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Dawn of the Soviet Jet Age

Aeroflot Passengers and Aviation Culture under Nikita Khrushchev

STEVEN E. HARRIS

In the short story “Aeroflot,” an old woman sees an ad for the airline: “Fast, inexpensive, comfortable, saving time. Fly north, fly south, fly on business, fly for pleasure, fly to all corners of the world.” The narrator describes the ad’s image of a jet-plane interior as a domestic space promoting internationalism. “A young woman gives her baby tea to drink and looks through the small window onto the sugar-like clouds. A black man with a large forehead holds a newspaper in his large hands, while passengers play chess as if they were at a table at home.” One day, the old woman is gripped by the ad’s message. She yearns to be young and healthy again, to visit her children and grandchildren. In a dream that night, she projects herself into the ad “in the wonderful machine [where] she gave her child tea to drink, the black man with the large forehead smiled at her with his big teeth and big lips. You could just touch the clouds outside the airplane’s window. What happiness! She’s flying!” Suddenly, a doctor wakes her and says she’s had a heart attack. “Did something happen to you?” he asks. “No,” she mumbles, but the narrator concludes, “How could he have known that the old woman had been flying?”¹

With this story, the Soviet writer Ida Shul’kina updated the Icarus myth for the Jet Age, which passengers began to enjoy in 1956 on the Tupolev-104. In the early 20th century, visionary inventors and reckless pilots had played the role of the Greek hero for audiences who largely experienced flight

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¹ Ida Shul’kina, “Aeroflot,” in *Tri minuty schast’ia* (Riga: Liesma, 1968), 83–86.

vicariously through their heroic feats. The old woman who replaces them in Shul'kina's story was a passenger, one of millions who flew Aeroflot annually and experienced the mobility and anxieties of jet travel. This article explores how representations of Aeroflot's passengers became a critical source of information about the Soviet Jet Age and moved from the margins of aviation culture under Iosif Stalin to its center under Nikita Khrushchev. With the emergence of the passenger as the chief subject of aviation culture, the public not only received practical information on flying but learned what it meant to be a Soviet citizen in an age marked by rapid technological changes and improved mass consumption, the ideological stakes of which were accentuated by the Cold War. Echoing the superpower conflict, Aeroflot's rivalry with Pan American World Airways shaped the socialist values of jet travel but also revealed the tension between expanded aerial mobility at home and strict limitations on foreign travel. Although Shul'kina's story intimated travel "to all corners of the world," aviation culture tempered such aspirations by celebrating air travel as a domestic affair and reframing international routes as signs of Soviet prestige and prowess on the world stage.

As proposed in this article, aviation culture provides a good entry for understanding how the Jet Age shaped the Khrushchev era. In his pioneering work on aviation culture in the first half of the 20th century, Robert Wohl opened this field for American and West European history by using a variety of sources from poetry and advertisements to film and memoirs to reveal the cultural and political meanings airplanes generated.² In Russian historiography, scholars have similarly examined aviation culture, focusing primarily on the Stalin era but also late imperial Russia and the 1920s. Examining all three periods, Scott Palmer has shown how aviation culture bolstered the state's legitimacy and helped define a Soviet path to modernity despite dependence on Western technology.³ Aviation culture after Stalin, however, remains

² Robert Wohl, *A Passion for Wings: Aviation and the Western Imagination, 1908–1918* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Wohl, *The Spectacle of Flight: Aviation and the Western Imagination, 1920–1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). For cultural histories of aviation, see also Nathalie Roseau, *Aerocity: Quand l'avion fait la ville* (Paris: Éditions Parenthèses, 2012); Sonja Dümpelmann, *Flights of Imagination: Aviation, Landscape, Design* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014); and Adnan Morshed, *Impossible Heights: Skyscrapers, Flight, and the Master Builder* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

³ Khans Giunter [Hans Günther], "‘Stalinskie sokoly’: Analiz mifa 30-kh godov," *Voprosy literatury* (November–December 1991): 122–41; Elena Gorokhovskaia and Elena Zheltova, "Sovetskaia aviatsionnaia agitkampaniia 20-kh gg.: Ideologiya, politika i massovoe soznanie," *Voprosy istorii estestvoznaniia i tekhniki*, no. 3 (1995): 63–78; Jay Bergman, "Valerii Chkalov: Soviet Pilot as New Soviet Man," *Journal of Contemporary History* 33, 1 (1998): 135–52; Jane Friedman, "Soviet Mastery of the Skies at the Mayakovsky Metro Station," *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 7, 2 (2000): 48–64; Scott Palmer, *Dictatorship of the Air: Aviation Culture and*

largely unexplored. Scholars have provided specialized studies on airplane design, military aviation, air routes, and administration but not the social and cultural roles of aviation in the Khrushchev era.⁴ Only one scholar, a US historian, has studied Aeroflot flight attendants and how their representations intersected with those from Pan Am.⁵ Although the closely related Soviet space program has attracted scholarly attention, the role of passengers in the aviation culture of the Jet Age remains unexamined.⁶

This article contributes to scholarship on Soviet aviation culture but also situates it in the broader historiography on the post-Stalin era. In recent years, scholars have reshaped the historiography on the 1950s and 1960s through a range of topics from ideological shifts and the dismantling of the Gulag to mass housing and consumption.⁷ The Khrushchev regime's approach to the

the Fate of Modern Russia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Mike O'Mahony, "Ever Onwards, Ever Upwards? Representing the Aviation Hero in Soviet Art," and Helena Goscilo, "Deineka's Heavenly Bodies: Space, Sports, and the Sacred," in *Russian Aviation, Space Flight, and Visual Culture*, ed. Vlad Strukov and Goscilo (New York: Routledge, 2017), 35–88; Mike Kulikowski, "Fantasy Flights: Technology, Politics, and the Soviet Airship Programme, 1930–1938," *Journal of the International Committee for the History of Technology*, no. 21 (2015): 66–80.

⁴ Betsy Gidwitz, "The Political and Economic Implications of the International Routes of Aeroflot" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1976); Von Hardesty, *Red Phoenix: The Rise of Soviet Air Power, 1941–1945* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982); Robin Higham, John Greenwood, and Von Hardesty, eds., *Russian Aviation and Air Power in the Twentieth Century* (London: Frank Cass, 1998); R. E. G. Davies, *Aeroflot: An Airline and Its Aircraft. An Illustrated History of the World's Largest Airline* (Shrewsbury, UK: Airline, 1992); Günther Sollinger, *Air Transport in the USSR and FSU: From Aeroflot to National Flag Carriers, 1923–1995* (Riga: RTU Press, 2014).

⁵ Victoria Vantoch, *The Jet Sex: Airline Stewardesses and the Making of an American Icon* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 125–52.

⁶ James Andrews and Asif Siddiqi, eds., *Into the Cosmos: Space Exploration and Soviet Culture* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011).

⁷ Elena Zubkova, *Obshchestvo i reformy, 1945–1964* (Moscow: Rossiia molodaia, 1993); Rudol'f Pikhov, *Sovetskii Soiuz: Istoriia vlasti, 1945–1991* (Novosibirsk: Sibirskii khronograf, 2000); Stephen Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw: Experience and Memory in Moscow's Arbat* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008); Miriam Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime, and the Fate of Reform after Stalin* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009); Mark Smith, *Property of Communists: The Urban Housing Program from Stalin to Khrushchev* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010); Steven E. Harris, *Communism on Tomorrow Street: Mass Housing and Everyday Life after Stalin* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press; and Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2013); Alan Barenberg, *Gulag Town, Company Town: Forced Labor and Its Legacy in Vorkuta* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014); Christine Varga-Harris, *Stories of House and Home: Soviet Apartment Life during the Khrushchev Years* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015); Polly Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma: Rethinking the Stalinist Past in the Soviet Union, 1953–70* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016); Victoria Smolkin, *A Sacred Space Is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

Cold War, economic development, and reinvigoration of internationalism have also drawn scholarly attention, as have space culture and automobiles.⁸ Much of this scholarship has complicated our understanding of late socialism by moving beyond simple narratives of (failed) liberalization to exploring how social and political actors dealt with the Stalinist past and reinvigorated the socialist project in an overall context shaped by the Cold War. The roles that Aeroflot and its passengers played in Soviet life after Stalin, however, remain little understood.

Among the many transformations scholars have examined in the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras, this article contributes to the growing scholarship on mass consumption by exploring the cultural and political roles that passengers were assigned as ideal consumers of socialist modernity.⁹ A tightly controlled form of state propaganda, representations of passengers in print media, advertisements, and film provided ordinary citizens with practical information on Aeroflot's routes, purchasing tickets, and what to expect from flying. Mass media also constructed an ideal passenger subject that initially took shape under Stalin. Aeroflot's passengers, the public learned, were beneficiaries of the most technologically modern and convenient form of mass transportation that only the Soviet Union could provide in a nonexploitative fashion. But the passenger also had obligations such as learning to behave properly while traveling, reporting on Aeroflot's shortcomings, and espousing the virtues of socialist internationalism while never actually being able to fly abroad at will.

⁸ Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Lewis Siegelbaum, *Cars for Comrades: The Life of the Soviet Automobile* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008); Andrews and Siddiqi, *Into the Cosmos*; Andrew Jenks, *The Cosmonaut Who Couldn't Stop Smiling: The Life and Legend of Yuri Gagarin* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2012); Oscar Sanchez-Sibony, *Red Globalization: The Political Economy of the Soviet Cold War from Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Tobias Rupprecht, *Soviet Internationalism after Stalin: Interaction and Exchange between the USSR and Latin America during the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Rachel Applebaum, *Empire of Friends: Soviet Power and Socialist Internationalism in Cold War Czechoslovakia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019).

⁹ Nataliia Lebina and Aleksandr Chistikov, *Obyvatel' i reformy: Kartiny povsednevnnoi zhizni gorozhan v gody NEPa i khrushchevskogo desiatiletiia* (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2003); Susan Reid, "Who Will Beat Whom? Soviet Popular Reception of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959," *Kritika* 9, 4 (2008): 855–904; Natalya Chernyshova, *Soviet Consumer Culture in the Brezhnev Era* (London: Routledge, 2015); Lebina, *Povsednevnost' epokhi kosmosa i kukuruzy: Destruktsiia bol'shogo stil'a. Leningrad 1950–1960-e gody* (St. Petersburg: Pobeda, 2015); Varga-Harris, *Stories of House and Home*; Timo Vihavainen and Elena Bogdanova, eds., *Communism and Consumerism: The Soviet Alternative to the Affluent Society* (Boston: Brill, 2015); Graham Roberts, ed., *Material Culture in Russia and the USSR: Things, Values, and Identities* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

Starting in the mid-1950s, the introduction of jet aircraft, expansion of routes, and development of airports and aircraft manufacturing transformed Aeroflot from last place in public transportation under Stalin to a massive operation under Khrushchev and Brezhnev. The mass scale of passenger traffic was the most evident sign of a significant and lasting rupture in Soviet civil aviation from the Stalin era.¹⁰ At the same time, representations of Aeroflot's passengers in the Jet Age expanded upon an already existing discourse of the passenger as a socialist consumer that took shape on the margins of aviation culture under Stalin. The Jet Age showed that the Soviet system could at last pivot from production and spectacle to providing consumer services on a mass scale and create modern, disciplined subjects worthy of advanced technology. While this pivot was barely evident in passenger aviation under Stalin, another mass transportation project—the Moscow Metro—demonstrated its possibility in the 1930s.¹¹ In short, aviation culture and the passenger of the Jet Age owed much to the Stalin era despite the appearance of a sharp break that entering a new technological age signified in 1956, when the Tupolev-104 started flying passengers across the Soviet Union.

Aeroflot's subsequent rapid growth echoed another transformation of Soviet life after Stalin—Khrushchev's mass housing campaign—and both bolstered the new regime's commitment to raising living standards. Aeroflot's passengers became central subjects of aviation culture not only because there were more of them but because of their symbolic roles in advancing broader projects of the Khrushchev era: mass consumption and socialist domesticity; the scientific-technical revolution (STR); and fighting the Cold War by promoting the socialist values of egalitarianism and internationalism. These roles mirrored those of the Soviet housewife, the chief subject in representations of mass housing, who similarly embodied socialist norms of consumption and technological development in an overall context of Cold War competition.¹² In contrast to the home, however, representations of

¹⁰ According to official statistics, approximately 400,000 passengers flew Aeroflot internally and internationally in 1940, followed by 1.5 million in 1950. Aeroflot boosted this number to 8.2 million in 1958, 16 million in 1960, and 36.8 million in 1964 (*Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1965 g.* [Moscow: Statistika, 1966], 512). As measured in passenger-kilometers, flying surpassed sea transportation in the early 1950s and river transport in the late 1950s but never exceeded rail and bus transportation throughout the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras. See *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1962 godu* (Moscow: Gosstatizdat, 1963), 381; *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1970 g.* (Moscow: Statistika, 1971), 428; *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1985 g.* (Moscow: Finansy i statistika, 1986), 324.

¹¹ Andrew Jenks, "A Metro on the Mount: The Underground as a Church of Soviet Civilization," *Technology and Culture* 41, 4 (2000): 697–724.

¹² Susan Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev," *Slavic Review* 61, 2 (2002): 211–52.

Aeroflot's passengers claimed that all citizens—regardless of age, gender, or profession—played an active role in promoting socialist values in the Soviet Jet Age.

Aeroflot Passengers before the Jet Age

The making of the Soviet airplane passenger began long before the Jet Age. In 1920s aviation culture, passengers were more often participants of “air baptisms” in barnstorming campaigns. In 1925, for example, 3,047 individuals enjoyed such flights in the summer alone.¹³ A total of 13,383 persons flew that year, but this included only 3,398 passengers on “regular routes,” while the remaining 9,985 individuals traveled on “episodic circular flights, photography [flights], etc.”¹⁴ Popular culture suggested that flying could even include a romantic date, as illustrated in Abram Room's 1927 film about a *ménage à trois*, *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia* (No. 3 Meshchanskaia Street). Transport was not yet flying's main purpose but an oddity, as the magazine *Ogonek* noted about the “youngest air-passenger” who flew from Königsberg to Moscow, where his father lived.¹⁵

By the 1930s, however, statistics reported passenger growth in one category, indicating that a passenger's main goal was now transportation. Air traffic grew from 27,225 passengers in 1932 to 237,900 in 1938.¹⁶ Nevertheless, passenger flight barely appeared in aviation culture before the war, which helps explain why scholars have paid little attention to passengers in the Stalin era. Instead, aviation culture remained focused on spectacle through the celebration of the pilot Valerii Chkalov, the display of new aircraft, and showcase flights. The main roles of Soviet citizens were to be “air-minded,” marvel at the regime's technological progress, and join Osoaviakhim, the state's mass organization that promoted aviation.¹⁷ Although still on the margins of aviation culture, a passenger on regular routes was a role that needed to be defined.

One question to be addressed was the socialist content of passenger service. Far from an end in itself, a comfortable flight—including ways to prevent puking—ensured that people arrived at their destination ready to

¹³ Palmer, *Dictatorship of the Air*, 152–59.

¹⁴ *L'Aviation civile de l'URSS: Publication speciale à l'occasion de la Conférence sur la Poste aérienne* (Moscow: NKPT, 1927), 19.

¹⁵ “Samyi iunyi avio-passazhir,” *Ogonek*, no. 35 (1924), no pagination.

¹⁶ V. P. Kliucharev, *Grazhdanskii vozdushnyi flot SSSR: Statistiko-ekonomicheskii spravocchnik za 1923–1934 gg.* (Moscow: Soiuzorguchet, 1936), 178; L. A. Tsekhanovich, “Aviatsionnye perevozki v 1939 godu,” *Grazhdanskaia aviatsiia* (hereafter *GA*), no. 5 (1939): 28.

¹⁷ John McCannon, *Red Arctic: Polar Exploration and the Myth of the North in the Soviet Union, 1932–1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 59–80; Palmer, *Dictatorship of the Air*, 115–24, 195–258.

build socialism; in contrast, passenger comfort in capitalist countries was only about making money.¹⁸ As Aeroflot expanded its routes, passenger flight was deemed the most efficient mode of transportation, far superior to trains, and theoretically accessible to anyone. The civil aviation journal *Grazhdanskaia aviatsiia* confidently claimed, "Any citizen of the USSR can use air transport services and compare the tedious, six-day trip by rail [from Moscow to Ashkhabad] with the 11-hour flight in a comfortable, speedy passenger airplane."¹⁹

To underscore its socialist underpinnings, passenger service was folded into the discourse on cultured consumption. *Grazhdanskaia aviatsiia* exposed problems in customer service and exhorted aviation employees to ensure "care for passengers and cultured service" (*zabota o passazhirakh, kul'turnoe ikh obsluzhivanie*). While some "clients" (*klienty*) left positive reviews in comment books, there was too much "disgraceful organization of service," from rude airport personnel to poor information and passengers forced to share cabin space with cargo. Moscow's airport terminal failed to create a space in which passengers could "feel" aviation before flying, partly because so many non-passengers frequented its restaurant, giving the space an "uncomfortable" atmosphere.²⁰ That passengers had a right to their own spaces in the air and on the ground suggested a spatial exclusivity that echoed "hierarchies of consumption" under Stalin.²¹

Calls to "serve new passengers in a cultured way" echoed broader representations of ideal consumers.²² Starting in the mid-1930s, the official line on consumption shifted away from the ascetic values of the 1920s and severe deprivations created by the First Five-Year Plan to celebrate a future "dream world" of "cultured trade," even in luxury items.²³ A Soviet version of the "citizen-consumer" emerged as the ideal archetype of Stalinist consumption. As Amy Randall has shown, the "citizen-consumer" was a political project that various states undertook in the 20th century to harness mass consumption

¹⁸ G. Silin, "Ob udobstvakh passazhirov v polete," *GA*, no. 5 (1934): 30–32.

¹⁹ Z. I. Pozin and Iu. V. Aristov, "K otkrytiiu magistrali Moskva—Baku—Ashkhabad," *GA*, no. 6 (1939): 13–15.

²⁰ V. Lebedev, "Obsluzhivanie passazhirov v Moskovskom aeroportu," *GA*, no. 2 (1935): 41–42; Tsekhanovich, "Aviatsionnye perevozki."

²¹ Elena Osokina, *Ierarkhiia potrebleniia: O zhizni liudei v usloviakh stalinskogo snabzheniia, 1928–1953 gg.* (Moscow: MGOU, 1993).

²² Pozin and Aristov, "K otkrytiiu magistrali."

²³ Jukka Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne: Common Luxury and the Ideals of the Good Life in Stalin's Russia* (Oxford: Berg, 2003); Julie Hessler, *A Social History of Soviet Trade: Trade Policy, Retail Practices, and Consumption, 1917–1953* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Amy Randall, *The Soviet Dream World of Retail Trade and Consumption in the 1930s* (New York: Palgrave, 2008).

for political and ideological ends by ascribing certain rights and obligations to consumers. In the Soviet case, the “citizen-consumer” was entitled to the good life that only socialism could provide but was also disciplined to consume in a cultured, socialist way and provide critical assessments of goods and services. Intended to help the state cope with the extreme shortages it had created, this ideal consumer projected a life of abundance for all in the future.²⁴ Aeroflot’s passengers, however few, fit this paradigm that scholars have explored mainly in retail trade and food.

On the eve of the war, the paragon of socialist consumption in the skies was the enormous PS-124, the passenger version of the mythic *Maksim Gor’kii* that had flown over Red Square in 1934. While historians have examined the *Maksim Gor’kii* as an example of showcase flights, little attention has been paid to its interior spaces and passengers.²⁵ Briefly put into service from Moscow to Mineral’nye Vody in 1940, the PS-124 greeted passengers with a “spacious vestibule” and three carpeted cabins, including a “luxury cabin” (*salon-liuks*). Passengers enjoyed a library, sleeping quarters, and food and drink served by a stewardess (*stiuardessa*) from the kitchen. *Izvestiia* marveled at how the plane’s enormous size maintained the spatial dimensions of domestic life on the ground, and *Ogonek* praised its fully outfitted “living space” (*zhilaia ploshchad*).²⁶ To be sure, most urban dwellers had nothing of the sort, crammed as they were in communal housing where “living space” was quantitatively distributed in paltry portions of square meters. But in the air and in the future, “living space” was a spacious and culturally refined site of luxury similar to the few single-family apartments that only party-state and cultural elites enjoyed at present.²⁷

Although few flew the PS-124, aviation culture urged readers to see the world and their futures through passengers’ eyes and critique Aeroflot’s shortcomings like any responsible “citizen-consumer.” In 1939, the satirical magazine *Krokodil* asked readers to imagine themselves comfortably seated on a plane with a carpeted floor, ventilation, hot tea, and medicine for turbulence. “You’re flying surrounded by kindness and care at a speed of 200

²⁴ On the “citizen-consumer,” see Randall, *Soviet Dream World*, 157–79.

²⁵ Palmer, *Dictatorship of the Air*, 207–19. Maksimilian Saukke provides photos of the *Maksim Gor’kii*’s spaces but with little commentary (“*Maksim Gor’kii*: *Istoriia samoleta-giganta* [Moscow: Polygon, 2004], 52–70).

²⁶ I. Osipov, “V salone vozdušnogo giganta: Probnyi reis samoleta ‘L-760,’” *Izvestiia*, 26 May 1940; A. Kriuchkov, “Polet na vozdušnom gigante,” *Ogonek*, no. 26 (1940): 18. These sources used the serial number L-760 for this specific PS-124 airplane. On the PS-124 model and the fate of the L-760, which crashed in December 1942, see Saukke, “*Maksim Gor’kii*,” 138–39.

²⁷ Harris, *Communism on Tomorrow Street*, 55–70.

kilometers per hour,” the magazine gushed. What a contrast this exemplary service (*servis*) in the air posed to absurdities on the ground, where the bus to the airport was overcrowded and baggage followed on a later flight. Readers were even encouraged to feel ill at ease with a cashier’s demand for their name and address in case the plane crashed. They were supposed to wonder why Aeroflot could not afford a few cars to drive passengers from their homes to the city ticket office for the bus ride to the airport. Despite these problems, readers were invited to imagine the “blissful state” of flying, when “in the airplane’s cozy and comfortable cabin you receive so much attention and care that all those earth-bound ‘inconveniences’ and ‘misunderstandings’ disappear.”²⁸ In such representations, the Stalinist discourse on consumption intersected with the vicarious experience of flying, producing a passenger who escaped the shortcomings of life on the ground for the enchanted world of the air and the future.

During the war, Aeroflot’s passenger services largely evaporated, and the airline was used by the military.²⁹ After the war and the airline’s removal in 1948 from the Defense Ministry,³⁰ representations of passengers as consumer subjects accompanied a concerted effort to attract more people to flying. Aeroflot personnel were instructed to advertise its services by coordinating with local newspapers and radio, and placing print and visual ads in urban spaces such as restaurants, movie theaters, and post offices.³¹ Whereas approximately 400,000 passengers had flown Aeroflot in 1940, 1.5 million did so in 1950.³² To be sure, air passengers represented a fraction of their railway counterparts: 1.34 billion passengers in 1940 and 1.16 billion in 1950.³³ However modest, air travel was growing—whereas train travel was still recuperating—and Aeroflot needed to better explain what it meant to be a passenger.

A preliminary goal was “to inform future passengers” about all aspects of air travel from new routes to fares. Underscoring what was socialist about flying, Aeroflot would never adopt “deceitful capitalist advertisement.” According to a brochure intended only for civil aviation personnel, ads should be a paragon of transparency: “Our information must be based

²⁸ Iakov Rudin, “Nebo i zemlia,” *Krokodil*, no. 20 (1939): 12.

²⁹ David Jones, “The Rise and Fall of Aeroflot: Civil Aviation in the Soviet Union, 1920–91,” in *Russian Aviation and Air Power*, 252–55.

³⁰ Gidwitz, “Political and Economic Implications,” 55.

³¹ G. M. Segal, *Obsluzhivanie passazhirov na vozdukhnykh liniakh* (Moscow: Redaktsionno-izdatel’skii otдел Aeroflota, 1948), 8–14; M. M. Polupinskii and Segal, *Passazhiram o vozdukhnom transporte* (Moscow: Redaktsionno-izdatel’skii otдел Aeroflota, 1949), 22.

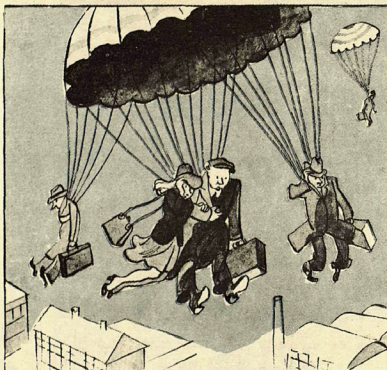
³² *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1965 g.*, 512.

³³ *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1958 godu* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe statisticheskoe izdatel’stvo, 1959), 552.

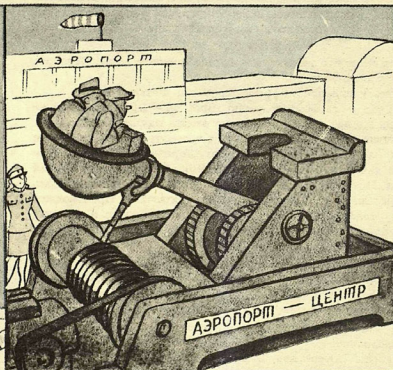
ИЗ МИРА ФАНТАСТИКИ

Рис. Бор. ЕФИМОВА

КАК ДОСТАВИТЬ ДОМОЙ ПРИВЫВШЕГО НА САМОЛЕТЕ ПАССАЖИРА



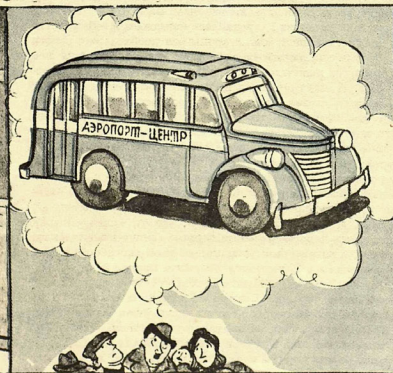
По мнению некоторых, лучше всего сбрасывать авиапассажира на парашюте в нужном ему пункте.



Другие считают, что проще устроить в аэропорту катапульту для переброски прилетевших в нужные им районы города.



Третий находит более целесообразным соорудить движущийся тротуар между аэропортом и центром города.



Есть даже чудачки, предлагающие разрешить проблему сообщения между аэропортом и городом с помощью обыкновенного автобуса. Но их предложение кажется администрации многих аэропортов слишком уж фантастичным.

Figure 1. Boris Efimov, "From the World of Fantasy: How to Get an Arriving Passenger Home." While the first three modes of transportation between city centers and airports are wild fantasy, passengers at the bottom right dream of the obvious solution that only airport administrators deem outlandish.

Source: *Krokodil*, no. 18 (1947): 10.

on absolutely accurate and verified data, must be undoubtedly true; the embellishment of reality and baseless promises must not be allowed under any circumstances." Buying tickets was to be as easy as possible, even featuring phone reservations and home delivery of tickets. Passengers were entitled to convenient transportation to and from airports so as not to squander time saved by flying. This was an obvious convenience, not some unrealistic fantasy as airport administrators seemed to think (Fig. 1). Once at the airport, check-in was to be efficient, and passengers waiting for flights could expect a spotless space featuring a restaurant, post office, a room for

women with babies, a room to rest, and kiosks selling print media, tobacco products, and cold drinks.³⁴

The consumer care envisaged in these representations drew from norms already established on the ground for ideal domestic and medical spaces. For passengers stuck because of delayed flights, airport managers had to provide lodging at hotels or even private apartments. Passengers were entitled to impeccably clean airplanes where a stewardess, “like a good, hospitable housewife,” served them food and drink, kept them informed about their flight, and distracted those susceptible to air sickness.³⁵ One brochure drew from aviation medicine to promote the “hygiene and comfort of a passenger plane cabin.” Here passengers were patients to be catered to, especially if they succumbed to “aviation sickness,” which this author claimed affected women more than men.³⁶

As a subset of the “citizen-consumer,” Aeroflot’s passengers were supposed to receive a list of rights and obligations upon purchasing their tickets that acculturated them to air travel but also disciplined their behavior and reflected the paranoia of a totalitarian state that did not want its airports, airplanes, or aerial views caught on film. The rules explained how to get to the airport, register one’s ticket and baggage, and when to board. Passengers’ rights (*prava*) were few and included provisions for carry-on luggage and checking bags with valuables. Prohibitions were numerous—such as a ban on “explosive materials, firearms, military supplies, and strong, poisonous, stinky, or flammable substances.” Cameras and movie cameras had to be packed away, and using them “at airports or on board an airplane is categorically forbidden.” Reflecting their status as cultured consumers, passengers were reminded “not to smoke, not to throw any objects from an airplane whatsoever, not to drink hard liquor, and not to enter the cockpit.” Finally, they were warned not to get close to an airplane’s propellers and only walk toward their plane accompanied by airport personnel.³⁷

Echoing such rules, invitations for Soviet readers to imagine themselves as passengers took a practical tone but also suggested that flying was becoming widespread and socially diverse. One pamphlet confidently asserted, “Air transport is becoming an ever more habitual form of transportation for millions of toilers.”³⁸ In stories that invited readers to follow along a route,

³⁴ Segal, *Obsluzhivanie passazhirov*, 8–33.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 14–33.

³⁶ Ia. F. Samter, *Passazhir v vozdukh: Sovety vracha aviapassazhiru* (Moscow: Redaktsionno-izdatel'skii otdel Aeroflota, 1948).

³⁷ Segal, *Obsluzhivanie passazhirov*, 23–24.

³⁸ “Navstrechu solntsu,” *Ogonek*, no. 41 (1950): 4–7; Polupinskii and Segal, *Passazhiram*, 30–32.

passengers came from all walks of life—such as an oil industry tractor driver, a Supreme Soviet deputy from faraway Primorskii krai, a doctor from Odessa, a naval port dispatcher, and an electrician.³⁹ According to a brochure intended only for civil aviation employees, making air transportation available to the “broad masses of toilers” was a fundamental goal. It revealed, the author argued, Aeroflot’s socialist nature in contrast to capitalist airlines, where cut-throat competition reigned supreme and service was only as good as what passengers could afford.⁴⁰

Yet the very same pamphlet made it clear that at present “the overwhelming majority of air transport passengers are the most advanced and active toilers of our country. These are party and state workers, enterprise managers, specialists from various branches of the economy, advanced industrial and agrarian Stakhanovites, scientists, artists, writers.” The state had a vested interest in saving these people time, since they were flying to undertake “state duties in connection with fulfilling the five-year plan.” So while air travel was theoretically intended for the Soviet everyman of the future, at present it was for “people who take an active role in all spheres of the country’s political, economic, and cultural life.”⁴¹ In other words, passengers for now came from the Soviet intelligentsia, whose privileged position as “citizen-consumers” of Aeroflot echoed broader hierarchies in housing and consumption but also served as the harbinger of ordinary citizens’ future mode of travel.

The advertisement “Save Time! Use Air Transportation” (Fig. 2) gave visual expression to these tensions over the social composition of passengers. What was articulated in words to Aeroflot personnel in the aforementioned pamphlet was represented to readers of *Ogonek* through images of well-dressed individuals: flying and exemplary service were available for now to the most cultured of individuals, the intelligentsia. Following the cultural logic of social mobility under Stalin, readers of *Ogonek* could aspire to the good life of elites—who deserved it not because of wealth, as happened in capitalist countries, but because of their role in advancing the state’s economic plans, their loyalty to the state, and their “culturedness” (*kul’turnost’*).⁴²

On the eve of the Jet Age, the Aeroflot passenger was emerging as an archetype worthy of attention in an aviation culture primarily focused on state

³⁹ “Navstrechu solntsu.”

⁴⁰ Segal, *Obsluzhivanie passazhirov*, 6.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴² Vera Dunham, *In Stalin’s Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990); Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Stalin and the Making of a New Elite,” and “Becoming Cultured: Socialist Realism and the Representation of Privilege and Taste,” in her *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 149–82, 216–37.



Figure 2. “Save Time! Use Air Transportation”

Source: Advertisement for Aeroflot in *Ogonek*, no. 17 (1949): 33.

achievements and pilots’ heroic feats, now drawn especially from the war.⁴³ In late Stalinist representations, passengers reveled in the wonders of aviation, just as “air-minded” audiences had done before, but did so now as “citizen-consumers” with expectations of superior service and obligations to critique shortcomings and display disciplined behavior. While most people never flew, readers of mass media were invited to imagine themselves as passengers in the future, once they had attained the requisite cultural refinement and importance to the state presently exhibited by the intelligentsia.

Domesticating the Jet Age

Nineteen fifty-six was a momentous year in Soviet history that started hopefully with Khrushchev’s Secret Speech denouncing Stalinism and ended ignominiously with the Soviet invasion of Hungary.⁴⁴ Largely forgotten

⁴³ On postwar aviation culture under Stalin, see Palmer, *Dictatorship of the Air*, 265–75.

⁴⁴ On this year’s place in Soviet history, see Kathleen Smith, *Moscow 1956: The Silenced Spring* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017)—reviewed in *Kritika* 20, 3 (2019): 613–26.

between these upheavals was a technological milestone, the Tupolev-104 jet plane, a civilian version of a bomber and product of Andrei Tupolev's design bureau.⁴⁵ The Soviet Union introduced the Tu-104 by landing it in London in March 1956, a not so subtle way of emphasizing British setbacks while celebrating Soviet advancements.⁴⁶ Such fanfare echoed what Scott Palmer calls the "compensatory symbolism" of Soviet aviation culture, whereby heroic feats and spectacles signaled the country's surge into modernity while papering over an undeveloped industry dependent on Western technology.⁴⁷ But with the Tu-104, Soviet aviation added the substance of regular jet service, beginning with its route from Moscow to Irkutsk in September 1956. Having started this pivotal year with a Stalin-era spectacle, Aeroflot ended it by inviting ordinary citizens to enter the Jet Age as passengers.⁴⁸

As *Ogonek* explained, "the era of jet airplanes" had dawned, in which ordinary people became passengers, enjoying the consumer amenities and speed that only the Soviet Union could deliver.⁴⁹ Entering this new era contributed to the new regime's ideological revitalization after Stalin. In the Third Party Program, which outlined the path to communism, Khrushchev's regime declared that flying "will become a mass form of transporting passengers" and that "new jet technology, first and foremost in air transportation, will experience rapid future development."⁵⁰ The Soviet Jet Age would thus advance broader goals of the Khrushchev era—the scientific-technical revolution and improving living standards. Aviation culture bolstered the regime's goals by making ordinary people the chief beneficiaries of cutting-edge technology set in an inviting, home-like atmosphere.

To date, scholars have focused on the single-family apartment of Khrushchev's mass housing campaign as the main site of "domesticating the scientific-technological revolution" through efficient kitchens, time-saving appliances, and furniture made of synthetic materials.⁵¹ New aircraft

⁴⁵ On the design bureaus, see John Greenwood, "The Designers: Their Design Bureaux and Aircraft," in *Russian Aviation and Air Power*, 162–90.

⁴⁶ Great Britain's de Havilland Comet, the first commercial jet aircraft, was suspended after devastating crashes (Davies, *Aeroflot*, 44).

⁴⁷ Palmer, *Dictatorship of the Air*, 7.

⁴⁸ To be sure, the Jet Age had already arrived for the Soviet air forces. See B. Iur'ev, "Znameniti deiatel' nauki," *Izvestiia*, 19 September 1950; and John Greenwood, "The Aviation Industry, 1917–97," in *Russian Aviation and Air Power*, 149–51.

⁴⁹ E. Riabchikov, "Era samoletov reaktivnykh," *Ogonek*, no. 40 (1956): 5.

⁵⁰ *Programma Kommunisticheskoi Partii Sovetskogo Soiuza (Priniata XXII s'ezdom KPSS)* (Moscow: Pravda, 1961), 72.

⁵¹ Susan Reid, "The Khrushchev Kitchen: Domesticating the Scientific-Technological Revolution," *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, 2 (2005): 289–316; Varga-Harris, *Stories of House and Home*.

and air terminals were also spaces where ordinary people experienced the domestication of jet-age technology and consumed its main product, time saved by flying. Although it was more fully theorized and incorporated into policies under Brezhnev, the STR originated as a concept in the Khrushchev era. Academics argued that the Soviet Union and the capitalist West had entered a time in which scientific and technological achievements—such as computing, synthetic products, and advanced automation—were displacing industrialization as the fundamental forces driving social and economic change.⁵² STR studies also celebrated aviation technology, highlighting the exponential growth in speed afforded by jet engines.⁵³ The accelerated pace of change and consumption of saved time were core benefits of STR that ordinary Soviet citizens discovered from media accounts of the Jet Age.

The Tu-104, as *Ogonek* told its readers, drastically cut the flight time from Moscow to Tbilisi from 12.5 hours to just over 4.⁵⁴ Whereas the 30 hours it took to fly from Moscow to Khabarovsk was a thing of wonder in 1950, the same journey was reduced to a 9-hour direct flight on the gigantic Tu-114 turboprop airplane, making it possible “to have breakfast in Moscow and a late lunch in Khabarovsk.”⁵⁵ Ordinary people could now travel across the USSR in a single day, even in pursuit of a quixotic love interest, as Vasilii Aksenov memorably recounted in his story “Half-Way to the Moon,” about the same route from Khabarovsk to Moscow.⁵⁶ Rather than focus on pilots, aviation culture now proposed that ordinary people could experience rapid travel for their own ends, improving their lives in the air as well as in single-family apartments on the ground.

Another factor helped reorient aviation culture toward passengers. Space culture in the late 1950s and early 1960s adopted the spectacle and hero worship of aviation culture under Stalin. The cosmos displaced

⁵² J. M. Cooper, *The Concept of the Scientific and Technical Revolution in Soviet Theory* (Birmingham: Center for Russian and East European Studies, 1973); Yakov Feygin, “Reforming the Cold War State: Economic Thought, Internationalization, and the Politics of Soviet Reform, 1955–1985,” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2017), 211–59.

⁵³ A. A. Zvorykin et al., *Istoriia tekhniki* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi literatury, 1962), 453–71. On this book's role in STR studies, see Cooper, *Concept of the Scientific and Technical Revolution*, 5.

⁵⁴ Riabchikov, “Era samoletov reaktivnykh.”

⁵⁵ On the 30-hour flight, see A. G. Ordin, *Moguchaia Stalinskaia aviatsiia* (Moscow: Pravda, 1950), 28. On the reduction to nine hours, see “Sem' tomov otzyvov,” *GA*, no. 2 (1962): 22–23. Quotation from A. Golikov, “Rozhdenie vozdushnogo lainera,” *Ogonek*, no. 3 (1960): 18–20.

⁵⁶ Aksenov's story originally appeared in *Novyi mir*, no. 7 (1962). It was republished abroad as Vasilii Aksenov, “Na polputi k lune,” in *Pravo na ostrov: Rasskazy* (Ann Arbor: Hermitage, 1983), 59–77.

the troposphere in propaganda and public enthusiasm for aerospace achievements.⁵⁷ To be sure, aviation culture did not lose its taste for air-minded enthusiasm, airplane modeling, and tales of extraordinary pilots and designers.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, space flight was now at the avant-garde of flying and the legitimacy it afforded the state in the Cold War. Space culture supplanted aviation culture as the site for projecting a futuristic world currently out of reach for ordinary citizens. As Asif Siddiqi points out, “Spaceships replaced airplanes as harbingers of the future.”⁵⁹ By monopolizing for cosmonauts much of the public excitement aviation culture had generated for pilots, space culture helped redirect attention in aviation to what was exciting in the Jet Age: the realistic possibility that anyone could become a regular passenger and fly across the Soviet Union in one day.

To communicate this message, Soviet mass media invited ordinary readers to explore the spaces of new aircraft and see the world “through the eyes of a passenger.”⁶⁰ While the spaces and time spent in them were new, such invitations echoed those from the Stalin era described above. Calling the Tu-104 a “work of art” and a “sculpture of metal and glass,” *Ogonek* took readers on a virtual tour of its “modern streamlined forms” with jet engines smartly integrated into its “arrow-shaped wings.”⁶¹ Photographs and newsreels celebrated its mid-century functionalism and metallic aesthetic (Fig. 3), and its ability to crisscross the Soviet Union from Moscow to Kamchatka.⁶² *Grazhdanskaia aviatsiia* praised its “elegant and soothing décor,” soundproofing, kitchen and refrigerator, reclining seats, and baby crib. Echoing the multiple spaces of the PS-124—but in a more efficient form without references to luxury—a cutaway of the Tu-104 (Fig. 4) showed a

⁵⁷ Andrews and Siddiqi, *Into the Cosmos*; Slava Gerovitch, *Soviet Space Mythologies: Public Images, Private Memories, and the Making of a Cultural Identity* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015).

⁵⁸ See the popular magazine *Kryl'ia rodiny*, published by the Volunteer Society for Assistance to the Army, Aviation, and the Navy (DOSAAF). DOSAAF, previously called Osoaviakhim, provided institutional support for aviation enthusiasts. On Osoaviakhim under Stalin, see Palmer, *Dictatorship of the Air*, 118–24. On DOSAAF's activities in the Cold War, see Edward Geist, *Armageddon Insurance: Civil Defense in the United States and Soviet Union, 1945–1991* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 46–47, 85–91.

⁵⁹ Asif Siddiqi, “Cosmic Contradictions: Popular Enthusiasm and Secrecy in the Soviet Space Program,” in *Into the Cosmos*, 52.

⁶⁰ V. Gol'tsov, “Glazami passazhira...,” *GA*, no. 12 (1956): 25–26.

⁶¹ V. Rudim, “Reaktivnyi passazhirskii...,” *Ogonek*, no. 14 (1956): 6–7; Riabchikov, “Era samoletov reaktivnykh.”

⁶² 1957 Soviet newsreel, *Tu-104 Flies Moscow to Kamchatka and Back 1957*, British Pathé (<https://www.britishpathe.com/video/tu-104-flies-moscow-to-kamchatka-and-back/query/tu-104>).

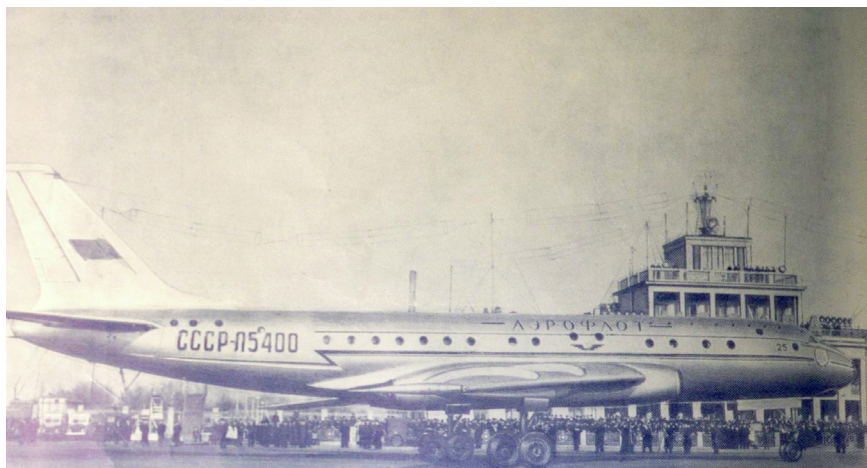


Figure 3. The Tupolev-104 at Vnukovo Airport in Moscow

Source: *GA*, no. 5 (1956): inside cover.

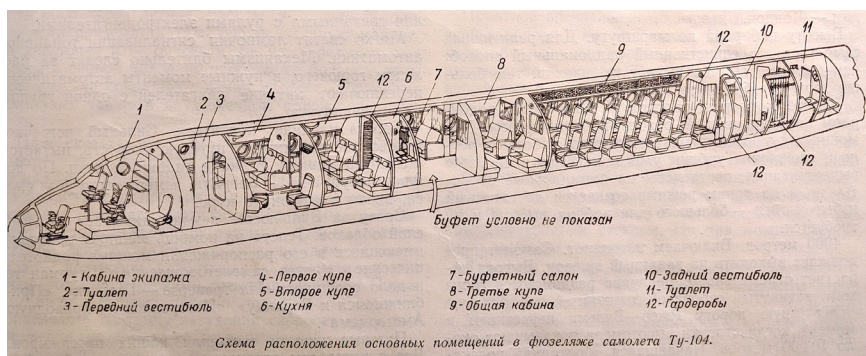


Figure 4. Cutaway diagram of the Tu-104

Source: A. Arkhangel'skii, "Samolet Tu-104," *GA*, no. 5 (1956): 19.

main cabin, three smaller compartments, and a dining area.⁶³ Reaching a variety of audiences, the plane appeared in *Sovetskaia zhenshchina* and the children's magazine *Murzilka*, which invited readers to join them on flights to India and China, respectively, and revel in the aircraft's comfort and speed.⁶⁴

Each new version of the Tu-104 was similarly introduced as evidence of improvements in comfort, technology, and new routes that met passengers' rising expectations.⁶⁵ Soviet citizens were invited to imagine themselves on

⁶³ A. Arkhangel'skii, "Samolet Tu-104," *GA*, no. 5 (1956): 18–19.

⁶⁴ Kamala Ratnam, "'TU-104' nad Gimalaiami," *Sovetskaia zhenshchina*, no. 12 (1956): 45–46; E. Nepriakhin, "Vozdushnyi korabl'," *Murzilka*, no. 5 (1957): 12–14.

⁶⁵ M. Lipatov, "Na sem' desiat passazhirov," *GA*, no. 6 (1957): 25–27; "Moskva—N'iu-Iork: Pervyi reis samoleta 'TU-104A' zakonchilsia uspešno," *Vecherniaia Moskva*, 5 September

board other new aircraft—such as the turboprop Iliushin-18 (the *Moskva*) and the turboprop Antonov-10 (the *Ukraina*)—that provided reassuring comfort at top speeds.⁶⁶ Newsreel footage invited viewers to hop on board new aircraft with the designers Sergei Iliushin and Oleg Antonov proudly showing off interior spaces and testing reclining seats.⁶⁷ Soviet media likewise welcomed readers onto the two-story Tu-114 four-engine turboprop aircraft for its proving flights across the USSR in stories that echoed showcase flights from the 1930s, but now with passengers as key participants.⁶⁸

To domesticate the potentially frightening technology of the Tu-104, journalists reassured readers that its interior was a hermetically sealed space of modern amenities and comfort, a “flying apartment,” that shielded passengers from turbulence, frigid temperatures, and even an Uzbek sandstorm. “I completely forgot that I’m on an airplane!” exclaimed the head of the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet as he looked up from his paperwork on a Tu-104.⁶⁹ As the journal *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo SSSR* explained, aircraft interior designers were actually “artists” whose job it was “to do everything so that passengers forget they are very high up, that somewhere nearby the jet engines are roaring, and that in reality they are sitting in a great cigar-shaped tube.”⁷⁰

Also critical to domesticating jet planes was the gendering of their interiors into wholesome spaces where unmarried female flight attendants made passengers feel at home, while male pilots, depicted as good family men, safely flew passengers in the air.⁷¹ Whenever the flight attendant Nadia Ganenko was on board, *Grazhdanskaia aviatsiia* explained, “there’s nothing

1957; “Na 100 passazhirov: Modifikatsiia samoleta Tu-104,” *GA*, no. 7 (1958): 21–23; A. Golikov, “‘Tu-104B’ letit po marshrutu,” *Ogonek*, no. 11 (1959): 28; V. Novoselov, “Samolet letit za Kaspii,” *Pravda*, 16 May 1959; L. Izraetskii, “Tu-104A ... na 100 mest,” *GA*, no. 2 (1962): 20.

⁶⁶ V. Vasilov, “Novye passazhirskie samolety,” *Pravda*, 10 July 1957; T. Iudin, “Na kryl’iakh ‘Moskvy,’” *Vecherniaia Moskva*, 21 September 1957; A. Golikov and Dm. Bal’termants, “Ispytatel’nyi polet,” *Ogonek*, no. 24 (1960): 18–19.

⁶⁷ See the newsreels *New Passenger Planes 1957* and *Four Engine Turbo Screw Plane Ukraine 1957*, British Pathé (<https://www.britishpathe.com/video/new-passenger-planes/query/tu-104>; <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/four-engine-turbo-screw-plane-ukraine/query/ukraine>).

⁶⁸ A. Golikov, “‘Tu-114’ vykhodit na start,” *Ogonek*, no. 47 (1957): 2; V. Vasilov, “34,400 kilometrov za 48 s polovinoi letnykh chasov,” *Pravda*, 9 July 1958; Golikov, “Rozhdenie vozdušnogo lainera.”

⁶⁹ Rudim, “Reaktivnyi passazhirskii”; Riabchikov, “Era samoletov reaktivnykh.”

⁷⁰ V. Mokichev, “V samolete,” *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo SSSR*, no. 2 (1961): 32.

⁷¹ Novoselov, “Samolet letit”; “Vernuvshis’ iz ocherednogo reisa, komandir korablia trizhdy ‘millioner’ Ivan Ivanovich Tukish smotrit s zhenoi Irinoi Petrovnoi i det’ mi Evgeniem i Ol’goi televizionnuu peredachu,” *GA*, no. 4 (1955): 41; “Vstupaia v novyi 1958 god...,” *GA*, no. 1 (1958): 8–11.

to be worried about, everything's in order.... She's a real housewife of the airplane." Before liftoff, she "familiarizes air travelers with the airplane's equipment and the forthcoming route," thereby translating the unfamiliar technological environment into a recognizable space.⁷² Pictures of nuclear families and children, particularly babies with their mothers, signaled the domestic feel of an aircraft's interior.⁷³ Aeroflot advertisements similarly showed young children and toys as reassuring signs that flying was safe and enjoyable. A 1961 poster, for example, showed the Russian folk character *Ivanushka-durachok* (Ivan the Fool) riding on the back of an airplane with a child's hobbyhorse in the foreground.⁷⁴ As ordinary families moved into single-family apartments on the ground, aviation culture invited them into the air, where they helped domesticate the cutting-edge technology of the Soviet Jet Age.

"Information Guides the Passenger"

Alongside jet aircraft, modernist air terminals provided the new spaces of a socialist consumer modernity.⁷⁵ One hundred airport terminals were newly built or revamped from 1958 to 1965 to meet the needs of expanding air travel. Among these, terminals that shed Stalinist neoclassicism for glass and metal modernity began to appear in the early 1960s.⁷⁶ The ones at Moscow's Sheremet'evo, Vnukovo, and Domodedovo airports were at the avant-garde of terminal design, which reshaped airports in such cities as Kiev, Novosibirsk, Mineral'nye Vody, and Yakutsk.⁷⁷ Along with its movie theater and hotel, a new terminal on Leningradskii prospekt in Moscow brought the Jet Age into

⁷² L. Krasnikov, "Khoziaika samoleta," *GA*, no. 3 (1961): 13.

⁷³ "Na vozdukhnykh trassakh strany....," *GA*, no. 7 (1955): 33; G. Piskov, "Dlia vozdukhnykh puteshestvennikov," *GA*, no. 1 (1958): 30; N. Klavin, "Novoe na staroi trasse," *GA*, no. 3 (1958): 25.

⁷⁴ Gleb Kotov, ed., *Istoriia v plakatakh Aeroflota: K 85-letiiu grazhdanskoi aviatsii Rossii—dniu Aeroflota* (Moscow: Aeroflot, 2008), 83. See also the newspaper ad "Pol'zuites' vozdukhnyim transportom!" *Vecherniaia Moskva*, 11 March 1964.

⁷⁵ Unlike mass housing, terminals have received little scholar attention. An exception is Lida Oukaderova's brief examination of their role in films of the Khrushchev era (*The Cinema of the Soviet Thaw: Space, Materiality, Movement* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017], 86–95).

⁷⁶ E. Vasil'ev, "Kompleks aerovokzalov Moskv," *Arkhitektura SSSR*, no. 10 (1965): 24. For an example of an air terminal with a neoclassical design, see G. Piskov, "Passazhiram—zaboty i vnimanie," *GA*, no. 9 (1956): 24–26.

⁷⁷ G. El'kin, G. Zil'berman, and Iu. Filenkov, "Aerovokzal Novosibirsk-Tolmachevo," *Arkhitektura SSSR*, no. 3 (1965): 29; E. Putintsev and V. Ushakov, "Aerovokzal v Yakutske," *Arkhitektura SSSR*, no. 3 (1965): 30; Vasil'ev, "Kompleks aerovokzalov Moskv," 24–30; V. Lobanovskii, "Aerovokzal v Borispol'e," *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo SSSR*, no. 10 (1965): 5–7; V. Ushakov, "Aerovokzal v Mineral'nykh vodakh," *Arkhitektura SSSR*, no. 8 (1966): 57–58.

the city. Embodying the scientific-technical revolution, it was presented as a time-space of perpetual activity and consumer services where passengers registered for their flights and hopped on buses directly to their aircraft at one of Moscow's four airports.⁷⁸

At the dawn of the Jet Age, however, government audits and mass media also identified airports as the main site of persistent problems. These included the lack of eating facilities, hotels, and rooms for mothers with babies; poorly planned spaces and the absence of furniture; and nonfunctioning facilities like toilets. Another issue was the lack of practical information regarding arrival and departure times, the location of a terminal's offices, and bus schedules.⁷⁹ *Krokodil* covered airport dysfunction in a biting article, which top aviation administrators relayed as required reading for airport personnel.⁸⁰ Similarly, *Grazhdanskaia aviatsiia* invited readers to witness shortcomings "through the eyes of a passenger" who chronicled his tale of woe flying from Moscow to Kemerovo, thereby fulfilling a chief obligation of the "citizen-consumer."⁸¹ From the lack of hotels for delayed passengers to dirty airplanes, Aeroflot was in serious need of improvement.⁸²

In the aviation culture of the Jet Age, the modernist air terminal signified passengers' liberation from these chronic difficulties in a new era of efficient socialist consumption. New terminals ostensibly featured all the facilities necessary to improve customer service—including restaurants and cafes, hair salons, rooms for mothers with babies, lounges with televisions, and even a "cocktail hall" at Sheremet'ev. Similar to single-family apartments, new terminals sported minimalist furniture of synthetic materials.⁸³ They also served as venues for observing the Jet Age, as airfields had in the early days of aviation. As new gateways to the socialist city (Fig. 5), terminals allowed

⁷⁸ N. Pekareva, "Moskovskii gorodskoi aerovokzal," *Arkhitektura SSSR*, no. 2 (1965): 10–17; "Moskovskoe tsentral'noe...", *GA*, no. 4 (1966): 15–18.

⁷⁹ See the 1950 report by the USSR Ministry of State Control on 16 airports in Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki (RGAE) f. 9527, op. 1, d. 3088a, ll. 19–36. See the 1961 report by the Main Administration of the Civil Air Fleet about problems at airports with international traffic in RGAE f. 9527, op. 1, d. 4986, ll. 1–8. On the lack of adequate food facilities, see the RSFSR Ministry of Trade's 1962 report in Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF) f. A-259, op. 42, d. 9323, ll. 4–5.

⁸⁰ E. Tsugulieva, "Mezhdru nehom i zemlei," *Krokodil*, no. 14 (1960): 6–7. See the administrators' memo about *Krokodil*'s exposé in RGAE f. 9527, op. 1, d. 4608, l. 27.

⁸¹ A. Ivanov, "Glazami passazhira," *GA*, no. 1 (1963): 15.

⁸² I. Govorin, "Komsomol'tsy zabotiatsia o passazhirakh," *GA*, no. 4 (1955): 15; N. Vasil'ev, "Dostavliat' passazhirov na avtobusakh-ekspressakh," *GA*, no. 12 (1955): 32.

⁸³ Putintsev and Ushakov, "Aerovokzal v Iakutske"; V. Ushakov, "Inter'ery aerovokzalov," *Arkhitektura SSSR*, no. 8 (1965): 35–41; Ushakov, "Aerovokzal v Mineral'nykh vodakh."

Such a service expanded on the information passengers received under Stalin with new rules from discounts and refunds to baggage size and transport of pets. While the prohibitions on hazardous materials, firearms, and camera equipment carried over from the late 1940s, passengers now faced more rules disciplining their behavior. If passengers arrived late for a flight, they could still get a refund during the first 24 hours minus 25 percent of its value; but no refunds were possible for losing a ticket or getting kicked off a flight for bad behavior. Sick passengers were prohibited from flying; walking about the cabin or smoking during takeoffs and landings was not allowed. Advice to male passengers not to fill their fountain pens with ink was intended to protect their suits (*kostiumy*) but also signaled an expectation to dress appropriately. Finally, passengers were urged “to inform family and friends by telegram the date and number of [their] flight.”⁸⁷ Without saying so explicitly, this would facilitate identification of deceased passengers in case of a fatal crash, none of which were reported in Soviet media.

Echoing similar prescriptions for flying in the late 1940s and riding the Moscow Metro in the 1930s, this mix of practical information and disciplining norms aimed at transforming ordinary citizens into cultured passengers. Much of that information was supposed to circulate through new, technologically enhanced spaces. At the center of aviation’s country-wide information network was Aeroflot’s central office in Moscow, linked to regional offices by wire and branch offices by teletype. Next, a new and centralized information bureau (*inform biuro*) would become every airport’s nerve center, drawing information from various critical nodes—including airplanes in flight—and transmitting it to a range of consumers such as Inturist, customs officials, information desks, and “passengers and clientele by telephone.” The public face of this system was the information desk (*spravochnoe biuro*) dispensing critical updates to passengers on the go. Aiding desk attendants was “silent information” (*nemaia informatsiia*) such as signs for check-in and the restaurant, as well as television screens and the display board for arrivals and departures. In aviation culture of the Khrushchev era, the airport terminal was a paragon of the STR where a scientifically planned system ensured that technology—from planes to telephones and TV screens—worked in unison to benefit passengers.⁸⁸

The information that guided Soviet citizens along their journeys celebrated jet-era mobility but also suggested its limits. Maps of the airline’s routes and media stories about their constant expansion underscored the tension in

⁸⁷ M. Z. Soloveichik, M. I. Fridman, and L. P. Khokhlov, *Spravochnik passazhira* (Moscow: Transzheldorizdat, 1958), 149–55.

⁸⁸ Piskov, “Spravka vedet,” 27–28.

passengers' mobility by showing an overwhelmingly domestic route structure with few international destinations.⁸⁹ Instead of dreaming of flights abroad, Soviet citizens were encouraged to imagine flying throughout the USSR from shorter connections between Moscow to Saratov, and longer ones joining the capital to Blagoveshchensk.⁹⁰ Aeroflot's brochures similarly advertised routes to Kirgiziia, resort towns on the Black Sea, and the Soviet Far East.⁹¹ Jet planes, *Pravda* demonstrated, brought the Soviet periphery closer to the center with a new route from Moscow to Krasnovodskii, the "gateway to Central Asia."⁹² Or as *Grazhdanskaia aviatsiia* put it in describing a route map, "The 450,000 km of civil aviation routes unite the capital of Moscow with the capitals of all the union republics, regional and oblast centers, the country's industrial centers and resorts, and agricultural regions."⁹³ Such information reminded readers that Aeroflot's routes were not just for passengers but advanced the economic and political integration of the world's largest country.

In visual and textual representations of their airline's routes, Soviet readers looked upon an immense, highly integrated country suspended in its own space with comparatively few routes to the outside world. The Cold War context, to which we now turn, was critical to shaping the information citizens received about where they could travel by air and what Aeroflot's routes, especially those abroad, were supposed to signify. Whereas Pan Am's routes presented a dense network connecting countries across the world for the benefit of American travelers, Aeroflot's routes told the story of the Soviet state's modernization through stages of economic growth, which afforded citizens the benefits of Jet Age mobility largely at home.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Such representations accurately portrayed the lopsided differences in Aeroflot's domestic and international traffic. In the entire postwar period, only 1–2 percent of its passenger traffic included international flights. These percentages were not reported in the statistical handbook. They are calculated here from statistics on overall passenger numbers and international passenger numbers reported in the handbooks (*Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1970 g.*, 463; *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1985 g.*, 350).

⁹⁰ "IL-18 na linii Moskva-Blagoveshchensk," *Vecherniaia Moskva*, 22 January 1964; "Novosti Aeroflota: 'AN-24' na liniakh Moskva-Saratov, Moskva-Cheboksary," *Vecherniaia Moskva*, 10 February 1964.

⁹¹ See the brochures "Aeroflot: Dal'nyi vostok," "Aeroflot: Kirgiziia," and "Aeroflot: Kurortnye avialinii" (RGAE f. 743, op. 1, d. 392, ll. 12, 17, 20).

⁹² Novoselov, "Samolet letit." Civil aviation, *Grazhdanskaia aviatsiia* explained, was key to modernizing Soviet Central Asia and connecting it to the rest of the Soviet Union. See L. Malanchev, "Turkmenistan—respublika sploshnoi aerofikatsii," *GA*, no. 10 (1961): 10–12; and "Golubyie puti Kazakhstana," *GA*, no. 9 (1964): 2.

⁹³ "Kryl'ia rodiny," *GA*, no. 8 (1964): 16–17.

⁹⁴ For examples of Aeroflot's and Pan Am's route maps, see "Vam, passazhiry: etapy bol'shogo puti," *GA*, no. 7 (1967): 2–3; and "Pan American Airways," 1967 brochure, University of

Passengers of the Cold War

As Susan Reid has argued, representations of the housewife in the Khrushchev era mobilized her to fight the “Cold War in the kitchen” by promoting a rational and scientific approach to consumption. In the single-family apartment and her efficient kitchen, the housewife was at the forefront of forging a socialist path in the STR in opposition to her capitalist counterpart who reveled in irrational, excessive consumption.⁹⁵ In a similar fashion, aviation culture in the Jet Age assigned passengers the role of demonstrating what was socialist and superior about Aeroflot. Whereas the housewife was the chief Cold War warrior in the Soviet home, representations of Aeroflot’s passengers reached across gender, generational, and class lines to compete with their American adversary.

Aeroflot’s main rival was Pan Am, an airline that Juan Trippe started in 1927 and built into an international behemoth with much regulatory and financial help from the US government, for which the airline advanced military and foreign policy goals before and after the war.⁹⁶ As Jenifer Van Vleck has shown, Pan Am promised a uniquely American vision of world unity by achieving the true potential of aviation: the disappearance of political boundaries and the creation of a globally integrated “one world” established on American terms in which Americans could travel wherever and whenever they wanted.⁹⁷

The Soviets met the American challenge in the skies in several ways. Starting in the mid-1950s, Aeroflot expanded its global presence through international routes to state socialist countries and then Western Europe and the Global South.⁹⁸ Continuing practices begun under Stalin, the aviation industry displayed its latest aircraft at international air shows, Aviation Day celebrations at home, and demonstration flights abroad.⁹⁹ Soviet media blasted Pan Am as a symptom of all that was wrong with capitalism and described Americans as war-mongering, irrational capitalists

Miami, Digital Collections, Pan American World Airways Records (<https://merrick.library.miami.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/asm0341/id/4127/rec/1>).

⁹⁵ Reid, “Cold War in the Kitchen.”

⁹⁶ Jenifer Van Vleck, “An Airline at the Crossroads of the World: Ariana Afghan Airlines, Modernization, and the Global Cold War,” *History and Technology* 25, 1 (2009): 3–24.

⁹⁷ Jenifer Van Vleck, “The ‘Logic of the Air’: Aviation and the Globalism of the ‘American Century,’” *New Global Studies* 1, 1 (2007): 1–37; Van Vleck, *Empire of the Air: Aviation and the American Ascendancy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

⁹⁸ Gidwitz, “Political and Economic Implications,” 303–35, 450–51.

⁹⁹ “Im ponravilsia vozduzhnyi parad,” *Ogonek*, no. 27 (1956): 4; I. Babin, “Na vseмирnoi vystavke v Brussele,” *GA*, no. 7 (1958): 6; “Krylatyi gost’,” *Ogonek*, no. 30 (1958): 22; Genrikh Gofman, “‘IL-62’ za okeanom,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 17 April 1968. On Stalin-era versions of these displays, see Palmer, *Dictatorship of the Air*, 195–258.

while the USSR used civil aviation for peace and economic development.¹⁰⁰ Aeroflot's passengers were living proof that the Soviet approach to aviation was not only technologically superior but egalitarian and internationalist in ways that rebutted the aimless individualism, profit-seeking motives, and imperial dominance of Americans.

Pan Am, however, always maintained a greater global presence than its Soviet counterpart and got a head start defining the terms of their conflict. Before the end of the war, Trippe pledged to transform Pan Am from "a luxury service to carry the well-to-do" into an airline for "the average man at prices he can afford to pay." In the 1950s, the airline reduced fares on key routes and introduced "economy service" in 1958 to grow its business through "a new type of air traveler," such as a school teacher, a businessman, and a rancher. By expanding the market for air travel, Pan Am would ensure that "the Jet Age will see the goal of international air transportation made available to everyone at a reasonable cost."¹⁰¹

Not to be outdone, Aeroflot similarly slashed fares to bring more Soviet passengers into the air, but only at home. In early 1958, it cut fares by 10–40 percent on various domestic routes, offered 10 percent discounts to those who bought round-trip tickets, and let children between the ages of 5 and 12 fly for half the cost.¹⁰² Flying, *Grazhdanskaia aviatsiia* admitted, had previously been for "people on official business" (*liudi, sledovavshie po sluzhebnyim delam*), but now it included those working less prestigious jobs but earning enough money, such as a sea boat mechanic on his way to Georgia for vacation. "Soviet people are wealthier," the magazine concluded, "so they want to use more convenient means of transportation that takes less time."¹⁰³

Through cheaper fares, Pan Am and Aeroflot sold their versions of the good life to broader segments of the population and claimed the superiority of their economic systems. In doing so, they helped transform the Iron Curtain into what György Péteri calls the Nylon Curtain, across which a range of

¹⁰⁰ N. Kozlov, "Na vozdukhnykh liniakh SShA," *GA*, no. 12 (1955): 33–35; G. Pol'skoi, "Kabare v ... stratosfere," *GA*, no. 6 (1957): 39; A. Sofronov, "Polet cherez dva okeana," *Ogonek*, no. 52 (1956): 25–27; V. Ignat'ev, "Reklama i fakty," *GA*, no. 1 (1959): 35; V. Danilychev, "Na vozdukhnykh putiakh mira," *GA*, no. 7 (1961): 15.

¹⁰¹ Pan Am pamphlet "The Jet Age." The content of the pamphlet suggests it was published in 1959. See Special Collections of the University of Miami Libraries, Pan American World Airways, Inc. Records, Accession I, Box 323, Folder 20, pamphlet "The Jet Age," 5–7.

¹⁰² Piskov, "Dlia vozdukhnykh putesthestvennikov."

¹⁰³ Klavin, "Novoe na staroi trasse," 27.



Figure 6. Advertisement for Capital Airlines, 1951

Source: Ad*Access, Duke University Library
<https://repository.duke.edu/dc/adaccess/T1079>).

mutually reinforcing images and aspirations about modern life circulated.¹⁰⁴ Representations of businessmen-on-the-go and well-dressed diners in the air suggested how social archetypes of the Jet Age developed across culturally porous borders (Figs. 6–9).¹⁰⁵ For both airlines, however, representations of passengers had to strike a delicate balance between affordability and maintaining the aura of an exceptional lifestyle. The first part of this message was best communicated through words and fare prices, while the latter relied on images.

In the charged political context of the Cold War, both sides claimed that the other's aviation sector was hopelessly geared toward members of the elite. In 1955, *Grazhdanskaia aviatsiia* asserted that airfares in the United States were out of reach for most Americans; those who flew were primarily "industrialists, businessmen, representatives of commercial firms, and well-paid government officials."¹⁰⁶ In 1957, it took offense at *Life* magazine for claiming, as the Soviet magazine put it, that "the Tu-104 is just a good piece of propaganda" and that Soviet leaders fly it around the world for official

¹⁰⁴ György Péteri, "Nylon Curtain—Transnational and Transsystemic Tendencies in the Cultural Life of State-Socialist Russia and East-Central Europe," *Slavonica* 10, 2 (2004): 113–23.

¹⁰⁵ Another major archetype of the Jet Age was the flight attendant, whose Soviet and American representations were mutually constitutive (Vantoch, *Jet Sex*, 125–52).

¹⁰⁶ Kozlov, "Na vozdushnykh liniakh SShA," 33–34.



Figure 7. “Time Is What I Gain! A Day by Train or An Hour by Plane.”

Aeroflot poster, 1961

Source: http://aeroflot-history.ru/afl_en/.



The lower deck lounge in the newest Clippers is tops for relaxation. It's a nicely-decorated sky club — congenial meeting place for a toast to your Clipper voyage.



Meals aloft are full-course and oh-so-good. These, and between-meal snacks, are served without extra charge. Your Clipper flies so steadily, so smoothly, that eating is easy and pleasant.

Figure 8. Drinks and Dinner on a Pan Am Clipper

Source: Undated brochure, “Sun Guide to Winter Vacations: Get Up and Go Where the Sun Shines Bright This Winter,” 4. Pan Am Airways, Inc. Records, Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

ceremonies.” To prove the Americans wrong, a journalist hopped on a Tu-104 and discovered a socially diverse mix of passengers flying from Moscow to Irkutsk. “Among them,” he declared, “were workers, engineers, technicians, doctors, students, and not one leader whose family name we knew before the



Figure 9. Dining in Style on the Tupolev-114. The plane included a “bar room” and “wide couches and upper sleeper-berths.” This Russian- and English-language booklet (probably from 1959) advertised the Tupolev-114, an enormous four-engine, 120- to 220-seat turboprop airplane that could fly from Moscow to Washington without refueling.

Source: *Tu-114; Aeroflot* (c. 1959), Accession I, box 121, folder 8, Pan Am Airways, Inc. Records, Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.

flight.”¹⁰⁷ In its exposé of *Life* magazine’s malicious representations, *Ogonek* went to Vnukovo Airport where it found two technicians and a mechanic, not “Soviet leaders,” among those on a Tu-104 flight from Khabarovsk. For good measure, the magazine produced an ad of the plane’s regular routes and a picture of passengers from Khabarovsk crowded around its tail.¹⁰⁸ A year later, *Grazhdanskaia aviatsiia* found again a healthy cross-section of society flying the Tu-104 and comment books that revealed “the feelings and thoughts of people of different ages and professions—workers and collective farm workers, scientists and engineers, doctors and artists.”¹⁰⁹

Soviet media met the American challenge of providing egalitarian access to air travel head on, but a more indirect approach was needed to combat the American “one world” vision of global mobility. Simply put, Aeroflot could not offer Soviet citizens such freedom of movement across borders; pretending

¹⁰⁷ A. Vasilenko, “Passazhiry reaktivnogo samoleta,” *GA*, no. 6 (1957): 22–24.

¹⁰⁸ “‘Laif’ govorit nepravdu,” *Ogonek*, no. 21 (1957): 26–31.

¹⁰⁹ P. Dzhiga, “Govoriat passazhiry Tu-104,” *GA*, no. 2 (1958): 37.

otherwise was rarely attempted.¹¹⁰ Even when readers were invited to fly abroad, the unmistakable message was to remain in the socialist camp, as an Aeroflot ad subtly suggested by keeping the West in the dark (Fig. 10). While high prices and the social barriers of race and gender were the chief limits on air travel in the West, in the USSR it was the state that imposed severe restrictions on flying abroad.¹¹¹ Insofar as policing its citizens' foreign travel was concerned, the Soviet Union remained a totalitarian state. In addition to issuing foreign passports, it strictly regulated who could travel abroad by forcing citizens to obtain permission and exit visas. Reflecting the state's paranoia and paternalism, citizens who managed trips to the West did so in well-regulated groups.¹¹²

In short, a more sophisticated answer to the American "one world" vision was needed so Soviet passengers could play a positive role in the Cold War. The answer was internationalism, a central concept of Soviet ideology that had taken many forms since the Russian Revolution, from engaging in cultural diplomacy to gathering and disseminating world culture.¹¹³ By showing Soviet aircraft at international exhibitions and giving military airplanes to the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War, Stalin's regime had used aviation to advance internationalism.¹¹⁴ Embracing it far more widely than his predecessor, Khrushchev reopened the country to the world and championed internationalism on many fronts, from Soviet links to Latin America and friendship societies to tourism and ties to other state socialist regimes.¹¹⁵ The Jet Age likewise afforded aviation culture new opportunities to

¹¹⁰ A. Kolesnikov, "Passazhir letit za granitsu...", *GA*, no. 7 (1958): 7–8; "Leningrad-Parizh," *GA*, no. 4 (1969): back page.

¹¹¹ Christine Yano, *Airborne Dreams: "Nisei" Stewardesses and Pan American World Airways* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Chandra Bhimull, *Empire in the Air: Airline Travel and the African Diaspora* (New York: New York University Press, 2017); Anke Ortlepp, *Jim Crow Terminals: The Desegregation of American Airports* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017).

¹¹² On foreign travel and its restrictions for Soviet citizens during the Cold War, see Anne Gorsuch, *All This Is Your World: Soviet Tourism at Home and Abroad after Stalin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Matthew Light, "What Does It Mean to Control Migration? Soviet Mobility Policies in Comparative Perspective," *Law and Social Inquiry* 37, 2 (2012): 395–429.

¹¹³ Katerina Clark, *Moscow, The Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931–1941* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921–1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹¹⁴ Palmer, *Dictatorship of the Air*, 244–47.

¹¹⁵ Gorsuch, *All This Is Your World*; Austin Jersild, *The Sino-Soviet Alliance: An International History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Rupprecht, *Soviet Internationalism after Stalin*; Applebaum, *Empire of Friends*.



Figure 10. “Aeroflot: From Moscow an Airplane Can Quickly Take You to the Capitals of Foreign Countries”

Source: *Ogonek*, no. 19 (1955): back cover.

advance internationalism and counter American “one world” visions. Subtly redirecting any aspirations for foreign travel also featured in such propaganda.

As the airline’s 1956 timetable proudly stated, “Aeroflot’s international routes serve the development of cooperation and friendship among peoples, the strengthening of economic and cultural ties with other countries.”¹¹⁶ Evidence that the Tu-104 advanced such ideals appeared in *Sovetskaia zhenshchina*, which published the glowing testimonial of an Indian diplomat who enjoyed all the amenities of the jet plane on its proving flight from Moscow to Delhi.¹¹⁷ In the 1957 film *Udivitel’noe voskresen’e* (An Amazing Sunday), a Tu-104 advances Soviet-Czech friendship through a stowaway from Prague who spends the day in Moscow to visit the World Youth Festival.¹¹⁸ Internationalism, as illustrated in the love story “Night at the Airport,” could take place inside the Soviet Union, with airports serving as the ideal setting for witnessing a parade of foreigners from state socialist countries, as well as the capitalist world.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ *Raspisanie dvizheniia samoletov*, no. 1 (1956): 6.

¹¹⁷ Ratnam, “TU-104.”

¹¹⁸ Iu. Volokitin, “Udivitel’noe voskresen’e,” *GA*, no. 10 (1957): 39.

¹¹⁹ Tat’iana Tess, “Noch’ v aeroportu,” *Ogonek*, no. 3 (1956): 17–20.

Notably absent in these internationalist celebrations were ordinary Soviet citizens actually flying across borders. Instead, readers were encouraged to marvel at the goodwill that Soviet jet planes and their pilots engendered abroad.¹²⁰ Soviet media chronicled the worldliness of their leaders, especially Khrushchev, as they hop-scotched around the world striving for peace or, in Leonid Brezhnev's case in 1961, narrowly escaped death when a French fighter pilot shot up his plane as it approached Rabat.¹²¹ Soviet audiences were encouraged to see the world vicariously through the eyes and adventures of their intrepid journalists. *Ogonek's* globe-trotting editor Anatolii Sofronov wrote up his aerial journey to Japan for an antinuclear weapons meeting and the Summer Olympics in Australia—with many stops along the way, including Hong Kong and Bangkok. His trip, however, was predictably marred by the anti-internationalist behavior of Americans, including one who sexually harassed a flight attendant, and the US government, which refused transit visas to Soviet citizens flying home. Sofronov skewered British and US imperialism, including a Pan Am sticker showing two Europeans in a rickshaw that he claimed displayed the “inhumanity” (*chelovekonenavistnichestvo*) of Europeans, now facilitated by the US airline.¹²² In short, the world was a scary place, and until Soviet efforts to bring about peace and the “friendship of peoples” succeeded, Soviet citizens were better off flying at home, where they could safely enjoy the internationalism their country forged on their behalf.

Maps of Aeroflot's international routes struck a similar chord. For example, *Grazhdanskaia aviatsiia* published a map showing Aeroflot's expansion into Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, and one lonely route in the Western Hemisphere to Havana. Lest any readers mistake these routes as an invitation to fly abroad, pilots who had done so explained what “the ‘geography’ of our international air routes” actually meant: namely, that Aeroflot helped bind the socialist countries of Eastern Europe closer to the USSR, provided a lifeline to Cuba, and connected the USSR to a range of decolonized countries from Ghana and Algeria to Iraq and Syria. Ultimately, the magazine explained, Aeroflot's international routes advanced cultural understanding between nations, as well as “peace and friendship, the great ideas of the international mission of the world's first socialist country.”¹²³

¹²⁰ Golikov, “‘Tu-104B’”; V. Smolin, “Velik li shar zemnoi?,” *GA*, no. 5 (1961): 24–25.

¹²¹ On Khrushchev's flights abroad, see for example “Sem' tomov otzyvov,” *GA*, no. 2 (1962): 22–23; and “Aviatsionnyi kalendar' semiletki,” *GA*, no. 1 (1961): 2, 4, 8. On the incident involving Brezhnev, see “Pozor vozduzhnym piratam!,” *Pravda*, 11 February 1961.

¹²² A. Sofronov, “Dal'niaia doroga: Rasskaz o polete v Iaponiiu,” *Ogonek*, no. 42 (1956): 23–26; Sofronov, “Polet cherez dva okeana.”

¹²³ “Vetry dal'nikh poletov,” *GA*, no. 9 (1965): 1–6. Quotations from 1 and 2, respectively.

Ordinary Soviet citizens' travel to faraway locations for their own purposes, in contrast, was simply not the point.

To counter the consumer individualism of the American "one world" vision, Soviet aviation culture also emphasized the collectivist nature of socialist internationalism.¹²⁴ Yet placing Soviet citizens in such scenarios beyond their borders was conspicuously avoided. This was best illustrated in the 1962 cinematic thriller *713-i prosit posadku* (Flight 713 Requests Permission to Land), in which passengers from a range of countries work together to land an airplane whose crew has been drugged by assassins trying to kill a "progressive politician."¹²⁵ Since the assassins' target never makes it on board, the passengers must cooperate without any political authority to guide them. Some prove unhelpful, such as an obnoxious American marine (played by a young Vladimir Vysotskii), a drug company salesman, and a former Latin American dictator and his female companion. Others uphold internationalism, such as a young Vietnamese woman about to enter Moscow State University, an older woman and little girl from India, and the mysterious German doctor Rikhard Giunter (Richard Günther), who hides his antifascist past from an agent pursuing him but eventually reveals it and thus sacrifices himself to help save the plane. Betraying yet again anxieties about letting ordinary citizens fly abroad, none of the passengers are Soviet. The spirit of socialist internationalism ultimately wins the day, but the outside world remains too frightening a place for Soviet audiences, who witness Günther's arrest by nefarious agents in the film's last scene.

The airport terminal in which the film begins also underscores its internationalist theme with signs in English and Spanish, desks for international airlines, and a modernist aesthetic (Fig. 11). As described above, the Soviet public in the early 1960s was becoming familiar with this new ex-urban space whose modernist aesthetics reconnected the country to international trends. The screenplay authors, Aleksei Leont'ev and Andrei Donatov, pointed out that, just as naval ports once resembled each other, "it's similarly not easy today to determine the nationality of this large air terminal, which lies somewhere far beyond the borders of our country."¹²⁶ Yet this international space and the jet aircraft on which the story unfolds are not an invitation for the aimless individualism of American travelers but an opportunity for peoples of different nations to work together. "We can only depend on our

¹²⁴ See the emphasis placed on flying as a collective rather than an individual experience in I. Bubnov, "Inter'er passazhirskogo samoleta," *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo SSSR*, no. 5 (1964): 33–37.

¹²⁵ Quotation from authors' summary of the screenplay in Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva (RGALI) f. 2453, op. 4, d. 2239, l. 1.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, ll. 2–3.



Figure 11. The International Air Terminal in *Flight 713 Requests Permission to Land* (dir. Grigorii Nikulin, Lenfilm, 1962)

collective strength,” Günther sternly declares before successfully recruiting a shy young American to operate the radio. Also joining the effort are a Czech cameraman Irzhi Vlček (Jiří Vlček) and Genri Charmen (Henry Charming), a handsome law graduate of Princeton University who has been traveling the world in search of a job for six years. Americans, the film suggests, can be redeemed but only through the collective (Fig. 12). Meanwhile, the sleeping pilots are symbolically removed from their preeminent position in aviation culture under Stalin, first by a technology—the plane’s autopilot—and then by ordinary passengers, who land the plane. Although no Soviet passengers are on board, the Soviet Union’s international presence is felt through a radio speaker’s voice announcing the country’s latest achievement in space. In addition, jazz permeates the film as background and diegetic music, further underscoring its modern, international setting.¹²⁷

In addition to its plot, the very origins of *Flight 713* were internationalist. The screenplay was based on the Swedish writer Henning Berger’s “The Sin Flood” (1907), a story that inspired three American films in which strangers stuck in a bar during a flood learn uncomfortable truths about themselves as they attempt to survive.¹²⁸ Leont’ev and Donatov also cited as inspiration the 1955 bombing of *The Kashmir Princess*, an Air India aircraft that terrorists

¹²⁷ For the film’s summary and list of characters, see *ibid.*, ll. 1–3, 17–20; and d. 2240, ll. ii–iii.

¹²⁸ In a discussion about *Flight 713* at Mosfil’m Studios, Berger’s story was referenced as a source but not the American films (*ibid.*, d. 1718, ll. 1, 11). The three American film adaptations were *The Sin Flood* (1922), followed by *The Way of All Men* (1930) and its version in German *Die Maske fällt* (The Mask Falls) in 1931. See the films’ entries in the American Film Institute Catalog (<https://search.proquest.com/afi?accountid=12084>).



Figure 12. Passengers on Flight 713 Work Together to Land the Aircraft. From left to right: Irzhi Vlchek, a young American man, an older Indian woman, Genri Charmen, and Rikhard Giunter.

targeted to assassinate Chinese premier Zhou Enlai, who missed the flight but had been on his way to no less an international event than the Bandung Conference.¹²⁹ *Flight 713* may have also had a source closer to home and more familiar to Soviet audiences. In 1960, Sergei Mikhalkov—best known as the author of the Soviet national anthem’s lyrics—wrote the children’s story “Suevernyi Trusokhvostik” (Superstitious Shaky-Tail) about a hare who overcomes his fear of flying in a dream in which he helps land a plane when the crew falls asleep. In both *Flight 713* and “Superstitious Shaky-Tail,” the deadly situation reveals individuals’ true natures, showing some to be hopelessly selfish and conniving, while others rise to the occasion for the good of the collective.¹³⁰ Both stories reflected broader changes in the aviation culture of the Jet Age by replacing pilots with ordinary passengers as the keepers of collectivist values and internationalism, all set in the modern, consumer space of the airplane.

Conclusion

This article has explored representations of Aeroflot passengers as a critical source of information that the Soviet public received about the wonders of the Jet Age and their role in it. Initially conceived on the margins of aviation

¹²⁹ RGALI f. 2453, op. 4, d. 2239, l. 1.

¹³⁰ Sergei Mikhalkov, “Suevernyi Trusokhvostik,” *Ogonek*, no. 18 (1960): 22–24. Mikhalkov wrote an expanded version of the story, *Trusokhvostik: Skazka dlia pap, mam i malyshei* (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1970). An English translation appeared under the title used above, “Superstitious Shaky-Tail,” in Sergei Mikhalkov, *A Choice for Children* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1980), 130–37.

culture under Stalin as “citizen-consumers” of the skies, passengers became its main subjects under Khrushchev not only because more people flew but because air travel advanced the new regime’s broader goals of promoting the scientific-technical revolution and mass consumption in the ideologically charged context of the Cold War. Indeed, the Cold War conflict was key to shaping how both adversaries represented the benefits of aviation to their domestic populations. In opposition to the US Jet Age, which championed individual mobility and the erasure of political boundaries on American terms, Soviet aviation culture projected a socialist version of the Jet Age that served the state’s global ambitions and championed cultured consumption, egalitarianism, and internationalism. Nonetheless, Soviet representations of passengers could never fully resolve the tension between the greater mobility jet planes afforded and severe restrictions on foreign travel. Through the end of the Soviet Union, ordinary citizens were encouraged to see their airline’s international routes as signs of their country’s global prowess and peaceful intentions but not as an invitation to fly abroad for their own purposes.

Once the Jet Age became part of Soviet life, did Aeroflot and aviation culture succeed at creating a viable civil aviation sector with “citizen-consumers” in the air who were socialist and thus fundamentally different from their capitalist counterparts? While answering this question lies beyond the scope of the present article, it is worth briefly addressing it here. Despite Aeroflot’s popular reputation for poor service, crashes, and mismanagement,¹³¹ scholars have long recognized that the Soviet state succeeded at building a massive airline that served a range of economic and scientific functions and fought the Cold War by extending international routes and technical assistance programs in the Global South. In addition, much of Aeroflot’s growth occurred in the Brezhnev era when passenger traffic grew faster than it had under Khrushchev and design bureaus turned out more jet aircraft from new classes of Tupolev airplanes to the short-range Iakolev-40 and the long distance Iliushin-62.¹³²

Building on this scholarship, a closer analysis of Aeroflot’s operations and aviation culture can elucidate their roles among the broader changes of the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras. While this article has explored how the state envisioned its airline’s passengers, questions that need to be addressed are the actual experience of Soviet citizens who flew Aeroflot and whether

¹³¹ See, e.g., the British television documentary *Airplaneski!* (dir. Norman Hull, 1995).

¹³² Gidwitz, “Political and Economic Implications”; Jones, “Rise and Fall of Aeroflot”; Davies, *Aeroflot*; Van Vleck, “Airline at the Crossroads of the World.” Under Brezhnev, Aeroflot expanded rapidly. In 1965, 42.1 million passengers flew Aeroflot. This number grew to 71.4 million in 1970 and 98.1 million by 1975. By 1980, Aeroflot was flying 103.8 million passengers annually and 112.6 million by 1985 (*Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1965 g.*, 512; *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1985 g.*, 350).

they saw themselves and their place in the world in a new light given the information Soviet mass media conveyed about their status as “citizen-consumers” of the air and the inherent tensions such representations had with strict limitations on foreign travel. In addition, how did Aeroflot represent itself to foreign passengers, particularly outside the socialist bloc, and how did their experiences compare with those of Soviet passengers?

In her study of late socialist consumption, Natalya Chernyshova has shown how consumers not only enjoyed more goods under Brezhnev but became increasingly demanding and discriminating, while the state became more tolerant once again of inequalities.¹³³ If passengers followed a similar pattern, it would suggest they successfully internalized the expectations for exemplary service and a sense of entitlement rooted in representations of passengers in the Stalin era that expanded in the Jet Age. Finally, since aviation culture was consumed primarily on the ground—through mass media, film, and advertisements, but also air terminals and aviation exhibitions—an empirical examination of the Soviet Jet Age must address the experiences and worldviews of those citizens who never or rarely flew. As Ida Shul’kina’s story suggests, an Aeroflot ad could inspire an ordinary person—even one who did not actually fly—to imagine a different version of herself transported far away from her everyday life, even to “all corners of the world.”

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¹³³ Chernyshova, *Soviet Consumer Culture*.