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Južnič, Stane: Človekovo telo med naravo in kulturo (Human Body Between the Nature and the Culture). Ljubljana: Faculty of Social Sciences, 1998.

At the end of the medieval epoch, it was rather of every day occurrence that someone whose wish was to come into possession of any 'original' part of a particular saint's body simply went to the town market and bought it. In fact, there was really a huge trading going on in those pre-modern days. Pilgrims or crusaders imported all kinds of relicts from the Holy Land: bones of sacred men who died a martyr's death while they were looking for the Holy Grail, blood of Jesus Christ spilled during he was nailed to the three, splinters from St. Andrew's cross and so forth. The list would be endless if we tried to make an attempt listing all possible kinds of relicts. And what is even more astonishing is the quantity of identical relicts that were offered at the market. The story of the Holy Prepuce vividly demonstrates a discrepancy between requests of medieval individuals to assure a slice of religious prestige on the one and the stock of unique relicts on the other hand. After Jesus was crucified, he was put to the grave from where he resurrected and went to Haven. Beside Mary, the mother of Jesus, he was the only living person ever to receive the privilege of being taken under God's wing as an integral human being, which includes not only his soul, but his body as well. Thus a wrong assumption might be made that the body of Jesus Christ was inaccessible for merchants who made a living by selling relicts. But merchants soon found a solution, for Jesus was most probably circumcised and that meant that there must still have been his prepuce waiting to be found. All of a sudden, the market was overfilled with more than just a few 'original' prepuces of Jesus Christ.

Small wonders that Protestants' reaction to Catholic exaggeration in terms of the human body was how to make the human body less important or perhaps how to take the human body under control. And they did so by making carnal knowing, which was at that time provided by submitting the body to aggressive religious practice, subordinate to the human mind. The fact that Protestants made the problem out of the human body in the early 15th century, brings us to the modern times and to the question why contemporary sociology and cultural sociology painstakingly rediscover the notion of human body. Protestantism not only made the problem; it also set on some mechanisms for solving the problem of the body as late as at the end of the second millennium. By the time social science was born, the problem of the body has already been solved, of course only to a certain degree, but basically the 'discussion' on the social and cultural problem of the body was already finished. And since social scientists are members of a very specific culture of inquiry, they use social classics as a powerful bond, which increases their professional and theoretical homogeneity. And as far as I know, this is also the reason why sociologists today usually understand society as bodiless as possible, whereas social classics (such as Spencer, Durkheim, Marx, Comte, Mead, Schutz...) spent only a short time in explaining the role of the human body, if any.

On the skyline of sociological and anthropological imagination, a new book has appeared. A book in which the author imposes himself a heavy burden of bringing back the notion of human body under the scrutiny of social and human sciences. The person we are talking about is Stane Južnič, Professor emeritus at the University of Ljubljana and the book he has written has the title *Človekovo telo med naravo in kulturo* (Human Body between Culture and Nature). Already the title itself indicates the extensiveness of the subject presented in the study and it is quite obviously that Južnič was forced to reduce the volume of the book to the extent presented. Although this should not be a problem for him, for we are speaking about a distinguished

professor whose experiences are so vast, that without doubt he carefully and with feeling for a scientific perception, selected every word he has written down in his marvellous book.

Let me now say a few words about the topic of the book. Južnič starts the discussion on the human body with the problem of know and perception of human body. There are two features crucial for understanding the human body in relation to culture. The first characteristic is derived from the fact that the body is alone the exclusive material bearer of the human mind. Central nervous system is the cradle of the individual's consciousness. The second feature of the human body is perhaps even more important. Beyond any doubt, the human body has been the only mediator of various kind of social and cultural experiences since the dawn of the humankind. Both features are in a position of being axioms defining phenomenon of individual cognitive closing, an ontological fact that every individual has access only to its own thoughts, emotions and feelings (see chapter A).

Since the body is the only possible link between human mind and physical environment, it is precious for every individual human being. The body is cared for and its limits are defined most precisely, for it has to be protected from noxious influences from outside. Integrity of the human body is important in so far as individuals are involved in many cultural and social bodily regimes, which can actually be hostile to the existence of the body or at least are prone to diminish its effectiveness. An interesting illustration of such hostility can be found in the 17th century religious movement in Russia, whose members practice unusual and painful ritual of self-castration. Men cut off penes, while women cut off breasts.

One of the many areas where culture also takes its place is the surface of the human body. It is the limit of body integrity and despite of being definitive in physical terms, the human body gives the individual an opportunity to express a vividly endless variegation of human cultures. In any culture, no matter how much it is technically developed, individuals would be condemned to unpleasant solitary life unless their bodies were used as a special kind of vehicle for transmission of cultural meaning among members of such society or culture. Even more. Experimental situation in which sensual deprivation was efficiently achieved, proved that the lack of sensorial stimuli might cause serious psychic trauma (see chapter B).

How important are the senses for establishing human culture and society, is presented in one of the chapters of the book, which is entirely devoted to human senses. Human beings get all the information from social and cultural surroundings by using senses in everyday communication. The significance of senses is more than just well illustrated by a story of Helen Keller, who was born blind and deaf. But despite of sensual deficiency, she was able to communicate, though in a limited way, with other people, by using the sense of touch. Her success in achieving communication was so big that she even won the reputation of being a successful writer (see chapter D).

Is it possible to make an assumption that the human body is used as a primary demonstrator for individuality of a particular person? Well, yes and no. Aaron Gurevič in one of his books tells a story of a man who had return from the army and presented himself as another person whose destiny was unknown, while this missing person had left the community years ago. Surprisingly, no one in the community noticed that this man is not the person who he is pretending to be. Until one day his fortunes were at low ebb and deception was disclosed and the man was severely punished. This story happened at the end of the Medieval Ages, at the time when the idea of individuality was gradually stealing into the mind of the arriving modern person. The conclusion that can be made from the story of the unlucky deceiver is that individuals are capable not only to perform on the surface of their bodies what they truly have on mind. As Goffman pointed out, individuals are quite capable of arranging their bodies to look like someone else's or bodily 'disguise' themselves to mislead the 'audience' to see their intentions, which might be in fact different from the real one. And what is even more important is to recognise that any intervention on the surface or below the surface of the human body is made in accordance with cultural and

social norms and values. The body is rearranged with intention to achieve a condition in which it could be recognised as realisation of culturally represented ideal type of the body.

Ever since Descartes analytically separated the body from the mind, the quest for a plausible explanation how and where the body and the mind interact with each other has bothered many philosophers, scholars and scientists. It is safe to assume that the dispute is unsolvable within the fields of social science and humanities. What fascinates more is the way in which individuals in everyday life practising the fact that they are sensitive to division between body and mind. Especially religions like to perform asceticism in order to gain sacred feelings. It is well known that individuals whose nourishment suffers the lack of minerals, vitamins and other important provisions for living are more inclined to experience fear and anxiety. Not to mention that various illusions and hallucinations are rather usual companions of malnutrition. At least to some degree, an enormous amount of mystical revelations, although practised by a minority of population - mostly monks, holy women etc. - so characteristic for medieval culture, can be explained as a product of abusing the human body.

On the other hand, a lot of cultural practices can be found where the human body is exposed to exaggerations of another kind. In many cultures it is quite normal that members of the community from time to time practice ritual overeating. The quantity of eaten food indicates the social status of the eater. Not to mention the importance who eats what. Or who eats whom. Cannibalism is understood as something reserved for less civilised societies or is accepted only when great insufficiency of food occurred. But it is rarely known that cannibalism was rather usual in the late 15th century in the early Europe as Edward Muir shows us in his book *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*. It was used as an instrument of punishment or as a safety social valve. If any individuals had been considered immoral in terms of behaviour, the mob looked for them with intention to satisfy their greediness for revenge or satisfaction. Sometimes the individuals who were considered as offenders, were allowed to compensate for their sins, but in cases when they expressed a resistance, they might take a risk of being killed. In that case their bodies were dismembered and the pieces of raw human meat were ritually eaten. So an argument to support the interpretation of professor Južnič that cannibalism appeared only due to deficiency of food supply cannot be found (see chapter C).

Although I expose only a few theoretical dimensions of the new book by professor Južnič, I sincerely hope that the readers will get an adequate impression anyway. At the end, I would like to sum up some general ascertainments. First of all, it is appreciative that Južnič decided to extend his interest to a new field, especially if we take into account that the investigation of the human body in social sciences was more or less neglected in the last few decades. What is even more welcome, is the profusion of different examples with which the theoretical language is illustrated. In this sense it is exceedingly suitable for introduction to a cultural study of the human body. Especially students who are for the first time involved in anthropological themes should be very pleased when they notice that after every chapter, there are notes explaining basic anthropological, sociological and philosophical terms. Nevertheless I expected the book to be written in a more polemic manner. Professor Južnič hardly ever impugns theoretical statements of other important anthropologists in the matter of the human body. Such a strategy more or less forced him merely to stay at the level of description. Unfortunately, by putting out above all his own view on the investigation of the human body, the outcome of his efforts to put the human body in a new theoretical perspective, becomes less attractive.