

## **The Body of Things: Gender, Material Culture and Design in (Post)Soviet Russia**

An interdisciplinary conference, Aarhus University, Denmark, March 8-9 2018



Since the late 1990s, the social sciences and the humanities have reconsidered the relations between discourse and materiality and between humans and non-humans, including things. At the same time, scholars of the Soviet Union and its successor states have demonstrated increasing interest in material culture, everyday life and gender. We propose that recent theoretical paradigms such as new materialism, object oriented ontology, material feminisms, thing theory and others can be useful tools for elucidating complex interrelations between politics, everyday life and professional cultures in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Russia. This conference aims to initiate a dialogue among scholars of Soviet and post-Soviet history and culture dealing with body and crafts, gender and design, DIY and subjectivity, and related topics.

In the 1920s Liubov' Popova and Varvara Stepanova famously turned a traditional "feminine craft" of textile into industrial design, or, according to another interpretation, into high art: two areas usually perceived as "masculine." Speaking of the "Thaw" era, the curators of the recent exhibition in the Museum of the History of Moscow identified transparency as a key cultural category that redefined the relations between bodies, materials and language. They viewed new urban districts with open spaces, fashionable semi-transparent clothes from synthetic fabrics, international festivals and exhibition with new opportunities for communicating with foreigners and the resulting interest to foreign languages, and so on, as interconnected elements of the new mode of life.

Taking these two examples as inspirations, we invite researchers from different disciplines and with various methodological toolkits to critically rethink the narratives of (post)Soviet material culture, gender, and design. How did (post)Soviet things intersect with gender, challenge gender roles, influence bodies and organize social relations? How did the actual interaction with objects influence the everyday and professional experience of women and men? How were (post)Soviet commodities gendered? What models of domesticity and housekeeping did the state promote in different periods of (post)Soviet history, and how could people respond to them? Is it possible to find examples of "queering (post)Soviet home"? What role did different sensory qualities – colors, textures, sounds, or even odors – play in constituting (post)Soviet everydayness? What career possibilities were open for women designers and architects, what implicit and explicit obstacles did they face and have to resolve? What were specific gender (im)balances and hierarchies in different professional communities, such as architecture, industrial and graphic design, theater design, applied art, and monumental art? How did the professional identities of women designers influence their attitudes to marriage, motherhood and domestic labor? Were there any design projects/products explicitly or implicitly challenging gender roles? What other questions about (post)Soviet material culture and gender can be provoked by new critical theories?

The conference is a part of the interdisciplinary research program "Cultural Transformations" at the School of Communication and Culture, Aarhus University

Conveners: Yulia Karpova, Birgitte Beck Pristed (Aarhus University) and Olga Gurova (Aalborg University)

Abstracts of no more than 300 words should be submitted to [bodyofthings@gmail.com](mailto:bodyofthings@gmail.com) by the deadline of **December 1, 2017**