

Dior Flair in Red Square:
Moscow's 1959 Fashion Show and Khrushchev Thaw

Erin Bronner
Department of History, Barnard College
Columbia University
Professor Joel Kaye
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Introduction

In May 1957, the article “Fashion” by German sociologist Georg Simmel was featured in *The American Journal of Sociology*:

Fashion is a form of imitation and so of social equalization, but, paradoxically, in changing incessantly, it differentiates one time from another and one social stratum from another. It unites those of a social class and segregates them from others. The elite initiates a fashion and, when the mass imitates it in an effort to obliterate the external distinctions of class, abandons it for a newer mode—a process that quickens with the increase of wealth. *Fashion does not exist in tribal and classless societies.* It concerns externals and superficialities where irrationality does no harm. It signalizes the lack of personal freedom; hence it characterizes the female and middle class, whose increased social freedom is matched by intense individual subjugation.

Retrospectively, it is understandable that Simmel would be apt to jump to such sweeping conclusions about fashion. Though the *American Journal of Sociology* republished this piece in 1957, Simmel wrote it in 1904, when his discipline had a considerably narrower lens than today or even 1957. Viewed through a historical perspective, it is worth examining how many of Simmel’s arguments held true across space and time. As an area of study, fashion reveals a myriad of gendered, socio-economic, and political implications about specific historical milieux. In this manner, Simmel’s arguments live on. What about the notion, however, that fashion does not exist in “classless” societies?

This thesis examines a specific case study of fashion in a planned economy. In 1959 (two years after this issue of *The American Journal of Sociology*), at the request of Soviet state officials, the French luxury fashion house Christian Dior presented 120 outfits to over 11,000 Soviet spectators in Moscow, in a series of fashion shows that lasted over the course of one week. Being the first event of its kind, it attracted a significant amount of attention from the press globally. At first glance, there appear to be several ideological contradictions within this event. As Simmel noted, one would believe that fashion, as an ever-changing commodity, would

be inherently linked to social class; and yet, this fashion show took place in the epicenter of a communist country that was founded on the rejection of social class. Christian Dior specifically, moreover, was one of the most widely renowned luxury brands in the capitalist world at the time. This prioritization of luxury was linked to the capitalist phenomenon that Marx critiqued and termed “commodity fetishism” in *Das Kapital*, and therefore luxury would seem antithetical to communist ideology. Finally, the aesthetic of Dior was pointedly traditionalist in terms of gender presentation, and this too contradicted the functionalist “workers” aesthetic that Soviet womenswear designers had been cultivating for decades prior.

In spite of these observations, the Dior fashion show in Moscow actually illuminated many of the changes that were taking place in the Soviet Union during the period of leadership by First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev, also known as the Khrushchev Thaw. It was during this period that a series of reforms related to international trade were enacted, as well as those that permitted the people of the Soviet Union to access some foreign media. Also characteristic of the Thaw was a series of international exhibitions such as the American National Exhibition, which not only served as a cultural exchange between the Soviet Union and capitalist countries but also as a means of peaceful competition. As an exhibition that took place during the Thaw, the Dior fashion show revealed the shifting strategies behind the planned fashion industry in the Soviet Union in light of both decades of its own evolution and increased influence from the outside. From a social and political standpoint, the Dior show in Moscow was a visual demonstration on an international level of the extent to which the Thaw contributed to lifestyle changes (such as luxury and its aesthetics not being entirely *verboten*). At the same time, several international publications, especially American ones, were quick to capitalize on the event’s coverage with overdrawn conclusions about the trajectory of the Soviet Union towards mimicry of

Americanisms and Europeanisms, catty mockery of Soviet fashion and accommodations as they stood, and a male gaze-heavy preoccupation with the alleged feminization of Soviet women.

The first chapter, “Revolution and Evolution in Soviet Fashion,” will discuss the evolution of the Soviet Union’s planned fashion industry from the 1917 Revolution to the early 1950s. The subchapter “Planned Ideals vs. Proletarian Reality” is devoted to tracking fashion in the Soviet Union from the Russian Revolution to the death of Stalin. It was during this time that the Central Institute of the Garment Industry, which played a large role in the planning of clothing manufacture, was established. This was the point of departure from which other governmental departments, such as the Moscow House of Fashion Design of Clothes (MDMO) and the All-Union Institute of the Culture of Clothes (ODMO), began dictating sartorial tastes in the Soviet Union. These agencies sought to establish their own definition of taste that was not dependent on Western notions of class. As indicated by the title, however, the garment prototypes that these departments created rarely reached the people of the Soviet Union themselves, as a result of resource and labor constraints. This resulted in a disagreement between the state and the people in regard to the importance of fashion. The subchapter “The Thaw: Looking Outward” provides information on the extent to which the early stages of the Khrushchev Thaw influenced changes to fashion in the Soviet Union. These included press-enforced taste dictates of modest womanhood, internationally influenced youth counterculture, and “lux” ateliers that catered to Party elite.

The second chapter, “Moscow’s Road to Dior, Paved in the Thaw,” focuses on the period from 1947 to 1959. The subchapter “Dior and the Postwar Fashion Landscape” analyzes the “French” side leading up to the event, that is, the state of French fashion post-World War II. I elaborate on the political significance of Christian Dior’s “New Look,” which gained

prominence as a means of ‘rebuilding’ Paris after the war and promoting a modern yet gendered mode of dress. The subchapter “The Dior Project Commences” investigates the planning that led up to the 1959 show in Moscow, on the part of the House of Dior and on the part of the Soviet government agencies involved.

The third chapter, “Press Reactions to the Christian Dior Show in Moscow,” details the procedure of the fashion show itself, as well as coverage of it from several different accounts, ranging from American to French to Soviet newspapers. The outpouring of American articles had the commonality of treating the event as a spectacle. An article for the French newspaper *Le Monde* took a more neutral, critical approach to the event. Meanwhile, a reporter for a Soviet literary newspaper who had lived in France for years provided a theoretical examination of the show as a defense of socialism.

Methodology and Historiography

The 1959 Dior fashion show in Moscow marked a relatively highly documented time of Soviet/non-Soviet cultural exchange in the realm of fashion, which lends itself to an in-depth study of the singular event. This marks my work as a departure from the majority of historical writing on fashion in the Soviet Union, which examines the subject over a much longer period, often from the birth to the fall of the nation. A known example would be *FashionEast: The Spectre That Haunted Socialism* by Djurdja Bartlett, a Research Fellow at London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London. This book, which received recognition in *Smithsonian Magazine* and *The New Yorker*, is one to which I credit my initial fascination with conducting my own research on Soviet fashion. It is in this book that Bartlett quotes Lydia Orlova, former fashion editor of the Soviet magazine *Rabotnitsa* (Working woman), who said “Believe me, Dior had many more fans in the USSR than in France.” While Bartlett does indeed open her preface

with a concise reference to the 1959 Dior show, the book itself operates more as a survey of Soviet fashion history from the 1920s to the 1980s, covering not just Russia but the satellite states as well. Bartlett states that she conducted research for *FashionEast* over the course of ten years, during which she conducted initial field research in Hungary, held twenty-four interviews with people from the former Soviet Union who were involved in fashion production, and accessed Soviet women's magazines in libraries such as the Moscow Arts Library and the Historical Library in Moscow.

On the other hand, the inaccessibility of Soviet government documents proved to be a significant barrier for an American undergraduate researcher such as myself, who neither knows Russian nor would have access to many of these files even if I did travel to Russia. This led to increased utilization of secondary research conducted by researchers who did have access to these documents. One book that cited numerous Soviet documents was *Fashion Meets Socialism: Fashion industry in the Soviet Union after the Second World War* by Jukka Gronow, Sergey Zhuravlev, published by the Finnish Literature Society. They, too, interviewed several people who "played active and central roles in the Soviet system of fashion as designers, pattern makers, models, engineers, economists, and editors" in Moscow and in Tallinn, Estonia. For archival research, they consulted scholars at the Institute of Russian History, Russian Academy of Sciences. Through their quotations and those in other, shorter articles about Soviet fashion from researchers, I was able to source an assortment of government reports and articles from the Soviet press. Had I had greater access to Soviet government documents, I would have been able to expand much further upon the specific research that the Soviet fashion agencies conducted on the House of Dior in the years leading up to the 1959 show.

When conducting primary research, I was able to source a handful of articles in Russian, which I meticulously translated using online services. The articles from *Ogonek* and *Literaturnaia gazeta* which I cite in my third chapter were accessible on the database *EastView*. I also accessed a handful of articles from *Rabotnitsa* from an independent Web archive that assisted me in contextualizing Soviet women's fashion journalism in the 1950s and 1960s. The majority of the articles, however, came from Web archives and databases for American newspapers. Additionally, I already had a subscription to *Le Monde* on account of my French minor, through which I was able to search for articles on the 1959 show in Moscow and translate myself. Thus, the focus of my research shifted from not only the event of the 1959 show itself, but its impact on how other nations viewed the Soviet Union as a result, and how the coverage served as a reflection of widespread foreign assumptions of Soviet culture. Ultimately, this new angle resulted in an interesting direction that contributed to further nuance and avenues of critique within my thesis.

Chapter One
Revolution and Evolution in Soviet Fashion



A dress exemplifying the style of “socialist realism” by Nadezhda Lamanova, founder of the Artistic Atelier of Contemporary Dress, from the 1920s ¹

How did one of the world powers most vehemently opposed to capitalist Western influence end up striking a deal with one of the most recognized fashion houses in Europe? This chapter contextualizes the complicated environment and actions, over the course of four decades, that lay the grounds for this event to take place.

Planned Ideals vs. Proletarian Reality

One of the most salient dichotomies that characterized the discourse on fashion in the Soviet Union was between the consensus of the political elite and the consensus of the working

¹ Jukka Gronow and Sergey Zhuravlev, *Fashion Meets Socialism: Fashion Industry in the Soviet Union after the Second World War*, Finnish Literature Society, vol. 20 (2015), 38-56, 46.

populace on what the role of fashion should be. In many ways, this dichotomy is unsurprising, and fashion's history in the Soviet Union--Dior runway show included--is representative of the consequences of the state's planned economy put into practice. While the state and the workers originally had a shared dislike of what fashion stood for during the Revolution, the state's view gradually shifted over the course of decades as they undertook to redefine fashion in their own terms as a project to "civilize and bring culture to the relatively uncultured social classes."² Naturally, the workers were not always on board with this project, and in many instances external factors such as wartime scarcity made it difficult for state-created fashion bureaus to execute their lofty visions.

Before the Revolution of 1917, namely at the turn of the twentieth century, fashion occupied a fully Europeanized association within the Russian Empire, particularly among the elite classes. Under the tsarist government, as stated by Christine Ruane in "Clothes Make the Comrade: A History of the Russian Fashion Industry," the nobility were the first to begin dressing in European-style fashions, as this symbolized for them modernity and a nod to industrialization.³ The bourgeoisie followed suit, and by the 1880s, even peasant women were begging their husbands to make enough to buy them Western clothing.⁴ This trend towards westernization and fashion's association with it was halted in 1917, however, when the Red Army called to abandon all notions of Europeanism.⁵ After 1917, the presence of expensive clothing outed people as members of the bourgeoisie and other enemies of the Red Army. In his

² Olga Gurova, "The art of dressing: Body, gender and discourse on fashion in Soviet Russia in the 1950s and the 1960s," *The Fabric of Cultures. Fashion, Identity, Globalization*, ed. by E. Paulicelly & H. Clark, (London, New York: Routledge, 2009), 73-91, 1.

³ Christine Ruane, "Clothes Make the Comrade: A History of the Russian Fashion Industry," *Russian History* 23 (1996), 311-343.

⁴ Ruane, "Clothes Make the Comrade," 318

⁵ Gronow, *Fashion Meets Socialism*, 38

memoirs, Semen Budennyi, a commander of the Red Army, recounted how two Red guards once arrested and shot two men on account of them wearing long fur coats and glasses.⁶

With the old guard of fashion literally taken out, the revolutionaries were ready to replace them and usher in a new style of dress, one that would suit the workers and peasants who overthrew the upper classes.⁷ Katharina Klingseis in “The Power of Dress in Contemporary Russian Society”⁸ uses the Foucauldian framework of “power ... employed and exercised through a net-like organisation” to describe the role that fashion occupied in the late Soviet Union, and I would argue this framework applies in describing the role of fashion since the birth of the Soviet Union as well. Beginning in 1917 and extending into the 1920s, the new Proletkult in charge aspired to establish visual uniformity among the proletariat, in order to enable their full potential to uniformly claim social power. Notably, this “reform dress” movement fully divorced itself from the word and pre-established concept of “fashion,” which these artists interpreted as synonymous with capitalism and the artificial highbrow snobbery seen in other fine art forms. The proposed plan for dress had multiple criteria which included the prioritization of functionality over aesthetics and the goal of equality among professions, ages, and genders. No longer would women need to be pitted against each other in the fruitless competition of purchasing more beautiful clothing than the other.⁹ The media, with its greater proximity to the masses than the state, approved of these proposals. In 1924, the magazine *Rabotnitsa* (The Woman Worker) proclaimed in the article “On Dress and Fashions,”

⁶ Gronow, *Fashion Meets Socialism*, 39.

⁷ Gurova, “The Art of Dressing,” 1.

⁸ Klingseis, Katharina. “The Power of Dressing Contemporary Russian Society: On Glamour Discourse and The Everyday Practice of Getting Dressed In Russian Cities.” *Laboratorium*, (2011), Vol. 3, no. 1, 84–115

⁹ Gronow, *Fashion Meets Socialism*, 41-43.

Our “fashion” ought to be plain, comfortable, easy to accomplish, inexpensive, affordable to the woman worker and, above all, meet the requirements of clothing in general, i.e. protect people from cold, dust and mud etc., while remaining elegant.¹⁰

Ultimately, though, this idealism already faltered under conflict in the wake of the economic prosperity brought on by the New Economic Policy (NEP). The few *nepmen* who especially gained financially from the NEP differentiated themselves from the working masses by lavishly spending on clothing. They comfortably slid back into fashion, this “hostile remnant from the class society,” to the tune of the proletariat’s disapproval, and thus social inequality and its signifiers remained even in the Soviet Union’s early years.¹¹ Meanwhile as Gurova observes, the “repair society” of workers and peasants in this early period placed value on making and repairing their own clothes, both as socialist praxis and as the only means of obtaining clothing in a reality of scarcity and shortage.¹² In their daily lives, there was no room for fashion, this being a pattern that would continue regardless of government planning.

We can view the subsequent efforts by the state in the next two decades, of establishing fashion-related trade bureaus, as a means of keeping their original visions of reform and cultural ministry alive. Though they thwarted the framework of capitalism, state officials nevertheless found it important to forge their own standards of beauty for the public. In the 1920s, the state was particularly fond of imposing the notion of “hygiene,” a more inoffensive stand-in for “fashion” or “beauty.”¹³ The term, however, encompassed standards beyond the mere recommendations to wash one’s hands or brush one’s teeth. This can be seen in the language state officials used concerning their establishment of the Central Institute of the Garment Industry in 1919, an institution involved with the manufacture of clothes that “correspond[ed] to

¹⁰ “On Dress and Fashions.” *Rabotnitsa* no. 3/1924:30–31. Translated by Klingseis

¹¹ Gronow, *Fashion Meets Socialism*, 43-44

¹² Gurova, “The art of dressing,” 2

¹³ Gurova, “The art of dressing,” 1

the conditions of hygiene, comfort, beauty and durability.”¹⁴ The press, essentially an extension of the politburo in these years, concurred with this new movement from the top. From

Komsomol'skaya Pravda, the main youth newspaper in mid-1920s:

Having as its ideological basis the liberation of all the elements of contemporary everyday life from all the remnants of capitalist society that still tormented it and to reform it on the tested facts of exact science and Leninism, the society sets its immediate task to cope successfully with the everyday hygienic situation, to produce a reformation of dress, furniture, bed, as well as to establish the right organization of rational leisure.¹⁵

The Proletkult extended this notion of scientific principle further into the state-backed design house they established, the Center for the Creation of the New Soviet Dress (later named the Fashion Atelier of the Moscow House of Fashion Design) in 1922. Prominent designers such as Varvara Fedorovna Stepanova and Liubov' Sergeevna Popova envisioned a new fashion that would serve the proletariat as well as the New Woman, continuing the trend of functionality and coining the term *prozodezhda* (production clothing). The aesthetics they did incorporate were based in the geometric design principles of cubism, to convey the ideal of Soviet modernity. Similarly, in 1919, the designer Nadezhda Petrovna Lamanova received permission from the state to found the Artistic Atelier of Contemporary Dress, which operated on similar principles of “socialist realism.”¹⁶ No matter the amount of aesthetic “realism” incorporated in these garments, however, only the political elite could truly enjoy their merit. Despite these government experiments being established in the name of the people, “the people” themselves owned barely any clothing at all. Thus, working class people continued to hold fashion in low

¹⁴ Zaitsev, V.M., ‘Etot mnogolikii mir mody.’ Sovetskaya Rossiya (Moskva), 1982, 58. Translated by Klingseis

¹⁵ *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, 10.10.1926, 4. Translated by Gronow

¹⁶ Gronow, *Fashion Meets Socialism*, 45-49

regard, and by the end of the 1920s the press even used quotation marks when referring to the word “fashion.”¹⁷

There was a brief reprieve from the working people’s criticism of fashion in the 1930s interwar period. In an effort to appeal politically to a growing “middle class” during the implementation of his five-year plans, Stalin shifted focus towards industries that would provide them with a sense of material prosperity, which included the industry of fashion.¹⁸ In 1934, the regime opened the first Soviet House of Fashion Design in Moscow on the prominent Kuznetsky Most street,¹⁹ further cementing the city as the official fashion hub. This approval of the state fashion plans would not last long, however, eventually hurling toward a worker-enforced political campaign against the westernization of Soviet fashion in 1949.²⁰ What lay behind this new shift? The most immediate explanation is the shortages following the Second World War. In 1944, the People’s Commissariat of Light Industry founded the Moscow House of Fashion Design of Clothes (MDMO) in anticipation of the Allied victory. They envisioned a scene in which, after the wreckage of the war, citizens would finally be rewarded with fashionable, well-constructed garments that would change by the season. By the fourth quarter of that year, the design oriented MDMO had already conceptualized 137 articles of women’s clothing in anticipation, to send off to the factories.²¹ They could not fully execute their artistic vision, nevertheless, because of the industrial complications following the war, ranging from a shortage of semi-skilled labor to the worn-out machinery. The order was too tall. Furthermore, civilians further impoverished from the war were not willing to pay the high prices the complex MDMO

¹⁷ Gurova, “The art of dressing,” 2

¹⁸ Klingseis, “The Power of Dressing Contemporary Russian Society,” 89

¹⁹ Gronow, *Fashion Meets Socialism*, 51

²⁰ Gronow, *Fashion Meets Socialism*, 87

²¹ Gronow, *Fashion Meets Socialism*, 82

garments fetched. The frustrated regime consolidated the divided labor of the factories and the MDMO designers into the All-Union House of Fashion Design (ODMO) in 1949, leaving the designers with less creative control as the main mission became patternmaking for simplified clothing prototypes.²² It seemed that the designers had only one thing left in their possession: the foreign fashion journals and patterns they obtained as loot from the war. And thus began the tendency to look beyond the Iron Curtain for inspiration.

The Thaw: Looking Outward

It was not until the death of Stalin and the replacement by Nikita Khrushchev as First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union that the Soviet public had any access to international popular culture. During this new period of de-Stalinization and liberalization, termed “the Thaw,” Khrushchev enabled a more open cultural atmosphere and began the process of contact with the West, leading to new fads in the Soviet Union ranging from *Tarzan* to jazz music.²³ As a result, both the regime and the public became more amenable to international fashion design tastes.

The first reason that interest in fashion was newly encouraged by the regime was the interest in peaceful competition with the West brought on by the Thaw. One of the many ways in which the Soviet regime could assert itself in this competition was through its people’s consumption, and fashion was an optimal means of achieving this. Furthermore, as Gurova argues, the encouragement of fashion represented a “symbolical manipulation,” a sort of cultural soft power, that replaced the violent totalitarian control of the previous decade. By satiating its people with “ex-bourgeois elements such as fashion, glamour, luxury, coziness and pleasure,”

²²Gronow, *Fashion Meets Socialism*, 78-81

²³ Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society Since 1900*, (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 123-126

the regime could in return receive their loyalty.²⁴ It should be noted, nevertheless, that the state certainly did not want its people to make a full reversion to these “ex-bourgeois” traditions, especially not the distinctly “degenerate Western fashions.”²⁵ Rather, in their new fashion-related campaigns, the new official key word was “taste”: like “hygiene,” another term innocuous to post-Revolutionary ears that stressed virtues in dressing such as “simplicity,” “practicality,” and “modesty.” Through this, we also see a gendered dictate of fashion that exhibits parallel thinking along the lines of the gender norms of the 1950s West.

This new attitude toward expression in fashion was reflected in the media through a litany of new fashion magazines popularized during the Thaw. These magazines were not only specialized to discuss fashion and other topics specifically targeted towards women, but were also further subcategorized into different aspects of fashion itself. One could pick up the more general *Rabotnitsa* (Working Woman), *Krest'ianka* (Peasant woman), and *Sovietskaia zhenshchina* (Soviet woman), as well as fashion magazines like *Modeli sezona* (Fashions of the season) and *Zhurnal mod* (Magazine of fashions) that were oriented towards the construction of garments and even included patterns.²⁶ An example of these magazines endorsing the opinion of the regime on tasteful clothing can be found in this 1958 issue of *Rabotnitsa*:

How young women ought to dress your wardrobe should reflect individuality, taking fashion into account without imitating it blindly.... It is not recommendable for a young woman to dress too “fashionably,” flamboyantly, garishly, attracting everybody’s attention in the street. And it is always nice to see a young woman dressed elegantly, comfortably, simply and harmonically.²⁷

As Klingseis diligently notes, the use of the term “individuality” is extremely different from the societal notion of individualism, which was still actively stigmatized. It is also evident that the

²⁴ Gurova, “The art of dressing,” 3-4

²⁵ Klingseis, “The Power of Dressing Contemporary Russian Society,” 89

²⁶ Gurova, “The art of dressing,” 5

²⁷ *Rabotnitsa* 3/1958, translated by Klingseis

term “fashionably” is still in quotation marks and still stigmatized. Nevertheless, the fact that “individuality” was placed at such high value does mark a departure from the Proletkult’s old goals of creating a pragmatic workers’ uniform. Furthermore, the press did diverge from the regime’s opinion in that it did creep towards admiration of international style seen in the foreign films and magazines now available, as well as of international celebrities. For example, *Rabotnitsa* contained an article on the style of the popular Argentinian actress Lolita Torres when she paid a visit to the Soviet Union.²⁸ Meanwhile, the regime still saw blatant international style influence among the general population as subversive; for example, they disapproved of the bright colors worn by members of the *stilyagi*, an internationally-influenced youth countercultural group.²⁹ The still-present tension between the state’s and popular opinion on fashion, and how they played off each other, is key to understanding what eventually led the state to further search for international design inspiration.

Ironically, if the state disapproved of international fashion influencing the masses, they certainly encouraged its influence among the elite. Established in 1953, the State Department Store (GUM) at Moscow, though known for experiencing high foot traffic averaging 200,000–300,000 people per day, was also the vehicle for this differentiation of the elite’s accessibility to fashion through its “secret” department which carried the work of many celebrated international fashion designers.³⁰ Eventually, the Atelier of the Individual Sewing of Clothes opened within GUM in 1954 for this express purpose. Categorized as a “lux” atelier, it charged its clients seventy percent more than even the other first-class ateliers did. There was also the trade organization of the Fashion Department within GUM, which worked on organizing regular

²⁸ Gurova, “The art of dressing,” 5

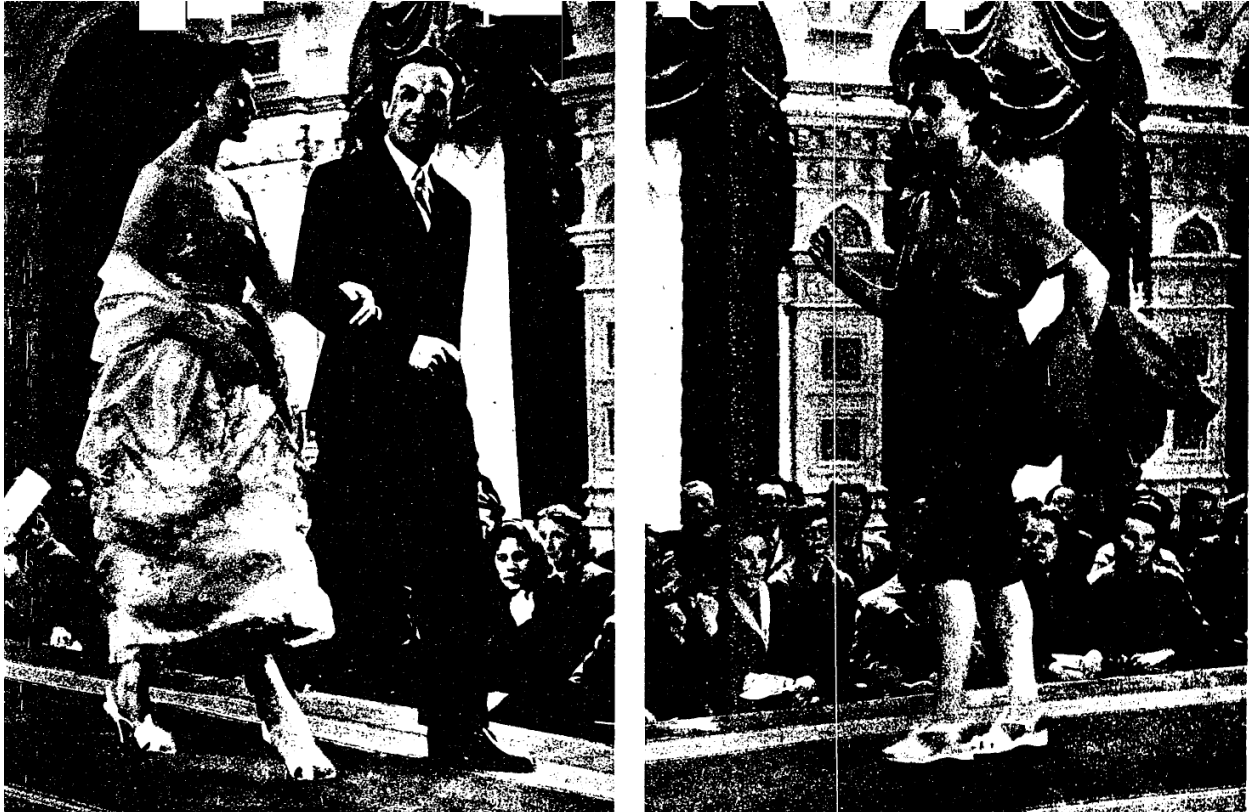
²⁹ Gurova, “The art of dressing,” 8

³⁰ Gronow, *Fashion Meets Socialism*, 136-137

fashion shows for its client base, and even sent its designers abroad to competitively display their collections.³¹ Observing the organization of the first-class departments within GUM, it is evident that the state during the Thaw period was particularly intent on carving out the privileged status for its elite of access to viewing fashion on an international stage.

³¹ Gronow, *Fashion Meets Socialism*, 137-141

Chapter Two
Moscow's Road to Dior, Paved in the Thaw



From a 1957 Moscow fashion show at GUM, a New York Times reporter observed that the designers' clothing emulated that of Dior

Dior and the Postwar Fashion Landscape

Though different on many other fronts, France and the Soviet Union had the commonality of enduring a dismal post-war landscape. Like the Soviet regime, the people of France looked to fashion as a means of revitalization. Christian Dior's "New Look" transformed the fashion scene both in France and abroad with its constant reinventions of the female silhouette, promoting a modern yet gendered mode of dress. Even the American fashion press saw promoting Dior's work as a means of 'rebuilding' Paris after the war.³² Although Dior's

³² Helena C. Ribeiro, "Made in America: Paris, New York, and postwar fashion photography," *The Fabric of Cultures: Fashion, Identity, and Globalization*, ed. E Paulicelli and H. Clark (London, Routledge, 2009), 41-52, 41.

aesthetic was definitely more ultrafeminine than the standard Soviet womenswear production models put forth by the design committees, his clean “New Look” was similar in ways to the “simplicity,” “practicality,” and “modesty” emphasized by Soviet notions of taste for women. One can see why the Soviet regime would find Dior’s work appealing.

In *Poiret, Dior and Schiaparelli: Fashion, Femininity and Modernity*, feminist theorist Ilya Parkins elaborates on the extent to which Dior personally sought to re-define the image of femininity after the Second World War.³³ Women’s clothing in Paris understandably underwent a drastic overhaul during the war; the sumptuous materials to which designers were accustomed were no longer available, replaced by synthetic fabrics and even wood for shoe soles. Dramatic silhouettes were no longer practical either, as riding bicycles and hiding in bomb shelters became commonplace. Dior saw this and designed the 1947 *Corolle* collection (i.e., the New Look), characterized by the cinched waist and full, long skirt. as a reaction. In his own words, “In December 1946, as a result of the war and uniforms, women still looked and dressed like Amazons. But I designed clothes for flower-like women.”³⁴ This was one of the many reasons why the eventual collaboration between the House of Dior and the Soviet regime evoked such a shocked reaction from the press internationally.

The politically reactionary undertone to his ultrafeminine aesthetic was controversial for some contemporary audiences and for historians. After all, French women had just been given the right to vote in 1944, and yet cultural assumptions about the role and status of women in France had hardly changed at all after the war.³⁵ In the midst of this tension, Dior decided to

³³ Ilya Parkins, *Poiret, Dior and Schiaparelli: Fashion, Femininity and Modernity*, London: Berg, 2012, Bloomsbury Fashion Central, 111-146. Sourced from HTML text.

³⁴ Christian Dior, *Dior by Dior*, trans. Antonia Fraser (1957; V&A Publications, 2007), 22–23. Quotation by Parkins

³⁵ Kelly Ricciardi Colvin, *Gender and French Identity after the Second World War, 1944-1954*, (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017)

revive the long skirt, a style which had been historically traditionalist and even idealized by the Vichy regime.³⁶ A vocal section of American women, recognizing the new freedoms in their lives post-war, even demonstrated against him after he brought lengthened hemlines back in style.³⁷ According to a commemorative article in *The Washington Post*, when Dior visited Chicago in 1947 to promote his New Look, women protestors declared: "Mr. Dior, we abhor dresses to the floor!"³⁸ Parkins, however, carefully makes the distinction that although Dior himself was reactionary in his nostalgia for the years of his childhood during the Belle Epoque, his writings about the women who inspired him as an "extension of [him]self [...]" suggest a fluidity of gender identity that is striking given his overt conservatism.³⁹ In this way, the wave in the fashion industry catalyzed by his return to the overt feminine form marks a hint of subversion.

Simultaneously to the volatility the Soviet fashion industry experienced after the war, the Dior craze represented volatility in the Western fashion world as well; in contrast, of course, Dior's volatility was distinctly capitalistic. Although he recognized himself as an artist foremost, he also prided himself in his ability to market his line internationally. In only ten years, until his death in 1957, he managed to turn his brand into a global household name. In his memoir *Dior by Dior*, he discusses writing his own press releases and takes on the role of ambassador of French fashion innovation: "After the long war years of stagnation, I believed that there was a

³⁶ Keith Rathbone, "'Save the Long Skirt': Women, Sports, and Fashion in Third Republic and Vichy France," *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 36, no. 2/3, Jan. 2019, 294–319.

³⁷ Parkins, *Poiret, Dior and Schiaparelli*

³⁸ James McAuley, "How Christian Dior Rescued Paris from its Postwar Misery: 70 Years After His Debut, an Exhibition Argues the Designer's 'New Look' Ushered in a New France," *The Washington Post, ProQuest*, Jul 05, 2017

³⁹ Parkins, *Poiret, Dior and Schiaparelli*

genuine unsatisfied desire abroad for something new in fashion. In order to meet this demand, French couture would have to return to the traditions of great luxury.”⁴⁰

Because he essentially commanded the Western fashion market in this regard, women of all social strata who bought into the aspirational messaging of Dior were not only quick to purchase his strategically licensed fragrances, but also to switch the hemline length they wore at the beck and call of his ever-changing collections.⁴¹ The majority of newspaper articles during Dior’s lifetime implicitly refer to the hemline changes in Dior’s skirts as drastic and radical. Evidently attune to the changes in length, a 1949 *New York Herald Tribune* article about his latest collection reports in the headline, “Skirts 15 Inches Off Ground.”⁴² Another article in *The Manchester Guardian* on *Dior by Dior*’s release, calls him a “celebrated extremist” and noted that “women throughout the length and breadth of Europe and America have been changing the position of their hemlines every year for his sake, whether it pleased them or not.”⁴³ It seemed that only women as prominent as First Lady Mamie Eisenhower in 1953 would dare to reject the “Dior Decree” (per *Newsday*) of the ultra-short sheath skirt.⁴⁴ Dior’s personal fame and market influence was undeniable at that point to anyone in the world who had heard of him. Part of Dior’s appeal to the contemporary audience was the paradox his designs presented. He promoted femininity, an arguably reactionary aesthetic and cultural vision, and yet he also was known for pushing boundaries with his scandalously short hemlines. The temperamentality and controversy of his taste principles was what launched him to the position of one of the top talked-about designers: his clothing provided plenty of fodder for the media.

⁴⁰ Dior, *Dior by Dior* pages 95, 8. Quotation found in Parkins, *Poiret, Dior and Schiaparelli*

⁴¹ Parkins, *Poiret, Dior and Schiaparelli*.

⁴² Lucie Noel, "Christian Dior and Molyneux have Openings: Skirts 15 Inches Off Ground; Dior shows Chemise Dress, Molyneux the Flower Line," *New York Herald Tribune* (1926-1962), Aug 10, 1949.

⁴³ Kay Collier, "Dior On Dior," *The Manchester Guardian* (1901-1959), Apr 12, 1957.

⁴⁴ "First Lady Spurns Dior Decree," *Newsday* (1940-1992), Oct 01, 1953, Nassau ed.

The craze surrounding Dior in the United States in particular was no accident on the part of the American fashion press. It was in direct response to France's efforts at postwar revitalization, that the editors of *Harper's Bazaar* "sent over" renowned fashion photographer Richard Avedon to Paris after the war (in Avedon's own words) to "rebuild" the city by portraying it to an American audience as modern and fashionable rather than war-torn."⁴⁵ The project, in-line with the general Marshall Plan sentiment Americans held towards aiding Europe after the war, involved Avedon shooting American models in French haute couture, in iconic, idyllic Parisian landmarks. It served the dual purpose of 'helping' France by marketing their city to American consumers, and orienting American consumers towards a profitable aesthetic for the magazine. As Helena C. Ribeiro writes in "Made in America: Paris, New York, and Postwar Fashion Photography," "Avedon's work does not sell only Dior and Cardin—it sells Paris itself."⁴⁶ Of course, Avedon's work in *Harper's* also happened to be notably instrumental in selling Dior. The magazine's fashion editor Carmel Snow, one of two leaders of the Avedon project, also happened to be the one to coin the term "New Look" for Dior's *Corolle* collection in the first place. The American fashion market and Dior's sphere of influence were intertwined, which is especially important to note when considering the expansion of Dior's sphere of influence into Moscow during the Cold War.

The Dior Project Commences

Transcending beyond the Soviet Union's general, gradually increasing tolerance of Western fashion in the 1950s, three main factors spurred this state's heightened particular interest in the House of Dior that took off around 1957. The opening of the Soviet Union's

⁴⁵ Ribeiro, "Made in America," 41

⁴⁶ Ribeiro, "Made in America," 42

physical and cultural borders during the Thaw explains all three of these factors. Firstly, the cohort of Soviet designers had a vested interest in Dior, which the government supported in spite of some public disapproval. Secondly, Soviet elites already developed several means of obtaining Western luxury items, such as the black market, and thus increased the demand for French haute couture.⁴⁷ Thirdly, the government considered Dior “the best” couture house in France, and they were seeking ways to publicly assert their own cultural taste in the midst of heightened competition with the capitalist West and a general increase in international exhibitions.

At the forefront of the Soviet designers’ push to study Dior was Nadezhda Lamanova, who founded the Artistic Atelier of Contemporary Dress in 1919. Despite her conceptualization of and public advocacy for “socialist realism” in fashion design, she had her own history of studying fashion in France that seemed the polar opposite of this concept.⁴⁸ Before founding the Artistic Atelier of Contemporary Dress, and before the Revolution of 1917, she designed dresses for the Russian Imperial court, and throughout this time period she went back and forth between Paris and Russia in order to hone her design skills.⁴⁹ Paul Poiret, who held the position that Dior would later hold as the most famous couturier in Paris, admired Lamanova’s designs and wanted her to work with him. Significant to this narrative, Poiret had a reputation as an extravagant, theatrical costume designer, and his couture fashions for the French aristocracy and bourgeoisie to whom he catered echoed these design elements.⁵⁰ Although Lamanova ultimately chose to

⁴⁷ Larissa Zakharova, “Dior in Moscow: A Taste for Luxury in Soviet Fashion Under Khrushchev.” *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc*, edited by David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 2010, 108.

⁴⁸ Jukka Gronow and Sergey Zhuravlev, *Fashion Meets Socialism: Fashion Industry in the Soviet Union after the Second World War*, Vol. 20, Finnish Literature Society, 2015, 45-49.

⁴⁹ Larissa Zakharova, “Dior in Moscow,” 99.

⁵⁰ Nancy J. Troy, *Couture Culture: A Study in Modern Art and Fashion*. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2004, 83-84.

stay in Russia and develop socialist fashion, her drastic departure from this avenue in the past, during her regular trips to Paris, explains the first seed planted for Soviet designers to turn to Dior's designs, which went against every principle in their design theories.

The Soviet government furthermore cultivated this seed rather than suppressing it, because it aligned with their clothing production objectives at the time. Both the government and the Communist Party “commanded designers to extract ‘useful benefit’ from Western clothing design in order to improve the Soviet system of clothing production,” and Dior had a reputation among the Soviet designers as “the best French designer.”⁵¹ Thus, the cohort of Soviet designers made their first state-backed trip to the House of Dior in 1957.⁵² At the same time as they internally reported multiple requests to the government to return to France, however, the Soviet designers censored themselves when it came to publicly sharing their opinions on French designs. Instead, they continued to utilize “politically correct clichés” about Western fashion in the Soviet press, referring to the designs as “bourgeois fashion exaggerations.”⁵³

However much of an effort the Soviet designers made in public to veil their admiration for Christian Dior, it was already evident to the American press by 1957. In an article from that year titled “Moscow Fashions Go Dior and Ivan League,” *New York Times* reporter Nicholas Tikhomiroff opens by noting the striking similarities of Soviet designs recently showcased in a GUM fashion show to designs from “Paris, London and New York, of Christian Dior or even

⁵¹ RGANI (Russian State Archive of Contemporary History), f. 5 (Central Committee *Apparat*), op. 43 (Department of industrial goods for mass consumption), d. 69, l. 83, 89. By way of Larissa Zakharova, “Dior in Moscow,” 101.

⁵² RGAE, f. 9480 (State Committee for science and technology of the USSR Council of Ministers), op. 3, d. 1417 (Correspondence with Ministries, departments and other organizations on questions of missions in France), l. 81; RGANI, f. 5 op. 43 d. 77, l. 1; RGAE, f. 523 op. 1, d. 205. By way of Larissa Zakharova, “Dior in Moscow,” 101. The designers would once again make similar trips to Dior in 1960 and 1965.

⁵³ Larissa Zakharova, “Dior in Moscow,” 102

Brooks Brothers.”⁵⁴ The obvious American bias Tikhomiroff weaves throughout the commentary provides insight into American perceptions not only of typical Soviet clothing, but also of the fashions Dior was known for. The commentary on the GUM show chiefly focuses on the increased amount of skin shown in the Dior-inspired womenswear presentations. While the men in the audience reportedly “gaze intently” at the models, the “drably dressed” women “study the model through different eyes.” In addition to being “gayer, more colorful—more Western” than Soviet fashion, Tikhomiroff writes, the Dior-inspired clothes were less conservative. For example, the “décolleté dress” featured on the runway was “officially recognized in the puritanical Soviet style world for the first time in twenty-five years.” As much as Tikhomiroff enjoys painting Soviet women’s fashion as particularly prudish, however, he also acknowledges that another skin-bearing set on the runway, a romper bottom with a high-backed camisole top, was “also news in America this year.” This perception of Dior’s clothes, and clothing inspired by Dior, as breaking boundaries for womenswear in America in this regard aligns with previous press reactions about Dior’s shorter skirt hemlines. Therefore, although the pieces in this 1957 GUM runway were Dior-inspired and not Dior themselves, they still marked a significant shift in what the government permitted Soviet fashion to look like. Whereas early 1950s Soviet messaging about womenswear promoted modesty as a dictate of taste, the eventual turn to Dior’s provocative fashions as inspiration indicated that the government was comfortable with lessening the conservatism of clothing as a means of asserting themselves competitively on an international stage. This is especially true considering that they allowed American reporters to attend and photograph this show. In line with the previous messaging, the clothes featured here

⁵⁴ Nicholas Tikhomiroff, “Moscow Fashions Go Dior and Ivan League,” *New York Times*, May 26, 1957, SM14

were still feminine, but their new edginess showed the world that Soviet fashion was not as 'backwards' as American reporters like Nicholas Tikhomiroff would like to believe.

Designers and regime figures from across the Soviet Union recognized that the Western press, especially the American press, were scrutinizing their fashion in particular to measure their economic prosperity during the Thaw period. This consciousness accounted for the inevitability of the Soviet government to utilize fashion as a competitive signifier of national strength. Before the nation faced outward in order to compete on a global scale in this regard, it even competed with the satellite states. In the 1957 article "Fashion Designers of the Soviet Bloc Meeting in Moscow: East Germans Critical, Hungarian Good Taste," Max Frankel reported to the *New York Times* on the Eighth International Fashion Congress, which took place in Moscow and included representatives from "the Soviet Union, Rumania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Poland and Bulgaria."⁵⁵ The designs deemed best would be shown outside the closed event, to the public. In the article, Frankel establishes a spectrum of "Communist woman" fashion, with one side closest to Western fashion (and therefore most agreeable) and the other side as the least feminine or least progressive and most alien: "If she lived near the Polish-East German border, her hemline would be where it is in New York; as she moved East, it would drop a bit." This was a common paradigm throughout American reporting of Soviet fashion during the Thaw, but what is notable in this instance is the clear geographical distribution of the paradigm. Unsurprisingly, Frankel explicitly qualifies the adherence to Western style as superior. On East Germany's display, he writes "The Germans maintain it is no longer sinful to recognize quality and merit west of the Elbe and to adapt Western styles to Socialist needs." On the other hand, he

⁵⁵ Max Frankel, "Fashion Designers of the Soviet Bloc Meeting in Moscow: East Germans Critical Hungarian Good Taste," *New York Times*, Jun 11, 1957, 2

writes “Soviet models tended toward the severe.” This negative imagery in the eyes of the press had the potential to be ‘remedied’ via the 1959 Dior show.

Another significant element of the reporting of Frankel and other American journalists at this time was their view of the appearance of the Soviet woman as a metric of the nation’s prosperity. This male gaze especially comes across in Frankel’s 1958 article “Moscow Women Start a Trend Toward Dress Style and Grace.”⁵⁶ In this special to the *Times*, Frankel links not only Soviet women’s fashion choices, but also their body image, to notions of the state’s freedom, as he connects both of these to an increase in consumerism: the subheading reads, “Slimmer Figures Clad In Nylon Stockings And Colorful Fashions Stir Admiration As The Consumer Era Progresses.” Tellingly, Frankel also alludes to Dior in writing that the Soviet Union’s increasing notion that “women ought to be more feminine looking” was a “revolution that goes deeper than style and implications would be short-ranged if dismissed simply as the other nation’s “new look.”⁵⁷ In this regard, he would be correct: when the regime was planning the 1959 Dior show, it was not only their association with a prominent Western fashion house that would make headlines but also the gendered implications of promoting a specifically hyperfeminine fashion house to their public, for all the world to see. Granted, not all international criticism of Soviet fashion, granted, was directed at its women. Reporting from London in 1957, *The Hartford Courant* published an article about the opinions of a Sicilian tailor named Angelo Litrico who made suits “in the Italian mode” for Khrushchev, titled “Nikita's Tailor Says Soviet Lags in Fashions.”⁵⁸ Litrico specifically alleges that “In the development of men’s fashions Russia just stopped in 1910.” Even with jabs like these added to the mounting

⁵⁶ Max Frankel, “Moscow Women Start a Trend Toward Dress Style and Grace,” *New York Times*, Jun 1, 1958, 10.

⁵⁷ Frankel, “Moscow Women Start a Trend Toward Dress Style and Grace,” 10

⁵⁸ “Nikita's Tailor Says Soviet Lags in Fashions.” *The Hartford Courant*, Dec 18, 1957, 26D.

criticism of Soviet fashion, however, the regime knew that they would garner the most international attention by focusing their efforts on women's fashion and playing the femininity game.

Evidently, the ultimate demand for Moscow to invite Dior came from the very top; understandably, Khrushchev, a patron of Western fashion himself as just demonstrated, was fed up with Western reporters lampooning Soviet fashion as a spectator sport. On May 14, 1959 (just one month before the eventual show date), in an article titled "Dior Accepts Soviet Invitation; Moscow Awaits Fashion Show," *Newsday* reported that it was the Premier's "hint" of telling Russian people to dress in Western-style clothes that quickly thereafter prompted the Soviet Trade Bureau to ask the House of Dior to come to Moscow and "stage an all-out Western fashion show."⁵⁹ For all of the years Soviet designers spent traveling back and forth to France on the government's dime and emulating Dior's designs, American journalists made the exchange look like a last-minute, urgent plea. The fact that "the French quickly agreed" comes as no surprise either, knowing that the relationship between the Soviet designers and the House of Dior was already two years in the making since they visited the atelier in 1957. While the American press might have seen this response as not only exciting but shocking, Dior was simply the obvious choice for the Soviet Trade Bureau, considering the trajectory towards feminine fashion that the regime had been crafting for years, and considering how much media attention they knew Dior attracted, especially in the United States.

⁵⁹ "Dior Accepts Soviet Invitation; Moscow Awaits Fashion Show." *Newsday*, May 14, 1959, 56

Chapter Three
Press Reactions to the Christian Dior Show in Moscow



*French Dior models interact with Russian women in the Red Square while onlookers observe.
Photographed by American photojournalist Howard Sochurek, 1959.*

In mid-June 1959, after years of coordinated effort, the Christian Dior fashion show in Moscow became a reality. While 11,000 attendants composed mainly of Soviet designers and Party elites saw the collection walk down the runway in the Palace of the Soviets, a large crowd of Muscovites also gathered in the Red Square and the GUM Department Store to watch three of the models as they were photographed.⁶⁰ In order to present all 120 outfits in the collection, the exhibition lasted one week, with two to three shows per day.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Katharine Petty, “Dior Comes to Moscow: Tracing the Threads of Haute Couture in the Soviet Union,” Pushkin House, London, UK, April 7, 2020.

⁶¹ Djurdja Bartlett, *FashionEast: the spectre that haunted socialism* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2010), ix

Unsurprisingly, the response of Western press outlets to the event was generally positive. After all, they considered the expansion of their cultural sphere of influence within the Soviet Union to be a victory. The most common praise among publications in the United States and Britain centered around the hopes of the increased feminization of Soviet women as a result of the exhibition.⁶² Interestingly, the press within France—one of the two main actors in the cultural exchange—provided a more neutral and critical response to the event.⁶³ Finally, the immediate response of the Russian press was mixed. While some articles expressed acclaim in line with the international commentary,⁶⁴ others were neutral about the show but expressed dissatisfaction with the way some international reports conflated the advent of French fashion in Russia with the embourgeoisement of the Soviet Union.⁶⁵ When viewed collectively, the immediate press reaction following the 1959 show best captures the full spectrum of its impact on both the global perception of the Soviet Union and the Soviet Union's perception of the globe.

Upon the arrival of the Dior fashion show date, a flurry of reports on the event were published in major American newspapers. The most common commentary across the articles was on the style of the clothes, on women's reactions, and on the excessiveness of the clothes. Moreover, the articles made a point to emphasize, especially those leading up to the event, the enthusiasm of the people of Moscow. As early as May 12, the *New York Herald Tribune* began publishing in anticipation of the show, starting with an article called "Moscow to See Dior Fashions, At Reds' Request."⁶⁶ Already in the title, there is an emphasis on the "Reds" initiating

⁶² "Dior Show in Moscow: Diplomats and Wives View New Paris Fashions." *New York Times*, Jun 12, 1959, 2.

⁶³ Michel Tatu, "Le Public Moscovite à La Découverte De Dior," *Le Monde*, June 15, 1959

⁶⁴ T. Troitskaia, "Parizh pokazyvaet mody" (Paris fashion show). *Ogonek* (Moscow) no. 26. Izdatel'stvo "Pravda", June 21, 1959.

⁶⁵ André Würmser, "We Are for the People." *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 18 Jul. 1959, 4.

⁶⁶ "Moscow to See Dior Fashions, at Reds' Request," *New York Herald Tribune*, May 13, 1959, 1.

the cultural exchange, which might have come as a surprise to the audience. Inherent in the article is a secondhand sense of pride that another Western country will be introducing their customs to the Soviet Union, and that the Soviet Union enthusiastically welcomed it. The brief report states that “The invitation was extended by the Soviet Trade Bureau after Prime Minister Nikita S. Khrushchev urged the Russian people to dress more smartly in Western-type clothes.” The quips in the commentary pertaining to the Russian people was also a theme in these American articles—that the manner of dress among the Soviet people was less “smart” beforehand, and that the introduction of Western fashion marked an improvement to their society that warranted promotion by their most influential leader. The article then includes a quotation from Jacques Rouet, a Dior official: “They asked us to show them everything. Lounging clothes, cocktail dresses, evening gowns—everything.” The article closes on this statement, as if to emphasize the sense of urgency the Soviet Trade Bureau had in their desire to see the realm of styles from the House of Dior. To an American audience, it gives the impression that the Soviet Union is about to undergo a major cultural overhaul.

A *Boston Globe* article from May 29 titled, “Five-day Fashion Show by Dior Completely Sold Out—in Moscow,” highlights this exact same sentiment, this time focusing on the reaction of the Russian public.⁶⁷ An emphasis was placed on the popularity, as indicated by the 12,000 tickets already sold and 10,000 people on the waiting list. This article does differ from the others, however, in that it keeps in perspective the policy restrictions that mark the difference between the Soviet Union and capitalist countries on the outside, namely that the women in the audience would not be able to buy any of the dresses actually featured because “The Russian Chamber of Commerce forbids the purchase of any French fashion imports.” These articles served as an

⁶⁷ “Five-day Fashion Show by Dior Completely Sold Out--in Moscow.” *Daily Boston Globe*, May 29, 1959.

intriguing glimpse into what seemed like an entirely different world. Reminders such as these in the press could well have resulted in deepening the perceived rift the American public felt between themselves and the Soviet Union.

When the show opened, another round of articles emerged, this time in more detail as journalists reported directly from the scene in Moscow. One reporter by the name of Tom Lambert for the *New York Herald Tribune* published some particularly colorful commentary.

Commenting on the arrival of the models in Moscow on June 10 in “12 of Dior's Models Create Stir in Moscow on Arrival,” Lambert does not hesitate to provide his own critique of their styling, writing, “The models, some wearing bogus eyelashes, heavy makeup and hats resembling derelict haystacks, created a minor furor as they came off in an airliner.”⁶⁸ This is one of his many comments that place emphasis on the excess and extravagance of the Dior entourage in comparison to their audience.

If the models' clothes today are any indication of what they will be showing for the next week, Moscow's stylists are in for some surprise. Fashions here have improved, according to those acquainted with haute couture, and materials as well. But ladies' styles on downtown Moscow's Hunters Row or Gorky St. would not cause shrieks of envy on Rome's Via Veneto, London's Oxford St. or New York's Fifth Ave.

Again, what appears is the perpetuation of the notion that there is an imperative for Russians to play catch-up to the inherently superior Western European tastemakers. At the same time, Lambert, as an outsider of both France and Russia, expresses his lack of understanding for some of the more bizarre traits of French haute couture. He closes with a description of the models, “Slender as lathes, with their exaggerated willowy walk, they are in sharp contrast to the more generously proportioned women here.” Snarky comments on women's bodies aside, the quip

⁶⁸ Tom Lambert, “12 Of Dior's Models Create Stir in Moscow On Arrival,” *New York Herald Tribune*. June 11, 1959.

provides yet another example of how these reports intended to emphasize the divide between the Soviet Union and the 'West.'

In Lambert's second article that week, "Dior's Show Brings Applause in Moscow: But Russian Women Call Models Too Thin; Gowns, Dresses and Shoes Draw Interest," Lambert continues his commentary on the women, drawing yet another contrast between the tastes of the elite and the workers, between "Soviet officials' wives and daughters" and "Moscow's women." Predictably, the elite women were most drawn to the "frilly, sequined, bouffant gowns and dresses." The women of Moscow, whom Lambert personifies as "Madam Moscow" for comedic effect, showed more interest in the tailoring of the suits and coats in the collection, in addition to being "fascinated" by the thinness of the heels in the shoes (and, presumably, how impractical they were). Additionally, Lambert again referred to "Madam Moscow's" shock at the physique of the models and reported that "'Too thin' was a common remark in the audience." Clearly, much of Lambert's reporting on the event is devoted to the blatant mockery of the audience. In hindsight, one could understand why a group of women historically threatened by famine would question the idealization of thinness; however, Lambert, missing this observation, instead quips on how "few [...] could have worn [the garments] without considerable alterations." On the audience as a whole, Lambert observed that "The background music, including several hillbilly numbers, was underscored by the rattle of programs being used as fans and by the occasional crunch of ice cream cones, which were peddled throughout the crowd." Viewed through a historical lens, Lambert's reporting provides implicit commentary on the growing class divide between the political elite and the remaining proletariat in Russia, manifested in the divergence of taste within this specific demographic, Russian women. However, this observation would

have likely been too tactful to pull an audience's attention toward foreign affairs; a more 'entertaining' story would have to do.

The reportage offered by *The New York Times* demonstrated more restraint but was still quick to highlight the cultural discrepancies apparent at the shows. In their first brief on the subject, "Dior Show in Moscow: Diplomats and Wives View New Paris Fashions," the paper specifically reports on the first, most exclusive showing of the collection at the French Embassy.⁶⁹ In noting that the showing was for "450 women, husbands in tow from Moscow's fifty foreign embassies," the *Times* demonstrates not only the exclusivity but the gendered nature of the event, highlighting the woman as the consumer. This article continues, mentioning "several ballerinas" being among the few patrons allowed to attend the private showing. Within this American article and others, there is much intrigue about the female consumer—an astonishment that such a feminine, allegedly frivolous event could have so much gravity within the Soviet Union. The article discusses "Russian newsmen," on the other hand, who were "puzzled by the lack of "working clothes" in the collection" and mentions that "Working clothes play a large part in Communist bloc fashion shows."

In the *Times*' second article, a longer feature and photo spread called "Dior in Moscow," the paper elaborates on the crowds' excitement over the show as the other American articles did.⁷⁰ It additionally made the cost of the garments a focal point. Referring to one of the dresses shown at the French Embassy, the *Times* notes that the dresses were "valued as high as \$5,000." In the next caption, the article reports the sum of the Christian Dior gowns shown as \$1,500,000 and the sum of the furs as \$100,000. In the same line, the article immediately links the high

⁶⁹ "Dior Show in Moscow: Diplomats and Wives View New Paris Fashions." *New York Times*, Jun 12, 1959, 2.

⁷⁰ "Dior in Moscow," *New York Times*, June 21, 1959, 2.

monetary value and the beauty, including the comment from a Russian girl in the audience, “I never saw anything so beautiful.” In this article, the ‘pull’ comes from the implicit astonishment at luxury, with its high price tag and all, being permitted and encouraged by a government that, in generations prior, sought to eliminate commodity fetishism.

Considering the dynamics of the Cold War and the large role culture began to play in it in the 1950s, it is unsurprising that the American press reported on the fashion show through an ‘American gaze’ inextricably bound to the promotion of consumerism. For the American audience, this further evidence of the Thaw translated to a perceived victory in asserting what they saw as the superiority of luxury and the capitalist spirit. In many ways, the Christian Dior show in Moscow was as much a spectacle for Americans as it was for Russians.

Meanwhile, the French press, having some stake in their finest couture house presenting its work, treated the fashion show as less of a circus than the American press did. Michel Tatu for *Le Monde* wrote “Le Public Moscovite à La Découverte De Dior,” (The Moscow Public to Discover Dior) on June 13, and his observations were concise and frank.⁷¹ The article begins with the remark that “the arrival of the great Parisian haute couture house in Moscow was in itself already an event: it undoubtedly testifies to the thaw that has occurred in Soviet society in recent years.” While he does refer to the astonishing success of the ticket sales, Tatu also gives the disclaimer upfront that even in these circumstances, the audience would be, in effect, “the privileged or the resourceful.” He also differs from the American reporters in revealing that “On the official side, the trend was towards calculated indifference.” Overall, his report gave the impression of a more ambivalent response among audience members of all statuses, and a desire from officials as well as proletarians for more practical clothes to be on display. More interesting

⁷¹ Tatu, “Le Public Moscovite à La Découverte De Dior,” 1959

still, Tatu reports on the House of Dior with a critical eye, quipping that “Never before had a large capitalist firm been seen pleading its case with such a wealth of leaflets and technical documentation,” and that the Soviet press learned through the event that “the Dior house was not making the fabulous profits that a certain press attributes to it.” From the point of view of a participating party in the event, and not an observer like the Americans, the French press had more insight into the dynamics at play and permitted themselves to be critical. Not at the forefront of the Cold War, the level of nuance displayed in the French response indicated a distance from the urge to attack ‘the other side.’ At the same time, Tatu still implies anti-Soviet sentiment by assuming that the House of Dior must be suffering financially if they are appealing to Moscow.

Were the sentiments about the fashion show reported by the international press actually expressed by the people of Russia? Obviously, the people of Russia were by no means a monolithic entity—especially considering the historically controversial nature surrounding the question of the place of fashion in the Soviet Union. On one hand, the crowds outside in the Red Square that day certainly felt anticipation and curiosity. The collection of photographs taken by American photojournalist Howard Sochurek for *LIFE* that day reveal this more reliably than any newspaper, or even the text in the corresponding *LIFE* article, could.⁷² In the photographs of the show itself, the guests do look attentive—after all, they are the target audience for the clothes. The crowds outside of the palace, meanwhile—in the Red Square and at GUM—stop to crane their necks to glance at the three models passing by, some admiring and some perplexed at the featured looks. A June 21, 1959 article from the Moscow-based literary magazine *Ogonek* corroborates that the show warranted excitement: “Soviet women would finally have the chance

⁷² Howard Sochurek, *Dior in Moscow*, *LIFE*, Moscow, 1959.

to see Paris fashion that, for centuries, has dictated new trends to half of the world's population"⁷³ Evidently, both the anticipation and perplexity was in witnessing the cultural phenomenon of Western high fashion that, up until that point, the working population of the Soviet Union had been excluded from witnessing.

On the other hand, notwithstanding the initial commotion, the Dior show certainly was the subject of critical commentary in the Soviet press. A nuanced perspective can be found in the July 18 issue of the Moscow-based cultural and political newspaper *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, in an article titled "We Are for the People" by André Würmser.⁷⁴ The paper refers to Würmser as its "French writer," and in the article he elaborates on his job of reporting French cultural affairs abroad in France.⁷⁵ The main scope of the article is a rebuttal to a handful of his detractors in the Soviet press who claimed that the Soviet Union, in its own aesthetic pursuits toward fashion and architecture, was merely copying Paris, and that this was evidence of the inefficacy of socialism. In response, Würmser argues that socialism in the Soviet Union accomplished *more* than Paris could in these realms, in its short existence of forty-two years, and that the detractors, by focusing on changes like the arrival of Dior clothing and the construction of "beautiful" palaces, ignore the more pragmatic benefits of socialism such as industrialization and education.

But ... isn't this also true: the Soviet Union turned backward Russia into an industrial country, which tomorrow will inevitably become the first in the world: from a state whose overwhelming majority of people were illiterate, the Soviet Union created a country that every year graduates more engineers than the United States.⁷⁶

⁷³ T. Troitskaia, "Parizh pokazyvaet mody" (Paris fashion show), June 21, 1959.

⁷⁴ Würmser, "We Are for the People," 4.

⁷⁵ Stephen Gilman, *The Novel According to Cervantes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). In addition to writing for *Literaturnaia gazeta* while residing in Paris, Würmser also worked as a Marxist literary critic. In the article "We Are for the People," it is evident that Würmser himself still subscribes to a Marxist-Leninist ideal of socialism.

⁷⁶ Würmser, "We Are for the People," 4.

At the same time, Würmser acknowledges that, much like with the universities, the beneficiaries of the movement towards high fashion in the Soviet Union were mainly the elite.

They don't ask who wears Dior's dresses and what women in the USSR dress more gracefully today than in past times. They do not ask for whom Moscow University was built. If they dare to compare the technical indicators of construction in Moscow and Paris, Leningrad and Marseille, Kiev and Lyon, then they do it without thinking about the social status of those who inhabit the house.

In this passage, Würmser responds to the French detractors that their claims of the failure of socialism are inaccurate because they claim to compare the lives of all French people and all Soviet people, when in reality they are making a comparison between the bourgeoisie of France and the political elite of the Soviet Union--especially with regard to "Dior's dresses." Würmser elaborates on his frustration and expresses particular anger in his rebuttal toward Georges Ravon, a journalist for the French newspaper *Le Figaro*. Ravon published an article about the Dior fashion show in Moscow titled "Dress Revenge" which insinuated that the presence of Dior in Moscow indicated the embourgeoisement of the Soviet Union and the eventual demise of socialism. In a constructed, theoretical back-and-forth argument about the "Dress Revenge" article, Würmser writes:

Ravon's little note about Dior's fashion show in Moscow is called "Dress Revenge." Who is the victory over? Over socialism, damn it! Because socialism has an enemy: this is not capitalism, but grace. If Soviet women today are incomparably more elegant than ten years ago, then this clearly proves that socialism is retreating. See how my colleague thinks. What is a bourgeois? This is a gentleman who is well dressed, eats well, lives in good conditions. Thus, if a crowd is well dressed, eats well and lives in good conditions, it means that it has become bourgeois. In 1970, all Soviet citizens will live in comfortable houses; they will work six hours a day; their education will significantly exceed the cultural level of our bachelors [...] Yes, women's coquetry has already reached the point that women are interested in Dior dresses. This means that the Soviet people will lead a "bourgeois" way of life, and "this allows one to see the possibility of reconciliation outside political regimes." Okay, my colleague, but between whom will this reconciliation be achieved?

Würmser's defense reveals a significant amount pertaining to the continued values, forty-two years post-Revolution, of a subset of socialist intellectuals in the Soviet Union. For Würmser, the increasing aesthetic similarities between the Soviet Union and the outside world do not indicate a decline in socialist values, because, from a pragmatic point of view, a crowd that "is well dressed, eats well and lives in good conditions" indicates a success of socialism rather than a return to the bourgeoisie. He resents the notion that any ascension to a high standard of living must indicate a triumph of capitalist values over socialism. He also resents the notion that "grace" and socialism are not compatible. In Würmser's eyes, as long as the advancement of the Soviet Union, aesthetic or otherwise, is in the direction of benefiting the people as opposed to the individual, then socialism has succeeded. His opinions reveal a shift in attitudes prevalent during the Thaw: while he still expresses intense pride in the USSR and takes issue with foreign press questioning its integrity, he also does not see the Dior show or other cultural exchange as in itself a form of Western imperialism or a threat to socialism.

As a component of the article, the reference to the Dior show figures briefly rather than as the focal point. This is, in a way, indicative of the place of the exhibition within the realm of the Soviet press: a noticeable phenomenon, but not of large enough intrigue to warrant much commentary. Similarly, the *Ogonek* article was published in the very last written page of the issue, and *Pravda*, one of the largest Soviet newspapers at the time, had little to comment on other than "that some of the styles were too open and short, and that 'they would not look nice on women who are stout and of short stature.'" Another magazine at the time wrote, of the high heels and narrow skirts featured: "Bourgeois fashion makers come up with such styles that the woman has difficulty walking and must wrap herself around her man."⁷⁷ While some

⁷⁷ Svetlana Smetanina, "The exhibition "Fashion and Socialism: A Fresh View" has opened at the Contemporary History of Russia Museum," *The Moscow News*, no. 18. May 11, 2007, 29. Equally

publications understandably expressed initial aversion to the sudden influx in international fashion, the overall reaction to the Dior fashion show was not overblown in the slightest. On the other hand, it was the international media that made a spectacle of it.

interesting, Smetanina comments, “The year 1959 also marked the time when the Soviet Union officially permitted fashion shows, and the persecution of people in trendy clothes gradually ended (writer Vasily Aksyonov called them the first dissidents because they challenged the system).” A caption reads, “Did fashion play a hand in ending communism?”

Conclusion

Ultimately, the means by which the Soviet government and its fashion industry bureaus rendered the 1959 Christian Dior fashion show in Moscow a significant political event was through its furthering of the gender politics of the 'new Soviet woman,' both as an internal message towards the people of the Soviet Union and as an external message for press outlets of the 'West.'

Internally, the Dior show was an efficient means through which the state could influence the people to share their same enthusiasm for their taste in fashion. State design coalitions such as the Artistic Atelier of Contemporary Dress and the ODMO had cultivated their own ambitious and noteworthy vision of what fashion directly for the working woman could look like, but the production of these prototypes unfortunately never reached the masses. For years, this disconnect caused a rift between the state and the working people as to how important fashion is and what it should look like. Especially important to the state during the 1950s were the new gender standards to uphold of the modest, feminine woman. While agitprop through women's magazines about this image the state intended to promote might slightly coax people, an entire fashion show from an increasingly influential international icon would surely change attitudes.

The Dior show also further highlighted the paradox of the influence of the Soviet Union's political elite on cultural matters, even within a nation that theoretically had no socioeconomic class ideology. Thus, Georg Simmel's argument that fashion is channeled down through the elite still stands when the political elite stands in for an economic elite in a society without notions of class. Researching the history of Soviet fashion in the years leading up to the Dior show revealed much about how material provisions and perks for the Party elite were in many facets more salient during the Thaw, such as the elite's illegal black market fashion imports and legal access

to international fashion designers at GUM through the Atelier of the Individual Sewing of Clothes. The Dior show was another extension of this method of cultural ministry by the state in that it catered foremost to these elite women.

Externally, the Dior show in Moscow permeated many post-World War II and Cold War narratives. Firstly, the show symbolized a continuation of post-World War II recovery for both France and the Soviet Union. For France, their most notable design house of the postwar era functioned as a diplomatic agent of cultural influence with one of the previously most unreachable demographics due to decades of isolation. For the Soviet Union, the invitation of Dior to present a collection marked a turning point in their rebuilding of the fashion industry after the war, as well as a signal of their taste to onlookers such as the United States. This was necessary considering the increased exposure during the Thaw.

The aesthetic and reputation of Christian Dior also matched what the Soviet Union's fashion organizations sought. Dior was one of the most provocative personalities in fashion, a legacy that lived on in his work after his death. His clothes were feminine, yet edgy. Although this aesthetic was inarguably the outcome of Dior's traditionalist, even reactionary philosophy to dressing women, and the edge an outcome of his capitalistic marketing tactics, the principle ultimately mattered less to the Soviet fashion bureaus than the novel aesthetic itself. It was modern, and thus the designers started presenting their own clothes that were feminine yet edgy, inspired by Dior. This was critical messaging to the outside press about the new, modern direction for the Soviet woman during the Khrushchev era. Likewise, when Khrushchev himself requested that the House of Dior show in Moscow, he sent a message not only to the Soviet people, as the press reported, but to the press themselves.

At the same time, when the Soviet government opened up the show to commentary from the international press, they subjected the event and the eventgoers to commentary that was not all positive. The snide attacks from the American press and their gaze on the Soviet woman is yet another form of cultural warfare akin to other historical moments during this period of the Cold War, such as the Kitchen Debate. What distinguished this specific event, and its resulting coverage, were the pointed attacks from the American press pertaining to women's bodies and manner of presentation. Thus, the Dior show's coverage illuminates a particular political discourse of gender within the framework of the Cold War.

Finally, the events leading up to and resulting from the 1959 Christian Dior show in Moscow demonstrate how defensive countries can become of their fashion. For France, Dior was a source of national pride since his rise to fame. For the Soviet Union, the fashion show was yet another political event through which the government hoped to demonstrate its cultural prowess on an international scale. For the United States, the press linked certain modes of dressing (even modes of European origin) so closely to an American way of life that it took pride in France's arrival in Moscow as their own victory, a stamp of influence. Though an unexpected facet of mainstream Cold War discourse, the Dior show in Moscow adds another example of how influential a role fashion can play in political, economic, and social history.

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