

INTRODUCTION

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The editorial team presents the second “eclectic” issue of *Laboratorium*—an issue comprised of texts not tied together by a theme or a common project. The first issue that did this in 2011 did not include a special introduction, which only partially deviates from the established academic practice. The editors believe that alternating thematic and regular issues is both natural and fruitful, and we assume that the readers, who at times critique the model of the contemporary academic journal as a series of thematic anthologies, appreciate this diversity. Our expectations were met, and the previous issue was received with interest. As it turned out, our young journal is already perceived through the prism of an unintentionally established tradition, cleverly described by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann as “the way of doing things.” This short introduction to this issue is a good place to note: there are other ways of doing things as well. The journal will continue to integrate these two models—that of thematic unity and the publication of independent research articles. At the same time, *Laboratorium* affirms its mission and the obligation it has accepted (“as previously agreed”): we reserve the pages of our journal first and foremost for research articles and discussion pieces grounded in empirical studies.

This issue opens with a study of the everyday organization of the profession of the neighborhood police officers conducted by Ekaterina Khodzhaeva within the framework of a group research project. This work can be called brave in two respects. First of all, it is brave because its methodology—participant observation—ensures a level of detail unusual for the analysis of institutional violence without sensationalism. Second, the presentation of the research results is brave as well as being an intervention into and disruption of the standard political and ethical critiques of non-codified police practices, which tend to be grounded in the familiar opposition between “culture” and “violence.” The author is inspired by a sociological understanding that owes more to Max Weber than to Clifford Geertz, and which is grounded in sharing the life experiences and subjective practices of meaning-making of the workers at a police precinct. As a result, the spatial practices of neighborhood officers, which are the declared focus of the author’s analysis, can be understood as fragmentary expressions of the general organization of their

professional world—an organization that is much more vulnerable to and dependent on informal conventions than normative discourses about police would claim.

The publication of the study by Catriona Kelly, impressive in its scope and level of detail, anticipates the upcoming publication of her book, *St. Petersburg: Shadows of the Past* (New Haven: Yale University Press). Against the backdrop of a historical overview of the living space politics of the Soviet era, the author decodes the organization of domestic space as a site of identity and memory as well as sites of rejection of memories of the imperial city center, inscribed into the biographic experiences of “born and bred” St. Petersburg/Leningrad residents, as they adapted to the “communal” regime of living, the blockade, and the new planned developments on the city outskirts. The article represents a methodological collision—on the border between history of culture and cultural anthropology, on one hand, and the sociology of the city and housing, on the other hand—converging around the following question: is the model of domestic space, the construction of “domestic comfort,” or the model of a “comfortable” city universal in a given period and transitive in terms of social differences? The answer common in sociology usually refers back to the multitude of competing empirical models of house/city enacted by actors belonging to different social and professional classes. At the same time, for a long period cultural anthropology tended to focus less on such differentials in favor of looking for universal patterns. Both approaches have their own history, foundations, and models of research. For the post-Soviet period, the author argues for a unified concept of comfort and model of the specifically “Leningrad” living space, which transcended social differences (in particular educational and professional ones). In this sense, Kelly’s article offers an expansive answer about the parameters of such a model. But it is also a stimulating invitation to discussion, which the editorial committee of *Laboratorium* hopes to develop in subsequent issues.

The article by Anna Pechurina seems like it addresses the same question—but in a geographical looking glass of sorts. If the main motivation of Kelly’s research was to articulate the invariable aspects of the Leningrad flat, then the author of the following article is interested, first and foremost, in the materialized signs of affinity with Russia used by Russian migrants to the United Kingdom to mark their domestic spaces in a new social environment. Such a study of the specific articulation and expression of a “native home” in host societies may feature several different dimensions: an analysis of the spatial organization of houses, “atypical” uses of functional spaces (kitchen, hallway, toilet, et cetera), descriptions of the engagement with the house and its furnishings and objects by various family members, the daily rituals and personal hygiene practices, et cetera. Pechurina focuses on the more “surface” (and, at first glance, stereotypical) markers of collective identity and memory of the home-dwellers: editions of Russian classics on the bookshelves, icons as part of the apartment décor, and “local” souvenirs which in Russia are intended, first and foremost, for foreign tourists. But beneath this “surface” level of material signs lies a deeper question about the symbolic meaning of the country of origin and strategies of auto-exoticization of immigrant identities and lifestyles. Interestingly, the question directed at the subjects of such studies could be directed at the

researchers themselves as well. Which strategies of describing the objective and subjective parameters of Russian society are able to go beyond a certain kind of “orientalism”—orientalism that may inform both the international dominant perspective, inspired by cultural distance and a longing for an “archaic” exotic, and the internal self-derogation, which supplants a rich comparative approach with a colonial-like positionality and self-perception? Previous issues of this journal have attempted to answer this question, especially the articles from 2009(1) and the special issue 2011(1). But, of course, it is premature to expect a decisive answer to the “colonial question” that was first posed in the social sciences in the 1970s. *Laboratorium* plans to continue publishing research engaging with this problem.

An unusual exploration of the orientalist theme (in a way) is found in the final research article of this issue, in which Yulia Gradskova explores the phenomenon of Soviet-era official internationalism through the case study of the Chilean solidarity movement. Data from the 1970s and 1980s suggests that the late-Soviet formula of international solidarity was realized not only in public rhetoric but also through a regimented system of political and expressive practices—from political song contests to donations to the Soviet Peace Foundation from the earnings of student construction brigades. At the same time, the official campaigns, which maintained their public image through the formal involvement of participants, shaped the personal experiences of their most active members in quite unpredictable ways. It was in this locus, the everyday underside of official internationalism, that the cultural production of “orientalist” imaginaries of Latin America as the continent of Indians, heroic revolutionaries, and exotic jewelry (which could be purchased at “solidarity fairs”) took place. In her conclusion, the author points out that institutional solidarity, which rarely presupposed practical forms of self-organization or political autonomy on the part of participants, could in fact lead to the formation of practical meanings for the participants that were at odds with the agenda of internationalism—including racism.

A critical overview of contemporary gender debates offered by Juliette Rennes in the “discussion” section will be of special interest for Russian readers. From the late 1990s on, gender theory and gender studies have found if not a central, then at least a stable place in Russian academia. Gender themes have also found a regular place on the pages of *Laboratorium*: almost every issue has featured an article or a discussion on such topics, including the special issue 2010(3). However, the intersection of gender studies and activist practices is understudied in Russian sociology and social history compared with their American and European counterparts. Rennes’s article demonstrates the necessary link between academic and public spheres and emphasizes the fact that various sociological studies of gender inequality (including statistical analyses) are themselves tools in political struggles against inequalities. Alongside a number of examples that are relevant in broader European context including the Russian one, this article serves as an introduction of sorts to a research direction that is a new one for Russian scholars—an “intersectional” analysis of different forms of inequalities and discrimination (sexism, classism, racism, ageism). This approach allows for the discovery of not only interconnected and

nuanced forms of structural violence towards different marginalized groups but also conflicts between their strategies of public advocacy. The text deconstructs a number of such “collisions” and analyzes instances of the political instrumentalization of anti-discrimination critiques—in particular, the feminist critique of the patriarchy, which is mobilized for the neutralization of the opponents of institutional racism. The article clearly outlines the key theses of a series of European public debates and studies, enriching the epistemological toolkit of not only academic studies but also of social movements. This is especially important in the context of the ongoing social uprisings in Russia, which, in the moment of the increasing civil activism and the ensuing political initiatives, are at risk of being instrumentalized by both the radical right and the state-authored forms of nationalism.

In the reviews section the readers will find overviews and critiques of works that are thematically related to the articles in this issue. These include monographs and anthologies that describe the structure and functionality of Russian police and the particular uses of law in the relations between the state and big business, present the results of urban studies research projects, and deal with sociologies and histories of sport, as well as sociologies of food.

Laboratorium is always open to collaboration and offers a platform for Russian and foreign authors to publish original research and relevant academic discussion. The information on how to reach the editors is published in every issue, it is also available on our website, where all articles are placed in their entirety simultaneously with the publication of the paper edition. We invite you to join this international dialogue among researchers.

Authorized translation from Russian by Veronica Davidov