

“Your one and only source”: “peripheral” fashion editorship within the transnational cultural flow. St. Petersburg publication *Modnyi magazin* (1862–1883)

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In 2013, at a public talk with readers, the first editor-in-chief of *Harper’s Bazaar Ukraine*, Natalia Guzenko, responded to a question concerning the task of a fashion magazine in the digital era when information is freely and abundantly accessible online. She answered that the core function of a magazine is not to transmit information merely but to filter and reframe current developments in line with the particular interests and needs of the target audience. This statement is even more true in the case of a “peripheral” fashion magazine that faces the additional challenge of reconciling the global and the local and has to establish its own voice in the domain, where the ultimate authority belongs to foreign sources. What could a historical perspective tell us about the characteristic features of local fashion journalism, particularly concerning the dialectics between local and global discourses – on fashion and beyond? This article examines this question by looking at one of the earliest cases of the Russian fashion press, the St. Petersburg publication *Modnyi magazin* [*Fashion Store*] (1862–1883), edited by Sofia (Rekhnevskaja)-Mei.

Fashion journalism within the metropolis-province interplay

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the fashion industry and the publishing world “began operating on the international playing field,” which resulted in the intensified cross-border circulation of fashion-related news, imagery, and discourse (Looft, 2017, p.47). Although St. Petersburg was gradually gaining the status of one of Europe’s fashionable cities, it had never been a source of global fashion authority or major fashion news. Instead, it diligently followed the lead of Paris, the recognized world’s fashion metropolis from which women’s fashion trends were spread across Europe and to the United States. St. Petersburg was the Russian Empire’s fashion capital, and all specialized local magazines were published there and then sent out further to the country’s provinces. They were largely dependent on the European press, which served as the “primary” source of information and determined the overall framework for their fashion discourse.

This article suggests analyzing the specificities of early “local” fashion journalism by engaging with the conceptual lenses of Swedish social anthropologist Ulf Hannerz (1992). He examines the transnational cultural flow by focusing on the distribution of culture in the world between the cultural “centers,” or “metropolises,” which serve as the world’s sources of cultural forms and standards, and “peripheries,” or “provinces,” which generally follow the metropolitan cultural lead. In this context, Hannerz emphasizes the socio-cultural role of media as one of the cultural agencies (“machineries of meaning”) that permits the circulation of “metropolitan” culture across national borders (p. 28).

Regarding the fashion press, in particular, one can assume that the “peripheral” disposition implies that local fashion journalism functions on the receptive side of the transnational production of meaning. For example, American historian Christine Ruane (2009) points out that the primary task of fashion journalists in the Russian Empire consisted in transmitting Western news and trends: “The need to provide timely information on the latest styles and excesses became the *raison d'être* for the Russian fashion press” (p. 94). However, it would be a simplification to regard local media as passive perceivers and transmitters of global news and discourses. Instead, they often “redefine the semiotic and social meanings of imported content” in line with the local socio-cultural context (Wang, 2008, p. 210). Such local redefinition is the result of work done by local editors and journalists. Thus, early Russian fashion reporters and commentators positioned themselves as “mediators between Paris and Petersburg, with the ability to interpret what Parisian fashion were appropriate for their Russian clientele” (Ruane, 2009, p. 94).

This article engages with Hannerz’s reflections on the mediating role of local cultural actors, also referred to as peripheral intellectuals or cultural elites, to conceptualize the specificity of fashion journalism in the periphery. One of their particular tasks is “gate-keeping the current of meaning that enters the local discourse and deciding which of the cultural forms and patterns should be let in, ignored, or ultimately rejected” (p. 258). This description is strikingly similar to one of fashion journalism’s classic functions, which, as suggested by British scholar Kate Nelson Best, has remained unchanged since the seventeenth century. In her *History of Fashion Journalism* (2017), she classifies fashion journalists as cultural arbiters who “review aesthetic, social and cultural innovations as they first appear and then classify these innovations as either important or trivial” (p. 7). While such selective “reviewing” constitutes one of the primary functions of fashion journalism, it acquires an additional layer in the peripheral context. This article thus maintains that “peripheral” fashion editors perform a double function: First, fashion journalists reviewing innovations (news, trends, ideas, and more) for their audience. Second, that of local cultural actors who filter metropolitan cultural forms entering local context and “scrutiniz[e] their coherence or incoherence [. . .] with the local culture” (Hannerz, 1992, p. 257).

Fulfilling this double function requires a particular professional expertise from an editor or a journalist, consisting as much of practical skills as of the socialization in both local and metropolitan cultural codes (Zarycki, 2007, p. 110). For example, speaking about multiple European editions of *Der Bazar* (1855–1936), Marianne Van Remoortel (2017) points out that local cultural adaptation required early fashion editors (predominantly women) to demonstrate a whole set of professional skills, e.g., “advanced language proficiencies, keen insight into the demands of the women’s magazine market at home, and cultural affinity with the fashion press abroad” (p. 270). In this context, textual fashion editorials could be seen as “sense-making practices, or articulations” (Delhaye, 2006, p. 96) in which metropolitan cultural forms are filtered, recontextualized, and discussed in local terms. Taking an early St. Petersburg magazine as an example of the “peripheral” fashion press, this article thus focuses on the role of its editor as a critical reviewer, or a gate-keeper, of the metropolitan “aesthetic, social and cultural innovations” entering a local culture. After briefly discussing the magazine and professional skills of its woman editor, it focuses on her fashion editorials and the interplay between the global influence and local considerations. For this, the article consecutively analyses *Modnyi magazin*’s rhetoric along such dichotomies as visual and

textual, esthetic and commercial, democratization and distinction, commercial advertising and social advocacy.

Sofia Mei: fashion journalist as a peripheral cultural actor

Arguably one of the most prominent and idiosyncratic fashion magazines in the Russian Empire, St. Petersburg-based *Modnyi magazin* [Fashion Store] was founded and – a rare case in nineteenth-century Russian publishing – unchangeably published and edited by a sole woman, Sofia Grigorievna (Rekhnevskaiia-)Mei (1821–1889), for twenty years. While it might at first seem counterintuitive to classify a fashion journalist as a member of the cultural elite, Sofia Mei can undoubtedly be seen as one. She uniquely belonged at once to Russian nobility (traditionally bilingual and socialized in Western cultural norms) and literary and nascent feminist circles.

Born in Moscow into a gentry family, the Polianskiys, Mei “received an excellent education and spent her youth in the best society” (*Istoricheskii vestnik* [Historical Herald], 1889 *Istoricheskii vestnik* [Historical Herald], 1889, p. 253). A writer and translator in French and English, she married a well-known Russian poet, Lev Mei, in 1852 and moved to St. Petersburg, where they hosted a vibrant literary salon frequented by Ivan Turgenev and other remarkable literati of the time. Since the family’s only source of income was Lev Mei’s honorariums, his wife’s decision to launch a fashion magazine was intended primarily to improve their financial situation. Initial capital was collected through “loans from the Literary foundation and friends” [На ссуду от Литературного фонда и одолженные у друзей деньги] (*Sankt-Peterburg. Khronika tr’iokh stoletii* [St-Petersburg. Chronicles of three centuries], 2003 *Sankt-Peterburg. Khronika tr’iokh stoletii* [St-Petersburg. Chronicles of three centuries], 2003, p. 408). Founded in 1862, the bi-monthly *Modnyi magazin* quickly became popular and commercially successful.¹ According to the archival source, it “was for its time undisputedly the best among Russian fashion magazines” [был в свое время бесспорно лучшим из модных русских журналов] (“Materialy k biografii Sofii Grigorievny Rekhnevskoi-Mei” [Materials to the biography of Sofia Grigorievna Rekhnevskaiia-Mei], 4 February 1889, The Pushkin House, f. 265, op. 2, no. 2222).

A year after it was launched, Lev Mei died, and two years later, Sofia Mei married for the second time, to a professor at the military academy called Stanislav Rekhnevskii. During her second marriage, she spent a few months per year in Paris and at fashionable European spa-resorts, from where she brought “the latest fashions for the following season and published them in her magazine” [самые свежие моды для наступавшего сезона и помещала их в своем журнале] (The Pushkin House, f. 265, op. 2, no. 2222). Apart from publishing the magazine, Sofia Mei was among the first St. Petersburg activists to advocate for organized pro-women’s charity, which, according to the renowned scholar Richard Stites (1991), signified “the beginning of feminism in Russia” (p. 47). In 1874 she initiated a fundraising campaign for a St. Petersburg-based philanthropic organization, *Pri’iut Sviatoi Ksenii* [St. Kseniia’s Shelter]. It helped educated girls find employment and provided women in need with work in affiliated fashion ateliers and fashion boutiques. Mei personally managed this organization and for many years broadly promoted this and similar feminist endeavors in her magazine. In 1883, already in her sixties, Mei transferred her editorial duties to a merchant,

Vasilii Turba, who then sold the magazine to Mei's main publishing competitor, the Russian illustrated press magnate Herman Goppe.

Sofia Mei's unique personal experience, combined with remarkable literary and entrepreneurial skills, let her shape the magazine with an idiosyncratic format and agenda. *Modnyi magazin* positioned itself as a high-quality Russian fashion and literary magazine for educated women whose social standing permitted (if not required) them to be equally interested in appearances as well as socio-cultural matters both in Russia and abroad. Its format unprecedentedly combined the features of Western-inspired fashion magazines, traditional literary-philosophical "thick journals," and emerging Russian magazines aiming at negotiating women's social status (Marks, 2001, p. 100). The fashion section of the magazine was composed exclusively by the editor herself. The following section discusses the key elements of Sofia Mei's approach to writing her regular fashion column.

***Modnyi magazin* as a bridge between Russian women and Parisian fashion**

Sofia Mei positioned *Modnyi magazin* as a premier local source for French fashion. She promised to provide readers with fashion news from "real" (first-hand) sources and claimed that she possessed all the necessary means for this "by following the fashion of the good society, receiving models from the main Parisian and St. Petersburg stores, and subscribing to all fashion magazines published in Europe." [следа за модами хорошего общества, получая модели из первых парижских и петербургских магазинов и выписывая все издающиеся в Европе модные журналы] ("Mody," *Modnyi magazin*, 1869, p. 300). Its self-positioning as a Russian medium of Parisian fashion news was reflected both in the choice of illustrations and the structure of fashion editorials.

The provision of Parisian fashion patterns and gravures was a specialty of *Modnyi magazin*. The majority of illustrative material was taken from leading Parisian publications, known as the world's primary source of fashion news (*Le Moniteur de la Mode* (1843–1913), *Les Modes Parisiennes* (1843–1896), *La Revue de la Mode* (1872–1913), to mention just a few). The exclusive nature of the contracts which Mei established with French publishers implied that no one else was legally allowed to reprint these materials in Russia, making *Modnyi magazin* a unique local source of prestigious French fashion plates. At the same time, adapting French fashion to local circumstances in the broadest sense of the term constituted the core idea of *Modnyi magazin*. Mei positioned it as a distinctively Russian fashion magazine and incorporated French illustrations "with selection, applied to fashion accepted by the highest St. Petersburg society and to the requirements of our climate and social life" [с выбором, применяясь к модам, усвоенным высшим петербургским обществом, и к требованиям нашего климата и общественной жизни] ("Pis'mo v provints'iiu" [Letter to Province], *Modnyi magazin*, 1871, p. 48.)

This selective audience-aware approach was also the defining feature of Mei's fashion editorials. This should be seen in the context of the magazine's targeting policy. In contrast to its predecessors, who catered specifically to the interests of wealthy nobility (e.g., *Moda* [Fashion] (1851–1861), Mei's magazine addressed a relatively broad audience extending beyond this utterly narrow social circle. In one of her fashion reviews, the editor noted: "*Modnyi magazin* is spread in all the circles of Saint-Petersburg society – from higher

aristocracy to modest households that do not have the opportunity to pay dressmakers” [„Модный Магазин” распространен во всех слоях петербургского общества – начиная от высшей аристократии и кончая скромными семействами, не имеющими возможности платить портнихам] (“Mody” [Fashion], *Modnyi magazin*, 1869, p. 390). Since the magazine aimed to cater to the interests of women of varied means, Mei’s primary editorial task consisted of combining two different elements – the best Parisian fashions and particular considerations of the Russian audience in all its socio-economic heterogeneity.

To decode Mei’s approach to writing her fashion reports, I suggest seeing this as consisting of two parallel strategies on presenting French fashion in order to satisfy the needs of the target audience’s different segments. The first strategy was to study and filter fashion news from all available sources to identify trends approved by established fashion communities in Paris and St. Petersburg. A summarizing overview was presented with regards to the Russian context’s specificities (e.g., climate, social events calendar). This part was meant to address common curiosity about the ‘general movement of fashion’ and to cater to the demand of those who could afford the most luxurious and trendy clothing: “among other female subscribers are wealthy persons of high ranking who require particularly sumptuous outfits.” [в числе подписчиц есть лица достаточные, высокопоставленные, которым нужны именно великолепные туалеты] (“Mody,” *Modnyi magazin*, 1872, p. 354).

The second strategy was presented to the readership as follows: “We are obliged to report on everything in fashion, and often we describe the outfits of the highest society; but our primary attention is mostly focused on what is accessible for everyone” [Мы обязаны давать отчет обо всем, что принято модой, и часто описываем туалеты самого большого света; но главное наше внимание обращено на то, что более доступно каждому] (“Mody,” *Modnyi magazin*, 1865, p. 349). This part of the editorial was targeted particularly at the economy-conscious segment of the audience, “persons of the middle circle – they constitute the majority [of the readership] – willing to combine elegance and economy” [лица среднего круга – таких большинство – желают соединить щегольство с экономией] (“Mody,” *Modnyi magazin*, 1872, p. 354). Accordingly, this selective overview was complemented by detailed practical advice on how to reproduce those styles, taking into account all potential limitations.

As a result, subscribers to *Modnyi magazin* could expect to receive a dense and well-thought fashion report, carefully merging the latest world trends with their particular needs and expectations (for example, advice on how to substitute fabric which was difficult to find in Russia). In this way, Mei’s fashion editorials became the platform for bridging the global fashion metropolis and Russian women of relatively varied socio-economic backgrounds.

Editorial angle for fashion reporting: the commercial and the esthetic

According to Roland Barthes (1990), the average image of a reader shaped by fashion magazines reflects “the permanent compromise which marks the relations between mass culture and its consumers: the Woman of Fashion is simultaneously what the reader is and what she dreams of being” (pp. 260–261). In the case of *Modnyi magazin*, the commercially-driven part of the editorial agenda and strategy was responsible for satisfying the practical needs of the audience or acknowledging “what the reader was”. At the same time, the magazine articulated and promoted particular esthetic ideals, as well as the high standards that it set, corresponded to “what she dreamed of being”. This second component was what gave

Modnyi magazin its attractive allure and, arguably, ensured audience emotional attachment and loyalty. In her fashion editorials and editorial addresses, Sofia Mei regularly emphasized that it was the journal's adherence to "practicality" and "gracefulness" (or "daintiness"), which earned *Modnyi magazin* its good reputation. The interplay between these two editorial principles determined the lens through which Mei filtered French fashion news. Following this, all major developments and trends were reported, but not all of them were endorsed as worthy of being followed.

On the one hand, *Modnyi magazin*'s editorials' distinctive feature was its economy-conscious focus and down-to-earth language. In particular, the editor's analysis aspired to identify certain persistent patterns in fashion dynamics that allowed for the prediction of the direction which fashion would take over the following seasons and years. For instance, Mei noticed that especially comfortable and practical novelties were ultimately acquiring "the right of citizenship" in fashion, while those who suddenly became overly trendy and popular were usually considered bad taste the following season. Attention to such patterns allowed the editor to advise her readers on which fabrics, colors, and styles to prioritize in order to maximize a garment's longevity and practicality. This served as an essential filter for Mei's fashion reports: "After two years' experience, the readers of *Modnyi magazin* could be sure that fashion, delivered by our magazine [. . .] is real fashion, [. . .] destined for a long existence" [Читательницы "Модного магазина" могли убедиться, из двухлетнего опыта, что моды, доставляемые им нашим журналом [. . .] – настоящие моды, [. . .] которым суждено долгое существование] ("Mody," *Modnyi magazin*, 1864, p. 10). Thus, local, commercially-driven considerations encouraged the fashion editor to adopt a critical stance regarding received foreign fashion news and filter it in line with the Russian socio-economic context.

On the other hand, an emphasis on exquisite elegance and selectivity formed the esthetic side of *Modnyi magazin*'s self-positioning and determined its particular contribution to local fashion discourse. Promising her readers to provide them with "only the most graceful and elevated in regards to fashion" [лишь самое изящное и благородное по части мод] ("Pis'mo v provintsiu," *Modnyi magazin*, 1871, p. 48), Mei based her fashion critique on adherence to elegant simplicity. Developing a distinct esthetic standpoint helped the editor establish her authority as a public arbiter of taste, while also serving as a reference point for her fashion critique: "Fantasy has never played such a great role in fashion as nowadays; unfortunately, it is not always marked by good taste" [Никогда еще фантазия не играла в нарядах такой роли, как теперь; к сожалению, в ней не всегда заметно присутствие хорошего вкуса.] ("Mody," *Modnyi magazin*, 1865, p. 26). In this regard, individual vision, as much as knowledge, became a core component of the editor's professional expertise. As Miller and McNeil (2018) point out, a single common characteristic uniting all professional fashion observers is the reliance on their "own personal experience, where the common denominator is knowledge and clarity of expression" (p. 154). The omnipresence of Mei's judgment in her fashion editorials suggests that a firm esthetic angle, together with practical considerations, allowed her to offer a simultaneously argumentative and critical fashion commentary and served as one of the primary criteria according to which she reviewed the information flow coming from Paris.

Therefore, in this case of a “peripheral” magazine, the two constitutive components of the fashion press – esthetic and practical (read: commercial) – were translated into the criteria for the critical gate-keeping of the incoming information flow.

“The charisma of the metropolis”: socializing techniques

The above-discussed editorial emphasis on the French origin of fashion-related content published in *Modnyi magazin* reflected both the audience’s demand and Mei’s awareness. In 1863, a female reader expressed her disappointment with *Modnyi magazin*’s social life observer, who had discussed the life of a St. Petersburg proletariat in a review. The woman suggested that “he would do better talking about the French court and similar fine subjects” [лучше бы он говорил о французском дворе, и тому подобных изящных предметах] (Responses of the editorial board, *Modnyi magazin*, 1863, p. 68). Responding to this complaint, Mei argued: “But this is already despotism, a constraint of freedom, don’t you agree? We can’t oblige him to talk exclusively about the French court and fine subjects – and we don’t see why he should not talk to the purpose of everyday troubles as well” [Ведь это уже, согласитесь – деспотизм, стеснение свободы. Мы не можем обязать его говорить об одном только французском дворе и изящных предметах – и мы не видим, почему не говорить кстати и о житейских тревожностях] (Responses of the editorial board, 1863, p. 68). To this end, the editor decisively defended journalistic freedom of speech and – implicitly – her editorial freedom to determine the content of the magazine.

Mei was certainly aware that her readers’ expectations exceeded the practical necessity of knowing what to wear, and they also demanded information about the metropolitan way of life, in the broader sense. As explained by Hannerz (1992), popular culture, of which fashion and fashion press are part, plays a particular role in satisfying the need of the periphery’s inhabitants to feel closer to the metropolis: “One can reach toward the charisma of the center at least as well through greater investment in popular culture as through involvement with a more differentiated, less widely understood high culture” (p. 241). From the mid- nineteenth century, the emerging fashion press started to fill the niche of a direct source of information on the Western ways of comportment for Russian women from an ever- broader social spectrum (Ruane, 2009). Accordingly, Sofia Mei addressed her readers’ urge to feel an affiliation with the fashionable metropolis. She did it not only by informing on fashion news but, more importantly, by socializing them in the symbolic sign system proliferating in the international Paris-centered fashion scene.

One of the most straightforward ways of doing this was the appropriation of French fashion vocabulary. Mei’s editorials were full of French terms for every aspect of clothing: from garment names to production techniques. While they were usually written in the original Latin alphabet, Mei, herself a translator, often juxtaposed French notions with their respective Russian terms, complementing them with explanations of difference and nuance. Quite literally, she taught her readers the language of fashion, which was in a constant state of becoming, with new fabrics, colors, and styles being invented every year. This did not only serve the very practical purpose of helping women explain their request to a seamstress or a shop assistant. These lessons in semantics could also be seen as an valuable socialization technique, which transformed local readers from ignorant imitators into well-informed members of the transnational fashion community.

Another formative component of Mei's fashion writing included references to cosmopolitan role models. During the decades when Mei was publishing her magazine, Parisian women, with French Empress Eugénie as the foremost fashion icon of the Western world, collectively embodied the role model to be admired and followed. In this context, Mei's fashion editorials provided information not only on the latest trends but also on the context within which these trends were born and worn. Fashion columns thus served as manuals for the lifestyle of 'a fashionable woman' whose primary incarnation was *La Parisienne*. Particularly interesting was, nevertheless, how the Russian editor instrumentalized this idea to support her local editorial agenda and promote an economical approach to dressing: "Coming back to a favorite topic of ours – elegance combined with economy – we aim [. . .] to discuss the key to the daintiness of Parisian women, who are the world's frontrunners in this respect. Why not learn something good?" [Возвращаясь к любимой своей теме – к щегольству, соединенному с экономией – мы намерены, [. . .] вникнуть в то, что составляет главное щегольство парижанок, взявших, в этом отношении, перевес над остальными женщинами. Отчего же не поучиться хорошему?] ("Mody," *Modnyi magazin*, 1865, pp. 331–333).

This point also illustrates how Mei used metropolitan authority and the "symbolic allure of modernity" (Hoganson, 2003) to address the practical concerns of her extended target audience. As Hannerz (1992) claims, the local cultural actors' task is to adopt foreign cultural forms selectively: "not because they are of the center, but because, recontextualized to other conditions, they are (at times) good to think with and express with" (p. 241). A closer look proves that what was praised and promoted in Mei's editorials were not Parisian women themselves, but the principles and approaches that they were supposed to master. For example, the word "mystery," often applied to describe the irresistible attractiveness of Parisian women, referred to a certain set of comprehensible and transmittable skills and tricks invented in order "to spend less money on outfits than others and always be fashionably dressed" [употреблять на туалет денег меньше других и быть всегда по моде одетой] ("Mody," *Modnyi magazin*, 1864, p.155). Simultaneously, by highlighting how French and Russian women had similar concerns, Mei's editorials, to a certain extent, bridged the Barthesian "dream-reality" gap. To this end, the editor addressed the sense of cultural detachment from the world's fashion capital, especially painful for those living far from St. Petersburg and, thus, feeling "doubly provincial" (Hannerz, 1992).

Socio-cultural shifts: between democratization and discrimination

Following the evolution of styles over years and decades is closely related to fashion journalists' roles as anticipators and articulators of "dramatic shifts in the broader culture". According to Best, "Fashion journalism is not a simple writing about fashion. As Baudelaire observes, it holds up a mirror to broader culture, acting as a hinge between the fashion industry and public consciousness" (p. 5). Since the Russian fashion press was ultimately dependent on metropolitan (or "primary") sources, it necessarily required that Mei be well-informed on the broader discourses unfolding within the international press and thus advise her readers about them. The cross-cultural transmission of such broader tendencies is indebted, according to Hannerz (1992), to a particular worldview of local cultural actors: "More or less at home in the world and not least in the center, familiar with its tendencies and fashions, the intellectuals of the periphery or semi-periphery bring these back home" (p.258).

In this respect, Mei's fashion editorials presented a platform where such broader trends were articulated for the local audience and reframed in local terms.

One of the major fashion-related socio-cultural shifts in the second half of the nineteenth century was an emerging freedom of choice and personalization of women's outward appearance (Delhaye, 2006). At this time, European fashion magazines changed their rhetoric concerning a woman's role in the fashion game. As Van Remoortel (2017) points out, "The new magazines actively targeted women as consumers and practitioners of style, granting them an unprecedented sense of control over their public identities" (p. 269). More particularly, Delhaye (2006) argues that nineteenth-century fashion editorials became a major site for encouraging female individualization through consumerism:

By means of individualizing techniques, fashion discourse educated women as self-defining consumers, increasingly aware of themselves and their unique outward appearance. Fashion editors aimed at endowing women with the capacities to act as autonomous consumers within a framework they as fashion experts themselves had set out (pp. 110–111).

Modnyi magazin's editorials allow for tracing the emergence of this rhetoric in the Russian fashion press discourse. While women's consumerist choices continued to be dictated by social prescriptions, Mei systematically highlighted self-expression through clothing as a global fashion trend and insistently associated a woman's manner of dressing with her unique individuality. For example, she contended that: "More and more fashion gives us space to choose ourselves, to apply what suits us most; in other words, to do what we like" [Мода все более и более дает простор выбирать по своему усмотрению, употреблять то, что более идет к лицу, словом делать то, что нравится] ("Mody," *Modnyi magazin*, 1881, p. 44). Furthermore, by advising her female readers on how to shop in order to dress well within the family budget, she legitimized consumerism as a predominantly female practice. In all these ways, the Russian editor outlined the emerging role of women as public arbiters of taste, pointing out an opening window of opportunity for women to legitimately express themselves in (semi-)public life.

At the same time, Mei's fashion rhetoric concerning personal choice serves as an illustration of one of fashion journalism's traditional functions: maintaining the equilibrium between inclusion and distinction, "democratizing fashion but at the same time upholding its discriminatory and symbolic value" (Best, 2017, p. 5). In other words, demystifying and liberalizing tendencies are balanced in fashion writing by introducing new markers of distinction. In *Modnyi magazin*, such regulatory discourse was expressed by promoting a "same-but-different" approach:

An outfit of a lady should not dramatically distinguish her from the crowd: there is one distinction – inimitable, elusive, only inherent to women of good society – which is taste, choice and *something* . . . (*je ne sais quoi*), something graceful, which will inevitably express itself.

[наряд дамы не должен резко отличаться от толпы: есть одно отличие, неподражаемое, неуловимое, присущее только женщинам хорошего круга – это вкус, выбор и *что-то такое* (*je ne sais quoi*) изящное, что непременно выскажется] ("Mody," *Modnyi magazin*, 1863, p. 159).

This rhetoric reflected the fashion industry's general reaction to the rise of new social classes and the occurrence of affordable ready-to-wear clothing, both of which were happening across Europe, particularly in France. When more people gained access to the latest fashions, the mere adherence to the trends stopped sufficing for achieving a desirable effect of distinction, the phenomenon first discussed by Pierre Bourdieu (1984) in his masterwork *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Consequently, the vestimentary code in the second half of the century was gradually becoming more complex and subtle in terms of details of distinction (Perrot, 1994). This tendency was succinctly articulated by Mei thusly: "in the majority of cases, a sheer nuance makes a world of difference" [в большинстве случаев, какая-нибудь малость составляет многое] ("Mody," *Modnyi magazin*, 1869, p. 159).

As Perrot (1994) observes, such developments evoked the establishment of "consumption in the modern sense; that is, consumption whose distinctive function was founded no longer simply on juridical and economic discrimination – purchasing power – but also on the social and cultural ability to discriminate – purchasing know-how" (p. 20). In this context, a stronger emphasis was put on the ability to select, which signified a person's particular socio-cultural background, individual perceptivity, and the awareness of symbolic connotations of every nuance of an outfit. Accordingly, Mei repeatedly claimed: "It is not enough to know what people are wearing – one should be able to choose" [Недостаточно знать что носят – надо уметь выбрать] ("Mody," *Modnyi magazin*, 1869, p. 300).² Consecutively, Mei promised her readers to be their reliable guide in mastering this skill, which was gaining symbolic weight in the metropolitan code of consumption. In this way, by reviewing metropolitan tendencies – toward both the democratizing and discriminating ends of fashion dynamics – and 'bringing them home', Mei served as the intermediary between the European socio-cultural context and her Russian readers.

Fashion sells: commercial advertising and beyond

Fashion journalism's core commercial function of is to sell, or mediate, between consumers and the market, which, on a local level, finds its particular expression in the promotion of local fashion producers. The establishment of this function could be traced in the editorials written by Mei. An ever-wider inclusion of such announcements reflected the magazine's gradual transformation from a unique source of useful information on the especially talented and trustworthy artisans into a commercial advertisement platform. At the same time, behind numerous announcements on local producers was a hidden agenda: Mei systematically applied the magazine's advertising potential to support women who earned their living with needlework and dressmaking.

What is more, her fashion editorials served as leverage for popularizing philanthropic sewing ateliers and fashion workshops organized by socially-engaged Russian noblewomen to support their female compatriots in acquiring economic independence. For instance, the editor propounded: "Fully sympathetic to women's work, we are always happy to inform in our magazine about any phenomena of this type, especially when we can, by giving work to those who need it, bring benefit to our subscribers" [Вполне сочувствуя женскому труду, мы всегда с радостью сообщаем в своем журнале о подобных явлениях, в особенности когда можем, доставляя работу нуждающимся, доставить в то же время выгоду нашим подписчикам] ("Mody," *Modnyi magazin*, 1864, p. 364). Mei's editorials raised this issue in

a light, unobtrusive manner, as spontaneous side-remarks to descriptions of the latest fashions. Such advertisements were adjusted to readers' potential interests, be they high quality, reasonable prices, or the exclusive services that such women-run enterprises could offer. Furthermore, as these side-remarks often took the form of personal recommendations by the editor, Mei's authority and her magazine's prestige attributed to them an additional symbolic weight:

I advise all my subscribers to order their dresses and underwear at *Women's Work Store*, founded by the *Society for Supporting Poor Women*. [. . .] Excellent work, fair prices, taste and expertise of the cutter (she is simultaneously the head of the workshop) are well known to me there.

[Советую всем моим подписчицам обращаться с заказами платьев и белья в *Магазин женских изделий*, основанный *Обществом для пособия бедным женщинам* [. . .] Отличная работа, добросовестные цены, вкус и знание дела закройщицы (она же и заведующая мастерской) мне вполне известны] ("Mody," *Modnyi magazin*, 1873, p. 52).

These techniques are still broadly applied in fashion writing with so-called hidden advertising or a subtle presentation of commercial material. Thus, fashion journalism presents a unique platform that could serve commercial and social purposes, since the same instruments could be used for both. Nevertheless, the realization of this potential depends on the editor's will and ability to find a way to reconcile social issues with the magazine's agenda. *Modnyi magazin's* quite extreme dedication to including pro-women's calls was due to the personal convictions of Mei, who herself was an engaged proponent of women's emancipation.

This local social agenda did not come from the foreign discourse; on the contrary, it stemmed from local situations, which did not necessarily coincide with those transpiring in global discourse. Nevertheless, while Mei raised the social agenda as a response to local socio-economic circumstances, the models provided by Western European societies served her as a point of reference and a source of approaches that could, in turn, serve local needs. Thus, the vision of organized feminist philanthropy promoted by Mei was novel for Russia. Based on John Stuart Mill's idea that self-help is more beneficial for a pauper than outside aid, it contrasted with the Orthodox vision of charity as purely emotional and irrational almsgiving (Lindenmeyr, 1996). For instance, Mei claimed:

Nature itself attributed to women the need to dress up and diversify her outfit. I see a good purpose in this: how many hands are occupied, how many poor people supply their whole families! Do not give alms but give work!

[Сама природа вложила в женщину потребность наряжаться и разнообразить свой наряд. Я вижу тут благую цель: сколько рук при этом занято, сколько бедняков кормятся с целыми семьями! Не подавайте милостыни, но давайте работу!] ("Mody," *Modnyi magazin*, 1875, p. 32).

Furthermore, Mei's rhetoric in this regard repeated that of the French press. She quoted "one of the most adorable Parisian fashion magazines" whose fashion editor contended: "this is so natural and, one can say, even necessary: without female coquetry, the industry and the arts themselves would be dead. What would happen to all the hands they provide work with! That would be a general devastation!" [Это так естественно и даже, можно сказать,

обязательно: без женского кокетства, промышленность и самые искусства были бы мертвой буквой. Что бы случилось со всеми руками, которым они дают работа! Это был бы всеобщее разоренье!] (“Mody,” *Modnyi magazin*, 1881, p. 106). Again, such references to the metropolitan authority further supported Mei’s editorial agenda and granted it additional symbolic weight.

Concluding remarks

What lessons can be drawn from examining the nineteenth-century magazine in regards to the specific functions of peripheral fashion journalism? Mei’s editorial approaches were structured around several dichotomies that still shape the dynamics of fashion journalism: visual and textual, esthetic and commercial, dream and reality, distinction and democratization, commercial advertising, and social advocacy. However, the dependency of the local fashion scene on the French one placed *Modnyi magazin*’s fashion rhetoric within an even larger dichotomy. Mei’s fashion writing was thus determined by an interplay between a Parisian trend-setting authority, on the one hand, and a varied local audience with its specific and varied needs and circumstances, on the other.

The ability to perform the role of a local gate-keeper undoubtedly owed to the editor’s socio-cultural capital, particularly to her socialization in the metropolitan symbolic code and sign systems. It was her social background and education, language proficiency, frequent visits and stays in the metropolis, direct business contacts that enabled her access to primary sources. At the same time, the “peripherality” of St. Petersburg vis-à-vis Paris paradoxically constituted the very creative potential of Mei’s fashion journalism. The specific local considerations (which could be seen as limitations) presented the editor with an opportunity to go beyond what was provided by the foreign discourse, shape her own standpoint, and establish her authority as a source of unique expertise.

Similarly to the modern “peripheral” fashion editor, Natalia Guzenko, who was quoted in the introduction, Mei saw her magazine as a local “filter” of globally-circulating information. Therefore, the challenge and, simultaneously, the added value of the local journalists’ practice are the ways they perform as double filters of the transnational information flow: as fashion observers reviewing trends, on the one hand, and as peripheral cultural actors selecting and refracting the metropolitan in line with a specific local context, on the other. In this regard, the entire preceding discussion could easily be repeated in the present tense, as, indeed, “The principal functions of fashion journalism have remained largely unchanged since the seventeenth century” (Best, 2017, p. 6).

Finally, as Miller and McNeil (2018) rightly notice, fashion journalism “has succeeded over many centuries to create for itself the reputation of being frivolous, disengaged from reality, and catering for the privileged few” (p. 2). Mei’s *Modnyi magazin* provides yet another counter-argument to this persistent stereotype (see Bennet 2004). The Russian editor tried to direct, when possible, her discourse along lines, which boosted the development of the local culture, nourished its forces, and addressed its problems by selectively adopting metropolitan cultural forms. This allows one to argue that, in the case of fashion journalism, it is not the genre that defines the editorial role, but the editor who realizes – or not – the vast potentialities of this versatile genre.

Notes

1. Its annual circulation figures reached 6000 copies, which turned it into one of the leading publications of its time (Marks, 2001, p.104).
2. As was shown earlier, *Modnyi magazin*'s entire self-positioning was based on distinguishing between economic and socio-cultural capital by arguing that following the fashions of 'the good society' required not wealth but taste and knowledge.

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