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**Peter Stankovič, Gregor Tomc, Mitja Velikonja (eds.):
Urbana plemena: subkulture v Sloveniji v devetdesetih
(Urban tribes: Subcultures in Slovenia during the Nineties).
Ljubljana: ŠOU, Študentska založba, 1999.**

The publication *Urban Tribes*, subtitled *Subcultures in Slovenia in the Nineties* is in many ways a meaningful work. It is also an excellent reflection of the situation in theoretical field of so called sub-cultural studies. First of all the articles are very eclectic something which they showcase. Even the theoretical articles at the beginning of the book are very diverse. The two articles concerned are contributed by two of the three editors of the publication, Gregor Tomc and Mitja Velikonja. It is interesting, that third editor Peter Stankovič did not write a theoretical text but contributed an article about popular music, i.e. rock and roll, entitled *Rockers from the end of Millennium*. I am making this point because it illustrates that the theoretical texts from the editors are not synchronised. They did not try to give the reader a theoretical background or theoretical frame for reading the articles which followed. These two texts are only a partial insight into contemporary issues such as subcultures. The text by Gregor Tomc deals with some of the fundamental questions and problems of social science. I can point to at least two important questions. One is about socio-biological discourses, issues which are usually absent from social science because of their negative connotations. This is a very popular question in contemporary social studies which Gregor Tomc has phrased in a new way. These are questions about body and about the biological dimensions of our cultural life. His article is called *Thesis about the Body*. Sociology has avoided these question for too long a time, only anthropologists asked these questions when addressing the 'nature v. nurture' dilemma. These are questions about the relations between unchangeable biological and physical heredity or attributes on the one hand and cultural, psychological, nurtured attributes on the other. A lot of contemporary authors in the field of social studies are now addressing these issues when talking about the body, body-subject and similar issues. Gregor Tomc also pointed to the question concerning physiological differences between persons regarding their age. These cannot be elaborated upon here however I will point to one interesting question, "should we take into account biological factors in the analysis of youth?" (page 8). Tomc answers this question by saying that "puberty is a biological context, in which the cultural growth of self is grounded" (ibid). However I cannot conclude that Tomc says that the biological is primal and the cultural is developed from this. Perhaps whether we agree with this or not is not important. This article certainly opens a lot of questions, if we want to discuss these questions seriously a lot of research needs to be completed. We certainly cannot avoid these questions anymore.

We can conclude on the basis of this article that his definition of so called subcultures is framed by youth. Tomc puts subculture in a teenage period of life. He also connects subculture with musical styles. In the article when speaking about youth culture it is synonymous with musical styles, such as rock and roll, rave etc. Tomc already differentiates between 'subcultures', 'subpolitics' and 'countercultures' in his previous book *Druga Slovenija/An Another Slovenia* (Krt, Ljubljana 1989).

We can also say that Tomc mystifies subcultures in some other ways. When he talks about 'specific youth sub-cultural enclaves', he maintains that they are in a minority and that not everyone can be a member of particular subculture (page 10). This is a form of exclusivity and elitism. He even maintains that "biological youth is necessary but not enough for cultural youth" (ibid). Therefore every young person is not necessarily a member of a youth subculture. If so what is this person then? What is the difference between the members of youth subcultures and the youngsters who are not members of any youth subculture? Is this even possible? Are these people therefore out of something and if so what? A lot of questions which need answering. We can also

ask what he means when he is talking about “a man of 40 years old, who can listen to rave music, but who cannot be a member of techno/rave subculture” (page 11).

Specifically about the connections between subcultures and musical styles, Tomc says that “every youth subculture has its own kind of dance style” (page 12). A little later he is talking about “a membership of one particular youth subculture” and “individual aesthetic preferences” (ibid). With this he loosens a little the bind between youth subculture and a particular musical style or cultural praxis. Is it possible to put within this frame other sub-cultural manifestations, such as bikers, gay and lesbian subculture, skinheads, skaters etc which are not directly connected to a particular musical style in the first instance.

The conclusion of his article Tomc points out one more important question. He talks about the revival of some subcultures. Is rock-a-billy in the nineties the same rock-a-billy from the fifties or sixties? Can we compare punk from the nineties with punk from the seventies? He uses Heraklit’s thought “the one who steps in the same river, does not step in the same water” (page 13). An extension of this is, the one who steps in the same river for the second time is not the same person he was before. Here Tomc implicates that not even punk from the nineties is the same as punk from the seventies but he also not the same person as he was in the seventies. Both perceptions have changed. This is a common problem with scientological knowledge. Is it possible to talk about a solid ground to our knowledge anyway? We change as well as our knowledge which changes too.

The point which Tomc makes his conclusion, is the starting point of Mitja Velikonja. This author starts his article with questioning the term ‘contemporary subcultures’ itself. This »baseline« is a point which Gregor Tomc returned to after his two or three decades of studying and participation in subcultures. Mitja Velikonja is using, although he did not point it out anywhere, a kind of Husserlian phenomenology. He is asking the question which is the pure starting point. From a pure point of view he wants to rethink contemporary subcultures. He wants to build a new, more solid ground for these studies. He also takes in account anthropological claim »from the native’s point of view«. He is very concerned with what the actors, the protagonists, the members of a particular subculture think about themselves. Velikonja then offers a picture of subcultures here and now. He also points to another anthropological thesis about the fact that “all cultures are equal” (page 14). His point of view is the opposite to Tomc’s. Tomc argues that not everybody can be a member of particular (sub) culture. This implies that not every (sub) culture is the same, equal. The article of Mitja Velikonja is also stimulates further thinking and discussions.

As I said before neither Tomc’s nor Velikonja’s article gives a theoretical frame for reading other articles. They only offer two different theoretical points of view. In this context the other articles are put together without any order. And so an article about rock-a-billy follows one about skating, then we can read about rockers, ravers, lesbian and gay subculture, about a nostalgic so called ‘Balkan scene’, about heavy metal, skinheads, bikers and punks. Writers of these articles also differ in their methodology as well as in other aspects. For example we find some aspects of qualitative research and case studies in the article about skinheads. The writer of the article about rockers used qualitative interview as a method, he was also a member of studied subculture. The writer of article about heavy metal used fan’s approach with a lot of insider information, and the writer of article about punk used some classical sociological methods.

I did not discuss questions about the credibility of the used facts about some subcultures in this book. Some protagonists of these subcultures have different opinions about these subcultures and the meaning of them, but these are questions of interpretation. Again we have returned to the beginning. What is the meaning of a particular subculture for its members, part-time members, weekend members, full-time members, non-members and outsiders? These are important questions for researchers in social studies as a whole. The eclecticism of these articles is a good example of the ‘every-day life’ situation of these so called subcultures (ways of life) in Slovenia in the nineties. There are a lot of further questions to answer in the future. The discussion will continue....