

**THE STILYAGI: SOVIET YOUTH (SUB)CULTURE OF THE 1950s
AND ITS FASHION**

By

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Abstract

The 1950's in the USSR are characteristic not only by the Cold War, late Stalinism and the hard process of destalinization. This period is also remarkable by the emergence of Soviet youth culture, or, more precisely, "subculture" of so-called *stilyagi* (literally "style-hunters"). They were urban youth of different class origins, obsessed with Western, mainly American fashion, music and dances. Although *stilyagi* do not fit the criteria of Western working-class subcultures, they present all the components of "subcultural style," according to the model of sociologist Michael Brake. Thus, *stilyagi* elaborated their recognizable dress style, behavioral patterns and argot. Since the first component played especially important role in *stilyagi*'s self-positioning, in this thesis I focus on their fashion.

The socio-cultural meaning of *stilyagi*'s fashion is often misinterpreted as rebellion against the regime, whereas *stilyagi* are painted as proto-dissidents. Such an opinion can be found not only in the memoirs, but also in some scholarly works. My aim is to challenge the one-sided vision of *stilyagi* as anti-Soviet rebels. Therefore this paper considers *stilyagi*'s fashion not as a phenomenon in itself, but in its social and cultural context. Accordingly, my approach is not a purely art historical investigation, but a multi-sided examination of *stilyagi*'s "subculture," including analysis of "moral panic" in the official press, comparison of basic modes within *stilyagi*'s and mainstream fashions, and comparative analysis of *stilyagi* phenomenon and a cross-cultural paradigm of dandyism. Such an approach allows explaining the ambiguous position of *stilyagi* in Soviet social and cultural history: they not only successfully used covert possibilities of 1950s Soviet system, but also influenced mainstream society. Moreover, *stilyagi* phenomenon can be evaluated as a vivid example of social significance of fashion on the whole.

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Introduction

Clothes and outward appearance can be considered as symbolical recourses of the power's policy.

Olga Gurova¹

The generation of subcultural styles... involves differential selection from within the matrix of the existent. What happens is not the creation of objects and meanings from nothing, but rather the transformation and rearrangement of what is given (and 'borrowed') into a pattern which carries a new meaning, its transformation to a new context, and its adaptation.

John Clarke²

The 1950s in the USSR are usually associated with the Cold War, late Stalinism and the hard process of destalinization. The formation of specific youth culture is hardly imaginable in these conditions. Thus, a young man in a parti-coloured suit, with a hairdo *a la* Tarzan, walking imposingly down the main street of Moscow in 1953, and even in 1956, clearly would be a provocation, not only in terms of aesthetics, but also in terms of ideology, morals, and politics.

Such a situation really existed, not as an exclusive case, but as a relatively widespread phenomenon, that became known as “*stilyazhnichestvo*.” This phenomenon is well described in a number of memoirs and scholarly works. *Stilyagi*, literally “style hunters,” were 1950s Soviet urban youth, obsessed with Western, mainly American clothes, music and dances. This group was not very numerous, predominantly male, with the age range approximately from 15 to 25. “Too young to have fought in the war,”³ *stilyagi* did not share strong patriotism of the older generation. They distinguished themselves from the dominant culture, that is, post-war Soviet urban culture, choosing a provocative style of clothing and behaviour. Although *stilyagi* did not develop an authentic music style, as is usual for youth subcultures, they had their music idols – American

¹ Olga Gurova. “*Idea potreblenia v sovetskom obshchestve*” [“The Idea of Consumption in Soviet Society”]. *Sotsiologicheskyy Zhurnal*, N 4, 2005. <http://sj.obliq.ru/article/669>

² John Clarke. “Style.” In Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (eds). *Resistance through rituals: Youth subcultures in post-war Britain*. (London: Routledge, 1993, rpt. 2002), pp. 175-191; p. 178.

³ Richard Stites. *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and society since 1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 124.

jazzmen. Many of these youngsters organized amateur jazz bands, and some of them even succeeded in making a professional music career, like, for instance, Moscow jazzman Alexei Kozlov.⁴

The stilyagi's appearance challenged the regime's vision of youth -- the paradigm of "youth-as-constructors-of-communism," as Hillary Pilkington terms it.⁵ Young people demanded recognition of their own social status outside of the official narrative about the "correct Soviet man." Thus, the eternal conflict of "fathers and sons" coincided with the totalitarian social policy, which leveled all the ages under the aegis of a single ideology. As playwright Viktor Slavkin notes, "What we [now] define as 'youth culture' simply did not exist [in the early 1950s]. Everything belonging to this sphere was called hooliganism."⁶ Stilyagi's defiant manners, scorn for factory work and absence of interest in ideological issues made them mortal enemies of Komsomol activists and gave them notoriety as "problematic youth" both in the contemporary Soviet society and, later, in academic discourse.

Scholarly interest in the problem of stilyagi in the West as well as in the Soviet Union/Russia has been developing since perestroika. Thus, in 1994 sociologist Hilary Pilkington presented her monograph on Russian youth culture, in which she briefly observed the problem of *stilyazhnichestvo*.⁷ Interestingly, she did not refer to stilyagi as a subculture. She instead used the more general term "youth culture," or more specifically

⁴ See Alexei Kozlov. *Dzhaz, rok i mednye truby* [Jazz, Rock and Copper Trumpets] (Moskva: Eskmo, 2006).

⁵ Hilary Pilkington. *Russia's Youth and its Culture: A nation's constructors and constructed* (London-New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 69.

⁶ Viktor Slavkin. *Pamyatnik neizvestnomu stilyage* [A Monument of Unknown Stilyaga] (Moskva: Artist, Rezhisser, Teatr, 1996). Abstract from the book on <http://www.paco.net/odessa/media/word/242/sn220b.htm>

⁷ The Russian term "*stilyazhnichestvo*" refers to the phenomenon, or to the particular style, whereas "stilyagi" – to the social actors.

“the first recognizable social group” and “an alternative avant-garde of youth.”⁸ In other works stilyagi are called a subculture⁹ or even a counterculture.¹⁰

This variety of opinions points to a problem with defining this phenomenon in sociological terms. Stilyagi do not match the criteria of Western working-class youth subcultures because of their heterogeneity both as a social group and a temporal current. The first stilyagi were so-called “gilded youth,” scions of the Party elite, concentrated in Moscow and Leningrad. But this group also involved middle-class youth. Finally, during the second half of the 1950s this current spread to working-class stratum in the capitals and some provincial towns as well. What is common for the whole group (and what is indicated in its very name) is an obsession with fashion and creating personal style, including that of dress. Therefore this aspect of stilyagi phenomenon presents a particular interest for a historian.

As a rule, common opinion treats fashion as a marginal phenomenon, inferior to the global political, economic and social issues in terms of its importance. Fashion is to be associated, first of all, with conspicuous consumption, advertising and entertainment. It seems to merely be a decoration or some secondary or tertiary attribute of other phenomena which “really matter.” In art history, too, fashion deserves a humble place among applied (or, depending on the approach, decorative) arts. In short, fashion is generally excluded from “serious” history, even more so for it is often understood as a feminine problem.

But, of course, the picture is not so unambiguous. Fashion is evidently not only about dress, and the academic discourse of the last century, especially its second half, confirms this. In the view of artist and art historian Sofia Azarkhi, “peace, war, scientific discoveries, philosophy, technologies, revolutions and fashion are the things of one order

⁸ Pilkington, 1994, pp. 66, 68.

⁹ For example, Mark Allen Svede, “All You Need is Lovebeads: Latvia’s hippies undress for Success”, in Susan E. Reid and David Crowley, (eds.) *Style and Socialism: Modernity and material culture in post-war Eastern Europe* (Paisley: Berg Publishers, 2000), p. 189; Alexei Yurchak. *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The last Soviet generation* (Princeton University Press, 2006) p. 170

¹⁰ Susan E. Reid. “The Exhibition *Art of Socialist Countries, Moscow 1958-9, and the Contemporary Style of Painting*”, in Reid and Crowley, 2000, p.122.

and time.”¹¹ Fashion as a combination of aesthetic, ethical, economic, psychological, social and political aspects has gained its role as an object of interdisciplinary research. It is, if you will, a mirror, absorbing and reflecting different aspects of human life.

The next inevitable question is whether fashion bears a universal character. Its very connection with consumption, advertising and mass entertainment makes fashion an indispensable part of Western capitalist society.¹² However, if we agree that fashion is a complex phenomenon, one can differentiate economic from psychological aspects. Consequently, modifications of fashion should exist to some extent in every society. Moreover, a remarkable feature of fashion is its ability to penetrate geographical and political borders. Thus, Azarkhi argues: “Fashion as a revelation of the collective unconscious runs through a single cultural space independently of any borders.”¹³ However, despite this “expansive” character, fashion can be very particular for a given time, place and society; its general flow tends to split into interesting local variants. Stilyagi’s fashion is a vivid example of such a process.

Considering any fashion, it is hard to avoid looking for its meaning, if not in semiotic, then in socio-cultural terms. The meaning of stilyagi’s fashion can be easily grasped one-sidedly, as intentional opposition. One may be tempted by the memoirs authors’ depiction of stilyagi as “the first Soviet dissidents.”¹⁴ Such a tendency is remarkably painted by Kristin Roth-Ey: inasmuch as stilyagi became widely known after 1953, they “fit so well with the notion of Soviet society as a whole being ‘re-born’ after the death of Stalin.” Consequently, “the stilyaga¹⁵ is the perfect emblem of the “thaw”—an individualist, but an individualist as part of a new, Soviet community that, by embracing

¹¹ Sofia Azarkhi. “Razmyshleniia o kontseptsii Sankt-Peterburgskogo muzeia kostyuma” [“The Reflection on the Concept of St. Petersburg Museum of Costume”], In Galina Gabriel and Yu. Arutyunyan (eds). *Moda v kontekste kul'tury [Fashion in the Context of Culture]*, no 2 (Sankt Peterburg: SPBGUKI, 2007), p. 7.

¹² See, for example, Carlo Marco Belfanti. “Was Fashion a European Invention?” In *Journal of Global History*, N 3 (2008), pp. 419–443

¹³ Azarkhi, 2007, p. 7.

¹⁴ Vasily Aksenov. *V poiskakh grustnogo bebi [In Search of Melancholic Baby]* (New York: Liberty Press House, 1987), p. 20.

¹⁵ “Stilyaga” is singular from “stilyagi.”

freedom of expression and tearing down the iron curtain, could leave its troubled past behind once and for all.”¹⁶ In a similar fashion, émigré writers Petr Vail’ and Alexandr Genis call attention to the idea of the 1960s journalist that “monument, depicting a youngster with a fluffy quiff, in pipe trousers and canary-colored socks, would present the epoch of rehabilitation together with a convict in quilted jacket.”¹⁷ Not accidentally, Viktor Slavkin gave his memoir book a title “The monument to the unknown stilyaga.”¹⁸

However, it is not that clear, what lies behind the monument. Keeping in mind the socio-political context of the phenomenon, we should be cautious in assigning dissident status to stilyagi. Had stilyagi been a clear-cut opposition to the regime, they could hardly have survived throughout the 1950s. This thesis aims to challenge the popular contemporary vision of stilyagi as rebels against the regime. Therefore it considers stilyagi’s fashion not as a phenomenon in itself, but in its social and cultural context. How were stilyagi officially treated by the society? What role did fashion play in this treatment? To what extent were stilyagi’s imagery connected to the contemporary Western fashion, on the one hand, and to the 1950s mainstream Soviet clothing production, on the other hand? Finally, were they anti-Soviet rebels or rather part and parcel of the 1950s Soviet everyday life? These are questions addressed by my thesis.

Unfortunately, there is not much of the research on stilyagi’s fashion, and what has been done are predominantly Russian works. Some authors, such as Alexandr Vasiliev, prefer merely a descriptive approach to this problem.¹⁹ Nevertheless, there are a number of interesting writings. For example, cultural historian Olga Vainstein’s recent book on dandyism (2006) interprets stilyagi as post-war Soviet dandies. Although this point of view

¹⁶ Kristin Roth-Ey. “Who’s on the Pedestal, and Who’s in the Crowd: Stilyagi and the idea of Soviet youth culture in the thaw.” *Neprikosnovennyj zapas*, 36, no 4 (2004). <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2004/4/ra4.html> English original provided by courtesy of the author.

¹⁷ *Ogonyok*, N 21 (1961). Quoted in Vail’ and Genis, 1996, p. 65.

¹⁸ Viktor Slavkin. *Pamyatnik neizvestnomu stilyage* [The Monument to the Unknown Stilyaga] (Moskva: Artist, Rezhisser, Teatr, 1996). Extract from the book in <http://www.paco.net/odessa/media/word/242/sn220b.htm>

¹⁹ Alexandr Vasiliev. *Russkaya moda: 150 let v fotografiyakh* [Russian Fashion: 150 years in the photographs], (Moskva: Slovo, 2004), pp. 294-299.

is plausible, it should be questioned, much because it contradicts her ideas, expressed earlier in the same book.²⁰ Next, a research journal “Theory of Fashion,” the first intellectual, ‘anti-glamorous periodical on this subject in Russia, has been edited in Moscow since 2006. Its third number (2007), completely devoted to the problem of fashion in socialism, includes Anna Kimmerling’s article about stilyagi of Perm’.²¹ In her case study, Kimmerling successfully examines some elements of stilyagi’s fashion: the mechanism of penetration of trends into the provincial environment as well as the process of gradual recognition of alternative fashion in mainstream clothing production. Yulia Muzalevskaya, a PhD graduate of St. Petersburg State Academy of Art and Design, presented a paper on stilyagi in the annual conference “Fashion in the Context of Culture” (St. Petersburg State University of Culture and Art) in 2007; the paper was then published.²² Muzalevskaya, like Vainstein, underlines the dandyish character of stilyagi. Her thorough analysis deserves attention, but her application of the concepts of “otherness” and rebellion to stilyagi should be understood critically.

Evidently, every scholar looks at stilyagi it from a particular focus, or, to put it differently, interprets them within a different model. Thus, Pilkington sees stilyazhnichestvo together with its style through Komsomol discourse as problematic youth; she places it in the context of “youth-as-victims-of-Western-influence” paradigm.²³ For Alexei Yurchak, stilyagi with their imagination about Western popular culture were the by-product of hypernormalization of Soviet authoritative discourse in the late 1940s.²⁴ Following authors of the memoirs, Vainstein and Muzalevskaya present *stilyazhnichestvo*

²⁰ Olga Vainstein. *Dendi: moda, literature, stil’ zhizhni* [Dandy: Fashion, literature, lifestyle], (Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2006).

²¹ Anna Kimmerling. “Platforma protiv kalosh, ili stilyagi na ulitkah sovetskogo goroda”. [“High Sole versus Galoshes, or The Stilyagi in the Streets of a Soviet City”], In Lyudmila Alyabieva et al (eds). *Teoria mody. Odezhda, Telo, Kultura [Theory of Fashion. Clothes, Body, Culture]*, no 3. (Moskva, Novoe Literaturnoe obozrenie, 2007), pp. 81-99.

²² Yulia Muzalevskaya. “Stilyagi kak fenomen otechestvennoj poslevoennoj mody” [“Stilyagi as a Phenomenon of Native Postwar Fashion”] In Galina Gabriel and Yu. Arutyunyan, op. cit., 2007), pp. 122-127.

²³ Pilkington, 1994, pp. 66-70

²⁴ Alexei Yurchak. *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The last Soviet generation* (Princeton University Press, 2006),

as a protest against monotonous Soviet style and totalitarian control over leisure.²⁵ And so on. My aim is to broaden the outlook and see the different possibilities for interpreting stilyagi. At the same time, this research will be focused on the phenomena of visual representation – style and fashion – which, I argue, has a significant place in the history of the stilyagi phenomenon.

The investigation is organized by the principle “from the general to the particular.” First and foremost I think it necessary to paint a theoretical background. Next, I will introduce “the actors” as they could be seen by its contemporaries through the official discourse. Ultimately, I will focus on stilyagi’s fashion, which is of my major interest in this work.

The thesis therefore consists of three chapters. The first chapter provides a theoretical framework for the subject. Here I define the key terms, adopted both from youth sociology and from fashion theory. I also highlight the particular situation with the sources and explain the chosen approach to them. The second chapter analyses stilyagi’s depiction in the official press. I focus on two significant sources: the satirical journal *Krokodil* and the youth newspaper *Komsomol’skaya Pravda*.

In the last, third chapter the focus is on the interrelations between stilyagi’s “westernized” style and the approved Soviet fashion. My aim, first, is to look at the informational channels and strategies of consumption both in mainstream and stilyagi’s fashion. Next, I examine the phenomenon of *meshchanstvo* (“petit-bourgeois lifestyle”), characteristic for the culture of late Stalinism, and its connection with stilyagi’s appearance. Finally, this chapter endeavours to evaluate stilyagi’s position in relation to dandyism. I discuss basic traits of dandyism and consider their presence, absence or modification in stilyagi’s style.

²⁵ Vainstein, 2006, pp. 521-527, Muzalevskaya, 2007.

In the light of the two last decades' mass re-evaluation of values and revision of stereotypes of Soviet culture, *stilyazhnichestvo* appears as problem more serious and weighty than it seems. In the light of the recent musical movie by Russian director Valery Todorovsky, *Stilyagi* (December 2008), the subject provoked an *agiotage* in Internet discussions, where comments often move from the "trivial" issue of style to sensitive political and social topics. The opinions are concentrated in the two poles. One is a condemnation of stilyagi as traitors of the society, while the other is praising them as rebels against the stubborn regime. Such a bipolar attitude to the phenomenon obscures its nature. Therefore I suggest a new perspective: looking on *stilyazhnichestvo* through different dimensions without emotive judgments.

A historian dealing with the phenomenon of stilyagi has to admit that his only way is to gather pieces of the mosaic in order to create more or less clear picture. But this way can also be productive, for the pieces are various and may turn to be surprisingly illuminating. What one should do is to look at them not only separately, but also collectively, thus accomplishing "three-dimensional" analysis. This approach provides a possibility to revise the standard vision of stilyagi as a deliberate youth dissent. More particularly, it helps evaluating the significance of style and fashion for the appearance and development of Soviet youth culture.

Chapter 1. Conceptualizing stilyagi's style and fashion

My topic concerns two specific fields of Art History, Soviet fashion and youth fashion. While the former is a part of a larger concept of socialist fashion, the latter is closely linked to the sociology of youth subcultures and the theory of oppositional style. Not that I pretend to cover all these interconnections in a taxonomic way in my thesis, but, certainly, it is necessary to define the particular position of the subject within a discipline and, in so doing, to explain the chosen approach to investigation. Moreover, the use of characteristic terminology from these branches of studies is inevitable for the analysis of stilyagi's fashion. This chapter therefore inquires into the operative terms from the field of sociology ("subculture" and "counterculture"), fashion history and theory ("fashion" and "style"), and the more particular, the interdisciplinary term "subcultural style." Then the chapter discusses some methodological problems connected with the types of sources available for the historian, dealing with the topic under consideration.

1. 1. Stilyagi in the context of youth sociology

A seemingly easy way to explain stilyagi is to name them the first Soviet youth subculture. But in fact subculture is a specific and not unambiguous sociological category. First of all, it is understood as a smaller unity within a larger culture,¹ like the "subdivision of natural culture" or, in anthropological terms, "learned behaviour within the cultural

¹ No question, culture is a poly-semantic and multifaceted concept. In my thesis I take the concept in its anthropological sense, as a set of significant patterns of life in any society, as "particular way of life which expressed certain meanings and values not only in art and learning, but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour" (R. Williams. *The long Revolution* (London: Chatto&Windus, 1961), p. 57, quoted in Michael Brake. *Comparative Youth Culture: The sociology of youth culture and youth subcultures in America, Britain and Canada.* (London - New York: Routledge&Kegan Paul, 1985), p.1. A similar definition is given by John Clarke et al: "Culture is the practice which realizes or *objectivates* group life in meaningful shape and form". (John Clarke, et al. "Subcultures, Cultures and Class: A theoretical overview" In Hall and Jefferson, 2002, pp. 9-75; p. 10.)

subgroups of a pluralist society.”² A number of sociologists, especially scholars of the Birmingham school, discuss subculture within the frames of a class theory. Thus, if we present classes as the basic groups of modern societies, then it is logical to think about “class cultures” as “major cultural configurations.” And, consequently, “relative to these cultural-class configurations, *sub*-cultures are sub-sets – smaller, more localized and differentiated structures, within one or other of the larger cultural networks.”³ John Clarke, like some other scholars, denotes “cultural class configurations” as “parent cultures” in their attitude towards subcultures; in turn, such parent cultures are located within a certain dominant culture – “the overall disposition of cultural power in the society as a whole.”⁴ Therefore the position of a subculture can be presented as the direct connection with a parent culture (particular class culture) and the indirect connection with the dominant culture (that of the class, dominant in a society at large).

Such model implies that subcultures can emerge only in a multi-class society with a prevailing (usually middle-class) culture. For Michael Brake subcultures are a by-product of a pluralist society with a dominant value system which is “never homogeneous; instead there are constant modifications and adaptations of dominant ideas and values.”⁵ Fred Davis, too, maintains that the existence of subcultural style (which he calls “antifashion”) “presumes a certain democracy of taste and display.”⁶ Consequently, it could be argued that the concept of subculture is problematic for “classless” Soviet society with its strict monolithic ideology and state-controlled leisure.

However, despite the totalitarian regime, post-war Soviet society was by no means homogeneous. Neither it was classless in reality. Soviet class structure is still a debatable question in scholarship, and, as some authors argue, “not... all of it was obvious to most of

² A. M. Lee. “Levels of culture as levels of social generalization.” *American sociological research*, no 8 (1945); M. Gordon. “The concept of subculture and its applications.” *Social Forces*, no 10, 1947; both cited in Brake, 1985, p. 13

³ Clarke, “Subcultures...”, 2002, p. 13

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Brake, 1985, p. 6.

⁶ Fred Davis. *Fashion, Culture and Identity*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 165.

those who were living through Soviet Russia.”⁷ Yet in retrospect we have some clues. Thus, as Vera S. Dunham brilliantly demonstrated, by the late 1940s a Soviet middle-class with its petit-bourgeois values was formed, and became a medium between *nomenklatura* and working class.⁸ One can discuss a complex stratification of Soviet society; now it is more important to underline the variety of people’s mentalities. If officially the interests of all strata of the late Stalinist society were equal, their private everyday life and attitudes to possessions obviously differed. It became even more possible within the milder ideological climate of Khrushchev’s time. For example, Alexei Yurchak presents the theory of hypernormalization of the authoritative discourse in the late 1940s. As a result of this “paradigm shift” the performative meaning of discursive forms became more important than constative meaning, which could be easily ignored by the actors. Furthermore, Yurchak argues, “Performative reproduction... had an important function of enabling new meanings, lifestyles, communities and pursuits, all within the discursive field of the state but without fully determined or controlled by it.”⁹ Therefore it can be supposed that the performative shift of the late Soviet socialism gave room for modifications of the dominant values, which, according to Brake, is a crucial condition for the appearance of a subculture.¹⁰

This is a clue to recognizing stilyagi as a subculture. In addition, the appearance of stilyagi in the shell-shocked and internally repressed post-war Soviet society might partially fit “functional” definitions of a subculture. The example is Phil Cohen’s notion of “the latent function of subculture... to express and resolve, albeit ‘magically’, the

⁷ Daniel Bertaux, Anna Rotkirch and Paul Thompson. “Introduction”. In Daniel Bertaux, Paul Thompson and Anna Rotkirch (eds). *On living through Soviet Russia* (London and New-York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 1-22; p. 6.

⁸ Vera S. Dunham. In *Stalin’s Time: Middle class values in Soviet fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990).

⁹ Yurchak, 2006, pp. 132-134.

¹⁰ Brake, 1985, p. 6.

contradictions which remain hidden or unresolved in the parent culture.”¹¹ Although Cohen implies working-class subculture, for stilyagi there obviously existed a larger-scale, dominant culture’s contradictions to be ‘magically’ resolved. Even closer to the youth group in question is D. Downes’s picture of a subculture: “A number of actors with similar problems of adjustment for whom no effective solution as yet exists for a common, shared problem.”¹² The understanding of a subculture as an act of self-distinction and public disturbance can also be extended on the stilyagi’s case: their alternative fashion and behaviour were seen as abnormal by the society. Therefore, for instance, Hebdige’s notion that “subcultures represent ‘noise’ (as opposed to sound) and strive to interfere in the orderly sequence” reflects specificity of *stilyazhnichestvo* as well.¹³

Nonetheless, the problem with stilyagi is their non-working-class origin, whereas “working-classness” is a crucial feature of a subculture in its traditional understanding (Teddy-boys, Mods, Rockers, skinheads, and punks are illustrative examples). Whereas stilyagi’s core consisted of the children of the party apparatchiks, diplomats, higher figures of culture, etc., their imitators were middle-class¹⁴ youngsters and, in the late 1950s, working-class youth, including provincials. In this respect stilyagi stand closer to “bohemian and middle-class delinquency” or “middle-class counter-cultures” such as hippies or beatniks. Thus, unlike sharply articulated, part-time and neighbourhood-based working-class subcultures, middle-class countercultures are described as “diffuse, less group-centred, more individualized,”¹⁵ and so were stilyagi. But, if we assume that

¹¹ Phil Cohen. “Sub-Cultural Conflict and Working-Class Community”. *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, N 2 (Birmingham: CCCS, University of Birmingham, 1972), p. 23. Quoted in Clarke, “Subcultures...”, 2002, p. 32.

¹² D. Downes, *The delinquent solution*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, London), p. 7. Both cited in Brake, 1985, p. 8.

¹³ Dick Hebdige. *Subculture: The meaning of style* (London: Methuen, 1999), p. 90.

¹⁴ In my understanding of the concept “Soviet middle-class of the 1950s”, I share the interpretation of Vera S. Dunham: “Despite the perils of imposing terms from the language of one culture on another, I want to suggest that the Soviet middle class consists of... the solid citizens in positions and style of life below the top officials and the cultural elite, yet above the world of plain clerks and factory workers, of farm labourers and sales girls”. Vera Dunham. In *Stalin’s Time: Middleclass values in Soviet fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, (1990), p. 5.

¹⁵ Clarke, “Subcultures...”, 2002, p. 60, see also Brake, 1985, p. 83.

stilyazhnichestvo was a middle-class counterculture, then we should look for their political opposition. This presumption comfortably comes together with the popular idea of memoir writers about stilyagi's proto-dissidence, but a closer look at the phenomenon makes this position seem rather doubtful and suspicious.

It should be admitted, however, that counterculture does not necessarily mean overt protest, for, as Clarke maintains, apparent indifference to politics often happens in such circles. Yet "even when the middle-class counter-cultures are explicitly anti-political, their objective tendency is treated as, potentially, political."¹⁶ Some of stilyagi could have potentially political ideas, but not the entire group. Therefore the term "counterculture" does not seem relevant. In addition, for this thesis the subject itself is more important than a sharp sociological determination.

1.2. Defining fashion and style

Fashion, of course, has a multiplicity of meanings and implications. First of all, there are two general concepts: the wider and the narrower ones. According to the first one, fashion is a "short-lived dominance of a particular taste in some sphere of life or culture," or, in a somewhat different expression "an unstable, quickly passing popularity" of any phenomenon or idea.¹⁷ Hence, theoretically, one can think about fashion in various arts, sciences and areas of everyday life.¹⁸ The second, more common concept is focused on apparel; Fred Davis, for example, determines it as "dress fashion."¹⁹

¹⁶ Clarke, "Subcultures...", 2002, p. 61.

¹⁷ Irina Baldano. *Moda XX veka* [Fashion of the Twentieth Century] (Moskva: Olma-Press, 2001), p. 37.

¹⁸ Fred Davis. *Fashion, Culture and Identity*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 120, 192-194.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 193. To be precise, Davis uses the plural expression ("dress fashions"), stressing the plurality of fashionable styles and motives in the modern capitalist society. Interestingly, in this case he obviously understands fashion as a particular stage, a temporal popularity of some dress/clothing forms, while in other examples he insists in the dynamic nature of fashion.

Next, fashion in the latter sense by no means has a singular meaning, for it is in danger of being confused with the terms “dress,” “clothing,” “costume,” etc.²⁰ They are clearly different because fashion is not only a wider concept than those enclosed in the indicated terms, but also more socially and economically determined. First, fashion means not just apparel (static phenomenon), but the popularity, spread, and use of this type of apparel (dynamic phenomenon). Certainly, this approach, again, has its variations. For example, Elizabeth Wilson interprets fashion as a rapid and permanent change of styles in dress.²¹ Similarly, Carlo Marco Belfanti, summing up the ideas of some contemporary fashion historians, attaches fashion to “rapid changes of clothing styles.”²²

Regarding fashion as change implies a presence of certain altering unities, or modes. These are, in turn, complex, and so there is a classical understanding of fashion as a repeating cycle, or a process, pioneered by Thorstein Veblen and Georg Simmel and later developed by the apologists of the “trickle-down” theory.²³ One of the definitions given by Irina Baldano is based on a similar cyclical understanding of fashion. Thus, fashion is “a sphere of the concrete professional activity, including forecasting, designing, production and realization of clothing, shoes, and accessories”.²⁴ Strangely enough, Baldano excludes consumption, one of the strongest markers of fashion, from this concept. At the same time, consumption is included in Davis’ model, a developed version of that of George Sproule. Underscoring a high institutionalization of fashion in Western societies, Davis distinguishes five stages of fashion as a process: invention, introduction, fashion

²⁰ Although not of a primary importance for this paper, it seems nonetheless worth considering Davis’s division of the terms “clothing” and “dress”: “...the term *clothing* might reasonably be restricted to the garments themselves, whereas *dress* could better be made to refer to the distinctive properties of particular assemblages of garments, i.e., the practices and expectation regarding their combinations and wearing issues”. Davis, 1992, p. 25.

²¹ Elizabeth Wilson. *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and modernity* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003), p. 3.

²² Belfanti, 2008, pp. 419-443.

²³ Thorstein Veblen. *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Macmillan, 1899), Georg Simmel. “Fashion” (1904), Rpt. in *American Journal of Sociology*, no 62 (May 1957), pp. 541-58. Both cited in Davis, 1992, pp. 103-120.

²⁴ Baldano, 2001, p. 37.

leadership, increasing social visibility and, finally, waning.²⁵ For him, it is this highly developed and structured process that distinguishes fashion in apparel from similar phenomena in other fields. The latter Davis understands not even as fashion, but as a “paradigmatic shift” demonstrated by Thomas Kuhn, which is, though it resembles fashion change, not the same. Though arguable, this position helps more clearly associate the term “fashion” with the sphere of dress and clothing.

Importantly, fashion is widely evaluated as a product of capitalism, and therefore its beginning is to be found in Europe in the end of the Middle Ages.²⁶ Thus, if every age and society has some kind of costume, fashion is specifically a modern Western phenomenon. Naturally, its status was strengthened by industrialization and global urbanization in the nineteenth century, for only then did a mass-scale production and consumption of clothes become possible. A crucial advance was the appearance of the independent couturier, creating dress models not only for individual aristocratic or high-bourgeois clients, but also for the market and thus for middle-class society. From then on Fashion Houses’ activity marked fashion as a Western domain.

Such a history puts in doubt the possibility of fashion in socialist societies in general and the USSR in particular. However, I would argue that fashion does not and should not have a rigid definition. If we take fashion not as a process with a fixed number of stages, but, in a narrower sense, as a number of popular modes of sartorial behaviour, then fashion can be found as an element of Stalin’s program of *kulturnost’* (mass cultural education, or “civilizing process”) of the 1930-40s or Khrushchev’s campaign for creating an authentic socialist style as an alternative to Western art and design.²⁷ Certainly, an

²⁵ Davis, 1992, pp. 123-158. To affirm his idea about fashion as change, Davis refers to etymology, relying on *Oxford English Dictionary*; thus fashion originates from the Old French term meaning “to make” in the sense of “fabricate”; not accidentally modern verb “fashion” also has this meaning. (Davis, 1992, p. 14). Interestingly, however, that French equivalent term “*mode*” is of more “static” character, for it signifies also “pattern”, “rule”, etc, that is, something given or set; Russian term “*moda*” originates from French (Baldano, 2001, p. 37).

²⁶ Davis, 1992, Wilson, 2003, Belfanti, 2008.

²⁷ Lyudmila Aliabieva. “*Pis’mo Redaktora*” [“The Editor’s Letter”] in Lyudmila Alyabieva et al (eds). *Teoria mody. Odezhda, Telo, Kultura* [Theory of Fashion. Clothes, Body, Culture], no 3. (Moskva, Novoe

orthodox fashion historian or sociologist would prefer to speak about the Soviet practice of dressing or planned production and realization of dress products rather than fashion. However, following the alternative “focused” approach to the concept and remembering the great influence of Western, especially American, fashion in the USSR after World War II, one can recognize fashion in Soviet culture, though in a modified form. Therefore, using the term “Soviet fashion” in this paper I am conscious of its specific character in relation to the traditional Western concept of fashion.

The next important term is “style,” often comprehended in a blurry relationship with the term “fashion.” On the one hand, the two are often used as synonyms in colloquial speech and popular literature on fashion. On the other hand, style is certainly about personality, while fashion is about the society/social group: one can say “individual style” but not “individual fashion.” But, if style is “personal,” does it therefore stay outside “collective” fashion? According to Baldano’s explanation, style and fashion are related in the form of interchange: firstly a fashion leader presents a style, then it is adopted by the mass and spread via media and becomes fashion, while in the sphere of fashion design already a new style is being created, and so on. Moreover, whereas fashion exists only in the form of popularised style, the latter can function even without fashion.²⁸ This last point has something in common with Wilson’s idea of a style close to classics, a “timeless style,” which “tries to get the essential element of change out of fashion altogether.”²⁹

Notably, Wilson presents this issue in the context of dandyism as an example of oppositional fashion. What is striking here is that fashion, being regularly self-rejecting, always contains in itself a degree of opposition. Thus, for instance, the pioneer of dandyism, George Brummell, played in the early nineteenth century English society

Literaturnoe obozrenie, 2007), pp.10-12; Susan E. Reid and David Clowney, (eds.) *Style and Socialism: Modernity and material culture in post-war Eastern Europe* (Paisey: Berg Publishers, 2000); See also Vadim Volkov. “The Concept of *Kulturnost*: Notion on the Stalinist civilizing process”. In Sheila Fitzpatrick (ed). *Stalinism: New directions* (London : Routledge, 1999), pp. 210-228.

²⁸ Baldano, 2001, p. 51.

²⁹ Wilson, 2003, p. 192.

practically the same role as did twentieth-century couturiers and pop-stars: he set the patterns of dressing and demeanour. But, on the other hand, his societal status is to some extent similar to that of beatnik poets or punk musicians: they also provoked imitations within specific social groups and, finally, inspired establishment designers, who commercialized their alternative style. Therefore, its ambition of “eternity” notwithstanding, style is always attractive to be absorbed and devoured by mainstream fashion.

The most important concept for this research is “subcultural style.” First and foremost I explain why it can be relevant. Despite the highlighted uncertainty with sociological terminology, I consciously choose “subculture” for my narrative on stilyagi as a conventional term, because of its convenience, keeping in mind the exclusivity of this use. I draw on Brake’s model of subcultural style, understood as a cultural form, common for all subcultures. He argues: “It expresses a degree of commitment to the subculture, and it indicates membership of a specific subculture which by its very appearance disregards or attacks dominant values.” Going further, Brake defines three basic elements of subcultural style:

1. ‘Image’, appearance composed of costume, accessories such as hair-style, jewellery and artefacts.
2. ‘Demeanour’, made up of expression, gait and posture. Roughly this is what the actors wear and how they wear it.
3. ‘Argot’, a special vocabulary and how it is delivered.³⁰

Stilyagi presented all these elements: they dressed and behaved differently from mainstream society, and elaborated their own slang, a mixture of jazzmen’s argot and adoptions from English.³¹ Therefore Brake’s explanation is the basis of my choice of the operative term. There are, however, a variety of definitions and explanations of subcultural style. For working-class subcultures, style is tightly connected with the division of work and leisure; leisure time is a soil for style to develop. From Clarke’s notion, “not only does

³⁰ Brake, 1985, p. 11.

³¹ Kozlov, 2006, pp. 79-84, 96-97; Vainstein, 2007.

youth structure much of its activities and concerns around leisure, but actively employs this area for the construction of very distinctive subcultural styles.”³² The problem of leisure-work dichotomy as reflected in the stilyagi’s style seems crucial in the context of Soviet ideology with its cult of hard work.

Next, there is a high sociological interest to the meaning of style, accompanied by adopting semiotic and linguistic theory.³³ In his outline of this approach, Brake demonstrates:

Style... is used for a variety of meanings. It indicates which symbolic groups one belongs to, it demarcates that group from the mainstream, and it makes an appeal to an identity outside of a class-ascribed one. It is learned in social interaction with significant subcultural others, and its performance requires what theatre actors call ‘presence’, the ability to wear costume and to use voice to protect an image with sincerity. Indeed, this form of performance skill may well be tested out by other subcultural members.³⁴

In short, Brake presents style “as a form of argot, drawing upon costume and artefacts from a mainstream fashion context and translating these into its own rhetoric.”³⁵ The analogue of costume with slang is also offered by Dick Hebdige, who refers to Roland Barthes’s distinction between ‘intentional’ and ‘natural’ images (for example, advertising picture versus news photograph). Similarly, subcultural style can be compared with that of the mainstream:

The subcultural stylistic ensembles – those emphatic combinations of dress, argot, dance, music, etc. – bear approximately the same relation to the more conventional formulae (‘normal’ suits and ties, casual wear, twin-sets, etc.) that the advertising image bears to the less consciously constructed news photograph.³⁶

Notably, Hebdige’s description of “stylistic ensembles” is close to Brake’s definition of style; instead of a more general and capacious concept of “demeanour,” he lists “dance” and “music.” However, the basic idea remains the same.

Also noteworthy is the anthropological approach to explaining subcultural style. Thus, a widespread and favoured device is the use of Claude Levi-Strauss’s concept of

³² Clarke, 2002, p. 176.

³³ For a detail analysis of style’s meaning see Hebdige, 1979.

³⁴ Brake, p. 13.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Hebdige, 1979, pp. 100-101

bricolage,³⁷ brought to youth sociology by Clarke. In the original sense, *bricolage* is “the re-ordering and re-contextualizing of objects to communicate fresh meanings, within a total system of significances, which already includes prior and sedimented meanings attached to the objects used.”³⁸ Loaded with meanings, objects become signs and are composed into one or another form of discourse. If in Levi-Strauss’s study the discourse is a myth or a totemic system, in Clarke’s theory the discourse is fashion of a modern industrial society.

As a result, one can find that

the practitioner of subcultural *bricolage* is also constrained by the existing meanings of signs within a discourse – the objects, the ‘gear’ used to assemble a new subcultural style must not only exist, but must also carry meanings organized into a system coherent enough for their relocation and transformation to be understood as a *transformation*. There is no point in it, if the new assemblage looks exactly like, carries exactly the same message as, that previously existing.³⁹

To summarise, subcultural style is generally seen by sociologists as a combination of meaningful elements, among which apparel plays a key role, altogether functioning as a sort of argot, or an act of significance.

Returning to the dyad “style-fashion,” I would present “style” in Baldano’s sense, as a prerogative of the few,⁴⁰ as a phenomenon similar to Brake’s “subcultural style” – a complex pattern set by the relatively small initial subculture of stilyagi. Close to this concept are Wilson’s “oppositional dress,” directed against the vanity of mainstream fashion, and Davis’s notion of “antifashion” (though he tends to connect it to counterculture rather than subculture).⁴¹ What happened when stilyagi’s style penetrated the provinces and even attracted some Komsomol activists was already fashion. I would like to conclude that style and fashion of stilyagi’s subculture are tightly interconnected,

³⁷ Claude Levi-Strauss. *The Savage Mind* (London; Weidenfeld and Nicolson), 1966; *Totemism* (London: Penguin), 1969; cited in Clarke, “Style”, p. 177.

³⁸ Clarke, “Style”, 2002, p. 177.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 177-178.

⁴⁰ Baldano, 2001, p. 51.

⁴¹ Wilson, 2003, pp. 179-207; Davis, 1992, pp. 159-188.

but approximately the early stage of their development (1949-1956) is associated with style and the later one (1957-1960) with fashion.⁴²

1.3. Methods and use of the sources

Since the approach to the topic is much conditioned by the sources, I now discuss the specific situation of investigating the stilyagi's style and fashion. Above all, fashion, as all visual arts, should be studied on the basis of images, whether real or reproduced. Thus, museums of costume and fashion magazines usually serve as sources for study of fashion. Neither, however, is available in the case of stilyagi. First, surely, nobody cared about collecting "ideologically wrong clothing," even the stilyagi themselves, for, grown up, they often changed their minds and did not evaluate these artefacts or simply did not want to bother with them. If something still remains, then it is only a private property and not accessible. Second, there was not such a thing in the USSR as fashion magazines in their Western sense. Instead, the state press offered journals on everyday life (*byt*) with advice about "correct dressing," "good taste," etiquette and, quite often, instructions for hand-making dresses; all this was addressed mostly to women. Naturally, it would be absurd to look there for pictures of deviant youth. And, again, only occasional photos may exist in private archives.

As a result, the complete picture of stilyazhnichestvo is impossible to reconstruct, but the topic itself is not impossible to investigate. Due to the contemporary press, memoirs, and interviews we know that this phenomenon existed, and this is already significant. Next, if we turn attention to the study of societal resonance of stilyagi and their

⁴² I adhere to this periodization, regarding Khrushchev's "secret Speech" on the XX Party Congress as a watershed, but the change is strongly fixed, for The Sixth International Festival of Youth and Students in 1957 can be also considered as a key event. A little different periodization is suggested by Anna Kimmerling. See Kimmerling, 2007), pp. 81-99.

style/fashion, it is possible to make quite interesting discoveries. Of course one should be cautious and critical while doing it. Thus, it is remarkable to have memoirs and interviews. On the other hand, they can never be really honest, for, as Kristin Roth-Ey notes, reminiscence is “by its very nature a creative and profoundly political act.”⁴³ Therefore these sources, while providing information, excite a historian’s imagination about what is missing and what is invented. If we focus on the descriptions of dress, it could be trustworthy, but, as I demonstrated, style and fashion include also behaviour and attitude to the dominant culture, which is inevitably distorted by memoir writers and the interviewed.

Happily, at our disposal are contemporary periodicals: satirical journals and youth press. To analyse their depiction of stilyagi is an interesting and offering option. Such method, of course can be seen limited and superficial by the apologists of oral history.⁴⁴ Definitely it is, but it does not yet reject its usefulness. I will use this method not for finding the real stories, but the reconstructing the image of stilyagi, dictated by the regime and popularized via widespread state press. Without this, neither stilyagi themselves, nor their fashion cannot be adequately evaluated. Moreover, the official press can provide the exclusive visual information, which is not to be found in oral sources. For example, popular satirical journal *Krokodil* [The Crocodile] is practically the only evidence of stilyagi’s dress style. As playwright Viktor Slavkin, not without irony, remarks, “If it were not the blood-thirstiness of *Krokodil*, there would be no place to see how the young people of the 1950s dressed (that was reflected in the cartoons, though in a grotesque way), how they spoke (what was delivered in the feuilletons, though with excess).”⁴⁵ The extreme, biased depiction of the phenomenon might betray some crucial aspects of it; moreover, the cartoons help to evaluate the official attitude and policy towards stilyagi. On the other hand, youth press elucidates the divergence of societal attitudes to the problems of fashion and personal taste. “Close reading” of anti-stilyagi message in state-run Soviet press is a

⁴³ Roth-Ey. 2004.

⁴⁴ Bertaux, Rotkirch and Thompson. “Introduction”, 2004, p. 1

⁴⁵ Slavkin, 1996.

way to avoid the limited vision of stilyagi in the framework of the tradition of political dissidence.

The journals on fashion and design, popular and professional alike, can also serve as sources when placing stilyagi in the context of Soviet fashion. They give a clue to what extent these youngsters were rebellious and “anti-fashionable,” or, on a broader level, what their relations were with the dominant culture. For my research, I refer to journals *Zhurnal Mod* [Fashion Journal] (Moscow), *Rabotnitsa* [Working Woman] (Moscow), *Decorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR* [Decorative Art of the USSR] (Moscow), and *Shveinaya Promyshlennost'* [Clothing Industry] (Leningrad).

Certainly, memoirs, published and oral interviews should by no means be excluded from the list of sources. Quite the contrary, they are useful in demonstrating people’s view of the phenomenon, their comprehensions and attitudes. The personal character of a written or oral source is not only a disadvantage; it is also a clue how the phenomenon is seen *post factum* by the actors themselves. In the case of stilyagi’s phenomenon such materials are, in a way, valuable for a comparison with other visions (of Soviet adult and Komsomol officials of the 1950s, of contemporary Russian and Western scholars). Therefore the analysis of the information from a personal interview is important, and an element of oral history will be present in the thesis. The available life stories of stilyagi-in-the-past are memoirs of the writer Vassily Aksenov, the playwright Viktor Slavkin, and the jazz musician Alexei Kozlov (all in Moscow), published interviews with the geologist Vladimir Tikhonenko (St. Petersburg), and my interviews with a St. Petersburg painter, Professor of Academy of Art and design (Odessa, where he spent his youth) and a Hungarian journalist, who in the 1950s lived in Moscow and Leningrad.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Aksenov. 1987; Slavkin. 1996, Kozlov, 2006; Olesya Guk. “*Tarzan v svoym otechestve*” [“*Tarzan in his Fatherland*”] (Interview with Vladimir Tikhonenko). Pchela, no 11, (1997). <http://www.pchela.ru/podshiv/11/>; V. G., interview by the author, (St. Petersburg, April 13, 2009); I. K., interview by the author (Budapest, May 4, 2009).

Using these materials, I share the position of Daniel Betraux' research team: "If we want to understand living through Soviet Russia, we simply cannot do without the direct testimony of the Russians who lived through it."⁴⁷ The same is evidently true for Soviet Union on the whole. But my thesis does not aim to cover the entire situation with stilyagi in vast Soviet space. In the all-state scale stilyagi were a small "subculture," absent in many towns and the countryside and concentrated in the few big urban centres. Even though, counting all the local cases means a long-term archival and field work. As a result, my work cannot avoid generalizations, based on the available information. I purpose to find basic features of stilyagi's group in general and their fashion in particular, keeping in mind the differences between the local styles. In addition, the general findings can serve a fundament for further, more detailed investigations.

The vocabulary, discussed and defined in this chapter, is an instrument for the analysis in the two following chapters. The term subculture is obviously useful for considering stilyagi, especially if we adopt Brake's model of subcultural style. But since the traditional Western conception of subculture cannot be applied to stilyagi's case, I prefer to use it in the quotation marks in order to avoid terminological confusions. I would like also to employ two other useful terms. One is "deviance" (and its derivative adjective, "deviant"), which I take in a simple sense – "difference from the approved norms." In this meaning "deviance" is more neutral than "nonconformism," "opposition," or "dissent," and therefore it does not contradict my basic idea that stilyagi were not oriented against the regime.⁴⁸ By the same token, I will use another term "alternative", meaning simply "other", "different," without any political connotations.

⁴⁷ Betraux, Rotkirch and Thompson. "Introduction", 2004, p. 11.

⁴⁸ Choosing the term "deviance" for use in my thesis, I have to mention the so-called "sceptical tradition" in the sociological study of delinquency and deviance, formed in the 1960s. The new tradition challenged the canonical concept of deviance by questions like "deviant to whom?", "deviant from what?", "problematic to whom?" and so on. (Stanley Cohen. *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The creation of the Mods and Rockers* (3d ed.) (London-New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 3-4). The simple meaning I employ can also be explained according to this theory. Stilyagi were deviant from the common norms of dress and behaviour, set by Soviet regime during the 1950s. They were deviant to the mainstream Soviet people, who followed the approved norms.

In the next chapter, I examine stilyagi through the official discourse, expressed in the state-sponsored press, which is necessary for evaluating the regime's reaction on the emergence of youth "subculture" on Soviet scene.

Chapter 2. “Moral panic”: stilyagi in the official press

Thinking about stilyagi as a problem of fashion and, more broadly, as a social problem, it is appropriate to see how they are represented in society. My basic argument is that the state-sponsored Soviet press, acting by some analogy with British mass media, reacted to stilyagi with what sociologist Stanley Cohen calls “moral panic.” In his case study of the British interpretation of Mods and Rockers in the 1960s, Cohen argues that public excitement around deviant appearances and group identities is typical for any society:

A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible.¹

These phenomena Cohen designates as “moral panics.” Presumably, their traits can be found in 1950s Soviet society faced by the threat of the young “westernizers.” In this case, “moral barricades” were filled by the “engineers of human souls”: Party officials, journalists, Komsomol leaders and activists, pedagogues and parents, and, finally, the “right thinking” working people at large.

If “moral panics” are focused on social groups, for example, youth subcultures, their members are treated as anti-heroes, as negative reflections of the “correct” societal actors. “In the gallery of types that society erects to show its members which roles should be avoided and which should be emulated, these groups have occurred a constant position as folk devils: visible reminders of what we should not be.”² Considering stilyagi as post-war Soviet “folk devils” through analysing their presentation in the state-run press is the aim of this chapter. I have selected the two most indicative periodicals in this respect. The first,

¹ Cohen, 2002, p. 1.

² Ibid, pp. 1-2.

Krokodil, addressed generally to adult readers, propagated unambiguous mockery with the help of cartoons. The second, *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, is important as a youth-oriented periodical and deals with youth problems more seriously. Separate analysis of these two periodicals is designed to call attention to the discourses themselves, and to allow identification of the basic issues of this particular “moral panic.”

Using Cohen’s theory demonstrates that the Soviets’ sharp reaction to youth “subculture” is not just a typical sign of totalitarian regimes, but is shared by other societies which perceive youth subcultures as a threat. However, the *stilyagi*’s case, like any “moral panic,” has its unique features, which are also to be traced in this chapter.

2.1. “The Crocodile’s teeth”³: satire on *stilyagi*

Krokodil [The Crocodile], published since 1922 and the only all-Soviet-Union satirical journal since 1930, long kept its popularity due to its comprehensive visual language. Satire served as a successful ideological weapon, and *stilyagi* easily became an attractive target. In some of its techniques *Krokodil* followed the long-term tradition of satire that goes back as far as to the antique times. Among them are grotesque and metaphors, especially botanic and animalistic ones. Traditionally, reducing the enemy to an inferior creature, proclaiming his miserable position meant half to defeat him. These metaphors are expressive and easily comprehensible for all spectators.

The term *stilyaga* (singular from *stilyagi*) itself is associated first of all with *Krokodil* satire. It was a title of a feuilleton by D. Belyaev, which appeared in *Krokodil* in 1949. It was, most likely, the first “trouble signal” on youth deviance.⁴ Belyaev ascribes

³ Stites, 1992, p. 126.

⁴ D. Belyaev. “*Stilyaga (Tipy, ukhodyashchie v proshloe)*” [“*Stilyaga (Characters, coming to the past)*”]. *Krokodil*, N 7 (March 10, 1949), p. 10.

the word “stilyaga” to youth slang, whereas its negative inflection suggests it was rather an invention of the author.⁵

According to the recollection of Alexei Kozlov, the word “stilyaga” was widely used and abused by “educators” even before Belyaev’s satirical attack. It points to the problematic character of the term. Thus, for Kozlov, the first Soviet “hipsters” did not call themselves “stilyagi”; it was just a label, loaded with scorn. “This term”, he argues, “stood in the line with such word-bludgeons as ‘rootless cosmopolitan’, ‘groveller’, ‘renegade’, ‘mould’, and was offensive for those who were called so.”⁶ Moreover, Kozlov is convinced that the word “stilyaga” was invented purposefully in the background of the Cold War, and played a role of ‘hoick’ command for Soviet philistines to attack young “westernizers.” At the same time, according to linguist Eduard Vartanian, the spontaneous origin of the word in the post-war youth jargon is also possible.⁷ Nevertheless, the term “stilyagi” became a popular label in the official discourse.

As the starting point for the ideological struggle with stilyagi in the press, Belyaev’s feuilleton deserves closer attention. The object of Belyaev’s condemnation is nothing but style, that is, an individual style, deviating from that of a “good Soviet man”. Interestingly, the satirist describes style that outraged him exactly in Michael Brake’s terms:⁸ “They [stilyagi], can you believe it, worked out a special style – in *clothing, talks, manners*. The main thing in their style is not to look like ordinary people. And in such striving they reach nonsense, absurd” [my emphasis].⁹ In spite of Belyaev’s strong bias, his description of the

⁵ The scorn is expressed in the morphemic structure of the word. It is formed from the term *stil’* (style) and typical Russian suffix «yaga», which mainly denotes features and actions of the subjects, or gives the word the tinge of familiarity, irony or reproach. See Eduard Vartanian. *Puteshestvie v slovo* [The Trip to a Word]. (Moskva: Prosveshchenie, 1982). <http://www.knigashop.ru/book/953/?poisk=true>.

⁶ Kozlov, 2006, p. 77. Interestingly, other participants of this youth subculture do not share Kozlov’s hostility to the word ‘stilyaga’ in their memoirs, and use it in a rather neutral tone (See Aksenov. 1987, p. 23; Slavkin. 1996, Guk. 1997, V. G. 2009).

⁷ For Vartanian, originally the word stilyaga had an approvingly-sympathetic coloration, but since 1949, the term was being redeemed and thus became a weapon for state-run journalists and *literati*. Vartanian, 1982

⁸ Brake, 1985, p. 11.

⁹ Belyaev, 1949.

stilyaga's apparel is the only evidence of the earliest Soviet stilyagi's look. All the memoirs of stilyagi-in-the-past and available interviews start with a narrative from the early 1950s.

Therefore what remains for a historian is to believe that Belyaev's picture to some extent reflects a real dress style of the first stilyagi. The author depicts a young man, appearing in a student club, who

had an amazingly odd look: the back of the jacket was bright orange, while sleeves and flaps were green; I had not seen such wide trousers of canary-pea-green colour even in the years of the famous bell-bottom fashion;¹⁰ his shoes constituted a sophisticated combination of black lacquered leather and red suede... The youngster leaned against the door-post and, with an awfully easy stir, crossed his legs, after that one could notice his socks, which, it seemed, were made from the pieces of the American flag - so bright they were.¹¹

What is stressed here are absurdity, complexity and inconvenience. Nonetheless, bearing in mind the author's device of the grotesque, we can approximately draw the costume of a pioneer of Soviet alternative fashion. Bright fabrics of the clothes (though not necessarily so variegated), trousers wider than the mainstream ones (which at that time were also quite wide),¹² shoes of combined materials – all this looked, no wonder, as a challenge to the post-war modesty in dress. In fact, this short descriptive passage is loaded with extra meanings. First, the (anti-)hero is presented as arrogant and wicked through his way of motion: purposefully easy posture, pretentiously crossed legs (the expression of “demeanour” element of subcultural style). Second, the American-flag-coloured socks are obviously a hint at the anti-Soviet orientation and servility towards the bulwark of capitalism. The genre of satire allows politicizing a minute detail; thus a banal garment becomes an element of Cold War rhetoric.

In addition, Belyaev points towards two topics for the next decade's anti-stilyagi satire: their mental/physical inferiority and gender relations. The first is revealed through

¹⁰ Most likely, Belyaev means the popularity of sailors' bell-bottomed trousers in the 1930s. See Anatoly Rybakov. “*O modakh, vkusakh I borodatykh studentakh*” (“On Fashion, Tastes and Bearded Students”). *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, 10106, N 87 (Apr 12, 1958).

¹¹ Belyaev, 1949.

¹² See Elena Kossareva. *Moda. XX vek. Razvitie modnykh form kostyuma* [Fashion. The Twentieth Century. The Development of Fashionable forms of Costume] (Sankt-Peterburg: Peterburgskii Institut Pechati, 2006), pp. 170-178; *Zhurnal Mod*, (Moscow, NN of 1949-1953).

the motif of a weed, a metaphor for the young loafer and ignoramus, bright on the outside but empty inside. This motif is assigned in the parable that opens Belyaev's article and develops in a further description of the protagonist's lack of elementary knowledge in high (especially national) culture. In addition to botanic comparison, the author expresses humiliation through the feminization of the stilyaga's visual image in contrast to the general masculine image of the Soviet young hero. Thus, "his mouth, brows and thin moustaches were dyed, and any Paris fashionable woman might envy his permanent-wave hairdo."¹³ Here the critique of bourgeois taste is also evident; similarly, the stilyaga's girlfriend looks as if she has "fluttered away from the cover of a fashion magazine" (implicitly a Western one), whereas their "complicated and absurd" dance resembles the cancan.

The second topic is gender relations among stilyagi. In Belyaev's story the stilyaga treats his girlfriend in a very slighting manner, while she takes it as normal and, ignorant like the stilyaga himself, looks at him with admiration. This becomes a theme for the image of stilyaga as a villain in his relation to a girl/woman that carries through the period.

Surprisingly, the next numbers of *Krokodil* contain practically no cartoons or satirical articles on stilyazhnichestvo until April, 1953, so the next item appears already after the death of Stalin.¹⁴ This suggests that during the last years of Stalinism youth "subculture" was not interpreted as a significant threat or a social problem, but just a marginal phenomenon – otherwise the "immaculacy" of the Soviet system could be questioned. This absence supports Belyaev's conclusion that this "type is quite rare, and in this case one for the whole dance hall."¹⁵ Even the magazine section, entitled "Types, coming to the past," points to the perception of stilyagi as just another vulnerable remnant of the bourgeois past; consequently, one or two mockeries in the journal would be enough

¹³ Belyaev, 1949.

¹⁴ E. Gorokhov. "V ZAGSe" ["In The Civilian Registry Office"], *Krokodil*, 1337, N 11 (April 20, 1953), p. 11.

¹⁵ Belyaev, 1949.

to defeat it. Another possible explanation is that in those years the *Krokodil* pages were devoted to the more serious “ideological enemies.”

After 1953, in contrast, stilyaga became a popular personage of *Krokodil* satire, with its peak in 1955. The image is generally stable throughout the fifties¹⁶ and differs from the 1949 one in fashion details (taper-toed shoes gradually replaced blunt-toed with high soles; new male and female hairdos appeared, etc). Its “iconographic” elements include an incredibly bright oversized jacket, a tie with an exotic pattern, pipe trousers, parti-coloured socks, and boots on the micro-porous sole (so-called “semolina”); “quiff” *a la* Elvis Presley or “Tarzan” hairdo and, quite often, thin “scoundrel’s” moustache. This new, post-Stalinist image can be analysed in terms of the two themes introduced by Belyaev: stilyagi’s mental/physical inferiority and gender relations. In addition, a new emerged theme, the responsibility of family, should be included in the analysis.

First, the inferiority of stilyaga was shown via the outer look, presented as a height of outrage and bad taste. Such a person was to evoke if not scorn, then, at least, pity towards the inferior creature; hence the spread of botanic and zoological metaphors. Stilyagi were compared with parrots and monkeys because of their affected look and imitation of Western dances (see Figure 1).¹⁷ Figure 2, a cartoon by A. Bazhenov, depicts two young men dancing rock-n-roll with two girls – the new dance had just come to the country with the Sixth International Festival of Youth and Students in 1957. The dancers’ faces are indeed monkeys’; the attached rhyme explains the author’s position:

We would not argue with Darwin,
For there is no defect in his theory,
He is right: in the remote past
People originated from monkeys.
It would have been so as it was for centuries,
But rock-n-roll confused all the plans,
And there is impossible to distinguish

¹⁶ Few examples of the journal numbers of 1960 will be given as conclusive for the 1950s anti-stilyagi propaganda and, accordingly, indicative for it. However, in general, the phenomenon of stilyazhnichestvo was in decline by 1960, therefore the 1950s is chosen as a chronological scope of the thesis.

¹⁷ L. Khudyakov. “*Obezyany*” [“The Monkeys”]. *Krokodil*, 1472, N 2 (January 20, 1957), p. 7; M. Slobodskiy. “*Pochti po Bremy. Popugai*” [“Almost by Brehm. A Parrot”]. *Krokodil*, N 1, 1960, reproduced in Kimmerling. 2007, pp. 81-99. *Krokodil* cartoons appear in Appendix 1 at the end of this chapter.

Man from monkey in this dance.¹⁸

In another cartoon (Figure 3) a couple of stilyagi, a boy and a girl in ornate costumes, are described as “The Family of Compositae” (“*semeistvo slozhnotsvetnykh*”).¹⁹ The already familiar motif of weed or dandelion was no less popular among *Krokodil* satirists. For instance, in the 1953 journal the verses by B. Timofeev are “devoted” to a certain Garry, a sponger with a foreign nickname, slavishly copying Western fashion. In the concluding lines the author puts a label: “So, who is this fop? A weed in our garden.”²⁰ In 1960 the artists’ group Kukryniksy carried the motif of parasite to its logical conclusion, unambiguously depicting dancing stilyagi as poisonous mushrooms,²¹ alien elements in the beautiful garden of Soviet society. Another aim of the ideologists was, likely, to demonstrate to stilyagi their own wretchedness and so convince them to turn “the correct way.”

This stilyagi’s image was to be contrasted with the image of a devoted Komsomol youth. The latter was usually depicted in a style of propaganda posters: “puritan” appearance, look firm of purpose. Such juxtaposition is noted by cultural historians Petr Vail’ and Alexandr Genis: “The look of the caricature stilyagi amazed by its inconvenience... The look of a correct person was different.”²² Unlike an affected stilyaga, a *komsomolets* looks statically quiet, even when in motion.²³ In sum, the language of satirists depicting stilyagi is based on binary oppositions: strict–pretentious, clear–

¹⁸Мы спорить с Дарвином не будем,/В его ученье нет изъяна,/Он прав: В далёком прошлом люди,/Произошли от обезьяны./Всё было б так, как шло от века,/ Но рок-н-ролл сместил все планы,/И в этом танце человека/Не отличишь от обезьяны. А. Bazhenov. “*Podrazhateli*”. [The Imitators]. *Krokodil*, 1494, N 24, (August 30 1957), p. 5.

¹⁹ А. Kanevsky. *Semeistvo Slozhnotsvetnykh* [The Family of Compositae]. *Krokodil*, 1452, N 17 (June 20, 1956), p.3. This is a word-play, because in Russian translation the term literally means “the family of complex-coloured”. The connection with stilyagi’s defiant gear is clear. Since Soviet educational system payed much attention to biology, this joke was to be easily grasped by everybody.

²⁰ В. Timofeev. “*Garri*” [Garry]. *Krokodil*, 1361, N 35 (December 20, 1953), p. 9.

²¹ Kukryniksy. *Poganki*. *Krokodil*, N1, 1960. Cited in Kimmerling, 2007.

²² Vail’ and Genis, 1996, p. 144.

²³ The attractive analogy is the tradition of orthodox icon painting, where the saints were depicted as motionless, like pillars, while sinners and devils, on the opposite, in jerky movements.

complicated, subdued–bright, modest–outrageous, etc, that is, generally, normal – abnormal.

Second, in terms of gender relations stilyaga is usually male, although in this period girls also quite often became the targets of critique. Their cartoon images are sometimes even more outrageous (see Figures 1, 4). This could be explained by the strict and conservative attitude towards female behaviour in Stalinist and later periods. Not surprisingly, being shown in stilyagi's company placed a girl in a position of public condemnation.²⁴ The girls' "iconography" is more flexible than that of boys. However, both have their own typical accessories. For the male stilyaga they are a bottle of alcohol, a wine-glass and almost always a cigarette in the corner of the mouth. The female stilyaga's accessories are a hairbrush, hand mirror and lipstick, sometimes fashion journals. All these objects were unambiguously associated with the bourgeois lifestyle. Stilyagi and their girlfriends are often depicted together, especially while dancing, which was appreciated as a characteristic vain activity of "the parasites."

Sometimes young women are presented as victims of stilyagi's dishonesty. According to many cartoons, a stilyaga is not capable of serious feelings, is inconstant and perfidious; he changes his preferences quickly and has a lot of marriages and divorces (see Figures 5, 6).²⁵ If he manages to stay married for a considerable time, he treats his wife improperly, wastes her money, and loads her with all the housework. Alcoholism and domestic violence were also ascribed to stilyagi.²⁶ As a result, *Krokodil* offers the two variants of gender relations inside the stilyagi milieu: either the "bad youngsters" trick and offend the "good girls", or they "convert" the girls in their disgraced lifestyle, which is perhaps even the worse evil.

²⁴ Kozlov, 2006, p. 85. However, the conservative attitude to girls/women is far from being an exclusively Soviet or socialist phenomenon. For example, Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber demonstrate that for the very same reason the position of girls in post-war British youth subcultures is marginal or invisible. See Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber. "Girls and Subcultures: An exploration". In Hall and Jefferson pp. 209-222, p. 213.

²⁵ *Krokodil*, 1337, N 11 (April 20, 1953), p. 11; 1521, N 15 (May 30 1958), p. 13; 1548, N 6 (1959), p. 5.

²⁶ Yu. Andreev. "Papen'kin synok" ["A Father's Son"]. *Krokodil*, 1570, N 28 (October 10, 1960), p. 10.

Third, the society was certainly interested in the cause of the appearance of such a “wicked youth.” The apparent one was Western culture with its bourgeois fashion, music and dances, so stilyagi were treated as the “victims-of-Western-influence.”²⁷ But somebody had to be responsible for this influence, and the critics easily found the guilty party: the family. Indeed, in *Krokodil* stilyagi are usually presented as “gilded youth” – scions of high-ranking parents. They fulfil any children’s caprices during childhood and shut their eyes to bad school grades. Then stilyagi enter the universities thanks to the parents’ position, but do not wish to study. Instead, they waste the parents’ money in restaurants. Dancing does not require thinking and hence displays their empty-headedness. Such a motif of substitution – dances for lectures, restaurant bill for grades record – is quite frequent in the cartoons.²⁸ In addition, stilyagi are pictured as rude in manners, not to mention their early weakness for smoking and alcohol.

These unpleasant characteristics are labels, ascribing stilyagi to a particular social stratum. It is clearly expressed through stilyagi’s attitude to factory work, which provokes panic, so-called “factory-phobia” («*zavodoboyazn’*») (see Figures 7, 8).²⁹ As we can see in figures 9 and 10, parents’ effort to give their children higher education is shown in such impressive scenes as the “assault” of the university doors or the “attack” on the department dean.³⁰

However, the parents’ egoistic indifference is shown to be no better than indulging. For example, a satirist addresses his rhyme to the imagined “intelligent” couple. They are typical representatives of Soviet elite, with a “Moskvich” car and a comfortable *dacha* near Moscow, but they failed to bring up their son properly. The author overtly accuses the parents:

²⁷ The paradigm “youth-as-victims-of-Western-influence”, developed during the 1950s, is a finding of Hillary Pilkington (Pilkington, 1994. pp. 68-69).

²⁸ For example, *Krokodil*, 1346, N 20 (July 20 1953), p. 9; 1947, N 9 (March 30 1957), p. 13; 1488, N 18, (June 30 1957), p. 7

²⁹ *Krokodil*, 1524, N 18, (June 30, 1958), p. 2; 1557, N 15 (1959), p. 7.

³⁰ *Krokodil*, 1490, N 20 (July 20 1957), p. 11; 1521, N 4 (June 30 1958), p. 4.

...From the whole time amount
Of your functions on the high posts,
You could not devote to your son
even an hour, with a good conscience.³¹

Here the root of wrong upbringing is in the substitution of the material spiritual values for the spiritual ones. Western fashion, no doubt, was ascribed to the former.

Often the parents are treated by the satirist as victims of their own generosity, as intelligent, but weak-willed. The 1955 cartoon by Boris Leo is very indicative: the overgrown youngster in stilyaga's dress sits on the neck of his grey-haired father (the popular satirical device of using the idiom literally). The father is evidently a respectable professor, but his sorrowful look shows that he gave up (see Figure 11).³² Therefore, the problem of youth deviance was considered not only as class-based, but also pedagogical. In fact the two explanations are logically interconnected: the apparatchiks as well as upper intelligentsia are remote from people's values and thus cannot cultivate patriotism and respect for labor in their children. In this sense, the view of the cultural historian David Feldman of anti-stilyagi propaganda as the part of Stalin's attack on the higher party leadership seems plausible.³³ However, insofar as this propaganda flourished only in the post-Stalinist period, it should rather be explained in the context of destalinization. The latter prompted more or less overt criticizing Stalinist *nomenklatura* system, on the one hand, and the struggle against "luxuries" both in architecture projects and in private life, on the other.³⁴ This, in turn, allowed exposing of vulgar fashion as moral depravity of "gilded youth".

³¹ "Из общего запаса/Ваших функций на больших постах/ Уделить вы сыну даже часа/ Не могли за совесть и за страх. Argo (a pseudonym). "Roditelskaya subbota" ["Parents' Saturday"]. *Krokodil*, 1422, N 24, (August 30, 1955), p. 5.

³² Boris Leo. "Once he climbed on his father's neck, and still has not get down" *Krokodil*, 1430, N 32 (1955), p. 5.

³³ Vladimir Tolts. "Lingva Sovetica – Sovetskii yazyk (2)" ["Lingva Sovetica – Soviet Language (2)]. Transcription of the broadcast on *Radio Svoboda* [Radio Liberty] from 19.10.03.

<http://www.svoboda.org/programs/TD/2003/TD.101903.asp>

³⁴ Elena Zubkova. *Obshchestvo i reformy 1945-1964* [The Society and Reforms 1945-1964] (Moskva: Izdatel'skii Tsentr "Rossiia molodaya", 1993), pp.107, 110; Natalia Lebina. "Shestidesyatniki: slovo i

Definitely, *Krokodil* authors tried to form public opinion about stilyagi as an elite “subculture,” opposed to the mass working youth via their individualist style. Certainly, the differences, often subtle, among the alternative looking youth were not relevant to the satire’s task. Thus the term “stilyaga” proved to be a convenient tool for labelling “folk devils” and creating “moral panic.” But to understand the place of stilyagi in youth culture more generally, it is necessary to consider their presence in the youth press.

2. 2. Polemics in *Komsomol’skaya Pravda*

As the official press organ of the All-Union Lenin Union of Youth (VLKSM), the daily *Komsomol’skaya Pravda*, founded in 1925, undoubtedly helped to form the common opinion of Soviet youth. At the same time, by provoking discussion and publishing feedback, the newspaper expressed this opinion as well. Of course, as Kristin Roth-Ey emphasizes, the readers’ letters were censored and sometimes even fabricated.³⁵ Therefore they expressed the opinion-as-it-should-be. Still, the readers’ letters, even fake ones, “were clearly a genre in Soviet mass culture, reflecting the conditions of their production, that did not prevent them from connecting to real people’s lives and emotions.”³⁶ Presumably, for those sincerely devoted to the Komsomol, the newspaper’s message was authoritative and influential, thus actual readers could deliver the same ideas which were systematically portrayed. As for the unpublished or the corrected alternative views (which definitely existed), they are not really important here, for I am looking into official opinion.

The issues raised by *Krokodil* are, in a way, present in *Komsomol’skaya Pravda* too, but with additions. The first (also drawn by *Krokodil* satirists) is what Roth-Ey calls

telo(stilistika sovetskoj povsednevnosti 1950-1960-h godov) [“Shestidesyatniki: world and body (stylistics of Soviet everyday life in the 1950-1960s”]. In Alyabieva et al, 2007, pp. 325-346.

³⁵ Roth-Ey, 2004.

³⁶ Ibid.

“overlapping categories,”³⁷ and which is close to Stanley Cohen’s concept of “spurious attribution.” The essence of the latter is that:

The initial stage in the labeling process was the use of emotive symbols such as ‘hooligans’, ‘thugs’, and ‘wild ones’. Via the inventory, these terms entered the mythology to provide a composite stigma attributable to persons performing certain acts, wearing certain clothes or belonging to a certain social status, that of the adolescent. Such composites are of all-purpose sort, with a hard core of stable attributes (irresponsibility, immaturity, arrogance, lack of respect for authority), surrounded by fringe attributes [that] varied more or less according to the deviance in question.³⁸

Such “emotive images” of stilyagi, when the people “wearing certain clothes” are being stigmatized, are explicit in the cartoons. According to the three defined themes, they are: weed (monkey, parrot); deceiver/depraver of women; father’s son/loafer. The topic of “rootless cosmopolitan” penetrates all three; not accidentally, Alexei Kozlov uses this expression as the first “synonym” of the term “stilyaga.”³⁹ By the same token, the Hungarian journalist, who studied and worked in the USSR in the 1950s, notes that in the official discourse the concepts “stilyaga” and “rootless cosmopolitan” were mixed.⁴⁰

In *Komsomol’skaya Pravda* picturing stilyagi as “rootless cosmopolitans” is more explicit. However, its expression has variations. One of them is satire, which dominated the newspaper’s treatment of stilyagi in the first half of the 1950s. As a rule, it presents a stilyaga as a social outcast. Thus, the satirical rhyme by L. Shatunovsky depicts the youngster of “vulgar style” feeling bored and alien at the students’ ball, being unable to understand neither the modest beauty of the clothes of the “good” youth, nor the genuine charm of folk dances. So this “‘foreigner’ of the type of the inveterate ‘stilyagi’⁴¹ dolefully

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Cohen, 2002, p. 40.

³⁹ Kozlov, 2006, p. 77.

⁴⁰ I. K., 2009.

⁴¹ Although the term ‘stilyaga’ was popular in the periodical’s lexicon, some authors still used it in quotation marks. It can be interpreted as a device of textual marginalization, exclusion from the general discourse, or as stressing stilyagi’s perverse understanding of classical term “style.” The role of quotation marks in presenting foreign phenomena as unauthentic and alien is considered by cultural historian Vladimir Papernyi in his study of Stalinist culture. See Vladimir Papernyi, *Kultura dva*. [The Culture Two] (Moskva: Novoe Literaturnoe obozrenie, 1996), pp 286-287.

goes away.”⁴² Drawing the border between the correct and the deviant (in this case in dress and dance), the author moves in verse from satire to propaganda:

There is no place for vulgar tastes and fashions between us –
We were born in the country of a fulfilled dream.
We are the hope of Fatherland; we are the youth of the people,
We are the protectors of a genuine beauty!⁴³

The vulgar stilyaga’s “I” confronts the righteous Komsomol’s “we”: the victor is evident. It means that the Komsomol’s bourgeois “other”⁴⁴ is not powerful; he is a marginal, an annoying exclusion from the rule.

Moreover, a stilyaga was placed in the line of negative social types, “folk devils” in Cohen’s terminology. In January, 1955 another satirist of *Komsomol’skaya Pravda* described a gallery of those “whom the New Year does not invite and does not take.”⁴⁵ Among them are the hooligan, the faultfinder (“*prorabotchik*”), the cheating lecturer (“*shpargal’shchik*”), the bureaucrat and the stilyaga. Although the last character is christened simply “the Ugly Creature” (“*Urod*”), by the description and the attached picture the implication is clear. Stilyaga is ugly, first, because of his deviant outer look, second, because of his moral depravity (“rude, vulgar and conceited, he is sensitive only to the fashions”).⁴⁶ He is included in the group of “villains” in Orin E. Klapp’s terminology,⁴⁷ as a negative role model for Soviet society, and stilyaga was its sub-type along with snob, egotist, idler, parasite, black-marketer and thief.

For example, in the feuilleton by S. Nariniani about a thankless son, living at the expense of his all-forgiving sick mother, nothing special is said about his dress style. However, the illustration clearly shows a stilyaga, with his typical oversized jacket and

⁴² L. Shatunovsky. “*Poshlyi stil*” [“Vulgar style”]. *Komsomol’skaya Pravda*, 8445, N 273 (November 19 1952).

⁴³ Среди нас места нет пошлым вкусам и модам - /Родились мы в стране воплощённой мечты. /Мы, Надежда Отчизны, мы – юность народа, /Мы защитники подлинной красоты! (Ibid).

⁴⁴ I refer not so much to the concept of “The other” by Iver B. Neumann as to more particular idea of stilyagi’s “otherness” (“*inakost*”) for the propagated Soviet style, suggested by Yulia Muzalevskaya (Muzalevskaya, 2007, pp. 122-127).

⁴⁵ A. Raskin. “*Tovarishch 55i puteshestvuet*” [“Comrade 1955 travels”]. *KP*, 9099, N 1 (January 1, 1955).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Orrin E. Klapp. *Heroes, Villains and Fools: The changing American character* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1957). Cited in Cohen, 2002, p. 3.

patterned tie.⁴⁸ In this way the illustration loaded a particular dress style with social and ethical meanings.

After 1956 this tendency developed further. An article, eloquently entitled “Once again about the mould”, tells the story of a big theft, made in an apartment after a drunken orgy.⁴⁹ It was committed by the guests, three seemingly innocent girls, who are the daughters of the respectable parents. Their fathers are a major general, professor of a military academy; a lieutenant colonel, minister of internal affairs; and a colonel of aviation. The general tone of the story betrays it as an invention, but, nonetheless, it perfectly shows the official opinion. Apparently, the case in point is the *stilyagi*’s company, the “gilded youth.” The characteristic features of *stilyazhnichestvo* are ascribed to the guilty girls: keenness on American movies, passion for fashionable clothes and dancing, leisure in the restaurants, flirting with “gilded boys” – in short, love for easy life. Even their crime is prompted by fashion hunger: “Robbing the apartment, they first of all grabbed foreign things – from lipstick to the underwear.” In this narrative fashion appears as evil, provoking vices and crimes, whereas the labels “*stilyaga*,” “father’s daughter,” “the depraved girl” and “criminal” are practically synonyms.⁵⁰

In the article from 1956 the “hero” is a young speculator, who offers a stranger the chance to buy a tie with the design of “blue saxophones on the white background.”⁵¹ This tiny detail is very indicative, for it opens an associative chain: saxophone, jazz music, boogie dance, stylish suit with exotic tie, vulgarity, disgrace, and, finally, crime. Thus the

⁴⁸ S. Nariniani. “*Mal’chik s poslednei party*” [“A Boy from the last School Desk”]. *KP*, 9219, N 121 (May 24, 1955).

⁴⁹ A. Starodub and I. Shatunovsky. “*Eshche raz o plesemi*” [Once Again about The Mould]. *KP*, 9417, N 11 (January 13 1956).

⁵⁰ The authors are very explicit in their critique of the *nomenklatura* mores. It resounds with *Krokodil*’s pedagogical issue and, as I have argued, seems natural in the context of Krushchev’s struggle against the shortcomings of Stalinism. A similar message appears in *Komsomol’skaya Pravda* as early as in 1952, in an article by lieutenant-colonel from Novosibirsk censuring unprincipled well-off fathers. However, *Komsomol* figures and teachers are also blamed there, and the whole idea is a total(itarian) control over private tastes rather than critique of the particular social group. Starodub and Shatunovsky, by the contrary, condemn precisely the moral corruption of the well-off family, the parents’ indifference and hence the wrong course of children’s education. See A. Alexeev. “*Ne proshchat’ nedostatkov*” [“Not to Forgive Demerits”]. *KP*, 8467, N 295 (December 16, 1952).

⁵¹ V. Nikolaev and V. Ossipov. “*Bezdelniki*” [“The loafers”]. *KP*, 9641, N 235 (October 4, 1956).

image of stilyaga becomes a vivid emblem of the “villain.” Such examples are many, but the basic idea is the same: labelling outsiders as “alien bodies” in the healthy Komsomol organism.

The second significant topic in *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* is a “good taste” as a special socialist virtue. In the case of stilyagi, it is the etalon of a “good socialist taste”⁵² which allows characterising those who did not follow it as deviant. Here is, for example, a description of a girl from the very last days of Stalinist rule:

[Her] plump figure was in tight silk dress. She constantly cast around coquettish glances, flapping her dyed light hair which looked like tow. On the feet were ‘elegant’ shoes on thick cork sole. The shoes made her step even more awkward and vacillating... The eyelashes were thickly made up with black mascara, and the bright lipstick far extended the contour of lips. This ‘lady’ about nineteen years old, evidently, thought herself beautiful.⁵³

But the author did not. All these tricks did not work, because “[i]n the image of Soviet youth, what is beautiful first of all is that the society regards as natural, that is, true, simple, and artless, that meets the laws of our reality.”⁵⁴ The most striking words in this formula are the authority of the society to set the rules of “good taste” and the belief in certain laws that condition this taste. Therefore the stilyagi’s crime is not only behavioral, but also sartorial: they dared to break the laws of “socialist style.”

In the newspaper, before the advent of destalinization, any attempt to privatize the choice of dress style, was met with the collective opinion: “No, it is our business!”⁵⁵ Personal taste becomes collective trouble, because it “shows the moral-political standard of a person, the misery or wealth of her spiritual world.”⁵⁶ And since personal taste is being politicized, the aesthetic education is treated as a part of Communist education.⁵⁷ Not

⁵² “Good socialist taste” is the term suggested by fashion historian Djurdja Bartlett, a specialist in fashion of socialist countries. See Djurdja Bartlett. “*Davaite odenem ikh v bezh: melkoburzhuzny mirok oficialnogo sociliasticheskogo kostyuma*” [“Let Them Wear Beige: the Petit-bourgeois world of the official socialist dress”], in Alyabieva et al, 2007, pp. 188-221.

⁵³ Lilita Berzinya. «*O tvoem vkuse*” [“About your taste”]. *KP*, 8531, N 51 (March 1, 1953).

⁵⁴ *Ibid*

⁵⁵ «*Net, eto nashe delo!*” [“No, it is Our Business!”]. A survey of responses for the letter by Zhenya Alexeeva and Lyuba Zaikina “*Nam stydno za podругu*” [“We are ashamed for our girlfriend”]. *KP*, 9827, N 188 (August 11, 1955).

⁵⁶ Berzinya, 1953.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*

surprisingly, debates on topics like “What is man’s beauty” provoked a resonance among the newspaper readers.⁵⁸

Gradually, this kind of discussion in *Komsomol’skaya Pravda* more and more involved the problem of *stilyagi per se*. The attempt was made to dissociate a particular sartorial image with delinquency. The journalists began to soften the extreme disapproval of fashion and to draw a clear border between “approved” and “bourgeois” fashions. Thus the topic of “good taste” acquired a complex interconnection with labeling and “emotive images”.

The advantage of this new approach in *Komsomol’skaya Pravda* was the opening the discussion with the readers, even though often in a fictive, imaginary way. In any case, the very picture of the exchange of opinions bears in itself a tinge of cultural liberalization. This happened within the general process of making Soviet official press open for feedback. As demonstrated by historian Elena Zubkova, after 1953 the growth of the audience’s correspondence became the matter of prestige (the lack of the desired activity partially explains the necessity of fabrications).⁵⁹ In this respect, the troublesome theme of *stilyagi* was effective in evoking reactions from readers.

On the other hand, such a discussion was important in the condition of a strengthened struggle with *stilyazhnichestvo*. Aside from the police, *stilyagi* were persecuted by volunteer groups – patrols, associated either with Komsomol or with the police.⁶⁰ The punitive measures ranged from cutting trousers and hair with scissors to exclusion from the Komsomol, universities or job positions. All that, I assume, made the youth more conscious in their dress modes, in order not occasionally to slip into the category of “bad style.” From this perspective, a reader’s answer “How many centimeters

⁵⁸ “*V chem krasota cheloveka?*” [“What is Man’s Beauty?”] A survey of the readers’ responses to the letter of Abdulkhamid Yusuf. *KP*, 9521, N 153 (June 30, 1955).

⁵⁹ Zubkova, 1993, p. 114.

⁶⁰ Pilkington, 1994, pp. 68, Roth-Ey, 2004; Artemy Troitsky. Interview with Alexei Kozlov. In Artemy Troitsky. *Back in the USSR* (London, Omnibus Press, 1987), p. 17.

wide should I make my trousers, not to become a stilyaga”⁶¹ does not seem that naïve and absurd.

Thus in the late 1950s, according to *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, one could be interested in fashion without being labeled a stilyaga. Stilyagi were marginalized not as evil fashion masters, but as fashion's fools. For example, an anonymous author claims:

Our youth treats ‘stilyagi’ with hostility. But this hostility boys and girls extend to fashions, erroneously believing, that fashions make a man ‘stilyaga,’ and not the ‘stilyagi’ spoil and vulgarize fashions. Therefore... one should not stick to a man the label ‘stilyaga’ only because he wears fashionable trousers or fashionable suit... ‘Stilyaga,’ caring about the unusual costume, exaggerates fashion and, not noticing it, makes himself a caricature, ridicules and displays to the common view his bad taste, foolish imitation of all and various fashions.⁶²

Here fashion as such is not treated as bourgeois; what matters is how it is used. In other words, the evaluation of a fashion lover depended on the context. I would explain this as a development of the Stalinist contextual model of understanding artifacts, which gave importance not to an object itself, but to its interpretation.⁶³ Drawing on this theory, Olga Gurova maintains: “Petit-bourgeois standard lies not in how many things a man possesses and what they are, but in his attitude to them. Thus appears the legitimization of belongings in the everyday life of Soviet man.”⁶⁴

A similar theory is presented by Alexei Yurchak in the connection with the post-Stalin period, when, with the hypernormalization of the authoritative discourse, “the [Stalinist] discourse about the acceptable and unacceptable ways to enjoy material and cultural products developed further.”⁶⁵ For example, the official attitude to jazz music, favoured by stilyagi, was ambiguous. Many Party and Komsomol activists liked this music themselves, but at the same time were nervous about the reaction to jazz performances, being afraid of “the explicit manifestation of the students’ excitement about that music.”

⁶¹ L. Pochivalov. “*Kakoi shiriny shit’ bryuki:?*” [“Of What Width to Make Trousers?”] *KP*, 10254, N 235 (October 5 1958).

⁶² “*Udobno i krasivo*” [“Comfortable and Nice”]. *KP*, 9506, N 100 (April 27, 1956).

⁶³ Victor Buchli. *An Archeology of Socialism* (Oxford: Berg, 2000). Cited in Gurova, 2005.

⁶⁴ Gurova, 2005.

⁶⁵ Yurchak, 2006, p. 169.

Therefore “the problem was not in the form but in its interpretation.”⁶⁶ *Komsomol'skaya Pravda's* messages confirm this idea. Musical critic V. Gorodinsky, for instance, argues that jazz contains both people's and anti-people's elements. Therefore educated Soviet people should distinguish between the spiritually rich jazz of the discriminated American black population and the tasteless “music of the fat.”⁶⁷ By the same token, a reader from a town in Zaporozhskaya oblast' defends such disapproved dances as tango and foxtrot. He claims that the character of these dances, glorious or, on the contrary, vulgar, depends on how one dances it.⁶⁸ This contextual approach was applied to fashion too.

The modes of contextualization were not, however, commonly accepted. Nor were they clear. This is illustrated by many letters to *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, where readers asked: why are students ordered to shave beards?⁶⁹ Or is wearing moustaches indeed unworthy for a Komsomol member?⁷⁰ Or is it fair that a hard-working advocate, an active *komsomolets* and ski champion in addition, is chastised by a Komsomol cell merely for his “unorthodox” suit?⁷¹ In one such letter, discussed by Roth-Ey, a technical student from Novosibirsk complains that he was labelled *stilyaga* for his modest, but narrow black trousers (25 cm width). “I understand: *stilyaga* is that with small, grey soul,” he defends his position. “It is a man for whom the limit of a dream is a dress with foreign label, and jolly dancing to the base jazz. But should one call *stilyaga* a man who has a purpose in his life, who strives to study and dresses inexpensively, but nicely, in fashion?”⁷² These examples let us conclude that while the journalists tried to improve the common attitude to fashion, many Komsomol activists complicated this task.

⁶⁶ Yurchak, 2006, p. 167.

⁶⁷ V. Gorodinsky. “*Razgovor o dzhaze*”. [“The Conversation about Jazz”]. *KP*, 10642, N 137 (June 13 1959); “Music of the fat” is the famous expression of Alexei Gorky, used in his critical article in 1928 (Cited in Slavkin, 1996).

⁶⁸ V. Ivanov. “*Razgovor nachistotu*” [“The Sincere Conversation”]. *KP*, 9839, N 127 (May 31, 1957).

⁶⁹ Anatoly Rybakov. “*O modakh, vkusakh I borodatykh studentakh*” [“On Fashions, Tastes and Bearded Students”]. *KP*, 10106, N 87 (Apr 12, 1958).

⁷⁰ K. Russakova. “*Kto iz nikh stilyaga?*” [“Who of Them is a *Stilyaga*?”] *KP*, 9594, N 188 (August 10 1956).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² A. Nuikin. “*Stilyaga li Vladimir Tokarev?*” [“Is Vladimir Tokarev a *Stilyaga*?”] *KP*, 10100, N 81 (April 5 1958); also cited in Roth-Ey, 2004.

The fact that the letters came from different regions of Soviet Union shows the diffusion of stilyagi's style in spatial terms and its transformation into fashion, with influenced mainstream Soviet fashion. As a result not only does the line between a stilyaga and a "person of taste" become flexible; even that youth circle which the newspaper labelled stilyaga was recognized to be heterogeneous. Thus, K. Russakova in her 1956 article "Who of them is a stilyaga?" depicted four types of a "villain."⁷³ Two of them are obsessed with fashion, and the other two, just the contrary, criticize "narrow trousers." But, the differences notwithstanding, all four, Russakova argues, are united as "people of bad taste." In this respect untidy T-shirt is not very different from sophisticated colourful suit. A curious tendency is seen here: firstly to thoroughly categorize "folk devils" and then to amalgamate them together.

The recognition of different types of "stilyagi" did not, however, destroy the image of a very limited group, not characteristic of generally virtuous Soviet youth. Quite the contrary, this image was constantly emphasized. The important reason is that stilyagi compromised Soviet youth in the eyes of foreign guests (foreigners were the primary source for illegal purchasing of clothes and music records).⁷⁴ Thus, N. Kruzhkov describes the impression of an English student with the pseudonym William Just, who compared stilyagi with Teddy-boys (contemporary British youth subculture) in his article in *The Observer*.⁷⁵ Agreeing that "fools" exist in any society, Kruzhkov makes a cunning contradictory claim. For him, Teddy-boys are a logical by-product of a capitalist society, while stilyagi are a socialist miscalculation, the result of "Western infection."

⁷³ Russakova, 1956.

⁷⁴ N. Alexandrova, L. Pochivalov. "Otstupnik – tak on i nazyvaetsa" ["Apostate is His Proper Name"]. *KP*, 10178, N 159 (July 9 1958); Igor' Miloslavsky and Leonid Samoseiko. "V krivom zerkale" [In the Distorting Mirror"]. *KP*, 10338, N 13 (January 16, 1959); I. Shatunovsky. "Pechal'nye rytsary zhevatel'noi rezinki" ["Grieved Knights of Chewing Gum"]. *KP*, 10339, N 14 (January 17 1959).

⁷⁵ N. Kruzhkov. "Vremen Noveishikh mitrofany" ["The Mitrofans of the Newest Times"]. *KP*, 9741 N 29 (February 3, 1957). The title is an expression of Alexandr Chatsky, a hero of Alexandr Griboedov's classical comedy "Woe from Wit" (1823). Chatsky, in turn, refers to the character of Denis Fonvizin's comedy "The Ignoramus", a young idler Mitrofan. Thus the article's author employs classic literary analogy to strengthen the effect of blame.

Ironically, the analogous technique to diminish the scope of a subculture had a place in the “degrading capitalist societies” as well. For example, Cohen distinguishes the so-called “Lunatic Fringe” topic in the “moral panic” around Mods and Rockers. “The Mods and Rockers were perceived as an entirely unrepresentative minority of young people; most young people are decent and conforming, and the Mods and Rockers were giving them a bad name.”⁷⁶ From this point of view it is interesting to compare the devices of blame in Soviet and British press. Thus, in 1957 *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* declared:

Their contemporaries studied, worked on the plants, in the collective farms, laboured on the scaffolds of Siberia's building projects. And the big road to the light, joyful world of labour and creation were open for Erlena, Alla and Tatyana, like for all the Soviet young people. But they did not take this road. They were attracted by the other [things]: pavements near 'Metropol' and 'Moskva' [hotels], where it was possible to quickly make new acquaintances; restaurants, where one can be on the spree at the expense of the occasional companions, drunken orgies with equally empty-minded, idle boys...⁷⁷

In seven years, with the flourishing of Mods/Rockers delinquency, the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Maulding) made a similar conclusion in *Evening Standard*:

There are two kinds of youth in Britain today. There are those who are winning the admiration of the world by their courageous and disciplined service in arduous mountain, jungle or desert territory – In Cyprus, on the Yemen border, in Borneo. And there are Mods and Rockers, with their flick knives... etc.⁷⁸

In both cases the examples are far from singular.⁷⁹ Although the authors of *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*'s texts are not public figures, it is clear that they expressed the official view. Therefore it seems that, despite stilyagi's heterogeneity, their treatment shares some features with the “moral panic” around British youth subcultures. More precisely, the authors of Soviet discourse constructed stilyagi's image as a negative subculture, localized somewhere at the moral bottom of the society.

⁷⁶ Cohen, 2002, p. 44.

⁷⁷ A. Starodub, I. Shatunovsky, 1956.

⁷⁸ *Evening Standard* (June 18, 1964), quoted in Cohen, 2002, p. 44.

⁷⁹ As for the British case, “in the 110 opinion statements from public figures, there were 40 explicit references to this theme.” Cohen, 2002, p. 44.

The analysis of the official Soviet discourse about stilyagi prompts the following conclusions. The reaction on the post-war youth dissent in the USSR can be described as a “moral panic.” It is realized in two basic types: the satirical humiliation, led by the journal *Krokodil*, and the more or less open conversation, presented by the newspaper *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*. The first is more simplistic, less sensitive, without expectation of feedback. Its most sound topic is parents' responsibility, because its aim is to awake their conscience and vigilance. This “moral panic” does not position itself as serious and global, hence the unambiguous diminution of a problem. The second type is more complex and contradictory. It reveals the permanent balancing between the recognition stilyagi as “our problem” and presenting them as “the others,” i.e. marginalizing.

However, both “moral panics” are united by creative “emotive images” (via metaphors, detective stories, or thorough verbal portraits) and merging categories of “folk devils” (tacitly or explicitly). Both are the strongly influenced by the political propaganda, even in the period after 1956.⁸⁰ And, importantly, in this latter period both “moral panics” are more concentrated. Thus, only with the development of Krushchev's “thaw” did the overt discussion of stilyagi as a serious problem become possible.

⁸⁰ When Krushchev criticized the cult of personality in his famous “secret speech” on the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU.

Chapter 3. Stilyagi as a part of Soviet fashion

In the previous chapter, I examined the societal reaction to stilyagi's "subculture." In so doing, I focused on the problem of labelling and "moral panics" rather than on the depicted and described alternative fashion. To use the expression of Stanley Cohen, less attention was paid to "to the actors than to the audience."¹ Now it is a time to turn to stilyagi themselves as the actors of fashion. If we agree with Tony Jefferson that personal appearance is "the cultural extension of the self,"² then a crucial role of fashion in stilyagi's self-positioning becomes apparent. And, like with Teddy-boys and Mods, style³ was the key feature of stilyagi's "subculture."

Placing stilyagi in the context of 1950s Soviet fashion helps to examine whether their societal status was oppositional. This chapter observes stilyagi through three different prisms: fashion consumption, state-approved private values, and, finally, dandyism. The latter is important not as Soviet category (which it is not), but as a powerful system of male fashionability, which has a potential to appear in different cultural contexts. I believe that such "three-dimensional" analysis provides a new perspective for understanding the phenomenon of stilyagi.

3.1. Channels of information and strategies of consumption

A crowd of stilyagi walked on Nevsky Boulevard in Leningrad. Sharply moving their legs (the way, they thought, should behave Americans on Broadway...), they were singing: "I met a girl, more beautiful than dawn, her name is Peggy Lee!"⁴

¹ Cohen, 2002, p.16.

² Tony Jefferson. "Cultural Responses of the Teds." In Hall and Jefferson, 2002, pp. 81-86; p. 82.

³ In this chapter, by "style" I mean mainly sartorial style (the "image" element of Brake's system), the *etalon* of dress, set by the leaders of a group. Thus I follow the definition by Baldano (see chapter I). The other uses will be specially designated.

⁴ Aksenov, 1987, p. 20.

This is a recollection of the writer Vasily Aksenov, who worked in Leningrad in 1956-1959. Clearly, the boys whom he describes actively positioned themselves as “Americans.” Some stilyagi could prefer the West-European image. In any case, it was Western fashion which served the model for Soviet nonconformist style, and which was the reason for the analysed “moral panic.”

But it is doubtful that stilyagi constructed their style only on the basis of imagining the “forbidden fruit.” They could re-interpret the existing cultural signs in their own style, i.e. create *bricolage*. Thus, the earliest depiction of stilyaga shows a loose, but not overlonged jacket, wide trousers and model shoes without thick soles. No quiff is on the head, just a slightly long hairdo with side-whiskers.⁵ Yulia Muzalevskaya, based upon private photos, presumes that this was the dominant stilyagi’s apparel before the mid-1950s.⁶ I would qualify this observation, since in the cartoons this model of depicting a stilyaga lasts only until 1953.⁷ However, I tend to agree with Muzalevskaya in pointing to the sartorial similarity of the early stilyagi and the jazzmen of the time of swing (the 1930-1940s).⁸

Around 1953 the stilyagi’s look changed toward the well-known pattern popularized by *Krokodil*. The major tendency was towards the longer jackets, the narrower trousers, high-soled shoes and hair dressed with greased quiff. This new type of costume is described by Kozlov:

Patterned tie, *bakhily* [big shoes] on thick caoutchouc sole, narrow trousers with wide turn-ups, long “*lepen*” (jacket) with laid-on pockets and spline, light mackintosh with length till the ground, long white silk scarf, wide-brimmed hat on the head, and in the winter “Scandinavian” (“pork-pie”) hat.⁹

⁵ D. Belyaev, 1949, p. 10.

⁶ Muzalevskaya, 2007, p. 123.

⁷ I refer to the examined cartoons in *Krokodil* and *Komsomol’skaya Pravda*.

⁸ Muzalevskaya, 2007, p. 123.

⁹ Kozlov, 2006, p. 79. Similar look of stilyagi is also described by Aksenov (Aksenov, 1987, p. 15) and my interviewee (V.G., 2009).

This kind of stilyagi's costume is seen also in the newsreels and documentaries of 1956 and 1960.¹⁰ Curiously, it has much in common with the gear of London Teddy-boys, who also appeared around 1953. The Teds adopted and reinterpreted the elements of the Edwardian suit and West-American gamblers' costume of the American West. The results of that *bricolage* were "the bootlace tie; the thick-creped shoes, skin-tight, drainpipe trousers (without turn-ups); straighter, less waisted jackets; moleskin or satin collars to the jackets; and the addition of vivid colours." As for Teds' hair, "it was usually long... with a boston neck-lone (straight cut), greasy, with side whiskers and a quiff." In spite of some differences, the general similarity with stilyagi's second-type look is evident.¹¹ This arouses a supposition that stilyagi were imitating Teddy-boys.¹²

Yet the Teddy-boys' influence could be indirect. Thus, the looks of rock-n-roll singers Elvis Presley and Bill Haley have similarities with the Teds' dress style (for example, quiff and bright colors of clothing.) Counting the rapid popularity of the new music trend in America and Western Europe as well, one can suppose the stars' impact on British youth.¹³ As a result, the Teds and stilyagi most likely imitated the same icons of style.

The question is unavoidable: how could the information about all these Western styles penetrate the "iron curtain?" First of all, we should remember that the first wave of stilyagi consisted of "gilded youth."¹⁴ Therefore the important channel of information could be the business trips of "gilded parents": ministers, diplomats, honored art figures, etc. Here is, for example, a recollection of Vasily Aksenov about the company of Moscow stilyagi in 1952:

¹⁰ M. Dobrova (the director). Leningrad newsreel, N 6 (February 1956); V. Krasnopol'sky and V. Uskov. "*Teni na trotuarakh*" ["Shades on the Sidewalks"] A documentary (Moskva: TsSDF [Central Studio of Documentary Films], 1960). Both in <http://bujhm.livejournal.com/383320.html?view=9130328#t9130328>, post from 16. 12. 2008.

¹¹ It is noteworthy that Anna Kimmerling and Olga Vainstein also compare the apparel of stilyagi and the Teds. Kimmerling, 2007, p. 95; Vainstein, 2006, p. 533.

¹² Jefferson, 2002, p. 85.

¹³ Dick Hebdige indicates that Teddy-boys favored rock-n-roll. Hebdige, 1999, p. 50.

¹⁴ Aksenov, 1987, p. 14; Kozlov, 2006, pp. 652-653; Live interview with V. G. By the author, April 13, 2009; see also Kimmerling, 2007, p. 84.

It was a party in the apartment of an upper diplomat, and the public mostly consisted of the diplomats' scions... Not believing my own eyes, I was looking at an American radio-gramophone, in which twelve disks played without a break. And what disks they were! In Kazan' we spent hours hunting... for the snatches of this music, but here it was present in its whole splendor, even with the portraits of the musicians on the covers: Bill Crosby, Nat King Cole, Louis Armstrong, Peggy Lee, Woody Herman...¹⁵

These portraits of musicians were definitely models for self-fashioning. Love for the music strengthened sartorial creativity, not to mention personal endeavor to play jazz, as in the case of Alexei Kozlov.¹⁶ With the advent of rock-n-roll, the records of Presley, Hailey, etc. became available for youth *beau monde* as well.¹⁷ In addition, the parents very likely brought Western journals with the images of the musicians or with the information on the latest fashion trends, not to mention clothes themselves.

Next, this information was spreading to the lower-status youth milieus via the system of friendship and personal connections. Alexei Kozlov, who came from a family of middle-class intelligentsia, received the information about the newest trends in Western music and fashion exactly this way. As we can guess by his hint, he managed to enter the narrow circle of "gilded youth" due to his gentle sense of dress style and his deep understanding of jazz and rock-n-roll.¹⁸ Moreover, Kozlov affirms that around the elitist groups were always "active fellows from the simpler social milieu, but more adapted to life, being experts in all the modern."¹⁹ Similarly, V. G., a student from an Art school in Odessa, was well aware how to dress "in style" and what music is in vogue much from his friends whose parents had advantageous connections.²⁰ Vasily Aksenov, a nineteen-years-old provincial student, was by the same token "consecrated" to the circle of young Moscow

¹⁵ Aksenov, 1987, p. 14.

¹⁶ Kozlov, 2006.

¹⁷ Slavkin, 1996 (web-site). Certainly, the small amount of genuine music records was not enough to fulfil the youth hunger for jazz and rock-n-roll; therefore the hand-made sisks acqiered a wide spread among stilyagi in defferent cities. They were cut from X-rate plates, which were in abundance in polyclinics and hospitals. This became a folk phenomenon with the name "records on ribs" or "records on bones". See Troitsky, 1987, p. 19.

¹⁸ Kozlov, 2006, p. 653.

¹⁹ Alexei Kozlov. "*Proiskhozhdenie slova "stilyaga", ili otkuda proizoshlo slovo stilyaga*" ["The Origin of the Term "Stilyaga", or Where the Term "Stilyaga" Originates from"].

http://www.koryazhma.ru/usefull/know/doc.asp?doc_id=121,

²⁰ V. G., 2009.

“Americanophiles.”²¹ This means, first, that the relationship within stilyagi circles was based not only on the social status of the members, but on the personal qualities as well. Second, “gilded youth” played a role of a mediator between Western culture, presented in the artefacts, and ordinary Soviet youth.

Although *stilyazhnichestvo* was concentrated in Moscow and Leningrad, and “in a few cities whose recent history was ‘Western:’ Tallin, Riga, Lvov,”²² some movement could happen in geographical terms too. The information gradually penetrated into the provinces. Unfortunately, there is no precise data on this process so far. The only case study for Perm’ is made by Anna Kimmerling.²³ The domestic travel and exchange of letters between peers may be a hypothesis. However, Artemy Troitsky argues that stilyagi of different cities had no contact with each other. Therefore we can also suppose that each local stilyagi “subculture” had specific informational sources, without mediation of Moscow.²⁴

Thus, in Odessa, a relatively small port city, illegal trade and smuggling was developed as early as 1953. For instance, one hairdresser had West European journals of hair styles, and thus made his stilyagi-clientele genuine “stylish” hairdos.²⁵ As for the provinces without issue to the sea, the presence of stilyagi depended of local factors. Basically they are the activity of youth, the organization of its leisure, the development of restaurants and central boulevards (places for stilyagi to hang-out), and, very important, the availability of movie theatres.²⁶ The crucial role of film in inspiring stilyagi’s style should not be underestimated.

The so-called “trophy” films were brought by Soviet soldiers from the liberated territories. Among them were American and West European cult films of the 1930-1940s,

²¹ Aksenov, 1987, pp. 15-16.

²² Troitsky, 1987, p. 15.

²³ Kimmerling, 2007.

²⁴ Troitsky, p. 15.

²⁵ V. G., 2009.

²⁶ Kimmerling, 2007.

with jazz music. As Aksenov explains, the Soviet government allowed the distribution of these films merely for the sake of profit.²⁷ As a result, in the condition of cultural isolation film actors became idols for youngsters in different cities. Thus, Leningrad stilyaga Vladimir Tikhonenko, as early as in the late 1940s, copied the image of an American secret service man, a hero of a certain “trophy” film.²⁸ Tarzan, played by Johnny Weissmuller (Tarzan’s New York Adventure, USA, 1942) became a model for the young men’s hairdo.²⁹ According to Aksenov, in Kazan’ the girls knitted pullovers, similar to that of John Payne’s hero in Sun Valley Serenade (USA, 1941), for their boy friends.³⁰ Jazz compositions from the films became great hits, and the dance tricks were thoroughly copied.³¹

At the same time, cinema influenced mainstream fashion, though mainly female. Insofar as Soviet film production in the late forties-early fifties was minimal, the American and West European movies prevailed on Soviet screens.³² Consequently, the girls were enhanced *en masse* by the looks of such actresses as Marika Röck and Deanna Durbin (the latter was, moreover, favored by Stalin).³³ In the second half of the fifties, with the advance of Soviet film industry, native actresses gained the positions of popular idols together with Western stars. Often they demonstrated the influence of Western fashion too, like, for example, Ludmila Gurchenko with her “New Look” dress in Carnival Night (1956).³⁴ In the opinion of fashion historian Larissa Zakharova, “[f]ashion preferences of both Soviet and Western actresses oriented toward Paris tendencies and therefore did not differ

²⁷ Aksenov, 1987, p. 19.

²⁸ Guk, 1997 (web-site).

²⁹ Artemy Troitsky. Interview with Alexei Kozlov. In Troitsky, 1987, p. 14.

³⁰ Aksenov, 1987, p. 15.

³¹ In addition, since 1955 jazz information circulated in the country via the weekly jazz program of Willis Conover on the radio Voice of America. Conover, too, became an idol for Soviet jazz fans. Aksenov, 1987, p. 20; Slavkin, 1996 (web-site); Kozlov, 2006, p. 98; Frederick S. Starr. Red and Hot: the fate of jazz in the Soviet Union, 1917-1980 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 242-243.

³² Marsha Siefert. “From Cold War to the Wary Peace: American culture in the USSR and Russia”. In Alexandr Stephan (ed.). *The Americanization of Europe: Culture, diplomacy and anti-Americanism after 1945* (New York: Belghahn Books, 2006), pp. 185-217; p. 196.

³³ Siefert, 2006, p. 196; Stites, 2002, p. 125.

³⁴ Josephine Woll. *Real Images: Cinema and the thaw* (London: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), pp. 50-54; Larissa Zakharova. “*Sovetskaya moda 1950-60-kh godov*”[“Soviet Fashion of the 1950-1960s”]. In Alyabieva et al, 2007, pp. 55-80.

much.”³⁵ Probably the stilyagi girls and mainstream girls often turned to the same cine-images for self-fashioning. But on the men’s side this strategy was likely more characteristic for stilyagi.³⁶ Given the general male indifference to fashion, stilyagi’s attention to film dress styles was rather exclusive.

Mainstream fashion consumers drew information from Soviet journals, while stilyagi looked to *Krokodil*. Ironically, the cartoons ridiculed but also advertised deviant youth fashion.³⁷ By the same token, caricatures on the stilyagi in school wall newspapers could in fact advertise their styles.³⁸

The Sixth International Festival of Youth and Students, organized in Moscow in July-August of 1957, can be evaluated as a window in the “iron curtain.”³⁹ The Festival became an important channel both for the information about Western fashion and for illegal trade of clothes. First, millions of Soviet people could see real European and American dress and appreciate the high quality of its design. At the same time, stilyagi could correct their ideas of “Western style.”⁴⁰ Now Soviet “westernizers” had multiplicity of styles to choose from instead of one pattern for imitation, set by “gilded youth”.

Second, black trade flourished in Festival days:⁴¹

...Moscow turned into a big bazaar. Students from Austria, Hungary, Denmark, Italy, Sweden, Finland, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Bulgaria, traded with shoes, kapron and nylon stockings, men’s trousers, women’s cardigans, nylon blouses, suits, ties, shirts, undershirts, ladies’ underwear, men’s knitted pullovers, knitted hats and raincoats from elastron in Moscow yards, near commission shops and purchase centres.⁴²

³⁵ Zakharova, 2007, p. 70.

³⁶ At least, nor fashion historians neither film historians describe the imitation of male film stars as mass Soviet phenomenon of the 1950s.

³⁷ Kimmerling, 2007.

³⁸ V. G., 2009.

³⁹ To believe the official statistics, Moscow received 34 000 delegates from 131 countries. Natalia Davydova. “15 dnei, kotorye potryasli stolitsu” [“Fifteen days, which Astonished the Capital”]. *Izvestiia* (July 7 2007). <http://www.izvestia.ru/hystory/article3106598>

⁴⁰ Kozlov, 2006, p. 103.

⁴¹ Kozlov and Tichonenko maintain that before 1957 illegal trade in the USSR had an occasional character. (Kozlov, 2006; Guk, 1997). However, Bertaux, Rotkirch and Thompson affirm that black market flourished from the late 1930s. Bertaux, Rotkirch and Thompson, Introduction. In Bertaux, Thompson and Rotkirch, 2004, p. 5.

⁴² Quoted in Zakharova, 2007, p. 71. The author refers to the archival sources: GARF (State Archive of Russian Federation), FO 9401/2/478, pp. 12, 20, 29, 170-172.

The scope of trade suggests that purchasers were not only stilyagi. Consequently, the Festival broke down the border between the mainstream and deviant fashion spheres, offering information attractive for both groups. Consequently, it provoked merging approved and alternative strategies of consumption within the mainstream society. After the festival, the space for black market of foreign goods widened, hence the illegal consumption of clothes became common, especially in large and port cities.

Just as fashion as such was not rejected by Soviet ideology in the 1950s, so too consumption came to be considered as a normal activity of Soviet people. If the former had to be distinguished from “vulgar style,” then the latter was symbolically differentiated from “bourgeois” consumerism. The official propaganda associated consumption with “rational needs,” which contributed to the active life of the individual and his “harmonious” development.⁴³ Consumerism, in contrast, “represented the disharmony of material and spiritual demands and... turned people into slaves of ‘things’.”⁴⁴ The whole discussion of “good taste,” expanded in special and general periodicals, aimed to encourage positive fashion consumption. So did the advertising of the models of the State Fashion Houses with the All-Union Fashion House (ODMO) as a leader. Consumption, particularly by youth, was not a private matter: “it reflected the much-propagated rapid rise in the material well-being, level of education and culture of youth people.”⁴⁵ Moreover, as Djurdja Bartlett demonstrates, during the fifties the practices of controlled consumption, supplanted political discussions from everyday life and hence the legitimization of the power.⁴⁶

By this logic, the state shops should have offered assortment of fashion, marked by “good socialist taste.” However, the backward light industry could not provide the desired

⁴³ Pilkington, 1994, pp. 80-81; cited in Larisa Flint. *Unzipping the USSR: Jeans as a symbol of the struggle between consumerism and consumption in the Brezhnev era*. Unpublished MA thesis (Budapest: Central European University, 2007), p. 6.

⁴⁴ Flint, p. 6.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Bartlett, 2007, p. 195.

quality of production.⁴⁷ Complaints in periodicals, from the consumers and specialists alike, show that the advertised Soviet fashion and the low-quality merchandise in stores had little in common.⁴⁸ Such inconsistency persuaded numbers of people to choose strategies of consumption different from the officially approved ones.⁴⁹

Thus, illegal trade, cooperation with private tailors and making clothes at home were the ways out for those consumers, not satisfied with the official production (or for the people with non-standard figures).⁵⁰ These strategies were at the same time usual for stilyagi. According to Kozlov, there existed elaborate system of achieving fashionable artifacts. The stilyaga, not belonging to “gilded youth,” had first and foremost form a network of relationships. Then, his possibilities could vary from direct purchases to involving a mediator, for example, a salesman from a commission store.⁵¹ In Odessa such mediators were barmen in small pubs. There were, however, many possibilities of the direct purchasing in the port.⁵²

Illegal buying was the most prestigious strategy of consumption – it offered authentic Western goods. But it was also dangerous, for, of course, a speculator was constantly in danger to be caught and imprisoned. Besides, it was risky in terms of forgeries, which were a widespread phenomenon.⁵³ Those stilyagi who had no “useful connections” had to be satisfied with home-made wares. This strategy, one can suppose, prevailed in those provinces where illegal trade was not developed. Kimmerling

⁴⁷ During Stalin’s rule, Soviet economy was oriented on the heavy industry; after his death the government turned to supporting the branches of industry which directly influenced people’s well-being. Light industry was included. Zubkova, 1993, p. 125.

⁴⁸ For example, V. Krechetova. “*Bolshche khoroshego platia*” [“More Good Clothes”]. *Rabotnitsa*, N 1 (January 1953). pp. 28-30; N. Makarova. “*Narodnye traditsii v sovremennoi odezhde*” [“Folk Traditions on Contemporary Clothing”]. *Dekorativnoe Iskusstvo SSSR*, N 10 (October 1957), pp. 63-64; L. Pavlova. “*Sporyat li o vkusakh?*” [“Should One Argue About Tastes?”] *Shveinaya Promyshlennost’*, N 3 (May-June 1959), p. 32.

⁴⁹ Bartlett, 2007, p. 201.

⁵⁰ I do not pretend to demonstrate the precise statistics of the alternative strategies of fashion consumption. Rather, basing on scholarly research, I demonstrate that they existed not only within stilyagi “subculture”. Bartlett, 2007; Zakharova, 2007, pp. 62-71.

⁵¹ Kozlov, 2006, p. 85.

⁵² V. G., 2009. Notably, in the late 1940s the channel for American clothes, was also land-lease program. (Guk, 1997; Vainstein, 2006, p. 530.).

⁵³ Kozlov, 2006, p. 83.

demonstrates that Perm' stilyagi often asked their relatives to make clothes, or ordered them from private tailors, sometimes in state ateliers.⁵⁴ Even the notorious "semolina" shoes were often ordered through private agreement with special shoemakers.⁵⁵

Thus, in spite of the USSR's cultural isolation in the 1950s, stilyagi found channels of information for creating "Western look" and succeeded to develop alternative strategies of consumption. At the same time, they were not excluded from the mainstream modes of consumption, for the latter were not limited by the official trade. This conclusion suggests that the stilyagi's and mainstream fashions could have other points of interconnection.

3.2. "Bad taste" and the problem of meshchanstvo

The official Soviet discourse of the 1950s proclaimed a dichotomy: *stilyazhnichestvo* versus "proper" socialist style. The former was a product of "bad" bourgeois taste, while the latter was a result of a "good taste" achieved by Communist education.⁵⁶ If one adopts this binary opposition as unproblematic, then stilyagi appear as protagonists of Soviet antifashion. However, one noteworthy concept challenges this clear picture, that is, the concept of *meshchanstvo*, which has no adequate equivalent in English.

This concept is perfectly explained by Vera S. Dunham in her classic study of everyday life in late Stalinism.⁵⁷ Thus I take her interpretation as a model. Originally, the term "*meshchanstvo*" meant the lower stratum of urban dwellers and dislocated peasants in seventeenth-century Muscovy. The meaning evolved, and by the late nineteenth century became dualistic. "In literary terms, meshchanstvo turned into a near equivalent of petty

⁵⁴ Kimmerling, 2007, p. 86.

⁵⁵ Kozlov, 2006, p. 83.

⁵⁶ The idea of "good taste" can be interpreted as a continuation of the enduring Stalinist concept of "*kulturnost*". Its approximate translation is "cultural education". According to historian Vadim Volkov, this concept, during its evolution, included not only proper appearance, manners and speech, but also knowledge of classical literature, broadening of cultural horizon and, finally, strong ideological consciousness. Volkov, 2000.

⁵⁷ Dunham, 1990.

bourgeoisie and, in a looser usage, evolving from the snobbism of the educated few, the term became derogatory. This usage has persisted and as a target, *meshchanstvo* helped to stimulate the Revolution.”⁵⁸ However, this phenomenon was not absolutely abolished. Just the opposite, it survived and even flourished in the post-war period.

This paradox is explained by the conventional agreement between the ruler and the mass of people, concluded after the war. Dunham famously called it “The Big Deal.”⁵⁹ She argued that the terror was not the only mechanism of power execution. Another one was a positive approach to the newly established middle-class – a heterogeneous conglomerate of professional groups, united, however, by the values of everyday life. They were offered a partnership and material support from above in exchange for hard work for the regime’s prosperity. The result could be the rehabilitation of private interests. Yet it could not completely happen, for the “Big Deal” contradicted the “orthodox” discourse and thus could not be given publicity. Therefore “[t]he regime had two objectives: to obscure the Big Deal in its form and to induce a conversion of official public values in substance.”⁶⁰ Private values were now treated as public and hence legitimized. The new “systemic” *meshchanstvo* was the result of this policy.

This new approach to private values helped rehabilitate private possessions, including clothes and accessories. That is why fashion as such was not rejected in the late 1940s – early 1950s. Djurdja Bartlett argues that already since 1935, when the first Fashion House was opened in Moscow, fashion acquired the official approval as a part of socialist mass culture.⁶¹ The course on developing Soviet fashion, disturbed by the war, was continued in the late 1940s; the opening of the All-Union House of Models of Clothing (ODMO) in 1949 is an excellent illustration. ODMO set the patterns of “correct, but boring

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 19.

⁵⁹ Ibid, pp. 10-19.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 15.

⁶¹ Bartlett, 2007, p. 188.

style” for other Soviet Fashion Houses and state-run ateliers.⁶² This style was presented in the official fashion showings and in the main fashion journals: the monthly “*Zhurnal mod*” (“Fashion Journal”) and “*Modeli sezona*” [“Models of Season”] issued two times per year.⁶³ The journal form of fashion advertising was, obviously, more effective due to its mass affordability. Although female fashion dominated one the journals’ pages, male fashion was also present.

The post-war official discourse of fashion constructed an ideal image according to the rules of socialist realism. Like socialist propaganda on the whole, it did not “claim to picture reality as it is but reality as it should be – life and lives worth emulating.”⁶⁴ Thus “written dress” and “pictured dress”⁶⁵ had little to do with the reality of the backward light industry. Nor it reflected the new emerging petit-bourgeois tastes of the middle-class. *Meshchanstvo* in fashion and house decoration was criticized in the press, but not completely rejected. Dunham argues that the issues of “Big Deal” were obscured in the official sources, but subtly delivered in state-sponsored fiction due to its more informal character.⁶⁶ Therefore, to understand the ambiguous position of fashion in the late Stalin’s period, one should compare its treatment in the contemporary fiction and the periodicals.

First, Dunham argues that post-war youth heroism, unlike the early Soviet one, was not directed against private possessions. On the contrary, the regime promised youth various material goods. Dunham gives a number of examples of stories about the life of ordinary students and young couples. Their heroes, especially heroines, pay great attention

⁶² Vasiliev, 2004), p. 299.

⁶³ Bartlett, 2007, p. 188; Zakharova, 2007, p. 57.

⁶⁴ Michael Schudson. Advertising, The Uneasy Persuasion: Its dubious impact on American Society (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 215. Schudson compares Western advertising with Socialist realist posters. I believe that fashion advertising in Soviet fashion journals is to be included in the second category.

⁶⁵ I adopt the expression of Roland Barthes who distinguished three types within the system of Fashion: “real dress” (the material object itself), “pictured/photographed dress” (the advertising picture in fashion journal) and “written fashion” (the description of the fashionable item in the same journal). Roland Barthes. The Fashion system. Ttranslated from French by Matthew Ward and Richard Howard (3 ed) (Berkley: University of California Press, 1990)? Pp. 1-5.

⁶⁶ For Dunham, poems, stories and novels could deliver values with were treated with ambiguity by the regime and therefore were undesirable in “official mythology”. The fiction need not be explicit. It can create the characters which enact “the values the reader himself holds, aspires to, or discovers”. This “personal imitation” cannot be provided by periodicals. See Dunham, 1990, pp. 28-29.

to “comforting” their rooms, decorating walls with postcards and posters of film stars, placing on shelves little vases with paper flowers, seashell boxes, etc.⁶⁷ The orange lampshade, which often appears in fiction descriptions, was a favourite interior detail and later became a symbol of Stalinist *meshchanstvo*.⁶⁸ On the other hand, on the peak of late Stalinism *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* calls for struggle against knick-knackery. “In many girls’ rooms I have seen banal postcards in frames on the tables, cuttings from pre-historical journals,” states the article’s author. “The appointments of a room should be simple. Fresh flowers and reproductions [of high art] should adorn the room.”⁶⁹ However, the heroes of fictions were not necessarily pictured as the bearers of bad taste. Rather, they expressed the right for material comfort after the war calamities.⁷⁰

Second, writers paid positive attention to the femininity and love of fashion. For instance, a young heroine

dressed and styled her hair very much according to the latest fashion. She was a mediocre student and in general did not distinguish herself at the university in any way except for her chic clothes. Between lectures, like everybody else, she walked arm in arm with the girl friend... “They will wear skirts cut on bias this season.”⁷¹

Theoretically, this could be a critical description of a female *stilyaga*. The ideal Soviet woman, painted in the official discourse, was different. Instead of discussing clothes, she marched “in the first lines of the builders of Communist society,” her outer look reflecting her “deep inner content.”⁷² But in this story’s episode the girl hardly a negative personage: she is just keen on fashion “like everybody else.”

Importantly, male fiction protagonists also revealed care for personal style. Here is a conversation between two students, one of whom is dressing up for a date:

⁶⁷ Ibid, pp. 35-37.

⁶⁸ Natalia Leбина. “*Shestidesyatniki: slovo i telo (stilistika sovetsoi povsednevnosti 1950-1960-h godov)*” [“*Shestidesyatniki: world and body (stylistics of Soviet everyday life in the 1950-1960s)*”. In Alyabieva et al, 2007, pp. 325-346, p. 328.

⁶⁹ Berzinya, 1953.

⁷⁰ Dunham, 1990, pp. 41-58.

⁷¹ V. Dobrovol'sky. “*Troe v serykh shinelyakh*” [“*Three Men in Gray Uniforms*”]. *Novyi Mir*, N 1 (1948), p. 42. Quoted in Dunham, 1990, p. 42.

⁷² *Zhurnal Mod*, N 2 (February 1953), p. 1.

What shirt should I wear: the blue one or the striped, the one with the detachable collar? Vadim thought intensely, arranging on the table his shaving kit. Of course, the blue shirt! I can never manage the detachable collar with those stupid studs...

“Well, how do I look?” he said, standing for some reason sideways at the mirror.

“Not bad. Not bad. Quite presentable.”

“And how is my tie? All right?”

“And the tie is not bad. Only never button your coat all the way down.” [Sergei] came up to him and unbuttoned the last button. “In a single-breasted coat only the middle button is buttoned.”⁷³

Meshchanstvo of the two middle-class males is not in the clothes they wear, but in their narcissistic obsession with small details. The scene is, perhaps, ironic. Nonetheless, the elaborate dress and expert knowledge of fashion codes were included in the middle-class values. But in the official fashion press male fashion was shown without much description, not to mention detailed advice. What were present are mostly coloured drawings of men’s gear: mostly dark suits of rectangular silhouette, with the emphasis on clarity, solidity and conservative taste.⁷⁴

The dichotomy between humble fashion in the official press and middle-class *meshchanstvo* in the middlebrow fiction was not clear-cut. At least in female “pictured fashion” of *Zhurnal Mod* and “*Rabotnitsa*” one can notice elements of petit-bourgeois taste: figured necklaces, ruffles, superfluous decorations, polka-dot fabrics for dresses, etc.⁷⁵ Therefore, in spite of the slogans of simplicity in dress, the journal’s imagery betrayed the ambiguous attitude of the regime towards new-born *meshchanstvo*. Thus, fashion designers were influenced by the bourgeois taste, which was needed as a compensation for the forced asceticism of the war time. But, of course, it could not be said overtly in the leading socialist state.

Certainly, the objects of *meshchanstvo*, described frequently in “court” Stalinist fiction, were not available to everybody in reality.⁷⁶ They appeared as a promised grant for zealous work and thus called for career climbing. Since clothes of a good quality were

⁷³ Yu. Trifonov. “*Studenty*” [“Students”]. *Novyi Mir*, NN 10-11 (1950), pp. 71-3. Quoted in Dunham, 1990, p. 44.

⁷⁴ *Zhurnal Mod*, NN 1,2 (1953); *Rabotnitsa*, NN 1, 2 (1953).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Bartlett, 2007, p. 188.

available only for Soviet elite, their ownership demonstrated successful service for the regime. In this respect, “gilded youth,” whose parents could afford Western clothes, were on the top of the career pyramid. As in the thirties the stakhanovites “were hated by their coworkers for their individualistic effort and individual reward,”⁷⁷ so too in the early fifties stilyagi were hated by working-class boys for their individualist style.⁷⁸

Thus the orange lampshade, porcelain set and American suit played a similar role of middle-class fetishes. Stilyagi, though the children of the elite (and likely of prosperous middle-class), were perhaps seen guilty not for their bourgeois look, but for overt celebration of a new *meshchanstvo*. Consequently, they embodied the values of the Big Deal rather than dissent. This is another possible explanation of the absence of systematic anti-stilyagi propaganda during the last years of Stalinism.

With the beginning of destalinization,⁷⁹ stilyagi slipped in the category of the remnants of Stalinist *meshchanstvo*. Therefore the widespread anti-stilyagi propaganda can be evaluated as a part of a new social policy. Not accidentally, the discussions of “good taste” and calls to expose everyday *meshchanstvo* flourished in *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* after 1953, and even more after 1956, when open critique of Stalinist heritage became possible. At the same time, fashion journals made the rhetoric of “good taste” and dress etiquette more serious as developing a proper style in art and design for socialist world.⁸⁰ In the sphere of fashion, the result of this process became “official socialist costume” – an ideological construct, propagated in Soviet media.⁸¹ Its basic qualities were claimed to be practicality, modest elegance and harmony of elements. The socialist style of dress was being methodically elaborated by the specialists and discussed on All-Union competition of

⁷⁷ Dunham, 1990, p. 14.

⁷⁸ Although various sources tend to paint stilyagi as the children of the Soviet nomenklatura, I presume that the children of middle-class parents could join stilyagi circles as well. They could be students of prestige universities, having contact with the elite stilyagi and purchase stylish clothes through “profitable connections”.

⁷⁹ I prefer to follow the concept of Elena Zubkova, who counts destalinization from the first weeks after Stalin’s death. By the same token, she argues that the “thaw” started in the year of the XX Party Congress (1956), but as early as in 1953. Zubkova, 1993, pp. 103-137.

⁸⁰ See Reid and Crowley, 2000.

⁸¹ Bartlett, 2007, p. 189.

fashion models and the annual Fashion Congresses in socialist countries. The Eighth International Fashion Congress of 1957, which took place in Moscow, became the apotheosis of this development for Soviet designers.⁸²

Nevertheless, in Khrushchev's time fashion did not sharply change its direction. Bartlett argues that in fact the designers failed to develop authentic socialist style and thus had to adopt the forms of bourgeois fashion. For example, Soviet fashion experts took over the experience of Christian Dior, "explaining it by his high professionalism."⁸³ What is more, the collections of Dior Fashion House were demonstrated in Moscow in 1959. The products of professional fashion design were in fact oriented on the middle-class and not available for the mass of working people.⁸⁴ Therefore, in spite of the active propaganda against *meshchanstvo*, some elements of Stalinist attitude to fashion persisted.⁸⁵ Zakharova sees here "a characteristic example of the contradictions of the thaw, when the wish to 'end up with abuses of the past years' peacefully came together with the continuation of many tendencies of Stalin's policy." Not with *stilyazhnichestvo*, however.

Soviet designers did not mechanically imitate Western fashion modes, but softened, re-coded them, and often "diluted" by folk motifs.⁸⁶ By contrast, *stilyagi*'s self-fashioning did not soften bourgeois forms of apparel, but, vice versa, emphasised them. "Stylish" look put in danger the peaceful compromise between Western adoptions and folk features. And, still, the best fashion items were affordable for the elite and prosperous middle-class youth,⁸⁷ blamed and hated by originally working-class youth. By the words of the former

⁸² "VIII Mezhdunarodnyi Kongress Mody" ["The Eighth International Congress of Fashion"]. *Zhurnal Mod*, N 4 (1957), p. 1. The International Congresses of socialist block were organized annually since 1950, in the capital of one of countries-participants. In the first year only German Democratic Republic and Czechoslovakia took part in the Congress. In the following years Hungary, the USSR and Poland, and then Rumania and Bulgaria joined the event. The Moscow Congress in 1957 had especially big scope and included all the six participants. The idea of Congress was a gathering of specialists in fashion – artists, designers, heads of Fashion Houses, representatives of clothing and footwear industries.

⁸³ Zakharova, 2007, p. 61.

⁸⁴ Bartlett, 2007, pp. 190-198.

⁸⁵ Of course, this suggestion does label the art of Dior as the source for fashion *meshchanstvo*. Its points to the relative tolerance to Western fashion, whether in its petit-bourgeois version or in its haute-couture revelation. For the detailed discussion of this issue see Bartlett's article (Bartlett, 2007).

⁸⁶ Makarova, "Narodnye traditsii...", 1957.

⁸⁷ Or by the people of simple origin, but skillful in illegal trade. See Kozlov, "Proiskhozhdenie..."; Guk, 1997.

Odessa stilyaga, “it was nearly class stratification.” He, being agreed with Aksenov, characterizes stilyagi as children of the well-off, the “sons” (“synki”). Himself son of a builder, he, however, had some extra salary for painting portraits of Party leaders for festive posters, and hence could afford some Western clothes. Those who could not, naturally, revealed hostility:

Who reacted angrily were mostly Komsomol brothers of the same age [as we were]. We were even more condemned by coevals [than by the officials], because that time Komsomol members were frenzied, for sure. Usually they were fellows from the countryside, promoted on this basis [of Komsomol activity], as I understand... There were clashes, hostility, and fights on the dance floors were more often not with patrol members,⁸⁸ but with ordinary Komsomol people.⁸⁹

No doubt, the “frenzy” of low-rank youngsters was caused by envy, masked by ideological pretext. Similar situation is described by former leader of Leningrad stilyagi Vladimir Tikhonenko, who was involved in black market of clothes and jazz records. By his evidence, Komsomol youngsters could beat a stilyaga right on the street, if noticed him with a foreigner. “They watched the purity of their banner, though [in fact] wanted clothes too. And robbed them from us.”⁹⁰ It can be therefore supposed that stilyagi’s subculture, like litmus paper, revealed deep contradiction between the elite and the masses, started with bureaucratization of Stalinist Party apparatus and post-war support of middle-class with its weakness for material values.

Curiously, although under Khrushchev *stilyazhnichestvo* was strongly associated with *meshchanstvo*, it was never seriously repressed. By the end of the decade, stilyagi’s style was diffused into state-sponsored mass production, which made the very concept of *stilyaxhnichestvo* irrelevant. The Youth Festival of 1957 and relative openness towards

⁸⁸ Komsomol patrol (*druzhiny*) were founded in the first years of Khrushchev period and formed from Komsomol members to control and struggle against stilyagi, cutting their hairs and clothes, preventing their dances, etc.

⁸⁹ V. G., 2009.

⁹⁰ Guk, 1997.

Western experience in design also influenced the societal attitude to non-standard fashion.⁹¹

So we have an interesting finding: stilyagi, despite their deviant character, managed to endure both the harsh times of late Stalinism and, then, the shift in the regime. Such adaptability suggests that to some extent stilyagi were conformists. However, it does not prevent one to consider them as nonconformists of Soviet fashion. At the same time, considering stilyagi as a part and parcel of the regime's social policy is *only* one option. Another option is to apply to their case a timeless cultural paradigm.

3. 3. Stilyagi's style and the notion of dandyism

As a male-dominant "subculture", stilyagi demonstrated the alternative to the mainstream men's fashion. This particular fashion leadership engenders the inevitable association with such a phenomenon as dandyism.

According to cultural historians, the roots of dandyism are in England of the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the British managed to set the canon of masculine elegance, as opposed to the effeminate French male costume, a heritage of the eighteenth century rococo fashion.⁹² For men, "French pre-Revolution fashion cultivated elegance and nicety, [while] the English [fashion] allowed extravagance and promoted originality as the highest value."⁹³ Thus dandyism was connected with romanticism on the one hand and with anti-French political attitudes on the other. Dandyism spread in Europe with its salient influence in France and Russia. During its development in the nineteenth

⁹¹ Kimmerling, 2007, pp. Zakharova, 2007, pp. 72-73; Muzalevskaya, 2007, p. 127.

⁹² Vainstein, 2006, pp. 108-114; Yuri Lotman. "Russky dendizm" ["Russian Dandyism"]. In Yuri Lotman. *Besedy o russkoi kul'ture: byt i traditsii russkogo dvoryanstva (XVIII – nachalo XX veka)* [Conversations about Russian Culture: Everyday life and tradition of Russian nobility (the eighteenth – the beginning of nineteenth centuries)]. (Sankt-Peterburg: "Iskusstvo SPb", 1997), pp. 123-135; Natalia Lebina. "Dendi v Kukuruze: Antistalinizm kak stil' muzhskoj mody khrushchevskogo vremeni" ["Dandies in Corn: Antistalinism as a style of male fashion in Khrushchev's time"]. *Rodina*, N 7, (2008). http://www.istrodina.com/anons_7.php3

⁹³ Lotman, 1997, p. 123.

century, dandyism underwent modifications and peaked in fin-de-circle eccentricity, personified by the figure of Oscar Wilde. However, several scholars tend to find forms of dandyism in the twentieth century as well. One of these could be considered male youth subculture.⁹⁴

Dandyism is not only about “dress fashion.” It is a multileveled socio-cultural phenomenon. Semiotic scholar Yuri Lotman argues: “The art of dandyism creates a complicated system of its own culture, which is revealed in the specific ‘poetry of fine costume.’ Costume is an outer sign of dandyism, but far from its essence.”⁹⁵ In my comparative analysis of *stilyazhnichestvo* and dandyism, I do not pretend to the all-embracing examination of the latter. Instead, it is logical to distinguish key features of dandyism that could (or could not) be applied to stilyagi’s case.

First, the “westernized” character of stilyagi’s style relates it to the tradition of Russian nineteenth-century dandyism. Olga Vainstein stresses that the choice of apparel played a considerable role in the famous debate between Westernizers and Slavophiles. Thus, just as Pushkin and Chaadaev followed Western European fashion and were fond of language, so too stilyagi wanted to look American and created slang, full of Anglicisms.⁹⁶ Such a comparison is, of course, very relative because of the difference in general socio-cultural situation of the two epochs.

However, Vainstein’s idea can be developed further. Curiously, the epithets “dandy” and “dandyism” can be found in descriptions of British, more precisely, London youth subcultures. Thus, Teddy-boys appear as “the first post-war, working-class dandies,” while Mods “reflected the elegant dandyism found among the young blacks in America.”⁹⁷ The idea of continuity of the traditional English dandyism is explicit here. More overtly, Yulia

⁹⁴ Vainstein, 2006; Lebina, 2008; R. Bazhanova. “*Dendi i moda: granitsy artistizma*” [Dandy and Fashion: The limits of artistry]. In Gabriel and Arutyunyan, 2007, pp. 22-26.

⁹⁵ Lotman, 1997, p. 125.

⁹⁶ Vainstein, 2006pp. 492-509; 527-528.

⁹⁷ Brake, 1985, pp. 73-74. Similarly, Dick Hebdige calls Mods “working-class dandies”. Dick Hebdige. “The meaning of Mod.” In Hall and Jefferson, 2002, p. 85.

Muzalevskaya considers the Teds and the Mods as successors to English dandies of the Regency and fin-de-siecle periods.⁹⁸ Keeping in mind that Teddy-boys, though indirectly, influenced stilyagi, we can draw a parallel with the Anglomania of the traditional Russian dandyism (which had a place alongside with Francomania).⁹⁹

Second, in particularly sartorial terms, the silhouette of the second-type stilyaga's suit is similar to that of dress popularized by the father of dandyism, George ("Beau") Brummell. Although the former is known mostly from cartoons, eyewitnesses confirmed the notorious combination "wide-shouldered jacket plus pipe trousers."¹⁰⁰ This kind of apparel can be imagined in the form of the upturned triangle. Stressing the width of shoulders, it reveals natural form of legs. But was it not the same with the dandy's suit, which marked "the great masculine renunciation" in European men's fashion?¹⁰¹ In the beginning of the nineteenth century the new geometric silhouette supplanted the pear-like male costume of the *ancien régime*. "Narrow shoulders of the pear-like silhouette were stretched, and biceps became visible through the tight sleeves, demanding additional volume." As a result, "now the lines of lapels form unturned triangle, with its apex down."¹⁰² Thus tailed-coat "rhymes" with "stylish" jacket, and narrow pantaloons with pipe trousers, as if stilyagi intuitively grasped the mode of dandyish suit.

But, surely, this comparison is only a theoretical construction. Looking closer, the relationship between classical dandy's and stilyaga's gears is more complex than just a parallelism. Thus, one crucial difference should be noted. Fashion historians mostly agree that original dandy's costume was inspired by the art of antiquity, rediscovered due to the

⁹⁸ Yulia Muzalevskaya. *Stritstail kak khudozhestvennoe yavlenie molodezhnoi mody (vtoraya polovina XX – nachalo XXI vekov)* [Street Style as Artistic Phenomenon of Youth Fashion (the second half of the twentieth – the beginning of the twenty-first centuries)] Unpublished PhD dissertation (St.Petersburg State Academy of Art and Design, 2006), pp. 134-135.

⁹⁹ Vaistein, 2006, pp. 492-509.

¹⁰⁰ Aksenov, 1987, p. 16; Kozlov, 2006, pp. 79-80; V. G., 2009; I. K., 2009.

¹⁰¹ "Great masculine renunciation" is the concept of fashion historian John C. Fluegel. Its essence is the simplification of male costume in the beginning of the nineteenth century: rejection of bright colors, luxurious fabrics, sophisticated cut and rich décor. Fluegel names several factors socio-economic of this change: democratization of European society in the course of French Revolution, growth of industrial capitalism and so forth. John K. Fluegel. *Psychology of Clothes* (London: Hogarth Press, 1930). Cited in Vainstein, 2007, p. 109.

¹⁰² Vainstein, 2006, pp. 112-114.

archaeological excavations in Pompeii and Herculaneum in the second half of the eighteenth century.¹⁰³ Therefore dandies' love of wools, linens and fine cuts reflects "concurrent academic and connoisseurial concerns with a re-evaluation of the antique, and especially of the heroic male figure." The new materials "subtly smoothed and emphasised muscularity, their neutral colours [were] mimicking the tones of naked flesh..."¹⁰⁴ The stilyaga's jacket with cotton shoulders, in contrast, does not reveal, but imitates muscularity.¹⁰⁵ Similarly to the "zoot suit" jacket, it seems to express parody on male solidity and elegance of tail-coat.¹⁰⁶ Nor the bright-coloured pipe trousers associate with the naked body. Stilyaga's *bricolage* apparel (Teddy-boy shoes, "zoot" jacket, Presley's quiff, etc) turns into a quintessence of quasi-Western dress style. It reveals kitsch, not the sophisticated dandyish fineness.

Stilyazhnichestvo in its extreme manifestations lacks the basic principle of dandyism – "conspicuous inconspicuousness." According to this principle, the beauty of costume should be seen only in the narrow circle of fashion experts and not attract everybody's attention.¹⁰⁷ The dandy's shocking is never sharp and vulgar, whereas the stilyaga's is vice versa. For example, one ex-stilyaga remembers his visit to the father's work, a building project, near Odessa:

¹⁰³ Anne Hollander. *Sex and suits* (New York: Kodasha, 1994); Breward, 2006; Vaistein, 2006.

¹⁰⁴ Christopher Breward. "The Dandy Laid Bare: Embodying practices and fashion for men." In Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson (eds.) *Fashion Cultures: Theories, explorations and analysis*. (London-New York: Routledge, (2000) 2006), pp. 221-237;p. 223. However, considering dandyism as a manifestation of masculine beauty one should be aware of its ambiguity. It paradoxically combine in itself rigidity and effeminateness. Yurii Lotman gives a noteworthy explanation, pinpointing two poles of dandyism. One of them is tough Romanticist rebellion, presented by Byron; another one is soft narcissism. Both protagonists scorned societal norms, but in a different manner: "Byron opposed to the effeminate (soft) society the roughness of a romanticism; Brummell opposed to the rude philistinism of 'high society crowd' the soft subtlety of individualist." Lotman, 1997, p. 124.

¹⁰⁵ The topic of stilyagi's physical weakness, hidden under the big jacket, is well present in the discourse of *Krokodil* and *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. The mockery of stilyagi's effeminated look (mostly in terms of hairdo) is also present. For example M. Dobrova (the director). Leningrad newsreel, N 6 (February 1956); V. Krasnopolsky and V. Uskov. <http://bujhm.livejournal.com/383320.html?view=9130328#t9130328>, post from 16. 12. 2008.

¹⁰⁶ Such explanation of zoot suit give Muzalevskaya (2006, pp. 81-82) and Vainstein (2006, pp. 532-533). Interestingly, Vainstein compares stilyagi with zoot suitors for proving dandyish character of the former. For me, however, it seems a contradiction to her preceding explanation of dandyism in the same book. Therefore I tend to argue with the scholar's position.

¹⁰⁷ Vaistein, 2007, p. 19.

I was in coffee-coloured pipe trousers with red stitches, something like polka-dot pattern. Then shoes on thick micro porous sole..., a shirt, whether Indonesian or Malaysian, with [ornamented by] flowers and birds... I remember it was a very nice shirt... And, of course, a [quiff] hairdo...¹⁰⁸

No wonder this apparel was immediately noticed and ridiculed by the workers and put the boy's father to shame. In a similar way, Moscow student Alexei Kozlov shocked the passengers in public transport: "As soon as I entered the tram, everyone there would begin discussing and condemning me: 'Oh, dressed up like a peacock!' or 'Young man, aren't you ashamed of yourself, walking around looking like a parakeet?' or 'Look, some kind of monkey!' I always stood red-faced."¹⁰⁹ The true dandy would scorn such look as vulgar, for "his costume, as a rule, is characteristic by the economy of the expressive means."¹¹⁰

However, I presume, the "parakeet" appearance was not the only mode for stilyagi's style. Obviously, it depended on personal taste. Thus, Aksenov mentions elegant black suits of Moscow "gilded boys" (even though with loose jackets).¹¹¹ Leningrad stilyaga Vladimir Tikhonenko, an expert in illegal trade, affirms that he always chose the finest garments. His suits were "simple, but very nice," of neat wool, and "without wild colours, as Komsomol people wrote."¹¹² Perhaps, among in different groups of stilyagi there were "clowns" and there were "dandies."

In addition, we should consider the period after 1957, when the Festival brought real Western fashion to Soviet people. Then stilyagi with a developed sense of elegance redeemed their style. According to Kozlov, it caused the split of Moscow stilyagi into different categories. The major two were "*firmenniki*" (the happy owners of authentic foreign clothes) and "*besfirmenniki*" (those who wore Soviet forgeries). The former, in turn, were divided into *shtatniki* (fans of American fashion), lovers of Italian and English fashion, and "*democrats*" (owners of gear from the states of people's democracy). These

¹⁰⁸ The interviewee did not recall the precise date. This happened approximately in 1953-1955, i. e. already after stilyagi's change for narrow trousers but before Youth Festival in Moscow. V. G., 2009.

¹⁰⁹ Troitsky, 1987, p. 15.

¹¹⁰ Vaistein, 2006, p. 183.

¹¹¹ Aksenov, 1987, p. 16.

¹¹² Guk, 1997.

new established “subcultural” groups were very sensitive to the details: the presence of a label, the way buttons and the lining are sewed, the material of the lining and so on. The test of a suit’s authenticity was a usual part of the ritual of a newcomer’s initiation.¹¹³

Preferring elegantly modest American suits, *shtatniki* practice mimicry from outsiders’ eyes. One of them tells:

I was not already so notable in the crowd, wearing, unlike stilyagi,¹¹⁴ wide trousers with narrow turn-ups... American suits were usually made from very high-quality and modest fabrics; no ties with [the pictures of] monkeys or naked girls we wore, they were rather a fruit of imagination of the scribblers-satirists. Instead of long hairdo “*a la* Tarzan” I had short haircut... And if the label of American firm was attached to the inner pocket of the jacket... this was known only by the owner of a suit... To be fashionable, not annoying anybody, became much easier.¹¹⁵

The described suit, clearly, fits the principle of “conspicuous inconspicuousness.” The boys from this particular milieu, described by Kozlov, positioned themselves as intellectual elite. Lovers of sophisticated bebop music, American classic literature (Hemingway, Huxley, Dos Passos and others),¹¹⁶ Western avant-garde art, these young “snobs” symbolically opposed themselves to *zhloby* – “squares”, conformists. In other words, they exhibited the dandyish art of “cold distance.”¹¹⁷

Third, the behavioural patterns of stilyagi demonstrate intersections with dandyism, especially stilyagi’s treatment of urban space. Stilyagi shared with nineteenth-century dandies the practice of visual games and *flânerie* (idle strolls along city streets, sign concept of the second half of the nineteenth century).¹¹⁸ Thus, the nonverbal communication of urban society is very meaningful for dandyism. The dandy, who followed the principle of “conspicuous inconspicuousness,” widely appreciated and used

¹¹³ Kozlov, 2006, pp. 83-84. However, Aksenov describes *shtatniki* of the year 1952. Maybe it is just mistake of memory, but the term might appear even much before the Festival.

¹¹⁴ *Shtatniki*, whom Kozlov describes, did not call themselves stilyagi. Nonetheless, since the term “stilyagi” is used more generally elsewhere, including scholarly works, I choose to use it as basic in my thesis.

¹¹⁵ Kozlov, 2006, p. 98.

¹¹⁶ This authors, like the prohibited Russian writers, were read in samizdat copies. It can be evaluated as countercultural element (but only an element) of stilyagi phenomenon.

¹¹⁷ Vainstein, pp. 24-28.

¹¹⁸ On the concept of *flânerie* see Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*. Translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999); Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*. (New York Vintage), 1978.

sophisticated performative and visual practices in the city streets and semi-public spaces like restaurants and closed clubs.

To some extent, so did the *stilyagi*. Besides the flats and *dachas* of high-ranking parents, the usual places of *stilyagi*'s hangouts were restaurants and dance hall. But, perhaps, the big street was the most effective for self-demonstration. The central street of every city where *stilyagi* existed was christened "*Brod*", from "Broadway" ("*Brodvei*" in Russian spelling).¹¹⁹ This act of renaming was, first, a symbolic reconstruction of city space, its replacement to "Imaginary New York." Second, the expression of *flânerie* was word-play (the association of "*Brod*" with the verb "*brodit*"- to wander). *Brod* was the main meeting point for *stilyagi*, the place of their evening walks and visual games connected with apparel: observation and assessment of newcomers' clothing, identification the brand of passer-by's coat, even the organized "happenings."¹²⁰ Obviously we can agree with Vainstein that "it was typically dandyish visual strategy, sanctioning observation, fleeting as well as highly attentive."¹²¹

Fourth, labeling *stilyagi* as neo-dandies means excluding females from their "subculture." Dandyism, despite its gentlemen virtue, is a male phenomenon, bordering on the line with narcissism, homoeroticism, and misogyny, according to some scholars.¹²² *Stilyazhnichestvo*, I argue, did include the girls, even though their "subcultural" status was secondary. The latter only increases the importance of the question to be considered.

Unfortunately, there is very little information about *stilyagi*-girls ("*chuvikhi*" in the "stylish" slang).¹²³ Based on the memoirs of Kozlov, they were not many, and their

¹¹⁹ Kozlov, 2006, pp. 69-93; Kimmerling, 2007, p. 87; Slavkin, 1996, web-site.

¹²⁰ Kozlov, 2006, pp. 69-73; Elena Zhiritskaya. "*Rebyata ot vintazh*" ["The Boys Haute Vintage"]. Interview with Olga Vainstein. *Novaya Gazeta*, N 11 (July 18 2007). <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/data/2007/44/20>

¹²¹ Vainstein, 2006, p. 529.

¹²² Breward, 2006; R. Bazhanova, 2007, pp. 26. At the same time, Vainstein claims that female dandyism is possible, but it always implies a certain element of androgynism in woman's look. Vainstein, 2006, pp. 297-282

¹²³ The slang name for boys was "*chuvaki*" (plural from "*chuvak*")

position was subordinate. Since sexual freedom was an attractive forbidden fruit for stilyagi-boys, the girls, belonging to their milieu, were often seen as sexual objects.¹²⁴ Richard Stites even supposes that it was sexual tension which provoked ‘macho’ toughness of stilyagi’s style. But the same factor, for him, prompted some girls to join stilyagi: “The puritanical official values of the regime and its sponsored mass culture acted as a spur to defiance.”¹²⁵ In the case of “gilded” core of stilyagi, girls were likely to look for a profitable match.¹²⁶

Since no female ex-stilyaga left memoirs or interviews, it is impossible to verify their mores and interests. All that is available are the descriptions of the girls’ sartorial look. They provide no single picture; therefore I share the opinion of Olga Vainstein: “Girls-stilyagi did not elaborate their emblematic style, being satisfied with the separate original accents in dress.”¹²⁷ According to Kozlov, Moscow “*chuvikhi*” wore short hair (so-called “*vengerka*” -“Hungarian cut”), shoes with heels, capron stockings with back stiches, checked skirts.¹²⁸ In Odessa, stilyagi’s girl friends had tight T-shirts with deep décolleté and the skirts *a la* “New Look”, narrow in waist and with lots of rigid petticoats. One can assume all they had intensive make up, which could complete their sex appeal.¹²⁹

However, male narrators give no evidence that female stilyagi played any active part in the “subculture”, like, for example, making records on X-ray plates, not to say participation in amateur jazz bands. No clues are provided about stilyagi girls’ attitude to the regime: was it opposition via style of a trivial feminine wish to be fashionable. At least, we know that girls were dance partners for stilyagi in the home parties and dance evenings in universities and working clubs.¹³⁰ This fact and the very presence of the girls in the

¹²⁴ Kozlov, 2007, pp. 85-89.

¹²⁵ Stites, 1992, p. 124.

¹²⁶ Kozlov, “Proiskhozhdenie...”.

¹²⁷ Vainstein, 2006, p. 531.

¹²⁸ Troitsky, 1987, p. 14.

¹²⁹ This is, at least, shown in the cartoons and satiric articles.

¹³⁰ Kozlov, 2006, p. 69; Aksenov, 1987, pp. 14-15; V. G., 2009.

discourse on stilyagi show that the girls were not invisible, but just marginal in stilyagi's "subculture."

Finally, we should not miss the basic dilemma of dandyism as a cultural system – rebellion versus conformism. Dandyism, in all its modification, is in effect a gesture of provocation. Original dandyism, if you will, was a mini-revolt in masculine self-positioning. Despite the popular opinion, it was not always practiced by the aristocrats. George Brummell himself was a grandson of a valet, who made a career due to outstanding personal qualities.¹³¹ Anne Hollander evaluates Brummell as a challenger of social hierarchies through self-confidence in sartorial behaviour.¹³² Dandy "lances" innovative style into a conservative male society, but, paradoxically, creates a new canon. As Elizabeth Wilson puts it, "[t]he dandies invented Cool; but the blasé pose was of course arresting. There was both revolt and classic chic in the dandy style."¹³³

Perhaps, dandies' "cool" can be compared with stilyagi's "stylish". Surely, not all stilyagi deserved the right to be called "lancers" of fine style. There were, obviously, a few boys from the whole stilyagi's "subculture", interested not only in dancing and having fun, but in high culture as well. It was they who quickly passed the "parakeet" stage of *stilyazhnichestvo* and stood closer to the "classic chic" of dandyism. They did not necessarily have high-ranking parents, as Kozlov eloquently demonstrates in his essay "Anatomy of the elite."¹³⁴ Such people had more chances to develop positive creativity; finally they left memoirs historians can use. Perfect examples are jazz musician Alexei Kozlov, who originated from the family of middle-class university professors; writer Vasily Aksenov, son of repressed party functionaries.¹³⁵ We can even believe that their hostility to the regime was sincere and is not *completely a post factum* self-heroization.¹³⁶

¹³¹ Vainstein, 2006, pp. 57-107.

¹³² Hollander, 1994, p. 92; cited in Breward, 2002, p. 224.

¹³³ Wilson, 2003, p. 182.

¹³⁴ Alexei Kozlov. "Anatomiia elity" ["Anatomy of the Elite"]. In Kozlov, 2005, pp. 642-658.

¹³⁵ Mother of Aksenov was famous journalist and memoirist Evgenia Ginsburg.

¹³⁶ Slavkin, 1996, web-site; Kozlov, 2006; Aksenov, 1987.

When their snobbish, “cool” style was diffused and simplified, it became fashion, a result of the *agiotage* of imitation. By the same token, dandies’ outer look is “easily imitated by the ignoramuses, for whom its inner aristocratic essence is not achievable.”¹³⁷ That is why the notorious pipe-trousers rarely concealed true dissent.

At the same time, no *stilyagi* were involved in dissident activity, since none of them had ambition to change the system. Rather, they lived inside it, “doing their own job.” Alexei Yurchak calls this model “being *vnye*”. Literally *vnye* is translated as outside, but in Yurchak’s conception it means “being simultaneously inside and outside of some context – such as, being within a context while remaining oblivious of it, imagining yourself elsewhere, or being inside your own mind.”¹³⁸ This phenomenon is close to the ambiguity of dandyism, brilliantly explained by Yuri Lotman:

Dandyism, first of all, is exactly a behavior and not a theory or ideology. In addition, dandyism is limited by the narrow sphere of everyday life. Therefore, not being confused with more essential spheres of social life, it occupies only the surface levels of the culture of its time. Inseparable from the individualism and at the same time invariably dependent on the observers, dandyism constantly balances between the pretension to rebellion and various compromises with the society. His limitedness is in the limitedness and illogicality of fashion, in the language of which it has to speak with its epoch.¹³⁹

The late incarnation of *stilyazhnichestvo*, the mimicry of *shtatniki*, is good example of a compromise with the society. Then, those *stilyagi* who put on their chic apparels only for the weekend (and they were many)¹⁴⁰ demonstrate their unreadiness to become dissidents. In general, *stilyagi*’s political inactivity reduces their rebellion to the sphere of fashion.

The latter idea does not, however, allow ignoring the differences between *stilyazhnichestvo* and dandyism which were pinpointed here. Therefore I would conclude that *stilyagi* possessed some elements of dandies’ cultural model, while cannot be marked as Soviet neo-dandies. Still, the analysis of *stilyagi*’s style as related to dandyism elucidated its socio-cultural particularity.

¹³⁷ Lotman, 1997, p. 125.

¹³⁸ Yurchak, 2006, p. 128.

¹³⁹ Lotman, 1997, p. 131.

¹⁴⁰ Troitsky, 1987, p. 16; I. K., 2009.

Considering stilyagi in the context of Soviet fashion reveals their ambiguous position. On the one hand, their style (and, later, fashion) was not something extraordinary. It was a construction based on possibilities provided by the system. Screening of trophy films, business trips of the diplomats, Fashion Congresses, International Festival of Youth and Students – all these channels of information existed *within* Soviet space. Even illegal trade can be considered as inevitable by-product of the rigid planned economy. Next, without privileges for Stalinist *nomenklatura*, and the post-War “Big Deal” the emergence of stilyagi is hardly imaginable. At the same time, they owe the relative liberalization of the “thaw” their long-time survival.

On the other hand, stilyagi’s appearance was obviously a challenge. Of course, it challenged the political system, but the standard sartorial canons. In this point *stilyazhnichestvo* intersects with dandyism. Yet stilyagi’s phenomenon is heterogeneous both in behavior and in gender terms. Therefore the model of dandyism cannot be completely applied to it.

Conclusion

If we accept the stance that fashion reflects important aspects of human life, then stilyagi can be evaluated as a symptomatic phenomenon of post-war Soviet history. Their style and fashion, deviant from mainstream patterns, demonstrated the failure of Soviet power to set the absolute border with the Western world. Stilyagi became a grotesque revelation of Soviet problems in the Cold War and hence caused “moral panic” in the press.

Curiously enough, Soviet system itself provoked the emergence of stilyagi. On the one hand, in the late 1940s the official censuring of cosmopolitanism and bourgeois taste stimulated youth interest to Western culture. This was an effect of wine that ferments and earlier or later breaks-down the tun. On the other hand, the regime provided informational channels for stilyagi’s self-fashioning, such as “trophy” films, clothes and disks brought from business trips, as well as the network of favourable connections within *nomenklatura* and middle-class. To continue the metaphor, sometimes the cover of the tun was slightly opened. This is one of the reasons of stilyagi’s passivity in political terms. Instead of struggling against the system, they took advantage of the privileges given to their parents. The stilyagi from working-class, in turn, enjoyed their advantageous friendships with “gilded youth.”

Next, stilyagi’s high interest in fashion was not something exclusive. In late Stalinism and in early “thaw” period alike fashion became an approved private value and the powerful mechanism of manipulating the society. Though in different ways, in both periods dress look symbolized social status and personal success. Furthermore, fashion was successfully used in forming the identity of a Soviet person. In this respect I share the opinion of fashion historian Maria Yakovleva: “Fashion turned from idle phenomenon to the main lever of power... And what can be more effective than not just supervision over consciousness, but precisely the forming of this same consciousness through creation of

value modes, incarnated in ideals.”¹ In late Stalinism such an ideal was the image of petit-bourgeois comfort as the reward for the eager work; in Khrushchev’s time it became the concept of “good socialist taste.” Throughout the 1950s, stilyagi did not reject these ideals, but, rather, re-interpreted them. They created their style within Soviet system of values, not outside it.

Thus, the early stilyagi were fond of ornate designs and bright colors, characteristic for Stalinist *meshchanstvo*. This was combined with the “exotic” image of American jazzmen through the technique of *bricolage*. By the same token, after 1953 stilyagi parodied a “correct” traditional suit through combining it with zoot-suit jacket, Teddy-boys trousers and shoes and Elvis Presley’s “quiff” hairdo, etc. Finally, after 1957 the modest but elegant suit of *shtatniki* became an expression of nearly a conformist stylishness. This development evokes an association with dandyism’s constant compromises with the society. On the other hand, stilyagi’s self-fashioning meets Clarke’s argument that subcultural style “is not the creation of objects and meanings from nothing, but rather the transformation and rearrangement of what is given (and 'borrowed') into a pattern which carries a new meaning, its transformation to a new context, and its adaptation.”² It was this new meaning, not predicted by the regime, which annoyed Party and Komsomol officials. Stilyagi’s deviance is not so much in breaking the norms as in exaggerating the existing patterns and unveiling secret mechanisms of Soviet system.

Yet it would not be correct to label stilyagi as Soviet conformists, which is no more reasonable than the label of “folk devils.” First, this “subculture” was not homogeneous in terms of attitudes of their members. Some stilyagi could indeed disdain the regime, but much more of them could be indifferent or, especially the “gilded youth” even sympathetic towards it. Even those few, whose *stilyazhnichestvo* was caused by conscious dissent, did not express it overtly. Second, stilyagi won attention of the society and, though in a

¹ Maria Yakovleva. “*Vlastnyi diskurs mody v dinamike gendernykh obrazov*” [“Powerful Discourse of Fashion in the Dynamism of Gender Images”]. In Galina Gabriel, et al, 2007, pp. 178-183, p. 180.

² Clarke, “Style.”. In Hall and Jefferson, 2002, p. 178.

negative way of “moral panic,” acquired recognition of self-sufficient youth culture. Ultimately, stilyagi’s persistent demonstration of their “subcultural style” stimulated a serious discussion of fashion and taste in *Komsomol’skaya Pravda* in the second half of the 1950s. They prompted Komsomol officials to revise their ideas about personal style and dissociate fashionable look with low morality. In short, they set a direction towards a more tolerant attitude to youth interests, which became visible after 1957 Youth Festival.

As a result, stilyagi not only successfully used covert possibilities of 1950s Soviet system (from the regime’s patronage of *nomenklatura* and middle-class to the illegal trade), but also influenced the mainstream society. Therefore their position in Soviet cultural and social history is rather ambiguous. Nonetheless, stilyagi’s role in forming post-war Soviet youth culture cannot be underestimated. In this respect I would agree with the director Valery Todorovsky, who implied in his film *Stilyagi* that the consequent Soviet/Russian “subcultures” owe stilyagi their origin. To conclude, stilyagi were “folk heroes” in a broad sense: they demonstrate the actual flexibility of seemingly rigid and uniform Soviet society of the 1950s. And, not the least, stilyagi phenomenon is a vivid example of social significance of fashion on the whole.

A number of questions still remain open about stilyagi phenomenon, which offers numerous possibilities for further research. For example, it would be interesting to analyze stilyagi’s apparel in terms of fashion theory, basing on *Krokodil* cartoons and available photo- and film materials, and examine its development throughout the 1950s. A case study on *stilyazhnichestvo* in the particular city, or to make a comparative analysis between the two local variants would be significant. Another worthy option is to compare stilyagi’s “subculture” with the contemporary Western youth subcultures, in terms of “subcultural style” as a whole or dress style in particular. A very important problem to be investigated further is less visible female *stilyazhnichestvo*, and so forth. In short, while the aim of my

thesis was to explain the basic traits of stilyagi's "subculture", "[t]here is an infinity of threads to follow."³

³ Daniel Bertaux, Paul Thompson and Anna Rotkirch. "Epilogue: Researching with interview sources on Soviet Russia. In Bertaux, Thompson and Rotkirch, 2004, pp. 252-256; p. 252.

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Appendix 1: *Krokodil* cartoons



figure 1. L. Khudyakov "The Monkeys." *Krokodil*, N 2 (January 20, 1957).

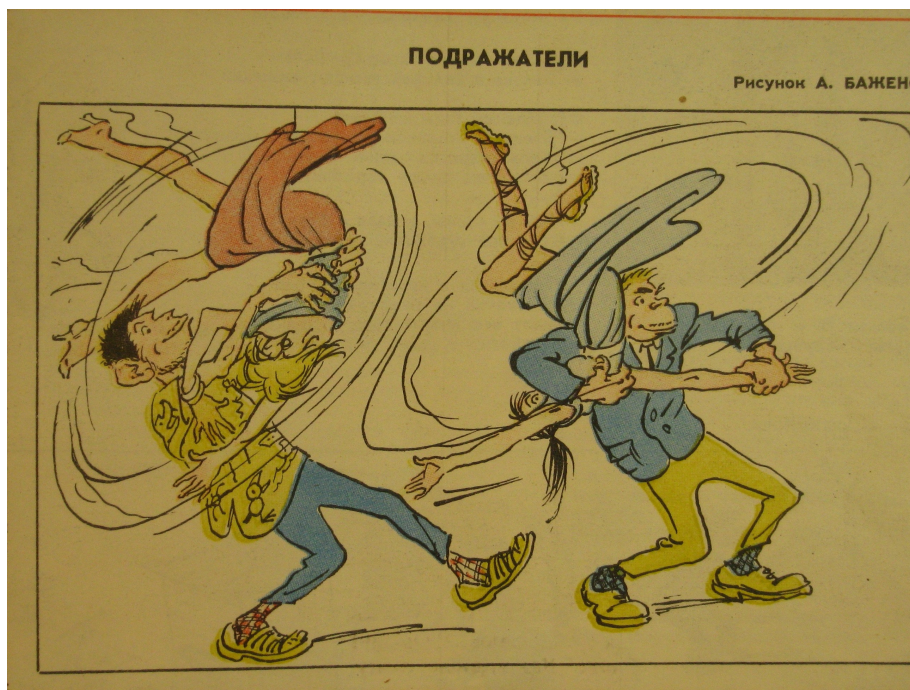


figure 2.A. Bazhenov. "The Imitators." *Krokodil*, N 24 (August 30, 1957).



figure 3. A. Kanevsky. “The Family of Compositae” (“The Family of Complex-Coloured”). *Krokodil*, N 17 (June 20, 1956).



figure 4. N. Lutokhin. “*Krokodil*’s Masquerade.” *Krokodil*, N 36 (December 30, 1955).



figure 5. E. Gorokhov. "In the Civilian Registry Office." *Krokodil*, N 11 (April 20, 1953).



figure 6. B. Savinov. "The Height of Efficiency." *Krokodil*, N 6 (1959).



figure 7. E. Shukaev. "A Stilyaga Escaped from Sakhalin." *Krokodil*, N 15 (1959).



figure 8. E. Shcheglov. "Dances Between the Tables." *Krokodil*, N 16 (June 10, 1958).



figure 9. N. Lissogorsky. "The Assault Brigade." *Krokodil*, N 20 (July 20), 1957.



figure 10. K. Elisseev. "The Admission Process Has Begun." *Krokodil*, N 18 (June 30), 1958.

Рисунок Бориса ЛЕО.



figure 11. Boris Leo. "Once He Climbed on His Father's Neck, and Still Has Not Get Down." *Krokodil*, N 32 (1955).