
33rd Nordic Ethnology and Folklore Conference in Copenhagen

The 33rd Nordic Ethnology and Folklore Conference took place at the University of Copenhagen on 18–21 August 2015. Approximately 230 participants gathered in Copenhagen to speak, perform and discuss various topics related to the prefix ‘CO’ – Co-productions, collaborations and contestations. The ‘Co’ also referred to the city of Copenhagen itself as well as to collaboration between ethnologists and folklorists and to complicated and controversial encounters.

The organising committee consisted of five collaborators and the people representing them: the University of Copenhagen’s Saxo Institut, the Department of Arts and Cultural Sciences at Lund University, Aalborg University Copenhagen, the Danish Folklore Archives of the Royal Library and the National Museum of Denmark. In connection with the conference, a two-day PhD course on Composing Cultural Analysis was held at Lund University on 16–17 August. On the last day of the conference, the participants had the possibility to participate in one of four excursions: the architectural sights of Copenhagen, DieselHouse, Christiania or Frederiksberg Garden and Zoo.

English as lingua franca

Copenhagen welcomed the conference participants with warmth and sunshine, and comparable warmth was conveyed by the organisers and the personnel throughout the conference. The welcoming ceremony took place at the festive ceremony hall, situated in the oldest remaining building (constructed in the years 1829–1836) of Denmark’s first university, founded in 1479. In her welcoming speech, Associate Professor Tine Damsholt (University of Copenhagen) underscored the fact that for the first time in the history of the Nordic Ethnology and Folklore Conference, the organisers had chosen English as the official language of the conference. It was hoped that this language choice would encourage all of the participants to join discussions in spite of their mother tongue. This was a seemingly successful idea, as the conference also invited contributions

from international participants. Although the conference call mentioned ‘Nordic colleagues’ as the focus group, the use of English as lingua franca opened the conference up also to participants from other countries, and indeed the conference received researchers from, for example, Great Britain and the Baltic countries. In this way, the ‘Co’ could also be seen as helping to broaden co-operation with ethnologists and folklorists without skills in one of the Scandinavian languages.

Miscellaneous conference program

Two conference days were filled with twenty-four panels and four project workshops, held at the university’s Southern Campus. The themes considered inter alia knowledge production in academia and traditional archives, border practices in the EU, transnational co-operation and Sámi research as well as heritage, collecting and collections in material and immaterial form. While considering the individual presentations, the topics intertwined with subjects related to body, space, food, nature and materiality, all of which seem to interest many researchers today. Most of the sessions were held in English, only a clear minority in one of the Scandinavian languages.

One of the many interesting panel presenters was Jonas Engman, head of archives at Nordiska Museet in Stockholm. He addressed the timely topic of needing to consider the political dimensions in the use of heritage. The cultural and radical underpinnings of tradition take on new significance in a multicultural context. The neo-national activists use romanticised visions of tradition for political purposes, and they define heritage by imaginary rhetoric of a mono-cultural past. Engman calls for a careful epistemological and ethical response on the part of archivists to this discussion.

Keynotes and co-notes

The conference programme included five keynote presentations. Two of them were so called Salon or Co-Keynotes – dialogical and conversational by character. Senior lecture Vicky Singleton (Lancaster University) gave her keynote presentation just after the welcoming ceremony at cer-

emotional hall. Singleton's topic was 'How Policy and Care Go-On-Together: Against the Pursuit of Common Values'. In the UK, there are conflicting values with respect to policy, care and patients in health care, and the concept of 'good care' is multiple and dependent on the different values and realities of people's lives. Singleton stressed that in order to achieve a greater understanding of discordant values, co-operation between the medical professionals, patients and researchers representing multidisciplinary points of view and methods would benefit all parties involved.

Professor Kirsten Hastrup (University of Copenhagen) reflected on how fields are made and analytically objectified in her presentation 'Comprehending Thule. The Co-Constitution of Places, People, and Stories'. Based on her extensive fieldwork in Thule area of Northwest Greenland, she pointed out how ethnography is the outcome of previous encounters and images, which still influence how a place and its people are comprehended as well as the current interests of the different actors in the area.

In co-operation with IKEA furniture

Orvar Löfgren, professor emeritus from Lund University, was introduced as a rock star of ethnology – and he certainly took his audience like one! The topic of the Salon Keynote was 'A Crowded Living Room: The Cohabitation of Stuff, Affects, Activities and Dreams', and it was presented in collaboration with Löfgren and a set of Ikea items. The stage setting itself aroused interest, and afterwards questions from the audience could only be asked in the form of a non-human actor, or else from a human perspective and addressed to a non-human object.

Löfgren compared the changes in a living room to the theoretical transformation of European ethnology. We still know very little about domestic life and a number of new things have yet to be discovered. There is more than one answer to the question, what is a living room good for? Löfgren encouraged researchers to 'throw the cushions from the sofa to the floor', and not to stick to old habits and routines, but to find everyone's own voice and style. Still, he underlined the fact that behind all the changes, there is continuity,

and styles may also come back in slightly different forms. Collaboration on the part of the researchers is vital. When books are placed on a Billy bookcase, they start touching each other and osmosis is created.

Can tradition be copyrighted?

Associate Professor (University of Iceland) Valdimar Tr. Hafstein's presentation, 'Authors, Editors, Folk: Copyright and Creative Agency from a Folklorist's Perspective', focused on the themes of authorship and copyright with respect to intangible cultural heritage and tradition. Hafstein referred to Thomas Pettitt's Guttenberg Parenthesis: the idea of interrupted oral tradition by the dominance of printed materials. This dominance has been challenged since the 1900s, first by sound recordings and later by the internet. Today, people make copies and change older tradition in a creative way, as part of everyday cultural practices, by using possibilities that the digital world offers. This creative use of older tradition is collective, cumulative and collaborative by its very nature. Traditional Western copyright laws do not recognise this new way of making copy culture. Using the case of a traditional lullaby, Hafstein underlined the challenges of defining the originality of heritage and traditional knowledge, which legally fall into a no-man's land but which stimulate a great deal of interest in the business world.

The originality of authorship is another matter in oral tradition that is difficult to define. The acknowledgment of an authorship has historically been related to gender and the fact that written text has itself a higher cultural status than oral tradition. Many folk stories have been told by women and written down by men. Focusing on ethical perspective, Hafstein pointed out the way in which the Brothers Grimm had adduced the storyteller in the early editions of their books. In later editions, as well as with many other of the authors' books, the original storyteller had taken on the form of a fairy tale mother or Mother Goose as a representation of the folk.

The different layers of tradition are formed over time by collective creativity. In many cases, it is impossible to authenticate the origins of ideas

and creative agency, not to mention the shaping processes in the circulation of culture. Hafstein suggests that maybe we should not talk about authors but rather about collector–editors, who give a new shape to folk tradition.

Hot and cold borders

The last co-keynote speech, ‘Broen II Bron: The Östersund Region Redux’, by Professors Tom O’Dell and Fredrik Nilsson (Lund University) and Associate Professors Marie Sandber and Mark Vacher (University of Copenhagen) finished the academic part of the programme.

Reference to the well-known TV-series *The Bridge*, where a body is found at the border zone bridge between Sweden and Denmark, bound together presentations of local, regional and national identities and mobility as well as the cultural changes in a particular region. The talk also focused on the changing character of border lines, from hot to cold and vice versa, in historical contexts and also from individual points of view. Sandberg introduced three bodies as symbols of pre-Schengen borders, Schengen borders and the EU’s external borders. She pointed out that EU borders are neither radically open nor are they vanishing. The borders are unnoticeable and cold to EU citizens, but for refugees they remain hot.

The matter of responsibility

In the last co-keynote speech, Valdimar Tr. Hafstein raised the question, ‘who does the body belong to?’ His presentation addressed the question

of who owns heritage. Jonas Engman had earlier called attention to the responsibility of archivists in neo-national discussions. The questions inter-related. The patterns of how heritage and transnational, internal and cultural borders are created should be further considered. We as researchers should not remove ourselves from this discussion. Instead, the concepts and contexts where heritage has been and is created and how it is used should be brought forth. As Marie Sandber stated, new borders emerge in our everyday lives and they find their way into xenophobic and populist rhetoric, but we have scarcely any empirical and historical evidence for the process works in practice. We are all responsible for the body while creating, preserving and construing heritage. As Orvar Löfgren had stated in his presentation, we do not know where the next new, exciting turn in cultural analysis lies. The future is unpredictable, and there are no patterns that we can unveil in advance. But we, as ethnologists and folklorists, have the responsibility to read and interpret the signs, make observations and interpretations – to make the body visible.

The conference ended with a boat drive to Langelinie Pavillon where the festive Conference Banquet was held. At the end of the dinner Professor Ella Johansson welcomed the audience to the 34th Nordic Ethnology and Folklore Conference which will be arranged in 2017 by Uppsala University.

Anna Rauhala