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When Soviet cuisine is discussed, whether in small talk or in scholarly publications, it is the iconic *Book of Tasty and Healthy Food*², which is heavily infused with ideology, that immediately comes to mind. The *Book of Tasty and Healthy Food* was a huge success (10 editions and 23 publications from 1939 to 1990, in print-runs of a million copies at a time), so it is hardly surprising that the totalitarian kitchen bible tops the list of Soviet culinary manuals. Sometimes, several other normative books on cooking and housekeeping printed between the mid-1930s to the late 1980s, which are somehow related to the main book and never questioned its authority, are mentioned in interviews and memoirs.³ There is a significant number of works dedicated to the creation of the *Book on Tasty and Healthy Food*, its ideological background and propaganda message, its changeable contents and its place within the corpus of Soviet culinary literature.⁴ Nevertheless, in the shadow of «official», prescriptive gastronomy, another cuisine existed that is rarely discussed and insufficiently investigated, if inves-

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¹ This paper is a part of a research project dedicated to the pragmatics of Soviet handwritten cookbooks, carried out at the Department of Anthropology at the European University at St. Petersburg. Part of this research was conducted in collaboration with Maria I. Goumerova, who participated in the elaboration of research design and undertook seven interviews.

² In scholarly papers, several translations of the original Russian title (Kniga o vkusnoi i zdroroi pishche) could be found: *Book about Delicious and Healthy Food; Book of Tasty and Nutritious Food; Book on Tasty and Healthy Food*. I use the title of the first English translation from 2012 (A.I. Mikoyan et al., *Book of Tasty and Healthy Food: Iconic Cookbook of the Soviet Union, Ministry of the Food Industry, USSR*, trans. by B. Ushumirskiy, 2012).


⁵ One of the few anthropological accounts of Soviet culinary practice belongs to Anna Kushkova. It describes the functions and the perceptions of the most popular and important Soviet festive dish [A. Kushkova, «V tsentre stola: zenit i zakat salata «Oliv’e»», in: *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 76 (2005), 278–313].
tigated at all. This cuisine was private, informal and practically invisible. It was typically Soviet because it was based upon Soviet chains of supply and a limited variety of food. It reconciled the past with the present, family recipes with the economy of shortage (along with the economy of storage) that made people hoard and overstock food-stuff, as well as prepare homemade preserves and share their skills with one another. It appeared in handwritten cookbooks and collections of kitchen notes, which were personally customised and were by no means analogous to their official printed counterparts.

These handwritten cookbooks had been received by their owners – mostly urban working women with technical, secondary or higher education – as something completely different in comparison with the official manuals on cooking. Actually, in some domains of the Soviet everyday life, the official and the unofficial, the public and the private, and the state and the underground did not constitute sets of binary oppositions in the way that they tended to be constructed and presented by some scholars of Soviet studies. «Official» and «unofficial» are terms that have been used to describe the gap between the approved documents and the unofficial opinions, the official art and the art of the underground nature, and so on.

However, this binary construction could inhibit the understanding of more complex, contradictory and diffused phenomena. In some routine practices, which included various patterns of consumption and information exchange, the private and the public constituted a kind of diffused scale with two poles influencing each other. Culinary information could be passed from printed media, which became prolific during Nikita Khrouchtchev’s rule, to manuscripts, and vice versa; some data were sorted out; and vernacular recipes could be printed in magazines such as Rabotnitsa (Working Woman), Krestyanka (Peasant Woman), Sovetskaya zhenschina (Soviet Woman), Zdorovye (Health), and tear-off calendars in specific «correspondence columns». In fact, it was a personal attitude that made official and domestic recipes opposite to each other, structuring the multi-layered force field into clusters on the basis of specific trust relations: People (to some extent) trusted their relatives, neighbours and colleagues, and expressed a certain distrust of the state and its production.

Handwritten cookbooks of the Soviet era were rooted in the strong modern tradition of private manuals and notes on cooking and housekeeping. They had predecessors both in the Russian country estate life (since the translating and printing boom of the 1770–1790s) and in petty-bourgeois traditions of housekeeping (since the rise of...
advice literature in the second-third of the nineteenth century). Last but not least, Soviet handwritten cookbooks were closely related to the socioeconomic context and the informational design of the Soviet society. In the USSR, the tradition of handmade cookbooks functioned as a parallel version to the official cuisine, which had been established, run and approved by the state, and which was built on substantial scientific knowledge on nutrition and hygiene. However, official cuisine as a system of knowledge had little credibility on the level of practice, while the unofficial one seemed to have created and embodied a specific kind of trust, and encouraged a social exchange of skills, knowledge and prestige. This phenomenon raises a series of questions. How did these two cuisines correlate with each other? Why was the tradition of private cook manuscripts so widespread? Why do people insist on a lack of printed information on cooking when remembering the Soviet past, despite the actual abundance of such information? What were pragmatic and symbolic values of handmade cookbooks? What type of social networks did the unofficial cuisine create, given that, according to Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, food and drink «are needed for mustering solidarity, attracting support, requiting kindnesses, and this goes for the poor as well as for the rich».

This paper investigates the questions of trust and solidarity, and of social rituals and socialising patterns as they mirrored one another in private handwritten cookbooks, which could be viewed and interpreted as documents of exchange and tools of creating some status and prestige within particular social networks.

At the moment, the data that I have used for my analysis include 32 interviews and copies of 70 family archives with materials on different kinds of cooking – notebooks and scrapbooks, postcards with recipes, leaflets and clippings, letters, printed cookbooks with handwritten remarks, and so on. These materials are mostly from 1960 to the 1990s (27 archives originated from St. Petersburg, while the rest are from Moscow, Kirov, Rostov-on-Don, Arkhangelsk, Novosibirsk, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, Vladivostok, Kazan, Almaty, Minsk, Tallinn and some other locations in different corners of the former USSR). The earliest manuscript of the corpus belongs to a newly-wed student of the Bestuzhev educational courses for women, the largest women’s higher education institution of Imperial Russia; it carries a mark of the year 1911 on its front page (the final entries of the manuscript were dated from the late 1970s). The most recent manuscript was created by a Leningrad school girl in 1987, «for boasting and showing off»: for the interviewee, the handwritten cookbook indicated the desirable status of adult Soviet woman and could serve as an accessory of prestige – this aspect will be discussed later. Furthermore, there are a dozen of private cookbooks from the nineteenth century preserved at the Manuscript Department of the National Library of Russia and several archives. They have been used as contrastive data – but with certain care, because it is very difficult to establish their owners and thus to recon-

10 All quotations from the interviews have been translated into English by the author; audio files and transcripts in Russian are kept in the author’s collection. Due to the reason of privacy, the names of the participants have been encoded.
struct the social networks within which they could have been circulating, with some remarkable exceptions such as the notes on cooking made by Countess Sophia Tolstaya, Leo Tolstoy’s wife.\textsuperscript{11}

From the historical perspective, making notes on cooking and housekeeping was intertwined with the increase of literacy and the rise of the Russian bourgeois society in the middle of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{12} The structural changes of society, transport development and the urbanising processes influenced the supply chains drastically. Certain types of notes – reflecting the needs and the demands of life in the countryside – disappeared or lost their importance. Others were received as archaic and thus needed to be paraphrased in new terms. On the contrary, notes on cooking gained popularity for two reasons. First, the new bourgeois virtues of «being good at housekeeping», «being a model mistress of the house», and «making savings big and small» had been inculcated in Russia from the period of the «depletion of gentry» up to the turn of the century. Secondly, the scientific and medicalised approach to routine, which appealed to the authority of chemistry, biology and hygiene, encouraged the development of new recipes and new methods of cooking and housekeeping.\textsuperscript{13} Applied sciences – the chemistry of food and the hygiene of housekeeping – stepped in, thereby conducing the conversion of \textit{techne} into \textit{episteme} through manuals and tutorials, and strengthening their credibility and expert notion in the public sphere.

Before the period of urban growth, the landowner or a land steward had administered the routines in numerous country estates, dealing with versatile tasks on the ground of custom and experience.\textsuperscript{14} Compare this with the following abstract from Alexander Pushkin’s poem, which describes customs and activities of the countryside performed by the landowner’s wife: «Mushrooms in brine, for winter eating, / fieldwork directed from the path, / accounts, shaved forelocks, Sunday bath; / meantime she’d give the maids a beating, / if her cross mood was at its worst / – but never asked her husband first.»\textsuperscript{15} In the époque of the Great Reforms, this multifaceted space began to shrink and adjust to an average bourgeois urban dwelling, with its specific troubles and practices; customs were questioned and science was invoked to produce an expertise. It was the mistress of the house who should supervise her household and have more direct control over the spheres that had previously been indirectly looked after by servants. It was the era when new urban communities were emerging and a new middle class, however controversial it was in Russia, was taking shape: These communities needed to produce and share new rules of socialisation that would allow people to

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\textsuperscript{11} S.Tolstaya, \textit{Cookbook}, Yasnaya Polyana 1874 (Tolstoy’s Manuscripts Department, f. 47, d. 33048, State Museum of Leo Tolstoy, Moscow).
\textsuperscript{15} A.Pushkin, Eugene Onegin, trans. by Ch. H.Johnston, Harmondsworth 1979, 79.
\end{flushleft}
co-exist without conflicts. Dining rooms and drawing rooms were principal areas where members of society reciprocated signs of sociality, and, consequently, where these skills could be demonstrated to others and appreciated by them.

The structure of the nineteenth-century notes on cooking and housekeeping, both Russian and Western ones, had been similar to Soviet private cookbooks, however, in the late nineteenth century, handwritten cookbooks had been marginalised by the printed sources, even though they had in fact never vanished. In Russia, the renewed process of the popularity of such books began in the late 1930s, after the so-called «bourgeois turn» or the de-modernisation project of Stalin’s era, which was aimed at reconciling the socialist programme with bourgeois standards, as well as communism with pre-revolutionary dining and consumption patterns, however imaginary they were. When life began to return to normality more or less after the upheaval of the Second World War, when social fabric was restored, this tendency towards comfortable and bourgeois living grew rapidly – along with the new boom of culinary writing and recipe collection. By the 1960s, the tradition of manuscript cookbooks gained great popularity: Such was the private answer to the public campaign for new domesticity of the Khrushchev Thaw, when printed media (such as manuals and advice literature that addressed teenage girls and young women on family values, taste, etiquette and everyday life) were published in large numbers and received by a significant female audience.

It is remarkable how the pragmatics of these cookbooks evolved in comparison with their nineteenth-century predecessors. They had several functions, such as working as memos and providing information for the ritual scenarios for celebrations. As instructions and distinct social messages, the cookbooks were used to fix most notably the horizontal social bonds, create short- and long-term solidarities based upon cooking skills and knowledge, provide socialisation within the community, as well as reflect a very specific type of trust of a group that shared a common power over routine (while they had previously followed printed media carefully, belonged to the rather isolated private sphere, and did not have the distinct function of socialisation). The latter functions seem to be of great importance. I argue that such a re-shaping of the pragmatics had originated in the socioeconomic context. Nevertheless, the analysis that I propose is cultural, not economic; it is the reception and emotions of people that interest me most of all.

18 Gronow / Zhuravlev, «The Book of Tasty and Healthy Food», 37.
1. The Economics of Shortage and Social Networks

Throughout the existence of the Soviet Union, Soviet informal economics was characterised by the requirement of an additional amount of resources, namely of time and information, in order to make a purchase – in comparison with the economics of capitalism.\(^\text{21}\) Despite the fluctuations of supply and the changes in the political course, this typical feature of Soviet economics was preserved until perestroika. One of the most important concepts that describe and interpret its mechanisms is the concept of blat (a system of favours, which worked in society along with the black market and bribery),\(^\text{22}\) but it does not entirely explain the information exchange that deeply influenced Soviet society in this period. This exchange might seem unconditional, disinterested and altruistic at the first glance; nevertheless, it also contributed to the creation of specific social networks, and established conditions for accruing benefits from «the limited good».\(^\text{23}\) There was a number of reasons for such a process of networking, with most of them somehow rooted in the economics of shortage (a term coined by Hungarian economist János Kornai)\(^\text{24}\): an unstable supply, a lack of confidence in official information (and a lack of trust in the state), a vital importance placed on mutual support; and an urgent need to build up bonds within small social groups for «normal living» (that is, the importance of reciprocal trust in kin, friends and colleagues).\(^\text{25}\) When discussing the patterns of consumption in the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras, Susan E. Reid remarks that «despite increased attention to living standards in the 1950s, this [Soviet regime] remained a culture of shortages – requiring of the consumer strategies for procuring, hoarding, and making do», even though the population simultaneously did consume in particular ways.\(^\text{26}\) Issues of buying alimentary goods and cooking, of making acceptable dishes and creating a specific social rhythm through ordinary and ritualistic foodways were the most essential issues.

According to respondents, gastronomical models represented by the official Soviet cookbooks were seen as unrealistic and utopian, particularly with regard to the Book of Tasty and Healthy Food since its lavishly illustrated fifth edition published in 1952, with
«the wrenching discrepancy between the abundance on the pages and its absence in shops». 27 It is noteworthy that all the interviewees considered the 1952 edition to be the first one even though the first edition of the Book of Tasty and Healthy Food had actually appeared in 1939 and had been re-published in both 1945 and 1947. It is most probable that the retouched photographs of abundance in the 1952 edition influenced and transformed the recollections of the book in previous versions. Since the late 1930s, the authorities had constructed an image of the new Soviet cuisine based on the scientific approach to nutrition, and which put a wide range of foodstuff to use: This imaginary Soviet table should first and foremost be nutritious and plentiful. 28 The opening paragraphs of the Book of Tasty and Healthy Food contained an appeal for a plentiful diet, which transforms the idea of pleasure into the idea of abundance, thereby making, as Evgeny Dobrenko put it, the objective wealth out of the subjective delight and pleasure. 29

The Soviet gastronomical bible, the Book of Tasty and Healthy Food, transmitted a versatile message. First, appealing to beginners, it demonstrated basic skills, techniques and operations, and, in the manner of the late nineteenth century, commented on the chemical and physiological processes of nutrition. All of that assisted in making some reputation for the book. Secondly, it advertised processed and semi-processed foods from the Soviet food industry to the busy urban dwellers and the working mothers in particular. Thirdly, appealing to the utopian image of the ideal cuisine and mass-produced luxury, the book spoke about complex dishes and inaccessible ingredients (in recipes as well as in advertising or educational texts in the sidebars, thus creating a specific food mythology) that were beyond the reach of the average Soviet citizen due to constraints of both time and the food supply. In this aspect, the Book of Tasty and Healthy Food was similar to the All-Union Exhibition of Achievements of National Economy, which was opened in 1939 and demonstrated the success of collective farming in the same mythological manner. Experienced cooks could read and interpret the challenging recipes without any difficulty, but did not have the necessary ingredients; beginners could consult the basic rules but could not cook anything more complex due to the frequent inconsistency of the culinary discourse of Book of Tasty and Healthy Food. On the whole, the processing cycles of «Socialist Realist foodways», as envisioned by Mikoyan’s propaganda, were broken or flawed at every stage from the collective farm to the state-run store and then to the table. 30 (This activated specific tactics of repair). Even processed and semi-processed foodstuff, as advertised in the book, – tinned fish and meat, soups in tablets, and instant coffee later on – were available only through special distribution [rations, special elite closed stores, special or

30 Geist, «Cooking Bolshevik», 298.
secret counters in regular stores, festive «orders» for certain privileged groups (за-
казы), warehouses and other hubs of intricate social interactions].\(^{31}\) Besides, some of
the most appealing recipes were particularly time-consuming. In the USSR, there ex-
isted only a tiny number of families with a time budget that was suitable for the more
or less sophisticated cuisine. In the post-war period, when the specific gender contract
of «working mother» dominated, cooking, along with household labour and shopping,
was presumably a female duty in all social groups of the Soviet society, which made
Soviet emancipation contradictory and inconsistent.\(^{32}\)

Interviewee: Have you ever seen those exemplary menus?! It reminds [me of] some
food production facility. Some ideal woman, like – wait, what’s they are called...
Stepford wives! I can imagine her easily – a puritan, politically aware, neat, virtuous
mistress of the house. Actually, those menus imply backbreaking work! Not even a
housewife could materialise such a menu – piglet in aspic today, jellied beef next
day! What about some time to breathe? And that’s an entrée, not even a main course.
It’s absolutely unreal. The only possibility to perform it – to have a kitchen maid.
(TK, female, 1957, Leningrad, higher education)

Interviewee: You see, here are clippings from tear-off calendars, as this book, which
had been approved by the Soviet government, by Stalin...

Researcher: You mean Book of Tasty and Healthy Food?

Interviewee: Yes. This book was a real crap, believe my words. It was completely
useless for a good cook. Only for all thumbs ones. Besides, it spoke about foodstuff
that was impossible to buy. I don’t remember exactly if they use asparagus there,
but let’s take mutton – no one could even begin to imagine to get one’s hands on it!
(MA, female, 1927, Leningrad, secondary education)

On the one hand, this inaccessibility and general distrust of the consumption models
issued and approved by the state aroused huge scepticism towards the official cuisine,
which was preserved up to the end of Soviet era. It is even more interesting that this
scepticism and distrust were rationalised in terms of impracticality, absurdity and im-
probability. On the other hand, it invigorated the «invisible cuisine» – an informal and
semi-formal circulation of culinary information presented in notes and talks that
aimed at accommodating the official quasi-reality to the Soviet everyday life, and to
reconcile a dream with a real food basket. Finally, it visualised the ideals of the plenty,
which underpinned the traditional representations of the Russian festive table of the
late nineteenth to the early twentieth century (for Christmas dinner, Easter morning,
name day celebration, wedding party, and so on), which had previously been inhibited
by social trouble, famines, war and shortage. The book also tempted the audience to

\(^{31}\) Oushakine, «Against the Cult of Things», 229–231.
\(^{32}\) Reid, «Cold War in the Kitchen», 220–221.
prepare dishes more or less similar to its content from available foodstuff, i.e. from next to nothing, – to create an image of the plenty, a theatre of abundance.

Macroeconomic adaptations for shortage, which Hungarian economist János Kornai analysed in his famous book of 1980, mirrored the microeconomic level of everyday Soviet cuisine. For example, some dishes and recipes were dying away because they were seen as being too difficult or impossible to be realised: If a dish has not been re-produced for ten to fifteen years, it falls out of the gastronomical repertoire. Some ingredients were substituted, so that the complex dishes became simplified and could be accommodated by the accessible alimentary goods: for instance, both in an official cookbook and in a non-formal handwritten cookbook one can find the typical remark, that «one can change this ingredient with that ingredient». The idea of such an accommodation was omnipresent: It was embedded in the structure of the recipe. Rare, inaccessible or expensive ingredients could be weeded out in the first stage of the recipe exchange or be substituted by surrogates later, when a manuscript owner corrected the notes according to his or her experience, budget, and scope of knowledge. However, even this minimalist cuisine demonstrated a certain variability as well as distribution of dishes according to social events. Apparently, there were endeavours to preserve symbolical order and to stress the social rhythm through the marking of some food as festive and others as ordinary. This phenomenon is well described in the studies on «deprivation societies» and communities in zones of conflict; actually, it could be traced in societies of permanent shortage as well, and in more favourable circumstances by far.

Respondents also identified as a fact the culinary «censorship» on ethnic and religious grounds in printed cookbooks. Despite the declared egalitarian ideal of the brotherhood of nations, certain recipes were not accepted for publication in official cookbooks, and not the least for the Book of Tasty and Healthy Food. Some recipes were re-named and camouflaged, while others were not authorised at all. Post-war cookbooks were purged of Jewish and Western (or at least those that were understood as such) recipes as the consequence of the state’s anti-semitism and campaign against «rootless cosmopolites». Editions of the book under Brezhnev’s rule starred ethnic recipes from national republics (polenta, placinta, pastrami, pumpkin pilav, baklava) and described recipes with exotic ground cherries, spinach and camel meat. At the same time, they omitted popular dishes such as the Easter cottage-cheese based dessert (paskha) and some other ritual-related dishes (such as kutya, frumenty made for funeral repasts), so home cooks sought to spread such recipes by word of mouth and in letters. The Russian peasant tradition, which had been vegetarian at its core, was

33 Kornai, Economics of Shortage.
36 Von Bremzen, Mastering the Art of Soviet Cooking, 123.
partly neglected, partly re-arranged, and reconstructed: Industrialisation and the making of new Soviet foodways changed both the repertoire of traditional dishes and the system of knowledge, skills, and techniques.\textsuperscript{37} My interlocutors of the middle generation, born in war and post-war times, told me that their mothers and grandmothers had the ability to cook complex dishes from memory and to make dough without consulting any cookbook: «[M]others and grandmothers had these recipes on their finger-tips.» As for themselves, they either reported feeling fearful of attempting such recipes or considered them rustic and inappropriate for urban life. Thus in interviews, simple «peasant» pies were regularly set against ornamental «urban» layered cakes.

Aside from specific ethnic and ritual types of food, the Soviet festive table demonstrated a rather consistent range of dishes, due to both the social coherence and the uniformity of the new Soviet rituals, such as the New Year celebrations. Practically all of them could be discovered in Soviet handmade cookbooks, carefully copied or written down from word of mouth, in spite of the fact that most of those dishes had somehow originated from the \textit{Book of Tasty and Healthy Food} and other printed cookbooks.

The economics of shortage promoted and nurtured a particular Soviet cult of bricolage and invention, which filled in the gaps and breaches in the routine needs that had been caused by shortage and deficiency.\textsuperscript{38} In the kitchen, the bricolage strategy resulted in secondary conversions of staple foodstuffs and ready-to-cook foods, as well as in eliciting the hidden potentials of ingredients, and their plasticity and versatility: «Everybody cooked at home and constructed food out of nothing. My friend and I had an idea to compose a cookbook based on available range – potatoes, carrots etc.» (MA, female, 1927, Leningrad, secondary education)

For example, factory-made mayonnaise was used as a cold sauce for Russian salad (\textit{oliv'Ä}), as a gravy to pour over meat such as chicken or fish before baking the meat in the oven (\textit{po-frantsuzski, po-ispanski, po-kapitanski, pod shuboj} – that is literally, meat/chicken/fish \textit{à la française}, \textit{à l'espagnole}, \textit{à la capitaine, under the dressing}), as the liquid base for the batter or the dough, as the key ingredient for cheese-dip-like salad (made of processed cheese and garlic), and so on. The bricolage strategy encouraged a very specific genre of advice, both oral and printed. As historian Galina Orlova has noted, the Soviet advice culture should help people to escape the flaws of the system: Advice perpetuated not the knowledge of order, which turned out to be a system made of imperfections, but the knowledge of manoeuvres that were needed to evade these imperfections. More than that, such advice both transmitted ideas on how to handle and utilise imperfect things, as well as inspired people to adopt secondary uses of them.\textsuperscript{39}
While the sphere of invention as such was considered to be the realm of man, the spheres of cuisine and the household both created an important resource for the building of women’s prestige, status and implicit power because housekeeping and cooking were considered and openly declared a female duty.\textsuperscript{40} Echoing the bourgeois turn of the late 1930s, when the image of the model hostess was promoted by official books on housekeeping, and following the «consumer» or «domestic» turn of the Thaw, both memoirs and private cookbooks from 1950 to the 1990s demonstrated the female power over routine. Women’s ability to create something remarkable from the odds and ends – or from nothing – was regularly stressed by respondents. One example is as follows: «I had a friend who was a very good at cooking. Her husband was in the service, and they spent all their life in the military camps. Obviously, you couldn’t do much there. And she was able to cook great dishes out of anything.» (NN, female, 1946, Leningrad, higher education) Here, «anything» substitutes for «nothing», which could be turned into «everything»: Thus a very scarce range of goods became the source of an infinite wealth with huge symbolic potential.

Even though access to highly prestigious foodstuff – such as salted and smoked salmon, ham, tinned salmon and sprats, salami, caviar, instant coffee, chocolate bars and candies – was problematic, and consumption had been democratised through necessity (in contrast to the process of food democratisation in Europe), the ostentatious festive table became a common practice.\textsuperscript{41} Its most essential feature was that prestigious dishes had to be constructed out of ordinary alimentary goods, and complex tastes out of common products. Tastes of luxury and tastes of necessity were strictly differentiated.\textsuperscript{42} Luxury was associated with rare and difficult-to-buy ingredients and products (such as canned fish), as well as complex dishes and ornamental forms (such as layered salads, aspics and cakes) that were typical of the pre-revolutionary Russian bourgeois cuisine. Necessity and routine mirrored in simple (or at least those that were perceived as such), familiar and easy-to-obtain food: Thus, beetroot salad («vinegret», not to be confused with the classic French dressing, sauce vinaigrette), mashed potatoes, and soups were never considered an appropriate food for the festive table.

On the contrary, it was the cold starters that found their places on the table. Gronow and Zhuravlev explained this practice by considering the popularity of special festive orders (zakazy), when Soviet citizens could buy at their working places or in some shops food packages with cheese, salami or tinned fish, which constituted «the highlight of Soviet festive domestic eating».\textsuperscript{43} However, this explanation does not provide reasons for people to exhibit a sense of bounty and excess. Neither does it explain the
generous sharing of prestigious food with guests, friends, relatives, neighbours and colleagues. I suppose that there were two more factors that existed on the different levels of routine. First, some well-known lavish illustrations of the main Soviet cookbook might have fostered the tradition of abundant feasting, which resulted in the practice of taking pictures of the festive table. Secondly, there was a model of the Russian festive table from the late nineteenth century, which was nearly extinct in Soviet reality by the late 1930s but which was still well-preserved in the collective memory and the Russian literature of the nineteenth century. A desirable abundance could be constructed through the model of the cold buffet, for which the festive table was literally covered with plates, bowls and salad dishes, and all the subsequent courses were added on to those on the table. «Russian or Soviet festive table meant that there is no empty space», and the main course was placed among the dozens of hors-d’oeuvres, as my interlocutor explained (ASH, female, 1967, Leningrad, higher education). This peculiarity might also increase the degree of the ornamental nature of the festive food, and contribute to the common practice of buying and storing valuable foodstuff for the holidays and celebrations, which could be interpreted as a private variation of the general cultural rule.

The persistent idea of the abundant Russian table could even form different sets of practices in cross-cultural communication. Another respondent from the family of a top Communist party official, worked as an interpreter and had the rarest opportunity to go abroad (to England, France and other «capitalist countries») in 1970s. She befriended some foreigners and even welcomed them to her apartment in Moscow. Her festive menus for the foreigners were elegant but laconic, brought into accordance with her idea of the then-current Western table, while her menus for her kin and Russian friends were exuberant, following the same pattern that was abided by other ordinary Soviet citizens: multiple cold starters, salads and one main dish. There is a number of Soviet and post-Soviet memoirs depicting the «paucity» and «meanness» of the Western festive table (with its sparseness, rotation of courses, and limited number of dishes), along with the Westerners’ account of the Russians’ generosity and on the abundance of the Soviet festive table. This cultural conflict of the two contrasting ethoi could be paraphrased in terms of exchange: The bourgeois Western ethos insisted on rationality, conventional individual respect and a one-sided trust, while the bourgeois Soviet ethos was based upon reciprocal trust and complicated exchanges between two groups (hosts and guests, givers and recipients), which could be interpreted as debt and credit relations.

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44 See, for example: S. F. Svetlov, Peterburgskaya zhizn’ v kontse XIX stoletiia (v 1892 godu), St. Petersburg 1998, 18.
45 Oushakine, «Against the Cult of Things», 226–229.
2. Cookbooks and the Socialising Process

As a rule, Soviet handmade cookbooks (such as manuscripts and collections of culinary notes, scrapbooks, printed books appended by hand) produced from 1950 to the 1980s included not only recipes but also conversion charts, notes on monthly budgets, housekeeping advice, diets, knitting patterns, alternative remedies, rhymed toasts and songs, and so on: «Yesterday I looked through my cookbook and discovered the note how to make some compress or something. And I thought that perhaps people had used to put down things – advice and skills and all. Books like this one had not been just cookbooks, but collections on housekeeping. [...] Well, you know, there are some papers where one puts down his secrets... her secrets and cum-savvies.» (NN, female, 1946, Leningrad, higher education) The eclectic contents point at the specific genre that lies between instruction, handwritten manual and diary. Putting down information was as important as consulting and sharing them with the referent social group: «You see, what is written roughly is something real, while in the beginning [of the cookbook] it’s more like... you know, schoolgirls used to create albums, so it was pretty the same, though with no hearts and kitties.» (TK, female, 1957, Leningrad, higher education) Collecting various texts as signs of memory had both practical and symbolic values: It verified and prolonged socialisation, detaching it from time and space, and transferring it into the sensory terms of taste and smell, and into the realm of recollections.

Most of the respondents decided to create cookbooks when they felt themselves to have become socially adult, which could be marked with a row of events (marriage, childbirth, the beginning and running of one’s own household, and the start of an employment). After the late Stalin’s and then Khrushchev’s turn to domesticity, both family and household activities became important spheres for female socialisation and estimate. Each time, when joining a new group (either through the extension of the family circle or by entering a new circle of workfellows), the Soviet woman had to be socialised within the group; she had to show off her social and practical competencies – those expected of a mother, a cook, a housewife, a seamstress, and so on. Small talk on cooking was the easiest way to forge relationships, not least because of, first, the shared nature of festive gastronomical models that had been put on paper in the cooking manuscripts, and secondly, the high value of information on buying foodstuff and on how to turn it into something decent, interesting and tasty.

In the social perspective, the working place was considered to be the most significant location for people to form friendly terms with one another on the basis of cooking and talking about food. The office and its analogues (for instance, the teachers’ room, the factory diner and the lab) were the median of the circle for the spreading and absorbing of culinary information; the inner circle included relatives, friends and neighbours (especially in the communal apartments), while the outer one involved distant and occasional social contacts. The most common practice was to share culinary skills and gastronomical knowledge at the festive table (either at home or at work), where one could try a dish, appreciate it, praise it out loud and ask for its recipe; the
social rule of reciprocity enabled this information to take root and to be spread further. Each woman, who was engaged in such an exchange, tried to do her best [as one respondent put it: «hosting a party always meant that you were to make an impression (blesnut')»], because her social reputation was at stake:

Recently my Tatar aunt has invited her friends. First she has served tea with milk, then salads (lyansai and others), chicken, meat pie, gubadiya (Tatar layered pie with dried quark. – M.P.), then dumplings in broth, kullama (Tatar soup with fat meat, noodles and vegetables. – M.P.). After all she has laid a tea table with seven types of pastry. They have spent five hours at the table and have tried every dish... Younger ones, like me, have fallen out of the race at the early stages. And all twelve babushkas make such parties in turn during the year and try to outdo one another. (GF, female, 1965, Tomsk / Almaty, higher education)

Reciprocity tended to overrun the circles of relatives and friends: Dwellers of communal apartments felt themselves connected to one another by the invisible ties of the neighbourhood, which required regular reciprocal gestures that included giving treats in the form of food. It was almost obligatory both for universal holidays such as the New Year, and for private events of the family’s life cycle; one should share one’s festive food with others even if the others were not invited. One had to treat neighbours to food and send a helping of salad, a piece of cake or some sweets to the children or the grandparents of a guest. When trying to explain this rule, the interviewees cited the «old Russian traditions of hospitality and generosity» or the «new Soviet tradition of mutual support and brotherhood», depending on the identity that they were pursuing and wanted to represent at the moment. However, perhaps the most important reason was the social rule of reciprocity that helped to create and keep up the ties within the community through the semi-compulsory food exchange, turning a pie or a cake into the Maussian «gift»:

There was an endless chatting on food and cooking. [...] Everybody wanted to share one’s skills, to bring something for tasting...

Was it the same in communal apartments?

Sure! When neighbours were on friendly terms, they always treated each other to something tasty. «Friendly terms» – it means that there were no real conflict, no knife fight. My grandmother used to bake pies twice as much as we needed, because she brought full plates around, treating all neighbours. When pies are baked you can’t stay calm.

Because of their smell?

Yes, it’s like a torture. You can’t eat pies in secret, under your bed. [...] Of course one didn’t treat neighbours to every tasty thing one got, but to pies – always, definitely.

47 Mauss, The Gift.
Should any pastry be shared?

Well, yes, one shared everything that had a strong appeal.

(TK, female, 1957, Leningrad, higher education)

This episode could be interpreted with the notions of «gift exchange» and «limited good» respectively. First, food sharing could be a manifestation of friendly terms and a tool for survival, both physically and psychologically.\(^{48}\) It engaged neighbours in cycles of exchange, forced them to maintain peace and to build «normal relationships» that might procure a repayment in information and small favours (for instance, babysitting, lending a cup of sugar or some small sum of money, reserving a place in a queue, sharing or selling some extra foodstuff or other goods). Secondly, according to anthropologist G. M. Foster, in so-called cultures of poverty or «deprivation societies» with a shortage of necessary resources and visible inequality, the notion of justice and avoidance of envy become of crucial importance.\(^{49}\) Even though examples of striking differences in well-being and power in the USSR were few, it was important for neighbours and colleagues to prevent the slightest possible grievance, envy or resentment. Food with a strong appeal and an appetising savour makes the minute difference in resources clear, so it was essential to restore equality, at least symbolically, and to share delicious pies with the closest circle. However, such practices were laced with a high level of distrust and social atomisation: The patterns of cooperation and alignment were fragile and unstable, and they had to be restored with every interaction.

The sharing of food was accompanied by the sharing of recipes (culinary knowledge and skills) too, and vice versa. More than that, the unspoken rule of mutual support encouraged complete strangers to exchange information on buying goods and foodstuff,\(^{50}\) on methods of cooking and making preserves: People were invited to speak about these topics on every possible occasion (such as in public transport, in queue, at the general practitioner’s door, watching over the kids at the playground or waiting for them at hobby groups or an art school), thereby keeping all potential social bonds alive. One can easily trace remarks about «a lady in the queue», «at the marketplace», and «from one babushka at the community playground» in Soviet handwritten cookbooks. Gastronomical small talk produced a system of constant and temporary relationships, and a network with areas of variable closeness, which was mirrored in the private cookbooks and which functioned through them.


And there’s another salad… And what is written here, in the parentheses?

There were three ladies I was on friendly terms with, and it’s the name of one of them. We were not close friends as with IS, but we were working together in the lab. She brought something delicious, I liked it and wrote the recipe.

Did you bring any food yourself?

No, I didn’t dare! I was afraid I couldn’t come near them! (Laughs). [...] I was feeling completely incompetent, you see, and I was copying carefully recipes of the others. (IB, female, 1927, Leningrad, higher education)

Copying someone’s cookbook was a way to express respect to its owner. The cookbook owners, or at least some of them, might have created the cookbooks with the possibility in mind that they would show or lend the books to the others, which would confirm their status as grown-ups. The manuscript cookbook was undoubtedly an object of prestige to women: It provided witness that its owner was responsible, self-dependent and socially included as a grown-up woman. It also testified to the existence of the reference group in which information of this type was received as precious and important. Similar to anecdote-telling, the exchange of recipes facilitated the creation of alliances and communities, and was memorialised in handmade cookbooks. Like anecdotes, the recipes were communicated incidentally («by the way») or were reciprocally circulated in turn, thus most participants of the conversation were capable of taking part in this social exchange:

Could you describe the process of recipes exchange? Do you try a dish at someone’s place or does anybody tell you?

They tell me, yes.

At working place mostly. There’s much more information there. Everything is told at working place. Well, sometimes at the party, when there are lots of friends. We begin to try and share recipes, like, «By the way, I know an interesting dish».
(PG, female, 1962, Karatau, secondary education)

Whom did you ask for recipes?

Colleagues, at work. At the house parties, too. Like, we were sitting in the office, we were talking, discussing recipes of each other. One might invite guests or visit friends and told about something nice and appetizing, what had been tasted. A cake, for example. You might come back home and call somebody back to ask. You see, here’s carrot pickles recipe by LS, Bulgarian vegetable stew by LD, eggplants by N, she was Moldavian and she shared Moldavian recipes with us.
(VP, female, 1941, Belebei, higher education)

As we can see, the taste of the dish could be easily taken for granted: A dish could be tried (there was a widely accepted practice of bringing some home-cooked food to the office and to serve it to those present – sometimes even the complex festive dishes
were cooked for colleagues on no special occasion, «just for showing off and doing them a favour»). It could just be described, without any trying, but others asked for its recipe nevertheless. In such a case, taste was mediated through words, invoking emotions and physical pleasure in the discussions about food, whereas the official Soviet cookbooks had rather seldom described taste as such, even though taste could be mentioned in the organoleptic descriptions of standardised food. It was most probably because of social politeness, group solidarity and close social experience that people relied on verbal evidence:

*How do you choose recipes to ask?*

Like – «Look, girls, it’s a great thing!»

*But did you try it first?*

Sometimes. Or one just praised her recipe: «Girls, I’ve made something terrific!»

(TK, female, 1957, Leningrad, higher education)

Private cookbooks displayed a broad circle of social references. As a rule, many recipes were literally ascribed to a colleague, friend or relative and became a link between the book owner and the source or the communicator of the recipe. It is remarkable that the interlocutors could easily recall the circumstances and the person in question twenty, thirty or fifty years later: The combination of «name» and «recipe» made for an ideal trigger of cultural mnemonics, and of recollections of recipes in details, their authors and the tastes of the dishes.

Researcher (looks through the cookbook): *Here’s a dough with the note – Nadia’s method.*

But who was Nadia? (Looks at the recipe). Oh yes, there was such a lady, Nadia, she told me that it was a very easy recipe. I remember her. We were working together.

(IB, female, 1927, Leningrad, higher education)

As before – as in restaurants – we were visiting friends to taste some particular dish. [...] For instance, I preferred eggplants cooked by M. Pancakes with apples were the best by S. My friends, stage director S. and her mother, were specialised in cooking Jewish gefilte Fisch. I know what I’m talking about, I tried lots of dishes, not that I was so impressed at the first try.

(MA, female, 1927, Leningrad, secondary education)

At the same time, a referencing name was a sign of the familiarity and applicability of a recipe. It denoted a term of approbation and somehow guaranteed that the ingredients, time and work would not be spent in vain. As one participant put it, such references helped people «to memorise the taste and to know who was responsible for it». The verbal version of a recipe had a commemorative function too: It was through the taste and/or the title of a recipe that acquaintances could be remembered. The imprinted and imaginary taste accumulated a social context, hinted at friendly or official relationships, and created conditions for the anticipation of festive occasions.
It was most probably a very specific type of trust that enabled the recipe exchange to be a widespread social activity too. Its structure included its own norms (of expectations and activities) and its own semantic basis: The situation of the exchange of recipes was grasped and de-coded instantly, defining a sequence of stereotypical actions, enabling even complete strangers to build a certain sense of solidarity and to trust one another’s experience and expertise. The scenario of this communication based upon the common economic, social and symbolic grounds was understood and shared by the majority of Soviet urban dwellers. It was manifested regularly in social rituals of different types such as visiting friends, celebrating a holiday, chatting with colleagues, spending time in long lines to buy goods in short supply and communicating with neighbours. To put it roughly, everybody mastered the language of trust: Its semantic basis became clear in the case of transgression, when all the participants of communication imposed responsibility on the person in charge of lapse in trust relations. Such an understanding of the structure of trust explains both the putting down of recipes «out of politeness» and the reactions to the refusal to share recipes.

You know, there’s such a genre – putting down a recipe in order to be polite.

*What do you mean?*

Look here. (Quotes from her cookbook). «Sauteed zucchini for winter». A person, whom you do not want to offend, tells you – look, it’s great thing, you should try it, and dictates a recipe. And it’s easier to put it down than to confess that you do not like it, that you are not going to cook it. (TK, female, 1957, Leningrad, higher education)

Interviewee 2 (looks through her cookbook):

*What is it?* Oh, yes, now I remember. I do not like it.

*What exactly don’t you like?*

You see, this recipe... it’s a pie with raw meat. We had been invited by our boss to her birthday party, and she had treated us to it, so...

(GL, female, 1935, Kharkiv, higher education)

Nobody could refuse to share a recipe because it means breaking an unwritten rule of communication and rejecting to participate in social bonding. When asked a question on the probability of such a refusal, the respondents seemed puzzled, laughed or cited real cases of transgression with laughter and bewilderment that demonstrated the strength and stability of the situational structure of social exchange.

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52 Ibid.
Did it happen to you to get a refusal while asking for any recipe?

Interviewee 1 (Laughing): No, I do not remember anything of this kind.

Interviewee 2: It’s very unlikely. (NN, female, 1946, Leningrad, higher education; AN, male, 1946, Leningrad, higher education)

Did it happen to you to ask for a recipe and get a refusal?

Interviewee 1: It was very natural to ask and to get an answer. When once some our friend, a brilliant cook himself, shirked my question, I was shocked, I had never experienced it before.

Interviewee 2: I think there’s a gender distinction. [...] Men could share their recipes only to get kudos, while women do it out of kindness.

Interviewee 1: Yes, it’s due to women’s mutual support! I didn’t even understand his refusal at once and continued to ask. [...] Afterwards he became mocked and laughed at, because nobody could imagine such behaviour. Yes, every woman liked to share her knowledge...

(TK, female, 1957, Leningrad, higher education; VK, male, 1962, Polyarny (Murmansk Oblast) higher education)

Nevertheless, in the aforementioned situation, the difference in gender patterns did not protect the guilty man from indirect and direct disapproval because he had broken the more essential rule of mutual support and information exchange.

Historically, any cook manuscript was written by several hands: It perpetuated some type of «invisible community» as it existed in that particular social environment, stayed within one family and documented both vertical (generational) and horizontal (social or communal) bonds.53 The Soviet routine influenced this phenomenon in a particular way by putting it within a certain economic framework and embedding it into specific trust/distrust structures. First, private handwritten cookbooks of the Soviet era functioned as a meta-corpus of personal skills that could compensate for the flaws of the economics of shortage and control of everyday life: They not only corrected and complemented the «official» cuisine; they also constructed its more trustworthy, individual and domesticated version. Secondly, private cookbooks enabled the memorisation and exchange of precious culinary information, which helped to maintain the normal social rhythm of food. Thirdly, they worked as a tool of socialisation that allowed for the distribution and re-distribution of social prestige, the creation of solidarity and the reinforcement of social bonds – and, at the same time, the creation of one’s own unique cuisine from scratches and scraps of paper, on which the recipes of relatives, close friends and significant others were put down during a break at work or at the festive table.

53 Theophano, Eat My Words, 11–12.
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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the problem of trust and solidarity as they were mirrored in private manuscripts on cooking and housekeeping, and traces the circulation of culinary information within specific social networks. Soviet handwritten cookbooks, though rooted in the nineteenth-century tradition, constituted a phenomenon in and of themselves. They maintained and transmitted everyday knowledge on cooking, which was perceived as being opposed to state-published cooking books and brochures. Gastronomical models represented by The Book of Tasty and Healthy Food and other culinary writings were beyond reach of an average Soviet citizen. On the one hand, this inaccessibility aroused huge scepticism; on the other hand, it invigorated «invisible cuisine» – an informal exchange of routine culinary skills that had aimed to accommodate official quasi-reality to the Soviet everyday life, and to reconcile a dream with a real food basket. Up until perestroika, private cookbooks functioned not only as a corpus of personal skills that could both compensate flaws of economics of shortage and control everyday life, but also an important tool of gender socialisation that could be used to support social prestige, create solidarity and reinforce social bonds.

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