



FETISHISM UNDER DEVELOPED SOCIALISM: LENINGRAD ADOLESCENTS AND THE CHEWING-GUM CRAZE IN THE 1970S

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Abstract: This article intends to clarify two interrelated issues. The first is recalling the meanings that chewing gum had in childhood and adolescence in everyday Soviet life. The second is the question of the function 'extraordinary' values of certain objects and artifacts in various subcultures. The author assumes that this case can be described (in terms of cultural anthropology and social psychology) as the phenomenon of commodity fetishism in the context of more fundamental mechanisms that determine the practice of collective interaction in terms of relative deprivation and self-isolation. Thus, in a teenage (and largely male) environment, the use of chewing gum deserves attention both as a key illustration of fetishisation, and as an example of the socialisation of the Soviet young in the period between the early 1960s and the late 1980s. Information about chewing gum highlights its strangeness and even hostility to the Soviet man in his social behaviour. In the case of adolescents, chewing gum was the manifestation of emotional solidarity, speaking as an alternative to the propaganda and expectations of Soviet ideology. From an ethnographic and anthropological point of view, this alternative is interesting because of its apparent irrationality. Yet it is convincing as an argument for which evidence was determined not by words, but by the very fact of its 'material' and symbolic presence: the price of gum was converted to the collective values of symbolic exchange. The role of the imagination in these cases was immeasurably greater than the physiology of taste or category of use.

Key words: chewing gum, teenagers' subculture, commodity fetishism.

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Fetishism under Developed Socialism: Leningrad Adolescents and the Chewing-Gum Craze in the 1970s

This article intends to clarify two interrelated issues. The first is recalling the meanings that chewing gum had in childhood and adolescence in everyday Soviet life. The second is the question of the function 'extraordinary' values of certain objects and artifacts in various subcultures. The author assumes that this case can be described (in terms of cultural anthropology and social psychology) as the phenomenon of commodity fetishism in the context of more fundamental mechanisms that determine the practice of collective interaction in terms of relative deprivation and self-isolation. Thus, in a teenage (and largely male) environment, the use of chewing gum deserves attention both as a key illustration of fetishisation, and as an example of the socialisation of the Soviet young in the period between the early 1960s and the late 1980s. Information about chewing gum highlights its strangeness and even hostility to the Soviet man in his social behaviour. In the case of adolescents, chewing gum was the manifestation of emotional solidarity, speaking as an alternative to the propaganda and expectations of Soviet ideology. From an ethnographic and anthropological point of view, this alternative is interesting because of its apparent irrationality. Yet it is convincing as an argument for which evidence was determined not by words, but by the very fact of its 'material' and symbolic presence: the price of gum was converted to the collective values of symbolic exchange. The role of the imagination in these cases was immeasurably greater than the physiology of taste or category of use.

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The term 'fetishism', as is well known, was introduced to scholarship by the French historian and linguist Charles de Brosses (in his work *Du culte des Dieux Fétiches, ou Parallèle de l'ancienne Religion de l'Égypte avec la Religion actuelle de Nigritie*, 1760) as the definition of religious worship directed towards material objects, a cult of 'earthly and material objects' endowed with 'divine power'. Brosses himself saw these objects (among which he included both natural and man-made objects: pieces of wood and bark, lions' tails and stones, shells, plants, animals, images of animals, and much else) as examples of beliefs which revealed general 'ways of thinking' — 'l'accessoire d'une Religion générale répandue fort au loin sur toute la terre' which was distinguished by this quality from other religions known to us [de Brosses 1760: 11]. The subsequent history of religious studies and ethnography varied the degree of the 'divine' which, according to de Brosses, determined the character and function of the different fetishes. However, viewing the concept that he used retrospectively, the possibility of these

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very variations made ‘fetishism’ an exceptionally useful term (albeit broad in content) for defining everything endowed with extraordinary symbolic value in the eyes of a particular social community [Pietz 1985; 1987; 1988; Graeber 2005].

In the 1840s Marx appreciated de Brosses’s term, seeing in fetishism ‘the religion of sensual enjoyment’, an illusion in which ‘inanimate objects’ change their natural properties at the whim of the fetishist [Marx 1955: 98]. Afterwards he was to breathe new life — this time sociological and political life — into the term in his theory of commodity and monetary fetishism. In the conditions of private property and the relations of production determined thereby, commodities function as a replacement for the relations themselves: the producer’s dependence on the market gives the commodity the personifying force of social order. Economic relationships between people turn into relationships between things, generating an almost mystical attitude towards the things themselves on the part of society.¹

Let us note that when Marx considers that commodities (and their equivalent in capitalist society, money) are the universal formula of wealth and social success, even while giving a socio-economic meaning to the concept of fetishism, he does not deprive it of its original religious sense.² It is explained that commodities and money, as values that bind society together, possess a power which may be termed supernatural even in relation to those communities which cannot, from an ethnographic point of view, be termed pagan or religiously primitive. At the beginning of the twentieth century the idea that communities are created and maintained not only by utilitarian but also by symbolic bonds was developed by Émile Durkheim. Relying not on Marx (and explicitly denying his influence on his own work),³ but on the tradition of Feuerbach’s philosophical anthropology, Comte’s positivism and Spencer’s sociology,

¹ ‘The bestowal upon objects of magic properties, their sacralisation or consecration, is inherent not only in the religious consciousness, but also in various forms of “secular” consciousness’ [Marx 1960: 82].

² For more detail on the connection between Marxism itself and secular religion, see the works of the Polish historian of ideas Leszek Kołakowski: [Kołakowski 1968; ‘A Leszek Kołakowski Reader’ 1971].

³ At the same time it is interesting that in his review of *Saggi intorno alla concezione materialistica della storia* (1897) by the Italian Marxist Antonio Labriola, Durkheim identified as a fruitful idea that social life should be explained ‘by reasons that escape the consciousness’ and ‘that these reasons should be sought principally in the way in which associated individuals are grouped together’ [Durkheim 1987: 250]. Later Isaak Rubin, one of the leading Soviet theoreticians of Marxism (until the repressions that descended upon him in the 1930s), was to complain in his *Ocherki po teorii stoimosti Marksa* [Essays on Marx’s Theory of Value] (1928) that ‘both Marxists and opponents of Marx’ are prodigal in their praises’ of the theory of commodity fetishism, but see in it, as a rule, ‘a brilliant summation of a sociological character’ ‘which has little connexion with economic theory’ and an ‘interesting excursus into literary criticism, parallel to Marx’s basic text’ [Rubin 1929: 8]. Rubin himself saw the theory of commodity fetishism as ‘the basis for Marx’s whole economic theory’, ‘a general theory of the relations of production of a commodity economy, a propaedeutics of political economy’ [Ibid.: 8, 10]. On the later fate of this concept in the context of Western Marxism, see: [Cohen 1978: 115–33; Ripstein 1978; Tucker (ed.) 1978: 312–29; Elster 1985: 127–41].

Durkheim placed the accent on people's faith in the irrational power of social bonds as such. Durkheim defined such a belief in a behavioural, socio-psychological inclination as the identity of 'the idea of society' and 'the soul of religion' [Durkheim 1912: 598–9]. According to Durkheim, the development of technology, urbanisation, outward secularisation and dehumanisation, 'the collapse of the old ideals and the old divinities' are no obstacles to such a belief, but, on the contrary, set free the sources of the 'divine social', which is expressed in the commonality of human feelings and passions [Maffesoli 1991 [1982]], which are not to be explained only by rational and utilitarian causation. (It is typical that Harold Lasswell was later to note that it is no accident that the institutions of political power reveal the irrational foundations of social existence, if only because such institutions are in one way or another confronted with the necessity of resolving irrational social conflicts [Lasswell 1986: 184ff.].)

Without going into the subsequent tradition of the research initiated by Durkheim and Mauss into the sacred as a foundation for social institutions and practices (research primarily connected with the heritage of the so-called Collège de Sociologie founded by Georges Bataille together with Roger Caillois and Michel Leiris ([Hollier (dir.) 1995]; on the French tradition of the study of the social sacral see: [Zenkin 2012])), it is important to note that in this research 'fetishism' was given practically no role of any significance. The researchers found the attributes of the 'divine social' outside the spheres of relations of production and the exchange of goods. Georg Simmel's book *The Philosophy of Money* might have been the bridge to establish that link — the link between 'the divine social' and commodity-monetary fetishism — since he emphasised on the one hand the socially binding function of money, and on the other its power to alienate and abstract, which divorced commodities from their purpose. No such link was established in sociological theory (but see: [Zelizer 1997; Dolgin 2002]). However, in the practice of individual sociological (and also social and cultural anthropological) observations, thoughts were on more than one occasion expressed on how commodities, and particularly money, can play the part of markers of social interaction, based not on utilitarian principles, but on considerations of their significance — above all in works on the sociology of consumption and economic psychology [Baudrillard 1993; Miller 1998].¹

Soviet propaganda used the concept of 'commodity fetishism', with a backward glance at Marx, not as an operational, but as a critical definition, characterising the economic relationships of people

¹ See also the expansive interpretation of consumer fetishism in respect of the social practices of the past, using examples from English literature: [Hawkes 2001].

involved in capitalist production as social relations between things. The aim of the substitution of commodity relations for subject relations, like any other hidden deception, according to Marx, is to reinforce the false consciousness of the masses, but the situation should have changed as the forms of production changed.¹ Relying on Lenin, who had also expressed himself on the topic of ‘commodity fetishism’ [Lenin 1971: 611–36], Soviet ideologues proposed that ‘in order to overcome CF the revolutionary overthrow of capitalist society based on private ownership of the means of production is necessary. Under socialism, in conditions where social ownership of the means of production prevails, relationships between people are not overshadowed by relationships between things, but proceed according to plan, and therefore CF disappears’ [Khandruev 1977: col. 58–9].

It is interesting to note that the ideological positions regarding commodity fetishism in Soviet studies are indirectly correlated with ethnographic interpretations of fetishism: it was assumed that since the fetishism of pagan and religious beliefs identified by de Brosses found analogies in the period of capitalism (in Marx), then it must be a ‘survival’ manifested not only in the sources of religion, but also where religion had acquired complex institutional forms. This interpretation of fetishism was begun by Yu. P. Frantsev, who on the one hand defined it as the earliest form of religion, and on the other hand found its remains in Christian icons and the veneration of relics. Frantsev’s ideas were developed by S. A. Tokarev, who continued the series of such survivals, finding them in the cult of personal protecting spirits in Africa, Oceania and Asia, and also in the custom of wearing amulets, which persisted ‘even among the highly cultured peoples of Europe and America, even amongst the intelligentsia’ [Tokarev 1990: 302], but who doubted that it was possible ‘to attach the greatest expression of fetishism to the early stages of the history of religion.’ In his opinion, fetishism ‘makes up one of the most constant elements of any religion. It is a universal phenomenon in the history of religious beliefs’ [Ibid.: 34],² but at the same time a phenomenon that expresses itself differently in different cases and sometimes

¹ ‘The whole mystery of commodities, all the magic and necromancy that surrounds the products of labour as long as they take the form of commodities, vanishes therefore, so soon as we come to other forms of production’ [Marx 1960: 86].

² It may be remarked that the use of the concept of ‘fetishism’ in Tokarev’s thought in this case is no less paradoxical than it is in Frantsev’s: in a footnote Tokarev points out that he is not dealing with ‘the question of the use of the terms “fetish” and “fetishism” in a metaphorical sense, to denote phenomena unconnected with the history of religion — “commodity fetishism”, “sexual fetishism”, etc.’ [Tokarev 1990: 33, note 4]. But in admitting that pagan fetishism may be ‘brought up to date’ in the modern wearing of amulets, ipso facto he allows his own argument about religion to be understood metaphorically. In Soviet philosophy A. D. Sukhov attempted to overcome this difficulty by assigning fetishism not to religion but to animism — a ‘pre-religious’ spiritualisation of the material world [Sukhov 1967].

conflicts with other manifestations of religious cults (for example the cult of the ancestors in the Congo) [Tokarev 1990: 300–1].

The existence in parallel of terms in one way or another related to the ascription of extraordinary meaning to things finally led to an acknowledgement that such survivals were also present within the USSR, both in the field of religious cults and in social interaction in the field of the consumption of commodities. The reluctant acknowledgement by the Soviet mass media that certain citizens of the USSR were inclined to the accumulation of property and the ascription of inappropriate symbolic meaning to various kinds of goods was unfailingly expressed as a complaint about survivals from the past. In such cases, ‘fetishising’ things was something that must be condemned and eradicated on the basis of socialist relations of production and the moral and ethical codex of the builders of the future communist society (see, for example: [Travin 1979]). The economic and ethnographic concepts of fetishism were mixed willy-nilly in these texts, allowing one to think that Soviet economics itself, with its postulates of a planned people’s economy, production and consumption, might be a subject for ethnographic research.

The first steps towards such research have already been taken, primarily in works dealing with various social ‘deviations’ of consumption in the conditions of the Soviet ‘shortage economy’ (the Hungarian economist János Kornai, the first to use this term, suggested that it is in essence applicable to all socialist economies, and differs only in the specifics of marketing [Kornai 1980]). Natalya Kozlova, who pioneered the study of Soviet everyday life, wrote that ‘the complaints of “inadequate supply”, which were heard throughout Soviet history, were still audible at its end; the history that could be written from this vantage point would be “when you couldn’t get what”’ [Kozlova 1996: 31].

In these cases examples of ‘commodity fetishism’ are predictably discovered across a wide spectrum of goods that were either unavailable or only rarely to be found in the shops ([Oushakine 1999; Golofast 2000; Dolgin 2006]; see also the articles in the collection: [Echevskaya (ed.) 2005]), but they are not confined to these. Thus if caviare, brandy, sparkling wine, gâteaux and salami were, in the felicitous expression of Jukka Gronow, objects of democratic ‘common luxury’ [Gronow 2003], they could only be objects of commodity fetishism if their symbolic value was expressed in the social prestige of their owners, and this was not always the case (for example, if the acquisition of a commodity in short supply was the result of a socially levelling procedure such as queuing or ordering in advance).¹

¹ On queues as the embodiment of a specifically Soviet world-order see: [Nikolaev 2000; Bogdanov 2001; Ivanova 2011].

Chewing-gum, as one such commodity, deserves attention because its fetishisation was practically confined to the adolescent (predominantly male) milieu and from this point of view it is an example which is important for the study of the age-group socialisation of Soviet adolescents in the 1960s — 1980s. Chronologically, the beginning of this fetishisation may be regarded as the period of the Khrushchev liberalisation heralded by the Fourth World Festival of Youth and Students held in Moscow in 1957 and the accompanying relaxation of the border and visa regime which significantly increased the number of foreign tourists in the USSR. From that time on foreign chewing-gum became relatively accessible to people who lived in towns which had direct trade or tourist links with foreign countries — above all Moscow, Leningrad, Odessa, Novorossiysk, the Baltic ports and Vladivostok. Until the middle of the 1970s, when the first attempts to organise production of Soviet chewing-gum were made (in 1976 at the Yerevan Sweet Factory in Armenia, and from 1977 at the Kalev Factory in Tallinn in Estonia),¹ the ways in which adolescents could get their hands on it were in one way or another connected with ‘abroad’ — a world which for the overwhelming majority of Soviet citizens existed in the sphere of the collective imagination, tinted with ideology. In the period of ‘developed socialism’ (proclaimed by Leonid Brezhnev in 1967 at the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the October Revolution and enshrined in law in the 1977 Constitution of the USSR) the symbolic value of chewing-gum in the adolescent milieu reached its peak, and stayed there practically until Perestroika, which was marked not only by a flood of foreign goods into the country, but also by the appearance of a wide variety of chewing-gums of native production (first and foremost by the Moscow Red Front Factory: Myatnaya (‘Mint’), Apelsinovaya (‘Orange’), Klubnichnaya (‘Strawberry’), Malinovaya (‘Raspberry’) and Kofeynyy aromat (‘Coffee Flavour’), the production of which was begun on the eve of the Olympic Games, but which only became widely available outside Moscow in the second half of the 1980s).² The social and indeed tragic culmination of this extraordinary demand among adolescents for chewing-gum was an incident at the Sokolniki Arena on 10 March 1975. On that day, after a match between the junior Barrie Co-Op team from Ontario and the Soviet national side, the Canadians began to distribute chewing-gum amongst the fans (their trip was sponsored by Wrigley’s). In the crush that resulted from this, made worse by the fact that the lights

¹ Although in a 1977 documentary film about new production at the Kalev factory it is said that ‘the production of chewing-gum was initiated here for the first time in our country’: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ehtU1vBCqo>>.

² The science fiction film *Per Aspera ad Astra* (1980, directed by Richard Viktorov, written by Kir Bulychev), which was a hit amongst young people in the early 1980s, is set in the twenty-third century, when communism has already triumphed on Earth, and has a close-up with a packet of this Soviet chewing-gum (Apelsinovaya (‘Orange’) brand).

in the stadium were switched off,¹ twenty-one people died (thirteen of them under sixteen), and twenty-five were seriously injured. It may well have been the incident at Sokolniki that prompted the Council of Ministers to take the decision to produce chewing-gum at home [Razzakov 2012: 73–4].² Be that as it may, in the preceding years it had been assessed negatively: medics considered it as injurious to the teeth and digestion, and publicists as an attribute of a Western lifestyle which had a corrupting influence on Soviet youth. Right-thinking Soviet citizens had their reasons for apprehensions of the latter sort: ever since the end of the 1950s chewing-gum had been a constant object of the black market — contact with foreigners with the aim of obtaining goods which were in short supply in the USSR [Romanov, Yarskaya-Smirnova 2005; Vasilyev 2007].³

In this case the spread of information about chewing-gum had its prehistory, which connected it with public behaviour which was alien to Soviet people. The relevant mentions of it in Soviet literature and film of the 1930s — 1950s pick out the image of foreigners, mostly Americans, whose penchant for this strange confectionery which can be chewed but not eaten is equivalent to their penchant for many other things which a normal (i.e. Soviet) person would find peculiar. Ilya Ilf and Evgeniy Petrov, who were among the first to try to answer the question of the popularity of chewing-gum in the USA, explained it by the capitalist politics of profit, which meant that Americans had to put up with being sold frozen meat, salted butter, unripe tomatoes and, as part of the same list of barely edible rubbish, chewing-gum:

In America the business of feeding the people, like every other business, is constructed on a single principle: is it profitable or not? It is not profitable to keep cattle or cultivate market gardens in the environs of New York. For this reason people eat frozen meat, salted butter and unripe tomatoes. Some businessman finds it profitable to sell chewing-gum — and the people have been taught to like it [Ilf, Petrov 1961: 39].

In post-war publicists' writings, in the Cold War atmosphere, the image of the chewing American is no longer pathetic, but threatening. Chewing-gum is no longer just the symbol of the American lifestyle, it is also something that is imposed by propaganda and direct aggression. This image was to reach its apotheosis later, in Andrei Voznesensky's poem 'Lines' (1967): 'Champing on his chewing-gum, imprinting the rubber, | The neo-Kuchum drags the daughter of

¹ This was explained in various ways: either the lights were turned off by a drunken electrician, or by order of the management, who were displeased that the Canadians were taking photographs of the young people in their frenzied attempts to get hold of the chewing-gum.

² See also the memories of eyewitnesses collected in the wiki-journal 'Man_With_Dogs' in the 'Dreamwidth Studios' internet community: <<http://man-with-dogs.dreamwidth.org/943530.html?thread=5789354>>.

³ See also the discussion of Vasilyev's book: [Vakhitov s. d.].

Vietnam along by her hair.’ (The neologism ‘neo-Kuchum’ was derived by the poet from the name of Kuchum (Küçüm), the bloodthirsty Khan of Siberia.) However, as early as 1954 the Soviet reader had been informed that it was no accident that the head of the pro-Western regime in Vietnam, ex-Emperor Bao Dai (Bảo Đại), had acquired a taste for chewing-gum, and that one of his servants took special care that he always had some in his pocket [Leontyev 1954: 46].

Chewing-gum was more frequently mentioned in the Soviet press from the end of the 1950s, but more and more often as a shameful fetish of people whose behaviour offended the self-respect of Soviet people. In January 1959 an article about *stilyagi*¹ and black marketeers entitled ‘The Sorry Knights of Chewing-Gum’ was published in *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, in which these lovers of all things foreign were portrayed as potential traitors to the socialist motherland. The next year, recalling this article, the authors of the journal *Agitator* warned of the dangers of an upbringing when

some excessively indulgent parents also help to turn their children into idlers who are only capable of hard work at the table. Even a hen can love her chickens, but if they are badly brought up, a son or daughter may grow into someone prepared to sell their soul for chewing-gum, like Repnikov and Rybkin in a recent report of Komsomolskaya Pravda. All these drones and parasites must obviously be put to shame [‘Sovety novatorov’ 1960: 4].

The documentary film *Shadows on the Pavements* by Vladimir Krasnopolskiy and Valeriy Uskov was also released in 1960, and denounced black-marketeers and parasites in the established vein of propaganda rhetoric that regarded the black-market trade in foreign goods, and the goods themselves, as ‘trivialities’ that were capable of resulting in crimes against the Soviet state [Groshev et al. 1969: 499]. The 1961 decree ‘On intensifying the struggle against persons who avoid socially useful labour and lead a parasitic way of life’, and Article 209 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR, promulgated on the basis of that decree, provided a legal basis for such ideas, and the words of A. N. Shelepin, the Chairman of the KGB, in his speech at the Twenty-Second Congress of the CPSU, reminded Soviet citizens who was henceforth decreed to be their ‘enemy within’: such ‘parasitic elements’ and ‘everyone who lives at the people’s expense’.² There came a moment in the affect of the ideological denunciations of chewing-gum when it became a bugbear that epitomised everything

¹ Young people who imitated Western *stil* [style] especially in their clothing, which they tried to acquire from abroad [Trans.].

² ‘Soviet laws are the most humane in the world, but their humanity must only extend to honest workers, and towards parasitic elements and all those who live at the people’s expense, the laws must be severe, for that category of person is our enemy within’ [Shelepin 1961].

that was alien and inimical to Soviet people. In publicistic and literary descriptions of the black-marketeers' way of life they are typically characterised as unprincipled idlers who corrupt the Soviet man: for example, that is how they are sketched in Leonid Volkov's 1962 story 'Pyatna' [Stains] [Volkov 1962], or Vladimir Lisovskiy's sketch 'Maksim redeems his fault' (1963):

Among the 'black-marketeers' it is not done to work. 'Let the tractor work — it's made of iron. And we can eat black caviare anyway.' In their drunken frenzy these social misfits mocked what Soviet man held most sacred, his pride in his work, his honour, his patriotism. They would hang about the entrances to museum, hotels and restaurants for days in search of foreign tourists. As soon as they saw any foreigners they would set about their 'business', enquiring ingratiatingly 'Have you any chewing-gum, or socks, or ballpoint pens?' [Lisovskiy 1963: 76].¹

The reasons why such a phenomenon as the black market had come into existence were explained ideologically both as due to failures in educational work amongst young people and to the acquisitiveness of foreign tourists, whether for money or souvenirs.² But that was not all: in the encouragement of black-marketeers and the giving of Western 'souvenirs' to Soviet adolescents the activities of foreign secret services on the lookout for potential agents were also discerned. Such stories were recounted, in particular, in Maria Belachova's story 'Doch' [The Daughter] and E. F. Bezrodnyy's admonitory composition *Shpionam net dorogi* [No Thoroughfare for Spies] (1962).³ The law-enforcement agencies' struggle with the black market — particularly when what was being bought and sold were high-priced commodities in short supply or foreign currency (according to Article 154 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR, adopted in 1960, those guilty of illicit trading as a source of income and on a large scale could be punished with imprisonment for up to eight years and confiscation of their property, while 'infringement of the rules of currency operations' fell under the 'capital' Article 88 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR, the 'mitigated' version of which meant imprisonment for up to fifteen years and confiscation of property)⁴ — continued until the years of Perestroika, but by the end

¹ Lisovskiy was one of the first people in the USSR to study the sociology of young people [Ikonnikova, Lisovskiy 1969].

² "But they're black-marketeers!" "What are black-marketeers?" "How can I put it? Well, along comes a foreign tourist. He wants to buy lots of stuff here, but he hasn't got much money — Soviet money, you understand. So that's where the black-marketeers come in" [Volkov 1962: 73].

³ 'One is put on one's guard by the fact that ever since foreign tourism has been developed, the imperialist intelligence agencies have been intensively studying the possibilities of using it to undermine the Soviet Union. <...> He also used to meet those two people who had been after chewing-gum. <...> It is perfectly obvious what foreign intelligence agencies want from people like that' [Bezrodnyy 1962: 67, 68].

⁴ Both articles were repealed by the Federal Law No. 10-FZ of the Russian Federation on 1 July 1994.

of the 1960s the publicists' excitement about chewing-gum was dying down. In Daniil Granin's book *Primechaniya k putevoditelyu* [Notes for a Guidebook], published in 1967, the description of the writer's visit to England was accompanied by a dialogue that rehabilitated chewing-gum in the eyes of the reader. There are probably things that ought to be prohibited, remarks the author here in the course of a dialogue with someone he knows in the tour group about the permissibility of kissing in public in the park or of abstract art, but 'there are some things it's better to try for yourself. You remember how they used to condemn chewing-gum? Well, I've bought twenty packets. It's a wonderful thing. Instead of cigarettes. I'm breaking the smoking habit' [Granin 1967: 249].

In the 1970s adults' opinions of chewing-gum were mostly concerned with adolescents, inasmuch as they were expressed by parents and teachers, who habitually forbade chewing during lessons and deliberately or accidentally furthered the spread of scare-stories about how chewing on an empty stomach can cause gastritis and ulcers, or how swallowed chewing-gum causes your bottom to stick together, and how the chewing-gum itself takes seven years to be dissolved in the stomach.¹ Even more frightening versions of these scare-stories, put about by conspiracy theorists, were the tales of foreign sadists who put razor-blades, needles, broken glass and rat-poison into the sticks and pieces of chewing-gum that they gave to Soviet children.² Prohibitive arguments of this sort had little effect, though, and even had the contrary result of underlining the significance of the forbidden chewing-gum. I suppose that by no means the least factor that determined this significance in the eyes of adolescents was that there was nothing that tasted like it among the products sold in Soviet shops (unless one counts its distant analogue from the chemist's, heat-treated larch resin, colloquially known as 'sulphur').³ This situation was to a certain extent changed when home-produced chewing-gum appeared, but not entirely eliminated. The home product was valued significantly less, considered as having an inferior taste and unattractive appearance (in comparison with the bright

¹ Oleg (oadam) 'On Soviet Chewing-Gum' (note in LiveJournal by user oadam, 29 December 2011. <<http://oadam.livejournal.com/108695.html?thread=8099223>>). However, at the beginning of the 1970s doubts about the wholesomeness of chewing-gum were being expressed by medical specialists too: 'It will really be possible to raise the question of producing chewing-gum in our country only if it can be clearly proved that it does no harm' ['Novyy preparat' 1973: 92].

² Scares of this sort circulated even in Irkutsk, where there were relatively few foreigners [Kork 2006]. In these cases folkloric sources may probably be found in the fairy-tale / mythological motif of the poisoned apple (the story of Snow White from the Brothers Grimm), as well as the scare stories of 'urban legends' (such as those told at Hallowe'en), but it is notable that in the Soviet context such stories were firmly linked to foreigners.

³ Memoirists who were children in the 1950s remember it with nostalgia: 'Sulphur was cheap, it was chewed by women and children, sometimes with a characteristic clicking noise. <...> Sulphur was far better than the foreign chewing-gum which appeared about twenty years later' [Varfolomeeva 2009: 28].

variety of foreign packets).¹ The causal links that would explain the value of chewing-gum for adolescents of that period are not determined in such cases only by the effect of the taste of corn syrup and sugar with flavourings. Chewing-gum might taste good, or not very, but its attractiveness consisted not so much in its taste as in the semiotic factors that accompanied its manifest and unseen contextualisation: its association with the distant and intriguing space of the not everyday, not routine, not usual world. It is important from a psychological point of view that the force of such associations was maintained not only visually, and thus contemplatively (although the colourful wrappers and the foreign inscriptions on them did assist in this), but also by immediate physical assimilation. The chewing of the gum, the actual having it in the mouth until it lost its taste and became hard (or disintegrated) was the process by which a somewhat vague, but quite direct communication with someone and something distant and desired was realised. Had Freud lived to see the day when chewing-gum became a fetish of Soviet adolescents, he would probably have discovered further arguments to associate the process of this chewing with a fixation on the oral stage of psychosexual development.

However that might be, behind Soviet chewing-gum loomed the mysterious ‘abroad’, the idea of which was in turn endowed with particular characteristics of taste and smell. The taste of chewing-gum and its exotic physical and chemical properties, which made it possible to blow bubbles with it and pull it out into long strings (Soviet chewing-gum, it might be added, was far worse for blowing bubbles and pulling strings), were the taste and properties of a world which was unknown to Soviet adolescents and which they could only form an opinion of by hearsay. Therefore owning and chewing such gum meant, in a certain sense, a participation in something that was exotic, enticing, and excited an enlightened curiosity (essential if only to be able to read and remember the foreign inscriptions on the wrappers: Wrigley’s, Spearmint, Doublemint, Purukumi, Kau-gummi, Chewing-Gum, Jenkki, Hollywood, Donald, etc.).

¹ People used to collect these packets. In the late 1970s and early 1980s it was not only the wrappers that were commonly collected and swapped, but also the so-called ‘inserts’ — shiny cardboard transfers, photographs and stickers that were included in chewing-gum packets. Many brands had inserts with a particular theme (for example, those of Donald gum had scenes from Disney cartoons, the Finnish ‘wide cards’ had pictures of hockey players, Turbo inserts had photographs of cars, and so on). Sometimes children played games with these inserts, instead of the games they had previously played with sweet wrappers: the inserts were placed picture-side down, and the players had to take turns in hitting them with the palm of the hand. If such a blow resulted in the card turning over to show the picture, it was won. (On games with sweet wrappers and inserts and their role in the ‘circulation of commodities’ among children, see: [Golovin 2013].) When a wide variety of chewing-gum became available in the 1990s, interest in making such collections waned, but did not die out altogether: today one of the largest collections of chewing-gum wrappers in the world belongs to Valeriy Nosal, a former Soviet schoolboy (born 1964). In 2013 Nosal’s collection included eighty thousand wrappers from 122 countries (see the 25,500 images of wrappers on the collector’s site: <<http://www.chewing-gum.net/index-rus.html>>; on the history of the collection see: [Yakimova 2008]).

In those cities of the USSR where chewing-gum was bought on the black market, it was also a stimulus to acquiring the habit of conversing in a foreign language that was necessary to acquire it. For example, in Vyborg and Leningrad, where by far the greatest quantity of chewing-gum was supplied by tourists from Finland,¹ it was a rare schoolboy who did not know at least a few words and phrases of Finnish, enough to establish the object and purpose of one's linguistic attack. *Purukumi joo?* ('Got chewing gum?') and Finnish numerals were the password for the young internationalists who hung about the coach stops and hotels on the days when large numbers of tourists were expected [Yurchak 2006: 202–3; Chereyskiy 2012; Kelly 2014: 187–8; Vyshenkov 2014].

Here I step onto the shaky ground of what David Hayano once called auto-ethnography [Sokolovskiy 2010] (the term began its history with the appearance of [Hayano 1979]). My memories of adolescence on the streets of Leningrad incline me to divide my male contemporaries of that time into two categories: the black-marketeers (*purukumshchiki*, as they were sometimes called in Leningrad at that time), who bought or traded for chewing-gum from the Finns, and those who bought it from the black-marketeers. There were probably other categories — those who had absolutely no interest in chewing-gum, and those whose parents brought it back, but I did not encounter them.² Buying and selling chewing-gum on the black market, in which I engaged myself, brought in a decent profit: in 1977–8 the Finns who stayed at the Hotel Druzhba (4 Ulitsa Chapygina) would usually sell five packs of Jenkki chewing-gum (each containing five pieces of gum) for a rouble. At school the price of one pack of Jenkki was one rouble (sometimes one rouble twenty kopecks), so the total profit was 400%. But I can assert that for the overwhelming majority of my friends who engaged in this sort of 'business', the main thing was not only money-making, but replenishing their own stocks. The danger attaching even to small-scale black-marketeering (the threat of having to explain oneself to the police and to one's parents, of actions taken by the authorities, and sometimes also of unpleasant misunderstandings with the competition) gave it an aura of a particular romanticism, risk and, in a manner of speaking, a corporate honour which

¹ The data on the number of Finnish tourists in the USSR are different in Soviet and Finnish sources, but overall (for the middle of the 1970s) they allow us to place Finland in the second place (after Poland) in the list of countries from which the most foreign tourists came to the USSR (according to Soviet sources, which include individual tours with stays of only one night, about 600,000 people every year — 14.8% of a total of around 3,900,000) [Kostiainen 1998].

² Colleagues with whom I discussed the positions of the present work have forced me to acknowledge that my observations are limited both with regard to gender and topographically even in respect of Leningrad: girls had a different attitude to chewing-gum from boys, and there was a considerable difference between the central 'big name' parts of the city, such as Nevsky Prospect, and its outskirts in the availability of chewing-gum itself and the extent of the black market.

prohibited simply asking for chewing-gum rather than buying it or trading it for Soviet badges or suchlike.¹

However diverse the forms taken by fetishism (which is, as psychologists note, a general feature of childhood and adolescence [Posypanova 2011]), my contemporaries' passion for chewing-gum in the 1970s was special in its collective character. Other foreign items, be they jeans or sweatshirts with writing on them (known as *pusserá*), trainers or gramophone records, collectible model cars or lighters, ballpoint pens or stamps, could also be highly prized and function as fetishes, but none of them were anywhere near as 'convertible' as chewing-gum. This last, though it was the object of buying and selling (and accordingly of illicit trade) was above all the object of a particular source of solidarity, which assumed that the 'ideology' of the outlook on the world connected with it was 'generally understood'. The behavioural relevance of this ideology required a conspicuous expression (analogous to the examples of the 'conspicuous consumption' described by Thorstein Veblen [Veblen 1899]; as applied to Soviet and post-Soviet society: [Vilyunas 1990; Logunov 2003; Tsimerman 2007; Posypanova 2012]) and accordingly assumed its collective legitimisation — the acknowledgement of the 'right to chew' (which particularly contradicted the admonitions of teachers). At the same time, as Vyacheslav Kornev rightly remarks in his essay on chewing-gum (viewing it as one of a number of socially marked 'objects of desire'), its collective use was interesting in itself for its communicative self-sufficiency: it was a 'deed' that seemed to replace 'words', a form transformed into content [Kornev 2011: 58]. I shall not risk the assertion that this rule is universal (Kornev expresses himself too emotionally here: 'Chewing-gum, with its synthetic taste and its inability to satisfy hunger, is the symbolic equivalent of social contact without profit or interest' [Ibid.]), but as far as the Soviet experience of adolescent socialisation is concerned, this was the case. The arguments of adults who deprecated the adolescent longing for this sweet and sticky polymer were ineffective precisely because they contradicted the conviction of mutual understanding experienced by adolescents in situations where it was enough to chew and by no means necessary to say anything. It is indicative that chewing gum by yourself, with no one to see, seemed a strange thing to do, and if it was done, then it was as the exception that proved the general rule: the value of chewing-gum was converted into the collective values of symbolic exchange. The role of the imagination in these cases was immeasurably more important than the physiology of taste or the category of wholesomeness.

¹ Such a commercial attitude to chewing gum was not uniform among Western tourists — there were cases where visitors imported chewing-gum to hand out as gifts, or swap for Soviet badges, etc. — but this seems to have been more characteristic of say US and British tourists than those from Finland, the main partners in such transactions in Leningrad [Eds.].

The 1990s changed a great deal, and, in particular, raised the problem of the very idea of the value of things as applied to the new practices of collective consumption [Desmet 2001; Echevskaya 2004; Petrov, Vyshenkov 2010]. From today's vantage point I am inclined to see in the reversals of value markers (expressed *inter alia* in the constancy of the semiotic significance attached to chewing-gum in the adolescent milieu) an expression at least of an emotional solidarity which served as an alternative to the propagandistic prescriptions of Soviet ideology. From an ethnographic and anthropological point of view this alternative is interesting for its apparent irrationality and at the same time convincingness — as an argument, the effectiveness of which was defined not by words, but by the very fact of its existence, equally 'material' and symbolic.

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