CONSUMERISM IN URBAN RUSSIA IN THE 1880S AND 90S:
EXPLORING CONCEPTIONS OF TIME, SPACE, AND MODERNITY THROUGH
BICYCLE AND WATCH ADVERTISEMENTS

BY

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the urban consumer culture in Moscow and Petersburg during the 1880s and 1890s and uses the consumption of bicycles and watches as a lens through which to explore changing perceptions of time and space within the experience of modernity at the end of the nineteenth century. Specifically, I argue that the way in which consumers and merchants constructed a dialogue of meaning around particular objects; the way in which objects are consumed by a culture gives insight into the values, morals, and tenure of that culture. The paper preferences newspaper ads and photographs as the mouthpieces of merchants and consumers respectively as they constructed a dialogue in the language of consumerism, and explores the ways in which both parties sought to assign meaning to objects during the experience of modernity. I am particularly interested in the way consumers perform elements of cultural modernity in photographs and how these instances of performance relate to their negotiation of modernity. The paper takes as its focus a large section of the urban Russian population, much of whom can traditionally be called “middle class,” but whose diversity has led me to the adoption of the term “consumer community,” and whose makeup is described in detail. The paper contributes to the continuing scholarly discourse on the structure of the middle class in Russia and the social boundaries of late tsarist society. It speaks to the developing sensibilities and values of a generation struggling to define itself in a rapidly changing world, to the ways in which conceptualizations of public and private space, as well as feminine and masculine space were redefined, and to the developing visual culture of the Russian consumer society, largely predicated on the display of objects to signify socially desirable traits. Whereas other explorations of consumer culture and advertisements have portrayed the relationship between merchants and consumers as a one-sided monologue in which merchants convince consumers that certain objects have cultural value, I emphases the dialogue between merchants and consumers, and their mutual negotiation of cultural meaning through objects.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction and Method

By the second half of the nineteenth century, Russia had secured a place among the major
powers in Europe, begun to participate in the industrial revolution sweeping the continent, and
was in the process of cultivating an intellectual and cultural elite who would make great
contributions to the sciences and arts. During this time, Russia continued to look Westward both
in her politics and cultural life; and as modern technologies filtered into the country, so too did
Western goods and modes of thinking. For those with money who lived in Moscow and
Petersburg, more goods of better quality were available for sale than at any other time in the
empire’s history up to that point. Now it was not only the nobility who accumulated
discretionary income, but also the merchant, the middle class, and to a lesser degree certain
members of the working class. In this age of industrialization, when factories were rising and
goods were being produced in record number, when the rubles in one’s account began to count
for more than the size of one’s estate; the goods that people purchased and the methods by which
they were sold speaks volumes about the sensibilities and values of a generation struggling to
define itself amid a rapidly and radically changing world.

This paper seeks to illuminate the values and social conditions of consumers in urban
Russia during the 1880s and 1890s by exploring the commercial atmosphere in Moscow and
Petersburg and by relating these conditions to changing perceptions of modernity, space and
time. Specifically, I argue that urban merchants and consumers at the end of the nineteenth
century participated in a dialogue of consumption which preferred certain objects as cultural
signifiers and symbols. Advertisement, use, and display of objects among consumers and
merchants were processes which gave expression to the experience of modernity, especially in the way individuals perceived notions of space and time. In other words, I suggest that the goods people buy speak to their character, values, and personality. They are an outward sign not only of the social position one has attained, but also of the way in which one wishes to be perceived by others in society. Just as consumers sought goods which they believed illustrated the qualities most socially valuable in the new, modern world, advertisers sought to provide goods which matched these descriptions, and the interplay between consumers’ desires and advertisers’ assurances helped to define the context through which the consumer community viewed itself and its place in larger society.

In order to answer these questions, I have focused this paper’s analyses on pocket watches and bicycles. These products have been chosen partly as a matter of convenience, and partly because of their illustrative and analytical clarity. Throughout my research, I examined advertisements from newspapers, address calendars, and illustrated journals contemporary to the period of my inquiry; which included periodicals written in both Russian and French. As with any scholarly endeavor that does not include archival research, I was hampered by the finite number of resources at my disposal. In the sources which I have been able to access, advertisements for the products listed above appeared in the greatest frequency, with the greatest variety, and on an individual basis, consistently yielded the richest examples of commercial language tied to social conditions. I do not suggest that this is the only method one might use when considering how consumerism illustrates the values of a society, but I am pleased to say that I have been able to address issues surrounding the conceptualization of modernity, attitudes
surrounding the changing nature of public and private space, the importance of internationalism in acquiring social capital, and the definition of masculine and feminine social space.

As I continued to research this topic, it became clear that by analyzing such details as the use of images in advertisements, the placement of words, or the utilization of space, I was speaking to the development of visual culture in urban Russia as well as its consumer culture. Other aspects of this developing visual culture included the widespread use of photography and the emergence of the realist school of painting. Thus in addition to the written record of the time, there existed a body of images which speak to the uses, and social significance of certain consumer goods. Throughout the paper I have thus tried to tie together the visual culture of advertisements with the visual culture of their display and use as illustrated in period photography. I argue that part of a product’s value was its visual representation of socially desirable traits. That is, commoditized products acted as iconic visual signifiers professing the owners adherence to, and fluency in the emerging normative behavior of the consumer community. Photography encapsulates these performative elements of consumer community culture and thus provides insight into how the members of this community wished to be seen.

**Time, Space, and Modernity.**

Although time and space are generally considered separately throughout this paper, it is useful to discuss them as an interconnected pair of forces here in the introduction. I contend that the watch and the bicycle were items which allowed consumers to participate in and perform modernity in the urban setting; their use facilitated the expression of modernity on the individual level and control over changing temporal and spatial environments. Zygmunt Bauman, while recalling the work of Michael Crozier, discusses how adaptation to one’s environment translates
into patterns of power and domination. At the risk of over-simplifying the argument, he agrees with Crozier that those individuals who are able to keep their own actions free while controlling the actions of others will end up ruling a society. During what Bauman describes as *light modernity* this ability to remain free is predicated on the individual’s control of movement and time:

The frame has filled with a new content; more precisely, the pursuit of the ‘closeness to the sources of uncertainty’ has narrowed down to, and focused on, one objective – instantaneity. People who move and act faster, who come nearest to the momentariness of movement, are now the people who rule. And it is the people who cannot move as quickly, [or] people who cannot at will leave their place at all, who are ruled. Domination consists of one’s own capacity to escape, to disengage, to be elsewhere and the right to decide the speed with which all of this done...The contemporary battle of domination is waged between forces armed respectively with the weapons of acceleration and procrastination.¹

For Bauman, this condition of light modernity corresponds to the modern computer age where e-mails, software, and other virtual methods of communication and transportation have rendered traditional conceptions of time and space irrelevant, but I argue that a similar condition of instantaneity was embedded in the process of modernity during the nineteenth century. As the adoption of linear time atomized the day into hours and minutes, those who commanded an understanding of time’s new structure possessed an advantage over others; their movements and routines may be tied to the clock, but their ability to plan, schedule and navigate their new environment was greatly superior to those who did not own a watch, or worse, did not adapt to the clock-driven urban culture. The importance of the ability or failure to utilize this new, atomized linear time to the greatest effect was compounded when watches with a second hand became widely available and a worker’s efficiency was measured accordingly. Freedom of

action depended on one’s ability to control time, and that control was greatly affected by one’s possession or lack of a watch.

In much the same way, the bicycle allowed individuals to travel over greater distances at faster speeds, to shrink the void between localities, and thus expand the spatial domain of the individual. As will be discussed later, the bicycle also provided a means of escape from the urban environment; one could go where they wanted, when they wanted, and return when they wished, independent of rail tables or the maintenance associated with keeping horses. As the pace of life accelerated during at the end of the nineteenth century, the use of bicycles and watches contributed to the mastery of new spatial and temporal environments.

It is important to point out, however, that this compression of space, and the drive for increased efficiency of movement over time, is only one face of the time/space dynamic to modernity. Again, referring to Bauman’s work, the compression of time and space were often used as indicators of progress and cultural development, but everyday life depended on a time system that was rigidly predictable, and a corresponding understanding of space as traversable relative to that rigid definition.

In the conquest of space, time had to be pliant and malleable, and above all shrinkable through the increased ‘space - devouring capacity of each unit...Flying over the English Channel and then over the Atlantic were the milestones by which progress was measured. There, however, when it comes to the fortification of the conquered space, taming, colonization and domestication, a tough uniform inflexible time was needed... It was wonderful and exciting to reach the sources of the Nile before other explore managed to find it, but a train running ahead of schedule or automobile parts arriving on the assembly line ahead of other parts were heavy modernity’s gruesome nightmares.²

² Ibid., 115. See also Ibid., 116-118. - For Bauman, heavy modernity connotes industry and industrialization that is married to time as apposed to the light modernity of the computer age which is divorced from time - where time has no meaning and is not a regulator because one can be in all places at once.
Thus, when we discuss notions of space and time in the later chapters of this paper, it is important to understand that these concepts’ relation to modernity was complex and multifaceted. It is therefore not unusual for the discussion of a particular advertisement to speak to multiple, seemingly contradictory conceptions of time and space.

**Toward a Russian Consumer Community**

For a long time I struggled with how to define the group of individuals I was interested in studying throughout this paper. After much consideration, I find that I can not simply assign it the term “middle class” and that another, more encompassing definition is necessary. In many ways, this group resembles what would typically be considered the middle of society: it was, in large part, made up of professionals and semi-professionals, merchants and artisans - creatures of the urban landscape who bought and sold, and possessed the discretionary income to buy again, items that went beyond those necessary for survival, items we have already defined as consumer goods. And yet, there are also those who could afford these consumer goods who fell outside the immediate “middle:” the skilled factory worker whose pay is higher than the average in his field, or the lower level nobility who are technically part of the ruling class, but in reality rule little. The one unifying link that has bound these individuals together in my mind has been that they participate in consumption and the socio-economic negotiation of signs and meaning through a common economic language; a common discourse of commodification among themselves within the urban setting. I have chosen to say only that I explore here a community of consumers in urban Russia whose social components will be described in greater detail below.
The Problem with the Middle

Who is, and who is not in the middle class has always been a matter of significant debate; and since much of the society I have engaged in this paper has, at one time or another, been placed into this category, it is necessary for me to discuss the use of the term. The work of two philosophers will dominate this discussion: Marx, whose middle class (or petty bourgeoisie) is seen as those who control the means of production to a limited extent, and Weber, whose multiplicity of classes is more difficult to summarize, but who introduces a middle consumer class who are without property, but are distinguished by their skill. Weber’s use of “social class” and “social strata” will also be discussed. At various times, I have connected the work of Marx and Weber to other philosophers to illustrate the difficulty of coherently defining a middle class. As Baudrillard indicates, consumerism is a process by which members of society communicate with themselves. Likewise, I hold that the consumers of urban Russia also fall outside these notions of middle class. I have therefore employed the term “consumer community” to define their ranks, and will discuss how this expands my social field of inquiry. In brief, in addition to those placed in Marx’s petty bourgeoisie, I include the positively privileged and middle groups in Weber’s Erwerbsklassen, the middle group of his Besitzklassen, and the petty-bourgeoisie of his social class, and several of his social strata. In short, the middle class, the lower level of the ruling class, and the skilled upper level of the working class.

Complicating the matter further is the realization that finding a detailed and widely authoritative definition of the middle class is particularly difficult. Let us begin with a discussion of Marx and Engels’s vision of the middle class, who themselves are not consistent
with their use of the term.\textsuperscript{3} The Communist Manifesto separates the middle class, the petty bourgeoisie, from both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie (the large scale capitalists). In this rendering of class, Marx predicts that the absorption of the petty bourgeoisie into the ranks of the proletariat will lead to “two great hostile camps...two great classes facing each other, the bourgeoisie and the proletariats.”\textsuperscript{4} Later in the Manifesto, Marx and Engels give a more detailed description of who makes up this petty bourgeoisie: “The previous existing small intermediate strata - the same industrials merchants, and rentiers, the artisans and peasants, all these classes sink down into the proletariat”\textsuperscript{5} Elsewhere, in \textit{Theories of Surplus Value}, Marx indicates that there is a growing middle class which bases its existence on wage labor and that holds within its ranks “the horde of flunkeys, the soldiers, sailors, police, lower officials,...mistresses, grooms, clowns and jugglers,...ill-paid artists, musicians, lawyers, physicians, scholars, school masters, inventors, etc.”\textsuperscript{6} What is especially interesting here is that Marx forecasts the arguments of several later scholars who claim that entrepreneurs and many of the recently professionalized industries like medicine and education fit into this middle class. One such scholar is Harold Perkin, who in \textit{The Origins of Modern English Society}, 1780 - 1880, divides the middle class

\textsuperscript{3}Tom Bottomore, ed. \textit{A Dictionary of Marxist Thought} (Oxford: Blackwell Reference, 1983), 333.


\textsuperscript{5} There are several points of interest here. This quote comes from Val Burris, “The Discovery of the New Middle Classes”, in \textit{The New Middle Classes: Life-Styles, Status Claims and Political Orientations}, ed. Arthur J. Vidich (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 19. See this author for an extended discussion on Marx’s use of the term middle class. Burnnis uses the Hal Draper’s translation of the original 1848 text and asserts that translation quality makes a considerable difference. To prove the point, another translation of the same quote reads: The lower strata of the middle class - the small tradespeople, shopkeepers and retired tradesmen, generally the handicraftsmen, and farmers - all sink into the proletariat.” Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. \textit{The Communist Manifesto}, trans. Samuel Moore (New York: Pocket Books, 1964), 70. Translation then, is yet another reason why it is so difficult to determine precisely what segments of society make up each class. Finally, the classification and role of the peasantry has been a constant source of debate in Marxist discourse. For an overview of this debate see Tom Bottomore, ed. \textit{A Dictionary of Marxist Thought} (363-365).

\textsuperscript{6} Val Burris, “The Discovery of the New Middle Classes” 20
into the capitalist, entrepreneurial class and a non-capitalist, professional middle class consisting largely (once again) of doctors, lawyers, and civil servants.7

To stress the point that theoretical conceptions of who fits into a class is largely based on the way in which class has been defined, let us recall that our discussion so far has taken for granted the Marxist notion that class is determined by the position of the individual to the means of production - that is, class is largely a factor of economic privilege. Others who place less emphasis on economics reckon the contours of class, and by extension the middle class, differently. One example of this is Ralf Dahrendorf, who sees the middle class composed of two parts separated by their possession of authority: the bureaucrats, who are part of the power system in society, and thereby linked to the dominate power group, and those outside the authority hierarchy who are disconnected from this dominate culture of power. Thus, the second group is closer in social position to that of lower, or working class.8

Weber: Class Strata and Community

My decision to use the term community has been largely based on my reading of certain philosophers who view class as a more stratified and varied concept than Marx’s original dichotomy. Foremost among these is Max Weber, who in addition to the concept of class, introduces the notion of social strata on which I base my articulation of a consumer community. The following paragraphs are designed to lay a philosophical foundation for my use of the term

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community, and to give justification for using consumerism as a defining characteristic of that community.

Weber presents a highly pluralistic conceptualization of class and defines two major types of economic classes: the ownership or propertied class (Besitzklassen) and the acquisition or commercial class (Erwerbsklassen). Whereas the Besitzklassen is defined by ownership of the property that is suitable to produce returns, the Erwerbsklassen is defined by the possession of (or more accurately the monopolization of) skills that can be offered on the market. Each of these categories of class is subdivided into two groups, the positively privileged and negatively privileged. In the case of the Besitzklassen, this distinction is fairly easy to understand: one either owns, or does not own property that generates income (factories, equipment, slaves, land, stock, etc.) Those that possess such property are considered positively privileged, and those who do not are considered negatively privileged. Among the Erwerbsklassen, the positively privileged are those who have acquired a monopoly, or at least a partial monopoly on marketable skills: these include entrepreneurs, professionals with important expertise, certain highly skilled workers, merchants, bankers and finances, etc.) The negatively privileged in this class are those laborers whose set of skills is not monopolized, that is: unskilled, semi-skilled and the skilled workers in fields where there is a large labor pool. Between each of these privilege groups, in each of these classes, there resides a middle class. Within the Besitzklassen these may be small property owners and in the Erwerbsklassen these may be self-employed, craftsmen, or farmers. Thus Weber envisions an economic society in which there is a multiplicity of middle classes. 9

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In modern society, it is also easy to see how this separation of classes between skill and profession does not account for the life conditions of some members of society. Indeed, one wonders if the distinction between these classes is not more porous than Weber intimates. Take for example a skilled worker who invests in his company’s stock. Imagine that his income from the stock is sufficient for him to supplement his regular income, but not sufficient for him to quit his job. Does the stockholding worker belong to the Besitzklassen or to the Erwerbsklassen, or to both? If one can occupy a position in both classes at once, can one be positively privileged and negatively privileged at the same time; and if so, what does this do to his relative class position? Again, my reason for introducing this example is not to delve deeper into Weber’s epistemology, but to introduce the possibility that class is even more multiple than his model suggests.

In addition to these economic classes, Weber also discusses the notion of social class, which (as Anthony Giddens points out) is less developed throughout his writing, but that presents another way of envisioning social relationships. For Weber, a social class is understood as “a cluster of class situations which are linked together by virtue of the fact that they involve common mobility chances, either within the career of the individual or across the generations.”

Weber identifies four social classes: the working class, the Petty Bourgeoisie (used in the same way Marx employs the term), propertyless white collar employees and civil servants, and the class privileged by property and education. Each of these social classes is made up of individuals in varying “class-situations” and is joined together by a common nexus of social exchange.

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10 Ibid., 48.
11 Ibid.
Finally, Weber introduces the concepts of status groups (*Stände*), which are built on criteria other than market situations; their members have a specific claim to some form of honor, or positive or negative social prestige (hereditary, educational, professional or occupational) which generally affords them privilege in society. Whereas members of class do not need to be aware of their position in order to be part of their class, the status group cannot exist without its members being self-aware that they are part of the group. In the sense that these status groups are comprised of self-aware members, they can be considered communities. With this self-awareness comes particular expectations: members of a status group share the same lifestyle, they follow the same fashions, and engage socially with one another. While status groups and classes may be closely linked, Weber argues that they nevertheless represent two competing modes of organization within the power distribution of a society.  

Weber’s own analysis of the status groups in Russia is particularly interesting and is worth quoting here:

Among status groups, key divisions are among: the monarchy, and its social circles…the aristocracy, split into conservative factions focused on maintaining social preeminence and a liberal faction that stakes its prestige on being at the forefront of movements for modernity, for Western standards and thus for reform; the bourgeoisie…the bureaucracy itself, which enjoys the status of being able to harass everyone else, and the peasantry….among the status groups may also be counted the various nationalities of the Russians empire who feel their national honor insulted by subjugation to Russian authority.

I use the term consumer community to include those individuals: professionals, white collar workers, petty-bourgeoisie, property owners, liberal aristocrats, merchants, entrepreneurs, and skilled workers that have been described throughout this section. In general, I mean to

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12 Ibid., 43, 44.

include those members of urban Russia who were conscious of their current social position, and whose position gave them access to money sufficient to purchase goods which they could utilize to display, or advance their social position in society; consumers educated enough to understand the social significance of the items they purchased, and who participated in the discourse of constructing their social meaning.

Theory of Consumption and Consumerism

Jean Baudrillard and Consumerism

Throughout this paper, I argue that certain members of Russia’s urban society participated in a culture of consumption during the 1880s and 1890s that redefined their conceptions of space and time, and that signaled their turn toward modernity. But in order to discuss how these concepts come together, it is necessary first to gain a theoretical understanding of how the sociological understanding of consumerism differs from that of classical economics and how this notion of consumption may be applied to urban Russia at the end of the nineteenth century.

Why do people buy the things they do and what does it say about them? The question is answered differently by authors in different fields. Let us begin by recalling the classical economist’s answer based on Adam Smith’s principle of rational self-interest. Individuals have unlimited wants and limited resources. These resources are used to purchase items that individuals rationally believe will give them the maximum benefit possible. That is, they will purchase items that can be utilized to fulfill their needs to the maximum extent possible. In this
sense, objects have a specific utility attached to them: they do something for the individual, or fulfill a specific need harbored by the individual.14

Contemporary sociologists, on the other hand, have argued for, and discussed at length, a cultural component to economics. Durkheim, the quintessential anti-utilitarian, argues that objects have a social value. Individuals do not buy products based on their utility or because of rational choice, but because they have been socially conditioned to focus their desires in a certain direction. Because objects have a social value, acquiring these objects transmits to the owner certain status or social capital within a society. Objects come to signify socially desirable abstractions and take on symbolic meaning that is significant in a given time and place. They become signs for cultural abstractions.15

Significantly, more recent sociological scholarship has focused on consumption in the contemporary period. Objects as signs become a critical concept in the work of Jean Baudrillard, who does much to influence socio-economic theorists after him and whose conceptualization of consumption I rely on heavily to frame my argument on Russia’s consumer community. His explanation of consumption is worth quoting at length:

Consumption is a system which assumes the regulation of signs and the integration of the group: it is simultaneously a morality (a system of ideological values) and a system of communication, a structure of exchange… Consumption is a system of meaning, like language… Marketing, purchasing, sales, the acquisition of differentiated commodities, and object/signs - all of these presently constitute our language, a code with which our entire society communicates and speaks of itself.16


15 Ibid., 85-87

It is this “language” of consumption and the signs attached to consumer objects that I am interested in analyzing within the context of nineteenth century urban Russia. How do merchants and consumers utilize this language to communicate a common value system of morals and ideology and how does this relate to the vision of modernity that was evolving in urban Russia at that time? Such are the questions we will discuss throughout the rest of this text.

Importantly, Baudrillard also speaks to the significance of advertising in modern consumerism and its role in the construction of meaning. Because postmodern society has, by its nature, deconstructed previously stable norms and practices, consumer objects lack a stable cultural meaning. As such, advertisers are able to co-opt preexisting meanings and attach them to consumer objects; to position objects as cultural signifiers for their own promotional needs. For example, a washing machine can be associated with freedom, a drink with sexual appeal, or a car with sophistication and intelligence. Culturally valuable abstractions become disassociated from particular physical objects, and thus can be renegotiated at will. We will discuss the legitimacy of advertisements as a medium through which to explore the Russian consumer culture later in this section.17

Yet through a discussion of advertising we see a different dimension to consumerism, for the act of consuming is not only based on social signs but also on personal choice and on the way in which consumers interpret objects on an individual level. Consumerism thus takes on a dualistic nature: the social and the individual, which are inexorably intertwined. As Zygmunt Bauman indicates, within modern society consumption is no longer about satisfying needs, but about satisfying desire, an abstract concept that needs to be cultivated in the consumer and which

advertisers channel and direct through advertisement. Even more abstractly, Bauman references the work of Harvie Ferguson to argue that more than desire, it is the liberation of the consumer’s wishful thinking that drives modern consumerism, for according to Ferguson “[Consumption links itself] to self-expression and to notions of taste and discrimination. The individual expresses himself or herself through their possessions.”¹⁸ I will return repeatedly throughout this paper to this concept of self-expression through objects, and try to address how Russian consumers used objects to situate themselves socially and culturally in a larger society; specifically, how consumer objects were used as performative devices to express elements of taste, sophistication and class by individuals.

**Selected Literature Review**

This section discusses a select number of authoritative texts on Russian historiography and advertisement literature which have been influential to the creation of this paper. Rather than a comprehensive review of each work, I have chosen to highlight their major contributions and the ways in which their arguments have been significantly influential to the conceptualization and development of my own writing. As with any literary review, I seek to situate my thesis within the larger body of scholarly literature and discuss the new directions my own suggests.

In *The Empire’s New Clothes*, Christine Ruane uses fashion and dress in Russia between 1700 and 1917 to explore the degree to which Russians accepted Westernizing influences since the reforms of Peter the Great and seeks to contribute to the scholarly literature on industrialization by exploring the fashion industry’s contributions to modernization, especially as

a commodified object of sale and distribution. Ruane’s assertion that fashion was used by
Russians as means of expressing social, cultural, and political attitudes, as well as her belief that
clothes purchased by individuals offer insight into their conscious and unconscious desires,
prefaces my argument that other consumer goods purchases by individuals also offer such
insight.

There is, however, more of a change in thinking between our two worlds than simply a
shift in focus from clothing, watches, and bicycles. Ruane sees the developing Russian clothing
market and the consumerism surrounding it as a litmus test which can measure Russians’
acceptance, or rejection of Western Europe’s influence. Although I agree that the consumption of
certain goods is indicative of a Westward looking mentality, I am interested in exploring how
Russian consumers constructed meaning through commodified objects that was specific to their
own place and time. Within the exploration of Russian consumerism then, Westernization can be
seen as a factor of developing social modernity, but not as the end all and be all of the process,
especially since the same commodified objects may be assigned different social meanings or
values in different cultures at different times.

Finally, Ruane includes a large number of period photographs (often from private
collections) throughout her book and offers excellent analyses of the ways in which clothing was
used as a performative mechanism by Russian individuals. In many cases throughout this paper,
I have returned to the photographs in her book to focus on the other objects also present there;
specifically watches and bicycles. The book offers a wealth of photographic sources otherwise
unavailable to me and has served as a useful source throughout my inquiry. Once again, by
utilizing these photographs to illustrate the way in which individuals expressed their desires,
values, and cultural attitudes, I extend Ruane’s argument beyond the use of clothing toward the other physical objects.

Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd’s work on constructing Russian culture focuses mainly on the ways in which literature can be seen as a lens through which to explore social and historical processes in Russia. Their conceptualization of literature is a “cultural studies approach”...in which ‘culture’ has its anthropological sense of the totality of relations obtained in a given society and textual expression is understood as part of an intricate network in which symbolism is as important as materialism.”

Throughout the book, several major themes are repeated, the most important of which for my own study has been the development of a consumer culture and a discussion on the relationship between culture and the market. Here, the focus is on seeing consumption as a cross-class phenomenon which runs contrary to older scholarly conceptions about the presence or absence of a middle class in Russia and suggests instead what Kelly and Shepherd term a “bourgeois sensibility.” This sensibility prefaces my own conception of a Russian consumer community as another cross-class framework for discussing a segment of society. However, whereas Kelly and Shepherd place the socio-political notions of the intelligentsia into their conception of a bourgeois sensibility, I define the consumer community strictly in terms of their participation in the dialogue of consumption, which is itself predicated on economics. Likewise, Kelly and Shepherd focus on the cultural ramifications of textual expression and its connection to consumerism, I consider the interplay between text and graphics in advertisements, and their role as communication devices in the language of

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20 Ibid., 4.
consumerism. I am also more interested in exploring visual representations of objects’ commodification and use in photography. Thus, if the discussion of cultural production is as Kelly and Shepherd have indicated, an intricate network, of which text is only one thread, I propose here to reexamine consumerism in Russia by analyzing the effect of text in tandem with elements of visual production. Doing so will allow me to present a more holistic picture of the consumerism and the consumer community.

Edited by Edith W. Clowes, et al., *Between Tsar and People: Educated Society and the Quest for Public Identity in Late Imperial Russia* offers a collection of twenty essays from scholars on varying subjects, including history, architecture, art, and literature, and is an attempt to discuss the relationship between social change and the search for new patterns of social identity in Russia. That is, to explore how the rise of urban culture at the end of the nineteenth century might help to define elements of a “middling group” in Russian society. As the editors suggest, the book’s quest for a Russian middle focuses more on the process by which the authors arrive at their conclusions, rather than on the conclusions themselves, and the reader is left with no clear answer as to precisely who is in the Russian middle class. Nevertheless, the work does offer a significant opportunity to continue the discussion, precisely because of these varying processes of definition. As such, the multiplicity of lenses through which to conceptualize the Russian “middle” has been instrumental in forming my conceptualization of the Russian consumer community, and within this context, I see my articulation of this community as another framework by which to describe the middle of Russian society. In much the same way,

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discussions of obshchestvennost’ throughout the book (as well as its definition from Kelly and Shepherd) offered insight into the fluidity with which conceptions of Russian civil society changed throughout the nineteenth century.22

Liz McFall’s essay on culture and advertising, “Advertising, Persuasion, and the Culture/Economy Dualism” challenges the widely held belief among advertising scholars that whereas the twentieth-century advertisements utilize persuasion, emotion, and subtle symbolic references to market their goods, pre-twentieth century advertisements relied on strategies that were overt, pragmatic and informative. By analyzing the typography in a series of pre-twentieth century British and American ads which date back to the 1700s, McFall demonstrates that early advertisers carefully considered the fonts, styles, and placement of text in their advertisements to play on the reader’s emotions, and tie their products to important cultural symbols. In so doing, McFall challenges what she terms the “epochalist account of advertising,” a framework by which advertising scholars have separated twentieth century and pre-twentieth century advertising techniques in decidedly separate camps with differing strategies, and advocates instead a historically grounded contextualization of advertising scholarship in which the production of ads is seen as necessarily linked to the period’s resources and cultural understanding of advertising’s function.23 Specifically, McFall’s analysis suggests that many of the aspects of consumer culture which social theorists generally ascribe to in the contemporary period can be seen in previous centuries, and the advertisements which she discusses contributed to the developing sophistication of consumption and cultural symbolism attached to consumer objects. This


article’s literature review was particularly helpful in leading me to works by other social theorists and philosophers who discuss the cultural implications of consumerism, as well as in furthering the assertion that modern consumerist practices can exist in pre-twentieth century societies. My only criticism is that by engaging such wide temporal period with so few examples, the author risks drawing over-generalized conclusions regarding advertising prior to the twentieth century.

Works by Sally West, both her PhD dissertation and an article titled “Constructing Consumer Culture” offer a detailed look into both the history of advertising in Russia, and its relation to modernity, urban development and society from the last quarter of the eighteenth century to the end of the imperial period. Often focusing on cigarette, perfume and alcohol ads, West sees advertisements as a lens through which to explore the business community’s contribution to the development of the consumer culture in Russia at the turn of the century and the ways in which the portrayal of products helped to shape the experience of modernity for consumers. Despite the significant insights into the consumer culture that West’s studies provide, there are several important points of departure from my own analysis which have pushed our studies in different directions and affected my theoretical framing of the consumer community. West focuses her analysis on the ways in which advertisers portrayed their products in print, claiming that their manipulation of symbols from daily life constituted a “capitalist realism” which portrayed not the true society in which consumers were immersed, but an idealized version of reality that could be obtained by purchasing certain products.24 West thus portrays consumerism in Russian as driven by a monologue formed by advertisements which speaks to consumers in an attempt to shape their purchasing habits. To quote her PhD

dissertation: “In my opinion, advertising is useful to historians not so much as a mirror of society...but as a cultural record of the advertisers themselves...Their message thus reflects not society per se but their views of it.”25 In contrast to this position, I hold that the messages of advertising represent only half of the language the consumerism that was being used to define the contours of the consumer community at the turn of the century. Rather then a monologue of the communication, I see consumers and advertisers engaged in a dialogue of consumption in which the cultural meaning attached to objects is negotiated both by the presentation of objects in advertisements as well as their use and display in daily life. Whereas West suggests that the reception of consumer goods can not be explored without a significant amount of speculation, I hold that the photographic record of the period offers a broad enough avenue by which to begin the exploration of this aspect of Russian consumerism. It is because of this these notions of dialogue and negotiation that I repeatedly highlight the term consumer community throughout this paper.

To summarize, this paper seeks to add to the scholarly literature on Russia at the end of the nineteenth century by using consumerism as a lens through which to explore changing conceptions of modernity and urban societal development. Whereas other inquires have focused on the first years of the twentieth century (the “heyday of Russian advertising”26) I am interested in exploring the consumer culture at an earlier stage, in an effort to better understand its development. Whereas others such as West have used the messages embedded in advertisements to explore this consumer culture, I attempt to balance my analysis by using the photographic


26 Sally West. "The material promised land, ” 348.
record to illustrate how the use and display of products by consumers also contributed to the consumer culture’s development. While scholars including Christine Ruane have used photographs extensively in their analysis of items such as clothing, the physical objects portrayed in photographs have received far less attention. Indeed, I know of no other study that discusses the social significance of the display of watches and bicycles in Russian society. Whereas other scholars have attempted to negotiate the boundaries of the “middle” in Russian society and applied notions of class, community and obshchestvennost’ in varying ways to Russian society; the notion of a middle defined by a common language of consumerism remains an underdeveloped idea. It is my hope that this thesis’s inquiry will help to enrich our understanding of the Russian society at the turn of the nineteenth century by a unique lens through which to view the period.
CHAPTER TWO: WATCHES

Theories and Notions of Time

If one wishes to write about the social conceptions of time, and the manner in which time is perceived by a society, one quickly encounters a large body of theoretical literature spanning multiple disciplinary fields and centuries of scholarship. A thorough review of this scholarship is neither possible, nor necessary within the confines of this paper. Nor does a complex analysis of the philosophical discourse on, and conceptualization of, time for its own sake, serve the purpose of this paper’s investigation. My interest here lies in examining how advertisements for pocket watches in the 1880s and 1890s illustrate the changing perceptions of time among Russian consumers and the manner in which this change in perception can be linked to a unified vision of modernity.

Whereas philosophy approaches the discussion of time and its relation to humanity in particularly abstract and sweeping terms, seeking an existential understanding of man’s relationship to time, anthropology and sociology discuss more culturally specific perceptions of time that are more useful for this paper’s discussion. It is not the “true” nature of time that I wish to explore here, but rather the changing ways in which it was perceived and expressed through consumerism at the end of the nineteenth century. Indeed, David Harvey makes the connection between the material culture of society and the production of a unique understanding of time and space:

The conclusion we should draw is simply that neither time, nor space can be assigned objective meanings independently of material processes, and that it is thorough investigation of the latter that we can properly ground our concepts in the former. … From this materialist perspective we can then argue that objective conceptions of time and space are necessarily created through material practices and processes which serve to
reproduce social life... each distinctive mode of production or social formation, will in short, embody a distinctive mode or bundle of time and space practices and concepts.27

If we accept this understanding of time and space, that each society will interpret time and space differently, then we can focus our inquiry on several specific questions about the Russian consumer community at the end of the nineteenth century. That is: what are the time and space conceptions of the consumer community and how are they expressed through consumption? More specifically (and perhaps paradoxically), how can these conceptions of modernity and time be understood by examining the consumption of the watch? Before going further, it is important to understand that the rise of industrial society produced, in large part, a shift in thinking about time throughout Europe and America, and it is worth discussing in some detail.

Perhaps the first movement toward modernity concerning time can be seen in the shift away from the cyclical understanding of time adopted by hunter-gather societies (time as a series of repetitive cycles closely linked to the natural world) and toward a linear perception of time that is oriented toward the future and which is common in Western industrialized societies. Numerous authors have identified this conceptualization of time in cultures which exhibit the development of industrialization, urbanization, and the shifting of social relations away from egalitarian communities toward social hierarchies based on economic commerce and politics. Or to put it another way, the movement away from a natural time associated with Tönnies’s *Gemininschaft* (community) and toward the rational time of *Gesellschaft* (society). For the purposes of this paper’s discussion, we are interested in considering what Martin Heidegger termed “ordinary” time; that is, linear, futuritial time which can be measured by clocks,

calendars, and schedules. This movement from cyclical to linear time deserves some further exploration.

What is critical here is the argument that the industrial age required a significantly different conceptualization of time than other periods in mankind’s development. The point is summarized by John Hassard: Social time and clock time in Western society have become inexorably linked - that is, many of the social processes of Western society are judged by the hour, minute, and second rather than the cyclical patterns of time. This creates social lives that are detached from nature, dictated instead by the clock and its ultimately unnatural method of time regulation. Industrialization has transformed much of human existence into an effort to avoid wasting time. Thus in industrial society time becomes a valuable commodity, where progress is measured by speed and productivity. Linear time (time moving in a single direction along a straight path from the past to the present and into the future) becomes the hegemonic conceptualization of time in the industrial era, where “progress is key...The past is unrepeatable, the present is transient, and the future is infinite and exploitable.”

Time, then, becomes commodified in modern, industrial society - time is a factor of production and has value because

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it is the medium by which economic activity is measured. It is an economic object or a symbol of production regulated by the clock.\textsuperscript{30}

Yet despite this notion of the domination of linear time as a movement toward industrial modernity, it has also been argued that other forms of time are present in society. Specifically, I find Georges Gurvitch’s articulation of multiple social times (as distinct from linear time) particularly useful, and it is worth digressing momentarily into the realm of social theory in order not only to indicate how complex the notion of time can become when discussing its theoretical conceptions, but also because Gurvitch’s separation of social times according to class implicitly supports my argument that the Russian consumer community could develop its own particular conception of time; it is no longer, as David Harvey suggests, each society that creates its own conceptions of time, but rather each group within each society.\textsuperscript{31}

Social time can be understood as the pattern of time a society develops as it acts out its processes of social reproduction; the way in which time is understood by members of society as they interact. Or as Gurvitch puts it: “Social time is the time of convergency and divergency of movements of the total social phenomena, whether the total social phenomena are global, group, or micro-social and whether or not they are expressed in the social structure.”\textsuperscript{32} This social time is then broken down into eight different kinds of time: (1) Enduring-time, where time is slowed down so that the past is projected into the present and the future - often experienced in rural

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{30} Jonh Hassard, “Introduction: The Sociological Study of Time” 9-13. Throughout his introduction, Hassard provides an impressive overview on the overview of time as conceptualized by major authors in philosophy and sociology.


\bibitem{32} Georges Gurvitch, “Varieties of Social Time,” 65. Here Gurvitch is employing the term “total social phenomenon” as it was developed by Marcel Mauss. Without going into great detail, Mauss sees different social processes, and actions as inexorably linked to one another. Thus, social actions that are religious, economic, political and so on,are all part of the total social phenomenon.
\end{thebibliography}
communities, and by peasants.  (2) Deceptive-time, in which there are long periods of time which are disrupted by sudden and violent changes or crises where ruptures between the past and the present occur. Gurvitch assigns this time to large cities, to the realm of politics, and to the ancient world of longstanding empires that endured repeated revolutions.  (3) Erratic-time, when there is an erratic fluctuation between the presence and absence of rhythms. It is a time in which uncertainty leads to passive mass social behavior and collective attitudes – relating especially to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.  (4) Cyclical-time, in which the past, present, and future are melded into one another, with a special emphasis placed on community. This time is often associated with mystical rituals, cults, or religious practices.  (5) Retarded-time, which is associated with nobility, the landed gentry, and other restricted closed groups where the conditions of the present are understood to be those of the future - where the character of life is expected to remain the same.  (6) Alternating-time, or the beginning of capitalism when monarchy controlled Europe. A time of alternating advance and delay in which the past and the future compete in the present.  (7) Time-in-advance-of-itsel, a time of competitive capitalism, in which the future becomes the present; of movement toward ideals, of mass action and mass revolt.  (8) Explosive-time, in which maximum communal efforts are encouraged and put forward; when both the present and the past are consumed by visions of a transcendent future and has been sometimes linked to Fascism and Communism.33 As may seem apparent, nineteenth century urban Russia fits into several of these categories of time, and ones perception of time was based largely on the position one found oneself in, in society.

33 Ibid., 69-72.
There is one other definition of time that needs to be addressed: the difference between public time and private time, for I use them somewhat differently in this paper than scholars have in the past. In his article on time and temporal structure, Eviatar Zerubavel uses the terms “public time” and “private time” to distinguish between the segments of a modern individual’s life in which he is engaged either in the public or private spheres. For Zerubavel, this separation between times is largely economic in nature. Time spent working at one’s job is considered public time, while time at home is considered private. The temporal boundaries between these periods are rigidly controlled by the clock, and the cultural conventions of modern industry create an environment in which individuals anticipate moving through public and private time at fixed intervals. The same usage of public and private time is suggested by Nowonty:

With the emergence of the bourgeois...The public time of work was set against the private time within the family. Both were temporally regulated, with precise specifiable rights of transition. In this polarization there arose a specific I-time-perspective which knows how to distinguish between one’s own time (proper time) and that of others.

Contrary to these definitions, I take private time to have a commercially constructed meaning whereby the commodification of personalized time pieces, marketed to a large number of individuals, created a new relationship between the consumer and the concept of time. Watches, as distinct from clocks, represented the first technology whereby time became truly portable and could travel with the individual as he moved from one locality to the next. Likewise, the watch enabled each individual consumer to “own” time for himself. Rather than gazing at a centrally located clock tower, individuals could reference time at their own leisure,


and establish a more personal relationship with time. This notion can be connected to the observations of David S. Landes who argues that the creation of the mechanized clock was one of the great inventions of human history, not because it was mankind’s first method of tracking time, but because its mechanization meant it could be reproduced in miniature. This miniaturization, Landes argues, created the possibility for widespread use which moved individuals from *time obedience* to *time discipline*. Rather than public clocks or bells that ordered individuals to particular tasks at certain times, the privatization of the watch meant that individuals began to regulate themselves according to the clock, and developed an internal discipline regarding time.³⁶ Thus, time became a personal affair and the responsibility of the individual who needed a tool to account for his own time.

But I also use the term “private time” to indicate the actual marketing of watches. Landes may be right that it was the miniaturization of clocks that led to the possibility of their widespread use, but it was their reduction in price that made it a reality. Whereas the creation of watches can be traced back to the fifteenth century in Western Europe, the nineteenth century represented the first century in which time pieces became affordable for consumers outside of the upper-class. That a greater number of consumers could afford watches meant that time could be personalized for a greater number of people. The commodified aspect of time strikes again, as watchmakers and advertisers provided watches that accommodated consumers by taking into account price, aesthetics, and personality. That so broad a market of watches existed by the end of the nineteenth century meant that time become private, not merely because it could be owned by the individual, but because the watch could express the tastes and personality of the individual

almost as accurately as it could express time. Let us examine this process of affordability in greater detail.

During the nineteenth century, numerous patents were issued in Europe and America for various methods of creating accurate watches. One of the most significant innovations came by the middle of the nineteenth century, when Pierre Frederic Ingold began making watches by using precision machines to manufacture the components. The effect was similar to that of standardization in other industries: larger numbers of watches could be produced at cheaper prices to a specific and constant standard and much of the work could be accomplished by unskilled laborers. During that time, the price of watches was also reduced by designers including Johann Georg Roskopf, who, by 1867 had designed a watch in Switzerland specifically with the cost of the product in mind, and many of the features he implemented were later used by other companies. These included the reduction of the number of parts in the watch, the use of cheap metals for the case, and dials that were constructed from printed cardboard rather than the traditional choice of enameled copper. These innovations, along with those of others watchmakers, opened the market to a much wider strata of society during the second half of the nineteenth century. We now turn specifically to the Russian market.

As Soviet author P.M. Romanov points out, Russian import laws during the nineteenth century also helped to ensure that large numbers of foreign watches found their way into the country. Although a small number of private Russian watchmakers were in business at that time, the local industry was stunted by the structure of tsarist import duties. Those duties required by the government on watch parts were substantially less than those required for finished goods.

causing foreign manufactures to ship unassembled watches from their home country, and then to assemble them in factories in Russia. One undated example given by the author indicates that while the import duty on a steel cased watch was one ruble, thirty kopeks, and the duty on a gold cased watch was six rubles, thirty kopeks, the total duty for a watch of either configuration in its disassembled form cost only seventy-five kopeks. This combination of modern manufacturing techniques and friendly economic polices meant that domestic watchmakers could hardly compete with the significant influx of affordable foreign watches. Conversely, the same manufacturing and trade conditions meant that a great number of Russian citizens could now afford the product.38

Advertisements and Photographs

Before beginning the analysis of the specific advertisements in this section, it is useful to make a few general comments about consumer choice vis-à-vis the watch market at the turn of the century, and how it relates to conceptions of time and space. Stephen Kern, during a discussion on the adoption of an international time standard, mentions that at the turn of the century Petersburg was two hours, one minute and 18.7 seconds ahead of Greenwich and that other cities in Russia kept odd local times.39 This is significant if we consider the notion of space among urban Russians, for if particular local times prevailed in Russian cities, the act of setting one’s watch to the “proper time” in that city symbolically grounded the owner to a specific and distinct locality. This conscious act of temporal placement, reinforced by the

38 PM. Romanov, Detishche Pervoi Piatiletki (Moskva: Moskovskii Rabochii 1985), 9 -10 Interestingly, that the watch industry developed a pattern of production in one country, and assembly in another suggests that one aspect of its connection to modernity is in the nature of its industry.

winding of the watch, the adjustment of the watch hands, and the general maintenance of one’s
time piece are choices that indicate the watch owner is not simply making a statement about the
adoption of linear time (“I am of the modern world.”) but also making a statement about his or
her proper place in the world (“I am of Petersburg” or “I am of Ekaterinburg.”) Local times tied
inhabitants to much more specific localities than later international standards based on
Greenwich Mean time, and the constant choice necessary to remain in sync with this urban
locality tied the consumer to a particular, and consistently reinforced, spatial identity.

Likewise, even by the 1890s it was still possible to buy cheaper watches that did not have
a second hand. As Landes points out, inventors have constantly striven to develop more accurate
modes of calculating time, more precise ways of dissecting the temporal environment into even,
predictable pieces that can be scheduled, calculated, and relied on; and yet we are also reminded
that these divisions in time are artificial, and by extension, it follows that the further atomization
of time, into the smaller fragments of seconds adds another layer of artificiality to the conception
of the temporal landscape.40 Although it is impossible to speculate as to the exact reasons for
individuals to purchase watches with a second hand, it can be suggested that the choice to
purchase such a product indicates a general degree of comfort with the notion of seconds; this in
turn indicates a higher degree of comfort with the artificial nature of industrial, linear time.
Those that were willing to embrace the concept of the second, either by necessity or by choice,
stood closer to the threshold of modernity than those that did not. If indeed time was money in
the modern world, those that controlled an understanding of the second possessed an edge over
those that did not, because it gave the former group a more precise tool to measure economic

40 David S. Landes, Revolution in Time, 3-6.
productivity. The second was a mechanism by which urban consumers could internalize more profoundly a notion of time that, for all its artificiality, was the driving force of modern, industrial society.\textsuperscript{41}

\textit{Women and Watches}

If the bicycle changed women’s relation to space and the public sphere at the end of the nineteenth century, the watch changed their relation to time and the public sphere; and advertisements from that time attest to the notion that women made up a considerable part of the consumer’s market. But why was this the case, and what do the descriptions of women’s watches found in advertisements tell us about a gendered conceptualization of time within the Russian consumer culture? As Nowonty indicates, time both entered the domestic sphere (long considered the traditional domain of women) and took women out of the domestic sphere. In the first case, the clock invaded the domestic sphere because it regulated when work began and ended, thus regulating the limitations of personal time in the home: when husbands left the home, when they returned, and when the family could expect the greatest degree of privacy. The rhythms of the household now were tied not to the cyclical patterns of nature, but to the demands of industry, and the internal dynamic of the family shifted as more or less time was required away from the home to acquire the economic means to insure its survival. Women’s perception of time thus needed to be disciplined to the public time embodied by the clock, regardless of whether they actually left the house. The second point is that they did, in fact, leave the house to

\textsuperscript{41} The earliest use of the second hand on a watch was recorded around 1665, but various methods of tracking seconds were still being perfected during nineteenth century. For a history of the development of the second hand, and a detailed explanation of how it functions in modern watches, see G.H. Baillie, \textit{Watches: Their History, Decoration and Mechanism} (London: Methuen and Co LTD. 1929), 326-334.
a greater degree than at previous points in the century. Women were beginning to play a more
active role in public life, often as workers in newly developing factories and industries, and
sometimes in the social life of urban culture. A knowledge of time was necessary to function
effectively in public.\textsuperscript{42}

Despite the assertion that women of all classes experienced this transition to clock-driven
linear time, and despite the numerous ads specifically advertising women’s watches, my research
in the photographic record indicates that women were far less likely to be photographed with a
watch than men. This may be because class as well as gender affected the way women
experienced time at the turn of the century. Feminist scholars have repeatedly argued that the
temporal life of women in modern society is fundamentally different from that of men because
the linear time of capitalism places more value on time spent at work than time spent at home.
Since work was traditionally a male dominated space, men’s time possessed an inherently higher
value than that of women, and much of the literature that has focused on temporality vis-à-vis the
equality of women has focused on demanding equal access to the workplace.\textsuperscript{43} By extension,
working women would have developed a greater need to keep track of time, than those who
remained within the domestic sphere and suggests that, at least for women, the \textit{absence} of a
watch in a photograph was a signal of higher social standing, and a sign that the family’s position
was well off enough as to allow the woman to remain more strongly within the domestic sphere.

\textsuperscript{42} Helga Nowotny, \textit{Time}, 113-120.

\textsuperscript{43} Georges Gurvitich, “The Problem of Time”, in \textit{The Sociology of Time} ed. John Hassard (New York: St. Martin’s
Press, 1990), 40-42.

One photograph illustrating this gendered division in time shows a husband and wife in formal evening-wear from around 1900 (figure 1). Despite their elegant attire, it is only the man who wears a watch in the photo; he, and not his wife, controls the device that will regulate their evening out in public and this responsibility and power rests only with him. Even when this woman appears in public then, she has no need of a watch because she is with her husband; he is charge of monitoring her temporal behavior in public and her actions are guided by his interpretation of his own watch.
Consider also the family image of two women and a young boy taken around 1903 (figure 2). Several aspects of the photograph help to place the family in a social class above that of the peasants and below that of the nobility. While their lives may be considered comfortable from a material standpoint, they did not display the opulence of the upper class. Those signs of material comfort include a stuffed dog which the child is holding, a broach worn by the woman on the right, and the lace blouse and bracelet and ring worn by the other woman. What is not present, is a watch. Both women have obviously taken time to accent their clothing with items that they deemed appropriate for their gender and social station, and that a watch was not
included in their attire may suggest that it was not considered an appropriately feminine piece of jewelry for the time.

A similar image is that of two young women dressed to go out at the turn of the century (figure 3). Here again, despite numerous material additions to their clothing, including hats, gloves, spectacles and a handbag, a watch is not to be seen. The quality of the women’s garments (especially the lace used in their construction) the ornate nature of their hats, and the chain around the neck of the woman on the left suggest that a great deal of time went into choosing each outfit, and these women had means at their disposal above that of many other urban residents. Thus we may speculate that here again, the watch was not seen as an acceptably
feminine accessory, even (significantly) when a women would leave her home and appear in public. Ruane suggests that the outfit each women wears here was specifically for spending a night on the town. This idea of traveling outside the home, vis-à-vis the absence of a watch is significant: women who could afford to dress in such elegant fashion and visit the wider public sphere acted as observers, or tourists; they could visit the public sphere, but they did not reside there. As such, there was much less of a need to own a watch.

Figure 4: Sankt-Peterburg v Ob’ektive: Fotografov Kontsa XIX - Nachala XX Veka (Sankt-Peterburga Gosudarstvennyi Russkii Muzei Tsebtrak’yi Gosudarstvennyi Arxiv Kinofotofondodokumentov 2003), 22.
Finally, I wish to invoke a well known photo of Nicholas II’s four daughters, in which the girls are gathered around a table looking at a book (figure 4). Here again, there are no time pieces to be found, despite the obvious opulence of the setting (pearl necklaces for each of the girls, flowers in ornate vases, dresses of exceptional quality, etc). Even the presence of the book amongst the girls (not automatically a symbol of femininity) is tolerated, and indeed given a place of prominence. Yet the girls are still circumscribed with a domestic sphere that, while it does tolerate their mastery of the written word, does not allow their mastery over time.

Figure 5: Barbara Alpern Engel. *Between the Fields and the City: Women, Work and Family in Russia, 1861 - 1914.* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.), 76.
In contrast to the absence of watches in the proceeding images, a photo taken of three women in Iaroslavl’ provence in 1916, demonstrates that for less affluent members of the consumer community, the presence of a watch was more likely. Indeed, on examining the photo, one will find that amid the necklaces, handbags, and gloves, a watch can also be seen on the wrist of the woman in the center. As Barbara Engel points out, by the 1890s, urban consumer goods (and especially clothing) played a large part in a woman’s dowery, and her ability to marry well depended on the ability to secure these items. If her family’s income was insufficient, she would have no choice but to seek work on her own, often in the city. Thus, I argue that whereas the absence of a watch was a status symbol for the more affluent female members of the consumer community, the presence of the watch for less affluent women served a particular function vis-à-vis their more public work lives and, at least in the case of the village community, seems to have served as a symbol of social capital and status.44

A good way of getting a sense of the diverse market of watches that were available for the consumer by the end of the 1890s is to examine an advertisement from a Swiss company out of Geneva. Within this single example, we see watches offered in a variety of metals, for both men and women, ranging from gold to nickel, and with prices from six to forty rubles. Pocket watches, table clocks, floor clocks, and alarm clocks are all available from the merchant. The ad makes two distinct references that are worth particular attention. First the specific and repeated reference to “keyless” (bez kliucha) watches. Older style watches were wound with the use of a
separate key that could be inserted into the watch by the user when maintenance was required. It was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that “keyless watches” (watches with winding mechanisms built into the design of the watch itself) became widely available. They appeared first in Switzerland and then in an improved form in England. As the ad indicates, the presence or absence of a key was a major factor in determining price. For example the prices listed here indicate that a man’s keyless silver watch would cost twenty-five percent more than the (presumably) “keyed” variety. The keyless version then, appears to be something of a luxury for the nineteenth century market; a convenience for which the consumer must pay extra, and within this notion we see a familiar truism of modern advertising - convenience and comfort can be bought (at a price) because advances in technology and innovations in design continue to make life easier. Finally this distinction between keyed and keyless watches makes the later variety something of a status symbol for the owner since the innovation of a built-in winding mechanism changes the aesthetics of the watch’s design. Others could see that a keyless watch owner could afford the luxury of such a device. In such an environment, the act of winding the watch in public becomes performative; the owner can profess his affluence simply by turning a dial.

The second point is that the advertisement makes a distinct reference to musical “boxes” (iashchiki) which range in price from ninety to two hundred and fifty rubles. The word “boxes” is a bit confusing here, because up until this point, the ad has specifically been about time pieces. It is entirely possible that the merchant simply offered music boxes for sale, but it is also possible that this refers to musical watches, as they had been in existence since about 1800. In fact, the development of the musical watch is directly linked to the music box, since they

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45 G.H. Baillie, Watches, 335-341.
share a common mechanism for producing sound; that is, a comb, or group of steel reeds that was operated first by a series of pins on a cylinder and later by a metal disk.\textsuperscript{46} Because of this close mechanical connection, and because of the variety of watches for sale by the owner, it is not unreasonable to propose that musical watches could be purchased. What is important to note, however, is that such watches would have remained a novelty, and (if the price listed here is any indication of the cost of the technology) prohibitively expensive for many consumers. However, the novelty of the item, and its use of music makes it a particularly powerful performative tool for an owner who wishes to broadcast his or her affluence. Indeed, the use of music meant that in public the owner could expect to draw attention to himself even when others were not already making eye contact.

![Image](image.jpg)

\textbf{Figure 7: NV, June 10 1898 pp.6}

Descriptions of watch advertisements illustrate the development of the language of consumerism, and the evolving dialogue between consumers and advertisers. One such example of the way merchants utilize this dialogue can be found in figure 7. Here, the first person

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 324-325.
narrative is used to present the advertisement as personal conversation with the consumer and sets a particular tone for the relationship. In the opening line of the text the merchant explains that his large inventory of watches has forced him into a position in which he must makes sales and that the customer can benefit from his unfortunate situation. In fact the merchant is only conducting business as usual, but the tone privileges the customer with respect, with control, and places the customer in a position of power. Such a presentation engages the ego of the consumer in an attempt to posit the watch as a status symbol. Later in the ad, the merchant refers to his customers as “gentlemen” intimating that it is the watch that confers this title; that the watch itself can command this level of respect for its owner. Likewise, the personal tone of a direct conversation suggests that the consumer is being let in on a secret, as if the watch allows him to enter a privileged social world in which he is privy to insider knowledge that puts him ahead of others.
Other advertisements focus on the elegance and sophistication of their products, on their practicability, or on some combination of both. In the text of one such ad for men’s watches, the adjectives used to describe the products repeatedly invoke images of affluence: the “most elegant and robust”, the “costly gilded cover,” or the “fine chain.” The description goes on to indicate that the merchant is willing to personalize the watch with the inscription of a monograph. The inclusion of a graphic is also significant; the intricate design gives the viewer an indication of the detailed craftsmanship (and presumably quality) that has gone into the product. Hence the language of the ad, both its text and its image, attempts to arouse the reader’s desire and imagination; to encourage the reader to imagine consuming the object before actually purchasing it. Although the advertisement attempts to be practical by drawing attention to the ten or twelve
ruble price by placing this text in a significantly larger font, it is important to remember that this is indeed the starting price of these items.

At the other end of the scale are those watch ads that specifically portray the item as affordable and which highlight its practical nature (figure 9). Such ads would appeal to those in the lower end of the consumer community, especially those skilled workers who still labored in factory settings and who needed a dependable, durable time piece for daily use. Addressing this cost-conscious consumer base in stark and direct terms, is an advertisement from the Varkobistkii Brothers, which begins with the words “Cheap”, “Practical”, “Pleasant”, and “Useful.” Although much of the additional information is obscured by the poor quality of the image, it is particularly interesting that the merchants offer an eight year guarantee in writing for their products, as this speaks to a focus on quality and long term dependability. Indeed, this length of time mentioned...
here far exceeds the guarantee offered by the Geneva company in the previous example and represents the longest guarantee for a watch I have found during my research. Yet despite the advertisement's assurance that the products offered are affordable, one can not help but notice that prices start at eight rubles (that is, more expensive than the Geneva products) and there are American gold watches that go as high as seventeen rubles. On the other hand, there seems to be a payment plan option, should the customer wish to, or need to pay over time. If this is correct, it would also indicate that the advertisement was designed for those consumers of more limited means. If indeed such a payment plan was offered, it would be an interesting illustration of the way in which the Russian consumer culture participated in a process of modernity, in that we can see the development of the increasingly complex relationship between buyers and sellers that characterizes contemporary society.

The paths to modernity are multiple and multi-layered, if one accepts that the movement of modernity can occur at any age where there is significant tension between old and new ideas within a society, it remains to find and explore these points of contention in order to understand modernity within a given place and time. One such avenue of inquiry is an investigation of the clash between personal and public time in urban Russia at the turn of the 20th century. By using watches as symbols of Russia’s modern culture we can gain insight not only into the way in which society was changing in that era, but also into the commercial behavior of a developing consumer society.
CHAPTER THREE: BICYCLES

On Bicycles and Modernity

As other authors have pointed out, the bicycle in Western culture represented a commodity by which society as a whole could be seen as moving away from the nineteenth century, and into the twentieth. Technologically, the bicycle led to road improvements in North America and Western Europe, as well as mechanical advances that foreshadowed the development of both automobiles and airplanes throughout the West. Socially, the bicycle was a mechanism through which the equality of women was debated, and expressions of class and democracy were argued. Ties between the bicycle and Russian social history, however, have been far less developed by scholars. As such, this chapter of my thesis is somewhat unique to the historiography of the bicycle: whereas other authors have omitted the Russian market and the social significance of the bicycle in that country from their investigations, or relegated it to the periphery, this section makes it its focus. The drawback to this approach is that this absence of scholarly material forces me to draw on several somewhat unorthodox sources and make a number of logical assumptions and deductive conclusions in order to further my argument. Wherever possible, I have tried to keep these leaps to a minimum and to qualify the conclusions I have based them on. Those interested in exploring the development of the bicycle and its social significance in the West, will find several authors of note including David V. Herlihy, Frederick

It is not my intention, to tie the bicycle to the macrocosmic social development of Russian culture in the 1880s and 1890s as a whole, but rather to illustrate how newspaper advertisements from that time period point to the development of sentiments, similar to those being exhibited in the West, regarding the way in which bicycle consumers thought about space and technology, and how this mindset is an aspect of the turn toward modernity exhibited by the Russian consumer class that is the focus of this paper. To this end it is necessary to examine the way in which scholars have connected modernity to the bicycle in the West, and to deconstruct what is meant here by modernity in the Russian example. I will focus on conceptions of space in advertisements and the way in which these representations of space illustrate perceptions of modernity among the Russian consumer class.

In his book on bicycles and modernity in Canada, Glen Norcliffe describes his vision of modernity as “a movement that is moulded and shaped in different ways and in different settings, with differences emerging not only at the level of the individual, but also between groups, classes, cities and countryside, regions and enterprises.”\footnote{Glen Norcliffe, \textit{The Ride to Modernity: The Bicycle in Canada, 1860-1900} (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 2001),10.} For all that this definition does to create a notion of the specificity of modernity, Norcliffe asserts that he is attempting to draw a connection between the Enlightenment’s universalist view of modernity which emphasizes
reason, rationality, and progress toward truth, and a more liminal model based on flux and change, contextualized within the specifics of place and time which have been forwarded by writers including Philip Cooke.  

It is to this dualistic notion of universality and specificity that I wish to draw attention in my analysis. Although the specifics of the industry, invention, and production of bicycles can be demonstrated with ease (for differing individuals in differing localities helped to develop differing aspects of the bicycle’s technological advancement and social capital) the fact remains that the analyses of various bicycle historians point to a social reaction to bicycles across the Western world that is strikingly similar, whether in France, England, the United States, or Canada. In each of these countries scholars have pointed to changing social conditions regarding the movement of individuals, relations between the sexes, and the use of bicycles as a method of mass recreation, all of which points to a commonality of culture across national boundaries. If so striking a similarity can be seen within this multinational environment, then I submit that those in Russia who purchased and rode bicycles, exhibited a shift in cultural attitude and viewpoint similar to those who purchased them in the West. In other words, the specific insights of bicycle scholars who comment on the ways in which modernity can be seen through the bicycle in the West, may act as a guidepost to Russian consumers’ notions of modernity and the bicycle.

Let us pause for a moment to consider in greater detail the concept of a “bicycle culture” and its connection to consumption and modernity. In his discussion on bicycles, Norcliffe makes

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49Ibid., 9-11.

the distinction between necessities and luxury goods, arguing that sales of luxury goods can be increased if the item is a *signifier* and maintains that the bicycle became “one of the more visible *signifiers* of modernity during the 1880s and 1890s…The bicycle, particularly its accessories, signified that a person was in the mainstream of popular culture at that time, just as other activities and artefacts serve as signifiers today.”

Significant to my own discussion of Russian advertisements, Norcliffe suggests that this desire was articulated by the interplay between producers and consumers who formed a symbiotic relationship during the period. I extend the author’s argument to suggest that a similar culture of modernity can be observed in Russia by examining the relationship between consumers and advertisers as illustrated by newspaper advertisements.

**A Note on Method**

Additionally, one note on methodology is necessary before moving further. Most of the bicycle ads in this section come from the 1898 Petersburg edition of *Novoe Vremia*. The reason for this choice is twofold: first, during my investigation this was the paper and year whose advertisements were graphically and textually the most diverse and aesthetically engaging, and which represented both the widest assortment of international manufacturers and the broadest diversity of goods found during my research. The second reason is a partial historical justification for the aforementioned findings: It is generally agreed among bicycle historians that

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the 1890s represents the golden age of the bicycle. It was during this time that technological advancement and falling production costs turned the sport into a mass phenomenon that crossed class, gender, and age lines across North America and Western Europe. Yet as Dan Herlihy points out, by 1897 the bicycle market in the West had been flooded with too many goods produced by numerous start-up companies. In order to stay in business, manufacturers needed to develop creative ways of selling their products. Although Herlihy never makes this argument, it is not difficult to imagine that some of these manufacturers turned their attention to far-flung markets such as Russia that still eagerly sought to participate in the Western phenomenon. Indeed, by the spring of 1898, Russian newspapers were replete with advertisements for bicycles from Germany, England, France, and the United States. Significantly, Herlihy points to a marked decline in the international bicycle trade by 1899. In other words, 1898 serves as a high watermark in bicycle advertisement and production; it was the period of time in which a surplus of goods existed on the market, and before the point when production adjusted to the decrease in consumer demand. This overproduction of goods in the West seems to have benefited the Russian market by lowering prices and increasing the diversity of goods available, which in turn seems to have opened the bicycle market to a wider economic range of individuals than ever before. It is this moment, when the bicycle was becoming available to the widest economic array of individuals possible, that I am most interested in exploring, because of its social and cultural ramifications; I also argue, that it is this moment in which these ramifications are most easily observed.


54 For a discussion on the decline of the bicycle market in the West see David Herlihy, *Bicycle: The History*, 283-298.
The Bicycle and Space

We now turn our discussion to the changing notions of space and its relation to modernity and the bicycle. On the one hand, bicycles were responsible for compressing space in Russia, between urban and rural localities; which in turn had consequences both on the individual level, and within the community. Inside the urban setting, the bicycle rendered the street a contested space of modernity, both because of technological competition with other forms of transportation, and because the street became a performative space in which to showcase modern consumerism. Finally, Russia’s inclusion in the international bicycle market opened its consumer class to a broader space of Western dominated consumerism and consumption, in which capitalistic sentiments on goods and services were exchanged and developed.55

Figure 10: Nizhegorodsky listok, June 2, 1896, pp. 4.

A common trend noted by Western bicycle historians is the degree to which the widespread use of the bicycle enabled individuals, both male and female, to roam over greater geographic distances at will (there were no set tracks or schedules to follow) and to enjoy a level of privacy and freedom not otherwise available in Victorian society. This was particularly true of the younger generation, but for all age groups who participated in the bicycle culture of the 1890s, the freedom that the modern invention gave to escape the city into the countryside and explore the outdoors was universal. That this freedom of movement and the connection to the countryside was significant in Russia is demonstrated by several ads from the 1890s whose images specifically invoke the narrative of freedom, movement, and nature.\textsuperscript{56}

At the community level, another common trend was that the greater speed and distance travelers could journey meant that individuals, goods and ideas moved freely from urban centers to rural areas. While the payload that a single bicycle could carry in addition to its rider was comparatively small to that of the horse or train, there are several instances in which letter carriers used bicycles to improve their delivery capability. That more rural areas were now within reach of a greater number of urban individuals meant that ideas of modernity and progress flowed more rapidly from urban centers and penetrated more deeply into rural areas. Interestingly, the bicycle also facilitated a dialogue between urban and rural spaces through its own marketing and dissemination. That is, residents in more provincial areas were also interested in purchasing and using the bicycle in their daily lives, and the demand in rural areas led to greater commercial contact with city centers where the supply was available. The use of

\textsuperscript{56}See for example, figure (Kinkman) which utilizes a flowers and fence to signify a locality outside of the city, or figure ____ in which the text is cleverly placed throughout the ad to give the reader impression of forward motion.
the bicycle in areas outside of Moscow and Petersburg will be discussed again, later in this chapter.

The bicycle also made the city street a contested space of modernity. While other authors have dedicated a fair amount of energy to documenting the laws passed against cyclers in the West who had disrupted horse-drawn traffic patterns, my focus in on the way in which individuals utilized the street as a performative space in which to advertise their interpretation of modernity. The point is well articulated by Norcliffe and deserves to be quoted at length:

Wealthy consumers of the late nineteenth century took advantage of both public and private spaces to parade their new possessions. Here the bicycle truly came into its own. Not only was it a modern artefact in its own right… that marked the rider as a social innovator, not only did it command the attention of bystanders on the street...but it could also parade other innovations - new styles of clothing, hats, and footwear, new parasols, new accessories, and even new cameras… a cyclist on the roadway stood out.57

It is difficult to ascertain to what degree this statement is valid within a Russian context. One can assume with relative surety that the wealthier bicycle consumer who rode down the streets of Moscow or Petersburg understood that to the street-side onlookers his or her utilization of the bicycle marked him or her as a person with an interest in technological innovation and Western culture. (Pre-revolutionary Russia had no bicycle factories and therefore any bicycles which were in the country ultimately came from the West.) For the wealthier bicycle owner then, the act of owning and choosing to be seen riding a bicycle (as opposed to the horse one could also afford) was in itself a performative act that linked the consumer to the bicycle's version of modernity. But the degree to which even the wealthiest consumers saw the bicycle as a venue through which to display other trends of consumerism and modernity is open to interpretation.

57 Glen Norcliffe, The Ride to Modernity, 245.
One can only guess as to the motivations behind each individual's choice to ride a bicycle. Likewise one cannot say with certainty that less well-off bicycle consumers were driven to make their purchases based on the performative opportunities which Norcliffe describes. Instead, without other evidence to the contrary, it is equally likely that lower-class consumers valued the bicycle for its utilitarian function as a means of transportation, and were unconcerned with the opinions of urban onlookers.

Finally, as has already been alluded to, the international nature of the bicycle market means that its proliferation in urban Russia is yet another way in which notions of space are redefined by the bicycle. As is evidenced by the similarity with which the bicycle impacted social culture in other nations, Russian consumers who participated in the cycling culture partook in a version of modernity that is at once both specific and universal in character. At the same time, the bicycle operated within a global marketplace of supply and demand that placed the Russian consumer in contact with a wider capitalistic culture. As distinctly foreign goods entered both the Russian economy and its social life, the way in which those products were accepted or rejected speaks to the values and mindset of the Russian consumer. That the bicycle was adopted by Russia’s consumer class signals a Westward-looking mentality whose perceptions about modernity included the expectation of greater participation in the consumer culture of the West. Let us turn now to a brief history of the bicycle before 1898 to contextualize the later discussions in this section.
**Historical Overview**

The bicycle was originally invented by Baron Karl von Drais of Sauerbronn, Germany in 1816 and has gone through a great number of design iterations since that time. By the 1860s the velocipede had become the standard incarnation of the bicycle, popularized by two French inventors, Ernest Michaux and Pierre Lallement. By the 1870s, cycling had become a popular sport in France, America, and Great Britain; the English, at least, carried the sport to their imperial colonies. Devotees in Europe and America formed racing circuits and amateur riding clubs, but cycling remained an activity reserved for those of wealth and station who had the connections to be accepted into these private associations and who could afford the considerable expense of the machines and the clubs’ dues. 58

It was from the racing circuit that the next major improvement was to come; one that rendered the velocipede a thing of the past. In 1870 in Birmingham, England, James Moore rode a vehicle with an overly large front wheel (forty inches in diameter) and a back wheel half its size which was to usher in the era of the high-mount, or “Ordinary” bicycle. In addition to greater speed, the larger wheel smoothed out the ride and raised the rider above the dirt of unpaved streets, but was prone to crosswinds and riders risked toppling over, head first into the road. Despite the increased danger, the Ordinary became the standard in the cycling world into the 1880s and increased the public’s interest in cycling as an activity. Indeed, women as well as men began participating in bicycling. A matter of some significance that will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. 59


Nevertheless, safety concerns over the Ordinary led to still further innovation and the first examples of the modern bicycle. The idea for a “Safety” bicycle was introduced as early as 1876, but its downfall was the rough ride still caused by the smaller wheels. This problem was finally solved in the late 1880s in Scotland with the development of the pneumatic tire. Additionally, the Safety’s heavy and costly construction was trimmed down by 1890 with the use of a diamond shape frame (still currently the standard configuration for today’s bicycles). At the start of the 1890s the Safety's technological innovations and lower cost rung the death knell for the Ordinary.60

**Photographs and Advertisements**

These same advancements led an explosion in the bicycle’s popularity that lasted through the 1890s and a shift in the character of cycling away from a social activity of the well-to-do, toward a mass movement throughout the Western world. For the first time, the bicycle was an affordable reality for those in classes below the aristocracy and its efficient, easy-to-use design meant that virtually anyone could operate the machine. Before turning to any specific examples, it should be noted that bicycle advertisements frequently appeared entirely written in vernacular Russian, with foreign names transliterated into Cyrillic rather than spelled out in their original language. This is significant because it speaks to the intended audience of the advertisements. That is, rather than advertising in a French language newspaper intended for the upper class and the intelligentsia, and rather than peppering their advertisements with foreign words in foreign spellings to convey a sense of sophistication and selectivity, (and which assumed that target

60 Ibid., 217, 246, 247.
consumers possessed a relatively high level of education) advertisers chose to construct their ads so that they would be easily understood by the widest Russian audience possible, often accompanying their ads with images and limiting the number of words in each ad. Whereas advertisements of the past would provide detailed descriptions of their products, many bicycle advertisements relied on a few descriptive adjectives and brand name recognition. This increased reliance on images may have also been implemented to create the biggest impact on the consumer and by shifting emphasis away from the written words and toward the use of images, advertisers were moving toward a more modern dynamic of visual culture in advertising.61

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One example of this increased importance of images comes from an advertisement for the weekly sports journal “Scooter” (Samokat) from 1898 (figure 11), which purports to be a publication dedicated to “all sports” (Vsekh sportov) including skating, skiing, and ballooning; but the advertisement’s inclusion of a bicycle graphic and the placement of cycling first among the sports listed suggests that it is this activity which the advertiser expects will generate the most interest in his product; likewise, the reader is led to believe that a good portion of the reporting will be dedicated to cycling. Whether this is an example of the publishing industry beginning to create new literary material to accommodate the public’s emerging interests, or whether it is only an attempt to market an older product by capitalizing on a current trend, is unclear from the advertisement. In either case, the ad seeks to positively associate itself with cycling and the bicycle, which seems to indicate that the advertisers believed the bicycle was already seen in a positive light within popular discourse of the time. Finally, by including cycling in its magazine, the Scooter was providing a discursive space in which bicycle users (I hesitate to say subcultural participants) could come together to share knowledge, formulate opinions, and debate controversies about their common sociocultural activity.

The Bicycle In the Consumer Community

If tracking the popularity and progress of the bicycle in Russia is harder than in Western Europe, certain anecdotal information from popular history and the extant photographic record at least indicates that the bicycle enjoyed some popularity among the aristocracy since the 1880s. The examples below are designed to draw out this point and to illustrate this section’s more
overarching argument that the bicycle was a mechanism through which Russians participated in a greater Western community of consumerism and culture.

One such image, taken around 1885, shows Prince Vasilii Aleksandrovich holding a bicycle as he walks with members of his family on their estate in Petersburg (figure 12). The photograph is significant for several reasons: first because it indicates that, at least among the aristocracy, it was considered socially acceptable for boys to ride bicycles in Russia during this time. (This is one of the few sources I have found depicting children, rather than adults,
participating in the activity; though it was common for them to do so in the West at this time.\textsuperscript{62}) Secondly, during the 1880s there was still a large debate in the cycling community over the superiority of either the traditional Ordinary or the new Safety model. Safety bicycle prices remained prohibitively expensive for many in the Western market throughout the decade, and it is reasonable to assume that their cost, as imported goods, would only be higher in Russia. The presence of this Safety bicycle in the prince’s hands at this early date is therefore a testament not only to his wealth and status within the Russian empire, but also to the unprecedented access to modern technology and Western consumer goods that his station allowed him. The point is even more starkly observed when we consider the prince’s young age.\textsuperscript{63}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{alexander_palace.jpg}
\caption{Alexander Palace, \url{http://forum.alexanderpalace.org/index.php?topic=1255.60} (last accessed July 2, 2010)}
\end{figure}


\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
Additionally, Tsar Nicholas II was himself an avid bicycle fan, and his interest undoubtedly spurred others to investigate the new Western oddity. Indeed, other scholars have pointed to remarks made by his frustrated bodyguards, who had a difficult time keeping up with his riding, and at least one photograph still exists of the tsar, bicycle in hand (see figure 13).64

A wardrobe receipt from the Alexander Palace in Petersburg serves to attest both to the international aspect of the bicyclist culture in Russia, and to the cost of the sport in the country - the later thus allowing for speculation on the affordability of the sport, and by extension, its proliferation. A 1903 receipt from the Swiss merchant Henry Fallenweider (who had acted as a clothier to the royal court since 1895) lists the sale of a pair of bicycle pants to the tsar for the sum of twenty-eight rubles, slightly more expensive than the white-coats ordered from the same merchant in the same year, which cost between twenty and twenty-five rubles each.65 Given the length of time the clothier had been employed by the court, it is reasonable to assume that this was not the first pair of bicycle pants he had made, nor the first time the tsar had ordered a pair for himself.66 Judging by this expense then, cycling could be considered an affordable sport to many in urban Russia by the start of the twentieth century. Especially if we consider that this example (intended for sale to the most powerful man in the country) probably represents the upper stratosphere of the price range for this article of clothing.

64 Ibid., 273 and see Figure 2.


66 Thus, to stress the international character of the bicycle culture in Russia at this time, we have a Russian customer, buying from a Swiss merchant, goods that were intended to be used in a sport where English, German, and American products were indisputably superior items. To support the notion that this was not the first time that the clothier was charged with making a pair of bicycle pants, his records also indicate that he had to make numerous alterations to Nicholas II’s pants and shirts in the same year because the tsar had been gaining weight. See Ibid.
Figure 14: NV April 26, 1898 pp. 01

Figure 15: Ibid.
It is here that certain advertisements also shed light on the cost of the sport, with one ad (figure 14) offering bicycles starting at 130 rubles and another (figure 15) offering two Cleveland models at 161 rubles and 50 kopeks. Cleveland, an American company based in the Midwest was, by 1898, one of the largest manufacturers in the region whose products sold in multiple foreign markets.67 Interestingly, many of the bicycle ads I found do not list prices in their advertisements, but if we take these two examples to be the entry level price for a bicycle in 1898, it seems clear that the initial purchase expense was still hefty enough to warrant some consideration on the part of the consumer. Nevertheless, given the economic conditions present in 1898 which were enumerated above, this price range should also be considered the most affordable offer made to date. Other examples also indicate that at least by the second half of the 1890s, the sport was within reach of those not within the aristocracy’s means. It is to these examples that we will next turn our attention.


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67 For information on Cleveland Cycles see David V. Herlihy, *Bicycle: The History*, 281.
One simple illustration of this point comes from a photograph from Christine Ruane’s
*The Empire’s New Clothes*, of a street in Nizhnii Novgorod, where a man is riding a bicycle.
(figure 16). As the author’s caption points out, the town was provincial at the turn of the century,
and to see a bicycle in such a location, suggests that the vehicle enjoyed an element of both
widespread popularity and affordability. Nevertheless, the lack of a concrete date for the photo,
and the inability of identifying its rider mean that we can not speculate as to how many bicycles
were in the town at the time, nor to the economic station of the specific individual riding the one
pictured here. On the other hand, one advertisement from a certain M. Blok provides proof that
bicycle sales did extend to a wide number of towns outside Petersburg and Moscow, from
modern day Poland and Ukraine to western Siberia (figure 17). More specifically, the company
claimed to have a sales presence in Kiev, Odessa, Warsaw, Kokand, Yekaterinburg, and Rostov
on the Don.
A more complex example comes from a photograph taken of a sportsman in the early twentieth century which speaks to the bicycle’s use as a performative device in urban Russia and a complex signifier of meaning within the urban culture, communicating a sense of financial empowerment, physical prowess, and worldly sophistication (figure 18). Although it is somewhat difficult to determine exactly which social strata the man hails from, the style of his hat, his rough hands, and his overall stocky build identify him as someone below the level of the traditional upper class. However, the photo indicates that the man’s position affords him some discretionary income: in addition to the fact that he could afford to have the photo taken at a photographer's studio, the number on the wheel of the bicycle and the position of the handlebars indicate that the primary purpose of the vehicle was for racing. Thus, the man’s occupation
afforded him both the financial security to be able to afford to race, and the free time to do so. That he is identified as a competitor suggests that he possesses not only physical strength (an affirmation of masculinity) but also the skill needed to compete against others effectively. Finally, it should be remembered that bicycling was a distinctly Western activity; as such, he is making a strong statement about his desire to be seen as a man of Western style and sophistication with sensible taste in quality and performance, whose hobby he shared not only with the gentlemen members of cycling clubs in Western nations, but also with the upper echelons of the social order in his own country. I see the overall image, therefore, as an attempt by the man to utilize the bicycle as a tool to acquire social capital that would otherwise be denied to him because of his profession, or economic situation. The presentation of the bicycle becomes a performative act, whereby the object is utilized as a sound-piece for the man’s personality.

**Bicycles for Women**

One of the most significant social consequences of the bicycle’s introduction in the Western world was its effect on women in the social sphere. In addition to affording them more freedom of movement, the bicycle prompted (at least in America) a rigorous debate on etiquette among the sexes, morality, and appropriate styles of dress for women, that as contemporary feminists and historians alike have pointed out, furthered concepts of gender equality across the social strata and provided a venue for conversations about femininity and women’s place in the public sphere. While it is difficult to demonstrate the extent to which women in Russia enjoyed similar results, advertisements from the 1890s do demonstrate not only that women participated in the sport, but also that, at least from the advertisers’ perspective, women’s participation in
Russia invoked many of the same social themes as were found in the West. This, in turn, speaks to an overarching point throughout this thesis: that through the consumption and commodification of goods, individuals in urban Russia in the last quarter of the nineteenth century began to demonstrate a common framework of thought and morality which identified them as a unique section of urban society and which argues for the redefinition of class in fin de siècle Russia, and more specifically for the presence of a “middle class” based on a common framework of consumerism, consumption and morality.68

Before going further, it is useful to discuss in more detail the changes that bicycles helped to bring to women in the Western world, in order to establish a baseline for the changes that can be observed in Russia. As early as the 1860s women’s cycling was a popular spectator sport in America and France, with female cyclists racing not only each other, but also occasionally against men. During the 1870s and 80s, society women also rode bicycles for pleasure and formed cycling clubs that mirrored those of their husbands. Additionally, doctors repeatedly insisted that cycling in moderate amounts was beneficial to both men and women. Thus, even before the 1890s (the decade in which higher production, lower cost, and better design allowed cycling to become an activity for the masses) bicycles enjoyed the dual Foucauldian approval of Power and Medicine which validates behavior in society; indeed other scholars have pointed out that it was in part due to this approval that bicycles became a mass phenomenon in the 1890s.69

As more and more women from across the social classes began to take up cycling, debates about proper social interaction and decorum increased in the West. Should, for example,

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69 Ibid., 135-140, 205-208, 266-275.

a woman be expected to change her own bicycle tire in the event of a flat? Is it appropriate for a woman to cycle alone or in the company of a man other than her husband? Most significantly, what should a woman of proper modesty be expected to wear while cycling? Although baggy pants or “bloomers” were advocated by some fashion critics in France and America as an alternative to full length dresses as early as the 1850s, and although it was common to see women racing bicycles in pants by the 1860s, it was not until the 1890s that the general public accepted this innovation for casual riders, and then only because cycling in a dress was patently impractical. Indeed, even throughout the decade there were constant discussions on how to make pants that were feminine enough so as not offend contemporary sensibilities. In this way, bicycling led the reform in women’s fashion away from the full length dress and toward pants. Finally, it should be reiterated that cycling allowed Western women a freedom of mobility unheard of in the past. Especially among those for whom owning a horse was cost-prohibitive.70

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An ad by E. Kinkman and Company in 1898 demonstrates that Russia too was affected by this debate over the role of women in cycling (figure 19). Specifically, the text and image used in the advertisement demonstrates the tension between traditional and progressive notions of femininity that were being voiced as more and more women participated in cycling. The overall impression one gets from the advertisement is that the Kinkman Company was seeking to find some middle ground that would appeal to the emerging female market, without offending the sensibilities of more conservative consumers. The resulting confusion of images serves to encapsulate the debate surrounding women’s participation in the sport and suggests that the nature of the debate in Russia was strikingly similar to the one going on in the West.
At first glance, we see in the advertisement a women dressed in what appears to be a very progressive feminine riding suit, complete with riding pants. The bicycle she stands beside, a single rider Safety model, also serves to convey a sense of independence and self-assuredness that seems at once progressive and liberating. The fence on which she is leaning and the flowers at her feet help to reinforce the notion that she is a woman who stands on her own, capable of going where she chooses in the larger world and who does not rely on others to help her get there. Yet at the same time, the image is coded to enforce in a viewer’s mind the idea that this is still a woman who conforms to the traditional sensibilities of the time. The hat on her head signals that she is still conscious of fashion, while her puffed sleeves, wide trousers, and her knee-high socks which accent the shape of her lower legs feminize her otherwise masculine attire. Her posture too demonstrates an odd mix of masculine and feminine qualities. On the one hand, the sharp, angular position of her arm conveys a sense of strength and will, that is traditionally masculine; while on the other hand, her raised leg with its pointed toe and her curved position indicate a passivity and delicacy generally thought to be feminine. Finally, the text of the ad makes clear that the company wishes to target women specifically. This is accomplished by the positioning of women (damskie) ahead of men (muzhsk) in the phrase “elegant women’s and men’s bicycles” but that same phrase’s first word (iziashchin) betrays the advertisers assumption that to attract female customers it is necessary to describe their product using a discourse which is couched in a traditional understanding of feminine sensibilities: women are more interested in aesthetic, rather than practical considerations and this drives their
consumerist habits. In so doing, the advertisers unwittingly illustrate a deep-seated traditionalist view of women that was prevalent at the time.  

Before we shift the focus away from this advertisement, it is important to point out that the proceeding analysis assumes that the image used here was an accurate representation of women’s cycling attire in Russia at the time that the advertisement was published and that this image was specifically selected for a Russian audience. If, for example, the Kinkman Company used a stock image of a Western woman in their advertisement, one could easily read in the image similarities to Western women’s social conditions that are in essence false-positives. Likewise, feminism in Russia during the late Tsarist period seems not to have extracted the same liberating jolt from the bicycle that women in the West were able to garner. Perhaps in part due to the conservative influence of the Russian Orthodox Church and the traditionalist stance of the monarchy, women in Russia on the whole remained inscribed in their traditional roles despite their participation in cycling. Indeed, even after the October Revolution, when the communists attempted to encourage women to drive automobiles, feminism and its accompanying extension of female agency as it is understood in the West, did not take hold. At least one scholar has indicated that this second failure of the feminist agenda may be due to the top down nature of the soviet model. 

*The Bicycle and Invention*

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71 It should be pointed out however, that the ad specifically mentions that the merchant is willing to sell these bicycles on an installment plan. This indicates a sensitivity to the financial cost of purchasing a bicycle, which runs contrary to my argument above. It also indicates an attempt on the part of the merchant to reach out to potential buyers who lack the economic resources to pay upfront. Such a statement indicates the degree to which bicycles were becoming an affordable commodity at the time, and illustrates just how competitive the bicycle market had become.

72 Tracy Busch, Asst Professor, History, Ferris State University, interviewed by author, Urbana, IL, June 23, 2010.
Another major social consequence of the bicycle in the Western world was its contribution to the development of the subsequent transportation industry. Companies including Singer and Michelin contributed greatly to the emerging auto industry, and one need only look so far as the Wright brothers to find a connection between bicycles and the realm of aviation. Motorcycles too were a natural off-shoot of the bicycle in the Western world, with some steam engine designs in America dating back to 1869 that were capable of reaching forty miles an hour. They also represent the most prescient technological innovation vis-à-vis Russian advertising before the twentieth century, with some advertisements appearing alongside bicycle ads in the late 1890s. During that decade, several new models had appeared in the West, powered by kerosene, gun powder, and eventually gasoline. This last invention was pioneered in Germany by Gottlieb Daimler who produced the first version of a motorcycle to be proven practical on the open road. Still others were to follow suit, with the Waltham Manufacturing Company constructing the first commercially successful American motorcycle in 1898.73

That same year an advertisement from a German merchant in Moscow, I.A. Werner, for a “two wheeled motorcycle” appeared in the Petersburg’s Novia Vremia (figure 20). The advertisement’s text is useful for several reasons: first, it confirms that gasoline engine motorcycles were available on the Russian market by 1898. Second, the combination of this gasoline engine and the German last name of the advertiser, adds weight to the idea that Germany enjoyed a significant advantage in the motorcycle market at this time. As the previous paragraph indicates, a gasoline powered motorcycle in 1898 would have represented the latest technology available to the consumer. This idea, in turn, leads to a third observation about the state of the Russian bicycle and motorcycle market in general: rather than a periphery market in which merchants and manufacturers from the West could unload outdated or unwanted
merchandise, urban Russia appears to be a market in step and up-to-date with Western trends. On an international level then, the bicycle and motorcycle markets appear to be a space in which Russian consumers could participate on more or less equal footing with Western consumers, purchasing the same products from the same manufacturers and utilizing those products for similar recreational or competitive activities. It should be pointed out, however, that the Moscow address of this advertisement also demonstrates the niche market nature of the motorcycle at this time. Although other advertisers for other products stressed that their businesses were in both Moscow and Petersburg in order to demonstrate the soundness of their company or the success of their products, there seems to be no indication that Werner had a physical presence in Petersburg. He was thus forced to advertise roughly three hundred miles from his store in order to find potential customers. Finally, the language of the advertisement’s text illustrates the nature of the motorcycle market at the time; its focus on safety (bezopasnye) and easy operation (legko upravliaemye) seem to be attempting to defuse the arguments against purchasing the product already amassed in the consumer’s mind. The presence of a product within a particular market does not necessarily indicate its popularity and a close reading of this advertisement seems to indicate that, at least in 1898, the motorcycle was a long way from gaining mass popular appeal.

Inherent throughout this discussion of new trends in transportation, and the technological advancements that made them possible, is the subject of modernity; not only because the emerging companies participating in the bicycle and motorcycle industry are familiar to the ear of the reader, but also because these products represented for their contemporary consumers the opportunity to utilize cutting edge technologies which reshaped the everyday social environments of their users and forced individuals to renegotiate their relationship to the
changing world around them. Whether this is illustrated by discussing gender relations, implications stemming from a greater freedom of movement, or the technological ramifications of the emerging transportation market itself, modernity and modernism repeatedly assert themselves in the developing culture of the bicycle as it progressed from velocipede to the Ordinary, and from the Safety to motorcycle.
A curious illustration of this concept of modernity and of the march toward the current modern era, is an advertisement, again from 1898, which portrays what appears to be an early rendition of the stationary exercise bike (figure 21). Billed as “indoor apparatuses for women and men” (komnatile apparty dla dam i muzchin) this patented device came with a “cycling meter” (s tsiklometrom) and seems to have been designed entirely for exercise in approximation of bicycling without leaving the home. The positioning of women ahead of men in the advertisement's text seems to indicate that the advertiser was targeting women as potential buyers. While it is unclear how successful this approach was, it does offer a solution for those women whose husbands, or fathers objected to their participation in the sport because of the increased freedom associated with riding. At the price of seventy-five rubles, however, the apparatus may have priced itself out of the buyer’s hands. As has been discussed previously in this section, the price of the bicycles by the late 1890s was only a fraction of what it had been a decade earlier, and while seventy-five rubles is cheaper than the bicycle advertisements I have found, its price is not so low as to automatically draw consumers away from more traditional bicycles which offered the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors or cycle with others. That the product carries a patent or patents in several countries and that the advertisement offers a free demonstration to those interested, also attests to its novelty in the market. Finally, the presence of a telephone number in the ad, and the presence of other devices including a rowing machine (grebnoi apparat) seem to indicate that the seller has a penchant for new and somewhat novel technologies. As the three digit phone number indicates, it was still unusual for businesses to have a phone at this time, and even more unusual for private residences to have one. The presence of the phone number may also indicate that the advertiser was targeting members of the
traditional upper class, as it was this demographic that was most likely to have the money (and the phone) to inquire about, and seriously consider a purchase. But even if the product itself was viable only on the eccentric fringe of the 1890s market, it still demonstrates a recognizable invention to the present-day reader, and indicates the continual experimentation, innovation, and interest in new novelties that existed in the turn of the century market.

If consumers in Russia purchased bicycles for the simple pleasure of riding down the open road and momentarily escaping the complexities of modern life, the social, technological and international ramifications of the bicycle’s sale and proliferation were anything but simplistic for Russian society. As consumers peddled their way toward the start of the twentieth century, the machine on which they were riding caused them to reevaluate not only gender relationships and attitudes toward transportation, but also allowed them to participate in an international market based on technological advancement and innovation. Bicycles were a catalyst through which Russian consumers encountered and grappled with modernity at the turn of the twentieth century and the social attitudes that were constructed by those who participated in the bicycle culture helped to define the consumer community on whom this paper is focused. Finally, the ways in which individuals consumed and utilized bicycles in everyday society helped to form a common cultural discourse of shared norms and expectations among the consumer class.
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