

3. Anthropological Relevance of Popular Culture

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Various forms of emerging and vanishing lifestyles and fashions could be considered as a natural experiment for anthropological investigation. We have to understand popular culture as a field where the globalised culture is becoming visible and analysable. Colourful diversity of contemporary world is not only stretched between the global flows and local invariables, or between translocal traffic and localised rootedness, but unprecedentedly fluid, fleeting and frivolous. However, not only considering its role in socialisation to the modern society, popular culture in many occasions provides virtual experience for people who would never form any kind of society or a group in its strict sense. Or the common “mediated” experience can, on the other hand, lead to formation of different modern we-groups or “tribes” (Maffesoli).

We shall discuss the role of popular culture, especially popular music, dance, fashion, film, and the like, in formation of virtual and real communities, “tribes” and scenes. Especially important may become discussion of the different kinds of understanding and misunderstanding or new understanding of such basic concepts as “the cult”. Can we understand the phenomena as fandom without redefinition of such concepts? Or can we discuss “techno tribes” without redefinition of the concept of “the ritual”? And can we discuss virtual communities on/with the Internet without redefinition of the term “communication”?

The Popular Culture: Praxis and Empathic Community

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The replacement of the notion of “mass culture” by the concept of “popular culture” has the very important meaning for anthropological research, especially concerning post-modern times. “Popular” not always marks mass production for mass audience, as Adorno and the Frankfurt School reasserted. The today’s popular culture creates wide possibilities of the identification with many of its areas. However to investigate the popular from the participant’s point of view, the anthropologist should recall the concept of “culture as social praxis”.

Author proposes the understanding of the popular culture which does not identify it with media and technology, but as the special praxis and the essential ground of “empathic communities”. They are less or more stable, can exist in real time and space (e.g. on concerts, in clubs), but also in the cyberspace.

Based on his own research, the author presents “Yes empathic community” built around the famous progressive rock group. The methods used in analysis combine ethnography, text analysis and experiment.

Flyerspaces/Technoscene. An ethnographic approach to an urban formation.

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Hardly any city’s image today is as closely linked to its scene or underground as Berlin’s and its myth. With the fall of the wall young artists and scenesters moved in to open up illegal bars, galleries, cinemas, clubs, etc. I will present the results of my extensive field research in the various and changing locations of the Berlin Underground during the last two summers. Through field notes, interviews, photographs, cartographies, flyers, etc. I shall outline the scene’s ‘counterspace’ that stages the multisited urban drama of the scene. In focusing on the scene’s theatricality and symbolic activity through illegal raves and informal gatherings, I intend to re-read Clifford Geertz.

Postsubculturalists, as Maffesoli or Bennett, by using concepts of tribes, communities or lifestyles, still refer to a reifying concept of (sub-)culture, even if or exactly by stating that group boundaries are blurred or in flux. In contrast to this, I argue that scenes are not social groups but symbolic performances “by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about attitudes towards life” (Geertz 1983: 89). Rather than distinguishing between various tribes or lifestyles, I suggest that it might be more appropriate to distinguish between social reality and the symbolic performances that scenes are and always have been.

Identity of Youth Cultures in Post-Modern Society: The Skater-Scene

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Two often opposing approaches seem to dominate current studies of youth culture: Research in the tradition of British Cultural Studies focuses on the coherence of style of expression creating groups’-identity. In contrast, post-modern theory considers youth cultures as fragile and heterogeneous conglomerates of more or less arbitrarily chosen elements of style and calls common conceptions of identity into question. Using the skater-scene as an example, I shall raise the question if, and how, a sense of belonging is established in a contemporary and post-modern youth culture. In summer 2003 I conducted group-discussions with skateboarders in Austria. Although the skater-scene comprises characteristics of a post-modern and individualised society, there are many important strategies of how the group-identity is established and permanently reproduced: Mechanisms of selection and distinction and subtle restrictions of admission guarantee the youth culture’s identity. Important components are certain “attitudes”, specific ways of dealing with the risk of injury, and a certain idea of (physical, intellectual and spiritual) development, which can be gained through intensive skateboarding. Moreover, a feeling of belonging is created by negative public image of skateboarders. This is a result of a typical style, a certain behaviour, and, most of all, the way public space is appropriated.

Rite and Intertext - Looking for Interpretation on the Basis of Experience from Party-Culture

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In the paper I undertake the reinterpretation of the anthropological fieldwork and the role of the ethnographer, based on the experiences of my fieldwork in urban subcultures. In my interpretation I have given place to the post-modern theoretical approach of the city, including the intertextual interpretation of the underground party-culture. By mediating the text of the subcultural and dominant (mainstream) culture towards us, one can meet well constructed stories. These interpretations can be further interpreted in the course of which the redefinition of the author's and scholar's role is inevitable.

In addition, it has also become necessary to reinterpret the concept of rite or Turner's liminality since one can see how cultural tribes – especially party tribes – can experience their gatherings. They break the virtual range of the city by their rites and sometimes they establish in-group and out-group communication, space and time. In my presentation I will explain the above mentioned raising in details.

Music Events as Narrative Genre: Virtual and Real Communities

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Music events are analysed as narrative genre representing reality at the semantic and symbolic level: empirical – remembered, empirical – retold, and the experience of the imagined.

The paper will deal with discourse of the 1990s at the territory of former Yugoslav urban zone: Belgrade, Zagreb, Sarajevo, Ljubljana. When cyclic celebrations and ticktock rhythm of the everyday routine have been replaced by condensed and risky political events, music spectacles became an arena and a scene of that reality: war, political conflicts and antagonisms, economic crisis, nationalist euphoria, xenophobia, patriotic megalomania – but also suppressed humanistic echoes. Music events as narration were either a part of political atmosphere or were withdrawn into the imagined global world. In such conditions music narratives as interpretations were a specific medium providing a virtual space of identification.

At the symbolic level, a music event as narrative genre is a social drama, identifying and imagining virtual stylisation. Several examples will show how music concerts or festivals (e.g., anti-regime rock concerts in Belgrade; a concert of U2 in Sarajevo; the EXIT festival in Novi Sad) are transformed into a story, and finally into a literature, thus becoming a specific virtual world – travelling face-to-face tribes.

Singing Politics of Croatian Transition

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The role of mainstream pop culture as *vox populi* in contemporary Croatia will be examined as anthropological symptoms of post-socialist societies, changing “serious” into the “trivial” nature of their political cultures. The reduction of enormous social energy engaged in the harsh process of Croatian transition to the “washed-up” procedures of learning democracy left a vacuum of politically silenced, hushed and unsaid. The suppressed content breaks out through the “singing” evidence of the transitional left-overs and social anti-climax. Beyond the phrase-ridden, blackmailed or “sly-civilised” talk of changing political elites, the prompt and excessive intellectual critique of pop-culture now acts as an enlightened arbiter, condemning

and vindicating, mocking and overestimating the plain love-hate expressions of the “folk political soul”.

Two striking examples of communicating pop-politics will be exposed through the “social adventures” of Croatian pop-idols playing national heroes-heroines. One is the case of Severina, her successful transformation from a sexy-tool of daddy-politics to the mighty product of female transitional enterprise, able to vague the parochial right-left-wing logic of the official politics. The other is Thompson’ story of how a clumsy soldier-singer from times of resistance eventually took his political advocacy too seriously, tempting the rules of pop-musical business and turning into the *persona non grata* of Croatian “official glamour”.

The Westernization of Russian Youth Culture

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The topic of this presentation is how Russian youth manipulates and integrates western culture into daily life and how it affects Russian traditional culture. Since the collapse of the Soviet regime, Russian youth culture has changed drastically.

Formerly, youth culture centered around underground literature, music and a desire to promote traditional and contemporary Russian literature and music. With the sudden appearance of western books and music, since the early 1990s, there has been a lull in Russian writing and composing.

Bard singers engage mostly adults, and Russian pop music itself emulates the western scene on MTV. Historically, Russian authors have repeatedly carefully observed the west, took aspects of western culture and made it “its own”. It has been claimed that once incorporated into Russian culture, the cultural tradition, worldview or art is superior to the western model. Some of the outcomes of this transition includes a new interest in Russian-authored pulp fiction, an integration of English into Russian vocabulary and incorporation of cult movements from the west.

The question then remains: are traditional Russian values also going to change and to what extent are they incorporating only the most popular of western youth culture, thereby ignoring basic values intrinsic to democratization.

"Foreign Dancers": The Dance Club as a Field for the Construction of Collective Identity Among African Labour Migrants in Israel

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During the nineties, Israel began importing a large number of foreign workers to replace its traditional labour force, the Palestinians from the occupied territories. Among these foreign workers are approximately 30,000 immigrants from 15 African countries. This research focuses on the Tel Aviv dance clubs operated by African foreign workers and examines how the workers use this social space to construct a sense of collective identity within Israel. My assumption, following the work of Stuart Hall and Simon Firth, is that dance clubs are a ground for the emergence of a double-meaning discourse, symbolic and tangible, which represents shared and separate elements between different groups inside the African community and other groups in their environment.

The primary questions that emerge from this orientation are the following: What kind of African-Israeli identity are Africans constructing of themselves within this space? How do dance clubs act as places allowing the formation of this dual-meaning discourse?

Based upon a year of fieldwork, I have outlined two main routes of identification building among African workers/dancers, the Pan-African and the “global black”. I perceive this identification to express a process of detraditionalisation and the striving for a sense of belonging to the “modern world”. In the uneasy context of illegality and temporariness it is the dance club, more than any other space, which allow crossing the boundaries between past and present, east and west, traditional and the modern.

