Roman Adrian Cybriwsky. **Kyiv, Ukraine: The City of Domes and Demons from the Collapse of Socialism to the Mass Uprising of 2013-2014**. Amsterdam University Press, 2014.

Review by Adrian Ivakhiv (University of Vermont)

In the first-person ethnographic style of Roman Cybriwsky's writing, I begin this review of *Kyiv, Ukraine* with a confession: this is the book I have wanted to write for over 25 years, since first spending a year in Kyiv (Kiev) in 1989-90 and then on repeated visits since. I have been alternately fascinated, heartened, and alarmed at the changes the city has undergone in its transformation from being capital of the second largest Soviet Socialist Republic to what is now a culturally vibrant, politically somewhat conflicted, and probably emblematic "postsocialist" city.

Urban geographer Roman Cybriwsky's study of the city mixes exhaustively detailed scholarship with an "eyewitness" feel for its daily life and ongoing transformations. Cybriwsky, whose previous work has included detailed studies of Tokyo and Philadelphia, is an observer who doesn't hesitate to participate in the things he witnesses. He follows people around, counts the Bentleys and Lamborghinis on his street and the numbers of security guards in near empty shopping malls, and engages with passersby, travelers and peddlers at the train station, street vendors, taxi drivers, security officials, and anyone else with a story to tell. Reporting on these through a tone that mixes fascination, perplexity, compassion, wistfulness, and a kind of creeping, understated outrage at the vague sense that something is wrong here, the book is rich with lively and poignant vignettes illustrating the paradoxes and ironies of postsocialist life.

Its recurring message is the indirectly argued point that Kyiv, perhaps more than any other city, exemplifies the shift that has divided much of the world into two classes with radically divergent trajectories. Following an "ethnography," as he calls it, of "Men in Black"—the security guards who police the boundary of the invisible but everpresent exclusion zone

(though I would call it an outsider's phenomenology, rather than an ethnography, since there is not much attempt at entering their perceptual world)—Cybriwsky writes:

> "in Kyiv (and elsewhere in our unequal world), we have two planes of existence in the urban landscape, the exclusive world and everyone else. They exist side by side but do not interact. We can look, but not too hard or for too long, while the privileged insiders never, ever see us. For them, the looking is done by Men in Black. They are experts at Face Control, and it is their job to distinguish between VIPs and hoi polloi, and to get it right" (p. 200).

The perception is no doubt correct, but the "and elsewhere in our unequal world" underlines how vague the insight necessarily remains. Kyiv is a divided city—not divided along the old, segregated, modernist urban model, but in the postmodern, neoliberal style of surveillance and exclusion zones, speculative real estate redevelopment schemes, corrupt lines of power connecting business interests and local officials, and a wealth gap of stunning proportions. But is it more so than other cities, and if so, what makes it that? It isn't clear. And while much of the book puts the argument into stark outline, a late section on the growing middle-class throws a wrench into it.

Much has been written about the larger issues framing Ukraine's development as an "unexpected nation" (Wilson 2000), the cultural and political divides that continue to mark it, and its shadowy class of post-Communist oligarchs. But little has been written that extensively analyzes the urban landscape of Kyiv as an actor within it all. That is what *Kyiv, Ukraine* does, piece by piece as in a grand mosaic. With chapters examining the historical center, the new suburbs, links to the Soviet past and to other (and painful) historical legacies, geographies of privilege and of exclusion, gender and sex tourism, and a growing green and urban preservation movement (the most heartening chapter, to my mind), the book covers its terrain with rich and exhaustive detail.

Other scholars might be frustrated that there isn't more critical theorization of the city's ills or of the very difficulty of diagnosing them. Surmising at one point that he was visited by an agent (of some kind) who was interested in finding out what his book might unveil about persons in power, Cybriwsky concludes: "Police? SBU [secret service]? Maybe, maybe not."

On the propaganda of ex-President Yanukovych's Party of Regions that their opposition is "fascist," Cybriwsky acknowledges that

> "again and again I have heard creepy people and disgusting words from those who attend Svoboda rallies [the Svoboda party was third in size of the opposition parties at the time of his writing]. Maybe they are plants, maybe they are not, and maybe Svoboda itself is a plant in order to discredit the opposition." [Each of these interpretations has its credible defenders.]

Elsewhere he writes, "We already know not to expect definitive answers in Kyiv because much is simply murky, and that with some topics it is better to not ask and even better to not know" (284). The author is far from alone in noting this ambivalent mixture where anything is possible and nothing is certain: as another scholar has put it, post-Soviet Ukraine has been a country of "movement without change, change without movement" (Dyczok 2000). In one of Cybriwsky's favorite graffito-sourced refrains, Ukraine is "excruciatingly far from heaven" (123). The virtue of Cybriwsky's book is that it puts these vague assertions into an ethnographic context that makes their meaning palpable, even if it fails to clarify where exactly it fits into larger global patterns of urban change and political-economic transformation.

Most of the book was written before the Maidan revolution of 2013-14, so ex-President Yanukovych and his Party of Regions loom large in the machinations that shape the city. A brief afterward updates enough of the details to give hope that Kyiv is changing for the better. Remarkably, his week-long visit in March, 2014, reveals only one vehicle in the category of "Bentleys, Rolls Royces, Lamborghinis, Ferraris, and other extra expensive cars"—where once these had been overwhelmingly evident not just on the streets (parked or speeding, sometimes the wrong way) but on the sidewalks. His sources tell him that "the rich cars have left the country, probably to Russia, along with 'the crooks who own them'." In the retrospect of nearly two years since that moment, this may have been an overhasty, and overhopeful, conclusion.

For anyone interested in the ironies marking post-Soviet Ukraine and the postsocialist world more generally, the book is an important addition to the literature. For those who

know the paradoxes shaping the city and the country for which it serves as capital, this 350-page book is by turns fascinating, horrifying (if not surprising), and immensely rewarding. It is also a labor of love by a perceptive urban explorer, whose knowledge of the city's two languages (Ukrainian and Russian) and its history makes him a wonderful guide to its richness and its meaning, its (historical) "domes" and its (political-economic) "demons." It is highly recommended.

Works cited

Dyczok, M. (2000). *Ukraine: Movement Without Change, Change Without Movement.* Routledge.

Wilson, A. 2000. *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation.* Yale University Press.