

about the Ukrainian “ethno-chaos” group DakhaBrakha, is the least engaging chapter, as it offers very thin and monologic textual and cultural interpretations, without giving much attention to the ethnographic multiplicity of local meanings that are otherwise so well elucidated in previous chapters.

Nevertheless, the book as a whole makes an important contribution to the contemporary ethnomusicological scholarship, and it does so in many senses: ethnographically, theoretically, topically. Moreover, it provides a compelling examination of the current Ukrainian cultural and political situation, as well as the related questions of nationalism, patriotism, imperialism, and the role of minority and marginalized groups in the shaping of the future Ukrainian sovereignty. The only issue that could further solidify Sonevtsky’s main arguments in the book would be a discussion of other important Ukrainian minorities and their music and cultural expressions (e.g., Russian ethnic and language groups, Roma people), which would – together with Hutsul, rural, and Crimean Tatar constituencies – probably be pivotal for any deliberation of a viable Ukrainian civic state.

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References

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Susanna Trnka
***Traversing: Embodied
Lifeworlds in the Czech Republic***

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Traversing: Embodied Lifeworlds in the Czech Republic is the title of the recently published book written by an anthropologist Susanna Trnka (of Czech origin, currently based in New Zealand). This impressive monograph provides the reader with fresh, and for many, also unexpected, perspectives to contemporary Czech society as well as to Czech history, with a focus on the construction of national identity. *Traversing* is based on thirty years of anthropological/ethnographic research in the Czech Republic (and the former Czechoslovakia). Moreover, Trnka’s overall theoretical approach in the book is interdisciplinary. She masterfully combines anthropological knowledge with philosophy. This makes her work genuinely exceptional, and her book is a significant contribution to both disciplines.

As the title suggests, the key concept that Trnka’s book introduces is “traversing” – “ways of seeing, experiencing, and moving through the world and the kinds of persons we become through them” (3). Trnka coins the term “traversing” to expand on the philosophical thought of Martin Heidegger and Jan Patočka, and to thus emphasise and examine embodiment as crucial to our understanding of being-in-the-world. In particular, Trnka pays attention to three movements that we make as embodied actors in the world: (1) how we move through time and space, (2) how we move toward and away from one another, and, finally, (3) how we move

toward ourselves and the earth we live on (3). In her own words:

Traversing foregrounds human independence and interdependence, agency and creativity. It posits culture, history, and technology in terms of how they shape us in terms of how we traverse through life, and in turn examines how our movements act to create culture, recast history, and engage with, or disavow, technology. Asserting the dynamism of any given society and any given life, it highlights how we move through life, just as life moves through and around us, necessitating that we never stay in exactly the same place and time but must continually navigate our “thrownness” or situatedness in a specific historical moment (4).

The concept of traversing, which is to a large extent formed by phenomenological philosophy, is nevertheless explored through admirably copious ethnographic data and through an analysis of “key moments” that occur across many Czech lives spanning various generations. This in-depth intertwining of anthropology and phenomenological philosophy enables Trnka to discuss topics such as “truth” and the “meaning of life”, which somewhat extend beyond the possibilities of anthropological interpretation. Moreover, the theoretical and methodological framework that Trnka utilises does not lead to cultural generalisation; on the contrary, it acknowledges the very individual and particular agencies of distinct social actors in contemporary Czech society. As part of her critical and reflexive anthropological approach, Trnka does not forget to frequently reflect on her own position (of a semi-native anthropologist) in the field. Her in-depth cultural knowledge of the

most intimate Czech lifeworlds, based on thirty years of anthropological fieldwork in various parts of the Czech Republic, is hugely impressive.

The book is structured into an introduction, conclusion and five main chapters. In Chapter One, titled “Footsteps Through the City: Social Justice in its Multiplicity”, Trnka contextualises the idea of being and feeling Czech as well as the construction of Czech national identity in relation to history and space. She takes the reader on a tour to the capital city of Prague with a focus on the celebrations of 28 September (St Wenceslas Day), but she also detours to Ostrava (a town known for its metallurgical industry and environmental pollution) and to the south Bohemian town of Český Krumlov (which she does not represent through the usual lens of tourism, but in terms of the “unspoken” histories of the local German, Jewish, and Roma inhabitants).

Chapter Two, “Digital Dwelling: The Everyday Freedoms of Technology Use”, discusses the notion of space and a sense of belonging in the 21st century in relation to technological developments and its impact on the social lives of individual actors. Trnka not only highlights the limitations and dangers of the uses of technology (emphasised also in Heidegger’s late philosophy), but also shows how new technologies, namely the internet, can serve as a site of personal freedom and as an expression of one’s agency. Last but not least, the second chapter offers important theoretical contributions to the understanding of the idea of how the notion of “space” (in the temporal, geographical, and social sense) is shaped and expanded by the employment of 21st century digital technologies.

In Chapter Three, “Ballroom Dance and Other Technologies of Sexuality and Desire”, Trnka explores the embodiment of the ballroom dance as an important social ritual for acquiring gender-normative relations amongst Czech teenagers while also focusing on heteronormativity, and the embodied and symbolic masculine dominance in such acts. Nevertheless, Trnka shows that the “worlds” of both men and women are closely intertwined, and that the gender divisions in the Czech lifeworlds are constantly negotiated in the economic realities and labour demands of the post-socialist period. Next, Chapter Four, “New Europeans: Twenty-First-Century Families as Sites for Self-Realisation”, depicts the shifting partnership arrangements under the new socio-economic realities and expectations. In this part of the book, Trnka also skillfully explores the idea of family life as a site of self-realisation, particularly through the case of Czech women and their relation to motherhood, as she places the whole discussion within the context of Patočka’s emphasis on interrelationality and the mother-child relationship as a primary form of interaction with the world. “Making Moods: Food and Drink as Collective Acts of Sustenance, Pleasure, and Dissolution” is the title of Chapter Five. This section offers interesting insight into the Czech foodways and drinking habits, including alcohol consumption. Trnka shows how food and drink are used as powerful social mediators for producing and managing specific moods, namely those of pleasure and extraordinary temporality (in Patočka’s terms, they are grounded in the mundane activities of the first and second movement, but simultaneously also enable the third movement towards

“truth”/self-transcendence). However, both food and drink (especially alcohol) is a “double-edged sword” and, thus, in this chapter, Trnka reveals how she was encouraged to overeat until feeling sick or how the line grows thin between the joys of alcohol consumption and alcoholism. In Trnka’s argument, the employment of food and drink as technologies of pleasure enable the production of a space for the enjoyment of the mundane and for the simultaneous momentary transcendence of it, and to “traverse across its boundaries to acknowledge our place in something much greater” (169).

In the last chapter, “Reconnection: Between the Power Lines and the Stars”, which constitutes the conclusion of the book, Trnka seriously takes up the suggestions by the three philosophers Heidegger, Patočka, and Kohák that we need to rethink the use of new technologies in our daily lives, to be aware of both its dangers and possibilities, as well as their insistence for us to reconnect with nature, from which the new technologies are dividing us. Nature, according to the aforementioned philosophers, as well as to Trnka’s ethnographic observations, plays a crucial role in our being-in-the-world, and we as humans need to both actively experience it and thoughtfully rethink our place within it. In practice, this can take a form of vacations at weekend cottages (so-called *chatas*), going to summer camps, or “tramping” within Czech lifeworlds. As Trnka says in her own words at the very end of her book:

Traversing is our way both of navigating our thrownness and of trying to surpass it, however fleetingly. Embracing nature – however historically, culturally, and technologically mediated that “nature” is

– is one possible route toward reconnection and toward grasping a glimpse of what lies both beyond and within the quotidian tasks and worries that often largely structure our everyday existence. So too, potentially, is embracing a lover, caring for a child, or converting a garden party into an Event that reconstitutes our sense of space and time. Each of these acts holds within it the possibility of enabling us to transcend the ordinary, just long enough to see where it is that we are actually (momentarily) standing. What we come back with enables us to live as thoughtfully as we can, amid both the power lines and the stars (188–189).

To conclude, Trnka’s book is not only theoretically innovative and inspiring, but also pleasurable to read. The writing is well-organised, explanations are clear, and the theory is properly backed by numerous ethnographic vignettes that further illustrate

the particularities of the phenomena being discussed in relation to the everyday lives of various social actors. In the book, Trnka “harvests the fruit” of her long-term research, which I believe will become a crucial postmodern anthropological and philosophical work of great importance, helping us to better understand the particularities of Czech lifeworlds. However, the theoretical remarks expanding on phenomenology and on embodiment can be easily applied or tested also in other cultures and countries of the world. Thus, the book can be heartily recommended not only to all Czech anthropologists and philosophers, but also to anyone with a deep interest in a human’s way of being-in-the-world.

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