

# Introduction

This book, as I hope is clear from the title, is about the city of Pula. Yet it would be more accurate to say that it is about the city's inhabitants, known locally in Croatian as *Puležani* (Pulezhani).<sup>1</sup> Or more precisely, about one strand of the city's residents and partly also about their relation to the environment in which they largely reside, work, go out, socialize or study – in short, where they live. *Tapija* (pronounced tahpeeya), which will be left unitalicized from now on as you become more familiar with it, is one of the key terms that expresses this relationship between the city and one part of its inhabitants, between Pula and *Puležani*. Yet it is also important to emphasize that this is a relationship among *Puležani* themselves, as well as towards those who come from other localities. *Tapija* features in the book's subtitle, and in the title of the Croatian language version (*Doći u Pulu, dospjeti u tapiju*), which paraphrases the title of a book from the collated Frankfurt lectures of the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk: *Zur Welt Kommen – Zur Sprache Kommen* (Sloterdijk 1992a). Here, the word Pula has been inserted in place of the word language [Sprache]. In this paraphrasing, the world stands for the environment in which boredom (*tapija*) can be found, there to be interpreted. Drawing such a close link between a city and a specific affect, concept, or indeed a phenomenon – despite oblique warnings I received about this in several casual conversations on the topic – is not an exclusive move, as such a close linkage seems to exist in other localities as well. Of course, I would never dare to deny or diminish that linkage in places in which I am unfamiliar with everyday happenings. Yet, after having conducted this research I can definitely claim that *tapija*, this decidedly polysemic concept, features as some kind of code in Pula, as a 'language' or slang whose nuances need to be mastered over time in order to understand them completely. Witnesses testifying to this fact can be found on the following pages, among a strand of interlocutors who have moved to live in Pula, as well as among residents of Pula who came across this term during primary or secondary school for the first time and, along with its

meanings, have adopted it as part of their own vocabulary. During the research I never heard of *tapija* having the same meaning and connotation in any other social environment and on so many levels as in Pula. This is a link wherein existing works of culture, small in number but nonetheless present, refer to *tapija* in a title, a postcard, songs or events. On the other hand, such remarks about the non-exclusivity of Pula and part of its residents' tight relationship with *tapija* can offer a route into responses to the question I was asked most often during the field research on *tapija*: when and how did the term *tapija* emerge in Pula?

I believe this question is best answered from a slightly constructivist position, as each generation not only has its own space, situations and times for using the term, but they also give it its own meanings, and these are sometimes quite distinct from those of other generations. And so, rather than homing in precisely on *tapija*'s 'when and how' – although answers to such questions are not out of bounds in the following chapters – I find it more interesting to try and fathom 'what' its previous and present meanings were, and 'why' it had them. Thus, in line with the *tapija*-related warnings I received, even if the term was used in other social environments outside of Pula, it was probably linked there to the completely distinct meanings the term was attributed in those contexts, and to the situations in which it was uttered. In this sense, linguistic creativity and the playfulness of the concept's multiple, shifting meanings would, in turn, be marked by the different economic or cultural, i.e. existential contexts in which *tapija* was present. There is no need to compare experiences of different cities and environments to reach such a conclusion; it is enough to compare experiences of various generations from the same city. In that sense, today's Pula is not the same city as 1980s Pula, so it is unsurprising that not only the meanings of local slang, but also the value systems that such slang expresses, are somewhat generationally influenced. Peter Burke's conclusion therefore holds that 'changes in the meanings of words are sometimes sensitive indicators of much wider changes in attitude' (1991: 191, cf. Bakhtin 1980: 184). These changes in meaning depend on, while at the same time make up, a key part of changes in the wider social field.

Furthermore, I understand the term anthropology in a threefold sense at least: it is comprised of ethnography, this study's dominant methodological approach; participant observation; and also interviews with Pula residents or newcomers (*došljaci*). I have thus attempted to grasp the dominant meanings of the *tapija* phenomenon among a wider subsection of Pula residents. This is the *materia prima*, i.e. the 'first matter' from which this manuscript has been made. The meanings and understandings of *tapija* skirt the edges, or completely fall within the

remit of certain topics that would be considered philosophy from a classical humanist perspective. I am thinking first and foremost here of the concepts of alienation and boredom. The first of these has been almost completely removed from research and writing in the social sciences and humanities, albeit not from everyday life. Meanwhile, boredom features as a kind of symptom that pertains to the times in which we live, and is currently experiencing a new lease of life and a revival in academic writing too. This book thus attempts to remind us of, and even to rearticulate, classical yet amputated concepts of thinking and possible action. At the same time, it attempts to breathe a local, specific character into certain concepts that may be described as fashionable at present. This is the real meaning of the (g)locality of *tapija*: it is always more than the mere sum of its parts, and may be considered a reflection or fragment of many better-known, better-elaborated concepts and affects, in terms of which *tapija* can also be explained in part. This is the idea from which also the English title of this book is derived from. *Almost, but Not Quite Bored in Pula* puts boredom in the foreground, yet at the same time leaves open space for possible differences between this contemporary symptom and the very subject of research presented in this publication.

Seen from such a viewpoint, *tapija* appears as a specific local concept that can link the city up with broader historical and geographical contexts. However, in the text, along the lines of the conversations with my interlocutors, I will also argue the opposite. Yet, this is not an exact, unambiguous and simply explainable phenomenon, and its principal contradiction perhaps emerges from this. This marked contradiction brings us to the third stated meaning of anthropology. If understood as a fusion of ethnology and philosophy (an ‘ethnophilosophy’, as I will later explain further), then it follows an understanding of the folklore underpinning the philosophy of Antonio Gramsci, that is, ‘Its basic and most characteristic features, that it is a diffuse, disunified, incoherent, inconsistent philosophy, in line with the social and cultural position of the masses’ (2007: 1396). In other words, albeit in social conditions that have changed since the time Gramsci was writing, ethnophilosophy deals with an interpretative system found among philosophers who are not necessarily educated. This makes such a hermeneutics of everyday life especially interesting and sometimes hectic too, and so it is not that easy to find a common denominator among the different narratives.

The noun ‘phenomenon’, from the subtitle, has a double meaning: it denotes and implies that *tapija* is endemic to and a specific phenomenon of Pula, and simultaneously implies that the phenomenon of *tapija*, articulated as a noun, verb and adjective in everyday speech, is also manifest as a spirit, rhythm or certain possibility of the city’s quality of life.

It can therefore ‘serve as a basis for knowledge of things’, i.e. in Pula’s case, ‘in its essence’ (*Filozofski leksikon* 2012). Of course, the essence of the city that *tapija* mediates – whatever it means, depending on the period and the context – is neither exclusive nor unchangeable. In the same way, it is also not eternal, because my understanding of *tapija* is at the centre of this research’s partiality. In other words, many sections of this book have a speculative character, and another researcher would probably describe the topic in a profoundly different way. Yet, on the following pages I attempt to organize and explain a topic that has largely been left unresearched and unsystematized to date. This largely means that no institutionalized ‘archive’ exists, nor any published comprehensive record of *tapija* for my analysis and use. Instead, such a situation pushes me to return once again to ethnography, to the field, to the ‘living archive’ which my interlocutors make up. I will not enter into a polemic here, nor will I respond to the question of whether or not I could possibly research the imponderables of everyday life differently. *Tapija* is – most definitely – a result or reflection of that everyday life.

Many researchers and publicists have done Pula a great service with their writing, by dedicating numerous pages to analysing or depicting past or present-day life in the city. Some of their conclusions are thus included in this book, and their works can be found in the bibliography. Yet, as I will occasionally assert, the phenomenon that I seek to interpret here is one that I have primarily understood and treated as a ‘theoretical problem’ to be explained, rather than a meticulously detailed depiction of the chronology of a concept’s life. Thus, while in certain sections this book will take a diachronic perspective, delving into times near to ours, or to history further back, I will make such a move elliptically rather than chronologically. Differently put, I will focus on those periods, moments and historical places linked to *tapija* in my research, or to the concepts from which *tapija* derives. The same applies to certain places and events in Pula that are especially imprinted in residents’ memories. There are simply innumerable festivals, concerts, spaces for public gatherings, etc. that have generated *tapija* or been places in which the concept of *tapija* has been uttered, referred to, felt or enacted. *Tapija*’s presence in this book has been largely conditioned by the interviews with my interlocutors. This is why I do not attempt to provide an exhaustive list of places of memory in Pula here, or of places that relate to present-day events and night-time happenings. Rather, this book seeks to analyse and interpret, from various angles, the meanings of a single concept in which one part of Pula’s sociality is immersed.

Analysing *tapija* and how it is articulated form the main topics and ‘actors’ of this book. This concept is not a casual, hermetic or ‘exotically’

mentioned phenomenon inserted here, and present in writing about more malleable and easier-to-grasp topics. On the contrary, it could even be argued that situations, processes and the city are interpreted through the prism of *tapija*. Yet such a method is prone to multiple possible misunderstandings and therefore requires some explanation. Pula cannot be reduced exclusively to *tapija* or to one of its meanings because, as I will later elaborate further, *tapija* is drawn through comparisons. To be *tapija* at all, as a separate attitude, affect, situation or period of time, it must also on occasion not be present in the lives of Pula's citizens and in the city itself. This fact is a source of possibilities for its understanding as irony, as *fore* (En. clever tricks/jokes) or *zezancije* (En. joking around), though it can sometimes simultaneously be the bearer of more powerful existential meanings.

That aside, perhaps the method of wholly concentrating on this and phenomena contiguous with it may contribute to a general, final impression that overexaggerates the importance of *tapija*. In other words, the arguments here may aggrandize *tapija*, compared with the extent of its meanings in the city and in the lives of individuals. Yet this is a risk that must be accepted if something new is to be said about this topic, i.e. if we wish to analyse it, approach it from 'within' and look deep inside it with an ethnographic microscope and a theoretical macroscope, while accordingly avoiding mere 'external' and in many ways redundant description. Furthermore, the generational approach that seeps through the manuscript in places is not at all exclusive; neither does it deal with cement-cast generational meanings and practices into which this phenomenon is woven, nor with tendencies that can always be found among profoundly different tendencies and examples, including among members of proximate generations. One example is an interlocutor who claimed that his circle of friends 'never used the word *tapija*', instead calling boredom and similar words '*mrtvilo*', which can be literally translated as 'dead thing' (G.P., interview). An interlocutor from a generation close to his said that '*tapija* was one word, perhaps used too frequently' (L.P., interview), which probably says enough about this dynamic.

At the end of this prologue I cannot but conclude that in Pula, besides, for example, the Amphitheatre, the Arch of the Sergii, the Twin Gates, the Augustus Templum, the Austro-Hungarian and Venetian Fortresses, the Uljanik shipyard, the Arena knitwear factory, the Pula Film Festival, the Book Fair(y) in Istria, all the well-known signifiers of the city, there are also entirely informal institutions at work. Almost always uttered briefly and informally, in a manner conveying commonly understood information, *tapija* also hides the fact that behind such sharp verbalizations of the term, a real, layered knowledge of it is often hiding.

## Note

1. In the Croatian version, I refer to inhabitants of Pula and the surrounding area throughout the book using regional phrases such as *Puležanka*, *Puležan* and *Puležani*, rather than the standard Croatian *Puljanin* and *Puljani*. [Translator's note: in the English translation, I use 'residents of Pula' or 'inhabitants of Pula' unless I deem the original Croatian terms necessary.]