *Pravda* stressed that the discussion of *kul'turnost'* was not a passing campaign, but the beginning of 'a long, systematic effort, in the sphere of cultural self-education, to inculcate cultural skills in the widest possible layers of the working population. The struggle for culture and cleanliness must embrace all spheres of our life.'[141]

Objects and Symbols of Private Life

The privatization of life was a long and complex process which conditioned the formation of the modern individual and society in Western Europe.[142] It implied a rearrangement of almost all the existing elements of everyday life and the introduction of new ones. Similar tendencies were present in the pre- and post-war Soviet Union.

The idea of mobilizing the wives of top managers and engineers in order to introduce workers to the basic skills of *kul'turnost'* was born, so the legend says, in the head of Ordzhonikidze in 1934 when he visited a Ural factory and saw, in the yard, a flower-bed, cultivated by a manager's wife (Surovtseva, later one of the leaders of the movement). There followed an All-Union Meeting of Wives of Industrialists and Engineering-Technical Personnel of Heavy Industry in May 1936 and a number of similar meetings in other branches of industry, the Red Army, and the communal services. This started a movement for the all-out civilization of everyday life. The journal *Obshchestvennitsa* became the printed organ of the movement, and the women involved were further referred to as *obshchestvennitsy*. No straightforward translation of the word is possible; it derives from the term *obshchestvennost'* (literally, 'socialness'), which came to signify the public as an active social force (see Prologue). In this particular case, the name *obshchestvennitsy* attached to the wives of members of the administrative-professional stratum (engineers, factory directors, etc.) who engaged in voluntary social work or agitation.

The *obshchestvennitsy* set out to reform the everyday life of workers along the lines of *kul'turnost'*. Initially, their work had nothing to do with propagandization of high ideas or ideals. Their fundamental principle was straightforward: 'a cultured environment raises the culturedness of those who live in it'; 'environment compels and edifies'.[143] 'Environment' here means the things proximate to one's daily existence: the arrangement of space, the structure of 'things at hand' (the term used, *obikhód*, can also mean 'equipment'), and elementary self-care techniques, such as hygiene routines and diet. It was these aspects of daily life that the *obshchestvennitsy* attempted to reform.

Workers' barracks, which accommodated up to several hundred workers with their families, all in one space, were one especial focus of criticism: they were seen as repositories of deviance, violence, filth, offensive smells, and coarse speech, problems to which the state had become more sensitive as a source of 'unculturedness'. Complaints that workers' domestic life and time outside sites of production were beyond the field of vision of *obshchestvennost'* had been heard before. But little was done to address this until the imperative of culturedness grew stronger.

On the pages of their journal the *obshchestvennitsy* shared their experience in erecting partitions and dividing the space of barracks into smaller living areas. (Where it was impossible to build new workers' hostels, changes in the living space were achieved through elementary partitioning of this kind.) There were numerous reports about how the bosses' wives planned and directed the rebuilding of barracks. New standards were implemented for 'these large, filthy halls':

> Each room must accommodate not more than four people. One bed must not touch another, even with its head; common bunks are unacceptable. . . . There must be a free passage between the beds not less than 0.35 m. wide, and a common passage at least 1.5 m. wide along the beds. . . . From which it follows that the norm for each bed must be not less than 4 square metres.[144]

Such norms were introduced with a twofold motivation: improving physical hygiene and ensuring public order. They also made living space more private. Social activities were now separated from physical ones. There were special and separate rooms for shared leisure and cultural activities; the occupants of the barracks were prohibited to sit or to eat on their beds. Special isolated 'hygiene rooms' were constructed. Their purpose was to improve hygiene, but at the same time they served to remove the natural functions of the body from public view.

The objects that surrounded people, their material environment, became instrumental in changing their habits and attitudes. The constant presence of certain objects was supposed to instil *kul'turnost'*. Among the items of everyday equipment associated with the norms of civilized life, three became fetishized, and are mentioned repeatedly in journal after journal: curtains, lampshades, and tablecloths. Sometimes the set included flowers and carpets. The following is a typical description of *kul'turnost'* achieved: 'There are snow-white curtains on the windows, tablecloths and flowers on the tables. There appear things never

known before: bookshelves, wardrobes, and silk lampshades.'[145] Wives of Red Army officers reported how barracks and canteens were equipped with portières, curtains, and tablecloths made by the caring hands of women. The obsession with the objects of *kul'turnost'* took them as far as the North Pole. In 1938 the ship *Taimyr* went to rescue the members of the heroic Papanin Arctic expedition. Women decided to take care of the ship's interior: 'It was decided to make two beautiful lampshades and a tablecloth for a gramophone. . . . Many nice things were made by our women: portières, tablecloths, napkins, carpets, and lampshades.'[146]

What were the social significance and effects of these small symbols of culturedness? Curtains became a universal symbol of *kul'turnost'*, serving as a device that symbolically constituted one's home, one's cultured dwelling. The 'curtain effect', then, consisted in the creation, both real and symbolic, of a private space through limitation of its observability. Curtains accompanied the partitioning of large communal spaces; they functioned as a diaphragm that controlled the degree to which private space was secluded from the outside world (a person shutting or opening the curtains is a widespread symbolic image in the arts, a cliché in cinema). Curtains were often described as 'snow-white', which implied cleanliness and proper hygiene (the adjective has also a resonance of the *volshebnaia skazka*, magic tale).

A lampshade has the combined function of regulating the tonality of lighting and the aesthetics of the interior. Lighting, however, is also part of the social microstructure. To a certain extent, it defines the genre of an event or activity, it creates dispositions. We know, for example, that festive lighting excites joyous dispositions, when the lights are bright and everything is rendered completely visible; we are familiar with lighting techniques in the theatre and cinema; we talk of mournful lighting or intimate lighting. Techniques of lighting create and maintain certain social dispositions, but are themselves barely discernible in everyday life, because their function is to render other things discernible and to present them in 'this or that light'. The introduction of lampshades (the journal *Obshchestvennitsa* provided instruction in how to make them from different fabrics) was fundamental to producing such effects. Delimiting and condensing living space, soft lighting helped to make one's dwelling more comfortable, private, and self-contained.

The tablecloth was the third normative element of a cultured setting. An article giving instructions on 'rational diet' concluded: 'If the table is draped with a white tablecloth, the dinner tastes good and is digested perfectly. To live in a cultured way also means to eat in a cultured way.'[147] The white tablecloth figured as a symbol of *kul'turnost'*, and also tied together diet, hygiene, and manners. The introduction of tablecloths in workers' canteens implied further changes. Long wooden tables and benches were removed, to be replaced by tables for four or six with separate chairs. One could no longer eat in the same way at a small table covered with a white tablecloth as at a crude wooden table shared with a dozen other people. The 'snow-white' tablecloth would immediately testify to the person's table manners: 'I can't sit down at a table like that with my hands dirty', wrote one worker.[148]

Kul'turnost' implied systemic changes in material environment. The things associated with *kul'turnost'* were not just discrete objects which people encountered in the course of their daily lives. Rather, they tended to form a specific 'object-system' or an 'equipmental matrix', wherein all the elements presupposed one another and, being assembled together, constituted the material infrastructure of *kul'turnost'*. This material infrastructure contained an implicit concept of its user, including the user's practical skills, rhythms of activity, level of self-discipline, and basic habits; people used the elements of this infrastructure not only for practical purposes but, beyond that, to constitute themselves as cultured individuals. And in so doing they were bound to develop new habits which derived from the patterns of usage carried by the objects of *kul'turnost'*. Thus, once such an equipmental matrix had been introduced, the moulding of individuals would in the long term require neither permanent persuasion nor external coercion.

Brought to life by the policies of *kul'turnost'* in 1936, the *obshchestvennitsy* movement had changed its objectives by 1939. As Europe witnessed the outbreak of the Second World War, a different set of policies aimed at military build-up and mass mobilization was launched in the Soviet Union. Everyday life, including the cultural sphere, was reorganized to meet the needs of defence. The original civilizing pursuit of the *obshchestvennitsy* was also redirected. The inculcation of cultural skills was supplanted by military training. But even though the movement did not revive after the war, the processes that it had helped to set in motion continued, and norms of hygiene, manners, the culture of private life, which in the 1930s were still largely ideals awaiting realization, were beginning, by the 1950s, to become ingrained.

Word and Thought

Another sphere to be embraced by *kul'turnost'* was that of speech. In March 1936 the Komsomol press began a campaign against 'dirty talk', arguing that it was incompatible with the norms of *kul'turnost'*. Denouncing the impoverished, bureaucratic, low-life jargon of the Komsomol leaders, an article in a popular youth magazine proceeded to ask: 'Is it possible that culture only means that Stakhanovites wear cheviot suits and "attend theatre and cinema at least three times a month"?'[149] Proper appearance alone was no longer enough to meet the demands of *kul'turnost'*. This was stressed by the Secretary of the Komsomol Central Committee at the movement's Tenth Congress in April 1936: 'We have now a breed of people who mistake various petit-bourgeois [*meshchanskie*] attributes for a prosperous, cultured life. Their thoughts do not extend beyond a suit of foreign make, a gramophone, and books published by "Academia" [publisher of translations of light foreign novels].'[150]

That external attributes and formal criteria expressed in attending theatre and cinema were no longer evidence of culturedness signified a shift in the locus of the concept. From now on it would be increasingly sought in, and projected on to, the individual's inner world. The value of inner *kul'turnost'* grew, and this corresponded to a subtle change in the method of its acquisition. The

mastery of correct, literary speech required greater self-monitoring and more sustained effort than buying smart clothes and gramophones. This linguistic aspect of *kul'turnost'* was further articulated during the celebration of the centenary of Pushkin's death in early 1937. Planned and prepared long in advance, this celebration marked a specific fusion of two grand cultural traditions, the old Russian and the new Soviet. Pushkin, it was declared, had given truthful expression to the Russian national spirit. On an individual level, however, the significance of Pushkin was more pragmatic, and was associated with correct patterns of speech: 'There can be no doubt about the positive effect of Pushkin's speech on the struggle for a cultured, correct, precise language.'[151]

In 1938 reading was proclaimed a central method of political self-education; before this, however, it had been associated mainly with the acquisition of *kul'turnost'*. At first, the word 'literate' was synonymous with 'cultured', but later, as more people read more books, 'educatedness' (*obrazovannost'*, a word from Pushkin's vocabulary) superseded 'literacy' (*gramotnost'*, which in Russian can apply to very low levels of literacy skills) as a designation for the primary characteristic of the cultured individual. Literacy was more of a technical skill; while educatedness implied knowledge and, significantly, the existence of a common cultural horizon acquired through reading. In a speech in 1936 the Secretary of the Moscow Komsomol organization presented a model of the cultured and educated person, a 20-year-old fitter from Leningrad, Nina Elkina: 'In the course of the year she read seventy-eight books by authors such as Balzac, Hamsun, Goncharov, Hoffmann, Hugo, Rostand, Flaubert, France, Chekhov, Shakespeare, Veresaev, Novikov-Priboi, [Galina] Serebriakova, Aleksei Tolstoi, Tynianov, Chapygin, and Iasenskii.'[152]

While retaining its earlier 'surface' manifestations, *kul'turnost'* gradually came to signify possession of this standard stock of cultural knowledge. The cultural world of the new Soviet man was formalized to the extent that it could be presented as a quiz with the title 'Are you a Cultured Person?', published in every issue of the popular weekly magazine *Ogonek* in 1936. Each quiz contained ten questions, accompanied by the following instruction: 'Remember, if you are not able to answer any one of the ten suggested questions, you evidently know very little about a whole sphere of science or the arts. Let this compel you to WORK ON YOURSELF [*PORABOTAT' NAD SOBOI*].'[153] The instruction also suggested testing one's friends and colleagues. Here is the first questionnaire:

> 1. Recite by heart at least one poem by Pushkin. 2. Name and describe five plays by Shakespeare. 3. Name at least four rivers in Africa. 4. Name your favourite composer and his three major works. 5. Name five Soviet automobiles. 6. Convert 3/8 into a decimal. 7. Name the three most important sports tournaments of the last year and their results. 8. Describe the three paintings which you liked most at last year's exhibitions. 9. Have you read Stendhal's *Scarlet and Black* and Turgenev's *Fathers and Children*? 10. Explain why the Stakhanovite movement became possible in our country.

Let the educated reader answer. There are grounds for supposing that by the end of 1936 many contemporary Soviet readers could. The *Ogonek* questionnaires

were mentioned in other periodicals, and culture clubs were advised to copy and hang them up as posters; so it seems likely that in 1936–7 they were a popular topic of conversation and form of self-education. They are remarkable documents, representing an original matrix of the cultural and ideological knowledge required of the contemporary Soviet citizen, reflecting its breadth and its limits. The first question of the first questionnaire implied the necessity of reading Pushkin, the last the desirability of acquaintance with Stalin's speech of 1935 on the Stakhanovite movement. Other issues of the journal assumed knowledge of the gods of war, love, and trade in ancient Greece and Rome, three types of warplanes, and seven Stakhanovites (no. 2); or of two British newspapers and two representatives of utopian socialist thought (no. 3). Within a single questionnaire the reader might be asked to name two poems by Heine and two Soviet icebreakers (no. 23).

The *Ogonek* questionnaire is evidence of further evolution of the concept of *kul'turnost'*. To become a cultured person one must read classic literature, contemporary Soviet fiction, newspapers, works by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin, and poetry, and visit the cinema and exhibitions for purposes of self-education. A cultured person must have a cultured inner world and a broad (if historically very specific) cultural horizon. It was in this sense that the notion of individual *kul'turnost'* came closest to the impersonal concept of culture as specific values accumulated by past generations which are to be appropriated and augmented by their successors.

Although *kul'turnost'* continued to figure in the language, and preserved its main features and effects until well after the Great Patriotic War, as a semi-official concept it began to wane around 1937–8, when the 'acquisition of culturedness' was absorbed into a broader concept of political self-education articulated via the doctrine of 'mastering Bolshevism' (*ovladenie bol'shevizmom*). This called for extensive theoretical education in dialectical materialism, and implied the cultivation of Bolshevik consciousness. The tendency that preceded and, to some extent, legitimated this new demand to master Bolshevism was what might be called the problematization of the external aspects of *kul'turnost'*. Smart clothes, elegant behaviour, and even refined speech became associated with the image of the enemy. In the summer of 1937 the sphere of leisure and private life was subjected to sustained criticism which reached its peak in late August at the Fourth Plenary Meeting of the Komsomol Central Committee. The Komsomol press launched vigorous attacks on the sphere of leisure. The enemies, it was declared, operated in youth hostels and on dance floors; dressed in smart clothes in the 'Harbin' style (*Kharbinskii stil'*), they introduced young Komsomolers to their 'beautiful and joyous lifestyle', and eventually recruited them into the ranks of spies.[154] At the Komsomol Congress of 1936 young men were still urged to acquire *kul'turnost'* and to treat one another, and especially women, gallantly. Later, the external aspects of *kul'turnost'*, including refined speech, were condemned, and internal convictions and healthy consciousness demanded in their place. In 1938 the Komsomol periodical summed up the new vision of the enemy: 'The image of the hooligan has changed! The enemy is dressed according to the latest fashion. He is gallant. He dances nicely, speaks beautifully. He knows how to charm

women. But if you delve into such a person, you will uncover his bestial, alien interior [*zverinoe, vrazhdebnoe nutro*].'[155]

This evolution of the image of the enemy is indicative of the dynamic of *kul'turnost'*. In 1934–6 (the first phase of *kul'turnost'*), the 'hostile elements' were dirty, badly dressed, ill-mannered, and illiterate people, while the model heroes of the popular press were neatly dressed, clean, well bred, and lived a joyous cultured life. In 1936–7, as culturedness became increasingly associated with inner culture, with broad knowledge and education, those obsessed with superficial attributes could be labelled 'petit bourgeois'. Finally, in 1937–8 the earliest aspects of culturedness became suspect, and, although there was no official rejection of personal hygiene and educatedness, the true virtues of the Soviet man now resided in the sphere of Bolshevik consciousness and private ideological commitment. If the semi-official beginning of the age of *kul'turnost'* was marked by Stalin's motto of November 1935, 'Life has become better, life has become jollier' (*Zhit' stalo luchshe, zhit' stalo veselee*), its official decline coincided with the new motto 'Master Bolshevism!' (*Ovladet' bol'shevizmom!*), unveiled in September 1938 upon publication of the *Short Course of the Communist Party*.

A Central Committee decree of 14 November 1938 prescribed the correct method of mastering Marxism-Leninism: individual reading (*samostoiatel'noe chtenie*). Dialectical materialism, the decree assured, was now accessible to all rank-and-file communists and intelligentsia, provided they undertook a continuous individual (this word was repeatedly invoked) programme of self-education through reading the *Short Course*, in classes and at home. A month earlier the Party's chief spokesman on cultural matters, Andrei Zhdanov, addressing Komsomol activists in the Bolshoi Theatre, emphasized that the Komsomol 'must make a very serious turn in the sphere of propaganda, concentrating on the quality, on the individual bookwork of Komsomol members'.[156]

The process of becoming cultured now had three stages. First, personal *kul'turnost'* was acquired through a combination of public effort (*zabota obshchestvennosti*) and self-transformation (*rabota nad soboi*, work on oneself). This entailed a dynamic relationship between the public and the private, wherein social engagement would normally result in individual ability to live in accordance with the norms of *kul'turnost'* without explicit external compulsion. Second, the process of becoming cultured moved from the external to the internal: beginning with a requirement of external propriety and manners, it went on to articulate and colonize the internal world, demanding intellectual and spiritual commitment. Third, all aspects of *kul'turnost'* were integrated, becoming a system of organic units which formed the elementary structure of public order.

In 1935–6 Stakhanovites were presented as models of *kul'turnost'*. They were initially associated with a kind of 'conspicuous consumption', purchasing expensive suits, overcoats, gramophones, furniture, and other accessories of cultured life.[157] Later, in the life-story of the Stakhanovite A. Busygin, published in 1939, we find that another vital ingredient has been added. After describing his comfortable, self-contained apartment, and his involvement in cultural life, he tells the reader about his new pursuits:

> At present I am working on the history of the Party [that is, the *Short Course*]. Slowly, in the dead of night, I read it line by line, paragraph by paragraph. Dozens of questions and new ideas emerge; I write them down. It is only recently that I started this way of working with the book. When you work with the book by yourself, when you think over every line, you feel that you are learning the Bolshevik way of thinking.[158]

This sketch creates an image of extreme privacy, of a quiet dark room with curtains drawn and a table lamp casting light on the book, an ideal setting for careful reading and reflection. Busygin's new experience, which the press sought to popularize, hints at the two vital components associated with the origins of private life: private living space, and silent reading, intensifying individual reflection.

Mixing Cultural and Material Goods: *Kul'turnost'* as Social Glue

The brilliance of the *kul'turnost'* ideology lay partly in the fact that it was a fusion of two value systems previously thought incompatible, those of the bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia. The reading lists, self-improvement programmes, and directions on hygiene that it set out would have been approved by any pre-Revolutionary intellectual (apart, perhaps, from one on the Bohemian fringe, such as Maiakovskii, whose revolutionary farce *Mystery-Bouffe* had seen the class struggle as a war of the 'clean' bourgeoisie and 'dirty' proletariat). The advice on good manners and home management provided, though, could have been taken from any manual of etiquette published in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, oracles which had been relentlessly pilloried by intellectuals of the day.

In the nineteenth century, and indeed in the 1920s, *kul'turnost'* had been used to signify 'cultivation' in the sense of education, and particularly the use of educated, rather than popular speech. The only pattern of contextual usage regularly cited in dictionaries comes from Plekhanov's *The Russian Worker in the Revolutionary Movement*, first published in the 1890s: 'The more I get to know Petersburg workers, the more I am impressed by their *kul'turnost'*.'[159] Similarly, in Ognev's novel *The Diary of Kostia Riabtsev*, a schoolgirl who asks what good her command of written Russian will do her in later life receives the following reply: 'Z. P. [Zinaida Pavlovna] says that I write good literary Russian. I asked her, what you need that for in the real world, and she said, that style is what distinguishes a cultivated [*kul'turnyi*] person. The cultivated person has broader horizons.'[160] In the 1930s, this earlier concept of *kul'turnost'* was absorbed into what would previously have been called *vospitannost'*, 'good behaviour, *politeness*', a quality that 1920s radicals would have found distressingly bourgeois.

Kul'turnost' also achieved the hitherto impossible feat of equating consumer goods and cultural artefacts, both now respectable appurtenances of the new Soviet citizen. Before 1917, the humorous magazine *Satirikon* (*Satyricon*), aimed at the St Petersburg intelligentsia, had poked fun at the new Russian middle

classes by crediting them with a lust for material acquisition unmatched by any grasp of high culture. One cartoon of 1910, published in an entire number dedicated to *poshlost'* (vulgarity), showed an obese couple in their over-decorated bedroom, accompanied by a 'Hymn to the Double Bed', as a sarcastic evocation of conventional family life. While poets might dream of illicit love, the text asserted, the double bed represented a truer and nobler kind of human existence:

> Пружинная! Нужней ты вицмундира!
> Дубовая! Ты жизнь нам можешь дать!
> Да сгинет та семейная квартира
> Где не в почете ты, двуспальная кровать!
>
> [Springy double bed, more necessary than a dress uniform!
> Oaken double bed! You can give us life!
> May the family flat rot in hell
> Where you are not honoured, O double bed!][161]

Another cartoon in the same number illustrated a parvenue complaining of the difficulties that she had had in furnishing her room: 'First the pictures wouldn't fit in the alcoves, then we couldn't get hold of an undamaged Venus de Milo, and then the oil paintings stank so much of paint that it was murder sitting in here for the first week!'[162]

The point of all this rather puerile humour was, of course, that classical sculpture was *not* the same as a new portière, and that one might be a fan of the double bed or intellectual pursuits, but not of both. The ideology of *kul'turnost'* deconstructed the binary opposition, creating a world in which a nicely bound collection of Tolstoi's works could, with perfect dignity, stand next door to a lustreware teaset, looking down on a tea-table laid with lace doilies and a table lamp. It also created a world where highly commercial cultural products—for example, Soviet musicals—could be seen as offering a radically new, 'Soviet' culture totally free of commercial values.

One way in which this was achieved was by the judicious use of the antonyms to *kul'turnyi*, *meshchanskii* (petit bourgeois), *poshlyi* (vulgar), and *nekul'turnyi* (uncultured). Of the three, much the simplest was *nekul'turnyi*, which was used to signify breaches of the new rules of etiquette—for example, failing to wash your underwear, biting your nails in public, not having heard of Pushkin, and never changing your sheets. The remaining terms suggested more subtle differentiations. It was, for example, permissible to have house-plants, but rubber plants, branded by *Satirikon* as 'vulgar' in 1910, remained taboo (the impeccably socialist realist painter Aleksandr Laktionov was reprimanded for introducing one into his canvas *The New Apartment* in 1952).[163] Dogs and cats were permissible (for those who could afford them), but canaries were not (Leningrad housing rules published in 1945 precluded the keeping of any pets bar cats and dogs).[164] But above all, the abusive terms 'petit bourgeois' and 'vulgar' were used in order to lambaste the capitalist West and late imperial Russia.[165] This technique was perhaps the most significant contribution to the process by which the profoundly bourgeois doctrine of *kul'turnost'* could appear to be class-free.

For all that, it would be simplistic to see *kul'turnost'* as an expression *only* of Soviet petit bourgeois values; this would over-value its 'etiquette manual' content at the expense of its 'cultural goods' content. The campaign was potent because it tapped the desires of the intelligentsia as well as the new elite. Not only magazines, but literature, paintings, etc. disseminated the doctrine. The third part of Anna Karavaeva's Stalin-prize-winning trilogy, *The Motherland* (*Rodina*, 1950), for example, opens with a scene in which Ol'ga Chelishcheva and her family return to the house from which they have been evacuated during the German invasion to find it in a shocking state:

> Ol'ga could hardly recognize the big room where the Chelishchev family loved to gather in the evenings. Instead of cheery wallpaper with pink bouquets on a green background, the walls were covered with brownish patches, the results of a botched attempt at whitewash. The embroidered net curtains had gone from the windows . . . All the doors were missing from the old oak sideboard, made by Ol'ga's late grandfather, a keen amateur wood-carver. The walnut sofa, lacking its cushions and both front legs, the armchairs, crippled in the same way, and the oval table were pushed into the corners, useless and ugly, with shreds of upholstery hanging off them. The floor was badly scratched; all the carpets and druggets had gone, and kitchen stools were mixed up with the dining chairs by the long dining table, over which a bit of old oil-cloth had been flung.[166]

As Vera Dunham asserts, textual representations such as this were likely to have been read by Soviet citizens in much the same spirit in which turn-of-the-century workers had gazed through the windows of department stores: 'Petunias in imaginary gardens or printed on imaginary fabrics acquired promissory significance.'[167] But they also catalogued goods that *were* available to some members of Soviet society, and for such readers, as well as painters and writers, they functioned as badges of genteelism. When the veteran painter Bogdanov-Bel'skii portrayed his much younger second wife, Antonina Maksimilianovna Höflinger, in 1932, he produced a canvas that is a positive sampler of desirable, *kul'turnyi* domesticity. Antonina Maksimilianovna sits in a plain but elegant Biedermeier mahogany chair, upholstered in a bright, and distinctively Russian, flower print. The room is flooded with light and is spotlessly clean; garlanded wallpaper can be seen in the background, and in the middle distance, to left and right, stand flowering plants on special Karelian birch stands. The *pièce de résistance* is a striking antique half-moon table to the rear of the room. Through the window can be seen a sunny, blossom-filled, trafficless street. It is the suburban idyll craved by the inhabitants of overcrowded industrial cities everywhere in Europe and America. Antonina Maksimilianovna herself is dressed with discreet opulence, and a whisper of decorous eroticism, in a fashionable green mesh top with gold braiding, its top left open to show marmoreal shoulders (but no cleavage), a pair of striped wool slacks, and a fair amount of casual jewellery. Her hair is elegantly permed, and round her shoulders is draped a fur tippet. On one level, the painting distantly alludes to Rubens's famous painting of his second wife, Hélène Fourment, draped in fur, with the insider's joke that Hélène (unlike Antonina) is nude underneath her cape. On another, Bogdanov-Bel'skii's use of a highly conventional treatment of the half-length (seated in an

armchair) recalls the solid virtues of such modestly talented mid-nineteenth-century portraitists as Vasilii Tropinin. The result is an identifiably Russian celebration of family happiness as conjugal bliss plus material comfort.[168]

Lest anyone suppose that idylls of this kind were the province only of the talentless, here is Mikhail Bulgakov's vision of earthly paradise, the secret abode of his heroes, the Master and Margarita:

> A divan here and a divan opposite, and a little table in between, with a wonderful reading-lamp on it, and closer to the window a row of books, and in the main room—a huge room, 14 metres square—books, and more books, and a stove . . . [Margarita] would arrive and put on an apron, and they would light the paraffin stove in the narrow hall . . . and prepare a meal and set it out in the main room on the oval table . . . Then the man who called himself 'the master' would work, and she, sticking her slender fingers with their nails filed to points into her hair, would read what he had written, and when she had read it, would go on embroidering his little cap.[169]

Modest, conservative comfort, tended by a woman's loving hands—that is, serviced by her unstinting and always uncomplaining labour—was wholly in the spirit of the official remodelling of reality. The fact that this idyll could be seen as an escape from Soviet life is a remarkable illustration of the pervasiveness of the new values. This was a society where many had come to feel that the maximum reward was that finally granted to Bulgakov's hero, not enlightenment or joy, but *pokoi* (tranquillity).

The Poetics of Manipulation: Consumption and Popular Resistance

The *kul'turnost'* campaign was not simply about changing values: it also related to actual patterns of acquisition. An intriguing portrait of consumption habits among the privileged is painted by Elena Bonner, daughter of two Comintern officials, in her memoir *Daughters and Mothers* (*Dochki-materi*, 1994). Until the 1930s, the family often depended on remakes of Elena's grandmother's cast-offs for their clothes, but from then on they began to shop at Torgsin, and later at the newly opened GORT outlet for Party officials, with admission by card only (at first at the less exclusive 'B' section, later at the 'A' section). Significant items acquired by Elena before her parents were arrested in the Great Purges included an elegant beige knitted suit and red blouse, and a leather coat. The family also replaced its battered aluminium knives and forks with new stainless steel ones, and for one birthday Elena was given a handsome new Parker fountain-pen, the first she had ever seen.

The Bonner-Alikhanov family continued to live quite modestly, by the standards of the contemporary Western bourgeoisie. Though they had a private flat (in the Hotel Luxe, no less), with a maid, accommodation was fairly cramped; idealists like many other Party members of their generation, Elena's parents were slightly embarrassed by their *ex officio* privileges (chauffeur-driven car and dacha), and made little use of the latter (though the children and their

grandmother summered there regularly). But their case illustrates that purchasing non-essential items, albeit in small quantities, was a fact of life for even the most high-minded.

For those outside the Party, rationing, and later shortages, were less comfortably buffered, but even here the better-off had resources. They could shop in Torgsin, where payment was made in vouchers granted to customers in exchange for valuable items (for example, jewellery or antiques), so that the store acted as the Soviet equivalent of a pawn shop. (The singer Galina Vishnevskaia, who saw the 1930s from a rather different social angle from Bonner's, recalls in her memoirs, *Galina* (1986), melting down an icon's precious metal *oklad*, decorative covering, in order to shop at Torgsin.) They could, in the 1920s and 1930s, petition foreign relatives to send them scarce items (Bulgakov wrote to relatives in France to see whether they would get his wife some lisle stockings), or indeed visit one of the 'speculators' (black market dealers) whose existence is clear from Western travelogues, if not from official statistics. The writer E. M. Delafield, who visited Russia in 1936, recalls how she was approached at a private gathering by a woman asking for 'silk stockings, aspirin, lipsticks, cotton frocks and nail scissors'; she duly agreed to sell some things to the woman in question, who proved a remarkably persistent buyer, having eventually to 'get her out of the room at last by giving her a lip-stick as a sort of bonus, like a pound of tea for a cash sale'.[170]

Stratification of the market-place was acknowledged not only by the provision of different retail outlets, but also by the grading of goods in terms of price and packaging. Most items were sold loose in shops called, say, 'Bread Shop no. 45', or 'Household Goods Shop no. 6', but the most prestigious, and expensive, shops and goods were allowed titles and brand names. The grandest and most elegant dress shop on Nevskii Prospekt was entitled 'The House of Fashion', rather than 'Women's Clothes', as a less pretentious equivalent would have been, and luxuries such as cakes, sweets, and chocolates, perfumes, fur hats, etc. all had individual names, albeit often ones with uplifting revolutionary connotations, such as 'Dawn' or 'October'. Moreover, the capacity of the privileged to afford such luxury goods was enhanced by the fact that the rationing system had built-in differentials. While unskilled workers in the provinces lived at levels only just above starvation (and peasants in many parts of Russia were literally starving), skilled workers, most particularly shock workers, army officers, OGPU and Party officials, policemen, and, above all, government officials had far more substantial provision. In 1930, for example, Moscow and Leningrad workers in heavy industry were due a maximum of 800 grams of bread and 200 grams of meat per day, and three kilos of meal (*krupa*), 800 grams of salt fish, 1,500 grams of sugar, 50 grams of tea, 600 grams of butter, and 750 grams of oil per month. In 1932 the meat ration had been reduced to two kilos per month, and no butter or oil was supplied. In reality, supplies often fell below even the miserly official allocations, and Moscow workers' diet deteriorated substantially in real terms between 1932 and 1935; the situation in the provinces was still worse. At the same time, privileged groups such as Party officials and shock workers were able to obtain far superior supplies of food (four kilos of meat per month, three kilos of meal,

and so on) on their ration cards, and could buy better meals for less in the canteen.[171] There was therefore more left of their already larger salaries for the purchase of non-essential items. Though the situation improved slightly with the end of rationing, it was still only the privileged who could be described as Soviet consumers; the rest spent what they had to in order to survive.

How did the 'have-nots' in Soviet society react to this situation? There is evidence that food shortages in particular caused deep resentment. In January 1933, three textile workers from Ivanovo wrote to *Izvestiia* complaining about the appalling conditions in the town:

> We senior workers didn't live like we do now under the capitalist system. Textile workers get 100 roubles a month and all we can buy at a fixed price is bread, the rest comes from the market. Our children are withering from hunger, they never see milk or sugar, they sell potatoes at the market by the piece, the canteens only have frost-bitten potatoes and water. You can't live like this, there's muttering and dissatisfaction among the masses. People are talking about demonstrations like the ones at the Vichugi and Teikov factories [in April 1932].[172]

As the letter suggests, overt protests, such as demonstrations or even strikes, were not unknown in such circumstances. However, workers who resorted to measures of this kind risked further exacerbating the hardship in which they lived. After strikes were banned in 1921, those who resorted to stoppages as a means of voicing disaffection risked military intervention, lockouts, or at the very least suspension of wages in retribution. As the Ivanovo letter suggests, walk-outs were resorted to only *in extremis*, and workers preferred different tactics—threats of disruption, lobbying the press. A letter sent to *Izvestiia*, *Pravda*, or another Soviet paper would not reach a Soviet mass readership, but it would be carefully processed by the journals concerned, sent on to the appropriate government agency, and might sometimes result in action.[173]

If pleading with the authorities did not appeal, other forms of manipulation might be resorted to. Not for nothing was Il'f and Petrov's NEP trickster hero, the Odessa rogue with the speaking name Ostap Bender, one of the most popular fictional characters of the Stalin and post-Stalin periods. Crime against state enterprises—embezzlement, theft, and vandalism—might be played up in official campaigns against 'Trotskyite' saboteurs, but there is no doubt that it was a real social problem, and that some of the inmates of Soviet prison camps would have been incarcerated in any country (if not in such inhumane conditions). One of the livelier plays of the 1930s, Nikolai Pogodin's *Aristocrats* (*Aristokraty*, 1934), was an account of criminal prisoners on the White Sea Canal forced-labour project which, despite its didactic 're-education' plot and wholly mythologized portrayal of a campaign in which thousands died of starvation and overwork, still gave, in a famous production by Sergei Okhlopkov, a reasonably convincing portrayal of the criminal world, with its peculiar songs, mores, and slang.[174]

Apart from roguery, there were many other possible ways of giving laws a run for their money. Though alternative types of manipulation are not well represented in Soviet literature, more humdrum sources attest them widely.

Workers might not strike, but they could slow down their work pace so as to threaten the norms of production set up under the planned economy, and, by extension, their managers' jobs.[175] They also could, and did, exploit the system of formal denunciation in order to get rid of unpopular foremen—a ruse whose force was recognized by the Party authorities, who tended to be chary, rather than appreciative, of the efforts exerted by specialists in the denunciation genre. The denunciation system required the authorities to negotiate the tensions between the likely benefits to Party standing when it was recognized as a mediator in disputes, and the detriments to this standing when officials came under assault from below. And in domestic contexts, denunciations could be used to acquire *Lebensraum* in communal flats, to settle private scores such as property disputes, and to exact revenge on enemies or even occasionally family members—in other words, to exploit the criminal law in order to settle disputes that would have been taken to the civil courts in Britain or America.[176] Given this background, Il'f and Petrov's 1930s sketch 'A Recipe for a Quiet Life', in which the narrator proffers advice on how to deal with people who annoy you when you are shopping—take their names down in your pocketbook, and then denounce them—seems sharp satire indeed:

> First find out who jostled you. Then demand he produces his documents. Of course the guilty party will say he didn't do it on purpose, and refuse to show them. Even better. You call the manager and say very quietly, but firmly, that you demand the instant expulsion of this hooligan from the territory of the trading area. The manager, of course, will tell you that he doesn't give a —— for your pocketbook. He doesn't give a ——! Wonderful! You mobilize the consumer collective, sort things out with it, and send it into action against this official who has lost his sense of reality.[177]

The fact that this satire on denunciation as personal revenge was first published in *Pravda* during 1934 is an indication of the authorities' suspicion of 'voluntarist' denunciation. On the whole, they preferred to use the relatively clinical evidence provided by those Soviet citizens whom they recruited to act as paid informers, and whose denunciations could be directed from above.[178]

There were also milder forms than denunciation by which one might parade dissatisfaction. One was by being more or less subtly rude to one's superiors, social or professional, a possibility which workers in the Soviet service industries, particularly, exploited for all that it was worth. In the late 1940s, competitions between stores were organized, and the raising of sales levels rewarded, in order to promote helpfulness and amiability, but by all accounts relations remained much as they had in the 1920s, when Mikhail Zoshchenko graphically recorded the frustrations of lower-class Russians with the petty tyranny, small-minded officiousness, and indifference of minor public servants.

All in all, manipulation of Soviet reality was much commoner not only than protest or confrontation, but even than open grumbling, which would have invited prosecution under Article 58 of the 1926 Criminal Code, which covered a wide range of subversive and counter-revolutionary activities as well as sabotage and armed resistance. Perhaps commonest of all, though, was total indifference to the procedures of authority, and alienation from the realities beyond

friends and family. A fascinating glimpse of this is given by an anthology of letters found in the pockets of Soviet soldiers fighting in the Soviet–Finnish War, and published in 1944 by the émigré journalist, and former Socialist Revolutionary, V. Zenzinov. The vast majority of the letters were written by workers and peasants. Though a good many indicate familiarity with the Soviet media (references to listening out for news 'on the radio' are common), few display any concern about the political or ideological aspects of the war. The majority of correspondents are completely parochial in their interests. They report the conscription of friends and relatives, complain about the problems of raising money to pay taxes, report with relief that there are no food shortages, and ask their soldier husbands, sons, and brothers to keep an eye out for scarce goods (notebooks, shoes, clothes). This indifference to politics and ideology is found even in letters written by petty officials. Mikhail Naumov, a sniper with the NKVD, for example, appears to have been barely more literate at a political level than he was at the level of grammar. His astonishingly badly spelt and inaccurately punctuated letter ends with 'a warm red army greeting' to his brother, and contains a few ritual exhortations to 'bash the Finns', but is otherwise entirely taken up with family affairs:

> Hallo, dear brother Mr P. I. Naumov.
>
> In the first lines of my letter I hasten to inform you that I have received your letter for which Im very greatful and for the good news about your life there and all. Petia now let me tell you wot Ive seen here that is in Moscow, I spoke to her but not for long she came into the shop they bought wot they came in for then they left Petia she looks deadbeat real bad she really misses you so you come soon but their OK at the moment no real problems by the way I bought myself a wrist watch one of them Kirov factory ones Petia I heard on the radio on 26 November there been standoffs wot those fins there up to eh hope nothing happened to you now Petia let me tell you wot I been up to things been going real good for me at the moment that is 26 November they let me off on a gymnastics course at Dynamo [Moscow] and it goes on till 1st May 1940 Ill be doing it from 1 Janury and when I get through that I wont have to attend the tech any more the moneys better here, by the way the weathers not too good some snow falling
>
> Petia write and tell me wots going on spec youll be having a go at them fins soon an all But thats all Ive got to say for now things are fine my healths good and I wish you all the best in your young red army life their if they lay a finger you make sure you hit them three times back
>
> I send you and all the soldiers and commanders a warm red army greeting from the NKVD section from us snipers
>
> Bye for now wishing you all the best, written by
> Mikhail Ivanovich Naumov.[179]

However, the letter also indicates that the idea of acquiring suitably 'cultured' goods was perfectly in tune with grassroots reality: here, it is a wristwatch that forms the centrepiece of Naumov's news. More confirmation of *kul'turnost'* in action comes from a rather different source: Nadezhda Mandel'shtam's embittered, but not implausible, description of her own denunciation at a workplace meeting in 1953:

> People began to speak from the floor, some with prepared texts and others spontaneously. A woman technician with a perm asserted that she had once seen me sitting on a windowsill—though everybody had seen in films that you were only supposed to sit in chairs or armchairs. (Their ideas of 'good manners' all came from the movies, just as their notions of love and honour did. But the way that they laughed came straight off the radio—they imitated the silvery cadenced tinkling sound affected by the female announcers.)[180]

The genius of the *kul'turnost'* campaign, then, was that it directed aspirations as effectively as a successful Western advertising campaign, promoting desirable goods, and investing these with an aura of luxury and mystique. But it achieved far more than that: it reached across classes to construct an ideal collective in which those spurning the new values could be seen as riff-raff ('hooligans', 'bohemians'), but those who were too overt in their material attachments might be lambasted as 'vulgar'. By providing not only a pattern of conduct, but also a model for day-to-day living, and by harnessing, rather than challenging, the self-betterment aspirations that had been obvious among working people well before the Revolution, as well as satisfying the desires of the new and old bourgeoisies, it was to prove far and away the most successful 'programme for identity' evolved in the Soviet period.

Eventually, the very success of the *kul'turnost'* campaign was to prove its undoing. The idea of material acquisition as a perfectly justifiable reward for honest toil cut across a key tenet of Soviet labour ideology: that work should be its own reward.[181] Progressively, the doctrine of *kul'turnost'*, supposedly both spiritual and material in character, undermined the disinterested, purely spiritual doctrine of labour as self-sacrifice that was propounded in other areas of Soviet propaganda. Though consumer demand began increasingly to impinge, however discreetly, on Party policy, the production-led ideology of successive Soviet leaders would never allow full consideration to be given to consumer demands, and hence the supply of consumer goods, *tovary shirokogo potrebleniia* ('goods of broad consumption'), was always poorly regulated.

The Soviet system's inability to control the desires that it unleashed was to become acutely problematic in the post-Stalin period, as differences between the elite and the masses widened, as the cumbersome bureaucracy controlling production became increasingly incapable of responding to consumer demand, and as Soviet goods began to be spurned by many people in favour of foreign products. But for the time being, the new institutions and facilities seemed, to many people, to bear out Stalin's announcement that 'life had become jollier'. Material conditions might be hard, but working-class inhabitants of Moscow and Leningrad (if not villages or provincial cities) were at least no worse off than they had been before 1917 (when a rented bunk in a barracks and a diet bordering on malnutrition had been the norm for many). The regime's failure to eradicate poverty quickly struck outsiders, such as André Gide, a good deal more forcefully than it did many Soviet citizens themselves.

The resentment inspired by another aspect of Soviet society that shocked outsiders—social stratification, which became increasingly entrenched in the 1930s—was also containable for the meantime. Though domestic service persisted

right up to the 1970s in many better-off families (when new opportunities for rural women, rather than changed preferences among employers, caused its decline), and though the Soviet upper intelligentsia and Party elite enjoyed far better living conditions than workers, let alone *kolkhozniki*, differences were discreetly enjoyed, rather than openly paraded. Ordinary people (unless in domestic service) never entered special Party apartment blocks or penetrated dacha compounds, and in any case old-fashioned intelligentsia tastes retained a hold.[182] By and large, Party activists did not collect Fabergé; they certainly did not sit at the opera in gold and diamond jewellery. Envy was also damped down by the fact that aspirations were relatively homogeneous across classes. A hand-embroidered evening dress or a dinner-jacket, a limousine or a Sèvres vase were much less likely 'wants' in the 1930s and 1940s than adequate living space, a Sunday suit, a magazine subscription, a radio, a chess set, a portière, or any of the other items associated with the *kul'turnost'* ethic. Foreign luxury foods might be available only to the elite, but indigenous ones could grace most tables on public holidays, such as New Year and the anniversary of the October Revolution. Given that a private car was an almost unheard-of possession until at least the late 1940s, when the Pobeda ('Victory', a sort of Soviet Volkswagen) came on the market, and that efficient public transport was a vaunted Soviet achievement, official cars inspired no more ill-feeling than ceremonial carriages might do in a monarchy. Though envy was far from absent in Stalinist society—the use of denunciations as a means to self-advancement is indication enough of its presence—'neutral' sources, such as the private letters collected by Zenzinov, are remarkably free of resentment on material grounds. They give the impression, rather, that the battle to keep afloat was so taxing that little energy remained for anything else.

Furthermore, most Soviet citizens had some tiny personal privilege—special rations, a professional skill, an unusually favourable allocation of living space—which allowed them to participate in the unofficial network of exchange and private purchase (*blat*). Peasants without the right to reside in cities could trade their labour as nannies or cooks for living space; workmen could gain access to a professor's rations in return for mending a lavatory; a seamstress might be the final recipient of a doctor's gifts from his grateful patients. And, since the privileged were regularly pilloried in newspaper articles and satirical plays and fiction, and since high-ups were most likely to come under fire in the various rounds of Party purges, those at the bottom of the heap could feel self-righteous if they wanted to, as they watched those above them go through the ruthless process of *samokritika*, the process of public self-vilification combined with general abuse from the spectators, that was urged on all Soviet enterprises during the Stalin era.[183]