REVIEW ARTICLES

ASPECTS OF LIMINALITY IN KNUT ERIK JENSEN'S *STELLA POLARIS* (1993)

Revisiting contingent pasts in Stella Polaris *(image courtesy Knut Erik Jensen).*

Introduction

This review article provides an analysis of Knut Erik Jensen's feature film *Stella Polaris* (Norway 1993) and shows how it relates to various forms of liminality. Firstly, I argue that Jensen's film articulates an understanding of Norway's northernmost county of Finnmark as a liminal, rather than marginal location. Secondly, I argue that *Stella Polaris* presents history as a constantly changing contingent product of various and often competing individual memories, negotiated on elusive liminal grounds in-between the past and future, and thirdly, I direct attention to Jensen's peculiar aesthetics which activate the liminal transitory spaces between shots, and between image and sound, in order to get its message across.

Knut Erik Jensen's *Stella Polaris* and liminality as a frame for analysis

Following a long series of documentary movies, *Stella Polaris* was Jensen's first feature film. It can probably be best described as a constellation of memory fragments pertaining to life in a northern Norwegian fishing village over a period of 50 years. It is a peculiar film in many ways, for instance without voice or dialogue; a film that challenges the

audience into a constructive endeavor rather than employing explicit imagery to tie down reimaginative activities. Jensen's film is at once stunningly beautiful although at the same time deeply tragic, and can be seen as emblematic for the county of Finnmark and its most recent history. *Stella Polaris* has received both Norwegian and international film critics' awards.

I will now move on to the theoretical and border-related issues this paper addresses: Liminality in *Stella Polaris*. It seems appropriate to start with a clarification of what 'liminality' is. Liminality is derived from the Latin term *limen* that means 'threshold' (Saunders 2010: 55). This points to the fact that liminality has something to do with transitions, crossings, or locations in-between divided entities. Liminality refers to a 'third space' (Bhabha in Rutherford 1990). This third space not only divides, but has the inherent potential to present a productive, and inherently disruptive and subversive alternative to established frames, and the discrete entities these frames imply.

Liminality refers to a threshold that divides and at the same time interconnects. With necessity, it implies the presence of something on each side of the permeable border that has to be taken into account, and that can possibly be subverted by an alternative constituted by an in-between. In particular, I will look closer at aspects of liminality in Knut Erik Jensen's *Stella Polaris,* focusing on political, temporal, and aesthetic aspects of liminality.

Political liminalities: Finnmark as marginal location or liminal zone

The liminal is often contrasted with the marginal and it has been claimed that the liminal can even replace a concept such as the marginal.[1] I agree with the assertion that these two terms are intimately related, but intend to argue that they serve very distinct analytical purposes that carry different political implications.

Let us consider the county of Finnmark as a marginal zone, or as located on the margins of Norway. This implies that Finnmark is related to an implied centre (such as Oslo) and therefore defined in implicit relation to this centre alone. To be situated on the margins of something means to be located near a border, far away from the centre. At the same time, however, what lies beyond that border remains outside the scope of the concept.

This said, marginality has been (and in my opinion still is) an important concept for a critical analysis of our various present conditions. It allows us, for instance, to focus on whose voices are heard in public discourse, whose life experiences are considered relevant, and whose interests matter in politics. However, to treat Finnmark as a marginal zone excludes any focus on what lies beyond, and in the case of Finnmark's history and the various identities this history has shaped and continues to shape, this *beyond* acquires a high significance that is precisely addressed in the feature films by Knut Erik Jensen.[2] The (usually unaccounted) beyond is the former Soviet Union located on the other side of the border. To include this ultimately constitutive 'other', necessitates a different conceptual focus: Finnmark as a liminal zone of contact and negotiation in-between two entities, rather than a location on the margins of Norway.

A liminal perspective on Finnmark and its history allows for a focus on the various cross-border experiences that are constitutive of the identities of local populations. These range from trading contacts and joint hunting expeditions to a close cooperation against a common enemy during the Second World War. It allows us also to problematise the unequivocal allegiance of the Norwegian state to the USA and NATO (including West Germany) in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. This allegiance forced many inhabitants of Finnmark to suddenly perceive their former allies and indeed liberators beyond the border as sinister, threatening beings on the verge of overrunning the country. As such, this forced them to embrace their former enemies, the Germans, as close associates.

In including focus on the 'other', liminality allows us to catch sight of various forms of othering that prove constitutive of not only official Norwegian cold war discourse and identities, but indeed of any war discourse. To exclude access to the other beyond the border is a precondition for the justification of warfare and other forms of massive intergroup violence (Pötzsch 2010). As such, liminality allows us to trace individual and local ways of negotiating or avoiding such exclusive political frames. It is precisely the inclusion of a Soviet-Russian beyond in his local, historical perspective that characterises Knut Erik Jensen's films as liminal in a historical and political sense. It is also within this focus on liminality (which includes the often constitutively excluded other) that the most immediate political thrust of his work is to be found.

In Knut Erik Jensen's films, Finnmark is brought to emerge as an independent entity, a third space, an alternative in between two or more opposing structures. The subversive potential of this in-between position is enacted in and through the everyday practices and experiences of its population. *Stella Polaris* articulates these experiences and practices, and thereby questions and undermines the cold war politics of polarity and exclusion, which for a long time narrowly framed the lives of people in the North and elsewhere, and continues to do so in historical discourse.

Temporal liminalities: The pasts and their presences

I have argued that Knut Erik Jensen's films present Finnmark as a liminal zone of contact and negotiation – a third space, rather than a neatly bounded location at the margins of Norway. However, his film *Stella Polaris* does not simply line up a series of allegedly objective historical 'facts' and dramatise these in a linear narrative in order to get his message across. Rather, the director presents contingent reconstructions that are based on fleeting, changing, and inherently erratic individual memories and dreams, rather than so-called historical facts. As a consequence, the past can never be ultimately grasped and this is particularly well executed in *Stella Polaris*. The film does not present the successful unearthing of a particular historical event that can then be objectified as History with a capital 'H', nor can it be seen to authoritatively assert a subversive counter-History.

One of the initial sequences of Jensen's film attests to this particular practice of historiography. The camera follows a young woman dressed in white who walks barefoot through the relicts of a northern Norwegian coastal fishing village. The woman moves slowly and seems startled as if not quite sure where she is or how she got there. The

camera repeatedly follows her gaze through windows without glass into spaces that apparently have been abandoned for years. These shots are intercut with short sequences showing past active life in the same buildings. As the woman approaches a derelict house and looks inside, the camera suddenly captures couples dancing inside. The lens moves into the room and focuses on a woman that resembles the implied onlooker outside. The reverse shot indicating the gaze of the woman inside then reveals the onlooker to be a little girl – the same girl that briefly told the 'sleepwalking' woman to wake up in an earlier scene that initiated the whole sequence. The woman, who constitutes the narrative's main protagonist, appears like a ghostly apparition, rather than a realistic character in a historical reenactment. This way Jensen directs attention to the fleeting nature of the past, the recurrence of which is dependent on the often erratic and contradictory memories and dreamlike recollections of individuals.

Stella Polaris enables a view of the present as being an ultimately liminal zone in-between an elusive past and an ever-changing, contingent future. What we at any point in time believe to be our collective or individual past can and always will be, challenged by new voices and perspectives, emanating from an endless source of past experiences. As such, also our historically constituted identities appear as inherently context-dependent and negotiable. They are constituted in a liminal sphere that is situated in-between past and future. This way these identities acquire an indistinct and almost spectral nature.

Does this imply that everything goes? Can we simply construct the history we want? I would argue against this. Identity constructs are contingent, not arbitrary. This means they can never be ultimately fixed in an objective and true form, but always remain fleeting and constantly changing. At the same time, however, all these collective and individual histories and stories are dependent upon past events, on something that actually happened in one way or another. This 'something' frames what we remember through traces in the landscape, such as ruins, abandoned villages, empty storage buildings, overgrown roads, and traces on human bodies and minds such as scars, memories, or recurrent traumatic flashbacks. These serve as testimonies of a past that ultimately recedes, but also remains present as a frame for articulations concerning it. *Stella Polaris* does not tell us that 'this or that actually happened in precisely that way'. The film shows traces of a past that we have to bring together ourselves. Instead of imaging the past, we are forced to constantly and creatively reimagine it. Therefore the audience becomes an active constituent of the film's meaning rather than a passive consumer. This focus on the constant negotiation of traces of a past in the present makes *Stella Polaris* a liminal film both conceptually and in a temporal sense.

Aesthetic liminalities: The zone between shots and between image and sound

In his films, Knut Erik Jensen develops a peculiar aesthetic that highly values transitions between shots and that actively juxtaposes the visual with the audible – image and sound. It can be argued that this peculiar aesthetic values an in-between and can therefore be termed as a liminal aesthetic.[3]

Those who have seen *Stella Polaris* might have noticed that when watching the film, that sound, music, and image do not always correspond. Often we hear what we have not yet seen, or we see something that does not fit with what we hear. At other occasions, audience expectations regarding transitions between shots are frustrated as, for example, in an early scene of *Stella Polaris* where a long tracking shot follows the walk of a woman through a derelict urban environment. Suddenly, the protagonist turns to the right and disappears from view while the camera continues straight ahead with exactly the same speed and trajectory. This defamiliarisation startles the viewer and demands an active engagement with the textual cues delivered by the film.

By such means as those described above, Jensen achieves an effect of estrangement. The transparency of the cinematic image is successfully challenged and spectators are constantly asked to actively negotiate what may appear to them as contradictory, strange, or illogical. As a result, active searches for meaning are facilitated and a consumerist engagement is prevented. Knut Erik Jensen's spectator does not enter the cinema to relax or forget, but to engage what the director refers to as "audio-visual riddles" that create a form of "fertile confusion" (Pötzsch 2012: 158–159). The spectator is not invited to relax and enjoy spectacular cinematic illusion-making, but is challenged to engage in active and contingent reconstructions on the basis of the cues and indices provided by Jensen's peculiar style. *Stella Polaris* exhibits a liminal aesthetic that treasures the indistinct transitional spaces between shots and between image and sound, and this way invites a reception that corresponds with the political and temporal liminalities characteristic of Jensen's films.

Conclusion

Jensen's first feature film *Stella Polaris* provides a new perspective on Norway's northernmost county Finnmark, its inhabitants, and recent history. In applying a peculiar aesthetic that constantly dislodges dominant ideas or frames for reception with reference to an inherently subversive in-between, his film not only challenges received political understandings and historical imageries, but also the engrained traditions and spectatorial positions conveniently fed and reinforced in and through mainstream filmmaking. As such, *Stella Polaris* questions, challenges, and potentially subverts borders and barriers in political, historical, and aesthetic registers.

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Notes

[1] For a discussion regarding the relationship between 'the marginal' and 'the liminal' see, for instance, Aguirre & Quance & Sutton 2000.

[2] Knut Erik Jensen had worked on similar issues before. In his documentary series *Finnmark melllom øst og vest* [Finnmark between East and West] that aired on Norwegian television in 1986, Jensen presented Norwegian war and post-war history from a distinctly northern point of view. Iversen (2001) writes that in this series Jensen

adopts a "perspective from the margins" (209) and engages in "identity work" that articulates the historical experiences and memories of local inhabitants (208; author's translations). Iversen, however, does not explore possible liminal aspects of Jensen's documentaries. Norwegian original reads "identitetsarbeid" and "utkantperspektiv".

[3] For a different approach to the aesthetics of *Stella Polaris* see Bruun Vaage (2004), who terms the film "a cinematic poem that has been written with sensual means" (8; author's translation). According to her, Jensen's style is particularly well suited to elicit an embodied experience that remains independent of traditional narrative structure, and that therefore invites for an associative production of meaning. Norwegian original reads: "*Stella Polaris* er et filmdikt som er skrevet med sanselige virkemidler".

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THE TALE OF FINLAND'S EASTERN BORDER

Review on the movie *Raja 1918*

> *"Societies in fact reconstruct their pasts rather than faithfully record them, and that they do so with the needs of contemporary culture clearly in mind – manipulating the past in order to mold the present," American historian Michael Kammen claims in his* Mystic Chords of Memory (Kammen 1991: 51).

The Declaration of Independence adopted by the Parliament of Finland on 6 December 1917 disrupted 108 years of the Russian sovereign rule in Finland and birthed a new nation. Tragically, less than two months later, the armed struggle between the forces of the Social Democrats, the Reds, and the forces of the non-socialist, the Whites, erupted. To make matters worse, both sides accepted military support from foreign powers: the Reds from Soviet Russia and the Whites from Germany. The armed struggle escalated into a short, vicious civil war which claimed over 36,000 lives (Upton 1980: 123). When the war ended, a newborn nation, Finland, started to construct its first state border in Karelian Isthmus.

Finland, like all nations, has found out that history is a living process, an unfinished business that cannot be but pondered, disputed, and hopefully cherished. The Finnish Civil War has been pondered and disputed for years but to cherish this most traumatic, controversial, and dehumanizing event in the Finnish history is impossible. Over a hundred years ago, Ernst Renan suggested that if nation building had been successfully conducted, the histories around it would disappear, and consequently, were even forgotten in popular consciousness. Perhaps Renan's suggestion offers at least a partial reason why the Civil War still continues to resonate in today's Finland. It appears over and over again as a main or related theme in contemporary fiction, drama, comic books, and films of which the movie, *The Border 1918* (*Raja 1918*, 2006), is one of the most recent examples. The need to repeatedly revert to this tragic event shows that the Finnish Civil War is far from being a completed or catalogued event in the Finnish history.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse how the state border and its constructing function in the movie. The film approaches the border through three distinguished border narratives. The omniscient border narrative is represented by the border, border processes, repercussions of the turmoil and trauma of the civil war, and a pervasive, avenging civil-war-related spirit. The second border narrative is represented by the two protagonists of the movie: Captain von Munch, an acting post-war commandant of

the frontier station and a local, but non-Karelian, village school teacher Miss Maaria Lintu. Their border narratives are intersected by the ones of the supporting characters. Finally, there is the antagonist's point of view represented by Mr. Heikki Kiljunen, now an outlaw, who during the war was one of the most notorious leaders of the Reds. Each one of these points of view is challenged or even destroyed by the 'others' who are either considered to stand in direct opposition to the laws and values of the new Finnish state, such as the members of the Red Guards, the people suspected to be Red sympathizers, or the people who simply do not fulfil the requirements of the Finnish citizenship. The latter group consists of Soviet-Russians, Russians living on the Finnish side of the border, the Jews, and toward the end of the movie, also the Germans. These points of view may first appear very sharply divided ideologically, nationally, socially, linguistically, and culturally but as the film proceeds, they begin to overlap. This overlapping both deconstructs many existing borders and also constructs new ones.

The Border 1918, directed by Lauri Törhönen, is not exactly a civil war movie, but the elements of the war are constantly present. The film begins with grisly fighting scenes and executions and continues to detail the Civil War's painful aftermath of the cultural, social, economic, and political turmoil at Finland's eastern frontier in Karelia. Although the Civil War is officially ended and a settlement has been reached, the volatility of an immediate post-civil war context strongly divides Finland along the political and ethnic lines. When the shooting stops, it does not mean that the first step away from hatred, hostility, and bitterness follows automatically. In addition, diverging visions of how to build the country after becoming independent cripples the nation even further. It is this historically real-life situation that serves as a backdrop to the film's main theme: the establishment of the first Finnish state border between Finland and Soviet Russia in post-civil war period.

The Border 1918 emphasizes the fundamental role of Finland's first state border. For the nation emerging from the trauma of the brutal civil war, the border serves as a focus point of collective consciousness during the transition from violence to peace. For the Finns the state border is an ancient wish that seems to materialize in 1918. The border does not only reassert Finland's legitimacy as a sovereign nation, but also serves as a symbol that helps Finns to imagine their republican nation with national solidarity and identity. While the border serves as a unifying agent, it at the same time divides Finland from Soviet Russia. The Captain sincerely believes that building up the border "will keep the peace", while Miss Lintu is a nation-blind who feels that people all over the world have become tired of the borders and the suffering they cause. Consequently, she strongly believes in that we are moving toward the borderless world and, therefore, in the decline of the nation-state. "Do you believe in your border?" Miss Lintu asks Captain von Munch. The Captain's answer, "I believe in Finland", solidifies an inescapable fact that building the state border is essentially bound up with nation-building. The protagonists' truly opposite viewpoints illustrate two ever-elusive "imagined communities" (Anderson 1983): universal solidarity transcending national borders and nation-state bounded by cohesive state borders.

The national border is going to be established in the area where people had adopted a collective fluid identity. Before the establishing of Finland's first state border, local people's collective consensus of political, economic, social, and cultural cooperation as well as civic tolerance had led to the forming of real cross-community relationships and

multilevel cross-cultural exchanges. Until Finland's independence, these people from different ethnic and language groups had been crossing the alleged border for over 600 years. The film portrays how the transnational regional culture with its fundamental principles of understanding, compromising, and transforming people comes to an end, and the fluid movement of people, capital, and information has to stand aside in favour of the border of the new nation state.

The national border creates a new social and cultural environment as well as a new political geography. The old community had been well established and real, while the new border demands people to accept an alien and abstract idea of the border and its region. It is very difficult for the local people to understand what the border is and how it is supposed to function. As Sergeant-Major Muranen informs the Captain, "a real border has never existed here…not for a thousand years". Therefore, it is incomprehensible why suddenly uncles are not able to cross the bridge and help their nieces with firewood; an elderly eastern orthodox lady is not allowed to enter and visit her family and friends; or cross-border traders cannot go back and forth to conduct their business. The bridge, a simple structure, providing a convenient crossing for people and goods, is suddenly converted into a border checkpoint, and a small muddy river running underneath it is now a national border.

The Captain tries to make the national border more concrete by barring the bridge. New posts, gates and blue paint serve as visible indicators of the official, Finnish national border. The bridge is divided down in the middle, and both sides are guarded by soldiers preventing people from crossing the bridge freely. The Captain also tries to make the border area more Finnish by abolishing bilingual names for streets and places and by replacing bilingual signs in Finnish only. The people's world is suddenly shrinking, and the edge of their new world is the new state border. The peculiar sense of baffling otherness descends on the region, intensifying even further the sense of a diminishing home region and the old way of life. The local people must learn to perceive themselves as members of a nation which is different from the 'other' nation across the bridge. The movie could have addressed more clearly to what extent the Finnish national identity formation, based on oppositional modelling, erodes the local interests, a local sense of place, and a local identity. What the movie portrays very strongly is that the border becomes an adversarial force in the midst of people's lives, interrupting and obstructing violently their daily activities. The border becomes a foul monument which brutally cuts people off from their families and relatives living on different sides of the new state border. The border is feared.

The Captain tries to convince people that the border acts in the interest of the whole nation and population. It guarantees that Finland is able to fulfil its potential, to reach its "greatest achievements – freedom, justice, and fairness". To make this possible, Finland has to protect herself "against barbarians". Therefore, the primary function of the border is to provide security to the nation. To guarantee security, the border must execute control, and this is only possible if border crossings are either heavily controlled or stopped altogether. At this point, the Captain's perception on the border as a protector and its 'clean-cut' function to ensure that "the Russians live on the other side and the Finns on this side" concurs with the War Office and the state's perception. The fear of 'barbarians' justifies the closure of the border as well as the exclusion of

certain groups. It is this perception that translates into stern but confusing and inefficient border policing measures.

When the official state narrative of border security is created and implemented, the rest of the movie concentrates on how it is challenged by other border narratives. These other border narratives focus on the question of identity which is posed by the flow of people who, due to the bloody Bolshevik Revolution in Soviet Russia, try to escape to Finland. Hundreds of people with no identification documents make it impossible for the Captain to enforce the strict state border security requirements. In a sense, Finland has created a system that categorizes people as 'wanted', 'unwanted', or 'enemy'. Wanted can enter; unwanted are to be deported; the enemy must be killed on sight. Yet, the Captain learns that the 'clean-cut' narrative of border security turns into a nightmarish identity of chimera. No matter what policing measures are implemented, they are not able to pinpoint elusive identities which multiply, diversify, negate and assert simultaneously in a single individual. Who are these masses of people who under their hardship try to find a refuge outside the rigidly defined ideologies, unyielding political loyalties, or actions of governments? Who are the Russians living in Finland? Are they Finns or the enemy? Who are the Finns who pass the border control by speaking perfect Finnish? Are they ideologically correct Finns or are they red defectors returning to Finland to start another war? What to do with the bilingual families? What 'infectious diseases' do innocent Jewish children spread? A diverse group of individuals with their mixture of identities presses against the state border with an increasing strength, blurring the lines between friend and foe.

The most heartbreaking cases are the people with no identity, people who are denied their identity, people whose actions define their identity in front of the law. The people with no identity are represented by a man who is hovering in the midst of people, has been deported several times, but who for one reason or another reappears on the Finnish side of the border. He has no name, no identification; nobody claims him or knows him. He cannot speak or write. He just 'hops' around, disturbs no one, and is happy. How he has been able to elude the border patrol repeatedly is a mystery. He is most callously killed for a dare when Lieutenant Suutari proves to his Captain that he has a will and skill to follow through all border security measures. This nameless man's border narrative shows how vulnerable the people with special needs are in political discourse of immigration, and undermines the hopelessness of the people who do not have a state.

The people who are denied their identity are represented by a Finn, Irmeli Ylipää. She has been working as a maid in St. Petersburg but had to escape from the Bolshevists to Finland. As a Finnish citizen, she should have been able to pass without any problems, but because she "had been with soldiers" and "behaved in objectionable ways", Lieutenant Suutari wants to deny her the right to enter Finland. The Captain dismisses the accusations and orders her release. However, Lieutenant Suutari disobeys the order and puts Miss Ylipää in quarantine. She is later killed in a senseless massacre with hundreds of other people. Her border narrative illustrates how morals and double standards embedded in culture reveal the asymmetries of power between genders, and how the imbalance of power affects the processes of social class and gender identity formation on the national level.

Miss Lintu and Doctor Perret represent the border narratives of people who go against all odds when trying to help other people and bring some sense to the raging

madness. Empathy or any kind of compassion is disappearing from the border region. These two are revisionist characters: a 'colourless humanist' and a physician who has taken the Hippocratic Oath. Their philosophical stance conveys both their outrage at social and political injustices as well as their belief in the possibility of transcending them. To accomplish this they must blur the lines between the lawfulness and lawlessness. The laws violate people's basic rights by denying them representation and voice. Therefore, deception is justified. Needless to say that these views get them both killed. Their border narratives bring forth resiliency of the human spirit in the midst of mistrust, violence, and fear. They are loyal to themselves thus defying coercive policies which are increasingly deviating from what is universally accepted as ethical. They share the Captain's vision of Finland's "greatest achievements" for its future – "freedom, justice, and fairness", but they approach this vision by crossing gender, ideological, and national borders instead of enforcing them like the Captain. Accepting the charges against them and seeing them sacrificed in mindless killings forces the Captain to realize that establishing the state border is not enough to nurture his dreams of freedom, justice, and fairness and materialize them in practice. His efforts to represent them in a tangible way by strengthening the border, and by obeying and implementing coercive border policing measures generate a completely opposite situation where no one is safe, and which finally leads to a massacre of unarmed people.

The Captain is a protagonist whose border narrative intervenes with other narratives. His narrative is not cohesive but fragmented. It vacillates between his identity of being a Finnish officer in the White Finland's army and his identity of being a scientist, an explorer who naturally must cross borders. He is an idealist but he is not blinded by it. He knows that Lieutenant Suutari is a pathological killer who wants to use any pretext to degrade or stereotype people according to his own ideological and social standards. The Captain becomes more and more aware of a vivid sense of the degradation of human life when people are reduced to a state of brutal struggle for survival in the quarantine. He recognizes that enemies are not found only amongst the people who are ruthlessly categorized according to their language, ethnicity, and religion, but are also found amongst the faceless, complacent, and ignorant bureaucrats of faraway Helsinki. He fears the German's imperialist ambitions and their increasing influence on Finnish politics. This in turn makes him question the borderline between Finland's independence and Finland's sovereignty. He becomes increasingly suspicious of the principles he serves, but he cannot renounce his duty. Reality does not make sense. The border has created a horrific, incomprehensible otherworldly reality where the stories of human cost and suffering and the multiple realities of the Civil War memory deconstruct the faith in the notion of a homogenous ethnic-nation. A widening gap between his ability to carry out his duty in a principled manner and his willingness to finish what he has started causes him to fall ill.

The last border narrative belongs to an antagonist, Heikki Kiljunen, the Captain's nemesis. He is an epitome of a born survivor; a figure of raw male energy and aggression. Half dead and wanted by the law he still carries his hate, mistrust, and utter contempt for the Finnish government. He has his own form of justice based on the will to survive. His world is a borderless land of the 'grey' where there are no distinctive borders between right and wrong if his personal situation so requires. His border narrative illustrates the opportunity that the border or absence of it offers to an individual who has burnt all

the bridges, literally, behind him. If he wants to survive, he must relinquish his country and his identity. He finds a dead man whose passport he steals and, therefore, is able to start a new life in Soviet Russia.

The film closes with a coda. Ten years after the massacre on the border, the Captain, now a Professor von Munck, and Heikki Kiljunen alias Alexander Muranen meet again in an annual celebration of the Finnish Independence Day. For a second, the years vanish between them and their old identities emerge. It is hard to evaluate what happens during those few seconds, but reflecting on their new identities, the viewer is able to draw some conclusions. The old class and social divisions between them have vanished. Both the Captain and Mr. Kiljunen are successful, affluent, and respected members of their communities. They are both Finns who have come to the same party celebrating the same occasion, so the ideological and national division has disappeared. Instead of border narratives, could they now tell a borderless narrative to the audience? Because there is no apparent shock in their sudden meeting at the party but they rather show indifference towards each other, this could mean that in their new reality everything and nothing has become to mean the same. Both experienced and survived the Civil War and the life on the border that denied them their ability to believe in the value of their own actions and their faith in ideologies they so loyally fought for. Neither of them was able to overturn the forces of evil as they defined them. Whatever they achieved, they achieved it with great cost. Are they now as eager as they still were ten years ago to erect borders between classes, ideologies, nationalities, and individuals? Just when they are about to shake hands, Finland's national anthem begins solemnly to commemorate Finland's tenth birthday. Suddenly, old memories come alive, hands are withdrawn, and both men move back to their own sides of the border.

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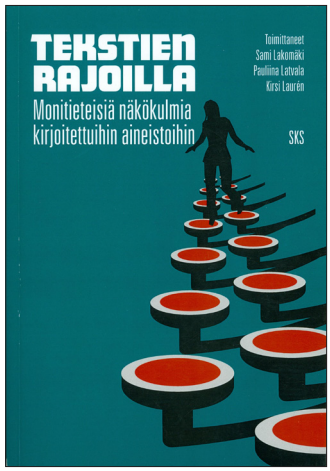
UNRAVELLING THE METHODOLOGICAL MESH OF WRITTEN MATERIALS



LAKOMÄKI, SAMI & LATVALA, PAULIINA & LAURÉN, KIRSI (eds.) 2011: *Tekstien rajoilla: Monitieteisiä näkökulmia kirjoitettuihin aineistoihin*. [Along Textual Borders. Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Written Materials.] Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura. 356 pp.

This article collection brings together researchers from social sciences, history, cultural and folklore studies who work with written materials, ranging from archives to internet discussions. The book offers multiple perspectives on current questions that apply not only to the considered texts but to all socio-cultural studies, such as: What is the relation between the narration and the 'reality'? Who is telling the stories? What kind of audiences are entangled in them? What are the power relations in the research process? Many of the authors reflect especially on the position of a researcher and discuss how this affects the interpretation and thus the results of the study. Such a discussion is well needed and the way the editors have outlined the book has produced an interesting combination of related viewpoints. The collection is divided into four sections with emphasis placed on power relations, body and affectivity, questions of privacy and publicity, and the temporal dimensions of the texts and interpretations. The structure works well and offers intriguing dialogues to the reader. The final article written by Jyrki Pöysä weaves together the strings unravelled by other authors, by considering the interconnection of temporal positions and interpretations.

Look who is reading

In their articles, Hanna Mikkola and Annamari Iranto especially, have turned their focus on the researcher as the reader and the interpreter of the texts. With the methodology of feminist stylistics – or feminist close reading as she terms it – Mikkola looks at the texts of dugout traditions as the production of gendered realities by asking, for instance: can the gendered reader be interpreted from the texts; are the characters gendered, and what do these characters tell us about the gendered world the writer lives in at the moment and in the particular situation that the writing has taken place in. She perceptively reflects her position as a feminist researcher with her own gender values which sometimes conflict with the writers' views on men and women. In addition, Mikkola introduces the methods of her analysis, which in turn renders her study process even more transparent to the reader. I think that this part of the process is still too often neglected in socio-cultural studies, and I would gladly see these essential starting points of feminist research applied in all research. Whilst Mikkola openly discusses the

emotions that the reading of the texts has aroused in her, Annamari Iranto makes such emotions the centre of her discussion.

Iranto's article is an important investigation on how emotions in written material form a dialogue with the researcher's own emotions, and how this ultimately affects whose emotions the researcher is writing about. She considers the methods used in the study of emotions, particularly in the feelings of injustice, by scrutinizing the letters received by Hannu Karpo, a TV-reporter whose program in 1983–2007 concentrated on cases where the Finnish citizens were believed to have been treated unfairly. By introducing a highly emotional example in which a woman is writing on behalf of her husband who through making several bad choices ended up dying, Iranto picks up the visible emotions of the text. Furthermore, she discusses the emotions she herself went through while reading the text and asks how these emotions might be reconstructed into the interpretations and whether the researcher is entitled to make value judgements through her analysis. Finally, Iranto argues that by positioning her/himself and her/his methods clearly, a researcher is permitted to question the values which arise from the material. She also challenges researchers to make unexpected experiments in their analysis, to use resistant reading and to even construct conflicting interpretations.

The ethics of methodological choices

A methodological book is never a good one without considering the ethical questions of research. Authors discuss ethics throughout this book (e.g. Sorainen, Saarikoski, Hynninen) and in particular, Johanna Järvinen-Tassopoulos contributes much to the book with her insight. In her study case of gambling women and their chatting in the forums for addicted gamblers, Järvinen-Tassopoulos emphasises both the question of studying vulnerable people and the responsibilities of the researcher. She argues that whilst listening to the stories and the knowledge of gambling women or any vulnerable people that may empower them, they themselves might also want to keep silence regarding the issue. To break the circle of silence and shame, extra attention must therefore be paid to the trust between the narrators and the researcher. Although the material put on the Internet might sometimes be considered as 'fair game', Järvinen-Tassopoulos underlines the importance of discussing the position of an invisible researcher who 'lurks' within the Internet and occasionally even intrudes upon the forums conversations. She claims that although people who write in online forums usually understand that anyone can read their writings, they do not think their stories will end up as research material. Järvinen-Tassopoulos's article is an excellent starting point for anyone thinking of using internet material as their research data and many of the questions she addresses apply also to the studies conducted 'offline'.

The research process is about making choices

The collection clearly shows how the research process is full of choices made mainly by the researcher, but also by people who have written or otherwise produced material that the researcher is analysing. For example, Piia Metsä-Tokila shows in her article how

the oral history material of former female political prisoners was actually collected by a group of female activists inside the communist party, and consequently the material represents the stories of this group to the exclusion of other women's stories. This starting point, as well as the political goal of these women to make their stories heard, had affected the heavy emphasis on comradeship and the justification of the women's illegal practices that can be determined from the interviews. Overall, the articles particularly demonstrate how much the position of the researcher and methodological choices, like the questions asked and the material framed in the analysis, have an impact upon the research results and sometimes even the lives of others. Therefore, the power relations of the research process, which usually are extremely favourable for the researcher, must always be made open to the readers, so as to enable counter-interpretation.

This book illuminates the situated research process from various different but intersecting angles and is highly recommendable for the students, as well as for the starting and experienced researchers in related fields.

Tiina Suopajärvi