

IDEOLOGY AND CLOTHES:

The Rise and Decline of Socialist Official Fashion

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the relationship between the socialist system and fashion in four countries: Croatia, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and the Soviet Union during seventy-two years of communist rule. From its beginning in 1917, the socialist system had an antagonistic relationship with fashion, which eventually turned into a grudging acceptance by the end of the 1980s.

I identify two main types of sartorial official codes within socialism: utopian dress and socialist official fashion. I analyse these ideological constructs through the concepts of time, class, taste and gender. The symbolic production of utopian dress was informed by the initial Bolshevik rejection of the past and the search for a totally new type of clothes. Socialist official fashion reflected the regimes' ontological fear of change and discontinuity, and in the later phases of socialism their need to dress up their new middle classes in civilian clothes. The socialist regimes failed to invent a new socialist dress. Instead, they embraced the most traditional aesthetics in dress and the most conventional notion of gender.

I demonstrate that similarities and differences in socialist official fashion were informed by ideological shifts within the master narratives in the respective countries. I conclude that the problematic relationship between socialism and fashion was caused by their ontological differences.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In 2004, during my research on socialist fashion in Moscow, I met Lydia Orlova, fashion journalist, author and editor of four Soviet fashion magazines in the 1970s and 1980s. Orlova, a dedicated Communist party member under socialism and a beautiful woman genuinely interested in fashion, had been a powerful promoter of fashion during the later phases of socialism. In her role of the fashion editor, she relentlessly endorsed information on Western fashion in the most popular mass women's weekly *Rabotnitsa (Working Woman)* in the late 1970s, and introduced *Burda's* paper patterns into the magazine at that time. In the Perestroika years, Orlova, however, advocated in a mighty Party daily *Pravda* that socialism deserved its own, proper fashion. She managed, through her highest political connections, to re-start three Soviet fashion magazines in the late 1980s, in order to compete with *Burda's* arrival on the Soviet market. Far away from the reality of poor quality clothing in the shops, and presenting exclusive prototypes of dresses executed within the central fashion institution the Moscow House of Fashion, these Soviet magazines looked much more luxurious and elitist than *Burda*. During our interview, Orlova told me: "Believe me, Dior had many more fans in the USSR than in France". This attitude of a total fascination with the most famous representative of Western fashion, combined with support for a genuine socialist fashion which would be able to sartorially compete with the West and eventually overtake it, while simultaneously neglecting domestic realities, encapsulated for me all the contradictions of socialist fashion, and of the official relationship towards the phenomenon of fashion.

From its beginning in 1917 socialism had an antagonistic relationship with fashion, which turned to ambivalence by the end of the 1950s and to gradual acceptance in the late 1980s. This thesis focuses on the socialist official relationship towards dress, as expressed in the phenomena that I call utopian dress and socialist official fashion. Neither utopian dress nor socialist official fashion had anything to do with the everyday. They were both ideological constructs, invented in the state dress boards and centralized fashion institutions and promoted through the state owned media. The thesis covers the development of socialist official fashion in the Soviet Union and three East Central European countries - Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia¹ - during seventy-two

¹ My research covers Croatia, one of the republics of socialist Yugoslavia which existed as a federation of six republics from 1945 to 1991.

years of communist rule. Both the utopian element (the Soviet Union 1917-1925) and the Stalinist mythical element (the Soviet Union 1929-1953) strongly influenced all the subsequent incarnations of socialist official fashion, equally in the Soviet Union and East Central Europe. It seemed necessary to provide an analysis of the origins of utopian dress and socialist official fashion, in order to understand the relationship between socialist ideology and the phenomenon of fashion after World War Two. Research on that relationship in four socialist countries enabled a comparative analysis, and consequently showed that the official relationship to fashion went through similar processes, even when it took place in historically and geographically separated phases. The comparative method gave me a chance to try to establish the ontological differences between socialism and fashion, differences that applied to socialism as such, and not just to the specific case of the Soviet Union or any other socialist country.² Socialist official dress codes were informed by the concepts of time, class and gender which not only differed from their Western counterparts but also differed between each socialist country. I analysed changes in socialist official fashion in these four countries through empirical research on state-sponsored women's magazines, etiquette books and socialist manuals on dress, as well through the interviews with its protagonists.

I started my research by analysing the social, economic and ideological features that shaped the socialist official approach to dress. Socialism did not encourage individual expression, and officially did not recognize social distinctions. Socialist production, distribution and commerce were centrally controlled. The system exercised power through a scientific and educational approach to dress practices. Ideologically, socialism opposed Western fashion, as something unsuitable to socialist values, which historically had emphasized austerity and modesty. While all those features did determine socialist official fashion, at the same time, they separated it sharply not only from the Western fashion but also from the existing theories on fashion. Gradually, I understood that I had to introduce categories that define Western fashion - time, social distinction, taste and gender - and identify their socialist counterparts. By establishing socialist concepts of time, class, taste and gender and analysing their performance within the field of socialist official fashion, this thesis aims to reach beyond the chronology and certainties of historical evidence, and

² I do not refer to ontology in its strictly metaphysical meaning but to its derivative meaning of the science dealing with such issues as the nature of existence and the categorical structure of reality.

to approach its topic in ways that go beyond the familiar narrative of shortages, centralized economies and controlled markets in goods and services.

The thesis presents the official relationship towards the phenomenon of fashion from 1917 to the end of socialism. The symbolic and material production of utopian dress and socialist official fashion were informed by ideological decisions and aims. Those practices started in the Soviet 1920s through the attempts of the early Bolsheviks to change all the manifestations of everyday life. Karl Mannheim observed the fatal role of ideas in a socialist utopia:

“We are faced here with the idea in the form of a novel substance, almost like a living organism which has definite conditions of existence... In this context, ideas are not dreams and desires...they have rather a concrete life of their own and a definite function in the total process” (Mannheim 1960: 216).

The thesis analyses the power of ideas to materialize in smart dresses in the socialist officialdom. Covering the relationship between socialism and fashion historically in four socialist countries, which differed in their political, economic and social organization, the thesis demonstrates that changes in socialist official fashion were driven by specific ideological shifts within socialist master narratives. Under the bureaucratic gaze, form followed power, and the controlling ideological dictate shaped equally the style of dresses, the practitioners of socialist official fashion, and its media representations.

When it brings in Western fashion, the thesis does not do so in order to compare the two sartorial phenomena, and especially not with an intention to proclaim Western fashion better and superior to its ideologically opposed counterpart. In this thesis, Western fashion is introduced in order to inform the research on socialist official fashion. Although socialism started with an ideological rejection of Western fashion, both socialist women and socialist regimes used Western fashion as the main point of reference to dress and its practices throughout socialist times, whether they rejected it or craved it. Western fashion was a permanent Other in the socialist efforts to invent their own genuine fashion. Slavoj Žižek (1998: 65-66) commented that ideology is always self-referential, and that it always defines itself through a distance towards an Other dismissed and denounced as ‘ideological’.

My research addresses the relationship between socialist ideology and the phenomenon of fashion, as well as the aesthetics and dress codes that emerged from that relationship.

While there is a limited literature on socialist dress codes in specific countries³, a historically comprehensive and comparative study of socialist official dress codes does not exist. Choosing dress as my topic, my research contributes towards the study of ideology within the everyday. Moreover, by analyzing dress practices which were informed by different ideological and organizational principles, my thesis contributes to existing fashion studies that are mainly organized around Western fashion and its practices. The research aims to contribute to both the theory of socialism and the theory of fashion.

Whilst material culture was not available because few clothes survived from the socialist period either in museums or private collections, photographs and drawings have been central to my research.

PREVIEW OF THE THESIS

In chapter 2 I analyze socialist official dress codes using various theoretical concepts including in particular ideology, utopia and myth. My theoretical framework is structured around the analysis of socialist conceptualizations of time, class, taste and gender, which made an analysis of the official ambivalence towards the phenomenon of fashion possible, and enabled me to attempt to establish a theory of socialist fashion.

In chapter 3 I give a detailed account of the methodology of my research. Starting from the theoretical framework developed in the previous chapter, I identify the data needed to answer my research agenda. My empirical research included various written, spoken and visual sources. In the first place I gathered and analyzed documentary materials including women's magazines, picture weeklies, political dailies, state archives, printed materials from museum collections, posters and films. Secondly I conducted a series of twenty four interviews with participants in various fields of fashion production during the socialist period including fashion designers, managers of central fashion institutions, models, organizers of official fashion shows and fairs, journalists and authors in the respective countries. Thirdly I carried out some material culture research, in so far as I was given access to dress collections, each consisting only of a few items.

In chapters 4 to 10 I present my original theoretical and visual research on socialist official fashion. In each chapter I analyze a particular historical sartorial practice grouped within a specific ideal-type-dress: utopian dress and socialist official fashion.

³ See Hlaváčková (2000), Vainshtein (1996).

I examine the concept of utopian dress in early Bolshevik Russia in chapter 4, and in East Central European socialist countries in the post-World War Two period in chapter 6. In these chapters I analyze the historical and social reasons behind the puritanical, ascetic and modest socialist dress ideals. The attitude towards fashion in those periods is marked by a clear break with the past, and a rejection of fashion as a decadent bourgeois gendered practice. Relying on original research in magazines, archives, memoirs and literature, these chapters emphasize that both fashionable dress and femininity were identified as a serious threat to the social body precisely because of their historical connotations. In consequence, the feminine woman was forced into the position of a permanent Other in both Bolshevik Russia and the post-World War Two East Central European countries.

Chapter 4 which covers the period 1917-1929 in the Soviet Union differentiates between various competing constructs of the New Woman and new dress practices, including the early asexual Bolshevik woman, the concept of the cosmopolitan but puritanical Constructivist woman, the Westernized NEP woman, Bolshevik artistic dress proposals and the working women's modernist dress practices in 1920s Soviet Russia. By contrasting the ideological rejection of Western fashion with its brief return in the 1920s, I detect an ideological split running through the Soviet social body during that decade.

Chapter 6 covers the period 1948-1956 in East Central European countries, and analyzes the official attitudes towards the phenomenon of fashion and the concept of the New Woman. The utopian element was the strongest during that period, since the respective countries were establishing a new political and social order. In this chapter I show that, as in the 1920s Soviet Constructivists' dress proposals, there was no place for the phenomenon of fashion because the new communist regimes were attempting to abolish all previous traditions.

In chapters 5, 7, 8, 9 and 10 I analyze the highly ideologized theories and practices of socialist official fashion. These chapters cover the consequences of central state planning for symbolic and material dress production during the socialist period. These chapters scrutinize different manifestations of the phenomenon of socialist official fashion from its introduction in the Soviet Union in the mid-1930s to its gradual decline in the period after the 1960s both in the USSR and East Central European countries. Different historical phases of the imposition of folk motifs as a genuine type of decoration in socialist official fashion are examined.

Chapter 5 covers the period 1930-1955 in the Soviet Union and examines the establishment of the Moscow House of Fashion during the mid-1930s and the

establishment of the centralized and hierarchically organized fashion institutions at lower administrative levels in the late 1940s. In this chapter I show that socialist official fashion started as an ideological construct that served the mythical nature of the Stalinist system, and aesthetically conformed to the Stalinist conservative concept of luxury. The fact that socialist official fashion was embedded in Stalinist mass culture prevented the development of a genuine socialist fashion within a real-life field of fashion design, production, retail and consumption practices.

Chapter 7 covers East Central European countries in the period following the end of World War Two and the communist takeovers. It explores the consequences of the ideologically driven rupture with the pre-World War Two traditions in East Central European countries. Adopting the Stalinist centralized model of fashion production, central fashion institutions were established. I show that the acceptance of the centralized model of fashion production was the main reason for their failure to develop genuine socialist fashion.

Chapter 8 covers the period 1956-1968 in the Soviet Union and East Central European states. It analyzes the official presentations of fashion including socialist fashion congresses, the highly representational fashion shows at home and abroad, the participation of the socialist central fashion institutions at the international trade fairs and exhibitions, and the ideological uses of private fashion salons. In this chapter I show that the official acceptance of the phenomenon of fashion both in the Soviet Union and East Central European countries took place against a background of struggle for cultural supremacy during the Cold War period.

Chapter 9 also covers the period 1956-1968 in the Soviet Union and East Central European states. It further explores the subsequent socialist opening towards the West and the gradual transformation of a harsh form of rule into softer forms of control of the social body. Those processes included the establishment of socialist middle classes whose loyalty the regimes awarded with improvements in living standards of which fashion was an important element. The chapter goes on to analyze the introduction of socialist good taste in the late 1950s as presented in women's magazines, etiquette manuals, films and novels. I reveal that, smoothly blending proletarian asceticism and petit bourgeois prettiness, socialist good taste was the agency through which fashion was eventually reintroduced as a legitimate practice within socialist countries. That approved form of fashion however still conformed to prevailing rules of appropriateness. I show that, although officially dismissed, the grandiose aesthetics of Stalinism, continued to inform socialist official

fashion, in parallel with the politically approved good taste, and that those aesthetics served the different ideological needs of the regimes. The chapter also covers the state-orchestrated re-conceptualization of gender in both the Soviet Union and East Central Europe. While Khrushchev dismissed Stalinist over-decorativeness in dress, in East Central European countries the austere New Woman was abandoned in favour of traditional prettiness. However, socialist prettiness was supposed to be moderate and balanced.



Figure 1: Cover *Moda stran socializma*, Moscow, 1962

Chapter 10 covers the final phase of socialist official fashion that started in the late 1960s. Unable to suppress the newly emerging demands for change in fashion, the official discourse was forced to adjust to the faster flow of time and to renounce some of its control over individuals and events. Although it attempted to conform to the new times and recognize fashionability, those changes happened only in the ideological field. I show that although the official discourse never renounced modesty, moderation and bland prettiness in dress, and continued to promote that aesthetics through women's magazines, socialist official fashion and socialist good taste had fulfilled their main historical role by the end of the 1960s.

In chapter 11, I conclude by setting out the main findings of the thesis, answer my research agenda issues, and present directions for future research.



Figure 2: *Moda stran socializma*, Moscow, 1989 (edited by Lydia Orlova)

CHAPTER 2: TOWARDS A THEORY OF SOCIALIST FASHION

In this chapter I identify the socialist conceptualizations of time, class, taste and gender. Socialism embodied those concepts in a different way to Western fashion. They informed the birth and aesthetics of both utopian dress and socialist official fashion in different phases of socialism. Therefore, my research on the phenomenon of socialist official fashion starts with their analysis.

FASHION AND SOCIALIST CONCEPT OF TIME

The revolutionary originators of the socialist system wanted to make a clear break with the past in all fields. No other revolution rejected the heritage more strongly or was more determined to provoke an absolute break in continuity between the past and the present (Carr 1970: 13). The Bolsheviks shared their concepts of breaking with the past and establishing a new world with earlier liberal and socialist utopias (Bauman 1976; Kumar 1991; Kumar 1993). Studies of Bolshevik utopia observed that it was based on a complete restructuring of time and space (Stites 1989; Clark 1995). The Constructivist critic Boris Arvatov envisioned collapsible furniture, clothes with detachable parts, moving sidewalks and houses on wheels, space travel and flying cities (1997: 126). Richard Stites (1989) described that post-revolutionary utopian fervour, and many other authors reflected on the relationship between extreme fluidity, arts and everyday life in post-revolutionary Russia (Bowlt 1996; Matich 1996; Gutkin 1994). Both the Constructivists and the Futurists held a concept of time that was rapid and fast. However, for the Constructivists time was highly articulated, rationalized and homogenized, while for the Futurists time was fragmented (Clark 1995: 51). The radical political and social changes that the Constructivists called for had to be choreographed according to the new progressive aesthetics (Bowlt 1996; Stites 1989). After his visit to Moscow in the 1920s, Walter Benjamin reflected on the fatal consequences of the fast flow of time on fashion: “Does fashion die (as in Russia, for example) because it can no longer keep up the tempo...” (Benjamin 1999: 71).



Figure 3: Unknown artist, political poster against prostitution *Stop to a Night Footpath*, the 1920s

Vladimir Paperny offered an explanation of the political change from Leninism to Stalinism based on a concept of time. He defined 'Culture One' as an unstable fluid period which took place during the 1920s. At that time even political decrees directly encouraged fluidity, which was also cherished in films, literature and architecture. Paperny observed that a man with a suitcase and a woman with a sack were typical characters in the films of

the fast-changing 'Culture One'. 'Culture Two' started in 1930 when, Paperny argued, time lost its plasticity, a change which was reflected in all other manifestations of culture and everyday life (Paperny 1993). Paperny applied his time distinction to futuristic avant-garde architecture versus Stalinist monumental style. In chapters 4 and 5 I will draw on this idea in order to analyse the diversified 1920s Soviet dress codes in contrast to the birth of socialist official fashion that took place in the Stalinist mid-1930s.

Unlike Bolshevism, which attempted to expel history from its new world and impose immediate change, Stalinism recreated the past by inventing new traditions (Hobsbawm 1983). Krishan Kumar stated that the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century believed that they had discovered the secret of history, and armed with that discovery they totally ruled and regulated society (Kumar 1993: 65). The Russian art critic Gleb Prokhorov observed that under Stalinism: "The past assumed clear purposefulness, and time was compressed to eliminate the gap between the present and the future" (Prokhorov 1995: 30). Sheila Fitzpatrick (1993) and Catherine Clark (2000) observed that within Stalinism mythical reality was preferred over everyday life. Ideology, understood as an interplay of ideas, became more important than the changes that were taking place in everyday reality (Puhovski 1990). Regine Robin claimed that Stalinist culture "designated for all time the historical vector with full certainty, blocking the future since it is already known, as well as the past, which is always reinterpreted in function of the origin time of October". Stalinist society and its culture were called 'postutopian' (Groys 1992) and 'mythical' (Bakshtein 1993; Glatzer Rosenthal 2002). Such differences towards the past between Bolshevism and Stalinism could explain their different approach to fashion.

The relationship of contemporary advertising towards time shows some similarities with Stalinism as both are expressed through highly controlled narratives. In her analysis of time, narrative and history in the context of advertisements, Judith Williamson argued:

"... the closed narrative has an obvious ideological function....Since closure contains the events which lead to it...it must have a synchronic status, it draws events out of time and into a sort of eternal moment".

Stalinist fashion, belonging to a highly controlled ideological system, operated exclusively at a synchronic level. In general, the coordination between the synchronic and the diachronic level in fashion is very important. As Roland Barthes observed:

“... it [is] necessary to distinguish in clothes between the synchronic or systematic level and the diachronic or processive level. Once again, as with language, the major problem here is that of putting together, in a truly dialectical snapshot, the link between the system and process” (Barthes 2006: 10-11).



Figure 4: *Zhurnal Mod*, Moscow, 1956, N 1

From Stalinism on, socialist official fashion preferred the synchronic, systematic level over the diachronic, processive level. In chapter 5, I will argue that the transposition of Bolshevik change into a mythical dimension disabled the link between the system and process in Stalinist official fashion. Opposing the supposedly eternal values in Marxist

thought, Benjamin claimed: “The eternal is in any case far more the ruffle on a dress than some idea” (1999: 69). In a paradoxical turn, the socialist idea in its fiercest and most ideologized form turned into an eternal ruffle in Stalin’s House of Fashion in 1935.

Moreover, from a variety of political, historical and literary sources (Salisbury 1960; Hixson 1998; Cauter 2003), socialist time can be seen as an ideological index in an analysis of socialist official fashion. As Khrushchev opened the Soviet Union towards the West and initiated political and cultural changes, time started to move again. The new concept of time also gradually spread to Eastern Europe. However, despite some visible changes reflected in socialist official fashion as well, socialism was unable to ever fully catch up with the West. As Boris Groys pointed out:

“Confronted by the failure of the Stalinist project to escape from world history, *homo sovieticus* at first requested readmission to history - one illustration was Khrushchev’s 1960s exhortation to “overtake and outstrip America”. At that moment it suddenly became terrifyingly clear to Soviet individuals how far removed they were from world history and the world context” (Groys 1992: 109-110).

In contrast to Western fluidity and rapid change, the epic socialist master narrative continued to express itself through a slow flow of time, within which change was always suspect. The near immobility and dissimulation of change were even more evident in the other socialist countries, on which socialism was imposed after the end of the World War Two. Those countries never experienced the genuine post-revolutionary enthusiasm and hope which the October revolution had provoked (Kovrig 1979; Renner 1989).

Fashion however functions in a different time frame. Georg Simmel (1997) insisted that the two key modernist features of fashion, its accentuation of the present and its emphasis upon change, increased its power well beyond the sphere of clothes. He acknowledged the dialectics between change and stability as a principal feature of modern fashion. Simmel argued that it was precisely that dynamic that satisfied the human need for distinction and the tendency towards differentiation and individual contrast (Simmel 1997). Charles Baudelaire was the first to perceive in fashion a delicate mixture of the ephemeral and fleeting with the static and eternal (Baudelaire 1964). In his study of avant-garde art, Renato Poggioli (1968:79) argued that fashion’s task was to maintain a continual process of standardization, putting a rarity or novelty into general and universal use, then passing on to another rarity or novelty when the first has ceased to be such. René König treated

fashion as a time-oriented phenomenon. He argued that a paradoxical situation was created within fashion by its tendency towards both abrupt change and equally abrupt stabilization. He himself resolved that paradox by understanding the tendency to stabilize as a period when fashion crystallized into a custom or a style, only to be followed by a new change (König 1973). Barthes recognized that “Fashion is a phenomenon both of innovation and conformity” (Barthes 2006: 89). In a modern democratic society fashion is:

“... destined to establish an automatic equilibrium between the demand for singularity and the right for all to have it. There is clearly a contradiction in terms here: society has made fashion viable only by subjecting vestimentary innovation to a strictly regular duration, slow enough for one to be able to be subject to it, but fast enough to initiate buying rhythms and to establish a distinction of fortunes between men” (Barthes 2006: 69).

According to Western fashion theories fashion develops in two phases, novelty and standardization. However, as I will show in the following chapters, time was differently inscribed into socialist official dress, mainly neglecting change in favour of stability. As René König has argued, the element of standardization was one of the key distinctions between Western and socialist dress codes. While socialist fashion was expressed through a limited number of elements, Western fashion was based on an incredible range of choice. Western sartorial codes offered both combination and specialization, supplying different types of dress and rules for each different social occasion (König 1988: 273). The irrationality of Western fashion had already been criticized in the Soviet Union in the 1920s (Kopp 1976) and the early Soviets wanted to oppose Western fashion by relying on the combined forces of art, technology and science (Misler 1989). As Raymond Hutchings (1976) observed, those principles continued to protect Soviet design against unexpected changes throughout the socialist period. In his research on Soviet design after World War Two, Hutchings also noted that the Soviet Union tried to keep out the caprices of fashion and therefore any new fashions were supposed to be introduced in an organized way (1968: 73).

In the same way, the activities of socialist central fashion institutions controlled and tamed fashion trends with the aim of preventing unpredictable change from taking place.



Figure 5: Day Ensembles presented at Warsaw Socialist Fashion Competition (from the left: Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Poland, Romania, Soviet Union and Hungary), *Zhurnal Mod*, Moscow, 1956, N 4



Figure 6: Evening Dresses presented at Warsaw Socialist Fashion Contest (from the left: Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Romania, Soviet Union and Hungary), *Zhurnal Mod*, Moscow, 1956, N 4

The annual collections designed within the socialist central fashion institutions, as I will show in the chapters that follow, condensed real time into an ever repeating controlled cycle. This can be compared to Jean Baudrillard's discussion of collections of antiques:

“And no doubt that is the collection's fundamental function: the resolving of real time into a systematic dimension... Indeed it abolishes time. More precisely, by reducing time to a fixed set of terms navigable in either direction, the collection represents the continual recommencement of a controlled cycle...” (Baudrillard 2005: 102).

The relationship between socialism and fashion can also be considered through the concept of the discontinuity of time, and the way socialism dealt with it. Socialism realized itself as a coherent and linear narrative. However, fashion does not possess a narrative (Lehmann 1999: 301). Therefore the slow and controlled socialist world could not deal with change in fashion, because as a system it was disturbed by the discontinuity of time. In establishing my thesis that the socialist predilection towards stability implied the design and production of conventional clothes, I draw on Slavoj Žižek's observation about the link between ideology and temporality in the act of repetition:

“Repetition is ‘located outside time’, not in the sense of some pre-logical archaism but simply in the sense of the pure signifier's synchrony: we do not have to look for the connection between past and present constellations in the diachronous time arrow; this connection reinstates itself in the form of an immediate paradigmatic short-circuit” (Žižek 1989: 140).

A slow concept of time, suspicious of the past and fearful of change, distanced socialist modernity from its Western counterpart. Modernity is the key notion in existing fashion theories, which argue that modern fashion was born and developed with and within Western modernity. I refer here to the specific historical phenomenon that Charles Baudelaire introduced under the name *modernité* in the mid-nineteenth century, pointing to the experiences of his hero, ‘the painter of modern life’ on the streets of a big city: discontinuity of time, feelings of novelty and sensitivity to ephemera (Baudelaire 1964). Baudelaire located that fugitive and elusive modernity in the fleeting beauty of fashion. Similarly, Georg Simmel (1997) and Walter Benjamin (1989) were concerned with the importance of novelty, change, new ways of perception and consumption in their analyses

of modernity during the early twentieth century. These theorists were not preoccupied with the totality of the new fast-developing capitalist reality; their theories fed on its details and fragments. Consequently, the ever-changing phenomena of fashion also took a central position within their aestheticized theories of modernity.¹

Krishan Kumar pointed out that utopia cannot seal itself off from history even when it attempts to expel history from its envisaged perfect order (Kumar 1991: 44). Historically, the Bolsheviks tried to realize their utopia at the beginning of the 20th century. In rejecting contemporary capitalist economic and social paradigms, the Bolshevik utopia also rejected the expressions of Western modernity, from contemporary Western fashions to new dynamics of gender, as well as new consumerist and retail practices. That fierce ideological rejection of the West can be detected in the Westernized and modernist shapes of the Constructivists' dress proposals. Georg Lukács claimed that high capitalism brought about a metabolic change to 'the *total* outer and inner life of society' (1971: 84). In order to increase profits by increasing the velocity of capital circulation, capitalism exists only as a function of its specific concept of time (Verdery 1996: 35). By a strategic political decision, Western modernity was brought to the Soviet Union in the early 1930s only to support the industrialization of the country carried out through the First and Second Five-Year Plans (Buck-Morss 2000: 164-172). Behind their multi-layered, hierarchical levels of decision making and their over-centralized bureaucracies, the socialist planned economies were based on an institutional fear of change. As Bauman expressed it: "Communism was modernity in its most determined mood and most decisive posture: modernity streamlined, purified of the last shred of the chaotic, the irrational, the spontaneous, the unpredictable" (Bauman 1994a: 167). Referring to socialist modernity, Lefebvre observed that the acceleration in technological progress was based on a victory over nature rather than on a transformation of everyday life, which became over-organized and excessively coherent (Lefebvre 1995: 206-207). Zygmunt Bauman observed that: "In opposition to a diffuse, market-regulated economic growth, a planned economy is teleologically, rather than genetically, determined..." (1976: 94).

¹ In his work *Fragments of Modernity* David Frisby distinguished between social theories of modernity by Simmel, Benjamin and Kracauer and sociological theories of modernization which were informed by a structural or institutional analysis (Frisby 1988: 6). On the other hand, those theories of modernity shared sensibilities and attitudes about the new discontinuous and fragmented reality with the contemporary artistic and literary movements, which became known as modernism.

Socialist modernity was distinguished from Western modernity by its relationship towards the past. In contrast to the initial socialist rejection of the past, “the modern does not regard the past as a defeated enemy...” (Lehmann 2000: 9). Pierre Bourdieu emphasized the inter-connection between structure and history in French fashion: “Like the field of the social classes and of lifestyles, the field of production has a structure that is the product of its earlier history and the principle of its subsequent history” (1993: 136). The socialist relationship towards the past, whether through the early Bolshevik rejection of heritage or through the later Stalinist mythical interpretation of history, was threatened by the way in which fashion relies on its own heritage. As Elizabeth Wilson (1990) observed, fashion makes frequent use of quotation, while Lehmann noted that fashion needs quotation in order to aesthetically rewrite its own history (Lehmann 1999: 308). In socialism, the intrinsic fashion practice of quotation was either excluded or suspect, both because it belonged to the past and because of its bourgeois origins. From the mid-1920s, folk motif became a preferred quotation in socialist official fashion. In subsequent chapters I will refer to Jean Baudrillard’s analysis of abstraction and systematization of time in marginal objects to analyse folk decorations on socialist dresses. Standing outside time and space, marginal objects are neither synchronic nor diachronic but anachronic (Baudrillard 2005: 85).

The most recent theories of fashion and time are more radical than earlier theories that focused on the dynamic interplay between change and stability in explaining the development of fashion. From a post-modern perspective, Gilles Lipovetsky (1994) offered a radical interpretation of fashion’s tendency for change. Drawing on Baudelaire’s idea that ‘curiosity has become a fatal, irresistible fashion’ (Baudelaire 1964), Lipovetsky argued that ‘consummate fashion’ has no place for stability. For him, fashion is in charge because the love of novelty has become general, regular and limitless (1994: 152-155). Various authors have argued that socialism’s unwillingness to change resulted in its eventual political and social collapse (Bauman 1994a, 1994b; Hankiss 1990; Szelenyi and Szelenyi 1994; Lipovetsky 1994). Katerine Verdery claimed that the collapse of socialism occurred due to the massive rupture produced by its collision with capitalism’s speed-up (1996: 36). However, Verdery argued, the fall of socialism was not related only to capitalism’s faster time, but also to the fatal clash of “two differently constituted temporal orders, together with the notions of person and activity proper to them” (ibid: 37).

FASHION AND SOCIALIST CONCEPTS OF CLASS

In functionalist and representational theories, fashion is closely connected with class and status, and dress is seen as a status symbol. For Thorstein Veblen (1961), changes in fashion are rooted in the production of social differences. Similarly, Georg Simmel (1997) understood fashion as an indicator of social status. For him the crucial question was to identify which classes and social groups were the first to embrace new fashions. For both Veblen and Simmel fashion was created among the privileged elite. It was a product of class division and was spread by the dissemination of taste from the upper to the lower classes. According to Simmel, fashion, a changing and contrasting phenomenon, had become much broader and more animated since the bourgeoisie assumed power (Simmel 1997). Like Simmel before him, Pierre Bourdieu (1986) believed that taste itself was the embodiment of class-determined culture, which he rooted in practices of consumption. He argued that the domination of the upper class seemed neutral and natural as it was mediated by taste. Among the upper classes taste in fashion was inherited in the shape of cultural capital, and only the privileged possession of cultural capital could explain the continuous renewal of the upper classes.

Social stratification existed in socialist countries as well, although it was not fully transparent. Officially, there were only two classes in socialism – workers and peasants, but socialist societies also recognized a third stratum, which was usually called the intelligentsia. That stratum was less well defined and more fluid, and at different historical stages included the political bureaucracy, the communist elite, engineers, company managers, teachers, artists, writers and practically everybody who did not fit into the two main classes. The socialist concept of the intelligentsia therefore covered a set of disparate groups of society with different levels of access to power and control, and with a varied possession of ordinary or highly specialized knowledge (Fitzpatrick 1993; Dunham 1990). During the socialist period both political elites and middle classes developed from this fluctuating social group of the intelligentsia. In *The Revolution Betrayed* Trotsky (1965) observed the transformation of the revolutionary leaders into highly privileged political elite. Later, Milovan Djilas (1957) recognized the birth of a New Class in socialism, which consisted exclusively of the highest level of the political bureaucracy. In discussing the question of whether there was a ruling class in USSR, Alec Nove (1979) recognized the existence of the Nomenklatura, a ‘unihierarchical’ power elite, which controlled the bulk of state property. It could to a great extent determine the status, earnings and social

position of various sub-groups in society, while, simultaneously, benefiting from that privilege.



Figure 7: *Zhurnal Mod*, Moscow, 1955, N 4

New professional elites emerged in the process of social stratification in the 1960s and spread out to different levels in society, professionally and hierarchically. Ken Jowitt observed that the relationship between regime and society had changed from one of domination through terror to domination informed by symbolic manipulation (1992: 99-

100). This was a more efficient and smarter form of domination, and politically it indicated that “the Party recognized the need to address the imbalances between the regime and society” (ibid). In this respect, Jowitt saw the socialist societies as modernity cultures, although not as the liberal variant of modernity. While studying the gradual replacement of the old *apparatchiks* by a new articulate group of professionally skilled political managers, Jowitt stressed the importance of that new educated and professional stratum. Tom Bottomore (1991) also noted the fast growth of the new ‘intermediate strata’. In chapter 9, the distinction between the highly privileged New Class and the newly emerging professional elites is important in my analysis of the phenomenon of socialist official fashion. The new professional stratum was a much larger and socially diversified social group than the previous New Class.

A process of negotiation between the regime and the different strata of the population had already started in the 1930s. Sheila Fitzpatrick (1993) noted that Stalin identified the intelligentsia as one of the three basic components of Soviet society, alongside the working class and the collectivized peasantry. She noted that from the mid-1930s the Soviet intelligentsia emerged as a composite social unity, including the old, formerly bourgeois, intelligentsia, the new intelligentsia of proletarian and peasant origins, and the Communist administrators and officeholders. Fitzpatrick observed that the intelligentsia promoted itself through culture and education, which were the only ways of reproducing hierarchy and privilege. Vera Dunham (1990) offered another reading of Stalin’s re-engineering of Soviet social classes in the mid-1930s and 1940s. She argued that Stalin restored the class system in the 1930s by creating huge disparities in wages and introducing material rewards for shock workers. After World War Two the process of constituting a socialist middle class in Soviet Russia continued, but the worker was no longer the Party’s favourite. Dunham argued that in the 1940s Stalin’s conservative regime negotiated a tacit agreement with the *meshchanstvo* - the remnants of the traditional petty bourgeoisie and the new middle class - with which the regime shared the goal of preserving the status quo.² Through that tacit agreement, which Dunham called the ‘Big Deal’, the middle class offered its support in exchange for a range of material goods, from housing to fashion. While the intelligentsia

² In contrast to the traditional Russian intelligentsia and its appreciation of higher spiritual and cultural values, the term *meshchanstvo* is related to a social stratum which cared more about material possessions and the acquisition of goods than about high culture. The narrow-mindedness of *meshchanstvo* brings it close to the continental concept of a petit-bourgeois. Social tensions between the intelligentsia and *meshchanstvo* had existed in Russia from the 1800s.

participated in culture (*kultura*), the new middle class required a different type of cultural knowledge – culturedness (*kul'turnost'*).



Figure 8: Day Dresses, *Modeli sezona*, Moscow, N 4, 1939-1940

Kul'turnost' became appreciated in the mid-1930s as a set of everyday practices which included some elements of the previously despised 'bourgeois' social rituals and social skills – hygiene, proper behaviour, appropriate dress - but it did not include a deep understanding and knowledge of traditional high culture. As such, *kul'turnost'* suited the emergent middle class and its short-cut ways of learning. For Dunham (1990), the relationship between the regime and the new middle class was based on *kul'turnost'*. Catriona Kelly and Vadim Volkov conceptualized *kul'turnost'* as a social glue, a fusion of two value systems: those of the middle class and the intelligentsia. They argued that it

would be simplistic to see *kul'turnost*' as an expression only of Stalinist petit-bourgeois values, as this would over-value its 'etiquette manual' content at the expense of its 'cultural goods' content (Kelly and Volkov 1998; Volkov 2000). The concept of *kul'turnost*' applied to both the new mass culture and everyday life, including good manners and dress. In chapter 5 I will argue that, as a consequence, fashion gained social recognition while remaining subject to the Stalinist rules of appropriateness.

In a similar process in the 1960s, the socialist regimes in Hungary and Czechoslovakia invented their own new middle classes. In place of open repression, the regimes bought the loyalty of their new middle classes with material rewards and imposed on them a culture of propriety and its practices, drawn from the previously despised bourgeois culture. Ivan and Balazs Szelenyi (1994) observed that in Hungary, from the late 1960s and early 1970s, a dual compromise was offered to society to legitimate Kadarist rule under which the intelligentsia received some rights to dissent, to think independently and travel abroad, while the working class received a license to create the second economy. Elemér Hankiss (1990) argued that an unofficial and unsigned deal which he called the 'Pax Kadariensis' had been made under which the Hungarian leadership assumed the role of a benevolent monarch, and allowed a new socialist middle class to develop on the basis of the 'second society'.³ In the 1960s, a Big Deal was also struck between the leadership and the middle class in Yugoslavia which allowed even more freedoms to engage in consumption and travel abroad. In fact, after the break with Stalin, Yugoslavia almost officially encouraged escapism to prove that its version of socialism was different. Consumer freedoms were exchanged for an implicit promise by the middle class to desist from criticising the political system. Ivan Vejvoda (1996) claimed that the dominance of a dictatorial political elite and the rise of living standards in the 1960s led to a situation in which people increasingly defined their orientations in terms of personal needs. Individuals became politically demotivated and were driven to expend their 'civic' energies either through the tightly defined mechanisms of Communist Party life or through private consumption and personal image enhancement.

³ Different authors observed the development of unofficial economies and unofficial social networks in the Soviet Union and the Central European socialist countries from the 1960s. Hankiss called that phenomenon 'second society' and argued that the first official society and the second unofficial society existed in parallel in Hungary, complementing each other (Hankiss 1990).



Figure 9: Žuži Jelinek (front) with models after her fashion show in hotel Esplanade, Zagreb, *Globus*, N 49, June, 1960

The class identity of the new socialist middle classes was established through appropriate consumerist practices (Pilkington 1994; Kelly 1998). From the 1960s on, controlled consumption was the least dangerous means of introducing social distinctions. Socialism favoured the acquisition of cultural capital, since it had officially abolished the possession of economic capital as a means of shaping the class body. As socialist taste depended on a politically approved culture and was disseminated through strictly controlled official channels, Bourdieu's theory (1986) about social distinction, based on the interconnection between cultural and economic capital, is too restrictive to be applied to the socialist middle classes. However, Lipovetsky's theory (1994) of post-modern consumerist practices is more relevant, since in his view cultural capital itself could establish self-legitimacy. It might be said that the non-existent or unrecognized economic capital in socialism turned the process of acquiring cultural capital by the new socialist middle classes into proto-postmodern consumerist practices. Gradually, fashion became one element of the cultural capital of the socialist middle classes.

Socialist official fashion developed through the relationship between the new socialist middle classes and the regimes. The Big Deals were continually re-negotiated since the

acquisitive ambitions and self-confidence of the socialist middle classes kept increasing during the later phases of socialism (Millar 1988; Hankiss 1990; Zsolt 1995; Lampe 1996). The emergence of socialist official fashion in the 1930s and its gradual demise after the 1960s was visible through the changing social and cultural position of the socialist middle classes. Adele Marie Barker (1999) observed that the ideological commitment to the equal distribution of the benefits of modernity proved to be too restrictive. Marshall Berman recognized the parallel but unequal starting points for the Western and socialist types of modernity comparing Paris and St Petersburg in the 1850s. Apart from backwardness and poverty, he found much deeper reasons why socialist modernity did not succeed. Berman argued that the type of modernization adopted in the socialist countries tried to attain the heights of a modern community without ever going through the depths of modern fragmentation and disunity (Berman 1983: 124). Lipovetsky observed that:

“The empire of seduction has been a euphoric gravedigger for the great ideologies. Taking into account neither the singular individual nor the requirement of freedom to live *hic and nunc*, those ideologies found themselves poles apart from temporary individualist aspirations” (Lipovetsky 1994: 210).

Therefore, the increasing self-confidence of the middle classes in the later phases of socialism, made both the temporal and aesthetic expressions of socialist official fashion superfluous. I will develop this point further in chapter 10 below.

CONCEPTS OF TASTE IN SOCIALISM

The Bolsheviks appropriated ideas on modesty, asexuality and simplicity in dress that had been expressed in the liberal utopias.⁴ There were significant differences between socialist utopia and liberal utopias in their relationships to the creation of a new world. Both envisioned the existence of their utopias in the remote future, but the socialist utopia linked its realization to the end of capitalist culture (Mannheim 1960: 216). Thus the Bolshevik utopia was a highly ideologized project from its beginning. The practitioners of the new socialist clothing rejected the Western fashion heritage, and envisaged novel modes of production and a completely new style of dress. This attempt to abolish Western fashion was expressed through the early Constructivist dress proposals in the 1920s (Kopp 1976;

⁴ These liberal utopias have been discussed by Corrigan (1996) and Wilson (1985: 208-227).

Bowlit 1985; Bowlit 1989; Ciofi degli Atti 1989; Stern 2004). The early Soviet dress proposals and practices - from Popova's 'flapper' dresses (Kiaer 2001) to the late 1920s textile design (Douglas 1992) - and the early ambivalences between the artistic and industrial approach to dress (Misler 1989) pointed towards the Avant-garde's close links with Bolshevik ideology. The art-historians Boris Groys (1992), Christina Lodder (1983) and Hal Foster (1999) emphasized the highly politicized views of the Constructivists within the early Soviet Avant-garde movements. Soviet historians were less inclined to explore the Constructivists' ambiguous position towards the political and social conflicts of the early Soviet Union, and their interpretations tended to isolate the Constructivist dress proposals from their highly ideologized position (Strizenova 1979; 1991; Lavrentiev 1988). In a similar way, some Western art and fashion historians were carried away by the visual similarities with contemporary Western artistic and dress practices. They depoliticized the revolutionary Constructivists' message on dress and dealt mainly with their seductive aesthetics (Sarabianov and Adaskina 1990; Bowlit 1989; Wollen 1998; Lussier 2003).

The Constructivists' rejection of both the Western and the domestic sartorial past caused a fatal rupture with the phenomenon of fashion. The same historical pattern was repeated in the initial relationship towards fashion in Czechoslovakia and Hungary in the late 1940s. In these countries the regimes tried to abolish fashion's tradition and continuity at the beginning of socialism, because of its bourgeois associations (Uchalová 2000; Hlaváčková 2000; Dózsa 1991; Dózsa 1991a). That initial abolition was informed by the same utopian drive that impelled the Bolsheviks after the 1917 revolution. I will develop this argument further in chapters 6 and 7.



Figure 10: Lenková, V., "Tonight We Go to the Theatre", *Žena a móda*, Prague, N 10, 1949



Figure 11 & Figure 12: *Žena a móda*, Prague, N 7 1951 & N 6, 1952

Theories of Western fashion claim that fashion is rooted in its past, and based on the dialectics of the old and the new (König 1973; Simmel 1997). In his *Fashion System*, Roland Barthes distinguished between the reservoir of fashion and the reservoir of history. In these reservoirs, the variants of the possible and the impossible are translated into the vestimentary features of the fashionable and the un-fashionable (Barthes 1990: 178-179). Ulrich Lehmann observed that fashion implied an aesthetic re-writing of history, and claimed that its relation with history went beyond its impact as a cultural object (2000: 301). In their attempt to establish an archaeology of dress, Alexandra Warwick and Dani Cavallaro stressed the historicity of fashion as one of its main characteristics. They observed fashion's engaging and meaningful play with the past:

“... fashion is in the business of simultaneously celebrating its reappropriating powers by placing the past under erasure and of implicitly acknowledging the past's omnipresence” (Warwick and Cavallaro 1998: 98).

Richard Stites (1989) and Brandon Taylor (1991) argued that the Bolshevik Avant-garde succeed in achieving neither its aims nor its visions. However, various experts on Stalinist art argued that Stalinism appropriated the Avant-garde's total project (Bakshtein 1993; Groys 1992). The art historian Gleb Prokhorov recognized the Avant-garde's project as an aggressive program of life construction and totalitarian ambitions (Prokhorov 1995: 26). On the other hand Groys (1992; 1996) claimed that Stalin accomplished the restructuring of “the very context of everyday life” that had been envisioned by the Constructivists. Katerina Clark (1996) observed that Stalinist culture realized a major project of the Avant-garde, that of “combining high and low in its new instituted mass culture”. But the appropriation of the Avant-garde project was just one of the elements in Stalinist culture, which stretched from Russian medieval history to Hollywood-style glamour (Dunham 1990; Stites 1992; von Geldern and Stites 1995).

Stalinist culture was conservative, archaic, and eclectic, adhering to the past and lacking any spirit of free inquiry or innovation (Golomstock 1993). Its artistic style, Socialist Realism, was expressed through a set of aesthetic categories, from beautiful to grandiose, sublime, pretty, emphatic, heroic, ornamental, picturesque and harmonious. It was also expressed through highly ideological categories such as *ideinost* (ideological commitment), and *partiinnost* (Party-mindedness) (Heller 1997). Joseph Bakshtein (1993) observed that Socialist Realism homogenized ideologically different forms at the plastic and stylistic

level, adding an archaic quality to Modernist form, and charging it with mythological content (1993: 49). In my view, the aesthetics of Socialist realism explains the over-decorative and conservative style of Stalinist fashion. In chapter 5 below, I will further discuss the ways in which the aesthetics of Stalinist official fashion corresponded to the aesthetics of Socialist Realism.



Figure 13: Cocktail dresses, *Modeli Sezona*, Moscow, N 2, 1938

Socialist Realism embodied the ontological characteristics of Stalinist society and its mythical culture. Beatrice Glatzer Rosenthal argued that: “socialist Realism was the Stalinist ‘method’ of myth-creation” (2002: 297). Socialist official fashion, which was developed in the Moscow House of Fashion from 1935, shared its ontological status with

Socialist Realism. In his article on Stalinist aesthetics, Leonid Heller commented on Socialist Realism's equation between beauty and life:

“Formulating the beauty/reality relation in these terms was not at all absurd; on the contrary, it made perfect sense given the fact that Zhdanovite realism presupposed the objective existence of everything it depicted. It thus created reality, much in the way the Avant-garde had hoped to create it (and, for that matter, not unlike medieval literature, with its refusal to question the different ontological status of the ‘seen’ and the ‘written’”) (Heller 1997: 68).

Socialist Realism “prognosticated not only a form of art, but also a new reality” and its artists “were given the directive to work with the *a priori* idea of reality already articulated in official ideology” (Prokhorov 1995: 28). In chapter 5 I will contextualise the aesthetics of smart Stalinist dresses within the mythical art practices of Socialist Realism. While the different manifestations of Stalinist mass culture have been widely studied, no research has been done either on Stalinist dress codes or on the socialist concept of luxury in dress. The Stalinist concept of luxury has been discussed by Jukka Gronow (1997; 2003), Sheila Fitzpatrick (1999) and Julie Hessler (2000). Their ideas can readily be applied to the analysis of the luxurious dress prototypes produced in the Moscow House of Fashion from the mid-1930s, and in the East Central European national fashion institutions from the early 1950s (see, for example, Figure 7). As historical accounts of the period demonstrate, that Stalinist concept of luxury, presented through idealistic media images, contradicted the everyday reality of the time (Ward 1993; Lewin 1995; Leбина 1999; Osokina 2001; 2003; Fitzpatrick 1999).

Stalinist aesthetics, once introduced in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, and later in the East Central European socialist countries, continued to inform socialist official fashion throughout socialism. In this context, I draw on Bakshtein's description of the Socialist Realist artists to explain the position of fashion designers and the dresses that they designed in the central fashion institutions:

“The main task of the artist was to use a representation as an index of some ‘other’, non-artistic circumstances, whether social, political, economic, or ideological” (Bakshtein 1993: 57).

Bound to the synchronous, systematic level within the field of socialist official fashion, fashion designers had been expected to neglect the diachronic level of fashion and avoid new trends.



Figure 14: Czech outfits at the Socialist Dress Contest, Warsaw, *Zhurnal Mod*, Moscow, 1956, N 1

Previous research on socialist dress codes in the Soviet Union (Vainshtein 1996) and in the East Central European socialist countries (Hlaváčková 2000; Oblath 2000) dealt mainly with the concept of modesty and restraint in socialist clothing. The concepts of modesty and measure were emphasised in research on Soviet design during Khrushchev's era.

Susan E. Reid (1997) studied the role of the intelligentsia and its ideologically driven attempt to turn excessive Stalinist style into a new aesthetics of everyday life. The new style was embodied in clear, simple, and restrained designs appropriate to machine production. In his research on 1960s Soviet design, Raymond Hutchings recognized the dangers of such a bland and unremarkable style:

“A tasteful monotony of visual forms, which would be only one degree better than the tasteless monotony of the past, therefore figures among the dangers looming for Soviet society” (Hutchings 1968: 84).

I will develop my concept of socialist good taste in official fashion as a merger between the original Bolshevik values of modesty and restraint, and the Stalinist categories of conventional prettiness and traditional elegance. Stalinist luxury and Khrushchev’s modesty both fought contemporary Western fashion trends and the change that they would have introduced. Drawing on Roland Barthes (1976) I will claim in chapter 8 that socialist societies eventually took on out-dated *petit-bourgeois* values and practices in order to ensure proper social behaviour and appropriate clothing for their middle classes. Barthes argued that everything that is not bourgeois is obliged to borrow from the bourgeoisie. He stated that the revolutionary made the world, while the already established bourgeois conserved it. The language of the former aimed at transforming the world, while the latter wanted to eternalize it. Barthes insisted that the poverty of the Myth on the Left was based on that, and that only the Myth on the Right was rich, theatrical, sleek, taking hold of everything and inventing itself ceaselessly (Barthes 1976: 145-149). René König (1988) argued that “humanistic functionality”, which Socialist ideologues propagated as a union of the beautiful and the useful, was stylistically *petit-bourgeois*, as it lacked any transgression.

When in the later phases of socialism the ideological pressures became less transparent, control spread in more diffused forms, and socialist good taste was introduced through mass magazines, popular novels and etiquette books. Writing about the creation of the socialist consumer, Catriona Kelly (1998) emphasized that in a centralized economy and a consensual culture, aspirations and desires could only be invoked in a safe educational context. Hilary Pilkington (1994) argued that the socialist system used the educational approach in order to promote rational forms of consumption in contrast to the insatiable Western consumer practices. Women’s magazines, manuals advising on the culture of dress, etiquette manuals and novels from the respective historical periods provided advice

on correct dress and grooming (Reid 1997; Attwood 1999; Vainshtein 1996; Azhgikhina and Goscilo 1996; Hlaváčková 2000; Oblath 2000).

In contrast, the middle classes in the West were shaped by a gradual civilizing process. Norbert Elias (2000) was the first to point out that the rise of the bourgeoisie in the West and its appropriation of power from the aristocracy had been a dynamic civilizing process. In the West, good manners and dress codes emerged from an amalgamation of the codes of the old and the new classes. In his study of French bourgeois nineteenth century dress codes, Philippe Perrot (1994) noted that the flood of etiquette books between 1840 and 1875 was a response to an unprecedented demand from a still uninitiated bourgeoisie, which sought to legitimate its new status with appropriate manners and correct dress. The process was dynamic because those segments of the bourgeoisie which aspired to upward mobility were fighting for cultural access and social acceptance from the dominant upper portion of the bourgeoisie.

The socialist regimes, on the other hand, politically engineered their middle classes when it suited their needs, and imposed rules of appropriate taste on them. In order to secure their political legitimacy, the leaderships made a series of deals with the middle classes which promised to deliver more consumer goods in exchange for political loyalty. In my analysis of the socialist educational programmes promoted through the state-controlled media, I draw on Pierre Bourdieu's observations on the workings of totalitarian regime:

“... ‘totalitarian institutions’...that seek to produce a new man through a process of ‘deculturation’ and ‘reculturation’ set such store on the seemingly most insignificant details of *dress, bearing, physical and verbal manners*... The principles embodied in this way are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness...hidden persuasion of an implicit pedagogy, capable of instilling a whole cosmology, an ethic, a metaphysic, a political philosophy, through injunctions as insignificant as ‘stand up straight’ or ‘don’t hold your knife in your left hand’. ... The whole trick of pedagogic reason lies precisely in the way it extorts the essential while seeming to demand the insignificant (Bourdieu 1977: 94-95).

FASHION AND SOCIALIST CONCEPTS OF GENDER

Socialism started with a preference for class over gender. Elizabeth Waters (1991) noted that the Bolsheviks had come to power with the emancipation of women on their agenda. The problem was that they viewed change first and foremost in terms of production, and the worker and the factory took the centre of the revolutionary stage, while the transformation of the home and family was on the periphery. In her research on the representation of women in early Soviet political art, Victoria Bonnell (1991) observed that immediately after the Revolution, the allegorical image of women on posters resembled pre-revolutionary iconography, but that by the early 1920s that poetic and feminine image had been transformed into the robust image of a woman worker or a peasant woman. By positioning gender differences in second place after class in their conceptual framework, socialist regimes had shown their preferences for the restructuring of power (Bonnell 1991). At the same time, official ideology initially down-played all traditional female attributes, including femininity and dressing-up (Attwood 1999).

Gender is defined in the literature as a primary way of signifying the relationships of power, one of the recurrent references through which political power has been conceived, legitimated and criticized (Scott Wallach 1988). In that sense, the socialist political deconstruction of the previous gender order was a highly symbolic and powerful act. Historically, it was inspired by the political struggle for women's rights at the beginning of the 1900s in capitalist societies. Spiritually, it was based on the long streak of utopian socialist ideas of equality between men, and Marxist theories which criticized the patriarchal order. But the creation of the new woman was in a broader sense just one of the elements inside the project of mastering nature (Clark 1993). Henri Lefebvre traced the earliest, and opposing, conceptualizations of modernity in the West and the socialist East concerning two different mid-nineteenth century concepts of nature between the two contemporaries, Charles Baudelaire and Karl Marx. Baudelaire opted for anti-nature that consequently was synonymous with pure artificiality (Lefebvre 1995: 172). On the other hand, Marx called on lost nature, split by culture and knowledge, and eventually developed his theory of revolutionary practice, which would abolish all dualities and alienations between man and nature, and between man and woman (ibid: 171).

Baudelaire however used women's practices of fashion and make-up to develop his argument that nature was vulgar and thus human beings should rise above it by the aesthetic artificiality of dressing up. He praised cosmetics precisely because it transformed

a crude natural woman into a beautiful creature superior to nature. Similarly, fashion was for him a permanent and repeated attempt at the reformation of nature (Baudelaire 1964). In the West, the artificiality of dress is culturally recognized and inscribed onto women who practice fashion, and fashion produces the feminine within an opposition between naturalness and artificiality (Evans and Thornton 1989). The West tamed female sexuality, turning it through a process of naturalization into femininity practiced in a series of highly codified grooming rituals. Western fashion eventually developed effeminated clothes for both men and women (Hollander 1996). In contrast, both the New Man and the New Woman were moulded on the Nietzschean *Übermensch*, (Glatzer Rosenthal 2002; Clark 1993). Besides the importance of robustness and strength in the shaping of the ideal female socialist body, the notions of modesty and asexuality played significant roles in its final look. Czechoslovak socialist dress codes initially imposed emasculated looks on women, but this robust version of woman was in latent conflict with strong traditional values as well as with women's craving for beauty and for feminine clothes as everyday practices (Hlaváčková 2000).

The 'New Woman' was not a fixed category, but one that underwent continual reconstruction and redefinition (Einhorn 1993; Attwood 1999). Official attempts were eventually made to show that femininity still mattered in socialism, but only when it suited the regimes politically. That happened in the Soviet Union in the mid-1930s and 1940s with the Stalinist petit-bourgeoisification of the society (Attwood and Kelly 1998; Dunham 1990). The new official recognition of femininity only confirmed the way in which representation and gender identity were intrinsically intertwined. In Stalin's Soviet Union, the New Bolshevik Woman had been transformed into a Superwoman. Femininity and other attributes of traditional womanhood were added to the list of her duties, making that burden heavier to carry out (Attwood 1999). In the Stalinist period it became a woman's right as well as her duty to divide herself between production and reproduction (Attwood and Kelly 1998).



Figure 15: Cover, *Ez a divat*, Budapest, 1955, N 3

The regimes continued to control the processes of gender formation and disseminated them through the official women's organizations. Different authors stated that those women's associations were powerful instruments of control in the hands of the Communist Party (Wolchik 1979; Wood 1997; Corrin 1994; Slapšak 1997). As Hana Havelkova (1993) observed, women were liberated from men in order to be enslaved by the state, which took on the role of patriarch. For Havelkova, a positive form of legal equalization was diminished by a negative form of equalization which removed or suspended differences

only to oppress all through totalitarian means. The women's organizations disseminated the official gender politics in a series of practices, from educational courses on hygiene and healthy cooking, to grooming and fashion shows. They promoted official shifts in the conceptualization of gender, and instructed women on correct dress and manners through the mass magazines that they controlled (Attwood 1999; McAndrews 1985). From the 1950s on, socialist regimes recognized the growing demand for fashion and grooming by the female members of their newly installed middle classes. Consequently, the notion of gender softened, and moderate expressions of femininity were encouraged in women's magazines. Various authors observed the insistence on measure and simplicity in the officially promoted femininity and dress practices in the women's press during the later phases of socialism (Vainshtein 1996; Hlaváčková 2000; Oblath 2000).

According to de Lauretis (1987) representation constructs gender. Conventionally smart and feminine dresses which appeared in the new mass media from the mid-1930s not only represented fixed and controlled meanings, but also reconstructed gender in its most traditional and fixed form. The new socialist femininity was ideologically imposed while in the West changing concepts of femininity are related to commercial practices and women's interactions with them. Caroline Evans and Minna Thornton (1989) stressed that fashion was one of many costumes of the masquerade of femininity. Developing further the notion of fashion as a masquerade, Barbara Vinken (1999) challenged the concept of fashion as a representation of gender. She insisted that women in the West were travestied by fashion into the dandy version of a man. In chapter 9 I will argue that, in contrast, the early socialist travesty of the woman clothed as a robust man casts a new light on the initial rejection of fashion in socialism, and explains its later official comeback in its modest petit-bourgeois version. Initially, fashion was completely rejected, as it belonged to a decadent and frivolous bourgeois life style that had nothing to do with the non-rhetorical, serious and hard working masculine world, into which the socialist masculinized woman was allowed to enter. In the later phases of socialism, a space for fashion opened when socialism reintroduced traditional femininity and women were allowed to be playful, although still controlled, losing along the way their place in the serious male world.

Even when the socialist regimes reintroduced notions of sexual difference and conventional gender division, they continued to control the everyday uses of traditional femininity. However, socialist women did not appreciate the state's intervention in style of their dress and looks (Azghikhina and Goscilo 1996; Vainshtein 1996). Soviet women's appreciation of chivalry, sex stereotypes, make-up and feminine dress originated in a desire

to oppose a system which had abolished all differences (Lissyutkina 1993). Reflecting on the analyses of the processes of opposition, subversion and manipulation of femininity in contemporary Western women's practices (Evans and Thornton 1989; Wilson 1990; 1993; Tseëlon 1995), I will argue that socialist women did not oppose the traditional concept of femininity itself. Socialist women internalised the officially imposed ideal of conventional femininity while simultaneously opposing the regimes' control of its expressions.

Having being suppressed under socialism, femininity underwent a total change in the period of late socialism. Through prostitution and pornography, private discourse and experience entered the public arena in the most transgressive ways (Waters 1989; 1993; Goscilo 1996). A.M. Barker (1999) interpreted this change as a response to the constantly shifting boundaries between what counts as public and private, particularly in the sphere of ownership of one's body.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have developed the concept of socialist official fashion, and situated it within the various phases of development of socialism in the four case study countries. I discussed the key variables which informed the development of socialist official fashion, including the socialist concept of time, the changing nature of class and taste in socialism, and the role of the socialist approaches to gender and the body. As these variables were conceptualized within specific political, economic and social circumstances, they differed between each socialist country and from their Western counterparts. Aesthetics of socialist official fashion was also influenced by changes in the official attitudes towards Western fashion, from the total rejection of fashion, to the official recognition of some of its elements. In the rest of the thesis I analyse the phenomenon of socialist official fashion through the prism of the four conditioning variables of time, class, taste and gender.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

My research has covered the phenomenon of socialist official fashion in four former socialist countries over a period of seventy two years. I began with an interdisciplinary study of the literature on Western and socialist fashion, and of the culture, history, politics and economics of the socialist system. This was followed by field work in Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary and Russia through which I collected empirical data from a variety of sources concerning socialist official fashion. I analysed this data in the light of the theoretical framework that I had developed on the basis of my initial literature review. My empirical research was qualitative, and included textual, spoken, and visual sources.

RESEARCH SOURCES

Documentary sources

I made use of a variety of documentary sources including women's magazines, art journals, picture weeklies, political dailies, satirical magazines, state archives, and printed materials from museum collections, posters and films.

Women's magazines were my main research source on socialist official fashion. As they were state-owned the regimes channelled all the official policies on dress and gender through them. My reading of the socialist fashion magazines' visual narratives was guided by my analysis of the specific ideological changes which I set out in the previous chapter. These magazines did not publish 'real' fashion images, as they did not present real-life fashion changes. I studied them as a representation of the second order, in which fashion had been submitted to ideology. My reading of these images was informed by an everyday knowledge that I interiorised during my up-bringing in a socialist country, and more recently by theoretical reflections on their meanings. This inter-textual knowledge facilitated my visual understanding of socialist official fashion. As Barthes argued, interpretation of readings of images depends on the "the different kinds of knowledge – practical, national, cultural, aesthetic – invested in the image" (1977: 46). Marcus Banks (2001) has argued that 'method' is inseparable from 'theory' and 'analysis' in visual research. My method was also enriched by my personal history and experiences in relation to my topic, which helped me to read images by "looking through, looking at, and looking behind" (Banks 2001: 10).

Each narrative belongs to a certain genre, which secures the meaning of a text (Schirato and Webb 2004). In my methodology, I classified socialist women's magazines as a genre of their own, informed by conventions of both fashion journals and more or less sophisticated political bulletins. I researched several magazines in each of the respective countries, covering the whole period of communist rule. I chose the magazines from each end of the social spectrum: both elitist and those meant for a mass public. This enabled me to identify differences in the dissemination of official policies towards different strata of the public. Although the state owned the publishing houses and the publishers, dress codes and concepts of femininity varied between the different magazines, and were adjusted for specific social groups. In Hungary I studied *Ez a divat (This Is Fashion)* (elitist) and *Nők lapja (Women's Journal)* (popular); in the Soviet Union: *Rabotnitsa (Working Woman)* (popular) and *(Modeli sezona) Fashions of the Seasons* (elitist) and *(Zhurnal mod) Fashion Journal* (elitist), and in Czechoslovakia *Žena a móda (Woman and Fashion)* (elitist) and *Vlasta* (popular). In Yugoslavia, the women's journal *Svijet (World)* fulfilled both elitist and populist functions in the same publication. By studying the differentiation between elitist and popular magazines I was able to observe not only the phenomena of modesty and restraint that prevailed in the popular magazines, but also the official concept of luxury which was promoted in the elitist magazines.

In his *System of Fashion* Barthes (1990) used exclusively a synchronic method in developing his semiotic theory of fashion. He gathered and analysed his data by relying on 'written' fashion in one year, from June 1958 - June 1959, in a couple of French magazines, in order "...not to describe concrete Fashion but to reconstitute a formal system... seeking to constitute a structure, it would be most useful to limit one's work to a state of Fashion, i.e. a synchrony" (1990: 10). In contrast, I used the diachronic and comparative analysis of women's magazines in order to identify the aesthetic expressions of socialist official fashion, as they were slowed down by an over-organized structure.

I also studied the satirical magazines - *Krokodil* (Soviet) and *Lúdas Matyi* (Hungarian). Discussing the use of cartoons within dress studies, Lou Taylor observed that: "...unless period cartoons are set in their historical period context, they become meaningless" (Taylor 2002:145). In contrast to socialist fashion magazines which tried to tame change, the satirical publications recognized the latest Western fashion trends and ridiculed them. Situated within their historical context, *Krokodil's* and *Lúdas Matyi's* exaggerations and overstatements on fashionable dress showed the depths of the socialist fear of the culturally different and much faster concept of time in the West. I gathered an additional insight in

the official approach to fashion through the critical reading of propaganda magazines – *USSR under Construction* (the 1930s and 1940s) and *Soviet Union* (1950s and 1960s) and *Yugoslavia* (the 1950s). Published in English and targeted for Western audiences, these luxurious magazines presented an imaginary socialist world and pictured conventionally elegant clothes that matched an opulent but entirely invented life-style. By depicting their ideal world as both affluent and aesthetically conservative, the propaganda magazines simultaneously demonstrated the functioning of the ideology and the aesthetically traditionalist nature of socialist taste.

I made a total of twelve field research visits to the respective countries over a period of six years, and each visit lasted about two weeks. In Russia, I used the Arts and Theatre Library in Moscow, which possesses a good collection of pre-revolutionary and socialist period fashion magazines and books on fashion. I also used the Historical Library, which contains collections of more general magazines, dailies and journals, as well as the library of the Moscow State University for Humanities. In Budapest, I used the National Library, the library of the Museum of Applied Arts and the library of the University of Applied Arts. During the period of my Open Society funded research fellowship I worked at the library of the Central European University in Budapest. In neither Russia nor Hungary is dress from the socialist period a part of the permanent collections in the museums, although the libraries have a good collection of fashion and general interest magazines from that period. It was initially very difficult to consult the relevant materials in Russia and Hungary as the staffs were unwilling to assist me in locating fashion materials, and to lend me socialist fashion magazines, because of their own negative memories of everyday life under socialism. But, as time passed by they came to recognise socialist fashion as part of their social history and their personal lives. At this stage they became proud that somebody wanted to study socialist fashion and became very helpful. In her essay “Making Histories, Making Memories”, Gaynor Kavanagh noted: “...*why* and *how* people remember some things rather than others, and the form the memory takes, is as important as accuracy of its content...Awareness of how memories are constructed is as important to historians in museums as an awareness of how history is constructed” (Kavanagh 1996: 9). During my field research I was able to observe the process of ‘memories being constructed’ as such changes were taking place. These observations of the social dynamics of memory were very helpful in my research on socialist dress codes.

In the Czech Republic, I worked in the National Library in Prague and in the library of the Museum for Applied Arts. When I started to work there in 1999, the technical level of

all the equipment in the public institutions was very low. On the other hand, the attitude of library and museum staff towards socialist fashion was more favourable because they perceived it as a part of a continuing tradition connected to their highly regarded pre-war fashion history. In contrast, domestic socialist fashion was little appreciated in Yugoslavia as people had access to Western fashions through travel. Their negative attitude was reflected in the library of the Museum of Applied Arts which did not have any written materials on socialist fashion, such as fashion magazines, or catalogues of fashion shows of the private fashion salons. Documentation on the latter's lively activities within the Crafts Association is almost totally lost. I managed to find some of those documents only in private houses, preserved through family interest. I also used the National Library in Zagreb, which was the only institution that had preserved all the dailies, magazines and journals from the socialist period. I also gained access to the library of the former socialist state publishing house *Vjesnik*, which includes all the magazines that it had published in that period.

I also used London libraries in my research, especially the National Arts Library at the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Library of the School for Slavonic and East European Studies, the British Library and the British Newspaper Library, which held original sources from the Soviet Union and Czech Republic. In addition, I used the British Newspaper Library to consult Western dailies and general interest weekly magazines. I also studied contemporary Western fashion magazines in order to observe visual similarities and differences between socialist dress codes and their Western counterparts.

Oral Testimony

I carried out a series of interviews with participants in various fields of fashion production during socialism (fashion designers, models, organizers of official fashion shows and fairs, journalists and authors of books on fashion and etiquette in the respective countries).

I conducted twenty four interviews in Russia, Czech Republic, Hungary and Croatia (the list of interviewees is set out in the Appendix). I chose and met my interviewees mainly through private contacts, as most of them were retired and lived at home. Private connections facilitated my meetings even with people within institutions such as museums or fashion houses, as a private recommendation is still the usual way to arrange a meeting in these countries. This ensured that trust was established, as a private recommendation

would usually put the interviewee at ease and encourage them to share information with me.

My interviews were semi-structured and covered a set of key themes. Consequently the questions varied between interviews depending on the context. My main set of questions covered the history of the central fashion institutions which dealt with the production and dissemination of socialist official dress codes, and the interviewees' role in those institutions. I also discussed everyday dress practices, while I gathered information on socialist official fashion. As the most of my interviewees belonged to the official sphere, they typically justified its role within the system. These interviewees had also experienced less traumatic everyday experiences in their dress practices, both because they belonged to a privileged social group, and because they tended to adhere to conservative aesthetics in their personal dress as well. Gaynor Kavanagh has noted:

“...what is remembered is being filtered through the idea of self and the individual's relative ability to cope with and relate to personal memories. The sum of this may well be given expression in how they articulate their memories, that is, the form of memory chosen” (Kavanagh, 2000: 86).

As with documentary sources and object studies, I attempted to contextualize my oral testimonies. I observed that the division of the personal and private sphere versus the official and formal sphere which had existed during socialism was also reflected in my interviews. As Lou Taylor stated:

“Memories have to be set within a viable interpretative framework of critical evaluation...The first and most obvious bedrock is that the words of the respondents have to be set firmly into her/his personal locality and period. Without that, the rest becomes valueless” (Taylor 2002: 262).

Object studies

Unfortunately there was little appreciation of dress as an artefact during socialism, and hardly anything is preserved in museums or in private hands. A lack of a storage space was certainly a problem as people mainly lived in flats during the socialist period (and still do), and therefore could not afford to store unnecessary items. Usually, once the owner died, all clothes were immediately given to charity. The negative attitude towards domestic socialist

fashion was also reflected in the permanent collection of the Zagreb Museum of Applied Arts, which only displays a few dresses designed by the Croatian private fashion salon owner and designer Žuži Jelinek. I saw and handled a few items of women's dresses from private wardrobes from the early 1960s that were designed and produced by private fashion salons in Yugoslavia and Hungary. These confirmed both the high level of craftsmanship and adherence to the aesthetics of socialist good taste. The highly representative dresses from the collection in the Prague Museum of Applied arts conformed to the same aesthetics and levels of production.

The Prague Museum of Applied Arts was the only institution of that kind in all the countries that I visited that had actively preserved and curated the dresses from the socialist period and continues to do so. Their collection consisted of representative dresses produced by leading fashion designers who had been employed in the central state fashion institution *Textile Production*, as well as dresses that had been designed and produced in fashion houses such as *Styl* and *Eva* (before World War Two these had been the privately owned *Rosenbaum* and *Podolska*). Currently, the Museum's dress collection is being continually enlarged with dresses by post-socialist fashion designers, so that the Prague institution is the only preserve of dress as an artefact covering all the historical periods in the countries that I visited during my research.

Memoirs, biographies and novels

Apart from oral testimonies, memoirs and biographies were very useful in grasping the different practices of socialist dress. Memoirs and biographies were especially valuable sources of information on the earlier periods, such as the Soviet 1920s and 1930s. I consulted both domestic and Western sources - for example, Knickerbocker (1931), Jacobson (1997), Triolet (2002), Rodchenko's diaries and letters (1982) and Stepanova's biography by Lavrentiev (1988). These sources painted a vivacious and dynamic background to the official policies, by contradicting both ideological dictates and the deprived reality with the dynamic messiness of everyday life and colourful individual characters.

I consulted several novels covering the early Soviet socialist period that identified the multifaceted meanings that dress codes performed in individual lives. Novels by Kollontai (1999) and stories by Strogova (1994) recognized dress in specific historical circumstances, and acknowledged the processes of identity construction through dress.

THE RESEARCH PROCESS: ADVANTAGES AND CONSTRAINTS

As a fluent Croatian speaker I was able to acquire the basic language skills in Czech and Russian. As I am unable to speak Hungarian, I was fortunate to have a research assistant during my research in Budapest, and later used a translator in London.

I experienced problems while studying the activities of the central fashion institutions, as key documents and artefacts had often disappeared, or had been appropriated by the former functionaries, who were often uncooperative. However, I managed to meet several former functionaries at their homes and in these cases they were more than willing to cooperate with my research. In these cases they produced official materials, including documents and samples of fabric, which they had managed to preserve and take home after their institutions had closed down.

My research was also seriously obstructed by bureaucratic procedures, which still exist in some of former socialist countries (especially in Russia), and the slowness of the services, which affected me because my field research visits were of limited duration. Very often, recourse to small-scale bribery was the only way to obtain very simple services, such as photocopying.

CHAPTER 4: UTOPIAN DRESS: THE SOVIET UNION, 1917-1929

In this chapter, I analyse five competing models of womanhood and the types of dress that clothed or were supposed to clothe women in the Soviet 1920s. These, as they developed and overlapped over time, were the early Bolshevik woman based on the Nietzschean *Übermensch*, the Constructivist modernist woman, the NEP woman adorned in the latest fashion, the Bolshevik artistic dress initiatives promoted by the state, and Soviet fashionable dress which, on an urban woman worker, mediated a merger between Bolshevik Utopia and contemporary Western modernity. Throughout the 1920s, these five models both coexisted alongside one another and competed against one another in the Soviet public arena.

Conceptually, three of them - the early Bolshevik woman, the Constructivist modernist woman, and the Bolshevik artistic dress initiatives - adhered to the official Bolshevik policies, but offered different interpretations of the ideal woman and the new socialist dress. The fact that the three models were quite different from one another demonstrates that the 1920s were pluralistic and that different concepts of new woman and new socialist clothes co-existed even within officialdom. However, these three models, as ideologically driven projects, did not reflect the new Soviet reality but promoted ideal-type women and ideal clothes, whether they envisioned a new socialist woman stripped of all adornment or imagined her clad in beautiful, hand-stitched folk-inspired dresses.

In contrast, the two other models - the NEP woman dressed in the latest Western trends and the Soviet working woman appropriating Western fashion to her needs and conditions - acknowledged in their dress practices the commercialised, market-oriented environment of the second half of the 1920s, which allowed the phenomenon of fashion to briefly return to the Soviet Union. Although both models opposed the highly ideologized official Bolshevik models, there were significant differences between them. While the NEP woman accepted luxurious Western dress practices, and was herself an alien in a new Bolshevik country, the socialist urban woman worker tried to adjust the latest Western trends to a new reality and her own position and role within it. Her dress, simultaneously modest and fashionable, attempted to reconcile the Bolshevik Utopia and its counterpart, Western modernity.

I demonstrate that all five models of woman and her ideal dress were related to the phenomenon of Western fashion, whether they rejected it, copied it, or tried to negotiate

new meanings between Western fashion and the new socialist woman. I also show that different women's magazines served different concepts of women and different notions of dress. Finally, the chapter identifies the ideological schism that was running through the Soviet social body throughout the 1920s.

NIETZSCHEAN ÜBERMENSCH CLOTHED IN A RUSSIAN PEASANT SKIRT

The ideological rejection of the phenomenon of fashion in Bolshevik Russia was part of a broader picture. Situating the Bolshevik revolution in a historical context, E. H. Carr stated: "Never had the heritage of the past been more sharply, more sweepingly or more provocatively rejected; never had the claim to universality been more uncompromisingly asserted; never in any previous revolution had the break in continuity seemed so absolute" (Carr 1970: 13). Zygmunt Bauman argued that "Lenin's redefining of the socialist revolution as a substitution for, instead of continuation of, the bourgeois revolution was the founding act of communism" (Bauman 1994a: 166). The Bolsheviks condemned the past, and wanted to exchange the present with a new world, inhabited by New Men and New Women. New clothes were needed to dress the new socialist masses. The Bolsheviks' urgent desire to invent a new world was utopian by nature. In contrast to More or Fourier who had only imagined Utopia, the Bolsheviks grasped an historical opportunity to enforce a new world on the country and its people. Both the New Man, and the New Woman were moulded on the Nietzschean *Übermensch*. The iconography of a strong and harmonious body fitted well into the broader framework for mastering nature. The socialist concept of nature was, following Marx's ideas, ontologically rooted into the eighteenth century idea of pure paradise, preceding capitalist alienation between both man and woman, and man and nature. Using powerful machinery and new technologies, the New Man was supposed to reinstate that harmony.

Following the revolution, the master narrative envisaged a role for the New Woman that privileged class over gender. On the poster entitled *Under the Red Star, Together with Men, Lets Frighten the Bourgeoisie*, a squadron of women workers and peasant women in long red aprons and wide black skirts threateningly marched towards a single bourgeois man (Figure 16). Symbolically dressed in formal evening wear, and sporting a huge exploitative belly, the bourgeois was already on the floor, trying unsuccessfully to escape the proletarian women's wrath. Their bodies with broad shoulders, broad hips and prominent breasts equally owed their shape to the strength of the Nietzschean Superman

and the softness of the countryside woman. With muscles adding strong and robust armour, that large body was big enough to embody a traditional peasant woman and a new Bolshevik woman at the same time. Only one iconographic detail - the way they tied scarves on their heads – differentiated women workers from peasant women. Established in that early period, a scarf tied below the chin continued to represent a traditional peasant woman, while the dynamic working woman tied her scarf at the back of her neck. Otherwise, in that poster, the women workers and the peasant women had the same large body, clothed in long and wide, peasant-style skirts.



Figure 16: Valerianov, N., political poster “Under the Red Star, Together with Men, Lets Frighten the Bourgeoisie”, 1925

Symbolically, her big, muscular body and unadorned face were not only required for the physically demanding role of building up the new world, but also for the destruction of the previous bourgeois culture. Made-up women clad in fashionable clothes had no place in

the new socialist world, and all the pre-1917 fashion magazines were abolished following the revolution. The new Soviet women's magazine *Rabotnitsa* (*Working Woman*) displayed the same cover during the whole first year of its publication in 1923: a woman worker in a red headscarf pointing towards the chimneys of a big industrial city with one arm, while in the other she held a banner emblazoned with the name of the magazine (Figure 17).

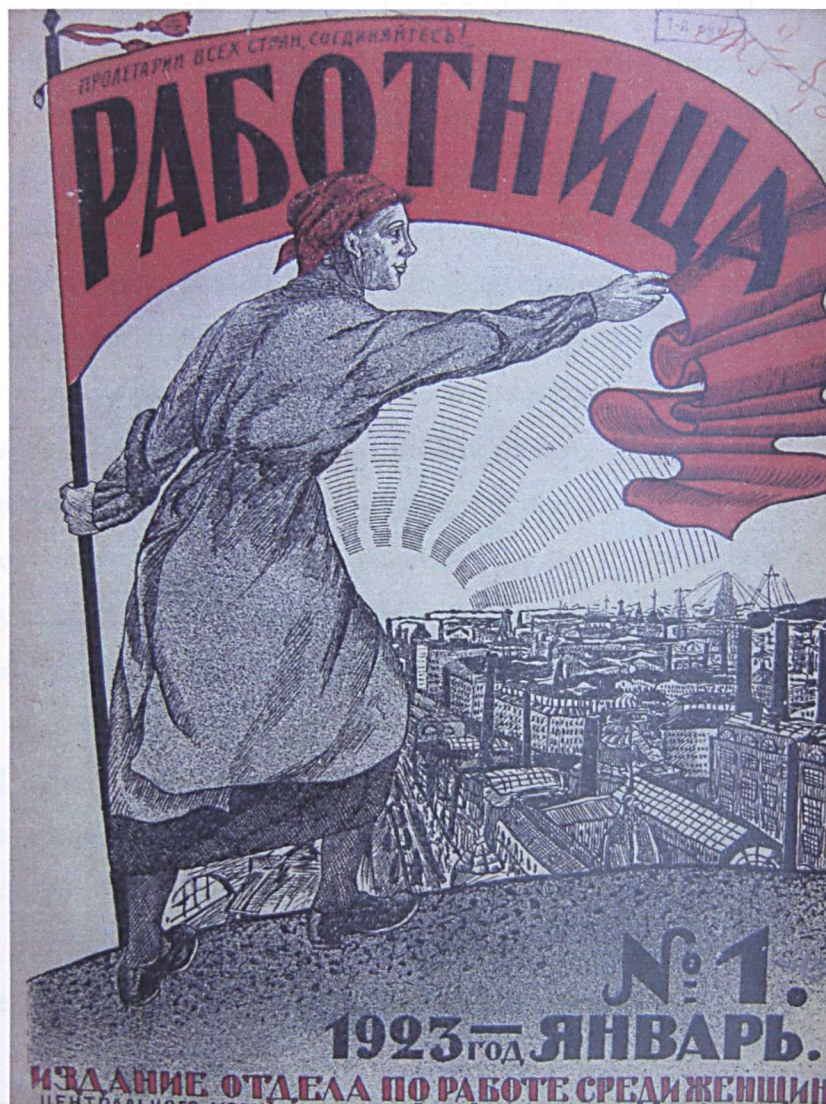


Figure 17: Cover, *Rabotnitsa*, 1923, N 1

Throughout the 1920s, covers were reserved for women shock-workers or revolutionary topics. The magazine dealt with a series of broad issues, which were supposed to interest the new socialist woman: politics, science, workplace, history and literature. Fashion and grooming were excluded from *Rabotnitsa* as they were identified with the overthrown bourgeois cultural and commercial heritage.

CONSTRUCTIVIST WOMAN: OPPOSING FASHION IN MODERNIST CLOTHES

The Constructivists' vision of the new socialist dress and the new socialist woman equally strongly opposed the bourgeois fashions and the sartorial eclecticism that still prevailed in the streets. The Constructivists rejected fashion, as they generally expelled history, and especially bourgeois history, from their utopian project. In the first issue of their programmatic journal *Lef*, the fiercest Constructivist theoretician Sergei Tretiakov had already emphasized that "the question of a rational dress could not be left to fashion magazine which dictates to the masses the will of the capitalist manufacturers" (Tretiakov 1923: 202). On the other hand, the Constructivists differed aesthetically from *Rabotnitsa*'s and the early post-revolutionary posters' images of big women wrapped in peasant-style clothes. In an attempt to theorize and put into practice the total reconstruction of everyday life, the Constructivists opposed traditional Russian culture and its aesthetics, as much as they rejected bourgeois values. The Constructivist concept of woman was informed by two contradictory ideas: visual similarity to Western aesthetics and puritanical proletarian ascetism. As depicted in drawings by Liubov Popova and Varvara Stepanova, the Constructivist woman possessed a strong body, but she did not resemble the curvaceous traditional peasant woman. The stark angularity of the Constructivist body was more influenced by cubism than by the folkloric interpretations of the Nietzschean Superman. Similarly, the geometric shapes of the Constructivist dress proposals and their textile design were shocking only within the contemporary Soviet circumstances. Visually, they corresponded closely to Western contemporary artistic and dress practices. Stepanova's radicality, as expressed in her 1923 programmatic article "The Clothing of Today: Production Clothing" lay, rather, in her ideological claim that the previous field of fashion – regarding production, retail and dress practices - should be abolished altogether. Promoting her new production clothing, that she called *prozodezhda*¹, Stepanova stressed:

"Fashion that psychologically reflects a way of life, customs and aesthetic taste gives way to programmed clothing... which is tested only through the process of working in it... The clothing of today must be seen in action; outside of this it is unimaginable"
(Stepanova: 1923: 65).

¹ The word *prozodezhda* is an abbreviated combination of two words: *proizvodstvennaya* (production, industrial) and *odezhda* (dress).

In her manifesto, Stepanova neither specified the shape of her production clothes nor divided them according to gender. They were never mass-produced², but four drawings of sports uniforms that accompanied her programmatic article in *LEF (Journal of the Left Front of the Arts)* demonstrated consistency with her radical theory (Figure 18).³

In 1922, Stepanova had already designed *prozodezhda* in the form of overalls-style theatre costumes. Staying true to the Constructivist ideals, she decided to take her uniformed clothes out from the theatre experiment into everyday life experience. *Prozodezhda* was supposed to bring a huge rupture with the pre-existing sartorial practices only when it moved from theatre design into the field of total redesign of everyday life. Although the geometric style of Stepanova's *prozodezhda* did not refer to any previous or contemporary Soviet sartorial practice, overalls had served as a functional workers' wear in America from the late 1910s, while the Italian Futurist designer Thayaht designed his overalls *tuta* in 1919. The shape was similar, but there were however important differences between the functional American work clothes, Thayaht's elegant leisure wear and Stepanova's *prozodezhda*. While American overalls existed outside the field of fashion and Thayaht's *tuta* flirted with it, Stepanova's proposal, denied the field of fashion production and its ways of organizing dress codes. Claiming that "shop windows containing wax mannequins wearing various designs ...are only an antiquated aesthetic phenomenon...." (Stepanova 1923: 65), she dismissed fashionable dress in its role as commodity. By insisting that new production clothing should renounce decoration in favour of comfort, she negated the previous history of fashion: "Any decorative detail is abolished with the following slogan: comfort and functionality of clothing must be linked to a specific productive function" (ibid).

² Stepanova's production clothes in their sport version were worn by her students in a performance accompanying the event *An Evening of the Book* in 1924. Stepanova's sports clothing, modelled the same year by her artist friend E. Zhemchuzhnaia, is the only other photo-documented occasion (both photographed by Stepanova's husband Aleksandr Rodchenko).

³ The looks of *prozodezhda* can be traced from Stepanova's and Liubov Popova's work in the theatre in 1922, and from some of Stepanova's drawings of female professional dresses in 1924.



Figure 18: Stepanova, V. (1923) Drawings accompanying her article on *prozodezhda*, *LEF*, Moscow, N 2: 66

Stepanova was fascinated by new Western technologies, seeing them as dynamic and innovative means of production. She envisioned the modernist future of dress and its liberatory potential by advocating mass-produced and simplified clothes: “Clothing must cease to be craft-produced in favour of mass industrial production” (Stepanova 1923: 65). The mass-production that Stepanova advocated was however more revolutionary than the style of her clothes. It was a highly ideologized concept of the productivist merger of art

and industry, in which technological development was tied up with social progress. The Constructivists imagined that the new constructivist artistic forms, revolutionary as they were, would more or less automatically enforce new productive modes as well, and consequently result in a radically new, interactive relationship between new socialist person and new socialist objects. For Stepanova, the new industrial production would bring transparency in that relationship, as it would reveal all the secrets behind a dress: "The stitching of a garment, its buttoning, etc, needs to be exposed ...the stitching of a sewing machine industrializes the production of a dress and deprives it of its secrets" (ibid). Corresponding to the dynamics and the rhythms of their industrial production, the technical elements, such as stitching and fastening, would eventually become the only decoration of a dress (ibid).

Stepanova's approach not only rejected the past but also tried to arrest the future development of fashion styles and prevent the recycling of the styles of previous times. The Constructivists were the only Modernists who could afford to reject ornament completely, because they rejected history in the first place. Even the simplest ornament is always evocative, while Stepanova was interested in a total novelty in dress and its pattern. In 1924, as textile designers at the First State Textile Print factory, Popova and Stepanova abolished the traditional flower motifs which the factory was still producing, and replaced them with novel geometrical patterns. The purge of decorative flowers in favour of minimalist triangles, circles and rectangles also announced an abrupt Constructivist break with traditional textile design. As everything old was supposed to disappear, new textile patterns expressed the constructivist will to purify space, which had been polluted with traditional flower patterns.

By the mid-1920s, it was obvious that the Constructivist utopian ideals of the total redesign of dress had not materialized. The Constructivists' dreams of overtaking the more advanced capitalist modes of production were broken by out-of-date machinery, shortages of raw materials and lack of dyes. Their avant-garde social and artistic visions could materialize only in modernist-style drawings, and not in the everyday objects that they envisioned for all. Adjusting to the new political and social circumstances in the early 1920s, even the Constructivist visions started to differ among themselves. The proletarian Stepanova dispensed with all adornments in dress in her quest for clothes suitable for the

new world and promoted a modernist looking but austere woman, but Liubov Popova developed a more complex relationship with femininity (Figure 19).⁴



Figure 19: Popova, L. (1923-24) 'Flapper' Dress, from Sarabianov and Adaskina (1990)

⁴ Although Stepanova and Popova shared the Constructivist aesthetics in their unanimous promotion of textile designs with geometric abstract patterns, they differed in many ways, from their background to their artistic development.

In 1924, Popova recoded the line and shape of the flapper dress into a more robust form, seen in the line of her dress, and the Cubist-like body that it covered, creating a strong, yet tender type of femininity. Although in 1924 a reformed Constructivist Popova consciously challenged Western notions of fashion with her “flapper” dress, she never designed a socialist mass dress, nor invented a new concept of socialist femininity. She recognized the changes in gender formation taking place both in the West and the Soviet Union in the 1920s, but she was able to confront them only within her artistic explorations. Stepanova, on the other hand, tried to abolish fashion as a phenomenon driven by the market and the inequalities it imposed. Stepanova’s ideal woman was supposed to lead a rational existence in simple and functional clothes, but her ideological opposite, a fashionable and eroticized woman already commanded an important place within the Soviet public sphere. Stepanova’s fierce rejection of the phenomenon of fashion should be perceived within the context of proletarian values and revolutionary ideals being devalued by the emerging NEP culture (Figure 20).



Figure 20: Fashion drawing, *Novosti Mod (Fashion News)*, Moscow, N 3, 1924

THE NEP WOMAN AND THE RETURN OF BOURGEOIS FASHION

Fashion returned to the Soviet Union with the introduction of The New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1921. The NEP was an economic system that re-introduced private ownership and private retail practices, which proved to be much more efficient than state-run businesses.⁵ In 1923, the NEP commercialized environment facilitated the launch of the first real fashion magazine after the revolution, *Atelier* (Figure 21). It struggled to reconcile fashion and socialism, and balance individual style with the official desires for uniform clothing. *Atelier* was a programmatic journal, established with the intention of bringing fashion back to the Soviet Union, justifying its rituals, and adjusting them to the new socialist reality.⁶ The collaborators of *Atelier* were not Party ideologues or loyal followers of the Bolshevik project. Their articles, fashion drawings, and fashion photographs, demonstrated that they were well informed about Western fashion and lifestyles.

Notwithstanding its modest circulation of 2,000 copies, *Atelier*'s role was symbolically very important. Its contributors, who had been active in the Russian arts and applied arts in pre-revolutionary times, fought the ahistorical Bolshevik and Constructivist attitude towards dress. *Atelier* was published in the same year in which Stepanova launched her proposal for uniform and rational production clothing (*prozodezhda*), meant for everybody and every occasion. Some of *Atelier*'s articles addressed the issues of appropriate dress for the new socialist masses, but the radical concept of production clothing was strongly opposed by Vladimir von Meck in his article "Dress and Revolution". As a financier of pre-revolutionary artistic events and a connoisseur of the history of costume, Von Meck understood production clothing as an adventurous theoretical proposal, which could not possibly be relevant for everyday life dress practices. The real revolution in dress, observed von Meck, had happened when the new urban proletariat left their traditional peasant dress and started to follow Western fashion trends in 1917-1918 (von Meck 1923: 32).

⁵ The NEP was initiated in 1921 by Lenin in a desperate attempt to improve the supply of basic goods following the Civil War, and came to an end in 1929 with the Stalin's attempt to centralize the whole country and the subsequent introduction of the First Five Year Plan. For an overview of the political, economic and social circumstances of the NEP, see: Ball 1987.

⁶ Although *Atelier* was aligned with the *Moskvoshvey* (*Moscow Textile Trust*), it had not been initiated by the Central Committee and its official women's organization *Zhenotdel*, while *Rabotnitsa*, started in the same year, was the publication of *Zhenotdel*.

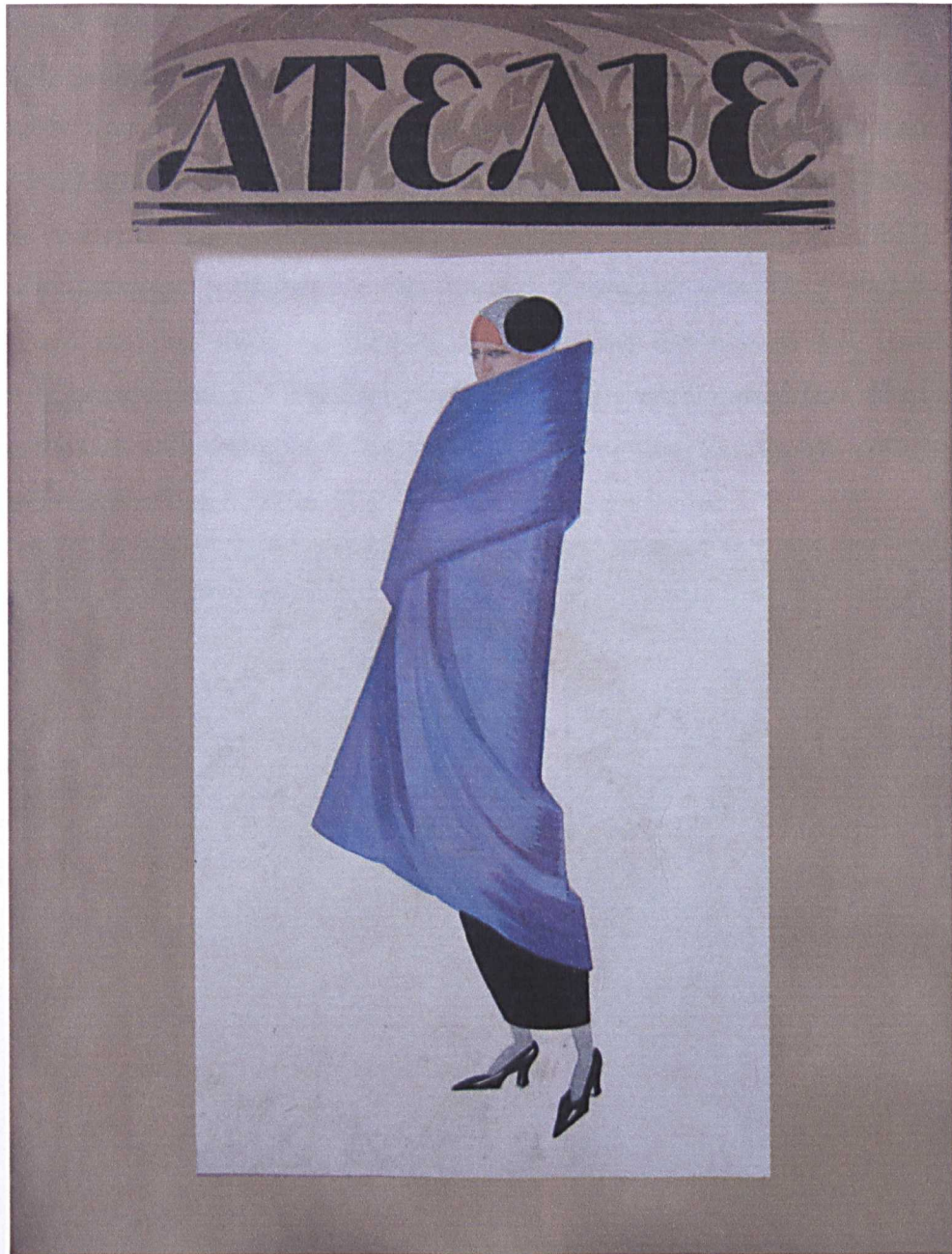


Figure 21: Exter, A. (1923) Cover, *Atelier*, Moscow, N 1

The artist and theatre designer Alexandra Exter published her ideas on functional work clothing meant for mass production in the same issue of *Atelier*. Like the Constructivists, Exter recognized that: "...the question of a new style of dress is the urgent issue. Since the working class constitutes the majority of the population, the dress should be adapted to suit

workers, and the particular job they perform” (Exter 1923).⁷ She also acknowledged that “prozodezhda or a mass-produced dress should be based on complementary colours and very simple geometrical shapes” (ibid: 5). Still, Exter’s concept of work clothing differed considerably from Stepanova’s rigorous views on prozodezhda. Exter advocated that “a style of dress grows out from conditions of life: work and leisure. The change of dress should be economic and appropriate, but also hygienic and psychological” (ibid). A series of Exter’s drawings published in the journal *Krasnaya niva (Red Field)* in 1923 demonstrated that her ideas on rational mass clothing did not exclude diversity and elements of ornamentation. Her concept of functionality presupposed that the same outfit could be used as a day dress, eveningwear and work clothes, simply by adding or taking off different layers (Exter 1923a: 31).

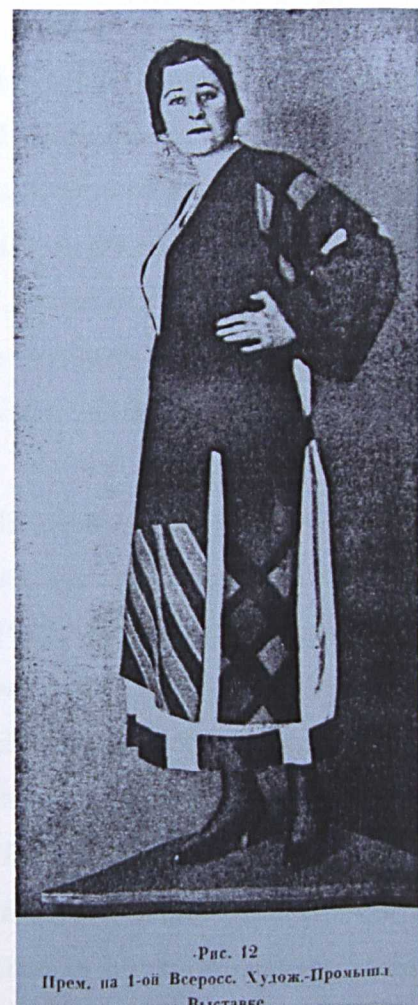


Figure 22 & Figure 23: Exter, A. (1923) *Atelier*, Moscow, N1: Drawing N 1, (left) & dress produced after that drawing for the *Exhibition of Art in Industry* (right)

⁷ Alexandra Exter started as the Cubist painter, and later transferred to design of theatre and film costumes. She did not share the Constructivists’ revolutionary zeal and emigrated to Paris in 1924, where she continued her career as a theatre costume designer.

Atelier acknowledged contemporary Western fashion trends in a series of articles. The playwright Nicolai Evreinov, the erstwhile supporter of tango and nudity on stage in the 1910s, praised Parisian chic in *Atelier*, claiming that only chic makes a Parisian woman appear better dressed than a woman from Berlin or Petrograd. A Parisian woman does not necessarily care about the latest fashions, argued Evreinov, she masters the art of wearing her clothes. In that way she adds a *cachet* even to a modest dress and that distinction (*cachet*) is known as Parisian chic (Evreinov 1923: 9). The fantastically precise details in the articles on fashion not only provided information about new trends but also painstakingly tried to restore the field of fashion and its rituals. Original contributions in fashion design in *Atelier* – by Alexandra Exter, Nadezhda Lamanova, Evgenia Pribylskaia and Vera Mukhina – presented artistic-style dresses and luxurious eveningwear (Figures 22 & 23). Mukhina's contribution was an artistic drawing of a voluminous long dress accompanied with a dramatic hat with a wide brim, while Lamanova's evening dresses, shown on the leading actresses, were embellished with precious lace. Only one issue of *Atelier* was eventually published, which in itself demonstrated its utopian position. Yet, in the still pluralistic 1920s, *Atelier* was a counter-attack on the rigid Bolshevik political ideas represented in the rationalized Constructivist aesthetics. Well-experienced in pre-revolutionary avant-garde artistic practices, the initiators of *Atelier* challenged the Constructivists' insistence on the modes of production on the expense at all other aspects of dress.

The fact that political power stayed firmly in the hands of the Bolsheviks while at the same time the capitalistic NEP acted as an economic system, contributed to the confusing status of the phenomenon of fashion during the 1920s. NEP fashion magazines, such as *Poslednie mody* (*Latest Fashions*) and *Zhurnal dlia khoziaek* (*The Housewives' Magazine*)⁸, were eagerly accepted in the NEP circles of new-rich Russian capitalists, their wives and girlfriends. They published numerous drawings of flapper dresses, which were literal copies of the latest Western fashion trends. The period of the capitalistic NEP was a brief episode in which Western style dress was accepted. Paper-patterns were enclosed within the NEP fashion journals, so that a seamstress or home dressmaker could make a copy of a flapper-style dress herself. In drawings, these fashionable dresses were accompanied by equally fashionable *cloche* hats and pointed shoes.

⁸ Both magazines had been published in pre-revolutionary times and immediately resumed printing the latest Western fashions.

Images of the NEP women's expensive dresses, silk underwear, painted nails, and eyelids smudged with black were published in contemporary NEP fashion magazines, showing that traditional symbols of bourgeois impurity - make up, nail varnish, feminine dress and jewellery - again threatened to pollute the pure proletarian body (Figure 24). Commercial advertising during the NEP also clearly demonstrated the presence of the NEP Woman, who was an avid consumer of all sorts of luxuries: fur, cosmetics, perfumes, fashion accessories and clothes. For the early Bolsheviks, the enemy, the old bourgeoisie and its ways of living, was feminized and embodied in the woman interested in fashion, cosmetics, and the former way of life. For them, fashion was immersed in the old, traditional world that they wanted to annihilate.



Figure 24: Drawing of a fashionable underwear, *Poslednie modi*, Leningrad, N 10, 1928

In the framework of the ideologically imposed concept of the pure new socialist world there was no place for fashion, not only because it was considered to belong to the past, but also because it was perceived as artificial. Feminised bodies and femininity itself were considered to be not only bourgeois, but also alienated in the ontological sense, because they were artificial in the first place. In socialism, fashion and femininity became political issues as they opposed the nature of the system itself.

On a poster from the 1920s fighting prostitution, a young, simply-dressed proletarian woman with a red handkerchief on her head, with her left arm raised, and holding a red signal light in her right hand, stopped an overdressed and overly made-up woman in a clingy evening dress, with a big trimmed hat covered in feathers, red painted cheeks and a cigarette hanging from her crimson red lips, who symbolized prostitution itself (Figure 3). In the background of skyscrapers and the lights of the big city, other fashionably dressed women were engaged with men in indecent erotic activities. The poster demonstrated how fashionable dress and make-up were identified as a serious threat to the social body. In consequence, the feminine woman was forced into the position of a permanent Other.

The Leftist art critic Sergei Tretiakov acknowledged the ongoing struggle between the restrained New Bolshevik woman and her ideological opponent, the Westernized highly groomed and fashionable woman:

“Is this not why the old-style beauties do not leave our screens, and men in the audience demand to see women with satin skin, dainty feet, the hands of aristocrats, delicate bones, noble profiles and perfect mouths? But do you not think it possible that this combination of attributes continues to reproduce the old feudal notion of the woman, as nothing more than a bed accessory? What sort of worker or friend is she, with her small feet, delicate bones and tender hands? She is exactly that kind of a ‘tender creature’ for whom men abandon their coarse, tired wives, with their snub-noses, small eyes and heavy bones. But instead of dethroning these beauties for the sake of these coarse, heavy-boned women, the stereotype of womanhood shared by cinema-goers and film-makers ensures that thousands of comely maidens are moving as if hypnotized towards the beckoning lights (of the cinema theatres)” (Tretiakov 1927: 29).

This description perfectly emphasized how, through a process of connecting various socially favourable and unfavourable cultural symbols to sex, the technology of gender was formulated. Only a woman of monumental shape could be a good worker and a loyal

friend. A delicate female body belonged to the class enemy and the old world, and was, anyway, suspected of eroticism and decadence (Figure 25).



Figure 25: Cartoon from the satirical magazine *Krokodil*, 1927; the workers' club (left) and the NEP night club (right)

Alexandra Kollontai published her novel *Vasilisa Malygina* in 1923, just as the NEP signalled the return to capitalist economic practices, and the NEP men started to behave

like a new bourgeoisie.⁹ In the novel, the proletarian heroine Vasilisa lost her communist husband to the frivolous and fashionably dressed Nina Konstantinovna. Vasilisa's friend Lisa described her: "She was incredibly beautiful, incredibly well dressed. She always wore silk, and was surrounded by admirers..." (Kollontai 1999: 131).¹⁰ The modest Vasilisa secretly went to a park, in which Nina Konstantinovna usually strolled with her admirers, to see for herself:

"So here she was at last. She wore a thin white dress which enveloped her body in soft folds and clearly exposed her breasts, and long sand-coloured gloves. A matching hat tilted over her eyes so Vasya couldn't see her face properly. All she could see were her lips, bright crimson as though smeared with blood. 'Why, look at her lips! They're like blood!' she exclaimed. 'That's lipstick', Maria Semenovna explained sagely. 'You should see her eyes too, all smudged with soot! I'd like to get a cloth and scrub all that mess off her face, then we'd see what she really looked like. Hah!'" (ibid.: 165-66)

Vasilisa by contrast was uneasy with cosmetics and the latest fashions. She despised the NEP wife of one of her husband's colleagues: "His wife was tartered up like a streetwalker in a diaphanous dress, with furs draped over her shoulder and rings sparkling on her fingers" (ibid.: 86). In fact, Vasilisa's husband betrayed her not only sexually, but also ideologically. While Vasilisa was still loyal to the ideals of revolution, Vladimir changed into an unscrupulous NEP man to such an extent that friends nicknamed him 'American'. Vasilisa's rival, the frivolous and feminine Nina Konstantinovna was a metaphor for the reactionary forces that threatened both the New Woman and the ideals of revolution. Dress visually expressed a huge schism within the Soviet social body in the second half of the 1920s, but that schism also ran along the gender divide. While economic anxieties were embodied in the NEP-men, sexual anxieties were embodied in his fashionable wife or girlfriend. There were two different visual representations of the fashionable NEP woman.

⁹ In the role of one of the leaders of the Communist women's association *Zhenotdel*, Kollontai was very disappointed with the NEP, as it threatened the existence of *Zhenotdel*. Kollontai believed that the love-story would stress the NEP-related dangers to communist ideals more strongly than theoretical and propaganda articles.

¹⁰ Further, Nina Konstantinovna was described as: "She's not one of us, she is not a worker". Officially, she was a secretary, but there were hints that she was a kept woman, and an altogether frivolous and irresponsible person, who cared more about obtaining the powder *L' Origan Coty* than anything else.

In the pages of the NEP fashion magazines, she was presented as slim, sleek, elegant and stylish, while in the cartoons published in the Bolshevik media she was fat, over-decorated, a *nouveau riche* woman lacking personal style.

The modernist sensibility of the NEP woman found nevertheless its ways even into official propaganda. The new androgyny was no longer based on the masculinity of the Nietzschean *Übermensch*. An ardent Communist, Kollontai's heroine shared a thin, boyish frame with the NEP woman. Kollontai accentuated throughout her novel that Vasilisa was thin, pale and flat-chested. Reflecting 1920s urbanity, she shared a body shape with her ideological opposite, the NEP woman. The difference was that the NEP woman decorated her groomed skinny body, while Vasilisa's equally urban, boyish figure was unadorned and restrained. Although Vasilisa despised the expensive embellishment of her ideological rival, visually they both conformed to the 1920s modernist travesty of women into young boys.

Ideologically, the NEP Woman was the total opposite of both the New Bolshevik Superwoman and the Constructivist modernist but restrained Woman. Politically, the NEP Woman reminded the loyal Bolsheviks of capitalism and its worst practices. Symbolically, the NEP Woman suggested the notion of the female body as the site of consumption and pleasure.

In 1927, in its advertisement, the Donbas State Tobacco Factory identified its customers through their dress: a soldier, a worker, an intellectual, a middle class lady, a peasant, and a man in an evening frock and top hat, accompanying an extravagant NEP Woman (Figure 26). She wore a long dress, covered with a huge overcoat trimmed with white fur. Everybody, including the NEP Woman, represented a certain, easily identifiable social type, but only her dress was the latest fashion statement. While the NEP woman's extravagant luxury was an ideological issue, the contemporariness of her dress was an ontological problem. From the viewpoint of the Bolshevik ideology, by promoting the present fashion moment, the NEP dress was actually returning to the past. The Bolshevik Utopia tried to expel both previous sartorial history and future fashions from its timeless order. Dress was not only supposed to be modest, but also ahistorical.



Figure 26: Zelenskii, A. (1927) Advertisement poster for the *Donbas State Tobacco Factory*

BOLSHEVIK DRESS: CREATION OF AN ARTISTIC PROTOTYPE

The Constructivist dress project stayed in an artistic limbo until its end in the mid-1920s, never materializing into the utilitarian garments its creators had dreamed of. Other Bolshevik initiatives, which ran in parallel but lasted until the end of the 1920s, attempted to create a new Bolshevik dress as a utopian merger between the backward and shattered industry and an individual-customer-oriented type of sartorial knowledge that was close to haute couture. Unique prototypes, whose production required demanding, hand-made techniques, appeared from that unlikely union. In those Bolshevik initiatives, fully supported by Anatoly Lunacharsky, the People's Commissar of the Ministry of Enlightenment, dress was perceived as an artistic artefact. In his 1928 article "Cultural Revolution and Art", Lunacharsky recognized three sartorial categories: working clothes, sportswear and festive dresses. He stressed the importance of the artist engineer's technical knowledge in the production of the first two types of mass-produced clothes, but emphasized his creative input in the design of the third, hand-made category (Lunacharsky

1928: 5-12). Lunacharsky used Stepanova's terms *prozodezhda* and *sportodezhda* for working clothes and sports clothes respectively. Although the third category - festive dress –opposed Constructivist functionalism, its artistic preciousness marked it as just another utopian construct.

By 1928 Stepanova had transferred all her Bolshevik anxieties about fashionable dress to the role of the designer. She opposed the trend:

“...in European women's dress ...towards making an individual model of a dress unrepeatable, available only to a very restricted circle of customers, or even the outfit for a single evening, to be worn once only, not stitched but only pinned – such ventures are seen from time to time in European fashion houses” (Stepanova 1928: 191).

But the bold decorativeness and exclusivity that Stepanova loathed in the West, also existed in the Soviet Union. Although Lunacharsky, from his powerful position, supported the Constructivists' avant-garde ideas about the merger of art and industry, he never renounced decorative aesthetics. The Applied Arts sub-section within the Department of Fine Arts of his ministry promoted an aesthetics of dress, which involved the use of decorative folk motifs in the search for new socialist clothes and would not abandon decoration and attractiveness.¹¹ The aesthetic differences between modernist austerity and the Art Deco-style embellishments underlined the main ontological differences between the Constructivists and the practitioners of Bolshevik decorative dress. While the former rejected fashion because they rejected history, the latter attempted to invent and promote a new socialist dress that corresponded to the previous history of fashion, while avoiding its exploitative and commercial practices. The respected pre-revolutionary fashion designer Nadezhda Lamanova was central to the state-sponsored promotion of socialist dress as an artistic outfit.¹² Unlike the Constructivists, such as Stepanova who made a lot of noise with her programmatic texts and Popova whose artistic excellence was never transferred to real dresses, Lamanova produced high quality outfits from both sumptuous embroidered fabrics

¹¹ In its other incarnation, decorative dress was provided to the NEP bourgeoisie through bespoke service by Alexandra Exter and Nadezhda Lamanova.

¹² Nadezhda Lamanova opened her own salon in Moscow in 1885 and soon gained a rich and sophisticated clientele, including gentry and famous actresses. In the immediate post-revolutionary period, Lamanova had spent some time in prison as an enemy of the people, and was eventually released only following an intervention by the writer Maxim Gorky.

and hopsack. This talent was precious to the state. From about the mid-1920s, when it became clear that the industry was incapable of producing any decent clothes, the practice of the artistic, custom-made prototype was appropriated and strongly promoted by the Bolshevik regime.

The state couturiere: Nadezhda Lamanova

Lamanova had lost her fashion house in the aftermath of the revolution, but started to build a new career in dress design by marching through the newly established educational and artistic institutions. Lamanova was the first to conceptualise dress design within the fields of industry and art. She poured all her creativity, technical knowledge and skills into an attempt to define a shape, fabric and ornamentation appropriate for the new proletarian dress. All these elements were supposed to be inter-connected, resulting in a simple industrially produced dress, which would still possess functional artistic details. In the years to follow Lamanova perfected her approach to the new dress by reducing the shape to a simple rectangle, insisting on the appropriate relationship between the modest fabric and the cut of the dress, and using decoration sparingly to achieve greater artistic effects. At the *First All-Russian Conference on Art and Industry* held in the spring of 1920, Lamanova defined the role of the artist who would design dresses in the new socialist society:

“Art must penetrate all spheres of life, and develop an artistic taste in the masses. Clothes are one of the most suitable areas...Artists must take the initiative, creating simple but beautiful clothes from plain fabrics, befitting the new mode of working life”.¹³

Lamanova, being a professional pre-revolutionary dress-maker, was more pragmatic than the Constructivists. In the spirit of the times, her vision of a new socialist dress rejected the phenomenon of fashion, but preserved a handsome dress. For Lamanova, a merger between art and industry would result in beautiful and functional clothes, and would provide an escape from the fashion circles and the laws of the market. Lamanova’s

¹³ Minutiae of the *First All-Russian Conference on Art and Industry*, 1920, Moscow, pp 37-38 (quoted in Strizhenova 1991: 38). Among the one hundred delegates from both the industrial and artistic sectors that attended the conference, nine of them represented the textile industries (details in: *Iskusstvo v proizvodstve (Art in Industry)*, Moscow 1921: 34-35).

understanding of the phenomenon of fashion and its dependence on the past as well as her technical knowledge of fabrics and cuts allowed her to retain her important private commissions¹⁴, but also served her well in state-sponsored initiatives.



Figure 27: Lamanova, N. and Mukhina, V. (1925) Hand-made caftan from the towels of the Vladimir region”, *Iskusstvo v bytu* (supplement of *Krasnaya niva*), Moscow

Through a strange twist of fate, Lamanova became once again an haute couture designer. This time, however, she was not running a private fashion house, but was engaged by the Commissariat of Enlightenment and its Department of Fine Arts, which was in charge of inventing and promoting the new socialist dress. Actively supported by Lunacharsky, this new dress could be beautiful and decorated. It also happened to be a unique, one-of-a-kind piece. Lamanova used her position wisely, proposing a type of Soviet Reform dress. Her proposals - simple, elongated shapes, delicately decorated with domestic folk embroidery - were clever and perfectly crafted Soviet versions of contemporary Western fashionable dresses (Figure 27). In contrast to Stepanova who tried to destroy fashion, Lamanova skilfully attempted to reform it, and adjust it to the new political and social situation.

¹⁴ Lamanova's private dress commissions, made of silk and machine lace and embellished with beadwork and silk ribbon tassels, differed from her official dresses also by their voluminous shape that was gathered at the waist with wide decorative belts, making them look almost obscenely opulent in the poverty-stricken 1920s.

Combined with discreetly embroidered tunics, her effortless straight dresses communicated a message of restrained elegance. Yet, although her Reform Dress in its paired down simplicity was perfectly suitable for the new socialist dress, it still bore traces of her earlier Art Nouveau stylistic preferences. Lamanova never abandoned decoration and only changed her style in accordance with emerging Art Deco aesthetics. Her private commissions required as much luxurious lace as it was possible to find, but in her official dresses she relied on Russian folk motifs for decoration. That was not an ideological problem. While her simple and functional dresses justified the very idea of a socialist dress, the folk motifs that adorned them served the representational purposes of the new state. These beautiful, hand-crafted dresses were displayed in exhibitions at home and abroad.

The presentations of elitist outfits in the midst of the prevailing poverty, and in the context of the ubiquitous ideological proclamations on equality, were validated with the unrealistic claim that those beautiful, hand-made dresses would be soon mass-produced and available to everyone. In the West, similar precious and elitist Art Deco and Modernist dresses had a different fate. In contrast to the Soviet approach that emphasized the importance of the mass-production of artistic elitist dresses, the leading Western fashion designers tried to preserve the artistic aura of their creations, while discreetly facilitating their mass production.¹⁵ Enjoying only the ideological support from the Commissariat of Enlightenment, Lamanova was in a completely different position. She and her colleagues found their creative refuge producing prototypes in the experimental laboratories that were either related to the state artistic institutions or vaguely attached to the new industrial establishments.

The number of collaborators was small, and more or less the same artists took part in all the projects. Lamanova, Exter, Mukhina and Prybil'skaya were active in both the dress and textile laboratories of the *Academy of Artistic Sciences* as well as in the fashion salon *Atelier of Fashion*. Attached to the *Moscow Textile Trust*, that fashion salon had two tasks: to produce both samples of dresses for the mass production and individual, custom-made outfits. The same designers were also the main collaborators in the 1923 magazine *Atelier*, which was the mouthpiece of *Atelier of Fashion*.¹⁶ When in 1923 the *First All-Russian*

¹⁵ For an overview, see: Troy 2003; Evans 2005

¹⁶ Under the combined circumstances of the commercialized NEP environment and the backward industry, which could not use their sophisticated proposals, both the journal *Atelier* and the salon *Atelier of Fashion* served only the NEP women.

Exhibition of the Art in Industry was organized by the Applied Arts sub-section of the Department of Fine Arts and the *State Academy of Artistic Sciences* in Moscow, the dresses by Lamanova, Exter, Mukhina and Prybilskaya were presented in the artistic section, while Exter also participated with her outfits in the industrial section (Figure 28).¹⁷ The *Moscow Atelier of Fashion* won the highest recognition, and the news was announced in the journal *Atelier*:

“The Committee of the exhibition, presiding at the Academy of Artistic Sciences, awarded the certificate of the first order to the Atelier of Fashion: a) for the successful results in colours and lines of dresses, and for the sophisticated interpretation of the mutual relationships between the person, fabric and the artistic shape in the outfits on display”; b) for engaging the highly experienced artists in design of the new contemporary dress”.¹⁸



Figure 28: Display of Lamanova, Exter and Mukhina’s dresses at the *First All-Russian Exhibition of Art in Industry, Russkoe Iskusstvo*, Moscow, N 2-3, 1923

In his review of the exhibition, the art critic Iakov Tugenkhold emphasized that the proletariat deserved beautiful and functional clothes, and stated that the Constructivist attempt to identify the proletariat’s aesthetic needs with the aestheticization of the

¹⁷ The programme of the *All Russian Exhibition of Art in Industry* was published in the artistic journal *Russkoe Iskusstvo* (Russian Art), Moscow, N 1, 1923: 99-100.

¹⁸ “Attestat I-oj stepeni na Vserossijskoj Chudozhestvenno-promyshlennoj Vystavke Atelier Mod” (The Certificate of the First Order at the First All-Russian Exhibition of Art in Industry to Atelier of Fashion), *Atelier*, Moscow, 1923: 48

machine, as promoted in the journal *LEF*, was wrong (Tugenkhold 1923: 105-106).¹⁹ The designers within *Atelier of Fashion* demonstrated different aesthetic approaches at the exhibition. Exter presented two types of dresses. The first group included ensembles with the stripes as a geometrical decoration, while her other dresses were an extravagant interpretation of the current Western fashion trends. Aesthetically, they were much closer to her exuberant theatre costumes than the prototypes that could enter mass production. The outfits presented by Lamanova and Pribylskaya had simple elongated lines and consisted either of a jacket and a dress or of a tunic accompanied by a pleated skirt adorned by hand-stitched embroidery.

The aesthetics of the new artistic Bolshevik dress was a compromising symbiosis of fashionable modernist dresses and traditional, ideologically unthreatening, folk decorations, but officially there was no compromise about its unique new way of production. Contemplating the new relationship between the artist and industry, D. Arkin from the *State Academy for Artistic Sciences* accentuated that the new Russian artist did not experience industry as weird and hostile, and did not find its technical formulas incomprehensible. Arkin emphasized that the new artistic schools educated their students in both scientific and artistic matters. The new Soviet artist would never become only an applied artist, a decorateur (Arkin 1925). Arkin's article, published in the official Soviet catalogue for the *International Exhibition of Decorative Arts in Paris* in 1925, was accompanied by photographs of Lamanova's dresses embellished with folk motifs (Figure 32). The folk-influenced abstract pattern covered almost whole surface of the outfits. However, Lamanova was not the new type of artist-engineer that Arkin had dreamt about, and her hand-embroidered dresses could not be industrially produced. Those outfits demonstrated the Bolshevik's confused relationship towards fashion. Due to the ideological obstacles and the desperate state of the Soviet clothing industry, the everyday reality of fashion was replaced by the highly representative dresses shown at the official exhibitions. The claim that those beautiful, individually executed dresses would be soon mass-produced was unrealistic, as was the idea that those exclusive outfits would be available to everyone.

¹⁹ Tugenkhold pointed to Stepanova's article on production clothing which was published in the Constructivist journal *LEF*. Tugenkhold echoed the contemporary opinion on the Constructivists. Although the Ministry of Enlightenment and Lunacharsky supported the merger between art and industry, the Constructivist total rejection of both traditional fine arts and applied arts was generally considered too fierce.

Soviet Russia at the Paris 1925 Decorative Exhibition

The display of Lamanova's outfits within the Russian folk section at the 1925 Paris *International Decorative Exhibition* demonstrated the confused ideas on new socialist dress in the Soviet Union.²⁰ Lamanova's clothes occupied stand N 59, squeezed between wooden carved toys, embroidered cushions, national costumes, naïve art paintings, decorated balalaikas, wooden painted boxes, pioneer dolls, lacquered wooden objects and painted pottery. P. Cogan, the man in charge of the Soviet display, announced in the preface of the exhibition catalogue: "There are neither luxurious items of furniture nor precious fabrics in our display. In the Grand Palais, our visitors will find neither fur nor diamonds".²¹ Rather, stressed Cogan, they would encounter genuine examples of Russian folk art, enlivened with new revolutionary topics.²²

Officially, Lamanova's dresses, designed with the help of her colleagues Pribylskaya, Mukhina, Exter and Nadezhda Makarova, represented the work of the Moscow branch of the Craftsmen association, *Moskumst* (Figure 29). Western-style dresses, with applications of skilfully re-interpreted folk motifs, differed significantly from traditional folk costumes and subverted the meaning of the other displayed objects within the Soviet folk display. While other folk objects had changed the iconographical elements and stayed within the field of conventional folk art, Lamanova's sophisticated outfits challenged the context of both folk and fashion, in an attempt to establish a new socialist dress. Prior to the exhibition, Lamanova and her co-authors agreed on the concept: to apply Russian folk motifs on Western-shaped dresses. The folk motifs, either genuine or specially designed by Mukhina to match the dresses, were purified and perfectly suited the clean lines of the outfits. Their functional and clean lines were guided by the minimalist concept based on the subverted luxury of hand-made embellishments. The clothes were accompanied by specially designed hats, handbags and jewellery, which were made from unusual materials, like cord, straw, rope, beads of wood, pebbles and even breadcrumbs. These stylish

²⁰Union des Républiques Sovietistes Socialistes (catalogue), the Paris Decorative Exhibition, Paris, 1925. For the folk section's display, see: Folk art (*Koustari*) section, pp 79-118 (Lamanova's dresses are listed at p 86). The craftsmen's association *Kustexport* was founded in 1920. By the mid-1920s, 400,000 local artisans were producing traditional folk objects, advised by the professional artists.

²¹ Cogan, P. "Preface", published in: *L'art décoratif U.R.S.S. Moscou – Paris 1925*, Moscow, p 7

²² *ibid*: 6

handmade accessories, like the dresses, corresponded to contemporary fashion trends but subverted the traditional idea of luxury which recognized only precious stones, fur, feathers and expensive types of leather.



Figure 29: Lamanova, N. Outfits presented at Paris Exhibition of Decorative Arts by the company *Moskust, Krasnaya niva*, Moscow, 1925, N 14

The lavish outfits, presented by seventy-five French fashion businesses, became a metaphor of how Paris wanted to be perceived in 1925: sleek, elegant, luxurious, sensual and feminine.²³ This French emphasis on luxury was not welcomed unanimously. Serious debates on the nature of the Paris International Decorative Exhibition started even before its preparations, but the Soviet Union was the only country to oppose the concept of

²³ For an overview of the French fashion at the Paris exhibition, see: Benton, C. et al (eds) (2003) *Art Deco 1910-1939*, London: V&A Publications

bourgeois luxury and to promote industrially produced art for the masses. Still, the Soviet display was confusing and emanated contradictory messages. While the Soviets theoretically insisted on industrial art, they presented traditional folk art, with the only innovation being the revolutionary topics in its decoration. The Soviets also exhibited artistic velvet prints by Luidmila Mayakovskaia and some avant-garde examples of the Constructivist textiles by Popova, Stepanova and Birylin, all of which were eventually produced in small quantities at home, and Lamanova's innovative dresses which could not be mass-produced. Although ideologically opposing luxury, the Soviet Union still exhibited furs and other luxurious items in order to boost its exports.²⁴ As the Soviet Union had been ideologically opposed to the phenomenon of fashion, Lamanova's dresses were displaced from their natural habitat, and shown in the folk art section.

Lamanova's outfits were alien to the opulent world of French fashion. Their pared down modernist style was far less attractive than the luxurious and exotic looks that the West expected from Russia. Moreover, they were genuine, while Paris was used to Russian national heritage in translation. Ultimately, Diaghilev's artistic productions as well as Bakst's and Goncharova's theatre costumes succeeded only because they provided what the West craved to see. Russia was the Other: exotic, wild and oriental. There was no mention of Lamanova's approach to dress in the Western magazines covering fashion at the exhibition. Reviewing costume and fashion design at the exhibition, even the official *Encyclopédie des arts décoratifs* offered just few words on the Soviet display:

“In the field of fashion, the Soviet Union relied on its national production and had no doubts about showing us a retrospective exhibition of picturesque costumes worn in different parts of its immense territory, From Ukraine to central Asia, from Siberia to Caucasus...” (*Costume and Fashion design: Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes*, 1925/1977: 31).

Another volume of the *Encyclopédie des arts décoratifs* dedicated to textiles, reviewed the Soviet display negatively:

“Apart from some Futurist exaggerations, it could be stated that fabrics from Soviet Union generally lacked originality and *richesse*. While the reservoir of Russian

²⁴ See: Union des Républiques Sovietistes Socialistes (catalogue), the Paris Decorative Exhibition, Paris, 1925, pp 45-60.

embroidery possesses an immense charm, all the trusts, that economically run the country today, did not yet reach level of the artistic production that could compete with other European countries". (*Textiles and Paper Products: Exposition internationale des arts decoratifs et industriels modernes*, 1925/1977: 56).

Utopian Uses of Folk Motifs

Nadezhda Lamanova won the Grand Prix at the 1925 Paris International Decorative Exhibition for "the contemporary dresses based on folk art", which was the recognition that the Bolshevik Russia was looking for.²⁵ Introduced in the early 1920s by Lamanova, and advocated by the folk expert Pribylskaia, folk motifs were gradually established as the approved type of embellishment in the new Soviet dress. The contemporary Constructivist artists would never use folk motifs as they were marked by the past and tradition, while the Constructivists planned to re-construct everyday life from zero in a new geometrical and cosmopolitan order. After the revolution, Lunacharsky attempted to attract as many artists as possible for Bolshevik artistic and cultural projects, as long as they did not challenge basic revolutionary values. Instituted in 1918 within the Department of Fine Arts of Lunacharsky's Commissariat of Enlightenment, the Applied Arts sub-section was not supposed to include only avant-garde practices but also a crafts revival in the united revolutionary platform that was taking shape. Its organizer, the pre-revolutionary suprematist Olga Rozanova and her assistant Aleksandr Rodchenko raised funds and reactivated craft workshops in Moscow, Petrograd and their immediate provinces, which were destroyed during the Civil War.²⁶ This political platform offered a chance to the artists and designers who were active in the pre-revolutionary crafts' revival to continue with its promotion.

Although the Bolshevik government might have wanted to capitalize on the contemporary process of russification of fashion and applied arts that were taking place in the West, the main reason for the interest in folk tradition was the hope that a genuine type of decoration such as the folk motif could become a legitimate Soviet answer to Western

²⁵ In the textile section, the Soviet designer Birylin was awarded the gold medal for his textiles while Liudmila Mayakovskaia's technically demanding abstract patterns on velvet won the silver medal. Covering different categories and consisting of French and foreign members, the various juries eventually awarded between 7.000 and 8.000 prizes.

²⁶ During that process of consolidation, the Abramtsevo craft workshops were absorbed by Department of Fine Arts of the Commissariat of Enlightenment by 1920.

fashion trends. Reviewing the *First All-Russian Exhibition of Art in Industry* in 1923, Iakov Tugenkhold praised the vivid colours of Exter's and Mukhina's outfits, but stressed that, belonging to the genre of fashionable evening dresses, their proposals did not address mass clothes for working women (Tugenkhold 1923: 104). In opposition to Constructivist austerity and Western-style extravagances, Tugenkhold praised Lamanova's outfits embellished with folk motifs, claiming that her successful application of the national heritage motifs onto dresses answered the needs for modern, democratic fashion (ibid: 107). As Lamanova used Bakst's and Goncharova's embroideries in her pre-revolutionary elitist dresses, folk decoration was acknowledged within the context of the artistic continuation of the different pre-revolutionary artistic practices. Embedded in such a background, folk motifs not only embellished dresses, but granted them an artistic existence as well. Such dress was handsome, but, as it belonged to the field of applied arts and crafts, it was not directly related to the field of fashion.

Although of simple style, Lamanova's dresses presented at the *First All-Russian Exhibition of Art in Industry* were however unsuitable for industrial production, as they were embellished by hand-stitched embroidery. Tugenkhold's approach demonstrated all the contradictions on which the Bolshevik artistic dress was founded: the ideological rejection of fashion, the reliance on the traditional artistic past and the unrealistic promises of mass industrial production. The supporters of the folk decorativeness in the new Soviet dress were not bothered by those concerns. They wanted to neutralize the ideologically suspicious Western fashion changes with an aesthetics relying on the Russian national heritage, in order to indulge in decoration. Exter, the pre-revolutionary practitioner of the merger of folk tradition and avant-garde, envisioned a dynamic relationship between Western and Soviet fashion. Writing in 1923 she stated:

“The vivid colours so characteristic of folk costume, particularly of the Slavs, cannot be preserved completely under urban conditions; but to reject it out of hand would mean to follow the path of European civilization, with its homogenizing spirit. The very environment of Russia demands colour: rich, primary colours, moreover, and not mere tones, as, for example, with the diffused colour of France (Germany dresses more brightly and more sharply than France does)”.²⁷

²⁷ Exter, A. (1923) “In Search of New Clothing”. The article was written for *The Exhibition of Art in Industry* in 1923.

Lamanova's style adjusted to the new ideological needs. She had to abandon extravagant and luxuriously embroidered fabrics, but her linen dresses were now embroidered with Russian folk motifs, or simply sewn from a couple of towels patched together. Lamanova described Russian style in dress as an interesting attempt to modify the forms and character of folk costumes and their application to everyday Soviet life. She claimed that the rationality of folk costume, as a result of its refinement through history, could serve as the ideological and plastic form for Soviet urban clothes.

"The basic forms of folk costume are always wise. Thus, taking for example the folk costume of the Kiev province, we shall see that it consists of an outer jacket, a skirt (*plakhta*) and a chemise with embroidered sleeves and hem. This folk costume consists of work clothes intended for manual labour, and is easily transformed from winter into summer wear and from daily into holiday with simple additions such as beads, garlands, and a bright-coloured apron. From this common costume, so in tune with everyday living and working conditions, and based on a sense of the physical characteristics of the Russian figure, it is easy for us to create urban garments. By accepting the wonderful colour of traditional costumes and distributing it rhythmically on a rationally made costume, we create the kind of clothes that are in harmony with our contemporary life".²⁸

Evgenia Pribylskaia applied her long-lasting formal research on Russian folk costumes to fashionable, Western-style dresses in *Atelier* (Figures 30 & 31). Her ideas, elaborated in the article "Embroidery in Contemporary Production", demonstrated all the limitations of *Atelier's* elitist approach to dress. Pribylskaia admitted that embroidery could only have a very limited applicability: "Its limitations are determined by a historical moment...which does not permit the production of frivolous and precious objects, which are deprived of an immediate utility" (Pribylskaia 1923: 7-8). With an official ban on Western fashion, the folk motif was the least confrontational type of decoration. Pribylskaia tried to justify the use of embroidery in order to secure authorized recognition for ornament in the new socialist dress:

"If we are aware of the scarcity of new fabrics and the limited range of variations in them, embroidery could partially modify the fabric. In that case, embroidery could

²⁸ Lamanova, N. "The Russian Fashion", *Krasnaya niva*, 1923, N 30: 32

perform a utilitarian function, contributing to the value of fabric, and adding to its esteem. Thus, embroidery could offer new ideas in textile production” (ibid).

It was unrealistic to expect that huge quantities of fabric could be improved by hand-made embroidery, and thus make an impact on Soviet mass production. The fashion plates that accompanied Pribylskaia’s article were in the end elitist examples of her talent to purify traditional folk motifs to the point when they aesthetically matched modernist Western dresses of the mid-1920s.



Figure 30 & Figure 31: *Atelier*, Moscow, N 1, 1923: Pribylskaia, E. (1923) Fabric pattern design (left) and the same pattern, hand-stitched on a shawl, accompanying the article (right).

The local provenance and relative immutability of folk not only isolated it from fashion changes but also negated the very phenomenon of Western fashion. In such a way, folk motifs could be perceived as an ideologically neutral type of decoration, which was important in the early 1920s. Folk motifs became an important visual statement within the Bolshevik aesthetics in its opposition to the Westernised decorativeness of the NEP dress. In 1923, the Bolshevik illustrated journal *Krasnaya Niva* compared Western fashion with Soviet fashion. Borrowing its shape and decoration from ancient Egypt, China and imperial

times, Western fashion looked exaggerated and out of place. In contrast, sparingly used folk decoration on the new Soviet dresses accentuated their clean lines and made them look modern in a new way. Lamanova and Pribylskaia approached folk in a similar way to the pre-revolutionary artistic and sartorial practices, when artists also experimented with the relationship between Western modernism and Russian traditional art. Lamanova and Pribylskaia purified traditional folk motifs, and only then incorporated them in the modernist 1920s shapes of dress.



Figure 32: Lamanova, N. *L'art decoratif U.R.S.S. Moscou – Paris 1925* (exposition catalogue), Moscow, 1925

Interest in Russian national heritage started to fade in the West by the end of the 1920s, but Lamanova stayed loyal to Russian folk motifs in her Art Deco dresses. In fact, she had no other choice. In its attempt to negate the past of Western fashion, the Bolshevik ideology only allowed the official decorated dresses to take quotations from the national heritage. In 1925, in an attempt to compete with the NEP fashion magazines, the journal *Krasnaya niva* published a supplement *Iskusstvo v bytu* (*Art in Everyday Life*). Drawings for coats, dresses, jackets, ensembles, sports outfits and the pioneer's uniform were accompanied with paper-patterns and precise instructions. Produced by Lamanova and Mukhina, this proposal, like their other creative sartorial interventions in the 1920s, was supported by Lunacharsky who was the co-editor of *Krasnaya Niva*. *Iskusstvo v bytu* was cleverly

conceptualised and beautifully executed. Well informed about the current Western fashion trends, Lamanova preferred clean elongated lines of clothes, decorated either with folk applications or accentuated with stripes in contrasting colours (Figure 33). Those embellishments took little account of the wishes of Soviet women who craved pretty but simple clothes that could be easily maintained through the hardships of contemporary Soviet life.



Figure 33: Lamanova, N. and Mukhina, V. (1925), Instructions for an outfit recovered from traditional kerchiefs with folk motifs, *Iskusstvo v bytu* (supplement of *Krasnaya niva*), Moscow

Carried away by the highly decorative Western Art Deco, but justifying it through the use of heavily embroidered traditional Russian towels, Lamanova designed dresses that could have been attractive to the avant-garde international circles in the Western artistic capitals, but hardly for her Soviet mass public. Soviet urban women workers preferred exact copies of Western flapper dresses, not outfits with traditional Russian folk decorations. In her attempt to reach the masses, Lamanova remained an elitist at heart. While Stepanova specifically opposed crafts as an ideologically and technologically backward way of making dresses, and wanted to move the production of all clothing to an industrial level, Lamanova enjoyed official support in her explorations of traditional crafts in the search for a genuine socialist dress.

However, the industrial development that was needed to transform the artisanal pieces into sophisticated, but industrially manufactured goods never took place in the Soviet Union. In contrast to Italy, for example, which experienced a gradual but steady development of traditional artisanal production into modern industrial methods of production at the beginning of the twentieth century, while maintaining the highest quality, the Soviet Union was plagued by a permanent confusion between craft and industrial modes of production. That confusion was perpetuated by official claims that exquisite hand-made artefacts could be successfully turned into mass manufactured products without losing any of their qualities.

The promotion of the Art Deco aesthetics expressed through Russian folk motifs continued in 1928 with the publication of a new journal: *Iskusstvo odevatsiia* (*Art of Dressing*), again with Lunacharsky's political blessing.²⁹ In the editorial of the first issue, he stressed:

“There are those among us who are afraid that clothing will become elegant or coquettish, and this they consider a great crime. It smacks, they say, of philistinism or, even worse, the bourgeoisie. Nonetheless, a certain amount of smartness and fashion is by no means unsuited to the proletariat”.³⁰

Lunacharsky had optimistically envisioned the democratic participation of the masses in fashion, but the aesthetics of the new magazine resembled Sonia Delaunay's simultaneous fabrics and her dresses from the mid-1920s.³¹ *Iskusstvo Odevatsiia* demonstrated that the folk motif remained as an appropriate Bolshevik decorative element (Figure 35). The three most prominent fashion designers promoting folk in *Iskusstvo Odevatsiia* were Mariia Orlova, N. Orshankhaia and O. Anisimova. Orlova's style was closest to Lamanova's delicate use of embroidery. Orshankhaia relied more on the traditional folk motifs, while Anisimova's folk applications were the most fashionable, relying on Delaunay's visual vocabulary (Figure 34).³²

²⁹ *Iskusstvo odevatsiia* appeared when the NEP was approaching its end. In political struggles within the Central Committee its supporters Bucharin and Lunacharsky were losing to Stalin and his plans for the political and economical centralization of the country.

³⁰ Lunacharsky, A. “Is This Really Time for the Worker to be Thinking About the Art of Dressing” (Editorial), *Iskusstvo odevatsiia* (*The Art of Dressing*), 1928, N 1, p 3
Petersburg, 1928, N 4

³² Delaunay was herself an occasional collaborator in the journal *Iskusstvo odevatsiia*. In 1928, she published an article on “Standardization of Clothes” (N 2: 2).



Figure 34: Anisimova, O. (1928) Cover, *Iskusstvo odevatsiia*, Leningrad, N 2

The clothing industry was neither organizationally nor technologically equipped to translate those prototypes into everyday dresses for the masses even by the end of the 1920s, and the designers remained condemned to isolated laboratory work. The exhibition, *Handmade Textiles and Embroidery in Woman's Contemporary Dress*, took place in the Moscow Museum for Popular Arts in 1928. Although it was held five years later than the *First All-Russian Exhibition of Art in Industry*, the two exhibitions shared many common features. Both were organized by the prestigious *State Academy for Artistic Sciences* and both promoted the same aesthetics of simple dresses decorated with hand-made folk-style embroidery. Lamanova and Pribylskaia's linen embroidered dresses were presented as a joint artistic project, with Lamanova designing dresses and Pribylskaia contributing with appropriate embroidery. This time there was less pretension that the outfits could or would be industrially produced.



Figure 35: Cover, *Iskusstvo odevatsiia*, Leningrad, 1928, N 5

URBAN WOMAN WORKER: SOCIALIST AND FASHIONABLE?

In 1926, the newly established *Zhenskii zhurnal* (*Women's Journal*), ideologically close to Bolshevik values, competed with the NEP fashion magazines by publishing literary copies of Western-style dresses, but also genuine attempts to create a socialist dress, meant for the fashion-conscious urban woman worker. The regular *Zhenskii zhurnal* column "Our Dress Proposals" published original drawings of fashionable dresses which were modernist in line but of a simpler style to drawings depicted in Western fashion journals (Figures: 37 &

38; Figures 47 & 48). Their simplicity and restraint were an aesthetic choice, as *Zhenskii zhurnal* attempted to institute a space in which socialist fashion could emerge.



Figure 36: Stenberg brothers, Cover, *Zhenskii zhurnal*, Moscow, 1929, N 7

The highly urbanized covers of *Zhenskii zhurnal*, produced by the leading graphic designers such as the Stenberg brothers, presented groomed women in minimalist refined dresses and modernist sporty outfits, engaged in some respectable leisure activity, such as reading, strolling, sun-bathing or swimming in the surroundings of cosy modern-day homes, urban parks, beaches and swimming pools, occasionally accompanied by equally fashionably clad children (Figure 36; Figure 39).

The editorial of the first issue of *Zhenskii zhurnal* stressed that the journal wanted to fill the space between the theory of the perfect laws on women's equality and the practice of

their problems in everyday life.³³ By dealing with the everyday, *Zhenskii zhurnal* embodied not only the political and social contradictions of late 1920s Soviet Union, but also the process of merger between the NEP and Bolshevik values. Yet, that merger was more complex than mere Bolshevik adjustments to the commercialized NEP life-styles in which fashionable dress played an important role. The recognition of fashionability announced an acknowledgment of a different type of modernity. While the process of industrialization was bringing the modernizing Western practices to the factory floor, fashionable dress started to convey modernity to the streets of the big city.

The post-revolutionary political attempts to deconstruct the previous gender order were challenged in everyday life from the outset. By promoting Western fashion, tango and foxtrot, *Atelier* announced that the Soviet 1920s would be contaminated with 'bad' Western influences. The woman that *Atelier* addressed was supposed to be chic as well as informed on the latest fashions in France, America and England. The Bolshevik press perceived all these Westernized rituals as serious social maladies. Yet, various elements of Western modernity, from wearing flapper dresses to indulging in American movies or dancing, spread from the NEP bourgeoisie to urban working class women.³⁴ Although the puritanical members of the Communist youth organization Komsomol complained about the idea of revolutionary youth indulging in foxtrot and waltz, many Komsomol clubs organized dances and dancing classes. At a conference of female Komsomol activists, held in Moscow in 1927, Comrade Smirnova from the Nogin factory emphasised:

“We know that streets exert great influence on our factory girls. The evenings we organise do not satisfy them and they come, if at all, only when the second part of the evening begins – dancing. They come in silk dresses, powdered and made-up, despite the fact that wages at our factory are not very high (2 roubles and 96 kopecks a day) they manage to carve out for cosmetics and silk dresses. Our agenda is of no interest to them and we are powerless to draw them away from dancing parties”.³⁵

³³ “*Tasks of Women’s Journal*”, Moscow, N 1, April 1926

³⁴ The Soviets imported about 1,700 American, German and French films in the ten years between 1921 and 1931 (quoted in: Youngblood 1992: 51).

³⁵ TsKa VLKSM, “Obzor o rabote Komosomola sredi devushek” (Review of the Komsomol’s Work with Girls), 1928 F. 1, Op. 23, Doc. 863, p. 14 KA (quoted in Brovkin, V. (1998) *Russia after Lenin: Politics, Culture and Society, 1921-1929*, London: Routledge, p.149).



Figure 37 & Figure 38: "Our Proposals" (Nashi modeli), *Zhenskii Zhurnal*, Moscow, 1929, N 9 (left); N 11 (right)

Reflecting on the shifts in 1920s society, the revolutionary poet Vladimir Mayakovsky published a poem about a factory girl who died because she could not afford a pair of fashionable patent shoes. Printed in the journal of the Communist Youth Association *Komsomolskaia Pravda* in 1927, Mayakovsky's poem was based on a real life story from the same newspaper which claimed that the Leningrad factory girl killed herself because she could not bear to live without these shoes. "Money was needed to buy shoes/ and money was in short supply/ Marusia bought a bottle of poison for five kopecks/ the end of a short life"³⁶, mourned Mayakovsky on the death of a young worker. The fact that the woman did not die for a revolutionary cause and that her tragically unnecessary death was not ideologically condemned or trivialized, demonstrated the importance that fashion commanded among the female population at that time. In 1927, even the Leftist art critic

³⁶ Mayakovsky, V. "Marusia", *Komsomolskaia Pravda*, October 4, 1927.

Sergei Tretiakov recognized that young Soviet women, at the end of a dull working day, in a mood “to escape their own lives through the familiar images of empresses, duchesses, heroines, mermaids, temptresses”, would rush to the cinema. He flatly admitted that: “the desire for elegance is very strong” (Tretiakov 1927: 29). The despised NEP eventually facilitated the entrance of Western modernity and a certain fashionability into the Soviet Union.



Figure 39: Cover, *Zhenskii Zhurnal*, N 8, Moscow, 1926

Towards the end of the 1920s, urban working women preferred the Westernized style of clothes and appearance to the ideological austerity in their everyday dress. Many had their hair cropped short, and their favoured outfit was a white soft, loose tunic, discreetly embellished with white embroidery in geometric patterns, combined with a straight skirt in a dark shade. In 1927, the heroine of an odd love triangle in the film *Bed and Sofa* was dressed in that easy urban style.³⁷ Obviously competing for attention with the numerous American movies the poster of this Soviet film, designed by the Stenberg brothers,

³⁷ The film *Bed and Sofa* (original title *Tretia Meshchanskia* - Third Petit-bourgeois Street) dealt with the problems which bothered young urban working people, from their lack of accommodation to the uncertainties of civil marriages and the emotional turmoil in relationships.

depicted a young, good looking and made-up woman with a beret, which replaced the scarf tied at the back of the neck among urban women workers at that time (Figure 40). That small iconographic detail was enough to mark the heroine on the poster as a member of the urban working class, because the NEP woman would have worn a cloche hat.³⁸

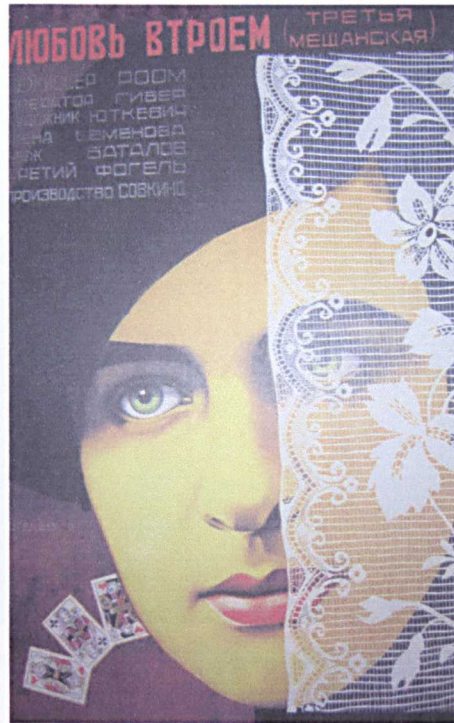


Figure 40: Stenberg Brothers poster for the film *Bed and Sofa*, 1927

Zhenskii Zhurnal was started in 1926 with the idea of promoting dress that would be fashionable enough to be interesting for urban working class women, but not the extravagant and luxurious sartorial statement that the NEP aesthetics preferred. *Zhenskii Zhurnal* introduced a competition for the best contemporary woman's dress in the same year. The entries in the contest presented a whole range of dresses, from a modernized version of the traditional Russian female costume *sarafan* to a dress for a modern housewife, elaborate evening wear and a uniform for a woman worker. The diversification of proposals not only reflected everyday reality and different dresses that suited it, at least in its idealized version, but also introduced a space in which fashion could take place (Figure 41).

³⁸ The Stenberg Brothers were among the founders of Constructivism, but moved towards commercial design after the introduction of the NEP.



Figure 41: “Competition of Zhenskii Zhurnal”, *Zhenskii Zhurnal*, Moscow, 1926, N 8

All the drawings of dresses published in *Zhenskii Zhurnal*, whether of domestic or foreign origin, were regularly accompanied by paper-patterns for home dressmakers. Women made their own clothes or used the services of a seamstress, not only because of poverty and insufficient supplies in the shop, but also because they wanted their own distinctive version of a flapper dress. Vera Inber, the Soviet revolutionary poetess, looked almost as chic pictured in her obviously home-produced flapper dress that accompanied the editorial of the first issue of *Zhenskii Zhurnal* as Lelong’s model in one of his dresses, published in the same journal (Figures 42 & 43).³⁹

³⁹ Lelong’s model illustrated an interview with him (“The Art of Dressing: Interview with Paris Fashion Designer Lucien Lelong”, *Zhenskii zhurnal*, Moscow, 1927, N 5, p 35).



Figure 42 & Figure 43: *Zhenskii zhurnal*, Moscow: Lelong's outfit, 1927, N 5 (left); Russian poetess Vera Inber, 1926, N 1 (right)

By the end of the 1920s, even the previously rigid Bolshevik strongholds, such as the journal *Rabotnitsa* introduced advice on fashion, paper patterns and fashion spreads (Figure 44). They featured simple, yet pretty, dresses with elongated lines that corresponded with contemporary Western fashion trends. In her factory sketches *Womenfolk*, Ekaterina Strogova vividly described the fashion conscious women workers:

“You’ll see our girls wearing stylish checked caps, and coquettish yellow shoes, and beige stockings. ... At parties you wouldn’t recognize the factory girls decked out in all their finery: silk jersey blouses (our factory’s own manufacture), in all possible colours with stylish trimmings, fancy shoes, and extravagant hair-dos” (Strogova 1994: 282).



Figure 44: Free paper-pattern supplement, *Rabotnitsa*, Moscow, 1929, N 6-7

Many working women tried to re-negotiate the early Bolsheviks' preference for class over gender, which marked the initial restructuring of power. By declaring women politically equal to men, the Bolsheviks wanted to abolish, or at least minimize, gender differences. In everyday life, especially encouraged by the NEP values and aesthetics, urban working women attempted to re-address the balance between class and gender. Yet, modernity mediated through Western dress and cosmetics very often not only opposed revolutionary values but also traditional ones. The position of women who plucked their eyebrows, fox-trotted, used cosmetics and dyed their hair was still vulnerable, both in the street and on the shop floor. Twenty-nine year old Marusia Vorobeva not only enjoyed too much fox-trot and consequently quit the Komsomol, but also started to dye her hair. Reporting on her inappropriate behaviour in the trade newspaper, her male colleague asked: "Will the five-year plan be better fulfilled if she is a redhead?"⁴⁰ Perceived as an individual aesthetic statement, the flapper dress was still susceptible because it was fashionable. The Bolshevik

⁴⁰ Quoted in: Koenker 1995: 1463

women's magazines were however forced to react to their readers' interest in Western style dress (Figure 46).

Under the circumstances, the image of a political activist was bound to change. An austere Bolshevik dress worn by a female political activist, was never meant to be a fashion statement, but gradually became an anachronism in the new culture gripped by the importance of Westernized and feminine looks. By the late 1920s, Strogova could allow herself to be amused by the sloppy appearance of the stern female members of Komsomol in her sketches on factory life (Strogova 1994: 282). In contrast to the artists and the urban working women who, encouraged by the commercialized NEP climate, were already interested in fashionable and handsome clothes, the political activists faced a bigger problem. Belonging professionally to a system which preferred class over gender, and loyalty to the Party over any expression of femininity, their space for manoeuvre was limited. Moreover, even Communist men did not perceive female political activists and female members of the Communist Party as women, but as comrades - comrades in a skirt - as some of them expressed it.⁴¹

The artists also depicted the ongoing negotiations between the meanings 'feminine' and 'politically conscious' that took place in everyday life. In 1927, the painting *The Party Delegate* still presented the Bolshevik political activist with an unmade-up and serious face, framed by the red scarf tied at the back. Yet she wore a simple skirt and a white blouse with a dark blue silk scarf tied up in a bow at the bottom of a collar in the manner of a boy's sailor suit (Figure 45). That sartorial quote, belonging to the pre-revolutionary dress codes of boys from the upper classes, was recoded in the 1920s into a representative dress of the politically conscious female urban workers. Similar to the leather jacket worn before the revolution by professional chauffeurs and adopted after 1917 by male political activists, a boys' sailor suit was an urban sporty dress code, which made both items natural choices for a dynamic lifestyle of political activists. The fact that the boy's sailor suit was a fashionable style in the female wardrobe at the same time in the West demonstrated corresponding sartorial and existential experiences between the urbanized Soviet Union and the West in the 1920s. Additionally, the boy's sailor suit had been an interpretation of a male work uniform, which granted it ideological approval.

⁴¹ For an overview, see Wood's discussion (1997) on the changes in the perception of a political activist.



Figure 45: Ryazhsky, G. (1927) *A Delegate*

The re-coding of the sailor suit from a boy's wardrobe softened its masculine edge, but still retained the restraining elements of male dress. On the back of an urban political activist, it became a sartorial expression of proletarian smartness, functional, simple and gender ambiguous.⁴² The everyday mass popularity of a little boy's sailor suit was demonstrated by numerous drawings depicting it in the pages of the Bolshevik women's journals, such as *Rabotnitsa* and *Zhenskii Zhurnal*.

⁴² Compare also the cartoon published in *Krokodil* in 1927. The cartoon portrayed crazed NEP women in luxurious flapper dresses, and responsible working class women dressed in little boys' suits, confirming that such a dress code enjoyed ideological approval.



Figure 46: *Zhenskii Zhurnal*, Moscow, 1929, N 11

While by the end of the 1920s the Bolshevik New Woman was too austere and simple to be a role model any longer, an androgynous attitude corresponded well with the ambiguities of the modernist insecurities concerning the concept of gender. Stalinism soon brought an end to a dress-mediated merger between Western and new socialist modernity that had only slowly started to develop on the streets of the big cities and in the new socially conscious women's magazines. The Avant-garde lost its artistic battles for the new modernist woman, and the commercially oriented NEP was halted in the late 1920s.



Figure 47: “Our Proposals” (Nashi modeli), *Zhenskii Zhurnal*, Moscow, 1929, N 3

CONCLUSION

Throughout the 1920s, different approaches to an ideal body shape and a new socialist dress reflected the deep ideological schism within the Soviet social body. The post-1917 Soviet woman was variously offered long-peasant-style skirts, a geometrically cut, striped uniform, the latest Western fashion trends, an artistic Bolshevik dress embellished with folk-inspired decorations, or wore a Soviet version of the modest, home-made flapper dress. The Bolshevik ideal body shape varied between a big Nietzschean body and the slender figure of the Constructivist woman. On the other hand, although the body shapes of the NEP woman and the socially conscious urban woman worker converged towards the end of the decade, they remained ideologically far apart. Stalinism eventually found an answer to the dilemmas regarding the New Woman and her looks, and offered a unique model of an ideal woman and her style of dress, which were promoted through the new, centralized and highly controlled mass media.

In the next chapter, I will analyse the Stalinist concept of woman and the birth of socialist official fashion within the drive towards industrialization and centralization of the textile and clothing industries. It might have been thought that the ideal Stalinist woman, the over-decorated aesthetics of Stalinist dress and the re-introduction of the phenomenon of fashion within the newly established Stalinist mythical culture, would have annulled all the 1920s models of womanhood and their approaches to dress, as Stalin found novel ways to discipline and control the social body. However, in the next chapter, and those that follow, I will argue that it was not the case. I will demonstrate that four of those 1920s models continued to exist in mutated forms throughout socialist times, serving the different ideological needs of the regimes. Only one of those models - the NEP woman and her dress practices – had been eradicated, as the capitalist system never returned in such an open, commercialized form in any of the socialist countries. The demise of the NEP woman, an avid consumer of the latest fashions, demonstrated that socialism and the phenomenon of Western fashion would never get along due to their ontological differences. However, socialist women's interest in fashion, as expressed by 1920s Soviet urban woman workers, did not disappear even after Stalinism discontinued the open exchange with the West and its modernity. Those dress practices continued through an alternative life in the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries. On the other hand, Stalinism developed a very dynamic relationship with the other three, ideologically driven concepts of the Soviet 1920s womanhood and dress practices – the Bolshevik New Woman, the Constructivist appreciation of homogenized efficiency, and the Bolshevik artistic prototype. Stalinism translated those concepts and incorporated the elements that suited its needs into Stalinist culture, while discarding the others.



Figure 48: “Our Proposals” (Nashi modeli), *Zhenskii zhurnal*, Moscow, 1929, N 1

CHAPTER 5: BETWEEN MYTH AND SCIENCE: SOVIET OFFICIAL FASHION, 1930-1955

Following rapid industrialization of the 1930, the new Soviet reality was so difficult that Stalinism translated it into an ideal mythical image, which had very little to do with the hardships of everyday life. In this chapter, I analyse how the Soviet Union moved from utopia to myth. During that process, Stalinism selected elements from earlier models of womanhood and their approaches to dress - the New Bolshevik Woman, the Constructivist fascination with technology and science, and the Bolshevik concept of an artistic prototype - to establish its own dress culture and its concept of woman.

By abolishing the NEP before the introduction of the First Five Year Plan in 1929, Stalin also abolished the NEP dress aesthetics, although some of the NEP glamour and femininity rubbed off on the ideal Stalinist woman. In a huge media campaign, the New Bolshevik Woman was reactivated as a role model, but now glamorous and feminine. Stalinism rejected the Constructivist angular, androgynous body and reclaimed women's curves, announcing a return to conventional femininity. In this chapter I analyse these shifts in the official re-conceptualization of gender. I discuss the conventional shapes of the Stalinist dresses that replaced the Constructivist artistic experiments. I show how Stalinism established the phenomenon of socialist official fashion in the newly opened House of Fashion in Moscow. Situated within the Stalinist myth, socialist official fashion was expressed through dresses of eternal, timeless style. I show how different elements – from the ideological use of folk motifs to selective borrowing from Western sartorial traditions – situate this conservative aesthetics within the mythical culture of Stalinism.

While the Constructivist woman and the Modernist aesthetics of her dress did not interest Stalinism, I will argue that Stalinism inherited and further developed the Constructivists' insistence on functionality and efficiency. In this chapter, I also show how the Bolshevik artistic dress of the 1920s was translated into the specific form of a luxurious representative outfit, and how and why the Stalinist fashion magazines preserved and promoted the concept of a unique prototype. I also show that Stalinism not only imposed a new style of socialist smart dress but engineered a new middle class and new elites, by introducing huge differences in wages and awarding some social groups at the expense of the others. While Lunacharsky had stressed that smart clothes were suitable for the

proletarian masses, Stalinism introduced a policy which permitted only a minority of privileged citizens to enjoy them.

THE DEMISE OF CONSTRUCTIVIST AND BOLSHEVIK ARTISTIC DRESS

In the early 1930s, the scientific approach challenged earlier Bolshevik artistic and utopian visions of new socialist dress, as well as the diversity that had characterized those visions. Up until his resignation from the post of People's Commissar for Enlightenment in 1929, Lunacharsky had allowed and even encouraged a variety of approaches, both in arts and applied arts. There were huge differences between Lamanova's decorated and elegant outfits, Stepanova's insistence on production clothing, Pribylskaia's folk embroidered dresses, Exter's extravagant, luxurious gowns and Popova's flapper-influenced Constructivist dresses with their vivid patterns.

As the power of the Avant-garde declined, its critics became more vocal. The Constructivists already had vociferous opponents during the heated artistic and ideological discussions of the 1920s. Just a few years later, historians assessed them negatively in the context of the Stalinist culture that had introduced a return to traditional artistic patterns. The prestigious art critic Frida Roginskaiia questioned the aesthetics of Popova's and Stepanova's textile patterns, claiming that their bold graphics were not suitable to the flimsy fabrics that they were printed on (Roginskaiia 1930: 26). In another article on Soviet textile artists published in 1935, Elena Eikhengolts stressed that the Constructivist abstract patterns did not respect the cut of the outfit, that the artists did not take into account the specific characteristics and textures of different fabrics and applied the same ubiquitous geometrical decorations indiscriminately on satin, flannel and rough-surfaced cloth (Eikhengolts 1935: 142). The Constructivists were just an episode in the history of Soviet textiles, claimed Eikhengolts, while praising the new generation of the textile designers such as Skliarova and Shuaheva who had brought back flowery patterns (ibid: 143). In 1931 the textile expert T. Armand confirmed the official return to traditional ornament in his study *Ornament in Textile* by re-introducing patterns from different historical and geographical backgrounds. Yet, all the ornaments that Armand presented, from traditional Persian patterns to rich baroque samples and grand evening wear in patterned silk from *Vogue*, fulfilled the highly decorative requirements of Stalinist aesthetics, as well as its technique of establishing a new iconography by re-coding

quotations from diversified sources. Armand recognized and praised only Lamanova's folk-decorated dresses from the earlier Soviet period (Armand 1931: 102-3).

STALINIST DRESS IS A SCIENTIFIC ISSUE IN AN OVER-CENTRALIZED INDUSTRY

But the legacy of the Constructivists continued to live on under the new political and economic conditions. While the Stalinist drive towards industrialization made the utopian element of their work superficial, the Constructivists' insistence on functionality and efficiency suited the new times. In 1928, Stepanova wrote "The Task of the Artist in the Textile Industry"¹ for the exhibition *Soviet Textiles for Everyday Life*, held at the Vkhutein. She revised her earlier radical position, recognizing fashion as an important part of contemporary rationalized modernity, but imposing the authority of science on its future expressions. Her idea that a change in the style of dress should be neither frivolous nor capricious, but should be related to the development of new technologies, fitted well with the industrialization drive. As the start of the First Five-Year Plan was approaching, Stepanova announced the fate of socialist fashion:

"Under a socialist planned economy, fashion will assume a completely different form and will depend not on market competition but on improvements and rationalization in the textile and garment industry...If the task of fashion in the capitalist economy is basically to reflect the cultural state of society, then in the socialist society fashion will be the progression to ever more perfect forms of clothing. Every discovery in whatever branch of technology industry will invariably lead to a change in the form of clothing" (Stepanova 1928: 191).

In the decades that followed, the design, production and distribution of dress would succumb to the total authority of socialist science. Science was emphasised over the supposed irrationality of Western fashion. By the end of the 1920s this started to tame avant-garde pace and artistic individuality into a homogenized industrial routine. In place of the artistically inclined fashion magazines *Atelier* (1923), *Zhenskii zhurnal* (1926) and *Iskusstvo odevatsiia* (1928), a new professional magazine, *Shveinaia promyshlennost*

¹ The text "The Task of the Artist in the Textile Industry" was printed in Noever, P. (ed) *Rodchenko Stepanova: The Future Is Our Only Goal*, Munich, Prestel, pp 190-193. A shorter version of that text was published in the daily *Vechernaia Moskva* on February 28, 1928, "Ot kostyuma – k risunku i tkani" (From Clothing to Pattern and Fabric).

(*Clothing Industry*) appeared in 1929. Throughout the 1930s this magazine followed the industrialization of the clothing industry closely, but ignored fashionable and artistic dress. *Shveinaia Promyshlennost* published a series of articles on ‘Colour in Clothing’ in 1932. Edited by perceptual psychologist Sofija Beljaeva-Eksempljarskaia, these dealt with the rational application of colours in clothing based on extensive and profound research into the theory of colour, including psychological theories of chromotherapy.

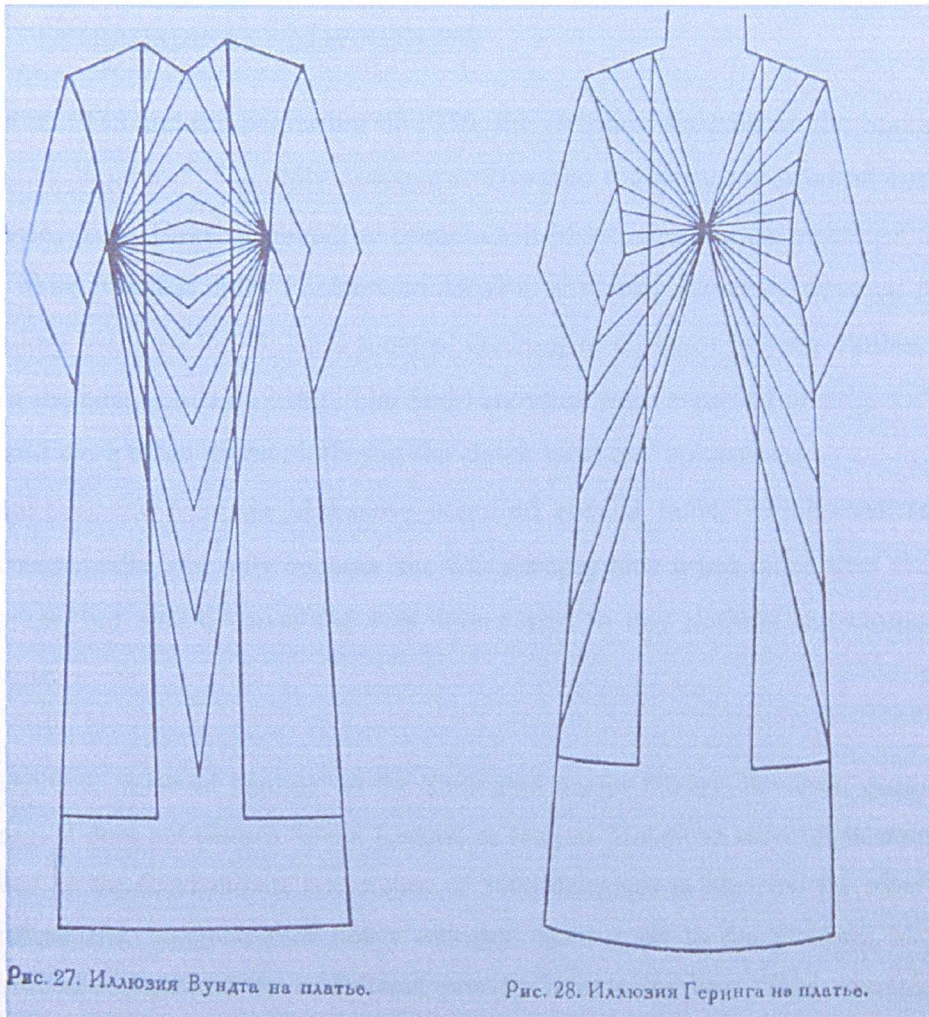


Figure 49: Beljaeva-Eksempljarskaia, S., 1934

Beljaeva-Eksempljarskaia had acquired her theoretical knowledge on psychology, arts and visual perception while working in Kandinski's psycho-physiological section of the *State Academy for Artistic Sciences* in the mid-1920s. Her manual on *Dress Design according to the Laws of Visual Perception* (1934) fed on the Constructivist legacy by linking dress with science (Figure 49). But the Constructivist's utopian expectation that art should and would permeate industry was abandoned. Beljaeva-Eksempljarskaia was a scientist, and her

manual analyzed various theories of form and their application to dress in a very serious scientific manner. She discovered that optical illusions can visually alter the human form, explaining their application to the cut, decoration, pattern and colour of dress. While in the utopian Bolshevik vision, science served ethical and social ideals, in the Stalinist world science symbolized industrial and homogenized progress. In the mid-1930s, science was cherished by the system, because it served the construction of the new reality.

STALINIST EXTRAORDINARY MANNEQUINS

At the end of 1935 and the beginning of 1936, the attention focused on the Stakhanovites - the star shock-workers.² The daily newspaper *Izvestiia* regularly reported on congresses of Stakhanovites from different industrial branches in Moscow and their meetings with Stalin, while the more populist daily *Vechernaia Moskva* (*Evening Moscow*) covered their social life, including visits to the Bolshoi theatre, dancing in clubs or buying clothes in special shops with the best goods on offer. The Stakhanovites were awarded prestigious clothes as bonuses, and were often given clothes at the shock workers' congresses.

The Stakhanovite Marusia Makarova acquired special fame, which even reached the Western mass-media, not only because she was earning nine times more after she became a shock-worker, but also because she was determined to buy nothing but clothes with her extra income:

“Makarova, ‘a labour heroine’ of the Stalingrad tractor factory, however, does want money. It does not disturb Soviet leaders, as long as Makarova stays ‘Stakhanovite’. Indeed, at the Stakhanovite conference of 3000 delegates to Moscow the other day, Orzohonidzhe, commissar of heavy industry, led her on to the platform himself. Terrific cheers greeted the commissar, proudly introducing her: “This, comrades, is THE Makarova who used to earn 150 roubles a month and now earns 1,350 because she wants to buy fawn kid shoes”.³

² Stakhanovism acquired its name from the coalminer Aleksei Stakhanov. On the night of 30th August 1935, Stakhanov overfulfilled his work quota by 1,400 per cent. ‘Shock work’ existed before, but Stakhanovism differed in material stimuli, as it was accompanied by the public promotion of consumer values.

³ Owen, F. “Stakhanovism”, *Daily Express*, London, January 6, 1936, p 10

Makarova's craving for clothes was also justified in the shock-workers' publication *Geroini sotsialisticheskogo truda (Heroes of Socialist Labour)* in 1936, where her friend and co-worker Slavnikova explained to the Politburo member Mikoyan:

"I asked my friend: 'Marusia, what are you going to do with the money?' She said: 'I'm buying myself ivory-coloured shoes for 180 roubles, a crêpe-de-chine dress for 200 roubles, and a coat for 700 roubles'.⁴

Before official receptions so-called 'simple people' whose huge professional achievements did not match their social skills were advised to dress up. The Stakhanovites were entitled to order custom-made clothes from the best fabrics in special ateliers. The situation was portrayed in the recollections of the Komsomol member Petrova, who was invited to a ball at the Column Hall of the House of Unions dedicated to model workers in 1935:

"I was wearing a black crepe de chine dress. When I was buying it, at the atelier at Taganka Square, I thought that my look would match the ancient Greek style. Not exactly like Danae, of course, but a loose tunic dress with a gathered cape around my neck – that was something!"⁵

During Stalinist times, state celebrations in the Kremlin took place in grand settings. Long evening gowns were paraded in salons with chandeliers, as the regime emphasized its successes and celebrated its heroes. The media reported that the Stakhanovites were often invited to those celebrations and met Stalin. Magazines paid special attention to the smartly dressed young female shock workers, who became an integral part of these carefully choreographed state events. Their work was no longer their only duty. They were also supposed to be extraordinary mannequins, as the Stalinist culture delegated them to dress up for the rest of the population (Figure 50).

⁴ *Geroini sotsialisticheskogo truda (Heroes of Socialist Labour)*, Moscow, 1936, pp 6-7 (quoted in: Fitzpatrick 1993: 227)

⁵ Quoted in: Lebina 1999: 223-224



Figure 50: Stakhanovites at a spa, *USSR under Construction*, June 1939

At the beginning of 1938, even the Russian journal *Stakhanovite*, dedicated to the world of machines and the supermen who mastered them, published advertisements for cosmetics and fashionable feminine hats (Figure 51). A mythological approach towards the world ritualized every action. Once a mundane everyday activity like work had become a highly appreciated ritual, a space also opened for dress codes to leave quotidianity burdened with shortages and scarcities, to be transformed into desirable rituals. Smart clothes and make-up fitted well into the Stalinist myth of abundance and a new-cultured life.

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всех крупных городах СССР.



Figure 51: An advertisement for hats, the journal *Stakhanovets*, N 1, 1938

However, these shifts in social stratification for certain categories of citizens, marked by beautiful clothes, did not take place in the real world. The luxurious goods granted to Stakhanovites in the 1930s were somewhat surreal for their co-workers, who could not afford or find even the simplest items of clothing in the shops.⁶ In 1934, the First of May factory produced 75,000 dresses, 85,000 skirts, 65,000 trousers, 39,000 blouses from white cotton that it had at its disposal. This strange choice of easily soiled colour, especially since soap was scarce, was explained in the daily *Leningrad Truth* (*Leningrad Pravda*) by the lack of dyes for the cotton.⁷

Although the dailies occasionally pointed to everyday problems, magazines, films and posters promoted a mythical concept of culture, informed by an optimistic vision of the

⁶ For an overview of the Stakhanovites' symbolic role in the Stalinist society, see: Siegelbaum (1988); Davies (1997).

⁷ Quoted in Lebina (1999: 224).

future which had very little to do with the harsh Soviet reality. Choosing between the two realities, an ordinary and an extraordinary one, between everyday life and its mythical opposite, the Stalinist mass media usually opted for the extraordinary representation.⁸ Stalin was first to encourage the development of the socialist middle class in the mid-1930s. The loyal managerial and technical intelligentsia, elements of the former bourgeoisie and the surviving petty bourgeois elements perfectly fitted Stalin's needs. They were apolitical, uncritical, upwardly mobile and acquisitive. Locating a beautiful dress ideologically within its new culture of smart appearance and good manners, Stalinism simultaneously re-located it in the sphere of its mythical reality.

THE BIRTH OF SOCIALIST OFFICIAL FASHION: MOSCOW HOUSE OF FASHION

The Stalinist mass media began to promote femininity and adornment through a major campaign to civilize the new socialist middle class in good manners and appropriate dress. The regime suddenly needed a confirmation that smart dress existed in the real world. In 1935, smart dress was officially confirmed as part of Stalin's mass culture with the opening of the House of Fashion in Moscow. Its opening, as well as other fashion events that took place at that time, was reported in the newspapers. In November 1935, *Vechernaia Moskva* (*Evening Moscow*) published two pictures, one of them documented a fashion show at the House of Fashion, and the artists and political dignitaries who attended it, while the other portrayed the director of the House of Fashion, comrade Makarova.⁹ A month later, the same daily reported on the presentation of new fashion trends by the Central Department Store (Univermag N1).¹⁰ Only a couple of days later, *Vechernaia Moskva* reported that the fashion atelier attached to the *Moskvoshvei* (Moscow Clothing Trust) would provide ready-made dresses, offer custom-made clothes and produce dress

⁸ Catherine Clark observed that those two realities co-existed during Stalinist times (Clark 2000), while Sheila Fitzpatrick recognized two realities, everyday and mythical, as 'life as it is' and 'life as it is becoming' (1993: 216-237).

⁹ *Vechernaia Moskva*, November 26, 1935. The article in *Vechernaia Moskva* stated that the event took place on November 22, 1935, and that the House of Fashion was attached to the Mosbelje Trust, and located at Sretenka Street. The editorial of the first issue of the journal *House of Fashion* also stated that the House of Fashion was opened in October 1935. In her autobiography, Schiaparelli (1954) mentioned that she was invited to open the Moscow House of Fashion at Sretenka Street in December 1935. The Soviet costume expert Tatiana Strizhenova claimed that the House of Fashion was opened in 1934.

¹⁰ *Vechernaia Moskva*, December 26, 1935

samples.¹¹ The publication of all that news, scattered between advertising for American movies and smart clothes, reflected the political shifts inside the Stalinist master narrative.

In 1936, in the editorial of its first issue, the journal *House of Fashion* envisioned two complementary ways to accomplish a Soviet style of dress. The first was an independent, creative path inspired by the folk costumes of different Soviet nationalities, while the second was a critical re-working of the technical elements of Western fashion in order to organize domestic production professionally. In its first issue the magazine claimed that the House of Fashion had already designed 4,297 original outfits from October 1935 till July 1936, and that these prototypes were being reproduced into mass clothing in textile factories from Moscow to the Ukraine, Byelorussia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan.¹² Both the creative and technical tasks of the House of Fashion were to be achieved by a group of artists specialized in costume and a group of highly qualified cutters and sample-makers, presided over by the Artistic Board, which had a very active role, and included the most prominent state artists and the high-ranking politicians.¹³ The established fashion designer Nadezhda Makarova, who started her career under Lamanova's guidance in the Workshops of Contemporary Dress, was the first director of the House of Fashion, while Lamanova was appointed as its artistic consultant. The head of the design studio within the House of Fashion was another of Lamanova's students, F. Gorelenkova, while the prominent theatre costume designers A. Sudakevich and S. Topleninov were also drawn into the design studio. All the names, from the members of the Artistic Board to the designers, cutters and sample makers were listed in the editorial of the first issue, in order to demonstrate the importance of the new institution and the new role of fashion at the time.

¹¹ *Vechernaia Moskva*, December 29, 1935

¹² Editorial, Journal *House of Fashion*, Moscow, 1936, N 1.

¹³ Members of the House of Fashion's Artistic Board included the most prestigious artists: Natan Altman, Evgeni Lansere, Vera Mukhina, Sara Lebedeva, M. Rodionov, Alexander Tyshler and Vladimir Favorski. They were joined by the secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth Organization T. Vasil'eva and by the secretary of the Moscow Communist Youth Organization L. Sidorova.



Figure 52: Outfits by F. Gorelenkova (left) and S. Topleninov (right), the journal *House of Fashion*, Moscow, 1936, N 1

The outfits presented in drawings and photographs in the first issue of the in-house journal were highly urbanized and polished (Figure 52). The style of clothes was neither modest nor minimalist, although Lamanova's restrained aesthetics was a visible influence. The outfits were stylish clothes for a busy woman on the streets of a big city. These refined, but simple, designs demonstrated that the director Nadezhda Makarova, after working for decades with Lamanova, stayed loyal to her mentor's ideas on dress. Her designs corresponded to 1930s Western fashion, but were not overtly fashionable. Makarova insisted on simple day dresses, intended for mass production (Figure 53). Although the editorial insisted that the dress coming from the House of Fashion would be inspired by the folk tradition, there was no trace of folk in the presented outfits.



Figure 53: Dresses designed by E. Raizman (left) and N. Makarova (right), *House of Fashion*, N 1, Moscow, 1936

It was the first time that the prototypes, supposedly meant for mass-production, were photographed. The previous fashion magazines, either Bolshevik or the NEP-ones, had mainly published drawings, the difference being that the NEP magazines had copied their drawings from the Western press, while the avant-garde artists had provided artistic drawings for the Bolshevik-influenced magazines. During the 1920s, drawings were also the prevailing medium of presenting new trends in the Western fashion magazines, although they were already using fashion photography by the mid-1930s. The journal *House of Fashion* emphasized its use of photography as an advantage to all the previous Russian fashion magazines:

“So called fashion magazines, published in our country previously, shared the same failure: they blindly depended on Western examples and merely copied illustrations from foreign magazines. In the journal *House of Fashion*, the designer and the

photographer face a new and decisive task: to bring out the most expressive presentation of the dress in combination with a live person”.¹⁴

The first issue of the journal *House of Fashion* therefore gave precedence to photographs. Documentary and modern media such as photography were better suited to the drive to industrialize the whole society. Photographs presenting ‘real’ dresses gave the impression that they would soon be mass-produced and soon arrive in the nearest shop. But the journal also featured some refined drawings of clothes by the leading state artists who also happened to be members of the House of Fashion’s Artistic Board, such as the painter M. Rodionov (Figure 54).



Figure 54: Makarova, N. (1936) *House of Fashion*, Moscow, N 1, 1936

The medium of artistic drawings served a different symbolical role to the documentary immediacy of photography. Those sophisticated drawings took an everyday object such as dress away from the competition of the market, and even away from the busy noise of the

¹⁴ Editorial, *House of Fashion*, Moscow, 1936, N 1

machines in the clothing factory. The beautiful dress from the drawing did not face an industrial destiny. In the mid-1930s, that dress entered the Stalinist mass culture and soon became one of the elements that perpetuated it the most.

Smart dress never entered the everyday life of every citizen. But, staying within the boundaries of Stalinist mythical culture, its representations appeared in the House of Fashion and its newly started fashion magazine. In 1935, the House of Fashion was far too ambitious a project for a country in which food rations were only recently abolished, and everyday goods, clothes included, remained scarce. In fact, the attempt of the first issue of the journal *House of Fashion* to present new dresses through the medium of photography very soon proved to be unsustainable. Photo shoots were too complex and sophisticated an operation to be produced under the contemporary Soviet conditions, even if only for representational purposes. Drawings became the prevailing medium in the luxurious magazine *Fashions of the Seasons*, which followed the journal *House of Fashion*, as an official fashion publication, which bi-annually presented new fashions coming from the House of Fashion from 1938 on.

In her autobiography, Elsa Schiaparelli described how she was asked to open the Moscow House of Fashion during a visit to Russia at the end of 1935. She was sent by the French government as the French representative to the exhibition of French light industry.¹⁵ The event, as described by Schiaparelli, only contributed to a mythical concept of fashion:

“Electric mannequins under glass were turning slowly as they displayed rather bewildering clothes. Or at least these clothes bewildered me, for I was of the opinion that the clothes of working people should be simple and practical; but far from this I witnessed an orgy of chiffon, pleats, and furbelows” (Schiaparelli 1954: 92).

Modest, practical clothes could not match the grand pretensions required by the Stalinist interest in dressing up its heroes, shock-workers of the huge industrialization campaign. During her visit in 1936, the English Labour MP Jennie Lee also reported on the grand

¹⁵ The *Exhibition of Samples of the French Light Industry* was conceived by the French politician Edouard Herriot, and it brought the best of French luxury to Moscow in November 1935: Chanel, Coty and Guerlain perfumes, Courvoisier brandy, Heidsieck and Pommery champagnes. Its location, the sombre and dignified Chamber of Commerce, demonstrated the political and strictly representational nature of the event. Accompanied by the photographer Cecil Beaton, Schiaparelli glided from one diplomatic party to another and attended state-orchestrated events.

fashion show held in the newly established House of Fashion, and attended by the girls from neighbouring factories:

“It was a very grand affair. The room might have belonged to a fashionable London or New York dress designer. The mannequins were of the same order. The first to appear was a tall, slender blonde who might have stepped straight out of a Cochran revue. Every detail was perfect. The flawless coiffure, pencilled eyebrows and expert make-up could not have been improved upon in any capital in Europe”.¹⁶

Among thirty outfits presented on the catwalk was a black evening dress with a long train.¹⁷ Jennie Lee observed that the working girls in the audience had been dressed very modestly, but in conversation with them she understood that they expected to wear pretty dresses from the catwalk soon enough. In order to persuade the English visitor of the fantastic Soviet progress, one of the girls asked her: “Have you seen our Metro?” Built within a record-breaking timeframe, and embellished with fine marble, decorated colonnades and crystal chandeliers, the Moscow underground railway was supposed to recreate the opulence of the old regime for the working class. Reporting on Soviet fashion shortly after Schiaparelli's visit, the French journal *Regards* quoted her advice to the Soviets: “Do not waste the best of your energies on evening dresses but on daywear”.¹⁸ Luxurious dress from the highly choreographed fashion show for working women was a purely ideological product, designed by the artist of the costume and realized as a unique copy by the artist sampler. Similar to the sleek drawings in *Fashions of the Seasons*, dress at the fashion shows was just another element of fashion as a myth rather than as an everyday commodity. In fact, the art of fashion drawing that started in the Soviet Union at that time, confirmed fashion's mythical nature under Stalinism. The regime did not want fashion, but a representational dress.¹⁹

The amazed Westerners such as Elsa Schiaparelli and Jennie Lee, as well as the impressed Soviet working women witnessed the birth of socialist official fashion in the

¹⁶ Lee, J. “Mannequins in Moscow”, *Daily Express*, London, March 26, 1936, p 8. Jennie Lee, the wife of the Labour politician Aneurin Bevan, and a politician and left-wing activist in her own right, published four articles in *Daily Express* on her visit to Soviet Union in 1936.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ Legas, I. “Fashion in Moscow” (*Mode à Moscou*), *Regards*, Paris, March 26, 1936

¹⁹ By ‘representational dress’ I mean a dress which is produced only for the purpose of representing an abstract ideological concept. The practice started with Stalinism and continued throughout socialist times in the respective countries.

Moscow House of Fashion in the mid-1930s. Real-life changes, fashion trends and the laws of the market did not disturb the birth of socialist official dress. Within the Stalinist mythical reality, socialist official fashion developed into a timeless, luxurious and unique phenomenon of its own. Informed by the new Stalinist culture, other women's magazines, like *Rabotnitsa* and *Krestianka (Peasant Woman)*, also started to publish fashion pages at the time. Unlike those populist magazines with huge circulation, *Modeli sezona* was not a mass magazine. Full of sleek colour drawings of smart dresses, without any text accompanying them, *Modeli sezona* did not look like a proper fashion magazine either, but like an album of luxurious clothes (Figure 55).



Figure 55: *Modeli sezona*, Moscow, N 2, 1938

Ideologically, Stalinism propagated luxury for each woman, but neither the contemporary society ladies nor the female shock workers were pictured in *Modeli sezona*. While the

nicely made-up dignified female workers or the smartly dressed and respected female artists or actresses were promoted in the mass magazines, *Modeli sezona* was exclusively a home to drawings of luxuriously dressed and groomed women who dwelled strictly in the mythical Stalinist world, inhabiting a totally separate reality from the real one.

AN ETERNAL RUFFLE: THE AESTHETICS OF STALINIST DRESS

Stalinist smart dress was not fashionable dress, although it was promoted from the newly instituted House of Fashion and its official magazine. Situated within the Stalinist myth, dress conformed to its rules. Generally, myth and fashion share very little. While fashion is a modernist, fast-changing phenomenon immersed in everyday reality, myth is conservative, traditional and preserves the status quo. Their relationship to the past is also different. Fashion grabs its quotations from the past erratically and unpredictably, while myth is loyal to specific historical moments. Stalinist dress shared both its mythical origin and its traditionalist aesthetics with Socialist Realism.



Figure 56: Afternoon Dresses, *Mod (Fashion)*, Moscow, 1940, N 1

In textile design, agit-textiles, designed by the leftist Stepanova's graduates, gave preference to the previously despised floral patterns, but not without a new ideological battle. In 1933, an article in *Pravda* ironically announced the demise of the agit-textiles with the claim:

“The tasks of political propaganda have been mechanically applied to textiles. Everything has its proper place! Let a picture hang in a picture gallery, let a poster mobilize masses in fulfilling urgent economic tasks...but let a dress...remain a dress. There is no need to turn a Soviet citizen into a travelling picture gallery”.²⁰



Figure 57: Anonymous designer, *The Red Navy*, late 1920s (from Strizhenova 1991)

The harsh reality of rapid industrialization required tractors in the fields, and chimneys, cogs and machines in the factories, no longer simply depicted in printed textiles (Figure 57). Once again, their patterns featured stylized flowers in bright optimistic colours. They perfectly suited the Stalinist aesthetics (Figure 58).



Figure 58: Anonymous designer, Silk fabric with floral pattern, the late 1930s (from Strizhenova 1991)

²⁰ Ryklin, G. “Speredi traktor – szadi kombain” (Tractor in Front, Combine-Harvester in the Back), *Pravda*, Moscow, September 6, 1933

The clean and minimalist lines advocated by Lamanova and Pribilskaya, as well as Stepanova's sporty functionality did not correspond with the new Stalinist conservatism. Stalinism's drive to industrialization significantly modernized the technological levels of the country, but Stalinist aesthetics was greatly indebted to pre-modernist times, both in its imagery and in its concept of the unique, precious dress, which stood in opposition to the very idea of mass-produced clothes (Figure 56).

In 1935, even the Schiaparelli capsule collection for the Soviet working woman did not fulfil the Stalinist officials' criteria. Schiaparelli recalled:

"The rumour went around that I had designed a dress for Soviet women. Stalin had decided that army officers should wear gold stars, smartly cut jackets and trousers with broad stripes. They must learn to fox-trot. Commissars must learn golf. The Red Army soldiers must teach the women how to look their best. Newspapers carried the sensational news that I had made a dress forty million women would wear. This news reached Russia. It was said that the wife of Stakhanov, the miner who had invented Stakhanovism, had been given a motor-car, a banking account, and the latest Schiaparelli dress" (Schiaparelli 1954: 91).

She described her dress for Soviet working women as a simple little black 'Schiap' number accompanied by a red coat lined in black, sporting big pockets, and a beret-style hat (Figure 59).²¹ In March 1936 Jennie Lee, on a journalistic assignment for the *Daily Express*, could not trace any Schiaparelli clothes, designed only three months earlier:

"I wondered what had become of the famous Schiaparelli model specially designed for Russian women. No one seemed to know anything about it. Ultimately, I unearthed it. The unfortunate Schiaparelli has been stuck in an obscure corner of an exhibition of French imports, which is being held in the Chamber of Commerce, formerly the Stock Exchange. The Soviet fashion experts have rejected it as unsuitable for mass production."²²

²¹ In her autobiography, Schiaparelli claimed that she wore such little black dresses every day, but eventually acknowledged that 'contrary to all expectation', she surprised the Soviets by designing something that simple (Schiaparelli 1954: 91).

²² Lee, J. "Mannequins in Moscow", *Daily Express*, London, March 26, 1936, p 8

The Soviets eventually rejected Schiaparelli's proposal, claiming that it was too 'ordinary' and the big pockets on the coat would attract pickpockets on public transport.²³ A Schiaparelli capsule collection was just a fashionable outfit, which could be easily mass-produced, of course, in an appropriate technological and market oriented environment. Schiaparelli's dress proposal was abandoned because it was considered too ordinary, but the Stalinist search for its own dress did not reject the historical and contemporary aesthetics of Western clothes altogether.



Figure 59: Elsa Schiaparelli's design for a Soviet working woman, *Daily Express*, London, March 26, 1936

As a form of genuine socialist dress had not emerged by the mid-1930s, Stalinism was compelled to borrow selectively from the West. The House of Fashion and the fashion ateliers that opened as elitist departments within the large textile companies and at model department stores were encouraged to subscribe to Western fashion magazines in the regime's rush to launch a new Stalinist dress. Although sartorial quotations from Western

²³ Schiaparelli visit to Moscow was reported neither in the Soviet media nor in Western fashion magazines. While presenting the new Paris collections, British *Vogue* dedicated a whole page to Schiaparelli's parachute dress, hinting on her visit to USSR with the caption: "Schiaparelli salutes the Soviet". (*Vogue*, London, N 4, March 1936: 69).

fashion were no longer an ideological problem, fashionability was not allowed to disturb the composed perfection of Stalinist representational dress and its emerging imposing style. Western fashions were copied and carefully recoded to suit the new Stalinist conservative ideals of beauty and femininity. Dresses picked up from the luxurious and conservative foreign fashion magazines²⁴ demonstrated that the budding Stalinist fashion institutions had to comply with the main characteristics of Stalinist aesthetics: grandness, classicism, uniqueness and preciousness.

In the first issue of the journal *House of Fashion*, contemporary modernist and functionalist aesthetics had been expressed in Makarova's day dresses and Topleninov's city suit consisting of a sports jacket and a pair of culottes. Yet, the grand evening wear and the insistence on technical perfection in the same issue of the journal announced the new directives for Stalinist dress. The Soviets were eager to master the techniques of impeccable cut and perfect execution of dress in order to eventually produce their own timeless classics. The idea was that those classics copied from the West, once flawlessly mastered in all their complex technical details, could have protected official Stalinist dress from future Western seasonal fashion changes. In contrast to the Bolsheviks who had encouraged change but had not allowed any space for fashion, Stalinism created a space for fashion by establishing the House of Fashion, special fashion ateliers and glossy fashion magazines, but stopped short of change by insisting on the concept of timelessness in dress. The Stalinist classical style appeared in a range of aesthetic expressions, from the imposingly glamorous to the conventionally pretty. In the end, all those expressions belonged to the Stalinist glorification of reality that tried to remove all conflicting and erratic elements from everyday life during the chaotic and deprived years that started with the introduction of the Five-Year Plans.

Evening gowns and cocktail dresses on the highly-maintained women were favourite outfits in *Modeli sezona (Fashions of the Seasons)* in the late 1930s. Illustrations reveal their curvy but trim bodies clothed in glamorous dresses with emphasized shoulders (Figure 13). Yet, while their styles matched outfits designed by the leading Hollywood costume designer Adrian, the practices differed. Ordinary American women could buy copies in a huge range of quality and price. In contrast, the luxurious looking Stalinist woman and her dresses remained merely elegant drawings in Soviet Russia. The

²⁴ For example, the Leningrad's fashion journal *Modeli plat'ia (Fashions of the Dresses)* reproduced its fashion drawings from the journals *Le Tailleur de Luxe*, *Costumes Manteaux* and *Le Grand Tailleur* in 1938 (see also: Gronow 2003: 96-97).

connection with classicism and luxury only added to the importance of dress within Stalinist culture. While both the avant-garde and the NEP had ignored the masses, Stalinism mobilized them through its new founded mass culture. That mass culture promoted a whole new world populated with new objects, from smart cars to gramophones, pianos, decorative lampshades, opulent curtains, perfumes, cosmetics, furs, lady hats and elegant dresses (Figure 8).



Figure 60: *Modeli sezona*, Moscow, N 2, 1938

In order to fulfil its grand pretensions, Stalinism aimed only at traditional, luxurious and prestigious goods. As these luxurious objects had been previously condemned, the Stalinist regime now had to borrow them from the West. Various types of dynamic relationships with the West - rejection, comparison, collaboration or exchange – which had taken place within both the Bolshevik and the NEP cultures ceased during Stalinism. Different

elements of Western culture and aesthetics served only as a raw material in the Stalinist production of its own mass culture and its own imagery. That process was both discriminating and creative, as luxurious Western objects were subjected to processes of signification that would change their meaning. Traditional luxuries were de-rooted from their natural commercial habitat, the market for the rich, only to be granted a new highly representational role within the new Stalinist mythical culture and its rituals (Figure 61).

Although it copied both contemporary Western cuts and the traditional Western concept of luxury, Stalinist dress rooted its uniqueness in the Russian national heritage. Western style dresses were simply adorned with folk motifs from an imaginary past in a huge project to invent tradition (Figure 60). The Stalinist uses of folk motifs on dress demonstrated that folk application also travelled from utopia to myth in the period from the 1920s to the 1930s and beyond. While Lamanova's folk applications were mediated through the pre-revolutionary avant-garde artistic practices, the 1930s uses of folk were informed by the all-encompassing Stalinist myth. Fashion uses sartorial quotations all the time in order to recreate itself, but the use of folk in the official Stalinist dress was an ideologically imposed and forced quotation. In their textile patterns from the early 1920s, Popova, Stepanova and Rodchenko had fashioned abstract motifs totally devoid of local ethnic images, as they had argued that clothing must present the Soviet man and woman as part of an international community. Geometrical or mechanical motifs were a direct reference to industrial civilization, as their kinetic forms symbolized emancipation and mobility. It was very different in the 1930s. The folk motifs on Elena Savkova's over-decorated dresses played an important representational role in the Soviet exhibition at the New York World Fair in 1939. By then, due to the unstable political situation in the world, the insistence on folk heritage announced an increased uneasiness with Western influences in the Soviet Union. Arriving from mythical wastelands, Stalinist folk was vague enough to serve different ideological needs and encompass the shifts within them. In the city, folk applications granted a genuine Stalinist chic to Western-style dresses, while an idealized folk costume was envisaged for the countryside.

Stalinism imposed a unified aesthetics for the newly introduced socialist official fashion which encompassed a diversified set of inspirations, from 1930s Hollywood opulence to traditional folk motifs. Under Stalinism, earlier artistic diversity was replaced by a unified vision of totalitarian glamour.



Figure 61: Elegant Dresses (detail), *Zhurnal Mod*, Moscow, N 3-4, 1945

In sharp contrast to the previous utopian insistence on an egalitarian, moderate society and an idea that a functionalist, modernist aesthetics would suit it best, Stalinist aesthetics did not allow for modesty and simplicity. However, significant gradations were established in the representations of the concept of luxury, corresponding to the Stalinist introduction of social stratification, privileges for some and a huge disparity in wages. While the shock-workers became the state's favourites in the mid-1930s, later they were joined by state artists and scientists, technical experts and loyal intellectuals.²⁵

²⁵ For an overview of the social stratification of Stalinist society and the privileges that it introduced for some, see: Dunham 1990; Fitzpatrick 1999; Lebina 1999; Osokina 2000.

The frozen, high style glamour of an elegant lady in *Modeli sezona* was diluted by the categories of prettiness and conventional femininity in the mass magazines, posters and paintings. Even the popular magazine *Rabotnitsa* started to dedicate more space to smart dresses. In the late 1920s, still competing with the NEP, *Rabotnitsa* had begun to publish fashion spreads in black and white, accompanied by a paper-pattern. Soon afterwards, fashion in *Rabotnitsa* reflected the new Stalinist interest in dressing-up.



Figure 62: *Rabotnitsa*, N 25, September 1937

By 1937, *Rabotnitsa* began to regularly publish pretty feminine dresses in pastel shades on its back cover (Figure 62). Those dresses, also accompanied by a paper-pattern, were worn by stylish women and pointed to the regime's re-conceptualization of gender. The urban working woman was no longer supposed to be only a dedicated worker. Dresses published in *Rabotnitsa* appeared worldlier, more fashionable, than the luxurious and highly sophisticated dresses published in *Modeli sezona*. Both magazines operated within Stalinist

mythical culture, but *Rabotnitsa* was obviously more immersed into everyday urban reality, while *Modeli sezona*, in its search of timeless perfection, negated fashion as an ever-changing everyday phenomenon.

As Stalinist myth was meant to be totally comprehensive, a new image of the Party delegate was also established by the mid-1930s. Her hairstyle was elaborate, her face was made-up, and she wore a smart suit. The 1920s' *Party Delegate* had worn an outfit resembling a little boy's sailor suit and had cared more about fulfilling her political tasks than looking pretty. By the late 1930s, the little boy's sailor suit, a sartorial expression of gender ambiguity, was no longer appropriate. The official aesthetics of Stalinist dress was promoted not only in the pages of the elitist *Modeli sezona* and the popular mass women's magazines such as *Rabotnitsa*, but also in the numerous highly representational paintings that marked significant political events. On those occasions, women who met Stalin wore beige belted suits, feminine flowery dresses and silk scarves (Figure 63).



Figure 63: Efanov, V. (1936) *An Unforgettable Encounter*

In his 1937 painting *Woman Delegate*, Yuri Pimenov also presented a woman delegate as a romantic and feminine figure, giving a speech at some important political meeting. She stood at a lectern surrounded by arrangements of flower bouquets, but in her silk blouse with ruffles, smart hairstyle and make-up she could be attending a theatre performance or a garden party. All the other delegates in the picture were also smartly dressed and perfectly coiffed women. The heroine, as well as other delegates, eluded a quiet self-confidence, typical of women who are well aware of their polished appearance. In fact, within the

Stalinist mythical reality fashion images easily merged with political meetings as a background for a new type of socialist woman, who smoothly combined political activism with sophisticated dress.

CONSERVATIVE SHIFTS IN THE STALINIST REPRESENTATION OF GENDER

The various Stalinist ideal-type women did not compete among themselves, and were not ideologically opposed, as the Bolshevik and the Constructivist woman had opposed the NEP woman. All Stalinist ideal-type women were imposed by the official ideology, and by the mid-1930s dissemination of their images was firmly controlled by the state-owned mass media and arts, from film to theatre, literature, magazines and posters. Stalinist culture tirelessly celebrated the remarkable achievements and smart looks of its Super Women, whether they were shock-workers, party delegates, young professionals, politically engaged housewives or mothers. Stalinist myth tried to apprehend a reality in its totality, to merge with everyday life, and to translate it into a series of highly desirable pictures. A teacher in a school, a dedicated worker by a machine and a Stakhanovite in a coalmine were also supposed to be groomed and dressed up. The new official recognition of femininity only confirmed the way in which representation and gender identity were intrinsically intertwined. The shifts in the Stalinist attitude towards beauty, femininity and dress - from a robust, emasculated image to a representation of the 'proper lady' - was driven by ideological shifts in the state formation of gender.

From the mid-1930s, when Stalin took total control of the country, the official Stalinist discourse reclaimed the female body and appreciated its curvaceous lines. Stalinism returned to the first official socialist embodiment: the big strong body, whose strength and health were needed in building a new society. That body was in demand more than ever, once the huge process of industrialization had begun. Ideologically, women were not excused from difficult physical jobs that required a strong body, and officially they were encouraged to perform even the most demanding physical tasks (Figure 64). But Stalinism recoded the previous incarnation of Bolshevik New Woman to suit its needs. The New Bolshevik Woman had been shy. Although her big bosom and huge hips had resembled the traditional female form, her female attributes had been hidden, covered by layers of long wide skirts, workers aprons or peasant clothes. In contrast, Stalinism exposed flesh and accentuated the female form.



Figure 64 & Figure 65: Cover, *Delegatka*, Moscow, 1931, N 32 (left); back cover, *Udarnitsa Urala*, Sverdlovsk, 1937, N 2 (right)

The politically imposed shift in the officially preferred looks of the female Stakhanovites resulted in a dramatic change. During 1937, even the regional journal of the female Stakhanovites from the Urals suddenly started to publish fashion spreads with very smart clothes, one of them presenting very grand eveningwear. The imposing Stalinist style, enriched by elements of Western fashionability, reached even the far-away regions of the Soviet Union. Elaborate make-up and hairstyles, big hats and high heels accompanied body-clinging long gowns meant for women with wasp-like waists (Figure 65). The covers of the *Udarnitsa Urala* (*Female Stakhanovite of the Urals*) also changed. Instead of a series of hard-working women in work uniform labouring by a machine, pretty looking young women, engaged in leisurely sports activities like swimming or just sunbathing in their swimming wear, appeared on the journal's covers. All of that reflected the way in which a new cultural order was being inscribed on women's bodies. While Stalinism went back to the most traditional versions of femininity and female looks, the regime made sure, at the same time, that they were practiced in very controlled social situations. In 1937, the women's magazine *Rabotnitsa* emphasized that the women workers on the metro-building organization *Metrostroï* rushed to put make-up and change into evening clothes the moment they took off their overalls. One of them told the magazine: "If you were to meet one of our female metro-builders at the theatre or a party, you would not be able to guess

that she works underground".²⁶ Advertised by the Ministry for Light Industry, perfume, make-up or a smart dress were more important as mythical transmitters of the new state policy than as real products.

A conservative style in dress, whether conventionally pretty or traditionally peasant-like, was the medium through which the Stalinist regime promoted the new concept of womanhood. The political approval of the return to traditional womanhood and classical femininity came with a price, as the right to abortion was banned in 1936. During Stalinism, a space for smart dress opened when the regime re-installed sexual difference, and no longer challenged the conventions of the traditional gender division. Prettiness was not an option but just another duty. After the initial post-revolutionary experiments with unisex vision of gender based on the Nietzschean *Übermensch*, and the further moves towards androgyny in the still fluid and unstable 1920s, the firm gender boundaries of the 1930s confirmed that the Stalinist society had stabilized by returning to the most traditional societal patterns of womanhood.

THE CULTURE OF A SARTORIAL PROTOTYPE

But in spite of all the glorification of high quality mass-produced clothes, the Stalinist regime proved unable to deliver them. Insisting on the scientifically-based mass production of clothes, Stalinism still only managed to produce some high quality prototypes from the experts from the Moscow House of Fashion. The main problem was that the newly mechanized industry, still struggling with weak organization, a meagre supply of raw materials, and the low quality of fabrics, could not live up to the ideals imposed by the Stalinist myth. Rationing came to an end by 1935, but many goods were still either too expensive or unattainable.

In the *Leningrad Rot Front* fur company's catalogue for the season 1936/7, published by the Ministry of Internal Trade, only the most luxurious fur coats, evening fur stoles, and fur hats could be found. Printed in colour on the best quality paper with a circulation of a mere couple of thousands, this catalogue was supposed to inform only the most privileged about the new collection of Leningrad's specialized fur company. Incredibly composed women posed in drawings of luxurious fur coats made of the most precious furs, in the same way that Paris haute couture would present its most exclusive products to its richest

²⁶ *Rabotmitsa*, 1937, Moscow, N 2: 15

and most sophisticated clientele. The women were impeccably made-up, had slim bodies, and their fur-coats were adorned with tiny flirty hats with a veil, black high heeled shoes and white gloves. Nonetheless, the line of coats resembled the narrow lines of the 1920s, while luxurious Western fur coats already had much wider, flaired lines by the mid-1930s. It demonstrated the cultural autarchy in which the high Stalinism started to enclose itself at that time. In the Stalinist set of values fashion trends were much less important than the demonstration of sheer luxury. Images of impeccably groomed women in *Fashions of the Seasons* were meant for the members of this narrow circle, who were discreetly given the chance to enjoy the most traditional forms of luxury.

During World War Two, *Modeli sezona* briefly stopped publication in 1943, but continued after the war. Published by the Ministry of Light Industry, the new fashion magazine *Zhurnal mod* appeared in 1945, and both publications, continued with the sartorial reproduction of the Stalinist myth on their pages. The cover of the first issue of *Zhurnal mod* presented a good-looking and smartly dressed woman. Her blue coat resembled the Western post-war fashion of the late 1940s. Embellished with an astrakhan fur collar, a blue hat, and a smart handbag, which was matched by a pair of leather gloves, she looked like a proper lady. Drawings of elegant dresses and advertising for smart products indicated that the monthly *Zhurnal mod* was, like the seasonal publication *Modeli sezona*, meant for the Soviet elite. The fact that *Zhurnal mod* was published only in 10,000 copies throughout the 1940s²⁷, confirms its elitist position.

Its pages were the right place to advertise the luxurious products of the Moscow *Fur Company N 2* (Figure 66). One advert presented two ladies wrapped in precious fur coats and engaged in a leisurely chat. While the populist *Rabotnitsa* had a circulation running into several million copies, the ten thousand copies of *Zhurnal mod* were not enough to meet the requirements of the elite at national and regional levels. However, in the late 1940s, the drawings of the highly representational dresses were grounded in the reality of the *All-Union House of Fashion* and a series of regional Houses of Fashion, which were engaged in the centralization of all aspects of design, production and distribution of clothes.²⁸

²⁷ The information on the circulation of *Zhurnal mod* in 1945 comes from my interview with Lidia Orlova, one of its later editors (Moscow 2004).

²⁸ In 1949, the existing Moscow House of Fashion was transformed into the central *All-Union House of Fashion*. Simultaneously, the regional Moscow House of Fashion was established in the line with the institution of other regional Houses of Fashion.



Figure 66: “Modeli iz Meha” (Fur Coats), *Zhurnal Mod*, Moscow, N 1, 1945

All clothes, whether in *Modeli sezona* or *Zhurnal mod*, were presented as the work of a particular House of Fashion, with the *All-Union House of Fashion* being the most visible. The names of the designers of those elegant outfits were always quoted and attributed to the particular House of Fashion which employed them. That contributed to a certain credibility for the outfits, whether they were presented in a drawing or, occasionally, in a photograph. On the other hand, it could have been just a hint to the readership, the members of the elite whom to approach if they wanted such a dress, as those clothes were still not available in the shops.



Figure 67: I. Pimenov, Cover, *Zhurnal Mod*, Moscow, N 3-4, 1945

The editorial of the first issue of *Zhurnal mod*, acknowledged that the magazine had a duty to educate its readers into a taste for beautiful dresses and in the culture of commodities.²⁹ Its editorial politics, staying within the parameters of the Stalinist myth, was only ever able to present prototypes from the Houses of Fashion. Apart from the title and technical descriptions of each outfit, there were no other texts accompanying page after page of fashion spreads. Drawings in *Zhurnal mod* resembled a luxurious picture album, which invited a leisurely flicking from the first to the last page. Covers, created by prestigious state artists, like Iurii Pimenov suited the official stress on traditional elegance that prevailed in the magazine itself (Figure 67). Staying loyal to his pretty, impressionistic style, Pimenov pictured a charming young woman against the background of the Moscow

²⁹ The Editorial, *Zhurnal mod*, 1945, Moscow, N 1

winter. Her youthful elegance was matched by serious black limousines on the road, making 1945 Moscow look both romantic and opulent under the snowflakes.

The textile and clothing practices, introduced in the Stalinist mid-1930s, continued after World War Two. Promising fabulous dresses, the regime still did not manage to provide even average clothes in the shops. The main problem was that the mythical structure of Stalinist society could not recognize the category 'average' in the first place. Clothes from mass production were supposed to look like the luxurious prototypes in *Zhurnal mod* or *Modeli sezona*, or as ambitious outfits presented at official fashion shows that started immediately after the war (see, for example, Figure 4). Even the completely centralized industry, under total state control, could not fulfil such unrealistic expectations imposed by the Stalinist myth. British *Vogue* reported in 1945 on a five-day long fashion show with 1,100 outfits in the All-Union House of Fashion, from which, it was claimed, 325 were chosen for mass production on the basis of "attractiveness, usefulness, and their possibilities for mass manufacture".³⁰ The presentations differed in style, but only one collection of prototypes was selected to be manufactured. *Vogue* quoted the deputy commissar of Light Industry Ribakov's claim that each outfit was to be made in five sizes and five different colours (see, for example, Figure 68).³¹

Such bureaucratic over-centralization contributed to the failure of the Soviet clothing industry in the late 1940s. The process started in the mid-1930s during the first industrialization period, leading up to the controlled mechanisms within the field of fashion production a decade later. Apart from the *All-Union House of Fashion*, the regional Houses of Fashion were instituted under central control at the end of World War Two. The Leningrad House of Fashion was founded in 1945, and it was reported that it delivered five hundred prototypes to the Leningrad factories in its first year, and it managed to deliver 1,500 prototypes in 1954.³² The House of Fashion in Gorki, founded in 1949, provided samples for fifty factories in three neighbouring republics.³³

³⁰ Aldridge, D. "Radio Report: First Russian Fashions", *Vogue*, London, N 7, 1945, pp 48-49

³¹ *ibid.*, p 49

³² CGA SPb. F. 2071. Op. 8. D. 426. L.I., quoted in: Lebina and Chistikov 2003: 204

³³ Hlyustova, N. "Visiting Artist-Sample-Maker in Gorki", *Zhurnal Mod*, Moscow, 1954, N 4: 16



Figure 68: Folk inspired dresses designed by the Moscow House of Fashion, *Zhurnal Mod*, Moscow, N 1, 1945

The powerful bureaucracy that, from the Stalinist period on, ruled the industry through a rigid, hierarchically structured and over-centralized system determined the functioning of the field of fashion up to the very end of socialism. With their activities informed by the hierarchical principle, socialist state textile factories did not depend on the market or customers' desires, but on their 'superiors', from whom they were getting both supplies and orders to fulfil a plan. If the company could not obtain the required quality of a raw material, or some essential part of the product was unavailable, production would not stop, as the plan had to be fulfilled. The production process would continue by the mechanism of "substitutions", which affected the quality of products. After a series of substitutions, regarding either fabric or details, the look and quality of the dress that would reach the shop floor, had little in common with the fashion drawing and the sample that had arrived to the textile company from the central House of Fashion, in order to be reproduced in a hundred thousand copies.

In fact, although the regime officially wanted to control dress production in order to improve it, its main efforts went into the control of dress representation. Nonetheless, the difference between the mythical image of a dress and its material form was so huge that it was visible even when the regime completely controlled the representation of its material form. Formal dresses presented on ambitious catwalks in luxurious settings never matched their idealized copies in drawings, although both emerged from the House of Fashion. Away from the catwalk and the samples of dresses that were paraded there, the situation with mass produced clothes was even worse. By the mid-1950s, the clothing industry not only still produced bad quality dresses but also too small quantities of those unsatisfactory goods. This was not only due to the fact that the clothing industry had been re-oriented towards production for the front during World War Two, but was also the result of accumulated organizational and technological problems.

Stalinism existed within the clashes between the deprived reality and the optimistic myth promoted through mass culture. The richness of that all-encompassing myth demonstrated that Stalinism had left the earlier revolutionary ideals and its aesthetics far behind. Analyzing mythical social structures, Roland Barthes stated:

“Left-wing myth supervenes precisely at the moment when revolution changes itself into ‘the Left’, that is, when it accepts to wear a mask, to hide its name, to generate an innocent metalanguage and to distort itself into ‘Nature’. ...At any rate, it is sooner or later experienced as a process contrary to revolution, and it is always more or less in relation to myth that revolutionary history defines its ‘deviations’. There came a day, for instance, when it was socialism itself which defined the Stalin myth” (Barthes pp 146-147).

NEW CLASSICISM AND TRADITIONAL FEMININITY IN THE EARLY 1950S

Grand formal dresses and ensembles prevailed in the fashion magazines that presented socialist official dresses designed by the Houses of Fashion throughout Stalinist times. Long evening dresses presented on polished women promoted a traditional concept of luxury. Folk motif details embroidered on silk fabric and showy jewellery both contributed to that concept. Images of women in dresses with an accentuated waistline were informed by the traditional concept of femininity that had been introduced by Stalinist culture in the mid-1930s. In 1950, Surov’s young textile designer Solceva declared in his play *Dawn*

over Moscow: "Comrade Stalin told us textile workers: 'Dress Soviet women as princesses, so that the whole world will admire them' " (Surov 1951: 121).

In 1953, after Stalin's death Khrushchev initiated a huge ideological campaign to de-Stalinize arts and applied arts. Three years later, Khrushchev affirmed his rule by simultaneously politically denouncing Stalin, and declaring war on excessive Stalinist aesthetics. Soon, a new Soviet aesthetics was promoted. In applied arts and dress, the new look translated modernist Western simplicity into socialist modesty. It was hoped that simple and functional lines would finally help industry to offer decent goods on a mass scale. The brief period between Stalin's death in 1953 and the promotion of the new Soviet aesthetics that followed after 1956, was characterized by a new classicism in dress presentation in *Zhurnal mod* and *Modeli sezona*. Women still had curves and wore beautiful, lady-like dresses, but many elements of the Stalinist monumental style started to disappear in this transitional period. Images of Stalinist frozen perfection in dress were exchanged for a look of conventional prettiness. Even the settings became more realistic. Within the Stalinist myth, the natural habitat of incredibly polished and luxuriously dressed women was a huge room furnished with antiques or a city boulevard full of smart cars and lined with beautiful classical buildings. By 1954, smartly dressed women entered the Moscow metro to present new dress styles (Figure 69). The fact that the Moscow metro itself is an ultimate monument to Stalin's excessive decorative style did not take that fashion plate too far from the Stalinist representation. However, symbolically those women were engaged in an everyday activity, while wearing smart but simple coats. Embellished with fur details, their coats were designed by the *All-Union House of Fashion* in Moscow. Another fashion plate in *Zhurnal mod* pictured women at a tea party and demonstrated a similar attitude (Figure 70). The image hardly presented a typical Soviet home at that time, and such feminine afternoon dresses were not available to the average hostess and her guests.

These images of restrained luxury announced new times, politically and aesthetically. But Stalinist-style luxury would never disappear during Soviet times. While Khrushchev's aesthetics of modesty was officially promoted in mass magazines, traditional luxury still reigned on the pages of the elitist publications *Modeli sezona* and *Zhurnal mod*. This practice discreetly served the Nomenklatura, while officially it continued to be used for highly representational purposes.



Figure 69: Zhurnal mod, Moscow, 1954, N 4



Figure 70: Zhurnal mod, Moscow, 1954, N 4

CONCLUSION

Socialist official fashion was born in the Moscow House of Fashion in 1935, based on a return to concepts of traditional luxury, elegance and femininity within Stalinist mythical culture. The symbolic importance of smart dress grew as the aim of constructing a radically new and utopian society was substituted by the production of mythical images. The ideological imposition of conventionally elegant, feminine dress took place amidst the terrible deprivations of everyday life that accompanied the Soviet industrialization. The birth of socialist official dress was not disturbed by real-life changes, fashion trends and the laws of the market. Within the Stalinist myth, socialist official fashion developed into a timeless, luxurious and unique phenomenon of its own. It was characterized by pastiche aesthetics and by selective borrowing from both the national folk heritage and the most traditional expressions of Western opulence.

I contrasted the Stalinist drive to industrialization, and its reliance on the earlier Constructivist fascination with technology, with its aesthetic's indebtedness to pre-modernist times, both in its visual quotations and in its concept of the over-decorated unique dress, which opposed the very idea of mass-produced clothes. I detected the Stalinist appropriation of the Bolshevik concept of the artistic prototype and its re-development into the concept of a smart, centrally designed prototype that was supposed to mask all failures of the socialist textile and clothing industries.

In the following chapter, I show how other distortions that would haunt socialist fashion till the end of socialism were inscribed in the first embodiment of socialist official dress conceived in the Moscow House of Fashion in the mid-1930s. Those included hierarchically imposed levels of decision making to a confused relationship towards Western fashion, and an isolationism relying on folk heritage. Privileges for the few and clothing shortages for the many persisted, as the state continued to act as an allocator of goods in an inefficient centrally organized field of fashion production. After 1948 the Soviet model was applied in the other Eastern European socialist countries, regardless of their previous high technical and stylistic levels in design and production of clothes.

CHAPTER 6: UTOPIAN DRESS IN EAST CENTRAL EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, 1948-1956

In the late 1940s Stalin orchestrated the communist takeover of power in Czechoslovakia and Hungary. At first, the new regimes repeated the early Bolshevik experiment and imposed a total ideological rejection of the phenomenon of fashion, just as the Constructivists had attempted to impose a total change in dress codes. The new Czech and Hungarian regimes condemned the past and wanted to replace their old and well-established traditions and dress codes with new forms of dress, worn by New Men and New Women. New women's magazines were started, initiated by the official communist women's associations. The regimes found dedicated journalists who obediently promoted ideas on the new socialist dress, and fashion designers who were willing to dress women in uniforms. Attempts to implement a political deconstruction of the previous gender order were as fierce as in early Bolshevik Russia, even though the Soviet Union itself had already experienced the Stalinist turn towards patterns of traditional femininity. Although Stalin ruled Czechoslovakia and Hungary as a master puppeteer, the new societies and new dress codes were established following the Leninist definition of the socialist revolution as a total rupture from the previous bourgeois world. Socialism was once again supposed to start from zero and this approach defined the relationship towards the phenomenon of fashion in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and – partially - in Yugoslavia from the late 1940s until the mid-1950s.

In this chapter I analyse significant differences in ideological debates in the three countries about dress and its role in the new society, and emphasize that the ideological attacks on Western fashion were the fiercest in Czechoslovakia which had the longest and most distinguished pre-war sartorial tradition. In contrast, in Yugoslavia Western -style dresses had a different ideological role. There, against the backdrop of post-war poverty and backwardness, smart dress was a symbol of a bright and abundant future that opposed the Stalinist model of socialism.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Ideological Opposition to Western Fashion

Fashion had flourished in the refined urban settings of industrially developed Czech society before World War Two, but the rich Czech sartorial tradition, intertwined as it was with Western sartorial practices, was officially rejected from 1948. In his search for a genuine socialist fashion, Karel Langer claimed in the newly founded applied arts journal *Tvar (Form)*¹ in 1948 that:

“...the undignified and helpless copying and modifying of designs observed at foreign fashion shows, exhibitions or in foreign journals will not save us or launch us into the leading position” (Langer 1948: 84).

Langer, who would later become a distinguished theoretician of Communist ideas on the phenomenon of fashion, had two main concerns about the future of post-war Czech fashion, informed by Communist ideology. He accepted that the new fashion reality was to be constructed from “zero” and rejected Western fashion both as a tradition and source of inspiration. Langer claimed that French fashion promoted an image of a woman as a fragile erotic toy, whose unique elegance was often charmingly tender but occasionally demonic. Such fashion was meant for decadent and idle women, and therefore had to be rejected. He dismissed Berlin fashion as frivolous and Viennese fashion as too sweet. Although Langer pronounced English fashion respectable, he denounced what he considered its dry, unfeminine sturdiness. Thus, Western fashions were unsuitable for the Czech socialist woman who was supposed to be graceful in an earthy, healthy, simple and natural way (Langer 1948: 84).

That rejection of Western fashion was fiercely advocated in the fashion magazine *Žena a móda*, which was started in 1949 by the new centralized fashion trust *Textile Design Institute* and the *Council of Women*, a women's organization aligned with the Communist party. In April 1949, a two-page fashion spread presented simultaneously the latest fashions and an attack on Western fashion, starting a confusing practice which would

¹ *Tvar* was started in 1948 by *The Folk and Artistic Production Centre* as a monthly journal for the industrial art and folk art. From the very beginning *Tvar* had been an arena for theoretical debates about socialist applied arts, and its articles very often theorized the phenomenon of socialist fashion.

continue for several years (Figure 71). Under the title “On the Way to Work”, the text started:

“The task of fashion designers in recent times in the capitalist system was to satisfy demanding, spoilt and indulgent women. Fashion was created only for the top ten thousand people. Nobody was interested in clothes for working-class women. They used to go to work in dresses of the lowest quality cuts, tasteless patterns and colours. Today, under the rule of the people’s democracies, though we have not yet managed to overcome the sheer scale of this unpleasant tradition, all sections of the fashion industry are nevertheless striving to produce contemporary clothes specifically designed for the working-class woman”.²

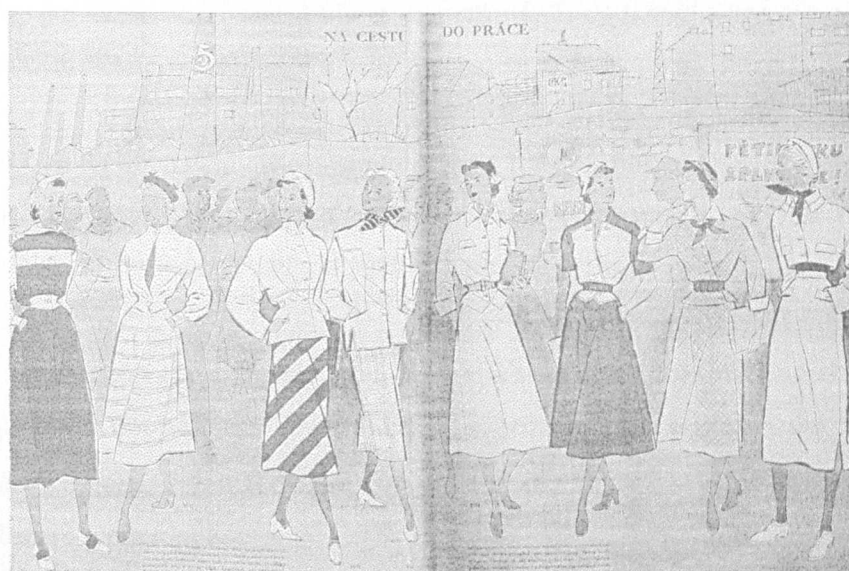


Figure 71: “Na cestu do práce” (On the Road to Work), *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1949, N 4

In the accompanying drawing, eight fashionable ensembles were presented against a backdrop of factory chimneys, which were adorned by a sickle and hammer and a slogan praising the Five-Year-Plan. The suits differed in patterns, the length of jackets, the cut of the sleeves and collars, a diversity that helped to transmit the elegant flair and individual style of the women who wore them. A new working woman’s dress, envisioned in the accompanying text, had nothing to do with the images of those coquettish clothes.

In 1949, this confusing relationship towards Western fashion was confirmed by a series of articles which presented Western fashion in an informative, yet disinterested way. The fashion spread “Western Fashion News” corresponded to current Western fashion trends

² Fashion Spread “Na cestu do prace” (On the Way to Work), *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1949, N 4: 6-7

designed by Dior and other leading Western fashion designers. For a small sum of money, women readers could acquire the paper patterns for each of ten outfits created for the coming season.³ On the other hand, the article “The Way towards a Contemporary Dress” from the same November issue of *Žena a móda* attacked French and American fashion magazines, claiming that eighty percent of their space was dedicated to evening dresses and luxurious sports such as golf.⁴ The author J. Spalova criticized Western magazines for not presenting working clothes on their fashion pages, unlike the socialist press, which dedicated serious thought to boiler suits for women workers. She eventually entered into a direct confrontation with her Western counterparts with the claim that the West had started to copy the socialist trend of functional clothes:

“At first, the West was ironical about our efforts. They thought that we aimed to compete with Western fashion. We cannot compete in such a way. We do not want to design for a handful of capitalists, adjusting to their wishes and desires... Even the Western fashion is suddenly showing endeavours towards progressive, purposeful and practical daywear....That is without doubt the consequence of the people’s democracies’ influence on style and public opinion of the whole world”.⁵

Spalova developed into the fiercest critic of the Western fashion in *Žena a móda*. In her article “Elegant will not be nice?” even the very word elegance was rejected, because of its bourgeois connotations, since for the bourgeoisie only the most expensive and the most decorative clothes were elegant. So,

“... socialist clothing - the clothing of the future - was supposed to substitute the word elegant with the words: pleasant, good, smart, tasteful, as the style of socialist clothing would be suitable and worthy”.⁶

The phenomenon of fashion and the whole idea of dressing up were officially rejected in post-war Czechoslovakia because of their connotations with class and luxury, as well as with the conventional association with idle and privileged women. After 1948,

³ “Western Fashion News”, *Žena a móda*, November, 1949

⁴ Spalova, J. “Cesta k novodobemu obleku” (The Way towards a Modern Dress), *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1949, N 11: 20. In her regular articles, the author attacked Western fashion, and adornment and femininity in general, from a rigid communist viewpoint.

⁵ Spalova, *ibid.*

⁶ Spalová, J., “Elegantní nebo příjemný?” (Elegant will not be nice?), *Žena a móda*, 1949, N 12: 19

Czechoslovakia adopted all the elements of the early Bolshevik ideology, and all previous Czech sartorial references were supposed to disappear. In her article “About the New Style of Clothes” Spalova insisted that:

“Clothing must be free from ornamentation originating from a different historical period, i.e. lace, ribbons, gathers, unpractical placing of buttons, senseless variations of the basic shape of the collar, pockets, yoke, cuffs and the like”.⁷

While the genealogy of Western fashionable dress demonstrates its complex relationship with the past, the genealogy of socialist official dress demonstrates a huge historical rupture with pre-socialist dress codes. In Czechoslovakia, the new regime had a double task: to ideologize its own relationship towards previous and contemporary Western fashions, as well as its own sartorial past. Driven by an ideological dictate, the new socialist dress was defined in negative terms, as it originated in opposition to bourgeois dress. Observing the functioning of ideology, Slavoj Žižek stated that: “...since ideology is always self-referential...it always defines itself through a distance towards an Other dismissed and denounced as ‘ideological’” (1998: 65-66). The strong official rejection of Western fashion confirmed that the socialist attack on fashion was fiercest in the country with the longest and most distinguished sartorial tradition and the most advanced bourgeois society among the new socialist states. The future of new socialist fashion could only start once fashion’s past had been eradicated. In 1951, Karel Lindt claimed that bourgeois societies produce a type of fashion that changes all the time, in detail and line, to encourage people to spend money and to keep industry busy:

“Fashion in the Western world has one and only goal: to attract people to constantly buy new clothes, by making others, still in a good shape, boring. Women wanted new dresses and spent a lot of money. That is called: business is business”.⁸

The socialist master narrative had no place for unpredictable change. In 1950, *Žena a móda* stated that Western fashion actually imposed uniformity, since it dictated fashion changes and the rules of dressing up.

⁷ Spalová, J. “O nový styl obleku” (About New Style of Clothes), *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1949, N 2
⁸ Lindt, K. “Ukoly odevni tvorby” (Tasks of Dress Production), *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1951, N 4, p 20. Founded after the nationalization of the pre-war private fashion salons, the *Dress Production* organized their activities under the new circumstances, and also included small tailors within its organization.

“It is necessary to understand that the obsession for changes in fashion and clothes that is rooted in wolf-like capitalist competition is simply not the true reflection of woman’s fashion, but that in fact it prevents fashion’s true development. Changes are not necessary for fashion. The concept of too much choice comes from bourgeois times. It forced women to wear different clothes for different occasions. ... It was uniformity...”⁹

Finally - this article insisted - Czech fashion had to be simple. It should not copy Paris, as that would mean being out of date all the time. Fads, like a skirt reaching a calf in one season or stopping at the knee in the other, could only bring the undesired effect of uniformity.¹⁰

Woman in Uniform

Fashionable women, bearers of pre-war sartorial memories, stood in the way of the regime’s efforts to create a new socialist woman. Those memories had to be eliminated so that new subjectivities could be created. As a recognizable icon of developed pre-war bourgeois culture, the fashionable woman became a serious threat to the notion of a strong and austere woman that the new Czechoslovak regime wanted to promote. The new concept of an asexual woman in a uniform dress had already started to emerge in 1946 and grew more prominent as the Communist party gained more and more power within the still pluralistic political scene in Czechoslovakia. In the professional Czech dressmakers’ journal *Krejčovské listy*, French fashion was attacked for promoting narrow waists, low-cut necklines and curvy hips. The author Augusta Pachmeyerová suggested that Czech fashion should follow a different trend, distinguished by restraint, simplicity and elegance.¹¹ In 1947, the Third Conference of the Communist Party in Prague introduced a proposal for economical and practical female clothes within the framework of the Two-year Plan of the Gottwald government. Only a few types of ready-made dresses in a limited number of colours were envisioned. Although that proposal was justified by post-war austerity and

⁹ Spalova, J. “Uniformita – a je vubec mozna?” (Uniformity – Is it at all Possible?) *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1950, N 3: 22

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ A. Pachmeyerová “Vyvoj dnesni dámské módy” (Development of Today’s Women’s Fashion), *Krejčovské listy (Dressmaker’s Journal)*, Prague, 1946, September 15, N 11: 7

the limited reserves of fabric in the clothing factories¹², it was equally informed by the incoming aesthetics of functionality and restraint.

Besides the importance of robustness and strength in the shaping of the ideal female socialist body, notions of modesty and asexuality played significant roles in its final look. In 1950, the Czech magazine *Žena a móda* proposed that a fabric should not hug the body too tightly as this was unpleasant and disturbed the wearer in her work. Therefore in the future tops should be wider as should sleeves and skirts, especially at the hips. Evening clothes were given less prominence and were generally considered suspect: “A woman should make sure not to catch a cold in some inadequate little dress“.¹³ As in Bolshevik Russia in the 1920s, a delicate female body belonged to the class enemy and the decadent bourgeois world. Yet, the ideologically and aesthetically opposed image of the slim and fashionable woman still existed in Czech women’s magazines in the late 1940s (Figure 10).¹⁴ It took three years to officially establish the image of the big robust woman in an overall driving a tractor in the fashion magazine *Žena a móda*. Dramatic changes in fashion imagery and shape of the female body between 1949 and 1952 say more about the tightening of politics than of the styles of clothes themselves.



Figure 72: “Linen in the Countryside”, *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1949, N 5

¹² The proposal was elaborated in the communist woman’s magazine *Nase žena a svet kolem ni* (*Our Women and the World Around Them*), Prague, 1947, June 2, N 6

¹³ “From Theory to the Practice of New Fashion”, *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1950, N 1: 22

¹⁴ A range of fashion magazines was published between 1946 and 1948: *Elegance*, *MO-NO* (*Modny Novinky/What’s New in Fashion*), *Milena* and others.



Figure 73: *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1950, N 1

In 1949 *Žena a móda* presented over-idealized images of summer dresses for both the countryside and city life. Country women in drawings that appeared in that magazine were still refined and groomed (Figure 72). The elegant drawings showed stylish feminine dresses with fitted bodices, tiny waists and huge skirts for both purposes. The only differences were in the fashion details: elegant but flat shoes accompanied the countryside style, while city fashion was accessorized by a shoe with a heel. The city women wore decorative little hats, while the heads of the countrywomen were covered by headscarves, but equally coquettish in style. Even the tools in their hands – the rake, the fork and the sickle - belonged more to the realm of fashion accessories than to real farm life.¹⁵ It is obvious that these were drawn by a sophisticated fashion designer used to pre-war city life and its rituals in the rich Czech capital. The style of dresses demonstrated that Czechoslovakia was still in an ideological transitional period.

In the following year the same women's magazine portrayed three groomed women in a countryside setting, dressed casually but still smartly (Figure 73). One of them wore a hooded jacket and cropped pants, the other a tailored overcoat and skinny pants, and the third a stylish overall.¹⁶ The odyssey of country clothes continued in 1951, but in a more realistic manner, and idealistic drawings were abandoned. Statuesque models, carrying bunches of hay and posed next to farm carts, wore functional aprons and practical cotton dresses. Traces of their previous glamour lingered on only in their carefully applied make-up and neat hairstyles.¹⁷ By 1952 all illusions were gone. The models embodied a genuine farmwoman's pose, wearing workers' overalls and standing beside a tractor. Overalls were

¹⁵ *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1949, N 5: 6-9

¹⁶ "In the Second Year of the Five-year Plan", *Žena a móda*, 1950, N 1

¹⁷ *Žena a móda*, 1951, N 7: 2-3

realistically presented on middle-age women feeding pigs or cleaning a pigsty (see, for example, Figures 11 & 12). Their farm-look was underlined by typical peasant-style headscarves. At that point, *Žena a móda* embraced the early Bolshevik ideology and no longer recognized any variety in the concept of womanhood. Beauty and elegance were banned from its pages, and a New Woman with a robust body, dressed in workers' overalls was officially promoted. These modest and utilitarian work clothes demonstrated that the previous gender order had been politically deconstructed. In the 1920s a woman worker with an *Übermensch* body had competed in the Soviet public arena with a Modernist Constructivist androgynous woman, and a fashionable NEP woman. However, those modernist concepts had been less threatening in the Soviet Union of the time as they were far too utopian for that backward and prevalently rural society. In post-war Czechoslovakia, on the other hand, sophisticated urban rituals had been widely practiced by modernist women in the very recent past, and therefore were more dangerous for the regime.¹⁸



Figure 74 & Figure 75: Z. Fuchsová, design for farmwomen's clothes, *Žena a móda*, Prague, N 7, 1951 (left) & N 5, 1951 (right).

¹⁸ Božena Horneková's purposeful clothes from the late 1920s were meant for the new modernist woman: boyish-like and busy, but still feminine in her up-to-date androgynous clothes (see: Uchalova 1996).

The fashion-spreads between 1949 and 1952 showed not only the state re-conceptualization of gender but also the ongoing official battle against the modernist urbanity of the big city. It was not until 1952 that the role of the sophisticated and feminine country woman was completely taken over by the working farmwoman. The earlier stylish drawings of country women disappeared, as did the drawings from the late 1940s, which had featured sophisticated women about town, visiting the theatre or attending dances and balls. The big city and its urban rituals, which had been a natural habitat for presenting new clothes in the late 1940s, surrendered to images about the hardship of village life and its rural practices. The ruralisation of the context in which new socialist clothes were presented in *Žena a móda* also contributed to the negation of the urbanized phenomenon of fashion. The farmwoman's neglected unisex look was now represented in realistic black and white photographs. Sitting on a tractor, a woman in overalls was an icon with a precise symbolical meaning in visual propaganda. Workers overalls did not hide the curvaceous female shape; they just underplayed the erotic potentials of the female body. Baggy overalls mocked both sexuality as a natural force and femininity as a bourgeois cultural practice. With its official preference for a dignified public role for women the state downplayed all their traditional female attributes including femininity and dressing-up.

Stepanova's constructivist dream about production clothing eventually materialized in Czechoslovakia in the early 1950s. Uniform was the ideal dress code to impose distance from the previous society, while simultaneously stressing the working role of women.



Figure 76: *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1950, N 10

Žena a móda challenged the role of fashionable clothes in women's lives by contrasting the latest fashion models by French and American designers alongside pictures of real-life socialist women dressed in uniforms (Figure 76). The accompanying article stated that the Western fashions:

“...root their credibility in dressing up a woman-doll in a capitalist society, who is about to stimulate the jaded nerves of financial and industrial magnates. These clothes precisely point to the class degeneration of the capitalist system”.¹⁹

Although dressed in well cut clothes, those women were without personality, claimed *Žena a móda*. In contrast, the socialist woman was clearly defined:

“The women in the people's democracies, dressed in the uniforms and working clothes of the new professions, are representative of a new type of socialist woman. They joined the labour force, they raised themselves to work side by side with all progressively thinking people who every day willingly, enthusiastically and diligently fight for world peace and the happiness of all mankind”.²⁰

Žena a móda published numerous examples of occupational uniforms in its fashion section for nurses, teachers, tram conductors, women factory workers, female office employees, women laboratory scientists, doctors, traffic wardens, political activists, female shock workers, librarians and police women. It was important to cover as many professions as possible, in order to demonstrate that the new regime appreciated the role of women in building up the new society. Work clothes were presented as the most important and enjoyable clothes for wearers and the most challenging type of dress for fashion designers. In the article “Practical Clothing” Spalova argued that work clothes were:

“...clothing for the nicest and most significant part of our day. In that way, work clothing turns into the focus of attention among all clothing, that is, so-called

¹⁹ “Človek dela šati” (Man makes Clothes), *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1950, N 10: 19-20.

²⁰ *ibid.*

fashion...Work clothing will become the foremost point of interest for designers from which other forms of clothing will be derived".²¹

An exhibition on protective clothing held in the Prague Museum for Applied Arts in 1949 also provoked much praise and comment on the social and psychological importance of work clothes. They were compared to uniforms in the army because they promoted a sense of comradeship in the same way.²² *Žena a móda* made clear that the new socialist dress would be:

"...functional, comfortable, tasteful, made of a solid quality fabric and useful for all occasions. In other words, it will be a dress for work, sport, going out, afternoon and evening. That is the aim of today's modern fashion and we believe that we shall fulfil this task in as a short time as possible."²³

Folk Motif: Reactionary or Progressive?

In 1950 the Czech attitude towards folk as an inspiration for socialist dress was still ambivalent, just as it had been in the early years of the Soviet Union during the Constructivist attempts to carry out a revolution in dress. To the severest critics of the past, such as Spalova, even folk costume had belonged to the past, both feudal and bourgeois, and that past was supposed to be abolished. Spalova emphasized that people progressing towards socialism should not wear national costumes:

"Thus far we can not under any circumstances put on what was worn by feudal man...We are interested to produce garments based on a precise study of the conditions of the contemporary society, garments that would perfectly suit the needs of the progressive people, which would be in harmony with their world view, and yet would not be at discrepancy with their national characteristics".²⁴

At that point, Spalova vehemently opposed the reliance on traditional folk costumes in attempt to design a new socialist dress, emphasising that their wide cuts, such as the richly

²¹ J. Spalova "Pracovní odev" (Practical Clothing), *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1950, N 7: 22

²² Dr J. Vydra drew a comparison between work clothing and army uniforms in his review of the exhibition in the applied arts journal *Tvar*, 1949, N 4: 131

²³ *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1949, N 4: 6-7

²⁴ Spalova, J. "Snahy o novou modu" (Attempts at New Fashion), *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1950, N 2: 22-23

gathered sleeves and skirts, were impractical for a mechanized age, and that their hand-made embroidery was not suitable for mass-production. It seemed that the Czechoslovak socialist dress would not need any decoration. Its ascetic, uniform style would be emphasized by good-quality fabric and a decent cut, brightened by colour.

But in 1951, only a year later, Spalova reported that women, including the shock-workers, opposed total austerity in dress. Claiming that colourful clothes would better suit the optimism of the new era, women demanded decorated and cheerful dresses. Spalova admitted: “Women crave the cosmopolitan patterns that we have been fighting”.²⁵ When Czechoslovakia was faced with a popular demand for decoration in dress, the official reaction was similar to the renewed interest in folk costume in mid-1920s Russia. The domestic provenance and timelessness of folk motifs were promoted, as they were perceived as ideologically less dangerous than Western fashion. One of the main promoters of socialist fashion, Karel Lindt argued that new dress:

“...has to be practical and convenient. At the same time, in order to fight decadent temptations of the Western fashion industry, it has to be rooted in the national Slavic tradition and its rich folklore which provides immense source of inspiration for our fashion design”.²⁶

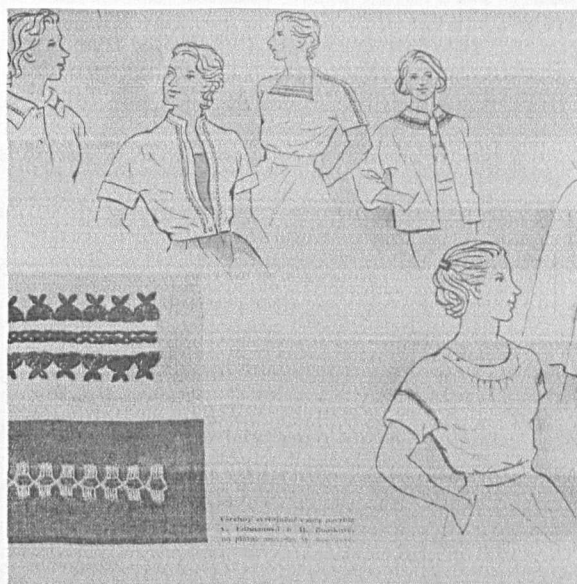


Figure 77: “Simple Hand-Embroidery”, *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1951, N 7

²⁵ Spalova, J. “Navezujeme na lidové umění: vysivka” (We bring In Folk Art: Embroidery), *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1951, N 9: 4

²⁶ Lindt, K. “Úkoly odevní tvorby” (Tasks of Dress Production), *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1951, N 4: 20

Spalova discussed how folk-style elements could bring freshness, colour and variety to socialist dress, but only if adjusted to the new culture of clothing and applied on a contemporary functional dress.²⁷ Following that ideological impulse, dresses, blouses and skirts embellished by folk motifs were promoted on the fashion pages of *Žena a móda* after 1951.²⁸

Luxurious embroidery did not suit the new socialist times, but the pre-war fashion designers who were employed in *Textile Design Institute* in the late 1940s, drew aesthetically from decades of experience in the use of folk heritage in dress design, and used folk motifs sparingly in their proposals (Figure 77). They would discreetly embellish the collar of a modern blouse or the hem of an otherwise fashionably wide skirt. Folk-embellished dresses existed only as drawings in *Žena a móda*, or as samples at fashion shows organized by *Textile Design Institute*. Since they required hand-made embroidery, those dresses could not be mass-produced.

Ideologically, a dress embellished with the folk decoration in *Žena a móda* eventually became a socialist sartorial answer to Western fashionable dress. In 1951, the magazine presented two long American evening dresses²⁹, and compared them with two Czech proposals. The extravagant Western proposals were attacked on various grounds. The cuts were complicated, meaning that they required a highly qualified seamstress and took too long to make, and the American dresses were also over-decorated and too erotic. In contrast, the magazine praised two Czech evening dresses designed by the socialist trust *Textile Design Institute*. Their simple lines and folk decoration validated the idea of a socialist evening dress. In socialism, concluded *Žena a móda*, women needed an evening dress not just as a means in itself but as an appropriate outfit to participate in cultural events such as theatre or classical concert music.³⁰

The *Folk Art Production Centre (ÚLUV)* was founded in Czechoslovakia in 1945 by a decree of the President of the Republic, but Czechoslovakia, due to its highly urbanized history, retained an ambivalent relationship towards folk. Once Stalinist ideologized attempt to adorn the new socialist dress with folk motifs was forced on Czechoslovakia in

²⁷ “We Bring in Folk Art: Embroidery”, *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1951, N 9: 4

²⁸ For an overview of the use of folk motifs in the Czech pre- World War Two fashion, see: Uchalova 1996

²⁹ “Škola odívání” (School for Clothing), *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1950, N 11: 23. The designers of the dresses were only identified as ‘American’, which immediately positioned the clothes as decadent, unpractical and luxurious types of dress that promoted social inequality.

³⁰ *ibid.*

the early 1950s, the designers tried to creatively challenge the national heritage. By 1951, *ÚLUV* had workshops in Prague, Bratislava and Brno each of which was specialized in a specific hand-made type of clothes or fabric.³¹ Some applied artists reworked the folk heritage into contemporary clothes and objects. Gerda Istlerova's report on the early history of *ÚLUV* in *Tvar* demonstrated that the Czechs found folk motifs to be a useful and safe medium to preserve decorativeness in dress in the early 1950s. In doing that, they followed in the footsteps of the 1920s Russian designers who expressed their interest in the applied arts through the medium of folk art, such as Lamanova and Pribylskaia. *Tvar* supported the activities of the *Czech Folk Art Centre*, perceiving it as refuge in which the applied artists could exercise their creativity and individuality.

HUNGARY

Western Fashion Is Reactionary

A radical, ideologically-informed shift in the concept of taste happened in Hungary in the late 1940s. While searching for an appropriate socialist fashion style, the Hungarian regime vigorously opposed Western fashion influences. The first Hungarian women's magazine *Asszonyok (Ladies)* was started in 1946.³² In its early issues, *Asszonyok* presented the changing trends in Western fashion. One-page picture reports on the latest Paris trends appeared throughout 1946 alongside features on literature, raising children, portraits of important women scientists and writers, and other topics considered appropriate for a progressive women's magazine.³³ Perception of Western clothes began to change during 1947. *Asszonyok* declared that the New Look dresses were tasteless and anachronistic, describing them as "class struggle dresses", outfits that served only rich, idle women.³⁴ As attacks on Western fashion continued, the directors of the well-established Budapest fashion salons were also asked to comment on "the persistence of fashion despite the fact

³¹Istlerova. G. "Některé problémy oblékání" (Some Dress Problems), *Tvar*, Prague, 1951, N 3-4: 120-128.

³² *Asszonyok* was published by the Democratic Alliance of Hungarian Women, a women's organization connected to the Communist Party.

³³ Reports on Paris fashion were published in: *Asszonyok (Ladies)*, N 1, January 1946; *Asszonyok*, N 3, 1946

³⁴ *Asszonyok*, Budapest, February 12, 1947

that it did not adjust to the spirits of the times".³⁵ The leading fashion designers stressed that they liked diversified fashion trends and that their customers also preferred them. The fashion designer Albert Apponyi from the salon Julia Apponyi stated that Hungarian women did not accept Paris trends blindly, but adjusted them to their needs. However, *Asszonyok*, claiming to represent women workers against the pressure to wear those anachronistic, unhealthy clothes, declared: "We are protesting against the waste-fashion!"³⁶

Asszonyok was renamed *Nők lapja (Women's Journal)* in 1949, and the new weekly regularly dedicated from one to three pages in each issue to fashion. Fashion did not occupy such an important position in the Hungarian media as in the Czechoslovakia. While the Czech *Žena a móda* fiercely struggled to abolish the pre-war sartorial traditions, *Nők lapja* tried to minimize the phenomenon of fashion as a whole. The main attack on Western fashion took place in the transitional period in the late 1940s in *Asszonyok*. After the private fashion salons were nationalized in 1948 and the new central fashion organization the *Design Institute for Garment Industry (RTV)* was founded in 1950. *Nők lapja*, rather than vilifying Western fashion, affirmed the new institution and its modest and austere design. Throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, both Czech *Žena a móda* and Hungarian *Nők lapja* defined Western fashion as privileged, unpractical, irrational, irresponsible, impossible, too expensive, socially restrictive, decadent, and therefore ugly, while the new socialist fashion was supposed to be modest, practical, functional, tasteful, balanced, measured, available to all, appropriate, comfortable, quiet, and therefore beautiful.

The attitude towards Western fashion in Hungary, just as in Czechoslovakia, was confusing. The covers of *Nők lapja* were very often dedicated to farm women or women workers, its contents featured heroic endeavours of female shock-workers, while it would simultaneously present very conventional, lady-like dress styles (see, for example, Figures 78 and 79). At the back of the magazine, a one-page drawing of conventionally pretty women dressed in slightly old-fashioned suits, with smart hair-cuts and lady-like make-up, evoked both Western fashion and Hungary's own pre-war bourgeois traditions. However, the image was sufficiently neutral and conventional not to provoke an outburst against

³⁵ *Asszonyok*, Budapest, October 15, 1947, N 20. The pre-war private fashion salons continued their activities in the immediate post-war period and tried to keep up with Western fashion trends.

³⁶ *ibid.*

Western fashion. Such images did not belong to any contemporary fashion trend but to ‘timeless’ smartness, a visual language that arrived from the West.



Figure 78 & Figure 79: Cover with a woman saluting the forthcoming Third Congress of the Communist Democratic Alliance of Hungarian Women (MND SZ), *Nők Lapja*, Budapest, N 21, May 22, 1952 (left); “Autumn Suits”, *Nők lapja*, Budapest, 1953, February 26, N 9, back cover (right)

Western fashion journals meant for a mass public used the same conventional and neutral lady-like style, which was supposed to satisfy the class aspirations of the masses of their female readers but also allow them to appropriate fashion changes slowly, and to an extent that would not require a huge investment in a new wardrobe.³⁷ Fashion drawings published throughout the early 1950s in *Nők lapja*, and presented as designs by the *Design Institute for the Garment Industry (RTV)*, were even more distanced from contemporary Western trends. Very often these drawings presented images of working clothes, city dresses and leisurely holiday wear, all on the same page (Figure 80). In that sense, by being neglected, Western fashion was even more effectively removed from *Nők lapja*.

³⁷ The French women’s magazine *Femme d’aujourd’hui* published many fashion pages of the same aesthetics during 1953-1954, concerning the style of clothes themselves, fashion accessories and pose of women in drawings (see, for example, *Femme d’aujourd’hui*, February 1954).



Figure 80 & Figure 81: Proposals by the Central Design Company for the Garment Industry (RTV): *Nők lapja*, Budapest, August 1952 (left) & *Ez a divat*, Budapest, 1950 (right)

While the mass weekly *Nők lapja* neglected fashion, fashionable dress still had an important role in the first fashion magazine *Ez a divat* (*This Is Fashion*) that appeared in Hungary in 1950. The first issue featured a series of luxurious photographs and elegant drawings (Figure 81). In the photographs, the elegant dresses presented on well-groomed women resembled the pre-war craftsmanship of the established Budapest fashion salons. In an escapist manner, the first issue of *Ez a divat* suggested types of fabrics that dresses could be made of, although in a period of post-war scarcity such fabrics could not be found in shops. Although sophisticated photographs featuring luxurious clothes soon gave way to modest drawings of simple but still feminine dresses or ensembles, *Ez a divat* did not demonstrate any particular hostility towards Western fashion. Modest dresses acknowledged post-war poverty as well as the transitional period in Hungarian fashion in which private fashion salons were abolished and the centralized fashion and textile institution RTV was established. During the early 1950s, RTV became the official agent in imposing fashion trends and coordinating the production of textile and clothes companies. The roles of *Ez a divat* and *Nők lapja* were different, although they complemented each other.

While the populist women's weekly *Nők lapja* presented modest dresses designed by RTV and occasionally got involved in ideological battles against Western fashion, the specialized fashion magazine *Ez a divat* promoted highly representational RTV outfits, and

never attacked the phenomenon of fashion. By presenting modest and 'timeless' dresses, *Nők lapja* demonstrated the ontological differences between socialism and fashion. On the other hand, the relationship towards Western fashion in *Ez a divat* demonstrated that the phenomenon of fashion was not such a threat to the system as in Czechoslovakia. *Ez a divat* preserved the field of cultural production of fashion by publishing information about new trends even in the early 1950s (Figure 82). Occasionally, it even published reports about fashion shows held by the few remaining private fashion salons which tried to keep up with Western fashion trends.

The discreet presence of elitist fashion shows and new fashion trends in *Ez a divat*, which itself was an elitist journal with a small circulation, demonstrated that the Hungarian regime allowed a certain amount of controlled plurality in dress and appearance from a very early period. The regime used the genre of novels popular amongst the female population to present, through the observations of an apparently neutral and innocent observer, a young girl *Szösz*, the official set of values. Modesty was the quality most promoted in dress and looks, but deviations were not severely punished. *Szösz*, a hairdresser's apprentice in mid-1950s Budapest, reminisced in the novel:

"Everybody is different and here, at the hair-dresser's, women become talkative. Even the elegant ladies! They tell you about where they are going for the summer holidays, where one can buy cloth of genuine Australian wool...It is not always possible to tell by the clothes who is who. Sometimes very simply dressed women turn out to be high-ranking officials. It was mere chance that they learned once that a middle-aged woman who wore her hair in a bunch and always put a dark coat on...was a deputy minister! ... And they wondered and pitied her for looking so 'unfashionable'. She could really have dozens of Australian woollen sweaters and as many 'Western' things as she wanted. She travels abroad more than enough. Yet she doesn't care, although she is not old. Aren't people strange? That little Mrs Mealy, the wife of a head waiter dresses a hundred times better than this deputy minister" (Gergely 1962: 62-63).

The more relaxed relationship towards Western fashion and groomed appearance was informed by the political changes in Hungary after the failure of the 1956 uprising. The new leader Janos Kádár tried to legitimize his rule by replacing politics with consumption and approval of fashion. The new official interest in Western fashion, expressed in the report on Paris trends in *Ez a divat* in 1956, served the political needs of the regime's self-legitimation.



Figure 82: “Spring Ensembles” (Tavaszi szövetruhák) , *Ez a divat*, Budapest, March 1954

Stefan Sander, fashion designer from the central fashion institution RTV, was the author of the first text on Paris fashion trends. His article was accompanied by photos of two summer ensembles by Jacques Heim and André Leduc, and by a series of drawings of the new trends.³⁸ This politically informed acknowledgement of Western fashion was imprinted with all the limitations of the socialist system itself: fear of change, attempts to control trends and desire to establish a timeless classical style. All those elements informed the style of socialist official dress in the mid-1950s, and turned it into the prisoner of time in decades to follow.

³⁸ “Paris Trends”, *Ez a divat*, Budapest, 1956. I was unable to find any reference to André Leduc in the literature on the Western history of fashion, but an indiscriminate coupling of the leading Western fashion designers such as Jacques Heim with the less known and less important names was a common practice in the magazine *Ez a divat*. This approach demonstrated that the latest Western fashion trends were not presented systematically and critically, but that they served the ideological needs of the regime.

Modesty and Prettiness, by Dictate

In 1946, *Asszonyok* stressed: “Women do not exist because of fashion, but fashion exists because of women”.³⁹ A year later, the magazine called Western dresses “weapons in the war for the class of ‘her ladyships’...that make us as thin, weak and sweet as our grandmothers were”.⁴⁰ While ideological attacks on fashionable women were carried out, the new woman was however allowed to be pretty. Although prettiness was praised in the Party daily *Szabad Nep* in 1949, it was supposed to be in the service of the state and one’s husband. A fashion editor addressed a woman who complained that she had no time to take care about her looks, in an authoritative tone:

“In your opinion, Comrade, it is a waste of time if a woman wishes to express that she lives and works in a healthy and free country by wearing a spotlessly sparkling blouse and sporting groomed hair...Did you ever consider what it would mean to your husband to see you in a clean, flower-printed hostess gown at home, your cheeks and your hands smelling fresh?... and I beg you, do not attend the stove in the same dress you wear in the street. Wrap an apron around your waist, one of those plastic aprons with ruffles. They do not require washing”.⁴¹

The main goal of the state controlled RTV was not only to provide information and logistics to the state textile industry but also to educate its consumers in appropriate dress codes, modest and practical, yet nice-looking. In 1950, *Nők lapja* praised trade union fashion shows which presented clothes produced by the newly nationalised textile and clothing industries. On those occasions the dresses were worn by healthy looking working women who were actually going to wear them, and not by ‘the mummified professional models’ who had presented them in the past.⁴² Although drawings of fashionable suits accompanied by smart handbags and worn by Western-style ladies were still published in *Nők lapja*, the cover was reserved for a different type of woman in a different suit. She wore a dark jacket of a masculine cut with a simple white shirt. With both her arms raised in the air, she was saluting the forthcoming Third congress of the communist *Democratic Alliance of Hungarian Women (MNDSZ)*.

³⁹ quoted in: Dosza 1991: 22-24

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ *Szabad Nep*, Budapest, August 1949

⁴² quoted in: Dosza, 1991: 22-24

In the early 1950s, a woman in an occupational uniform was also introduced in *Nők lapja*. She was an icon with a precise symbolical meaning in visual propaganda, highlighting the importance of women in building socialism. The pictures were designed to show that women's interest was in re-fashioning the world, not in the fashioning of their clothes. At that time, both the Czech *Žena a móda* and the Hungarian *Nők lapja* published numerous articles on women shock workers. The extraordinary women textile workers were especially praised as new role models in both magazines. Working hard at a weaving machine in their simple worker's overalls, they demonstrated the new role of women in socialist society. The sheer determination of the textile shock workers to produce functional clothes for new socialist women suggested that the days of idle society ladies in fashionable clothes and expensive jewellery were gone forever.

Ideological Uses of Folk Motifs

By the early 1950s, proposals by the Hungarian *Design Institute for the Garment Industry* retreated into folk style, taking the domestic socialist fashion seemingly away from Western fashion trends (Figure 83).



Figure 83: Dancing Dresses, Central Design Company for the Garment Industry (RTV), *Nők lapja*, N 36, September 1952

A drawing presenting dancing dresses demonstrated different levels of folk applications, from the discreet urbanized version on the singer's dress and her girl-choir's dresses to outfits that relied on folk heritage. However, even embroidered dresses only vaguely resembled folk costumes. In fact, the fitted bodices of those dresses that emphasized the waist, and their gathered skirts reaching the mid-calf level of the leg, hinted more towards the New Look than towards the national heritage. Long ribbons on the head-dress of a girl turned with her back recalled *párta*, a folk head-dress which was traditionally worn by girls before they got married. While many variants of *párta* existed, each of them being a part of a specific national costume, that '*párta*' was however a new urbanized version of a traditional item. All folk quotations in that drawing were geographically vague, evoking an imaginary Hungarian national costume. As folk costume always has a local provenance, a Hungarian national folk costume had never actually existed.⁴³ The promotion of its local variants to the national level demonstrated the regime's need to introduce a decoration that would neutralize quotations from Western fashion. In practice, the designers from the *Design Institute for the Garment Industry* only paid lip service to that requirement. Even though they did invent an imaginary Hungarian folk tradition in their decoration, they primarily based their designs on Westernized fashions.

Similarly to Czechoslovakia, Hungary officially recognized folk as its sartorial quotation from the past. But the folk motif was politically imposed and was dead as a fashion reference. Folk is an immutable sartorial code related to traditional and, usually, very small rural communities. There is nothing wrong in itself in fashion's leap into the past. But, the use of folk motifs in early 1950s' official fashion was an ideologically informed quotation. The socialist view of the world perceived all social systems preceding socialism as exploitative, saving the most severe social critique for its arch-enemy capitalism. This critique spread to all of its values, rituals, and aesthetics. In the meantime, bourgeois fashion was happy to permanently borrow cuts, patterns and colour schemes from its own past, and from epochs preceding it, in order to reinvent itself each season.

Yet, the utopian element still existed in the folk inspired dresses in Hungary in the early 1950s. Although they already were under Stalinist pressure to cut off their connections with the West, their designers applied folk motifs to Western style dresses. The trends that

⁴³ In fact, a geopolitics of the costume advocates that there are no 'national costumes', but rather local or regional costumes. To confine them within political boundaries is a highly ideologized practice (comp. Boucher, F. "Geopolitique du costume", in: *L'Amour de l'art*, 1er trimestre 1952: 69).

they adopted were not the latest Western haute couture fashion. However, in their combination of Utility functionality and New Look decorativeness, they corresponded with the popular fashions of the time.⁴⁴ The Hungarian fashion designer Margit Szilvitzky stated that she and her colleagues had developed their artistic interest in folk heritage while studying fashion design at the University of Applied Arts in Budapest in the early 1950s. Szilvitzky emphasized that her curiosity in folk had originally developed out of necessity, as Western fashion journals were not available. As a student, she travelled to the countryside to study folk costumes, and remembered visiting the picturesque villages Kazár and Hollóko. Szilvitzky observed that her genuine interest in folk faded after 1956, and stated that the new aesthetics, marked by the return of an appreciation for formal dress and traditional rituals, was introduced at the University.⁴⁵

In fact, the mid-1950s announced significant changes in the use of folk motifs. While earlier they had been applied on restrained yet elegant dresses in Czechoslovakia, and on the re-interpretations of Western popular fashions in Hungary, the Soviets imposed on both countries the style of dress that had been engineered within the Stalinist mythical culture in the mid-1930s. With its mixture of folk-inspired dresses and Western-style evening gowns, that aesthetic fulfilled the Stalinist idea of luxury. Having started out as an attempt to construct utopia, but preventing artists from exploring its artistic possibilities, the regimes' attempts to harness folk to the invention of socialist dress had ended in the acquiescence to the Stalinist myth in both countries in a short period of time.

YUGOSLAVIA

Why the West was not a Threat

In 1946, in its first issue the Croatian fashion magazine *Naša moda (Our Fashion)* insisted that “times of ‘professional’ clothes horses were over” and that “today’s working and serious woman should not be a slave to various and very often even impossible fashion fads...”.⁴⁶ The article claimed that:

⁴⁴ For an overview on the popular fashion in the West in the 1950s, see: Partington (1992).

⁴⁵ Margit Szilvitzky Interview 1998 (I am grateful to Marton Oblath who kindly offered me to use that interview).

⁴⁶ “Odijevanje” (Clothing) *Naša moda*, Zagreb, N 1, February 1946. *Naša moda* was published by the Croatian state publishing house *Vjesnik*.

“World fashion capital Paris dictated ways of dressing up to millions of women in vain, if they, because of economic reasons, could not acquire sophisticated designs by the leading fashion designers, which, anyway, had been meant only for a very limited number of women who could pay incredibly high prices, and who could afford to enjoy such impractical models because of their social standing”.⁴⁷

Naša moda acknowledged that copies of fashionable Western outfits had also arrived in Yugoslavia before the war, but insisted that they did not suit the life-styles of the majority of women, and concluded that they were even less suitable for active working and professional women. Attacks on Western fashion would occasionally reappear, but *Naša moda* published Western fashion dresses from its first issue, carefully choosing simpler and more modest outfits from contemporary Western collections.

Western fashion capitals or the names of Western fashion designers were regularly quoted. A two-page fashion spread “World Spring Fashion” presented fashion proposals from Paris, London, Geneva and Moscow in its April issue, and a well-cut English suit embellished the last page in the May issue. Summer dresses from the French fashion journal *Ma nouvelle collection* announced the summer 1946 line: square shoulders, tiny waist, floating, and knee-length skirts, accompanied by written details of the new trend. In November 1946, *Naša moda* dedicated eight pages to the first fashion show in post-war Zagreb, which presented domestic clothes designed by local private fashion salons (Figure 84). *Naša moda* used that photo-reportage to launch a heavy attack on Western fashion:

“Till yesterday, fashion was a mere imitation of foreign designers’ fashion perversities, coming from Paris, London or Vienna. Only privileged, rich, fashionable, mentally unstable women could afford it. Those women were only interested in attracting attention to themselves. That fashion was monstrously visible, but still far away from the masses of working women. Fashionable woman and workingwoman were opposites. Fashion that denies the sense of beauty and warm feminine modesty, fashion that is means in itself and becomes a woman’s only profession, has no place in the new Yugoslavia.”⁴⁸

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ “Moda u službi naroda” (Fashion in the Service of the People) *Naša moda*, Zagreb, N 10, November 1946

The tone of that attack contradicted the collections presented at the fashion show, which resembled the late 1940s Western fashion.⁴⁹ While *Naša moda* praised the government for helping the domestic crafts and stressed that most clothes were made from domestic fabrics, the journal had more trouble justifying the luxurious design of the collections by local private fashion salons. Critical, yet in awe, the journal concluded that some domestic outfits could have come from any world fashion capital.



Figure 84: The first post-war fashion show by local private fashion salons, *Naša moda*, Zagreb, N 10, November 1946

In fact, the phenomenon of fashion was never rejected outright by *Naša moda*. Throughout its existence, the journal provided information on the latest trends, but occasionally attacked Western fashion extremes. In the article “An Encounter with Paris Fashion”, *Naša moda* juxtaposed two evening dresses by Mme. Grès, a fur coat by de Weil and a fashionable coat by Mad Carpentier to the clothes worn on Paris streets by ordinary women.⁵⁰ After describing the latest trends, the journal observed:

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ “Susret s pariškom modom” (An Encounter with Paris Fashion), *Naša moda*, N 1, January 1947

“You do not see this famous Paris fashion on the streets. It is available only to a limited number of rich people. Others can only spot it in the windows of the smart shops in Rue Rivoli, Champs- Elysées and grand boulevards during a Sunday walk... On the streets of Paris, you meet sales-girls from the big department stores, thousands of typists, working women, dancers and singers in bars... They try to match colours in cheap fabrics according to their circumstances...they wear fake-gold jewellery and apply make-up on their pale cheeks and lips. They live in suburbs in houses that fall apart... Colours of their dresses match, they possess certain beauty and charm, but they also reveal all the misery of poverty”.⁵¹

Naša moda ceased to exist by the end of 1948, but Western fashion continued to be present in the new fashion magazine *Svijet (World)*, founded in 1953 by the state publishing company *Vjesnik*. In her reminiscences about the magazine launch, the first editor of *Svijet* Smilja Dončević claimed:

“We would ask acquaintances who travelled abroad and fellow journalists on foreign assignment to bring back to us as many women’s magazines as possible. That connection helped to inform *Svijet*’s readership about fashion, news for women, events from the other countries” (Dončević (1990: 84).

Magda Weltrusky, who became *Svijet*’s fashion editor in the mid-1950s, elaborated at greater length on the Western journals from which *Svijet* appropriated its aesthetics:

“We mainly used French *Vogue* and *L’Officiel*, but also other journals, such as a Swedish journal and the French journal *Modes & Travaux*. The last two were popular magazines, but we used them because of the paper-patterns of simple dresses that we wanted to offer to our public. At the beginning, all the foreign journals arrived at *Svijet* irregularly, but we eventually subscribed to *Vogue* and some others soon afterwards.”⁵²

Svijet did not recognize the Yugoslav post-war reality burdened with scarcities and poverty. It inhabited a fantasy world of fashion from its beginnings in 1953. Its fashion

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² My interview with Magda Weltrusky, Zagreb, 2005. She came to *Svijet* in the mid-1950s and became a fashion editor soon afterwards.

pages were packed with fashion news, sophisticated drawings and photographs (Figure 85). *Fashion Overview*, the editor's letter published on page three starting with the first issue in 1953, was preoccupied with fashionable dresses, jewels, feminine hairstyles and new fashions from Paris. In 1954, the editorial *Fashion Overview* started with the question: "What is the most fashionable this season?" and rushed to answer:

"Tight suits, short jackets, longer pleated skirts, dresses with high waists, navy blue, low necklines, sailor-style collars, bunch of lilies of the valley in the jacket's pocket, printed fabrics and those in one colour, little hats, tiny waists..."⁵³



Figure 85: Cover, *Svijet*, Zagreb, January 1954, N 1

Weltrusky admitted that *Svijet*'s covers and fashion spreads were just transferred from Western fashion magazines, without any references to sources:

⁵³ "Modni pregled" (Fashion Overview), *Svijet*, Zagreb, 1954, N 6

“From the Western journals, we used whatever we liked, nobody ever complained till the moment when a big invoice arrived from *Modes & Travaux* for the use of their paper-patterns. It was paid by the publishing house, but we stopped using that journal, although we continued to use others”.⁵⁴

Svijet went down the escapist route of Western fashion magazines, continually promoting the latest fashion trends and the feminine women who would wear them. A proper lady was supposed to go to the theatre in an elegant black evening gown. She attended the beach in Hollywood-style beachwear. On other occasions she was clad in elegant suits and coats, adorned with precious brooches and wore fur. Already in 1954, *Svijet* gave precise information on Paris fashion by presenting detailed accounts of the collections of the leading designers. In 1956, it left the formality of female dress from the first half of the 1950s to present the more casual clothes, which were coming into fashion.



Figure 86: “Sport”, *Svijet*, Zagreb, March 1956, N 3

⁵⁴ Interview, Weltrusky 2005

Smart overcoats and sporty but elegant suits and sports jackets announced the new trend (Figure 86). *Svijet* commented that those outfits were not meant for sport only. On the contrary, the magazine stated, they were functional clothes for the workingwoman.

Glamorous fashion pages copied from Western fashion magazines did not reflect Yugoslav reality. The space dedicated to the latest Western styles in the fashion pages of *Svijet* at that early stage of socialism was informed by the specific political and social situation. Politically, some liberties were allowed just to show how Yugoslav socialism was different, even luxurious, after Yugoslavia broke with Stalin in 1948. A beautiful dress in an advert or on the page of the women's magazine *Svijet* announced an aspiration towards a different life-style from that practiced in the socialist countries under Stalinist influence. As domestic industry was still unable to produce such a dress, the battle moved into the ideological sphere. In that sense, a beautiful dress was just one element in a huge ideological dispute between Yugoslavia and Soviet Union.

In 1952, Yugoslavia officially abandoned the doctrine of socialist realism in literature at the annual meeting of the Writers' Congress of Yugoslavia. At the same time, the Yugoslav visual arts were granted official approval to explore contemporary avant-gardes ranging from geometrical abstraction to abstract expressionism. The founders of the Zagreb-based avant-garde group Exat 51 declared in their manifesto that they aimed to create a synthesis of arts and applied arts. Their modernist and geometrical aesthetics eventually moved from paintings into the real world of new architecture and furniture, decorative textiles, and layouts for books and magazines in the 1950s. One of the founders of Exat 51, Aleksandar Srnec acted as a graphic designer for the women's magazine *Svijet* in the early 1950s (Figure 87).

The phenomenon of fashion did not disturb the system, as a developed bourgeois society did not exist in Yugoslavia before World War Two, unlike in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Thus, Yugoslavia was not haunted by the previous bourgeois traditions and rituals. Western fashion was therefore presented -and credited - without ideological obstacles in *Naša moda* between 1946 and 1948. After 1953, unspecified Western fashion quotations expanded into a whole new parallel dream world in *Svijet*. Highly urbanized and elegant Western dresses were perceived as an ideological threat and had been expelled from the Czech and Hungarian women's magazines by the late 1940s and early 1950s, but were granted a precise ideological function in the Yugoslav fashion press. They were Yugoslavia's own escapist shortcut from post-war poverty, from the inherited

technological backwardness, and the prevailing rurality into an aspiration for a highly developed and urbanized socialist society.



Figure 87: “Kaputi i kostimi” (Overcoats and Suits), graphic design by A. Srnec, *Svijet*, Zagreb, February 1954, N 2

Uniform as a Fashion Statement

In Yugoslavia, the evolution of utopian dress was different from the Central European experience. Workers’ overalls, an obligatory clothing item in socialist women’s magazines in Central Europe in the late 1940s, were turned into a fashion statement in *Naša moda*. While the Czech and Hungarian examples reflected state-orchestrated attempts to reconceptualize gender by dressing women in unisex work clothes and removing make-up from their faces, *Naša moda* went in an opposite direction in 1946. In its first issue one page was dedicated to workers’ overalls and working blouses with drawings of very feminine looking young women (Figure 88). A girl in worker’s overalls had a Veronica Lake hairstyle and held a hammer in her hands as if it were a fashion accessory. Her overall was complemented with a wide belt to emphasise her tiny waist. The blouses, with

their long gathered sleeves and golden buttons, resembled those worn by Joan Crawford in 1940s Hollywood movies more than real work-wear.



Figure 88: Workers' overalls, *Naša moda*, N 1, February 1946

Both overalls and blouses were fitted snugly to a slim body shape. Faithful to the general socialist emphasis on work, working clothes for the office, domestic work, factory, workshop, gardening and scientific work appeared repeatedly in *Naša moda*.⁵⁵ The magazine presented drawings of slim and groomed women, who would never give up their stylish pose, whether they were tending a machine, tidying up their home, teaching by the blackboard, going to the grocer, cooking lunch or standing by a desk in their office with a memo in their hand.

Naša moda offered a utopian proposal for each situation in a woman's life, including the most politicized ones, like the voluntary youth work organized by the Alliance of Communist Youth. What should a girl pack if she went, in true communist spirit, to help construct the Bosnian railway line between Šamac and Sarajevo? *Naša moda* offered some DIY advice:

⁵⁵ *Naša moda*, April 1947, N 4; September 1948, N 9

“Take any old raincoat, your brother’s old trousers and your own worn-out summer suit. Add knitted trimmings to adjust clothes, little tops, a check-patterned belt, a halter-top, skirt and shorts...”⁵⁶

The result, as the drawing showed, was fashionable and pretty, and resembled resort dress codes more than working clothes especially because the tiny-waisted model had a film-star hairstyle.



Figure 89: *Naša moda*, Zagreb, N 7, July 1947

Similarly, the other young girl with long blond hair wore fashionable shorts for work in the field (Figure 89). Her photograph with a rake in her hands was accompanied by drawings of swimming suits, an ensemble consisting of a flowery gathered skirt, a blouse and a ‘coquettish’ bra, and another ensemble comprising a summer shirt with a low neckline and shorts. In fact, in the same issue *Our Fashion* published a fashion spread presenting

⁵⁶ “Šamac Sarajevo”, *Naša moda*, Zagreb, 1947, April, N 4: 2

fashionable summer clothes for the seaside. They did not differ in style from those proposed for work in the field. The body was revealed in those fashionable images of sports and working clothes, taking them far away from asexual uniforms presented, at the same time, in the Czech and Hungarian fashion magazines. While the latter examples followed the route of the early socialist utopias by clothing women in masculinised overalls, the Croatian magazines presented modernist versions of sports clothing which dared to play with the notions of sexuality and transgression.

Serving its utopian urban and sophisticated woman, *Naša moda* regularly featured articles on exercise, cosmetics and stylish underwear. This official approval of femininity did not mean that the Yugoslav Communist party was liberal. It did exercise power in different spheres of public and private life of individuals.⁵⁷ Many fashionable women experienced problems in their everyday life if they continued with pre-war dressing up practices⁵⁸. The more rigid female functionaries inside the official organization Women's Anti-Fascist Front would occasionally observe that women had more important tasks to perform in a new socialist society. Such attacks demonstrated that the fashionable woman was an ideological construct launched from the highest place. The fashionable woman did not exist in the deprived post-war reality nor was she generally accepted and valued notion among the ordinary Communists.

Political reasons explain why femininity was not officially banned in Yugoslavia in the late 1940s, although it was controversial in everyday life. The regimes in Hungary and in Czechoslovakia were controlled by Stalin and troubled by their own pre-war bourgeois traditions and rituals. They wanted to exorcize all previous dress codes and methods of fashion production in order to implement a totally new socialist dress which would be worn by the new socialist woman. Although it possessed its own bourgeoisie in the capital Zagreb, post-war country as a whole was not in danger from that disempowered minority.

⁵⁷ Yugoslavia, and Croatia within it, followed a different route to other Central East European socialist countries from 1945. The fact that it was liberated from the Germans by its own resistance movement, and not by the Red Army, guaranteed Yugoslavia a certain distance from Soviet influence. That influence stopped completely when the Yugoslav president Tito broke with Stalin in 1948.

⁵⁸ Nada Drnovšek was the wife of the rich industrialist and a perfectly dressed and groomed society lady in the interwar years in Zagreb. In my interview with her, she made it clear that throughout the 1950s she had to accept a secretarial job, and dress down under the pressure of neighbours and the local branch of the Communist party. She kept her continuing interest for fashion to herself and exercised it only inside safe surroundings (Interview: February 2002).

Analysing utopia and ideology, Paul Ricoeur observed that they both become pathological at the point when the question of power and authority has to be confronted within a society. He argued that escape is the utopian pathological reaction to unresolved power and authority problems, and that, on the other hand, power and authority are confronted by dissimulation in ideologized societies (Ricoeur 1986). Following Ricoeur, I argue that the Czech fashion designers' and fashion magazines' answer to the ideological pressure to introduce uniforms was an act of dissimulation. The discreet but huge opposition to masculinization and ruralization that existed among the Czech female urban population throughout the 1950s, regardless of all the uniforms and work clothes published in *Žena a móda*, only confirmed that the attempt to install work clothes as everyday wear had been state orchestrated. In contrast, in Yugoslavia, fashion could offer an escape. The Croatian fashion press went down the utopian route of the Western fashion magazines, promoting, from the late 1940s on, the latest fashion trends and the feminine women who would wear them.

The relaxed approach to fashion and the fashionable woman remained evident in *Svijet*. The space granted to luxurious clothes on its fashion pages during the early 1950s was meant to demonstrate that Yugoslav socialism was not only different, but also luxurious following the break-up with Stalin. Indeed, *Svijet's* regular column 'Fashion Overview' was supposed to serve just this purpose:

“The season of grand balls, theatre performances, afternoon dances and big evening parties is here again. On these occasions our clothes should differ from everyday outfits. The dresses for those purposes differ in the first place through the choice of the fabric, and then by the cut and adornment. Afternoon visits or social events deserve a dress made from light wool fabric in a darker shade, while other purposes demand dresses in heavy or light silk, velvet, taffeta and brocade, with the exception of ball-gowns which call for delicate georgette cloth, fine lace, tulle or new fashionable fabric like organza.⁵⁹

A column “Fashion Overview” was dedicated to precious jewels a couple of issues later. The article advised the readership:

⁵⁹ “Modni pregled” (Fashion Overview), *Svijet*, Zagreb, 1954, N 1: 3

“Pearls or diamonds combine well with an emerald green dress, while turquoises and emeralds, combined with the same dress, suit more adventurous women. Emerald jewellery and gloves in the same colour can accompany an evening dress. A short evening dress should be paired with dancing shoes in sea-blue colour or ones in the emerald green colour with tiny white stripes”.⁶⁰

While women were officially encouraged to be fashionable and feminine, Yugoslavia was still a socialist country. The utopian concept of a feminine woman in luxurious clothes was politically informed, as much as the ideologically driven travesty that attempted to clothe the woman into a uniform that suited a robust man, was a political order of the day in the Czech Republic and, to a lesser extension, in Hungary.

CONCLUSION

The new communist regimes in Czechoslovakia and Hungary imposed a total rupture with the previous bourgeois fashion. The phenomenon of fashion was too dangerous for regimes which wanted to abolish the past and its rituals. As in 1917 Russia, socialism was once again supposed to start from zero, and fashion, a repository of personal and social memories, was a serious threat to those efforts. Moreover, as fashion is indebted to the past, the new regimes in Czechoslovakia and Hungary feared it almost more than the early Bolsheviks, as their citizens had previously known and enjoyed fashion and its rituals.

The concept of a fashionable woman who expressed herself through a myriad of styles and individual aesthetic statements was exchanged with a single new model: a woman worker in an occupational uniform. After seizing power in 1948, the Czech and Hungarian communist regimes tried to impose, through the new socialist women’s magazines, the Bolshevik concept of a large austere woman in ascetic clothes. The robust body announced the New Woman’s active social role in constructing socialism and opposed the pre-war sartorial traditions and the fashionable women who practiced them. Therefore, magazines in Czechoslovakia and Hungary replicated, ideologically and aesthetically, the early Bolshevik notion of the New Woman. In contrast, Croatian women’s magazines followed an escapist route by presenting the latest Western fashions on groomed women, serving the Titoist ideology of a different type of socialism.

⁶⁰ “Modni pregled” (Fashion Overview), *Svijet*, 1954, N 9: 3

There were significant differences between Czech and Hungarian magazines. The strongest critique of Western fashion was launched in the Czech *Žena a móda*, as the Czech pre-war clothing production had been the most developed, and therefore had to be totally denied. Although the Hungarian populist women's weekly *Nők lapja* also followed the ideological dictate, the more specialized fashion magazine *Ez a divat* never attacked the phenomenon of fashion, demonstrating that fashion was not such a threat to the system in Hungary as it was in Czechoslovakia.

CHAPTER 7: SOCIALIST OFFICIAL FASHION IN EAST CENTRAL EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, 1948-56

In the previous chapter I demonstrated how the new regimes in Czechoslovakia and Hungary had supported utopian ideologies and utopian dress codes, alongside a fierce rejection of Western fashion. In this chapter I show that the ideological denial of everyday fashionable dress practices was accompanied with the abolition of the capitalist economy of clothes production. However, Czech and Hungarian efforts to produce new socialist clothes failed to create a new model of production. Czechoslovakia and Hungary were trapped in the worst of two worlds. Whilst ideologically they adopted the Bolshevik utopian ideal of austerity, in design and production they were forced to adopt the Stalinist model of industrial centralization. New central fashion institutions, modelled on the Moscow House of Fashion, were established to coordinate all the activities of the newly nationalized textile companies, from design to production and distribution of clothes. Those ideologically driven decisions caused a huge rupture within the field of clothes production and distribution.

I identify how the ideological dictates imposed on the new central fashion institutions in Czechoslovakia and Hungary affected their efforts to produce new socialist clothes. I explore the complex relationship between the socialist regimes and the pre-war fashion designers who were employed in the new Czech and Hungarian central fashion institutions. I discuss why in the early 1950s the production of uniforms became a main aim of the new centralized clothing industries. I also cover socialist dress contests which provided the Czech and Hungarian central fashion institutions with a new task: to present representational dresses on the annually organized catwalks from the mid-1950s. Finally I show how Yugoslavia was an exceptional case which followed a different path towards industrialization. Although the factories were nationalized, the Yugoslav regime did not establish a central fashion institution to direct the design, production and distribution of clothes. Following its escapist model of socialism, Yugoslavia promoted smart dress in fashion magazines and through the newly established advertising industry, and praised the successes of its clothing industry while neglecting the lack of professional and technical knowledge of the new politically-appointed factory managers.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Textile Design Institute

In the immediate post-war period, the pre-war fashion salons tried to re-establish and re-integrate themselves into the new society. Those activities culminated in *The Week of Czechoslovak Fashion*, which in 1947 comprised six fashion shows with five hundred outfits and 1,800 fashion accessories, produced by hundreds of fashion enterprises. Leading Czech fashion salons tried to export their products and establish Prague as a new European fashion centre. But these endeavours were disregarded by the new regime, and the private fashion establishments were nationalized in 1948. In contrast to the small salons which had been able to quickly re-start their activities, the large Czechoslovak textile and clothing industries could be re-developed only gradually, as their technological base was completely destroyed during the war. However, this re-development was not driven by economic logic but was instead motivated by a utopian dictate.

Karl Mannheim argued that socialist utopia and liberal utopia shared the belief that “the realm of freedom and equality will come into existence only in the remote future” (Mannheim 1960: 215-216). Yet, for socialism that future had a precise starting point: the breakdown of capitalist culture (ibid). This utopian ideal informed the post-war destruction of previous dress traditions at a symbolic level. Consequently, the whole field of Czechoslovak fashion production had to be urgently repositioned so that the new roles for the textile and clothing industries could be established. As the breakdown of Czech capitalism coincided with Stalin’s increasing political control over the country, the Stalinist model of centralized planning and production was soon imposed on Czechoslovakia. The fate of Czech fashion was sealed in a series of intensive meetings attended by the representatives of the textile and clothing industry, the central director of the nationalized textile and clothing companies, representatives of the *Central Union of Czechoslovak Trades*, the members of the official women’s organization the *Council of Women*, and the Ministry of Information. In June 1949, the central fashion institution *Textile Design Institute (TDI)*¹ was founded by a decree of the Minister of Light Industry. Its official task

¹ *Textile Design Institute* is a loose translation from the Czech *Textilní tvorba*, which literary translates as *Textile Creation*. The term *Textile Design Institute* expresses more clearly the function of the organization, which, as the central fashion institution, was in charge of both textile and clothes design, and production of model collections.

was to coordinate all the activities of the newly nationalized textile companies, from design to production, and to produce prototypes for factories.²

The first *TDI* fashion show was announced in *Žena móda* only months after the centralized system of textile and clothing industries was established (Figures 90 & 91). The magazine announced that the spring fashion show would take place in Prague's prestigious *Lucerne* hall, and that new spring and summer clothes for women, men and children, as well as work clothes would be presented in three consecutive evenings and at a Saturday matinee.³



Figure 90 and Figure 91: The first Textile Design Institute fashion show, *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1949, N 4

² For the development of the post-World War Two Czech fashion, see also: Hlaváčková (2000)

³ *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1949, N 3

The photographs accompanying the review of the first *TDI* fashion show in *Žena a móda* demonstrated that the system that had destroyed the historical field of fashion production could not yet produce new clothes. Dresses with an accentuated waistline reflected the lines of contemporary Western fashion. A picture of a woman in a light evening dress, gathered in a way that accentuated her hips and bosom, could have easily been published in a contemporary French fashion magazine. Her long black gloves, black hat with feathers and pearls contributed further to her *femme fatale* look. However, neither dresses shown on the catwalk nor the smart outfits published in *Žena a móda* under the name of *TDI* were products of the new socialist clothing industry. They were prototypes, which were designed and made up by pre-war fashion experts, now employed by *TDI*.

The existence of a centralized institution in charge of all design and production, which adopted the model of the Moscow House of Fashion, negated the pre-existing domestic structure of fashion production as well as the previous history of fashion. The socialist regime, however, appropriated the good reputation of pre-war Czech fashion, without ever making any reference to it.⁴ Early on, *TDI* undertook a huge propaganda campaign, aimed mainly at the foreign public, which celebrated Czech talent and skills in clothing and textile design. Professional fashion designers entered into a complex relationship with the new regime, after all the private fashion houses were nationalized. The authorities were willing to engage pre-war experts and take advantage of their experience and technical knowledge about clothes. Their expertise was welcome as long as they were prepared to design and promote the new socialist dress. Fashion professionals had to adjust to new official requirements regarding dress codes if they wished to continue working in clothes design. Eminent pre-war fashion designers employed by *TDI*, like Zdenka Fuchsová and Hedvika Vlková promptly switched from creating sophisticated cocktail dresses to designing work clothes at that time (Figures 74 and 75).⁵ The journalist J. Spalova claimed that throughout history work clothes had never received the attention they deserved.⁶ Spalova insisted that work clothes should be designed by the most skilled designers, using the best fabrics and the most beautiful colours. Spalova envisioned the final result as a

⁴ In 1949, the export company *Centrotex* shot a short, highly aesthetic film on the Czech textile industry, which was later shown at the Zurich Fair (*Žena a móda*, Prague, 1950, N 9: 25).

⁵ During the 1920s and 1930s Hedvika Vlková was the chief designer in the prestigious Prague fashion house Podolska and from 1938 to 1949 she was the designer and owner of her own fashion house. Zdenka Fuchsová was the chief designer at the most prestigious Prague fashion house Rosenbaum from the mid-1920s until 1938 (on the inter-war Czech fashion see: Uchalova 1996).

⁶ Spalova, J. "Pracovní odev" (Work Clothes), *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1950, N 7: 22

masterful combination of functionality and aesthetics, which would put to shame and render redundant over-decorated evening dresses.⁷

The creation of a uniform socialist dress was a specific task for the newly reorganized textile and clothing companies which struggled to define their new social role outside of seasonal fashion cycles. In 1920s Soviet Union, poverty and industrial backwardness had prevented the Bolshevik Woman from acquiring new and different clothes. The Constructivist ideas on functional clean-lined dress were confined to a limbo of esoteric artistic practice. But the Czechoslovak project, ideologically driven to design a new dress for the new socialist woman, managed to produce the new, professionally designed clothes, along with theoretical debates, propaganda articles, exhibitions and fashion spreads in fashion magazines.



Figure 92: Uniform for women tram conductors designed by H. Vlková's students, *Žena a móda*, Prague, N 11, 1952

In her teaching and design at the Department of Fashion Design at the Academy of Applied Arts in Prague, Vlková gave precedence to work clothes and uniforms (Figure 92). In her article “Uniform for a Woman”, published in 1952, she presented and explained her students’ proposal for a uniform for women railway workers.⁸ She used all her previous

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1952, N 11: 12

technical knowledge acquired from her earlier experience of designing and cutting haute couture clothes in her proposal for a woman's uniform. Her craftsmanship and ability to produce a precisely cut jacket is visible in the pictures, and Vlková discussed every detail: the beret on the woman's head, the cut of the trousers, the way the differences between summer and winter seasons are reflected in the fabrics and colours, the choice of colours (dark red jacket and moderately dark trousers) and the most suitable types of fabric.

Apart from the prestigious fashion designers, the professionally organized atelier of *TDI* employed pre-war drawing artists, cutters and tailors. Numerous technical problems arose in the transfer of their designs and prototypes to the factory floor. While it succeeded in design and in making up samples, *TDI* constantly struggled with the production side of its responsibilities. The fact that its designers came from an haute couture background hindered *TDI*'s relationship with the industry, which employed new and inexperienced but politically loyal people in its leading positions. Even Spalova, the most ardent promoter of new socialist fashion admitted that the cadres in the newly founded clothing industry were not up to their task:

“Predominantly, our designers are neither artists nor have they studied the history of dress, nor do they possess sufficient knowledge about cutting techniques. We can not hide that fact”.⁹

On that occasion, Spalova argued against a proposal for complicated folk-inspired styles to be introduced in the mass production of clothes, but she exposed the real operational problems of the industry. Generally, *TDI*'s prototypes were too sophisticated and difficult for the mass production industry that had to be rebuilt from scratch after 1948. In addition, ideological obstacles constantly threatened the engagement of pre-war professional fashion designers in *TDI*.

⁹ Spalova, J. “Snahy o novou modu” (Attempts at New Fashion), *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1950, N 2: 22-23, p 22

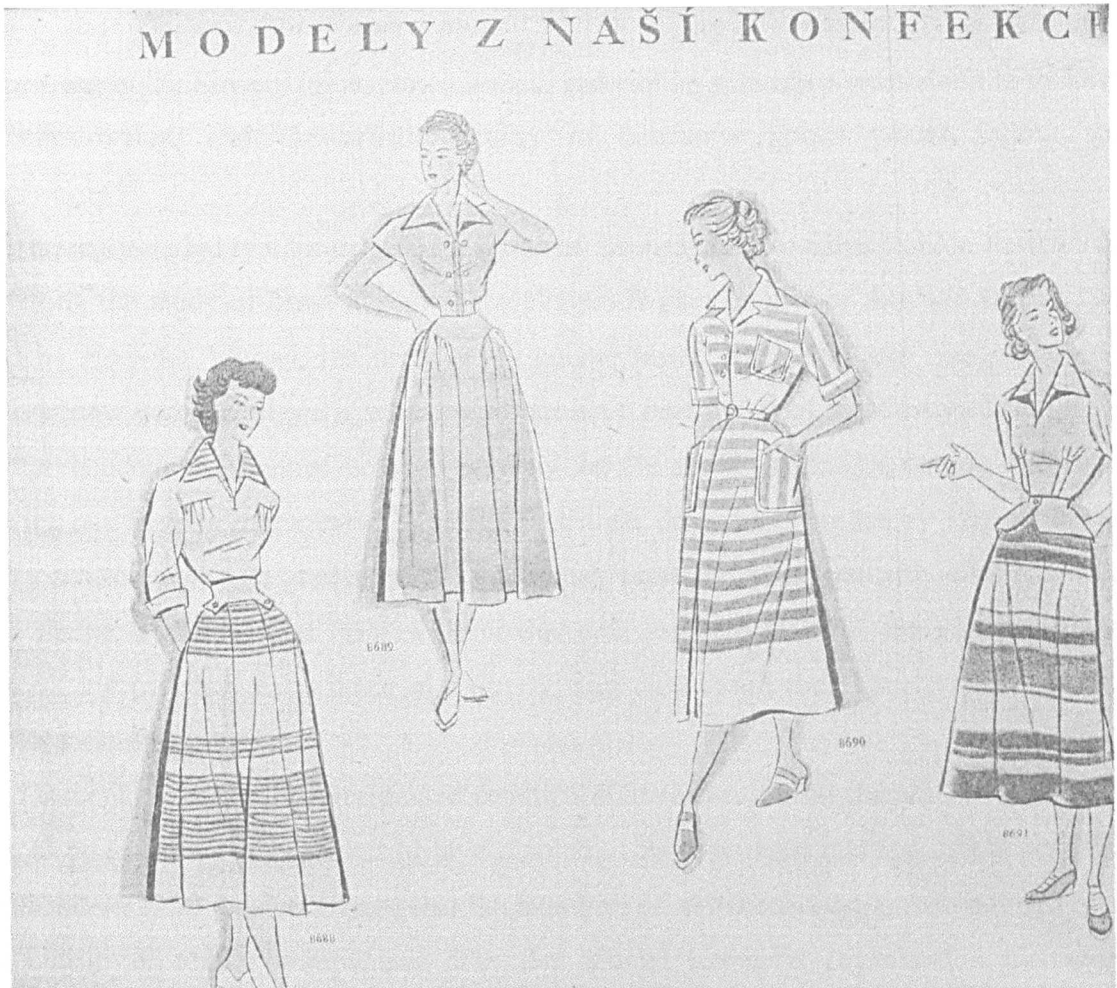


Figure 93: “Outfits from Our Ready-to Wear Collection” (designs by the Textile Design Institute), *Žena a moda*, Prague, 1949, N 4

The role of the fashion designer became a political issue in Czechoslovakia in the early 1950s. Debates in the journal *Tvar* struggled to develop a theoretical framework for the phenomenon of socialist fashion and the role of a new socialist designer. Those debates tried to account for a series of confusing practices which prevented the re-establishment of the fashion industry that had flourished before the war. The editor in chief of *Tvar*, Josef Raban used the plot of Surov’s play *Dawn over Moscow* that premiered in Prague during the early 1950s, in order to demonstrate the importance of the creativity that only a fashion designer could provide.¹⁰ In the play, the young textile designer succeeded through a romanticized political struggle to produce colourful, folk-inspired patterned fabrics in place of the previously poor-quality colourless fabrics. Raban obviously needed the highest authority to back his argument at the time. He quoted from Surov’s play: “*The artist,*

¹⁰ Raban, J. “Sovetska vyroba a prumyslove vytvarnictvi” (Soviet Production and Industrial Art), *Tvar*, Prague, 1951, N 4: 33

Sanya, that is power, that is such a power!"¹¹ The quality of consumer goods was already improving in the Soviet Union, stated Raban, and similar processes were about to follow in Czechoslovakia, and the artistic quality of consumer goods would follow soon afterwards.¹²

The regime tried to educate its own group of 'progressive' socialist fashion designers by initiating the study of dress design at the Prague *Higher School of Applied Arts* in 1949. Led by Hedvika Vlková, the dress study course lasted five years and was supposed to deliver new young designers, who would not have been infected by Western fashion. The comprehensive programme included drawing, textile and dress design, cutting techniques, sewing and fashion journalism.¹³ The study of dress design was funded by *TDI*, which was supposed to employ its graduates. Although they came out of school with solid theoretical knowledge, and their first fashion show was well received in 1950, the young designers lacked any practical experience in industry, and as a result they usually were not well received in the factories.

The centralized field of design and production of clothes meant that all *TDI*'s proposals had to be approved at a number of levels, some of them professional and others politically imposed. In 1950, Spalova stated that the members of *Artistic Board* were appointed by the Czechoslovak textile companies, *TDI*, the official women's organization *Council of Women*, fashion magazines, artists, clothing industry, representatives of retailers and designers.¹⁴ Their views differed according to their political and professional affiliation. Usually, functionality had preference among different criteria dealing with cut, suitability for mass production and possibilities for adjustments, while a collection of prototypes was chosen for industrial production. *TDI* organized regular fashion shows with their approved prototype collections in clothing factories all over the country. All types of dresses, from work uniforms to daywear and evening clothes were shown as long as they adhered to

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ After working shortly with *TDI*, Heda Vlková became the head of the Dress Design at the Prague Higher School of Applied Arts. Vlkova published an article about the activities and aims of the Dress Design (Vlková, H. "Odevni skola a její poslani", (Dress School and Its Mission) (*Tvar*, 1951, N 2: 52-55).

¹⁴ Spalova, J. "Snahy o novou modu" (Attempts at New Fashion), *Žena a moda*, Prague, 1950, N 2: 22-23

ideals of modesty and functionality. Those 'explorative' fashion shows were supposed to confirm that the *TDI*'s design fulfilled the needs of socialist women workers.¹⁵

Regardless of all its efforts, the *TDI* eventually came to be regarded not only as a bastion of pre-war sartorial expertise, which the system wanted to use for its own sake, but also as perpetrator of a bourgeois style in dress (see, for example, Figure 93). In the early 1950s, the activities of *TDI* came under permanent attack from its politically imposed tutors: the Textile Department within the Ministry of Light Industry and the *Textile Commission* of the official Communist women's organization *Council of Women*. In its 1951 manifesto, the *Textile Commission* demanded from fashion designers practical, easily managed skirts and trousers for women workers that would not lose shape or fade during washing. Designers were also told that the sleeves on the dresses were usually too tight for women doing physical jobs, and that they should design more clothes in bigger sizes. The *Commission* nevertheless praised the state plan for clothing production, claiming that it took into account the cultural characteristics of the nation and fulfilled high aesthetic criteria, and emphasized that its manifesto was intended to prevent technical problems in realizing the plan.¹⁶ All the enumerated problematic issues only confirmed that the new central state organization *TDI* was unable to meet the quality that the Czech consumers were used to. The reality of bad cuts and poor craftsmanship lurked behind the *Commission's* ideologized praise of the new plan.¹⁷ In *Žena a móda*, Jan Danielis, the Head of the Technical Department of the Ministry of Light Industry emphasized that the professional designers in *TDI* were still inspired by Western fashion, and complained that the advisory Artistic Board supported such aesthetics instead of standing against them.¹⁸ The permanent tension between the professional institution *TDI* and its ideological counterparts within the Ministry of Light Industry and the *Council of Women*, demonstrated two different approaches towards the field of fashion production. The latter cared only to fulfil its political task of clothing the masses in functional, uniform clothes, while the former tried to maintain a high quality professional design, ideally meant for the individual customer.

¹⁵ "Pruzkumove Prehličky Textilní tvorby" (Explorative Fashion Shows of Textile Production), *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1952, N 10: 12-13

¹⁶ *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1951, N 6: 24

¹⁷ "Information by the Textile Commission of the Czechoslovak Council of Women", *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1951, N 6: 24

¹⁸ Danielis, J., "Textilní tvorba a její úkoly" (Textile Production and Its Tasks), *Žena a móda*, 1953, N 1: 24

While *TDI* was in charge of design, production and distribution, the state wholesale company *Textilia* was responsible for the distribution of goods. Adhering to socialist ideals, the editorial of the first issue of *Žena a móda* unrealistically promised a just distribution and a wide choice of textiles and clothing by the following spring. The regime had just over a year to fulfil its promise, and to establish the new system of design, production and distribution of clothes. Such a promise was important in 1949 in Czechoslovakia, a country in which three quarters of the population had been buying decent ready-to wear clothes prior to World War Two. But the centralized process of distribution did not acknowledge individual needs. A sales person from the *Brotherhood Clothing Shop* sent a letter full of complaints about the clothing industry to *Žena a móda* in 1951.¹⁹ In the early 1950s a critique was allowed, as long as it was considered positive and constructive. Following the conventional pattern, the sales-woman stated that she had been selling women's clothes for twenty years, and that her only wish was to help the clothing industry with her experience. The letter was carefully written, and probably edited by the magazine, but the picture that emerged from it was still very unfavourable. The clothes that were on offer in the *Brotherhood Clothing Shop* were of poor quality and produced without a real customer in mind: the width of sleeves did not correspond to the dress size, the sleeves of the coats were too narrow, the colours of the dresses did not take into account the age groups that specific dresses were suited to, and the clothes were produced from a fabric that seriously shrank in washing.²⁰ On the other hand, the quality of the textile and clothing goods varied hugely. Some factories had made an effort to produce decent goods, while other companies offered poor quality products, knowing that, during a period of shortages and rationing, customers had to put up with it.

Although the Czechoslovak road to the centralization of the textile and clothing industries started differently from the Soviet drive towards centralization, the result was eventually the same: the centralized structure did not allow a proper development of the industry, and eventually, due to the bad management and the lack of proper knowledge by the new socialist managers, led to severe shortages of good quality products. Socialist Czechoslovakia could keep up with its pre-war sartorial traditions through the design and production of prototypes by the highly professional team within *TDI*, while contemporary industrial production was both of poor quality and insufficient. Post-war rations were only

¹⁹ The letter was signed: R.M., Prague, column "Dopisy" (Letters), *Žena a móda*, 1951, N 8: 22

²⁰ *ibid.*

abolished in 1953, the last year of the First Five-Year Plan. At that time, it became clear that the Czechoslovak textile and clothing industries had not fulfilled the plan, and had not delivered their promises to their customers. From the mid-1950s, bespoke fashions were however presented in *Žena a móda*, as wonderful products of the new socialist industry in a new shift of taste informed by the Stalinist aesthetics. But those beautiful dresses were revealed as mere prototypes by the fact that readers were advised that they could buy the paper patterns for each of them at the magazine's headquarters. Staying true to the imported Stalinist myth, those promises were too optimistic in the first place. Post-war poverty certainly contributed to the poor quality of many products and their deficient supply in the shops, but the newly imposed centralization of the textile and clothing industries, which abolished all previous practices, had tragic consequences at the practical level.

Officially, *TDI* had to take the blame, as it was supposed to coordinate design and production of clothes, and to take care about their distribution during the First Five-Year Plan. But *TDI* survived those attacks, and gradually solidified its representational role. While in the years to follow the mass production and everyday supply of clothes remained unsatisfactory, the ateliers of *TDI* continued to design and produce stylish prototypes. They perfectly served the regime's new representational aspirations.

HUNGARY

The state socialist system was established in Hungary in 1948 under the leadership of Mátyás Rákosi.²¹ Understanding that the previous bourgeois culture was embedded in everyday rituals, the regime tried to impose radical changes in the everyday lives of the people. In this, the Hungarian Communist Party followed the early Bolshevik approach. The previous bourgeois practices were to be altered through a process of re-education, and a new socialist life-style established. However, the messiness of everyday life and its well-established rituals, such as dress and femininity, was hard to control. Each product, from a simple dress to a pair of shoes, acquired a strong ideological meaning. Shop windows were not supposed to encourage consumption but to demonstrate the level of socialist

²¹ In the late 1940s, the Soviet influence was even greater in Hungary than in Czechoslovakia, as Soviet troops stayed in Hungary till 1955. Their existence helped Stalin to tighten his grip over the country, and eventually control it through the Hungarian Communist Party. For an overview of the role of the Hungarian Communist Party, see: Molnár (1990).

production. In the late 1940s, the regime tried to exercise control over the everyday, on both economic and ideological levels. The political decision to invest almost all the nation's resources into heavy industry seriously disturbed the people's everyday lives. In the late 1940s, tailors, cobblers and other small businesses were closed down in an attempt to eliminate all traces of the previous capitalist system.

The Central Design Company for Clothes Industry

Following the Communist take over in 1948, all the Hungarian fashion houses were nationalized. The *Laboratory for Workers' Uniforms* was founded in the same year, while experts from the pre-war fashion salons were organized in the *Fashion Centre* in 1950. These two state-controlled institutions merged in the *Central Design Company for the Clothes Industry (RTV)* in 1951. *RTV* was established on the basis of two opposing concepts and practices of dress: industrially produced work clothes and individualized made-to-measure dresses. This contradiction haunted its activities throughout its existence. Officially, the main goal of *RTV* was to provide information and logistics to the state textile and clothing industries. *RTV* was supposed to help factories to design collections as the industry did not employ designers in the 1950s, but that collaboration did not function properly because the new socialist managers in the clothing industry cared only about fulfilling the plan. They even did not know what type of professional help they needed from *RTV*. The initial group of the *RTV* designers joined the central state design institution only after the private fashion houses were nationalized. They did not really understand the specific requirements of the post-war mass production, which could have eventually laid the basis for the future ready-to-wear industry.²² However, in the early 1950s the relationship between the industries and *RTV* was superficial. During the First Five-Year plan, the clothing industry had been under the control of the Ministry of Light Industry, which ensured two hundred thousand outfits were delivered to the shops each year. Clothes were of poor quality and bad design, but the plan was officially fulfilled.²³

²² The Hungarian fashion designer Margit Szilvitzky expressed similar opinion about the 1950s Hungarian dress politics in an interview to Marton Oblath in 1998: "The RTV designers did not understand what workers' clothes should be about, as their approach recognized only conservative style of dress. The factories were lost. They never got what they needed. On the other hand, their dilettante managers never asked for what they really needed". (I am grateful to Oblath who kindly offered me to use that interview).

²³ Dózsa 1991

The *RTV* designers visited the factories and presented ad-hoc fashion shows with modest outfits, in order to spread a new culture of dress among the workers. They also started to visit the countryside, schools and summer camps for young people, and often gave lectures on socialist dress at the *Scientific Educational Society*.²⁴ The models who presented the new socialist dress at those modest fashion shows had fuller bodies, demonstrating that the previous gender order that promoted a slim figure was undergoing a process of political deconstruction in Hungary as well.

The Soviet achievements in the clothing and textile industry were praised in the magazines, and the centralized model of design and production was promoted. *Nők lapja* claimed that only centralized planning could provide for the real needs of the people and that the Western model catered exclusively for the privileged few. The development of the Hungarian *RTV* was similar to the growth of *TDI*, its Czechoslovak counterpart. *RTV* promoted a modest style of dress in drawings published in the mass women's magazine *Nők lapja* which were reduced to pure function: work in the field, labouring by the machine or cooking a meal. Between 1950 and 1953 there was no space for frivolity in dress or any expression of individuality and femininity. In the shops, women could only find functional clothes.



Figure 94: “At Leipzig International Fair”, *Ez a divat*, Budapest, 1955

²⁴ The fashion designer Éva Mészáros, which was employed in *RTV* (later *Fashion Institute*), from 1957 till 1988, told me in our interview: “Basically, we went everywhere where they called us” (Interview, Budapest, June 23, 2004).

The pre-war fashion designer Vera Nádor joined *RTV* following the establishment of its Fashion department. Vera Nádor, who would later become the leading designer and artistic director of *RTV*, was instrumental in defining its activities. Bringing her pre-war technical expertise and her knowledge of the history of fashion to *RTV*, Vera Nádor helped the institution to shift towards a sophisticated representation of elegant and feminine dress. This shift began after the liberal communist Imre Nagy became Hungarian prime minister in 1953. Changes in the field of ideas were felt immediately, influencing the relationship towards Western fashion. *RTV* started to develop its activities in the direction of representational dress. The *RTV* design team, enriched by the first generations of Vera Nádor's students from the Fashion department of the Budapest Academy of Applied Arts, started to design lady-like dresses. Those prototypes had a very special ideological role in the mid-1950s. Hungary started to present its fashion at the socialist fashion contests in 1952, but by the mid-1950s it was taking part in various international fairs. In 1955, *Ez a divat* reported that Hungary had presented a collection of 35 outfits at the Leipzig International Fair (Figure 94). A lady-like suit, accompanied by a hat, a pair of white gloves and a crocodile skin handbag, was a prototype designed and produced by *RTV*. From the early 1950s, *RTV* was also in charge of clothes exports. The expertise of the highly qualified *RTV* designers was demonstrated in those specially designed collections. When customers questioned why the clothes meant for export were usually of better quality and style than those in the shops, *Nők lapja* explained that the Hungarians did not want to consume their future in advance.²⁵

The Dress Department at the Academy of the Applied Arts and Revival of Lady-like Dress

In 1950, the Dress Department was established at the Academy for the Applied Arts as part of a state-orchestrated endeavour to impose a new socialist way of life. The fashion designer had an important role in the attempt to abolish all elements of the previous bourgeois life-style. The first generation, consisting of just seven students, experienced the political changes in the relationship towards dress, from hard Stalinism at the beginning of their study to the more relaxed attitude in the mid-1950s.²⁶ Vera Nádor, working at that

²⁵ Dozsa, 1991, part 1: 22-24

²⁶ Éva Mészáros was among the first generation of the students at the Academy for Applied Arts (My interview, Budapest 2004). Mészáros gave an account of that time in her autobiographical book (Mészáros 2003).

time at *RTV*, was invited to teach at the Academy of Applied Arts, and she re-introduced the aesthetics of conventional prettiness and a set of rules of correct dress and deportment, which resembled pre-war dress practices. Students were supposed to learn about different outfits for different occasions, from a day suit to a cocktail dress and eveningwear (Figure 95). Vera Nador taught her students through practical examples, by re-introducing them to types of fabrics and cuts beyond the ideologically imposed concept of pure functionality. She was also personally engaged to the point that she obtained appropriate types of fabric for some students' graduate collections.²⁷ However, all rituals had been re-coded. Evening dress could be justified only if worn to attend a concert of classical music. The fashion shoot presenting the graduating outfits of the first generation of students of the Dress Department demonstrated that they had mastered the basics of cut, use of the appropriate fabric for a specific outfit, and that they all conformed to the canon of conventional dress aesthetics.



Figure 95: Outfits by the first generation of Dress Design students at the Budapest Academy for Applied Arts, *Ez a divat*, Budapest, N 4, 1955

²⁷ Interview Mészáros 2004

The officially approved revival of some of the pre-war sartorial practices was also visible in other initiatives. In 1953, small tailors were recognized and gathered in the association *Laboratory for Small Tailors (OKISZ Laboratorium)* under state control. Members of the association would occasionally take part in fashion shows on the same catwalk with *RTV*. By the mid-1950s, the aesthetics of the official dress designed by the *RTV* designers were the same as those of the private fashion salons. Both outfits, worn by traditionally feminine women, stuck to a traditional concept of elegance. Thus, the severe ideologically informed rejection of fashionable dress lasted only a few years in Hungary, mainly from 1947 to 1952. However, *RTV*'s activities were not related to everyday dress but to its highly representative counterpart, as demonstrated by the images published in *Ez a divat* and on its covers.

SOCIALIST DRESS CONTESTS

The initial idea for dress contests between the countries within the socialist bloc was born in Czechoslovakia, as the country perceived itself as the natural leader in the field of clothing. The regime wanted to use its pre-war fashion experts to implement the new centrally organized textile and clothes production, but they themselves also believed that there might be an opportunity to preserve the craftsmanship and advance the Czechoslovak expertise and leadership both domestically and abroad even within the new organization. The regime did not oppose it, although only the countries of the Eastern bloc were allowed to take part.

The series of annual dress contests between the socialist countries started in 1950. Only Czechoslovakia and East Germany took part in the first two, with Czechoslovakia winning both contests with a presentation organized by *TDI*. In 1951, at the second contest held in Leipzig, each country presented a collection of fifty outfits. Spalova stated not only that the Czechs won the dress contest due to the superior catwalk show, but that the East Germans were impressed by the centralized organization of the Czech textile industry, and planned to institute a similar central fashion institution.²⁸ In 1952, the Hungarian Ministry of Light Industry established a permanent working group within *RTV* to deal with the Hungarian presentations at the socialist dress contests, and Hungary joined Czechoslovakia and East Germany at the *Third Contest in the Culture of Dress* (Figure 96). In the article "Success

²⁸ Spalova, J., "ČSR zvítězila v módní soutěži" (Czechoslovak Republic won the Fashion Contest), *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1951, N 5: 25

of Czech Clothes in the German Democratic Republic”, *Žena a móda* stated that Czechoslovakia again won at the third fashion contest in 1952, while the newcomer Hungary came second, and East Germany was placed third.²⁹



Figure 96: Czech outfits at the 3rd Socialist Dress Contest, held in Leipzig, *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1952, N 12

The quotes from the East German journals, which accompanied the article in *Žena a móda*, praised the “balance between elegance and purposefulness in the Czech outfits”, taking as an example “sporty suits, which were combined with straight, proportioned skirts”.³⁰ Although clothes for working women were especially admired for their “practical elegance”, the images that accompanied the article presented dresses of classical style and traditional gracefulness. Fashion catwalks at these contests were accompanied by politically informed professional talks between the textile experts and representatives from the Ministries of light industry of the respective countries. Officially, these contests were

²⁹ “Úspěch československého oděvnictví v Německé demokratické republice” (Success of Czech Clothes in the German Democratic Republic), *Žena a móda*, 1952, N 12: 23

³⁰ *ibid.*

supposed to provide important exchanges in technical and organizational knowledge and experience. Before leaving for Leipzig to attend the third contest, the Czechoslovak delegation from *TDI* was received by the Czechoslovak president Antonin Zapotocky and the minister of light industry Alois Malek.

The following year, the Soviet Union joined the fourth socialist dress contest held in Prague in 1953, competing with Czechoslovakia, Hungary and East Germany, while Poland and Romania were invited as observers.³¹ Organized by the Ministry of Light Industry, the show was opened by the Czechoslovak President Antonin Zápotocký, and attended by the Prime Minister Viliam Široký, minister of light industry Alois Malek, the mayor of Prague Dr Vaclav Vacek and other dignitaries. The images published in the domestic journals demonstrated the highly representational nature of the event, in a setting that looked like an odd combination of fashion catwalk and Communist Party congress. Models on the catwalk wore silk summer dresses with a flowery pattern, accompanied by big hats and gloves. But the catwalk occupied only a small part of the huge hall. The space was commanded by the enormous podium, which accommodated the political elite. Other iconographical details included a red draped curtain spreading along the back wall, and a slogan praising the contest in the Culture of Dress, which graphically resembled political slogans at Party gatherings. The respective countries competed in four categories: 1) the most appropriate use of fabric, 2) the amount of waste, 3) the technical quality, and 4) the aesthetic achievement of the collection. Although the overall winner of that contest was the Soviet Union, the Czechs won the aesthetic category.

TDI not only initiated the international dress contest in 1950, but also imposed itself as the main authority within the East European socialist countries on the basis of its previous sartorial traditions. As these annual contests gathered more participating countries, the *Secretariat for International Dress Contests* was founded in Prague in 1955 in order to organize the annual meetings, but also to raise the organizational and technical standards of the socialist clothing industry. A special golden tag was envisioned for winning outfits from the respective annual contests. While the Czechoslovak *TDI* was the main influence, the annual socialist dress gatherings were still called contests, and organized around professional criteria. These criteria tried to preserve at least technical expertise, as fashionable dresses were not yet allowed to re-enter the public space. The aesthetics of

³¹ "Průhledka Mezinárodní soutěže v odívání" (Fashion Show at the International Dress Contest), *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1953, N 11: 2

clothes presented at those contests, officially promoted as ‘practical elegance’, obliged to neutral and sombre classical style, but stylistic neutrality only emphasized the perfect cut and impeccable execution of the Czech proposals.



Figure 97: The Soviet Union was the winner at the Socialist Dress Contest held in Budapest in 1954, *Ez a divat*, Budapest, 1954

In 1953, the Soviet victory at the Fourth Dress Contest in Prague already announced the future of those manifestations. Gradually, the Soviet Union took a very active and often controlling role in those annual fashion gatherings, imposing its grandiose aesthetics and its practice of centrally controlled fashion trends.

The Growth in Importance of Socialist Dress Contest

The Soviet Union also took the first prize cup home from the fifth fashion contest in Budapest, and many others to follow (Figure 97). The Soviet model who walked down the catwalk dressed in a long white organdie dress, carrying a large cup, demonstrated not only

the Soviet victory in the culture of dress, but also the victory of Soviet grandiose aesthetics. The early years of socialist dress contests, during which the Czechs had planned to re-organize and technically improve the existing socialist textile and clothes industries, proposing restrained and elegant dresses, were over. The Soviets imposed the style of dress that had been engineered within the Stalinist mythical culture in the mid-1930s. Combining folk-inspired dresses and Western-style evening wear, that aesthetics complied with the Stalinist idea of luxury (Figure 98).



Figure 98: The Hungarian collection (at the top) and the Czechoslovak collection (above) at the Budapest Socialist Dress Contest in 1954, *Zhurnal mod*, Moscow, N 1, 1955

Czechoslovakia and Hungary followed the same aesthetic idea in designing their collections. After initial attempts to invent their own uniform but beautiful socialist dress had failed, socialist official fashion was engineered in Czechoslovakia and Hungary within their central fashion institutions, just as Stalinist official fashion had been created within the Moscow *House of Fashion* in the mid-1930s. By 1954, the Czech and Hungarian

central fashion institutions had taken charge of their textile and clothing industries, and the process of establishing their versions of socialist official fashion had been accomplished. Escaping from the everyday reality of mass produced clothes, socialist official fashion had a strictly representational function (see, for example, Figures 5 & 6). Failing to deliver a new socialist dress and engineer a new woman, the socialist regimes started to turn back to the most traditional sartorial codes and the most conventional expressions of femininity. All their respective central design institutions had employed the pre-revolutionary professional designers, from Nadezhda Lamanova in 1920s Russia to Nadezhda Makarova in the Stalinist 1930s to Zdenka Fuchsová in early 1950s Czechoslovakia, and Vera Nádor in 1950s Hungary.

The comeback of fashion was possible only as a return to history. A rich reservoir of sartorial quotations in outfits presented at socialist dress contests from the mid-1950s symbolically announced both the return of history and the end of utopia. Utopia, which is by definition a-historical, rejected fashion precisely because of its historical connotations. Socialist official fashion, on the contrary, embraced the history of fashion, but, significantly, chose conservative and conventional sartorial quotations. Such quotations suited the mythical origin of socialist official fashion, as they corresponded with the conservative nature of the myth itself.



Figure 99: Working outfit from the Polish collection, presented at the Socialist Dress Contest held in Budapest in 1954, *Ez a divat*, Budapest, 1954

In 1954, socialist dress contests still paid lip-service to the functional and modest proletarian dress (Figure 99). Each of the five participating countries – Hungary, East Germany, Poland, the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia competed with fifty outfits. There were a series of categories: workers' uniforms for heavy, light and food industries, peasant clothes, sports uniforms, housewife dresses, eveningwear, men's suits and coats, children wear and knitted clothes.³² On the catwalk, a made-up woman in a worker's overall cheerfully carried a rake, but she was not the winning image in the socialist dress contests. She was not the favourite role model in the socialist fashion magazines either. The magazines preferred ladies in smart dresses, with hats, gloves and elegant handbags as fashion accessories.



Figure 100: Evening dresses in front of the jury at the Socialist Dress Contest held in East Berlin in 1955 (from the left: Czechoslovakia, Poland, East Germany, Hungary, Romania), *Ez a divat*, 1955, N 5

The socialist dress contest held in 1955 in East Berlin, confirmed that socialist official fashion had to be monumental, in order to make-up for the destroyed one (Figure 100). Under a picture of the East German Communist leader Walter Ulbricht, and in front of the

³² The Budapest socialist dress contest was widely covered with fifteen pages illustrated with pictures in the fashion magazines of the participating countries, such as *Ez a divat* (Budapest, 1954, N 5-6) and *Zhurnal mod* (Moscow, 1955, N 1)

jury, models paraded in long highly decorated evening dresses. In the picture story “Outfits at the Berlin Socialist Fashion Contest”, which covered the same event, the models in afternoon ensembles were pictured against the background of a modernist socialist city (Figure 101). The new socialist architecture featuring neo-classical decorations was an appropriate surrounding for the formal style of dresses and expressions of conventional femininity that the socialist regimes had started to promote.



Figure 101: “Outfits at the Berlin Socialist Dress Contest” held in 1955 (from the left: East Germany, Romania, Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia), *Ez a divat*, 1955, N 5

YUGOSLAV EXCEPTIONALISM

Yugoslavia did not take part in the socialist dress contests, as the country had already broken with Stalin when they started. Yet, the development of the textile industry mirrored the Stalinist model in the immediate post-war period. Some Croatian textile and clothing companies had long pre-war histories, but following the introduction of communist rule, all those factories were nationalized, and re-organized in order to suit the new socialist

system. In 1946, the Croatian journal *Naša moda* recognised that before World War Two the textile company *Tivar*³³ had employed more skilled workers than its post-war successor. Socialist consciousness was supposed to make up for the lack of technical expertise. *Naša moda* stressed that the politically conscious workers were helping *Tivar* to overcome the problems caused by the war, and even to overtake the level of pre-war textile production.³⁴ But the main news was that *Tivar* was also starting production of ready-to-wear clothes. *Naša moda* described in detail how 750 workers were employed in a new department to cut, sew, finalize and iron ready-made clothes, using new electronic machines. Those workers decided to raise their production by 75 per cent in comparison to the pre-war level, and challenged workers in other textile companies to compete to provide more textiles in a country destroyed by war. *Naša moda* claimed that *Tivar*'s textile workers were fulfilling their task cheerfully and with a song.³⁵

The post-war textile and clothing industries

Such a propagandistic approach demonstrated that socialist Yugoslavia had started to adjust to the Soviet organizational and representational patterns in the textile and clothing industries. In fact, *Naša moda* praised the Soviet model of fashion production at that time.³⁶ In 1946, the first Yugoslav *Five-Year Plan* prioritised the rapid development of heavy industry and the collectivization of agriculture, similar to the Five-Year Plans in other new East European socialist countries in the late 1940s. However, the political break with Stalin in 1948 and the following Soviet siege liberated, as well as constrained Yugoslav socialism. It was forced to move closer to the West economically and away from the Soviet Union ideologically. Both movements happened simultaneously, and had a significant impact on both the real and symbolical role of dress in Yugoslavia.

The first *Zagreb Fair* after World War Two took place in the spring 1947, with the Soviet Union in the most important role. The exhibitions conformed to the propagandistic slogans until 1950, celebrating the nascent domestic socialist industry, the achievements of

³³ *Tivar* was eventually renamed into *Varteks* and grew into one of the biggest textile and clothing companies in Croatia following World War Two.

³⁴ "Od vune do gotovih odijela" (From Wool to Ready-Made Clothes), *Naša moda*, Zagreb, N 2, March 1946

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ In May 1946, the journal favourably reported on the fashion show in the Moscow House of Fashion ("U moskovskom domu modela" (In the Moscow House of Fashion)), *Naša moda*, Zagreb, 1946, N 4), while a highly approving article on the one of the Moscow state-owned fashion ateliers was published in October ("Moskovski modni atelje" (Moscow Fashion Atelier), *ibid.* N 9).

the domestic *First Five-Year Plan* and praised the accomplishments of Soviet industry. The political break with Stalin also marked a break with the worst Stalinist representational practices, which, far removed from the difficulties of the post-war reality, praised the mythical triumphs of socialist industry. From 1951 on, the *Zagreb International Fair* revived its original activity of trade, attracting 680 foreign exhibitors in 1952. In the next three years, the number of the domestic and foreign exhibitors continued to increase, as did the turnover of the fair (Sabolić 1999: 90). The achievements of the domestic textile and clothing industries were celebrated in the domestic media. In 1949, the magazine *Ukus (Taste)* reported that the *Zagreb Fair* pavilion displaying domestic textiles attracted a huge number of visitors, and praised their quality, diversity of patterns and tasteful colours. In 1949, according to *Taste*, 11.31 metres of fabric were produced per capita, four metres more than in 1939.³⁷

Those accomplishments not only justified the socialist system in comparison to the previous capitalist society, but even more so the Yugoslav version of socialism. Post-war textile rations were abolished at the beginning of 1948, and the domestic media tried hard to demonstrate that Yugoslav socialism was going to be completely different from the austere and restrictive Stalinist version. The daily *Narodni list (People's Newspaper)* reported in 1953 that the *Spring Zagreb Fair* made domestic visitors proud by offering many novelties in different fields, from heavy industry to the cosmetics and textiles.³⁸ The first fashion show with outfits produced by domestic industry took place in the same year at the *Zagreb Fair*.

The symbolic role of smart dress

Copied directly from the Western fashion press, the smart dresses shown in the fashion magazines *Naša moda* and *Svijet* were not even presented as prototypes from domestic industry. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the newly established domestic textile and clothing factories could not deliver the smart outfits that had been published in those magazines, although the design, production and distribution of clothes were not directed from a central fashion institution, as had happened in Czechoslovakia and Hungary. The activities of the new factories were however negatively affected by post-war difficulties,

³⁷ "Na velesajmu" (At the Fair), *Ukus (Taste)*, Belgrade, N 18, 1949

³⁸ *Narodni list (People's Newspaper)*, Zagreb, May 17, 1953

and even more so by a lack of professional knowledge and organizational skills of the new politically appointed managers and the technically uneducated workers.

Despite the difficult post-war environment, the domestic textile and clothing industries started to deliver merchandise, even though its quality and style did not match the images published in the magazines. In 1952, the *Zagreb Business Directory* listed many state-owned shops selling textiles, clothes and fashion accessories. There were: sixty-two shops selling textiles, twenty-seven shops selling shoes, thirteen shops selling fashion accessories such as hats, socks, underwear and leather goods, and one shop selling fur coats. Thirteen shops retailing ready-to-wear clothes belonged to the clothing factories themselves, such as *Varteks* and *Naprijed*.³⁹ The most important retailer located in the main Zagreb square, the Austrian-owned department store *Kastner & Öhler* was nationalized and renamed *NaMa*. It dedicated its shop windows to carefully arranged displays of dresses and textiles.⁴⁰

Mirko Segrak's book *Shop and Shop Window* also demonstrated the early official approval of embellishment in everyday life. In post-war Hungary the official ideology had imposed an austere aesthetics for shop windows in order to eradicate all residues of the previous bourgeois way of life. In contrast, the Yugoslav regime in its search for a different type of socialism turned to conventional patterns of a civilized life-style.⁴¹ Segrak's book was both a basic manual for inexperienced socialist shop managers and an etiquette guide on sophisticated shopping rituals. Political consciousness was mentioned as a requirement for a good sales-person, but the book insisted more on the respect of customers' desires and their tastes. (Sagrak 1952: 76-80). A shop manager had to provide a wide collection of merchandise appropriate for his shop. In a textile shop, an adequate assortment comprised all types of wool, cotton, silk and linen fabrics, ready-to-wear clothes for men, women and children, fashion accessories, threads and other sewing goods, haberdashery, such as lace, buttons, elastic bands, decorative buckles and ribbons. A textile shop was supposed to offer all these items in different colours, sizes and a range of quality and prices. (ibid: 108). That extensive list was far removed from a reality still burdened by post-war scarcities. Yet, the very existence of the list which recognized diversity, colour and decoration in dress, ideologically distanced Yugoslav socialism from the contemporary Czech and Hungarian asceticism in dress, which had been imposed upon them by the Soviet Union.

³⁹ Poslovnii adresar grada Zagreba (*Zagreb Business Directory*), 1952, Zagreb: Savremena tehnika

⁴⁰ NaMa is shortened version of Narodni Magazin, which means the People's Department Store.

⁴¹ For different experiences in Hungary, see: György, P. (1992)

The official longing for highly urbanized everyday rituals was best demonstrated in the instructions for the decoration of shop windows. “In the evening hours, shop windows bathed in light are very attractive. They light up the streets and make them very attractive”, claimed Sagrak (ibid: 173-74). He distinguished between the arrangement and decoration of a shop window. Summer clothes could be easily arranged in the window, but only the decorative elements, such as mannequins displaying dresses, a picture with a boat sailing in the distance, an image of a lighthouse or nicely arranged children’s toys for playing in the sand, would make a shop window really attractive (ibid: 176). Clearly opposed to the everyday deprivations of East European type of socialism controlled by Stalin, Yugoslav socialism was supposed to develop in the direction of everyday cosiness. In the early 1950s, consumerist abundance was still far away, but there were no serious ideological obstacles for it to arise.



Figure 102: Advertisement for the domestic cosmetic collection *Elida*, produced by *Saponia, Svijet*, Zagreb, February 1954, N 2

Advertising and its ideological tasks

In the early 1950s, the domestic textile and clothing factories enjoyed a much greater level of independence than their Soviet, Czech or Hungarian counterparts. However, they did not escape the socialist type of industrial development and eventually grew into over-sized establishments, mainly managed by political loyalists rather than by professionally capable people. Such an industrial base arrested the development of fashionable dress and its seasonal changes, but the factories still started to produce mass clothing. In contrast to other socialist countries, the Yugoslav textile and clothing industries depended on a specific type of market, which combined elements of a centralized economy and a proper market economy. This hybrid market managed to impose a certain level of competition between the companies, which were forced to court their potential customers. In this context, an advertising industry started to develop in Yugoslavia at the beginning of the 1950s. In 1930s Stalinist Russia the Ministry of Light Industry had promoted state policies by advertising products such as perfumes and lady-like hats. Advertising did not appear in East Central European socialist countries till the late 1950s. In contrast, the Croatian advertising companies *Ozcha*⁴² and *Interpublic* designed and produced advertisement ordered by the companies themselves. The first professionals in the advertising agencies emulated the consumerist West by using collage technique (Figure 102). In 1954, an advertisement for the cosmetic collection *Elida* featured cut-outs of two sophisticated women from a Western fashion magazine combined with images of the products themselves. Advertisements which relied on a drawing could envision the ideal world even more precisely, and were not restricted by any feeling of socialist modesty and restraint. It might seem that the advertising industry competed with official ideology even in that early period, but it was not quite so. The advertising men loyally served the ideological needs of the Yugoslav socialist regime. A smart couple, clad in evening clothes and enjoying a cocktail, advertised not only the products of the Croatian company *Badel* but also the significant difference in approach to everyday life between Yugoslavia and other socialist countries.

⁴² *Ozcha* is a shortened name for *Oglasivacki zavod Hrvatske* (Advertising Agency of Croatia).

CONCLUSION

The early Bolshevik style, modest and undecorated, was promoted as an appropriate aesthetic for the new socialist clothes in Czechoslovakia and Hungary. They were to be produced by the Stalinist model of centralized dress production in the newly nationalized fashion companies. The total ideological focus on production eventually captured the material realization of clothes themselves, as the new central fashion institutions failed to produce new dresses of decent quality.

CHAPTER 8: THE COLD WAR AND THE FASHION WAR

After consolidating his rule in 1956, Khrushchev abandoned Stalinist isolationism and opened the Soviet Union towards the West. This ideological turn brought about a change in official attitudes towards the phenomenon of fashion in the socialist countries. After decades of rejection, the official encounter with Western fashion was a confusing process in both the Soviet Union and East Central European countries. With neither tradition nor market, and aspiring to control fashion changes inside their centralized systems of production and distribution of clothes, the socialist regimes could not keep up with Western fashion trends. In fact they did not want to, preferring to control the vagaries of fashion on their own terms. They tried to do this in various ways including the managed re-appearance of Western fashion in domestic fashion magazines, the opening of model department stores, introducing a new ideological emphasis on private fashion salons, and organizing fashion presentations at domestic and international fairs and socialist fashion congresses. In this chapter, I present all four countries together in comparative perspective since, from the mid-1950s, their official fashion practices intertwined and ran in parallel. I tease out the differences among them, which depended in part on the different levels of ideological manipulation to which those practices were subjected. I start the chapter with a claim that socialism had to re-position its approach towards the phenomenon of Western fashion when the Cold War moved from the race in technology into the race in everyday life.

U.S. EXHIBITION IN MOSCOW AND SOVIET EXHIBITION IN NEW YORK

The development of mass culture brought the Cold War to a new phase. By the late 1950s, having emphasized the Soviet victory in the space war, Khrushchev extended the competition with the West to everyday culture and life-style. Thus, in the summer of 1959 the Cold War moved to the field of cultural exchange. The Soviets organized an exhibition of their scientific, technological and cultural achievements in New York, and the Americans followed with their own National Exhibition in Moscow. Both Russians and Americans tried to show off their best clothes on each occasion. The official repositioning of the phenomenon of fashion in socialism therefore took place within the context of a fight for cultural supremacy.

Before her visit to Moscow in 1959, Pat Nixon, wife of the American vice-president Richard Nixon, renewed her wardrobe. Announcing the Nixons' trip to Moscow to open the American National Exhibition, *Newsweek* reported that she chose her wardrobe very carefully:

“One suit of natural raw silk, a brown silk taffeta cocktail dress, a silk and cotton flowered print dress with jacket and two other dresses. Most of her clothes were bought at Henry Bendel's in New York where Pat spent an hour – and several hundred dollars. ‘They are costumes’, she explained. Mostly full-skirted dresses with matching accessories to make a ‘picture’. They are not high fashion and they’re the sort of thing I like, and which I think looks best on me”.¹

At the opening of the exhibition, in the company of her husband and the Soviet deputy Prime Minister Frol Kozlov, Pat Nixon glowed in her natural raw silk suit and smart hat. She looked just as she was supposed to: a sophisticated and well-heeled American housewife. The message was clear: the Russians might still be ahead in space research and education, but they could not match the sophistication of Western dress, and the easy smoothness of an American lady going about her everyday life. Pat Nixon's carefully chosen wardrobe demonstrated a life-style with which the Russians could not compete. Throughout their Moscow exhibition, the Americans promoted the technologically advanced and civilized life style that supposedly made everyday life in America easy and smooth. Fashion was part of that approach. IBM's electronic brain called RAMAC provided four thousand answers about different aspects of life in America. One of them offered information in perfect Russian about the wardrobe of an average American woman. She owned:

“Winter coat, spring coat, raincoat, five house dresses, four afternoon ‘dressy’ dresses, three suits, three skirts, six blouses, two petticoats, five nightgowns, eight panties, five brassières, two corsets, two robes, six pairs of nylon stockings, two pairs of sports socks, three pairs of dress gloves, three pairs of play shorts, one pair of slacks, one play suit, and accessories”.²

¹ “Lady Packing for a Trip”, *Newsweek*, New York, 1959, July 27, p 42

² *New York Times*, August 5, 1959. The Soviet media reacted nervously to the emphasis on consumerism, as well as on the interest it provoked among the domestic public. *Izvestia* questioned whether the U.S. exhibition in Moscow was a national exhibition from a great country or from a

During the exhibition, American fashion was presented by four 35-minute long fashion shows that took place each day, each of them attended by 3,000 to 5,000 Russians. The Soviet rulers opposed many of the proposals that the Americans made for their participation in the exhibition, but eventually the Russian audiences got a chance to enjoy American fashion shows, consisting of youthful clothes, leisure wear, daily ensembles and formal long evening dresses. Attempting to bring the Russians 'a living slice of American' - the outfits were presented by professional models, children, teenagers, grandparents and whole families. *Newsweek* described the fashion show as boring, but acknowledged the political meaning behind the clothes:

“The dresses were all right, though a bit on the dull side...The whole idea behind it was to show the people of the Soviet Union how the average American woman dresses at work and at play – not the glamorous girl on Park Avenue, but the young matron on Main Street, including the young Negro matron”.³

The choice of everyday mass-produced American clothes was very powerful propaganda.⁴ The sophisticated outfits from New York fashion salons could have been easily attacked as elitist clothes meant for the exploiting class. The Americans knew only too well that the Russians could not compete in the field of decent mass-produced dress.

While fashion contributed to the huge propaganda effect that the *American National Exhibition* provoked in Moscow, the American media also identified Russian shortcomings in the culture of everyday life at the Russian exchange exhibition that had taken place only two months earlier in the New York Coliseum. The *New York Times* reported:

“The Soviet exhibition strives for an image of abundance with an apartment that few Russians enjoy, with clothes and furs that are rarely seen on Moscow streets”.⁵

branch of a department store (quoted in: “Ivan Takes a Look at American Life”, *US News and World Report*, August 10, 1959, pp 40-43: 42).

³ “Fuss over Fashions”, *Newsweek*, 1959, July 27, p 21

⁴ On the advice of the diplomats in the American Embassy in Moscow, the organizers of the U.S. exhibition concentrated on consumerism, and not on freedom of speech or other political issues. For an overview of both exhibitions, see: Hixson (1998); Caute (2003)

⁵ Frankel, M. (1959) “Coliseum Exhibition Depicts Nation Not as It Is, but as It Wishes to Be”, *New York Times*, 1959, June 30

The fashion show that was included in the exhibition drew ironic comments from Western journalists. Five female and one male model displayed designs by Soviet fashion designers from the leading Moscow department store *GUM* and the Moscow *House of Fashion*. *Time* stated:

“The textiles, mostly thick, heavy-textured woollen suits – are more impressive for their usefulness against the Russian winter than for their styles, which are clumsy attempts to copy Western designs”.⁶

While the American media declared *GUM*'s outfits ‘clumsy copies’ they were the most prestigious representations of the Soviet-style smartness (Figure 103). In 1956, the booklet *GUM*, penned by its general director V. G. Kamenov, described in detail the services that the Soviet flagship department store offered.⁷ Fashion ateliers for custom made-clothes and special shops selling natural silk, artistically hand-painted silk, women's hats, fur coats and perfumes were not only supposed to present an idea of abundance but also of sophistication (Kamenov 1956: 10-11).

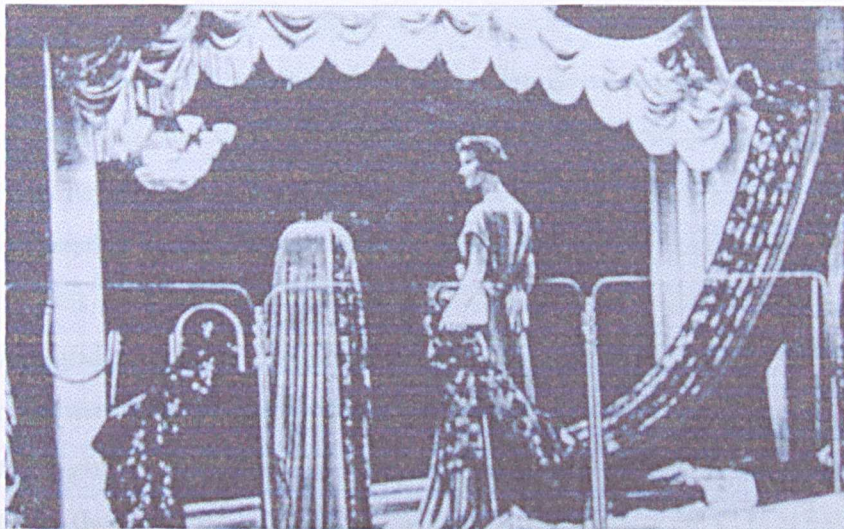


Figure 103: Window display with silk fabrics, *GUM* booklet 1956

⁶ “Foreign Trade: Red Sales”, *Time*, 1959, July 6, p 68

⁷ *GUM* is shortened form for the State Department Store. Originally, *GUM* was financed by the Moscow tradesmen and craftsmen, and opened at the end of 19th century. Located just off Red Square, *GUM* consisted of numerous small, individually owned shops before 1917. Following the revolution, *GUM* was nationalized and became the biggest and the most important Soviet department store.

In the illustrations accompanying the text, those traditionally luxurious goods were offered to the customers by attentive sales personnel. One section of the booklet *GUM* dealt with new sale techniques, while another praised the fashion salons, shops within the shop which offered an individual service in sumptuous surroundings (ibid.: 18-31). The interior, filled with dark wood carved furniture, crystal chandeliers and heavy velvet curtains, did not differ at all from the 1930s Stalinist concept of palaces of consumption. Even in the late 1950s *GUM* was still indebted to the Stalinist mythical practice of cultured trade and to the Stalinist concept of luxury, but its grandiose aesthetics was visually out-dated by the end of the 1950s. The Stalinist glorification of reality that tried to remove all conflicting and erratic elements from everyday life could not compare with the West. When Khrushchev started to open the Soviet Union towards the West, the disjunction between the deprivation of everyday life and its ideal representation became blatantly obvious.

NEW DRESS ISSUES

By the late 1950s, in comparison with the pace and efficiency of trade in the large American department stores and the diversity and quality of the mass-produced goods that they offered, *GUM* had become outdated and provincial, as direct contacts with the West painfully demonstrated. The cover of *Life* magazine from August 1959 showed that the fashion war was going on even at the highest diplomatic level (Figure 104). Flanked by Mrs Mikoyan on her left, Nina Khrushcheva (right) and Mrs Kozlova (far right), Pat Nixon appeared as a smartly dressed American upper-class housewife during her visit to Moscow. The *Life* cover was a visual testament to the Soviet diplomats' wives inability to match the sophisticated, worldly style of Pat Nixon's silk flower-printed dress, string of pearls and carefully applied make-up, as well as her svelte figure.

There were significant visual differences among the three Soviet politicians' wives, which pointed to their different levels of sartorial awareness. Nina Khrushcheva was clad in the simplest dress which buttoned at the front. Called *khalat*, this style had become a domestic uniform of Soviet women. Women wore *khalat* at home, whether they were going about their domestic work, cooking, resting or entertaining. Mrs Mikoyan was dressed in a sartorially more demanding outfit: a suit, with a cut that discreetly shaped the body. Her suit was modest, but its proletarian ascetism was softened with a little hat. That fashion detail demonstrated a certain investment into a look, transforming her simple suit into an outfit for going out.



Figure 104: Pat Nixon with her Soviet counterparts: (from the left) Mrs Mikoyan, Mrs Nixon, Mrs Khrushcheva and Mrs Kozlova, Cover, *Life*, 1959

The formal outfit of the wife of the Soviet deputy prime minister Frol Kozlov, Mrs Kozlova, on the other hand, showed a full awareness of the importance of the occasion. Accompanying their husbands, the ladies attended a dinner-table conference at Khrushchev's *dacha*. Kozlova's evening gown, embellished with embroidery around the neck-line, her embroidered muslin stole, her white evening handbag, her white gloves, her hair-style and make-up showed a new attitude towards fashionable dress. Her acknowledgment of fashion demonstrated an effort and investment in dress. But Kozlova could not yet match the sophistication of Western dress and the easy smoothness of an American lady of the same social standing. The ideologically-informed rejection of fashion's history was imprinted on Kozlova's dress even more so than on Mrs Mikoyan's simple suit or Nina Khrushcheva's symbolically burdened house robe.

Kozlova's appearance not only acknowledged contemporary formal Western dress, but also broke an important socialist dress code. The members of the *Nomenklatura* had always dressed modestly in public. The practice had started with the Bolsheviks. Stalin and his political circle had also stuck to the proletarian ideals of modesty in their public looks, although their private lives had been loaded with all the symbols of traditional luxury, from

fur coats to house help, antique furniture and fine food. The Old Bolshevik wives Nina Khrushcheva and Mrs Mikoyan respected the long-standing Nomenklatura dress code. However, the wife of the new Nomenklaturalist Frol Kozlov, Mrs Kozlova, dared to transgress it.⁸ Her dress demonstrated her awareness that times were changing, and that the new members of Nomenklatura recognized this too.

The journalists who channelled official policies on dress in socialist magazines, started to report on Western fashion at the end of the 1950s. Reporters from both the Croatian magazine *Globus* and the Soviet fashion magazine *Zhurnal mod* visited Paris to observe the seasonal fashion shows, and came back with similar stories. *Globus* had chosen Coco Chanel as its heroine, as she was

“...a promoter of functional and comfortable fashion that emphasizes female beauty and is totally feminine, in opposition to her competitors Dior, Givenchy or Balmain, who insist on bizarre and spectacular effects”.⁹

The magazine stated that Coco Chanel had already caused a couple of fashion revolutions in the past, and stressed that she rejected the role of fashion revolutionary in the latest phase of her career. According to the magazine, Chanel understood that there was no need for a new revolution, as contemporary fashion already fulfilled all women’s needs and “allowed a woman to dress aesthetically and practically, but still look beautiful, be free in her movements, elegant, and even to attract attention”.¹⁰

In a similar way, the Russian reporter L. Efremova found only functional and simple clothes on the Paris streets in 1958. She observed that many Parisian women would go to the theatre or a party in the same dress they had worked in, even though evening dresses also existed. Belonging to an artistic nation with a tradition of excellent taste, elegance and accuracy, French women knew how to choose an outfit, being at the same time modest and

⁸ While Mikoyan joined the Communist party in 1915 and Khrushchev in 1918 respectively, Kozlov rose to the high position of the full member of Presidium, and the deputy Prime Minister as a close ally of Khrushchev in the late 1950s. The caption at the *Time* cover presented Kozlov as a potential heir to Khrushchev (July 13, 1959), but he fell out of power after Khrushchev’s resignation.

⁹ “Chanel 1959. Pariz: Jesenja moda za normalne zene” (Chanel 1959. From Paris: the Autumn Fashion for Normal Women), *Globus*, Zagreb, August 22, 1959

¹⁰ *ibid.* Observing similarities to her styles from the 1920s and 1930s, the Western media pronounced Chanel’s 1950s collections conservative and old-fashioned (de la Haye and Tobin 1994). Valerie Steele (1993) observed that, contrary to the French and English, only the American magazines, which themselves feared fashion changes, praised Chanel after her comeback in 1954.

simple. Efremova's conclusion was: "So, the final truth is: Paris fashion is practical, because simplicity, elegance and modesty are always present in day dress".¹¹ Being a senior fashion designer in the *All Union House of Fashion* in Moscow, Efremova's praise of "Paris as a long lasting centre of European fashion"¹², confirmed that the official attitude towards Western fashion had changed.

The official recognition of the phenomenon of fashion, which was happening in the East Central European socialist countries in parallel, seemingly announced that the regimes had begun to exercise their control in more subtle ways. Only a couple of years earlier, the Czech women's magazine *Žena a móda* had claimed that feminine and luxurious Western dresses pointed to the class degeneration of the capitalist system as they clothed exclusively 'a woman-doll', whose role was to please rich men.¹³ But, in 1957, Western fashion was again acceptable:

"We do not wish to abolish fashion or to isolate ourselves from Western fashion and dress any more than any one else in the civilized world. On the contrary, we want to carefully and consistently follow fashion trends on a world scale and we shall be happy to take a lesson from the positive values and the innovative fantasy of the international fashion designers".¹⁴

The Hungarian *Nők lapja* cautiously attempted to bring fashion and its rituals back home. Its reporter found only tasteful and moderately priced clothes during the visit to the Stockholm department store *H&M* in 1958.¹⁵ The reportage stated that Swedish women did not need to pay for expensive custom-made clothes, as *H&M* offered affordable, instantly available, pretty dresses. Moreover, the sales personnel provided an extremely user-friendly service, claimed *Nők lapja*. The reporter witnessed a scene with three shop assistants persuading a customer that a dress did not suit her. Instead, they chose a more beautiful and considerably cheaper dress for her. Such carefully composed articles addressed important new issues related to dress, which had been brought out by the Cold War struggle for cultural supremacy. Those new issues had to do with mass-produced

¹¹ L. Efremova "What is Paris Fashion and How are the Parisian Women Dressed?", *Zhurnal Mod*, Moscow, 1958, N 3: 24-25

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ "„Človek dela šati" (Man Makes Clothes), *Žena a móda*, 1950, N 10, pp 19-20

¹⁴ "Módní linie" (Fashion Directions), *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1957, N 2: 11

¹⁵ "Stockholm, Augusztus" (Stockholm in August), *Nők Lapja*, Budapest, Aug 28, 1958

dress, the smooth distribution of decent quality clothes, satisfactory service and, finally, with the phenomenon of fashionability itself.



Figure 105: Cover, *Ez a divat*, Budapest, April 1957

During the years of political isolation, shops had either been empty or insufficiently supplied with clothes which in any case were of bad quality. In the other, mythical, reality smart one-of-a-kind dresses, designed and produced within the centralized fashion institutions, had been presented as success stories of the domestic clothing industries in the state controlled fashion magazines. While they had previously successfully competed in heavy industry and space technology, the socialist regimes now had to try to produce their own version of socialist fashion in the new battle of life-styles. The socialist regimes only acknowledged fashion when mass culture and mass consumption could no longer be held back.

The opening of the department store *House of Fashion* in Prague in 1956 was in tune with the Soviet opening towards the West. The prices were higher than in ordinary shops,

but the quality of clothes, which were produced in small batches, was considerably better. Marking the tenth anniversary of the *Prague House of Fashion*, *Žena a móda* claimed that there was hardly any woman who did not visit the store. In fact, the *Prague House of Fashion* served twelve million customers in the first ten years.¹⁶ The selected flagship stores immediately communicated the preferred official aesthetics and announced the forthcoming shopping future. Like the Moscow *GUM*, the *Prague House of Fashion* bore little resemblance to people's everyday shopping experiences. Significantly, however, its interior was not influenced by the concept of traditional luxury, which pervaded the sumptuous interiors of at *GUM* in the same period. The *Prague House of Fashion* demonstrated a modernist look, in accordance with contemporary Western aesthetics. The Czechoslovak regime employed pre-war architects and theatre-set designers, and relied on their expertise and style to impress both the domestic public and the West.¹⁷ A number of specialized schools for window arrangers opened in Czechoslovakia at that time, and 1,500 experts trained there arranged 120,000 shop windows throughout the country.¹⁸

As the socialist regimes opened towards the West, domestic fashion magazines started to promote the new official policies. They were supposed to carefully admit to the increasingly better informed domestic public that Western dress practices were more developed both at design and retail levels, but also to reassure domestic customers that the socialist regimes were aware of issues related to fashion, and prepared to face them. The regimes recognized the importance of fashion in their competition with the West and invited the French fashion house Christian Dior to presents its collection in Moscow's sports hall *The Wings of the Soviet Air Club* in 1959 (Figure 106). Unlike Schiaparelli's visit in 1935, which was restricted to the enclosed diplomatic and Nomenklatura circles and was not reported in the domestic media, street posters made Dior's fashion show very public.

¹⁶ Procházková, H. "Deset let Domu mody" ("Ten Years of the House of Fashion"), *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1966, N 7: 16-17

¹⁷ On the fifth floor of the *Prague House of Fashion*, the space was decorated with armchairs and coffee tables covered with fashion magazines. Metal, glass and plastic, a ceramic bas-relief by two contemporary Czech artists and sculptural ceramic pendant lights contributed to the feeling of modernist easiness, which was highly praised in the applied arts' journal *Tvar* (N 4, 1958: 126-128).

¹⁸ "International Conference of Advertising Workers", *Naš publicitet (Our Advertising)*, Zagreb, N 3-4: 33



Figure 106: Dior's fashion show in Moscow in 1959

The mass weekly *Ogonek* excitedly stated that “Soviet women would finally have chance to see Paris fashion that, for centuries, has dictated new trends to half of the world's population”. *Ogonek* stressed Dior's revolutionary role in post-war fashion, and added that it brought him world fame and wealth.¹⁹ Dior's highest representatives and fashion models stayed on in Moscow for ten days, presenting shows on a daily basis. Heavily scented with Dior's perfumes, the hall's eight-hundred seats could not accommodate all the women who wanted to see Dior's latest summer collection, which was presented to the sounds of the latest Paris and New York soundtracks. The public consisted of women designers and employees from the textile industry, young actresses, and Nomenklatura wives and daughters. The Christian Dior company sent its general manager Jacques Rouët to Moscow, together with Henry Fayol who was in charge of Dior's business at Boussac. The French businessmen visited the textile factory *Trehgornaia* and the Moscow *House of Fashion*. Fayol praised the high level of textile production in *Trehgornaia*, and Rouët stated that the dress design in *House of Fashion* had considerably improved in recent years.²⁰ In the context of the opening towards the West, and the socialist desire to overtake the West in the sphere of everyday culture, an interest on both sides was logical.²¹

¹⁹ Trotskaia, T. (1959), “Parizh pokazyvaet mody” (Paris Fashion Show), *Ogonek*, Moscow, N 26, June 21, 1959

²⁰ Trotskaia, *ibid.*

²¹ Business interests may have motivated their praises published in the Soviet media. According to the Moscow-based American journalist H. E. Salisbury, Dior's bosses hoped to sell a cosmetics licence to the Soviet cosmetic industry, and to obtain a contract to modernize it (Salisbury 1960: 47).

Ogonek's favourable report of Dior's fashion show warned that the average French women did not wear those luxurious clothes on the streets.²² However, the Soviet regime still had to acknowledge the actions that would be needed to affect the everyday lives of its citizens by the end of the 1950s. Khrushchev's aesthetics envisioned simple styles with clean lines that opposed the highly ornate Stalinist aesthetics and would have been easy to mass-manufacture. Positioning a phenomenon of fashion in the field of its mythical reality, and introducing a supply of goods in a highly hierarchically structured order, Stalinism had never been concerned about the quality of mass-produced clothes. Khrushchev's reforms were intended to affect equally industrial production, artistic production and the production of everyday life. De-Stalinization was as concerned with the abolition of ruffles and pleats on Stalinist dress, as with the denunciation of the worst practices of Stalinist politics. Dress was supposed to leave mythical culture behind, move efficiently through the production line, and enter the department store through a smoothly run distribution process. The mass journals, such as *Ogonek*, relentlessly promoted the successes of the domestic textile industry. In 1959, *Ogonek* claimed that the textile manufacture *Trehgornaiia* had produced four hundred million more metres of dress fabric than in the previous year (Figure 107). However, the quantity was no longer the main criteria. *Trehgornaiia's* design studio improved quality and produced three hundred new patterns in that period.²³

Designers and design were now perceived as vital in re-shaping the everyday life of the people. In the early 1960s design came to be called '*tekhnicheskaia estetika*' (technical aesthetics) a name that fulfilled the criteria of Khrushchev's political reconceptualization of culture and its objects: the merging of technology and aesthetics. The *All-Union Scientific Research Institute for Technical Aesthetics (VNIITE)* was established in 1962, and immediately become a powerful tool for spreading the new official aesthetics. However, the politically motivated stress on mass consumption failed to improve the quality of goods offered in the stores. The officially acceptable fashion could only be clothed in a representational dress, as the new flagship stores demonstrated.

²² Trotskaia, *ibid.*

²³ "Trista novih risunkov" (Three Hundred New Patterns), *Ogonek*, Moscow, 1959, N 15: 25-27



Figure 107: “Trista novih risunkov” (Three Hundred New Patterns), *Ogonek*, Moscow, 1959, N 15

In Yugoslavia, the political recognition of fashion was accompanied by different production and retail practices. From the mid-1950s, the state-owned Croatian clothing companies presented their seasonal collections at the *Zagreb International Fair*, alongside fashion shows by private fashion salons. *Svijet* reported in 1956 that the companies *Varteks*, *Vesna* and *DTR* presented decent, reasonably priced clothes, produced from domestic fabrics.²⁴ However, the encouraging media reports would usually point to underlying problems, from unfashionable styles to the failure of the clothing factories to deliver outfits seen on the catwalks to the shops. *Globus* stated that only 20 percent of Yugoslav dress fabric production was used by the ready-made clothing industry, compared to 70 percent in the West.²⁵ The fact that all other textile production was used by seamstresses, private fashion salons and home dressmakers, pointed to the insufficient supply of ready-to-wear clothes in the shops, as well as to their unappealing shape. In fact,

²⁴ “Modna revija” (Fashion Show), *Svijet*, Zagreb, 1956, N 5

²⁵ “Proljetne laste lete na Istok” (Spring Swallows Fly to the East), *Globus*, Zagreb, N 32, February 7, 1960: 38-40

the journals reported that even textile supplies suffered terrible delays, and that fabrics which had been presented at the fairs would arrive in the shops only at the end of the season.²⁶ *Varteks*, which was both a textile and a ready-to-wear clothing factory, collaborated with the owner of the prestigious private fashion salon Žuži Jelinek.²⁷ The political approval of collaboration between state industry and a private fashion salon demonstrated the vulnerability of the domestic state clothing industry, which still relied on private designers who could provide both experience and style.²⁸ Even when there were no ideological obstacles, the lack of tradition, the insufficient knowledge, the undeveloped domestic market, and the controlled economy arrested the development of fashion in Yugoslavia.

IDEOLOGICAL USES OF PRIVATE FASHION SALONS: PRESERVING SMART DRESS

The new socialist industry proved unable to mass-produce any form of smart, good-quality dress, as it lacked both adequate technological capital, and appropriate cultural capital. Consequently, driven by their need to compete with the West on a life-style level, the regimes turned towards representational dress, which appeared only on the fashion catwalks and in fashion magazines. While the state-owned clothing industries struggled, private fashion salons attempted to preserve their fashion rituals.²⁹ They retained their pre-war cultural capital as well as the expertise to produce good quality dress and to offer it to specific customers. In their socially ephemeral field, private fashion salons preserved both the physical existence of smart dress and its symbolical role. Although the East Central European socialist regimes allowed the existence of some very exclusive fashion salons in the pre-war tradition, those fashion salons took different forms in different socialist countries.

²⁶ "Sajam mode 1958" (The Fashion Fair 1958), *Svijet*, Zagreb, 1958, N 6

²⁷ Jelinek designed a special collection of *Varteks'* fabrics in 1956 and exhibited it in her salon ("Varteks priredio u Zagrebu modnu reviju" (Varteks presented a fashion show in Zagreb), *Borba*, Zagreb, November 6, 1956)

²⁸ Žuži Jelinek was a designer with pre-war experience, but left her business to become a member of the partisan resistance movement during World War Two. Her political loyalty and connections facilitated her relationship with the regime after 1945.

²⁹ Private fashion salons did not exist in the Soviet Union, where sartorial needs of the privileged strata were served by a number of state-owned ateliers for the custom-made clothes, which guaranteed both good quality fabrics and decent look of clothes. Those fashion ateliers existed widely at both occupational and residential levels, although the quality of their services varied.

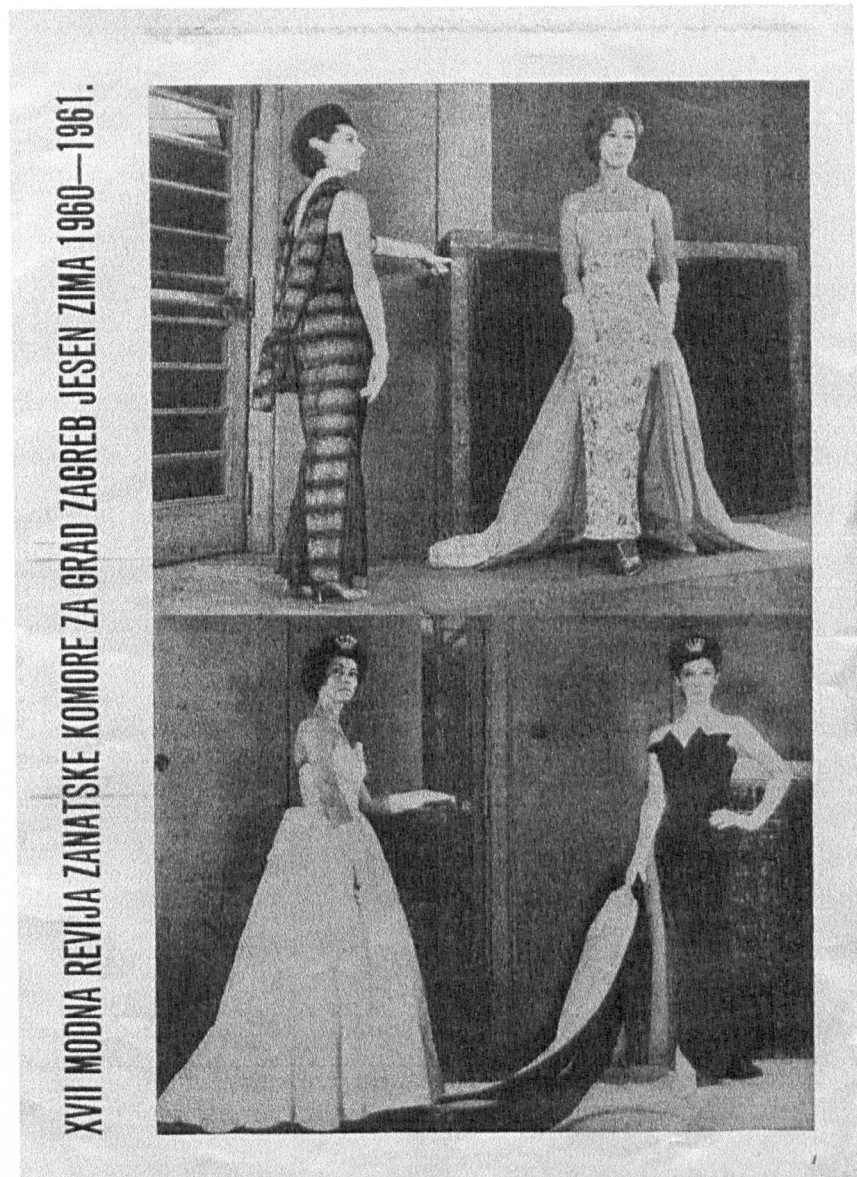


Figure 108: Cover, Catalogue 17th Fashion Show of Zagreb's Crafts Association, 1960-1961

The Croatian association of private tailors, established in the late 1940s, was active in organizing seasonal fashion shows, which took place with the full approval of the regime in the headquarters of the Crafts Association in the centre of Zagreb (Figure 108). The event would last for ten days each September, and was attended both by members of the pre-war elite and the new privileged socialist strata. Mila Mirković, one of the first professional Croatian models recalled:

“The private fashion salons’ seasonal fashion shows were important social gatherings throughout the 1950s. They rivalled the prominent theatre premieres, and I was

usually presented with flowers by the leading Croatian actress Bela Krleža at the end of the show".³⁰

At those gatherings, fashion brought together the members of the disempowered urban elite with representatives of the new, powerful but unsophisticated elites of rural origin. New civilizing rituals and rules of propriety were polished at such events through the medium of smart dress. The seasonal fashion shows of the state clothing companies failed to attract such a dedicated following. Their dresses were not considered exciting, partly because they were industrially produced and presented in the unattractive premises of the Zagreb Fair pavilion, and partly because they lacked the direct connection to fashion's past that the private fashion salons provided. The media also paid much more attention to the private salons' fashion shows than to those organized by the state clothing companies.³¹ The public craved those long evening outfits, velvet bows on lace dancing dresses, romantic billowing skirts and suits that emphasized an hourglass figure, because they were evocative of the splendid traditions of the pre-war fashions. Accessories, such as stoles, hats, long white gloves, high heels and jewellery contributed to the allure of the dresses presented by the private salons (Figure 9).

Seasonal shows by exclusive fashion houses, such as *Eva* and *Styl*, were also regularly reported in the Czech media at that time (Figure 109). *Žena a móda* reported that the new relationship towards fashion was "to carefully and permanently follow world fashion trends and to take lessons from the innovative creativity of world fashion designers".³² While only the socialist elite discreetly enjoyed their fashion shows from 1948 on, elitist dresses presented by the exclusive fashion salons were now perceived as a sign of a civilized life-style. The new recognition of the phenomenon of fashion allowed those exclusive fashion presentations to be publicly promoted in the media. The official re-organization of the Czech association of exclusive fashion houses' emphasized their new representational role. Called *Fashion Works (Modny zavody)*, they were required to design and execute dresses for special state presentations, foreign trade and other exclusive purposes. Due to the new political atmosphere following the opening towards the West, the pre-war sartorial traditions were, all of a sudden, approved, and the expertise of exclusive

³⁰ (My interview Mirković, Zagreb, May 22, 2001).

³¹ "Modna revija" (Fashion Show), *Svijet*, Zagreb, N 5, 1956. Although the review was related to the presentations by both the clothing industry and private salons, the accompanying images showed only the salons' outfits.

³² "Modni linie" (Fashion Trends), *Žena a móda*, 1957, N 2: 11

fashion houses was needed and praised in the media. *Fashion Works* even proudly advertised its activities with a slogan: “Our outfits are winners at international fashion shows”.



Figure 109: “The Prague Haute Couture”, *Žena a móda*, Prague, N 12, 1970

The Hungarian Rothschild staged her biannual fashion shows in luxurious spaces such as the Budapest restaurant Gundel or the ballroom of the smart Gellért hotel, while Nusi Arató presented her Paris inspired collection in the Budapest town hall to an exclusive audience twice a year.³³ Both private salons had been prominent in the pre-war years, and

³³ I am grateful to the Hungarian fashion designer Éva Mészáros, who worked in Nusi Arató’s salon in the mid-1950s, for sharing that information with me. Nusi Arató’s husband was, for example, the highly positioned banker in the 1950s Hungary. Yet, after some political scandal the couple committed a suicide and the salon was closed down by the end of the 1950s (Interview 2004).

Rothschild and Arató were able to stay in business because of their good connections with the new regime. In the mid-1950s, their fashion shows were attended by the new political elite, whose members were also their customers. The attention that Klára Rothschild's fashion presentations commanded in the Hungarian popular and fashion press in the early 1960s declared the new times (Figure 110).



Figure 110: The finale of Klara Rothschild fashion show held in October 1960 in Budapest, from Gerő and Peto (1999)

Ez a divat regularly covered fashion shows by other private salons as well. Just as in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, pictures of smart luxurious dresses by the private salons met the new official needs. As the domestic industry was not able to produce such clothes, the regimes grabbed from the existing sartorial reservoir in order to achieve their representational purposes.

In 1959, the Croatian magazine *Globus* introduced a new weekly feature “Diors Are among Us”, dedicated to the owner-designers of domestic fashion salons (Figure 111). In one feature, Tilda Stepinska, owner of a domestic private fashion salon, emphasized that she was always inspired by French haute couture, but only chose ideas suitable for “our conditions”.³⁴ Like Christian Dior, who dressed the French upper class and nouveau riche, the Yugoslav “Diors” catered for the socialist elite. Stepinska commented that she dressed “women who held high political office in the country, or represented it abroad, and

³⁴ Stošić, B. “Diori su među nama” (Diors Are among Us”), *Globus*, Zagreb, N 15, October 11, 1959: 40-41

therefore needed elegant and functional clothes”.³⁵ The publication of such a statement in a mass magazine at the end of the 1950s was all part of the new politics of style.

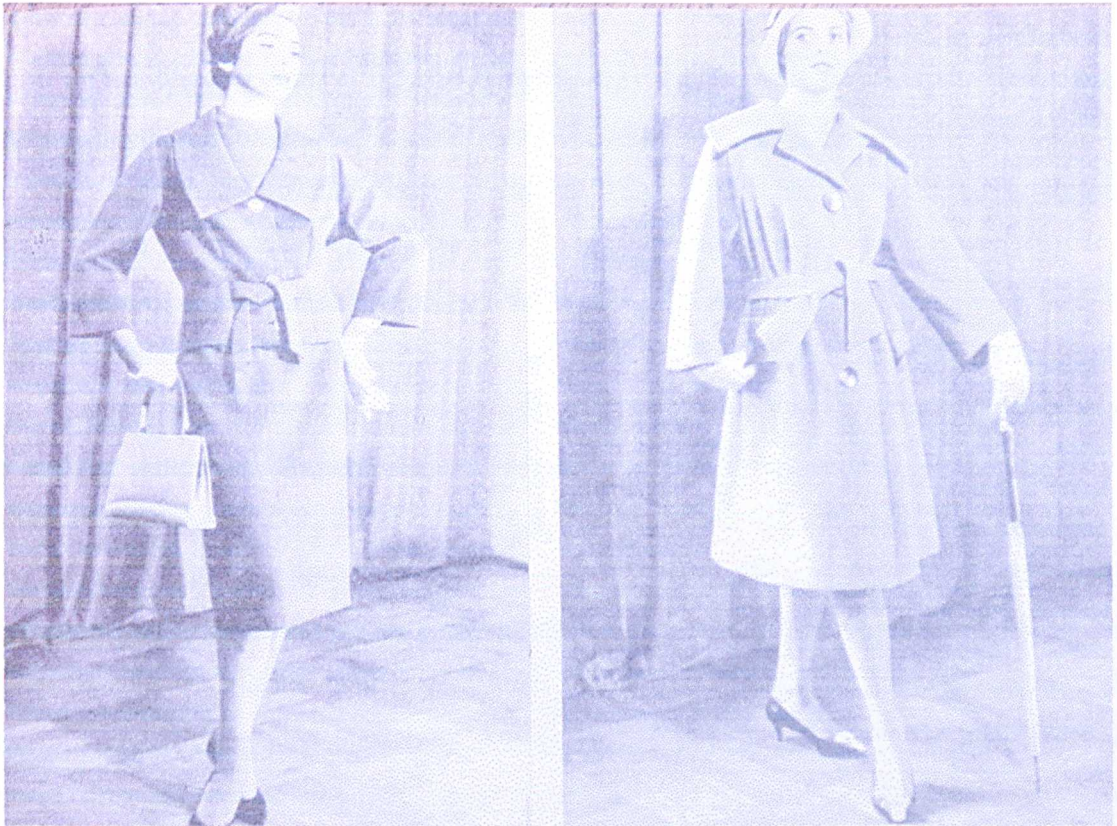


Figure 111: Day suits by the Croatian designer and private fashion salon owner Tilda Stepinski, *Globus*, Zagreb, N 15, 1959

The Croatian designer and private salon owner Žuži Jelinek was well informed about the latest fashion trends. Her innate minimalism fitted well with the ideal of socialist simplicity, while adding a much-craved dose of glamour.³⁶ The Yugoslav media closely followed Jelinek’s attempt to establish her fashion house in New York in 1959.³⁷ Although she enjoyed enthusiastic and professional support in America, her project failed, as she could not produce her clothes in sufficient quantities for the American market (Figure

³⁵ *ibid.*: 40

³⁶ I am grateful to Mrs Jelinek for granting me an interview and giving me access to her private archive (Interview February 26, 2001). In the interview, Mrs Jelinek claimed that President Tito proclaimed her an enemy of the people in a public speech on February 22, 1962 (I did not find evidence for that claim in the contemporary media). She eventually left for Switzerland to become a successful and rich businesswoman, but returned to Croatia in 1964 to run her private fashion salon. In her educational role, Jelinek was the author of a newspaper column and a writer of a couple of books on proper style and acceptable elegance.

³⁷ “Žuži of Yugoslavia”, *Globus*, Zagreb, 1959, N 2: 40-41

112).³⁸ Privately owned fashion salons were officially recognized in Yugoslavia, but were legally restricted, as private companies were only allowed to employ up to five people. Even the most prestigious among them could not develop into proper fashion houses. The regime invested Jelinek's dresses with an ideological task: to present Yugoslavia as a liberal and civilized country. The media attention of American and Yugoslav magazines served that purpose to perfection. However, the domestic magazines showed little interest in Jelinek's production and delivery problems which prevented her success in America, and presented her business trips to the USA as a great achievement.

Žuži Jelinek confirmed her talent in dealing with the media abroad by playing with the image of the socialist fashion designer in an interview for the *New York Times* during the same business trip in 1959. When asked if there was any common denominator between her and her American counterparts, she answered: "It's Paris, of course. What happens to fashions every season depends directly on what the French couture does. But, of course, I copy them".³⁹ That is precisely what the owners of the established socialist fashion salons were supposed to do by the end of the 1950s. Klára Rothschild travelled regularly to Paris at that time to learn about the latest trends and to buy lavish fabrics for her outfits. Her luxurious and Westernized seasonal collections were direct copies of Givenchy and Coco Chanel dresses, which, she said, were preferred by her clients.⁴⁰ Rothschild's good connections, both with the Hungarian ruling party and in the West, enabled her to travel abroad and obtain top quality fabrics. Jelinek's entrepreneurial attitude was punished. The owners of the private fashion salons were not expected to be serious business people in their own right. They were supposed to confer some sophistication and glitter to the image of socialist official fashion at a time when the regimes wanted to re-connect socialist sartorial codes with Western fashion.

³⁸ Following a series of Jelinek's New York fashion shows, her P.R. Martha G. Palmer wrote a desperate letter to her in Zagreb in December 1959. Palmer reminded Jelinek of the media attention she had secured for her and the department stores' orders that had followed, and demanded that the orders should be delivered. Thanks to Palmer's P.R. connections, Jelinek was presented in the *New York Times*, the *Herald Tribune*, *Women's Wear Daily*, the hotel's magazine *Host* and the National Broadcasting System (Martha G. Palmer's letter is in Jelinek's private archive).

³⁹ Emerson, G. "Yugoslavs Also Copy Paris Style", *New York Times*, May 4, 1959

⁴⁰ "The New Class", *Time*, August 13, 1965. The article also stated that Klára Rothschild was with "a state-paid salary of \$20,000 a year, one of János Kádár's most generously valued national assets".



Figure 112: American model Suzy Parker wearing clothes by the Croatian designer Žuži Jelinek, *Globus*, Zagreb, N2, 1959

Yet, the ‘socialist Diors’ were not allowed to follow into footsteps of their famous French colleague. The ‘Dior reference’ however signalled that the official perception of fashion had started to change. The exclusive fashion salons survived throughout the socialist period in Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, but their presence was very discreet until the end of the 1950s. Although they perceived themselves as bastions of proper bourgeois values, and kept up appearances with seasonal fashion shows, their dresses gradually became dated in an environment that was neither creatively nor economically encouraging. The official re-conceptualization of fashion had brought private fashion salons to the attention of the socialist media. The previously rejected bourgeois practices

and dress codes were now recognized and recoded to suit the new concept of the socialist life-style, one that could compete with the ways of living in the developed Western societies.

From 1960 onward, fashion was politically legitimated and entered the body of approved cultural capital. The new official discourse recognized the existing private fashion salons as a useful medium to present fashion practices that suited the socialist slow flow of time: classical, elegant, timeless, and possessing a tradition that socialism suddenly desired. The pre-war cultural capital that only private fashion salons could provide was needed to ideologically re-affirm smart dress. The fashion shows put on by the politically neutralized and economically incapacitated private fashion salons were, for a while, permitted to promote smart dress. But it was not long before the socialist regimes gave their own annual fashion congresses the main role in proposing and affirming new socialist fashion trends.

UNDER A BUREAUCRATIC GAZE: SOCIALIST FASHION CONGRESSES

From the mid-1950s, the national central fashion institutions were required to establish socialist official fashion at their dress contests. On the catwalk of those dress contests, socialist official fashion escaped the everyday reality of badly mass-produced clothes and acquired a representational function. The style of dresses presented at the 1956 Warsaw dress contest demonstrated that, having failed to deliver a new socialist dress and engineer a new woman, the socialist regimes started to return to the most traditional sartorial codes and the most conventional expressions of femininity. The Soviet *Zhurnal mod* reported that thirty five beautiful models from Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Romania, Hungary, the Soviet Union and Poland presented dresses in fifteen categories, from working clothes to eveningwear on the catwalk of the *Institute of Industrial Forms*.⁴¹ However, the images of dresses accompanying the article in *Zhurnal mod* were mainly representative samples of the luxurious eveningwear and of the seriously elegant afternoon ensembles. Whether presented on the catwalk or in the state-controlled fashion magazines, dresses designed within the national fashion institutions always embodied the state policy on dress. Smart, conventional and luxurious dress was a new official favourite (Figure 14).

⁴¹ Skliarova, V. "Contest in Warsaw", *Zhurnal mod*, Moscow, 1956, N 4: 20-21

While the Warsaw fashion event was still called a 'contest', symbolically retaining the initial idea of those gatherings to promote a new 'culture of dress', the new imposing name of 'congress' was introduced in 1957 in Moscow. *Rabotnitsa* reported that six socialist countries took part in the 8th fashion congress, held in July 1957, and that each of them presented a collection of exactly 53 models meant for different purposes (Figure 113). Although women's magazines published women's eveningwear and luxurious dresses and ensembles, the participating countries always included working wear, sports clothes and men's and children's clothes in their collections. The selective approach of women's magazines only demonstrated that fashion acquired a new, highly representational, role. The media reported that, at the 8th fashion congress in Moscow, fashion professionals from Poland, Hungary, Romania, East Germany, Bulgaria and the Soviet Union met to exchange experiences, and that an international jury chose outfits for the unique collection that each country would put into mass-production.⁴² The unity of the participating socialist countries in choosing future fashion trends was continually stressed in magazine reports of those congresses in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s.⁴³ The result was an "elegant and contemporary style, which did not copy Western fashion".⁴⁴

Unlike the early restrained and professionally oriented contests, which were initiated by Czechoslovakia in 1950, the fashion congresses between the socialist countries developed into a display of luxurious fabrics and extravagant cuts. Models paraded up and down the catwalk in ball gowns with ruffles and long wide skirts, taffeta evening coats with huge collars and low-neck cocktail dresses. The outfits were accessorized with excessive amounts of costume jewellery and high heels. There was nothing casual in socialist day wear, as serious ensembles of overcoats and matching dresses were accompanied by matching shoes and handbags, hats and gloves. The conservative aesthetics of socialist official fashion presented at the socialist fashion congresses from the end of the 1950s on announced an ontological anxiety about the fluidity of time. The hierarchical levels of decision-making in planned economies revealed a nervous fear of change.

⁴² In addition to the *Soviet ODMO (All Union House of Fashion)*, the *Czechoslovak Textile Production* and Hungarian *RTV*, other newly founded national organizations joined the socialist fashion congresses, including the *Bulgarian Centre for New Goods and Fashion*, the *Romanian Fashion Institute*, the *East German Fashion Institute* and the *Polish Central Textile Laboratory*. Mimicking the political interests within the socialist world, China, Albania and Cuba were usually the observers at the socialist fashion congresses, occasionally joined by Yugoslavia in the same observing role.

⁴³ *Rabotnitsa*, Moscow, 1957, N 7: 28-29

⁴⁴ *Zhurnal mod*, Moscow, Winter 1958/1959: 37



Figure 113: Day Suits from Socialsit Fashion Congress held in Moscow, *Kvety*, Prague, N 31, August 1957

The dresses presented on the catwalks of the congresses defined the socialist relationship towards Western fashion, which could no longer be avoided. Socialist fashion congresses were a channel through which Western fashion trends could be controlled, tamed, and re-coded to serve the needs of the regimes. In his book *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes argued that “ideologically, everything that is not bourgeois is obliged to borrow from the bourgeoisie” (Barthes 1976: 139). In that context, the bourgeois dress was constitutive of the socialist official fashion as an internalized negative image. Evening wear, day dresses and suits at socialist fashion congresses demonstrated that bourgeois dress codes were borrowed and re-coded very seriously. In the late 1940s and in the first half of the 1950s Western fashion itself promoted traditional and lady-like clothes, but by the end of the 1950s the official socialist dresses were even more traditional, lady-like and luxurious. These exaggerations only confirmed that, after being rejected, Western fashion continued to exist as an eternally threatening Other within the socialist sartorial sub-consciousness. The excessive style of dress presented at the annual socialist fashion congresses from the end of the 1950s and throughout the 1960s ultimately reflected isolationism and a fear of competition with contemporary Western dress.⁴⁵ Lacking both tradition and the market, and aspiring to control fashion changes inside their centralized fashion systems, the

⁴⁵ The special annual magazine *Moda stran socializma* (*Fashion of the Socialist Countries*), started in 1959 and published in Moscow, covered the socialist fashion congresses till their end in 1990. Published in a circulation of a few hundred thousand, and distributed throughout the participating countries for free, the magazine's served as a propaganda tool for the official socialist fashion. Its contents consisted only of the fashion images covering the socialist fashion congresses.

socialist regimes could not keep up with Western fashion trends. More importantly, although they now craved Western fashion, the respective socialist countries were not really interested in the latest Western styles which were already announcing the forthcoming relaxation of dress codes.

Since socialist fashion congresses were under Soviet organizational and stylistic dominance, there were no official channels for direct confrontation, collaboration or even comparison with contemporary Western fashion. Although their full name was *International Fashion Congress*, those events presented only the collections born within well-controlled and culturally isolated socialist world (Figure 1). In my interview with Éva Mészáros, who used to be one of the leading designers in the Hungarian central fashion organization *RTV*, she confirmed:

“The role of fashion congresses was to propose new socialist trends, in the same way as Paris launched new Western fashions. I must tell you that the Soviet Union was usually the winner, with Hungary and Czechoslovakia competing for the second best award. However, I do not imply that political reasons lay behind the Soviet victories. The Soviets usually presented excellent collections”.⁴⁶

I do not find it surprising. While the supply of clothes in the shops was much worse in the Soviet Union than in Czechoslovakia and Hungary, their efforts demonstrated total dedication to the ideological role of those events, and their understanding of the importance of representational dress. The Soviet authority over the congresses from the mid-1950s onwards imposed both isolationism and an excessive aesthetics. Under Khrushchev, the over-decorative Stalinist dress was officially dismissed in the mass-media, but the Soviet regime reserved the right to use it to provide a highly representational response in the sartorial battles with the West.

TAKE A LOOK: TRADE-FAIRS AND FASHION SHOWS

Socialist official fashion was not hermetically sealed within the socialist countries, but was also displayed in the West. Apart from the regular annual fashion congresses between the

⁴⁶ Mrs Mészáros stated that the collections that the participating countries presented served to share ideas and information with the colleagues from the other national fashion institutions, but denied that the one unique collection was forced on all as an obligatory trend at the end of those annual gatherings (Interview 2004).

socialist countries, the realm of socialist official fashion spread from the showcase international commercial fairs to representational socialist fashion shows. At the end of the 1950s socialist official fashion was presented at those events both in the West and in the socialist countries. Those presentations of socialist official fashion were ultimately informed by the five-year plans, which were the most important product of the ideologically constructed reality⁴⁷. Socialist fairs filled huge halls with beautiful clothes and other consumer goods that never found their way to the shops. The dresses presented at those events were the only realistic detail in the surreal environment of an invented reality. The ambitious presentations of socialist dresses in the West also belonged to that invented world. While the shops were empty or badly supplied at home, the abundance of extravagant, luxurious and smart dresses on the catwalks was the only answer that the socialist regimes could manage to the Western challenge in the new battle of life-styles, quickly and without any political or economic risk to the system.

Throughout the 1960s, Hungary actively continued to promote socialist official fashion at fashion shows held in the West. The Hungarian state propaganda company *Hungexpo* organized fashion shows in Copenhagen, Oslo, Bergen, West Berlin, Rome, Milan, USA and Canada meant exclusively for the Western public. The clothes could not be bought in shops at home nor were they supposed to be sold to Western customers or department stores. Lavish presentations in luxury hotels served a propaganda role.⁴⁸ Vera Nádor and her team from the central fashion institution were responsible for the fashion show itself on those visits to the West. Nádor was already engaged in running the new Fashion Design study at the *Academy of Applied Arts* and had been crucial in the turn towards smart dress within *RTV* in the early 1950s. Now the regime trusted her with a new fashion mission. Her pre-war bourgeois sartorial expertise was obviously perceived as a guarantee for the success of official Hungarian fashion in the West.⁴⁹

The twists of fate in the socialist official fashion in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s demonstrated that it was purely a part of the regime's ideological discourse. In the short period during the general political and cultural relaxation leading up to the Prague Spring

⁴⁷ For an overview of the concept of the ideological construction of reality, see: Epstein (1995).

⁴⁸ Agi Oblath, who throughout the 1960s and 1970s was in charge of the organization of Hungarian fashion presentations in the West, shared her memories about those events in an interview with me (Budapest, 1999).

⁴⁹ *ibid.* Agi Oblath remembered those fashion shows as being perfectly organized, and she credited Nádor for that. She emphasized that the Hungarian models behaved as proper young ladies. Oblath also stressed that dresses were perfectly executed, due obviously to Nádor's pre-war technical skills.

of 1968, the Czechs made serious attempts to re-connect with Western fashion, taking part in the Paris Prêt-à-Porter in the autumn 1965 and spring 1966, ‘the first socialist country to present its ready-to wear collection among three hundred other Western companies’.⁵⁰



Figure 114 and Figure 115: Czech outfits at Paris Prêt-a-Porter, *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1966

After a significant period of isolation, affected by poverty and lost traditions, the Czech contribution at the Paris Prêt-a-Porter was prepared with great effort, and it consisted exclusively of hand-made samples. Although dresses designed by the samplers' atelier at the clothing factory *Prostejov* had clean lines and were pretty and functional, they were not an industrial product but the result of the best craftsmanship. In spring 1966, *Žena a móda* emphasised that the lace evening dresses embellished with crystal beads were particularly

⁵⁰ Vitouskova, M. “Poprve v Parizi” (First Time in Paris), *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1966, N 1: 6-7. Organized by the official textile exporter *Centrotex*, the collection included dresses designed by the knowledgeable sample-makers at the leading state clothing company *Prostejov*, by the Prague branch of the organization *Clothing Services*, and by the central *Institute of Interiors and Dress Culture*, (*UBOK*), which was set up after the central textile institution *TDI* was dismantled in 1958.

praised at the Paris Prêt-à-Porter (Figures 114 & 115).⁵¹ As the Czechs were eager to prove themselves sartorially after years of politically imposed isolation, those dresses were executed by the elitist Prague branch of The *Clothing Services* that employed the most experienced tailors. While they tried to escape the ideological limitations of socialism, the Czechs still operated within the field of representational dress, which led them to present exclusive hand-made evening dresses within a prêt-a-porter event.⁵²

Socialist official fashion was, nevertheless, in its most natural habitat at the socialist fairs where both Western and domestic goods were on show. Carefully choreographed displays of beautiful clothes that were not available in the shops perfectly suited its ontological status. For the regimes, domestic fairs were an opportunity to compete with the West on their own territory, and to set the rules of the game. The catwalk at the *Leipzig International Fair* had been a meeting point with Western fashion since the mid-1950s.⁵³ As their race to catch up with the Western life-styles grew in speed, the socialist countries displayed more extravagant dresses, big hats, high heels and costume jewellery in Leipzig, year after year. Dutch, French and Swedish clothing companies arrived in Leipzig with trade on their minds, only to be confronted by the phenomenon of socialist official fashion that was not affected by the market. While the West was always represented by specific clothing companies, the socialist fashion presentations were mainly state-orchestrated until the beginning of the 1960s.

⁵¹ "Jeden den na Porte de Versailles" (A Day at Porte de Versailles), *Žena a móda*, 1966, N 7 : 12-13

⁵² The Czechs had no time to learn from their experiences in the West. The Soviet military intervention in 1968 and the period of the *Normalization* stopped the processes of liberation in all fields.

⁵³ "At the Leipzig Fair", *Ez a divat*, 1955; "Meeting in Leipzig", *Zhurnal mod*, Moscow, 1956, N 3: 38-39. The ambitious director of the East German *Fashion Institute*, Ellie Schmidt, even planned to invite Paris couturiers to present their collections on the Leipzig Fair's catwalk, and also planned to visit the Paris fashion shows with her team of designers. Schmidt shared the pre-war professional designer's experience with the Hungarian Vera Nador and the Czech Zdenka Fuchova. In a similar manner, Schmidt was instrumental in establishing the traditional, bourgeois-style aesthetics of official socialist dress in East Germany from the mid-1950s on.

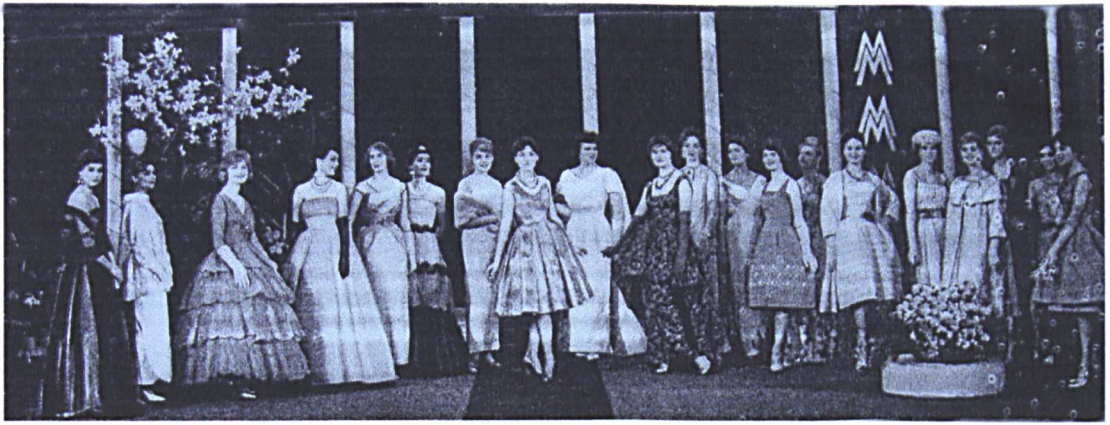


Figure 116: The finale of the international fashion show that included the socialist and Western fashion companies in Leipzig, *Fashion Journal*, Moscow, 1961, N 3

When, rarely, East and the West took part in the same fashion shows, the style of socialist dresses was carefully orchestrated in an attempt to defeat the Western clothes. In 1961, an international fashion show took place in Leipzig with the Soviet Union, East Germany, Poland, Hungary, Holland, Sweden and France. The finale of the Leipzig fashion show, engaging all the participants, clearly demonstrated the highest representational level of the socialist sartorial ambitions (Figure 116). Reporting on that Leipzig international fashion show, the Soviet *Zhurnal mod*, quoted praises to Soviet fashion from the East German daily *National Zeitung*:

“The House of Fashion has shown a lot of fabulous overcoats and ensembles, restricted in colour (mainly beige), and daily dresses made of wool with beautiful rose patterns. Spectators were especially charmed by the dress ‘Russian Song’ (bright red roses on the dark blue background), inspired by Russian folk motifs, and accompanied by a scarf with a fringe. Another dress with a pattern of golden-yellow roses on a green background was accompanied by a green overcoat. A black astrakhan coat with a grey mink collar, an astrakhan jacket with cuffs in white mink, and a sport overcoat in white lambskin demonstrated the abilities of the Soviet fur industry”.⁵⁴

Within the field of fashion, the competition with the West was mediated through the medium of socialist official fashion. But socialist fairs permitted real contact with Western modernity, knowing that the risk was small in the spatially controlled and time-limited surroundings. With their technologically up-to-date settings, which displayed attractive socialist goods, the international fairs organized in the socialist countries enabled

⁵⁴ *Zhurnal mod*, Moscow, 1961, N 3: 14

comparisons with Western modernity and its consumer goods, but only because the socialist companies competed with goods produced exclusively for a specific fair or destined for export. However, that trade policy was questioned in the Yugoslav media: “Why can we not find these wonderful clothes in our shops? We can only hope that, one day, our companies will export to their own country as well”.⁵⁵ In the relatively liberal Yugoslav society, such concerns were often raised. The Zagreb-based daily *Narodni list* challenged the fashion show by the clothing company *Nada Dimić* at the *Zagreb International Fair* in 1957.⁵⁶ What was the purpose of presenting house robes, morning dresses and swimwear in modern colours and attractive prints if they never arrived to the shops, asked the newspaper, and continued: “In fact, *Nada Dimić* does not manufacture these clothes but obviously produces just a couple of samples each year, with fashion shows in mind”.⁵⁷ In Hungary, media praise about the export success of the domestic industry, and its admiration for desirable and attractive goods at fair displays, was also been increasingly challenged. The Hungarian *Nők Lapja* quoted female visitors to the Budapest International Fair in 1968: “We really hope that the goods will appear in the shops and that we will not need to walk our legs off looking for them”.⁵⁸

The regimes knew only too well that they could not offer such exclusive dresses to every woman, but they needed their luxury, smoothness and elegance in their competition with the West. As an object, a socialist official dress was perceived as a piece of art rather than as a commercial product to be worn even by the end of the 1960s. The Budapest *Fair Chronicle* stated:

“The visitors are practically walking in the halls and gardens of world famous museums or renaissance palaces. As we enter the pavilion we glimpse the façade of the Louvre. In front of this shop dummies represent the cotton industry. To the sound of a gong the two dummies rise, a designer and a model step up to the platform. The former improvises in full sight of the public and dresses up the model by winding pieces of cloth around her body. When he is ready, he steps to the microphone and announces the manufacturer and the brand name of the cloth he has worked with. After a deep gong the light goes out and colour fashion films run on the screens ...One can find here a novelty as well: the mannequin dummies stand on 2,5 diameter discs.

⁵⁵ “Dvije sajamske medalje” (Two Fair Medals), *Svijet*, Zagreb, 1968, N 22, October 23: 6-7

⁵⁶ “Prices Do Matter” (Cijene su važne), *Narodni list*, Zagreb, 1957, April 17

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Nők Lapja*, Budapest, May 24, 1968

There are control tables hidden in the flower-beds surrounding the exhibition and the visitors can spin the mannequins by pushing the buttons. The mannequins take two slow turns to display the dress they wear. An illuminated sign indicates the producer company's name. At the location of last year's fashion show four paternosters work with a mannequin in each box. The elevator moves the dummies between the two floors".⁵⁹

Such extravagant displays obviously tried to divert the consumers' attention from the real problems with dress in socialism. The enthusiastic public applauded the fashion show, stated *Nők Lapja*, but also raised the question when those dresses would arrive in the shops. The answer was: "Soon".⁶⁰ At their own Fair, which attracted 1,400 participants from 36 nations to Budapest in 1968, the Hungarians could compete only with representational dress.

On the other hand, the interest in fashion grew, fuelled by visits to such fairs, easier access to Western fashion magazines, and also by the occasional visits of leading world fashion designers to the socialist capitals. After his visit to Moscow in 1959, Dior presented his latest collection in Prague in 1966 in the prestigious artistic venue *Lucerne* on three consecutive evenings. The Czech women's magazine *Vlasta* commented that *Christian Dior* produced everything that a modern woman needed, from clothes to perfumes, cosmetics and fashion accessories.⁶¹

But the most serious, officially orchestrated, direct meeting with Western fashion took place at the *International Fashion Festival*, held in Moscow in 1967. The festival was a unique event and was intended to demonstrate that the socialist system had caught up with the West in fashion. The Moscow Festival hosted fashion shows by top Paris houses Coco Chanel and Christian Dior with their latest collections (Figures 117 & 118). By this gesture, the Moscow Festival acknowledged changes in Western fashion, and allowed them on to the domestic catwalk. Organized by the Soviet *All-Union House of Fashion*, the Moscow Festival presented both western and east european collections, as official socialist fashion suddenly dared to compete with Western fashion trends, at least in a festival context. The Soviet *Zhurnal mod* announced in its editorial:

⁵⁹ Hungexpo – Fair Chronicle, July 1968

⁶⁰ *Nők Lapja*, May 24, 1968

⁶¹ Pribramská, M. "Christian Dior", *Vlasta*, Prague, 1966, N 48, November 30: 16

“Twenty-four countries told us about their current life through clothes and fashion. We visited the streets of Paris and Rome, Tokyo and New York, Stockholm and Oslo, Prague and Warsaw, Berlin and Bucharest, Madrid and London. We not only visited streets, but also the homes, the countryside, and parties”.⁶²



Figure 117: Chanel (left) and Figure 118 (right): Dior: International Fashion festival in Moscow in 1967, *Zhurnal mod*, Moscow, N 2, 1968

However, the centralized way of proposing and approving fashion trends within the socialist world never changed. In order to present their unified vision at the Moscow *International Fashion Festival*, the socialist countries had met beforehand at their own fashion congress in the Bulgarian city of Varna. The Soviet *Zhurnal mod* commented on their presentation on the catwalk of the Moscow *International Fashion Festival*:

“The SEV countries presented very integral collections, which reflected fashion trends for 1968. East Germany, Romania, Hungary, Poland, Soviet Union and

⁶² *Zhurnal mod*, Moscow, N 2, 1968 (Editorial)

Czechoslovakia presented collections using the principles laid down at the last meeting in Varna".⁶³

Following the competitive Soviet attitude towards the West, socialist official fashion was granted an exclusive task: to develop a new sartorial classic, which would fulfil the laws of classical beauty and harmony. Socialist fashion would then escape the constant change of decadent bourgeois fashion and become as eternal as classical art. To paraphrase Slavoj Žižek, the sartorial practice of socialist official fashion, presented at the fashion congresses and trade fairs, confirmed the capacity of official discourse to arrest and immobilize the fashionable historical moment - the formality of Western fashion in the mid-1950s - and to isolate that detail from its historical totality (Žižek 1989: 139).⁶⁴ Socialist official fashion maintained the stiffness of formal dress codes till the mid-1960s, almost a decade after Western fashion left them for more relaxed and youthful styles.

SOCIALIST OFFICIAL FASHION: A PRISONER OF TIME

Socialist official fashion relied on the principles of functionality in the style of clothes, and a scientific, rational approach to their production. Although its time started to move, socialist official fashion would exist to the end within a different time frame from conventional fashion time, which engaged in regular, and often radical, seasonal changes. In that context, the over-organized, rationalized and 'scientific' approach was consistent with socialist official fashion, precisely because it opposed the irrationality for which Western fashion was so much criticized. The centrally organized field of official fashion production was not only an economic phenomenon. Time was differently inscribed on socialist official fashion than on Western fashionable dress. Socialist official fashion was a prisoner of time. The slow and controlled socialist world could not deal with change because, as a system, it was disturbed by the discontinuity of time. When reporting changes in Western fashion styles, socialist women's magazines would produce nervous reports, which revealed the system's atavistic fear of change especially with regard to the concept of time, much more than to hems, cuts or colours:

⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁴ Žižek refers to the difference between the immobility of historical materialism in contrast to the dialectical practices of Marxist doxa.

“Fashion was never so moody as in the last couple of seasons. Several fashion trends appeared and disappeared in a short time, and women welcomed only the simple and elegant options that suited them. There were bits of such options in previous trends. Anyway, the latest fashion, sack-style dress, will hardly find any admirers among women, although fashion designers insist that a woman was never as elegant as in the sack-dress”.⁶⁵



Figure 119: “Moderna vreća” (Fashionable Sack), *Svijet*, Zagreb, N 9, September 1958

⁶⁵ “Moda je hirovita. Ona izmišlja koješta” (Fashion is moody. It keeps inventing nonsense), *Večernji vjesnik*, Zagreb, May 10, 1958

While this negative report was published in the Croatian daily *Večernji vjesnik, Svijet* carefully announced that women would wear 'reasonable' sack dresses in 1959 (Figure 119). However, even that cautious prognosis was expressed in the article with a vigilant title "Fashion Does Change but It Does Not Make Sudden Leaps"⁶⁶ This fear of discontinuity was applied to both past and future Western fashions. The fear arose because fashion was considered to be adventurous and frivolous, meaning that it could not be controlled. The field of socialist official fashion was permanently on the defensive against historical references, as they disturbed its ideological and organizational structure based on the nationalization of previously existing fashion establishments and the central control of all clothing and textile factories.

In contrast, there was no similar contradiction between structure and history in Western fashion. Attacks on the sack dress in the Western fashion press in the late 1950s acknowledged that it was designed by the same designers who had launched previous trends and would launch new ones again next season. Writing about French *haute couture*, Pierre Bourdieu observed that the field of fashion production had a structure that is the product of its earlier history and the principle of its subsequent history (Bourdieu 1993: 136). In contrast, the socialist concept of time attempted to negate both the pre-existing structure and the previous history of fashion. In "A Fashion Letter from Rome", the Hungarian *Nők Lapja* reported that:

"... the designers have brought back those old lines which might have been nice in their own time, although not very comfortable. But today they seem anachronistic...what is shown in the great salons is not wearable for the workingwoman...We hope that this unfavourable and not very tasteful fashion will be short-lived".⁶⁷

The presentation of fashion in the domestic fashion magazines was constantly burdened by an ontological anxiety about the fluidity of time, which was demonstrated by a pathological fear of change. Reporting on a fashion show that *Svijet* organized with Žuži Jelinek (Figure 120), the magazine announced that changes had been avoided in devising the fashion trends for the new season:

⁶⁶ "Moda se mijenja, ali ne pravi skokove" (Fashion Does Change but It Does Not Make Sudden Leaps), *Svijet*, Zagreb, September 1958, N 9

⁶⁷ "A Letter from Rome", *Nők Lapja*, Budapest, June 5, 1958

“As fashion for the coming spring and summer season is overwhelmed with enormous changes, the outfits at our fashion show were cleverly designed. The middle ground was applied between this year’s and last year’s fashion. All outfits are adjusted to our women and to our circumstances; if our ready to wear industry accepts them, we can claim in advance that our women will be dressed very nicely and tastefully.”⁶⁸

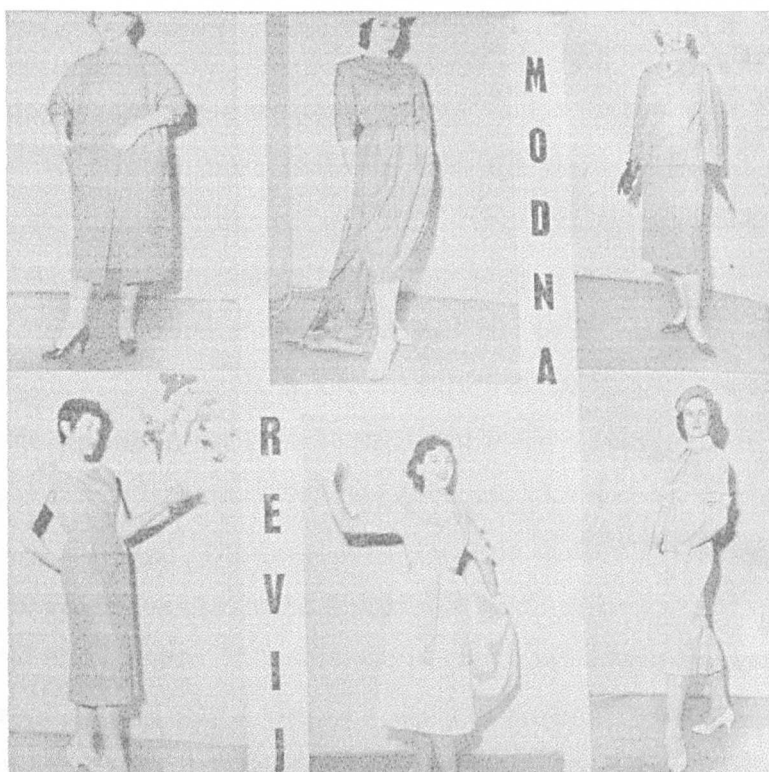


Figure 120: “Modna revija” (Fashion Show), *Svijet*, Zagreb, April 1958

The fear of change was embedded in the socialist system so deeply that it affected the presentation of fashion even in relatively liberal Yugoslavia. Rapid and uncontrolled fashion changes were resisted the most in the countries with completely centralized fashion production, which rejected the free market. The article “Fashion Travels” published in *Rabotnitsa* started with the statement that fashion was born in Moscow, within the *All-Union House of Fashion*.⁶⁹ The dictates about the length of our skirts and shape of our stiletto heels came from the street Kuznetski Most⁷⁰, the journal dramatically stated. But

⁶⁸ “Modna revija” (Fashion Show), *Svijet*, April 1, 1958

⁶⁹ “Puteshestvenie v mody” (Fashion Travels), *Rabotnitsa*, Moscow, 1966, N 1

⁷⁰ The *All-Union House of Fashion* was located in the central Moscow street Kuznetski Most, which traditionally had been Moscow’s smartest fashion address, accommodating luxurious shops in the pre-revolutionary times.

the artistic director of the Soviet *All-Union House of Fashion* L. F Turchanovskaiia immediately denied that her institution imposed changes and dictated rules. Fashion used to be careless and despotic, stated Turchanovskaiia, but the new 1966 season was going to be reasonable and non-dictatorial. She envisaged a practical, acceptable, simple, comfortable, but also more versatile fashion.⁷¹

When the opening towards the West started, fashion change became the most sensitive issue for the fashion magazines and books on fashion that began to offer ideologically appropriate explanations on the phenomenon of fashion. In 1962, the Soviet author Olga Rusanova rhetorically asked: “Do we need fashion?” in her *Thoughts on Beauty and Taste*. The positive answer caused more problems than the earlier rejection of fashion as a decadent and superfluous bourgeois practice. Rusanova insisted that Soviet fashion designers should educate the masses in beauty and taste. Armed with adequate knowledge, the socialist citizens would therefore learn to say ‘no’ to the latest fashion crazes which were bombarding them from the West. Preoccupied with uncontrollable change, Rusanova dedicated a whole section in her book to the latest fashion craze, which, she argued, had nothing to do with Soviet fashion, which was devoted to a noble task of the culture of dress (Rusanova 1962: 152-157).⁷² The concept of the latest fashion craze had to be addressed urgently because Soviet women were vulnerable to its siren call. Dreaming about the sartorial future of communism, Rusanova did not see any fashion changes on the horizon (ibid: 158-165). In contrast to the Western practice of imitating the latest fashion trends, communist fashion, would fulfil individual tastes developed on the basis of aesthetic appreciation. The Czech Zdenka Fuchsová expressed a similar negative opinion of the latest fashion craze. As an experienced pre-war fashion designer who regularly travelled to Paris to learn about new fashion trends, Fuchsová knowledgably called it ‘dernier cri’ in an interview in 1958. Arguing from her new influential position within the Czech central fashion institution, she commented that the latest fashion crazes did not work for Czech women. Fuchsová suggested that they knew how to be well and appropriately dressed in a

⁷¹ “Puteshestvenie v mody” (Fashion Travels), *Rabotnitsa*, 1966, N 1

⁷² In different Slavic languages, such as Russian, Czech and Croatian, the word for the latest fashion craze is ‘krik’, literally meaning ‘scream’. Rusanova’s section on the latest fashion craze is literally called “The Latest Fashion Scream! Scream! Scream!” Rusanova probably intended to address the hysterical nature of the fashion craze, but subconsciously also expressed her deep fears in front of change.

discreet, quiet way, and that they possessed inherent elegance that harmonized their appearance.⁷³

When in the late 1950s change was ideologically recognized as a legitimate part of fashion practices, socialist fashion time started to move both forwards and backwards. In order to accept contemporary fashion, socialism had first to recognize the past of Western fashion. Yet, socialist fashion time continued to tick according to its own slow pace. The phenomenon of socialist official fashion fed on an incredible range of quotations, which had not been stylistically interrelated nor corresponded to the latest Western fashion trends (Figure 121).



Figure 121: Soviet collection at the Budapest Socialist Dress Contest, *Zhurnal mod*, Moscow, 1955

⁷³ Mrkvickova, Z. (1958) "Thirty Years of a Clothing Artist", *Žena a móda*, Prague, N 7: 25

Those arbitrary quotations could equally have been indebted to antiquity, to proper lady-like ensembles, to crinoline-style long evening skirts, to folk motifs combined with Hollywood glamour, and to an image of a sophisticated society hostess dresses. The choice of quotations from Western fashion's historical reservoir was a significant element in the socialist return to fashion. The method resembled archaeological excavation, as the 'excavated' sartorial fragments were related neither to contemporary Western fashion nor to socialist everyday dress. They lagged behind the latest trends in the former case, and were distanced from reality in the latter. The dresses displayed at the socialist fashion congresses adhered to the synchronic, systematic level of fashion and neglected the temporal, diachronic level. The otherness of socialist official fashion only demonstrated its synchronic relationship with the ideological dictate of the day.

On a practical level, those erratic quotation choices demonstrated the confusion of the socialist fashion practitioners, who suddenly came into possession of Western fashion magazines and started to visit Paris fashion shows by the end of the 1950s.⁷⁴ Professionally, it was impossible for them to catch up with Western trends after the long gap during which socialist fashion had been politically isolated from Western fashion practices. The socialist fashion practitioners craved Western fashion, but the strange fragments that they happened to choose from its reservoir, led to a design of clothes that were traditional and pompous, precisely what the regimes wanted socialist official fashion to look like. Ideologically, the distorted use of the most disparate quotations in socialist official fashion perfectly suited the socialist slow flow of time. In that sense, the Iron Curtain not only divided the two opposing political, economic and social types of organizations. It was mainly a time barrier and as long as it existed the concept of time was geographically determined.

CONCLUSION

In the mid-1950s, the ideological turn brought about a change in official attitudes towards the phenomenon of fashion in the Soviet Union and the East Central European socialist countries. Against the backdrop of the Cold War, the encounter between socialist official

⁷⁴ All socialist fashion designers whom I interviewed, from the Russian Slava Zaitsev to the Hungarian Éva Mészáros and the Croatian Žuži Jelinek, stressed the subscriptions to the Western fashion magazines as the most important milestones in their work. The fashion practitioners from the Hungarian and Czech central fashion institutions also were allowed to attend fashion shows in the West from that time.

fashion and Western fashion brought a huge clash between the two systems of representations, capitalist and socialist. Forced into the competition in everyday life cultures in which they lagged far behind the West, the socialist regimes suddenly had to try to produce their own version of socialist fashion.

In the end, socialism failed to design and produce a new socialist dress which could have competed with the Western fashionable dress. As Western fashion thrived, conforming to Barthes' concept of the sleek and rich Myth on the Right, Khrushchev's sharp turn towards the original austerity and modesty of the Myth on the Left failed, both as an aesthetics and as an attempt to significantly improve the supply in shops and the quality of goods. Khrushchev struggled to impose a new modesty and clean modernist lines resembling the Constructivist purism and restraint. Unlike the Constructivists who had envisioned the new society against a background of technological backwardness, Khrushchev attempted to channel some of the latest technological developments into the design and production of everyday goods. But he did not succeed. Fashion in the Soviet Union and East Central European countries under its control, stayed indebted to Stalinist aesthetics and was blocked by the socialist ontological fear of unpredictable change.

The socialist regimes continued to rely on the concept of representational dress, presenting unique prototypes at domestic and international fairs and at their own fashion congresses. In this context, the representational prototype, introduced through the Bolshevik artistic dress of the 1920s and perfected by Stalinism within its mythical culture, continued to live on well into the 1960s in the socialist countries. The central fashion institutions, which had been in charge of controlling and taming change since the mid-1930s, kept their grip over socialist official fashion turning it into a prisoner of time.

CHAPTER 9: FROM RED TO BEIGE: A SET OF RULES

At the end of the 1950s, the East Central European socialist regimes engineered their new middle classes, while at the same time Khrushchev re-engineered the Soviet middle class. In each country, these new composite social groups were much larger and professionally diversified than the respective Nomenklatura circles. The new socialist middle classes owed their appearance in the public arena to their tacit deals with the regimes, and therefore were expected to follow the new official rules on dress practices and social rituals. In this chapter I will argue that the regimes wanted to dress their new middle classes in civilian clothes in order to catch up with the West, while at the same time they were determined to control the looks and behavioural patterns of those social groups. Women's magazines and etiquette books channelled the new policies on fashion and femininity, attempting to ensure compliance with the socialist rules of appropriateness.

I develop the concept of socialist good taste which was promoted in the mass media and meant for the new middle classes, and define it as the merger between the genuine socialist ideals of modesty and restraint, and the petit-bourgeois values of prettiness and conventional elegance. Analysing the aesthetic expressions of socialist official fashion, I also explore the contradictory relationship between the newly introduced concept of socialist good taste and the grandiose style of representational dress, which was introduced in the Stalinist Soviet Union and survived throughout socialist times.

DRESSING UP THE SOCIALIST MIDDLE CLASSES

The process of reconciliation between fashion and socialism through the medium of socialist official fashion started due to the life-style competition with the West during the Cold War. The other critical element in this reconciliation was the emergence of the socialist middle classes, which were engineered by the regimes out of a mixture of social arrivistes, members of the old bourgeoisie and petit-bourgeois strata. The new middle classes played two important roles. First, the regimes needed a loyal middle class to support the system once the revolution settled into quiet societal patterns. Second, the regimes required a large and relatively mobile social group which they could trust with public performances of middle class rituals, in order to compete with the West more convincingly. While the Nomenklatura were revelling in privilege and luxury, and secretly

enjoying expensive status statements such as traditional fur coats²⁵⁹, the new middle classes were encouraged to move into the socialist sartorial version of prettiness and cosiness. New dress codes had to be decided urgently, as the previous rejection of the Western fashion heritage left socialist official fashion with nowhere to borrow from. While that rejection was not important in earlier phases, when the regimes claimed they would establish new, and much better, socialist fashion, problems arose in the late 1950s. First, it became obvious that a genuinely new socialist fashion had not materialized and, second, the new composite socialist class needed to be dressed up.

New Class, New Rituals

The state-controlled media and the books on etiquette that started to appear offered a safe educational context in which inappropriate fashion desires could be disciplined and refined, as the new socialist middle class was composed from disparate social strata, mainly from those with only a limited knowledge of culture and of its diversified practices. The new socialist middle classes were established after rapid formal schooling and informal gathering of rituals and habits appropriate to their new status. Once the private vices of the *Nomenklatura* became public virtues, rules on appropriate style were disseminated so that every member of the new socialist middle class could master them. Each area and each situation was covered: travel, work, home, beach, dancing, ball, theatre premiere, political meeting, the First of May Parade, birthday parties, dinner, lunch, weddings, funerals, walks in the park, and picnics. Some rituals were old, some were new, but a new consensus on proper dresses, the right colours and suitable accessories, had to be reached about all of them.

The article “Making a Visit, at the Theatre, at the Concert”, published in *Zhurnal mod* in 1958, reflected the regimes’ urge to dress up their newly installed middle classes in civilian clothes (Figure 122). The strong pedagogical content demonstrated that the new socialist middle class was composed mainly from people with a rather restricted knowledge of refined sartorial and everyday culture rituals.

²⁵⁹ For the *Nomenklatura* dress codes, I refer to my earlier description of dresses of Mrs Khrushcheva, Mrs Mikoyan and Mrs Kozlova during their soiree with Mrs Nixon in Moscow in 1959. For an overview of the *Nomenklatura*’s public modesty and secrete luxuries, see also: Voslensky 1984.

“We have repeatedly written that the choice of clothes should follow the basic rule: time of day and particular circumstances. During the day, for example, it is not appropriate to pay visits or receive guests in a smart evening dress. On that occasion, a strictly elegant day dress is appropriate: of short length, high or just slightly open neckline, with short or long sleeves.... Such a dress is not served by loads of jewellery, it is better to restrict oneself to one piece: a brooch, a hairpin or a bracelet. Shoes, hats and gloves should be matched with such a day dress. Of course, everything should be coordinated according to the colour. Let us repeat: a dress that you wear during the working day should be modest and restrained in appearance. Matinees, parties at 1pm, cocktails and ‘a la furshet’ parties from 5 till 8 pm, require a smarter day dress and a little elegant hat, which you are not supposed to take off. Evening dress, made from an expressive and decorative fabric that is not worn during the day, is necessary for grand receptions, theatre premieres and gala concerts, especially if they happen after 8pm. Although not necessary, the evening dress is characterized by a lower neckline, short sleeves and a long skirt. Silk or lacy gloves can be added to such a dress; their length depends on the length of the sleeves: the shorter the sleeve, the longer the gloves, and the other way round. A small elegant handbag accompanies eveningwear. Light open shoes with high heels, or medium heels for older women, serve those occasions; shoes can be made from silk, brocade, or from golden or silver leather. Day shoes are not appropriate for eveningwear. Eveningwear may be embellished with jewellery. Here, a sense of measure is welcome, as always”.²⁶⁰

As the official fashion publication, through which the system’s policies on fashion were channelled, *Zhurnal mod* was quite clear about the regime’s intentions in its editorial note “Clothes for Going Out and Formal Occasions”, which preceded the article itself. The magazine exploited the usual tactic of the socialist press in promoting new state policies: readers’ letters. Claiming that their editorial team had received a number of letters with queries about the proper way to dress for going out and for formal purposes, *Zhurnal mod* suggested “a set of rules that have been established long ago, and are accepted almost everywhere”. They ended by stressing: “We recommend our readers to follow them”.²⁶¹ The editorial also drew a precise profile of the strata which needed to dress up:

²⁶⁰ A. Maskulii “Making a Visit, at the Theatre, at the Concert”, *Zhurnal mod*, Moscow, 1958, N 3: 34-35

²⁶¹ *ibid.*



Figure 122: “Making a Visit, at the Theatre, at the Concert”, *Zhurnal mod*, Moscow, 1958, N 3

“Naturally, these questions interest our readers but, in a broader sense, they also appeal to certain groups of the Soviet people who attend official and government events on public holidays, who meet foreign visitors at international competitions and academic congresses, who go to parties at embassies and consulates, and attend theatre premieres, and, especially, family celebrations - weddings, birthday dinners and high-school graduation parties”.²⁶²

In fact, this offered a very good description of an ideal member of the new socialist middle class and a series of rituals that he or she could get involved in. This article, and numerous similar articles that appeared in socialist women’s magazines in the Soviet Union and East Central European socialist countries during the same period, emphasized the institution of everyday culture for the middle classes that the respective regimes had created in order to legitimate and support the system.

²⁶² *ibid.* An ‘a la furshet’ party, obviously derived from the French word ‘fourchette’, table fork, is a buffet party. A. Maskulii explained in a foot-note the concepts of both ‘cocktail’ and ‘a la furshet’ party: “Cocktail is an event that takes place between 5 and 8 pm, at which tea, wine, juices, pastries, and sweets are served. The name comes from the English word meaning mixture of drinks. ‘A la furshet’ party is a gathering at which people do not eat seating at the table, but standing. Appetizers are arranged at the table, and guests serve themselves”.

Tacit Deals between the Regimes and the New Middle Classes

Observing political and social changes in the socialist countries in the 1960s, Ken Jowitt argued that the relationship between regime and society was changing from domination through terror to domination informed by symbolic manipulation (Jowitt 1992: 99-100). To pursue this objective the regimes created a new middle class that deserved ideological and organizational recognition (ibid: 102). In the 1960s its members spread through different levels of society, both professionally and hierarchically. Fashion had been considered a dangerous bourgeois practice until the late 1950s when the politically informed repositioning of social classes began to take place. In the 1960s, however, the regimes no longer needed support for the revolution. Socialist official fashion was introduced at that point as one means, among others, used to depoliticize the population.

Analyzing the birth of socialist official fashion in the late 1950s and 1960s, a series of tacit deals can be traced between the respective socialist regimes and their nascent middle classes, through which consumption and fashion practices were legitimized.²⁶³ In the Soviet Union, Khrushchev inherited Stalin's middle classes, but tried to reshape them to fit into his vision of the new modern society. In Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, on the other hand, pre-war bourgeois and petit bourgeois strata contributed to the identity of the new socialist middle class, together with the new socialist arrivistes, who mainly occupied the leading political and cultural positions. Each of those disparate constituents justified in its distinctive way the socialist middle class as a new compact social group. The humble origins of the arrivistes provided them with credibility, while the previous bourgeoisie and petit-bourgeoisie contributed their smooth rituals and good manners. But the values of the former bourgeois classes were distorted due to the processes of deculturation and reculturation that they had endured until the 1960s. Their dress codes had become dated and displaced because the field of their fashion production had been officially abolished and replaced by the centrally planned production of clothes. Aesthetically, socialist official fashion presented at the socialist fashion congresses and at the trade-fairs was a result of those distorted bourgeois dress codes.

²⁶³ In Hungary, the standard of living improved significantly. Consumption rose by 30 % between 1968 and 1975, and the middle class grew from 15 % of the population to 24 % in the same period (Kovrig 1979). Starting in the 1950s, the process of forming the new middle class was strong in Yugoslavia, especially in Croatia. In the subsequent forty years the agricultural population in Croatia fell from two thirds of the total population to about one third.

An essential element of the deals which were struck between the regimes and their socialist middle classes was that freedom in consumer practices should not bring the nature of political rule into question.²⁶⁴ The regimes needed a loyal middle class that would mimic the advanced and sophisticated everyday rituals of their Western counterparts, without questioning the socialist system.

In that sense, the state had a crucial role in the production and dissemination of the new socialist middle class culture, its imagery and its etiquette, which became an important part of the cultured lifestyle. In his book 'To Moscow and Beyond', the American newspaper correspondent H.E. Salisbury recalled the pleasant small talk he exchanged with the Soviet trade minister Anastas Mikoyan at a late 1950s diplomatic party. On receiving compliments about the fine appearance of the Moscow citizenry by some Swedish businessmen, Mikoyan was very pleased:

“ ‘It’s true. Our people do look much better. Their clothing has improved. In fact there are times when you can’t tell them from Americans’. He turned to me. ‘Isn’t that true, Mr Salisbury?’ I was happy to support Mr Mikoyan. ‘Yes’, he said. ‘Today when you see them on the streets you can’t always tell the Russians from the Americans, especially in the summer’”. (Salisbury 1960: 48)

It seemed that the Soviet middle classes were catching up with the West in their appearance, at least on the smart streets of the capital. In contrast to the secretive *Nomenklatura* dress codes, the middle class’ dress sense was paraded in public, and their smart looks suggested that they were getting better at sophisticated rituals. The new social hierarchy was opened up to all those with the necessary educational qualifications. While the new socialist middle classes successfully acquired professional skills through rapid schooling, they struggled to acquire other middle class attributes and knowledge, from good manners to classy taste in clothes or home decorating. In her book *On the Culture of Dress*, L. Efremova offered advice on appropriate dress for the theatre, concerts, work,

²⁶⁴ Elemér Hankiss called the unofficial deal between the ruling elite and the Hungarian majority ‘*Pax Kadariensis*’, situating it in the late 1960s and 1970s (Hankiss 1990). The Kádár regime’s recognition of new needs like consumption was colloquially called *goulash* socialism. But the Czech middle class betrayed that unofficial deal in 1968, by trying to obtain more political freedoms during the Prague Spring. So their deal was revoked, and it was only in the early 1970s during the period of Normalization that a deal was re-negotiated in Czechoslovakia. De-politicization after the *Prague Spring* expressed itself through an emphasis on consumption, which rose by 36,5% between 1970-1978. In Yugoslavia, the consumerist escapism was supported by loans from the West, and by open borders towards Western countries.

home, dance, walking and the beach (Efremova 1960: 10-37). Varying in tone between gentle recommendations and strong disapproval, Efremova advised her unenlightened readers that attention to detail was essential, but disapproved of women wearing taffeta and moiré eveningwear at the workplace. Luckily, Efremova wrote, fashion had moved on from the extravagant and difficult styles of the 1930s and 1940s towards more functional and easy to wear shapes. The drawings demonstrated smart dresses and ensembles, which perfectly suited urbanized and sophisticated rituals.

A whole new culture was being presented in the media. Recipes for exotic cocktails accompanied smart new dresses in fashion magazines, while advertising started to promote aspirational products that accompanied a modern lifestyle. Adverts were filled with fast cars, TV sets, stream-lined furniture, curtains with fuzzy abstract prints, shoes with high heels and casual urban outfits. Women wore eveningwear made of brocade and drank cocktails in dresses called Martini, Cortina, Margarita and Symphony in Gold (Figures 123 & 124).



Figure 123: “Meeting at the Leipzig Fair” (dresses called ‘Martini’, ‘Cortina’, Margarita’, ‘Symphony in Gold’), *Zhurnal mod*, Moscow, 1956, N 3; Figure 124: Advertisement for the *Osijek Silk Factory*, *Svijet*, Zagreb, N 11, 1957

The fact that those rituals, and the dresses that accompanied them, belonged to bourgeois culture, no longer worried the regimes. Acting as a cultural agent for the state, the owner of the Croatian private fashion salon, Žuži Jelinek, was enraged to find large quantities of an

ugly orange wool fabric in the state textile company she was consulting on the patterns, colours and the quality of their products. In her new educational role of enlightening the state-appointed managers, and eager in her mission to bring a dash of style to the masses, Žuži Jelinek acted swiftly:

“I advised them not to produce any more of that horrible colour... If a fabric in that ugly orange colour was not to be produced at all, customers would be forced to choose a nice beige colour and would slowly get accustomed to it. After some time, the customers will refine their taste and they would themselves be shocked by the idea that they could have previously worn something that ugly”. (Jelinek 1961: 139)

The Importance of Proper Advice

Little was left out in socialist magazines and etiquette books aimed at the new middle classes. A dress had to be appropriate but pretty; functional but not extravagant; feminine but not vulgar (see, for example, Figures 125 and 126).

The Hungarian etiquette book *How Should We Behave* clearly distinguished between good and bad taste through practical advice. Members of the new socialist middle class were reminded of even the most trivial details:

“However harmoniously and well combined the elements of dress, if a button is missing, or a stain spoils the beauty of a dress, we could hardly say that this woman is pretty”.²⁶⁵

Another Hungarian good manners manual smoothly combined three elements: good taste, modesty and patriotism:

“Hungarian women and girls are famous for their fine clothing all around the world... They are women who are real artists in variety. Sometimes they work miracles with a skirt that is too wide or tight at the waist, and with one or two pullovers, or a scarf. They say: if money is scarce, add an idea!” (Réczey et al. 1960: 252)

²⁶⁵ Burget and Kovácsvölgi 1959 (quoted in: Oblath 2000: 45)



Figure 125: Figure 126: Cover, *Ez a divat*, Budapest, March 1957 (left) & October 1959 (right).

The first socialist etiquette book appeared in Yugoslavia in 1963.²⁶⁶ It advocated a similar set of values: tidiness, appropriateness and a modest style in dress. There was a clear division between clothes for work, home and going out. The last category was further divided into morning, afternoon and evening clothes. Severe rules of propriety applied even to evening dress. It was noted that an evening dress could be made from taffeta, brocade, lace, chiffon, organza, and accompanied by fur, jewellery, gloves and a special pair of shoes. But at the same time it was suggested that “at certain point, the imagination should be restrained” (Zelmanovic 1963: 52), either because of financial reasons or out of pure self-control.

The socialist etiquette books that had appeared in the 1960s could be better compared with the Western manuals on good manners from the mid-19th century than to the Western etiquette books from the late 1950s. Just as the nineteenth century manuals had

²⁶⁶ In the following 22 years, the Yugoslav etiquette book *The Illustrated Etiquette* came out altogether in seven editions, each of them printed in 15,000 copies, which was considered as the best selling publishing story. The author Djordje Zelmanovic claimed in the seventh edition: “The book expressed huge social changes, as the urban population doubled in Yugoslavia in those two decades: from 2,1 to 4 millions and many of its members were in desperate need to refine their manners” (Zelmanovic: 1985: 6-7). In my interview with Mr. Zelmanovic (Zagreb, February 24, 2001), he also remarked that the publisher had put enormous pressure on him to write that manual in the first place, presenting him with an already existing collection of French, English and German etiquette books, and agreeing to pay him a high fee for writing it.

accompanied the rise to power of the new middle classes²⁶⁷, the socialist 1960s manuals sanctified the introduction of a whole new social class, and the invention of social rituals that would be suitable for it. In contrast, Western 1950s etiquette books legitimated the processes of social adjustment as those societies were returning to conventional societal patterns following the end of World War Two²⁶⁸. However, the socialist civilizing processes did not arise from a process of democratization or from the openness of society, but rather reflected a reconfiguration of state power over the individual. The socialist regimes recognized that new desires were arising, of which fashion and dress were among the most important. Still, fashion had to subject itself to the rules of appropriateness, and it was only then that fashion was politically recognized. As Pierre Bourdieu stated, “concessions of *politeness* always contain *political* concessions” (Bourdieu 1977: 95).

From 1960 onward, fashion was politically legitimated in the form of rational practice, and entered the body of approved cultural capital.²⁶⁹ However, the new socialist middle class had neither the money nor the repository of distinctive symbolic goods at its disposal on which to build its own cultural capital. From the time when bourgeois cultural practices became politically discredited, socialism failed to develop its own hierarchy of cultural tastes. This new and huge social group entered the socialist social scene together with industrialization and urbanization, but it was promoted to the status of the new socialist middle class only through a political decision. Under the circumstances, it could not engage itself in time consuming and costly practices of refining its own cultural consumption. Tacit deals with respective leaderships in each of the socialist countries not only gave this new socialist class a visibility but also provided it with ready-made petit-bourgeois cultural forms which eventually resulted in the new socialist official taste, which combined the socialist values of modesty, asexuality and moderation with the degraded, impoverished and old-fashioned *petit bourgeois* codes.

BACK TO FEMININITY: SOCIALIST LADIES WEAR HATS AND GLOVES

At the end of the 1950s, the image of a proper lady that appeared in socialist women's magazines in a traditional ensemble and a hat was not really about clothes. It was a visual

²⁶⁷ See Elias (2000) and Perrot (1994: 87-89).

²⁶⁸ Women's independence had to be put under control and channelled into socially acceptable rituals such as embellishing the home, organizing parties and cooking sophisticated meals.

²⁶⁹ For an overview of the concept of 'cultural capital', see: Bourdieu (1986).

testament to the official reconceptualization of gender (Figure 105). The new approval of the traditional female ideal reflected the socialist failure to engineer a new socialist woman, which became even more obvious during the socialist opening to the West with its sophisticated rituals of femininity. The column “School for Clothes” in the Hungarian women’s magazine *Nők Lapja* demonstrated the process through which proletarian sartorial asceticism was carefully recoded into a controlled version of femininity:

“Thus, do not dress in a scandalously different way from what is usual or acceptable in our society. The astonished glances will hardly ever express appreciation. Of course, don’t go from one extreme to the other. A grey uniform is nothing to be proud of either; it marks a lack of good mood. A woman should start wearing a hat if it is well shaped, or put on a new dress if it makes her pretty and yet she can remain tasteful.”²⁷⁰

The new shift in the state formation of gender was reflected in the other socialist countries. Reporting from the Cannes Film Festival in *Žena a móda*, a Czech male reporter was charmed by the beauty and grooming of French women. After that, he looked at Czech women from a new perspective:

“It has occurred to me many times that over the past ten years we have greatly wronged our women. A remarkable dress and perfect harmony of colour was for us eccentric and quite platonic were the occasional remarks and calls: let us give our women all that is the best and the nicest because they deserve it!”²⁷¹

Initially, the creation of the new woman was part of a whole project of mastering nature, and fashion and femininity had been rejected as they opposed the nature of the system itself. But at the beginning of the 1960s, even the political activist officially left her ascetic style:

“The opinion that the politically engaged woman-worker does not need to take care of her dress-style is wrong. On the contrary, her appearance will be more appropriate if she is dressed tastefully but simply. A lot of people take an interest in her looks, many women have her as a role model and she has to give an example by the way she dresses”. (Jelinek 1961: 115)

²⁷⁰ “School for Clothing”, lesson N 39, *Nők Lapja*, Budapest, January 2, 1958

²⁷¹ Vesely, L. “Festivalová pohlednice” (Festival Postcard), *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1956, N 8: 24

So, what was the most appropriate style for her? It was a simple but elegant jacket and skirt made out of a good quality fabric in colder months, or a cotton *chemise dress* in the summer, or an ensemble consisting of a little blouse with three-quarter sleeves combined with a pleated skirt. A little feminine hat, short white gloves, a string of pearls or a brooch could be added in socially more demanding situations, such as at official party meetings, formal parties, cocktails, important anniversaries and The First of May Parades (ibid). In the late 1950s and early 1960s, when the back-to-femininity-campaign was at its fiercest stage in the Soviet Union, women could be even fined for wearing trousers. Khrushchev's mouthpiece on women's issues, the weekly *Ogonek* advocated that only slender, tall and young women should wear trousers, preferably at home.²⁷² In his 1962 travel book *House without a Roof: Russia After 43 Years of Revolution*, Marcel Hindus also reported that women struggled to wear trousers and shorts but were prevented from doing so, except at home (Hindus 1962: 377-78).

When sexual difference was reintroduced without challenging the conventions of the traditional gender division, socialist women lost their important place inside the male world, which was considered to be the only authentic one. They had to divide themselves between that world and the traditional women's world, from motherhood to dressing up.



Figure 127: "Appointment at the National Theatre at 7 pm", *Nők lapja*, Budapest, July 1958

²⁷² *Ogonek*, Moscow, March 4, 1962, N 10: 31

A coquettish young woman in a pretty dress chatting on the telephone in the photo-reportage *Appointment at the National Theatre at 7 pm*, published in the Hungarian *Nők lapja* perfectly embodied a new female ideal (Figure 127).²⁷³ The fashion story had a precise script in eight pictures about a young lady preparing for a date and choosing appropriate clothes to suit the occasion. She was feminine, elegant and happy to please the man in her life. Her thoughts were 'frivolous', evolving around dancing, strolling through the park and sipping coffee in a little café. Her billowing skirts were accompanied by hats, gloves, satin bows, tiny handbags and jewellery. Moreover, all those fabulous clothes were produced by the central fashion institution *RTV*.

"1: 'At seven o'clock?... Yes, I will be there...'; 2: 'Sure I will be there, but what should I wear?... Big trouble... But today I have the opportunity to put on not just my own clothes but also the dresses by the Design Company for The Garment Industry. Well...'; 3: If we do not go anywhere special, just for a little walk or for a coffee in a small café, I may put on this pink-and-purple-polka-dot suit with this tiny blouse. But... 4: "...if we are going for a stroll at Margit Island, I'd better dress in this silk afternoon dress with a wrap... 5: "...although for that occasion a printed nylon dress with a tiny waist and a huge skirt might fit better, as it is great for dancing...; 6: "Or should I rather choose this black and white silk-like dress with white ornaments. It's quite discreet accompanied with white gloves; he does not like me dressing too loud... 7:...again, for the same reason, he would be glad to see me in this skirt with a transparent blouse. What do you think about it?; 8: So, what do we think? Each outfit is very nice, but to give one more idea: how about putting on the very same nice white skirt and silk blouse in which we have seen you at the telephone? Anyway, have a nice evening".²⁷⁴

Paper patterns for home dressmakers were a regular feature in women's media, which also published columns on appropriate dress and proper behaviour. Socialist women's magazines ran regular columns, like "The ABC of Good Manners", "Fashion Lexicon", or "A Pocket History of Fashion" (*Svijet*), "School for Clothing" (*Nők Lapja*), "Women, this is for you" (*Ogonek*), and their educational texts insisted that only simplicity is elegant and beautiful. In a manner that combined the patronizing style of Western women's media with the socialist educational approach, not only was the new socialist good taste promoted, but

²⁷³ "Appointment at 7 pm", *Nők lapja*, Budapest, July 24, 1958

²⁷⁴ *ibid.*

so was the old petit-bourgeois concept of femininity as well. The repetition had an enormous role in imposing the newly approved feminine image. The new rules were simple and were preached by socialist women's magazines ad nauseam: shoes and handbags should match, more than three *colours* should never be used in an outfit, be pretty but do not over-dress. A new female identity was produced by such repetitions.

Hats had been perceived as a short cut to lady-like traditional femininity, and at the end of the 1950s socialist women's magazines promoted them. Information on the history of women's hats was published, dealing with shapes and fabrics of historical styles.²⁷⁵ Magazines advised on the proper style of hat for different types of face.²⁷⁶ At the same time new styles of appropriate hats were publicized in women's media and picture magazines.²⁷⁷ Hats were supposed to be accompanied by the right gloves and handbags, and faults in a proper lady-like style were criticized (Figures 128; 129; 131 & 132).²⁷⁸



Figure 128 & Figure 129: Cover, *Modeli sezona*, Moscow, N 1, 1961 & *Svijet*, Zagreb, N 2, February 1957

²⁷⁵ “Ženski šeširi” (Female Hats), column Modni leksikon (Fashion Lexicon), *Svijet*, Zagreb, N 22, November 15, 1964: 14

²⁷⁶ “Does this hat suit you?”, *Rabotnitsa*, Moscow, December 1957, N 12: 30

²⁷⁷ *Kvety*, Prague, August 22, 1957: N 34: 23; *Kvety*, Prague, December 26, 1957, N 52: 23; *Zhurnal mod*, Moscow, Winter 1958/59: 36; *Svijet*, Zagreb, October 15, 1964, N 20: 39

²⁷⁸ *Svijet*, Zagreb, September 15, 1964, N 18: 8-9

Analysing the Soviet-type of the Newspeak, Françoise Thom stated:

“Repetition here is more than a pedagogic process. Stylistically, it incarnates the invincible clarity and supreme authority of the idea”. (Thom 1989: 85)

The education of women in appropriate fashion and grooming started early. In 1960, the Soviet advice book *To you, Girls* treated fashion in the context of classical Russian literature, and reminded its young female readers that their role models should be Natasha Rostova and Anna Karenina:

“The first ball! An unforgettable array of memories for the rest of your life! Remember Natasha Rostova! There is a moment in each girl’s life in which she puts on the first evening dress with the same palpitation like Natasha” (Sudakevich 1960: 219).

While preparing a dress for their high school graduation ball, girls longed for advice on colours, cuts and types of fabric. Informed by the aesthetics of modest socialist good taste, such advice was offered in the manual, but girls were at the same time reminded that Anna Karenina had never attracted attention with her clothes. Her ball gowns were just a frame for her beauty and personality to shine through. Soviet girls should follow that example: “Do not try to attract attention with your dress. Be interesting and refined yourself” (ibid.). Ideologically, the new Soviet ritual of a high school ball practiced by young socialist girls had little to do with contemporary Western fashion trends. Socialist ball dresses were supposed to be inspired by luxurious and ultra feminine ball gowns of the Russian tragic and aristocratic literary heroines.

By contrast, by the end of the 1950s, Western fashion had already abandoned post-war traditional femininity²⁷⁹, not just to change it into a series of youthful styles, but also to challenge the gender roles of both women and men.

²⁷⁹ In February 1960, the Croatian picture magazine *Globus* still had a group of models from the current *Fashion Trade Fair* wearing full-skirted dresses on its cover. Jacques Griffe had already designed a sack dress in 1958, and such, less structured, lines became the prevailing look of the next decade.



Figure 130: Cover, *Globus*, Zagreb, February, 1960

At the end of the 1950s and throughout the 1960s socialist women were relentlessly educated into “proper ladies” in a huge politically dictated campaign.²⁸⁰ As the socialist civilization process was channelled through dress and good manners, women were the most important recipients of the new approved taste (see, for example, Figure 130).

²⁸⁰ In contrast, the Western female ideal had been already transformed from a mature into a much younger version of woman, only to become an androgynous child-like creature at the end of the 1960s.

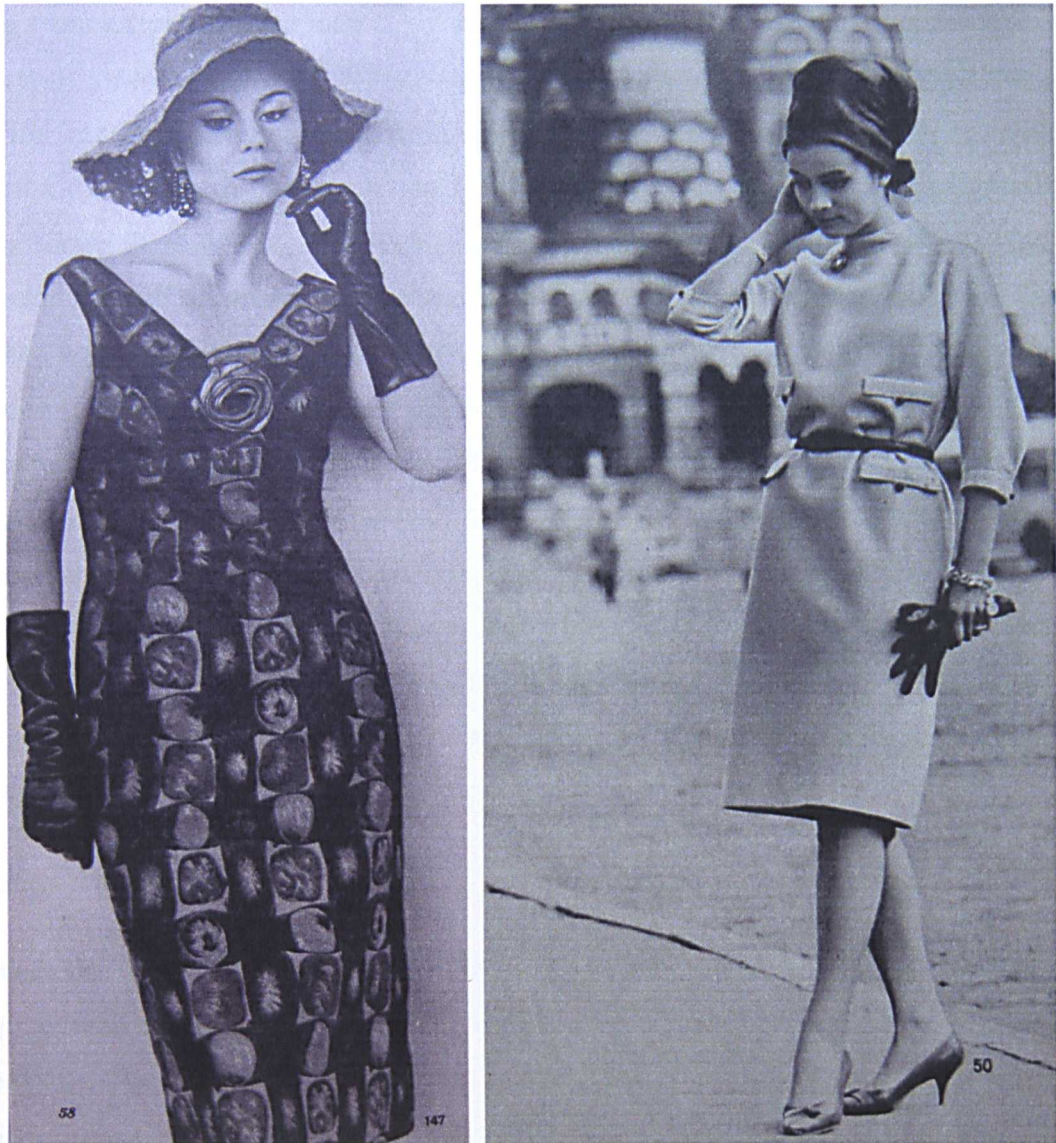


Figure 131 & Figure 132: *Moda stran socializma*, Moscow, 1965 Czech model (left) and Hungarian model (right)

GRANDIOSE OR MODEST: TWO AESTHETICS OF SOCIALIST OFFICIAL TASTE

Throughout the socialist period the concept of taste went through a series of changes, which were informed by ideological shifts inside the socialist master narrative. On a practical level, genuine socialist dress never materialized, but its ascetic aesthetics would not have been suitable for the new socialist middle classes. The new aesthetics of their dress had to be decided upon fast, promoted through the media, and applied in everyday life. Socialism was forced at that time to borrow its official dress style from the reservoir of bourgeois culture. Paradoxically, the official socialist discourse appropriated petit bourgeois style, which had previously been strongly rejected. In fact, petit bourgeois style,

ranging from kitsch to 'good taste'²⁸¹, had not been eradicated with the communist seizure of power. It survived quietly, in the ideologically less controlled field of everyday life.

By the late 1950s, socialism suddenly needed two of its aesthetic expressions: pseudo-classical kitsch and petit-bourgeois 'good taste'. At that point socialist official taste shifted to incorporate these two styles into its own fashion practices, creating two new stylistic forms, which I call grandiose pseudo-classicism and socialist good taste. While the former promoted an out-dated concept of luxury, the latter developed out of the socialist concept of modesty. There was a continuous dialectic relationship between the concepts of luxury and modesty in official sartorial codes. Both concepts demonstrated the predilection for synchronicity rather than diachrony in socialist official fashion. Although the concept of modesty was officially promoted, and luxury was supposed to be banished together with Stalinism, the outdated concept of luxury was never abandoned. In each of the respective countries, the concepts of modesty and luxury were promoted through different sets of women's magazines, which were meant both for different audiences and served different needs of the regimes.

Grandiose pseudo-classical taste

The aesthetics of pseudo-classical taste informed the style of socialist official fashion in its highly representational version, such as collections presented at fashion congresses between socialist countries, or exclusive outfits on the catwalks of domestic and international trade-fairs. For representational purposes, the socialist regimes amplified bourgeois dress codes into the grandiose pseudo-classical style. The concept of luxury in socialist official fashion relied on the formal and socially rigid dress codes of mid-1950s Western fashions. Once contemporary Western fashion began to move towards youthful, relaxed and unpretentious styles, socialist luxury became increasingly more and more outdated. Such an obsolete concept of luxury in representational socialist dress was informed by decades of political isolationism and cultural autarky, and eventually developed into a self-conscious, carefully preserved choice.

²⁸¹ Each definition of good taste is arbitrary. I refer throughout the text to petit-bourgeois good taste, which I consider to be ordinary, banal, anonymous, and scared of any transgression.



Figure 133: Suits (detail), *Modeli sezona*, Moscow, Autumn/Winter 1955/56

The central fashion institutions had been engaged in perpetuating grandiose pseudo-classical style from the mid-1930s with the founding of the *Moscow House of Fashion* (Figure 133). Aesthetically, the Stalinist concept of totalitarian glamour still informed the style of dresses not only in *Modeli sezona*, which was founded in the mid-1930s, but also the aesthetics of dresses published in the Hungarian *Ez a divat* and the Czech *Žena a móda* during the 1950s and 1960s.

Closer to the Soviet reality, *Rabotnitsa* quietly admitted that those dresses had nothing to do with the shoddy clothes sold in the shops. While in the mid-1960s, the magazine

dutifully interviewed the designers from the *All-Union House of Fashion* on new trends²⁸², it also discreetly acknowledged that the style and quality of ready-made clothes were still very poor. Advising on an appropriate style for dress at home, the designer-correspondent E. Semenova shared with her readers a story about how her clever young neighbour bought a ready-made dress, and, being very unhappy with its bad quality and standardized style, embellished the dress herself.²⁸³

A similar division between the elitist fashion magazines and the mass women's press existed in other socialist countries. The elitist *Ez a divat* continuously published page after page of smart dresses, which were attributed to the *RTV* design team. The gap between a superior *RTV* dress and a mass produced dress of bad quality was so huge that dresses in *Ez a divat* were not even presented as successes of the domestic clothing industry. The Ministry of Light Industry controlled both the elitist representation provided by the *RTV* and the uniform mass-production of bad quality. Eight fashion shows that were held daily on the catwalk of the Ministry of Light Industry's theatre during the 1958 Budapest International Fair, presented dresses which totally differed in style and quality from the clothes produced by the domestic clothing industry. While the mass women's magazine *Nők lapja* started to raise questions about why those beautiful dresses never reached the shops, their parade continued in the elitist fashion publications undisturbed. The elitist approach of the Hungarian *RTV* perfectly fulfilled the regime's representational needs, either through a smart dress materialized on the domestic and foreign catwalks or in the elitist fashion magazines, such as *Ez a divat* and *Pesti Divat* (Figures 134 & 135). The latter journal was started by the Hungarian central fashion institution in 1960, to present its own production, smart dresses from other socialist central fashion institutions, as well as the contemporary Western fashion trends.²⁸⁴

²⁸² The representatives of the *All-Union House of Fashion* would usually stress that fashion was not about to change in the new season (see my earlier quotations: "Our Interview", *Rabotnitsa*, Moscow, 1966, N 1: 29; "Puteshestvenie v mody" (Fashion Travels), *Rabotnitsa*, 1966, N 1

²⁸³ Semenova, E. "How to Dress at Home", *Rabotnitsa*, Moscow, August 1963

²⁸⁴ *Pesti Divat* was a quarterly publication of the Hungarian central fashion institution *RTV* with a small circulation of a couple of thousand copies.



Figure 134 Cover, *Ez a diva*, Budapest, November 1959 & Figure 135: Hungarian outfit, presented at the Socialist Fashion Congress held in Prague, *Ez a diva*, Budapest, July 1959

The regime certainly needed the *RTV* smart dress in its competition with Western fashion, because mass-produced dress still did not rise to the high, suddenly officially preferred, smartness and quality. But those grandiose dresses served even more the ruling bureaucracies at home, as they implied that changes within the field of fashion production were not needed. The political relaxation towards the phenomenon of fashion did not mean that the regimes wanted, or could possibly risk, changes in existing practices, as those changes would bring their rule into question. The field of fashion production could not be organized on a principle different from those on which the whole system was organized. Trends were centrally imposed on textile and clothes companies, which, due to the hierarchical levels of decision-making, caused delays in promoting new styles, as well as a process of diluting of their quality. When journalists from the American newspaper *Christian Science Monitor* visited the Czech *Institute of Interior and Fashion Design (UBOK)*²⁸⁵ in 1967, they discovered that trends were imposed on the fashion designers in the Czech textile and clothes factories by that institution. Only the experts from the *UBOK* travelled to the Western fashion capitals, and were in possession of Western fashion

²⁸⁵ In 1958, Textile Design Institute (TDI) was exchanged by the central institution with a wider scope: Institute of Interior and Fashion Design (UBOK).

magazines. The directors of the Institute observed that fashion designers in state-owned companies would be fools if they did not accept the new trends proposed by their Institute: “The very latest trends and for free!”²⁸⁶

The timelessness of pseudo-classicism mirrored the slow socialist concept of time. Moreover, the traditional concept of luxury suited the totalitarian pretensions of the regimes. Although in the 1950s and 1960s Stalinism had been officially rejected, the highly bureaucratic socialist leaderships interiorized the Stalinist logic of mythical perfection in their vigorous attempts to present their reality as the best possible world. Outdated luxury in representational dress was supposed to illustrate stability, continuity and changelessness.



Figure 136: The outfit that won the All-Union Competition in Dress. The ensemble, consisting of a short coat, waistcoat, blouse and skirt, was designed by L. Lusiš from the Riga House of Fashion, *Zhurnal mod*, Moscow, 1958, N 3

Inhabiting everyday reality, the mass women’s magazines were allowed, in a quiet way, to raise issues about the current ready-to-wear production. On the other hand, the elitist fashion magazines, which were the mouthpieces of the central fashion institutions, resided in another, mythical reality and traditionally luxurious dresses published in their pages demonstrated it. Those dresses did not convey an evocative type of glamour in which the

²⁸⁶ “Czechoslovaks seen as Fashion Conscious”, *Christian Science Monitor*, February 10, 1967

individual citizen could eventually engage. Rooted in a totalitarian vision, their glamour was prescriptive. The aesthetics of those dresses was defined within the boundaries of the traditional, 'classic' and chic. Yet serving the authoritarian needs, their style neither allowed any transgression, nor did it imply any emotional relationship between a dress and the individual. The glamour of socialist official fashion belonged to the state-imposed, authoritarian variety. The elitist fashion publications existed in their mythical, isolated world till the end of socialism, answering only to the ideological requirements of the highest authorities. By the end of the 1950s, when the regimes decided to communicate with the masses, they delegated the mass women's magazines to disseminate the new official style, which united modesty with prettiness.

Socialist Good Taste

The second stylistic expression of socialist official fashion was socialist good taste. While grandiose pseudo-classical taste was given a highly representational role, socialist good taste served the purposes of everyday life, but it still operated inside the field of official socialist cultural production (see, for example, Figure 136). To develop socialist good taste, the official discourse borrowed aesthetic categories from petit bourgeois 'good taste'. At the end of the 1950s, those categories were needed to soften the asceticism of proletarian style, which the regimes never officially renounced. Socialist good taste was the result of the merger of proletarian style with petit bourgeois 'good taste'. It was produced through the hybridization of their mutual characteristics, like modesty, blandness, appropriateness and comfort. At the same time, prettiness and elegance were two crucial categories appropriated from petit bourgeois good taste, and added to its socialist version. Ideologically, in such a form socialist good taste was the real and proper aesthetic statement for socialist official fashion. While luxurious dress fulfilled its representational task, a modest but pretty dress was presented as a perfect choice for the members of the new socialist middle classes in the mass women's magazines. Socialist good taste was an ideal medium to filter, neutralize and slow down fashion changes, and to offer safe sartorial choices to those who were new to sophisticated rituals of dressing up (see, for example, Figure 137). The choice of the Western fashion magazines from which the Yugoslav and Hungarian mass magazines borrowed the images for their fashion pages significantly defined the socialist official aesthetics: neither the French *Femme d'aujourd'hui*, *Femmes d'aujourd'hui* and *Femme pratique* nor the German *Burda* and

Neue Mode presented the cutting edge fashions to their domestic public. The socialist mass magazines appropriated their style, as it already ‘calmed down’ the latest trends and ‘disciplined’ them into conventional and easily copied versions.²⁸⁷



Figure 137: Outfits from the 8th Fashion Congress held in Moscow in 1957 (Czech on the left, East German on the right), *Zhurnal Mod*, Moscow, N 1, 1958

²⁸⁷ More opened to the West, Yugoslavia and Hungary literally copied popular Western fashions from Western mass magazines. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, adopted the style, but did not publish factual copies from the Western sources, while Czechoslovakia continually relied on its domestic fashion designers, presenting in fashion pages clothes of high craftsmanship and conventional style.

From the late 1950s throughout the 1960s, socialist good taste served the precise ideological purpose of reaching a truce between socialism and fashion, which was now needed to dress up the new middle classes. When in 1964 *Svijet* decided to introduce an award for ready-to-wear dress, a potential winner had to fulfil the criteria:

“...to be of simple but original cut, to be elegant, practical and capable, with little alternations or with addition of some details, to serve different purposes. Obligatorily, it has to be produced from domestic fabric and for the domestic market, and executed in a solid and correct way. These criteria result from many letters by you, our readers, letters that daily arrive at our magazine. In them you ask us to suggest to you the type of clothes which would serve not only one occasion but be suitable almost for any time of the day, naturally, with slight changes”.²⁸⁸

And which dress won? A little navy princess-line dress, with a satin collar and tiny satin-covered buttons which, in the true style of socialist good taste, tamed Western fashion trends with the socialist concepts of practicality and modesty.

Once neutralized with simplicity and functionality, previously despised categories, such as prettiness, femininity and elegance contributed significantly to the aesthetics of socialist good taste. In such a context, a little black dress became the sartorial favourite. In the late 1950s and 1960s, the little black dress fulfilled the new socialist criteria of ‘timeless’ elegance. The little black dress appeared to be an efficient shortcut to Western smoothness and femininity, yet it seemed simple, functional and democratic. In her book *On the Culture of Dress* L. Efremova called it a universal outfit, and offered a drawing with three options for the same dress. The office version was accompanied by a pretty blouse with dots and a wide belt, a short smart jacket completed a leisurely walking variant, while the smartest version, adorned with pearls, stole and black gloves, was meant for the theatre. *Rabotnitsa* suggested its readership accessorize a little black dress with different details, such as a lace collar and cuffs, a silk blouse with a ruffle, a tiny fur detail or a white collar. These details were not only supposed to embellish the little black dress; they also stressed its versatility and functionality (Figures 138 & 139).

²⁸⁸ “Nagrada koja čeka ime” (Award in Search of a Name), *Svijet*, Zagreb, N 17, September 1, 1964: 10

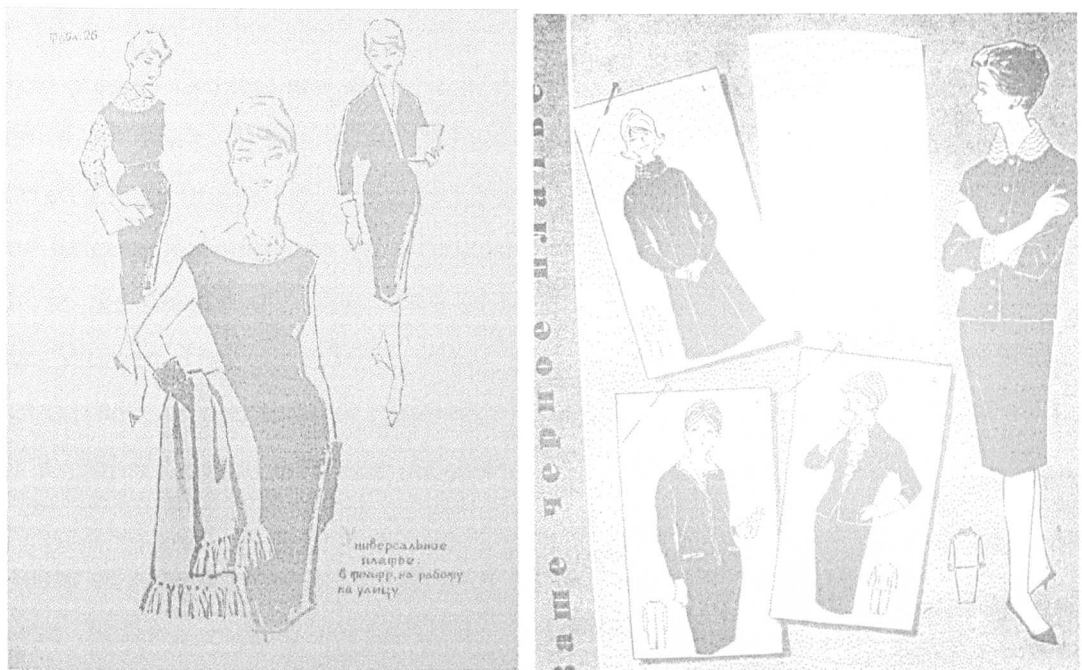


Figure 138 & Figure 139: Illustration from Efremova (1960) *Culture of Dress* (left); “Your Black Dress”, *Rabotnitsa*, December 1960 (right)

The little black dress was the most praised choice in the 1960s Yugoslav media. At that time, the most stylish event was the annual music festival at the coastal town of Opatija, whose reputation as a smart tourist resort stretched all the way back to the Austro-Hungarian times. The festival, with vocalists crooning about love under the antique chandeliers of a grand hotel, accompanied by a big orchestra, emulated the contemporary Italian festival held in San Remo. The dress codes followed suit, but with moderation. Reviewing the 1964 Opatija festival, *Svijet* stressed that all female performers and presenters wore a little black dress. The magazine stated that dresses were simply adorned with:

“...roses and only roses - white, green, red, pink, blue and black. In the evening, under the warm reflector lights they seemed to blossom, and sparkling gemstones' roses twinkled as vivid patterns at the concert hall's walls which were in the shadow”. A little black dress was a winner, because «its simplicity proved once more to be elegant and beautiful”.²⁸⁹

In *Rabotnitsa*, any craving for adornment was cooled down with a barrage of advice, which recommended caution and a sense of measure. Should a woman wear an extravagant

²⁸⁹ Vrbanić, N., “U znaku ruža” (Under a Sign of Roses), *Svijet*, Zagreb, 1964, November 1: 32

brooch on the lapel of her coat? A young woman, Klara Chebanova had seen a woman on the street dressed like this and felt a need to discuss the appropriateness of her dress with colleagues at work. While some thought that jewellery suited women, the others considered a huge brooch an excessive statement. Chebanova was confused, and wrote an agitated letter to *Rabotnitsa* in 1959 to help her to resolve a dilemma.²⁹⁰ The answer was already in the magazine's title: "Bejewelled? Yes, but Not Excessively". The regular column "Women, This is for You", which started in the popular Soviet weekly magazine *Ogonek* in 1960, recognized that all women loved to dress beautifully, but advised them to muster a proper balance, and abstain from frills and the ridiculous extremes of fashion trends.²⁹¹

A sense of measure was a key concept in the new stylistic synthesis of modesty and prettiness. Fashion entered the body of approved cultural capital only when it was politically legitimated in the form of rational practice. The regimes encouraged the middle classes to copy the advanced and refined everyday rituals of their Western counterparts, but simultaneously tightly controlled them during the process. There were clear boundaries between the categories of appropriateness and inappropriateness, and socialist fashion had to operate within those boundaries. By preaching appropriateness, the socialist mass-magazines and manuals on fashion tried to prevent any transgression. Creativity and individuality were out of the question; the socialist middle classes had a lot of rules to learn, and very fast:

"There are different approaches to the search for beautiful combinations of colours in dress. The simplest principle is the combination of various shades, or different intensities of the same colour. For example, it is suitable to combine a sky-blue suit with dark blue hat, blue handbag and blue shoes. Or, if you have a yellow or beige coat, then brown details are appropriate.... Such combinations are always beautiful and they do not require a refined feeling for colour, or any knowledge of the colour palette. The second simple principle of colour combination in dress is the use of neutral tones, i.e., white, black and grey. In these variants it is easy to achieve a lot of effects, without a risk of appearing tasteless. ... The most difficult and interesting principle in the combination of colours is contrast. For example, a very risky

²⁹⁰ Semenova, E. "Ukrasheniia? Da, no v mery" (Bejewelled? Yes, but Not Excessively), *Rabotnitsa*, Moscow, 1959, N 2: 32

²⁹¹ Khrabrova, N. "V poiskakh krasivogo, udobnogo" (In Search of Beautiful and Comfortable), *Ogonek*, N 10, March 6, 1960

combination of red and green can be beautiful, if the colours are taken in the right proportions. This also applies to combinations of yellow and blue, sky-blue and pink, red and sky-blue, and so on. It is better to combine two colours in dress, but we can even approve the combination of three colours, if the third one belongs to the family of tones of one of the first two in the combination” (Sudakevich 1960: 222).

Similar articles appeared in all women’s mass-magazines. *Svijet* approved all shades of green and blue for redheads and women with dark hair, while blondes were recommended purple, pink, blue and red. But caution was necessary not only in the choice of colours but even more so in their combinations. Any creative transgression was forbidden in advance:

“Never mix these colours in your wardrobe: purple with red, yellow with orange, blue with purple, red with pink, and brown with black and navy.”²⁹²

New rules were set, and the new socialist middle classes were expected to obey them. The mass-media attacked an evening brocade dress at work as vehemently as it did a stained untidy dress at home. A campaign concentrated on fighting the messiness of home dress was especially strong in the Soviet Union.²⁹³ When Khrushchev came into power, the ugly truth behind the Stalinist mythical vision of an ideal Super Woman, who was dressed smartly both at work and at home, was exposed.

In Khrushchev's Soviet Union, it was officially recognized that women carried a double burden, and the regime promised to help them with modern appliances at home, a better choice of consumer goods in the shops and more efficient childcare. In return, working women were expected to tidy up their unkempt looks at home.²⁹⁴ The domestic magazines declared a war on the image of a messy housewife who spent her time at home in a scruffy dressing gown, dragging herself around in a pair of old slippers and having rollers in her hair (Figures 140 & 141). The mass-magazines admitted that the traditional Russian dresses, *sarafan* and *khalat*²⁹⁵ clothed the overweight bodies of overtired women, who had been too exhausted to care about their looks between their four walls. But Soviet women, however, were no longer forgiven for looking untidy at home. In the mass magazines such

²⁹² “Nekoliko riječi o bojama” (Couple of Words on Colours), *Svijet*, Zagreb, N 7, July 1957

²⁹³ *Rabotnitsa* published two articles on the same page in 1963, one attacking eveningwear at work, and the other one recommending proper dresses to wear at home (Moscow, August 1963).

²⁹⁴ Semenova, E. “How to Dress at Home”, *Rabotnitsa*, Moscow, August 1963

²⁹⁵ *Sarafan* is a wide dress without sleeves, while *khalat* is a simple dress that buttons at the front down the whole length. Generally, both shapes are forgiving for women with bigger figures.

as *Ogonek*, the Soviet woman was envisioned in a well-equipped home of clean modernist lines in which she would move easily in her aesthetically matching simple and undecorated clothes. Numerous articles advised that the purpose, one's company and the time of day informed the type of fabric and a cut of dress meant to be worn at home, taking into account rules of moderation and prettiness.



Figure 140 & Figure 141: Clothes for domestic work, *Zhurnal Mod*, Moscow, 1956, N 1 (left); untidy and tidy *khalat*, Efremova (1960) *Culture of Dress* (right)

Grandiose and Modest: Fighting Fashion Together

An ideologized insistence on moderation and measure in dress was raised only in the mass-magazines. The Croatian *Svijet* was an exception among the women's mass magazines, as it divided its fashion pages and topics between luxurious dresses and practical advice to home dress makers, by picking both styles from Western fashion magazines. Other mass magazines, such as *Rabotnitsa* and *Ogonek* in the Soviet Union or *Nők lapja* in Hungary persisted on the new mix between modesty and prettiness. On the other hand, the Soviet *Models of the Seasons* and *Zhurnal mod*, the Czech *Woman and Fashion* and Hungarian *Ez a divat* and *Pesti divat* continued with their editorial policy of publishing luxurious, elitist one-of-a kind dresses, which were designed within centralized fashion institutions for the socialist fashion congresses or for the catwalks at the international and domestic fairs. While the circulation of the mass magazines ran into millions of copies, the elitist fashion

publications usually had a very low circulation in tens of thousands of copies, or even a couple of thousand, which also demonstrated their representational role. A modest one-page presentation of the 8th Moscow socialist fashion congress in *Rabotnitsa* differed completely from the luxurious photo presentation of the same event in *Zhurnal mod*, which took almost all the space in its January issue in 1958. In contrast, *Rabotnitsa* covered the event with a short text, and a couple of small drawings of dresses presented at the congress. Elegant dresses accompanied with sophisticated accessories and luxurious eveningwear, which were paraded at the socialist fashion congresses, belonged to another world than the one shared by the millions of readers of *Rabotnitsa*. Drawings of pretty and modest dresses, published in *Rabotnitsa* and *Ogonek*, not only embodied the new official aesthetics but could also have been easily mass-produced, unlike the samples of extravagant dresses made from luxurious fabrics. Yet, those simple and functional dresses never reached the shops in decent quality and required quantities. Why did modesty in the new form of minimalist socialist modernity not materialize in the Soviet Union, regardless of the huge politically imposed campaign and its appealing aesthetics which acknowledged prettiness and elegance?

Dress was just one element in Khrushchev's huge process of destalinization of the fine arts, applied arts and everyday objects, which embraced architecture, furniture, kitchen appliances and clothes. He planned to leave Stalinist over-decorativeness behind, as the space age was supposed to be served by an uncomplicated and practical style in dress, which could be easy to manufacture on a mass-scale. Yet, while Khrushchev's political project of weakening ideological pressures was welcomed by the intelligentsia and artists, his project of the reconstruction of Soviet industry failed. Although relentlessly promoted in the mass women's magazines, pretty but simple dresses that were supposed to be manufactured on a mass scale, did not fulfil the criteria of prettiness and the quality required, if they eventually materialized in the shops at all (see, for example, Figure 142).



Figure 142: *Zhurnal Mod*, Moscow, N 2, 1960 (model on the left designed by A. Trofimenko; model on the right designed by G. Pondopulo)

When Khrushchev came into power and denounced Stalin and his monstrous policies, he met an even more dangerous enemy. In planned economies which did not recognize private ownership, the powerful bureaucracy ruled all the hierarchical levels of decision making, and that most influential social group did not want any changes.²⁹⁶ From the mid-1950s, the improved technological levels enabled Western fashion to provide diversified products of different quality and prices, which resulted in cheap fashionable dress for the masses. Socialist textile factories could not keep up technologically and stylistically with their Western counterparts. From the very beginning, socialism promised to offer stylistically

²⁹⁶ Moshe Levin stated that the ‘cult of Stalin’ was exchanged by the ‘cult of the state’, and that bureaucracy had turned the Party into its own “ruling servant”. Levin called the Soviet system “bureaucratic absolutism” and argued that Khrushchev’s project failed because the radical changes that he planned did not suit the ruling bureaucracy (Levin 1995: 204-208). Dunham (1990) also claimed that Khrushchev failed since he attempted revolutionary changes.

new and mass-produced dress to everybody. The West defeated socialism in everyday culture and lifestyle, and a political reformer such as Khrushchev, was powerless to impose any radical changes. His huge political campaign exhausted itself in the mass magazines and specialized applied arts' magazines, such as *Applied Art of USSR*, and failed to transform significantly the production of everyday life and its objects. Simple, functional dress never had a chance, not only because there were too many decision makers, organized in boards, committees and working groups which depended upon and overlapped with each other, but also because the taste of that powerful group was informed by grandiose pseudo-classical aesthetics. Bureaucracy stopped Khrushchev, since it benefited from the rigid hierarchical structure at all levels of the society, and drew huge privileges from the status quo.²⁹⁷ Khrushchev did not succeed in overthrowing pseudo-classical grandiose style, which had held sway as the official aesthetics from the Stalinist times. Khrushchev's ideologues called that taste petit-bourgeois, and argued fiercely against it.²⁹⁸

Although Khrushchev's style, which united functionality with modesty and prettiness, was totally different from the Stalinist pseudo-classical extravagancies, it belonged to the petit-bourgeois world itself. Encompassing all dress codes, socialist good taste was granted political approval because it was ordinary, anonymous, moderate and banal. Its visual blankness could be called "untroubled prettiness". René König recognized the petit-bourgeois essence of socialist good taste:

"The union of the beautiful and useful, which was sometimes called functionality, is in no way humanistic, but, in the best of ways, 'petit-bourgeois', as it can embellish everyday life without a trace of transgression, at the same time damaging any impulse towards real creativity" (König 1988: 272).²⁹⁹

²⁹⁷ Different authors recognized the power of bureaucracy during socialism (see Djilas 1957; Nove 1979).

²⁹⁸ The attacks on petit-bourgeois style (*poshlost*) started immediately following the 1917 revolution, led by the Futurists and Constructivists. During Stalinism, *poshlost* became one of the important cohesive elements that formed new Stalinist culture. Khrushchev's programme on the reconceptualization of the everyday culture was attacking Stalinist culture and *poshlost*, as one of its constitutive parts.

²⁹⁹ S. Hutchings recognized the dangers of such a bland and unremarkable style in the 1960s Soviet design: "A tasteful monotony of visual forms, which would be only one degree better than the tasteless monotony of the past, therefore figures among the dangers looming for Soviet society" (Hutchings 1968: 84).

Regarding the Soviet concept of taste in that context, Stalin and Khrushchev's political cultures produced very different aesthetics. After the Stalinist monumental and baroque style, which equally affected the arts, architecture and dress, the aesthetics of socialist official fashion during the Khrushchev period in Russia was informed by simple and moderate lines. That style was far away from Stalinist kitsch, but, on the other hand, was banal and anonymous, and without a trace of transgression.

At the end of the 1950s, socialism aligned itself with a random collection of semi-knowledges and well-worn pronouncements on 'true' style (see, for example, Figures 143 & 144). It was a cheap choice, which required minimal previous knowledge or sophistication on the part of the unskilled socialist textile worker or the new socialist consumer. Fashion was allowed in socialist societies at that time, but only in a controlled and dull *petit-bourgeois* version. Developing under the bureaucratic gaze, socialist official fashion respected rules of appropriateness, comfort, practicality and moderation, informed by the aesthetics of socialist good taste. The conservative nature of that taste was equally suited to socialist regimes and to their new apolitical middle classes, as they were both interested in preserving the status quo. In a book called *The Secret of the Well-Dressed Woman: The Rules of Attractiveness and Good Taste* the Croatian fashion designer Žuži Jelinek stressed that a woman did not need to feel obliged to wear the latest fashion. The fashionable woman:

“...is in danger of becoming a fashion doll, and nobody appreciates that. Fashion fads change so fast that it is very difficult to keep up with their pace. The most fashionable dress will be out of fashion before you had even chance to put it on three times”.
(Jelinek 1961: 91)

Generally, there are significant differences between the phenomenon of fashion and 'good taste' in Western dress, mainly related to the latter's aesthetic neutrality and its slower changes. Good taste manifests itself in the Western dress codes of different strata of society, from the upper class to the lower middle classes. All the versions of 'good taste' share its main characteristics: anonymity, neutrality, strictness, conformity, prettiness and slow change.³⁰⁰ Regarding the concept of time, socialist good taste had similar

³⁰⁰ Ted Polhemus and Lynn Procter (1978) argued that any "good taste" in Western clothes, ranging from the upper class to the middle class or the *petit-bourgeois* version, is an anti-fashion statement.

characteristics. Both versions of ‘good taste’, petit bourgeois and socialist, were almost immutable, and equally scared of unpredictability and individuality.



Figure 143 & Figure 144: Czech Outfit produced by *Textile Design Institute*, *Žena a móda*, 1958, N 8 (left) & “Your New Dress”, *Rabotnitsa*, Moscow, 1957, N 5 (right)

The socialist regimes reserved for themselves the right eventually to change dress standards. In that way they introduced a slow movement in sartorial codes, but always inside their master narrative of modesty, simplicity and appropriateness. At first sight, it might seem that socialism turned in desperation to well-worn and old-fashioned patterns of petit-bourgeois sartorial codes. Although they originally belonged to the despised Western aesthetics, they were ready-made and could be used immediately, and socialist official fashion was unsuccessful at the time and in serious need to clothe its new middle class. But the reasons why socialism adopted the petit-bourgeois style, and not some other version, were also rooted in socialist poverty, lost traditions of dress making, and the previous rejection of past fashion styles, both domestic and foreign. Without its own fashion heritage, socialist official fashion found the easiest applicable reservoir of fashion quotations in petit-bourgeois style.

Both versions of socialist taste, grandiose and modest, served the official politics of style throughout the 1960s. A grandiose and luxurious pseudo-classical version testified to the continuity of the system and the power of the bureaucratic stratum. On the other hand, by advocating modesty in the cut and quality of fabric, and by suggesting creativity within

standardization, socialist good taste served the new stylistic synthesis of modesty and prettiness. At the end, both traditional luxury and socialist modesty served the same ideological need: to fight contemporary Western fashion trends and the concept of change that they would have introduced.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have shown how the regimes imposed socialist good taste as an appropriate aesthetics for clothes meant to dress their middle classes through their women's mass magazines. Answering new needs, socialist good taste combined modesty with prettiness, but avoided any excesses and transgressions. The conservative nature of that taste affirmed the re-configuration of gender by the state and the re-introduction of a socialist lady modelled on the early 1950s Western image of woman. While socialist good taste was introduced in Khrushchev's Soviet Union as an opposing aesthetics to Stalinist grandiose style, these two stylistic expressions continued to support two different aspects of socialist ideology in the respective socialist countries, and were promoted through the different sets of women's magazines. Finally, I have explored the continuous dialectic relationship between the concepts of luxury and modesty in socialist official sartorial codes.

CHAPTER 10: THE DECLINE OF SOCIALIST OFFICIAL FASHION

The decline of socialist official fashion started at the end of the 1960s. The regimes could no longer exercise the same degree of control over the everyday lives and dress practices of their citizens due to improved connections with the West and easier access to information on Western fashion trends. They had to recognize change, at least at the representative level, and the central fashion institutions started to adopt the latest fashions and apply them to socialist official fashion. However, the newly up-dated aesthetics did not change the ontological status of representational dress, which was still displayed only on the catwalk and in fashion magazines. But by then, helped by the rise of the second societies, women had found their own ways to obtain fashionable dresses.

In this chapter, I explore the demise of socialist official dress under late socialism. I cover the changes that took place in the 1970s and 1980s in the central fashion institutions, the role of the state fashion designers, the new uses of folk, socialist fashion congresses, fashion magazines, gender formations, private fashion salons, and the behaviour of the socialist middle classes.



Figure 145: Outfits at the International Fashion Festival in Moscow: Czech (top left), Hungarian (top right), Polish (below left) and Czech (below right), *Zhurnal Mod*, Moscow, N 2, 1968

The 1967 Moscow International Fashion Festival recognized new Western fashion trends and distanced itself from the traditional aesthetics praised in the previous decade (Figure

145). The jury recognized Chanel's presentation as the best current trend, but the Grand Prix was awarded to the Soviet designer Tatiana Osmerkina from the All-Union House of Fashion for a dress called *Russia*. Chanel's classicism was politely pronounced old-fashioned in the editorial of *Zhurnal mod* covering the festival:

“Classical form, classical show, classical music. Chanel presented this new collection abroad for the first time. On the catwalk, despite its enormous size, there was only one model wearing clothes, moving slowly to the music by Mozart and Lully. Discreet make-up, just highlighting her eyes, smooth hair. The style of Chanel outfits (the artistic hand of this outstanding French woman has already become a style) is well known all over the world. They are distinguished by their sophisticated taste, their eternal uninhibited elegance, and they are so refined that they seem almost old-fashioned.”³⁰¹

The Moscow *International Fashion Festival* also officially recognised the mini-skirt. By that time, Western fashion novelties had already begun to make their appearance in the socialist fashion media.



Figure 146: “Two Paris Fashions”, *Zhurnal mod*, N 3, 1967

³⁰¹ Editorial, *Zhurnal mod*, Moscow, N 2, 1968

Reviewing the Paris autumn-winter collections for 1966/1967, *Zhurnal mod* declared that the ‘old’ French fashion houses conformed to the traditions of the classical school of French elegance, but was more impressed by ‘brave innovators’ like Pierre Cardin, who presented youthful collections inspired by geometrical lines and space style (Figure 146).

SPACE FASHION

Western space fashion trends were eagerly accepted by the socialist central fashion institutions. The radical new imagery of totally new shapes and proportions, with no references to past fashions, seemed the right choice for socialist official fashion, which had dreamt of inventing a genuinely original dress fifty years earlier.

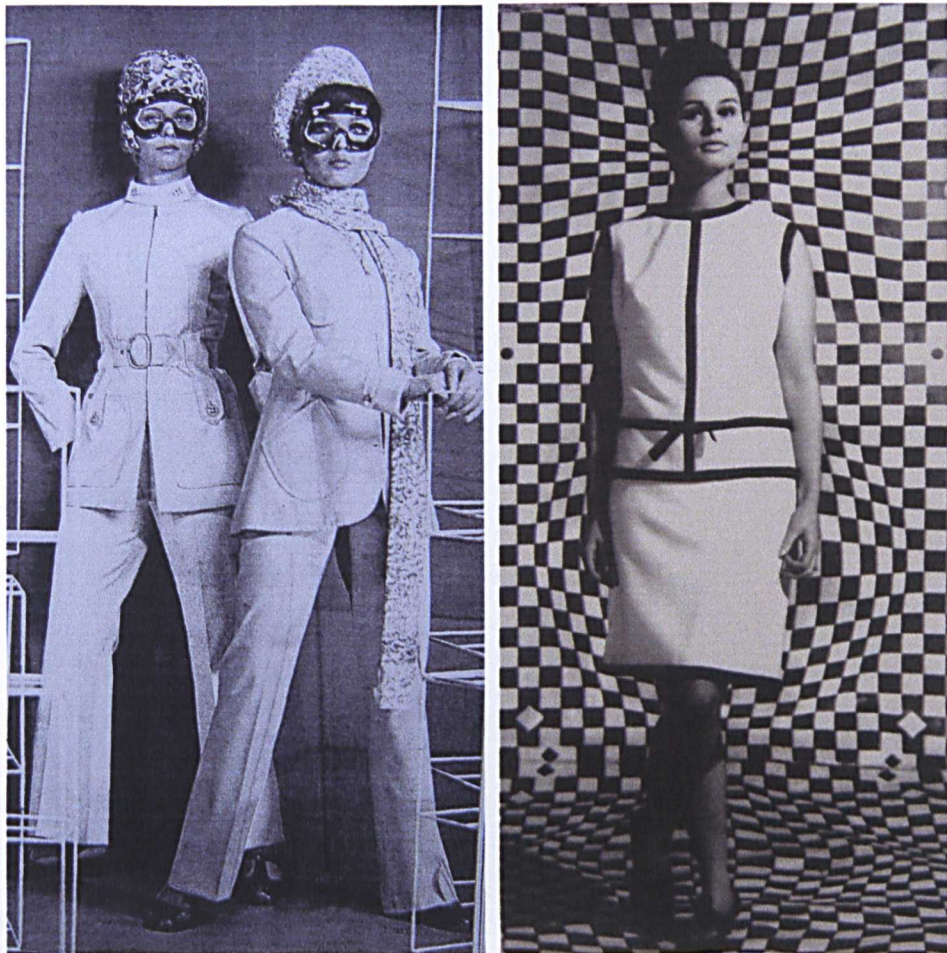


Figure 147 & Figure 148: “Astromoda”, *Žena a móda*, Prague, N 7, 1970 (left) & “Summer 1966”, *Žena a móda*, N 4, 1966 (right)

Belonging to the modernist tradition Western fashion trends had combined the new with selective elements of previous trends. Socialism craved only pure novelty, due to which space fashion could be easily incorporated into the socialist master narrative. The socialist

enthusiasm for this trend was clearly linked to the achievements of contemporary Soviet science and to the socialist victories over the West in the space race. In 1964, Valentina Tereshkova had been launched into the stratosphere in her cosmonaut suit, demonstrating to the world the equality of Soviet women and the technological achievements of Soviet space science. In contrast to all previous Western trends, a cosmonaut dress could be perceived not only as the latest frivolous craze but also as a socially progressive dress code.

The Czech *UBOK* adopted ‘astrofashion’, but translated it in its sober style into lady-like trouser suits (Figures 147 and 148). While Czech craftsmanship in cut and finish was still there, the white colour of the suits, motorcycle goggles and helmet-style hats pointed towards the new space age. In *Svijet*, the column “The Latest Fashion Craze” presented Paco Rabanne's tiny metal mini dresses. The ever-trendy *Svijet* commented that they resembled medieval armour, but nevertheless pronounced them incredibly stylish.³⁰²



Figure 149 & Figure 150: “Hello, the World Wants Informal Fashion”, *Žena a móda*, N 9, 1970 (left) & cover *Zhurnal mod*, Moscow, N 3, 1967

Information on Western fashion news could no longer be suppressed, with the development of youth culture, and with rock music rapidly gaining momentum in the

³⁰² “Viteški oklop i plastična haljina” (Knight’s Armour and Plastic Dress), column *Modni krik* (The Latest Fashion Craze), *Svijet*, Zagreb, 1968, October 23, N 22: 5

world mass media (Figures 149 & 150). A heavily made-up girl, her black hair in a mess, screamed the message “Hello, the World Wants Informal Fashion” in *Žena a móda*.³⁰³ The youth generation rejected formal dress, reported the magazine, presenting younger style suits on girls with fashionably loose long hair and eyes rounded with black kohl. In the *UBOK* interpretation, the new styles consisted of elegant outfits with short jackets in Jackie Kennedy mode, sewn from sporty fabrics such as tweed and checked woollens.

DEVELOPMENTS IN TECHNOLOGY AND RETAIL

Technological developments had enabled Western clothing companies to introduce more efficient methods of production and produce cheaper mass-produced clothes. Under socialism, science and technology tamed creativity and change. In the late-1960s, the ideological discourse continued to praise the achievements of the domestic textile and clothing industries. However, in promoting the scientific and rationally organized methods of domestic industry, the media was defending the slow socialist concept of time and presenting the disadvantages of domestic industry as a huge benefit.

East Germany had a special place within the countries of the socialist bloc, as it was pushed by the planning system into the research and application of plastic in industrial design, and man-made fabrics in fashion design. In the socialist media, plastic and nylon were perceived as the ultimate socialist materials – technological, modern, scientific, aesthetic, and able to satisfy consumer demands. The East German central fashion institute, *Deutsche Modeinstitut*, was praised in *Nők Lapja* because of its good connections with the textile research institutes, especially in Karl-Marx Stadt.

“Thus, the chemical industry has a very important role in the DDR’s garment production. That is why they export to every part of the world, including France. The main advantage is that each outfit is worked out scientifically...The other secret is that everything is made out of nylon, but using a special methodology that allows air to circulate through the dress”.³⁰⁴

³⁰³ “Halo, svet chce neformalni modu” (Hello, the World Wants Informal Fashion), *Žena a móda*, 1970, N 9: 8-9

³⁰⁴ “A Fashion Excursion in the DDR”, *Nők Lapja*, Budapest, 1968, April 13, p 20

The article “And the Steam Boat Sails ...” described the trip of a fashion boat, packed with cheap plastic *bijoux*, summer dresses made out of polyamide silk (“long-life and easy to wash”), nylon stockings, knitted mini skirts, synthetic under-wear and colourful shoes. The boat left East Germany, sailed down the river Danube and stopped in Bratislava, Budapest and Belgrade. A fashion show was held on the bank of the river in each city.³⁰⁵ Although it still took place within the world of socialist official fashion, this series of fashion shows abandoned the extravagant presentations of luxurious dresses for cheap versions produced from man-made fabrics.

Unlike earlier versions, these dresses eventually reached the domestic shops. Meant for the masses, they fulfilled their cravings for fashionability. Kadar's Hungary led the new trend, Czechoslovakia followed, while the Soviet Union lagged behind. Clothes of better quality appeared, distinguished by small series production and high prices. While the clothing industries had previously been encouraged to export all their production of quality dresses, the regimes increasingly had to take into account the needs and desires of the middle classes. Elitist dresses, produced either by small ateliers within the large clothing companies or by the central fashion institutions, served the more prosperous and sophisticated members of the middle classes. In Prague, they were sold in the *House of Modern Dress*, established in 1966. In comparison with mass clothing production, those dresses were both stylish and expensive. The *House of Modern Dress* served as a laboratory for smart dress. Its limited production was supposed to promote fashion trends and provide quality. The best dresses were awarded the label *Golden Fig Leaf*, which guaranteed both fashionability and the highest quality.

Following the Hungarian economic reform in 1968, the prices of good quality clothes in the domestic shops were high and kept rising.³⁰⁶ The central Hungarian *Fashion Institute* opened its own shop in the early 1970s, selling samples or small series of dresses. Officially, the *Fashion Institute* wanted to test the market, while their exclusive dresses in fact catered for the style-conscious Budapest women.³⁰⁷ In 1968 *Nők Lapja* firmly

³⁰⁵ Nádor, I. “And the Boat Goes on...”, *Nők Lapja*, Budapest, 1968, July 20

³⁰⁶ The reason was that the clothing companies were used to export decent quality goods, either to the West or to the socialist COMECON market, and in the latter case they were subsidized by the state. When the companies came under the political pressure to deliver good quality clothes to the domestic market as well, they tended to keep their prices at the export levels in order to compensate for the lost state subsidies.

³⁰⁷ This information comes from my interview with one of the chief designers within the *Fashion Institute* Eva Mészáros. She stated that the *Fashion Institute's* shop was very popular and had regular customers. (Interview 2004).

announced “Nobody Will Dictate Fashion to Us”, and claimed that, due to the specific scientific method, the Hungarian textile company *Hungaria Jacquard Textile Factory* was better than those in the West in silk production. Journalist Magda Kertész also stated that their silk had been “first tested on the international market, but today it is also produced for the domestic market”.³⁰⁸

In Yugoslavia, the clothing industry was well-established in the 1970s. Reviewing the 15th Belgrade based fair *Fashion in the World, Svijet* stated:

“We were fighting for fashion for fifteen years. We got clothing, eventually, and that is much more important. ...Big and small companies, and the latter took time to develop, formed the base of our mass clothing industry (good or bad, it does not matter!), the habit to dress in ready to wear clothes and the custom to buy dress off the rack in the shop”.³⁰⁹

In Yugoslavia, the improvements in the domestic ready-to-wear industry were eventually perceived as a contribution towards a more civilized and more urban lifestyle. The mass magazines recognized that the large manufacturers had improved their skills and produced more fashionable dresses, but the backward shop managers were blamed for the outdated clothes on the racks in the shops.³¹⁰ Éva Mészáros also said the wholesale side of business was the main problem of the Hungarian ready to wear industry (Figure 151). The distribution and retail of clothes were centralized and state managed, and only wholesalers attended fashion shows at which the clothing companies presented their new collections. Mészáros stated: “The wholesalers would order clothes for small shops, but their taste was at best conventional, and more often boring and old-fashioned. Sometimes, they would place an order for outfits from last year’s collection”.³¹¹ Acting as agents for a bureaucracy that out of its own interests or pure laziness did not want changes, shop managers exercised their power, informed by the slow flow of time, while placing orders with the ready to wear industry.

³⁰⁸ “Nobody Will Dictate Fashion to Us”, *Nők Lapja*, Budapest, 1968, June 1, pp 16-17

³⁰⁹ Weltrusky, M. “Jubilarna razmišljanja” (Jubilee Thoughts), *Svijet*, Zagreb, 1974, October 16, N 21: 5 The fashion fair *Moda u svetu (Fashion in the World)* was held in Belgrade and included participants from Yugoslavia, socialist and Western countries.

³¹⁰ Weltrusky, M., 1974, *ibid.*

³¹¹ Interview Mészáros, 2004



Figure 151: Advertisement for the *Debrecin Fashion Company, Pesti Divat*, Budapest, 1973

CENTRAL FASHION INSTITUTIONS

Shifts towards fashionability from the late 1960s did not mean that socialist fashion and textile factories suddenly started to produce fashionable goods or that the supply in the shops became significantly more varied. The fact that the most fashionable socialist official dress was designed within the Soviet *All-Union House of Fashion*, while the supply in the shops was at a lower level than in the other socialist countries, demonstrated its ideological nature, which resided in another, mythical reality.

The central fashion institutions were symbolically very important for the regimes, because of their ability to perpetuate representational dress within the field of socialist official fashion, and because they served as agents who controlled fashion changes. Being part of the highly bureaucratized system, the central fashion institutions increased their staff, and their internal ways of dealing with fashion became increasingly more complicated. The Soviet *All-Union House of Fashion* employed sixty-five fashion designers, and engaged even more managerial and administrative staff.

The Hungarian *Fashion Institute* founded in 1974 employed over two hundred people in its three departments. The *Ministry of Light Industry* invested much effort in organizing and re-organizing the Hungarian central fashion institution. The institution changed its structure and its name three times between 1963 to 1974 which confirms the official interest in fashion and the attempts to control it. In 1963, three units – clothes, knitting and shoes - were merged into the *Sample Clothing Design Company (Ruházati Mintatervező Vállalat)*, only to be recalled into *Divat Tervező Vállalat (Fashion Design Company)* in 1968. The *Fashion Institute* was supposed to mediate the relationship between the state and the phenomenon of fashion. As expressed in the Ministry's founding act, the tasks of the *Fashion Institute* stretched to marketing, advertising, organization of exhibitions, fashion presentations abroad, coordination of both domestic production and exports, dissemination of information on the new fashion trends and technological developments, education of designers and managers within the clothing companies, as well as education of the general public in the culture of dress. When information about fashion became more readily available in the 1970s and Hungarian clothing companies started to export to the West on a larger scale, the *Fashion Institute* intensified its activities, even choosing the buttons on outfits produced by the clothing industry, and carefully coordinating the styles and colours of clothes, knitting and shoes, in order to avoid stylistic clashes between them.³¹²

In the Soviet Union, the new fashion institution, the *Centre for Fashion of USSR* gained in importance from the early 1960s, apart from the well-established *All-Union House of Fashion*. While the two institutions competed between themselves, with their tasks overlapping, the *House of Fashion* was more dedicated to fashion design itself, while the *Centre for Fashion of USSR* was more closely connected to the textile and clothing industries.³¹³ The latter acted through a highly organised structure, consisting of many sections, such as wool, silk, cotton, linen, man-made fabrics and knitting. The role of the *Centre for Fashion of USSR* was perceived as so important that a new building was erected in Moscow to host its programmes and accommodate almost 400 people whom the Centre employed. The exhibition space, with month-long exhibitions presenting the activities of the Soviet textile and clothing industries, occupied a whole floor of the building, while the

³¹² From my interview with Mészáros (2004), who spent forty years working at the Hungarian central fashion institution.

³¹³ The *Centre for Fashion* was a part of the *Institute for the Light Industry Goods*. I am grateful to Nina Konstatinova Protopopova, who was the director of the *Centre for Fashion* from 1986-1993, for an interview about its activities and functioning (Interview, Moscow, October 18, 2002).

huge fashion theatre, created in the 1980s, covered an area of 1,500 square meters. The Centre's highly specialized experts coordinated all design, production and distribution of clothes at the national level. Their work consisted of numerous presentations and meetings with the representatives of industry and retail. Not one dress was supposed to be designed, produced or sold without their input and approval. The process started with the experts on colour and fabrics briefing the textile factories on the new trends. When the samples following those consultations had been designed, a big exhibition would be organized at the *Centre for Fashion* premises to present them. The experts' jury from the Centre would eventually choose the best textile samples for production. New dresses were supposedly sewn afterwards only from the previously approved textiles. Experts on fashion design, construction and cut coordinated colours and styles of dresses. Another group of experts coordinated the technological side of the industry, consulting managers on new developments in the textile and clothing industries. In my interview with her, Nina Protopopova, Director of the *Centre for Fashion of the USSR* in the late 1980s, insisted on the highest levels of education for the Centre's experts. Their knowledge comprised history of fashion and history of art, and they regularly attended international fashion shows in order to keep up with new fashions. The centre's library hosted many books on fashion and the decorative arts, and was subscribed to domestic and foreign fashion magazines. Throughout our interview, Protopopova stressed that the Centre cultivated a serious approach towards fashion, which combined artistic, scientific and educational elements.³¹⁴

As the chief coordinator of all national textile and clothing production, the *Centre for Fashion of the USSR* had a commanding position, and further exercised its power through the organization of annual artistic conferences for each of the industrial branches whose activities it covered. Those gatherings were not only an opportunity for direct meetings between the representatives from industry, the experts from the *Centre for Fashion* and other related artistic institutions, as well as the representatives from the Ministry of Light Industry, but also an occasion for professional juries to review and judge the industrial achievements, and award prizes to the best. The *Ministry of Light Industry* also engaged the *Centre for Fashion* to organize an annual wholesale trade fair at which the Centre's experts facilitated meetings between the factory managers and big retailers. The biggest buyers came from the state-owned *Russian Organization for Trade in Clothing (Rostorgodezhda)*, which existed at national level and at the levels of all the Soviet

³¹⁴ Interview 2002

republics, but direct contracts were also brokered at those trade fairs between the factories and prestigious department stores, such as the Moscow *GUM* and the *Unimag (General Magazine)*.

All those levels of decision-making and the administration machine that still existed at the end of the 1980s slowed down fashion changes in the Soviet Union. Moreover, bureaucracy, the main enemy of change, took on a life of its own. The reformer Mikhail Gorbachev was as powerless in front of the immovable bureaucratic machine with his *Perestroika* programme as Khrushchev had been thirty years earlier. Even when the highest levels of bureaucracy, informed by *Perestroika*'s entrepreneurial spirit, began to advocate fashion changes, little happened. The Ministry of Light Industry eventually instructed the textile factories to introduce a minimum of new products because their managers had been too lethargic to consider changes themselves. Lacking individual incentives, managers relied on the easy option of repeating the same patterns and fabrics in order to fulfil their planned production effortlessly. In the new climate of change, the *Centre for Fashion*'s annual gatherings of experts and representatives of industry introduced special prizes for companies which introduced new fabrics. Change was also encouraged at the Centre's annual wholesale fairs in the late 1980s. Closely cooperating with the Centre's experts who acted as agents of change, the clothing companies would produce pilot collections. The same experts tried to 'enlighten' the wholesalers to recognize novelties, and offer them to the mass-market.³¹⁵

The drive to educate the citizens in the socialist culture of dress never disappeared. A regular fashion show for the general public took place on the catwalk of the *Centre for Fashion of USSR* each week to improve their taste in dress. The fashion changes that *Perestroika* initiated were eventually, as in previous periods, only representational. An Yves Saint-Laurent's retrospective exhibition was held in St Petersburg's *Hermitage* museum under the patronage of Raisa Gorbachova at the end of 1986. Following the new official stress on entrepreneurial activities and economic cooperation with the West, the *Centre for Fashion of USSR* coordinated Pierre Cardin's arrival in Moscow with his elitist department store *Ljuks (Luxury)* in 1987. A huge campaign, supported by Gorbachev, envisioned cooperation between Cardin and Soviet industry, with his licenses planned to be produced domestically by 32 Soviet factories.

³¹⁵ Nina Protopopova's remarks also confirmed that the *Centre for Fashion* had been significantly more change-oriented than the textile and clothing industries in the late 1980s (Interview 2002).

SLAVA ZAITSEV AND SOCIALIST FASHION DESIGNERS AFTER 1968

The *All-Union House of Fashion* continued to deliver representational dress for domestic and foreign fashion shows. Its designers perfected their skills and, once the information on Western fashion became more available, tried to catch up with the West. A special Experimental Atelier, employing only six designers, responded to those needs. Another sixty designers employed at the *All-Union House of Fashion* were supposed to serve industry, overlapping with the *Centre for Fashion of USSR*. The relationship between the *All-Union House of Fashion* and industry eventually developed in a commercial direction, with the central *House of Fashion* designing an industrial collection and selling it to industry. The designers from that section had to produce four to five models each month, which were meant to serve as prototypes for industrial production. The so-called artistic council, which comprised the administrative officials from the *All Union House of Fashion*, would judge their work at the end of each month. Their models were very often rejected without proper judgment based on professional criteria. The designers feared that day, as they were only too aware that an opinion such as “I would never wear something like this”, could deny all their creative efforts during the previous month.³¹⁶ The combination of traditional and contemporary had informed the aesthetics of collections meant for mass production during the 1970s and 1980s. That cautious style was disseminated from the *All-Union House of Fashion* to the regional *Houses of Fashion* during the annual conferences held in Moscow.

Following the introduction of fashion design study at the *Moscow Textile Institute*, the professional status of fashion designers spread from the central and regional *Houses of Fashion* to the factories.³¹⁷ Before that, clothes designers were self-taught, learning their skill through practice, but in the 1960s and 1970s a group of professionally educated designers entered the field of Soviet fashion. After graduation from the *Textile Institute*, many were employed by the *All-Union House of Fashion*. In the 1960s and 1970s, designs

³¹⁶ Details about the inner functioning of the *All-Union House of Fashion* during the 1970s and 1980s come from my interview with the Russian designer Slava Zaitsev (Moscow, June 3, 2004). I am grateful for his time and kindness, and I am also indebted to the Soviet dress historian Raisa Kirsanova, who helped to organize that interview

³¹⁷ Following in the footsteps of the 1920s Constructivist schools Vkhutsein and Vktumas, the *Textile Institute* was established in 1929. Initially, it educated only textile engineers, gradually spreading towards textile design during the 1930s, and introducing the study of fashion design only in the late 1950s (My interview with the dean of the *Textile Institute* Tatyana Kozlova, Moscow, June 2004).

by Slava Zaitsev, Tamara Makeeva, T. Kuznecova, Tatiana Osmerkina, Galina Gagarina, L. Telegina, V. Aralova and Irina Krutikova appeared frequently in *Zhurnal mod*, announced as the *All-Union House of Fashion's* outfits. The designers from the special atelier of the *All-Union House of Fashion* enjoyed relative creative freedom, and perks such as foreign travel and access to Western magazines. In contrast the designers engaged in production of collections for industry were artistically frustrated because their carefully created prototypes were not mass-produced in their original version even in the 1980s. *Perestroika* could not break the bureaucratic procedures which were informed by the slow concept of time and fear of change.



Figure 152: Slava Zaitsev with his models, *Soviet Export*, 1976

The most prestigious socialist fashion designers enjoyed the privileges that the system offered in exchange for their obedient cooperation. After graduating with the best grade from the *Moscow Textile Institute*, Slava Zaitsev was appointed artistic director at the *Experimental Technical Clothing Factory (Mosoblsovnaarhoz)* in 1962.³¹⁸ While there, he was supposed to design a collection of *telogleika*, traditional Russian warm work clothes. Zaitsev's intervention, which turned grey boring uniform into a series of colourful outfits, drew the attention of *Paris Match*. In 1965, Zaitsev presented his new collection in

³¹⁸ Some information on Slava Zaitsev comes from my interview with him (Moscow, June 3, 2004).

Moscow, together with Pierre Cardin, Marc Bohan (Dior) and Guy Laroche. Zaitsev's dresses had been immediately appreciated and he was promoted to the post of artistic director of the special experimental studio within the *All-Union House of Fashion*. That was the most prestigious post that the Soviet fashion designer could have hoped for, but he was not only recognized at home. The influential *Women's Wear Daily* selected Zaitsev for an article entitled "Kings of Fashion", which covered the Moscow fashion meeting. The article was accompanied by images depicting Cardin, Bohan and Zaitsev. *Paris Match* published an article on Zaitsev under the title "He Dictates Moscow Fashion". The Western interest for the designer who dared to use bright colours in his highly decorated dresses grew, and Zaitsev was nick-named the Red Dior straight away. Zaitsev recalled:

"The director was angry with me, and summoned me to his office, only to tell me: 'We do not have one Dior in this fashion house, we have sixty Diors here'"³¹⁹.

Zaitsev was not allowed to travel to the West for twenty years, but continued to be the most respected fashion designer at home in the following decades, and his dresses continued to represent Soviet fashion. His position was paradoxical. While craving Western fashion and trying hard to keep himself informed on the latest fashion trends³²⁰, Zaitsev dutifully designed dresses inspired by Russian folk motifs, year after year (Figure 152). Those dresses became a trade mark of his style, and made his name both at home and abroad. The West liked Zaitsev's dresses because they fulfilled the Western preconceptions of an exotic, far-away culture. At home they were appreciated because they did not capitulate to the Western concept of fast change and their quotations privileged Russian historical imagery over Western fashions. Zaitsev's decorative folk-style dresses perfectly fitted the ideological needs of the regime. The authorities were pleased to learn that the West acknowledged them as genuine Soviet fashion, but moreover they were also pleased because those dresses were not fashion at all. Either calculating or intuitively understanding that both the West and the East would cherish Russian folk motifs, Zaitsev established himself with the collection *Russian Series* in 1965. Representing the *All-Union*

³¹⁹ Interview 2003

³²⁰ Zaitsev told me that he was very satisfied when he could get hold of Western fashion magazines, and stressed that he always shared his information with all the other colleagues. He conducted seminars on: Dior, Givenchy, Balenciaga and Cardin. The designers would study them, get informed and inspired, but their proposals often were not accepted, said Zaitsev.

House of Fashion, his folk dresses travelled the world from Canada to Japan, France, Italy and Yugoslavia from 1965 to 1976, but without their author.

Clothes inspired by Russian folk motifs brought unprecedented fame to Slava Zaitsev, but in 1978 he decided to quit the *All-Union House of Fashion*.³²¹ He made that decision on impulse, one evening after presenting two fashion shows for the general public in the packed Moscow cinema hall. Women in shabby coats waited for him after the presentation outside, desperate to know where they could obtain such gorgeous clothes. The answer was the usual one: nowhere. Zaitsev suddenly fully understood that those presentations were just a charade, that everything was a lie, especially the use of folk motifs. Women wanted beautiful clothes, and they did not like folk applications. Zaitsev's impulsive decision completely changed his position within the Soviet system. In his words, he was a believer, and it was only on that evening in 1978 that he finally understood that the Soviet fashion system and the use of folk motifs blocked the development of fashion.

All the doors had been closed to him for a year when he got a phone call from the ideological secretary of the *Central Committee* Evgenij M. Tiajelnikov, who offered to help him. In the Soviet Union, the informal institution of the political sponsor helped many Soviet artists out of trouble. Tiajelnikov suggested that Zaitsev start his own collection, and he founded his design studio under the existing scheme of artistic ateliers in 1979. Zaitsev stayed in the public arena by designing the uniforms of the Soviet Olympic team, writing a book on fashion, teaching at the University, and creating theatre costumes. His studio eventually started to attract private clients, such as lawyers, academics and people from show business. In 1982, Zaitsev started once again to present his collections, changing his style completely. Classical English tweed suits and traditional Chanel-like suits were paraded on the catwalk, because his clients craved an attractive and feminine look. Significantly, Zaitsev switched from one anti-fashion statement to another, by exchanging Russian folk-inspired dresses for the most conventional bourgeois suits. His atelier became the *Slava Zaitsev House of Fashion* in the late 1980s.³²²

Perestroika's sympathy towards entrepreneurship enabled Zaitsev to show his dresses under his own name, and also finally let him present his work in the West. Once again, he gradually returned to folk. Zaitsev told me that he opposed folk in the early 1980s, as it was an imposed aesthetics, but that he returned to folk in the late 1980s because he

³²¹ This is Zaitsev's version of the story from my interview with him (2004).

³²² *Slava Zaitsev House of Fashion* still exists, sustained by the profits from the sale of the perfume *Maroussia* that he launched with *L'Oreal* in 1992.

perceived himself mainly as a Russian artist with a Russian soul.³²³ On the other hand, Zaitsev knew quite well that the West would be highly interested in clothes adorned with Russian folk motifs. He received unreserved ovations and honours on the catwalks in Munich, Stockholm, Paris, Vancouver, Helsinki, Rio de Janeiro, Boston and many other world cities. On those occasions, his dresses were often presented within the *Russian Week*, a programme of cultural events which tried to bring the new face of Russia to the West: dynamic and open to the world, but still true to its best traditions. Zaitsev again proved to be an ideal representative, socialist, but entrepreneurial, and rooted in Russian folk. Unable to initiate significant changes, *Perestroika* continued to rely on socialist representational dress.

THE USES OF FOLK IN DEVELOPED AND LATE SOCIALISM

The use of Russian folk motifs in Slava Zaitsev's dress design drew on his personal aesthetics. However, considering the symbolic importance of his position within socialist officialdom it also demonstrated the official relationship towards folk heritage and the dynamics of its changes. Once folk motifs had been introduced in order to fight Western influences on socialist dress codes, they never disappeared from socialist official fashion. While in the earlier period folk motifs had been an ideological barrier that were intended to suppress Western trends which threatened to contaminate the new socialist dress codes, they acquired a new symbolic role after 1968. Socialist women disliked folk motifs, and the regimes could no longer prevent them from appropriating Western trends in their everyday dress practices including home dress making, use of the black market and the assistance of seamstresses. In an ideological turn, folk was no longer mobilised for the domestic battles against Western fashions, but was used to represent socialist official fashion abroad. During the period of intensified cultural exchanges with the West, dresses embellished with folk decorations, presented as unique artistic clothing items, fought the socialist sartorial battles in the West directly. On those highly representational occasions, folk-inspired clothes did not depend on any reality, and folk did not encounter rejection by its potential users.

Socialist folk-inspired dresses entered a dynamic relationship with the latest Western fashion when they were presented at state sponsored fashion shows in the West. Relying

³²³ Zaitsev was born in Ivanovo, the Russian region with rich folk traditions, and that might have also influenced his artistic development.

simultaneously on contemporary Western fashion trends and Hungarian folk motifs, Vera Nador's style perfectly embodied the aesthetics of the socialist official dress at the end of the 1960s. In the context of the Cold War, the role of the lavish Hungarian fashion presentations held in luxury Western hotels was purely propagandistic. The report *Miss Hungary and the Others* in the Hungarian *Nők Lapja* presented the *Hungarotex* fashion show that took place in Sweden and Finland in 1968 (Figure 153).³²⁴ Its official aim had been to find new opportunities for Hungarian fashion exports.

According to the report, the clothes were made in the most modern European style with a touch of Hungarian folk motifs, but the drawing and pictures told a different story. A stylish drawing of a princess line cocktail dress was in accordance with late 1960s fashion, as well as feminine mules with kitten heels, decorated with matching daisy embroidery. The head-dress with its long ribbons decorated with a rose pattern, was taken from a folk costume. It could belong to a number of traditional peasant styles from the Central-European region, but in an ideological interpretation the dress, embroidery and head-dress appeared as the Hungarian heritage. While the drawing was stylized, the photographs that featured one of the fashion shows on the *Hungarotex* tour emphasised another reality. As a literal transposition from peasant styles from an imaginary, distant past, those clothes demonstrated the slow moving socialist environment from which they originated.

While Western fashion, under the influence of hippy culture and its cosmopolitan iconography, was also interested in folk motifs at that time, its use of folk quotations was different. In contemporary Western fashion, folk quotations were trans-national and trans-historical, borrowing and blending indiscriminately from India, Nepal, Russia and Eastern Europe.

The use of folk in socialist official fashion continued to be an ideologically informed quotation. Cutting itself off from 'decadent' bourgeois aesthetics, socialism was left with its own archaic visual nineteenth-century past. All the socialist countries, except Czechoslovakia, had been predominantly rural countries before the introduction of socialism. The folk heritage was available, rich and beautiful, but 'dead' in fashion terms, as it could not relate to twentieth-century reality and iconography. Folk costume is an anti-fashion statement *per excellence*. Folk and fashion relate completely differently to space and time, meaning that folk costume is confined in a small territory and changes slowly

³²⁴ "Miss Hungary and Others", *Nők Lapja*, Budapest, August 31, 1968, pp 20-21. Hungarotex was the state company in charge of textile exports.

through time, while fashion, on the other hand, spreads rapidly to large areas but lasts only for a short period (Polhemus and Procter 1978).



Figure 153: “Miss Hungary and Others”, *Nők Lapja*, August 1968

Folk’s relative immutability and newly recognized national identity were the reasons why socialist official fashion continually insisted on it. Folk perfectly suited socialism’s isolationism, fear of competitiveness, and its idea of uniqueness. Therefore, the more ideologized the system, the more folk motifs were incorporated in the officially fashionable dresses, with Romania leading in that direction:

“Romanians are brave in representing all the fashion trends, but are the best when designing clothes inspired by their own folk costume tradition. The head of the Romanian delegation Mr H. Waldner told the reporter that since the textile factories

discovered how to apply folk patterns onto the fabric itself, urban women are also willing to wear dresses inspired by the Romanian folk costume”.³²⁵

Triumphant reviews in the domestic press reported on the presentations of socialist official dresses adorned with folkloristic embroidery and lace motives. Apparently, the West was always enchanted by the beauty and originality of those folk-inspired outfits. Those fashion shows point to the another significant difference between folk and fashion. Folk is always about representation, while fashion disrupts and eventually distorts each order of representation. If we apply Baudrillard’s definition of the marginal object to folk inspired dress, it can be seen that such a dress was not synchronic or diachronic; it was achronic. The folk object stands outside both time and space. It signifies historicity and otherness (Baudrillard 1996: 105). Thus, mythical folk quotations in the socialist dress, which started in Stalin’s era, demonstrated that the regimes, which had seized and maintained power undemocratically, used an invented sartorial tradition in order to legitimize themselves.

THE SOCIALIST FASHION CONGRESSES AFTER 1968

Socialist fashion congresses continued until 1990. In the Soviet Union, the *Centre for Fashion of USSR* was in charge of the organization of the annual socialist fashion congresses, while the collection was designed and produced by the special atelier within the *All-Union House of Fashion*. Similarly, the Hungarian *Fashion Institute* continued to design special collections for the fashion congresses, while in Czechoslovakia the central institution *UBOK* was in charge of those presentations. The aesthetics of socialist fashion congresses gradually changed towards fashionability at the end of 1960s, in order to keep up visually with Western fashion (Figure 154). Those cosmetic changes in socialist official dress only served to mask more efficiently the real immutability of socialist dress codes. Throughout the 1970s and the 1980s official dress acknowledged Western fashion trends and demonstrated professionally made-up prototypes, but the production, quality and distribution of mass produced clothes never matched Western standards. Burdened with an over-bureaucratized organization of production and distribution of clothes, and state control exercised through the central fashion institutions, the dresses presented at the

³²⁵ “Dresses of Six Nations”, *Nők lapja*, November 1, 1958. See also Lou Taylor’s discussion (2002) of the development and persistence of the folk-inspired clothes in Romania.

socialist fashion congresses stayed within the same mythical official discourse until the very end.



Figure 154: Outfits by V. Zaitsev, L. Telegina, G. Mecen, V. Zaitsev, L. Pavlova (from the left), *Zhurnal Mod*, Moscow, N 1, 1967

The Hungarian daily *Népszabadság* described the 1969 socialist congress held in Budapest:

“After a week of symposia, the meeting of the working committee on Dress Culture of the COMECON Standing Committee on Light Industry, which was being held in Budapest, ended on Monday with a plenary meeting at which fashion designers and representatives of the fashion industry from seven countries – Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, GDR, Romania, the Soviet Union, and the host, Hungary exchanged views. Delegates from the participating countries demonstrated their 1970 fashion collections and textile samples, and exchanged brochures. The professionals who participated in the meeting of the Working Committee visited a number of plants on Monday, including the “1st May” Clothing Factory, the “Red October” Men’s Clothing Factory, the National Worsted Spinning and Weaving Factory, the “Hungaria Jacquard” Factory of the Hungarian Silk Company, the “Danube” Shoe factory, the

Rákospalota Leather and Plastics Processing Company, and the Fashion Design Factory, among others”.³²⁶

Formal discussions, endless meetings, and officially organized visits to model factories tried to cover up for the insufficient and inadequate supply in the shops. While censuring everyday reality, socialist fashion congresses were actively producing another reality. Introducing the idea of productive power, Michel Foucault argued that the effects of power should not be described in negative terms. He abandoned the idea of power that ‘excludes’, ‘represses’, ‘censors’, ‘abstracts’, ‘masks’, or ‘conceals’ and insisted that, in fact, power produced reality, its objects and rituals of truth (Foucault 1991: 194). In the annual publication that covered the fashion congresses, *Moda stran socializma*, the discourse on socialist official dress never changed, insisting on beauty, elegance, simplicity and comfort. As dresses on the catwalk of socialist congresses had nothing to do with mass-production, their discourse remained outdated.

Commenting on the latest fashion congress in 1976, *Moda stran socializma* announced that the important characteristics of the new fashion were total comfort, practicability, femininity and sporty lines.³²⁷ However, the culture of dress relied on elegance which the magazine defined as a sense of measure, a merger of simplicity and restraint. A dress itself was never elegant; a woman who wore her dress respecting those rules was elegant. Such elegance, nevertheless, was not an equivalent of the ‘ultrafashion’.³²⁸ Even when it tried hard to visually present fashionable dress on the catwalk of its own fashion congresses, official discourse could not, and would not verbally express fashion.

FASHION MAGAZINES AFTER 1968

Since the identity of the socialist middle classes was mainly legitimized by real or imagined consumption, the circulation of the existing fashion magazines, both popular and elitist, increased in the 1970s and 1980s. *Zhurnal mod* had started in 1945 with a circulation of 10,000 copies, serving only the highest numbers of the *Nomenklatura*. By the 1970s and 1980s its circulation ran into hundreds of thousands of copies. Accompanied by a paper pattern, *Zhurnal mod* answered the desires of the new middle classes to improve

³²⁶ “The COMECON Fashion Congress Is Over”, *Népszabadság*, Budapest, February 18, 1969

³²⁷ “Chelovek i moda” (Person and Fashion), *Moda stran socializma*, Moscow, 1976

³²⁸ *ibid.*

their personal look. This does not mean that *Zhurnal mod* lowered its criteria for presenting luxurious dresses. The style of dresses it presented was still far away from reality, but the middle classes refined their tastes in the meantime, and became more aspirational. Generally, all socialist fashion magazines, even the elitist ones such as the Soviet *Modeli sezona*, the Czech *Žena a móda* and the Hungarian *Ez a divat* and *Pesti divat*, continued to be supplemented by paper-patterns for drawings or images of outfits designed within the central fashion institutions. This demonstrated that the system had been unable to supply the shops with the dresses which the official magazines promoted. Women were left to fulfil their cravings for fashion through their own initiative. On the other hand, the Czech, Hungarian and Yugoslav magazines regularly provided information on Western fashion. While *Žena a móda* tried to keep up with the latest trends, *Pesti divat* opted for more conventional choices when choosing from the contemporary Western fashion imagery. *Svijet* developed in a more realistic direction. Its images still came from Western women's magazines, but luxurious dresses were left out in favour of the safe, predictable outfits fitting the new middle-class public. *Svijet* kept in touch with the new Western trends in its specialized columns dedicated to youth fashions and the latest crazes.



Figure 155: Cover, *Moda stran socializma*, Moscow, 1990

During the 1970s and 1980s, individual initiative could make a difference in the presentation of fashion in the socialist magazines. Following their readers' desires, and gaining in confidence themselves, some ambitious editors started to organize their own fashion shoots. In presenting fashion as having its own narrative, those stories in pictures resembled in style the Western fashion magazines. During the 1980s, *Pesti Divat*, an internal seasonal publication by the *Fashion Institute*, ambitiously started to photograph its own fashion stories, although both the outfits and the chosen locations, such as sumptuous museum interiors, still paid their dues to representational socialist fashion.³²⁹

Lydia Orlova, a fashion and interiors editor of the Soviet mass-magazine *Rabotnitsa*, introduced many novelties during her reign from 1970 until 1986.³³⁰ Orlova emphasised: "I perceived my main task to be to publish more information on Western fashion, in order to break through the isolationism of the Soviet system, and to educate the public by presenting fashion in a historical and social context".³³¹ She introduced more pages on fashion, and started to present fashion through fashion shoots. Orlova also succeeded in making ubiquitous paper patterns more reliable and attractive to her readers by obtaining permission from the German *Burda* to use its paper patterns in 1978.³³² By the end of her period in *Rabotnitsa* the circulation of the magazine reached 26 million.

The Soviet *Burda* appeared in March 1987, printed in 240,000 copies, as the first joint venture between the Soviet Union and the West, and fully supported by Gorbachev.³³³ A couple of months earlier, Lydia Orlova had become the editor in chief of three Soviet fashion magazines: *Zhurnal mod*, *Modeli sezona*, and *Moda stran socializma* (Figures 2; 155 & 156). The *Perestroika* times required changes in their style and content, but those changes still needed to be facilitated through official channels. Orlova remembered: "I

³²⁹ My interviewee Eva Mészáros was the fashion editor of those fashion stories in *Pesti divat*.

³³⁰ In an interview, Lydia Orlova shared with me her experiences about her editorship of *Rabotnitsa*, and three other Soviet fashion publications, which she edited after 1986 (Moscow, June 2004).

³³¹ Interview 2004

³³² Orlova emphasized that she had been granted foreign currency in order to buy Western fashion magazines. Her favourites were *Jardin des Modes* and *Burda*. The rare copies of *Burda* that circulated on the black market had been very popular, because its paper patterns were precise and reliable. Showing an independent spirit, Orlova wrote to Mrs Burda asking her for permission to print their paper patterns, and finally obtained the permission for free in 1978.

³³³ The circulation could not satisfy the huge public demand. The Soviet *Burda* was published in West Germany, as the Soviet partner, the official publisher for the *Ministry for Commercial Trade* could not provide adequate printing premises. In our interview, Orlova stated that the Soviet side, from Gorbachev on, had been disappointed to see that the Soviet was a direct translation of the German edition (Interview 2004).

believed that the Soviet Union deserved its own fashion magazine, and fought for it by writing letters to the Communist Party's newspaper *Pravda*. I secured political support from the secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party Alexandra Birjukova, and found a printing house in Leningrad. When everything was ready for the start of the new series of *Zhurnal mod* there was no paper of the required quality. I published a letter about it in *Pravda*. Gorbachev got angry after reading it and called Birjukova who reassured him that the problem was already resolved. Indeed, she provided paper in one day”.³³⁴

Zhurnal mod finally appeared in 1988, feted by a promotional party in the biggest concert hall *Russia*, which was attended by the Moscow political and social elite, including foreign ambassadors. Due to the problems with paper, the initial circulation of one million was well below the public demand, and sold out in a couple of hours. Regarding its ambitions and production, *Zhurnal mod* was the first proper Soviet fashion magazine. Its location in the historical fashion street *Kuznetskii most* comprised a studio equipped with the latest photographic equipment. Fashion journalists, professional photographers and make-up artists were on the team, as well as a correspondent from Paris. In her editorial, Lydia Orlova told women that they had been forced to prove themselves as workers and sportswomen for decades, but that they were “simply women”.³³⁵



Figure 156: Cover, *Modeli sezona*, Moscow, N 2, 1989

³³⁴ (Interview 2004).

³³⁵ Orlova, L. “Nash adres: Kuznetskii most “ (Our Address: Kuznetskii most), Editorial, *Zhurnal mod*, Moscow, N 1, 1988

In 1986, such a statement would provoke feminist rage in the West, but in the Soviet Union it sounded liberating. The fashion stories resembled those in contemporary Western magazines, but the designers who created them still came from the *All-Union House of Fashion* (Figure 158). Two more smart journals followed in 1989: a new series of *Modeli sezona* and *Moda stran socializma*.

PRIVATE FASHION SALONS

In Yugoslavia, private fashion salons existed throughout socialist times, but their symbolic role diminished after the 1960s with the arrival of youth culture and improved access to the latest Western fashions. By that time, their craftsmanship and insistence on the rules of conventional elegance appeared to be old-fashioned. A new type of private fashion shop called a boutique brought about the demise in importance of the private fashion salon. The success of the boutique was due to the owner's ability to react fast to the latest fashion trends. In its Yugoslav version it meant that the entrepreneurial owner would travel to Italy, obtain the most fashionable item, cut it into pieces at home to master the cut, and reproduce a couple of thousand cheap copies for the masses interested in fashion fads. The diminutive size of the boutiques, which, nevertheless, usually occupied the best locations in the city centres, and the levels of trade that the owners declared to the tax authorities disguised the truth about their huge business activities and big profits. The owners were also served by the cheap work force in the shadow economy, which contributed to their sudden wealth. While the authorities severely imposed a limit of five employees on the owners of private fashion salons, and controlled their activities in the earlier times, the relaxed attitude towards the owners of boutiques during the 1970s demonstrated that the regime valued the capability of the boutiques to deliver fashion to the masses more than the strict application of the laws which would curb their business activities. The huge rise in individual travel to the West and the shopping opportunities thereby offered to the Yugoslavs eventually put an end to the meteoric rise of the phenomenon of the boutique in the 1980s.

In Hungary, the existing private fashion salons offered smart and pretty styles. The magazine *Pesti divat* recognized the activities of the Hungarian *Association of the Small Tailors*, and presented dresses by their members on its pages together with the new Western trends and outfits from the socialist fashion congresses throughout the 1970s. Just as in Yugoslavia, the phenomenon of the boutique gradually diminished the symbolic role

of the traditional private fashion salons. During the 1980s, fashion salons and dressmakers were joined by small private retail outlets that offered clothes and accessories. They brought with them the political and economic changes that helped to establish the parallel second society in the 1980s. Although they were officially approved, the status of the private fashion shops remained ambivalent. The Hungarian satirical weekly *Ludas Matyi* ridiculed Marika, a girl who foolishly spent too much money on a fashionable dress she spotted in the window of a privately owned boutique, only to spend more money on the alteration of that outfit, as its 'freakish' style did not suit her body shape. She was well aware that you had to make sacrifices for fashion, was the journal's ironic comment.³³⁶ Hundreds of boutiques were however located along Budapest's central avenues (körút), situated mainly in the corridors of the capital's historic buildings.³³⁷

The Czech fashion salons were fully recognized in the 1970s. Their craftsmanship was praised in an article under the significant title "The Prague Haute Couture".³³⁸ The designer of the prestigious salon Eva, Inny Arnautova stated in the same article that she was inspired by Dior, Madame Grès and especially Balmain.³³⁹ In 1967, even the *Christian Science Monitor* reported on a fashion show in the "charming salon" of Eva, which employed "a staff of 200 in its workrooms" and whose "styling and workmanship compared favourably to just finished New York press week collections".³⁴⁰ The seasonal collections by other exclusive fashion salons, such as *Styl* and *Tvar*, were given the same space in *Žena a móda*.³⁴¹

CHANGES IN GENDER FORMATIONS IN LATE SOCIALISM

The concept of femininity started to change during Perestroika. Having been suppressed under socialism, femininity became highly visible and demonstrated the extent to which

³³⁶ "The Extremes of Fashion", *Ludas matyi*, Budapest, 1977, July 21, p 7. The article also emphasized that the state-owned establishments did not charge for alternations and that their prices were generally cheaper. Only a fool, who unreasonably wanted to be dressed in the latest fashions, would go to the private boutique, where dresses were both silly and expensive.

³³⁷ My interview with Eva Körtvélyes (Budapest, July 2005).

³³⁸ "The Prague Haute Couture", *Žena a móda*, Prague, 1970, N 12: 11

³³⁹ *ibid.*

³⁴⁰ Ness, M. "Czechoslovaks seen as Fashion Conscious", *Christian Science Monitor*, February 10, 1967

³⁴¹ The article "From Prague Fashion Shows" presented the collection of the fashion salon *Tvar* (*Žena a móda*, Prague, 1971, N 6: 10-11), while the article "The Prague Fashion Avant-garde" published pictures from the fashion show of the fashion salon *Styl* (*Žena a móda*, 1970, N 6: 4-5).

the boundaries between the private and the public had shifted. The new over-exposed rituals of femininity and sexuality could be interpreted as a liberating and healthy reaction to the previously imposed deritualization of sexual behaviour. The Russian feminist Larissa Lissyutkina argued that “sexist stereotypes in the West are accepted by Russian woman as a return to individuality and to the forcibly wrested feminine ‘I’” (Lissyutkina 1993: 277).³⁴²

Western-style beauty contests had been introduced in 1988, during Perestroika, organized by official institutional networks, such as the branches of the Communist Youth organization and the first Soviet entrepreneurs. The contests were approved because of the interest in developing business connections with the West. The media emphasized that beauty contests generally were profit-making events. The winners were presented as excellent pupils, well-read girls and loving daughters. This perception changed with the first All-Union contest for the first Miss Russia in 1989, at a time when pornography had begun to appear openly in the Russian media.³⁴³ After the earlier enthusiasm about the perfect pairing of beauty and business, the image of the beauty queen quickly began to lose its allure. Following decades of public invasion of the private sphere in the socialist period, the private now entered the public arena in even more transgressive ways than in beauty contests. High-class prostitutes became highly visible and embodied Western-style fashion and beautifying rituals in their most sexualized versions.

Officially, prostitution had not existed in Soviet Russia, but the liberalization processes during Perestroika opened up a space for the phenomena of prostitution and pornography in the domestic media in the late 1980s. A series of voyeuristic reports appeared about the high life and the stylish and groomed looks of high-class prostitutes. They revealed the fascinating milieu of the *Intourist* hotels, in which high class prostitutes mingled with Westerners, dressed in sexy mini skirts and high heels, with their youthful beauty enhanced

³⁴² Lissyutkina argued that even men’s small courtesies towards women, such as holding a door for her, helping her from a car, or kissing her hand, were not perceived as retrograde and hypocritical by Russian women, but considered instead to be the precious recognition of a gender difference that had been denied them for too long.

³⁴³ In 1989 the All-Union contest for the first Miss Russia was planned without any irony for the symbolic date of March 8 on which International Women Workers’ Day and Mother’s day were both celebrated, demonstrating the high esteem in which beauty contests were held during Perestroika. The contest was finally delayed to May 1989, because of many organizational problems. For an overview of beauty contests during Perestroika, see: Waters 1993.

by expensive perfumes and skilfully applied make-up.³⁴⁴ Their appearance emphasized an image of a woman who dared to be sexually provocative in public. The high-class prostitute was not perceived only as a feminine and sexy woman, but also as an independent businesswoman, a pioneer of the market economy (Lissyutkina 1992).

In 1988, *Intergirl: A Hard Currency Prostitute* by Vladimir Kunin became a literary bestseller and a very successful film. Its heroine Tanya, the Russian version of *Pretty Woman*, knowledgeably dropped the names of brands such as Chanel, Max Factor, Christian Dior, Nina Ricci and Cardin in her conversations. She and her colleagues seemed to announce a new sort of Russian woman: they swam in the morning, played tennis in the afternoon, lunched with business partners and learned English, Italian, French and Finish. They also managed to earn a hundred dollars with each client, a huge sum in Russia (Kunin 1991: 8-9). Tanya's adventurous leap into the new world nevertheless meant that she experienced the dangers, alienation and coldness of foreign culture first-hand. She married her rich Swedish client, only to get killed in a car-accident soon afterwards. During Perestroika, Tanya was envied but was still a tragic figure that got 'punished' for transgressing sexual and sartorial mores.³⁴⁵ Yet, she heralded the relationship between highly sexualized femininity and the world of commodities which came into being within a few years in the specific context of Russian capitalism.³⁴⁶ However, from the mid-1990s, glossy Western magazines affirmed a new concept of sexualized femininity following their sophisticated aesthetics. In fact, *Vogue*, *Elle*, *Marie Claire* and *Harper's Bazaar* reclaimed that sort of femininity from the demimonde world, and grant it respectability and credibility just as the most prestigious Western fashion houses started to open their shops in Moscow.

The provincial, Soviet Perestroika papers praised the sophistication of the high-class prostitutes, and the most coveted Western cosmetic brands entered the vocabulary of post-

³⁴⁴ 'Inhotel' is the shortened version of the name for the hotel that exclusively hosted foreigners. See the media reports on prostitution in: Waters 1989: 7- 8. While accusing prostitution of alienation and labelling it as a serious social problem, these reports in the Perestroika newspapers nevertheless presented it as glamorous and exciting.

³⁴⁵ The sexuality of high class prostitutes was mediated through traditional and polished femininity rituals.

³⁴⁶ The relationship between a high-class prostitute and fashionable dress in Perestroika can be compared to the introduction of bourgeois fashion in the nineteenth century in Western Europe. A few authors dealing with that fashion period – from Philippe Perrot (1994) to Georg Simmel (1997) and Werner Sombart - recognized the *demimondaine* as a brave promoter of fashion. Claiming that luxury production and luxury consumption gave birth to capitalism, Sombart argued that the courtesan was a catalyst of that development, as she promoted "all the follies of fashion, luxury, splendour and extravagance" (Sombart 1967: 57).

Soviet literature. But high class prostitutes were hardly elegant – rather, they wore youthful even ‘alternative’ fashions. Apart from their youthful beauty, the allure of high class prostitutes in the Soviet context was rooted in the fact that they shared a uniform with their Western counterparts.

“One wears a denim jacket, stone-washed to ‘fashionable’ perfection, a short woollen skirt jutting out below, legs in tight black knitted leggings ... (the other one) ...jacket decorated with an unimaginable number of pockets, zips, buttons...”³⁴⁷

Perestroika also facilitated the arrival of other Western dress codes. In 1982, Slava Zaitsev started to dress the first Soviet businesswomen in conventional suits made from English tweed, a look which they considered to be elegant and feminine. Although Raisa Gorbacheva cultivated that style, Soviet women did not like her high visibility and her expensive taste, and she was given the nickname “Czarina”.³⁴⁸ While the privileges of the political elite were previously hidden, Gorbacheva enjoyed them openly, which only emphasized the gap between ideal and reality more strongly. A young Muscovite woman called Anna observed: “... she must use more common sense. She goes to a factory wearing furs. That’s bad taste. She’s showing off, and it doesn’t help her husband’s public image.”³⁴⁹ Gorbacheva nevertheless owned four fur coats and wore three of them in one day while accompanying her husband in Washington on an official visit. The American media was amused by the way in which Raisa Gorbacheva and Nancy Reagan borrowed from each other’s visual vocabulary in their attire: “Will the Soviet First Lady return to the gold-lamé sandals she wore in London in 1984? Will the American First Lady shock the world by wearing red, her favourite colour, in Red Square?”³⁵⁰ Gorbacheva’s groomed appearance and slender body shape charmed the West, but her looks were unfavourably compared against the sophisticated Western sartorial practices:

“Raisa’s fashion tastes have received mixed reviews. Parisian critics, for example, have described her as ‘elegant but not chic’. In fact, she appears to avoid flashy clothes. Much of her wardrobe is prepared by a team of designers led by Tamara

³⁴⁷ Descriptions from the Soviet media, 1986-1987 (quoted in: Waters 1989).

³⁴⁸ The nick-name was mentioned in: “Coffee Or Tea?”, *Time*, December 14, 1987.

³⁴⁹ Chua-Eoan, H.G. “My Wife Is a Very Independent Lady”, *Time*, June 6, 1988. Raisa Gorbacheva was on the cover of that issue.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Mokeyeva of the ‘experimental’ atelier at the Dom Modeli in Moscow. Soviet clothing factories depend on the shop’s designs to keep track of what’s hot and what’s not. But the cuts and colours remain conservative. According to one report, Mokeyeva has only praise for her First Lady: ‘She has natural charm. This is not something you can learn.’³⁵¹

The ‘experimental’ atelier within the Central House of Fashion which was mentioned in the quote had been led by Zaitsev in the 1960s and 1970s. Tamara Makeeva stuck to the conservative aesthetics of socialist official fashion improving it with a bit of flair and femininity but not enough to fool the fashion conscious French (Figure 157).



Figure 157: “Tamara Makeeva: Hudozhnik goda” (Tamara Makeeva: Designer of the Year), *Zhurnal mod*, Moscow, N 6, 1988

On the other hand, some members of the Soviet Nomenklatura disliked Gorbacheva’s behaviour as if she were a public official.

“‘She misbehaves,’ says a Soviet translator, ‘She shouldn’t lecture everyone she meets.’ Over tea and blini, the women in the dachas of the privileged grumble that she

³⁵¹ Ibid.

does not know her place, that she is reversing the traditional roles of the sexes. 'She's a shrew,' says one Muscovite. 'She wears the pants in the family'".³⁵²

Symbolically, that was a serious accusation as Soviet women had not been supposed to wear trousers since the late 1950s when Khrushchev's reconceptualization of gender had attempted to turn them back into ladies. In the collective Russian memory, trousers remained a metaphor for the forced Soviet masculinization of women. The early Bolshevik concept of woman modelled on the Nietzschean *Übermensch* had not only violated the notions of traditional femininity, but had also blocked the arrival of the dynamic exchange between female and male wardrobes that had taken place in the West. There, in contrast to the socialist masculinization of the social body, an opposite process of feminisation of the social body has taken place, and women's borrowing from men's closets eventually changed the dress codes of both.³⁵³

In contrast, once it was re-introduced in the late 1950s, the Soviet concept of femininity remained caught in traditional practices. In the Khrushchev period, advice books on beauty, taste and culture of dress stressed that trousers not only jeopardized a woman's femininity but also her modesty. The traditional concept of femininity was so deeply interiorized in the psyche of Soviet women that trousers were socially accepted only as a practical dress code even in the late 1980s, while on other occasions women were still supposed, and themselves preferred, to wear skirts and dresses. Living in the isolation of the highly ideologized world that was imposed upon them, socialist women were mainly unaware of the bourgeois commercialization of beauty and fashion, and they craved the artificiality of Western femininity and dress in place of the ideologically imposed ideal of moderate prettiness. Their persistent dissent focused on the quantity and quality of what was ideologically approved, and the levels of control over it, rather than on the concept of traditional femininity itself.³⁵⁴

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ For an overview, see: Hollander (1994)

³⁵⁴ In contrast to their socialist counterparts, Western women developed their own techniques, from rebellion to subversion, to deal with the social and commercial pressures that the Western concept of femininity imposed on them (see Evans and Thornton 1989).

THE MIDDLE CLASSES AND THE DEMISE OF SOCIALIST OFFICIAL FASHION

The socialist middle classes, once established, expressed the universal bourgeois behaviour patterns, from professional ambitions to consumer aspirations in which fashion featured prominently. Like every expanding class, the socialist middle classes were interested in legitimating their social standing by acquiring all the status symbols that historically defined their class. At that point, controlled consumerist practices were the least dangerous means for the regimes to introduce social distinctions in a supposedly classless society. Encouraged by the development of the second economies and second societies³⁵⁵, rock music and liberated travel, unofficial dress practices started to grow in strength and importance, making both information on fashion trends and fashionable goods themselves more easily available. The changes in the aesthetics of socialist official fashion demonstrated that the real threat of the phenomenon of Western fashion was now much closer. Unable to suppress newly emerging demands for change in fashion, official discourse was forced to adjust aesthetically to the faster flow of time, and to renounce some of its control over individuals and events. In later phases of socialism, a variety of everyday dress codes demonstrated that the socialist middle class gradually established its social standing in consumption, as democracy and the market were out of the question.

Fashion became one among many activities of the second society that took place in everyday life, spreading the practices of unofficial, Western-type modernity. Overlooked by the regimes and enjoyed by the people, fashion continued to disturb the socialist master narrative by recognizing change, encouraging individual expression, affirming the present and its immediate pleasures, and breaking through socialist isolationism. Socialist official fashion and socialist good taste were however crucial in the official recognition of fashion in socialism. Smoothly blending proletarian asceticism and petit bourgeois prettiness, socialist good taste was the agency through which fashion was eventually reintroduced as a legitimate practice in the socialist countries. While socialist official fashion and socialist good taste eased the introduction of Western fashion into the socialist systems, they were

³⁵⁵ Different authors observed the development of unofficial economies and unofficial social networks in the Soviet Union and the East Central European socialist countries from the 1960s. Hankiss argued that the first official society and the second unofficial society existed in parallel in Hungary, complementing each other (Hankiss 1990). Similarly, Jowitt observed that informal practices in Soviet Russia, from the second economy to corruption, only testified "to the Soviet regime's ability to ensure that for the most part they contributed to, rather than subverted, the Party's tasks and interests (Jowitt 1992: 121).

at the same time fatal factors that arrested the development of a genuine socialist fashion in the decades to follow. All the distortions that characterized socialist fashion were already apparent in its conservative aesthetics at the end of the 1950s: an ontological anxiety about the fluidity of time, a pathological fear of change, the hierarchical levels of decision making in planned economies, the neglect of the market, the confused relationship towards Western fashion, cultural autarky, and a lack of experience informed by an earlier ideological rejection of fashion's history. Although the official discourse never renounced modesty, moderation and bland prettiness in dress, and continued to promote that aesthetics through women's magazines, socialist official dress and socialist good taste had fulfilled their main historical role by the end of the 1960s.



Figure 158: "Silk Waltz" (detail), designer S. Kacharava, *Zhurnal mod*, Moscow, N 1, 1990

CONCLUSION

Socialist official fashion was always simply a discourse with little concern about reality. Even the shifts towards fashionability inside the central fashion institutions in the 1970s and 1980s were ideologically imposed. Fashion-conscious outfits within the field of socialist official fashion showed that the regimes had been aware of the need for change, but continued their attempts to control it both through the state-owned women's magazines and through the inefficient and centrally organized design, production and distribution of clothes. As the agents who mediated between Western fashion and socialist official fashion, the state fashion designers within the central fashion institutions were unable to initiate a process which would have changed the ontological status of socialist fashion. Even when Gorbachev's Perestroika tried to introduce changes in the design and production of socialist dresses, those attempts failed, due both to the power of bureaucracy and the atavistic fear of change, which had been built into the socialist system from the 1930s. Officially, the relationship towards Western fashion underwent different phases, from total rejection to ignoring and selective borrowing. The latest Western fashion trends never arrived in the socialist countries. During the 1960s, the regimes unsuccessfully attempted to compete with the West with their own version of socialist fashion. Socialist official fashion lacked all the elements that Western fashion feeds on, from its reservoir of sartorial quotations to its dress rituals and traditions. Socialist official fashion did not stand a chance against the sleek and well-established phenomenon of Western fashionability. In practice, the dependence of the socialist clothing and textile factories on the ruling bureaucracies and the central fashion institutions, rather than the laws of the market, made the establishment of socialist fashion an impossible task.

The demise of socialist official fashion and its slow-changing aesthetics in the 1970s and 1980s was also influenced by the changed social standing of the middle classes. Better informed about the latest fashions, allowed to travel to the West and supported by the second societies with their networks of small privately owned boutiques, the members of the middle classes started to practice their own versions of fashion which allowed for change and individuality.

CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSION

I conceptualised my research on the official socialist relationship towards fashion around a typology of two distinctive socialist dress codes: utopian dress and socialist official fashion. I analyzed these two dress codes through the prism of the four variables discussed in the thesis: time, class, taste and gender.

Within this framework, I discovered that 'utopian dress' during the socialist period was informed by an urge for a total change of taste and for a total change of the previous gender order. My theoretical research demonstrated that once the past was forbidden, fashion became a dangerous activity, as it was the part of the rejected bourgeois cultural heritage. I situated the practices of 'utopian dress' in that early socialist period whether in early Bolshevik Russia or in East Central European socialist countries following the introduction of communist rule in 1948. I discovered that this initial socialist break with the past arrested the development of fashion in the decades to follow.

I contextualized the birth of socialist official fashion within the Stalinist myth and its general return to history. In contrast to utopia, socialist official fashion embraced the history of fashion, but, significantly, chose conservative and conventional sartorial quotations. Such quotations suited the mythical origin of socialist official fashion. I showed that in its first phase, socialist official fashion conformed to the highly decorative style of Stalinist aesthetics. At that time, socialist official fashion also announced the state-orchestrated re-conceptualization of gender, from the restraint of the New Woman to the traditional prettiness of a woman in a smart dress. My research on luxurious and mass market women's magazines showed that socialist official fashion continued to exist throughout the socialist period as an ideological construct far away from everyday reality.

My overall conclusion based on my empirical research into women's magazines in four socialist countries, object studies, and through interviews with key individuals who had been involved in official dress practices under socialism showed that fashion as a phenomenon known in the West failed to develop in the socialist period in either the Soviet Union or in the East Central European countries. However, both utopian and socialist official dress codes developed through different types of relations to Western fashion. Utopian dress attempted to abolish Western fashion, while socialist official fashion selectively borrowed the most traditional Western quotations in order to develop its two sartorial aesthetics: grandiose style and socialist good taste. The neutral aesthetics of

socialist good taste suited the regimes' ideas of an appropriate fashion for their new middle classes and their concept of traditional femininity from the late 1950s.

From that period on, fashion was one of the agencies by which the regimes wanted to establish a new daily narrative, and impose softer means of control over their citizens. I argue that the historical meeting between socialism and fashion demonstrated the socialist fear of change, as the regimes attempted to control fashion trends and tame them through their central fashion institutions. In the end, socialist official fashion was a predictable victim in the final clash of two systems of representation. It was unable to compete with its ideological opponent, not because Western fashion was faster and sleeker, but because of the initial ontological difference between them.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Future research might systemize the existing empirical data, scattered and partially lost, in order to preserve the official documents on socialist official fashion and prevent them from disappearing completely due to the general disregard towards socialist life-style in the respective countries.

Furthermore, it is even more important to preserve the records on unofficial dress codes, chiefly through the method of oral testimony and collection of everyday dresses and photographs. The research on socialist dress codes could cast light on women's everyday lives in the socialist period, and examine the parallel practices of femininity in the socialist East and the West.

Research on socialist dress codes could bring new and exciting results to comparative studies on post-socialist dress codes, exploring the patterns of negotiation, colonization and liberation that accompanied the abrupt change from one social, political and economic system to another and totally different one. In the context of existing research on socialist dress codes, new research on the post-socialist dress-codes could establish the continuing history of fashion in the respective countries, as well as the dramatic and fast change in the concept of womanhood.

New research on post-socialist dress-codes could also accompany and theoretically assist the arrival of many Western fashion brands into the respective countries. Neither the biggest designer names that have already been in some of these countries for some time nor the recent arrival of middle-of-the-range fashion and accessory brands have attracted

any theoretical interpretation, either from an economic, sociological or feminist point of view. They deserve to do so.

CHAPTER 12: BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Croatia:

Naša Moda (Our Fashion) (fashion monthly) 1946-1948

Svijet (World) (women's by-weekly), 1953-1989

Globus (Globe) (illustrated weekly), 1950s and 1960s

Czech Republic:

Žena a móda (Woman and Fashion) (Czech fashion monthly), 1949-1980

Tvar (Form) (applied arts journal, monthly)

Kveti (Flowers) (illustrated weekly), 1960s

Vlasta (women's weekly)

Hungary:

Asszonyok (Ladies), 1946-1949)

Nők lapja (Women's Journal) (women's weekly), 1949-1989

Ez a divat (This is Fashion) (fashion monthly), 1950-1980

Pesti divat (Budapest Fashion) (fashion quarterly), the 1980s

Soviet Union:

Rabotnitsa (Working Woman) (women's weekly), 1923-1989

Delegatka (Female Delegate), (women's monthly), 1923-1929

Krasnaya Niva (Red Field), illustrated weekly, 1923-

Poslednie mody (Latest Fashions) (fashion monthly), the 1920s

Zhurnal dlia khoziaek (The Housewives' Magazine), fashion monthly, the 1920s

Ogonek (Little Flame), illustrated weekly, 1923-1989

Krokodil (Crocodile) satirical weekly, the 1920s-1989

Iskusstvo Odevatsiia (Art of Dressing), fashion monthly (1928-1929)

Zhenskii Zhurnal (Women's Journal) (women's monthly), 1926-1929

Udarnitsa Urala (The Female Stakhanovite of the Urals), (monthly), the 1930s

Stakhanovets (Stakhanovites), monthly, the 1930s

Zhurnal mod (Fashion Journal) (fashion monthly), 1945-1989

Modeli sezona (Fashions of the Seasons) (fashion biannual), 1938-1989

Moda stran socializma (Fashion of the Socialist Countries) (annual publication), 1959-2000

USSR under Construction (1930s and 1940s)

Soviet Union (1950s and 1960s)

CHAPTER 13: APPENDIX: Oral Testimonies collected during Field Work

NAME	POSITION	LOCATION OF INTERVIEW	DATE
Klara Nademlynska	Fashion Designer and owner of the fashion house under her name	Prague	19 January 1995
Hana Havelková	Fashion Designer and owner of the fashion house under her name	Prague	21 January 1995
Anna Wessely	Professor, Sociology Department, Ervos Lorand University	Budapest	February 1999
Eva Uchalová	Dress Curator and Head of Dress Collection, Museum for Applied Arts	Prague	January 1999
Marton Oblath	Student at Sociology Department, Ervos Lorand University (late 1990s)	Budapest	February 1999
Djordje Zelmanović	Croatian journalist and author of Etiquette book	Zagreb	24 February 200
Mila Mirković	Fashion Model (1950s and 1960s)	Zagreb	25 February 200
Regina Jaeger	Fashion Model & Commercial Director of Croatian Knitwear Company Nada Dimic, (1960s & 1970s)	Zagreb	26 February 200
Zuzi Jelinek	Fashion Designer and owner of Fashion Salon	Zagreb	26 February 200
Eva Meszáros	Fashion Designer & Deputy of Hungarian Fashion Institute (1960-1980)	Budapest	23 June 2004

Nina Protopopova	Director of Textile Institute of USSR (the 1980s)	Moscow	18 October 2001
Slava Zaitsev	Fashion Designer & Head of Experimental Art Studio All Union House of Fashion Moscow	Moscow	3 June 2004
Tatyana Kozlova	Dean of the Moscow Textile Institute	Moscow	4 June 2004
Raisa Kirsanova	Russian fashion historian	Moscow	17 October 2004
Olga Vainshtein	Academic, State University of Humanities Moscow	London	14 April 2004
Maja Kosic	Entrepreneur and fashionable woman	Zagreb	July 2005
Lydia Orlova	Fashion Editor of <i>Rabotnisa</i> (the 1970-1980) and Editor in Chief in three Soviet fashion magazines (<i>Zhurnal mod</i> , <i>Modeli sezona</i> , <i>Moda stran socializma</i> (1986-1990) and the author on book of fashion <i>Alphabet of Fashion</i>	Moscow	1 June 2004
Eva Körtvelyes	The editor –in-chief, the magazine <i>Elite</i>	Budapest	12 July 2005
Konstantina Hlaváčková	Dress Curator of Twentieth Century Dress, Museum of Applied Arts Prague	Prague	June 2003
Nada Dirmovšek	Fashionable Woman and wife of a rich industrialist before World War Two	Zagreb	7 February 2002
Magda Weltrusky	Fashion editor of Croatian women's magazine <i>Svijet</i> (1950s-1980s)	Zagreb	July 2005
Aliona Doletskaya	Editor in Chief of Russian <i>Vogue</i> , Moscow	By telephone	24 March 2005
Natalia Shustikova	Executive Director, Textilexpo JSC (current); Textile Institute of	Moscow	June 3 2004

	USSR, Director in charge of promotions (1980s)		
Elena Ijicheva	Editor in chief of the trade journal <i>Textile Industry</i>	Moscow	June 3 2004