

Beyond the Café / Pub Split: Interlocking Urbanity and Rurality in the Popular Culture of East Central European Societies

Veranstalter: The Centre for Study of Popular Culture (CSPK)

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On the last weekend in October 2015, the Centre for the Study of Popular Culture organized, in cooperation with the V4 partners, i.e. Charles University Prague (CZ), the National Museum (CZ), Constantin Philosopher's University in Nitra (SK), the Slovak Academy of Sciences (SK), the University of Warsaw (PL) and the Institute of Political History in Budapest (HU), the conference „Beyond the Café/Pub Split: Interlocking Urbanity and Rurality in the Popular Culture of East Central European Societies“. The conference was supported by the Visegrad fund, Erste Stiftung and WUS Austria.

The historical narrative of nation building in East Central Europe has highlighted how nationalist movements have linked the city and the village. The linear process of urbanization has relied on a logic that interlocks rural and urban spaces in this region. Whilst on the one hand both capitalist and state socialist modernization have brought an influx of rural migrants from the countryside to urban centres, this has, on the other, given rise to numerous artistic and social movements which have fostered an interest in rural space and culture (e.g. folklorism, (agro-)tourism, rural sentimentalism). It is only from this perspective that we see the emergence of tensions between popular culture rooted in traditional folk culture, cultural activities stimulated by new technologies and the everyday life cultural strategies of urban communities and subcultures. During the 20th century different political regimes brought to the fore either rural or urban segments of the population, which in turn had a significant impact on popular culture. Taking this as a starting point, the conference focused on the question of an in-betweenness that might be dubbed „rurba- nity“, comprising phenomena that challenge

the simple urban/rural split.

The programme of the conference was opened by the keynote speech held by STEF JANSEN (Manchester). Using the example of the small city quarter in Sarajevo, Jansen showed how important the smooth running of public transport is for the city's inhabitants – not only for practical purposes, but also as a measure of social and cultural development. In interviews with his fellow passengers at the bus stop, Jansen asked how the idea of culturedness (a variant of balkanism) influenced their everyday routine and communication. People drew comparisons with other, mainly Western countries and complained about the bad behaviour of bus drivers and inspectors who were aggressive and rude. They sometimes blamed this absence of culturedness on the supposed regional identity of the bus drivers. Some of the complaints also had a strong moral and normative character; others referred to the popular paradigm of modernization which distinguishes the backward / primitive „Balkans“ from the modern/progressive „West“. They perceived their everyday transport situation as abnormal and complained that a normal life was beyond their reach, in comparison with the lives they had lived during communist times. Jansen's focus on infrastructure revealed it to be a useful analytical tool in dealing with the topic of urbanity and rurality as it is able to point to dynamic processes that underline the urban / rural divide.

The first panel started with WERONIKA PARFIANOWICZ-VERTUN (Warsaw) speaking about „DIY“ practices and cottages built in city garden colonies as mediating between urban and rural space. She described these colonies as places where lifestyles mix, leisure and recreation fuse with agricultural and gardening activities, rustic and sentimental aesthetics encounter pop culture and urban imaginaries, and the dreams of „pure nature“ come true with a little help from PVC, asbestos and PET bottles. She concluded that gardening in colonies as a lifestyle has been a significant feature of urban life under both political systems – before and after 1989. HEDVIKA NOVOTNÁ and MARTIN HEŘMANSKÝ (both Prague) analysed the present-day Czech competition called „The village of the year“ and documented how the competitors

introduce themselves in their pursuit of the ideal of the „perfect“ village. They argued that there are several discourses of rurality (expert / academic discourse, public / media discourse, the discourse of actors) interwoven in the representations of villages created for the competition. Through these questions they were unable to uncover how these discourses operated and how they recreated the „ideal“ villages that are meant to serve as models to be emulated. The panel was closed by JIŘÍ FIALKA (Prague) who introduced his research on popular culture in the town of Slušovice, one of the symbols of 1980s late socialist Czechoslovakia. Among other reflections, Fialka highlighted the turning of traditional rural songs into the pop-music arrangements of the 1980s as part of a socialist modernity.

After lunch, the second panel began with NATALIA KIM (Nizhny Novgorod) talking about the self-perception of the inhabitants of provincial towns located in present-day Russia near Nizhny Novgorod. Her examination was based on quantitative research which collected more than five hundred interviews. The following paper focused on the theme of migration from the countryside to the city as portrayed in Bulgarian cinema. TEMENUGA TRIFONOVA (Toronto) also examined post-communist spiritual homelessness in order to expose the first cracks in the monolithic body of Bulgarian nationalist cinema. She stressed that whilst geopolitical transformations have given rise to new genres and styles in Bulgarian cinema, there is still considerable continuity, both in terms of style and subject matter, between pre- and post-1989 films. Her interpretation of these films was subsequently challenged in the follow-up discussion by some participants who regarded them as proof of the existence of stereotypes in popular cinema. In the following paper, INES PRICA (Zagreb) provided an insight into the West Balkan musical phenomenon of „ganga“ – an ancient musical style that is now, especially following its official UNESCO recognition, understood as an important part of the region's cultural heritage. Nevertheless, as the paper pointed out, it may also be viewed as an act of self-orientalism in contemporary Croatian society. JIŘÍ ŠOUKAL (Prague) elaborated on

the relationship between villagers and the owners of summer holiday apartments in the Bohemian lands in the second half of the 19th and early 20th century. A crucial role in this relationship was played by stereotypes which were created by newspapers, magazines (frequently humour magazines), books, drama, and later by radio and films as well.

After the break, TEODORA KONACH (Cracow) presented his paper dealing with the culture of cafés and political rituals in the 19th and 20th century in Bulgaria and Poland. Konach pointed out that significant changes in the public functions of cafés occurred in the 1960s in both East European societies. In the Bulgarian capital Sofia, cafés had a democratic status, and belonged to the popular culture of people's daily life. Bulgarian cafés related to the traditions of urban life and culture, as well as to the traditional model of visiting *zavedenia-kruchmi* (including, but not only, pubs) that is still preserved in Bulgarian villages. In comparison, the place of cafés in Polish culture was less far-reaching. Another view on the theme of coffee bars was given by NORBERT PETROVICI (Cluj-Napoca). In his presentation he showed the development of different types of cafés in the post-socialist Romanian city of Cluj. At the end of the state-socialist era, it was mainly working class cafés called „Bodega“ that were on the rise, but after the revolution new types developed. Petrovici distinguished two different types of cafés which exist nowadays: in the first one cultural capital constitutes the main essence, and the other is largely bound up with financial capital. Both are representative of the style of the new post-socialist elites. The next presenter followed up on this theme in greater detail, albeit in a different country. ONDŘEJ DANIEL (Prague) focused on the relationship between the constitution of the post-socialist bourgeoisie in 1990s Czech Republic and its portrayal in films and TV series such as „Život na zámku“ (Living in the castle). In his paper he tried to identify themes related to inegalitarianism, *embourgeoisement*, Darwinism, productionist ethics and the admiration of both self-made men and the aristocracy. He concluded that the mental horizon of the post-socialist Czech bourgeoisie could be described as a specific mix of liberal/conservative

values and anti-PC „common sense“. YULIA GRIBER (Smolensk) spoke about „Urbanity and Rurality in the Colour Culture“. According to her, urban colour is always split into „official“ and „domestic“ colour spaces that are constructed according to fundamentally different rules and involve completely different semiotic levels. They can be considered as „background“ and „pattern“ in the image of the city. Both capitalism and state socialist modernization did not destroy, but, on the contrary, defined this split even more clearly. She argued that the „official“ urban colour spaces of different cities in the world have been experiencing „colour globalization“, and are symptomatic of a trend toward „placelessness“, when people do not form senses of place.

The second day of the conference began with the thematic panel on traditionalism and modernism in the Baltic States of the 19th and 20th century. During those two centuries, reflections on rural themes and local traditions were very common in Lithuanian and Latvian cultures. However, the acceleration of urbanization and industrialization on the one hand, and the growing interest in scientific and technical progress on the other, led to tensions between traditionalist and modernist tendencies in Baltic popular cultures during the Cold War. In the first paper, BAIBA TETERE (Greifswald) discussed how the multi-layered nineteenth-century society which inhabited the Baltic region of the Russian Empire was spurred on by the scientific and anthropological importance of photography and began to use the indexical power of images as a tool for engaging with the world and for producing ethno-schematization. She demonstrated how political and cultural interests conceptualized the identification of Latvian ethnicity with peasantry and used the new technology of photography to depict their social and cultural positions. ODETA RUDLING (Greifswald) dealt with the rise of modernist tendencies in Soviet Lithuanian culture. The burgeoning exploration of space in the late 1950s and early 1960s and the growing interest in cybernetics provoked a demand for „innovativeness“ (*novatoriskumas*) in cosmic terms in various cultural fields. Yet, as paradoxical as it may seem, this new trend even touched upon the stage of traditional music,

challenging cultural activists to be creative with folk music even though tradition and modernism seemed to be at odds with one each other.

Using the social history of cinema as an approach, LINA KAMINSKAITE-JANČORIENE (Vilnius) presented the function of cinema in Lithuanian society during the Stalinist era. She reconstructed how cinema theatres, film-showing places, film distribution, and film repertoire politics contributed to the cinemafication (*Kinifikacija*) of rural areas. Whilst cinemafication was an integral element of the Soviet modernization project, it also had a clear propaganda goal: to demonstrate the technological power of the Soviet Union and to use cinematic tools in the process of ideological indoctrination. In last paper of this panel, VIOLETA DAVOLIUTE (Yale) described the popular engagement of Lithuanian society with its cultural origins in the village and the agrarian way of life. The 1970s movement of *Agrarininkai* searched for inspiration in rural areas. Against the background of the Soviet state's centralizing policy on agriculture, when the last single family homesteads and farms were being rapidly destroyed (*melioracija*), the practice of making 'pilgrimages' from the city to rural areas became a widespread phenomenon. The goal of this collective ritual was to discover one's individual and collective ethnic roots, and to witness and record a „lost“ past that could provide a platform for resisting the destructive effects of Soviet-style modernity.

In the afternoon session, IRENA ŠENTEVSKA (Belgrade) described the nature of Serbian Hip-hop subculture which could be seen as a typical East European „glocal“ phenomenon, but on closer inspection also reveals much about Serbian identity itself as it incorporates many local phenomena such as „turbo-folk“. ZDENĚK NEBRĚNSKÝ (Prague) focused on discussions about young married couples, particularly those who choose a partner from a different sociocultural background. He was interested in the way that marital disagreements were associated with differences between the town and the countryside as well as in how disputes between spouses who came from such disparate backgrounds often stemmed from media discussions. He

argued that the medialized differences between rural man and urban woman were based on the discourse of de-Stalinization. In the final paper, MICHAELA RUDYJOVÁ (Bratislava) talked about contemporary Slovakian artists who have moved to the countryside. Using the cases of three artists, she showed how their artistic works and expressions changed following their discovery of the different environment. It changed not only the characteristics of their artwork and the mode of their distribution, but also their reception from the side of the audience and the forms of the artists' grouping and socialization.

REANA SEJNKOVIĆ (Zagreb) summarized the conference results and drew final conclusions. Sejnković pointed that the topic urbanity / rurality had been addressed from many different angles at the conference, and that various disciplinary perspectives on different levels had succeeded in widening our over-simplistic binary view of the phenomenon. The split between rural and urban should not be seen as fixed or stable but rather as a process that is negotiated again and again. In some cases, it is very subtle nuances that require us to engage in careful observation and considered reflection, which would take into account contextual particularities with regard to, primarily, political and social environment.

The attempts to re-villagize villages are often driven by strong nationalist sentiments: villages, as seen from within this discourse, cure national amnesia, bring people closer to their origins (through this we may perhaps understand better the difference in the role of „a village“ between the socialist and post-socialist periods). This mode of constructing the nation through the prism of its tradition as established in the countryside may be traced back to the end of the 18th and 19th century. While the construction of the nation through the prism of tradition and the countryside is very well researched, particularly where the 19th century is concerned, and has become part of our common knowledge, it still seems to be surprising that this connection is also true for the post-socialist period. The phenomena of urbanity and rurality have strong negative connotations; each is often negatively stereotyped by the other.

Conference Overview:

Karel Šima (Centre for Higher Education Studies, Prague): Concept of the Conference

Keynote Lecture

Stef Jansen (University of Manchester): Waiting for a Bus: An Infrastructural Perspective on City Routes and Routines

Section A

Chair Péter Csunderlik (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest)

Weronika Parfianowicz-Vertun (University of Warsaw): „Living in the Garden“: Stories from the Backyards of Transformation

Hedvika Novotná, Martin Heřmanský, Dana Bittnerová (Charles University in Prague): „Pop-ruralities“: Discourses of Rurality in the „Village of the Year“ Contest

Jiří Fialka (Charles University in Prague): Community Life in Slušovice: Modern-Day Town Transformation

Section B

Chair Levente Polyak (Central European University, Budapest)

Natalia Gronskaia, Natalia Kim, Nadezhda Radina (Higher School of Economics, Nizhny Novgorod): Rural or Urban? Motherland Territory in Perception of City-Dwellers of Provincial Towns in Russia

Temenuga Trifonova (York University, Toronto): Internal Migration and Immigration in Bulgarian Cinema

Ines Prica (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, Zagreb): Coping with Notorious Heritage

Jiří Šoukal (Charles University in Prague): „We just want the same thing, what you have“: Relationships and Stereotypes Between Citizens and Villagers on Summer Flats

Section C

Chair Stef Jansen (University of Manchester)

Galia Simeonova-Konach (Jagellonian University in Cracow), Teodora Konach (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań): The Culture of Cafés: Between Modus Vivendi and Political Rite

Norbert Petrovici (Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj): Central Café Shops and Peripheral Bodegas: Refashioning Class through Consumption in Cluj, Romania

Ondřej Daniel (Centre for the Study of Popular Culture, Prague): Rich and Décomplexé: Constructing Czech Post Socialist Bourgeoisie through Popular Culture

Yulia Griber (Smolensk State University): Urbanity and Rurality in the Color Culture

Panel: Reflections on Traditionalism and Modernism in the Baltics of 19th and 20th century

Chair Karel Šima (Centre for Higher Education Studies, Prague)

Baiba Tetere (Ernst-Moritz-Arndt-University, Greifswald): Looking at Peasants: Hybridized Visions of Rural Life in Latvia, 1860s–1910s

Odetta Rudling (Ernst-Moritz-Arndt-University, Greifswald): Folk Music Goes Modern: „Space Motives“ and „Innovativeness“ in Soviet Lithuanian Folklore Culture of the 1960s

Lina Kaminskaitė-Jančorienė (Vilnius University): The Cinemafication of Rural Areas in Postwar Soviet Lithuania. Was Cinema the Most Important Art?

Violeta Davoliūtė (Lithuanian Cultural Research Institute, Vilnius): Anti-Modernist Cultural Practices in Lithuania in the 1970s: The Case of the Agrarininkai

Section D

Chair Miroslav Michela (Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava)

Zdeněk Nebřenský (Academy of Sciences of Czech Republic, Prague): Rural Man and Urban Woman: Discussions about Young Married Couples in the Polish Press after Stalinism

Michaela Rudyjová (Comenius University in Bratislava): Faces of Rural Mobility of Artists in Slovakia

Irena Šentevska (University of Arts in Belgrade): „Peasant Ghetto“: Rural Cultures and Serbian Hip-Hop

Conclusion: Reana Senjković (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, Zagreb)

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