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## Six Historians in Search of *Alltagsgeschichte*

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### MARIA BUCUR, INTRODUCTION (20 February 2008):

It is not the first time a journal is attempting a livelier format of intellectual exchange among academic specialists in the history of Russia/the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. But it is the first time that specialists working on questions of gender in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe are coming together to discuss a theme, theory and methodology issue together in this fashion, across a vast area and a very rich and differentiated scholarship. My interest in generating this dialogue is connected to my graduate training in the early 1990s, which came at a point when the social history of Eastern Europe was starting to gain new dimensions, linked to oral history and to the evanescent everyday life field that was gaining an important foothold at that time through the work of Alf Lüdtke and a group of social historians and historical sociologists working at University of Michigan and a few other institutions at that time.<sup>1</sup> I was also becoming interested in gender as a category of historical analysis and found the *Alltagsgeschichte* approach embraced by this group of scholars particularly conducive to making gender topics visible and relevant in historical research and writing.

I was fully convinced that everyday life would in fact become a great site of historical work, but that hasn't been the case. In Germany today, the German History Museum in Berlin has an important part of its permanent exhibit dedicated to questions of everyday life in that country since the Weimar period, and all the way up to the fall of the Berlin Wall on both sides of the Cold War divide. In 2007 the museum also organised a large and extremely well documented temporary exhibit about the quality of everyday life in the GDR. Yet this kind of approach to representing the meaning of the past is still rare in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe and even among scholars who are interested in this area in Western Europe and the United States, where everyday life has become an important field of historical research in other places in the world. The responses to the call for papers for the third issue of *Aspasia*, which clearly asked scholars to send us materials that engaged with the field of *Alltagsgeschichte* in some fashion by posing questions about the practice of everyday life and themes

linked to the lived, everyday aspects of gender identities, are an illustration of this trend. Most authors had a vague, intuitive sense of what makes 'everyday life' historical research and writing a specific field, but did not situate themselves in it. We take this as a lack of familiarity, and wanted to offer our readers and other scholars in the field a dialogue that will enable them to better engage with *Alltagsgeschichte*.

With this introduction as a starting point, can you address your own involvement with *Alltagsgeschichte* – whether you see yourself as someone who practises or uses both the theoretical and methodological approaches of this body of scholarship; about your definition of what *Alltagsgeschichte* means and how is it specifically useful; and how do you see the *Alltagsgeschichte* in your field of work, both currently and also in the future? Do the politics of the communist regimes in this area count for an important factor in how one might think of the advantages and disadvantages of everyday life history? How?

### MAUREEN HEALY (4 March 2008):

I'll start with my rough definition of everyday life history. It is when you want to write about politics and the workings of power in a given historical context, and you want to emphasise human agency in the process. Thus, an everyday life history will *not* have as its object of analysis the following structures: a political party (where, say 'the Socialist Party' is seen as an autonomous acting agent), a particular class (as in 'the middle class did such and such'). These structural agents were the bread and butter of 'social history' in its beginnings and practitioners of *Alltagsgeschichte* (in West Germany) found them inadequate for understanding the historical workings of political power. In particular, structural histories missed/erased/blotted out the realm where individual human actors made decisions, performed deeds, ignored or followed instructions, did or did not do something. But what is this 'realm' exactly? I'd call it 'the everyday'. In the everyday, individuals are of course bound within structural networks of class, party, economy, etc. – they are not autonomous heroes acting on pure free will – but there is always a little room to manoeuvre.

For this room to manoeuvre we can turn to German historian Alf Lüdtke, who coined the term *Eigensinn*. English-speaking historians like to say that this term is untranslatable. I won't take a stab, but will offer Kathleen Canning's able summary of what Lüdtke is getting at: '*Eigensinn* encompasses both historical subjects' encounter with "constraints and pressures" and their appropriation or *Aneignung* of these structural or discursive pressures'.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the historical actor has a sliver of autonomy (self-will, personhood, call it what you will) that allows him or her to navigate below the structures that older social history relied on.

I have been drawn to investigate these little moments of *Eigensinn* or expressions of personhood in my own work for a couple of reasons. The first is a matter of personal preference. When I'm sitting in the archive, it is usually the story about a person that grabs me most, causes me to read on, gets my mind spinning about meaning and causation. (Critics of *Alltagsgeschichte* might dismiss these stories as anecdotes. More on this, perhaps, later in our conversations?) But I'm looking at a court record and a

woman accused of treason is making the impassioned defence 'I am a patriotic Austrian!' The *Alltagshistorikerin* in me immediately pauses to ask a few questions: What did patriotism mean at this time? What did 'Austria' mean to this woman? Or to those accusing her? This brings up *Alltagsgeschichte's* second appeal for me: it allows for a way of reading that goes beyond fact-finding. Reading a document becomes a process of asking myriad questions of it.

How much do I 'believe' in this method? Several colleagues and I recently co-wrote an article about *Alltagsgeschichte* for an upcoming volume of the *Journal of Modern History*.<sup>3</sup> We tried, collectively, to define what it was. I found myself resisting the urge to trumpet the *Alltagsgeschichte* approach as the Next New (Old) Thing. Or the True Path. Or the Answer. There are limitations to working up, from small to large, from specific case study to more general explanation. In my current research I've run headlong into one big problem: What if the topic you are researching does not yield documents in which individual experiences come to light? What if there don't seem to be 'people' and their stories in the documents at all? How do you begin to investigate *Eigensinn* if you are looking at statistics, a train timetable or a list of imports and exports? I'll conclude by saying that an everyday life methodology works well when you are dealing with historical documents in which subjects speak from the 'I' subject position. Declarative statements are a gold mine!

Maria posed a second question on whether the politics of communist regimes make good terrain for *Alltagsgeschichte*. I don't work on communist regimes, but I'll offer an unqualified 'yes' to this question. In *Everyday Stalinism*, Sheila Fitzpatrick limited her investigation of the everyday to those 'everyday interactions that in some way involved the state'.<sup>4</sup> This emphasis on state is really useful. Communist and other authoritarian regimes care about the everyday lives of their citizens/subjects in ways that prove to be a boon for historians. These regimes keep records and produce documentation of the minutiae of neighbourhood life, family relations, relations among co-workers, conditions in shops, utterances in the school classroom and the like. To my mind, police and court records from strong state regimes have yielded the very best examples of *Alltagsgeschichte*. In addition to Fitzpatrick on the Soviet Union, German historians have effectively used police records for everyday life histories of Nazi Germany and the GDR. Thomas Lindenberger's volume on everyday life in the GDR would be a 'must read' for scholars wanting to 'try out' an *Alltagsgeschichte* methodology on their own particular communist regime.<sup>5</sup> While I have emphasised the richness of police state records, of course I'm not suggesting that these are transparent documents. Paying attention to how actors fashion themselves as subjects in any correspondence with 'the state' is part of the interpretive work. The ways that actors mimic back the language and rhetoric of a regime in their own autobiographical writings and declarations helps us understand the relationship between high politics and daily life. They 'meet' in language, I think.

### WENDY GOLDMAN (13 March 2008):

The particular term *Alltagsgeschichte* is not used consciously by historians of Russia and the Soviet Union, but the idea of investigating 'everyday life' has been a critical

part in the historiography of the last three decades. The commitment to investigating how people lived, and their thoughts, opinions, and actions in the daily sphere served in fact to revolutionise the field of Soviet history in the 1980s and 1990s. With the opening of the archives in the early 1990s, it has been possible for historians to get ever closer to workers, peasants, students, women, and other social groups. It has also been possible for historians to move beyond social class to investigate issues of individual mentalities, consciousness, and 'the Soviet self', as it has come to be known.

In Soviet history, the investigation of 'everyday life' has been connected to strong political fissures in the field. In the 1980s, historians (many inspired by the ideas of the 'New Left') began looking beyond the small group of well-known political leaders to investigate a variety of social groups. They discovered a world of chaos, political vacillation, and debate that did not accord with the notion of the state as an all-powerful, monolithic entity, which successfully controlled all forms of life. The debates that ensued in the United States, known by the shorthand term 'totalitarianism' versus 'revisionism', proved enormously productive for the field. A spate of studies on social groups and everyday life transformed our understanding of Soviet history. 'Everyday life', known in Russian/Soviet history simply as 'social history', had an enormous impact on our understandings of how people lived and thought, as well as how much 'control' the state was capable of exercising. My first book, *Women, the State and Revolution. Soviet Family Policy and Social Life*, serves as a good example of the challenge to an older model of purely political history.<sup>6</sup> Initially, I was interested in the revolutionary family and gender legislation of the 1920s. Once I began researching how the legislation actually affected women in the countryside and the cities, however, an entirely new picture emerged. I realised there was a powerful dialectic between women's responses (collective and individual) and state policy. This dialectic was a key component, not only of my own work, but also of numerous other studies that investigated social groups. The study of social life virtually exploded the concept of 'totalitarianism', or, in another sense, simply rendered it useless from a methodological perspective.

Interestingly, there has recently been a resurgence of the totalitarian thesis among younger historians. Perhaps this has been spurred by new evidence from the archives that shows the powerful hand of Stalin and the state. Perhaps the younger generation, lacking experience with social movements and cynical about their outcomes, has less interest in general in history from below. Yet other historiographical evidence suggests that the sharp dividing line between the revisionist and the totalitarian perspectives may be blurring. The opening of the archives has not only revealed new information about Stalin and the state, but has also enabled historians to investigate topics that were previously thought to exist only in the realm of speculation: private political opinions, strikes, resistance to collectivisation, personal behaviour and belief during the 'Great Terror', and the extent to which ordinary people accepted, rejected or reshaped the powerful categories and worldviews imposed by the state.

Maureen Healey writes (4 March 2008) that *Alltagsgeschichte* 'will not have as its subject a political party or a particular class', but I would say that in Soviet history, this sharp distinction does not exist. In fact, we have moved closer to 'everyday life' precisely through the investigation of particular classes and social groups.<sup>7</sup> Many historians in the Russian/Soviet field have taken as their jumping-off point a particular

group or class, and this has been a tremendously useful entry point for investigating people's daily lives and the conditions that affect them. The opening of the archives has also made it possible now to study the Communist Party at the local and regional levels. The view of everyday life within the Party, for example, in the factories, is very different from the more familiar narrative of high politics that has previously defined the Party's history, and no less important in terms of policy and its implementation.

Finally, I think that the history of ordinary people, their difficulties and triumphs, is all the more important in communist societies, where the state plays such a powerful role in politics, economics, cultural life, education, etc. In fact, I think it is impossible to understand state policy without understanding everyday life, and conversely, everyday life cannot be studied apart from the state. If one looks at the tumultuous history of Russia – the First World War, Revolution, Civil War, 1921 famine, collectivisation, industrialisation, mass repression, the Second World War, 1946 famine, de-Stalinisation, re-Stalinisation, privatisation and crisis – the stream of ordinary life was in fact inseparable from the bloody, tumultuous events that defined the twentieth century. In other words, there is no Russian 'of a certain age' whose life has not been marked by these events. 'Ordinary life'? This is what Russians often say they yearn for. 'What do you want?', I sometimes ask Russian friends or acquaintances in the ever-recurring discussion, 'Whither Russia?' And the answer is always the same: 'Just an ordinary, normal life', they say wistfully, 'just a normal life'.

### **RAYNA GAVRILOVA (13 March 2008):**

It is a pleasure being part of this discussion. As a representative of the cohort of historians in Central and Eastern Europe who experienced the social post-communist transformations during the last twenty years, I believe a short sketch of my research trajectory could be a good case. Allow me to begin with a declaration of identity: I conceive of myself as historical anthropologist, with one important clarification: I aspire to approach an understanding of the past through anthropological methods, i.e. by trying to interpret the intentionalities behind the documented behaviour of its inhabitants.<sup>8</sup>

Being formed as a historian in the orthodox Marxian methodology of structuralist materialism, early on I developed a keen interest in urban history, and this research immediately confronted me with questions that I was not prepared to address with my then methodological qualification: how to research a field consisting of multiple individual entities with a number of common features and distinctive identities; how to perform extrapolations in such a distant and poorly documented period (the Antiquity); and how to narrate change in a structural framework, were some of the difficult questions. Twenty-five years later I believe that precisely these preoccupations have been driving my investigations ever since: how to understand the individual embodiments of the historical phenomena and how to study history that goes beneath and beyond the unique historical event or personality.

The French *Annales* School offered the first insights, and this was the case for a vast number of scholars in the communist and post-communist countries. Due to some

historical circumstances the French intellectual tradition was perceived by the communist censorship as less threatening and therefore was more accessible, in many instances through its reception in some Soviet academic circles: scholars such as Mikhail Bakhtin, Roman Jakobson, Vladimir Propp and Aaron Gurevitch were translated and quite popular among historians and ethnologists.<sup>9</sup> The new history, the total history, the interdisciplinary history, the mass facts, the research on mentalities opened exciting new paths for research. Sadly, not many historians engaged in this approach: ethnologists, sociologists and linguists formed almost exclusively the new generation of scholars in this area in Bulgaria.

The research and writing of my Ph.D. thesis, 'Bulgarian Urban Culture in the Eighteenth and the Nineteenth Centuries', published under the same name by Susquehanna University Press in 1999, was when the history of everyday life, or rather the lack of it, drew my attention for the first time. My Fulbright fellowship in 1986–7 in the United States exposed me to the second major influence that shaped my research personality: American cultural anthropology.

During the early 1990s I started meticulously collecting evidence dispersed in dozens of diverse texts, some quite unusual for orthodox historiography: personal correspondence, diaries, folk songs, travelogues, late ethnographies, etc. At the same time, being acutely aware that the lack of tradition in this field in Bulgaria would put future historians in the same position I was in, together with my colleagues and students I started collecting oral narratives with a focus on everyday life. The first oral histories opened for me another important door: the gender aspect of history. The striking discovery was the incredible activeness, ingenuity and independence of women, recurring in interview after interview and of which official history was totally oblivious.

My first rather intuitive definition of everyday life that structured my 1995 book was descriptive. Unhappy with my methodological framework and conceptual instruments, I started reading into general theory and existing research. I would define my present understanding of the purpose of the historical study and the meaning of the everyday life as shaped by Max Weber, Agnes Heller, Marshall Sahlins, and Pierre Bourdieu. I have found inspiration in the works of Alf Lüdtke and Hans Medick and disagree with the critics who accuse them of neglecting political divisions and class differences.<sup>10</sup>

I happen to share the conviction that universal definitions are useless. Each researcher is bound to state and explain her/his definition at the outset of her/his research. Briefly, I might summarise my position as follows. One way of thinking of everyday life is through its negative definition: I would exclude from the structure of the everyday life history the political sphere and its material expressions, the creative activities of every kind, and the unique, unrepeatable events (natural, social, economic or biographical ones). In my understanding, the phenomena (practices and discourses) belonging to the sphere of everyday life are characterised by repetitiveness and collectiveness (meaning being reproduced in vast number of similar individual experiences). Everyday practices have special cognitive advantage when studying the past: their repetitiveness and collectiveness allow for extrapolations from the unique towards the common, the shared – an invaluable quality in a research field constituted

from highly fragmented empirical data. The everyday practices are an ideal field for doing historical anthropology and social history. Furthermore, everyday practices are relatively stable and fixed. They allow for significant individual variations within the group while retaining at the same time the established cultural patterns. The fixed character of everyday practices is a constant reaffirmation of the link of the individual to the collective (community or society).

I do believe that the study of everyday life offers a privileged point of view towards understanding change. Change doesn't happen automatically; it takes shape in multifarious manifestations and everyday life is an excellent platform – unlike microhistory, for instance, which places special emphasis on the unique. The anthropological framework of the everyday life allows for generalisations: as temporary and precarious as they might be, the advancement of the search is marked by consecutive adoption and rejection of interpretations.

### **KATE LEBOW (14 March 2008):**

For someone who grew up intellectually steeped in the 'new social history' written in the U.S. in the 1980s, *Alltagsgeschichte* seems very much part of a wider historiographical family. In its emphasis on the agency of ordinary people and on listening closely and critically to their words and actions, and in stressing the way in which power relations are reproduced and challenged in everyday exchanges, *Alltagsgeschichte* shares a basic set of concerns and methods with a variety of other forms of 'history from below'. So to begin with (and possibly to state the obvious), I think it's important not to exaggerate the distinctness of *Alltagsgeschichte* vis-à-vis the broader universe of social history as, for the most part, it is practised today.

Partly out of nostalgia and partly to test this assertion, I reread two books that had a huge impact on me in college: Christine Stansell's *City of Women*, on working women in antebellum New York, and Jacqueline Hall et al., *Like a Family*, based on oral histories conducted with Southern U.S. mill workers.<sup>11</sup> It was something of a shock to discover that my own intellectual concerns have evolved very little since that time (seemingly, I'm trying to rewrite these two books, but in the context of communist Poland). It was less of a surprise to see the basic consonance between the authors' approaches and that of *Alltagshistoriker* like Alf Lüdtke or Lutz Niethammer.

Both Stansell and Hall use the central spatial metaphor of a 'world' (or, in Stansell's case, a 'city') inhabited by their working-class subjects. These are worlds of meaning constructed by the inhabitants themselves; they map onto the physical spaces of the Southern mill town or New York City, but remain distinct from the authoritative geographies of mill owners, social reformers, working-class men, or middle-class women. Sometimes these 'worlds' constitute a reservoir from which people can draw strength and support; at other times, in brushing against – or colliding with – the 'official' world, they generate destabilising friction. This, for me, is what Lüdtke's *Eigensinn* is about. It's the notion that 'ordinary' people actively create these robust worlds of meaning (and a sense of themselves and where they stand) that can hold up against the rul-

ing discourses of a particular society. In this way, they provide individuals with what Maureen Healy nicely described (4 March 2008) as that crucial 'sliver of autonomy' in a world in which, otherwise, they have little power.

So much for what *Alltagsgeschichte* shares with other schools of 'history from below'. What makes it distinctive? At the most obvious level, *Alltagsgeschichte* is more theoretically articulated than much social history in the Anglo-American tradition, which can admittedly have its advantages. Like Maureen and Kathleen Canning and probably many others, I find the *Begriff* of *Eigensinn*, in particular, to be original and useful. Concretely, it's given me a way of thinking about the sorts of unruly behaviour that were rife in the city I study, the new town of Nowa Huta, Poland, in the Stalinist period. From drinking at work, to listening to the Voice of America, to pouring hot coffee on agitators, to punching out Party officials and beating up militia officers for sport, there was a spectrum of behaviours that, at one end, some historians would have no problem labelling 'resistance'.<sup>12</sup> I would rather, though, respect the ambiguity of such actions (ambiguity that, I suspect, many of the actors themselves intended) and call them an expression of *Eigensinn*. As Lüdtke has shown, unruly acts (he uses the example of 'rough-housing' by young male workers; the gaudy Sunday fashions of Stansell's working girls also spring to mind) can constitute the enactment of group identity and belonging.<sup>13</sup> This sense of belonging provides the crucial glue (solidarity) if and when members of the group decide to act collectively against the status quo (e.g., go on strike, launch a petition or protest in the streets). But it doesn't *have* to lead to opposition – a point Lüdtke makes when he argues that for some German soldiers, their identities *as workers* actually coloured their perception of the rightness of what they were doing on the Eastern Front.<sup>14</sup> So, more than either the overly vague idea of 'resistance' or the overly deterministic one of 'class consciousness', *Eigensinn* preserves historical contingency and ambiguity, and for me feels 'true' to the realities of Stalinist Poland. Ultimately, Nowa Huta's workers did erupt in protest against the system – and a richly layered set of local identities and associations gave this protest explosive power. But the path towards this outcome was anything but straightforward or foreordained.

Is *Alltagsgeschichte* well suited to the study of communist societies? I don't have much to add to Maureen's (4 March 2008) and Wendy Goldman's (13 March 2008) excellent responses here. So I'll conclude by addressing Maria's question about the place of *Alltagsgeschichte* in my 'field', which for the moment I'll define narrowly as the history of Polish communism. The idea of 'everydayness' is, by definition, ill suited to the narratives of national victimisation and/or heroic resistance that currently dominate much (though certainly not all) of the historiography on communism in Poland. By contrast, there is a vast amount of popular literature inside Poland itself that responds, evidently, to a hunger for this topic – a deep nostalgia always heavily tinged with irony. This includes, for instance, multi-volume compilations of ordinary people's letters, and anthologies of jokes; many of these quickly sold out their print runs. An exhibit in Warsaw a few years ago reproduced walk-in models of a Gomułka-era cinema, where movies of the time were being screened, and a milk bar, where one could order a snack. As David Crowley has pointed out, the name of the exhibit – 'Gray, in Colour' – evoked the apparent contradictions of everyday life in a dictatorship.<sup>15</sup> All

this suggests that there is much work for historians yet to do in the area, and that it is important work, too.

### **MARK PITTAWAY (14 March 2008):**

I came to the field of Central and Eastern European history to understand the processes that structured everyday life under state socialism in Central and Eastern Europe, and to grasp how socialist dictatorships were experienced. I was influenced by the rich tradition of working-class history developed in my native Britain since the 1960s, which placed questions of experience at the centre of their account. My real problem was that when I began to research in the early 1990s, the politically inspired meta-narratives that had sustained working-class history were exhausted, as a consequence of the end of state socialism across Europe and as a result of the retreat of left-wing ideas within the academy domestically. It was not only that, of course, but the whole Thompsonian paradigm was utterly inadequate to capture the nature of everyday experience under socialism. What was more, I accepted entirely the criticisms of history written under the influence of this approach that maintained it reified class, leaving no scope for the proper consideration of collective identities based on gender, race or ethnicity.

It was in this state of theoretical disorientation that I began digging through Budapest archives to write a Ph.D. thesis on the history of industrial workers in Hungary's early socialist years. After a while, lost in the archives, I began to realise that I was examining the dynamic relationship between a state that was deeply despotic, but less powerful than the literature had led me to believe, and a workforce that had real agency. As I went further I realised that the same literature contained an enormous amount about the 'state', but as a category it was rarely problematised. Beyond arguments that stressed the regime's seemingly remorseless search for power, its purposes went unexplained. Interrogating the role it conceived for industrial labour seemed to me to be a productive way forward.

It was during the search for literature that would help me conceptualise better my reflections on what I was seeing in the archive that I stumbled across Alf Lüdtké's essay, 'The Honour of Labour: Industrial Labour and the Power of Symbols under National Socialism'.<sup>16</sup> A response to a tired debate about how far German industrial workers had resisted Nazi rule, it argued that Hitler's regime had, to use Michael Burawoy's phrase, 'manufactured consent' on the country's shop floors. While I didn't find the empirical detail or the conclusion wholly convincing, the approach was. It stressed the role of the Nazi state in creating a system of symbols that touched established working-class mentalities to mobilise support and to generate consent. Lüdtké's essay showed me how to conceptualise the state from below, by demonstrating that its practices are a fundamental part of the culture of the everyday and that these practices can structure the space within which agency was exercised. It was also obvious that different state forms could structure the social field in very different ways, creating and interacting with varied sets of mentalities to influence agency. It is this culturalist conception of state practice and its implications that is *Alltagsgeschichte's* most original contribution to the writing of social history, and its most valuable one.

We still understand too little of the nature of the experience of Central and Eastern European citizens under state socialist rule, and we also know remarkably little about the nature of state action on an everyday level. This is where an application of approaches from *Alltagsgeschichte* can be most fruitful. While I applied its insights in writing histories of Hungarian factories, mines and construction sites, its usefulness is not merely restricted to the realm of labour. More recently I have been investigating the social history of the Austrian and Hungarian borderlands between 1938 and 1960. Examining the ways in which different states, engaged in dynamic processes of decomposition, collapse and reconstruction, classified, categorised and sought to manage borderland residents, in conjunction with the practices of the residents of the region themselves, demonstrates for me the broader validity of the fundamental insight.

The state and its nature is perhaps the most central question for writing the social history of socialism in the region. The state not only industrialised and collectivised and distributed (semi-successfully) food and consumer goods; it also sought at various times to remake the institution of the family, to invent a new nation, to transform the mentalities of its workers. Even at its least ambitious, after the mid-1970s, the Central and Eastern European state promised a bargain of sorts to its citizens: it demanded participation in the socialist labour force, in exchange for the means of subsistence, consumer goods, housing, and a whole range of public goods. To discharge its functions, the state was not reliant merely upon the coercive power of its police and security apparatus – as the literature suggested – but also required a sufficient degree of cooperation from enough of the ruled to function. The extent to which it could do this determined how easily its institutions could fulfil their goals on an everyday level. This was both influenced by, and influenced popular attitudes towards, the state and the regime. Opening up the whole question of the nature and operational capacity of the socialist state in this way is an area that really could transform our understanding of socialist regimes.

### **MARIA BUCUR (18 March 2008):**

The opening remarks and answers to my questions enable us to move into more contentious territory. I should start by stating that I do not presume you need to agree with the premise of my line of inquiry. The main question that I want to pose at this point is the following: Having traced the kinds of new and crucial elements of historical analysis opened up by *Alltagsgeschichte*, one has to wonder why this particular type of historiography has not seen more development in Eastern Europe and Russia in the past two decades? If the archives have been by and large more open than before 1989 and 1991 respectively, and if the kind of multidisciplinary and theoretical breath required for the research and writing of everyday life history is more widely practised in North America and Europe, why do you think this field has not seen greater flourishing to date?

A related question pertains to the critiques levelled against *Alltagsgeschichte* as moving in a direction that distorts power relations in non-democratic societies. How

would you respond to the criticism that the focus on everyday life and individuals without great sociopolitical influence, and the move away from the study of formal institutions, leaves historians unable to understand the extent to which the lives of average individuals are in fact shaped to a great extent by these larger institution-alised forces (especially in the non-democratic East), so that the relevance of everyday life history is at best minor, and at worst irrelevant for understanding the important forces moving these societies? I hope in your answer to this question you will focus in particular on gender topics.

I also hope that we can move in this discussion about inadequacies and lacunae to explore a more positive direction, focusing on possibilities ahead. In particular, what would be fruitful lines of research in the area of researching the gender of everyday life in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe? Where would you like to see a new crop of historians dig in? And how would the specific lines of research and writing you are willing to identify help reshape the historiography in our area?

### **WENDY GOLDMAN (7 April 2008):**

Maria asks us to consider why *Alltagsgeschichte* has not become more popular among historians now that the archives are open and it is possible to investigate many questions related to social life. It is difficult to explain why any particular field of history receives more or less attention at any given time, but there are several possibilities, which we might consider. First, I think that historical trends are loosely tied to the political concerns and experiences that historians have in the present. If historians, for example, are practising their craft at a time when there are powerful women's movements, Third World liberation struggles, strong working-class organisations, strikes, student movements, or other forms of collective protest, they tend to be interested in pursuing similar movements and moments of struggle in the past. In the 1960s and 1970s, such movements, to a certain degree, redirected historical research to explore a variety of liberating impulses from below. An interest in *Alltagsgeschichte* reflects an interest in social life, ordinary people, and daily struggles. Due to contemporary politics, the political interests that fuelled an alternative history 'from below' may have waned somewhat. Today, historians seem more interested in identity, nationality, ethnicity, globalisation, and transnational histories, which reflect in turn preoccupations of our contemporary world. Obviously, there is no one-to-one correspondence here, but rather, our historical concerns are generally or loosely viewed through a contemporary lens.

Second, in the Soviet case, the opening of the archives sent many historians back to 'high politics' in the hope that previously classified documents would reveal answers to big questions about individual leaders and the state. Historians were interested in high-level decisions about collectivisation, diplomacy and Stalinist repression, to name a few topics that received attention. They were also interested in hitherto hidden statistics, and avidly in search of 'smoking guns'. At the same time, however, important material has emerged on the subject of everyday life, including new work on the lives of soldiers in the Second World War, workers after the war, peasants, women

during the great industrialisation drive, prisoners, exiled kulaks in the special settlements, and other groups. The initial 'gold rush' in the newly opened archives may have been aimed at high politics, but I think the results of the overall 'mining operation' are mixed. Wonderful and exciting material on daily life and ordinary people is emerging.

Finally, I think women's history, as a set of historical studies loosely inspired by the heady moments of the women's liberation movements in the West, has now become a fully developed field. Women's history gave rise to gender history, which is less concerned with women's oppression than with how male and female identities are produced in any given time and place. And there are a few signs that gender history may now be giving way to an impulse to deconstruct the female identity entirely, challenge the idea that women have anything in common as women, and reject gender as a useful lens through which to explore human experience. The very freedoms won by the Western women's movement – legal abortion, equalisation of pay, freer sexuality, more equal gender roles at home and at work, greater career opportunities, child care, contraception – have been realised by a younger generation that has little experience of the humiliations, constricted lives, and narrowed opportunities of their mothers and grandmothers. Women's history as such perhaps holds less interest for them despite the fact that the vast majority of the world's women, today and in the past, never experienced these freedoms. At the same time, I am confident that women's historians in Eastern Europe, Russia, and other areas now have the tools to begin looking closely at the ways in which women's concerns (so often dismissed under state socialism as petty or 'a politics of the stomach') affected state decision making and the consolidation of state power.<sup>17</sup> I hope we will eventually reach a point when it is impossible to write good political history without incorporating women's history and the history of everyday life.

Maria asks whether a focus on everyday life can leave historians unable to understand the power of the state in shaping people's lives. In Soviet history it is simply impossible to research everyday life and ordinary people without being keenly aware of the role of the state and political cataclysm in shaping people's everyday lives. Three recent collections of interviews with Soviet women (Ransel, Fitzpatrick, and Engel/Posadskaya) as well as diaries (*Intimacy and Terror*) make this abundantly clear.<sup>18</sup> No Soviet citizen who lived through the great events of Soviet history – revolution, civil war, industrialisation, collectivisation, repression, and war – was somehow able to wall him- or herself off or to escape from these events. The characters in the novel *Doctor Zhivago* yearn to escape the great events of their time into 'private life' and love. Yet the point of the novel is their inability to escape either the deforming or liberating impact of politics. In the Soviet Union, there was no everyday life apart from politics. Just as it was impossible to live through the siege of Leningrad without being marked by this horrific event, it was impossible to be a citizen of the Soviet Union without being marked and shaped by its tumultuous history. Recent documentary collections of letters to authorities (Siegelbaum/Sokolov, Storella/Sokolov) show the degree to which peasants, workers, teachers, and others struggled with and participated in the great defining events of Soviet history.<sup>19</sup> There is no topic – food, family, sexuality, travel, consumption, production, living space, and child-rearing – that can be fruitfully stud-

ied apart from politics. What is perhaps a more interesting question is one that should be posed to narrowly political historians: can we chart or understand the actions of the Party and the state without a deep understanding of the responses, struggles, and conditions experienced by ordinary people? I would argue that a history of everyday life is essential to understanding the actions of the state. The decision to collectivise, for example, looks quite different in light of workers' food riots and protests in the cities in the late 1920s. Knowledge of these riots and protests makes it much more difficult to argue that the decision was undertaken out of a purely ideological predisposition against peasants. The daily situation in the labour camps in 1937–8, with its high death rate, enfeebled prisoners, deadly shortages, lack of clothing and footwear, epidemics, and overcrowding, makes it difficult to argue that repression was driven by the economic and productive contribution of the Gulag. And finally, it is impossible to understand the development of the Terror without knowing how local party members and organisations reacted to the Kirov murder.

I have always felt uncomfortable making suggestions about what topics historians should research, what would be most fruitful, or how to reshape historiography. People, as long as they have the freedom, will do what they do regardless of calls to do something different. Each generation is influenced by its collective experiences just as every individual is affected by their personal experiences. Our passions are shaped by a larger politics as well as by our personal preoccupations. Personally, the history I find most compelling is that which explores the dialectic between the actions of the state and the experiences of ordinary people. In Soviet history, these two contending points are in constant and transformative conflict. The work that interests me most explores this dialectic. As a teacher, I try to expose students to the ideas that I find most interesting, and as a researcher, I focus on that which I think has the greatest explanatory power.

### **MARK PITTAWAY (14 April 2008):**

We can certainly see the trends that Wendy identifies (14 April 2008), in relation to the links between historical research and the political climate in Central and Eastern Europe, and especially in Hungary. The period since 1989 has been a conservative one, which has been hostile to narratives of social emancipation in general. It has been dominated by the desire to create a free-market, consumerist democracy in which money and power are tightly intertwined, rather than one which is genuinely participatory. Popular mobilisation has been tied to the instrumentalisation of cultural struggles by political elites (those connected tightly to the two largest political parties). Emancipatory ideas have been sidelined, given the hegemony of a 'left'–'right' struggle, which is more accurately characterised as a conflict between neoliberal and conservative-nationalist visions of Hungary's future. For much of the 1990s whatever 'history from below' existed in Hungary concentrated on uncovering the histories of the middle classes, or of entrepreneurs during the late nineteenth century, in order to contribute to broader public debates about the conditions under which a possible *embourgeoisement* of Hungarian society could occur. While this has changed in the past

decade to a degree, during which a number of younger scholars have produced excellent work on the history of socialism, some inspired by *Alltagsgeschichte* approaches, the broad political and intellectual climate remains hostile. This intellectual-political climate has sharply gendered dimensions, partly to do with the heavily masculine nature of political, intellectual and academic culture. Furthermore, for the reasons the political scientist Joanna Goven has given, the circumstances of the collapse of state socialism created a markedly anti-feminist climate.<sup>20</sup> While the influence of broader pan-European trends has mitigated it, the anti-feminist climate of the 1990s has yet to be openly challenged. This is not to say that there is no good work being done by historians that investigates critically gender relations – just to say that this work is still relatively marginal within broader patterns of cultural and political debate.

The other connected problem is the nature of academic history, which remains dominated by traditional political and diplomatic history. I remember sitting in a Ph.D. defence in 2002 of a dissertation inspired by *Alltagsgeschichte* approaches. While the dissertation concerned passed, the chair of the committee described it in his introduction as a work of ‘social reportage’ (*szociográfia*), rather than – and this was the implication – a work of ‘reputable’ history. In this climate it is quite difficult for alternative approaches to the political history mainstream to flourish; given that the distribution of jobs and research moneys are heavily influenced by paternalistic relations in universities and research institutes, there is a considerable risk that established academic prejudices will simply be perpetuated.

Moving on to Maria’s second question, it should come as no surprise, given my earlier response (14 March 2008), that I reject the premise upon which it is based. To the extent that the central question for writing the history of state socialism is the nature and action of the state, the question does touch upon the central issue. However, it rests on a set of assumptions about the nature of the state, and the relative autonomy of social agents. These assumptions are ones that are basically normative, in that they assume that states with liberal democratic arrangements are necessarily ones in which social actors can exist in a depoliticised realm that one can term ‘everyday life’. On the other hand, in dictatorships, so the assumption goes, everyday life is subordinate to politics. There is much that is fundamentally wrong with these assumptions, not least, that even in democratic states like my native United Kingdom, power (both administrative and economic) shapes the contours of everyday life and restricts (and expands) the autonomy of social actors in a number of different ways. This was also true of socialist Hungary – but what is often missed in analyses of dictatorships is the ways in which the intervention of political power into the realm of everyday life revealed the limits of that power. What I’m really getting at here is rather than simply assuming that dictatorships and democracies are fundamentally different, we should instead set up the question of the difference (and the nature of that difference) as one which is worthy of empirical investigation. My own experience is that *Alltagsgeschichte* provides us with some indispensable theoretical and methodological tools for conducting this kind of investigation.

I think this is especially true of the question of the gendered exercise of power. An excessive focus on formal state power simply doesn’t give us the ability to grasp some of the ways in which gender worked under state socialism. Let me give an example. In

Hungary, during the first five-year plan, the Stalinist state sought to open highly paid, skilled industrial employment to women through affirmative action. During the early 1950s it showed real determination in pushing this agenda through. But, by 1953, it was clear that it had been largely frustrated, as waves of protective legislation, passed by the same state, were used at workplace level to demote women to lower-paying jobs (not necessarily those that were least physically strenuous, or the most healthy). If we concentrate on the realm of formal power, then there is nothing we can see that explains this shift. The state never abandoned its commitment to gender equality in the workplace, and protective legislation was always – formally – in operation, even when the state was at its most radical. It seems the only thing that really explains this shift is the way in which the diffused operation of gendered power in workplaces interacted with established class and occupational identities to shape the contours of everyday power relations in Hungarian industry. The state was present in this process, but not as a monolithic actor, and so were others – managers, male skilled workers, women workers themselves, and foremen – all of whom appropriated and deployed different gendered discourses to frustrate (and resist the frustration) of the drive for gender equality in the socialist industrial enterprise.

The third question is the hardest to answer, because like Wendy I'm not sure that I believe that historical research is always best stimulated through the programmatic visions of individual scholars. This isn't because I'm short on suggestions as to what might be done – quite the reverse; the task seems so enormous, and, relatively speaking, so little has been done, that almost anything that sought to critically interpret aspects of the recent history of Central and Eastern Europe through a gendered lens would be an advance. I think I would like to reformulate the question, and ask others about what it would take to make gendered approaches absolutely central to historical writing on the Central and Eastern European region. There is very clearly a link between present concerns and the topics that are chosen by historians, and the reception they receive. What might we do to ensure that debate about gender becomes more central than it is at the moment? Under what circumstances do we think this could occur?

### **KATE LEBOW (15 April 2008):**

In addition to the reasons offered by Wendy (7 April 2008) and Mark (14 April 2008) for *Alltagsgeschichte's* relatively weak showing in Eastern Europe, I'd add nationalism. Certainly this has been a factor in Poland. For years, a national paradigm, the Hegelian view of nations as the prime movers of history, provided Polish historians with the only real alternative to so-called historical materialism: conveniently, it was a paradigm that could be used, depending on one's choice of subject matter, either within the framework of officially acceptable scholarship or outside of it, as a vehicle for either upholding or challenging the system according to one's inclination. The Hegelian paradigm, of course, is deeply antithetical to *Alltagsgeschichte* (and vice versa); when the analytic lens is focused on collectivities rather than individuals, it's difficult, if not impossible, to speak of the 'everyday' in meaningful ways.

Following the collapse of communism, many Polish historians who rejected nationalism as a political ideology nonetheless kept the nation at the centre of historical inquiry. For several years, the dominant framework for scholarship based on new archival sources was, as the title of one book simply put it, the hostile relationship between 'power' (*władza*) and 'society' (*społeczeństwo*). Here, 'power' was defined as something external to society ('them', as Teresa Torańska's study of Stalinist functionaries was evocatively titled), while the modifier 'Polish' before 'society' was always implicitly understood as the 'us' in question.<sup>21</sup> This meant that historians working with revelatory new material initially tended to use it in ways that, from the standpoint of *Alltagsgeschichte*, neglected many of the fascinating questions it begged. With implacable hostility between society and power simply assumed, these archival excavations often seemed mere cataloguing exercises, intent on documenting alternatively the various 'mechanisms of power' or the range of ways in which 'society' expressed its innate resistance to authority. Of course, one could argue that East Europeans had been deprived so long of truthful information about themselves and their societies that a period of setting the record straight, of filling in the 'white stains', was called for. But as the creation of the Institute for National Remembrance, a.k.a. the Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation, demonstrates, this was in fact rarely a neutral exercise, but one aimed at supporting a particular narrative of national martyrdom and/or heroism.

Almost twenty years since the first free elections in Poland, though, the Hegelian paradigm seems to be showing signs of wear and tear. No doubt this is at least in part a reaction to right-wing extremism; while, as both Wendy and Mark have indicated, the reasons for historiographical shifts are often overdetermined, we could tick off a number of important recent episodes bearing upon how Poles think about the last century, including the Jedwabne debate; troubling revelations associated with the lustration campaign; and, more broadly, the Kaczyński camp's hyper-nationalist and crudely political approach to history, which recently led, for example, to investigating whether Jan Gross should be criminally charged with 'insulting the nation' in his book on post-Second World War anti-Semitism.

In short, a number of respected historians of the communist period in Poland today will assert that the boundary between 'power' and 'society' was never absolute, and that each had a role in constituting the other.<sup>22</sup> For this reason – and given the resonance, as I said earlier, of such a position for vernacular understandings of the communist past – I think there is a promising space for the growth of *Alltagsgeschichte* in Poland.

Question two: Like Wendy (7 April 2008) and Mark (14 April 2008), I don't see how the history of everyday life can possibly be understood in isolation from the realm of high politics, or vice versa. But I would add that there is 'everydayness' even to exceptional events of the sort often studied by political historians. Solidarity activists, for example, in addition to debating lists of demands and speaking to the press, going on strike or hiding out from the authorities, typed, ran off mimeos, ate, slept, shopped and fell in love. Far from being incidental or frivolous subjects, these matters bear intimately on how a movement like Solidarity reproduced itself and on the forms its activism took. It's no coincidence, then, that some of the best recent work on Solidar-

ity has put women and/or gender at the forefront – precisely because a gendered lens here offers access to fundamental questions about why, when and how the ordinary becomes extraordinary.<sup>23</sup>

Just as gender can open up new perspectives on the formation and contours of opposition movements, it can also illuminate the reproduction and/or erosion of state power (indeed, helping to define, as Mark says, what ‘the state’ actually is). I’m waiting for a study of low-level Party wives, girlfriends, and secretaries: their stories, I suspect, would reveal much about the culture of power – about a social universe, facilitated by women, in which functionaries’ social and political capital was accumulated and maintained. Likewise, the nexus of gender, consumption, and socialism seems a natural subject for study, including the role of women in the second economy.

Exploring gender and everyday life under socialism can make another important contribution to our field: it can provide a bridge between the historiography of Europe’s two ‘halves’, East and West. Throughout Europe, family structures, generational relations, and gender roles changed dramatically after the Second World War. Europeans moved en masse from villages to towns, and new forms of domesticity displaced older ones. Visions of modernity based on consumption and personal choice were linked to expectations of ever-improving standards of living and widening social mobility, regardless of the political system in question. Women’s and gender history lie at the heart of these broad secular changes, and can help us understand similarities as well as differences in Europeans’ experiences of postwar modernity.

### **RAYNA GAVRILOVA (16 April 2008):**

Maria’s first question (18 March 2008) or rather statement about the relative position and appeal of the *Alltagsgeschichte* in post-communist countries leads us into the vast discussion about the factors that shape the historiographical landscape in specific national or regional contexts. I am tempted to offer a few general statements, and from Kate’s (15 April 2008), Wendy’s (7 April 2008) and Mark’s (14 April 2008) comments I see that we have more or less the same picture.

The traditional academic bodies in Eastern European countries are extremely conservative institutions; curricula change very slowly and creative energy seems to be concentrated in fields such as economics, administration, European studies, etc. The established Departments of History and the research institutes, which educate professional historians and host almost one hundred percent of the doctoral students, teach and encourage the practising of more traditional kinds of history writing.

In all post-communist countries there exists already a certain tradition and accumulation of texts and archives related to everyday life history, most of them in local languages and obscure journals or *Festschriften*. However, there are exceptions. In each country there are a few interesting book-length researches;<sup>24</sup> foreign researchers (such as the participants in this discussion, as well as Sheila Fitzpatrick and Susan E. Reid) have contributed enormously to focus the interest.<sup>25</sup> The number of local practitioners is relatively small and in most countries they know each other, often personally, and still do not represent a scholarly community in the sense of established formats of

communication, exchange, peer discussions. For instance, I do know personally the three or four persons in Bulgaria who are interested in gender and oral history, but none of them from the *Alltagsgeschichte* perspective. What is lacking, then, is precisely the methodological reflection. Lately, it seems that increased interest among amateur historians has developed – writers, journalists, artists who clearly belong to the next generation, for whom the memories of socialism are more of a childhood curiosity.

To sum it up, in most post-communist countries gravity centres attracting and forming future researchers do not exist. Inclusion of young researchers and doctoral students in wider networks both national and international could encourage, in my opinion, faster growth in a field of great potential.

I couldn't disagree more with this kind of criticism, as posed in the third question, and do believe that the methodological opposition macro–micro history (to simplify the argument) is epistemologically false, as is the entrenched defence of the Cartesian paradigm.<sup>26</sup> Everyday history 'facts' cannot be isolated from the broader historical framework within which they are meaningful. The historical meta-narratives, on the other hand, are necessary tools for investigation as long as they do not become the canon (so familiar to all East European scholars). And third, and most important, it is time to build more arguments that power structures, institutions and ideologies of the past did not operate as matrices, moulding the behaviour of the classes or social groups. Human agency produced myriads of versions of the dominant patterns or effects of the 'institutionalised forces' throughout history and here I see the major potential contribution of the 'minor' field of *Alltagsgeschichte*. Social history with no interest in individual embodiments produces neat pictures of mechanisms but quite often offers little explanation of how it was possible for human beings to exist and even smile within the cage of the structures. History without understanding in the sense of *Verstehen* holds for me personally very little attraction.

Within this perspective gender history acquires special interest: the sphere of everyday life has always been ordered by dominant social divisions, power configurations (both public and private) and cultural patterns. Nevertheless, the main business of everyday life – the business of coping – was shouldered by both sexes and, I am tempted to say, predominantly by women. In this area they were the active, creative agent, entrusted with the invention of survival strategies. I have in mind the half century of communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, of course, but this perspective doesn't seem unique, just more extreme against the background of the age of affluence in the West, where survival and adaptation strategies became much less important.

I already mentioned above that I strongly believe in the need for anthropologisation of history: not so much in adopting universally the micro history or everyday life approach, but in the wonderful wave of self-reflection regarding explicit or hidden assumptions. *Alltagsgeschichte* is an extremely promising approach for studying the operation of institutions, practices and ideologies not only as social technology, but also in their actual impact, appropriation, and subversion. The accumulated archives of oral histories, memoirs, mundane documents, artefacts and other remnants of the past, discarded by traditional historiography, could become first-hand evidence; the repetitiveness, unoriginality, seriality of these sources would become their main value.

A well-equipped everyday life historian should possess the skills of an archaeologist, the categories of a psychologist and the scholarly honesty of a decent historian.

### MAUREEN HEALY (17 April 2008):

Here I'd like to qualify Maria's claim (18 March 2008) that interest in *Alltagsgeschichte* has been lacking, if we are going to include East Germany in the realm of 'Eastern Europe and Russia'. This might seem like a quibbling point, but I don't mean it as such. If there is any place that *Alltagsgeschichte* has been thriving in the past decade, it is in GDR history.<sup>27</sup> Of course, the German case is specific because one historiography (East) has been nearly completely subsumed by another (West) in ways that don't apply to the other countries in Eastern Europe. The pattern of the 'foreign' researcher (à la Fitzpatrick) bringing the theory/method in from abroad is blurry in the inter-German case. But I'd say that the lively *Alltagsgeschichte* of the GDR speaks directly to Maria's second query about the distortion of power relations in non-democratic societies.

Does 'the move away from the study of formal institutions leave historians unable to understand the extent to which the lives of average individuals are in fact shaped to a great extent by these larger institutionalised forces ...?' This question assumes that 'institutional forces' operate outside/beyond human agency. But there is always a human face on an institution, some guy (or gal) sitting at a desk, or standing in line, making decisions. An *Alltagsgeschichte* of a communist society (or any society) looks at the small moments in the day when these decisions reinforce or challenge institutional norms. To answer the critics whose voices Maria has raised: I simply don't believe that one can get a true or convincing understanding of how institutions operate without looking at the operators. Perhaps the Stasi records bear this out even more obviously than records of other institutions, but such institutions are always composites of individual actors. Václav Havel comes to mind when considering this question of everyday life versus institutional forces. In 'Power of the Powerless' he recognised the everydayness of the institutional, showing how the mundane actions of the greengrocer could reinforce or subvert the 'larger forces' that seem to govern his life.<sup>28</sup>

Or her life? How does gender fit in here? I'm quite taken by Rayna's term for everyday life – 'the business of coping' (16 April 2008). I'd like to see a new crop of historians dig into research on 'a history of coping'. Coping, an umbrella term and a multi-layered field of activity, is a promising place for investigating gender in Eastern and Southeastern Europe. Coping involves exchange/negotiation among individual women and men, children, neighbours, workplace hierarchies, party. Even trade and foreign policy come to bear.

For the third question: As a U.S. researcher whose primary academic contacts are in Austria and Germany, I don't have the same kind of knowledge of the institutional lay of the land in Eastern European departments and universities you all have spoken to. So I will pose a more general question: In order to identify why gender and everyday life have not taken firm hold as fields for historical study in Eastern Europe, perhaps we ought to clarify which fields *are* the most attractive for young scholars there and why. Nation and nationalism have already been mentioned. What are the

other topics and themes one would expect to find in a current history or anthropology dissertation from Poland, Hungary, Russia? If not gender theory, which discourses are popping up in the Eastern European footnotes of 2008? Which theories would a graduate or post-doc be required to 'contend with'?

### **MARIA BUCUR (23 April 2008):**

I want to thank all of you for the extremely thoughtful and nuanced responses to the questions I asked you to consider. I have learned a great deal in the process, and I would like to offer some concluding remarks aimed at summarising some of the points made here, as well as offer my own considerations on some of these topics. This is by no means the 'final word' on the topic of *Alltagsgeschichte*, but rather the arbitrary end point in this particular conversation, which I very much hope will continue as all of you continue to engage with sources, students, and colleagues, and as readers of *Aspasia* have a chance to consider this dialogue as well.

As I had expected, and as Rayna remarked (13 March 2008), 'universal definitions are useless'. Another way of saying this is that, while each participant offered a personally inflected, but scholarly founded, definition of the term *Alltagsgeschichte*, the juxtaposition of the five answers suggests both commonalities and also differences, reinforcing the scholarly usefulness of this term, as well as its richness. While for some 'everyday life' is about the personal and individual in the larger social landscape, for others it is about the quotidian practices that are 'relatively stable and fixed'. These are not necessarily contradictions, but rather two sides of the same coin.

All interlocutors point also towards the impact of social history, and some towards cultural anthropology, as a significant source of influence for the development of *Alltagsgeschichte* and in terms of their own interest in this approach. But here we also have some differences that pertain to generation and larger scholarly (and also political) context. While for some the politics of the New Left in the 1980s seems to be an important factor in the turn towards everyday life, for the generation that came of age (as historians) in the 1990s *Alltagsgeschichte* was part of a larger post-Foucauldian and post-Thompsonian moment that blended an interest in social history with an understanding of the variegated ways in which categories such as 'class' or 'gender' work in culturally specific ways. Finally, Rayna (13 March 2008) and Mark (14 March 2008) remind us both that Marxism (and thus the Old/New Left connected to it) has drastically different meanings in the scholarship of Eastern Europe produced inside that area, vis-à-vis Western Europe or the U.S. Mark's description of his inability to use theoretical frameworks employed by Thompsonian Marxists to understand history from below is an important reminder of the power of context in shaping theory and the need to always keep one foot in the empirical, even as we try to theorise what 'everyday life' means in a more sophisticated manner.

In tracing their view of the usefulness of *Alltagsgeschichte* for understanding the communist period, all authors responded with an enthusiastic 'yes', offering various explanations for how this approach might better enable historians to understand the

'everydayness' of authoritarian politics, mechanisms of coping, surviving and resistance. To the notion that such a perspective would obscure institutionalised forms of disempowerment/control, the interlocutors responded with a nuanced deconstruction of the premise of such a critique. If one does take the concept of 'everyday life' history seriously, then to analyse state institutions is in fact to engage with the ways in which these institutions are meaningful in so far as they are inhabited by the people who enforce and negotiate their positions of power, as well as the population with whom they engaged as 'recipients' of such policies. *Alltagsgeschichte* blurs a convenient polarisation of power relations and forces us to think about authoritarian politics as human practices and not as mere fixed institutions.

And as they considered the limited development of *Alltagsgeschichte* as a field of historical research in the post-communist era, the five scholars described varied elements that might have had an impact in this direction. To ask about an absence is, in fact, to engage in a kind of counterfactual reconstruction of causes and effects that might not be the best historical practice. But the interlocutors graciously indulged me by offering thoughtful considerations. Wendy (7 April 2008) returned to the observation that 'historical trends are loosely tied to the political concerns and experiences that historians have in the present', pointing out that history 'from below' might not be as closely connected to how political concerns are framed today, and reminding us that women's history is not as ardent a topic in the period of third-wave feminism. Mark (14 April 2008) refines this point for the Hungarian context to identify interest in history 'from below' there in the 1990s as the history of the middle classes – part and parcel of the current political concerns for visions of *embourgeoisement* for the future. Kate (15 April 2008) added the element of nationalism in politics and scholarship as an important limiting factor in opening up a non-Hegelian paradigm for understanding the past lives of individuals, rather than collectivities thought to be 'organic'. And Rayna (16 April 2008) reminded us of the additional curricular conservatism of post-communist history training. In this regard, the GDR, as Maureen states (17 April 2008), stands in contrast to the rest of the area. The GDR, as she suspects and I agree, became a historical field of research for a state that had been quickly swallowed up inside another state, and where problems identified by Mark, Kate, and Rayna simply ceased to exist by the early 1990s.

What is to be done? Getting involved with colleagues in the post-communist countries in framing individual courses along a more cross-disciplinary approach, and agreeing to sit on Ph.D. committees for young scholars who have an interest in *Alltagsgeschichte* is a simple first step of changing some of the curricula and introducing future generations to this approach. Organising workshops, conferences, and research groups that bring together anthropologists, historians, and ethnographers, the practitioners of 'everyday life' history from different vantage points, is also a great venue for facilitating greater multidisciplinary. To offer just one upcoming example, together with a colleague in Anthropology, Sarah Phillips, who focuses on Ukraine, I will be organising next year a seminar on 'gender and citizenship in the post Cold War world', which will bring together scholars in history, anthropology, sociology, political science, literary studies, and law from the U.S. and post-communist Europe to consider

together across our disciplines the important legacies of the Cold War for understanding how citizenship has to be understood in gendered ways, and how gender identities have been shaped by changing notions and practices of citizenship. From my point of view, *Alltagsgeschichte* is a central component of understanding these legacies, as we are interested primarily in 'lived' citizenship, at the grassroots and individual level, rather than in any institutionalised sense. And we very much hope that our interlocutors from – and those working on – Poland, Ukraine, Hungary, Russia and Romania will take the insights offered in our discussions into their own approach to understanding the past of these societies.

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## ◆ Notes

1. See especially Alf Lüdtke, ed., *The History of Everyday Life. Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, trans. William Templer, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989.
2. Kathleen Canning, *Gender History in Practice: Historical Perspectives on Bodies, Class and Citizenship*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006, 105.
3. Paul Steege, Andrew Stuart Bergerson, Maureen Healy and Pamela Swett, 'The History of Everyday Life: A Second Chapter', *Journal of Modern History* vol. 80 (June 2008), forthcoming.
4. Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times. Soviet Russia in the 1930's*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, 3.
5. Thomas Lindenberger, ed., *Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur: Studien zur Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR* (Rule and resistance under dictatorship: studies in the social history of the GDR), Cologne: Böhlau, 1999.
6. Wendy Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution. Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917–1936*, New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
7. See for example, Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants. Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994; Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels Under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996; Donald Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Late Stalinism: Labour and the Restoration of the Stalinist System after World War II*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002; Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain. Stalinism as a Civilization*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997; Diane Koenker, *Republic of Labor: Russian Printers and Soviet Socialism, 1918–1930*, Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2005; Jeffrey Rossman, *Worker Resistance under Stalin: Class and Revolution on the Shop Floor*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005; Elizabeth Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997; Beatrice Farnsworth and Lynne Viola, eds., *Russian Peasant Women*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
8. Most practitioners of historical anthropology would profess the inverse interest: attempting to understand the present through the study of history.
9. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, Bloomington, IN: Midland-Indiana University Press, 1984; Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1968; Roman Jakobson, *The Framework of Language*, Michigan: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1980; Aaron Gurevich, *Historical Anthropology of the Middle Ages*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
10. Hans Medick, "'Missionaries in the Rowboat'? Ethnological Ways of Knowing as a Challenge to Social History', in *The History of Everyday Life*, ed. Lüdtke, 41–71.
11. Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789–1860*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1986; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall et al., eds., *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987.
12. For example, I feel that some of the essays in Lynne Viola's *Contending with Stalinism: Soviet Power and Popular Resistance in the 1930s*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002, exemplify an insufficiently rigorous definition of 'resistance'. Interestingly, Viola also uses the metaphor of alternate 'worlds' in her introduction, to excellent effect, evoking 'an entire world within the Stalinist dictatorship, a semi-autonomous world of many layers, cultures, and languages of existence, experience, and survival that coexisted with, evolved within, interacted with, and at times bypassed the larger and seemingly omnipresent reality of Stalinism'.
13. Alf Lüdtke, 'Organizational Order or Eigensinn? Workers' Privacy and Workers' Politics in Imperial Germany', in *Rites of Power: Symbolism, Ritual, and Politics since the Middle Ages*, ed. Sean Wilentz, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, 303–333.

14. Alf Lüdtke, 'The Appeal of Exterminating "Others": German Workers and the Limits of Resistance', *Journal of Modern History* vol. 64, suppl. (1992): S46–S67.

15. David Crowley, *Warsaw*, London: Reaktion Books, 2003.

16. Alf Lüdtke, 'The Honour of Labour: Industrial Labour and the Power of Symbols under National Socialism', in *Nazism and German Society*, ed. David F. Crew, London: Routledge, 1994, 67–109.

17. Christina Kiaer and Eric Naiman, eds., *Everyday Life in Early Soviet Russia. Taking the Revolution Inside*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005; Wendy Goldman, *Women at the Gates. Gender and Industry in Stalin's Russia*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002; Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic. Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006, all look closely at the impact of gender and everyday life on high politics and state policies.

18. David Ransel, *Village Mothers: Three Generations of Change in Russia and Tataria*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000; Barbara Engel and Anastasia Posadskaya, *A Revolution of their Own. Voices of Women in Soviet History*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998; Veronique Garros, Thomas Lahusen and Natalia Korenevskaya, eds., *Intimacy and Terror: Soviet Diaries of the 1930s*, New York: New Press, 1997; Alexey Vingradov and Albert Pleyzier, *The Women of Izmaelovka: A Soviet Union Collective Farm in Siberia*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007; Sheila Fitzpatrick and Yuri Slezkine, eds., *In the Shadow of Revolution: Life Stories of Russian Women from 1917 to the Second World War*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000; Joachen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.

19. Lewis Siegelbaum and Andrei Sokolov, eds., *Stalinism as a Way of Life. A Documentary Narrative*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000; Carmine Storella and Andrei Sokolov, eds., *Voice of the People*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, forthcoming.

20. Joanna Goven, 'The Gendered Foundations of Hungarian Socialism: State, Society and the Anti-Politics of Anti-Feminism, 1948–1990', Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, Berkeley, 1993.

21. Teresa Toranska, *Them: Stalin's Polish Puppets*, New York: Harper & Row, 1987.

22. See, for instance, Błażej Brzostek, *Robotnicy Warszawy. Konflikty codzienne (1950–1954)* (Workers of Warsaw: Everyday conflicts [1950–1954]), Warsaw: Wydawnictwo TRIO, 2002, 182–183.

23. Kristi Long, *We All Fought for Freedom: Women in Poland's Solidarity*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996; Padraic Kenney, 'The Gender of Resistance in Communist Poland', *American Historical Review* vol. 104, no. 2 (April 1999): 399–425.

24. See, for instance, Paul Miclau, *Roumains déracinés. La vie quotidienne dans la Roumanie de Nicolas Ceaucescu* (Uprooted Romanians. Everyday life in Nicolae Ceaușescu's Romania), Paris: Publisud, 1995; Ion Bulei, *Viața cotidiană în timpul lui Carol I* (Everyday life during Carol I's time), Bucharest: Editura Tritonic, Colecția Biblioteca de Istorie, 2004.

25. Susan E. Reid, 'Khrushchev's Children's Paradise: The Pioneer Palace, Moscow, 1958–1962', in *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*, eds. David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, New York: Berg, 2002, 141–179.

26. Jürgen Kocka, 'Geschichte als Aufklärung?' (History as enlightenment?) *Frankfurter Rundschau* (Frankfurt review) (4 January 1988).

27. See Sandrine Kott's review essay, 'Everyday Communism: New Social History of the German Democratic Republic', *Contemporary European History* vol. 13, no. 2 (2004): 233–247; also conference proceedings of Lewis Siegelbaum, 'Historicising Everyday Life Under Communism: The USSR and the GDR, Potsdam 8–10 June 2000', *Social History* vol. 26, no. 1 (2001): 72–79.

28. Václav Havel et al., *The Power of the Powerless. Citizens against the State in Central-Eastern Europe*, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1985.