

DYNAMIC DISCOURSE AND THE METAPHOR OF MOVEMENT

PREFACE TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

Thinking about movement keeps our approach to culture and society dynamic. Movement serves as a creative metaphor that helps to carry us away from anchored theoretical concepts and the methodological establishment. Assuming that people and things move, we also presume changes in culture, perception of space and time, and last but not least, adaption of new tools and techniques. Obviously, this connection between the metaphor of movement and creativity of research is not automatic. We shall recall the attention Pertti J. Pelto (1973) received when he published his *Snowmobile Revolution*, a book that became obligatory reference when discussing the social meaning of movement in Western Arctic studies for decades. 'Movement' embodies the possibility for a successful search for new interpretations of culture. Moreover, the concept of movement also provides us terms for understanding other things like physical and cultural experiences, assumptions, presuppositions, values, emotions, and attitudes (comp. Lakoff, Johnson 1981: 5, 57–60).

Lakoff and Johnson argue that our conceptual system is partially grounded and structured by metaphors. At the same time, in searching for concepts that are possibly metaphor-free, they propose movement-related spatial concepts as the main candidates. Spatial concepts emerge from continuous spatial experience, and are related to human cognition in the most fundamental way. Anyhow, although movement experience seems direct, it has a huge background of cultural presuppositions,¹ as every human experience. Movement, as well as any other cultural practice, is never understood directly but interpreted through a metaphoric conceptual framework (ibid.: 56–57; 1999: 118).

Lakoff and Johnson (1999: 128) propose that metaphors have a central role in bridging everyday practices and abstract concepts:

Correlations in our everyday experience inevitably lead us to acquire primary metaphors, which link our subjective experiences and judgments to our sensorimotor experience. These primary metaphors supply the logic, the imagery, and the qualitative feel of sensorimotor experience to abstract concepts. We all acquire these metaphorical models of thought automatically and unconsciously and have no choice as to whether to use them.

We may agree (at least, conditionally) that movement can be conceptually approached as significantly close to natural human experience.² In this case we see that there is a good purpose for studying various movement practices and exploring concepts of

movement among different peoples. It may well be that studying movement will get us closer to many important characteristics of various cultures.

On an ethnographic grass-roots level it is challenging to learn the reality before starting to build up any metaphorical-conceptual models of movement. On the one hand it appears that indigenous people in the north perceive their movement skills as totally natural and often they fail to communicate their movement knowledge to researchers adequately (see, for example, Alekseyenko 1986: 81; Lukina 1986: 127–128; Middendorff 1987: 88). This happens because they cannot see anything particularly valuable in thinking and talking about movement. On the other hand, if an ethnographer manages to observe and participate in traditional practices that involve movement, they can describe illuminating conceptual and practical models of movement traditions. Apparently, indigenous movement is well designed but often people simply lack skills or need to articulate it in explicit way.

An aspect that makes theorising 'movement' in the Arctic more interesting is the complexity of movement practices and concepts. Indigenous traditional perceptions and techniques are merged with modern imported structures and means of transport, as Pelto already discussed four decades ago (see Argounova-Low in this volume). This adaption has never been one-sided. Since for centuries incomers have adapted local means of transport, knowledge and perception of the landscape for their own use, it is sufficient to read Jack London novels to understand it. Moreover, incomers who do not have to use local indigenous means of transport do live in the Arctic. These incomers can ignore indigenous transport and use instead their own 'indigenous' practices of movement (Komarnisky in this volume). This demonstrates that the social and cultural meaning of movement in the North should be studied keeping an eye on various groups living in the region and the purpose of their movement, a comparison that is a prominent aspect of anthropology.

On a more general level, descriptions of culture-specific movement patterns add to our knowledge about cultural diversity. It is good to know that multiple culture-specific practices and concepts are spread in different societies. From the perspective of scholarly cognition, documented traditional customs and perceptions, as well as new creative developments in indigenous, regional and inter-regional movement patterns and discourses, serve as methodological models. Emic modes of movement have certain heuristic potential; they provide metaphors for a more abstract theoretical approach.

Potentially, a really strange pattern of movement or peculiar local cultural philosophies behind it may lead us to something new in the theoretical respect. The ethnographic reality of movement has a prospective to initiate a theoretical shift. At least, it allegorically exemplifies the dynamic nature of any culture. Movement is holistic, it relates to different aspects of culture and thus may serve as a tool for sketched possible theoretical innovations.

Naturally, the feasible process of transfer from ethnographic reality to the domain of theoretical abstraction is rather complicated. It is justified to ask, is it simply a cognitive magic of analogy that may provoke us to believe in the illuminating effect of movement on scholarly enterprise? The issue of connection between movement and thinking remains unclear. Is there something directly meaningful for the theoretical understanding of culture in the ethnography of movement?

In a certain way we attempted to address these issues by organising the Arctic Workshops, titled World Routes, at the Department of Ethnology, University of Tartu, Esto-

nia. This special issue of the *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics* is based on the materials of the 2nd workshop, held in late spring of 2011.³ The abovementioned theoretical and methodological questions are too large and principal to be answered satisfactorily by any single ethnographic study or even by a short series of workshops and collections of articles. Anyhow, we can attempt to reveal elements of these potential theoretical and methodological initiatives in our modest collection of papers.

Donatas Brandišauskas investigates the interrelation between practices of arranging places, movement, the use of paths and signs among the Orochen-Evenki of Zabaikal Krai. The author discusses the official conception of Orochen-Evenki hunters and herders in Tsarist Russia where they were referred to in legislation as “wanderers”. (It was not a term exclusive to the Evenki but was applied in respect of all nomadic and the majority of semi-nomadic peoples, most of whom inhabit Siberia.) Brandišauskas demonstrates by his ethnography that movement really is a crucial moment in the Evenki culture. How movements of animals and humans are related is important to the success of Evenki subsistence, place making as well as worldview and morals. The author also points out that skilful movement in the taiga and knowledge concerning animal behavioural patterns are essential for hunting and herding activities. It is also significant that the Evenki hunters have elaborated a technique of communicating with each other by using certain signs while subsisting in remote areas.

Vladimir Davydov’s article also addresses the topic of movement among northern Baikal Evenki. This paper is dedicated to the analysis of temporality of traditional Evenki movement. Davydov proposes a distinction between short-term and long-term movements. In the course of short-term movements the Evenki return to the same place within a short time period. Long-term movements involve complex groundwork, usage of several hunting cabins and travelling over large distances. In this multifaceted movement network, stationary and mobile structures and hunting bases are also involved and even a village functions as a kind of base and serves as a point of constant return.

Veronika Simonova explores movement and memory practices among the Evenki people, as well. In her research Simonova describes local practice of commemoration in the form of ritual travel to a Memorial Tree. The author discusses relationships between local and official memorial regimes. Simonova opposes her approach to mainstream understanding of the relationship between dominating and vernacular memories, and histories, in terms of repression and resistance. According to Simonova, the Evenki connect themselves creatively with administratively authorised memory establishment and achieve a successful relationship between this official memory discourse and local understanding and treatment of memorial objects. The author argues that remembering has been used as a form of interaction with official powers and external audiences.

Tatiana Argounova-Low relates in her paper a theoretical approach to roads using the specific experience of driving in Sakha (Yakutia), Siberia. The researcher aims to contribute to the extended body of literature on mobility and argues that a local drivers’ perspective might contribute to our notions of roads and movement. Argounova-Low examines the flowing character of roads in Siberia and the social significance the roads have by focussing on truck drivers and their perception of so-called winter roads. The article is focussed on interpretation of truckers’ narratives, the way these stories structure drivers’ road experiences and the way in which notions of the agency of the road become prominent.

Stephan Dudeck explores the meaning of roads and the practices of movement for the Khanty reindeer herders, fishermen and hunters who inhabit the Western Siberian lowlands of the middle Ob in the midst of the oilfields of the Surgut region. Dudeck examines the Khanty point of view on mobility and opposes it to the evaluation of the state administration approach on movement. According to Dudeck, the Khanty reindeer herders attempt to introduce a distance from the industrial colonists and try to protect their independent way of life in the forest. It appears that through creative application of the Khanty daily practices and culture-specific motivations they attempt to change new situations in their favour by negotiating, manipulating and struggling for survival.

Sara Komarnisky discusses the initial findings of research in progress with Mexican migrants and immigrants to Alaska. Komarnisky provides an overview of the historical and contemporary connections between Alaska and Mexico and explores how and why those connections have been obscured or ignored by researchers as well as in general public discourse. Through time, both regions have obtained a particularly powerful image. Alaska, and 'the North' more generally, have been described by many authors as "the last frontier" where the bravest of human heroes have been carrying out their epic deeds. Latin America and Mexico specifically, are related in popular imagination with a careless pace of life and hot weather that constitute an extreme contradiction to Alaskan snowfields. Komarnisky's research demonstrates how peculiar social processes are initiated and blurred images appear when these two cognitive edges are brought together through movement.

It seems reasonable to generate at least a sketch of synthesis that covers a theoretical and methodological approach to ideas that can be found in this collection of scholarly papers. As it appears from articles of the volume, there are several issues worth considering of potentially general value that would help us move towards cultural theory in certain areas. These outcomes relate movement and cultural theory in a more general way.

Firstly, it must be mentioned that understanding movement constituted official identity of Siberian indigenous peoples for 100 years – from 1822 until the first decades of the 20th century. The movement concept was transformed from superficial observation into legal instrument. At the same time, there is random cohesion between the cultural role of the northern people's movement skills and official labelling of it.

In a certain sense it can be argued that movement reflects a ritualistic dialogue between dominating social agents and common people, vernacular creativity and official establishment. People can obtain control over social relationships with dominating social actors through manipulation of different approaches to movement. On the other hand, official categories of movement force people into social clusters that determinate their social position in the society and economic activities.

Particular movement patterns are complex and cover all natural space available to a community and extend over considerable time periods. Material elements of movement can be perceived as creative factors that shape the cognitive world of people who are involved in specific modes of movement practice. Movement is a kind of a model for life. It binds different domains of people's lives, practices and ways of thinking about things. It also enables the development of culture-specific communication strategies.

Movement also has creative significance for changing the understanding of established discourses and meanings. Commonly recognised imagination about places,

regions and their inhabitants can be challenged through unexpected movement practices that weave together different peoples, customs and objects.

These somewhat abstract arguments, derived from particular papers of this special issue, are random, employing different heuristic potential and scope. They demonstrate that there is always something more to be found in a theory from specific case-studies and descriptions. This indicates that in certain conditions it really appears to be possible that the concept of movement may work as a metaphorical model of a methodological approach for scholars.

Art Leete
Editor of the Special Issue

Aimar Ventsel
Guest editor of the Special Issue

NOTES

1 This way of thinking is related to the principal approach to human cognition. According to Immanuel Kant, every spatial and temporal concept (space and time are approached by Kant as the two basic cognitive categories) is based on a priori intuition and sensibility (Kant 1965: 65–91). If we put it more metaphorically, it can be said that movement is always conceptualised on the basis of cultural background, which is felt as naturally given in a particular group.

2 Why not recall that Bronislaw Malinowski (1969 [1944]: 91) included movement in his list of basic needs that constitute the fundamental nature of any culture.

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