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ENTANGLED GENEALOGIES

History and the Notion of Tradition

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Growing reflexivity within folklore studies has established an understanding of tradition as a keyword of Western modernity, and of folklore studies as part of the modernisation processes. The article explores this field by examining how processes that produced a modern idea of *history* also gave birth to the notion of tradition. The contention is that as twin products of a uniquely modern temporality, history and tradition are mutually constitutive concepts. A temporalised notion of History as an overall process, and as a “collective singular”, had its parallel in the understanding of Tradition as a separate but related mode of temporality with its own processes of change and transformation. The discussion is based on British and Nordic examples.

Keywords: tradition, folkloristics, temporality, history, nineteenth century

Entangled Genealogies: Concepts of History and Tradition

From their very beginnings as academic disciplines in the nineteenth century, tradition was a core concept in both ethnology and folklore studies. It referred to empirical material as well as to major research questions about continuity, change and distribution. During the twentieth century, the importance of the term decreased in both disciplines, and at present it seems to have been more or less eclipsed by the new and powerful notion of cultural heritage. Heritage studies now attracts the attention of scholars from a wide range of disciplines. To ethnologists and folklorists, this new field comes with an echo of older terms and of the concept that once defined their disciplines. At this conceptual crossroads, the present article seeks to investigate the genealogy of the concept of tradition. On a general level, this approach refers back to the works of Michel Foucault.

More particularly, the discussion will be based on Reinhardt Koselleck's argument that the emergence of a modern experience of temporality, traced by him to the period 1750–1850, created a new concept of history (Foucault 1975; Koselleck 1985). I will argue that the notion of tradition was stamped by the same processes. As twin products of the modern experience of temporality, history and tradition can be seen as parallel and mutually constitutive concepts. The temporalised notion of history as an overall process or force was accompanied by an understanding of tradition as a parallel, but different type of temporal process. Tradition represented a separate kind of transformations, changes and continuities. The conditions of possibilities that created the modern notion of history were equally significant for the concept of tradition.

Tradition is a term with many meanings, both as a scholarly concept and in vernacular language. It can

refer to practices of communication and transmission, to shared cultural property and to ideologies and cultural norms (Ben-Amos 1984; Eriksen 1994; Bronner 2000; Oring 2013). The growing reflexivity within folklore studies from the 1970s onwards has established an understanding of tradition as “a keyword of Western modernity,” as Dorothy Noyes has expressed it. Out of this has grown a deepened insight into how folkloristics, with its interest in tradition, itself has been an integral part of modernisation processes (Noyes 2009: 234). Its role in nineteenth- and twentieth-century nation-building has been well established by now, but what Noyes and others point out is that tradition, even on a more fundamental level, is a part of modern mentality (see for instance Shils 1981; Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983; Blank & Howard 2013). Examining the theoretical aspects, Pertti Anttonen has analysed how “the concept of tradition is inseparable from the idea and experience of modernity, both as its discursively constructed opposition and as a rather modern metaphor for cultural continuity and historical patterning” (Anttonen 2005: 12). Anttonen’s seminal work clearly demonstrates how modern experience as well as theories of modernity rely heavily on a notion of tradition for their articulations.

The present article will explore how processes that produced a modern idea of history, also were highly significant for the notion of tradition during the nineteenth century. The nineteenth century’s interest in collecting and studying folk culture was not only part of the processes of modernity on a more general level, but represented an active reinterpretation of specific cultural forms. The material that emerged from this process of transformation as “tradition” was neither discovered nor invented in the period. What happened was rather that it was inscribed into new ways of conceptualising time and temporality. This gave rise to new terms embedded in a new discourse. What had long been known as “popular antiquities”, “superstitions” or “peasants’ beliefs” re-emerged first as “folklore”, and then as “tradition”.

These terminological changes can be traced empirically. This article will argue that they are also

integral to more fundamental changes in the experience of temporality and understanding of history. British and Nordic material supply the empirical basis for the following discussion.

The aim of these investigations is not to mine the empirical material for the origins of the term ‘tradition’, but to explore its conditions of possibilities in a field of entangled concepts, ways of speaking and ways of understanding. When knowledge about the past gradually came to be identified with the new discipline of history, what happened to those parts of the past that could not be disciplined within these frames? Oral narrative, material remains, customs and old ways of living also reflected “the past”, but did not fit into this concept of history. And equally important: Their ways of existing in time did not fit in either. The empirical material in this study will be explored to detect how this type of temporality was articulated and conceptualised.

Shipwrecks of Time – Popular Culture in the Early Modern Period

Peter Burke presented his influential thesis about the “discovery of the people” in the now classical study *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (1978). Burke’s well-known argument was that elite culture had separated itself from popular culture in a process of gradual withdrawal that took place from the end of the Middle Ages until the middle or late eighteenth century. When popular poetry, tales and customs finally attracted new attention, this process meant that the elite were largely in the dark about them, so that they subsequently “discovered” popular culture and inserted it into cultural and political programmes of Romanticism, nation-building and cultural criticism. The model has considerable appeal, not least because nineteenth-century collectors and editors themselves frequently used a very distinct terminology of discovery and salvage.

However, as Burke himself also makes clear, the culture that was “discovered” was not totally unknown. Antiquarian collection and knowledge production, reaching back to the Renaissance, included a constant interest in popular culture. The role of these activities should not be underestimated. More-

over, this kind of work contributed significantly to the creation of a notion of modernity and change during the early modern period. Bauman and Briggs have argued that “the gap between the past and the present that is constitutive of the advent of modernity” relied heavily on antiquarian discourse and the erudite interest in popular antiquities during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries (Bauman & Briggs 2003: 70). Antiquarian studies of what later came to be known as folklore held “a key role in defining modernity through this negative or alteric process,” they claim (ibid.: 72). Their investigations of antiquaries from Aubrey to the Grimm brothers demonstrate how the tales, beliefs and customs of rural populations were conceptualised and collected as fragments and relics from the past. To Bacon, antiquities were remnants of history, casual escapes from the shipwreck of time. Bauman and Briggs take this further and argue that “antiquities, by definition, can only exist in a damaged state,” as “emblems of absence, decay and loss constructing and underscoring the gap between past and present” (ibid.: 74). With his efforts to save the relics, the antiquarian conjured the past into the present, bridging, but also affirming, that gap between the past and the present which Bacon understood as constitutive of modernity.

Taking the antiquarian work of John Aubrey as their first case, Bauman and Briggs present a meticulous investigation of what they term the “antiquarian constructions of modernity and the discursive Other” (ibid.: 72). A warm admirer of Bacon and his ideals for a new science, Aubrey very explicitly let his work echo the baconian understanding of antiquities as shipwrecks of time. Bauman and Briggs are nonetheless emphatic that to Aubrey, the disjunction of past from present was no mere theoretical stance or abstract philosophical principle, but directly based on his personal experiences of the radical changes of mid-seventeenth-century England. His references to “the past” correspond to the “before” of his own boyhood and the period before the Revolution. In that period, according to Aubrey, old women told tales of ghosts and walking spirits, of Robin-good-fellow and the fairies, while “nowadays”, all such

fables and stories are gone. People read histories in printed books instead of listening to the old wives, and the phantoms have disappeared. Bauman and Briggs remark that Aubrey “reads historical and cultural disjunction out of a change in discursive and metadiscursive practices; the displacement of particular speech forms and speech practices becomes an index of a fundamental contrast between the old times and the present” (ibid.: 75). At the same time, they underscore, the disjunction is not complete. Aubrey’s separation of past from present is couched in a “purifying rhetoric” that is itself producing this contrast or break. Furthermore, the older forms have not fully disappeared. They remain in memory – Aubrey’s and others’ – and they are cited and referred to by antiquarians and collectors. However, they live on merely as fragments (ibid.: 76f.).

Similar notions of antiquities as remains or “vestiges” can be found in the works of the seventeenth-century Danish physician, collector and antiquarian Ole Worm. In his efforts to read the runic alphabet he did not only collect ancient inscriptions from all over Denmark and Norway, but also drew on contemporary peasant culture in his interpretations of them (cf. Svestad 1995; Mordhorst 2009). One reason for this was that close to Worm’s own time, runic letters were still in some cases used for the peasants’ wooden calendars. Even far more generally, however, Worm referred to the customs and sayings of the peasant population to give an interpretative context to his readings of the old Norse and Mediaeval inscriptions. This approach was important in his first antiquarian work, the *Fasti Danici* from 1626, as well as in his large *Danicorum Monumentorum Libri Sex* from 1643. In both cases, the investigations relied heavily on reports from local clergy and other collaborators in answer to a royal missive from 1622, requesting all bishops in Denmark-Norway to send in “antiquities” of every kind from their respective regions.

One of the small collections of drawings and descriptions that was sent to him may serve to elucidate the comparative approach and its tendency to regard all “antiquities” as equally ancient. From the diocese of Oslo, Worm received fourteen watercolours made

by the lawyer and philosopher Peder Alfsson of the Oslo cathedral school. Most of them depict runic stones, situated in churches and churchyards in the region. On each of them Peder Alfsson has noted that he has asked the local peasant about the meanings of the inscriptions, but that “nobody” is able to read them or has any information about the stones. Three other images present rock carvings at sites close to the medieval churches where the runes were found. Alfsson reports that nobody has been able to tell him more about these “inscriptions” either. He presents his own theory that the rock-carvings are pastime works by the masons who built the churches (Moltke 1958). That rock carvings and runes have been made in very different periods does not seem to occur to him, neither the idea that the stones are far too old for any living peasant to have direct knowledge about them.

A similar strategy of juxtaposition of ancient and peasant customs are found a century later in the work of the Norwegian antiquary Iver Wiel. Investigating an ornate drinking horn and an old dagger at the farm Strand in Hallingdalen, Wiel presents an elaborate antiquarian argument. For horns, he says, nothing fits better than to derive the Latin word *cornu* from the Greek *keras*. The reason is that Xenophon relates that the Thracians drank wine from horns after having greeted each other at feasts. This has obviously also been the custom in Hallingdal. The connection is proved by the dagger, which probably has been a pocket weapon “used at banquets, which seldom took place without murder and manslaughter.” Wiel presents his argument in the following way:

When they arrived at a banquet, they are said first to shake hands, and to take drink from a horn. Then they sat down, and the drinking merrily went on. When all were drunk, they started to quarrel and fight: *Inqve repentinos convivia versa tumultus / Assimilare freto possis, qvov svæva qvitetum / Ventorum rabies motis exasperat undis*

(You might compare the banquet, changed into a sudden tumult, to the sea, which, first calm, the

boisterous rage of the winds disturbs it by raising its waves)

Then they drew their daggers, the lights went out, and everyone hit those he could, whence a large loss of both friends and foes frequently followed. (Wiel 2005: 115f.)¹

Today, the peasants in Hallingdal use wooden bowls instead of horns and knives instead of daggers. Apart from that, nothing has changed.

The structure of these comparisons is quite complex. On the one hand, Wiel compares local customs in “ancient” and present times. The ancient is represented by the somewhat unspecified past that produced the horns, while the “present” is the life of contemporary peasants. At the same time, Wiel also compares Norwegian customs to what Xenophon says about the Thracians. Nonetheless, this is not a case of modern ethnography. The past tense in the passage above is somewhat unspecified, as are also the actors. It is not obvious when these customs were in use, neither *who* actually behaved in these ways. The obvious reason is that the words are not Wiel’s own. The paragraph is partly a paraphrase, partly a quote. Wiel takes his description from Worm, who builds on Xenophon. The Latin inserted words are from Ovid. Consequently, nothing of what is being said originally concerned peasants in Hallingdal, in the past or present. The passage refers mainly to Xenophon’s description of the ritual banquets of the Thracians (in *Anabasis*), while the Ovidian quote is taken from *Metamorphoses*. What is remarkable is that Wiel inserts these quotes and phrases so seamlessly into his own text that all difference in time, place and actors dissolves, most specifically, in relation to the actors. The word “they” slides unnoticeably between referring to the inhabitants of Hallingdal in ancient times, to the present inhabitants of the same valley and to the Thracians of Xenophon’s Greek world. Apart from the use of Latin and some Greek in the quotes, there are no grammatical traces to whom the word “they” actually concerns. Thracians and the peasants from Hallingdal merge into one (Eriksen 2014b: 42).

A precondition for this kind of juxtaposition of more or less contemporary popular customs with ancient inscriptions and other material was an understanding of their shared nature as “antiquities”. This made them comparable and relevant to each other, independent of any more detailed discussion of their respective age or origin. According to this argument, then, what defined antiquities to seventeenth-century scholars was not their age as such, but their dislocation and survival in a fragmented state. Antiquities belonged to a “before” of some kind, but this temporal dimension was not conceptualised as one of progress, development or even of causal chains of events. What created antiquities was rupture, break and temporal disjunction – Bacon’s “shipwreck of time.”

Antiquities, History and Exemplarity

Arnaldo Momigliano has pointed out the existence of two separate but parallel lines of knowledge about the past during the early modern period: antiquarianism and history (Momigliano 1990). Antiquarianism was based in a study of material remains from the past, including coins, inscriptions and documents. It was largely a work of collecting and inventorying. Antiquarian publications, often in the form of catalogues of collected material or descriptions of a specific locality, tended to be systematic rather than chronological in their structure, and to focus on typologies, categories and forms. History, on the other hand, is described by Momigliano as largely rhetorical. Chronology gave it its structure, while the grand epic style distinguished its form as well as its content. These two lines did not really converge until the nineteenth century, when they both contributed to the modern discipline of history as critical, source-based investigations into the past.

The strict dichotomy of this model can be criticised, but its perspectives have nonetheless proved highly fruitful (Jensen 2003; Miller 2007). The older interest in collecting or inventorying the popular antiquities of a certain region or locality fits well into Momigliano’s description of antiquarianism, and with the fact that even if they were understood to be old, even “ancient”, popular antiquities were

not normally treated as parts of regular history. Like material findings, tombs or inscriptions, they might in some cases *contribute* to the knowledge of this or that historical hero or event, but they were not ascribed independent historical value. Antiquities might supplement history, but did not belong to the realm of rhetoric and epic style. Representing “the wisdom of the ancients,” they could nonetheless teach useful lessons.

In 1695, the Danish clergyman and linguist Peder Syv published his book of two hundred ballads, an extension of the collection of one hundred old ballads published by the antiquary Anders Sørensen Vedel about a hundred years earlier (1591). In a dedicatory poem, Syv presented the ballads as containing moral lessons: They will teach us to follow the path of virtue and demonstrate the detestable effects of evil deeds. The ballads present ancient stories about the pious and the wild, the hard and the mild, about good deeds and misdeeds. With elaborate and playful alliterations, the poem was obviously intended to entertain and amuse, as well as to demonstrate the author’s linguistic proficiency. But despite the light note, Syv was vehement in his presentation of the ballads as both instructive examples and vestiges of great antiquity (Syv 1695: dedication). This was the staple argument of early modern antiquarianism. Ballads, like other antiquities, were *additions* to history. They told stories about ancient kings, and heroes, about memorable deeds and great courage. In this way, they reflected the same world as did the work of Saxo and other medieval chroniclers. However, their prime value as historical supplements lay in their being material remains of this ancient world, not merely referring to it or describing it. Antiquarians were frequently accused of being mere collectors of meaningless fragments and dusty shreds, neither presenting the synthetic analyses nor having the rhetorical elegance of the historians. The oft repeated defence was the claim that antiquarian work gave more substance to historical narrative: It supplied history with a sound material base (Sweet 2004: 2).

Momigliano’s portrait of history, on the other hand, reflects an understanding similar to that of Koselleck in his description of the *magistra vitae* to-

pos, the idea of history as a teacher of life. Koselleck argues that this notion, going back to Cicero, dominated historical writing in Europe for nearly two thousand years. What defined history according to this way of thinking was that it presented ethically valid and politically relevant narratives about memorable persons and events, and that these stories could work as models and examples. Pragmatic history of this kind therefore often occurred in the plural as “histories”. Taken as a whole, history consisted of a large repertoire of stories that could be used to judge, understand and interpret not merely the past, but also the present and the future, and thus work as practical guides for action and lessons for thought.

This was the understanding of history that dissolved with the new experience of temporality during the latter part of the eighteenth century. Koselleck describes its novelty as both fundamentally modern and as genuinely historical – the realisation that the present differs from the past in profound ways, and that the future is open-ended and will always be unknown and new. A gap emerged between the space of experience and the horizon of expectation, in Koselleck’s terms, and with it the understanding that narratives from the past could give no guidance for the future. In the place of histories as a plurality of exemplary narratives, History (with a capital H) emerged as a collective singular and as an overall transformative and temporal process (Koselleck 1985: 31).

Other scholars have argued that the dissolution and disappearance of pragmatic history was not as uniform and straightforward as implied by Koselleck (Jensen 2009). In his investigation of historical writing in Britain 1740–1820, Mark S. Phillips finds an extension rather than a dissolution of pragmatic history in this period. He argues that new reader groups with considerable “sentimental competence” required new kinds of historical narratives to identify with and learn from. History could no longer be merely lessons in politics and statecraft, relevant for the training of a male elite of princes and leaders. Readers from the new middle classes and the bourgeoisie wanted to read histories that concerned their own situations in life. According to Phillips,

this contributed significantly to widening the field of historical writing, which now came to include dimensions of civil life and society, from commerce and trade to art and literature (Phillips 2000).

The Aesthetic Fragment

During the latter half of the eighteenth century, fragments dramatically changed their role: They became aesthetic objects. Ruins are a case in point. Michel Makarius has pointed out that in European art the meaning of ruins changed in this period. From being an allegory of heathendom in Nativity scenes and images of the lost world of classical antiquity in landscapes, they became aesthetic objects in their own right, appreciated for their “sublime” qualities and as symbols of worldly transitoriness (Makarius 2004). A leading figure in this development was Denis Diderot. As an art critic he began to mix his description of the works exhibited at the annual *salons* with more general reflexions on philosophical and aesthetic questions, thus creating a “poetics of ruins” (Bukdahl 1995: 5ff.). Makarius also argues that this new poetics became a productive force far beyond the world of painting. It worked to transform the ruins, and more generally the fragment, into an autonomous philosophical and aesthetic object (Makarius 2004: 111; Eriksen 2014a).

Even before Diderot had written his most influential texts on ruins, a similar transformation could be seen to change the role and significance of popular antiquities: An aesthetic evaluation of the fragment made popular antiquities leave the dusty realm of antiquarianism to be incorporated into the sphere of art and artistic appreciation. Popular antiquities – per definition fragments – became objects of independent aesthetic enjoyment and of new interest. Book titles like MacPherson’s *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* (1760), and Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) fully demonstrate this change. Both men, in their respective prefaces, emphasise the fragmentary character of the material they present. Percy embedded it in a comprehensive aesthetic program:

To atone for the rudeness of the more obsolete poems, each volume concludes with a few mod-

ern attempts in the same kind of writing: and, to take off from the tediousness of the longer narratives, they are everywhere intermingled with little elegant pieces of the lyric kind. Select ballads in the old Scottish dialect, most of them of the first-rate merit, are also interspersed among those of our ancient English minstrels; and the artless productions of these old rhapsodists are occasionally confronted with specimens of the composition of contemporary poets of a higher class; of those who had all the advantages of learning in the times in which they lived, and who wrote for fame and for posterity. (Percy 1765: x)

The defining qualities of the “reliques of antiquity”, as they are presented in this text, are their simplicity and artless grace, which make them speak directly to the heart of the reader. These values are aesthetic rather than historical. Moreover, they are not about classical harmony, balance and completeness. The pleasure of fragments lies in their capacity to address sensibility and imagination, to evoke strong emotions. To enjoy the kind of artless art that popular antiquities are taken to represent, the reader will therefore have to be trained in romantic sensibility, and to have developed a competence for being moved, for taking part in the typical eighteenth-century “cult of sensibility” (Damsholt 2000; Krefting 2003). These values, embodied in the natural simplicity and somewhat rugged character of the material – according to Percy – are so important that he has sought to enhance them through his own creative adaptations. Samples of contemporary poetry were included to produce a variegated, lively and colourful composition, tossing the reader incessantly from one fragment of poetry to another. Percy thus staged a cult of fragments, adding new ones to the ancient, thereby amplifying their aesthetic appeal. These editorial principles represent the very opposite of an attempt at restoring the poems to a more complete state.

From these perspectives it becomes clear that the fragmentary nature of antiquities was not a defect to be mended, but rather an ideal to be emulated by Percy and his contemporaries. As “Naturpoesie” – to

use Herder’s term – popular poetry came to represent an aesthetic alternative to (overly) sophisticated works of art produced according to classical patterns. Its simplicity and presumed artlessness was one reason for this, but the broken and fragmented forms also added to it significantly. As fragments, popular poetry did not only represent samples in the antiquarian’s collection, but also examples to be followed in poetic work. In the Norwegian contexts, the poetic works of Henrik Wergeland supplies an example. He did not collect folk songs himself, but published poems with the title of folksongs, imitating the simple and “natural” style of oral poetry (Wergeland 1849).

As was the case with the ruins, this new evaluation of popular antiquities invested them with a new temporality. What distinguished these fragments – ruins and popular culture alike – was no longer merely a rupture between “before” and “now”. They came to invite sorrowful but also pleasingly melancholic meditations on decline, dissolution and death. Antiquities – material and immaterial fragments – embodied the inevitable transitoriness of all human greatness. To antiquarians of all kinds this brought a new awareness that change and disruption not only had taken place in the past, but that it was still going on and probably would continue to do so. Change was not tied to definite events, like the Revolution with its impact on British antiquarianism, or the Reformation that created a similar divide between a Catholic, superstitious “before” and a pious, Lutheran “now” in the northern countries (cf. Pontoppidan [1736]1923). It rather appeared as a constant and all-compassing process, intrinsic to time itself. The metaphor of the shipwreck that *had taken place* was changed for that of a devouring fire *going on*. By the same token, rescue work became more urgent as well as more heroic. The Norwegian collector M.B. Landstad compared medieaval ballads to old family jewels, and declared that his strenuous efforts had saved them as “from a burning house.” Though “ancient, venerable and golden,” they also carried the traces of the devouring forces of fire (Landstad [1853]1968: iv). Moreover, work of rescue also brought with it the drive towards reconstruc-

tion of the lost whole. The influential theories of the Grimm brothers saw fairy tales in oral tradition not only as fragments that could be saved by eager collectors, but also as remains of an ancient mythology to be reconstructed through diligent scholarly work.

The romantic aestheticization of fragments in the late eighteenth century added new dimensions to the exemplarity of popular antiquities, far exceeding those that had been called upon by Syv and other antiquarians a hundred years earlier. Their presumed simplicity, innocence and general artlessness that left the fragments models to be imitated by romantic poets, also turned them into examples of emotional expression of a profoundly “natural” and therefore ideal kind. One reason for the popularity of Macpherson’s Ossian was, according to Linda and Alan Burnett, that the poems were “permeated by a tenderness and sensibility that appealed directly to 18th century readers looking for literature that was instructive but also touched their hearts” (Burnett & Burnett 2011: 31). The new appreciation can easily be compared to the situation Phillips described for historical narrative (above): New and competent groups of readers wanted stories, images and poems that addressed their sensibility and desire to be moved (Damsholt 2000). Fragments of popular culture, or contemporary artistic reworkings of them, fitted well into this wish for strong feelings and emotional identification. They were integrated into the vocabulary of forms and expressions distinctive to the “cult of sensibility” of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

New Terms, New Times

When the work of the Grimm brothers inspired a more systematic collection, research and publishing of “popular antiquities” in the early nineteenth century, this old term seems to have been found increasingly unsatisfactory. Early collections often did without any overarching generic term and contented themselves with an enumeration of the different “species” – legends, tales, folksongs, proverbs, customs, superstitions and so on. The term used by the Swedes E.G. Geijer and A.A. Afzelius for their collection of ballads, published in 1814–17, was

“ancient folksongs” (*folkvisor från forntiden*). The stories published by Andreas Faye in 1833 bore the title *Norwegian legends (Norske Sagn)*. In his introduction, explaining the value of books like this, Faye also used the word folk legend (*folkesagn*). Contrary to that of the two Swedes, Faye’s term suggested nothing about age. However, even in his choice of words, which probably was directly influenced by the Grimm brothers, the older notion of the “popular” (*allmue*) had been replaced by the more fashionable epithet “folk”.

William John Thoms’ new term “folklore”, launched in 1846, was expressively intended as an alternative to the older notion of popular antiquities, or, as Thoms emphasised, to the expression “popular literature” (Thoms 1846, here from Dorson 1968: 52). The new field of collection and systematic study that this proposal was intended to designate was still dominantly literary in nature. Folklore could largely be found in books, for instance in Shakespeare. Thoms’ scholarly ideal was the Grimm brothers’ methods for reading ancient mythology out of the collected material (cf. above), but the practical work that he advocated seems to have been conceptualised as largely literary and archival (Bennett 1994: 30). Dundes has also pointed out that Thoms’ choice of term reflects the nationalistic sentiment that was intrinsic to the new field of study. As an alternative to the Latinate “popular antiquities”, the new term was “a good Saxon compound” (Dundes 1999: 10; see also Mazo 1996).

It corroborates Dundes’ perspective that in Norwegian, Danish and Swedish the corresponding generic term came to be “*folkeminner*”, literally meaning folk memories. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the word was used in the singular (*folkminnet*) and referred somewhat loosely to the field that could be mined for bits and pieces of mythological information and ancient poetry (Bringéus 1962). From the middle of the century, the plural form became the accepted form, and the meaning changed from the location or site of collection to the material that was being collected. Used mainly as a noun, “*folkeminne*” referred thus to objects rather than to activities, processes or mental faculties. The

plural form furthermore indicates the collectability of these objects. They appear as separate items rather than as pieces of an organic whole. In the same way as the English “folklore”, the new generic term signalled an attempt to delimit a new field of collection and scholarly investigation. The national folklore archives that were established in Scandinavia during the early twentieth century all came to have the word “folkeminne-” in their names.

When P. Chr. Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe published the second edition of their collection of Norwegian fairy tales in 1851, the original work (1841–1844) was equipped with a long introduction written by Moe. The text is now regarded as the earliest scholarly investigation of folk narrative in Norway. Its main aim was to argue the distinctly national character of the tales, though without hiding their connection to similar tales found in other countries. The list of literature as well as the argument indicate that Moe and his colleague were well read on the emerging field of comparative folklore research. Most important in the present context is the fact that Moe on this occasion used neither the Nordic term “folkeminner” nor the English “folklore”, but instead chose the word “tradition”. It is largely used in the plural, as “traditions”. Moreover, Moe also speaks about “folk literature” or “folk poetry” (*folkedigtning*). Occasionally using the plural form even here, he indicates that each “folk” has or has had its own (oral) literature – or traditions.

As Moe employed it, the word “tradition” was thus not invested with a meaning that differed significantly from that of “folklore” or *folkeminner*. All these terms referred to objects or items, objects that could be collected from the folk, largely the peasant populations, and be categorised, analysed and eventually published according to the scholarly methods and ideals that were being forged on this new field of comparative erudite work. Used in this way, traditions worked as a collective term, even if it did not yet represent a unity. Nonetheless, the term did have significant potential. Contrary to the words “folklore” and *folkeminner*, “tradition” was not irrevocably locked to an understanding of popular culture as a patchwork of single items. The word proved to

be open to some very interesting shifts of meaning.

Complementing the plural form with the singular, “tradition” gradually evolved into a generic term. In the work of Moltke Moe, Jørgen Moe’s son and Norway’s first professor of folklore studies, expressions like “the tradition” or “foreign tradition” appear as a matter of course (see for instance Moe 1888). Similar wordings are found in the work of Moe’s contemporary, the Danish professor Axel Olrik (for instance Olrik 1908). These expressions refer to unities, to the sums of the folklore items, traditions (in the plural) or popular antiquities that can be found within a group or nation. These items, on their hand, could now be described as traditional, indicating that they shared an identity and possessed specific qualities stemming from this overarching category. Contrary to the somewhat older terms, tradition thus proved to be a concept that could refer to cultural processes, not merely designate cultural items. Moreover, it proved to work on a theoretical level as well as on the empirical.

During the same period, the notion of folklore partly followed another path. In her investigation into “the Science of Folklore” in Britain, centred on the Folklore Society and its leading figures, Gillian Bennett has argued that during the earliest years of the life of the Folklore Society, its perspectives were efficiently redefined from the older (antiquarian) approach to the new theories of evolutionary anthropology. The man behind this adaptation – or revolution – was the society’s young secretary Georg Laurence Gomme. By his manoeuvre Gomme secured the “science of folklore” a central position in current cultural theory, Bennett contends. Folklore was no longer the antiquities renamed by Thoms, but came to be seen as cultural “fossils” – or survivals, according to Andrew Lang – and as such as extremely valuable witnesses to the understanding of primitive man. The only problem was that this happy situation did not last long. Hardly had Gomme succeeded in his redefinition before cultural theory and the interest of anthropologists started to change. Bennett writes that by the 1880s, many British folklorists “saw anthropology and folklore simply as different aspects of a single study. But the catch was that folk-

lore could only be a part of anthropology if classic cultural evolution was the dominant theory. Unless the ‘folk’ could be transmogrified into ‘primitives’ using the ‘space-becomes-time’ formula, the materials of folklore were not relevant to the understanding of primitive society” (Bennett 1994: 32). The implication of this “formula” was that folk culture – taken to represent the culture of a primitive past – could be equated with the culture of “primitive” people living in the present. The historical distance of the one corresponded to the cultural distance of the other, and the two – folk culture and primitive culture – could thus shed light on each other. The “folk” of the folklorists equalled the “primitives” of the anthropologists, and scholars in the two fields could work hand in hand.

In this way, evolutionary theory forged a link between anthropology and archaeology. Folklore studies had conceptualised itself as the very embodiment of this common ground. When changes in cultural theory drew the two disciplines apart, folklore studies “simply fell through the gap” (Bennett 1994: 33). As the losing party, the “science of folklore” found itself turned into what it had claimed folklore to be: fossilised remains of older ways of thinking.

Bennett’s argument sheds important light on the development of folklore studies in England. In the Nordic context, however, the notion of folklore or *folkeminner* was incorporated into that of tradition. Put simply, it can be said that folklore remained the itemising designation of particulars of expressive culture, while tradition came to be used both as a similar designation (often in the plural) and as a – frequently normative – term for cultural processes that shaped these particulars and gave them their meaning and value (cf. Kverndokk, forthcoming).

Tradition and History as Entangled Concepts

How did the notion of tradition get its potential to analyse temporal processes, to illuminate certain kinds of cultural change that took place over time? Assessing the position of folklore studies in the mid-1990s, Henry Glassie situates the discipline at the crossroads between anthropology and history. A key concept in his argument is tradition, which, accord-

ing to him, allows an approach that mediates between the systematic orientation of anthropologists and the historians’ focus on change. This approach is the “secret weapon” of folklore studies, so to speak, and does not only supply our discipline with a unique take on the historical study of culture (or vice versa), but also represents a remedy for the alleged shortcomings in the two other. In Glassie’s line of argument, the (anthropological) concept of culture comprises a “synchronic state of affairs. Overreacting to the excesses of evolutionism, anthropologists stripped culture of history and shaped it to fit the scientific fashion prevalent in the period from 1910 to 1960” (Glassie 1995: 399). Even the more recent perspectives developed by Geertz, Turner and others cannot be said to give cultural theory a more pronounced temporal dimension. History, on the other hand, not only is predominantly about change, but also tends to see change principally in terms of rupture and upheaval, to “segment time into trim periods” and to disregard “the massive fact of continuity” (ibid.: 396). Glassie’s conclusion is that the notion of tradition unites the two perspectives, and gives each of them what they lack. He is emphatic that tradition is a historical way of thinking about culture, because tradition itself is a temporal concept: “Now define tradition as culture’s dynamic, as the process by which culture exists, and it emerges as the swing term between culture and history, the missing piece necessary to the success of a cultural history that would bring anthropology and history, with folklore as the mediating agents, into productive alliance” (ibid.: 399).

Glassie’s argument rests on an understanding of history and historical investigation that emerged during the latter half of the nineteenth century and that was fundamental to the shaping of history as a modern academic discipline. The same processes were highly significant to folklore studies and the notion of tradition. These two ways of conceptualising the past represent two different but closely entangled and truly modern ways of thinking about time. In historical writing, time (as chronology) had long been understood as the “location” where historical events had taken place. History itself was, nonethe-

less, not about understanding time or temporal processes, but rather about exemplary and memorable actions (cf. above). The new experience of temporality not only undermined the old and conventional ideas of identification with past persons and events, it also brought with it “the discovery of the uniqueness of historical processes and the possibility of progress” (Koselleck 1985: 32). History emerged as a collective singular.

In this new role as History, “historical narrative was expected to provide the unity found in the epic derived from the existence of Beginning and End,” and each incident was expected to be part of a larger whole and illuminate “history in general.” History could be understood as “the latent power of human events and suffering, a power that connected and motivated everything in accordance with a secret or evident plan to which one could feel oneself responsible, or in whose name one could believe to be acting” (Koselleck 1985: 29ff.). It was no longer the virtues and vices, cunning or foolishness of individual persons that represented history, these were merely the external expressions or representations of History as a driving force. Moreover, history was not the only concept to re-emerge as a collective singular in this period, according to Koselleck: “Freedom took the place of freedoms, Justice that of rights and servitudes, Progress that of progressions [...] and from the diversity of revolutions, ‘The Revolution’ emerged” (ibid.: 31). To this series of collective singulars, Tradition can be added.

For the modern discipline of history, the full effect of the transformation did not emerge until the nineteenth century. The Danish historian Bernard Eric Jensen contends that it was not until well after 1850 that the past itself became the historians’ obvious field of study, and the discipline of history became the investigation of processual change over time (Jensen 2003: 123). Within its new frames, the modern historical discipline that took upon itself to investigate the processes of temporal change tended to be rather exclusive in its choice of issues and sources. The perspectives presented by both Koselleck and Jensen describe a process of purification and delimitation. The modern historical discipline was defined

by its method and material – written documents that could be subjected to strict source criticism – and by its systematic study of change, understood as temporal and processual. A historian came to be a person who was trained to master the specific methods, and not (as had been the case before) one whose position in society allowed a close observation of the events that he or she wrote about (Pocock 1999). As Gianna Pomata has pointed out, the new role largely excluded women, not only because they often lacked formal education, but also because their contributions to historical writing had used to be family chronicles and conventual histories, in addition to letters and memoirs (Pomata 1993). These fields of knowledge and types of material now largely fell outside the realm of historical inquiry.

In the same manner as “popular antiquities”, even folklore represented cultural expressions that fell outside the realm of the historical discipline. However, as historical writing and methodology changed, the reasons for exclusion also developed. Even if old, folklore could only with difficulty throw useful light on the ruptures, upheavals and processes of change that history now was about. Its weaknesses in this respect were numerous. Folklore could not be dated. It did not fit into the system of historical periods, each now reckoned to have their own specific “style” and expression. And perhaps most fundamentally: Folklore did not fare well under the light of historical source criticism. Compared with the historical “facts” produced by the new methods, it seemed vague, imprecise and unreliable. This did not mean that folklore was exempted from the new experience of temporality as transformation. Rather, folklore no longer was seen as merely old – vestiges from a past or from a “before” – but was conceptualised in itself as the expression of temporal, transformative processes. The transformations reflected in folklore were nonetheless different from the ruptures and changes observed in history and examined by historians. Folklore represented another kind of alteration, another type of temporal process.

As a collective singular, Tradition concluded the development that was started by the shift from the plural to the singular form of the word. It emerged as

a category of its own, in possession of strong transformative powers and inviting specific types of narrative structures, motives and representations. In this new form, Tradition could subsume traditions, folklore and popular antiquities – all the terms that had been used to designate specific narratives, customs, beliefs and collectable “items” from popular culture, and order them into a new whole. As with History, all particular items that were parts of Tradition could now be seen as the elements of a larger unity, subjects of overarching processes and forces, and fundamentally shaped by them. According to Reidar Th. Christiansen, it was distinctive to Tradition that

... all the particulars, both in their shape and their content are no longer marked by their individual origins, but have acquired an attitude and a homogeneity which correspond to the fact that they are not the utterances of a single person, but of all those who have made this material their own, polished it in their minds and then passed it on. The voice of “the folk” is heard here, “it is told” or “people tell” are the true authority in this. The material will of course always be presented by individuals and in the guise of single cases, but its distinctive character is nonetheless the universal and common, and the contribution that might have been added by the individual is not of primary significance. (Christiansen 1926: 14, translated here)

This argument was presented in a guide for folklore collectors, published in 1926. Christiansen, who later was appointed professor in folklore studies, was at this time responsible for the Norwegian Folklore Archive. Kyrre Kverndokk has argued that Christiansen used this small guidebook to present the prospective collectors with an entire folkloristic taxonomy. This system served to discipline the collectors, stopping them from collecting material that fell outside the definitions and categories. It also purified folklore, instructing the collectors “in how to make some sort of order out of chaotic and unsystematic oral utterances” (Kverndokk, forthcoming). In this work, a

distinction between the specific utterances – which would bear the stamp of their immediate contexts – and the more fundamental processes and forces, was highly useful. Christiansen was emphatic that a collector had to “draw a line between random folk narrative and real folk tradition,” even if he also underscored that in actual fact, the collector would meet tradition in the shape of specific and concrete narratives (Christiansen 1926: 14). Thus folklore – the particular expressions – reflected Tradition.

As was the case with History, the narrative representations and recurring motives of Tradition as a collective singular reflected the specific temporal principles that underpinned the entire category. For tradition, however, the span between beginning and end that gave the narrative its structure, as well as its overall message, differed from that of history. The beginning, when it comes to tradition, was invariably remote, and even if the questions of origin (of customs, fairy tales and so on) were fundamental in nineteenth-century folklore studies, they did not represent a quest for specific years or dates. Instead, the issue of origins was partly about a rather mythic past, and partly about the early phases of conjectured evolutionary processes. The temporal structure was nonetheless important, not least because the end tended to be themed as one of corruption, dissolution – hopefully followed by salvation, thanks to diligent folklore collectors, and an eternal life in the haven of the folklore archives. Between the two poles, change and development followed other patterns than those of history. According to Christiansen, the processes imply that folklore has a groundwork “old as the hills, unyielding and conservative, complemented with some external influences coming from the shifting layers of culture and knowledge that is being added to the common base, a seepage that is incorporated, coloured and transformed by tradition” (Christiansen 1926: 16). Tradition is the force that works on the particulars and slowly changes them.

As “tradition bearers” the superstitious old peasants and talkative old women who told the fairy tales and legends, sung the ballads, knew the healing charms and used the old ways of speaking, were also

transformed. They still represented a fragmented and decaying “past”, and they were still ignorant and superstitious, but all the things they could tell were now both parts of tradition and fundamentally shaped by it. Consciously or not, tradition bearers acted on behalf of tradition and sometimes also in its name. Tradition had become an overarching framework that gave meaning to all the bits and pieces contained by it, and at the same time a powerful super-organic force that was shaping this content, more or less independent of human will. The singers, storytellers and so on were its representatives on earth, vehicles at its disposal. Tradition acquired an agency of its own. Christiansen argued that tradition

... continuously incorporates new elements, but it does so slowly and it chooses carefully what to include, making it apparent that the groundwork is so strong that it will colour all the new elements that tradition lays its eyes on. It is therefore possible to detect more or less distinct sedimentations from different periods, while it at the same time is obvious that the groundwork rests on another understanding of the world than that of the sciences and textbooks of our own time. (Christiansen 1926: 15)

Tradition became a power that, for example, allowed or disallowed certain changes or deviations from well-known forms. It could be living or dead, flourishing or perishing, rich or poor. It acted, it worked, and even if often presented as dying or dissolving, it nonetheless tended to exert considerable normative pressure on cultural development, for instance by judging, accepting or rejecting innovations, variations or new and foreign cultural forms.

Used as a collective singular, then, Tradition came to be a number of different things at once. In part, it meant traditions: actual cultural forms and larger complexes of them. As such, tradition could be itemised, collected, inventoried, archived and published. It could be investigated, interpreted and compared. In part, tradition also meant actual processes of communication – singing, storytelling and so on – leading to the distribution and the handing down of

traditions in the first sense. On this level, tradition usually also included a certain degree of normativity and evaluation, representing the *right* way of doing, singing, telling, speaking, as well as the responsibility to do so and the right to sanction those who did not. However, tradition could also refer more analytically to cultural processes tending towards stability and creating long-lasting patterns. And on top of it all, Tradition towered as a general cultural process. Tradition and History – in the meanings discussed here – both emerged from the modern experience of time, and the fundamental idea of temporality as an inherently transformative power is the vital principle of both. The modern study of history and tradition both aim at understanding processes that in some way relate to or stem from this power. However, the actual processes that are investigated are different and complimentary. The study of tradition focused on patterns of stability, processes of transmission and on slow modes of change.

Concluding Remarks

The aim of this article has been to add one more dimension to the comprehension of tradition as a concept fundamentally related to modernity – produced by it as well as contributing to its articulation. Emphasising its inherent temporality and its very close entanglement with history, I have sought to develop the understanding that tradition not only reflects the experience of the deep divide between the (traditional) past and the (modern) present, but also that in itself it is an integral part of this modern present. Tradition refers to temporal processes that are as significant to the modern experience of time as are those of history. Its transformation from a term designating collectable items from popular culture into a collective singular in possession of independent agency reflects this temporal experience.

As pointed out above and by a number of other scholars, tradition is a term with many layers of meaning, ranging from the empirical to the theoretical and from the descriptive to the normative. The present argument can be read as an addition to this profusion. However, its concern has been neither to present an exhaustive overview of how the term

tradition has been used (cf. Ben-Amos 1984), nor to prescribe how it *should* be used (cf. Oring 2013). Rather, my aim has been to investigate some of the conditions of possibility of tradition as a theoretical concept and to explore the principles of its powers as an analytical tool. In this context it has been important to underscore its profound and defining relationship with a modern notion of history. Tradition as a core concept of modernity presupposes the position of its twin, history, and the understanding of the modern idea of tradition hinges on a corresponding understanding of this relationship. Moreover, the perspectives presented here will indicate that tradition – as a collective singular and a theoretical concept related to the modern experience of temporality – not only is a handy tool for folklorists, but represents a significant contribution to general cultural theory. This insight may serve well in preparation for the next turn of the screw: the contemporary transformation of tradition into cultural heritage, adding new dimensions to the old story.

Note

- 1 "Naar de kom til Gjæstebud, siges de først at have hilset hinanden med Haandtag, hvorpaa de bleve tildrukne med et Horn, derpaa satte de sig ned, og gik det da lystig til med at drikke. Naar de bleve fulde, begynte de at larme og klamres: *Inqve repentinos convivium versa tumultus / Assimilare freto possis, quod svæva qvietum / Ventorum rabies motis exasperat undis*. Derpaa trak man Dolken, slukkede Lyset, og lod saa træffe hvem træffe kunde, hvorved stort Nederlag ofte skede saavel paa Venner som Uvenner."

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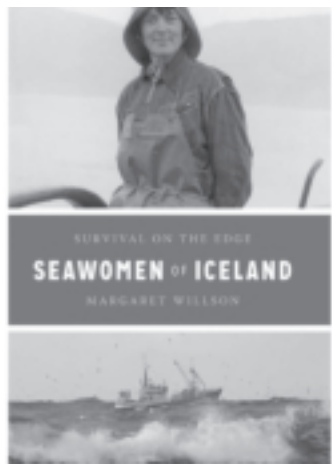
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In December 2014 the membership of SIEF, the Société Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore, voted in favour of making *Ethnologia Europaea* its official journal, after SIEF, the editors and the publisher of *Ethnologia Europaea*, Museum Tusculanum Press, had prepared the ground for a mutually agreeable association between organization and publication. SIEF was founded in 1964, *Ethnologia Europaea* in 1966, and as recent historiographic research makes quite evident, there was no love lost between the actors founding the two respective institutions. Some five decades later, it is safe to say that cooperation rather than particularization is the major coin of scholarship. Both partners share a profound interest in nurturing and promoting scientific research and communication within our field(s), in extending international collaboration among European ethnologists as well as in disseminating new ethnological knowledge to a wide readership.

Membership

SIEF gathers every two years for its international congress, where colleagues engage with one another's work and enjoy each other's company. The SIEF congress is an intellectual festival that showcases the state of the art in our fields and a ritual time in the academic calendar, crucial for building professional networks, a number of collaborative projects, finding inspiration, and cultivating friendships. Between congresses, SIEF's numerous working groups provide platforms for critical debate, networking, and exchange of information; they organize their own meetings and sponsor publications.

SIEF has two professional journals: *Ethnologia Europaea*, a printed subscription-based journal that all members receive by mail twice a year, and *Cultural Analysis*, an Open Access journal published online. In addition, SIEF communicates with members through its website and with two newsletters sent out every year.

The annual membership fee is € 35. Opting for a two-year membership in one go qualifies for a discounted price of € 67. Membership will support SIEF to grow as a strong professional organization, while allowing members to participate in the SIEF community and shape the future of the academic fields.

The membership package offers a great host of benefits, including a subscription to the lively and interdisciplinary, peer-reviewed journal *Ethnologia Europaea*. Members will receive printed copies of the biannual journal as well as electronic access to available backlist issues.

See more and apply for membership now at www.siefhome.org.

INSTRUCTIONS TO AUTHORS

Ethnologia Europaea is an interdisciplinary peer-reviewed journal with a focus on European cultures and societies. The journal was first published in 1967 and since then it has acquired a central position in the international and interdisciplinary cooperation between scholars inside and outside Europe. Two issues are published yearly in a printed version and a digital one.

The journal welcomes high quality papers from European ethnology but also from social/cultural and historical anthropological perspectives as well as from scholarly fields such as human geography, sociology, cultural history, and cultural studies.

To find out if your contribution fits in, you may start by e-mailing the two editors a short abstract or outline. To familiarize yourself with our profile, take a look at some recent issues. An impression of the areas covered by the journal is reflected in some of the thematic topics of recent special issues: *Imagined Families in Mobile Worlds* (2012), *Irregular Ethnographies* (2011), *Performing Nordic Spaces* (2010), *Sense of Community* (2009). Please visit the publisher's website: www.mtp.dk/ethnologia_europaea.

Authors of successfully published articles receive one copy of the journal and the article in a pdf-file.

Submission and format: Manuscripts (in English) should be sent to the two editors as a computer file via e-mail. Authors will be notified after the peer-review process about acceptance, rejection, or desired alterations.

Papers should not exceed 12,000 words. Too many grades of headings should be avoided. Long quotations should be marked by indentations and double line spacing.

British or American English may be used, but adhering to one or the other consistently is essential. For non-native English speakers it is a precondition for publishing that final accepted manuscripts are checked by a professional copy-editor or translator.

Abstract, keywords and author presentation: Five keywords as well as an abstract should accompany the manuscript. The abstract should be at the most 125 words, outline the main arguments, the empirical basis and stress the conclusions. A short presentation (approximately three sentences) of the author should be included, describing title, position, research interests and for example a recent publication. Please check and copy the style of a recent issue of *Ethnologia Europaea*.

Illustrations: You may supply suggested illustrations for the editors to choose from. For the final version the chosen illustrations with accompanying captions (including photographer or source) should be provided with the highest possible resolution. Desired positions of illustrations should be marked in the text. The author needs to secure publishing rights for all illustrations. The journal does not pay for illustration costs and authors will be asked for a written statement about permissions.

Endnotes and references: Endnotes should be used sparingly. If acknowledgements appear they should be placed in the first endnote. Please check that all references are included in the bibliography and vice versa. Bibliographic references in the text are given as (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983; Shaw 1995, 2000).

In the bibliography the following system is used:

Bauman, Zygmunt 1990: *Modernity and Ambivalence*. In: Mike Featherstone (ed.), *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*. London: Sage Publications, pp. 143–169.

Czarniawska, Barbara & Orvar Löfgren (eds.) 2012: *Managing Overflow in Affluent Societies*. London: Routledge.

Timm, Elisabeth 2012: *Grounding the Family: Locality and Its Discontents in Popular Genealogy*. *Ethnologia Europaea* 42:2, 36–50.

www.mtp.hum.ku.dk/details.asp?eln=300309. Accessed June 5, 2013.

Contributions to this special issue take a back-door approach to the study of cultural practices by exploring various modes and forms of silence and silencing in daily life. Joining Gregory Bateson and scholars inspired by his concept of noncommunication, the articles examine situations and circumstances where communication is avoided, or deemed undesirable, because it would somehow alter the nature of the idea, relationship or situation in question. Authors also draw attention to the unspoken and the unspeakable as they emerge in ethnographic fieldwork and the research process, discussing the challenges of doing fieldwork on silence and pushing the boundaries of silence as an analytical category.

Silence emerges from this special issue as a productive and performative force constitutive of agency, power and the margins of society and language. Case studies from Estonia, Finland and the north-western and north-eastern part of European Russia trace the roles silence plays in “doing old age” (Karoliina Ojanen), “doing family” (Pihla Maria Siim), and sustaining co-existence in societies divided by ethnic lines (Elo-Hanna Seljamaa). By exploring the symbolic meanings of silence among Evangelicals, two articles (Tuija Hovi and Piret Koosa) add to the growing body of scholarship that questions the fundamental role of language in Evangelical Christianity and seeks to broaden perspectives on understanding conversion.

This volume also includes one open issue contribution by Anne Eriksen, who on the basis of British and Nordic examples explores the entangled genealogies of the notions of *history* and *tradition* as the twin products of a uniquely modern temporality.

