



Ethnologia Europaea

Journal of European Ethnology

37:1-2 2007

Museum Tusulanum Press

Ethnologia Europaea

Journal of European Ethnology

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E-mail order@mtp.dk Internet www.mtp.dk
- Bank IBAN: DK10 5202 0001 5151 08
BIC: AMBKDKKK

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E-article

In

Ethnologia Europaea
Journal of European Ethnology
Volume 37:1–2

2008

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University of Copenhagen

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Copyright © 2008 Museum Tusulanum Press

ISBN 978 87 635 0998 5

ISSN 1604 3030

IN

Ethnologia Europaea

Journal of European Ethnology 37: 1-2

E-journal

Copyright © 2008 Museum Tusulanum Press

ISBN 978 87 635 0981 7

ISSN 1604 3030

Unaltered version in pdf-format of:

Copyright © 2007 Ethnologia Europaea, Copenhagen

Printed in Sweden by Grahns Tryckeri AB, Lund 2007

Cover and layout Pernille Sys Hansen

Cover photos Pernille Sys Hansen and Robert Lau

Photos Susanne Ewert, page 6

Richard Wilk, pages 16, 34, 44, 50, 70

ISBN 978 87 635 0885 8

ISSN 0425 4597

This journal is published with the support of the Nordic board
for periodicals in the humanities and social sciences.

Museum Tusulanum Press

University of Copenhagen

Njalsgade 126

DK-2300 Copenhagen S

www.mtp.dk

VILLAGE HOMES

Jonathan H. Shannon

My family splits time between an apartment in New York City and a house in the South of France. This arrangement, though hardly unique, afford us unique perspectives on home. For me, as an anthropologist, musician, and photographer, the senses of home assume different values, or what McLuhan called "sense ratios." I sense my home in New York through site and sound differently from my home in France. In this way one is at home in both places, or rather,

one carries both places in the journeys between and among them, like a snail with its shell, leading to a dual sense of home: a double exposure, New York in France, France in New York.

The anthropologist Steven Feld remarks that each experience of listening carries with it a memory, a biography of prior listenings. The same can be said for ways of seeing and framing home. Because for me so much of my sense of home revolves around raising

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Ill. 1: At Play in the Village, New York City.

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Ill. 2: Reflections, Washington Square Village.

Ill. 3: Vistas and Volets, Calvisson.

my young son, when we are at play in New York, we both remember times in Calvisson, while Calvisson, despite its small scale, reflects New York, creating a dialogue of Village and village. The experience of home in double produces a double exposure in many ways. The following photographs¹ explore this sense of duality, tracing reflections and resonances of home in New York and France, from the intimate and candid to the serendipitous and surprising of the quotidian.

Like all New Yorkers we face the challenge of raising a child in a restricted urban landscape. The neighborhood playground becomes a refuge, not only for the children but also for their parents. It is the village square where families interact, plans are made, stories exchanged. For us, community revolves to a large degree around the playground. We create and recreate home in an outdoor space. The Washington Square Village "Key Park" thus becomes the referent for all other play spaces, whether in New York or France. My son can disappear as if down a rabbit hole and come out the other side in France. It's the

magic of childhood transubstantiation during play.

Volets (shutters) become a metaphor for home. Their opening and closing mark our presence and absence in the village, something remarked on by our neighbors and friends, who tell us they await the days when the blue shutters will once again be open (even if we usually forget to follow their advice to close them during the midday sun). For us, the *volets* offer vistas – onto the surrounding countryside (we think of the much more limited vistas available to us in New York) as well as onto the neighbor's garden, so that opening the *volets* becomes an invitation to conversation, or their closing a sign of the desire for privacy.

The quirkiness of the quotidian irrupts at the Sunday market (*marché dominical*), where the rustic and the cosmopolitan meet. Here, a stockings seller captures my attention the way a found object might in New York. For us the village is a series of found objects, the surprise of the new (the kitschy clothes stand) as well as the comfort of the predictable (the North African fruit and vegetable vendor). The

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Ill. 4: Market Stockings,
Calvisson.

double exposure occurs when I wander the market, sensing a touch of New York in the cosmopolitan items, or a scent of France in the green markets of New York. They interpenetrate.

Southern France has a vibrant bull culture dis-

tinct from the better known traditions of Spain. Throughout the summer the villages in our area host *fêtes votives*, ostensibly village saints' festivals that include at their heart the running of the bulls. The *abrivado*, *bandido*, and *encierro*, as the three types of

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Ill. 5: Running with the
Bulls, St. Comes, France.

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Ill. 6: Newlyweds, Calvisson.

bull events are known, are occasions for young men to demonstrate their strength and bravery by tackling the bulls as they run through the streets, literally grabbing them by the horns (or tails). But they are also social events par excellence, as the villagers and tourists descend on the town squares for hours of bacchanalian fun, with much drinking, music, and merry making. The *fête votive* in the village of

St. Comes-Maruejols concludes with a masquerade – a touch of Halloween in summertime France. The sound of the canon announcing the opening of the *abrivado* or the noisy song until late have become for us markers of our French home, if simply because they are as unavoidable as they are unique: *this would never happen in New York!*

Although we only spend a few weeks of the year

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Ill. 7: Father of the Bride,
Calvisson.

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Ill. 8: Portrait of Two Artists (with Claude Foënet), Aubais, France.

in France, in many ways our friendships there have grown as deep as those we cherish in New York. Home, of course, is friendship and intimacy, and in Calvisson it means being invited into the neighbors' homes – for an *aperitif*, a meal, or a spontaneous

visit. A sign of our “being at home” in France was attending the marriage celebrations of our neighbor's – and friend's – daughter. To be at the threshold of family marked for us a deeper sense of being home.

Home is also a space for play, and in France we

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Ill. 9: Pirate of the Mediterranean.

(and especially our son) are fortunate to count among our close friends artists whose vision of life captures the spark and imagination of childhood. What irony that we find more art (of all varieties) in a small French village than in Greenwich Village!

It may come as a surprise to many that New York City is a cycling capital in America. This is not because the streets are bicycle friendly – they are not – or that car-driving New Yorkers go out of their way to accommodate cyclists – they usually don't. But despite the challenges (or perhaps because of them) New York is full of bicycles, and cyclists abound. Over 120,000 New Yorkers commute to work daily by bicycle, and many thousands more ride recreationally or as messengers. Here, the bicycles parked outside New York University's Bobst Library await their owners' return, chained much like dogs to a fence. This photo for me captures the duplicity of home: I ride my bicycle less in France, which in many ways

is far more suitable for cycling. There is something about the chains and the fences that promotes a desire to ride, to create a home on wheels. De Certeau wrote about walking the city as an exercise in urban archaeology; I ride my city, my homes.

Note

1 All photographs taken by the author.

Jonathan Shannon is Associate Professor in the Department of Anthropology, Hunter College, and the PhD Programs in Anthropology and Music at The City University of New York Graduate Center. He is the author of *Among the Jasmine Trees: Music and Modernity in Contemporary Syria* (2006) and numerous articles on musical aesthetics in the Arab world. He is currently working on a project on the Andalusian musical traditions of Syria, Morocco, and Spain. (jshannon@mac.com, <http://www.amongthejasminetrees.com>)

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Ill. 10: Colloquy of the Bicycles, Washington Square Park, New York City.