

BOOK REVIEWS

LAURA ARO AND BO LÖNNQVIST (eds). *Autenttinen ihminen—Tulkintoja irtautumisen etnografiasta*. Jyväskylä: Atena kustannus, 2006. Pp. 146. ISBN 951-796-352-1.

Autenttinen ihminen is an interesting collection of papers originating from two separate research projects at the Department of Ethnology of the University of Jyväskylä, funded by the Academy of Finland. The writings have been collected and edited under a unifying theoretical theme of the ‘Ethnography of Detachment’, and continue the work presented in a previous compilation called *Arjen säikeet*. The book is divided into five sections, which all deal with the concept of detachment in their own way: I Löydettyä (‘encountered’), II Rikottua (‘transgressed’), III Siirrettyä (‘transited’), IV Etäistettyä (‘distanced’), V Saavutettua (‘attained’).

The first chapter, by Bo Lönnqvist, presents some of the methodological background unifying the various scholars. The authors’ opinion is that the research on the “imaginary”, in general, has been a rather unattended issue in ethnology, which traditionally has viewed people as rationally acting cultural agents (as in functional interpretations of fantasy in society, for instance). Research on the imaginary, dreams, belief, and fantasy has been more often the subject of disciplines such as comparative religious studies or the classical humanities, whereas ethnological research has focused more on empirically perceivable and comparable phenomena. But how do expectations, hopes, and fantasy interact with the making and experience of the social and cultural world in which these aforementioned agents live? How does one, at least temporarily, detach oneself from quotidian life and experience through fantasy, dreams, and imaginary mental worlds? How have people used detachment to reflect upon one’s own existence and how does it relate to the experience of authenticity?

Jari Eilola writes about the history of mentalities, or “antropological history”. He looks at how canonical historiography has deliberately left out reflexive critique of the manner of its production, attempting instead to achieve “objectivity”. He further examines how traditional history has neglected fantasy. For instance, he argues that microhistorical research, including comparison of specific witchcraft trial documents, reveals more accurately the content and variety of what was thought about witches in everyday life than do standard historiographical narratives. In his view, microhistorical research and “traditional history” are not mutually exclusive nor necessarily in any manner incompatible, nor does interest in microhistory signify the “death of grand narratives”. Instead, they are different ways of approaching history. Microhistorical research should however be central to ethnology. History of mentalities and microhistory have in common, epistemologically speaking, the strength of noticing things that other historiographical methods would not notice. The advantage of this kind of research is its contact with the everyday experience of an era—as opposed to relying on academic, formal, and distanced accounts of intellectuals and other elites.

Erkka Pehkonen describes the lives of fish vendors in Kuopio. He explores price bargaining and small (often humorous) cultural dramas related to their work, through which they achieve momentary ‘detachment’. His analysis draws on the theoretical ideas of John Huizinga and Roger Caillois on play and culture. Play is an informal manner of creating

mental imagery that fits the physical and social surroundings. Price negotiation is on the one hand playful, non-serious social interaction, on the other it is a competition between the customer and vendor. Such negotiations may also etch a space where the values of the market place and of the outer world intersect. This is because today bidding is experienced more as economic resistance than it was previously, and market vendors cannot really economically compete with supermarkets, which can remain more competitive through effective logistics, stock management, and other rationalized or institutionalised action. The garrulous vendors mock outside norms with skillful inside jokes. The small dramas and playing around are simultaneously satirical, ethical, political and normative, and Pehkonen compares this to Bakhtin's writing on market culture.

Bo Lönnqvist discusses the use of clothing in 'detachment'. Examples include a student happening that has become tradition in Jyväskylä and other cities called *Kauppakadun approbatur*, and the concept of *kalsarikänni*, which is essentially when one, instead of going out publically to celebrate, remains home or in another private setting drinking in one's underwear. In the *Kauppakadun approbatur* event, students create a mock university, where alcohol consumption is the goal: the more one drinks, the higher "degree" one is rewarded. In this student happening special overalls are worn, which indicate through symbols attached to them not only the student status itself, but also a specific academic faculty and other affiliations. Lönnqvist compares the festival to initiation and transition rites. Yet the event does not comprise an 'initiation' as such since the social status of the participant does not really change. Nevertheless, it aims at detachment from ordinary academic work through a reversal of norms and expectations, in a similar vein as the modern tradition of carnival in Latin American countries. *Kalsarikänni* is another form of detachment through transgression, also related to student life. In it one celebrates and transgresses norms, including dress code.

In the third section of the book Juha Laine describes ballroom dance events in contemporary Finland, which have long been places for spending leisure time, searching for future mates, and meeting friends. Today the majority of beginners do not learn the dances in a traditional manner, that is, from their parents or neighbours. Instead they usually begin dancing by participating in a beginner's course at a dance school. Dancing venues are usually semi-casual; not completely quotidian, nor formal or ceremonious. Dancing venues are distanced not only mentally from everything quotidian, but the actual dancing sites are usually situated somewhere quite remote, outside of cities and residential areas. These sites strictly control everything from proper dress to conduct, and in doing so, create a structured virtual or fantasy world separate from the "real world". This creates the surroundings in which people realize their dreams and gain experience. As a result, real world socioeconomic status, for instance, is unimportant, as only socially talented people or good dancers form the "elite" of this temporary world.

Heli Niskanen approaches the question of the non-real by looking at women's restrooms as a sort of 'public/private' issue in bars and nightclubs. These areas are physically separated from the "public" sphere of the bar, but more importantly, they are strongly separated from the "official ongoing" of the public sphere of a bar, where the subjects cannot escape the ever evaluative eye of the public. The nightclub atmosphere is, after all, only one of pseudo-detachment, and people are expected to blend in to the supposedly carefree and light nightclub milieu through their behavior and dress. This pseudo-detached state needs

constant repair and updating—often enough, in restrooms. They become spaces where young women discuss freely and where a collective feeling of authenticity is abundant.

Analyzing personal journals, the authors in the fourth section discuss experiential distancing and detachment through the act of writing. Nina Sääskilähti examines the journal entries of two women, Saara and Aino. Her theoretical approach starts from the idea that journal writing is processual and never finished; it is the constant processing and analysis of life events. Autobiographies on the other hand are usually written after a life has been lived with an artificial thematic structure in mind. She combines this idea with Paul Ricoeur's notions of the interdependence of narrative and temporality and the everyday tendency to conceal the finiteness of existential time from Heidegger (authenticity as the *being-towards-death*). An authentic feeling, in description, of a significant moment—for example the beginning of a war—is achieved through certain writing techniques or textual structures. Authenticity can be achieved by use of the present tense by the journal's main character, as compared to historical or documentary forms. This presentational mode does not separate the experiencing subject from the author, allowing the reader to identify her or himself with the character.

Laura Aro also writes about two journal writers, Merja and Leena. Her position, analogous to microhistorical critique, is that the diaries of 'nonpublic' people are in some respects more descriptive of their epoch than those of public people, which have already in advance been subjected to considerable attention in the media, sometimes even by academic circles, and hence have been loaded with artificial and premeditated interests. Personal diaries often 'self-objectify', meaning that the writer attempts analytically to understand his or her daily routine and its chaos through narration.

Bo Lönnqvist concludes the book in part five, where he focuses on arriving and departing as significant mental categories in everyday experience. He discusses his personal farewell lecture held at the university of Jyväskylä upon his retirement. He further discusses the frequency of the verbs 'to arrive' and 'to depart', everyday words and actions that introduce significance into life. Achieving something is essentially about arriving at that point, but also about losing or leaving behind something else.

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