

Alenka Barber-Kersovan. *Vom "Punk-Frühling" zum "Slowenischen Frühling": Der Beitrag des slowenischen Punk zur Demontage des sozialistischen Wertesystems.* Hamburg: Reinhold Krämer Verlag, 2005. 577 pp., 44.90 euros (\$52.53, paper). ISBN: 3-89622-073-X.

What is it, what we are holding in our hands? A politico-historical work? Or a musicological analysis? Both and much more! In any case, both the title and the illustration¹ on the cover of the book arouse the viewer's curiosity and interest.

Punk: this is a social phenomenon that also has relevance in the world of art (and especially music). Nevertheless, general encyclopedias of music either do not even mention punk,² or offer only a brief explanation of it.³ The reason for this may be a certain insecurity and reluctance among researchers to approach this very elusive socio-cultural phenomenon, which lacks a clear delineation and which can hardly be defined. Furthermore, many people perceive punk as something strange, only to be examined from a distance. With all of its provocative aspects, it is frightening and sometimes even repulsive.

Nonetheless, Alenka Barber-Kersovan takes on the challenge of characterizing punk. In the first part of her work, she provides not only a description of the phenomenon of punk in all of its facets around the world, but also describes its expression and the special role it has played in Slovenia in detail. The following chapter headers from the first part of the book are indicative of its focus and scope: *I. Recontextualization of Anglo-American Music in Slovenia*; *II. Student Cultural Organizations as the Basis for the Slovene Punk Movement* (including: The Slovene Student Revolt, The Rock Channel "Radio študent," The Student Center for Cultural Life; The Established Music Industry, The Slovene Independents and Punk; The Province Strikes Back); and *III. The Bands*.

Barber-Kersovan appears to successfully walk the difficult tightrope of scholarly writing about a subculture without indulging in

¹ Cf. <http://images-eu.amazon.com/images/P/389622073X.01.LZZZZZZZ.jpg>; the picture is one of the typical provocative covers from the student magazine *Mladina*.

² E.g., the *Riemanns Musiklexikon* (Mainz, 1928–) or the encyclopedia *Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Kassel, 1997).

³ E.g., *The New Grove* (vol. 20, p. 600, article by Alan F. Moore; ed. 1996) or in Metzler's *Neues Lexikon der Musik* (vol. 3, Stuttgart, 1996).

typical clichés or succumbing to shallowness. In doing so, she succeeds in providing well-researched observations on this phenomenon, some of which help destroy certain misconceptions. For example, by providing a detailed analysis and redefinition of Nazi-like symbols, Barber-Kersovan shows that the general societal characterization of punks as Nazis or fascists is completely unfounded.

The author also consistently adheres to her methodology, which demonstrates her rigorous scholarly approach. She discusses and reasons out her own methodology (e.g., pointing out why she considers a specific type of analysis of lyrics appropriate in various cases, cf. 294). In addition, the author also includes an esthetic approach to punk-culture: by means of an array of examples (illustrations from newspapers, posters, and photographs) as well as comparisons with representatives from “classical” music (e.g., Richard Wagner, cf. 247, 251) she stresses the possible broader understanding of the punk phenomenon in the sense of a synthesis of the arts.⁴

In reading the first part of the book, the question is raised whether it may compel readers to change their attitude towards any “subculture” or—to an even more pronounced degree in the second part—to develop a liking for the world of punk. In any case, it can be assumed that readers’ perceptions of groups of people that are marginalized by our society will be affected by reading this book. Last but not least, the following question is raised: Which emotional relation does the author have toward the Slovene “subculture” of punk alongside her many years of scholarly work in this field?

The second half of the book (231–) provides answers to a number of questions that generated by the first part of the book: What is behind this punk phenomenon? What impact has it had in Slovenia? Part two of the book also forges links between the description and the interpretation of punk, the relevance of which was steadily increasing in the 1980s for the political situation in Slovenia.

As a contemporary witness, the author introduces the “Western Bloc” reader to the logic system of the communist “establishment” (as the communist authorities are consistently referred to by Barber-Kersovan). At the same time, she carefully makes her way through all the

⁴ Considering the use of audiovisual media, one might partly regard the products of punk culture as synthetic culture.

various names of the numerous organs of a communist state—despite the very good translations of these into German, these are nonetheless difficult to grasp for those not familiar with the system. In addition, she sheds light on the interrelations between these organs and society. The increasingly special role played by sociopolitical development in Slovenia from the mid 1980s onwards, in comparison with the other republics of Yugoslavia, becomes obvious. The author describes, on the one hand, the gradual transition from a subculture to “sub-politics” (447), and, on the other hand, the interaction between state repression of punk culture and its reactions⁵ that eventually accelerated the democratization process in Slovenia.

I would especially like to emphasize the experienced interdisciplinary perspective that the author applies when approaching the topic. This creates a broader view of the various interrelations involved. In addition to examining the topic from a musicological and sociopolitical point of view, Barber-Kersovan also applies various approaches based on disciplines such as linguistics (e.g., numerous references to language, its application, and its role; e.g. Slovene vs. Serbo-Croatian, 80, 82, 118, etc.), journalism (interrelations between media and subculture), esthetics, and literary studies (including examples from literature, such as Orwell’s work).

With regard to layout, the organization of the table of contents, with its two main parts corresponding to the title of the book (chapters I–III and IV–VII), represents a very appropriate choice. Moreover, nearly every major chapter starts with a cogent quotation—for example, from Plato’s *Republic* (449) or from the Slovene songwriter Jani Kovačič (231)—which causes the reader to reflect on various issues. The text is rendered even more vivid not only by the pictures of documents on punk culture used for illustration purposes, but also by many interviews and quotations from contemporary personalities.

In addition, the author addresses the problem of translation with great success: for example, Barber-Kersovan does not keep the original lyrics from the reader, but presents them with their German equivalents, which have been translated with great skill. The same accuracy is applied

⁵ “Such repressions, however, caused the opposite of what the establishment sought to achieve” (438, my translation).

to the bibliography: the Slovene original title of a particular work given with its corresponding German translation in parentheses.

The only technical deficiency, which is nonetheless apparent to informed readers, is the absence of Slovene diacritical signs throughout the entire text (in Slovene lyrics, original titles, proper names, etc.). Although the author refers to this deficiency in her preface, it remains a shortcoming—on the one hand because of the decrease in linguistic authenticity, and on the other hand to the irritation of readers familiar with Slovene.

Barber-Kersovan's work is an extremely successful study of the phenomenon of punk in Slovenia. Not only is it unique in terms of its scope and its in-depth analysis, but it will definitely be of interest to political scientists, sociologists, musicologists, philosophers, philologists, socio-linguists and journalists as well. I hope that it will reach as many of these readers as possible.

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