

Oleg Kharkhordin & Risto Alapuro (eds), *Political Theory and Community Building in Post-Soviet Russia*. BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies. Abingdon: Routledge, 2011, xiv + 237pp., £90.00 h/b.

MOST STUDIES OF DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA ARE centred on institution building and public opinion surveys. Not so the work under review; for rather than examining practices at the state level, this edited volume investigates how material infrastructure in cities and apartment blocks may foster or impede the development of democratic practices in the communities which inhabit them. It is based on the findings of the research project 'Self-Governing Associations in North-Western Russia: Common Things as the Foundation for *Res Publica*', which examined utility reform in the industrial town of Cherepovets and home owners' associations (TSZhs) in St Petersburg between the years 2004 and 2007. The work is split into two parts: Part One consists of chapters by Risto Alapuro and Olga Bychkova which elucidate the theoretical and methodological approaches the project employed; Part Two, by Olga Bychkova, Evgeniia Popova, Rosa Vihavainen and Olga Kalacheva, presents the empirical findings. Oleg Kharkhordin introduces and concludes the book.

The research is based on two theoretical assumptions. The first, inspired by the so-called 'new materialist' turn in social theory, holds that non-human 'things' are also capable of agency—they are, in the terminology of Bruno Latour, 'actants'—and therefore need to be re-integrated into our ontology of the political. The second is that republican theory, understood here as 'sustained collective action based on at least relatively established networks and a common identity' (p. 53), is the normative model for a democratic community. The book's bold theoretical aim is to bring actor-network theory (ANT) together with republican theory in order to 'amend' (p. 3) both mainstream social sciences which the authors claim do not sufficiently focus on *res*—materiality—and ANT, which they consider unable to account sufficiently for collective action, the *publica*.

In order to achieve a simultaneous analysis of materiality and collective action, the authors introduce two dichotomies. The first, drawing on insights from political economy, distinguishes 'common' from 'public' goods on the basis that while each person may claim a right to the common, its limited availability results in rivalry. Public goods are available to everyone and one person's use does not diminish another's. The second dichotomy is 'just in use' as opposed to 'in full possession'. Can the community exercise the triad of ownership rights of access, withdrawal and alienation over a given object, or is it merely able to use it? Based on these dichotomies, the book distinguishes four categories of object-oriented collective action: common use, public use, common possession and public possession. Republican democracy is considered to be actualised only in the fourth category, public possession, 'when all are engaged in taking the destiny of their city into their own hands as a public, as a people' (p. 18). The book's normative goal is to examine the question of whether one could 'get *res publica* into contemporary Russia somehow?' (p. 22), and the case studies, beginning in the third chapter, examine the extent to which republican practices are fostered in two Latourian 'networks': the apartment block and the city.

Chapter Three examines the role of Soviet city infrastructure in inculcating or hampering the development of democratic and market-oriented norms in its users. Using three examples—heating, payment and maintenance systems—Bychkova and Popova show how Soviet 'scripts' of universalism and collectivism were built into the design of city hardware, and highlight the problems that were encountered in redesigning it according to the principles of market logic after communism's collapse. The research presented shows that most attempts were unsuccessful because they only dealt with surface issues and did not try to reform the whole system. As such, in contemporary Cherepovets, residents still 'have no chance to individualise their consumption' (p. 133).

Chapter Four considers TSZhs as a ‘seed-bed of republicanism’ (p. 140), a site in which an actor is rendered ‘capable of taking the responsibility for his or her property and other affairs, and also of making demands’ (p. 51). Here, Vihavainen highlights how the organisational structure of a TSZh, as stipulated in Russian law, in fact helps to nurture ‘important civic skills’ (p. 160) in apartment owners through the common possession of staircases, attics, parking spaces and flowerbeds in their block.

In Chapter Five, Kalacheva searches for spaces of public symbolic significance, of *res publica*, which would ‘unite a typical post-Soviet crowd into a city with a shared destiny, and . . . mend the gap between the official life of leaders and managers and the non-official life of ordinary people’ (p. 166) in the industrial city of Cherepovets. Using the four categories of object-oriented collective action, she explores citizens’ relationships to various facets of Cherepovets, concluding that public possession, *res publica*, is perhaps evident only in the city’s public history as embodied in famous landmarks (p. 201), though one may, of course, debate the materiality of this finding.

While the research clearly demonstrates the co-constitutive relationship between human and non-human actions, the normative desirability of *res publica* as a mode of democracy was less obvious to this reviewer. The two requisites elucidated in the introduction, that of ‘a bond that ties the crowd into a public’ and the metaphorical ‘willingness to die for *res publica*’ (p. 20) seem to suggest a kind of liberal nationalism at the local level, rather than a deliberative or participatory democracy that would allow not only for inclusiveness, but also for contestation. The idea of ‘an over-arching existential meaning’ (p. 214) that could unite an entire city seems rather naïve in an age of multiculturalism and identity politics. The utopian nature of *res publica* was underlined in the text itself by the fact that it was not to be found in any of the case studies—the TSZh was considered ‘too modest in scale’ (p. 214) for *res publica*; sites in public possession in Cherepovets were also difficult to find (p. 203); and it was very clear that city infrastructure was not in public possession either (p. 133). Republican theory as used here successfully illuminates how material culture can encourage participatory democracy in small communities; it was less clear how the theory’s unifying principles outlined in the introduction could support a vibrant democracy at the macro-level.

Taken together, the book constitutes an important and highly original innovation in the study of democracy. It shows that ‘bringing materiality back in’ to research on democracy can help develop policies to encourage the spread of democratic norms. However, a more in-depth discussion of the suitability of republican theory as a normative model of democracy would have been useful for this reviewer.

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John Lamberton Harper, *The Cold War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, xii + 335pp., £18.99 p/b.

MANY BOOKS HAVE BEEN PUBLISHED IN RECENT YEARS OFFERING interpretations of the Cold War, often focusing in detail on specific aspects or issues, or applying particular theories or approaches in attempts to provide general explanations. This book offers instead a historical overview of the Cold War from its origins to its denouement with an emphasis on diplomacy and the role of political leaders. John Lamberton Harper has produced a compact but comprehensive political history of the Cold War. Whilst acknowledging that there were important cultural, economic and espionage aspects to the Cold War, the author focuses on the diplomatic and