



Mikhail Kopylkov, "Pink Dress and Autumn Coat," *chamotte, salts, glazes, metal*, 1976

THE BODY OF THINGS

Gender, Material Culture and Design in (Post)Soviet Russia

An interdisciplinary conference, Aarhus University, 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 20th 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 viewed open urban spaces, fashionable semi-transparent clothes from synthetic fabrics, international festivals and exhibitions 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 rethink the narratives of (post)Soviet material culture, gender, and design. How did (post)Soviet things challenge gender roles, influence bodies and organize social relations? 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, what implicit and explicit obstacles did they face? 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? What other questions about (post)Soviet material culture and gender can be provoked by new critical theories?

Confirmed keynote speakers:

Dr. Anke Hennig, Associate Lecturer at Central Saint Martins

Dr. Christina Kiaer, Associate Professor at Northwestern University

The conference is a part of the research program "Cultural Transformations" at the School of Communication and Culture and the research program in Global Studies at the School of Culture and Society, Aarhus University. Conveners: Yulia Karpova, Birgitte Beck Pristed (Aarhus University) and Olga Gurova (Aalborg University).

There are 10 places to fill. Confirmed participants will be invited to the conference dinner, and we will cover accommodation costs, provide day catering plus possibly some funding for reimbursement of travel expenses.

Abstracts of no more than 300 words and CV should be submitted to bodyofthings@gmail.com by the deadline of December 1, 2017. Conference papers are due February 23, 2018.



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