

Modernity, Domesticity and Temporality in Russia: Time at Home. Rebecca Friedman. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020. x, 223 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. £76.50, hard bound.
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At the 1915–16 Futurist Exhibition, Kazimir Malevich’s “Black Square” was famously hung in a corner. With its subject matter signifying a void, and its positioning evoking the icon corner of the traditional Russian home, this painting was the antithesis of coziness and a supreme expression of the modern. Breaks from convention that iconoclastic art can proclaim are rarely so stark in daily life. As *Modernity, Domesticity and Temporality in Russia* reveals, in domestic space during the long fin-de-siècle, past, present and future “coexisted and overlapped” in a “pastiche” (3, 33). True to its subtitle, this is a book about time at home, not domesticity per se. Rebecca Friedman thus devotes a chapter to theories about time, before examining Russian domesticity through temporality—the consciousness of time passing (17)—in the late nineteenth century, at the turn to the twentieth, and during the first decade after the Revolution. She contends that Russians writing and reading about domestic space simultaneously longed for the past, embraced the present, and idealized the future. This is supported by an abundance of sources, including women’s and lifestyle magazines, prescriptive literature, fiction, and autobiographical texts.

In her first substantive chapter, Friedman establishes that the Russian middle class that emerged during industrialization and urbanization, and was able to partake in new forms of leisure and consumption, found advice about housekeeping, organizing time, rearing children, and cultivating modern aesthetics compelling. Rather than focus on the extent to which its members fulfilled them, though, she accentuates their investment in meeting expectations, citing this as evidence of modern sensibilities. For example, even if plumbing technologies were insufficient, striving for good hygiene implied faith in the latest science.

The layered nature of time is especially well illustrated in the next chapter, on the fin-de-siècle. Here Friedman casts intimate portraits of domesticity and orderly routines as grounding individuals in the present. She also shows the ubiquity of nostalgia—in texts and images evoking nature and childhood; wistfulness over the decline of estate life; and determination to preserve peasant handicraft traditions. She argues, however, that such phenomena did not signal a rejection of the modern, as evinced, for instance, by advertisements for vacations on ocean liners nestled among features on country life.

Drawing heavily on existing scholarship, the chapter on the early Soviet years surveys experiments with living collectively and streamlining household tasks. At the same time, this foray into efforts to reorder daily life with a view toward the communist future serves Friedman well for tracing the persistence after the Revolution of certain domestic motifs. These included anxiety over dangers of the past (represented by dirt), which could cause disease or reflect poorly on residents, and enthusiasm for efficiency and uniformity in housekeeping. More surprising are the ways that a longing for the past continued to be manifested, for example, through the creation of the society “Lovers of the Estate.” Such trends might be readily explained by the identity of the subjects at the center of this study (presumably, still middle class). Nevertheless, in illuminating them, Friedman probes a subject, retrospectivism, that has received far less attention for the early 1920s than for later Soviet years.

Meanwhile, in her analysis of the late tsarist period, Friedman joins longstanding debates about Russian exceptionalism and convinces that “bourgeois domestic aesthetics did emerge in Russia at the end of the old regime, if never perfectly parallel to domesticity in other parts of Europe” (32). Speaking to similarities,

she shows that ideas about “a well-ordered and respectable home” (31) appealed to the Russian, as much as European, middle class. Unfortunately, opaque references sometimes substitute for explicating notable dissimilarities. For example, Friedman claims that “the nexus of time and space” can shed light on “the regional nature of modernity” (7); that “moderns were conscious of how temporal frames are ‘riddled with issues of power and hegemony’” (79); and that the Bergsonian idea that time was unknowable was “appealing to a Russian Orthodox audience” (83). Elaborating on what was regional (or national?), how religious sensibilities figured into Russian perceptions of the modern, and what hegemonic forces were at play for educated and privileged Russians might have added another dimension to this book. That said, it fully accomplishes its challenging objectives: to depict how the modern revealed itself in domestic space, and to capture Russian consciousness of the modern. The result is a beautifully atmospheric study that transports the reader back to fin-de-siècle Russia.

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Cold War Mary: Ideologies, Politics, and Marian Devotional Culture. Ed. Peter Jan Margry. Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2021. 432 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. \$65.00, paper.
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Cold War Mary, edited by Peter Jan Margry, offers interesting insights into a previously poorly investigated subject: Marian apparitions and their instrumentalization for political purposes in the modern world. For many years within the Eurocentric academic tradition, visions, miracles, and other supernatural phenomena were related to the Third World and pre-modern societies, while in Europe itself, politics were perceived as something rational, secular, and public.

This volume is novel, ground-breaking and necessary, as it illuminates the role of vision and the supernatural in the modern western world. Here, Marian apparitions are interpreted as social constructs, as stories that have been developed, distributed, believed, and legitimized to some extent.

It is widely known, that with modernization and secularization, the number of Marian apparitions did not decrease but increased instead, against all odds. The core premise for analysis is that Marian apparitions happen as reaction, or response, to some social stress, social tension, or social discontent such as secularization, decline of traditional authorities, and/or liberalization of social norms. Whereas modernization was a huge social stress itself, the Cold War, political division of the European continent, and fears associated with the threat of the Soviet style communism have further increased the feelings of anomie and uncertainty.

The volume focuses exclusively on the Cold War period, when numbers of Marian apparitions were extremely high. It illuminates social and political dynamics around miracles, visions, and apparitions. There are different agents involved—seers, typically children, who are perceived as being innocent, that is, having no personal interests or their own political agenda; local communities who “consume” the narrative of the apparition to articulate their own concerns; the media, seeking profits and sensations; Catholic communities struggling for influence under domination of Protestantism or Calvinism; right-wing and left-wing political powers, using apparitions for their own agenda; and the church, which is partially supportive yet partially afraid of events happening outside clerical control.