

the distinctive features of television as a broadcasting medium, as well as of the scholarship and the methodology that is required for its study, is evident not only in the volume's bibliography, but also in the analyses of the TV programmes that Bren uses as her sources. For example, TV serials written by Jaroslav Dietl are, for the most part, reduced to a rather fragmentary re-telling of their plotlines, while drawing speculative parallels between some of their motifs and the social realities of 'normalization'. Some reference is made to the broad similarity between these serials and 'Western' soaps, but there is no sustained comparison between them. Yet this is far from unimportant, since socialist TV serials did not simply reflect social realities, but also thoroughly reworked them in a number of ways. Another key aspect of Dietl's serials was the distinctive performance of the actors, yet Bren offers hardly any analysis of this. Where Bren is strongest is in the solidly researched and well-documented analysis of the discussions that surrounded Dietl's personality. These are based, in part, on the today nearly forgotten samizdat dispute over Dietl's legacy as a 'normalization' celebrity. Dietl's controversial personality and his ambiguous position in the field of Czechoslovak media are exemplary of the impossibility of applying a historiography of binaries to the understanding of cultural life during late socialism.

As a scholar, I find that this book brings to light unstudied sources and develops some important links and connections between them. However, as a witness and possible informant, I feel as if my youth was spent on another planet. As a student I did not own a TV set and do not remember a single discussion in my social circle, other than a few cynical remarks, about what was being shown on TV. My own socio-cultural spaces were not necessarily dissident, but were only just about tolerated by the establishment. They included amateur theatre, folk music, and reading Heidegger with friends on skiing trips — in other words, precisely the 'culture' which Bren, somewhat blinded by the blue light of her own (rather than 'the greengrocer's') TV screen, simply chose to omit. Sure, there were May Day parades, Party congresses, even the *chlebičky* (Czech open sandwiches), which Bren seems so concerned with, but, to paraphrase Kundera, life was also elsewhere. And this brings me to my final question: where in Bren's 'culture of normalization', which is made up of 'Václav Havel's distaste for the greengrocer and Jaroslav Deitl's talent for providing that greengrocer with mass appeal' (p. 206), is that which produced the sudden explosion of all those social, cultural, emotional, political and spiritual energies of the Velvet Revolution of 1989 (which, incidentally, featured many of the actors from Dietl's serials in the front line)? This question is clearly not posed by Bren's book, but I wonder if an account of any historical period can be so completely absolved from considering that which was born out of it.

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**Čtenáři a internauti. Obyvatelé České republiky a jejich vztah ke čtení.** By JIŘÍ TRÁVNÍČEK. Pp. 192. Brno: Host. 2011. CZK 249. ISBN: 978 80 7294 515 3

It is no secret that Czechoslovakia — which its communist cultural managers, obsessed with 'overtaking capitalism', liked to present as the world's reading superpower — was no champion when it comes to research into its own reading practices. Small-scale projects, such as those conducted by Aleš Haman at the former Sate Library in Prague or, later on, rather random investigations by Pavel Machonin and Milan Tuček, which formed part of their analyses of post-1989 Czech 'transitional' society, cannot compare to more serious studies accomplished by, say, István Kamarás's team at the Centre for Library Science and Methodology at the National Széchényi Library in Budapest, or the research department of Biblioteka Narodowa in Warsaw. However, two recent systematic surveys, conducted jointly by the Institute for Czech Literature of the Czech Academy of Sciences and the Czech National Library, have begun to fill the gap in what we know about the reading habits of the contemporary Czech population. The book under review, released by the Brno-based academic publisher Host,

summarizes the results of the second, 2010, phase of this project, which has focused primarily on the patterns of reading fiction, although the volume also includes some references to the first, 2007, phase, which has dealt with Czech reading culture in more general terms.

The author of the volume, literary scholar and critic Jiří Trávníček, starts by providing an informative, if inevitably simplified, summary survey of the history of mass reading worldwide. However, the main purpose of his introduction is to place the above research project's findings in the context of recent debates on the complex relationship between the printed and the digital word; in this, he draws not just on English-language sources, but also German and Polish ones. Trávníček further argues that the above survey of Czech reading practices does not study them in isolation from other everyday activities, including online communication, nor does it examine them as just one leisure activity among others. Rather, it analyses various forms of purpose-driven reading, focusing on readers' motivations, preferences and patterns of book consumption, specifically in relation to contemporary transformations of the Czech book market, which has more than quadrupled over the past two decades, with c.17,000 titles coming out in 2010, as compared to c.4,000 in 1990 (p. 86). The 2010 survey has also been able to follow the impact of the 2008 economic crisis, revealing that Czech reading had not altered in frequency or intensity as a result, although it had, apparently, relocated partially from bookstores to libraries.

The volume is packed with empirical data, graphs, and statistics, some less predictable than the others. The specificity of Czech data becomes apparent in sections that aim at international comparisons (pp. 127–140). These allow the author to conclude that, as in earlier times, the Czech Republic continues to live up to the reputation of a 'reading superpower'. Along with the Scandinavians, the Czechs are among the best-read nations in Europe and are ahead of the North Americans. For example, only one fifth of Czechs consider themselves non-readers, compared to one third of Brits; 47% of Czechs consider themselves to be regular readers (i.e. to read more than seven books a year) compared to only 12% of Poles; 38% of Czechs claim to have visited a public library at least once in the previous year, as compared to 19% of Germans. Of course, what must be taken into account is that, as everywhere else, it is the works of contemporary popular fiction, such as the bestselling novels by Michal Viewegh, which take the top spots on the Czechs' reading lists. Nonetheless, the fact that classics such as Erich Maria Remarque, Dick Francis or Karel Čapek also rate quite highly, suggests that the average literary tastes of Czech readers tend to follow established canonical values (p. 120) rather than explore new literary territories.

A great deal of continuity with the past is also demonstrated by the Czechs' relatively regular attendance of public libraries, as well as the cultivation of large home libraries, with a remarkable average of 250 volumes per household and just 2% of respondents claiming to have an entirely book-free home. These findings challenge the clichés about 'post-communist' societies galloping away from traditional cultural values into the realm of the superficial new mass media culture. Moreover, while respondents almost univocally singled out the internet as enemy number one of reading, this study also reveals a close positive correlation between these two activities, with the most frequent users of the internet being at the same time the most passionate readers of books.

Although this study is accessible only to readers of Czech, it does contain a few pages in English summarizing its key findings, enabling a wider group of scholars working on related material to compare data. As argued by Robert Darnton, reading remains the most difficult stage in the book communication cycle to understand. The volume reviewed here and the project from which it emanates can be seen as a worthy attempt at confronting this uneasy task, allowing us to glean, through a statistical lens, some intriguing aspects of contemporary Czech cultural practices.