ZUZANA JURKOVÁ ET AL.

PRAGUE SOUNDSCAPES

Prague Soundscapes

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LISTENING TO THE MUSIC OF A CITY
Zuzana Jurková

Prague Soundscapes is about the music in Prague through the ears of ethnomusicologists. As my student Petra once said, "When someone has been through ethnomusicological schooling, he never listens to music the same way as before." This apparently banal truth (after all, every experience we have changes further ones) is particularly valid in the case of music: we perceive it so intimately, and are so used to approaching through the categories of "like" vs. "don't like" that we experience a change in approach as an attack on our personal integrity. However, this is exactly how ethnomusicology works: whether or not you like certain music is not the main issue. You have to understand *why* it is the way it is. For an ethnomusicologist, listening means trying to understand.

From our point of view, ethnomusicology is more or less synonymous with musical anthropology. We thus seek the answer to that WHY in human society – in its behavior, values, and relationships. However, as is often the case in science, there is no universal theory, or even a universal concept clarifying what exactly music is. From the ethnomusicological perspective, it is not only sound, but also – and in fact primarily – the people who produce and listen to it and the way in which they do so, that is fundamental. It is the world around sound. The musical world.

Imagining this is not always entirely simple. In order to clarify our perspective, we begin this book with theoretical considerations. In the second part of the first chapter, we then describe the process of writing this book. Each of the following six chapters is connected to a single anthropological phenomenon which we are convinced is related to the shape of music. And in fact, these connections are the main theme of our book.

A bonus awaits attentive and empathetic readers: it often happens (and it has also repeatedly happened to us) that when we understand why music sounds exactly the way it does, we like it. It becomes our music.

FOR THOSE WHO DO NOT WANT TO WASTE TIME ON THEORY

We imagined music in Prague as a set of musical worlds (for which the word *soundscapes* is sometimes used): worlds of people who perform and listen to a certain type of music; worlds whose boundaries are, however, vague. In addition to having unclear boundaries, these worlds are permeated from various sides by global factors both those of a technical and economic character and those of thoughts and images. And so the Prague soundscape is full of streams of individuals, all of which are constantly merging and influencing one another, the sounds they produce, and meanings with which they connect those sounds.

FOR THOSE WHO ARE NOT AFRAID OF THEORY

Our topic originally appeared to be simply arranged along three axes: people (who listen) – music (which they listen to) – and place (where they listen). It looked as though we wanted to describe a three-dimensional reality – certainly not an easy task, but at least an understandable and transparent one. Besides, concepts for this reality exist that may help us, at least a bit.

The key concept, in the English-language literature (and also in several Czech texts), is called soundscape. It combines the word *sound* with the morpheme *-scape*, which refers most directly to the word *landscape.* However, it carries connotations not of solidity associated with mountains and meadows that form a landscape, but rather, of a process of creation or formation. For that matter, Kay Kaufman Shelemay, speaking about her idea of *soundscape* (which is similar to ours and about which we will speak a little later), refers to sea-scape, *which provides a more flexible analogy to music's ability both to stay in place and to move in the world today, to absorb changes in its content and performance styles, and to continue to accrue new layers of meanings.*[1]

The word *soundscape* was first popularized in the 1970s in the work of the Canadian composer and sound ecologist Raymond Murray Schafer and his colleagues. In their concept, a soundscape is comprised of the sound characteristics of a concrete environment, some sort of sound parallel to a landscape, including the sounds of cars, bells, footsteps and birds singing… Schafer and his team considered this sound landscape, the sound environment, both as a research topic (being primarily interested in people's perceptions of it) and also as a special sort of artistic work. In this approach, they were not far from John Cage, who is discussed in the third chapter.

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1   Shelemay 2006: XXXIV.

In 2000, the word *soundscape* was used by the Harvard ethnomusicologist Kay Kaufman Shelemay in the title of her book. While the form of the term itself was inspired by the cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai,[2] in the content Shelemay followed up on the well-known three-part analytical model of the classic ethnomusicologist Alan Merriam (1964). In it, Merriam, a trained anthropologist (and passionate musician) suggested how to research music from the anthropological perspective – as a product of human activity. What we are accustomed to calling "music itself" (and what Merriam calls "sound phenomenon") is a product of human behavior – the movement of fingers on strings, the vibration of vocal chords – and also of the interaction of the audience when it spontaneously joins the performing group e.g. by clapping in rhythm. The review of an operatic performance that the critic writes for an influential newspaper also belongs here: this "verbal behavior" can cause the soprano, Madam X., whose vibrato was criticized by the reviewer, not to sing the main role next time.

Verbal behavior also belongs in this category, whether in the form of a written review of an operatic performance or oral disagreement with the playing of a local cymbalom band at a wedding. All of this influences the sound of music now or in the future.

The above-mentioned types of human behavior, however, are not accidental; on the contrary, they are deeply rooted in human ideas, values and concepts – be they about music or, more broadly, about the world in general. The ancient Indians, convinced of the spiritual effects of sound, tried with all their might to avoid mistakes during the performance of ritual chanting. Therefore, they created the first known musical notations and established one social stratum especially for the performance of these sacred texts. And thus it is still possible to listen to their ancient (sometimes very complicated) melodies today. Musicians in a punk band, convinced of the rottenness of the majority society, express their revulsion, their rebellion, their negation in various ways: with simple crudeness against the cultivated and complicated classics, with amateurism available to everyone against specialization (including musical), and by wearing rumpled and even torn pants, socks and jackets with unfriendly and prickly-looking decorations against refined, fancy clothing.

As far as people are concerned, Merriam's model, like the cultural and social anthropology of the time, assumed a relatively simple world of more or less isolated, homogeneous, and, moreover, static groups.[3] It is exactly because of this unrealistic view that Shelemay emphasizes that dynamic similarity to the *seascape* which makes it possible to grasp changes in the sound world and in

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2   His concept of -scapes appears in the book *Modernity at Large*, 1996.

3   Regarding terminology, the English-language literature most often uses the term "community."

How can we listen to the music of the whole city? Prague from the Petřín Hill lookout tower

the world of people. We use the expression "musical world" as a synonym for soundscape for such an idea of music in the most various contexts.[4]

Both concepts clearly differentiate in their musical ties; while Schafer's concept binds sounds to a place, Shelemay connects them primarily to people – to those who produce music as well as those who listen to and appreciate it. The latter concept is understandably closer to us as musical anthropologists. We also agree with Merriam's and/or Shelemay's understanding of music: following the ethnomusicological tradition (and perhaps somewhat limited by a tradition of historical musicology), we understand music as an intentional human creation. Concretely: we would not unequivocally agree with the classical musicological assertion that music is (only) a sound structure which bears esthetic information. We know that phenomena we would designate as music have (and, as is apparent in the music of Prague, not only in rather exotic cultures) various meanings in different cultures and in many cases it would not occur to the "users" of these phenomena to ask if the music is "lovely." Nevertheless, we constantly oscillated between Blacking's thesis that music is "humanly organized sound" (which we understood as "*intentionally* humanly organized sound"), and a newer concept, highly popularized by Christopher Small, that music is actually human activity,[5] which is not too far from Merriam's understanding.

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4   It is beyond scope of this text to deal with different meanings and variants of the term "musical world" in the texts of other authors; we have just tried to find a meaningful equivalent to "soundscape." These include Becker's (1982) *Art Worlds,* or "musical worlds" (or "musical pathways" used in the same sense) by Ruth Finnegan (1989).

5   Small 1998: 2.

Thus, decisive for us is the intentionality which connects sound to people. The idea of Schafer and his followers that the sound of passing trams, random footsteps and slamming doors could be perceived as art or music is alien to us, not only because we are not such limited traditionalists, but also because it is closer to the anthropological point of view of understanding music as an intentional human creation than as a product of place.

But what can we do if the concept of music, its most crucial intention, becomes unintentionality, thus the unintentionality of the resulting sound shape, and, on the contrary, the intentional connection to the random sounds of a place? That was exactly the case of a special type of concert – a "sound-specific performance" (as the organizers called it) – in the Bubeneč sewage disposal plant, which we will discuss later, and other Prague musical events. One dimension of our three-dimensional research reality – the dimension of music – gradually became foggy.

Moreover, inside the unclearly bounded phenomenon called music, there are, as we knew from our own research and that of other ethnomusicologists, very permeable borders of categories called genre or style. And, thus, what is called a mantra in two different places sounds completely different in each. Or the music sounds similar, but it means something different to those who play it and those who listen to it. Jazz could be an example: so full of meaning for the Czech youth at the very beginning of World War II (as Škvorecký writes about it), meaning so far from that of the Afro-American fathers of jazz a half century earlier. This is exactly the accruing of new layers mentioned by Shelemay.

The fogginess, related at first to the concept of music and its categories, is also applicable to the second axis of our interest: people. Like Merriam, thinking about the rather simple reality of isolated homogeneous societies, the world was viewed in the same way by many sociologists and cultural anthropologists.[6] When they became interested in groups of people who differed from others (usually in an urban environment), groups that they began to call subcultures, they realized that their common element was often musical style. Sometimes musical style directly generates such groups,[7] sometimes it strikingly indicates them,[8] and sometimes this process is a two-way street. Punk subculture is usually mentioned as an especially famous example. Our experience – be it from the musical style itself (and thus, from the sound of the

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6   This homogeneous approach began to change, especially in the 1990s.

7   Turino 2008: 187 mentions the example of the American contra-dance movement, when a community is created around the musical activity itself. In her extensive article about community (2011), Shelemay convinces us that music plays a basic role in forming communities of different types. (pp. 367–370).

8   For example, various features of hip-hop specifically belonged to certain age groups of Afro-American urban ghettos at the time of its origin.

The smallest musical world
is the individual

music) or from the people we met – revealed a world less "homogenized" and less clearly segmented. The majority of today's teenagers would most likely say that they belong MORE OR LESS (and this is meant literally: sometimes more and sometimes less, sometimes only fleetingly) to one subculture or another.[9]

Some of today's philosophers and sociologists agree. While in traditional societies people had, according to Anthony Giddens, a relatively fixed majority of social roles and ways to fulfil them (and thus possibilities for their own self-creation were limited), for our "late modernity" an overwhelming offer of possibilities is significant, and everyone can always chose an answer to the question, "Who am I and how shall I behave?"[10] The picture of homogeneous subcultures crumbles. This approach is taken to the extreme by Mark Slobin,[11] according to whom everyone is a unique musical culture. Most ethnomusicologists would rather, however, identify with Kay Shelemay, who says, *We do not*

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9 And some would, on the contrary, emphasize that they are not connected to one or another style and subculture, which is, however, actually the sign of another distinctive group.

10 Giddens 1991: 70.

11 Slobin 1993: IX.

study a disembodied concept called "culture" or a place called "field," but rather a stream of individuals.[12] We thus perceive a human world metaphorically as a mass of individuals carried by the same stream. Some are closer to the center of the stream; some are more on the side; some get out and climb on the bank. Sometimes the stream splits or, on the contrary, merges with another one. We can apply the thesis of Zygmunt Bauman about liquid modernity,[13] including that of musical worlds. Or we can use the idea of the universe with galaxies, orbits, and individual planets. The closer we look, the more detailed are the worlds which open to us, until we reach the world of each human individual.

For the understanding of such **individual worlds**, Timothy Rice offers a model which is similarly three-dimensional to the one we thought about at the beginning. Its axes are, however, different: time, place and metaphor.[14] On the axis of time, chronological as well as historical (how a musical composition flows, in which "objective" time its performance is set), is interwoven with the phenomenological, experiential one (how I perceive it – most likely in a different way from the first time, etc.). On the axis of place, Rice leaves an idea of a concrete, "natural," physical place (*we and our subjects increasingly dwell not in a single place but in many places along a locational dimension of some sort*[15]) and accepts the idea that it is a social construct in which a social event is set into the most varied coordinates. (Where, in my personal history, did that happen?). Here Rice comes close to the socio-geographic method of mental maps which some researchers use to try to understand how people perceive their environment.[16] How would Prague look on the mental map of a techno fan and, on the other hand, of a singer of Gregorian chant?

The third dimension is *metaphor.* Rice uses this term to mean *…the fundamental nature of music expressed in metaphors in the form "A is B" that is, "music is x."*[17] This is not a rhetorical figure, but a way of thinking: metaphors as special forms of images emphasize some details while suppressing others and, in doing so, express the structure of our thinking. When we say that good news is "music to my ears" we reveal substantial values which we attribute to music. (The clever reader certainly realized that this axis of Rice's is almost identical with the deepest layer of Merriam's model.)

Although Rice discusses music as a personal experience and the musical world of an individual, as an ethnomusicologist he does not ignore the in-

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12   Shelemay 1997: 201.

13   Bauman 2000.

14   Rice 2003.

15   Rice 2003: 160.

16   For example, Shobe and Banis 2010.

17   Rice 2003: 163.

disputably collective nature of music. He suggests closer understanding of individual musical worlds because of our better understanding of the character of musical collectivity – and also human collectivity: how close are the listeners of the same operatic performance in their experiencing of the music and how close are those of a rock concert or participants in a Hare Krishna procession? Equally? Unequally? Why?

We still have not addressed the third axis: **place**. It is possible to think about the local anchoring of music in several principal directions. The most striking and loudest one comes from the idea of massive territorialization,[18] the phenomenon torn off from one concrete physical place as an accompanying feature of modernity. All of us are daily witnesses to this: not only the omnipresence of Coca Cola and Shell gas stations, but also souvenirs from Greece made in Indonesia… Arjun Appadurai adds further consequences of modernity to this, especially the influence of imagination in our lives (and possibilities of realizing this imagination to a large degree)[19], and tension between the global and the local. The cocktail mixed from these ingredients makes every place specific.

For investigation of this specificity, Appadurai offers five dimensions of "global cultural flows". They are not meant as different types of influences which form today's reality. Appadurai speaks about *deeply perspectival constructs.*[20] They are building stones of what he calls "imagined worlds," thus worlds which are established by historically constituted ideas of people and groups around the whole world.

The five dimensions are (a) *ethnoscapes* (by this Appadurai means…*persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers…); (b) technoscapes (…the global configuration… of technology and the fact that technology… now moves at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries…); (c) financescapes (… the disposition of global capital* that *is now a more mysterious, rapid, and difficult landscape to follow than ever before…)*[21] These three dimensions are connected in an unforeseeable way or – regarding many other influences – even separated.

Both of the other -scapes are closely connected to the world of the imagination: (d) *mediascapes (… the distribution of electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations, and film-production studios… and the images of the world created by these media…* while… *they provide… large and complex repertoires of images, narratives, and ethnoscapes to*

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18   Concept elaborated by Appadurai 1996, also discussed by Rice 2003.

19   In doing so, he follows Anderson 1983 and his concept of "imagined communities", i.e. communities created on the basis of imagination, not physical closeness.

20   Appadurai 1996: 33.

21   Appadurai 1996: 33.

*viewers throughout the world, in which the world of commodities and the world of news and politics are profoundly mixed); (e) ideoscapes are related to the ideologies of states and the counter-ideologies of movements explicitly oriented to capturing state power or a piece of it… These ideoscopes are composed of elements of the Enlightenment worldview, which consists of a chain of ideas, terms, and images, including freedom, welfare, rights, sovereignty, representation, and the master term **democracy…**[22]*

Appadurai's conception suited us for two reasons. The first was a certain convergence of points of view: we also saw technology (in the chapter on electronic dance music), commerce (in the chapter on commodification) and migration (in the chapter on identity) as important contemporary social phenomena which are strikingly expressed in music.

In addition, Appadurai's conception of a deep perspectival construct also suits freer application because it corresponds to the "metaphoric" nature of music, as it is called by Rice[23]. In other words, it is possible to look at music and also at phenomena that influence it from different perspectives. We used it in the introduction of different theoretical views, different schools.

We do not, however, want to give up the idea of local anchoring of music. (Here Appadurai's idea of tension between the local and the global, which characterizes different places, suits us well. For us, it means the possibility of looking for the specific character of Prague musical worlds.) Our initial decision to understand music not only as sound, but also as a social phenomenon, i.e. the sounds and people who produce and accept them, is substantial. In this case, we are primarily interested in how the people of our Prague musical worlds are connected to a concrete place, including the meanings they attribute to it. At the same time, we are convinced of the non-randomness of the location of a musical event: the shape of the space where music sounds is not random – musicians and listeners have chosen it and, moreover, physical boundaries co-form the event; the environment of the event is not random (as is shown in our "Walk along the Royal Road"); and, finally, the broad stage of Prague is certainly not random. This non-randomness, however, is formed by influences of different dimensions (historical, social, economic…) – and also our perspectives. We certainly do not present the Prague musical world in its constantly changing plasticity: we did not, in fact, intend to do so. Hopefully we have grasped some of its moments and perspectives.

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22 Appadurai 1996: 35–36.

23 Rice 2003.

WRITING ABOUT THE MUSIC OF A CITY, SPECIFICALLY PRAGUE

Zuzana Jurková

For years I have been teaching a musical anthropology seminar at the Faculty of Humanities. In it the students learn how to research music as a social activity rather than as a "sound object." Because the faculty is located in Prague – and it is necessary to have "material" at hand – the majority of the research takes place in this city. Some like ethnomusicology so much that they continue with a bachelor's thesis, master's study in anthropology focusing on ethnomusicology, and sometimes even a doctorate. Thus we have assembled a lot of material about what is going on with music in Prague and also various ways of looking at it. At the same time, a sort of free platform[24] was formed at which we discussed various questions of ethnomusicology for years, where we invited guests[25] and where we organized various events,[26] so necessary for the acquisition of experience of broad horizons – because the ethnomusicologist must see that the music he listens to and understandably (!) considers to be the best is not the only right one. The fact that classmates like a completely different kind (or, even worse, only a slightly different kind) is not necessarily an expression of snobbism, ignorance or contemptible unmanliness. He must experience what Timothy Rice formulates in the following minimalist way: Music is X. That music is something different for everybody.

In 2009 or 2010 we decided that our "thesaurus" was sufficient for sharing. We wanted to share both the exciting amount of material and the various musics and surrounding "worlds" and also the exciting variety of views on it. From earlier experience we knew that writing "collectively" has its numerous

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24 Recently formalized as the Institute for Ethnomusicology of the Faculty of Humanities, Charles University.

25 Our long-term lecturer is Adelaida Reyes (USA); Speranta Radulescu (Rumania), Victor Stoichita (France) and Irén Kertész-Wilkinson (UK) have repeatedly lectured here. Particularly legendary was a series of lectures by Bruno Nettl (2010). Since I do not keep a systematic database/chronicle of guests, I have likely forgotten someone.

26 Students were directly involved in the organization of several international conferences: Romani Music at the Turn of the Millennium (2003), Music and Minorities (2008), round-table Theory and Method in Urban Ethnomusicology (2011), international doctorate seminar (2011), International Summer School with students of the University of Pittsburg (2012).

At an ethnomusicology seminar

and sharp crags.[27] On the other hand, however, we wanted to preserve the distinctiveness of individual perspectives. Therefore – and also inspired by many ethnomusicological texts which use so-called interperspectivity or intersubjectivity[28] – we decided to combine two basic genres in the text of the book.

The first of these are like snapshots. In them, the authors attempt to transmit the experience of a musical event. And because the experience is always very subjective, we allow the personal voices of those who participated in the events to be heard. (Sometimes the personal history of learning the described musical world surfaces which, in our opinion, can help draw the reader in and also enlighten the personal perspective through which the author sees the world. We are aware that sometimes the very different tones of the texts can be confusing but we think that the transfer of the feeling of teamwork, in which the experience of the individuals is not lost, is worth a bit of effort in reading.) The snapshots, however, are not only verbalized emotion or mechanical description: in them, we try to capture those aspects of the event that we consider to be relevant for the perspective from which we present the event. At the same time, we begin with the presumption that the reader is not at home in the described world (in anthropological terminology, he is not an "insider"). Therefore, the description can sometimes seem very naïve, like some sort of

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27 As a team, we wrote *Roads of Romani Music* in 2004 and, in 2008, texts and catalogue for the *Musika Etnika* exhibition for the National Museum.

28 A method using as many perspectives as possible. It is also proclaimed in the textbook which we use for our ethnomusicological seminar: Stone Sunstein – Chiseri-Strater, 2007.

school writing assignment. However, we have experienced that at least some world is completely unknown to everyone, and thus we needed and valued such "basic" description. A similar genre, however, is used in the majority of ethnographic or anthropological works. It enables us to look at the event through the eyes of an outsider and, at the same time, the author chooses the facts which s/he considers important from the overwhelming number of facts overall. For the best mediation of the event, we also add photographs. However, not all research sites were appropriate for taking pictures and not all the authors are good photographers, which is why the pictures vary in quality and quantity.

The second genre, presented for the most part in boxes distinguished by color, is "theoretical lenses". These most often communicate theoretical concepts through which we look at a musical event. It is self-evident that what happens can be viewed from various angles. Applied to research, this means the possibility of using different theories. The suitability of using a concrete theory, however, is proven by its explanatory power. We have thus chosen from an arsenal of available ethnomusicological or anthropological theories those which, in our opinion, illuminated these phenomena well. In some cases – e.g. in Lomax's case, used in connection with opera – we didn't want to avoid the presentation of a theory which already, in current ethnomusicological discourse, is rather deep beyond the horizon, but in its time it was very important. In the interest of a homogeneous style it was I who wrote all of the theoretical texts. Those which relate to the research of other authors, however, were collaborative efforts. The entire text was also discussed with all of the authors.

Aside from the fact that we structured the text into the two above-mentioned genres, we further stratified them so that the more detailed information, for example about musicians, is set off in small lettering and completely marginal comments appear in the form of footnotes along with references to the literature or other sources. We thus wanted to achieve the possibility of reading the book – perhaps repeatedly – on various levels: first, e.g., as fleeting familiarization with everything one can hear in Prague, then with an interest in understanding the ethnomusicological perspective, later with attention to accessible details. In our opinion, the division of the text also simplifies orientation –where to look for which type of information. Basic instructions concerning this paragraph to the reader are as follows: do not be afraid to skip over the small lettering to theoretical texts for explanations if you are not interested in the details.

WRITING ABOUT THE PRAGUE SOUNDSCAPE(S)

As is apparent from the introductory text, Prague and its soundscapes do not yet appear in clear contours, as a clearly profiled model. So our writing is also

more of an examination of the topic; it is similar to the groping of blind men trying to know and describe an elephant.[29] The topics we use to introduce Prague – the elephant – definitely do not represent systematic categories, because we are unable to provide such profound systematicity.

At the same time, it is not a random ("aleatoric") choice of topics (although even such a choice would show something substantial). We set a few criteria. As mentioned above, our intention is to show music in Prague through the eyes and ears of an ethnomusicologist. That is why we tried, on the one hand, to capture events which take place here more frequently, and, at the same time, those in which, at least from our perspective, musical language and a musical event are very explicable through the cultural values of the community. The third criterion was a certain diversity regarding the presented styles as well as the discussed topics in order to show Prague as multidimensional as possible. However, it is clear from the following pages that none of the topics are isolated, just as no music – whether we think about its language or an event – is untouched by what is happening around it in contemporary Prague. This is exactly the interlocking that ascertained that we, groping blind men, are touching the same elephant. And with enough patience, the contours will appear more and more clearly.

Besides a certain representativeness, appropriateness (homogeneity of musical style and its cultural context) and diversity, we targeted one more goal. In addition to Prague musical events themselves, we also intend to introduce ethnomusicology – a discipline which aims to understand people through music and music through people. Individual topics provided the occasion to introduce various theoretical concepts which are, in the history of (musical) anthropology, of different degrees of importance, but, in our opinion, relevant for the given soundscape.

We step into the Prague soundscape as anthropology and ethnomusicology used to do, that is to say, by focusing on "those others." However, this is not because we consider the worlds of minorities and foreigners more interesting or important than the others. But here it is possible to observe several basic phenomena that will also be important for the other chapters. As for the material concerning Romani/Gypsy music, it is clear that the musical "world" arises through some sort of negotiation between musicians and listeners (whom Lévi-Strauss calls the "silent performers"). And here it is also apparent how musical language reflects those "negotiated" cultural values.

In the second part of the chapter, we focus on recent migrants. We concentrate on the fact that their musical production is a manifestation of their attempts to join the new environment. And because belonging is an important

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29   This metaphor is used by Bruno Nettl in one of his books, Nettl, 2012: XIV.