

## CONCEPTUALIZATION THE EXPERIENCE OF SOVIET FASHION TO RECONSIDERATION OF THE SLOW FASHION PHENOMENON

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### ABSTRACT

The requirements imposed on the Soviet taste in clothing, formed mainly in the 1950s (first of all, a sense of proportion, modesty, simplicity, elegance, rejection of excesses), are explained by socialist morality, the ideological situation, the peculiarities of the functioning of the economic system in the USSR. However, some consumer habits and strategies formed in the 1950s and later can be rethought in the spirit of the concept of “slow fashion”, relevant in the XXI century. In particular, the predominance of classical style, the spread of bricolage practices and the building of special emotional ties with wardrobe items meet the requirements of the theory of modern sustainable fashion. The works of modern researchers of slow fashion and sustainable consumption, mainly foreign authors, as well as domestic empirical material — published interviews with Soviet people about vestigial practices, materials of the satirical publication “Crocodile” and women’s magazines “Rabotnitsa” and “Krestyanka” — were used to prepare this report.

### KEYWORDS

Soviet fashion, “thaw”, slow fashion, sustainable consumption, vestimentary practices.

**W**e start with a brief review of the vestimentary practices of the Soviet people. It is worth noting that in this work we focus on consumer culture and fashion discourse of the 1960s–1970s, as we count the history of the Soviet style in clothing since 1956. It was in this year that the “Fashion Magazine”, published by the Central House of Models, declared the need to develop a style characteristic of the countries of the socialist camp [4, p. 53]. Of course, among the privileged intelligentsia and the highest party

apparatus, fashionable discourse existed in the 1930s–1940s, but we are interested in the period of involvement of more Soviet people in fashionable consumption.

Despite the legitimization of fashion discourse during the years of the thaw, the creation of the concept of Soviet taste and the increase in the number of channels for broadcasting fashionable images that formed the fashionable desires of consumers, the opportunities for fashionable consumption among the citizens of the USSR were limited. It was an unique situation: fashion discourse was officially resolved, people's fashion desires were actively formed under the influence of various channels for promoting fashionable images, but the possibilities for satisfying these desires were limited due to the peculiarities of the command economy. The problems of finding a fashionable dress, as well as the hype in stores caused by the shortage, in the 1970s often became a topic for notes or cartoons in the satirical magazine "Crocodile". So, in one of the issues, a short story "In which dress to celebrate?" was published, in which advice was given to buy the simplest dress in the clothing store. It is in such a dress that a woman will be unique, because of the fear of buying a New Year's outfit like others, the rest of the participants of the celebration will not dare to buy the products of this store [10, p. 12]. The interesting thing about this note is that it not only plays up the problem of producing the same products and the lack of diversity on the shelves, but also emphasizes that all women refuse to purchase festive dresses in stores. Thus, the authors of this story recognize the impossibility of meeting fashion needs in the USSR without additional efforts.

Many people, especially those who considered themselves included in the fashion discourse and tried to dress in accordance with the latest trends, tried to find alternatives to buying ready-made clothes. In some cases, the solution was to contact the tailoring studio. It should be noted that the independent choice of fabric, headset, costume model when ordering at the studio contributed to the development of individual taste, which led to more familiarization of Soviet citizens with fashion discourse than buying finished products in stores. However, contacting the tailoring studio was inaccessible to many people due to high prices. In addition, the choice of fabrics for tailoring suits in the atelier was limited, and employees tried to impose on customers models of fabrics that they needed to sell [7, p. 183]. Also, the tailoring studios were characterized by a low service culture, which was often reflected on the pages of Soviet magazines. So, the article "Such pies", published in the women's edition — the magazine "Rabotnitsa", tells about a citizen who could not get boots ordered from the studio for a whole year, because the employees had been making fur blanks for future shoes for a very long time. When the order was completed, it turned out that the shoes did not match the size of the customer's feet [9, p. 27].

Consequently, the purchase of ready-made clothes in stores and tailoring to order in the studio were accompanied by a number of difficulties for the Soviet person (lack of

a wide choice of styles, outdated models of suits, low level of service), therefore many people turned to the practice of self-manufacturing things.

Tailoring practices, as well as actions to remake the purchased finished products, widespread in the everyday life of the period under review, were not only a way to solve the economic problem of scarcity, but also an opportunity for Soviet people to avoid feeling guilty for becoming consumers [2] and began to enjoy material things, so perceived models behavior of residents of capitalist countries. As a result of labor efforts to create their own thing suitable for its creator and/or transformer, the Soviet man established strong emotional ties with wardrobe items, which contributed not only to their physical durability, but also psychological stability.

It should be noted that Soviet bricolage practices (sewing a new thing from several old items, sometimes not even vestimentary) often caused unpleasant feelings among Soviet people, both those who committed them and outside observers.

Especially bad memories of forced practices of interaction with clothing and “involuntary sustainable consumption” have been preserved about the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the economic situation as a whole was negative. In the 1980s–1990s, the younger generation got acquainted with global trends in clothing due to the penetration of advertising, Western films and music, and the availability of any things, even domestic old style, decreased, which led to widespread practices of sewing old parental things to adapt them to European and American trends. Thus, supply opportunities have sharply decreased, and fashion desires that stimulate demand have become more acute. Therefore, the negative experience of the 1980s–1990s is often the reason for the reluctance of Russian consumers to resort to the practices of slow fashion, as some research shows [3; 6]. At the same time, vestimentary practices of the 1960s–1970s were not so traumatic in the memory of ex-Soviet people, since the penetration of Western culture was limited, and many participants in the fashion discourse were quite satisfied with the results that could be achieved thanks to the work of studios, tailors and their own labor efforts. In addition, it is these years that often cause nostalgia. Consequently, they may be of interest to modern theorists of slow fashion, as having a prospect for a partial revival.

What features of Soviet consumption are relevant for slow fashion?

First of all, the above-mentioned building of emotional connections with things, which in Soviet society was achieved due to difficulties in the process of acquiring things, and today can be achieved in various ways (from investing labor efforts in decorating already purchased things to creating a special history of things) can help overcome the novelty fetish characteristic of participants in fashion discourse in developed countries. Today, in the conditions of fast fashion, consumers have a desire to buy more and more new wardrobe items for the sake of enjoying the process of purchasing things. In fast fashion, most of the clothes are bought to complement the wardrobe or replace

psychologically outdated clothes that still retain physical integrity [8, p. 13], and low prices and a wide selection of clothes create a situation where it is easier to buy a new thing than to update the old one [8, p. 16]. In the case of creating emotional connections with wardrobe items, their value increases and the desire to acquire new ones that do not have such value for consumers decreases. This is all the more relevant today when things become obsolete psychologically faster than physically, and only emotional attachment to a thing can help increase its durability [8, p. 17]. This is confirmed by the experience of the participants of the project of the study of social practices “Local Wisdom” (the project is organized by the researcher of the principles of slow fashion Kate Fletcher and is devoted to the study of the use of clothing — mainly the care and repair of it), they say that the potential for durability is embedded in any object, it does not require special financial investments and special creative efforts of people. For example, a man wears his father’s jacket precisely because it has holes burned with sulfuric acid. These notes remind him of his father’s youth and that he studied at the Faculty of Chemistry. The man does not try to sew them up or fix the whole jacket in any other way, but perceives the holes as part of the design of the thing, and the whole jacket as an object demonstrating his love for his father. At the same time, the thing is not fetishized, and the new scuffs that form on it symbolize the experience of the new owner [8, p. 23–24]. Thus, the thing brings satisfaction from its consumption, and not from its acquisition, there is a struggle with the fetish of novelty.

Secondly, creating a new thing from an old one is attributing a new value to a thing instead of an unclaimed one. Such practices are considered in some detail in their work by Carla Binotto and Alice Payne. They describe the manufacture of things from garbage, as a result of which the converted thing looks like new, is perceived as made from fresh raw materials, but thanks to the history of creation broadcast on labels or in advertising materials, it supports the fight against the excesses of consumer culture, attracts attention to environmental problems [1]. The skills of sewing and knitting possessed by the inhabitants of our country can be useful for giving new meanings to old things.

Thirdly, classic style is a remedy against fast trends. Researchers Mary Alice Casto and Marilyn DeLong research its benefits. Thus, the features of the classical style remain always recognizable, and the context is clear. At the same time, the classical style can be modified or embellished in accordance with the requirements of the time [5, p. 33]. Soviet magazines have always emphasized the prerogative of the classical style, which was explained by the expediency of planning the release of products of a certain style in a command economy. If we analyze the articles about fashion trends in “Rabotnit-sa” or “Krestyanka”, we will see that the fact is almost constantly emphasized that classic, feminine and sporty styles prevail, and the main styles are preserved from year to year, and only simply details will change. This was the main trend of the official fashion

of the 1960s and 1970s. Note that the focus of designers of slow fashion on creating items of mainly basic wardrobe coincides with the Soviet promotion of classical style.

To sum up, our forecasts are quite optimistic. In Russian society, thanks to the Soviet experience of vestimentary practices, there are chances of an increase in the number of adherents of fast fashion, which should change not only the fashion industry, but also humanity as a whole.

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