Poverty and Profit-Making

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Of Loss and Loot

Stalin-Era Culture, Foreign Aid, and Trophy Goods in the Soviet Union during the 1940s*

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In an essay entitled "Spoils of War,"[1] Joseph Brodsky, writing in exile in America, described the impact of foreign objects introduced by the war on his childhood in Leningrad. His account mixes trophies seized from the enemy—German or Japanese—with American aid goods, including canned foods, radios, and above all films. These various objects of diverse origins were invaluable in shaping his individuality and that of his generation, as they created a foreign musical, cinematographic, vestimentary, and cultural presence within the otherwise hermetic Soviet environment, offering citizens the opportunity to constitute themselves as autonomous individuals with respect to their political and social surroundings. It could be argued that the culture that Brodsky described, the outcome of indirect contact with other countries made possible by the war, contributed to uniting individuals within a socially circumscribed generation. It is also true that, taken as a whole, these objects represented unique challenges for the Soviet political system, a challenge perpetuated, as Brodsky aptly noted, by the steady stream of Western products arriving through illegal or legal means. Until the closing days of the Soviet regime, these foreign objects were the focus of deep infatuation among

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1. Joseph Brodsky, "Spoils of War," in *On Grief and Reason: Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), 3-21.

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the Soviet population for reasons that were materialistic but that also involved evocations of a more or less mythologized culture.[2]

Objects played an important role in constructing an imaginary that influenced the development of Brodsky's sense of identity during his youth amid the ruins of Leningrad.[3] It is also noteworthy that the origins of these objects became blurred in his recollections—some were donations from the Allies and others were spoils of war. The purpose of this article is to reconstruct this pattern, but in the opposite direction, by exploring the circumstances that led these objects to be present in the martyred city of Leningrad and indeed throughout Soviet territory. The study explores the role of a wide range of actors and political events both during and after the war in this massive influx of foreign goods, while also seeking to explain the sort of indifference or amnesia among Brodsky's former compatriots with regard to their origins. Although the image of Soviet existence as uniformly gray, rigid, and above all, closed—the war bringing with it fragments of Western civilization for the first time—needs to be taken seriously because it emanates from contemporary accounts, it should also be questioned. In fact, the war provided every level of Soviet society with an opportunity to display their prewar possessions, either stolen or destroyed by the enemy, in inventories that reconstitute far more varied and sophisticated tastes and imaginaries than one might expect. This is true in part because they reflect changes in official prescriptions concerning matters of taste, which, beginning in the 1930s, had rehabilitated a style inherited from the European middle class of the nineteenth century. Brodsky's "Spoils of War" thus calls the entire material civilization to which the revolution gave birth into question, i.e. not only all of the objects that constituted it, but also the social relationships that were tied to these objects and the relationship with abundance, luxury, and tastes that were of Western origin. This interrogation cannot therefore be limited to the end of the war, but instead calls for the examination of several earlier periods in order to understand how the war and the objects associated with it influenced Soviet civilization.

2. Regarding the presence of Western goods in post-Stalin-era Soviet society, see Larissa Zakharova, *S'habiller à la Soviétique. La mode et le Dégel en URSS* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2011); Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Sergei I. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dniepropetrovsk, 1960-1985*, (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2010).

3. Regarding objects that came from abroad "thanks to" the war, see Vera S. Dunham, *In Stalin's Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976). Through an interpretation of fiction published during the 1940s, this book demonstrates how, at the end of the war, the Stalin administration was able to create a veritable pact with a large segment of Soviet society by rehabilitating the search for material comfort as fair compensation for the people's sacrifices and efforts, but also for their political allegiance. The approach of the present study is different, however, because literary texts, important testimony from witnesses of the realities of the period, as well as their shared perceptions, must be understood as constitutive elements of the imaginary of the authors and actors of "primary" sources that are not in themselves narratives.

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The wider effects of the war on the status of objects were not limited to the USSR in the 1940s. In fact, over the past two decades, scholarship covering the period of World War II has gradually constructed the idea that the material world of civilian populations had become an essential feature of "total war" for every combatant nation. The goal of Nazi Germany's systematic pillaging was not merely to acquire wealth, but to humiliate the peoples of defeated countries. This was followed by a vast attempt to inventory the losses experienced by the victims, part of a reparations policy that resulted in the organized transfer of assets of every kind as well as financial compensation,[4] in addition to an unprecedented influx of privately and publicly funded humanitarian aid.[5] This three-fold phenomenon—pillaging, inventories, and reparations—required the creation of specific administrative agencies in the different countries concerned. The character and contents of the archives that they left behind provide evidence of commonalities across individual experiences, and allow scholarly efforts to retrace the history of the objects, including the donations that were collected by American immigrant communities and sent to the USSR, the loot gathered by Soviet dignitaries in the conquered territories, and the inventories created by Soviet citizens to declare their private losses. While the fate of art works and technologically sophisticated industrial objects made the deepest impression,[6] it was above all ordinary objects that became central topics in political discussions and high-level conflicts,[7] while

4. Among many studies of the spoliation of Jewish property and the forms of restitution and compensation, see in particular Martin Dean, *Robbing the Jews: The Confiscation of Jewish Property in the Holocaust, 1933-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Constantin Goschler and Philipp Ther, eds., *Raub und Restitution. "Arisierung" und Rückerstattung des jüdischen Eigentums in Europa* (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003); "Spoliations en Europe," special issue, *Revue d'histoire de la Shoah* 186 (2007). Regarding the case of Jews in France, among the many publications that followed studies conducted by the Matteoli Commission (Antoine Prost, Rémi Skoutesky and Sonia Étienne, *Aryanisation économique et restitutions* (Paris: La Documentation française, 2000)), see Tal Bruttmann, *Aryanisation économique et spoliations en Isère, 1940-1944* (Grenoble: Presses universitaires de Grenoble, 2010); Laurent Douzou, *Voler les juifs. Lyon, 1940-1944* (Paris: Hachette Littératures, 2002); Florent Le Bot, *La fabrique réactionnaire. Antisémitisme, spoliations et corporatisme dans le cuir, 1930-1950* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2007). The matter of compensation received by victims has been considerably less well studied. For some information, see Danièle Voldman, *La reconstruction des villes françaises de 1940 à 1954. Histoire d'une politique* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997).

5. Jessica Reinisch, "Internationalism in Relief: The Birth (and Death) of UNRRA," in "Postwar Reconstruction in Europe: International Perspectives, 1945-1949," ed. Mark Mazower, Jessica Reinisch, and David Feldman, *Past and Present Special Supplement* 6 (2011): 258-89; Laura Hobson Faure, "Un 'plan Marshall juif': la présence juive américaine en France après la Shoah, 1944-1954." (PhD diss., EHESS, 2009).

6. Sophie Cœuré, *La mémoire spoliée. Les archives des Français, butin de guerre nazi puis soviétique, de 1940 à nos jours* (Paris: Payot, 2007); see also Alexandre Sumpf and Vincent Laniol, eds., *Saisies, spoliations et restitutions. Archives et bibliothèques au XXe siècle* (Rennes: PUR, 2012).

7. Jean Marc Dreyfus and Sarah Gensburger, *Des camps dans Paris. Austerlitz, Lévitan, Bassano, juillet 1943-août 1944* (Paris: Fayard, 2003); Annette Wieviorka, *Le pillage des appartements et son indemnisation* (Paris: La Documentation française, 2000).

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also remaining the principal preoccupation of a large number of individuals for whom the war could be either a catastrophe or a blessing.

The case of the Soviet Union is thus part of the wider role played by objects, and the process of investing them with meanings, during wartime. Despite similarities with other combatant societies, however, the Stalin-era USSR—combining an economy defined by scarcity and the deep politicization of even the most minute details of individuals' material possessions with the authorities' desire to completely control distribution[8]—had already endowed objects with a particular status that the war further altered. In reality, Brodsky's "Spoils of War" concerned every layer of Soviet society, even if their deepest significance was ultimately defined by changing relationships with material comfort as well as Western culture and the shifting political loyalties of the Soviet elites.

Abundance from Abroad

After the immense destruction wrought by the war, Soviet territory experienced an influx of foreign goods that, although totally inadequate to meet the needs of a population still impoverished by the war, was greeted with profound desire. Foreign objects were enormously varied, ranging from used clothing collected by American charitable organizations to the solid gold dishes of 1940s Nazi dignitaries. These consumer goods reflect two very distinct lines of supply. The first, which began approximately mid-war, was foreign aid sent by the Allies or neutral countries via different methods to the Soviet population. The second was the fruit of intense pillaging by the Soviets following the occupation of former enemy territory.

Jewish organizations played a major role in that humble part of Western aid, care packages containing critical basic commodities. The Stalin administration was sensitive to the susbtantial population of émigrés from the former Russian Empire who, formed into groups of every stripe, constituted natural donors. It took pains to help to mobilize these groups to assist the Soviet population. Relations were never simple, however, as they replayed old conflicts around humanitarian aid, which had been suspected of facilitating propaganda and conflicts since the early days of Soviet Russia, when the Bolsheviks simultaneously attempted to encourage and channel aid to the hungry and to Jewish populations that had been the victims of pogroms during the civil war. Jewish donors frequently expressed doubts and dissatisfaction about who actually received the aid, a climate of suspicion that lasted throughout the war in Jewish anti-Communist circles. In order to counter

8. Julie Hessler, *A Social History of Soviet Trade: Trade Policy, Retail Practices, and Consumption, 1917-1953* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Borders of Socialism: Private Spheres of Soviet Russia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Marina Balina and Evgeny Dobrenko, eds., *Petrified Utopia: Happiness Soviet Style* (London: Anthem Press, 2009); David Crowely and Susan E. Reid, eds., *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010).

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such criticisms, these groups felt that it was important to verify what was happening on the ground in the liberated Soviet territories. Beginning in late 1943-early 1944, the Russian War Relief, the principal organization funneling American humanitarian aid, most of it Jewish,[9] had a permanent resident representative in Moscow, Leo Gruliev.[10] Despite these efforts, access to the provinces that were previously inhabited by strong Jewish minorities remained closed to him[11] and, when his superior, Edward Carter, a pro-Soviet American intellectual, visited in August 1945, the Stalin administration chose to show him the heroic cities of Leningrad and Stalingrad,[12] the high point of his visit being the mining region of Donbass.[13] The itinerary of Carter's visits thus defines a geography of the victims of the war that emphasized sites symbolizing the heroic resistance of the Soviet people, Russian heritage, and one of the jewels in the Stalin-era industrial crown, but that remained silent where the massacre of the Jews was concerned.

This tension surrounding aid distribution was relayed to authorities numerous times by the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, which had been created at the outset of the war by the Kremlin in order to mobilize Western Jewish opinion.[14]

9. 60 percent in 1943 according to Edward C. Carter, State Archives of the Russian Federation, Moscow (Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii, hereafter "GARF"), collection (*fond*, hereafter "f.") 8581, inventory (*opis'*, hereafter "op.") 2, file (*delo*, hereafter "d.") 59, page (*list*, hereafter "l.") 75.

10. GARF, f. 5283, op. 2a, d. 21, l. 81, 86, 95 and d. 44, l. 127v. Gruliev's family origins, part Russian and part Jewish, support the assumption that he had linguistic knowledge that allowed him to at least minimally navigate Soviet realities and was particularly sensitive to the fate of Jews in Soviet territory. However, his excessively insistant attitude permanently inconvenienced the Soviet authorities.

11. GARF, f. 5283, op. 2a, d. 21, l. 79-79v, 86 and 92-93. Jewish evacuees were also the subject of Gruliev's demands inquiring about their situation in the region of Saratov, where Russian War Relief (RWR) prepared an aid program. GARF, f. 5283, op. 2a, d. 21, l. 79-79v (July 1944).

12. In a proposal in August 1945, Vladimir Kemenov, president of the Pan-Soviet Society for Cultural Rapprochement between the USSR and Foreign Countries (Vsesoiuznoe Obshchestvo Kul'turnoi Sviazi s zagranitsei, VOKS), suggested to the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs that, as well as the local RWR warehouses and orphanages that benefited from its aid, Carter be taken to visit the emblematic sites that officially representated the martyrdom of the city at the time: the urban reconstruction plan, accompanied by the lead architect, the "Defense of Leningrad" exhibition and the devastated imperial palaces in the area. An additional sign of the importance attributed to the American guest and the role of this official visit in the Soviet staging of the fate of Leningrad, he also planned for a meeting with the Party First Secretary, Petr Popkov, who led the city during the siege, GARF, f. 5283, op. 2a, d. 44, l. 126. Regarding the Stalin-era construction of official memory of the siege of Leningrad, see Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad, 1941-1995: Myth, Memories, and Monuments* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

13. GARF, f. 5283, op. 2a, d. 44, l. 148-52.

14. Shimon Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia: The Jewish Antifascist Committee in the USSR, 1941-1948* (Boulder: East European Quarterly, 1982); Karel C. Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger: Soviet Propaganda During World War II* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

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The work of the Soviet Red Cross in liberated zones crystallized their criticisms. Foreign organizations had agreed that the aid was to be distributed "without distinction of nationality,"[15] but they had also obtained an agreement in principle that priority would be allocated to districts with the highest concentrations of Jews. However, in the context of the increasingly open anti-Semitism of the population and local authorities, the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee received abundant mail from individuals complaining that they were excluded from distribution precisely because they were Jewish, quite the opposite of special compensation. One ghetto survivor who returned to his home in Odessa denounced the immoderate desire of his fellow citizens for Jewish property, relatively rare in a city that had already suffered a "furniture catastrophe," when Jews' apartments were plundered during the Romanian occupation three years earlier. The term "catastrophe," used at the time to refer to the genocide of the Jews, was not a random choice of words for the author since, in his view, the two events were "genealogically" connected. The Soviet authorities' indifference to the stripping of Jewish survivors' assets, including by the Extraordinary State Commission—responsible for determining crimes perpetrated by the occupiers and assessing damages—ultimately served to deny the fate of a community that the Fascists had virtually destroyed already.[16]

The political importance attributed to such matters merits close attention: the investigations overseen by Viacheslav Molotov following mail that he received from Solomon Mikhoels implicated the top levels of the government, while also concluding that there was a total absence of discrimination.[17] Although it cannot yet be seen as a systematic policy, state-sponsored anti-Semitism had been growing from the beginning of the war, before becoming fully fledged in the late 1940s when the Anti-Fascist Committee began to be persecuted and was eventually disbanded.[18] It is also conceivable that Molotov was sincere in his desire to ensure that the Jewish population of liberated regions received material assistance. Other

15. In other words, ethnic belonging, in terms of Soviet vocabulary and categories.

16. Mordekhai Altshuler, Itsak Arad and Shmuel Krakovskii, *Sovetskie evrei pishut Il'e Erenburgu 1943-1966* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1993), 140-42 and 222, letter dated July 22, 1944. The author of the letter only hinted at the specificity of the fate of Jews under the Occupation, through the still-uncertain numbers of victims: of two hundred thousand Jews before the war, he estimates that about two hundred were, like him, able to return. Regarding discrimination against the survivors of the Odessa ghettoes during the distribution of American donations, see also the letter of Tatiana Mironovna Shapiro, July 1944, ibid., 143-4.

17. Gennadii Vasilievich Kostyrchenko, *Gosudarstvennyi antisemitizm v SSSR ot nachala do kul'minatsii, 1938-1953* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia"/Materik, 2005), June 1944, 52-57 and Shimon Redlikh, *Evreiskii antifashistskii komitet v SSSR 1941-1948. Dokumentirovannaia istoriia* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1996), November 1944, 123-25.

18. Regarding the renewal of this ancient (and still hotly debated) question due to the opening of the archives, see Gennadii Vasilievich Kostyrchenko, *Tainaia politika Stalina. Vlast' i antisemitizm* (Moscow: Mezhdunaronye otnosheniia, 2003), and David Brandenberger, "Stalin's Last Crime? Recent Scholarship on Postwar Soviet Anti-Semitism and the Doctors' Plot," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 6, no. 1 (2005): 187-204.

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high-level figures primarily voiced mistrust and even animosity towards the Jews, however, using arguments that had previously proven effective, including the idea that humanitarian aid was a Trojan horse for the capitalist powers. Such arguments had in fact been brandished since the regime's earliest days, when aid was destined for famine victims as well as Jewish victims of the pogroms during the civil war. It was also argued that special treatment of Jews could awaken popular anti-Semitism, an argument voiced since early in the war by the advocates of silence about the fate of Soviet Jews under Nazi occupation. These arguments would soon be joined by warnings about the "Zionist menace."[19] For foreign-based Jewish organizations, the opacity of Soviet methods appeared particularly suspect because they were fully aware that other nationalities—such as Poles and Armenians—had succeeded in establishing their own aid networks, managed by their own representatives.[20] This reasoning neglects the complicated question of the citizenship of aid recipients. It may nevertheless have encouraged Mikhoels to advocate for the creation of an organization to oversee the distribution of material aid for survivors; in 1943, he had already proposed the creation of an agency devoted to the search for Jews reported missing in Soviet territory who were being sought by their relatives both in Russia and abroad.[21] It is worth observing that neither of these proposals was ever acted upon. From the perspective of foreign donors in the early 1920s, aid distribution and the search for pogrom victims were closely linked due to the opacity of the information released by the Soviet authorities.[22] The Committee nevertheless paid a heavy price for this project. Its connections to foreign Jewish charitable organizations, particularly the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, were an important element in the official accusations that led to the execution of most Committee members in the early 1950s.[23]

19. Georgi Fedorovich Aleksandrov, chief of the propaganda sector of the Central Committee, October 1945, in Redlikh, *Evreiskii antifashistskii komitet*, 130. He is the author of a note concerning Soviet artists dated August 17, 1942 that is considered one of the first explicit examples of state-sponsored anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union. Note dated February 19, 1947 from Grigorii Chumeiko, director of the foreign policy sector of the Central Committee, to Andrei Zhdanov, regarding a request by Jewish émigrés of Ukrainian origin to be permitted to be directly in contact with Ukrainian Jewish communities, ibid., 135. See Kostyrchenko, *Tainaia politika Stalina*, and Laurent Rucker, *Stalin, Israel et les juifs* (Paris: PUF, 2001).
20. Redlikh, *Evreiskii antifashistskii komitet*, 120. Regarding the case of the Poles, see Catherine Gousseff, "*'Kto naš, kto ne naš.'* Théorie et pratiques de la citoyenneté à l'égard des populations conquises. Le cas des Polonais en URSS, 1939-1946," *Cahiers du monde russe* 44, no. 2-3 (2003): 519-58; for more concerning the Armenians, see Claire Mouradian, "L'immigration des Arméniens de la diaspora dans la RSS d'Arménie, 1946-1962," *Cahiers du monde russe* 20, no. 1 (1979): 79-110.
21. Redlikh, *Evreiskii antifashistskii komitet*, 115-16.
22. Regarding the attempts of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee to respond to the expectations of foreign correspondents, see in particular the lists of names of Soviet Jews who escaped from different localities, sent abroad by the Committee in 1944, which figured among the accusations leveled against the Committee after the war, GARF, f. 8114, op. 1, d. 973.
23. This explains the presence of numerous documents concerning this question of aid in the archives of the Central Committee preserved at the GARF, whose files were

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The redeveloping Jewish communities of the western regions of the USSR,[24] which were focused both on religious renewal and material solidarity with impoverished fellow Jews, did ultimately succeed in tapping a portion of the foreign aid that was intended for them.[25] As a consequence, they were often suspected by Soviet authorities of providing a smokescreen for commercial activities involving gifts from foreign Jews. One reader of a report from the region of Zhytomir used red pencil to underline the claim that nearly every Jewish community had contact with religious American Jews, who sent them valuable packages.[26]

The missions of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) created in Minsk and Kiev in the spring of 1945 managed to maintain an effective working relationship with Soviet authorities, but their small size and the limits on their movement prevented them from verifying how the agencies created by Soviet authorities in the Republics were actually managing aid distribution in the field.[27] The volume of the aid provided by the UNRRA to Ukraine and Byelorussia was considerably less than the aid offered to other liberated European countries, but it nevertheless proved to be critical for the population, particularly food donations.[28] According to reports filed by local UNRRA missions, the food sent by the United Nations, with the exception of bread, represented the majority of what was sold in the stores responsible for distributing rationed goods.[29] In early

carefully selected by the Ministerstvo Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti (Ministry of Governmental Security), and numerous recopied and/or translated documents (particularly from Yiddish). These were described at length by Abakumov in a note dated December 4, 1950, in which he cited in particular the letter of Mikhoels dated October 28, 1944, which denounced the indifference of the Soviet Red Cross concerning Jews in its distribution of foreign aid: Kostyrchenko, *Gosudarstvennyi antisemitizm*, 139-47. Curiously, Mikhoels' famous letter, referred to as a draft in Abakumov's note, is available in the archives of the Committee in its definitive version, received by Molotov and annotated in his hand on October 29, 1944, more precisely a "certified copy," Redlikh, *Evreiskii antifashistskii komitet*, 122.

24. A renaissance facilitated by new legislation and a greater tolerance from which religious denominations represented on Soviet soil generally benefited. Yaacov Ro'i, ed., *Jews and Jewish Life in Russia and the Soviet Union* (Ilford: F. Cass, 1995).

25. Yaacov Ro'i, "The Reconstruction of Jewish Communities in the USSR, 1944-1947," in *The Jews Are Coming Back: The Return of the Jews to their Countries of Origin after WWII*, ed. David Bankier (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2005), 186-205, especially 196-97.

26. GARF, f. 6991, op. 3, d. 28, l. 227.

27. Veniamin Fedorovich Zima, *Golod v SSSR 1946-1947 godov. Proiskhozhdenie i posledstviia* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1999), 146. See also George Woodbridge, ed., *UNRRA: The History of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration*, 3 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950).

28. Reinisch, "Internationalism in Relief." Food aid for the Republics of Byelorussia and Ukraine represented respectively 49 percent and 53 percent of the aid sent by UNRRA in the equivalent of US dollars, followed by supplies for industrial reconstruction (29 percent and 28 percent), clothing, textiles, and shoes (11.5 percent and 9 percent), supplies for agricultural reconstruction (9 percent) and medical equipment and supplies (1.6 percent and 1.3 percent). See Woodbridge, *UNRRA*, 2: 250.

29. UNRRA, *Economic Rehabilitation in the Ukraine*, Operational Analysis Papers, 39 (1947), 68 and 72; UNRRA, *Economic Rehabilitation in Byelorussia*, Operational Analysis Papers, 48

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1947, the prospect that this aid source might end led the missions to fear the worst, as they saw food supplies and health conditions in the region declining before their eyes.[30]

Tushenka (corned beef) was unquestionably the most archetypal item among foreign food donations, which primarily consisted of US Army rations, and Brodsky was not alone in expressing indelible memories of this common foreign food item. Among people for whom every basic necessity was in cruelly short supply, donated clothing was also the focus of particular greed and desire. Like corned beef, but more enduringly, clothing was valued because it enabled survival, but also because it provided a small sample of simple Western pleasures. For that reason, references to clothing aid in official public discourse became less frequent as its importance among recipients grew.[31] Typically referred to as *zagranichnye podarki* (presents from abroad), or *amerikanskie podarki* (American presents), the exact origin of donated clothing was rarely evident, although it does raise the question of the prestige and recognition that the West, especially the United States, derived from its largesse. Still, the primary concern for ordinary Soviets was not where these donated goods came from, but simply how to access them. The use of the term "presents" (*podarki*) referred less to the way in which these foreign items came to be on Soviet soil and more to a category of goods combining relative quality and abundance, in stark contrast with the scarcity and poor quality of Soviet products. In fact, these same objects were sometimes also labeled *amerikanskie veshchi* (American "things"). They were perceived as the very least that could be provided by a culture that was so materially superior, even where used clothes were concerned, even if it lacked Soviet endurance. These basic donations, as appealing as they may have been, were far from sufficient to alleviate the deep physical suffering of the Russian people. Indeed, this very imbalance was a source of controversy: for some, it was the insultingly low price that Westerners were willing to pay to conceal their cowardice, while for others, it was the Soviet regime that was humiliating its own people, who were reduced to rejoicing in donated items of little value in the West. In one propaganda letter, a young girl marveled at a green dress with two pockets while telling her story as a child war victim and daughter of a veteran who

(1947), 42 and 49, n. 2. According to this final report, 70 percent of the foodstuffs sold in Byelorussian shops during the spring and summer of 1946 came from the UNRRA, even though the Soviet government had not confirmed this figure. Other supply sources in which UNRRA goods were not commercialized were the famous *gastronom* food shops in which un-rationed luxury goods were sold at prices affordable only to the privileged few in Soviet society, as well as the kolkhozian markets, where access was more democratic, but whose prices were also incomparably higher than those of rationed goods sold in government shops. Regarding the Soviet postwar distribution system, see Hessler, *Social History*.

30. UNRRA, *Economic Rehabilitation in the Ukraine*, 77-78; UNRRA, *Economic Rehabilitation in Byelorussia*, 53-54.

31. Timothy Johnston, *Being Soviet: Identity, Rumour, and Everyday Life under Stalin, 1939-1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 95-97; the author neglects the omnipresence of *zagranichnye podarki* in Soviet reports from the 1940s, however.

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fought on the front.[32] Varlam Shalamov referred to American clothing with similar tenderness,[33] before continuing to describe the happiness of "starvers" gobbling whole barrels of American *solidol*, an industrial lubricant delivered at the same time as the lend-lease machines that were used to move mountains of frozen cadavers from the Gulags.

The means by which these objects were appropriated by Soviet citizens also subverted their original destinations. A pyramidal system of committees was supposed to ensure their distribution, a task taken over, as we have seen, by the Soviet administration. In reality, however, aid sometimes accumulated in warehouses where local notables were given first choice, as in the case of railway administrators in the Siberia-Ural region who arrived, accompanied by their spouses, maids, and chauffeurs, and made off with the best part of what was in storage. Little remained afterwards other than clothing in poor condition, mismatched stockings, and useless or inappropriate apparel whose theoretical recipients remained a mystery. The American gifts that eventually did arrive were thus greeted not only with desire but also with anger, and many of the "deserving poor" expressed indignation and even refused gifts considered doubly insulting in view of their needs and what they felt they deserved, but also with respect to the officials and their families who had been given first pick. News of the scandalous condition of donated clothing became widespread and was repeated across the USSR as far as Magadan.[34] Local and regional civil servants were not alone in helping themselves to the bounty that was stored in warehouses, accompanied by their households. The first secretary of the Party in Byelorussia, himself a member of the Central Committee, Panteleimon Ponomarenko, was accused of similar behavior. This celebrated chief of the partisans during the war apparently did not hesitate to offer the best of what was carelessly stored on the grounds of the central base of Belglavsnab in Minsk to the leaders of the Republic or to keep it for himself.

In reality, the wives of the top-level administrators in Byelorussia looked forward to the arrival of treasures from Germany labeled "trophies" or "reparations" far more eagerly than clothing and shoes from the UNRRA.[35] The objects contained in the crates of these two distinct origins—foreign donations and "trophies"—were

32. GARF, f. 9501, op. 5, d. 315, l. 2-2v.

33. "We prisoners, we have heard talk about gifts from abroad that had worried camp authorities ... In the lists, these woolen marvels were designated as "second hand," which was far more expressive, understandably, than "used" or obscure initials such as "w/u" (was used), which are not comprehensible for a man of the camp." Varlam Chalamov, "Prêt-bail," *Récits de la Kolyma* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 2003), 506.

34. Elena Yu. Zubkova et al. eds., *Sovetskaia zhizn', 1945-1953* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2003), 83-88. Apparently, Gulag prisoners were also aware of being victims of the rapacity of local leaders: "Worn-out knitted suits, second-hand sweaters and jumpers collected on the other side of the ocean for the detainees of the Kolyma had been absconded with by the wives of the Magadan generals who had almost fought over them," Chalamov, "Prêt-bail," 507.

35. Russian State Archives of Social and Political History, Moscow (Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii, hereafter "RGASPI"), f. 17, op. 122, d. 139, l. 83-92.

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generally stored in the same locations but were distinguishable in two significant ways: how they had been collected and their value. In fact, arrivals of "trophy goods" are etched far more vividly in Soviet memories than aid that represented Allied solidarity. This bounty is inextricably linked to the extreme violence that accompanied the Red Army's occupation of defeated countries. The behavior of Soviet troops towards the civilian population, particularly the systematic rape of women, has remained largely unacknowledged in the East, however,[36] although it was extremely common over a vast territory. One of the first and most spectacular manifestations of these violent rampages by the occupying Soviets that culminated in Germany was the sacking of Budapest.[37] Although they have received little attention in Russia, the veritable pogrom conducted in Eastern Prussia and the terrorizing of Berlin by the Soviets upon their arrival are widely known in the West, while local memories echo the archives in reporting a dangerous environment for occupied civilians that lasted for years, involving sporadic rape and depredation by isolated soldiers and bands of deserters, who requisitioned women, livestock, and every kind of food reserves at will from terrified villagers. While the Soviet narrative concerning atrocities committed by the occupiers in the 1940s had always included a close connection between assaults on property and physical violence, in this instance they became dissociated in Soviet memory and discourse. This dissociation was facilitated by the fact that the physical violence committed against defeated populations differed in scale and nature. In truth, the violence resembled material damages, not only because they occurred together but also because of the treatment of enemy women's bodies, as the call to simply kill every representative of the German nation vanished from Soviet propaganda. The prevailing idea was that appropriating defeated civilians' property and assets was justified because of the pillaging suffered by the Soviet population during the war, an idea of justice reinforced by the well-known shock Soviets experienced upon crossing the border into defeated countries, which even in ruins were so obviously more prosperous than their own country. The Soviets also saw—or believed they saw—among their defeated enemies, from Romanian cities to Prussian farms, the direct outcome of plundering at the hands of the Germans on Soviet soil, from livestock[38] to

36. Regarding the absence of recognition by Russian historiography and, more generally, by Russian society of the behavior of Red Army soldiers in Germany, see Oleg Budnitskii, "The Intelligentsia Meets the Enemy: Educated Soviet Officers in Defeated Germany, 1945," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 10, no. 3 (2009): 629-82, especially 635 and following.

37. Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Krisztián Ungváry, *The Siege of Budapest: 100 Days in World War II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

38. See the letter from a Red Army soldier and former kolkhozian on his arrival in Eastern Prussia: "They took the livestock from the best farms in Europe. Their sheep are the best Russian merinos, and their shops are piled with goods from all the shops and factories of Europe. In the near future, these goods will appear in Russian shops as our trophies," Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939-1945* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), 260.

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tramways, including the objects of value that were found in former occupants' apartments.[39]

This point of view meant that serving oneself was entirely fair and was not mere blind revenge, a justification that also extended to destroying enemy property.[40] Although destructive acts, like physical violence against the population, particularly women, were not addressed in public discourse in the USSR and continue to this day to be met with silence, this was not the case concerning the confiscation of property—including personal property—belonging to the residents of defeated territories. At the time, much as would be true today, the appropriation of war trophies was seen as both legitimate and harmless.[41] For a Soviet ranking officer, the wristwatch was a typical example of such loot, and witness accounts commonly reflect that it was not unusual for a soldier to wear several watches on his arm. Tolerance of such obvious evidence of theft from the enemy reveals the meaning attributed to it at the time: not only were watches extremely rare in the USSR and buyers easily found when a soldier returned home, but a certain compulsiveness with regard to enemy property was also perceived as acceptable.[42] Frequently wearing several watches, even if they did not work, and sometimes on both arms, also mirrors the treatment of German women, whose age, physical condition, and other personal characteristics seemed to be unimportant to the soldiers who raped them.

The popularity of bicycles, which were still rare at the time in the USSR, provides an excellent illustration of the uncomplicatedness with which trophies were acquired and displayed. Even Soviets from privileged backgrounds had no idea how to ride a bicycle, but they were completely unashamed to reveal their clumsiness. Everyone knew that their acquisition may very well have been associated with a rape or a murder, and the sight of Soviets learning to ride bicycles with childish delight mirrors an image often reported by defeated peoples of barbarians whose utterly naïve behavior stands in dramatic contrast to the savage acts perpetrated by the very same soldiers.[43] One Soviet diarist, however, named Vladimir

39. RGVA, f. 32900, op. 1, d. 458, l. 42-42v, 94-5, 98 and 112-16.

40. Budnitskii, "The Intelligentsia Meets the Enemy," 633.

41. "The jamboree involved no guilt. Even today, the veterans can talk of it without embarrassment, as if recounting a particularly fruitful rummage sale. Getting the best things was a sign of skill, of concern for one's family, of an ability to deal with the new beast, capitalism," Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 279.

42. The retouching of the famous photograph by Evgenii Khaldei showing a Red Army soldier who had climbed to the top of the Reichstag, his arm holding the Soviet flag initially decorated by several wristwatches, does not contradict this idea of tolerance, but demonstrates instead the widespread nature of this practice, which led Khaldei, having chosen his model, to not even notice this detail until later.

43. Upon exiting the cellar in which she had hidden after the Russians arrived, a woman from Berlin described one of her first sightings of the invaders, before she was serially raped a few hours later, as follows: "On the road, the Russians had climbed onto freshly stolen bicycles. They taught each other to ride, holding themselves as stiffly as Susi, the female chimpanzee in the zoo, crashing into trees and bursting

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Gelfand, turned this disjunction to his advantage, and the day after learning to ride a bicycle he felt sufficiently at ease to call on a German woman and her daughter, who had been raped; the woman asked him to protect them against his compatriots, an offer that he politely declined.[44] Somewhat later, dressed in an elegant civilian suit that was probably tailored for him in Germany, he had himself photographed riding his bicycle, an action shot that was unusual among his contemporaries. The snapshot attests to his dexterity, but above all it allowed his quest for objects to be reframed and placed on a different level.

In fact, although they were celebrated in Soviet propaganda beginning in the 1920s, cameras were in reality very scarce, and they were an even more popular trophy item than bicycles or watches, which were seen as purely practical.[45] Cameras propelled their owners into an entirely new cultural practice and were a source of great satisfaction among members of the intelligentsia with the good fortune of acquiring them.[46] The young Gelfand obtained his own camera in January 1946, perhaps on Berlin's Alexanderplatz, where all sorts of goods exchanged hands more or less discreetly.[47] During his extended stay in Germany, he used cameras as trade objects, but he ultimately learned to use them and attempted to accumulate the equipment needed to develop his own photographs.[48] He then began making portraits of his feminine conquests, the great project of his experience of the

into laughter like children," *Une femme à Berlin. Journal, 20 avril-22 juin 1945* trans. Françoise Wullmart (Paris: Gallimard, 2006). The author of the journal expressed pleasure at having witnessed this ambivalent scene. See also the autobiographical narrative of Sándor Márai concerning the beginnings of the Soviet occupation of Hungary, *Memoir of Hungary, 1944-1948*, trans. Albert Tezla (Budapest: Corvina, 1996) as well as his novel, *Libération*, written at the end of the siege of Budapest but published posthumously (Paris: Albin Michel, 2007).

44. Wladimir Gelfand, *Deutschland-Tagebuch, 1945-1946. Aufzeichnungen eines Rotarmisten* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 2005), 78-82. This kind of scene became commonplace in descriptions of the good female Soviet with respect to German women, who had allegedly become rather wild.

45. The first Soviet cameras were as rare as they were mythical, because they were produced in the model orphan camp (*besprizorniki*) called Felix Dzerzhinsky. The FED 1 came out in 1934, and one was produced for every five hundred inhabitants in 1937. Photography development material was just as scarce and expensive, meaning that amateur photography remained quite limited before the 1950s. See Ivan Narskii, *Fotokartochka na pamiat': semeinye istorii, fotograficheskie poslaniia i sovetskoe detstvo (avtobio-istoriograficheskii roman)* (Cheliabinsk: Èntsiklopediia, 2008), 317-18.

46. A revealing fact concerning the perspective of contemporary Russian society, including the intelligentsia, on this aspect of the war is that the first group photograph of the three child-heroes of a recent novel was taken by an old, patriotic military doctor who had a "superb trophy camera," revealing interesting prerevolutionary manners in private scenes. Liudmila Ulitskaia, *Zelenyi shater* (Moscow: Èksmo, 2011), 22-25.

47. Gelfand, *Deutschland-Tagebuch*, 205, January 14, 1946.

48. Ibid., 267, May 22, 1946, and 302, August 27, 1946. He most likely learned these skills in May 1946, when he was in frequent contact with a cultivated Polish family who came from regions annexed by the USSR. Ibid., 308, September 11, 1946.

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occupation, as well as of the people he met and the cities and landscapes through which he traveled.[49] This new passion even tended to replace his diary.[50]

The radio receiver, the phonograph, and the typewriter were also sought after by Soviets who essentially shared the cultural universe of the West, a sense of common values that helped Soviets to feel less concerned by the exact circumstances surrounding the acquisition of such objects.[51] Trophy goods, in addition to functioning as a kind of compensation, thus offered access to a world that had developed a modern culture to which Soviets—both leaders and ordinary citizens—all aspired.

As a consequence, the tension between the political model represented by Stalin's USSR and these material aspirations created complications that inevitably led to restrictions on who should be allowed to have access to items seized from the enemy. Derived from the troops' thirst for revenge and a common method of compensating a population still impoverished by the pillaging of the occupying forces and the deprivations of war, trophy goods also presented the risk of fomenting mass insubordination and a dangerous fascination with Western civilization. Still, at least at first, Soviet leaders appear to have encouraged and, in a certain way, helped to organize this opening to Western material culture, while nevertheless attempting to ensure that access remained stratified.

On December 26, 1944, as the Red Army was approaching German territory, a decree was issued authorizing soldiers to mail monthly packages back from the front. Packages' weight varied according to rank: five kilos for rank-and-file soldiers, ten kilos for officers, and fifteen kilos for generals.[52] The decree drew attention both because it was considered an open invitation to soldiers to seize what they could, and because it was also interpreted at the time as imitating the German policy allowing Wehrmacht soldiers and other German citizens in occupied territories to mail postal packages. Although he expressed moral disapproval of the decree, one Soviet officer nevertheless justified it in his journal, noting that "every month, the German soldier was allowed to send home a package of sixteen kilograms from the territories they had seized."[53] The explosion in the number of packages

49. Ibid., 306, September 6, 1946, and 308, September 7, 1946. These photographs of the occupation echo the better-known and certainly more widespread practice of German soldiers in occupied territory photographing both young women and scenes of atrocity. Still, Gelfand's journal does not seem to indicate that his goal was to photograph traces of the war.

50. Ibid., 269, letter to his mother dated May 27, 1946. Gelfand was certainly predisposed towards photography: he regularly had his portrait taken by professional photographers and mailed numerous snapshots to his mother and his other women correspondents. He also papered the walls of his room in Germany with purchased and found photographs.

51. In addition to utilitarian clothing, Gelfand's mother ordered a radio receiver through him, ibid., 181, letter dated November 15, 1945.

52. Pavel Knyshevskii, *Moskaus Beute. Wie Vermögen, Kulturgüter und Intelligenz nach 1945 aus Deutschland geraubt wurden* (Munich: Olzog Verlag, 1995).

53. Budnitskii, "The Intelligentsia Meets the Enemy," 657. Regarding the frenzied mailing of packages by the Germans during occupation, including from the USSR and particularly from the Ukraine, see Götz Aly, *Hitler's Beneficiaries: Plunder, Racial War, and the Nazi Welfare State*, trans. Jefferson Chase (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007).

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that followed this decree inevitably outstripped the capacity of the postal service. In Kursk, for example, employees were specially assigned to handle packages sent from the front.[54] The number of monthly authorized packages was later reduced, but it never matched demand, compelling soldiers to resort to different forms of subterfuge. Regular packages mailed to family members through the postal service or other channels came to be seen as a veritable duty for soldiers with the good fortune of being posted abroad. Gelfand's mother even placed orders for adults' and children's clothing and other valuable items, adding, however, that he should be discreet, even if a considerable portion of their correspondence related to similar requests.[55]

This liberal policy concerning the individual transfer of property belonging to defeated peoples to Soviet homes did not change when the first great waves of returnees to the USSR repatriated former Soviet detainees and demobilized soldiers, soldiers, and civilians with permission, all of whom were exempted from customs procedures in the summer of 1945. The bags of returning soldiers in special trains indeed seem to have reached epic proportions. One account of a military veterinarian returning home to Uzbekistan in September 1945 from Vienna with nearly a ton of baggage, almost certain (like many others) to be fleeced on arrival by the local authorities, provides a singular example of this pattern.[56]

Acquiring goods in occupied zones through the black market or in a variety of different shops was made still easier by the permeability of the borders. In Gelfand's journal, Berlin seems to be the epicenter of his desire because of the Alexanderplatz black market and an additional concentration of trade near the former Reichstag. In reality, however, the Berlin black market extended to virtually every street, house, and corridor, and every café in the city, which was filled with beggars and rife with opportunities to exchange objects and food for money and other barterable items.[57] Even when Soviet authorities attempted to eradicate this trade, at least in such an emblematic location as the Alexanderplatz, their efforts apparently proved to be in vain. In November 1945, Gelfand, under the pretense of having his boots cleaned, attracted a flood of vendors concealing their wares under their clothes. In the time it took for a shoe-shine man to wax his shoes, he acquired a shirt, a leather jacket, several pairs of socks and gloves, under the nose of Soviet patrols monitoring even officers' activities.[58]

The institutionalized transfer of loot seized from the enemy, which was soon to be transformed into an official reparations policy,[59] also offered an opportunity

54. Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 281.
55. Gelfand, *Deutschland-Tagebuch*, 180, letter to Gelfand from his mother dated November 15, 1945, in which she asked him not to write her any longer at her work address, and particularly to send no packages.
56. Mark Edele, *Soviet Veterans of the Second World War: A Popular Movement in an Authoritarian Society, 1941-1991* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 30. Gelfand left Germany in more modest circumstances, with two "small but heavy" suitcases and two bags. Gelfand, *Deutschland-Tagebuch*, 312, September 26, 1946.
57. Ibid., 204-5, January 14, 1946, and 211, January 21, 1946.
58. Ibid., 176-77, November 6, 1945.
59. Knyshevskii, *Moskaus Beute*.

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for individual Soviets, or for some at least, because the authorities responsible for systematically collecting trophy assets also regulated their acquisition by ranking officers: beginning in June 1945, Red Army generals were granted a car at no cost, while rank-and-file officers could obtain either a bicycle or motorcycle. Generals were also authorized to acquire an upright or a grand piano, a radio, a hunting rifle, and a wristwatch, pocket watch, or a pendulum clock. Generals and officers could also receive, for a fee, carpets, tapestries, furs, tea services, cameras, and other valuable goods.[60] The possibility of purchasing a trophy asset from the Soviet occupation constituted an obvious privilege that enabled Gelfand to acquire a radio receiver for four hundred marks that would have cost ten times that price on the open market in Berlin.[61]

The occupation of defeated countries made it possible to gain authorized access to a level of luxury that was actually organized by the government, with the effect of reinforcing social hierarchies within Soviet society. Serving in foreign territory as either a civilian or soldier was in itself an advantage, regardless of rank, but for the elite, who made no efforts to conceal their good fortune, the authorities reserved the finest items. The dissident Larisa Bogoraz relates that in the immediate postwar period, the daughters of generals serving in Germany wore dresses that were dramatically different from everyone else's because of the fabrics and patterns that their fathers sent from Berlin. She concluded: "That was the postwar taste—new dresses cut out of luxurious Western fabrics." The privilege was all the more visible in that it involved not only the fabric but also the cut of the dress, which made them look like "young German girls," a resemblance clearly considered highly respectable and even enviable.[62] Bogoraz also recorded the fact that her uncle, a general serving in Germany, brought her back pieces of fabric.

The open appropriation of the fashion and culture of the conquered was a widespread phenomenon in the postwar USSR, which the projection of trophy films suggests even tended to be encouraged by the Kremlin. The cultural opening offered by the war was in fact highly eclectic, enabling aspects of American culture to rub shoulders with those of old Central Europe.[63] The most remarkable aspect of this phenomenon was that it became generalized across every layer of Soviet society, particularly among the younger generations, despite the deformations and reappropriations inherent in the vast geographical, social, and cultural distances that separated the ordinary Soviet citizen from the urban locations in which most of the clothing, fashions, and music imported from the West were concentrated.[64]

60. Pavel N. Knyshevskii, *Dobycha: Tainy germanskikh reparatsii* (Moscow: Soratnik, 1994), 120-21.

61. Gelfand, *Deutschland-Tagebuch*, 218, letter to his mother, January 26, 1946: purchase of a "good" receiver with five lamps for four thousand marks; 280, June 23, 1946: a radio valued at two thousand marks that he traded for two suits; 300, testimony of August 28, 1946.

62. Cécile Vaissié, *Russie: une femme en dissidence. Larissa Bogoraz* (Paris: Plon, 2000), 39.

63. Valérie Pozner, "Le sort des films trophées saisis par les Soviétiques au cours de la Seconde Guerre mondiale," in Sumpf and Laniol, *Saisies, spoliations et restitutions*, 147-64.

64. See Juliane Fürst, *Stalin's Last Generation: Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), especially 200-49.

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The tolerance of the Soviet authorities towards the theft of enemy property, or the clearly legal possibility for individuals of a variety of ranks to import vast quantities of foreign goods, constituted only one aspect of this massive material transfer from defeated countries, particularly Germany, towards the Soviet Union. The sheer scale could only compromise the social and political order that the Stalin administration had managed to reestablish in liberated territories, and it inevitably created problems of misappropriation, the black market, and other forms of uncontrolled circulation throughout the Soviet Union.

This trade fueled the rise of networks that were typical of how the underground Soviet economy operated. Some individuals did not settle for bringing back their war-related prizes for themselves or their friends and families, extending their activity into illegal trade. In late 1946, Tambov's militia confiscated 4,622 furs from one veteran and former officer, who had stolen them from a store in Berlin at the end of the war, and was preparing to sell them in Moscow. Another veteran, who returned from Germany by car in October 1946 with a trunkful of trophies that he later sold to his brother-in-law, was arrested in the spring of 1947.[65]

Although it had already reached unprecedented proportions, this circulation of appropriated loot attained an entirely new level at the end of the war with the beginning of deliveries that were part of the Soviet reparations policy. Arriving by land or sea, shipments were subsequently loaded onto entire trains destined for every corner of Soviet territory. Cargoes of loot were inadequately guarded, and record-keeping regarding contents was not systematic. Indeed, theft from trains and warehouses became such a serious problem that, in January 1947, the Ministry of the Interior proposed creating an inter-ministerial commission to take necessary counter-measures.[66] Thefts on Soviet soil were committed by individuals and by armed bands, but also by networks of officials responsible for transporting and storing the spoils. These networks were also involved in the resale of goods, for example in the case of a documented network trafficking trophy goods at the depot in Novosibirsk that was dismantled in early 1947. The incident revealed that a number of grand pianos, dressers, and pendulum clocks were decorating the homes of a small circle of local administrators who had acquired them at bargain prices, although they were originally intended as compensation for meritorious civil servants.[67]

Socialist property theft was a matter of constant concern among Soviet authorities, and in June 1947, *ukases* (decrees) stiffened sentences for these crimes. The Kremlin was keenly aware of the mass theft of individual and public property, even

65. Edele, *Soviet Veterans*, 91.

66. GARF, f. 5446, op. 49a, d. 467, l. 12-18. Regarding reparations policies, see Jörg Fisch, *Reparationen nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1992).

67. GARF, f. 5446, op. 49a, d. 2848, l. 1-3, I am grateful to Juliette Cadiot for bringing the existence of this file to my attention. Regarding the participation of the commercial authorities of the government in the black market as an invariable feature of the operation of the Soviet economy, see Tamara Kondratieva, "Les personnes matériellement responsables sous le régime de propriété socialiste," in *Les Soviétiques. Un pouvoir, des régimes*, ed. Tamara Kondratieva (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2011), 113-30.

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as the nation remained deeply impoverished by the war and at risk of outbreaks of famine. The way it viewed this was no doubt greatly influenced by the misappropriation of massive deliveries of great value from foreign destinations, considered to be state property and therefore representing substantial loss of revenue. Further more or less related factors complicated these economic considerations, including the growth of networks at every level, the consolidation of patronage, and the lack of centralized management of how the loot was distributed. The Stalin administration found ways to take advantage of this rampant corruption, however, using periodic official anti-corruption campaigns to unseat officials seen as problematic. One probable example of such an opportunistic purge occurred in Byelorussia, where the Party first secretary, Nikolai Gusarov,[68] discovered a scandal involving twenty-seven thousand trophy cows that had been delivered to the Republic in 1945. Byelorussia had suffered more than any other Republic during the war, and the confiscation of these cows by two thousand relatively high-ranking officials was perceived as particularly blatant given that more than 150,000 impoverished kolkhozian families possessed none. Indifferent to the misery of those whom they were responsible for governing, these officials had completely lost sight of the collective livestock culture of the region and focused exclusively on developing their personal connections and networks of patronage to serve their own "middle-class" preoccupations.[69]

Misappropriating cows, a critical necessity for the survival of millions of Soviet families, was both very common and very revealing of these officials' lack of consideration for the suffering of their fellow citizens. Although the logic behind their indifference can be understood as stemming from the profit motive and a desire to maintain their political base of support, it is also interesting to consider their actions as a form of protest, in some cases at least, against the reasoning behind the priorities set by the central authorities. Such defiance of the official hierarchy on the part of heroes and victims of the war was sometimes reinforced at the most local level by the profound, intimate acquaintance that flows from sharing such an experience as the war. The case of a certain Gryn illustrates this hypothesis. The president of a *sel'sovet* in the Ukrainian region of Nikolaev, Gryn had reclaimed a trophy cow from a family to whom it had been awarded specifically because two family members were serving on the front. The pretext was that the Germans had confiscated his own cow during the occupation. He also confiscated from demobilized soldiers—whom he accused of being former police collaborators—the decorations and documents that gave them access to certain privileges.[70]

68. Regarding Stalin's personal involvement in reducing Ponomarenko's power at the helm of Byelorussia by appointing Gusarov a year earlier on February 27, 1947, see Oleg V. Khlevniuk et al., *Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) i Sovet ministrov SSSR, 1945-1953* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2002), 47n1.

69. The Byelorussian leadership was also denounced for embezzling public resources in order to build private homes, demonstrating similar disinterest in the misfortunes of the citizens whom they served, many of whom were forced to live in earthen huts, and the same profit motive, as some rented out the houses that they built with public funds, or resold them at "speculative" prices.

70. GARF, f. 8131, op. 37, d. 3187, l. 17, report by the prosecutor's office of the Nikolaev (present-day Mykolaiv) region, April 1946.

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An entirely different kind of criticism arose from particular cases in which the immorality of misappropriated loot did not stem from injustice towards war victims but rather from an excessive appetite for luxury. Such accusations reveal a fantasized vision of what could be perceived as limitless possibilities for accumulating wealth belonging to the defeated enemy. The case of two highly placed officials in the administration of occupied Germany is illustrative of this zeal for luxury. The men were removed from their posts after confessions extracted by Viktor Abakumov, former counter-espionage chief and head of state security, who was eager to discredit his rivals with Stalin.[71] One remarkable aspect of the case is that the information collected through the operation appeared valid to Abakumov, or to Stalin himself. The quantity of objects of German origin "discovered" when the apartments of the two accused men were raided is even more astounding, however. Just as a single example, one of these civil servants' Moscow apartments was found to contain over 3,000 meters of fabric, 8 tea services and other sets of household dishware amounting to approximately 1,470 pieces, 315 valuable antique objects such as statuettes and vases, 90 silver items, 41 carpets (including long hall carpets), 15 paintings, 359 pieces of feminine lingerie, more than 150 pairs of shoes and other leather goods, nearly 60 dresses, 17 suits, 22 overcoats and furs, 323 pairs of stockings, 6 radios and phonograph-radios, and 4 accordions. Such mind-boggling, never-ending lists give the distinct impression of a warehouse rather than a luxuriously furnished apartment, but the ultimate destination of these goods was never fully explained. The idea of a resale operation is scarcely mentioned, and only in an ironic tone, in the documents. A central element of the accusations, once again, was the exchange value of the stolen property, but this does not fully explain the sheer volume of the loot, even if it does showcase certain highly suspect practices. Ivan Serov allegedly offered a radio-phonograph to his superior, Marshal Zhukov, gold watches to the wife of a highly placed American general in Berlin, and two tea services and a hunting rifle to his subordinate Sidnev, but this represented only a tiny fraction of the misappropriated loot.

The logistics required to transport this volume of bounty to the Soviet Union were equally spectacular. The aircraft chartered by Zhukov for this sole purpose are widely recalled, as are other similar scams, although they were never proven or avowed. Serov allegedly organized for his own benefit a veritable merry-go-round of trains and automobiles, as well as an airplane that apparently shuttled back and forth between Berlin and Moscow loaded with furs, carpets, paintings, and other valuable items.[72]

71. Regarding this "war of the services," see Nikita Petrov, *Pervyi predsedatel' KGB Ivan Serov* (Moscow: Materik, 2005). Except when otherwise stated, this book is the source of information concerning this affair.

72. In his own defense, Serov in turn accused Abakumov of arranging to have twenty carloads of loot delivered to Moscow despite the fact that the war was at its peak, and of having loaded an airplane bound for recently liberated Crimea with trophy goods. Although he was not as highly placed, Sidnev admitting to using SVAG aircraft or Serov's planes to transport large amounts of seized goods to furnish his Leningrad apartment. See also the repeated use of regular Byelorussian flights and Ponomarenko's personal

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With a few notable exceptions, the descriptions of the objects remain largely laconic and repetitive concerning the time wasted, instead of serving the country, in the futile personal use of the very items that represented Germany's diabolical superiority, such as the radio-phonographs that Serov allegedly had custom-made by a renowned German artisan using cabinetry from Hitler's personal office in the Chancellery. Little is consequently known about Soviet thieves' specific tastes, in particular which paintings high-ranking Soviets chose to steal from 1940s German magnates, competing with the specialized brigades that crisscrossed the defeated countries.[73] Nor do we know for what ultimate purpose the thefts were conducted, whether for personal use or resale of art works on the black market on Soviet soil. The answers to these questions remain completely unexplored to this day. Similarly, it is not known what style was being referenced specifically in a report denouncing the widespread habit among Soviet generals and officers in the occupied zone of ordering "stylish furniture" from German luxury firms to decorate their Moscow apartments or dachas, although this practice does enable us to understand that the relationship maintained by the top administrators with the material world of the enemy was not limited to predation but also offered freedom from the asceticism and lack of esthetic choices or personalization imposed by the Soviet value system.[74] The lifestyle for which they were criticized is scarcely legible to us now, except for the elegant private receptions and hunting parties, which we know were not strictly forbidden because of the authorization granted to high-ranking officers to use tea services and hunting weapons. These habits, while not prohibited outright, could risk leading officers into dangerous territory. Those accused allegedly adopted what was described as a "seignorial" lifestyle in occupied Germany that was in blatant contradiction to Soviet morality. The exact origins of the goods is frequently not indicated because they had helped themselves in warehouses, which were veritable Ali Baba's caves and were distributed throughout Berlin and the Soviet zone. When former owners were referred to, they did not inspire pity because they were the former "big shots" (*bogachi*) of the Nazi regime. The sin of those Soviets who were accused was precisely that of having slipped into the lifestyle of the previous owners by occupying their requisitioned villas, and not of having absconded with with their contents. The accusations are also mute regarding the individuals to whom appropriated luxury goods were officially destined. One of the interrogators even exclaimed, referring to tapestries by Flemish and French masters of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that had belonged to wealthy Germans and that Sidnev had appropriated for his Leningrad apartment: "but the only place for these tapestries is a museum." The boundaries of acceptable luxury, even in the Soviet interior of a member of the elite, had apparently been crossed.

airplane to transport several tons of carpets and other highly valuable items back to Minsk, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 122, d. 308, l. 92.

73. Konstantin Akinsha and Grigorii Kozlov, *Beautiful Loot: The Soviet Plunder of Europe's Art Treasures* (New York: Random House, 1995); Knyshevskii, *Moskaus Beute*; Margarita S. Zinich, *Pokhishchennye sokrovishcha: vyvoz natsistami rossiiskikh kul'turnykh tsennostei* (Moscow: In-t rossiiskoi istorii Ran, 2003).

74. GARF, f. 5446, op. 49a, d. 243, l. 38-39 and 51.

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Serov, although directly incriminated in depositions by his collaborators, was not the subject of investigation and continued to occupy his high position. At least two of his collaborators, however, were arrested in late 1947 and early 1948 and sentenced to ten years in a labor camp in October 1951.[75] Rapidly rehabilitated after Stalin's death, they revealed a different truth. In explaining how the inventories came to be falsified, they clearly conveyed between the lines the inferiority of national products. During raids, Abakumov's men included objects actually of Soviet fabrication, objects made of nickel and alloy or platinum instead of gold and silver (materials that were simultaneously seen as noble and contemptible) in the inventory of goods allegedly misappropriated from Germany. The rehabilitated men did not deny possessing numerous unused items, however, confessing to frenzied buying sprees while posted in Germany. More specifically, it was their wives (and by extension a niece or daughter) who scoured various locations in the occupied zone, where for modest prices vast quantities of goods that were not particularly valuable (although clearly impossible to find or hugely expensive in the USSR) were for sale, including stockings, linens and lingerie (for men and women), inexpensive decorative objects, and "bric-a-brac." There were ample opportunities to find fully legal bargains, from the "Voentorg" stores (where valuable objects and second-hand furniture were exchanged), which were reserved for high-ranking Soviets, to the direct sale to German and Soviet individuals of the possessions of the former Nazis.

One of the two men also blamed his wife for illegally transporting goods from occupied villas in Germany to Moscow. Appropriating the resources of occupied Germany was regularly blamed on the wives and female relatives of high-ranking officers, who clearly lacked the Soviet morality represented by their husbands, who were too busy with work to remind them of it. Both men expressed similar disgust at this frenzied accumulation, mentioning the quagmire into which they had been dragged by their wives, who were not educated enough to resist the "deleterious bourgeois environment" of defeated Germany.[76] There was very probably a grain of truth to these assertions, which were made easier by the fact that Soviet discourse—and prevailing values—had always claimed that the "survival" of prerevolutionary values, among them an attraction to superfluous material wealth, was the fault of women. Nevertheless, these men were apparently more than capable of using their power to appropriate particular items or to place direct orders with prestigious German manufacturers, even if the items were intended for the most part for women, whether spouses or mistresses—another recurrent association with this hunger for objects that contravened Socialist moral values. The fact that, despite repeated appeals, they were not able to rejoin the Party although they were rehabilitated, can be explained—beyond the twists and turns of de-Stalinization—

75. However, three individuals arrested in the same case received suspended sentences during their trial in October 1951, after more than three and a half years of detention that had driven one of them to the prison psychiatric ward.

76. The fact that both men used the same arguments can be explained by their proximity, but the theme of a "philistine swamp" (*obyvatel'skoe boloto*) is a moralistic trope in Bolshevik discourse.

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by the renewed strictness of the Khrushchev period concerning personal enrichment and philistine behaviors.

It is worth recalling that these "moochers" were *vydvizhentsy*, high-ranking officers who had enrolled in the Party long ago and had been mobilized to defend the nation and the revolution, including in occupied Germany. They claimed that they had been corrupted by money, a reference to the fact that they received exceptionally large pay supplements befitting distinguished servants of the Soviet government during their service in the Soviet zone. The combination of sudden wealth (which, although common practice, was not mentioned in the Stalin-era accusations) and easy access to Western goods had thus resulted in a true shock to the values and practices of this layer of Soviet society. This had translated into a small internal revolution, although the difficulty of untangling truth from falsehood in the texts of accusations makes it difficult to determine with any certainty their precise nature and implications in the moral terms of the period.

Hidden Prewar Soviet Treasures

The primitive character of the accusations filed against Soviet civil servants who displayed compulsive behavior concerning the products of capitalism, whether it can be understood with reference to an imaginary shaped by the Party's ascetic morality or by the realities of an impoverished society, ultimately stems from the very dichotomy proposed by Brodsky. On one side was the uniformly grey Soviet Union, and on the other, foreign objects—from the most basic to the most sophisticated—that opened a previously unknown world to Soviet postwar society, whether that world was associated with a liberating culture, abundance, or guilty luxury.

The problem with this narrative is that it obscures the existence of the "unknown" world of the prewar USSR and the complex matter of the objects that it incarnated. They were available to a restricted circle of privileged members of society at the end of the tsarist period. Their prominence was renewed due to the uneven production of Soviet manufactured goods or foreign imports, and they circulated prolifically at different levels of urbanized Soviet society. The Soviet authorities had naturally played a key role in this circulation by expropriating and redistributing the property of the former elite, before public authorities siphoned off on a massive scale anything seen as valuable that was possessed by individual Soviet citizens. The central authorities were particularly avid for gold, then silver and gemstones, and eventually any valuable object that could be converted into foreign currency that would provide access to the Western materials that were useful to Soviet efforts to rapidly industrialize. Elena Osokina's study of the founding of the Torgsin, stores created on the eve of the great famine of 1933 in order to acquire foreign currency, demonstrates the extent to which the quest for valuable goods outstripped the fire sales of imperial collections and church possessions abroad that had begun in the 1920s. Old coins dating from the tsarist period or Kerenskii's government hoarded by the peasants, and the silver teaspoons and

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family jewels of the middle classes, were exchanged for bread as hurriedly as possible over the counters of the Torgsin stores, a process made easier by the fact that they could be melted down into ingots or disassembled for sale abroad. Destroying material patrimony, independently of any question of class-based social justice, was seen as unimportant, and the sole value attached to these objects from the past was whatever foreign buyers were willing to pay for the finest items.[77] The vast operation of pillaging Soviet wealth engaged in by the occupying forces, from museum collections to individuals' domestic possessions, was thus denounced by the very same forces that had conducted a similar operation less than ten years earlier.

The quest for items in individuals' homes, that would always be perceived as suspect in the Soviet context, and its corollary, the rabid hunger for objects developed by a population denuded of material possessions and brutally affected by shortages, can be seen in the magic shows of the magician Woland on the stage of a Moscow theater in the 1930s, as imagined by Mikhail Bulgakov in his novel *The Master and Margarita*. His incarnation of the Devil of foreign origin (his German identity is alluded to) literally laid bare a public who had "scarcely changed," despite the appearance of buses, telephones, and other indications of technical progress that made it difficult to recognize the capital. His assistant Fahoth, creating a lady's fashion boutique on stage, announces that the old dresses and outmoded shoes worn by the women in the audience would be graciously exchanged for the latest Parisian creations, triggering a tidal wave of women rushing onto the stage, with no pretense of restraint, for these miraculous luxury products to take advantage of this unexpected, fleeting godsend.[78] Somewhat later in the story, a character dreams of an equally nightmarish spectacle during which an artist in a tuxedo invites him to move into the glare of the stage-lights to reveal, under hoots from the audience, the presence of dollars concealed in his honorable Soviet citizen's apartment. They then attack a different spectator, a certain Sergei Gerardovich Dunchil, for "stubbornly refusing to turn over currency [he] still [has], while the country is in need of it, and [he has] no use for it whatsoever." His mistress, Ida Kherkulanovna Wors—the repetition of these names, forenames, and patronymics with foreign resonances was not random—appears in turn on the stage bearing a bundle of eighteen thousand dollars and a diamond necklace worth forty thousand gold rubles on a golden platter that the unfaithful husband had hidden in her apartment in Kharkov. The spectators are invited in an increasingly threatening tone to surrender their foreign currency, which they should not have possessed in the first place, as an army of cooks bring in a vast cauldron of soup and a platter

77. Elena Osokina, *Zoloto dlia industrializatsii: "TORGSIN,"* (Moscow: Rosspèn, 2009), especially 83-102 and 118-46.
78. "Exactly a minute later a pistol shot rang out, the mirrors disappeared, the display windows and stools dropped away, the carpet melted into air, as did the curtain. Last to disappear was the high mountain of old dresses and shoes, and the stage was again severe, empty and bare," Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (London: Penguin, 1997), 130.

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loaded with black bread.[79] When the novel was finally published in the Soviet Union in 1966, well after Stalin's death, these two passages were censored, perhaps because of their commentary on Soviet humanity beyond the vagaries of Stalinism, a humanity rendered grotesque by fear of their masters—obsessed with finding hidden treasure in provincial apartments—and by an undying attraction to everything foreign and therefore inherently, diabolically desirable. The Soviets of the 1930s depicted by Bulgakov were not ignorant of Western culture, quite the contrary, but they were incorrigibly driven by material desires that were ultimately labeled as a sin by the regime and thereby ineluctably transformed into torments.

Analyzing the inventories that Soviets in occupied territories, whether they remained at home or were evacuated,[80] were invited to submit from the end of 1943 in order to assess the losses caused by the enemy, confirms that on the eve of the war and after twenty years of Soviet government, the material universe of some citizens was distinctly tainted with the philistine tastes described by Bulgakov. It also indicates that they had not awaited the flood of foreign goods borne by the war to subscribe to Western cultural practices. Most surprising is the fact that they offered such detailed descriptions in the first place. In an apparent paradox, the destruction and theft of the property of millions of Soviet households by the enemy accentuated the rehabilitation of material comfort and, in the process, of individual property, that Stalin initiated during the 1930s. The Soviet government, within the framework of a broad investigation of crimes by the occupying forces in the 1940s and the material losses for which they were responsible, invited the inhabitants of occupied regions to declare the entirety of their possessions that had been stolen or destroyed.[81] The normative discourse concerning objects that had prevailed before the war was sufficiently weakened in this new context for some of those declaring their losses to reveal, despite the immense poverty of the vast majority of their fellow citizens, ownership of property and possessions such as furniture, clothing, and musical instruments that revealed tastes diverging considerably from official ethics, however fluctuating they had proven during the interwar period.

79. Ibid., 163-70.

80. Many of the inventories analyzed for this study were written by individuals evacuated early in the war to the Urals and to Central Asia. The particular relationship between these individuals and their assets is due to several factors. Having left most of their assets and property behind them, they could only imagine the worst, in other words, their total disappearance, and not only at the hands of the enemy. The question of the inventory and the preservation of property left behind by evacuees had, since the beginning of the war, given rise to a series of decrees intended to protect them from indelicate neighbors' appropriations. GARF, f. 5446, op. 43a, d. 6328. In reality, the situation was far more confused. Many of the evacuees belonged to the Soviet elite and included some individuals of Jewish origin who may have been doubly concerned about their property. Regarding the social profile of evacuees and their experience of the war, see Rebecca Manley, *To the Tashkent Station: Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

81. Nathalie Moine, "La commission d'enquête Soviet sur les crimes de guerre nazis: entre reconquête du territoire, écriture du récit de la guerre et usages justiciers," *Le Mouvement social* 222, no. 1 (2008): 81-109.

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However, for the most part, it is the sobriety of the lists that is ultimately—and perhaps predictably—their most striking feature. In this regard, rural and urban inventories must be differentiated. In the case of rural declarations, the most significant value was attached to buildings (a house, and sometimes adjoining buildings like barns or warehouses), livestock, and above all full individual ownership of a cow, as well as food stores. On the other hand, nothing, or almost nothing, was declared in terms of furniture, dishware, or clothing, although there are occasional references to a chest or bolts of fabric. This absence of common consumer goods can be explained in several ways, but in most cases it should probably be interpreted as revealing the extreme material poverty of rural Soviet citizens. This has been suggested in several reports without ever having been the focus of systematic study, and it relates to behaviors in the context of the war whose exact meaning is at the heart of major historiographical debates. The extremely rudimentary nature of rural interiors was reported, for example, by the dissident Bogoraz, who recalled how as a young but very poor Muscovite she had left the city to teach in the Kaluga region in the early 1950s. Bogoraz recorded that she had frequently excused her young nanny for stealing spoons or cups because for her, as for the other village residents, an aluminum spoon or a glass represented a truly foreign luxury.[82] While her account reveals the nature of postwar Stalin-era life, it could also be readily applied to earlier decades. In the late 1920s, humorously invoking the Soviet mania for inventorying the slightest consumer object, the satirists Ilya Ilf and Evgeni Petrov remarked that the number of chairs in the Soviet Union was missing from the statistics. They crudely calculated this figure by taking the total population and subtracting the peasants who in fact made up its majority, thereby expressing a truth that was no doubt well-known at the time: the vast material and cultural gap between peasantry and urban civilization.[83] Referenced in a comic way, the coexistence of these two distinct worlds would have a dramatic effect ten years later, when rural poverty would express itself in the war-era hunger for objects. In particular, the relatively active participation of the local populations in the massacre of the Jews under the occupation could be seen as stemming from a desire to appropriate their possessions, from clothing to furnishings.

Urban residents also participated in redistributing the meager possessions of the Jews, to the point that it became a literary trope that can be seen in the letter written by Victor Strum's mother. Strum was the central character in *Life and Fate*, and the letter was written to her son, just before she was assassinated. It recounted the behavior of her neighbors from Berdichev during the early days of the occupation, when they chased her from the room that she occupied and stole her settee,

82. Vaissié, *Russie: une femme en dissidence*, 61-62.

83. "If we leave aside ninety million peasants who prefer to sit on wooden benches, boards or earthen seats, and in the east of the country, shabby carpets and rugs, we still have fifty million people for whom chairs are objects of prime necessity in their everyday lives," Ilf and Petrov, *The Twelve Chairs*, trans. John Richardson (London: Frederick Muller, 1965), 118.

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predicting that her time was soon to come.[84] In fact, while Strum's mother, a doctor, possessed this element of relative comfort, many city-dwellers only declared owning a table or a few chairs, one or several beds, and sometimes an armoire. Anna Fedorovna Chudova, an evacuee employed in a candy factory in Kuibyshev (the present-day city of Samara) who had worked washing dishes at the Mogilev hospital before the war for the modest monthly salary of one hundred rubles,[85] declared an armoire, an "English bed," five chairs, and a table. Her clothing included an overcoat, three dresses, a pair of high-heeled shoes, and lingerie that she did not trouble to describe in detail. Valued at fifteen thousand rubles, her overcoat was by far the most valuable item in her possession, while the armoire itself was only estimated to be worth one thousand rubles. Possessing a bicycle, which was valued at the same price as an overcoat, was apparently a luxury that as a single person she was able to afford.[86]

Still, as the value of lost national heritage grew, descriptions became increasingly precise and began to include the materials of which items were made and to display a wider range of furniture, domestic items, clothing, linens, and items connected to cultural practices. It is possible to perceive in this tendency a reflection of *kul'turnost'*, a commonplace in Stalin-era discourse relating to the lifestyle of the 1930s. This untranslatable term designated anything related to German *Kultur*, in other words, to different fields of knowledge and lifestyles, whose acquisition was necessary in order to leave the state of backwardness typically associated with peasants. *Kul'turnost'* often expressed itself through clothing and the rehabilitation of bourgeois manners, and it was also reflected in interiors resembling those of the European middle classes in the nineteenth century.[87] Gaining access to a lifestyle consistent with *kul'turnost'* could be measured by the possession of objects that denoted both the modern spirit and the cultural appetite of their owners, such as a bicycle, a camera, a radio or a gramophone. This was true in both visual representations for the wider public and for the very sober statisticians who investigated Soviet households' budgets.

Other, more classical items were also reintroduced into the material horizon of the Soviets in a positive way, such as the piano. The origins of such items came up in the case of older objects, however, because of the problematic question of

84. Vassily Grossman, *Life and Fate*, trans. Raymond Chandler (London: Harvill Press, 1995), 81.

85. The average worker's salary in the 1930s was three hundred rubles.

86. GARF, f. 7021, op. 28, d. 68, act 133. Obviously, evaluating market prices at the time of the creation of the act by the commissions distorts matters considerably: the coat was probably purchased for a far lower price, depending on when, and especially how, it was bought. See Nathalie Moine, "Évaluer les pertes matérielles de la population pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale en URSS: vers la légitimation de la propriété privée?" *Histoire et Mesure* 28, no. 1 (2013): 187-216.

87. Among a large number of studies of this question, see Catriona Kelly and Vadim Volkov, "Directed Desires: *Kul'turnost'* and Consumption," in *Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution, 1881-1940*, ed. Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 291-313.

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inheritance in Stalin-era society, where bourgeois origins remained an impediment, and very rapid social promotion was widespread among the new elites and a fundamental value of the regime. Within the inventories, by limiting the scope to these markers designated as indicators of an individual's level of *kul'turnost'*, one paradoxically encounters social spheres that are absent from the official description of Soviet society. Far from the Stakhanovites in factories who were in principle the intended audience of this kind of production, one can imagine professional strata characterized by specialization but also, more hypothetically because of the nature of available sources, by family heritage, both in terms of practices and material transmission.[88]

Although it is difficult to fully reconstruct the specific social characteristics of their owners, the inventories do allow these "cultural items" to be seen within the context of other components of their owners' material existences, providing enough information to imagine their actual lives separately from the representations in propaganda on which historians have been obliged to rely until recently. The possibility of an ideological filter regarding what was recorded in the inventories should nonetheless be kept in mind. The normative framework surrounding those composing the inventories was far from uniform, however, and it is not possible to confirm whether this stems from the sincerity of the authors or from overlapping normative models, of which Stalin-era *kul'turnost'* was only one aspect.

First, while the owners of cultural objects unquestionably belonged to more cerebral professions, the boundary between urban and rural lifestyles can at times be blurred. This is the reflection of a provincial climate that authorized its inhabitants, including those of diverse backgrounds, to circumvent the Socialist rigors of the Soviet economy by keeping a few head of livestock, a vegetable garden or an orchard. For example, before being evacuated to the Kuibyshev region, a certain Iakov Pavlovich Kozlov, a resident of Kalinin (the present-day city of Tver) scrupulously recorded his significant losses from not being able to sell the products of his cherry orchard, vegetable garden, and beehives during the occupation. These resources were probably situated close to the house that he owned outright, perhaps on the city outskirts. Included in the list of lost property, this "gardener" owned a piano whose brand was recorded as "Vol'fram Grosman" as well as a three-hundred-volume library, which included an encyclopedia, a number of classics, and works devoted to the Russian language and mathematics. The fact that the witness to his inventory was a secondary school teacher from the same city suggests that this "gardener" was primarily a professor who cared very much about his mirrored walnut and mahogany furnishings, his table with its samovar, his silver cutlery, twenty-four piece tea service, and porcelain dishes, and his clothing, which included an overcoat with an astrakhan collar and another fur-collared wool coat, while his wife deplored the loss of two crêpe de chine dresses, possibly sewn at home on their "Zinger" sewing machine.[89]

88. Note that the acts only rarely indicate victims' professions.
89. GARF, f. 7021, op. 28, d. 68, act 121.

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On the other hand, the profession of Efim Savelievich Savin is unstated, although we do know that he was evacuated from a new industrial suburb of Leningrad, Slantsevye rudniki. He spent his free time keeping a few head of livestock, including a cow, two sheep, two goats, fifteen laying hens, and seven beehives, and he also owned assets more typical of a modern urban lifestyle, including a bicycle, two sewing machines, and a gramophone with a few albums, while his house, of which he was full owner, contained a clock and two mirrors.[90]

The search for "cultural" items in Soviet citizens' inventories, whether they dated from prerevolutionary culture—including pianos and other musical instruments—or from the more pioneering practices of the interwar period—cameras, radios, or gramophones—primarily reveals the comforts of interiors that could be called "Socialist bourgeois." They can be distinguished from those of high-ranking civil servants, whose comforts were entirely provided by the government (and were therefore easily reversible at the whim of purges and official disfavor) and corresponded to an austere esthetic. This was all the more true in that such officials were required to devote themselves entirely to the cause of Socialism and in principle had no free time or leisure activities. In fact, they represented professions whose higher incomes provided access to a material environment distinguished by multiple styles, noble materials, and, especially, a level of refinement of which a between-the-lines reading of their inventories provides some understanding. Their possessions reveal the complex contours of the social environment of *spetsy*, highly qualified specialists, who were alternately vilified by the regime for being "references for *byvshie*" (survivors of prerevolutionary elites) and wooed as members of the class of recruits trained in new Soviet institutions but perpetually at the mercy of ideological shifts.

The detailed inventory of Evdokia Samoilovna Iantovskaia, a prewar resident of the city of Dniepropetrovsk, offers a good illustration of such a shift in its unvarnished display of her (prior) wealth. She admitted to having earned a comfortable monthly income of two thousand rubles as a salaried German professor in a foreign language institute before the war, supplemented by teaching at other institutes around the city. Her husband, a workshop supervisor in the Koksokhim Combine at the time, apparently also earned a good living, although she did not specify his income. Her mother also contributed to the household income by teaching embroidery. As a result, this industrious household had the means, in her words, to "live well and in a civilized manner" (she used the term in fashion at the time, *kul'turno*, although the extensive list of her possessions "pillaged by the Germans" later diverges from Stalin-era norms in a number of ways). Music appears to have played an important role in her household in the form of a high-end piano made in Dresden that was probably not entirely decorative, since a set of Japanese bamboo shelves held the scores of operas such as *Carmen*, *Faust*, *Eugene Onegin*, and *Rusalka*, waltzes and mazurkas by Chopin, rhapsodies by Franz Liszt, sonatas by Ludwig van Beethoven, and albums of songs by contemporary composers, along

90. GARF, f. 7021, op. 28, d. 31, l. 142.

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with Gypsy romances and songs from other repertoires. The family owned only eight albums, some foreign, for their gramophone, which was English-made. They were also a family of readers, with a library that held the complete works of Alexander Pushkin,[91] Mikhail Lermontov, Nikolai Gogol, Nikolay Nekrasov, Feodor Dostoyevsky, Alexander Kuprin, Leo Tolstoy, Heinrich Heine, Johann Goethe, Friedrich von Schiller, and Guy de Maupassant,[92] as well as textbooks and technical literature. There were no paintings by great masters, but there was a reproduction of a celebrated painting by Ivan Shishkin that is indicative of rather unadventurous tastes.[93] The list of furniture was as long as the items were impressive in size, an indication of a relatively spacious apartment. There was a carved and mirrored armoire of walnut, and another of oak, as well as two bookcases, a luxurious leather-covered oak sofa with a mirrored back, and an additional sofa upholstered in plush fabric. The living room table was of carved mahogany, and the oak dining room table was surrounded by twelve oak and ebony chairs covered in imitation leather.

Iantovskaia's mention of her twelve chairs involuntarily echoes Ilf and Petrov's satirical novel of 1929 and, through it, the cultural significance of Gambs furniture (*Gambsova mebel'*). This nineteenth-century Russian firm, whose founder was of German origin, had become well-known for manufacturing furnishings for the imperial family and other wealthy groups; despite the variety of its designs, it was identified with a generic style resembling that of Biedermeier, and was especially favoured among the bourgeois elite who valued robust comfort over stylistic audacity. In the novel, the twelve matching chairs became separated after the revolution, providing a hint of the high-society interiors of an earlier century while also resituating

91. Regarding the official cult devoted to Pushkin, particularly during his jubilee year in 1937, see Kevin M. F. Platt and David Brandenberger, eds., *Epic Revisionism: Russian History and Literature as Stalinist Propaganda* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005).

92. This author was found among the small travel kit that Strum's mother took with her when she entered the Berdichev ghetto. It was essentially comprised of her most precious books, along with photographs, letters, and the basic necessities for sleeping, eating, and continuing to practice medicine. Her description serves to connect Anna Semenovna to an intelligentsia of Russian culture that was intimately familiar with nineteenth-century Russian-language authors and also possessed some acquaintance with certain French literary texts (she continued to give French lessons in the ghetto), whereas Ukrainian plebeians reminded her of "what [she]'d forgotten during the years of Soviet regime—that [she] was a Jew," Grossman, *Life and Fate*, 81. It can easily be imagined that the same kind of self-representation operated in these somewhat dry lists of literary works. As opposed to Semenovna, however, who represented the intelligentsia which holds material possessions in contempt, victims of pillaging registered such cultural references as a sort of material comfort that was certainly equally meaningful to them, outside of the question of possible financial compensation.

93. The painting in question is "A Morning in a Pine Forest" by the painter Ivan Ivanovich Shishkin (1832-1898), exhibited in the Tretiakov Gallery in Moscow and in mass reproduction even to the present day, particularly on boxes of chocolate manufactured by the well-known "Krasnyi Oktiabr'" factory.

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it within the Russian context.[94] A table service and a porcelain tea service for twenty-four people—again, a seemingly minor but in fact significant detail[95]—invoke scenes of numerous guests dining on crystal plates and using silver cutlery. The walls and floors were embellished by no fewer than seven carpets, one of which was French, while the most handsome were described as Ukrainian and Greek. A French clock constitutes a further element of these furnishings clearly not all of Soviet manufacture and very probably dating from before the revolution and revealing an unorthodox social milieu, along with a small, carved walnut card-table covered in green baize.[96]

Inventories that recorded such abundant furnishings indicate lodgings that were worlds apart from the exceedingly precarious living conditions of most Soviet citizens, even those with the highest incomes. It is practically impossible to form

94. In Ilf and Petrov's novel, the twelve chairs belonged to a certain Vorobianinov, marshal of the nobility converted into a government employee after the revolution. Learning that one of them contained an inestimable treasure, a discovery that launches the novel's plot, he recalls the vanished salon of his former provincial home: "He clearly remembered the drawing room in his house, and its symmetrically arranged walnut furniture with curved legs, the polished parquet floor, the old brown grand piano, and the oval black-framed daguerreotypes of high-ranking relatives on the walls," Ilf and Petrov, *The Twelve Chairs*, 15. Corny memories for the two satirists, this nostalgia probably did not seem quite as ridiculous to some readers.

95. The ambitious reconceptualization of 1920s lifestyles, which has remained highly theoretical but for which each detail was significant, went so far as to denounce, for example, the production of tea services for a determined number of guests (six or twelve depending on convention), which tended to preserve a mode of sociability oriented towards the domestic living space instead of promoting spending all of one's time in the collective living space of the canteen. V. S., "Oformlenie byta. Proizvodstvennye organizatsii ne raskachalis'," *Iskusstvo v massy* 4 (1930): 22-23, cited in Karen Kettering, "'Ever More Cosy and Comfortable': Stalinism and the Soviet Domestic Interior, 1928-1938," *Journal of Design History* 10, no. 2 (1997): 119-35, here 126. The fact that Evdokia Samoilovna lists a tea service that is both made of expensive material and designed for a large number of guests, shows the extent to which prescriptions had limited influence, but also how the context of the war often permitted an inversion of values in terms of material possessions.

96. GARF, f. 7021, op. 100, d. 71, act 184. When she wrote her declaration, Iantovskaia was living in a house in Chirchik, a new city in Uzbekistan thirty kilometers from Tashkent. She was separated from her husband, who had disappeared in the Urals during the early stages of the evacuation. Like so many other evacuees, her standard of living had declined, although she claimed to be receiving a monthly income of one thousand two hundred rubles. Her letter is marked by virulent "anti-Kraut" Soviet patriotism, but her primary motivation was certainly related to her fierce desire to be reimbursed, leading her to include, amid dishes and pots and pans, six gold teeth and six dental crowns in the inventory. The anachronism suggested by this latter point, particularly given by a Jewish evacuee should not be surprising. The mercantile value of gold teeth was not first discovered by those who pilfered them from cadavers. When they needed to, individuals could conceive of having their teeth extracted and reselling them or trading them for bread and other staples. See *"Svershilos'. Prishli nemtsy!" Ideinyi kollaboratsionizm v SSSR v period Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2012), 98 (respectively November 26 and December 2, 1941).

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an idea of the precise spatial organization of these interiors, however. The declaration of Samuil Moiseevich Ekmekchi, an attorney and consultant on legal matters, provides a notable exception. Prior to the war, he and his wife, the director of an agency that offered protective social and legal services for women and children, lived with their two children in an apartment in the city of Nikolaev. The apartment included a living room that also functioned as an office, a bedroom, a children's bedroom, a bathroom, and a kitchen. This couple of attorneys had a more modern cultural outlook than the previous case, as illustrated by their Milbach piano and an oak bookcase containing five hundred literary books and legal treatises. Their living room contained not one but two Soviet-manufactured radio receivers ("Pioner" and "SI 235"), a gramophone and eighty records, and an office equipped with an "Undervud" typewriter. The apartment was linked to the outside world via a telephone line. They also owned a FED camera that allowed them to photograph their children in less artifical poses and settings than the professional studio portraits of the time, which remained the sole—and much sought after—source of Soviet family albums. A pair of binoculars also featured, suggesting evening outings to enjoy shows in the city. The rest of the list indicates a carefully arranged, rather heavy decor, including a sofa, two armchairs, and six upholstered occasional chairs; it also lists a round mahogany table, a bronze chandelier, a bronze lamp with a silk lampshade and a malachite base, and a Persian carpet. Five paintings and a tapestry adorned the walls. The apartment's doors were covered in plush fabric, the curtains were tulle, and the vases were made of crystal. A small mahogany piece of furniture described as being inlaid with bronze and crystal is labeled a "museum piece," attesting to its probable purchase in an antique shop. The dining room must have been spacious, because in addition to a table and the twelve leather-covered oak chairs, it contained an oak buffet inlaid with crystal, a sofa with a leather-upholstered back, and an old clock with musical chimes. From the dining room ceiling hung an additional bronze chandelier, and the walls were embellished with decorative porcelain plates. The samovar was decorated in crystal, the tea service was porcelain, and the curtains were again of tulle fabric. The bedroom furnishings were radically different from most Soviet interiors, largely because it was atypical at the time to possess a room dedicated only to sleeping: at night, most Soviet citizens at best transformed a sofa into a sleeping couch. In this case, the bedroom furniture, besides the bed itself, included a vanity, a birch-wood, mirrored armoire, a couch, two armchairs, and four ottomans covered in matching velvet. Yet another couch was upholstered with a Turkmen carpet. The apartment's third chandelier was suspended from the bedroom ceiling, and two recent paintings hung on the walls. The children's room was another obvious rarity, although nothing suggests that its furnishings were specifically designed for children.[97] The mere fact of having a

97. References to children's furniture are extremely rare in inventories. One evacuee from Kharkov, Iakov Moiseevich Gurevich, mentions a children's sofa, a small table, and three chairs for his two daughters. He belonged to a comfortable class with a modernist orientation in a number of domains: an expensive piano, a collection of two hundred record albums, and electric domestic items including an oven, kitchen elements, and

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bathroom with a shower and an enamel bathtub completed the impression of luxury, which was naturally also reflected in the family's clothing. In fact, the family's clothes were even more elegant because they were custom-tailored, an impression supported by several meters of different rich fabrics that naturally included silk, as well as a fur-lined coat, a kimono, and a man's silk pajamas.[98]

The Ekmekchi's interior, described in intimate detail, calls to mind the set of a Western bourgeois vaudeville more than it does a Soviet-era interior, even of members of the elite. The fact that Samuil Moiseevich, like others in his class, thought it was reasonable to flaunt their prewar lifestyle to the authorities could appear surprising, because a certain amount of discretion was probably advisable at this level of society in the 1930s. Soviet functioning, with its stratified commercial networks, allowed this kind of lifestyle—one of the primary lessons of these inventories—but there was no question of justifying it, because each item had been acquired at great cost, sometimes through relationships that enabled individuals to benefit from bargains, but also through inheritance from the prerevolutionary bourgeoisie. This new feeling of impunity was an outgrowth of the fact that the war made it acceptable to display one's wealth, since what was being reported had already been stolen by the enemy and would only add to the latter's guilt and final reparations bill. In the preceding cases, this legitimation seemed to suffice and no particular effort was made in the inventories of lost property to call attention to any sense that the owners subscribed to the regime.

By contrast, other inventory authors went to great lengths to offer evidence of their real or imagined allegiance. Petr Stepanovich Davidenko, evacuated from Sumi and employed in a factory in Chirchik, seems to have led a prewar lifestyle well above that of a factory worker. He owned a superb pair of boots, a leather coat, an expensive Cheviot-wool suit, a silk muffler, and an "Omega" pocket watch. He exhibited an athletic profile, particularly in owning an "Ukraina" bicycle, and also a taste for modern technology, declaring that he owned both a "gramofon" and a "patefon" along with the disks required by each machine. This did not prevent him from austere reading habits, however, because he declared approximately one hundred books, of which over one quarter were authored by Lenin.[99] The list of books reported lost by Salomon Mikhailovich Moshkovich, an evacuee from Rostov-on-Don, were apparently equally edifying, mixing nineteenth-century Russian classics

an iron, GARF, f. 7021, op. 100, d. 53, act 171. Toys are also almost never referred to in inventories. Dmitrii Nikolaevich Golovastikov, an engineer at a factory that manufactured machines in Voronezh, had a similar profile: 250 records, a radio, highly serious reading material—technical, political, a bit of literature—as well as two porcelain dolls with eyes that closed, two "*Ded moroz*," and even a string of electric Christmas lights, which is revealing in that such items were only re-authorized in 1936, GARF, f. 7021, op. 100, d. 71, act 194. References to children's bicycles are encountered more frequently, however. Regarding the scarcity of toys in the Stalin-era Soviet Union, see Catriona Kelly, *Children's World: Growing up in Russia, 1890-1991* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

98. GARF, f. 7021, op. 100, d. 53, act 158.

99. GARF, f. 7021, op. 100, d. 71, act 166.

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with the books of both major figures of the revolution. His list included two volumes by Lermontov, twelve by Pushkin, and the complete works of Lenin and Stalin (these three collections were estimated at the same value). More sober than the previous case and an employee of Rostsel'mash, the crown jewel of Soviet industry evacuated to Tashkent, his interior was that of a white-collar worker in whose home a framed portrait of Lenin hung alongside a portrait of Stalin. An engineer from Voronezh, who did not fail to mention his wife's silk dresses and outfits, a few pieces of gold jewelry, a silver pocket watch, crystal vases, and a large tea service, he also paid particular attention to the prevailing ideological discourse, listing, along with a variety of journals, a prominent collection of 143 political works, closely followed by books relating to his profession, a handful of literary works (he mentions Maxim Gorky and Tolstoy), and several medical texts among the 368 books in his library.[100] This reflects Stalin-era precepts that authorized engineers and technicians to distinguish themselves from workers by a lifestyle inherited from the bourgeoisie while also encouraging them to devote their free time to reading texts that would make them good guides, both in technical and ideological terms, for the workers under their orders.

Considered as a whole, the inventories are not particularly rich in information about the artistic tastes of the collections' former owners beyond the occasional reference to nineteenth-century Russian painting, which was perfectly consistent with officially approved culture. The same is true of literary references. Maria Markovna German, who was evacuated from Moscow to Syzran in the summer of 1941, was almost certainly an official in one of the government agencies that were preemptively moved to Kuibyshev and the surrounding region. She claimed that she had left behind three reproductions of paintings by Ivan Aivazovskii and Arkhip Kuindzhi, as well as the complete works of Pushkin and Tolstoy.[101] Conversely, the significance of the fact that the names of the artists who painted missing pictures were rarely mentioned is unclear. Was this "detail" really seen as unimportant by the inventories' authors? Were they painted by an obscure artist? Or, alternatively, did the authors of these lists fear that their tastes might not be well-received by the officials who read them? And, finally, did fear cause them to underplay the value of the artworks in their possession?[102] In any event, despite

100. GARF, f. 7021, op. 100, d. 71, act 194.

101. GARF, f. 7021, op. 28, d. 31, l. 20. Ivan Konstantinovich Aivazovskii (1817-1900), a great lover of the navy and Romantic Russian painter who was popular both before the revolution and in the 1930s. In an article published at the end of the 1930s, Aivazovskii was cited among the painters whose works would best decorate Soviet interiors—provided the art afficionados acquired quality reproductions like those published by Izogiz. This article was typical of the lessons on rigidly defined official definitions of good taste published in the journal and aimed at Soviet middle-class women. K. Kravchenko, "O kartinakh i reproduktsiiakh," *Obshchestvennitsa* 15 (1937): 17-19; Arkhip Ivanovich Kuindzhi, Russian landscape artist, 1842-1910.

102. The Soviet government never seemed to have envisioned including in the list of art works taken by the enemy and potentially subject to being returned or compensation, anything other than works taken from museums and other public institutions. See Konstantin Akinsha, "Stalin's Decrees and Soviet Trophy Brigades: Compensation,

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apparent luxury, the feeling that there were limitations on what could be displayed must also have been internalized, as evidenced by the total lack of references to religious items—whether icons or other ritual objects—in the inventories.[103]

A further question raised by a close reading of these inventories in terms of "cultural objects" relates to the position of foreign-made objects. A number of such items have been cited earlier, including pianos and more modern possessions. The inventory drawn up by Zinovii Efimovich and Tatiana Lvovna Feiman, a couple from Odessa evacuated to Tashkent, illustrates the incursion of these recently-manufactured foreign technical objects into an old-fashioned Soviet home. They reported the loss of a "Steer" racing bicycle estimated to be far more valuable than earlier examples, two typewriters—an "Undervud" and a "Remingt"—an electrophone of unspecified brand but whose name suggests Soviet manufacture, along with fifty record albums and a range of what must have been professional equipment—an arithmometer (mechanical calculator) and a chest of measuring instruments. The inventory also included a T/b/I radio of Soviet origin and its accessories. Nevertheless, the cultural environment reflected by this inventory is that of the cultivated Russian bourgeoisie since the turn of the century. The bookcase contained three hundred volumes that included the celebrated Brockhaus and Efron encyclopedia, translated from German and published in the Russian Empire between 1890 and 1906, as well as other books edited by the Soviet Academy of Sciences, and Russian classics. The artists who painted the five paintings and watercolors are not mentioned, nor are the musicians responsible for the musical scores that accompanied a violin "of high quality." The couple also reported the furnishings of a dacha that they owned in their inventory. Additional elements confirm their attentiveness to detail and to the distinctive decor of their home, including an expensive "English" suit and an "American" glass bookcase, although it is not possible to be certain whether these adjectives designate a style or the origin of the items. A wooden Japanese armoire, a small antique table labeled as a museum piece, a sculpted ebony medicine chest inlaid with ivory, and a custom-made oak ice chest provide further indications of the couple's careful circumvention of the standardized Soviet stylistic environment.[104]

These inventories, produced during wartime, thus reveal a lost world in which the prerevolutionary past was combined with the assimilation of modern practices supported by foreign objects, as well as a taste for the nineteenth century, preferably Russian, and sometimes matched with references that, although not directly linked to the revolution, were derived from it. Some of these items had only been recently reincorporated into the officially approved tastes: they cannot

Restitution in Kind, or 'Trophies' of War?," *International Journal of Cultural Property* 17, no. 2 (2010): 195-216.

103. It was still probably too early for ordinary Soviets to evaluate the changes put in place by the Kremlin regarding religion. See Tatiana A. Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia: Russian Orthodoxy from World War II to the Khrushchev Years*, trans. and ed. Edward E. Roslof (Armonk: M. E. Sharp, 2002).

104. GARF, f. 7021, op. 100, d. 53, act 243.

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therefore be considered as limited to either official prescriptions or socio-economic level. They also raise numerous questions to which archival sources unfortunately cannot provide answers. What were the origins of these objects, and by what precise means, and when, did the owner-victims acquire them? What could possibly have made them decide that their lists of possessions would not bring them more problems than benefits? While they were scrupulously preparing their inventories, it is unthinkable that they did not have in mind the lists of possessions seized from fallen aristocrats in the aftermath of the revolution and so admirably staged by Ilf and Petrov in *The Twelve Chairs*, which was extraordinarily popular during the late 1920s.[105] The inventories of the Soviet Investigation Committee unarguably echo the files imagined by these two satirists, themselves a reflection of very real ledgers,[106] recording at the same time the seized assets and the institutions to whom they were assigned, and occasionally the rare individuals who received small amounts of them as bribes—the revolution did not officially allow the pure and simple reconstitution of the heritage of the former elites in the homes of its new guardians, regardless of how deserving they were.

Reading the Commission's inventories does not tell us whether objects' owners were members of the former aristocracy who had escaped the initial waves of Bolshevik retribution or their fortunate beneficiaries, or perhaps both. The circulation of these seized assets could in fact be highly complex, passing from hand to hand by decree, informal exchanges, humiliating sales on a flea market,[107] through a "reseller" middle-man in defiance of the law,[108] or an auction house like that in

105. "Whose furniture do you want to know about? Angelov, first-guild merchant? Certainly. ... Taken from Angelov on December 18, 1918: Baecker grand piano, one, no. 97012; piano stools, one soft; bureaux, two; wardrobes, four (two mahogany); bookcases, one... and so on. ... The letter V it is. ... In one moment. Vm, Vn, Vorotsky, no. 48238, Vorobyaninov, Ippolit Matveyevich, your father, God rest his soul, was a man with a big heart... A Baecker piano, no. 54809. Chinese vases, marked, four, from Sèvres in France; Aubusson carpets, eight, different sizes; a tapestry, 'The Shepherd's Boy'; a tapestry, 'The Shepherd's Girl'; Tekke carpets, two; Khorassan carpets, one; stuffed bears with dish, one; a bedroom suite to seat twelve; a dining room suite to seat sixteen; a drawing room suite to seat twelve, walnut, made by Hambs," Ilf and Petrov, *The Twelve Chairs*, 77-78.

106. Regarding the practice of seizing furniture immediately following the revolution, see the admirable reconstitution of a luxury apartment building in Petrograd by Larissa Zakharova, "Le 26-28 Kamennoostrovski. Les tribulations d'un immeuble en révolution," in *Saint-Pétersbourg. Histoire, promenades, anthologie et dictionnaire*, ed. Lorraine de Meaux (Paris: R. Laffont, 2003), 473-505.

107. The famous photographs featuring representatives of the former elites add to the stories and testimonies. In the pictures, the figures are standing on a sidewalk awaiting a client, obliged to sell their last possessions during the Civil War to be able to purchase basic necessities.

108. The director of the asylum for the elderly to whom one of the twelve chairs had been attributed resold it to one of the characters in the novel, who pretended to be a *perekoupchtchik*, i.e., from the perspective of Soviet law, an intermediary illegally purchasing an item, whether or not it was government property, in order to resell it to a client and pocket the difference, Ilf and Petrov, *The Twelve Chairs*, 54-55.

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the Petrovka Passage, a former hub of Muscovite elegance. In was in this location that Ilf and Petrov situated the auctioning of their famous twelve chairs by a bureaucratic agency, the Directorate of Scientific Affairs, which was attempting to empty the cellar of the Moscow Furniture Museum where they had been placed following the revolution. Sold separately, they were a boon to a range of purchasers who included a lower-class female engineer wanting to elevate the style of her interior, a penniless satirist,[109] a theater company—meaning the chairs retained the vague status of public property decreed by the revolution[110]—and above all a railway workers' union that, unknowingly acquiring a chair whose upholstery was stuffed with diamonds, resold them and converted the wealth of the former nobility into a clubhouse fitted out with the very latest cultural equipment for the people, a fitting moral to the story that no educated 1930s Soviet citizen would have failed to comprehend.[111] Stalin-era tastes had slightly altered the situation, and in reading these inventories, which probably reflected somewhat exaggerated luxury because they entailed an expectation of compensation, we can see both a reflection of new tolerance concerning real fortunes—born of the relegitimation of material comfort inherited from the prerevolutionary period or inspired by 1930s bourgeois society—and the simultaneously precise and variable representation of the kinds of wealth seen as acceptable for a good Soviet citizen.

Stalin-era morality had not altered fundamental societal values, however, and these inventories, in their departures from the norm, also reflect real strategies of preservation and acquisition engaged with discretion in the privacy of prewar families and homes. The circumstances surrounding the war subsequently brought these strategies to light, in the same way that the archivist responsible for the assets of the fallen aristocracy in Stargorod, the quintessential Russian province imagined by Ilf and Petrov, marveled that his files contained "the whole town" and "the mirror of life," in other words, an entire universe that had not vanished but had merely been transformed by the revolution.[112] Similarly, the ambivalence

109. The novel introduces us to the fate of another set of Gambs chairs, sought after in error by a greedy pope: seized from the home of the wife of a Stargorod general, they were given to "Engineer Bruns," who left the city in 1923 for Kharkov, taking with him all of his furnishings, "and was looking after it very carefully." He then traveled to Rostov, where he worked for a large cement manufacturer before being invited to work at the Baku refineries, where the furniture henceforth decorated his comfortable dacha, amidst the luxuriant vegetation of a hill overlooking Batumi, making Bruns into an avatar of the colonial elites, ibid., 55, 150, 211 and 287-92.

110. Which did not prevent the technician of the theater from clandestinely reselling the assets assigned to his theater to individuals, in this case to the heroes desperately seeking to acquire such bounty, ibid., 137-38, 164-68 and 280.

111. The Russian version of the article by Larissa Zakharova, "Le 26-28 Kamennoostrovski," is also entitled "*The Twelve Chairs,*" an indication of the extent to which the novel, and its moral, were inextricably linked in the Soviet and post-Soviet consciousness, from its publication to the present day, with the fate of the assets of the former tsarist elites.

112. "'It's all here,' he said, 'the whole of Stargorod. All the furniture. Who it was taken from and who it was given to. And here's the alphabetical index—the mirror of life! ...

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of the sentiments elicited by the inventories of Stargorod high society, whether it was the emotion of memories of a destroyed past, which in fact was faked by one of its—false—scions, or the jubilation of the Soviet archivist at the thought of a crushed social order, without even considering the envy of most of the protagonists, certainly played out differently in the 1940s. The openly avowed pain of declaring the loss of personal possessions revealed the many facets of a now-destroyed prewar life, pride in a heritage that provided evidence of one's culture and merit, but perhaps also, for some, secret spite at having lost in the war what they had managed to save from the furor surrounding the revolution and the vicissitudes of daily Soviet life. Finally, for those of Jewish origin, the anti-Semitic climate that developed in evacuation zones and in their original home cities and regions might have encouraged them to have Soviet authorities record the lists of possessions that they must have suspected would be particularly difficult to have appraised once they had returned to their hypothetical homes.

Writing forty years after the war, Brodsky was attempting to reconstruct the impressions of his early encounters with foreign objects, but he was also echoing distinctive private memories shared by many Soviets and constructed over time, in which the exact circumstances that brought these objects into their world had been effaced, if indeed they were ever known. The touching reference to a young boy—in fact of Jewish origin—discovering the smell of corned beef in the martyred city of Leningrad after the siege was lifted masks the survivors of the Shoah who were forever deprived of the aid made possible by American generosity. The infatuation displayed by the poet with Sarah Leander, star of the Nazi cinematographic industry, which he discovered when trophy films were projected on Soviet screens during the 1940s, says little about the fate of German women when the victorious Red Army arrived. As for the records from Shanghai that opened the world of famous operas to the Brodsky family, along with the fox-trot and the tango, it is worth wondering to what extent that repertoire resembled what the evacuees of Odessa or other Soviet cities listened to on their own gramophones before the war.

The striking ressemblence between the lists of objects in the inventories authored by Soviet victims of pillaging and in the registers of objects from abroad, from the humblest to the most valuable, illustrates a shared cultural space. The difference, of course, is in abundance and quality, even if the archival sources only allow this to be partially surmised. Equally striking is the fact that this overview of the objects of the war brings so many figures of Soviet Judaism to the fore: the destitute survivors of the Shoah, and in their wake the more than two million Jewish victims pitilessly stripped of their belongings and property, even the humblest, by the occupiers but also by their own neighbors before they were assassinated. There were also representatives of a more comfortable class of Jews who had the privilege, itself not devoid of challenges, of being evacuated, and finally a younger generation

It's all here. The whole town. Pianos, settees, pier glasses, chairs, divans, pouffes, chandeliers... even dinner services,'" Ilf and Petrov, *The Twelve Chairs*, 77.

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that did not view their Jewishness as a central aspect of their identity and whose frantic search for foreign goods was less out of vengeance than as a vector for their personal pleasure or satisfaction. The predominance of these Jewish figures can be explained in several ways: a side effect of the archival sources (they were overrepresented among the educated population that resorted to writing, and they were perhaps better acquainted with the logic of foreign compensation) but it is also possible that they simply possessed a different culture. Whatever the case, such figures also express a wartime experience that affected the whole of Soviet society.

The obsession with objects that the war made available and their intense circulation created problems for Stalin's administration. On one hand, the state sought to cultivate appreciation of individuals' heritage and encouraged their desire for compensation, showing considerable complacency in terms of how they appropriated foreign products and goods. On the other hand, the state never entirely distanced itself from a strict moral code whose consequences could be brought to bear on individual Soviet citizens at any moment. Depending on the context, the same luxury objects could become indicators of the merit and talent of a Soviet specialist, the compensation of the army elite, or a sign of corruption that expressed the profound ambivalence about abundance and comfort that remained an inherent feature of the Soviet system until it fell.

In the Soviet context, the war of objects clearly blurred the lines between what was acceptable and what was unacceptable in terms of personal appropriation, access to comfort, the quality of materials or the choice of esthetic registers. Still, the strictness of the Bolshevik enterprise meant that while these lines could shift, they could not be abolished. Lastingly inscribed in the mentality of the period, Soviet material culture—which could designate both the objects themselves, including imported objects, and the relationships maintained between individuals and objects through the particularities of seeking or consuming them, as well as the state's desire to control distribution—appears to have remained relatively static for several decades, only to disappear with the fall of Communism.[113]

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113. This disappearance is clearly of variable rapidity depending on social level, age, etc. The nostalgia that developed for the Soviet material domain did not interrupt this process, given the extent to which it was itself a part of a Western mode of commercialization.

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