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PERFORMING ETHNOGRAPHY AND ETHNICITY

An Early Documentation of Finnish Immigrants in Nordiska museet

Hanna Snellman

This article discusses the first project of the Nordic Museum in Stockholm, Sweden, dealing with immigrants. It was carried out between 1972 and 1990, and it produced material based on interviews, participant observation, photographs and other written and visual sources. The article first examines why and how this extensive research project was carried out and then discusses the documentation project as performance. The project was an early attempt to document the contemporary lives of people through fieldwork, although the original aim of this pioneering project was merely to create and preserve ethnic identity by documenting "authentic" Finnish characteristics. Thus, it is a good example of changing paradigms in ethnological research.

Keywords: immigrants, fieldwork, museums, Finland, Sweden

The Nordic Museum (Nordiska museet) in Stockholm provides a Nordic perspective on the question of performance and ethnographic praxis raised by Dwight Conquergood. In his *Rethinking Ethnography* (1991: 190) he asks, "What are the methodological implications of thinking about fieldwork as the collaborative performance of an enabling fiction between observer and observed, knower and known?" He also wonders, how thinking about fieldwork as performance differs from thinking about fieldwork as the collection of data? As the reading of texts? He further asks how the performance model shapes the conduct of fieldwork? "The relationship with the people? The choices made in the field and the positionality of the researcher?" For a performance, there is always a starting point, one or more proto-performances. Proto-performances can be found in the performing arts, rituals and sports, but also in many occupations such as those of the lawyer, doc-

tor and policeman. Ethnologists as professionals are not clearly distinguished by special clothes or insignia, but nevertheless they also surely perform their jobs: they too have prescribed tones of voice and professional vocabularies, and their conduct is likewise marked by the visible exercise of authority. The informants can also be seen as performers: they are given a role by their researchers, and they are observed in that role. Richard Schechner argues that identifying what is emphasized and what is omitted is important for understanding both the performance process and the social world that contains and is also shaped by particular performances. Any behaviour, event, action, or thing can be studied "as" performance (Schechner 2006: 40, 208, 226).

This article describes the Nordic Museum's first project dealing with immigrants to Sweden and discusses why and how this extensive research project was carried out.* The performers in this research

were people of Finnish origin living in Sweden, as well as returnees and potential immigrants living in Finland. The researchers of the museum were interested in their informants' performance in everyday life: the informants were expected to perform "Finnishness", using a certain Finnish grammar and vocabulary – a Finnish choreography – designed by the researchers (cf. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991: 397; Schechner 2006: 19). A touch of Swedish influence was also anticipated as a result of immigrant experience. I am not concerned here with traditional museum material – artefacts that were first incorporated in the museum's existing collections and later exhibited in the museum, conserved and possibly used as source materials for research or teaching (Hein 2000: 4–5). Rather, this article is concerned with documentary collections that have resulted from interviews and participant observation. Such documents are, however, also artefacts of ethnography (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991: 394).

The Nordic Museum's pioneer project experimented with old and new approaches in trying to change the ethnological research agenda. However, even though the research was intended to focus on identity, ethnicity and culture, the approach was still a traditional one that focused on materiality. Materiality back then was seen more or less as cultural traits and symbolic objects, not as practice, as Maja Povranović Frykman suggests (Povranović-Frykman 2008: 18).

The Migrationen Finland-Sverige Project

The Nordic Museum's annual report for the year 1974 states that a research project on Finnish immigrants entitled "Finland-Sweden after the Second World War" had been initiated with funds provided by the foundation Riksbankens Jubileumsfond.¹ The project was, according to the report, to be carried out in cooperation with the Department of Geography of the University of Umeå in Sweden and the Department of Ethnology of the University of Jyväskylä in Finland. Its primary objective was "to examine the assimilation and ethnic identity of Finnish immigrants, in other words the extent to which the Finns had adapted to Swedish society." Research had,

in the course of the year, been carried out in Virsbo in the municipality of Surahammar and Upplands Väsby near Stockholm, in other words "in a small mill community and on the outskirts of a city" (Nordiska museet under år 1974 1975: 160). There were at the time of the documentation thousands of Finns living in Virsbo and Upplands Väsby. The project continued the following year. According to the annual report for 1975, the ethnological part of the study was completed as the result of fieldwork and compilation carried out during that year. The fieldwork had continued in Upplands Väsby and had begun in the Finnish districts of Karstula, Närpes (Fin. Närpiö), Nokia and Borgå (Fin. Porvoo). Finnish-speaking Karstula and Swedish-speaking Närpes had been chosen because emigration from these localities to Sweden in the 1950s and 1960s had been particularly marked. Finnish-speaking Nokia and Swedish-speaking Borgå had in turn been chosen because their populations included many returnees from Sweden. In Karstula and Närpes, the project sought to determine the factors influencing the decision of emigrants to return, and to obtain interview material concerning the time before the decision to emigrate was made. The aim was then to monitor the history of the migrant families for the next five to ten years. In the case of the returnees, the project was interested in the Finns' assimilation into Swedish society and their re-adjustment to a Finnish environment. The researchers conducting the interviews published surveys of the research localities. The collection of material was also expanded to take in Finnish children who had been evacuated to Sweden during the Second World War and Finns who migrated to the province of Värmland in Sweden. The experiences of these evacuees might, it was thought, be of significance in subsequent decisions to emigrate. Värmland was chosen because the researchers were interested in whether the Finns' identity differed in regions where there had been Finnish settlements for centuries. The publication of the research results also continued. In 1990, 18 years after the funding application had been submitted, the final report, *När finländarna kom* [When the Finns Came], was published. It combined both ethnological and geo-

graphical perspectives, with an emphasis on the latter (Häggström, Borgegård & Rosengren 1990).

Why Was the Material Collected?

In 1975, Sweden changed its official immigration policy from one of assimilation to one of integration. Whereas the policy had previously aimed to assimilate immigrants into Swedish society, it now sought to permit – and even encourage – immigrants to preserve aspects of their prior culture. To what extent the change in immigration policy affected the implementation of the Nordic Museum's project is not known, but it may be assumed that the ongoing socio-political debate had a positive effect on the decision to provide funding. After all, the ethnologists in the museum's employ would make excellent detectives in ascertaining the special characteristics of Sweden's immigrant groups – characteristics that were possibly worth encouraging.

In an article published in *Fataburen* in 1972, Göran Rosander, the initiator and leader of the project, pointed out that in the collections of the Nordic Museum there were no artefacts belonging to the Roma or to the immigrant labourers arriving in Sweden after the Second World War from Finland, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey. According to Rosander, these groups were just as much members of the Swedish people (*Swe. svenska folket*) as the Swedes themselves, and their lives needed to be documented. He stated, "Museum pieces derived from the latter group should concentrate on festive customs, clothing, religion and perhaps toys and household effects" (Rosander 1972: 166). Since Finns were by far the biggest immigrant group in Sweden and constituted a group that could be characterised as a minority,² it was natural to begin the documentation with them. Nonetheless, according to Barbro Klein, it was not until the mid-1990s that the Swedish government enjoined all cultural institutions, including those in what is now known as the heritage sector, to take into consideration the fact that the country was now "multicultural". The Agenda Cultural Heritage programme, as the government called its project, was then expanded to embrace an idea of cultural diversity that included gender, generation, social class,

disability and sexual orientation in addition to ethnic diversity. The broadened notions of "cultural diversity" and "cultural heritage" have become official ideologies and governmental responsibilities, and perhaps also bridges to integration (Klein 2006: 9).

Government identity policy was, however, not the only reason for the Nordic Museum's extensive project. The collection of material on Finnish immigrants would at the same time address the challenge of investigating contemporary life. Whereas the main emphasis in museum documentation and acquisition had previously been on the past, the focus was now on the present day. When the Nordic Museum arranged a conference under the heading *The Possibilities of Charting Modern Life* in 1967, however, no consensus had been reached even on the definition of "modern life". For some it meant the 1870s, for others the 1960s (Silvén 2004: 152). There was severe pressure to expand museum documentation towards the present day. Almost next door, the ethnologists of the University of Stockholm had already partly changed their focus: Knut Weibust had conducted fieldwork in Portugal for his maritime ethnological study entitled *The Crew as a Social System* in 1958, and Mats Rehnberg had shifted the focus to rather more contemporary times in his 1965 Ph.D. dissertation on lighting candles on graves (Daun 1993: 333–334). Åke Daun's study (1969) dealing with the closure of a sawmill in Båtskärnsäs in northern Sweden close to the Finnish border broke new ground and in a way started a new era in Nordic ethnological research (Löfgren 1996: 54). The actual paradigm shift took place in the 1970s, when altogether three Ph.D. dissertations in ethnology focusing on modern life in some form were submitted in Sweden: Åke Daun's study dealt with a suburb (1974), Billy Ehn's with immigrants (1975) and Orvar Löfgren's with a fishing community (1978). Only Ehn's work was exclusively synchronic, the others tending more to examine change over a longer period. It is no coincidence that the name for the Chair for Ethnology at the University of Stockholm was changed from Folk Life Studies (*Swe. folklivsforskning*) to European Ethnology (*Swe. etnologi*) in 1972. The times were truly changing.

The documentation of modern life at the Nordic Museum began with *Samdok* (a system of documentation of contemporary society) slightly later, officially in 1977. The above-mentioned Göran Rosander was again a key figure (Rosander 1980). In 1972, in the same article in which he proposed his idea to document the everyday life of post-war immigrants, he pointed out several shortcomings in the Nordic Museums's collection policy (Rosander 1972: 166). In that article, Rosander gives credit to Professor John Granlund, who a few years earlier had outlined his programme for documenting contemporary society by establishing research stations in different locations in Sweden where ethnology students would carry out fieldwork using modern anthropological methods. Granlund ends his article by saying: "It is time to update 1800s ethnology classics and their research questions. How far were they just pseudo problems in functional formulations? To what extent did they become open problems to which research should be directed? We have a responsibility to this research continuity" (Granlund 1967: 255).

It is worth remembering, however, that the Nordic Museum had actually been sending out agents, equipped with notebooks and cameras, to document Swedish life in the country ever since the 1930s, and that contemporary life had also been recorded by the Nordic Museum on a small scale since the 1950s (Nilsson 1999: 98; Rosengren 2006: 104–105). Thus, the most important point about the change was not the period of time examined but what was studied. Eva Silvén crystallizes the idea behind the change when she writes that the aim of ethnological research oriented towards modern life was to foster an understanding of the times in which we live. The objects of ethnological research were no longer flails, folk costumes, watermills or tools for slash and burn, but people and society. The new winds of change blowing from the anthropological research communities were accompanied by new practices in museum archiving. Material obtained in the field was no longer chopped up thematically and topographically; instead, from 1965 onwards, it was examined holistically. The goal of museum acquisition was very clear: "The aim was no longer objective description but the

way the people themselves understood and defined their own reality, and how society looked from their perspective" (Silvén 2004: 156–160, 181). Instead of mountains of artefacts, museums wanted narratives and photographs. Alongside the artefact-oriented museum there now emerged the narrative-oriented museum (Hein 2000: 7).

A couple of decades later, Annette Rosengren, one of the interviewers on the Migrationen Finland-Sverige project, was, however, more critical of the way the migration project had been conducted. According to her, the most important thing was not so much analysis of the material but getting it ordered and written up in the archive. The purpose of the interviews and photographs was, she said, rather to create a context for the museum's artefact collections. The primary objective of the interviews was to counterbalance the superficial picture of contemporary society given by the media, which tended to seek out its unusual aspects (Rosengren 2006: 105).

How was the Material Collected?

The ethnographical project of the Nordic Museum consisted mainly of interviews conducted in people's homes and participant observation (Rosengren 2006: 105). Officials were also interviewed, and various events were documented. The project did not even include a collection of objects. I have not yet come across any research plan or even any interview forms, so any conclusions as to the questions asked can be drawn solely from the material collected. In short, we know the interviewees' replies but not the questions. There are plenty of answers: the Nordic Museum's archives contain 60 folders of written-up interviews, photographs, ground and layout plans, brochures, press cuttings, school essays and other material.³

The interview transcripts, in accordance with 1970s practice, rely mostly on hand-written notes and were not taped. After the interview, the interviewer wrote a report and a transcription of his/her notes (Tyrfelt 1977: 2). The interviews were generally conducted in the interviewee's mother tongue, that is, either Finnish or Swedish. The Finnish transcriptions have been translated into Swedish. Birger

Grape, a speaker of Meänkieli, a dialect of Finnish spoken along Sweden's northern border with Finland, conducted his interviews in Finnish and made transcriptions into Swedish. He best understood the nuances of the interview language and thus frequently added the Finnish expression in brackets after the Swedish translation. He also stresses in his interview report that the interviewee was, if necessary, asked to repeat the same thing several times so that something particularly important could be recorded word for word on paper. Among the interview transcriptions made by Grape in Virsbo are some questions translated into Finnish to which a specific reply was sought in the interview.

The interview reports describe in detail how the interview was arranged and in what conditions it was conducted. Reading them enables us to step into the shoes of the museum researcher of the mid-1970s, to see how she or he performed his or her role as an ethnologist with a new research agenda. We can read how Birger Grape, for example, rang a doorbell in Upplands Väsby on December 10, 1974, and the door was opened by the family's 10-year-old daughter. She fetched her mother, who, according to the interview report, gave a friendly smile as she said hello; she is reported as having curlers in her hair. There on the doorstep an interview was fixed for a day in the near future. In his reports, Birger Grape repeatedly complains that it is difficult to ask personal questions right at the start of an interview. Documenting modern life in a brand-new suburb was a new world for the museum researcher.

An account by Annette Rosengren gives us some inkling of the interview context and the interviewer's attempt to describe the world of the interviewee – a Finnish immigrant in Sweden – as precisely as possible:

On Wednesday October 9, 1974, I came to conduct a second interview. It was a little past 7 when I arrived, and I apologised for being late. It came out that they had been expecting me at 6 and wondered why I had not come. There had been some misunderstanding. But everything was OK, and we were able to continue our interview where we

left off the previous Friday. The evening was a repeat of the previous one, and at the end we had coffee and home-baked bread. We had fun, and I took a few photos. During the evening, Alfons [the interviewee] went out to buy the evening paper. He put on a jacket that was on the rack for outdoor clothes in the hall, a blue track-suit top made in Finland. His brown trousers were made in Finland.

The people for the interviews conducted in Finland were chosen because they had either lived in Sweden at some point, were intending to emigrate there or were of a suitable age for emigration. They had been found with the help of the parish office and employment office officials or by the snowball method. The names of people and places in the transcriptions made by Swedish researchers in Finland are accurately recorded; at least there are no obvious errors in the way they are written. The interviews were autobiographical and covered the same themes with each interviewee. The interviews made in Sweden were equally precise and observed the same research ethical code as today: the interviewees were assured that the material would be used solely for research purposes, that their anonymity was guaranteed and that no photographs would be taken without permission. The interviewers also debated questions of research ethics in their reports. This often amounted to no more than a note that the interviewee was given a packet of coffee by way of thanks after the interview and sent a Christmas card and a free ticket for the Nordic Museum – in other words, the project did not wish simply to use people; it also contacted them later on. In some instances, however, the interviewers have reflected on the significance of the information obtained and on problems of preserving anonymity. Although there were hundreds of Finns living in the research localities, their networks were very dense (cf. Gradén, this volume), so maintaining confidentiality was a challenge.

In Upplands Väsby, the interviews were made in collaboration with the geographers who were involved in the project. People were selected from the geographers' material to give ethnological inter-

views. Some of the interviewees were found by the snowball method. In both Upplands Väsby and Virsbo, those chosen for interviews were people who had moved to Sweden either between 1958 and 1963 or between 1970 and 1972. In addition to interviewees of Finnish origin, native Swedes were interviewed in Virsbo. The latter were designated as the “control group”. The aim of interviewing them was probably to filter out “Swedish” traits in order to find the truly “Finnish” characteristics in the material. In Värmland, the Nordic Museum researchers sought interviewees who had moved to Sweden immediately after the Second World War, in the period between 1945 and 1955.

In addition to the interviews, the material includes photos of the interviewees’ homes and living environments. There are also ground plans of the

homes with inventories of furniture and in many cases layout plans. Both verbal and visual descriptions were made of the research localities. There are also some surprises, such as some fine photos of the former lockup at Lovisa police station. This documentation well reflects the fieldwork environment: a researcher from the Nordic Museum called on the Lovisa authorities in order to find the names of people to interview. On hearing that the Swedish visitor worked at a museum, the police wanted to show him their lockup. The researcher was very keen to photograph it, even though it did not directly tie in with the subject of the project.

The Swedish researchers acted according to the same logic elsewhere as well: they documented everything they could. This obsessive approach to fieldwork is similar to Konstantin Stanislavski’s method acting, where the behaviour onstage is based on ordinary life, and the actor “disappears into the role” (Schechner 2006: 176, 179). In Virsbo, for example, the researchers noticed people milling around a kiosk in the evenings, and they asked the kiosk keeper how the growing number of Finns was reflected in the everyday life of the kiosk. The everyday lives of Virsbo people – in the bank, post office, local shop, library, restaurant, school, factory, church, dance hall, sports contests, the Finns’ Mother’s Day celebrations and trade union meetings – were also recorded in photos. Not even the sauna, washroom and changing room were out of bounds to the photographer. Orvar Löfgren has described this passion for documenting as follows: “Sometimes, while gazing out of the window of a train and seeing some functionalist villa or cottage flash past in the landscape, I remember being fascinated by the idea of knocking on the door and getting yet another new perspective on Swedish everyday life” (Löfgren 1996: 53). We can then read in the memoirs of Åke Daun how he became so immersed in life at Båtskärnäs that he even changed his outward appearance. Snuff was the only thing he drew the line at (Daun 2003: 83).

Early ethnological studies of both workers and immigrant communities dealt mainly with men; in this project, too, men were the norm and women exceptions. Couples were interviewed together, but



Ill. 1: Relaxing after sauna bath in Virsbo. (Photo: Birger Grape, 1974, Nordiska Museet)

the husband was always entered as the main interviewee. This even applied to cases where the wife had more to say than her husband. Children were not interviewed, but they would sometimes act as interpreters in interviews. In the case of women and children, the picture of Finns in Sweden is fortunately made clearer by photographs. There are, for example, some photos in the material taken in Upplands Väsby in late autumn 1974. The seven-storey blocks of flats in the centre of Upplands Väsby that nowadays dominate the landscape, and which at the time were the homes of many Finns, had just been built when the photos were taken. The photos taken in the yards, playgrounds and car parks supplement those taken in the homes. The documentation of Virsbo Bruk, the biggest employer of Finns in Virsbo, in turn shows women employed in the metal works. Dressed in overalls, they differ little from the men to look at, but the title *Fru* (Mrs) in the photo captions indicates that they were women. At least in the photos, men and women did similar work, married couples often working side by side.

“The Family has no National Costume or Knife”

Richard Schechner argues: “One asks performance questions of events: How is an event deployed in space and disclosed in time? What special clothes or objects are put to use? What roles are played and how are these different, if at all, from who the performers usually are? How are the events controlled, distributed, received and evaluated?” (Schechner 2006: 49). It could be argued that in the fieldwork described above there were actually various layers of performance, intended or not, taking place within the fieldwork encounter. The ethnologists performed their ethnological function, and they expected their interviewees to perform certain “Finnicisms”. We can see from the interviews done in Sweden that the ethnologists tried to bring out any particularly Finnish traits of the Finns living in Sweden. This is clearly evident from a statement that is common in the transcriptions: “The family has no national costume or *puukko* [sheath knife].” One person was offended at being asked about the tango, a particu-

larly popular dance in Finland. She said she was sick of the Swedes saying, when she mentioned she was going to Finland for a visit, that of course she would be listening to tangos; next, no doubt, they would start talking about knives. The returnee migrants in Finland, for their part, were asked whether they had learned any new food customs in Sweden. For example, a vocational student who had previously lived in Sweden was asked whether he had learnt any new recipes while living in Sweden. At least, this may be deduced from the relatively laconic note: “Veli-Matti has not learnt any new recipes in Sweden.”

On another level of performance, it is noteworthy that the interviewers also paid special attention to the home interiors. If there was a *täkänä* (a woven wall cloth) or a *rya* rug hanging on the wall of the living room, this was mentioned as a special Finnish feature. Spinning wheels, horse collars, churns and flails brought from Finland and used to decorate the home were carefully photographed. The researchers also picked on various symbols of Finnishness, Finnish design (for example, vases and tableware), the Finnish flag and blue-and-white (the colours of the flag) in general. Interviewees were asked which of the items in their homes were from Finland. If an item did not look particularly Finnish, this was mentioned. For example, three blue china plates on the dining room wall of one family received the verdict: “Do not look particularly Finnish.” For some reason, the researchers were always eager to report it if the interviewee had a copper coffee pot as an ornament; these seemed to be common. It is not known whether the museum was perhaps planning to acquire some copper pots or was simply seeking links with an agrarian background. While interviewing a woman who had been in Sweden as an evacuee during the war, Annette Rosengren almost apologized for categorizing the interviewee as Finnish in her research report because the woman spoke Swedish with no Finnish accent whatsoever.

Finnish immigrants in Sweden also voluntarily performed “Finnishness” on certain occasions by wearing national costumes on formal occasions and happily showing off their ethnic textiles. There is, for example, one photo in the material taken at

a Finnish Culture Day event held in 1974 for which the caption reads: "Finnish girls in national costume acting as ushers in the foyer." Handicrafts constituted a special category of their own in the competitions held on Finnish Culture Days. A photo taken of this section shows both *rya* rugs and *täkänä* wall cloths – and a Finnish woman dressed in national costume displaying textiles. Judging from a photo taken of the shop window, the local store sold Iittala vases and sauna requisites. The performance of "Finnishness" culminated in the evening: the caption of one photo taken at a Culture Day dance says that no one was very drunk and there were no fights – both drunkenness and aggression being stereotypically associated with Finns. It then goes on to say that some shouting in Finnish could nevertheless be heard in the course of the evening.

Birthdays, anniversaries, marriages, funerals and the like were of particular interest to the researchers. The Finnish interviewees living in Sweden were asked where they wished to be buried. Other church customs also interested the interviewers. Did the interviewee go to church? Did their children go to Sunday school? And what sort of Bible did the family possess, the Finnish or the Swedish version? The interviewers also asked about citizenship, and especially whether the male interviewees had changed citizenship in order to avoid Finnish military service. Detailed questions were asked about how the annual festivals were celebrated. With regard to May Day, the researchers were especially interested to know whether the interviewees customarily lit bonfires. No questions were asked about the workers' May Day, though the custom of celebrating this day as a festival of the workers came out in the replies. Under the heading of "folklore", the interviewees were asked about Finnish *sisu* (meaning grit or determination), heavy drinking and violence. They were also asked about co-habitation and homosexuality under this rubric. It was assumed that Swedes were more liberal than Finns.

A Peep into the Archives

Fieldwork material reflects the life of the researchers just as much as that of the community they study. I

now wish to create an overall picture of the corpus as a whole: I have read every third set of interview materials in each of the folders to be found in the archive of the Nordic Museum in autumn 2006.⁴ The material is so vast, amounting to dozens and even hundreds of interviews, that rather than being a cross section the survey barely scratches the surface.

The interviewer usually began by briefly running through the interviewee's life history before going on to ask questions about housing, education, emigration to Sweden, plans to stay in Sweden, language skills, leisure activities and hobbies, annual festivals, food and stimulants. The majority of the questions are about annual festivals and food: bread, pies, casseroles, oven-cooked dishes, soups, meat, sausage and fish dishes, blood foods, cheeses, porridges, gruels, various types of flour, beverages with meals, vegetables, fruit, mushrooms, spices, cakes and buns. The same terms recur from one interview to another, especially in the case of annual festivals and food.

Annette Rosengren, who was one of the researchers from the Nordic Museum doing fieldwork in western Finland, had met a shop assistant aged about 30 in the shop one morning and she agreed on an interview. The shop assistant had undoubtedly mentioned in the course of the conversation that her excavator-driver husband had spent five months working in Stockholm when he came out of the army. The couple were interviewed together. Keywords have been added in the margins of the transcription, again in accordance with ethnological tradition in the early 1970s. These words referred to the following categories: biography + occupation, dwelling, children and marriage, plans for the future, language, social network, special customs, Christmas, Christmas parties, St. Lucia's Day, New Year, Shrove Tuesday, *våffeldagen* (Waffle Day), Easter, May Day, Mother's Day, Whitsunday, Ascension Day, Midsummer, All Saints' Day, Independence Day, birthday, name day, wedding day, leisure time, holiday trips, summer cottage, Sundays, reading habits, courses, societies, firewood, berries and mushrooms, sport, hobbies and dances, the cinema, the theatre, restaurants and bingo. The transcrip-

tions are accompanied by a drawing and description of the interviewee's home.

A Finnish ethnology student interviewed a 25-year-old man working at a paper mill in southern Finland whose name had been obtained from the employment office. The young man's working career was probably typical of the early 1970s: compulsory military service, work at a paper mill in Sweden, back to Finland after a couple of years, back to Sweden and another paper mill after a year, then to the Saab-Scania automotive works in another Swedish location the following year, a rubber factory in Finland the year after that, then after a couple of years there, a paper mill in another town in Finland, and from there fairly quickly back to live in the town where he was born and where he had started his journey.

Annika Tyrfelt from the Nordic Museum interviewed a couple of which the husband had been born in southern Finland and the wife in Ingria, a region surrounding St. Petersburg. Both were born just before the outbreak of the Winter War between Finland and Russia in 1939. The husband was an electric fitter and the wife a housewife. They had just moved back to Finland after nearly ten years spent in Sweden. The man had been an evacuee in Sweden during the war, so the decision to immigrate to Sweden later had, he said, been easy. The reason why they had come back to Finland was that after 1972 it was not possible for foreigners to receive bank loans in Sweden. They consequently had to give up their dream of buying a house of their own, and they moved back to Finland. The reason for their return emerged when the interviewer asked whether they dreamt of buying a summer cottage. The man replied that "only the bosses can afford a summer cottage; workers dream of a house of their own" and told her the reason for their return. At the time of the interview, they were living in a flat, and the interviewer did not go back to the house theme – possibly because there was no question about this on the interview form and the interviewers felt that they had to stick to the script (Schechner 2006: 145).

With the wisdom of hindsight, we might say that in this case today's ethnologist would have thrown the interview form away and let the interviewee

speak, thereby allowing for a more in-depth analysis of the connection between being an evacuee and the decision to emigrate, and of the position of workers and Finns in Sweden. Instead, the 1970s ethnologist stated in her report that she was sorry the interviewee had wandered from the topic and that, when she prepared to photograph the home and draw a ground plan of it, the interviewees had picked the children's toys up off the living room floor despite her request not to. On the other hand, the interviews did, after all, take place in the homes of the interviewees, and even in their role as informants, they had the right to perform in the way they wanted to. Having a messy living room was not something they wanted to perform.

When interviewing return migrants, the interviewees were still first asked to give a brief life history before going on to questions about family, language, emigration to Sweden, return to Finland, social networks in both Sweden and Finland, reading habits, purchase of a car, other consumer goods bought in Sweden, differences between Finland and Sweden in interior-decoration styles, annual festivals, food, differences and expectations in both Finland and Sweden, and leisure activities. The last of these topics covered questions about holiday trips abroad, summer cottages, entertainment, socializing with friends and television.

The Nordic Museum has seven folders of interview materials from Upplands Väsby, amounting to dozens of interviews. Birger Grape from the Nordic Museum interviewed a man of about 30 and his wife, who was five years younger than him, in Upplands Väsby in December 1974. The man had just been on a course for caretakers but was unemployed at the time of the interview. The wife was a day nursery supervisor. They had two children. The couple had moved to Sweden in 1970, and had lived in two towns before moving to Upplands Väsby a year ago. The keywords in the interview transcription again summarize the course of the interview: context, people, environment, dress, annual festivals, food, contacts with Finland, leisure, study and culture, symbols, contrasts, folklore, opinions and values. The interviewer contacted the couple again a year or

two later. He phoned them at home and asked them whether they had made use of their right to vote in Sweden's municipal elections on September 19, 1976. This was a new right, which the interviewees had used. Other interviewees were asked the same thing; doubtless, the museum was already at this stage keen to answer the call of integration policy.

In October 1974, Annette Rosengren interviewed a family of Swedish-speaking Finns living in a terraced house in Upplands Väsby: a fitter of about 40, his wife of about the same age employed as an evening supervisor, and their two school-aged sons. The couple had migrated to Sweden in 1961. Some years earlier, the wife's brother, both parents and her sister and family had migrated to the same town along with many other Swedish-speaking Finns from Ostrobothnia in western Finland. The "Ostrobothnian traits" are marked in the material; the family's circle of acquaintances consisted of Ostrobothnians in their new home municipality, Upplands Väsby. They attributed many of their habits, such as stinginess and reserve, to the fact that they were "Ostrobothnian". They had had nothing to do with Finnish-speakers, possibly because they could not speak Finnish. Nor did they much like talking to Swedes because they spoke a different dialect of Swedish.

The following year, in November 1975, Annette Rosengren interviewed a Finnish-born auxiliary nurse living in Värmland, who had been in Sweden for over 20 years, since she was 13. The keywords in the transcription are familiar from the interviews made in Virsbo and Upplands Väsby. There is, however, one difference: the interviewee was asked what her attitude was to "the Forest Finns",⁵ and whether she in fact knew anything about them. The interviewee, oblivious to the meaning of the term, replied that she had even cared for elderly Finns from Finnish villages!

Creating and Preserving an Identity

A fish only notices it is a fish when a fisherman lifts it out of the water, says the Norwegian anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen in his book *Rötter och Fötter* (Eriksen 2004: 95). By this he means that people

often discover or become aware of their ethnic identity only when they feel that their status is insecure or even threatened. Ethnic identity is created and expressed in various situations when people belonging to different groups come together. Fredrik Barth and his school demonstrated in the 1960s that rifts between groups derive not so much from cultural differences as from the assumption that such differences exist. Ethnic identities are created through discourse about differences with both insiders and outsiders, and identities become crystallized as fixed antitheses where once there were just grey zones and nebulous transitions, says Thomas Hylland Eriksen in a discussion of the research of his fellow Norwegian scholars (Eriksen 2004: 86).

The Migrationen Finland-Sverige research project of the Nordic Museum was like a colouring book in which the aim was to identify the grey areas of Finnishness and tinge them blue and white, the colours of the Finnish flag. In order to penetrate to the heart of the Finnish ethos, the researchers on the project interviewed Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking Finnish immigrants in a suburb of Stockholm and in a small factory community in Central Sweden, returnees from both Finnish and Swedish language groups, war-time evacuees and Finnish immigrants in an area with a long tradition of Finnish settlement. In order to bring out contrasts they also interviewed native Swedes living in the same areas and Finns who had no experience of living in Sweden and certainly no intention of emigrating there. The interviews concentrated on annual festivals and food customs. These were areas that most clearly revealed group boundaries and differences between Finns and Swedes. This objective was made very clear in a paper read by Göran Rosander, the leader of the project, at the seminar The Documentation of Immigrant Cultures held at the Nordic Museum in 1979. According to him, the aim of the museum's documentation of the lives of immigrants was to create and preserve an ethnic identity (Magnusson 2006: 134–135).

Even though there were attempts to follow new trends of ethnology in the project, there was much of the "old ethnology" in it. Finnish culture was seen

as if it was in a box, as a collection of characteristics, customs and objects. Ethnicity, culture and national identity were treated almost as something people were born with. The traditional approach had traces of the “Cartographic Method” that Tim Tangherlini discusses in his article elsewhere in this volume of *Ethnologia Europaea*. Yet the project acknowledged the fact that a new Sweden was emerging and that museums and ethnology as a discipline had to face the challenge it presented. In fact, it was not only a question of a new Sweden, but of a new Nordic Space of migration and hybrid cultures as well. The new Nordic landscape of migration, adaptation and integration was documented like the old one, and the new and old paradigms co-existed in the project.

The project did not include a collection of objects or plans for an exhibition, just texts, drawings and photographs. Nevertheless, the material is so extensive that it alone would serve as the basis for almost any museum exhibition focusing on Finland in the 1970s. For Swedish researchers, it is a peephole into the physical and social environment of the early 1970s. This is undoubtedly one reason why the folders are neatly archived for researchers to use them. A number of research reports on the material have been published, but as far as I know, none of them has ever covered the entire corpus. To some extent, the reasons are no doubt connected with the ethics of research: the interviewees can still be recognized from their photos and narratives. In other respects, however, the material does not, to my mind, pose any ethical problems: the Nordic Museum has not greedily appropriated any material that really belongs elsewhere or the presentation of which would be unethical. Nor can the material ever, for reasons of research ethics, be made openly accessible to all (see Henning 2006: 151–152). Should the material be widely disseminated, the promise of anonymity might cause distress to people for whom the figures in the photos are not just women, men and children but friends and even loved-ones, complete with their names and personal histories (see Clifford 1991: 120–232). The contemporary urban Finn might further be annoyed or amused by the way the “typical” or “authentic” Finn is presented, the man with his

sheath knife and the woman at her spinning wheel (cf. Bendix 1997: 7; Lionnet 2004: 93). However, the Finnish interviewees do not come across in the material as comic figures any more than their Swedish interviewers – if anything, rather the contrary is true.

A similar project today would begin with a different premise. The Finnish interviewee now living in Sweden would not be asked whether he possessed a sheath knife or a national costume, because the questions would now be directed more at processes, cultural encounters and the construction of ethnic identity and the virtual community. Today’s ethnologist does not understand ethnicity as something people have but rather as something they do (Pripp 2002: 20). In the Migrationen Finland-Sverige project, the elements that determined the Finnish immigrant identity were chosen by the museum researchers, not by the Finnish immigrants themselves. Had the interviewees been given an opportunity to talk freely about their everyday lives, about what they did, then the picture of the typical Finnish immigrant in Sweden would undoubtedly have been different. The fact that the data would – of course – nowadays be collected using a different research strategy does not to my mind lessen the value of the extensive material in the Nordic Museum’s archive. The greatest merit of a large corpus of material is ultimately the unique information contained in the folders. Once the information supplied by the interview reports and transcriptions has been combined with the photos taken in the interviewees’ homes and at work together with the ground plans and detailed furniture inventories, we almost have the feeling that we have been personally sitting in an interviewee’s living room asking questions after an exhausting bike ride. People we have never met grow familiar as we read the interviews. Here are facts, events large and small: human fates at turning points in history and decisions taken at different stages of people’s lives, all together.

Richard Schechner states that anything and everything can be studied “as” performance (Schechner 2006: 1). This article studies performance in two ways, as performing ethnicity and performing

ethnography. Those who performed ethnicity were Finnish immigrants who were living in Sweden or who had returned to Finland after living there for some years. Why were they willing to perform Finnishness even though they sometimes were critical and felt like animals in a zoo, supposed to act in a certain way? The interviewees were promised that their interviews and photos would be preserved for future generations. It appears from the transcriptions that this was important to many of the interviewees; they wanted the Finns to have a visible place in the history of Sweden (Grele 2005: 44) and thus they were willing to "perform Finnishness". Traditions are known to be important to immigrants everywhere in the world: repeated expressions and performances, images of the past are "stored" in bodily memories such as gestures, lullabies and food traditions, and passed on to following generations (Klein 2006: 10), and in this case, to museum archives.

Richard Schechner also writes that performances are actions, and behaviour is the object of performance studies (Schechner 2006: 1). This article has shown that it is fruitful to analyze ethnologists as performers of ethnography. Because every possible detail was documented in the fieldwork notes, one can actually follow the actions of the researchers quite well as they described what they did and also what they were thinking. Schechner also argues (2006: 30) that performances exist only as actions, interactions, and relationships. Several phases in the performance of ethnography have been traversed in producing this article: the first phase took place when the ethnologists of the 1970s conducted their fieldwork; the next phase when the museum curators decided and carried out the filing of the material in the archives of the Nordic Museum; and the last when I, as an ethnologist, myself performed ethnography and analyzed the field-work material produced by my colleagues from the past. "The struggle to write history, to represent events, is an ongoing performative process full of opinion and other subjectivities", concludes Richard Schechner (2006: 257).

Notes

- * This article is a part of my Academy of Finland-funded project Happy Days? The Everyday Life and Nostalgia of the Extended 1950s (2004–2007), Dimensions of Sway: The Meaning of Social Networks for Finnish Immigrants in Sweden (project number 137923).
- 1 Riksbankens Jubileumsfond is a Swedish foundation with the goal of promoting and supporting research in the Humanities and Social Sciences.
- 2 Finnish has been defined as a minority language in Sweden since 2000. See SOU 2005:40.
- 3 From here on, the material referred to is *Migrationen Finland-Sverige*, sign. KU 10583, located in the archive of the Nordic Museum unless otherwise stated.
- 4 Folders 6, 16, 21, 25, 27, 29, 42, 49, 52, 54 and 55 could not be found in the archives in October 2010.
- 5 The "Forest Finns" is the name given to Finnish immigrants to Sweden and Norway mainly in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Many of them settled in the province of Värmland.

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