Olivia Angé – David Berliner (eds.). *Anthropology and Nostalgia*

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Recently, one might feel rather overwhelmed by the more or less hysteric claims about a 'loss of culture'. Verbal threats of 'losing' or 'diluting culture', traditions, and roots appear in social media, as well as in everyday conversations, or, for example, music performances. For anthropologists, there is nothing new in this pre-apocalyptic rhetoric (as they have themselves used it and spread it in the past), although many have become increasingly uncomfortable with it, says David Berliner (p. 19), who has published, together with Olivia Angé, an edited volume called *Anthropology and Nostalgia*.

Berliner, Professor of Anthropology at Université Libre de Bruxelles, whose main research interests include social memory (2005), cultural transmission, and the politics of heritage (2012), observes that: "losing culture is a nostalgic figure as old as anthropology. As much as continuity is a key idea for social scientists (Berliner 2010, Robbins 2007), our discipline has, from its birth, held on to nostalgia for disappearing worlds, far away or close to home, as in the case of folklorists (Bendix 1997)" (p. 19). In the thought-provoking first chapter called *Are Anthropologists Nostalgist?* (pp. 17–34), Berliner argues that anthropologists hardly escape nostalgic forms of thinking and writing (although many refuse to be associated with the trope of a vanishing culture) because of what he calls *disciplinary exo-nostalgia*. According to him, nostalgia continues to inform major aspects of the production of anthropological knowledge.

It is exactly this statement in the book which triggered my curiosity the most. Although I find the whole collective monography – which presents various ethnographic case studies exploring how nostalgic discourses and practices work in different social and cultural environments – to be a very interesting and contributive work worth appraisal, I will focus on the Berliner's chapter, as surely, it is valuable for all anthropologists, as well as other social scientists or historians, no matter their research interest. I would even recommend including it on the list of compulsory literature for anthropology students who are deciding to undertake their first fieldwork.

David Berliner understands nostalgia as "a specific [emotional and cognitive] posture vis-à-vis the past seen as irreversible, a set of publicly displayed discourses, practices and emotions where the ancient is somehow glorified and considered lost forever, without necessarily implying the experience of first-hand memories" (p. 21). Drawing on Herzfeld's 'structural nostalgia' (1997), he first turns our attention to the longing of immense numbers of young patriots from different corners of the world for a country they have usually not known, and that probably never existed. Then, evoking Arjun Appadurai's term 'armchair nostalgia' (1996: 78) for a nostalgia without a lived experience or collective historical memory, Berliner points on examples of lamenting the vanishing of other people's past and culture during his field research in the Lao PDR (Berliner 2012): from tourists complaining that locals do not even wear their traditional

clothes anymore up to UNESCO experts, whose policies significantly contribute to the dissemination of the trope of a vanishing heritage around the world (p. 19). Therefore, Berliner suggests distinguishing between two basic nostalgic postures: between 'endo-nostalgia' for the past one has lived personally and the vicarious 'exo-nostalgia' for a past not experienced personally, nonetheless triggering affects such as indignation, anger, or pain (p. 21).

Berliner shows how the primitivist exo-nostalgic discourse of 'being late', 'witnessing the disappearing native', or 'they must be studied now or never' and 'documented for posterity', has played a dominant role in the history of anthropology, being found in the ethnographies by Franz Boas, Bronislaw Malinowski, Edward Evans Pritchard, Marcel Griaule or Claude Lévi-Strauss, among many others. Without minimizing the historical facts of brutal colonization and ethnocides, he points to the fact that the so-called traditional societies were *a priori* thought of as unable to resist changes. Anthropologists mostly portrayed themselves as observers and as the prophetic announcers of a cultural disaster soon to happen. Nevertheless, many diagnoses of cultural loss proved later to be wrong. One example is Berliner's own field research among the Baga fifty years after French anthropologist Denise Paulme's claim of 'being too late' in the 1950s. Berliner interprets this theoretical perspective, which soon became a practice institutionalized in university departments and materialized in museum object collections as a form of critique of the present, as a quality often recognized in nostalgia, be it 'imperialist nostalgia' (Rosaldo 1989) or not.

Anthropologists from the major traditions slowly abandoned this exo-nostalgic posture based on the belief in pristine cultural essences seen as disappearing, and substituted it with a discourse on the 'ability of societies to resist erosion' (p. 25), which manifests itself through a copious use of notions such as memory (Berliner 2005), revival, invented traditions, etc. However, their discourses are, according to Berliner, "still crafted within nostalgic narratives" (p. 27), even if transformed. First, he finds the newer expressions of exo-nostalgia in longing for the 'local'. He sees the notion of 'local' as emotionally loaded, replacing the no-longer-politically correct 'indigenous', and believes that many anthropologists, including himself, have "nowadays nostalgized the particular and heterogeneous" (p. 28). Reflecting on his own field research in Luang Prabang, he claims that "anthropologists still need their 'savages', their particular and heterogeneous locals against the idea of undifferentiated modernity" (p. 29). This theoretical stance reflects itself in the choice of the research subjects and in the insistence on the key method of participant observation. According to Berliner, "participant observation functions precisely as a nostalgic quest for intimacy and sincerity with locals (although actual fieldwork can be riddled with conflicts and lies)." (p. 29). Therefore, he provocatively asks: "Have we not nostalgized our methodology itself?" (ibid.).

Moreover, Berliner sees the disciplinary exo-nostalgia – "an indignation and a theoretical stance in front of irrerversible loss" (p. 30) – to be deep-rooted in the anthropologists' long-term attachment to the poor, weak and powerless, facing social

instability, urban poverty, migration, war, and political disempowerment. As some of the examples he mentions, he evokes the supposedly pre-apocalyptic tone in the ethnography of crack dealers by Bourgois (2003) or the call to militant anthropology by Sheper-Hughes (1995) based on the idea that anthropology must be a discipline useful to its powerless subjects of research. For him, it interestingly reveals how nostalgia is a specific form of engagement with the future, crafted within horizons of expectations in the present, intertwined with the hope and desire to imagine another, better world.

Surely, Berliner's well-written text might give rise to some questions: e.g., if his understanding of nostalgia is still not too broad, although the chapter and the book seem to aim for the opposite. However, I find it thought-stimulating, provoking self-reflection (I, indeed, must admit that according to Berliner's chapter, I have been quite exo-nostalgic myself). I do believe that nostalgia in our discipline must be reflected upon, not only because it can reveal a lot about our present theoretical and methodological choices, but also because only then can we try to understand and to interpret the nostalgia of others, which is the aim of the subsequent chapters of the book.

In the introductory chapter called *Anthropology of Nostalgia – Anthropology as Nostalgia* (pp. 1–16), David Berliner and Olivia Angé (who is an Associate Researcher at the Sociology of Development and Change Group, Wageningen University) mention the Czech hero of Milan Kundera's novel *L'ignorance*. Josef is suffering from a 'lack of nostalgia' (Kundera 2005: 87), but Angé and Berliner observe the exact contrary in many parts of the world: "there seems to be a current overdose of nostalgia, a reaction to the modern 'accelerism' [...]" (p. 2). Proving the editors' statement, the following eight chapters take the reader on a fascinating ethnographic ride to Argentina, Cyprus, Spain, Germany, Lithuania, Russia, and Hungary. Overdosed with so many diverse forms and contexts of nostalgia, one actually might find it a "central characteristic of our age", as one of the reviewers on the back of the book suggests (or at least an "undeniable part of modern experience", as suggested by another).

As much as the Holocaust has become a paradigm for research in memory studies, previous works on nostalgia have been "paradigmatically 'Eastern European'" (p. 1). Therefore, it is not a coincidence that five of the eight chapters deal with Central and Eastern European post-socialist contexts:

Gediminas Lankauskas (who is Associate Professor of Cultural Anthropology at the University of Regina, Canada) describes and interprets an almost surreal 'commemorative performance' of '1984: The Survival Drama' in the Bunker, an experiential-immersive theme park located underground near Vilnius in the fascinating chapter *Missing Socialism Again? The Malaise of Nostalgia in Post-Soviet Lithuania* (pp. 35–60).

Maya Nadkarni (Visiting Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Swarthmore College) and Olga Shevchenko (Associate Professor of Sociology at Williams College) provide an excellent comparative analysis of *The Politics of Nostalgia in the Aftermath of Socialism's Collapse*, drawing examples from Russia and Hungary, locating the

power of nostalgia within the ability of politicians to accumulate political capital out of nostalgic content (pp. 61–95). A different approach to the field of Hungarian nostalgia is undertaken by Chris Hann (Director of the Department of Resilience and Transformation in Eurasia at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle) who revealingly describes the cultural practice of *Crying Back the National Past in Hungary*, and explains why in the case of this country, *Post-imperial Trumps Post-socialist* nostalgia (pp. 96–122), causing an Aha! moment in the Czech reader's mind, puzzled by the seemingly incomprehensible current events taking place not so far away from her.

Interpreting the local boom of private museums of everyday life objects from GDR and the steady reappearance of GDR-era brands, Jonathan Bach (Chair of the Global Studies Program at The New School in New York City) discusses the famous ambivalent phenomenon of *Ostalgie* – the cultural practice of *Consuming Communism: Material Cultures of Nostalgia in Former East Germany* (pp. 123–138). I find his insightful interpretation using e.g. Michael Herzfeld's (1997) concept of cultural intimacy to be very useful. Another example of nostalgia from Germany is presented by Petra Rethmann (Professor of Anthropology at McMaster University, Canada) in her chapter *The Withering of Left-Wing Nostalgia?* (pp. 198–212). Interestingly locating her ethnographic field in the auditorium of a conference entitled *Kommunismus*, organized in Berlin in 2010 with keynote speakers such as Antonio Negri, Slavoj Žižek, and Alain Badiou. On this example, Rethmann explores two manifestations of 'left-wing nostalgia' and their attempt to re-imagine a fair future.

Hunted by a different spectre than communism, Turkish and Greek Cypriots engage in remembering their island's partition. Although we usually associate nostalgia with memory, the important chapter *Nostalgia and the Discovery of Loss: Essentializing the Turkish Cypriot Past* (pp. 155–177) by Rebecca Bryant (A. N. Hadjiyannis Senior Research Fellow in the European Institute at the London School of Economics) studies the relationship between nostalgia and forgetting. According to Bryant, "the object of nostalgia has the status of the forgotten – the lost, the irretrievable, the impossible object of memory" (p. 155). She claims that nostalgia emerges most at times of rapid social change, liminality, and confusion because its basic function is to essentialize – to portray ourselves to ourselves in ways we would like to see ourselves, to portray to us some (imagined) essence that has been irretrievably lost. Therefore, nostalgia represents not a longing for a forgotten past, but rather a *longing for essentialism*, a longing for a simplified, clear, and secure representation of ourselves that appears to have been lost in the reconstitution of the community (p. 156 and 172). It may also be "strategically deployed to define thresholds, boundaries and hence orientation towards the future" (p. 172).

Validating Bryant's statement, the chapter *Social and Economic Performativity of Nostalgic Narratives in Andean Barter Fairs* (pp. 178–197) by Olivia Angé shows how – during economic exchanges between Highland and Lowland peasants in Argentina – the repeated allusions to the ancestors' code of exchange and the

vanishing balanced reciprocity contribute to essentializing ethnic identities in a context of social liminality. Moreover, Angé interestingly reveals how peasants mobilize these strategic utterances (as 'nostalgic discursive devices') during barter haggling to increase their rewards.

Joseph Josy Lévy and Inaki Olazabal (both anthropologists teaching at Université du Québec à Montréal) evoke the very first meaning of nostalgia as a longing for a lost geographical home. In their chapter *The Key from (to) Sefarad: Nostalgia for a Lost Country* (pp. 139–154), they explore the persistent presence of narratives and images of the powerful symbolic object of La llave, the key to the lost ancestral house which Sephardic Jews are said to have carried throughout their exile following their expulsion from Spain in 1492. The story of the key continues to thrive, as it is mobilized by Spanish politicians to restore relationships with Jewish communities around the world, as well as by travel agencies to develop tourism.

The book surely fulfills the aims of its authors to push the discussion around nostalgia in four directions: First, "to clarify the notional fog surrounding the label" (p. 5). Second, to describe "the concrete fabric of nostalgia in interactions, facts of communication, places and times, and through texts, objects and technologies" (p. 7). Third, to capture the transformative aspect of nostalgia as "a force that does something" (p. 9). And fourth, to capture how "nostalgia always carries with it a politics of the future" (p. 11).

Nostalgia has been an ethnographic puzzle for anthropologists, sometimes rather an unwelcome guest. In his prophetic Afterword *On Anthropology's Nostalgia – Looking Back/Seeing Ahead* (pp. 213–224), William Cunningham Bissell (Associate Professor of Anthropology and Sociology at Lafayette College) recalls his surprise when his local interlocutors in Zanzibar at the turn of the millennium spoke of the colonial urban past in explicitly nostalgic terms. As a US-trained African studies and anthropology scholar immersed in post-colonial critiques, these were not exactly the sort of sentiments he expected to hear – indeed, quite the opposite. Nor, at the time, did he know quite what to do with these discourses, as he confesses: "Should I dismiss these claims? Simply ignore them?" (p. 213). Although at that time, studies of remembrance were undergoing a renaissance across the humanities and social sciences, one would find only scattered references to nostalgia. Thankfully, he turned this puzzle into a research subject (Bissell 2005), and some others did too. I certainly agree with Bissell's (p. 222) view that nostalgia represents much more than just an academic fashion. Its prominence as a topic has a great deal to do with its salience in providing a critical take on the unfolding and uneven dynamics of modernity. And, so long as intimations of crises and change continue to be uttered, anthropologists will still have much to say about diverse ethnographic deployments and dimensions of nostalgia. Obviously, the reviewed book greatly pushed advancements in this field, providing inspiration for future research.

Veronika Seidlová

Where the Countryside met the Town: Latest Explorations of the Ostrava Industrial Agglomeration[1]

Jemelka, Martin. *Na kolonii: život v hornické kolonii dolu Šalomoun v Moravské Ostravě do začátku socialistické urbanizace*.
Ostrava: VŠB – Technická univerzita 2007.

Jemelka, Martin. *Na Šalomouně: společnost a každodenní život v největší moravskoostravské hornické kolonii (1870–1950)*.
Ostrava: Ostravská univerzita, Centrum pro hospodářské a sociální dějiny 2008.

Jemelka, Martin. *Lidé z kolonií vyprávějí své dějiny*.
Ostrava: Repronis 2009.

Jemelka, Martin (ed.). *Ostravské dělnické kolonie I: závodní kolonie kamenouhelných dolů a koksoven v moravské části Ostravy*.
Ostrava: Filozofická fakulta Ostravské univerzity 2011.

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Jemelka, Martin (ed.). *Ostravské dělnické kolonie II: závodní kolonie kamenouhelných dolů a koksoven ve slezské části Ostravy*.
Ostrava: Filozofická fakulta Ostravské univerzity 2012.

Jemelka, Martin. "Ostrawskie kolonie robotnicze na drodze od osiedli firmowych do socjalnie wykluczonych osiedli romskich (1954–1989)."
Pp. 59–79 in Szyszlak, Elźbieta, and Tomek Szyszlak (eds.). *Kwestia romska w kontekście bezpieczeństwa wewnętrznego i międzynarodowego państwa*. Wrocław: Fundacja Integracji Społecznej Prom, Centrum Badań Partnerstwa Wschodniego 2013.

Jemelka, Martin. "The Ostrava Industrial Agglomeration in the First Half of the Twentieth Century: Where the Urban Countryside met the Rural Town."
Pp. 71–98 in: Borodziej, Włodzimierz, Stanislav Holubec, and Joachim von Puttkamer. *Mastery and Lost Illusions: Space and Time in the Modernization of Eastern and Central Europe*. München: Oldenbourg 2014.

Jemelka, Martin (ed.). *Ostravské dělnické kolonie III: závodní kolonie Vítkovických železáren a dalších průmyslových podniků*.
Ostrava: Filozofická fakulta Ostravské univerzity 2015.

The Ostrava agglomeration is one of the most industrial and populated regions in Central Europe. In the mid-19th century, many industrial corporations in the sectors of coal mining, iron processing, and chemical production arose in the heart of a traditionally residential area. Along with heavy industry, dense railway, road, and transport networks were built by public authorities, as well as by private companies. In the surrounding villages, workers who regularly commuted between their rural home and the urban industrial districts were hired. The economic boom in the 1860s attracted thousands of migrants of a peasant origin, hailing from distant agricultural regions; these were settled in the newly established workers' housing schemes. The housing schemes, comprised of small-scale workers' houses with tiny gardens and yards, hindered classic urban development. The transformation of the Ostrava region from a rural area into an urban space with an enormous ethnic, social, religious, and cultural heterogeneity has left its significant mark in the mental development of local inhabitants.

This mark, characterized by the merging of the town and the countryside, soon became the topic of intellectual as well as scholarly inquiries. Since the 1950s, Marxist historians, geographers, and ethnologists focused on the rise of the modern Ostrava agglomeration, and carried out systematic studies, which have lasted several decades until the present. One very promising scholar who builds on the results of these researchers is Martin Jemelka (*1979). With his inspiring and innovative manner, Jemelka confronts the older conclusions of the historical, demographic, and ethnographic explorations of the Ostrava industrial region with newly accessed archival documents and qualitative interviews. With the support of conceptual tools from the history of everyday life and the history of working class culture, Jemelka has published and edited several monographs, which have analyzed the problems of urbanization, industrialization, and migration in the micro-historical context.

Jemelka's first monograph (2007), or its rewritten and extended version (2008), respectively, deals with the social and cultural history of the largest and the most populated workers' housing scheme in Ostrava. This housing scheme known as "Šalamouna", named after the powerful businessman and industrialist, Salomon Mayer Rothschild (1774–1855), was erected in the late 1860s and early 1870s. After almost one hundred years of its existence, it was demolished and replaced by prefabricated concrete housing blocks – the most visible sign of postwar modernity and communist utopia. The main focus of the monograph lies on the interwar period, and aside from analyzing the building documentation and the population census results, it includes several unique sources that captured the experiences of former inhabitants of the housing scheme.

As it has been already stated, the leitmotif of Jemelka's work is a blending of the urban and rural world. During the boom of housing schemes in the 1920s and 1930s, industrial corporations preferred the construction of houses with a maximum of eight housing units. Thus, houses were not only hostels for tens of industrial workers, but they also tried to provide a certain level of housing culture and an economic base for the worker's family. The houses

included shelters for domestic livestock, small gardens for growing vegetables and fruits, and corporations also provided the opportunity for renting tiny agricultural fields in the close proximity of the schemes. All this played out in the shadows of mining towers and factory chimneys. Jemelka argues that workers' households evoked a rural past and contributed to the persistence of rural lifestyles and of a traditional peasant mentality in a modern urban industrial society. The housing schemes in general, and the workers' houses in particular, disturbed the long-term patterns of urbanization and urban development. The childhood, adolescence, and maturity of the inhabitants of the housing schemes neither took place in an urban or a rural environment, but rather in the space that could be called "in-betweenness" (Katherine Lebow).

Even though Jemelka has not explicitly used this concept, his monographs have collected many examples of spaces in which "in-betweenness" or "rurbanity" was articulated. The rural past of the inhabitants of housing schemes affected family, friendly, and social ties, which were based on a regional background. Houses in housing schemes were originally settled by male tenants, lodgers, and acquaintances who came from the same village and region. This type of grouping determined the choice of partners, wedding attendants, godparents, neighbors, and colleagues at the workplace. Moreover, the regional background was also manifested in memberships in trade unions, in civic associations, or in religious communities. Some pubs were accessible only to members of of a specific regional group, and other denizens were subjected to physical violence upon their visit. The mapping and topography of such regional affiliation, which sometimes almost delves to the level of particular streets and houses, is probably the most interesting moment of Jemelka's analysis.

In 2007/2008, when Jemelka published his first monographs, historians began to use sociological, ethnological, or demographic surveys from the past as an interesting source for historical analysis. In this sense, Jemelka's approach was in many aspects innovative and promising. However, the fact that Jemelka sometimes accepted the conceptual framework of Marxist ethnographers is problematic. Thus, workers' festivals, habits, sustenance, and clothing are interpreted as an "anachronism" – remnants of a rural origin and background. An explicit reflection and contextualization from the contemporary perspective is missing in this case. Similarly, Jemelka shows very interesting examples of how local dialects and language varieties of rural migrants persisted in the urban environment, as well as how workers of rural origin appropriated their new world through older vocabulary, using excerpts from the daily press, school chronicles, complaints and court files. Unfortunately, Jemelka understands these phenomena in a very static manner, and overlooks their dynamic moments.

During their work on monographs, Martin Jemelka interviewed the former inhabitants of housing schemes and their family members. A selection of collected interviews and memories was published in the separate book called "People from Housing Schemes Tell their History" (Jemelka 2009). The book met extraordinary response from the public: e.g. the

radio version of the publication was read in a series. The book presents the subjective testimonies and personal narratives of people who were born in the housing schemes, and who grew up and spent part of their productive age there. Later, many of them left the housing schemes and moved to new, prefabricated concrete housing blocks. The long-term perspective enabled the author to capture the gradual change of local memory and oral tradition, including the current, mostly distant attitudes of former inhabitants towards the mentioned "rural anachronism". For example, in 2007, Milada Kaupová (*1928) recalled that the "house scheme was, for us, like a trip to a village". Moreover, the collected and published interviews also revealed one interesting moment that was not explicitly present in the archival documents, i.e. the existence of "Jews" and Jewish prejudice. Interviewees identified "Jews" through classical stereotypes as shopkeepers, sellers of alcohol, brothel operators, doctors, and lawyers. Interviewees did not distinguish Jews, for example, among ordinary miners and steelworkers. Jews were the others who differed from "us."

Even though Martin Jemelka described many examples which illustrate the merging urban and rural environment in housing schemes, he did not inquire about their general context. Emotional ties to nature and to animals, holidays and vacations spent outside of the town, economic shortages and the need to find supplies in the countryside during the economic crises of the 1930s, World War II, or under communist dictatorship did not interrupt the relations of the inhabitants of housing schemes with the rural world. The expulsion of the German population in the late 1940s, political campaigns calling for the settlement of borderlands and for an intensive connection to relatives encouraged many industrial workers to the "return" to the countryside after their retirement. In this respect, boundaries between urbanity and rurality were very blurred. It raises the question of the necessity of a more precise definition of "urbanization" and "anachronism", used by Jemelka for his interpretations.

The themes, methods, and sources which were shown in the exploration of the housing scheme "Šalamouna", were utilized by Martin Jemelka in the collective research of eighty other housing schemes in the Ostrava agglomeration. The result was a three-volume encyclopedia entitled "Ostrava Workers' Housing Schemes", which compiled several thousands of topographic data (Jemelka 2011, Jemelka 2012, Jemelka 2015). All three volumes have a unified structure that makes reading through them easier. A description of the spatial layout allows readers to create a mental picture of where each housing scheme was located, and how the inhabitants traveled to work. The detailed depiction of the building development opens the doors of individual houses, and guides the reader from the cellar to the groundfloors, and provides literal insight into the kitchens and bedrooms of the housing schemes' inhabitants. What is valuable and unique, though, is that the authors attempted to put the building development of housing schemes into the historical and architectural context, and to show how many houses were typical of their time and corresponded to the housing types of a given professional group or social strata. In the description of the housing

standard, readers are informed about the size of the dwelling unit, about the level of hygienic facilities, and about the introduction of electricity or the connection to the municipal water supply system. These are considered to be attributes which distinguish urbanity from rurality.

When the authors examined the territorial background of the housing schemes' inhabitants, they pointed out the linguistic, regional, social and religious heterogeneity of the Ostrava agglomeration. This heterogeneity affected the specific forms of the nation-building processes in the region, where people from different places of the Habsburg and the German empires immigrated to. The authors point out that work migration has been linked to a whole range of issues which had an impact on the life of inhabitants in housing schemes. Many of the migrants came from poor rural regions, were illiterate or semi-literate, performed unskilled work, and established closed communities. Alcoholism, prostitution, violence, or the Antisemitism evoked by the distinct habitus of the Hasidic community manifested. When the authors consider the housing schemes as the proverbial melting pot, they should demonstrate, however, what the result of the melting process was.

Whereas during the capitalist urbanization housing schemes provided respectable shelter to the wage workers, under communist dictatorship, they offered asylum to the Roma dispersed in industrial regions. The Roma were to be "civilized" in the housings schemes in accordance with the ideals of a new socialist man and society. It were the Roma themselves who, in addition to the retired employees of the coal-mining and metallurgical corporations, represented the last inhabitants of the housing schemes before they were demolished in the 1980s. The housing schemes were removed not only because of their obsolescence, but also because they were considered to be an anachronism of the capitalist past and outdated approach to housing issues for working classes (Jemelka 2013). According to Jemelka, the Roma in the housing schemes appreciated the possibility of living in the middle of the urban environment while maintaining a partially rural life in the separated residential neighborhoods with small gardens and green landscape.

In the tree-volume topography of workers' housing schemes in Ostrava, the intersection of urbanity and rurality is not a primary goal, but a by-product of inquiry into the spatial layout, demographic development, social structure, and everyday life. Jemelka purposefully analyzed the entanglement of the urban and rural space (the creation of a rurban environment) in a concise article in English (Jemelka 2014). In contrast to previous examinations of "industrial villagers", i.e. those workers who lived in the countryside and seasonally worked in industry jobs, Jemelka takes into account other types of sources for their analysis, i.e. works of fiction. Stories of poor peasants who were forced to leave the countryside and begin to work in the industrial sector nostalgically recalling the rural landscape, referring to environmental pollution, idealizing the village community, and criticizing urban (im)morality are certainly examples of a classic literary topic. The bards who celebrated the Ostrava region in their poems and novels are not any exception. However, the confrontation of literary and historical narratives that Jemelka has undertaken is quite an inspiring approach to this issue. In general,

Jemelka's previous studies were characterized by a social and economic determinism that served as an interpretative framework. Jemelka did not neglect cultural, mental and folklore motifs in his inquiry; however, he did not research them systematically. They were of secondary importance for his analysis, and he used them for colorful description. Although similar attempts still remain at the half-way mark, one wants to read more. This is a reason to look forward to Martin Jemelka's next monograph.

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