

Everyday Life in Russia Past and Present. Ed. Choi Chatterjee, David L. Ransel, Mary Cavender, and Karen Petrone. Afterword Sheila Fitzpatrick. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2015. x, 430 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. \$90.00, hard bound. \$35.00, paper. \$34.99, ebook.

This interdisciplinary collection of essays on imperial, Soviet, and post-Soviet Russia approaches the everyday as “the contact zones of daily life where grand historical events and ideological contests are personally experienced” (2) and offers readers a sampling of the myriad ways in which the concept of the everyday can help to reframe approaches to Russia’s history and contemporary life. A pithy introduction and several contributions (including David Ransel’s survey of the historiography of the everyday, pieces by Olga Shevchenko, Douglas Rogers, Deborah Field, Peter Pozevsky, and Sheila Fitzpatrick’s Afterword) directly confront the analytical purchase of “the everyday,” which can easily degenerate into a catch-all category so broad as to lose coherence and meaning. Rogers usefully distinguishes between the Russian term *povsednevnost’* – “a zone in which people experience, contemplate, and act on the world around them in the ordinary, habitual, unremarkable times of their lives” (75), and *byt*, used by ethnographers to ascribe a distinctive and static set of cultural practices, beliefs, and rituals. Fitzpatrick, while acknowledging the potential amorphousness of the concept, stresses that for historians, “studying the everyday is a good way of subverting assumptions made on the basis of formal political and social structures and codified ideologies” (390).

It is through the empirical work of each of the seventeen chapters that the volume tackles both the meaning and the utility of everyday life as an analytical tool. Most of the contributors emphasize the close links between materiality and the everyday. Mary Cavender's article on provincial nobles looks at ideas about agronomic progress in terms of yields and productivity. Elizabeth Skomp explores the materiality of everyday life in the late Soviet fiction of Natalia Baranskaia and I. Grekova, and how the role of women in arranging and controlling material possessions validates their social positions. Susan Reid and Serguei Oushakine look explicitly at objects and their role in everyday aesthetics, Reid exploring the cabinet and the presentation of its contents in the Soviet-era apartment, and Oushakine focusing on the centrality of consumer objects in 1990s' media retrospections of Soviet life. Choi Chatterjee analyzes Americans' travel accounts, noting the irony that although one travels to *escape* the everyday, foreign observers became obsessed with the material insufficiencies of everyday life in the pre-war USSR, particularly in comparison with the American consumer regime they had come to identify as normal. Other contributions use the looser concept "standard of living" as the principal link with the everyday. Karen Petrone explores the grievances of returned Afghan War veterans over the deterioration of their living conditions. Elizabeth McGuire also emphasizes complaints about living conditions in her piece about Chinese students receiving military training in 1920s Moscow.

Several contributions approach the everyday as a way to consider the public-private divide: people live their everydays in the private sphere. Field argues that everyday life precisely reveals those spaces in which Soviet citizens sought to carve

out a private, intimate, individual life apart from the collective. Apartment life constitutes an obvious arena in which to consider the public-private dichotomy as it plays out in daily interactions, as Steven E. Harris, Reid, Ilya Utekhin and Pozevsky discuss in their respective chapters on community-building in Khrushchev-era housing, the aesthetics of apartment life, the post-Soviet communal apartments of St. Petersburg, and the representation of home life in transition-era films about the Stalin period.

Almost all the contributors agree that politics takes a back seat to practices, objects, and domestic relationships described by the rubric of the everyday. Anthropologist Rogers suggests that the sponsorship by oil giant Lukoil of Perm' region Folk Arts Festivals deliberately shifted the public gaze from an everyday life of getting and spending – *povsednevnost'* (and its politics) to a static celebration of traditional culture – *byt*, removing debate and contest from the public sphere. Shevchenko argues forcefully against the notion that the everyday is an appropriate site to look for resistance. Referring to post-Soviet practices of constructing personal spaces outside the state, she insists “the intended functions of these arrangements has been, and remains, self-protection, not resistance” (64). And she concludes, “We would do more justice to the richness of everyday life if we resisted the temptation to reduce it to resistance by default” (67). On the other hand, in her Afterword, Fitzpatrick argues that the everyday approach can fruitfully be applied to high politics as well as private life, by exploring the quotidian experience of political life – dealing with the boss, competing with rivals, patterns of sociability, setting the rules of the game.

The richness of everyday life is definitely on view in the realms of the quotidian that these seventeen essays address. Home and family constitute the most common sites of these investigations. Complementing the studies of home and housing mentioned above, Benjamin Sutcliffe's contribution places the Liudmila Ulitskaia novel, *Medea and Her Children*, squarely in the realm of *byt* – a condition of stasis deliberately constructed around the family, seen by Medea as the “highest secular authority” (318). Natalia Pushkareva finds the key to the work identities of women scientists she interviewed to lie in family ties, especially in their relations with fathers. For her respondents, work becomes “everyday” in the sense that they minimize their singular achievements: “We don't talk about ourselves.” (116).

This volume usefully calls attention to the ways in which “unconventional” sources can be used to recover the complexity of lived experience. The institutional records which constitute the core of most state archives provide limited insight into the kinds of intimate, personal, informal lives under investigation here, although Harris, Field, and McGuire demonstrate the ways in which these records can capture the texture of everyday life, particularly in their use of petitions and complaints. Fiction (Skomp and Sutcliffe), film and television (Oushakine, Pozevsky, Utekhin), participant-observation and oral histories (Rogers, Shevchenko, Pushkareva, Ransel, Reid), memoirs and travel accounts (Petroni, Chatterjee) offer important additional access to the variety of everyday lived experience in Russia past and present.

Everyday Life in Russia Past and Present, despite some unevenness in its contributions, offers readers a richly theoretical and empirical consideration of the “state of play” of everyday life as it applies to the interdisciplinary study of Russia.

Diane P. Koenker

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign