

Ritualization of Daily Life

Life of the Gentry at Ratula Manor in Artsjö (Finnish Artjärvi) around 1900

Bo Lönnqvist

Lönnqvist, Bo 1988: Ritualization of Daily Life. Life of the Gentry at Ratula Manor in Artsjö (Finnish Artjärvi) around 1900. – *Ethnologia Europaea* XVIII: 93–116.

Since the 1920ies Finnish manor houses have been studied mostly from a historical or socio-historical viewpoint or as subjects for art history. This has resulted in monographs about various types of manors and about the development of agriculture, economical and social structure of the manors. From an ethnological point these results only concern the framework of the culture of the manors.

This text deals with the *concept* of manorial culture in Finland. According to the main theories of cultural anthropology the author is looking for the organizing principles of the manorial culture. The material for the study was collected in 1971 through field work at the Ratula estate (near Borgå/Porvoo). The author describes the physical milieu and the life styles at the turn of the century as an example of a ritualized daily life. It concerns the organization of the physical area (space), the position of the individuals in the social hierarchy, the shape of appearance and the concept of time. Manorial culture is seen as a system for communicating meaning. It is an entity where various social and local groups of the manor manifested their cultural standards by playing different roles and through physical arrangements. Among individuals in leading position the ability to preserve traditions and to ritualize everyday life was of essential importance for the preservation of the manorial culture.

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1. Theoretical background

Some of the essential features of the cultural and social history of the Finnish manors were inventoried seventy years ago with the publication, in *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland*, of Gabriel Nikander's series of articles entitled "Finnish manors in the Gustavian era". Nikander discussed the social importance of manors, their economy, construction, and horticulture (Nikander 1917). True, a few historical monographs had been published even earlier (see Lönnqvist 1978:23), but Nikander's expositions made the *cultural history* of the manors an accepted field of study. His main themes were reiterated in his article "Finnish manors in the 18th century", which appeared in the

journal *Rig* in 1922. One may also surmise that Nikander's view of manorial culture put its imprint on the treatment of the subject in the collection called "Manors in Finland" (I–III, 1928–29), the editor-in-chief being Nikander himself.

During the past seventy years, our idea of manorial culture has more or less remained the same. Descriptive writing has focussed on manors partly as social and economic entities (see Jutikkala 1932), partly as clearly delimited physical environments reflecting specific historical styles. The most recent exponent of these aspects is the historian Olle Sirén in his monographs on the manors Sarvlaks and Malmgård in the eastern Nyland (Finnish Uusimaa) province (Sirén 1980, 1985). Nikander

was the first to depict the social history forming the background and basis for the manorial society, which gave room for social conflicts as well as for social care. It has been said that the flourishing of the manors meant that a higher culture of intellectual improvement and learning came into being in the country. There is a wealth of material bearing witness to the economy of the manors (account books, contracts) which is a real temptation to the researcher. The material is quite detailed so that both the material standards of living and innovations in the form of new customs and new household items can be closely studied. This is also true for gardening, building and interior decoration, all of which have left a rich heritage in garden architecture and the history of styles.

Variations in these features have made it possible to draw the profiles of various types of manors: those belonging to iron foundries and glassworks, residences of military officers, manors belonging to civil servants, and old freehold estates (the *allodialsäteri* type). Kaarlo Wirilander's study *Herrskapsfolk* (Gentry), based in part on statistical information, adds variety to the picture of the Finnish gentry as a phenomenon of social history (Wirilander 1982). Yet even in 1917, Gabriel Nikander was aware of the limitations of this approach, as research would concentrate on the external forms of culture on the manors, the *framework*. In his view the final goal of research should be to "grasp ... average people during a given epoch, in the totality of their thought and action". He regarded his overview as an attempt to "describe the cultural possibilities of a whole class of society" (Nikander 1917:84).

Today we can state that research in those days could not develop new approaches because of the concept of culture which was then, and still largely remains prevalent amongst both historians and ethnologists, that is, the one focussing on the history of civilization. Nikander's demand for complete coverage is a precursor of functionalist influence, both with regard to biological and psychological explanations for human needs, and with regard to the view of society as a living organism (B. Malinowski, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown). In this context culture will be seen as a set of institutions

rooted in human needs and functioning as instruments for the satisfaction of those needs. The critical voices maintained that research resulted in descriptions and analyses of differences, whereas the attitudes of the researchers and the categories they used reflected their own society.

During the post-war period, entirely new vistas have been opened up even concerning the conventional material of culture history, primarily by structural anthropology, research on the history of mentalities, and historically oriented semiotics. The focal point in research has moved from the description of the historical development of a phenomenon to the analysis of the process of change itself. The difference between history and ethnology lies in the choices of "complementary perspectives" as the historian catches the conscious expressions of social life and the ethnologist the unconscious preconditions for it – as has been stated by Claude Lévi-Strauss, *the structural anthropologist*, in 1958.

The search for new structure in culture has also included the study of *language* as a most important variable, not only as a cultural product but as part of culture and as a prerequisite for it. This means that dialectic relations will be used in establishing the systems of symbols forming the basis of language and of the relations between man and his surroundings. Thus social relations are building material for the researcher, but the pattern found in it may also be inherent in the culture itself, often tangibly in the form of a norm, or else as a way of interpreting or explaining matters. Structuralism (and even its predecessor, configurationism) has also entailed a renewed holistic concept of culture. The culture of a society is an entity clearly divergent from that of other societies, a set of meanings and codes, patterns and dispositions shared by the members of that society. Cultural anthropology expressly analyzes this pattern, which also takes the form of linguistic categories. The stress thus lies on the *organizing principles in a culture*, the system providing the society with its specific form (cf. Durbin 1978). Methodologically, this means that the phenomena are picked out, isolated, although research must obviously not be given



Ratula manor house in the time of the Armfelt-von Etter family. The house was built by Berndt Magnus Stackelberg presumably in the 1780s and renovated by Alexander Armfelt in the 1840s. The front gable carries the Armfelt family arms. Photo Signe Brander 1910, the National Board of Antiquities.

to a mere reduction of processes (cf. Mennell 1986:13).

The structures are not static but each model system continuously generates new cultural arrangements. The changes occurring with time, as a structured process, thus become an important variable. This leads us into the field of research on the history of mentalities, which has essentially influenced structuralism.

Originating in natural geography, the French-dominated *Annales* school has formulated key concepts in the history of mentalities such as "trying to grasp man's mental tools through the language, the conceptual world and the syntax of an epoch", as put by Lucien Febvre (Odén 1978). The object of study has been the slow process of change affecting men-

tal structures in the feudal society, exemplified in the attitude to death (Philippe Ariès), and in qualitative forms of taste (Stephen Mennell), against the background of the specific conditions in the society studied.

As far as the contribution of semiotics to research on culture is concerned, the focal points is the actual communication of culture. Here, culture is seen as a system of communications regulated by, *inter alia*, socially coloured codes. Particularly the Estonian specialist on semiotics, Jurij Lotman, has in his numerous studies on Russian culture applied this approach when analyzing material emanating from the literature of past periods. A case in point is his study of a city and the semiotics of city culture, of St. Petersburg as a cultural



Minister State Secretary Count Alexander Armfelt (1794–1876) created the Ratula milieu. National Board of Antiquities.

writing. Lotman's key concept is the *secondary model-forming systems*. These are systems structured according to the principles for natural speech, yet with a more complicated nature. These secondary model-forming systems – rituals, social and ideological communication by means of signs, art – together form a coherent and complex semiotic unity, a culture (Lotman 1974, Lotman 1984).

I am going to discuss *manorial culture as a system for communicating meaning*. The questions asked are the following: What organizing principles underlie various cultural arrangements expressed in the environment, rituals, sayings, language? What cultural standards were formulated within the manorial society? What ways of thinking characterized Finnish manorial society?

2. Physical framework of the Ratula culture

The material for this article, which has gained topical interest almost twenty years after collection, was gathered in the course of an inventory that I made of the Ratula estate in Artsjö (Finnish Artjärvi) parish to the north-west of Borgå (Finnish Porvoo) in the summer of 1971. At that time cavalry captain *Gunnar Rotkirch* (born in 1897) was putting the estate up for sale, finding it difficult to look after the house and park; most of the grounds had been sold earlier. Now the whole manor was to be emptied: archives, furniture, and household items were to be placed elsewhere. This was the final break-up of a family tradition, a cultural continuity from the year 1835. In that year the captain's father's maternal grandfather, Count Alexander Armfelt, then councillor of state at the Secretariat for Finnish affairs in St. Petersburg, had acquired the estate. The inventory that I made in my capacity of ethnologist at *Folk Kultursarkivet* (archives of Swedish popular culture in Finland), maintained by *Svenska Litteratursällskapet* (society for Swedish literature in Finland), led to countless discussions on the ways and means of preserving the tangible souvenirs, including the manor itself. The estate was in fact alive with historical memories. The year before, in 1970, the Finnish National Museum's historical department had photographed the interior and the exterior, and it was my task to document, on tape and in text and pictures, life as it had been lived on the estate, and primarily during captain Rotkirch's childhood, i.e. the first decades of the 20th century. Today, the interviews with captain Rotkirch of 4.5 hours, the photographs in two old family albums, and my own experience of Ratula as a researcher constitute the essential elements in my cultural-anthropological analysis.¹

Both the exterior and the interior of Ratula bore the imprint of *Alexander Armfelt* (1794–1876). He acquired the estate in 1835. The manor house dated back to 1780 and had been in the possession of the Stackelberg family. Armfelt set to adding another storey and a front gable with pillars according to drawings



A metal mark with the picture of the manor, dating back to 1853. Such marks were presented to labourers when their working days were over. SLS 1015.

by C.L. Engel. Several new farm buildings were added and an extensive park laid out around the manor. Before the redistribution of lands in the 1920s (Crofter's Act in 1918, Lex Kallio in 1922), the estate covered some 3,500 hectares. It was a typical peasant and tenant farmer estate of 76 farms and crofts, the holders of which paid their rents in the form of work on the estate (Rotkirch 1928).² The social

hierarchy was pyramidal as was customary on major Finnish estates, and life fell into three categories: the life of the landed gentry centering on the manor; the life of the servants in direct contact with the family, centering in the kitchen area; and the farming activities centering on the steward's lodgings and the farm buildings (cf. Lönnqvist 1978).

My informant, *Gunnar Rotkirch*, had a



A crofter's or peasant's lodgings at Ratula. SLS 1015.



The Ratula salon in 1910. Photo Signe Brander, the National Board of Antiquities.

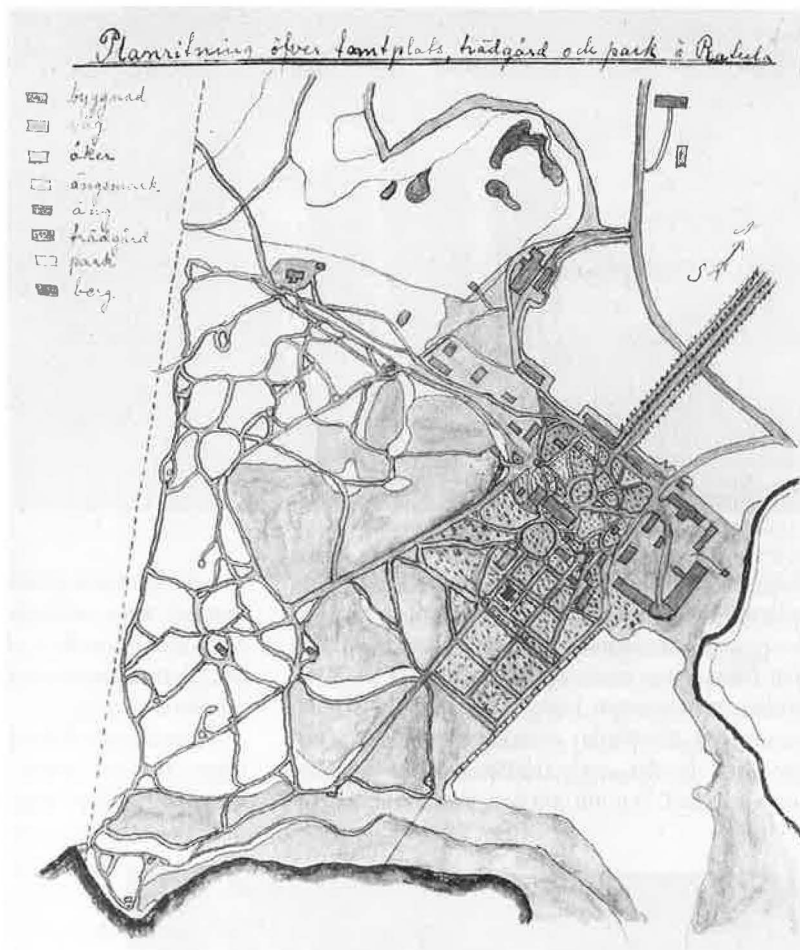
unique double perspective on life on the manor insofar as he had, while still a child, experienced it both as an underling and as one of the upper class. His father *Gustaf Alexander Rotkirch* (1865–1940), who had a university degree in agriculture, worked as the estate steward between 1893 and 1921, and his family inhabited a side wing. Alexander Armfelt's youngest daughter, Countess *Eugenie von Etter* (1831–1922), had inherited the estate when her father died in 1876. She lived in the manor house, although she spent the winters in St. Petersburg until 1896, when she moved to Ratula, bringing her spouse *geheimerådet* (confidential counselor) Alexander von Etter (1831–1902) there too. When Eugenie von Etter had been a widow for ten years she bought a winter apartment in Helsinki. Countess von Etter's older sisters Mariana Armfelt (born in 1823) and Augustine Rotkirch (born in 1826, my narrator's father's mother), who lived at Äminne

manor in Halikko and in Åbo (Finnish Turku), respectively, played very influential roles in society (on family relations see Carpelan 1954:60, 1958:939–940).

My informant's family lived in the steward's lodgings as a matter of course, while countess von Etter with her husband, her lady companion, her maids, the housekeepers, and the guests, "the court" as it was called, stayed in the manor house. My informant says that the countess would, in her old age, sit alone in the big dining hall when anyone came to see her. She is the main character of this study.

Ratula is also touched by political history due to the fact that its creator, Alexander Armfelt, was for forty years, from the 1830s to the 1870s, the leading statesman in the Grand Duchy of Finland, working as Minister State Secretary in St. Petersburg. He was probably the most influential man as regards Finnish relations to the Czars in Russia. Con-

A hand-made map showing the Ratula estate and park in 1923. SLS 1015.



sequently his three daughters had been brought up at the court in St. Petersburg, but even while still small they always spent their summers at Ratula. It seems that these stays must have displayed a marked contrast between the ceremony of Russian court life and life in the Finnish countryside. Yet the Ratula setup has affinities with the organization of manors in Russia and in the countries to the south of the Gulf of Finland.³ And there was also a Swedish dimension, as Armfelt's first wife, Baroness Sigrid Oxenstjerna af Eka och Lindö (1801–1841) actually came from Sweden. The family thus spoke French, Armfelt's main language, Swedish, and Russian. Alexander Armfelt, the second son of Gustaf Mauritz Armfelt, who lived in the Gustavian era of Sweden, had had a solid education in St. Pe-

tersburg and Åbo, also supplemented in Uppsala and London (Hirn 1938).

3. The spatial principle as a basis for ritualized daily life

The layout of the park around Ratula, both by sheer extent and by richness of detail, offers a unique example of nature being used as a cultural space communicating symbolic values. The park may be seen as a catchment area for significant cultural activities, taking the form of rituals as well as of actual buildings, in consolidation of thoughts and ideas (cf. Lönnqvist 1987). The joining together of nature and culture is unique in its kind. A large wilderness area was converted into an organized outer world by the owner's planning and working on



The Ratula park; a cavern on the lake, lined with birch bark. SLS 1015.

it for twenty years: it was a reflection of the culture, found inside the manor house, the indoors area. My informant's narrative is amplified from notes made by his father (G. A. Rotkirch's manuscript history in SLS 1015). It seems that Alexander Armfelt started work on the park in the early 1840s, overseeing the work himself. An old garden was extended to

the shore of the Villikkala lake, and fields and forests were reshaped. What had probably been an old croft, a place called Iloniemi (cape Joy), lent its name to the largest of the summer pavilions.

When finished the park area covered 30 hectares studded with 40 pavilions and other buildings. There was a total of 30 km of foot-



The Birch Bark Temple, a pavilion in the Ratula park. Photo Kari Hakli 1971, SLS 1015.



The Iloniemi pavilion, built in 1854 by Alexander Armfelt. Photo Kari Hakli 1971, SLS 1015.

paths. Several hundred foliiferous trees were planted, among them 200 birches, also aspens, ash trees, lime trees and an oak forest extending from the old garden, larch trees, and snow-ball trees. Two avenues, the garden avenue from the manor house, and the granary avenue from the big granary, led to a vast tangle of winding footpaths. Armfelt seems to have been very partial to birch trees. In many of the pavilions, birch bark was used both as a building material and for decoration purposes. The “birch bark temple” had birch trees for pillars and a roof of birch bark. On the slope down to the lake there was a cavern lined with birch bark. A number of the pavilions had their walls decorated with wood shingles.

The pavilions were built for Armfelt’s children. The biggest one, Iloniemi, was built in 1845 for “the young master” Mauritz who, however, remained in Russia. Iloniemi served as lodgings for Armfelt during the hours he spent in overseeing the work: his breakfast would be taken there, and no delegations were allowed to disturb him during these morning hours. In 1854, his favourite child, Eugenie, then 23 years old, was presented with a sexagonal pavilion overlooking the lake. His daughter Augustine had a pergola dedicated to her, whereas Armfelt’s second wife Aline Demidoff, who was not allowed to practise her orthodox religion in the manor house, had a small prayer chapel erected in 1844.

The park had pools, a merry-go-round with armchairs, a playhouse, swings, a tennis court and a skittle-alley, as well as burial-places for the pet animals. Probably the most exotic item was a cone-shaped Lap hut, which had been fetched from “somewhere in the far north”. A number of stones were quarried and arranged into fortifications, ruins with basements, and a stone cavern. A wooden bridge stretched across a ravine in the oak forest. The springs in the park were the sources of all the drinking water used in the carafes and decanters in the manor house. When Armfelt died, the inventory list contained “18 water carafes and 36 glasses and 18 trays”.

At Alexander Armfelt’s death in 1876, his daughter Eugenie planted two silver firs in front of the major house façade facing the park, naming them “Alexander” and “Eugenie”. Every year a boy was sent up to tidy the tree tops so as to make them grow straight.

This *cultivated forest* derived its significance from the rituals taking place in it on an almost daily basis. The pattern which was still observed in the early 20th century and directed



Eugenie’s pavilion, built in 1854. SLS 1015.

by Eugenie von Etter makes it possible to deduce the functions that the park fulfilled in Armfelt's days.

The park had its main use as a goal for *excursions*. Eugenie von Etter delighted in coffee picnics in her pavilion a few hundred meters from the manor house. The maids would take along huge baskets filled with provisions and treats in advance of the party. The lady herself would drive there in a one-horse surrey. Elderly guests would also be driven to the pavilion while the young people were expected to walk.

Another favourite traditional pastime of the family was *dressing up* and performing plays; this was done in the Iloniemi pavilion, a curtain being hung between the two rooms and benches provided for the spectators. This generally occurred on birthdays and other family celebrations. Even in his youth, Alexander Armfelt had been interested in the theatre and in dressing up; in St. Petersburg society he enjoyed the reputation of a good amateur actor. He would set up plays in his own home, also taking part himself in the acting.

A completely different use of the Iloniemi pavilion was for the marriages of the servants. During Eugenie von Etter's time the coachman Backman's daughter was married to a groom called Leino, and the marriage ceremony took place at Iloniemi (cf. Lönnqvist 1988).

As described here, the manor park may be regarded, from the viewpoint of cultural anthropology, as an expression of the *spatial principle* in culture, i.e. the principle of organized space communicating symbolic values. The space was clearly delineated both culturally and physically: it emanated from the manor house, forming a continuation of that organization of an indoors world; and in fact the park was not an actual outdoors area. The manor house also constituted the watershed between daily working life and esthetic life, where activities had a ceremonial character and where, consequently, workers and labourers had no place. On the outskirts of the park, in the periphery of civilization, the real wilderness began.

From what we know about Alexander Armfelt's personality, the Ratula park may be in-

terpreted from a historical and biographical point of view as the realization of a young man's dream of a sanctuary, an undisturbed paradise on earth. The configurations and arrangements of the park, denominations such as "temples" and "caverns" make it possible to trace not only the influence of classical antiquity but also an ideal of time that came close to the Greek concept of time. The cultivated forest expressed a space which was outside all linear time changes (such as the continuous turmoil of Russian court power struggles that Armfelt witnessed).

Nature was a stable element, continually renewed, it only knew cyclical time. When Armfelt designed an antique temple in Finnish birch bark, when a crofter's hut was converted into a pavilion (Iloniemi – cape Joy), then both days gone by and days to come were equally distant. When houses were required in the cultivated forest they were not to bring to mind any topical buildings but they should bear the imprint of wilderness or of timelessness. Even the small convenience next to the main building could easily be taken for a children's playhouse.

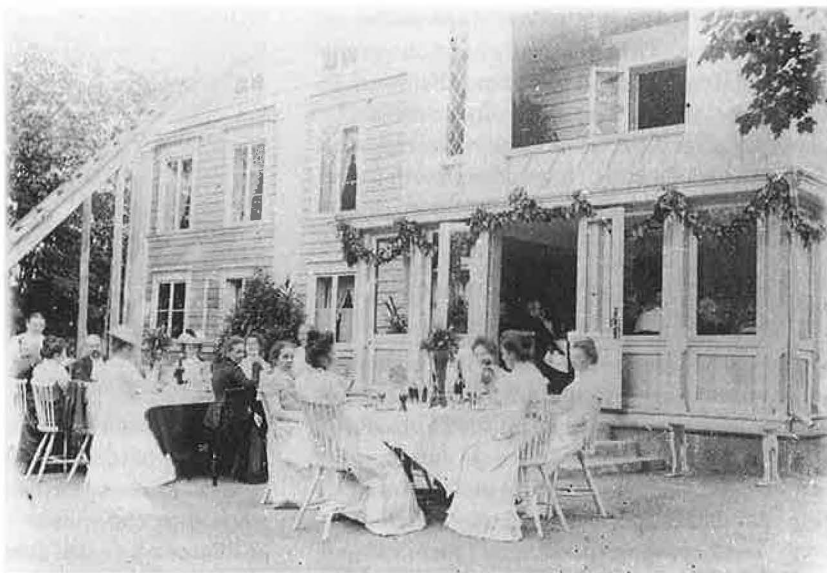
In the park there was order and harmony, there was a timeless existence in a sheltered space with trees for sentinels. The ruins were there so as to underline the transitoriness of man's achievements in civilization. The exotic Lap hut was also outside the scope of time.

Here, the statesman, burdened with responsibilities, had broken the chains of time, even biological time, by means of a suite of spatial arrangements (cf. Lönnqvist 1988).

Yet time was also stopped by means of cyclic repetitions of the dressing up ceremonies. As a site of timeless rituals, the park could also be open to the servants. Iloniemi, cape Joy, the gentry's theatre pavilion, then became the place for the possibly most consequential event in the life of the servants, the wedding ceremony. On those occasions the room beyond the limits of time would serve as a place where even social class limits faded out, albeit only temporarily.

This double function of space, as a site for both serious matters and their reflections in play, was something that only the upper class

Dinner party at Ratula, midsummer 1901. Some of the company are sitting on the veranda. SLS 1015.



were masters of: to the servants the theatre was closed. The gentry was thus *culturally bilingual*. The linguistic categories manifest in the words used, *excursion* and *dressing up*, bear witness to the changeover from one cultural language to another. It is reflected in the Swedish prefixes *ut-* and *av-* as in *utfärd* (excursion), *utklädsel* (dressing up), *avfärd* (departure) and *avsked* (farewell).

There were other restricted areas where ac-

cess was for the gentry exclusively, other manifestations of the principle expressed in the park. In the border area between the civilized *indoors* and the civilized *outdoors*, there were the manor house verandas where a considerable part of life was concentrated in summertime. "People at that time would, when visiting the countryside, like to be seated out of doors, yet to be sheltered – by glass panes and walls". A case in point is that at Ratula, the bottom

The Ratula "Court" assembled in midsummer 1901. Eugenie von Etter, née Armfelt, is third from the right, seated by her husband Alexander von Etter, on his 70th birthday. Members of the party are dressed up so as to represent various nationalities. SLS 1015.



part of the front gable pillars were sawed off and a glass veranda was built instead. As the dining hall was hot in summer, the veranda facing the park quite naturally became the place for afternoon coffee. Below the veranda there was a long see-saw board on trestles, and a swing hung from the ladder to the roof.

4. The vertical principle expressed in symbolic actions and items

If the spatial principle reveals to us a structure of separate hunting-grounds, a cultural arrangement supported by the organization of space into categories like outdoors and indoors, center and periphery, there is also a "vertical" principle with the *social hierarchy* as its backbone. This may be expressed as "*upstairs*" and "*downstairs*": the former then corresponds to the manor house, particularly the upper floor, whereas the latter corresponds to the kitchen. The steward's wing was part of the downstairs sphere, lying at the foot of the small hillock where the manor house stood, to the left of the avenue leading there.

At the death of Alexander Armfelt in 1876, the manor house contained the following rooms mentioned in the inventory list: the dining hall, the library, the count's sitting room (bedroom), the bedroom (his wife's bedroom), the study (for working), the drawing room, the upper guest room, the salon, the upper closet (for toilet purposes), the upper cloakroom and the upper staircase. The ground floor probably held the store room, the inner room (bedroom), the outer and inner lady's rooms (bedrooms), the outer guest room to the right and the inner guest room, the downstairs cloakroom, and the inner and outer servants' rooms with simpler furniture such as folding tables, wooden chairs, kitchen tables and shelves, hand looms and mangles.

With the exception of the servants' rooms, one of which at times would be used as a kitchen, all the rooms listed may be counted as belonging to the upper sphere. Until 1896 the manor house did not have a proper kitchen, but food was prepared in a separate adjacent kitchen wing, the *pakari* (Finnish for bakery). From here, the food was carried to the upper

floor of the manor house where the dining hall lay. This arrangement, too, illustrates a general principle: cooking and the preparation of food is something not quite nice in character and should preferably not be seen. It is only the laid table and the end products of cooking that are displayed.

Countess von Etter had an old housekeeper called Eva Tamott, a lady's maid called Hanna Waselius, and a "second housemaid" called Mari Siltala, a crofter's daughter, all of whom lived "upstairs", while the second housekeeper Matilda Rotström (who later rose to be housekeeper), the servants' cook and the poultry girl lived "downstairs" in the *pakari*. Here, in the general kitchen, food was served to those who worked in the manor house, and also to the gardener who came from Sweden, the gardener's men, the coachman and the stable boy, if they did not have households of their own. There were two old overseers who would also fetch their food from the general kitchen. The kitchen held great importance as a location where two cultures and different cultural codes met. As the servants were trained at the manor from childhood on, some of them worked there in the third generation, and as they moreover tended to intermarry, the manorial society was rather closed. This guaranteed that the hierarchical order and the command structure would continue to be the natural state of affairs, an unwritten law.

An example of the patriarchal structure may be seen in the fact that when the maid Hanna Waselius was married, the wedding ceremony was arranged in the dining room. She was married to a gardener from Orimattila.

The administration of the estate, agriculture and other kinds of work lay outside the upper sphere in Countess von Etter's time. It was her nephew, G. Alex. Rotkirch, who had this in hand as the estate steward. In the steward's wing, business would be transacted with the reeve, with the overseer for the crofters and tenant farmers, with the joiner, the blacksmith and the miller, with the cowman heading six milk maids, and the forester looking after the outlying farm, Mickola.

Between the steward's lodgings and the "court" in the manor house there was *unoffi-*



Ratula servants in 1902. SLS 1015.

cial communication through Countess von Etter's lady companion in summer, Miss Hedvig von Kraemer (born in 1858). Her mother had been one of the countess's bosom friends. During the winter Miss von Kraemer had school children as boarders in Helsinki, but in summertime she would invade Ratula accompanied by her half-blind housekeeper. "She came with three trunks and left with ten", which is explained by the fact that she made all kinds of preserves of fruit and berries from Ratula pro-

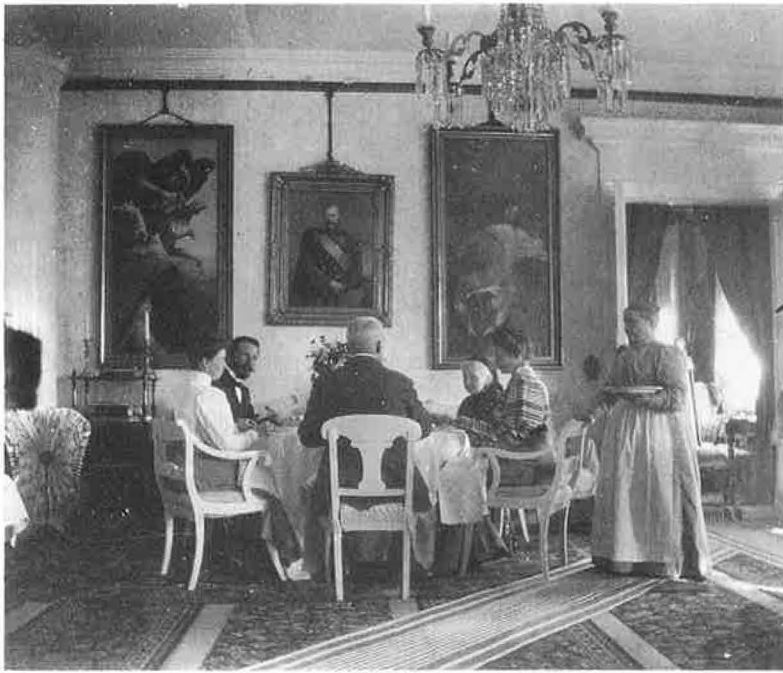
duce. She would betake herself to the steward's to impart "court" news and take other news back, which is reflected in the somewhat spiteful nickname given to her, *Ratulan uutiset* (the Ratula News).

Summer was altogether a social season: friends and relatives came to stay at Ratula with their servants. There was a separate guests' wing matching the steward's wing. From 1907, it was let to councillor Konstantin Ruin from St. Petersburg, who came there with his many children. Everybody was generously treated as a guest, the countess providing the upkeep for all. There was a stream of milk, butter, calves, sheep and chicken from the estate to the kitchen. The only one to grumble was the gardener who did not like the guests picking berries in the garden.

All food served was rushed across from the kitchen wing to the upper floor where it was put in a hot closet to keep warm. The meals comprised morning coffee, breakfast at eleven, afternoon coffee at two, and supper with three courses at five, with a tea in the evening. Coffee was often taken on the verandas. All were assembled for the meals. The maid blew a horn signal when meals were served. There were three different kinds of signals used at the



The bell used by Countess von Etter to ring for the servants, and the silver horn blown by the maid to call guests to dinner. SLS 1015.



The maid serves the coffee. SLS 1015.

manor, each one carrying its particular meaning. Countess von Etter would ring for the servants on a little bell, the maids assembled the guests by blowing a silver horn, and there was an old bell steeple from the times of the Stackelberg family standing in the angle between the manor house, the steward's wing and the granary; this bell would be rung by the steward's wife at seven in the morning for work on the estate to begin, at the beginning and end of the breakfast hour, and at the end of working hours.

The vertical principle was also expressed in other ways, namely, in certain *symbolic gestures in the communication between masters and servants*:

When coffee had been brought and everybody had had theirs, the countess would take a handful of sugar lumps from the sugar basin and some cakes and hand these to the maid, saying "and this is for you", and every time the maid would curtsy saying "thank you my lady". And so the maid carried out the coffee tray and the tribute she had received.

The younger generation found the whole ceremony peculiar: in the kitchen the maid could have any amount of sugar and cakes, to her

heart's content. However, in this ritual, sugar had lost its meaning as a sweetening ingredient. The fact that carried cultural significance was in reality the double meaning of the ceremony, the generous gesture between the superior and the inferior, the pattern being: you know your position in the household and I set store by it daily. – A more dramatic example is when the first housemaid tried to give notice. Mari Siltala, who had started out as second housemaid and learnt some pidgin Swedish, was not always kindly treated by the countess and threatened to leave. "And then Aunt Eugenie called Mari to her and made her bend down. And so she put her arms around her and cried 'I won't let you go until you promise to stay'."

Another recurring occasion loaded with symbolic meaning was the great rye party given for the numerous crofters and their families. It was held next to the granary.

When the rye had been harvested there was much baking and brewing just for the party. Then everyone who had been harvesting was given bread by the great stone table in the courtyard. Every married man received for himself and his wife a huge loaf with a lump of



Alexander Armfelt's coachman Ekström painted by E. J. Löfgren in 1869. The painting was commissioned to thank Ekström for driving Czar Alexander II. Photo P. O. Welin, the National Board of Antiquities.

butter in the middle of it. Every unmarried man received half a loaf, and every child a quarter of a loaf with a piece of butter on the top, provided they had taken part in the work. For one loaf of bread almost two pounds of butter would be used. The countess distributed the bread herself, and the kitchen staff served *kalja* (weak beer) from huge cowls, and everyone came along with two liter jugs. On this occasion the whole "court" was expected to be present. Once my narrator's stepmother (the steward's wife) had been delayed and was late, which made the countess furious so that she said "you just wait and see, when you give your first rye party here I will come and haunt you".

This custom which annually annulled the vertical principle temporarily, yet reconfirmed it with the countess distributing the bread, continued into the 1920s.

The servants curtseyed to the countess. She was called "the Countess" or "my lady", in

Finnish *kreivinna*. The steward's son was called *Kunnar-herra* (master Gunnar), while the younger children were addressed by their first names only. He thought this was because he was the oldest and would inherit the estate. The countess called the servants by their first names: "Hanna, look here Hanna", she would say. She spoke French and Swedish, and for this reason the coachman Vilhelm Backman, who only drove the gentry, was recruited in the Swedish speaking coastal area of Pernå, where he used to work as a fisherman.

On the manor there were also objects that through their mere existence and the narrated traditions around them made the double significance of the vertical principle manifest. In the stairway leading to the upper floor there was a portrait showing Alexander Armfelt's coachman Ekström, painted by Erik Johan Löfgren. The portrait's story was as follows:

Ekström had acted as a coachman to Czar Alexander II and his spouse on their journey to a diet in Finland, either in 1863 or 1867, the journey being arranged by Armfelt. The coachman drove the four horses pulling the covered imperial sledge. This was in the coldest period in winter, and the coachman was tied to his bench, as he was not allowed to get off nor to sit down in the presence of their majesties. At each coach station fresh horses were kept in readiness to speed up the journey, the change of horses was rapidly effected, and the horses instantly flew off again. Their majesties did not descend. The coachman, tied to his place as he was, was provided with a tankard of hot liquor at each stop. As the horses and sledge finally arrived in Borgå, Ekström was well under the weather. His master had the portrait painted as a token of gratitude for the coachman's excellent behaviour.

The vertical principle made itself felt outside the estate as well. The mail for Ratula arrived at the Uusikylä station where it was put in a sealed bag. The station master was in the habit of reading the cards arriving for Ratula and thus knew when to expect visitors. Thus on one of the cards he wrote a note saying that he had already ordered the salmon.

When the vertical principle comes to be annulled towards the end of the era of manors,



Countess Eugenie von Etter's cabinet at Ratula in 1902. SLS 1015.

and above all during the civil war, its manifestations are unambiguous:

"Prior to 1917, before the Crofter's Act came into force (1918), there was a widespread spirit of upheaval. And well do I remember once when the crofters were driving manure from the cowshed in their sledges, those *kibikkas*, low sledges with cradle-like basket tops – their horses were poor and meagre. Down the avenue they went and had just turned off to the left. And then the farmyard bell rang. And they just up and turned their sledges over, tilting the contents onto the roadside, and home they went".

But among the people living next to the gentry, the housekeeping staff being a good example, the double role play continued. Thus, for instance, the steward's cook was known to be "Red as blood", and she knew where the silver was hidden in the loft of the steward's wing, "but she was completely loyal". Nor did any of the employees inform on the steward, Mr. Rotkirch, when he went into hiding in Lahti in

1918, as "he had never been harsh or unkind to them", as my informant said about his father.

5. Ritualization of daily life

I asked my informant how Countess von Etter passed her days, and he said he had given the matter very much thought, eventually deciding that "apparently she walked around the rooms and looked at her things". She might trifle with handicrafts, reading and letter-writing. A serial story in the daily *Hufvudstadsbladet* would be read and discussed. There were also certain recurring activities breaking the monotony in two ways: one was a physical move to another location, the other was a change of shape or appearance by means of dressing up.

The distance in space only had minor importance as is demonstrated in the previously described coffee parties in the park pavilion – the



Dressing up for a young relative's birthday party in June, 1901. The birthday child stays third from the right, on her left Eugenie von Etter in gentlemen's clothes. Observe the servants by the kitchen wing to the left. SLS 1015.

distance was but a few hundred meters, but the proceedings were ritualized into a circumstantial journey with carriages and baskets of provisions.

"And then she (Countess von Etter) was wild about going on trips to the Salmela hill across the lake, the distance along the road was 6 km. And then horses had to be available for the carriage, normally there were five such horses, two pairs and a single one. But this was not sufficient for the carriages, so in spite of the fact that it might be in the midst of haymaking, a message was sent to the steward that such-and-such a number of carriages were to be sent up, and he was cursing his head off but to no avail, there was nothing for it but to take the horses from haymaking and harness them to the carriages. And so the carriages took the countess and her party the 6 km road to the mountain to admire the view, or to the outlying farm Mickola, or to the church in Artsjö. And there the party climbed the church tower to admire the view. And sometimes coffee was

taken along, or Russian *kvass* (weak beer) made on the estate.⁵

Like her father, Countess von Etter found great pleasure in dressing up, and she was quite partial to wearing men's clothes. After the dressing up there was a charade, and the court had to guess what it was. This was not just a form of amusement. Countess von Etter's passions surpassed the limits of everyday life in a manner that would today be considered bizarre. Thus she used to dress up and scare people, and she would also threaten to haunt them after her death. Even when she was already between 75 and 80 years old, one night she dressed up wholly in black, with a black mantilla and white kid gloves, which she dipped in water. She then crept into her lady companion's, 58-year-old Miss von Kraemer's room, putting first one wet glove, then the other on the forehead of her victim. The lady flew up and cried out, but the countess soundlessly wafted out of the room. The next day Hedvig von Kraemer was telling everybody



Pastime: patience. The lady is Eugenie von Etter's sister Augustine Rotkirch, née Armfelt. To the right Alexander von Etter. SLS 1015.



"The moment of parting", late August 1902. The hostess, Eugenie von Etter, stands behind the seated lady. SLS 1015.



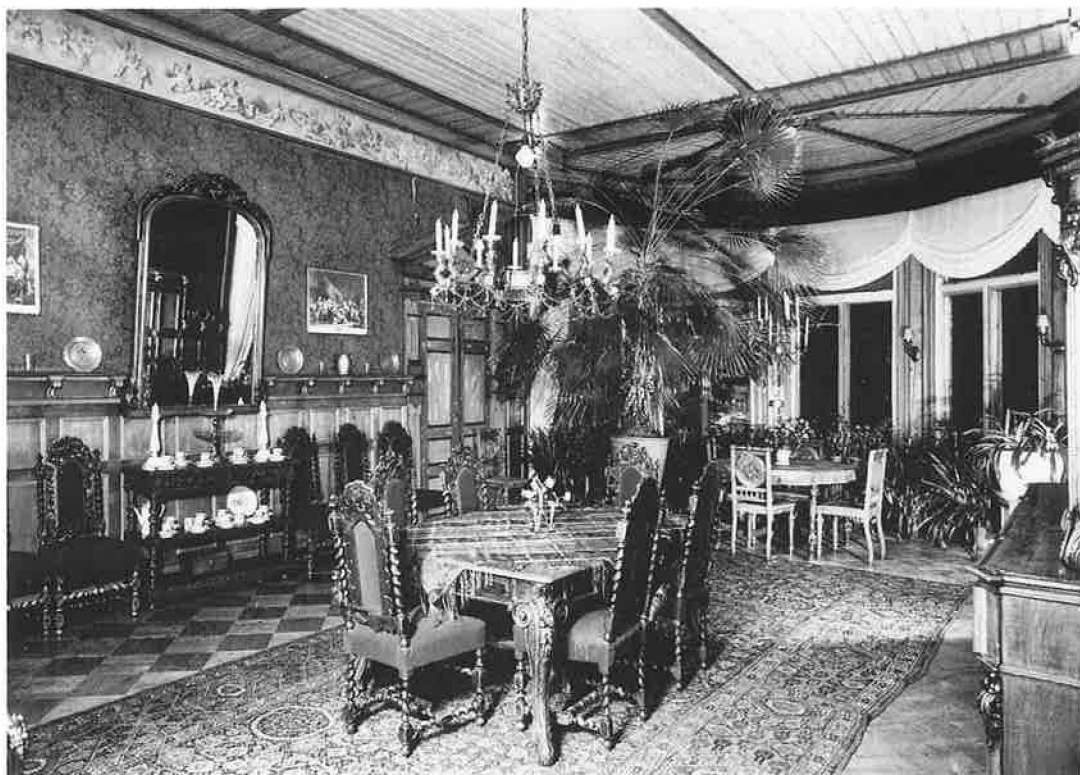
Count Alexander Armfelt's bedroom at Ratula, kept intact from his death in 1876 until 1922. Photo Signe Brander, the National Board of Antiquities.

about her dreadful experience, while the countess kept her countenance and repeatedly asked "and how did it really happen, dear Hedvig". The dressing up, particularly during the time when Alexander von Etter was still alive (until 1902), was also associated with birthdays and family celebrations. Both young and old and guests as well took part in plays by Z. Topelius like "The lost shoe" or "Rinaldo Rinaldini" at the Iloniemi pavilion. Even Alexander Armfelt's old uniforms were used for costumes. Countess von Etter was very particular about remembering birthday parties.

The adults also used to play various games, of which the countess was very fond. Even at the age of 80 she participated in a game called *påve* (the Pope). It was played at the stone table in the courtyard. The Pope had a scarf tied over his eyes, the others crept into hiding,

and when the cry "all is clear" was heard, the pope took off the scarf and set out to look for the others. Those in hiding were expected to beat the pope to the stone table and tap it. If they did not reach it first they were "burnt out". The game included quite some physical strain due to the running.

Relatives were considered more important than the neighbours on the five nearby manors, and Countess von Etter was in fact disdainful of some of them. Yet there was an interchange of visits in summer. The distance to Kinttula, inhabited by Elin Hamberg, a consul's widow, was 9 km. The countess would telephone and ask if a visit was convenient, and the trip was made every summer. The distance to the Stråhle family at Perheniemi was 18 km, to Toivonoja 21 km, to Constance af Forselles at Nyby 21 km, and to Baroness Eu-



The Ratula dining hall in the extension built in 1896. The furniture had been bought from a ballet dancer at the Mariinskij opera house in St. Petersburg. The hall was built round the furniture so that it could never be taken out. Photo P. O. Welin 1970, the National Board of Antiquities.

genia Wrede at Arrajoki 24 km. In summer one longer trip was made with two horses and a carriage to Stensböle in Borgå (Finnish Porvoo), to the house of a distant relative, Baroness Emilie Segerstråle (née Rotkirch). A rest would then be taken in Mörskom (Finnish Myrskylä).

Departures from the estate were also ritually organized through the following custom, which the countess kept up for everyone leaving:

"When the guests were to leave and the two horses and carriage stood at the main entry, everybody gathered in the main hall. The maid came in and Countess von Etter served two kinds of home-made *nalifka*, a nice and strong cherry liqueur, in glasses the size of a thimble. When everyone had had a glass the company sat down. Then followed a minute of silence. And when the minute had passed the countess said "cheers and happy journey", and everyone

drank up. Then everyone went out and stood on the stairs while the guests climbed into the carriage. While the horses made the tour of the courtyard, the court walked at a brisk pace down past the corner of the steward's wing, and when the carriage had gone down the alley and again came into view everybody waved. This custom was still observed when the countess was in her eighties, that is around 1910".

6. The principle of continuity

Another most important structure in manorial culture including both spatial dimensions, behaviour and attitudes will now be discussed. The principles analyzed earlier centered on organization of space and of social relations, whereas the next one may be termed the principle of continuity insofar as it manifests a given order of time. It includes a requirement for symmetry in cultural arrangements, so



Ratula manor house façade to the park. The two tall silver firs "Alexander" and "Eugenie", planted by Eugenie von Etter after the death of her father Alexander Armfelt in 1876. Photo P. O. Welin 1970, the National Board of Antiquities.

that qualities such as *unchangeableness* and *interdependence* characterize the structure.

Continuity was expressed, firstly, in the demand that certain objects were not to be moved, they should always remain in their specific places and had actually lost their normal functions. At Ratula this principle affected the furniture and interior of entire halls. Thus Alexander Armfelt's library and bedroom were kept intact exactly as he had left them in 1876. His daughter Eugenie von Etter admired her father excessively and it was only after her death, when the household goods were split up, that this arrangement came to an end. In other respects also, the principle of unchangeableness held good, as it did for the memorial rooms. The countess resented everything new: no water pipes were allowed in the manor house. "My father got along without water pipes; so can I. It was good enough for my father so it is good enough for me." Those were

the reasons given. No trees must be felled in the park. The memorial trees planted by the manor house have already been mentioned. The general rule was that nothing from the countess' father's time must be changed.

In everyday behaviour the principle of symmetry was manifest in the means of promoting *good luck* and forestalling *bad luck*. The arrangements are illustrated by the following customs:

The countess refused to sit down to a table with thirteen people, there must be either twelve or fourteen present. As a consequence the steward's son was invited to the manor a number of times, according to himself, due only to the fact that otherwise there would have been thirteen people at table.

During meals no one was allowed to take the salt cellar from anyone else's hand. In such cases the countess would slap the fingers of the culprit and say "put it down". To receive the

salt cellar directly from another person meant bad luck.

The two last cited examples illustrate the principles of symmetry and continuity which characterized the view held by the masters as well as by the servants. Today such views would probably be regarded as superstitious.

The old second housekeeper Matilda Rotström, who lived in the attic of the *pakari*, the kitchen wing, used to tell stories about the ghosts that she had seen in the manor house: a lady in grey and an officer. But she also reported that when the countess was travelling she always knew when to expect a letter from her, as the following sequence of events would regularly take place: "I woke up in the evening and the countess opened the door and came up to my bed, and I said 'Very well my lady, I will see to it'. And so she walked out, and then in the morning there was a letter from the countess informing me of what she wanted me to send to her".

In the following example, the relation between people and the manor has a vivid symbolic significance:

There was a tale told at the manor that if there was a fire this meant someone would die. This had in fact happened in 1902. The cowhouse was destroyed by fire around the New Year, and in the autumn Alexander von Etter died. One summer, a few years after 1911, Eugenie von Etter's sister Mariana Armfelt came to stay for some time. While the ladies were down at the steward's having coffee, one of the labourers' huts, the fireguard hut, caught fire and the steward had to rush there as there was a great commotion. Sister Mariana then said "Poor Eugenie, who has to die now." Eugenie was the youngest daughter, and she therefore maintained that the one to die would be Mariana, the oldest. Mariana nevertheless said, "You are ridiculous, why should I have to die because your Ratula is burning, it is obvious that Eugenie is the one who has to die since Ratula is Eugenie's". They quarrelled about this and got into quite a disagreement, and Mariana was already intent on leaving. She found it terrible to think that she would have to die because there had been a fire at Eugenie's Ratula. But then they realized that

the steward, their nephew, had been afflicted by a bad headache. So they went down again to the steward's, saying, "Woe to you, poor Alexander, what a pity that you are going to depart from this life." He was really furious. Every other day the two old ladies would creep down to the steward's, asking "And how is Alexander today?" He nearly went literally mad with them. But then the old forester, Tasanen, died of consumption. He had been dying for some time. The sisters then walked down to the steward's, offering their congratulations to the steward, Alexander Rotkirch, who would live.

Now how to interpret this? Contrary to the first example with the housekeeper, the relation is here not a person-to-person one, but person to physical space. The principle of order demanded that when part of the manor disappeared, part of the people there had to disappear as well. The contention that the person owning the manor was the one to die is thus explained. The relationship might almost be called animistic.

7. The cultural bias – self-regulating and delimiting mechanisms

In the above I have tried to lay down certain principles in the Ratula culture which have contributed to marking the manor as a cultural entity. A set of *cultural standards* (patterns, attitudes) is here shared by groups within this entity. They are related to the organization of space (the spatial principle), of the individual's position (the vertical principle), and of time (the principle of continuity). They were strengthened and expressed not only by means of purely physical arrangements, but also through symbolic acts of a ritual character (repeated in the annual cycle), objects with a higher emotional charge than the ordinary ones, and through linguistic categories and expressions, especially words for closeness and distance, for the superior and the inferior. It has been my intention to show that behaviour which to modern people may seem peculiar or irrational was in fact part of a larger cultural setup, in which the meaning was clear, even though it may not always have been expressed in words.

Similarly, the forms of behaviour exemplified in the ritualization of daily life had a clear meaning as delimiting principles in this culture. The border areas are actually the ones where cultural forms become pregnant. They show where the limits for physical, and at the same time social, districts are located. They would indicate the limits of time, or stop the working of time altogether. In the border areas there is a flourishing of cultural bilingualism which becomes singularly marked in confrontations between different social orders. *Cultural bilingualism* presupposed a change of roles, a reduction of roles, a disheaval of the pattern of cultural roles. When the gentry were playing theatre in the pavilion, they were both players and spectators unto themselves; but when the coachman's daughter was married in the same pavilion, they were spectators only, without losing their basic social role as gentry.

Cultural bilingualism was not an exclusive right of the gentry. When working as a cook the cook was part of the manor society, a loyal character, whereas her role as a Red sympathizer in the civil war apparently was a feature external to the Ratula culture. One might ask whether sharing actively in the cultural bilingualism on a manor would counteract role conflicts or not. The unambiguous behaviour of the crofters in 1918 seems to indicate that they were not in possession of cultural bilingualism in the manorial society, at least not to any marked extent. They lacked the self-control necessary for existence and life in the culturally bilingual zone. As for the servants, especially those close to the countess, they had to possess both the ability and the wish to play two roles. This also held true for the gentry, not only in relation to the servants but also in relation to other gentry.

By displaying the principles underlying manorial culture as a semiotic system I have wanted to point out that this culture was not solely marked by material resources and social hierarchy during a long historical period, the way the matter is generally presented.

In a longer historical perspective one may naturally ask at what time the cultural standards shown here came into being. This is con-

nected to the question of how well the people who were part of this culture were aware of these things. My aim has been to shed light on *the role of one individual* in putting his or her imprint on cultural arrangements, even though these principles in themselves, like cultural bilingualism, are neither new nor specific to Ratula only.

In this case the first important individual is Minister State Secretary Alexander Armfelt. It is not at all likely that any significant portion of the Ratula culture, which was born in the 1830s, was inherited from the time of the Stackelberg family (from the 1740s to 1811). Against the background of Alexander Armfelt's biography it seems rather more probable that the Ratula culture was marked by his Gustavian childhood home, his cosmopolitan studies, and his life at the Russian court. Secondly, the continuity of the Ratula culture was assured exclusively by the strength of character of his youngest daughter, Eugenie, and her strong sense for tradition, joined to a religious awe for her father's memory. Seen in this light, Eugenie von Etter's behaviour was not a matter of free choice but very much tied to the manor and to persons.

This reasoning also throws light on the question of the disappearance of manorial culture. This cannot be seen only as a process where economic and social revolutions changed the material basis for a "ritualization of daily life". One must take into account the generation shift, where the individuals who exited into history had a cultural disposition totally different to what independent Finland would know.

It is only the vivid childhood memories of my informant, and the cultural bilingualism required from a steward's son *cum* heir presumptive, the preservation of these memories, and of the Ratula culture long into his old age, that have made it possible for me to get an insight into a closed culture. This enabled me to apply an anthropological perspective on manorial culture, as a counterweight to the luscious growth of truths on cultural history as well as economic and social history connected with the manors.

Translation: Elwa Sandbacka.

Notes

1. The 1971 inventory of Ratula manor resulted in collection SLS 1015 at *Folk Kultursarkivet*. The material contains, i.e., tape recordings corresponding to 75 text pages; two old photograph albums with 156 family pictures; 46 photographs of the park and specific objects taken by Kari Hakli during the inventory; and lists of library books and various objects (clothing, playthings) now at the National Museum. G. Alex. Rotkirch's handwritten history of Ratula (1923) is part of the above collection. The Ratula guest books from 1899 to 1971 have been stored in the *Svenska litteratursällskapet* general archives. The manor archives are kept at *Folk Kultursarkivet*.
2. In the 1930s Ratula covered 905 hectares (Nikander-Jutikkala 1939), as altogether 1968 hectares had been partitioned off to form 23 crofts, 34 farms of various types, and 40 minor plots.
3. The Ratula park has features in common with the Hertons manor park by Helsingfors, which was planted by C. O. Cronstedt after 1810, and with the Monrepos park near Viborg (Finnish Viipuri), planted by Ludwig Heinrich von Nicolay in the early 19th century. It also has resemblances to parks at a number of Russian manors, and to the von Pahlen family's estate Palmse in Lahemaa, Estonia (see Tarvel 1983, p. 178ff).
4. The Finnish name of the manor was, judging by the orthography in old documents, pronounced with a Swedish intonation as "Rattula".
5. My narrator says that the way of life at Karlberg manor near Tavastehus (Finnish Hämeenlinna), owned by Colonel Hugo Standertskjöld, was quite similar to this even in 1918. The Karlberg manor park Aulanko is probably the largest one of its kind in Finland.
6. My narrator called Eugenie von Etter "Aunt", and he says she could not bear his sister who was born in 1902. This was the year when Eugenie von Etter's husband died, and she suffered under the conviction that her husband had to die because a child was born to the steward.

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