

the sufferings caused by such a male-oriented world. Her provocations successfully lead to self-unmasking of male characters (Ganya). Her key strategy is shamelessness, which functions as a “cover for anger and a vent.” It justifies her deviated behavior and more importantly, it is used to ridicule her opponents who then become “the sources of her own empowerment” (75).

In *The Diary of a Writer*, provocation is fueled by irritation. Mass media evens out the density of various events happening every day in the world. On the one hand, readers become detached from the actual happening of an event. But at the same time, they are eager to listen to an expert’s assessment of it. Dostoevskii addresses his readers’ thirst for judgement by offering his commentaries on current issues. Echoing the habitat of “participatory media,” the writer treats his readers as intellectual “coworkers” who engage themselves with his ideas. Dostoevskii’s strategy is to express his authentic psychological state to evoke an analogous state in his readers (106). This can be found in his discussion of Russia as the mother of all Slavic nations. In his chapters on Tolstoi’s *Anna Karenina*, Dostoevskii criticizes the author by inserting himself into one of the scenes in the novel. By reorchestrating the relevant dialogues, Dostoevskii presents Levin’s reactions as an example of profound selfishness and indifference to the suffering of distant others.

Patyk describes Zosima’s provocation in *The Brothers Karamazov* as prosocial. The strategy is marked by infinite tolerance and abstinence from judgement or blame. Yet the provocateur is not passive; he would extend help and foster relations in a community. When Zosima responds to Ivan’s atheistic remarks, the former probes into Ivan’s intention and identity instead of elevating the discussion into a debate of moral maxim. The provocateur does not impose truth on the others; he assists them to embark on the search for self-knowledge on their own.

In conclusion, Patyk compares provocation to a child playing with matches. The child is fueled with intentions in fondling the matches, but there is no guarantee of how the play ends. It is this unpredictability in the act of provocation that captures the infinitude and human freedom in Dostoevskii’s works.

## **Kateryna Malaia. *Taking the Soviet Union Apart Room by Room: Domestic Architecture Before and After 1991.***

**Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2023. vii, 204 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$36.95, hard bound.**

Marija Drėmaite

(Post)Authoritarian Landscapes Research Center, Vilnius University

Email: [marija.dremaite@if.vu.lt](mailto:marija.dremaite@if.vu.lt)

doi: 10.1017/slr.2024.488

When Russia initiated the war in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, numerous multi-story, multi-apartment prefabricated houses became targets of bombardment, highlighting not only a ruthless assault on civilians but also serving as symbolic testaments to the enduring nature of the (post) Soviet space, which has undergone minimal transformation since its construction. However, within these structures, significant internal changes have transpired—an aspect explored in Kateryna Malaia’s work, *Taking the Soviet Union Apart Room by Room*. The book endeavors to comprehend the post-Soviet metamorphosis by scrutinizing the evolution of everyday life, with a particular focus on the residential domain.

Malaia's portrayal of the collapse of the USSR unveils both enduring continuities and profound transformations. Rather than adopting the traditional grand narrative of the end of state socialism and the emergence of democratic political systems and neoliberal economics, Malaia proposes an alternative narrative focused on the period from 1985 to the mid-2000s, examining the change in everyday life. While Soviet infrastructure persisted, the domestic spaces of urban dwellers assumed symbolic significance in their transition to post-Soviet residents. Malaia investigates the experiences of Soviet and post-Soviet city residents as they met housing challenges and profound social disruptions from the late 1980s to the 2000s.

The post-USSR era spanning two decades witnessed a notable surge in urban apartment renovations. Malaia illustrates how individuals, constrained by limited residential mobility, reshaped their homes, establishing new lifestyles characterized by spatial privacy. Remodeled interiors emerged as tangible expressions of social identity, supplanting outdated Soviet symbols of prosperity. By interweaving narratives of home improvement, self-reinvention, the decline of state socialism, and the tangible experiences of change, Malaia constructs a comprehensive portrait of this transformative period. Her objective is to comprehend lived experiences of change through their spatial dimension. Malaia subtly reveals that while the exteriors of large prefab panel houses remained unchanged, significant yet identical processes occurred on a mass scale inside them. She chooses to deconstruct the apartment, considered a formative product of socialist state engineering, social knowledge within the communist state, and a personal internal enclave.

The book's chapters are therefore organized around domestic practices and present a room-by-room analysis, encompassing remodeling, sleeping, eating, hygiene, and socializing. Malaia astutely observes that when examining domestic practices instead of room outlines, common themes of post-Soviet change, such as the emergence of private bedrooms, expansion of the kitchen, new bathroom standards, or the convergence of socializing and eating spaces within the home, become apparent. These processes, explained through specific concepts such as "evroremont," the imagined European standard, are well connected to collective desires, economic changes of late Soviet period perestroika, and the opened borders after 1990.

Advocating for similarities across the former Soviet empire and the post-Soviet space, this study relies on interviews and fieldwork primarily conducted in Kyiv and Lviv, Ukraine. Malaia demonstrates that it is an effective method to write a history of the post-Soviet transformation while avoiding Russian sources and cases. She argues convincingly that it is crucial not to study the Soviet Union solely through the lens of Russia: "Limiting research related to the Soviet Union to Russia alone not only generates an inaccurate view of the Soviet and post-Soviet reality but also perpetuates the problematic perception of the Russian Federation as the normative locus for the entire post-Soviet region" (22).

Malaia adeptly combines academic precision, anthropological detail, and a vivid narrative, enabling both scholars and a broader audience to comprehend the processes of apartment transformation, their causes, and outcomes. However, a documentary fact requires clarification: Malaia references the well-known set of documents that regulated Soviet construction, "Sanitary Norms and Rules," but the correct form should be "Construction Norms and Rules" (*Stroitel'nye Normy i Pravila*, or SNIIP). While this does not fundamentally alter the existence of a stringent regulatory mechanism, maintaining documentary accuracy is imperative.

During the composition of this book, Malaia observed that the historically complete remodeling boom concluded in the early 2000s, leading her to assert that the post-Soviet period was drawing to a close. However, it was the revanchist Russian invasion of Ukraine that brutally demonstrated the end of the post-Soviet era. Consequently, the book serves as a historical account of the past. Functioning as a narrative of historical change through the lens of everyday life, *Taking the Soviet Union Apart Room by Room* explores the significance of the home amid a dynamically changing world.