

BORDERS OF SOCIALISM  
PRIVATE SPHERES OF SOVIET RUSSIA

EDITED BY  
LEWIS H. SIEGELBAUM

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

### "I KNOW ALL THE SECRETS OF MY NEIGHBORS": THE QUEST FOR PRIVACY IN THE ERA OF THE SEPARATE APARTMENT

Steven E. Harris

#### Introduction

Shortly after Stalin's death in 1953, Soviet state and society embarked upon a mass housing campaign, the main purposes of which were the elimination of severe shortages in housing and the relocation of urban residents from communal housing into single-family separate apartments.<sup>1</sup> Unlike many reforms of Nikita S. Khrushchev's regime, the mass housing campaign was a success and continued past his downfall in 1964. Moving to a newly built separate apartment and creating a new domestic life were the mass phenomena through which most Soviet citizens experienced the "thaw" in state–society relations after Stalin. From 1953 to 1970, state and society built 38,284,000 apartments throughout the Soviet Union in cities and rural areas, and 140,900,000 individuals, or 38 million families, moved into new housing.<sup>2</sup>

The campaign's qualitative effects were a radical transformation of what everyday life had become under socialism. Soon after the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks committed themselves to resolving the "housing question" for the urban lower classes languishing in basements, barracks, and dilapidated tenements.<sup>3</sup> At first, workers forcibly resettled into the single-family apartments of the bourgeoisie and aristocracy. This was the founding act of the communal apartment (*kommunalka*), in which families lived in individual rooms but shared common spaces and facilities with other families.<sup>4</sup> In the 1920s, projects for collectivist living, such as the house-commune, dominated visions for future housing, but were rejected

in the early 1930s.<sup>5</sup> As resources went into industrialization, the state opted for the inexpensive alternatives of barracks, dormitories, and communal apartments.<sup>6</sup> The devastation of cities during World War II deepened extreme shortages in housing.<sup>7</sup> By the 1950s, most residents lived in overcrowded dwellings with few amenities. For the population at large, housing was one of the chief failures of Stalinism.

Khrushchev's mass housing campaign revived the state's commitment to solving the "housing question." But instead of constructing collectivist housing for a socialist society as envisioned in the 1920s, it built the separate apartment. The single-family apartment had been rehabilitated under Stalin, but had been made available only to elites. The wretched conditions and unpopularity of communal housing further turned state and society away from collectivist living projects and toward single-family dwellings. In choosing to make the separate apartment widely available, Khrushchev's regime was responding to popular demand for better living conditions, single-family housing, and greater privacy. It also intended to use the separate apartment to achieve state goals. Popular enthusiasm for improved housing could be channeled into greater mass participation in the regime's overall project of building communism, including housing construction itself. Better living conditions would lead to a healthier and more satisfied workforce, which would result in higher productivity and economic growth. Separate apartments would strengthen the family unit. In turn, the family would take better care of its own housing than communal housing, thereby assisting the state in maintaining the housing stock.<sup>8</sup>

The separate apartment's most immediate, qualitative impact was on the spatial relationship of the public and private in Soviet society. The divide between public and private life had run straight through the communal apartment, producing a conflict-ridden domestic space, which Ekaterina Gerasimova has labeled "public privacy."<sup>9</sup> The separate apartment moved the line between public and private back to the threshold of the home. It introduced privacy on a mass scale in a realm of the everyday, the home, in which little had existed beforehand. How did this change Soviet life?

Some have argued that the separate apartment was part of a larger "destratization" and "privatization" of society after Stalin that afforded urban residents greater autonomy.<sup>10</sup> With private apartments, the state retreated from the domestic realm, permitting people to live a more "normal" life and purchase a greater variety of consumer items.<sup>11</sup> In the long run, the separate apartment transformed the state from a totalitarian into an authoritarian regime. Its "relative domestic freedom" gave root to "seditious thoughts about political and economic freedom, and the freedom of self-expression and creativity."<sup>12</sup> In short, the separate apartment eroded Soviet socialism, making its ultimate collapse possible.

Others have emphasized the state's efforts to keep privacy in check and even use the separate apartment to control society. "Social organizations," such as neighborhood parents' committees, served as a counterbalance to the privacy of a separate apartment.<sup>13</sup> Authentic private life, existing for its own sake and independently of state and society, was effectively eliminated in the 1930s.<sup>14</sup> But rather than revive this autonomous sphere, Khrushchev's regime used the separate apartment, particularly the kitchen, to propel Soviet citizens into modernity and communism through "the irradiation of the home by the Enlightenment values of rationality and science."<sup>15</sup> Women were chiefly responsible for accomplishing these public goals for which the private domain was mobilized.<sup>16</sup> Through new consumer items, such as furniture, the state allowed a resurgent cultural intelligentsia to police this new urban space against "petit-bourgeois" tastes and inculcate "a body of disciplining Modernist norms in the domestic realm."<sup>17</sup> These assessments support the broader claim that the Khrushchev era was ostensibly less liberal than the Stalin era since social control became more thoroughly dispersed and ingrained.<sup>18</sup>

These two sets of arguments appear to be in strict opposition. The first contends that society gained privacy and pushed back against the state's totalitarian reach. The second asserts that the state either compensated for any ground it lost to private life or gained it in ways previously impossible under Stalin. Despite differences in outcome, both arguments share the same assumptions: any gains in private life necessarily came at a cost to the state, and citizens would only want more of it; conversely, any encroachments on private life were necessarily the product of the state's efforts to retrieve or extend power over people's everyday lives.

This essay adopts a different approach. At its most basic level, the privacy afforded by the separate apartment revolved around a person's greater control of space and time within the context of the family and to the exclusion of state and society. Obstacles to such control and efforts to resolve them reveal that in their quest for privacy, residents were far more engaged with state authorities and its discourses than has been recognized. For its part, the state was not always the source of encroachment on its citizens' privacy and worked at times to secure aspects of private life.

Two case studies illustrate these points. The first draws upon letters that working women in Leningrad wrote to the city soviet in 1965, complaining that its decision to delay the start of their workday deprived them of control over their nonwork time. The women assumed that the state would help them regain their lost time, which they saw as a crucial aspect of their private lives, and they drew upon their officially sanctioned and traditional roles as housewives and mothers to make their case. The second example concerns residential noises, which encroached upon residents' control of their private

space, but which the state attempted to resolve through a "war on noise" (*bor'ba s shumom*) from the late 1950s through the early 1970s. To adapt Gerasimova's terminology, the separate apartment promised to separate the "public" from "privacy" in the home. But getting there, as our two case studies show, was a process that kept state and society in constant dialogue and even cooperation.

### Working Women's Control Over Time

Moving to the separate apartment was an emboldening experience, providing residents with a greater sense of control over their everyday lives. They were now liberated from communal apartment neighbors, their ineliminable conflicts, and the written and unwritten rules that structured people's time and use of shared spaces. As a Muscovite housewife explained in *Izvestiia* in 1956, living in a separate apartment afforded her family "mental tranquility." She added, "I, for example, can arrange my day, my many tasks by my own discretion. It's not necessary to tune yourself to somebody else's order and frequently to somebody else's mood, like in the communal apartment where we lived previously."<sup>19</sup>

While a separate apartment afforded residents a greater sense of control over their domestic lives, underdeveloped neighborhoods on the outskirts of town ensured that everyday life would remain difficult. Lagging behind housing construction, insufficient public transportation made the commute to work and home time-consuming and unpleasant.<sup>20</sup> Attempts by municipal authorities to manage public transport resulted in further disruptions. The case that interests us here reveals how decisions in urban management could upset, albeit unintentionally, the delicate balance between a person's work and domestic life.

In 1965, the Leningrad city soviet received complaints, mostly from women, about its decision in January to delay the beginning of the workday for many research and scientific institutions, and planning and construction offices. In response to a letter from approximately 80 employees, both men and women, of the institute "Giprominmetallorud," originally sent to *Leningradskaiia pravda* in April, the city soviet justified the new policy as a way to relieve congestion on public transport. Instead of starting work at 8:30 a.m. to 9:00 a.m., employees of the designated institutions would arrive at 9:15 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. The new policy expected an estimated 300,000 employees to start work at this later time.<sup>21</sup> (This represented at most 9 percent of the city's population.<sup>22</sup>) The schedule change violated a central feature of private life, control over one's time. With their daily routines already spread out between work and home, women were bound to be affected in particular.

The new policy had its strongest impact at the end of the workday. In their letter, the employees of "Giprominmetallorud" questioned the city's attempt to pitch the reform in the state's paternalistic discourse of "care for the people." Attempts to increase public transport did signify "a good example of the care for Leningraders' needs." But the decision on the workday schedule shift, they charged, "can in no way be understood as care for the people." They explained, "Every minute of time in the evening after work weighs like gold for women. Is it possible that high-placed organizations do not know this? Stores, preparing meals, the wash, cleaning up the apartment, children—but you see some basic rest is desired, not to speak of cultured rest." The employees made their case for protecting women's nonwork time by appealing to the public discourse on their chief role in social reproduction.<sup>23</sup> "Schools and social organizations talk a lot about the role and responsibility of parents in raising children," they asserted. Yet the new policy prevented women from fulfilling this role. "But where does one get time for this, when the mother has a double working day at work and at home[?]. Where is the care for the woman, the mother, the wife here?"<sup>24</sup>

The policy also conflicted with everyone's desire to get out of the polluted city after work, enjoy rented dachas, and "breathe fresh air." While the employees linked a woman's claim to her nonwork time to the cause of social reproduction, they expressed the same claim for all residents as an individual's exclusive right to nonwork time. "Why draw out the workday, especially in the approaching summer period, when every free minute spent outside the city is only for a person's benefit, or is this also included in the care for a person's well-being?" The employees' sarcasm about the state's paternalistic rhetoric of "care for the people" ended in open ridicule. Transport problems would only worsen with more mass housing and the city's consequent territorial growth. With the workday shift, city officials had taken "the 'easiest' path" to resolving the problem by "subordinating workers' interests in how they live and rest to transport congestion." They ended their complaint, "So where is the continuously declared care for the person?"<sup>25</sup>

In a letter to the city soviet chairman in the fall of 1965, 127 employees of an office in the State Forestry Committee emphasized that the schedule shift negatively affected women, who comprised 70 percent (400 persons) of their workforce. Such effects were particularly felt in new housing estates. "It will be especially difficult for women who have received apartments in new districts, such as Pionnna station, Dachnoc and others, where one has to get to by train." The employees sarcastically pointed out that "the splendid measure of our government on shortening the length of the workday from eight to seven hours cancels itself out, since we will end work now, as we have done before, at 5 p.m. and get home at 7 p.m. (taking into account

stopping off at stores to obtain food).<sup>26</sup> By the time housework was done, there was "no free time for helping children with homework, not to speak of going to the theater, the movies, concerts and the like."<sup>27</sup>

While men continued to sign such letters, women began writing them independently of their male colleagues, as evidenced by a switch to the first person plural when discussing how the policy affected women. In a letter to Leonid Brezhnev and the Leningrad city soviet chairman, received in September, employees of Giprottranssignal'svaz' explained that working mothers began their day at 6 a.m. and took smaller children to day care by 8 a.m. and older children to school by 8:30 a.m. Stores opened at 9 a.m., but the extra time gained from beginning the workday later was not enough to shift some housework to the morning. The schedule change reduced the amount of time they could spend with their children later in the day. Children arrived home at 2 p.m. and remained alone for the afternoon. "[C]oming home at 7 o'clock in the evening, we must go to the store, prepare supper, feed [our families], do the laundry and still spend some time with the children, but they must already go to sleep at 9pm." With less time in the evening, but with the same amount of housework, women had less time for rest. The schedule change also prevented women in communal apartments in particular from shifting housework to the morning.<sup>28</sup> The unstated reason was that one's use of the bathroom and kitchen was already restricted on account of having to share these facilities with neighbors.<sup>29</sup>

The more women realized that the schedule shift affected them in particular, the more forcefully they represented it as such. In October, employees of an unnamed workplace wrote to Kosygin, Brezhnev, *Pravda*, and *Izvestia* to complain that the schedule shift was "undemocratic" because "it worsened our life conditions for the sake of the Leningrad city soviet's completely unjustified hopes of improving transport." Use of the first person plural indicated that women had written this letter. They explained that "women are completely deprived of the possibility to rest since we shorten our little crumb of free time coming home late in the evening." Since protecting free time on its own merits was not a strong enough argument, the women drew upon prescribed roles in social reproduction and represented it as work. "We value and guard our work time, and we want our popular authorities likewise to treat the work time of a toiling woman cautiously for whom the working day continues at home."<sup>30</sup> If their male readers could see women's housework as real work, they would have to protect their free time.

The changes in women's thinking were best reflected in their decision to write and sign their letters independently of men. In November 1965, over 30 employees sent a letter signed, "Women of Leningiprochtrans," to the city soviet chairman. Suggesting that their earlier letters included male

signatories, they wrote, "This time women-mothers alone, who have ended up in a sad situation, turn to you." The schedule shift had increased congestion on public transport. "If before we more or less calmly used transport, now we gasp for air, hang on the footboards, they push us out and our coat buttons are torn off, [we're] exhausted, angry, with a spoilt mood. But then the entire working day lies ahead." These women backtracked several bus stops on foot just to get on a bus. "But this means that it is necessary to leave home even earlier. And all of this is because of the shift of the start of the work day to one time in many institutions."<sup>31</sup>

These women claimed that schedules at some workplaces had been staggered in the past and that the new policy had actually synchronized schedules. With more women in stores after work at the same time, shopping now lasted two to three hours instead of one to one and a half. Time was in extreme shortage and hence very valuable to women. They noted, "But indeed every 15 minutes plays a colossal role in the household cares of a woman." Echoing previous letters, these women bolstered their claim for recuperating control over lost time by appealing to the public discourse that mandated their central role as mothers and housewives in social reproduction. The schedule shift had upset "the normal evening order of the family and in particular of children." They continued, "We would like to pose still this question: exactly what time in a day is allotted to us for the upbringing of children, for our personal leisure?" This appeal to leisure, while not as frequently articulated as appeals to women's role in social reproduction, also drew upon an official discourse that promoted and guided increased time for leisure toward socially beneficial activities.<sup>32</sup> This appeal underlined what was at stake for these women: their ability to determine the structure of their daily lives outside of work. They ended their letter in the most direct terms possible: "We need a lengthened evening. Return the former hours of the start of work."<sup>33</sup>

The workday schedule shift made a working woman's day, already stretched between her public life at work and private life at home, even more difficult. Yet the women in Leningrad exploited, rather than criticized, the woman's "double working day" in making their case. They wrote their letters as collectives based in their workplaces, but discussed issues that primarily deal with their ability to function fully as mothers and wives at home after work. In their minds, manipulating these interconnections in a working woman's public and private life, and the public discourses on women's social roles and leisure in order to achieve a private gain—control over one's nonwork time—made perfect sense. Public discourses could be used to secure private gains in a complementary fashion that benefited both the public cause of social reproduction and the private lives of women. State authorities, according to these women, should have no problem seeing the logic of their argument.

But in writing their letters, the women also reproduced, rather than challenged, their "double working day." They justified their demands by explaining that they could best raise their children and do the housework under the old work schedules. This argument limited what they could do and what they could say as they pursued their goal of securing control over nonwork time. If they abandoned their jobs, they would have never written their letters. If they called for a reorganization of the division of domestic labor in order to adapt to the schedule shift, they would have had no argument. An alternative argument—that they should regain the lost time for themselves—was only rarely advanced, although one suspects that this was in fact their main goal.

While their decision resulted in a breach of private life, city leaders had not been motivated to shift the workday schedules in order to regain control over their citizens' private lives in the era of the separate apartment. The women's own assessment of the reasons for the city's decision pointed to the mundane and the callous. As mass housing boomed and Leningrad grew larger, the city soviet faced a mass transit crisis that it could solve on the cheap by rearranging 300,000 people's daily lives, not to mention those of their families. Complete disregard for what this might mean to women, as well as those eager to leave work for their dachas, most likely helped make this decision possible. The Soviet state did not need an ideological aversion to private life in order to violate it; mismanagement in urban planning could exact sufficient damage. Moreover, if the intended recipients of the letters, apparently all men, actually read them, they would have heard what appeared to be women's tacit approval of their "double working day." Little wonder, therefore, that the women's male colleagues signed these letters.

What were the outcomes of this story? The letters of rejection the city soviet sent to the women strongly suggest that city leaders never amended their decision to meet the women's demands.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, this episode made working women more aware of themselves as a social group particularly susceptible to losing out on major benefits of the separate apartment. This ran counter to an official goal of mass housing: improving women's daily lives with the rationally designed kitchen equipped with modern appliances that would reduce their time spent on housework.<sup>35</sup> The women's growing realization that the repercussions of the schedule shift were primarily a working women's issue was evident in how their letters changed over the course of 1965. Initially, both women and men signed the letters in which women were discussed in the third person plural. Authors then wrote about women in the first person plural even as men continued to sign the letters. Later, signatories identified themselves exclusively as women and wrote about their experiences in the first person plural. This evolution in group consciousness appears when one reads the letters in their chronological

order. Moreover, all of the letters examined here were written by employees from different workplaces. This suggests that working women throughout Leningrad affected by the policy, not only those who wrote the letters discussed here, experienced this process of raised consciousness and group solidarity.

### The War on Noise

While the women in Leningrad fought to control their nonwork time, others sought to maintain control over the exclusive, private space for the family afforded by the separate apartment. Gaining full control over previously communal spaces (the kitchen, bathroom, toilet, and corridor), furnishing them, and stocking them with household objects were new opportunities a family enjoyed in moving from the communal to the separate apartment. Mixed with this experience were the separate apartment's tiny dimensions, badly developed layout, construction defects, and dysfunctional modern amenities.<sup>36</sup> Noise and the lack of proper sound proofing were also major problems.

Hearing and being heard by one's neighbors had violated one's privacy in the communal apartment.<sup>37</sup> The separate apartment promised, in contrast, the complete eradication of this problem, yet always seemed to fall short. One major reason was the quality of new housing architecture and construction. In an article for *Izvestia* on new housing in Moscow in 1955, an architect and an engineer noted that sound problems persisted in new apartments, despite recent efforts to use better building materials. "The penetration of walls that divide apartments and partitions between rooms by sound has become relatively low," they wrote. "Yet there isn't complete isolation from neighbors on other floors."<sup>38</sup>

In complaints about new housing, residents typically represented the move to the separate apartment as a two-step process: a period of happiness, filled with the promise of creating a new domestic world, followed by intense frustration in dealing with the construction and design defects of new apartments and neighborhoods.<sup>39</sup> In a letter to architects at the 1954 All-Union Meeting of Constructors, a Muscovite party member, Ganicheva, wrote, "In 1951 I encountered great happiness—they issued a housing permit for a small separate apartment. My gratitude is great." But soon troubles began and noise was no exception. Worried that her neighbors might hear her and vice versa, Ganicheva explained that one had to talk quietly and concluded, "The fact that one can hear others is insulting." She pleaded with architects and constructors: "Don't spoil the happiness of 'new residents' by repeating old mistakes!"<sup>40</sup>

Residents also confronted architects and housing officials in person. At a meeting of residents and architects in Leningrad in 1954, one individual



explained, "What's bad is that the noise penetration of partitions is high. People talk in a whisper, but everything can be heard."<sup>41</sup> Some complained about noise from apartments that could be heard while one was in the public spaces of an apartment building. At a meeting of residents and housing officials in Leningrad's Vyborg district in 1962, one resident complained, "When you go along the stairs, the impression is such that it's a nut house—all around voices, laughter, music, shouts. Everything can be heard on the stairs."<sup>42</sup>

In a review of new housing in Leningrad in 1963, reporters from *Leningradskaia prada* found that for one resident "there is no peace from the noise which comes through the walls, the floor, and the ceiling—even the tick-tock of his neighbors' clocks can be heard."<sup>43</sup> In 1969, *Vecherniaia Moskva* asked its readership to respond to questions about their apartments and how to improve housing design and construction. Letters were published under the rubric, "A Moscow Apartment. How Should It Be?" One Muscovite commented that noise problems were the "Achilles' heel of our apartment houses." He continued wryly, "I'll tell you a secret: I know all the secrets of my neighbors. Not only are conversations audible, but even the flip of switches. Architects helped out here: the ventilation shafts of kitchens and bathroom-toilet units reliably unite apartments."<sup>44</sup>

In response to these problems, the state conducted a "war on noise," which enlisted medical and public health professionals, and acoustics engineers, to study urban noises and their ill effects in the home, the workplace, and the street. Combined with government decrees, their recommendations were to be used in industry, urban planning, and housing. The campaign illustrated the state's commitment to resolving a problem that plagued mass housing and encroached upon people's enjoyment of their private space. The "war on noise" also enabled its publicists to critique man's relationship to nature and his urban habitat, as well as Soviet industrialization and the promise of transforming man.

Technical manuals on noise and sound proofing predated the mass housing campaign, but were usually intended for engineers and provided little on the historical and cultural aspects of battling noise.<sup>45</sup> An exception was Aleksandr Marzeev's 1951 guide to municipal hygiene, *Kommunal'naiia gigiena*, in which he noted that noise had existed since antiquity, but that the twentieth century had turned it into a threat to an individual's health and endangered the national economy.<sup>46</sup> Representing the twentieth century as a break from the past was nothing new, but in the Soviet context it was usually associated with the indisputably positive outcomes of the Revolution and industrialization.<sup>47</sup> When refracted through the lens of noise, however, the twentieth century's break from the past had negative undertones. Marzeev only hinted at this, but later publicists of the "war on noise" would expand upon it.

Marzeev's categorization of noises reflected a division of the city into public and private spaces. He identified three kinds of noises: street noises, noises in the home, and industrial noises. In addition to damage or loss of hearing, Marzeev was interested in how noise impacted "the nervous system and the psychology of the individual." In the communal apartment, he identified three ways in which noise adversely affected an individual: "a) it irritates, riles, and traumatizes the nervous system; b) it infringes upon normal rest, tranquility, and sleep; c) it lowers the ability to work and the productivity of work, particularly mental labor."<sup>48</sup> In other words, noise affected the individual on three levels: his person, his ability to enjoy his domestic space, and his ability to work.

The state's decision to mount a broader campaign against urban noise coincided with the mass housing campaign in the late 1950s and expanded in the 1960s and 1970s as sound proofing deficiencies in mass housing became more widely apparent. Much of the literature continued to be written by and for health professionals and engineers.<sup>49</sup> A permanent Commission on the War on Noise was established in 1958 under the Main State Sanitation Inspectorate of the USSR.<sup>50</sup> Legislation on public health and changes in housing construction standards were also implemented.<sup>51</sup> Proponents of the "war on noise" praised both capitalist and socialist countries for combating noise and coordinating their work through international bodies such as the International Association on Noise Control, established in 1959, and the ISO (International Organization for Standardization).<sup>52</sup>

Bulgaria's campaign for noise control shows that socialist countries shared similar approaches to and interpretations of the problem. The sounds of industry in Bulgaria were initially praised in the 1940s and 1950s as the country modernized, but were later reinterpreted as noises that adversely affected public health and productivity. The categorization of noises reflected a division of urban spaces "along a public-private axis" similar to Marzeev's. Improvements in housing design and construction were officially presented as ways to increase labor productivity by ensuring that residents could be fully rested for the next workday and engage in socially beneficial leisure. While never presented as an end in itself, greater privacy in the home was the practical effect of such measures. Furthermore, the Bulgarian campaign against noise allowed state officials, writers of fiction, and urban residents to explore and secure aspects of a quiet, private life that approximated "the classic bourgeois notion of privacy." Battling excessive noise in the Bulgarian home became part of broader efforts at defining proper social conduct and cultural mores.<sup>53</sup>

Attention to such social and cultural aspects of urban noise likewise characterized the "war on noise" in the Soviet Union. In his 1965 book *The War on Noise* Mikhail Cheskin chided those who failed to see the

dangers of noise and the importance of doing something about it. He was most critical of urban residents, "mostly recent arrivals to the city, [who] even feel some kind of satisfaction and happiness from noise, seeing in it some sort of sign of civilization and even culture."<sup>54</sup> In his 1971 book *In Search of Silence* Vladimir Chudnov expressed disdain for those "who unceremoniously and scornfully treat the rules of the socialist community and the culture of sound, and the peace and health of their neighbors in apartments and houses." Soviet citizens were to embrace a regime of tranquility. Naturally, the exemplary, quiet citizen was Lenin, who "tried (during the years of emigration) not to bother the neighbors in his apartment and always walked about his room on tip-toes." Chudnov asserted, "The war on noise is the display of respect to those around us, and normal, healthy, mutual relations between people at home and at work."<sup>55</sup>

To underline the seriousness of the situation, some made exaggerated claims about the detrimental effects of noise. Cheskin grimly explained, "One can kill a man with sound." He claimed that the guilty sometimes had been executed in the Middle Ages by being placed directly under ringing bells, the sound of which eventually killed the person. Jumping to the present, he warned that supersonic airplanes flying too close to the ground could shatter windows in houses.<sup>56</sup> Chudnov asserted that ten individuals in the United States had been paid to take part in a fateful experiment on the effects of a supersonic plane's noise. "The plane flew at a height of 10–12 meters over the heads of these unfortunates. As a result of the noise all 10 individuals were killed."<sup>57</sup>

Cheskin attributed several more social and medical ills to modern urban noises. He claimed that young mothers could suffer such stress and lack of sleep that their breast milk would turn bad. In fact, noise appeared to affect women more than men. Cheskin claimed that a study in England had found that noise created nervous disorders in a third of women and a fourth of men. More frightening was the irrational and aggressive behavior that noise unleashed in animals and humans. Some animals had killed their newborns in a delirium caused by noise, while other animals had even been known to commit suicide.<sup>58</sup> According to Chudnov, in 1968 the noise of four youths loitering outside an apartment building in the Bronx drove one resident to dispose of one of them with a gun. "The murderer explained to the police that he had lost his self-control because the children were making noise and prevented him from falling asleep."<sup>59</sup>

Cheskin also claimed that modern urban noise reduced life expectancy by eight to twelve years. Noise was a leading factor in various forms of cancer and children could go blind or develop a sturter after a sudden burst of noise. Noise adversely affected one's cardiovascular system, led to nightmares if heard during sleep, caused various mental illnesses, and made

children irritable and unwilling to eat. Cheskin also cited its role in causing auto deaths. He made the hyperbolic claim that 38 million people had died in the United States in auto wrecks in 1957 alone (as opposed to 24 million dead from infectious diseases), and that noise had been a major factor in many of these accidents.<sup>60</sup> In a 1972 pamphlet, Chudnov similarly expressed concern about the link to nervous disorders and sleep deprivation. "In West Germany," he lamented, "they annually consume half a billion portions of sleep-inducing remedies or, as they call them, 'tranquility pills' or 'the happy pill,' for a total of 75 million marks."<sup>61</sup>

The mass housing campaign was one of the main reasons that concern about noise was broadened into a larger "war on noise" in the 1960s and 1970s. In a survey of 975 Muscovites published in 1964, it was residents of new housing who complained the most about noises coming from within their own buildings such as music, conversations, the elevator, and the garbage chute.<sup>62</sup> After praising the great number of people who had received new apartments, Cheskin wrote, "it is now time to move from quantitative achievements to qualitative ones. The penetration of noise in new houses has become the talk of the town; moreover, it is not possible to eradicate this problem after a building has been constructed."<sup>63</sup> Chudnov noted the new consumer items of the home that created excessive noises. In addition to sewing machines, vacuum cleaners, washing machines, refrigerators, and alarm clocks, he explained that even electric razors created too much noise, reaching the decibel levels of a truck or autobus.<sup>64</sup>

Industry and technology had caused noise pollution in the home and the city, but publicists of the "war on noise" were confident that science and technological progress would solve the problem. "Is man capable of putting a stop to the invasion of noise and decrease its influence?" Chudnov wondered. "Science, practice, and experience answer this question in the affirmative."<sup>65</sup> He reported that new models for refrigerators, sewing machines, and washing machines were being developed that reduced their previous noise levels. Doorbells were designed to sound a melody instead of ringing. Even alarm clocks would be transformed into a system of flashing lights based on the green, yellow, and red lights of a stop light.<sup>66</sup>

Yet Cheskin and Chudnov also used the "war on noise" to articulate anxieties about urbanity and the technological transformation of domestic life in the twentieth century. According to Cheskin, man "had grown accustomed over millions of years of evolution to a background of optimal noise—the varied and unobtrusive sounds of nature." The modern world, in contrast, had fundamentally broken man's equilibrium with the natural world. Cheskin lamented, "But here unnatural sounds invade the animal and plant world—sounds which a million years of evolution had not known."<sup>67</sup> Even the belief in science and technology as the solution came

under doubt. In Cheskin's book, *The Invisible Enemy*, an acoustics academician considered why architects of the present were incapable of maintaining the high standards of sound proofing achieved in antiquity. "Unfortunately, at this very time, when constructors and architects are armed, as it is said, 'to the teeth' with the physical and mathematical laws of acoustics, buildings are often constructed with poor sound proofing."<sup>68</sup>

Cheskin chastised those who foolishly believed that "the human organism, having adapted itself over the course of thousands of years to gradual changes in the conditions of the outer environment, will adapt itself to noise." He found such faith in nature's ability "to develop defensive powers in man" to be "theoretical" at best and potentially disastrous at worst. "Practically speaking, mankind risks having to pay millions of lives for such an adaptation." In contrast to past human evolution, contemporary noises were introduced so rapidly that nature simply had no time to create the necessary defenses.<sup>69</sup> While focused on the issue of noise, his analysis raised criticism of two ideas central to Soviet ideology: first, that man could and should be transformed by simply changing his environment;<sup>70</sup> and second, that rapid industrialization had been necessary, despite the heavy costs in human suffering.<sup>71</sup>

If noise pollution was a major symptom of the larger problems of industrialization, was there a solution? In his book, Chudnov provided partial answers. The separate apartment—when correctly designed and constructed, and inhabited by civil and quiet residents—was one urban space that afforded the urban dweller an escape from the city and its noises. Yet Chudnov's sense of a person's private space reached beyond the home. A person should be able to find parks and other places in the city where he could rest in absolute quiet and solitude. Lest there be any doubts, Chudnov explained that this did not run counter to socialist values. "One can hardly speak in the given instance about an unhealthy individualism, the opposition of oneself to the collective, a separation from society. The wish to be in silence, to be alone with nature is a person's natural tendency and right."<sup>72</sup>

### Conclusion

Massive campaigns that mobilized human and material resources for a greater cause were nothing new when Khrushchev set about building the separate apartment. Collectivization, industrialization, terror, and war were the defining mass campaigns of the Stalin era. What was different about mass housing? This was the first time that the Soviet state had conducted a campaign mobilizing enormous human and material resources that enjoyed the nearly unanimous support of its citizenry and, simultaneously, did not

result in the massive destruction of human life. The state mobilized the resources, people received separate apartments, and nobody got killed. Calling a campaign against poor sound proofing a "war on noise" underscored, in a sometimes comical way, how much times had changed.

Notwithstanding the absence of high costs in human life, the mass housing campaign was a quintessentially Soviet campaign: a systemic solution to a systemic problem. But it produced unintended consequences such as mass transit crises and noise pollution, and rising expectations among urban residents for better apartments, better neighborhoods, and more furniture.<sup>73</sup> State authorities responded with more systemic solutions, leading to yet more unintended consequences. In the case of the mass transit crisis in Leningrad, the city soviet's solution inadvertently deprived many working women of control over their nonwork time. In the case of noise, the state mounted a campaign to secure residents' control over their private space. As this essay has shown, this basic aspect of private life—control over time and space—was something that urban residents and sometimes state authorities worked to secure.

This essay has also explored the outcomes of these efforts to secure private life. As far as we know, the women in Leningrad did not convince the city to amend its decision. Yet their experience raised their awareness of themselves as the social group most likely to lose major benefits of the separate apartment and sharpened their ability to represent a flawed urban planning policy as a working women's issue. The "war on noise" promised actual improvements in housing construction and urban planning. Some of its publicists used the campaign to articulate anxieties about urban life and industrialization. Their reflections even suggested that transforming man through his environment might be dangerous, even undesirable, and that a reconciliation of modern man to nature was in order. In exposing the limitations of mass housing, the women of Leningrad and the publicists of the "war on noise" cast doubt on the feasibility of such modern systemic projects.

### Notes

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2. *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1959 godu* (Moscow: Statistika, 1960), 568. *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1967 g.* (Moscow: Statistika, 1968), 677, 681. *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1974 g.* (Moscow: Statistika, 1975), 581, 585. The number of families was calculated by using the average family size in 1959, 3.7 persons. See G. M. Maksimov, ed., *Vsotziznnaia perepis' naselennia 1970 goda* (Moscow: Statistika, 1976), 262.
3. Nikolai Bukharin and Evgenii Preobrazhenskii, *Azbyuka kommunizma* (Gomef: Gos. izd-vo, 1921), 273–276, 315–316.
4. On the origins of the communal apartment and its history through the 1930s, see Hubertus E. Jahn, "The Housing Revolution in Petrograd, 1917–1920," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 38 (1990), 212–227; Natalia B. Lehina, *Posledniiia zhizn' sovetskogo goroda: Normy i anomalii, 1920–1930 gody* (St. Petersburg: Zhurnal "Neva," 1999), 178–204. For analyses of communal apartment life, see Ekaterina Gerasimova, "Sovetskaiia kommunal'naia kvartira kak sotsial'nyi institut: Istoriiko-sotsiologicheski analiz," Candidate dissertation, European University in St. Petersburg, 2000; Iliia Utekhin, *Ocherki kommunalnogo bytia* (Moscow: O. G. I., 2001); Ekaterina Gerasimova, "Public Privacy in the Soviet Communal Apartment," in *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*, ed. David Crowley and Susan E. Reid (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 207–230.
5. Frederick Starr, "Visionary Town Planning during the Cultural Revolution," in *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928–1931*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 207–240.
6. Stephen Kodkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 157–197.
7. Harris, "Moving to the Separate Apartment," 42–49.
8. These observations on the Khrushchev regime's decision to embark on the mass housing campaign are based upon the research and writing of my larger study, Harris, "Moving to the Separate Apartment."
9. Gerasimova, "Public Privacy."
10. Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People: Changing Values in Post-Stalin Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3–14, 181–182.
11. Natalia B. Lehina and Aleksandr N. Chisticov, *Obypatel' i reformy: Kartiny pousebnoi zhizni gorozhan v gody nepa i khrushchevskogo desiatil'ia* (St. Petersburg: Dmitri Bulanin, 2003), 162–194.
12. Viktor A. Krasil'shchikov, *Vdognoku za poshedbin nekom: Razvitiie Rossii v XX veke s tochki zreniia mirovykh modernizatsii* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1998), 138–139.
13. Alfred John DiMaio, Jr., *Soviet Urban Housing: Problems and Policies* (New York: Praeger, 1974), 164–172, 202–203.
14. Oleg Kharkhordin, "Reveal and Dissimulate: A Genealogy of Private Life in Soviet Russia," in *Public and Private in Thought and Practice: Perspectives on a Grand Dichotomy*, ed. Jeff Weintraub and Krishan Kumar (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 333–363.
15. Susan E. Reid, "The Khrushchev Kitchen: Domesticating the Scientific-Technological Revolution," *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, no. 2 (2005), 289–316.
16. Susan E. Reid, "Women in the Home," in *Women in the Khrushchev Era*, ed. Melanie Ilic, Susan E. Reid, and Lynne Attwood (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 149–176.
17. Victor Buchli, "Khrushchev, Modernism, and the Fight against *Petit-bourgeois* Consciousness in the Soviet Home," *Journal of Design History* 10, no. 2 (1997), 161–176.
18. Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 279–354.
19. A. Peremyslov, "Kvartira v novom dome," *Izvestiia*, December 27, 1956, 2.
20. Harris, "Moving to the Separate Apartment," 393–466.
21. Tsentralfnyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Sankt-Peterburga (TsGA SPb), f. 7384, op. 42, d. 1001, ll. 2–5.
22. This percentage is based on the assumption that all employees lived in the city and none in the oblast. The city's population was 3,218,000 on January 1, 1964, and 3,261,000 on January 1, 1966. *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1963 godu* (Moscow: Statistika, 1965), 22; *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1965 g.* (Moscow: Statistika, 1966), 34.
23. On women's roles in production and social reproduction as they developed in the West and the Soviet Union, see Tatiana Ju. Zhurhenko, "Social Reproduction as a Problem in Feminist Theory," *Russian Studies in History* 40, no. 3 (2001–2002), 70–90.
24. TsGA SPb, f. 7384, op. 42, d. 1001, ll. 2–4.
25. TsGA SPb, f. 7384, op. 42, d. 1001, l. 3.
26. The letter writers were alluding to a major labor reform of the Khrushchev period: reduction of the workday to seven hours. See Mary McAuley, *Labour Disputes in Soviet Russia, 1957–1965* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 107–111.
27. TsGA SPb, f. 7384, op. 42, d. 1001, ll. 2, 5, 44–47.
28. TsGA SPb, f. 7384, op. 42, d. 1001, ll. 47–48.
29. Gerasimova, "Public Privacy," 215–217.
30. TsGA SPb, f. 7384, op. 42, d. 1001, ll. 148–149.
31. TsGA SPb, f. 7384, op. 42, d. 1001, l. 157.
32. For example, P. Maslov, "Vremia v bytu," *Novyi mir*, no. 10 (1960), 157–165. See also Murray Yanovitch, "Soviet Patterns of Time Use and Concepts of Leisure," *Soviet Studies*, 15, no. 1 (1963), 17–37.
33. TsGA SPb, f. 7384, op. 42, d. 1001, l. 157.
34. TsGA SPb, f. 7384, op. 42, d. 1001, ll. 5, 44, 46.
35. For example, see Anna N. Cherepakhina, *Blagoustroistvo kvartiry* (Moscow: izd-vo Min. kommun. khoz. RSFSR, 1961), 12–35.
36. Harris, "Moving to the Separate Apartment," 341–391, 467–546.
37. Gerasimova, "Sovetskaiia kommunal'naia kvartira," 81–82.
38. Ia. Linskii and A. Peremyslov, "Novyi dom," *Izvestiia*, June 26, 1955, 2.
39. Harris, "Moving to the Separate Apartment," 341–391.
40. Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki (RGAE), f. 339, op. 1, d. 1097, ll. 97–97ob.
41. Tsentralfnyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva Sankt-Peterburga (TsGALI SPb), f. 341, op. 1, d. 386, ll. 1, 14.
42. TsGA SPb, f. 6276, op. 273, d. 1270, l. 41.

43. V. Kupriianov et al., "Posle novoseliia," *Leningradskaia pravda*, July 13, 1963, 2.
44. "Moskovskaia kvartira. Kak ei byt'?" *Vecherniaia Moskva*, October 25, 1969, 2.
45. For example, S. P. Alekseev et al., *ZinKoizoliatisia v stroitel'stve* (Moscow, 1949).
46. Aleksandr N. Marzecv, *Kommunal'naiia gigena* (Moscow: Gos. izd-vo meditsinskoi lit-ry, 1951), 133.
47. See, e.g., the Third Party Program (1961): "O programme kommunisticheskoi partii Sovetskogo Soiuza," in *Kommunisticheskaia partia Sovetskogo Soiuza v rezul'tatsiakh i resheniakh s'ezdov, konferentsii i plennumov TsK, Vol. 8 (1959-1965)* (Moscow: Izd-vo polit. lit-ry, 1972), 202-206.
48. *Marzecv, Kommunal'naiia gigena*, 136-137, 431.
49. I. I. Slaviv, "Nauchnaia konferentsiia po bor'be s shumom i deistvii shuma na organizm," *Akusticheski zhurnal*, 3, no. 1 (1957), 83-85. M. N. Grigor'eva and A. D. Rashkova, "Gigienicheskaia osenka krupnopanel'nykh domov konstruktssii V. P. Lagutenko," *Gigiena i sanitaria*, no. 7 (1964), 75-77; and Georgii L. Osipov, *Zashchita zdaniia ot shuma* (Moscow: Izd-vo lit-ry po stroitel'stvu, 1972).
50. "O sozdanii komissii po bor'be s shumom pri glavnoi gosudarstvennoi sanitarnoi inspektsii SSSR," *Akusticheski zhurnal*, 5, no. 2 (1959), 257-258.
51. Vladimír I. Chudnov, *V poiskakh tishiny* (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1971), 8-9, 84-85, 125; Inna L. Karagodina et al., *Bor'ba s shumom v gorodakh* (Moscow: Izd-vo "Meditsina," 1972), 9.
52. Chudnov, *V poiskakh tishiny*, 124-125. Karagodina, *Bor'ba s shumom*, 7, 11; V. P. Troimov, *Problema bor'by s promyshlennym i bytovym shumom* (Kiev, 1969), 47.
53. Rossitza Guentcheva, "Sounds and Noise in Socialist Bulgaria," in *Ideologies and National Identities: The Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe*, ed. John R. Lampe and Mark Mazower (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), 211-234.
54. Mikhail S. Cheskin, *Bor'ba s shumom* (Moscow: Znaniie, 1965), 10.
55. Chudnov, *V poiskakh tishiny*, 93-94, 118.
56. Cheskin, *Bor'ba s shumom*, 4.
57. Chudnov, *V poiskakh tishiny*, 6.
58. Cheskin, *Bor'ba s shumom*, 6, 8, 11.
59. Chudnov, *V poiskakh tishiny*, 7.
60. Cheskin, *Bor'ba s shumom*, 6-8, 11-12.
61. V. I. Chudnov, *Transport i bor'ba s shumom* (Moscow: Znaniie, 1972), 4.
62. I. L. Karagodina et al., *Gorodskie i zhilishchno-kommunalnye shумы i bor'ba s nimi* (Moscow: Izd-vo "Meditsina," 1964), 62-64.
63. Cheskin, *Bor'ba s shumom*, 22.
64. Chudnov, *V poiskakh tishiny*, 90-91.
65. Chudnov, *Transport*, 5.
66. Chudnov, *V poiskakh tishiny*, 91-92.
67. Cheskin, *Bor'ba s shumom*, 5.
68. Mikhail S. Cheskin, *Nezrinyi vrag* (Moscow: Sovetskaiia Rossiia, 1966), 111-112.
69. Cheskin, *Bor'ba s shumom*, 11.
70. Discourses on kitchen designs and women's role in constructing communism reflected a revival of this ethos. See Reid, "The Khrushchev Kitchen."
71. During the mass housing campaign, housing shortages were cited as an unfortunate, but inevitable outcome of rapid industrialization. See A. I. Shneerson, *Chto takoe zhilishchnyi vopros* (Moscow: Izd-vo VTS i AON pri TsK KPSS, 1959), 61-62.
72. Chudnov, *V poiskakh tishiny*, 75-100, 112.
73. Harris, "Moving to the Separate Apartment," 341-546.