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Historical Reenactment: Narrativity, Affect and the Sublime¹

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Abstract

The Karelian Evacuation Trail is an annual reenactment event which commemorates the uprooting of the Finno-Karelian population from their homeland in present-day Russia, and their resettlement in residual Finland in the aftermath of World War II. Initiated in 2006 by the Society of Children Displaced by the War, the Trail has since been held annually, each time in a different municipality in Southern Finland. In the Evacuation Trail, plot lines derived from family traditions and national literature act as a Gestalt, within which the empirical phenomena gained via sensorial stimuli are perceived. The embodied experience generates a sublime effect and a grounding sense of community among the participants.

Based on my case study, I argue that inter-subjective co-creation through embodied performance provides a more inclusive alternative to the institution of ‘branded authorship’ prevalent in modernist historiography. It is particularly well suited for representing

postmodern collectivities, traumatised by major displacements and destabilised by social change and the far-reaching ‘dispersal’ and ‘disembodiment’ of contemporary media.

Keywords

Karelia; Finland; reenactment; narrativity; affect; inter-subjectivity; sublime; authorship

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Constructing a 'Thirdspace' in the Russian borderlands (*Fennia-International Journal of Geography* 2013), *Highways of Desire: Cross-Border Shopping in Former Yugoslavia, 1960s-1980s* (CEU Press 2010) and a compendium of *Key Concepts in Cultural Studies* (Palgrave MacMillan 2008).

Introduction: The Second-World War Displacement of the Finnish Karelian Population

For Finland, World War II involved several distinct struggles: the defensive Winter War in response to the Soviet invasion (1939-40), the counteroffensive Continuation War (1941-4) and the Lapland War, fought against Germany after the armistice with the Soviets had been signed (1944-5). It also entailed a loss of territory and, concomitantly, a major displacement of the Finnish population. In the Moscow peace treaty, signed at the conclusion of the Winter War, Finland ceded around ten percent of its territory to the Soviet Union, including nearly all of Finnish Karelia. Virtually the entire Finnish population of the area was evacuated during or shortly after the war. The Finnish government embarked on a massive resettlement operation. The undertaking was suspended in June 1941, when the Continuation War began. Many returned home and began to rebuild their war-destroyed farms, local buildings and infrastructure. By mid-1944, the Soviets pushed the Finnish army back to approximately the same position they held at the end of the Winter War. The armistice signed in September roughly reintroduced the 1940 border, a decision later confirmed by the Paris peace treaty (1947). Some 420,000 people from across the ceded area were again evacuated to be resettled in the rest of Finland (Paasi 1996, 113).

About This Project

The Karelian Evacuation Trail (Finnish, *Evakkovaellus*) is a reenactment event, which commemorates the uprooting of the Finno-Karelian population from their homeland in present-day Russia, and their resettlement in residual Finland in the aftermath of the Second World War. Intended simultaneously as a ritual of memorialisation and as trauma therapy for the survivors, the event aligns itself with similar traditions-in-the-making, which became popular in the 1990s among Europe's displaced populations.

Initiated in 2006 by the non-profit organisation called the Society of Children Displaced by the War (Finnish, *Evakkolapset*), the Trail has since been held annually, each time in a different municipality in Southern Finland. Most of the event is self-funded through membership contributions, and supported by local heritage associations. The host municipalities include Virolahti (2006, 2009, 2014), Lohja (2007), Urjala (2010), Mikkeli (2011), Somero (2012) and Kangasala (2013). With steadily increasing numbers of participants,² this gathering has evolved into a socially significant ritual, which competes with other more regulated and more institutionalised forms of commemoration. The popularity of the event shows a vitality of physical reenactment as a mode of representing the past, which I set out to explore in this paper.

For this project, I took part in the Evacuation Trail events in Somero (2012) and Kangasala (2013), as well conducting archival research and obtaining video recordings of two earlier reenactments. During my fieldwork, I took notes, photographs and video footage, and audio-

recorded interviews of varying length, depth and formality.³ At the same time, I joined Regia Anglorum, a reenactment group in England, where I currently live. This parallel experience has helped me appreciate the richness and diversity of the myriad of practices that go under the banner of ‘historical reenactment’, providing useful points of comparison and a wider perspective on my own case study.

History need not be done on the page...

... language itself is only a convention for doing history — one that privileges certain elements: facts, analysis, linearity. The clear implication: history need not be done on the page. (Rosenstone 1995, 10—11)

Historical scholarship has been subject to substantial soul searching over the recent decades. An array of perspectives — including post-structuralism, deconstruction, phenomenology, hermeneutics, new historicism, new pragmatism, post-feminism, post-Marxism and postmodernism — raised questions, which put conventional history’s claims to ‘objective’ truth under a welcome critical lens. Whither history? Do postmodern ways of thinking indeed signal the end of history as we know it? If so, should we bemoan or celebrate history’s ostensible demise? Or, once we have acknowledged that history itself is a ‘mind- and discourse-dependent performative literary act’ (Munslow 2003, 2), what other modes of representing the past can we usefully explore?

Within the postmodern paradigm, the formal requirements dictated by a strictly empiricist agenda — such as prolific footnotes and linear argumentation — lost some of their former

authority. This ushered in some fresh investigations into alternative forms of representing the past, especially those afforded by media other than the written word. Some of the most compelling forays into this area have focused on film, both in its documentary and dramatic varieties. Robert Rosenstone's pioneering suggestion, two decades ago, that film could be considered a 'serious vehicle for thinking about our relationship to the past' (1995, 3), is still viewed with caution by many academic historians. 'If it is true that the word can do many things that image cannot', Rosenstone asked, 'what about the reverse — don't images carry ideas and information that cannot be handled by the word?' (Ibid. 5). True to the postmodern ethos, Rosenstone was most inspired by those films, which showed no pretense to realism, but rather used the affordances of the medium in order to 'reinvent' history.

Another mode of representing the past that has made plausible claims to legitimacy is performance. In particular, the intersections between history and performance have been explored from a feminist perspective. Charlotte Canning, for example, has argued that performance can 'encourage considerations of the gestural, the emotional, the aural, the visual, and the physical in ways beyond print's ability to evoke or understand them. Through the connections between the audience and the performer(s), performed history can actively place the past in the community context of present time' (Canning 2004, 230). Feminist historiography has a number of affinities with performance, including its awareness of its own positionality; its distrust of 'referentiality' and 'universal truths'; and its interest in the spatial, the dialogic and the carnivalesque.

Over the last decade or so, we have witnessed a remarkable proliferation and diversification of performative history-making practices, and a growing interest in reenactment studies

across a range of disciplines (de Groot 2008, 2011). The chance of feeling the wind in one's face onboard a historical tall ship, or of brandishing swords on a medieval battlefield, is particularly alluring in our society, in which performance of multiple identities is not only easily achievable, but also encouraged on a daily basis by the pervasive media.

The extraordinary popularity of historical reenactment testifies to a taste for immediacy and personal experience characteristic of contemporary society. Vanessa Agnew has interpreted this shift away from the analytical and towards the experiential as a symptom of a turn-of-the-millennium backlash against purely cognitive modes of historical representation (2007), while Katie King has associated it with the blurring of boundaries between different modes of knowledge production (2005, 459—60).

These conclusions bear heavily on the current debate on the nature of history as a discipline. According to Agnew, reenactment's 'implicit charge to democratise historical knowledge, and its capacity to find new and inventive modes of historical representation suggest that it also has a contribution to make to academic historiography' (2004, 335). It is increasingly recognised that historians and heritage specialists have a lot to gain from studying reenactment. Its value, Jerome de Groot argues, lies precisely in its capacity to 'demonstrate the uncanny, peculiar, odd way in which we relate to the past, and undermine the controlling and disciplining claims of an all-encompassing, authoritative historical mainstream' (2011, 588).

My own research into the Karelian Evacuation Trail resonates with these insights. In this paper, I argue that reenactment indeed offers its own affordances — embodiment, affect,

experience of the ‘sublime’ and inter-subjective co-creation — as productive ways of representing the past, which provide insights into possible new ways of enriching the postmodern historian’s toolbox.

The Karelian Evacuation Trail as a Hybrid Practice

In contemporary mediatic, popular-cultural and academic contexts, the term ‘reenactment’ is used to refer to a confusingly broad spectrum of cultural practices. For the purposes of this study, a distinction needs to be made between hobbyist reenactment as a leisure activity unrelated to citizenship, and ‘commemorative reenactment’, which is less commodified, and promotes citizenship values and behaviours.

The Karelian Evacuation Trail belongs to the latter category. As a hybrid mix of conventions from across different discursive boundaries — trauma therapy, theatrical performance, pageant and commemorative ritual — it has parallels with some other commemorations of twentieth-century displacements, mostly related to the Second World War. An example is the 2009 reenactment of the evacuation of more than 10,000 predominantly Jewish children from Nazi-occupied Europe to Great Britain in the wake of the Second World War, known as the *Kindertransport*. Like the memory of the Karelian evacuation, the *Kindertransport* did not come to the public eye before the late 1980s, when a reunion was staged to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the event. Numerous Kinder have been passionate in sharing their life stories and insisting that they be acknowledged and remembered. A highly mediatised 2009 reenactment brought together twenty-two survivors and their descendants on an emotional four-day train trip from Prague to London, reenacting the original journey. The event was

dubbed by the media as the ‘Winton train’, after Sir Nicholas Winton, the London stockbroker who had arranged the original passage of the Czech contingent seventy years earlier. In 2009, the hundred-year old Winton welcomed the train at London’s Liverpool Street Station, the destination of the original transport.

Although the ‘Winton train’ reenactment has never developed into a regular ritual in the same vein as the Karelian Evacuation Trail has, it nevertheless provides a useful point of departure for addressing some of the salient characteristics these events have in common. In both of them, part of the participants are enacting their own life story, and this ‘re-living’ of the past is meant to have a therapeutic effect; in both of them, the representation is a patchwork of micro-stories, the ‘communal dream’ that ensures bonding and bridges the gap between the past and the future. The plot, in both cases, involves loss of home, a journey into the unknown, the eventual arrival at the destination and the first contacts with the new environment.

It is not surprising that both events follow the conventions of the romance genre, in which togetherness, transition and nostalgia play an important role (Jameson 1975). With their eschatological underpinnings, they bear a particular resemblance to the Biblical story of the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. One of the key themes of the Exodus— the cultural distinction between ‘Self’ and ‘Other’, central to ethnocentric discourses, as well as to Western monotheism more broadly (Assmann 1996) — provides a ‘grand narrative’ that lends itself to providing a mirror to an ‘imagined community’.

The Karelian Evacuation Trail: A Tradition in the Making

The Evacuation Trail is a fairly new tradition, initiated at the dawn of the twenty-first century. During the Cold War, Karelia was seen as a potentially contentious subject, which could upset Finland's precarious relationship with the Soviets (Savolainen 2013, 27). Opening speeches at the Karelian Evacuation Trail reflect upon the postwar struggle to reinstate Karelianism to its central position within the broader Finnish national discourse. Several examples are worth mentioning: for instance, psychologist and poet Pirjo Riitta Rintanen (2007), stated her regret that the first generation of evacuees 'did not get sympathy, space to talk, appreciation, until now when most of them have already passed away'. In the same vein, author Anne Kuorsalo observed several years later that the 'closet Karelianism' of the postwar period now gave way to a pervasive tendency of the Finns to align themselves with the evacuee experience (2013). This shift — made possible by the relaxation of Cold War tensions in the 1990s — also coincides with the wider 'memory boom' related to other World-War-II-related population dispersals, such as, for example, the dispersal of Germans from Central and Eastern Europe, or the Exodus of the Italians from Istria and Dalmatia.

The purpose of the Karelian Evacuation Trail, as the organiser of the Somero event told me in an interview, is to 'honour the evacuee children, and all those who survived the Karelian evacuation'. Participants understand their experience as a pledge to their ancestors, expressed through a willing appropriation of their suffering in a performative ritual. Over the years, there have been minor variations in the format of the Trail, but its core – a several kilometres long walk along open roads and through the forests and grasslands of southern Finland (Figure 1) – has remained the same. In addition to the walk itself, each annual event

comprises speeches, concerts featuring Karelian songs and kantele⁴ music, recitals of poetry written by erstwhile evacuee children and dramatic performances by amateur theatre groups.



Figure 1. Moving through fields, Kangasala 2013.

Now well in their seventies, the original ‘evacuee children’ still participate in the event in significant numbers, and in some cases exhibit exceptional willpower to confront the challenges of the walk, regardless of the physical disabilities that come with old age. These ‘evacuee children’ play an important role, and are typically invited to speak from the stage about their memories. One of the themes that feature prominently in these speeches is that of ‘evacuee identity’, which is perceived as something that cannot be simply ‘shaken off’ once

the evacuation experience is concluded, and something that goes hand in hand with a responsibility to keep the memory of evacuation alive.

Narrativity: Stories of Karelian Evacuation and Resettlement

As a major cataclysmic point in the recent Finnish past, the Second World War and its aftermath possess a considerable myth-making power. In the space of five turbulent wartime years, many Karelians were forced to leave their homes not once but twice, each time with little hope ever to return. During the Cold War decades, stories of evacuation and resettlement were told at family gatherings and group reunions, as well as featuring in numerous memoirs published by Karelian associations. The moment of departure in particular – of embarking, literally, on the evacuation trail – is among the stories' central themes (Niukko 2009, 64). This moment signifies a radical disruption of everyday routine seen as safe and taken for granted. It is characterised by a complete suspension, by the evacuees, of what Anthony Giddens called ‘ontological security’, or the confidence that ‘most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action’ (1990, 92).

An example comes from the following story written by Eeva Aresvuo from Jaakkima municipality, which was included in a monograph published by the Museum of South Karelia in Lappeenranta in South-Eastern Finland (Laakso 1994, 16—8). What Eeva remembers are the minutiae of her daily routine, disrupted by the urgency of evacuation: she was preparing meatballs in the kitchen when a messenger came to tell her that she had two hours to pack her possessions and join the other evacuees at the village school. When the order came, Eeva had

an eleven-month old daughter and was pregnant with her second child. ‘Let’s eat first’, she told her husband. Then she quickly packed the child’s bed cover, a few clothes, a washing bowl and some food for the trip. For Eeva and her family, the trip began on a fully loaded horse-drawn sleigh in bitter cold of minus thirty degrees Celsius. Like many others, the family returned to Karelia soon after the Continuation War started. By then, Eeva was pregnant with her third child. With her husband away at the front, she endured extreme hardship and privation. Two years later, the family had to repeat the trip, this time evacuating not only their private possessions, but also the sawmill where her husband used to work.

If being uprooted occupies such an important place in the memories of the Finno-Karelian community, so does being re-grounded in the residual Finnish territory. The resettlement operation represented a major strain on Finland, devastated by the war and weakened economically by war reparations. Against all odds, the government’s effort to provide farm land to all those who had made their living through agriculture in the ceded territories proved to be a major success (Engman 1995, 235—7). In the late 1940s, Finland was mainly agrarian, and the majority of evacuees were farmers. Although some of the land came from the state and the church, a large proportion had to be expropriated from private landowners. Depending on the size of their farms, some had to surrender up to eighty percent of their landed property, and in return received government bonds which were quickly decreasing in value due to inflation (Sarvimäki, Uusitalo, and Jäntti 2007, 4).

Stories of resettlement have burst into the public eye more recently, with the entry into older age of the generation of evacuee children. Examples are numerous: Maila Suominen thus remembers sharing a two-room house in Hyvinkää with another family; Aini Nikula tells the

story of her brother having to do hard farm work at eight years of age, and then cutting logs and building his own house at fifteen; Kaisu Rokka remembers her parents working hard to educate their children and yet helping other evacuees in a similar situation (Kuorsalo 2014).

Anne Kuorsalo is an ‘evacuee child’, who has devoted much time and energy to collect evacuee stories and make them available to broader audiences. Kuorsalo has edited or co-edited several collections of stories written by evacuee children and their descendants. She is also one of the founding members of the Society of Children Displaced by the War, which was formed with the explicit aim of providing peer support to her generation of Finno-Karelian evacuees. The subjectivities and identities of the people belonging to this group, she says, were indelibly marked by the displacement (Kuorsalo and Saloranta 2005, 8—9, Kuorsalo 2014, 13). The evacuee children have stories to tell, and they tell them in the most compelling way. This urge to overcome one’s oblivion through storytelling seems to be more pressing among people who experienced extreme rootlessness, mobility or war-related trauma. That was the conclusion anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff came to after years of painstaking fieldwork among Holocaust survivors in Los Angeles in the latter half of the twentieth century. In her posthumously published collection of writings titled *Stories as equipment for living*, Myerhoff wrote:

Nevertheless, people who have lived well, according to the proper rules, at least have in the eyes of their fellows that acknowledgment of their worth which comes with the knowledge of who they were and what they did. [...] But when a person steps into a group of strangers and says, ‘I was that’ who is there to believe it? [...] Then that whole invisible world somehow has to be remade, presented, made tangible,

performed, enacted. The others have to be invited in, the listener has to agree to see it. Then storytelling has to become a very persuasive and dramatized affair. All stories are rhetorical, or rather persuasive, but here the need to persuade is even more important. (Myerhoff, Kaminsky, and Weiss 2007, 21)

Storytelling, as well as visualisation and reenactment, are common cognitive-behavioural methods of treating trauma.⁶ As soon as a particular traumatic experience can be narrativised and thus ‘subsumed in the history of one’s life, it will lose its threatening and specifically traumatic character. The traumatic experience has then been adapted to one’s identity and vice versa’ (Ankersmit 2001, 301). Told, written, painted or enacted, stories alleviate past traumas because they impose a narrative order and an ethical framework onto an essentially chaotic experience. As forms of narrative endeavour, therapeutic storytelling and reenactment partake in the ‘factitious’ (Munslow 2012, 45) nature of conventional history writing. They are, however, not governed by the empirical-analytical-representational constraints within which canonical history operates (Ibid. 7). The underlying criteria are different: healing and identity grounding take precedence over issues of empirical accuracy, critical-theoretical framework, authorship or marketability. To become ‘History’, stories about past trauma need to accept the rules of the academic marketplace. This, however, would divest them of much of their affective and community-building power.

The Finno-Karelian Ethno-National Ethics

The stories performed in the Evacuation Trail operate simultaneously at several levels of signification: personal-familial, ethno-national, and generic-universal. They paint fragments

of an ethical ideal — specifically, the virtue of *sisu* (stamina, guts) — which stands at the core of the Finno-Karelian ethno-national self-imagination.

Sisu is notoriously hard to define. Among its attributes are ‘obstinacy, patience, bull-headedness’ (Engle 1975, 6), ‘guts, inner fire, superhuman nerve-power’ (Taramaa 2007, 107), and the ‘ability to endure hardship and adversity’, and to ‘survive against incredible odds’ (Lewis 2005, 59). *Sisu* is often invoked when describing the predicament of the Finns in World War II. For instance, the cross-cultural communication expert John D. Lewis, with strong sympathies for the Finnish culture, states explicitly that, ‘[w]hen the world shrugged its shoulders at the inevitability of Finland’s fate in 1939, *sisu* was the quality that enabled the Finns to survive against incredible odds’, and in the postwar period, it ‘provided the stamina that enabled the nation to pay off crippling war reparations’ (Ibid. 59—60).

Sisu, however, is not only about the capacity to put up with extreme adversity; it is also about the solidarity of the co-nationals in residual Finland towards the evacuee population. Even if not always smooth or unconditional, this solidarity was ultimately the *sine qua non* of a successful resettlement and integration of the evacuee population. In this, they closely approximate a particular ethical template of *sisu* — a combination of pragmatism, self-sacrifice and generosity towards fellow human beings — which has been portrayed in Finnish nationalist literature from the early nineteenth century onward.

A well known early example is Runeberg’s poem Peasant Paavo (1878, 203—5). Paavo, the hero of the poem, is a poverty-stricken farmer, whose livelihood comes from a small field of rye he owns somewhere in the forests of Finland. Year after year, the field promises to

produce an excellent crop, but, just before harvest, a disaster comes - frost or a hailstorm - and destroys most of Paavo's rye. Rather than despairing, Paavo advises his wife to mix some pine bark into the flour, so there would be enough bread for the coming winter. Eventually, one year, no calamity happens and there is plenty of rye for Paavo to collect. Rather than keeping the entire crop for his family, Paavo tells his wife to add pine bark to the flour yet again, and share the bread with their less fortunate neighbour, whose field still lies frozen.

The ethics of solidarity of the kind that Runeberg eulogises in his poem informs the stories of resettlement told by the descendants of Karelian evacuees. Even if sporadic acts of resistance to land requisition are acknowledged,⁷ the resettlement enterprise is generally recognised as an act of extreme solidarity governed by concern for national cohesion.

Performance: Enacting Family Lore

With the Evacuation Trail, evacuee children and their descendants have an opportunity to act out their stories by re-presenting themselves, or their family members, in persuasive and corporeal ways. One such memory-based scenario was enacted in Kangasala in 2013. The scenario involves a local landowner, Markku Meurman, with no Karelian lineage, but with family history in facilitating the resettlement in the local area. Meurman's family has owned the historic Liuksiala manor for almost two centuries.⁸ As chairman of the local heritage society Kangasala-Seura, Meurman closely cooperated with the local Karelian society, which organised the trail; he allowed them to use his property for the event, including a large parking area that accommodated close to a thousand participants, a birch-lined lane through which the long procession of walkers, carts and other period vehicles meandered in their

imagined evacuation journey, and a small stone chapel to provide a welcome halfway stop on the walk, where a brief service was held and a kantele concert performed by a youth ensemble. Meurman went on to actively participate in the planning and preparation meetings over a period of about a year prior to the event. Talking about this in a telephone interview (4 March 2014), he made it clear that, in his view, preserving Karelian traditions was relevant not only to the descendants of the evacuee population, but to the entire Finnish national community:

It started roughly one year earlier. [...] We have old Karelians who are very active, but now new, active young people have also joined their activities. That is important, it is awfully important from the continuation viewpoint. [...] It is difficult to get young people interested because of their work commitments. Karelians have managed to get relatively young people to join. Usually those active people have been between 60 and 80 years, but now you can have even people who are under 50.

In a gesture symbolic as much of universal compassion, as it was of the postwar act of national solidarity with the evacuees arriving from the ceded territory, Meurman then took part in the actual reenactment, as one of the participant-performers, greeting the walkers and offering them water for refreshment. Most importantly, the role Meurman played in the event was also a re-performance of his own family history: namely, the Liuksiala manor contributed around sixty hectares, or half of its arable acreage, to the postwar resettlement project. Although born after the war, Meurman is deeply aware of the postwar developments, which also represent a pivotal point in his own family history:

[The evacuees] arrived in several stages. They were all from the Karelian Isthmus, from Kivennapa, those who arrived here. We received many people from Kivennapa.

[...]

Some families had their grandparents with them and others were all of working age. As far as I remember, the exact number of people who were given farms was eighteen.

[...]

We often discussed the Karelian settlement while my parents were still alive. They told us how at Liuksiala we welcomed the Karelians willingly and tried to provide for them as much as we could, even though there was a shortage of everything in those days.

The Liuksiala archives contain documents, which show just how taxing this sacrifice would have been for the masters of the manor at the time (Ylikahri 2011). These documents show the deep concern felt by the head of the household, Jalmari Meurman, regarding the productive capability of the remainder of the farm, once it is significantly reduced in size due to the resettlement initiative. His understandable caution notwithstanding, the Meurman *pater familias* nevertheless recognised the course of action outlined by the government as a necessary sacrifice for the benefit of the national community (Ylikahri 2011, 40).

The reenactment scenario performed by Meurman is clearly related to stories pertaining to the family lore of the Liuksiala manor. Yet, his story, as well as others enacted by the participants of the Evacuation Trail, also draw intertextually on familiar plot lines from national literature and popular culture, which provide an ethical prequel to physical performance. A similar ‘ethical preamble’ is part and parcel of any act of authoring the past: historians hold ethical views, and it would be unreasonable to expect them to leave them behind in order to write ‘value-free’ histories (Munslow 2006, 197).

Embodiment, Affect and the Sublime

If both narrativity and ethics are immanent to any act of authoring the past, regardless of medium, genre or discursive field, the embodied and affective aspects are conspicuously discourse-bound. This is not to say that the affective dimension is absent from conventional historical practices such as archival research: as Emily Robinson has argued, the ‘thrill of chasing a paper trail, the quickening sensation of uncovering a key piece of evidence, of confirming or unsettling a narrative will be familiar to any historian (Robinson 2010, 507). The affect Robinson describes, however, is still firmly grounded in a positivist framework, within which ‘thrill’ comes from empirical and analytical discovery. This is not the ‘healing’ affect that leads to the experience of the sublime, understood as one that by its very nature defies epistemological frameworks.

In the Karelian Evacuation Trail, the value of empirical accuracy is overshadowed by ethics and the power of direct sensorial experience of the present moment. An example of embodied performance, which was enacted in the Karelian Evacuation Trail in Somero in 2012,

involves a young woman, who chose to walk the entire length of the Trail barefoot, carrying her young baby in a sling across her chest. This scenario resonates with the many stories of evacuation published in recent decades. Told by erstwhile evacuee children, and thus naturally offering their perspective, these stories typically feature mothers and siblings as protagonists. Mothers are often idealised as self-effacing and capable of extraordinary suffering.

The young woman was enacting a family story, and an ethical ideal while enduring considerable physical hardship. According to Vanessa Agnew, reenactment privileges experiences that can be described as extremely intense. In an assumed hierarchy of legitimacy, she says, ‘the most intense manifestation of suffering is most authorised to occupy the voice of history’ and the ‘greatest suffering [...] makes for the most compelling story’ (2004, 331).

Through my own experience with *Regia Anglorum*, I have become aware of the physical and psychological challenges associated with reenactment practice. Depending on the nature of the event, these could include sleeping on hard floors in churches and community halls, braving cold weather outdoors, or – for those involved in combat – suffering pain and injury in battle reenactments. Different scenarios might involve a whole gamut of genuinely taxing experiences, including hunger, claustrophobia, seasickness, humiliation and fear (Agnew 2004, 330, Brewer 2010, 81).

Agnew has suggested that suffering, as an integral part of many forms of reenactment, is related to Burke’s notion of the sublime (Agnew 2004, 330). Pain and danger, argued Burke,

produce the ‘strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling’ (1757, 13). When, however, they ‘press too nearly, they are [...] simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful’ (Ibid. 13—4). Bodily experience is thought to be much more immediate and powerful in shaping our emotional responses to the past than purely intellectual cognition. An affective event ‘happens to the body directly on the level of its endocrinology, skin conduction, and viscera’ (Callard and Papoulias 2010, 247).

At the same time, as anthropologist Nadia Seremetakis has argued, the ‘sensory landscape and its meaning-endowed objects bear within them emotional and historical sedimentation that can provoke and ignite gestures, discourses and acts’ (1996, 7). In the Karelian Evacuation Trail, bodily responses are facilitated by material props and the natural landscapes, in which the practice is performed. Physical emplacement and materiality play an important role: participants thus talk about experiencing feelings similar to those they had when visiting their ancestral homes in the ceded territory, on occasions when members of the entire extended family gather around the ruins of the erstwhile farmhouse, sharing a bottle of brandy and singing the familiar cadences of a Karelian patriotic song. In her study of the first Virolahti event, Anna-Kaisa Kuusisto-Arponen emphasised the importance of the material landscape of the Finno-Russian borderlands in shaping the reenactment experience. This landscape, she argued, coincided with the representations already existing in the personal and collective memories of the participants, about one-third of whom ‘had also originally walked that same road’ (2009, 553).

Coffee pots, washing bowls, farm animals (Figure 2), horse-driven carriages (Figure 3), forest paths and country manors provide rich sensorial stimuli. When asked to comment on the clothes the participants were wearing in the 2012 Somero Trail, Riitta Lehtinen pointed out that individuals tried to emulate their own family backgrounds as closely as possible: thus, wearing tailored town fashion was taken to signify the urban roots of a person's family.

Many participants wear period clothes and carry things – old suitcases, pine baskets – from their family collections (Figure 4). Some of these objects were among the possessions originally brought from Karelia in the process of evacuation. For decades, they have animated the narratives of evacuation circulating in popular-cultural texts. What was salvaged and why? What was left behind in the rush of departure? Available for public viewing in home museums and local history collections, these objects are put to work in performative rituals such as the annual Evacuation Trail, where they assume a socially mediating and community-building role. Other objects used in the Trail – original military and Lotta⁹ uniforms (Figure 5), vintage vehicles (Figure 6), and even small airplanes ominously zooming above the walkers – are provided by heritage organisations, historical reenactment groups and local museums.

It is well known that empirical accuracy of props is a paramount concern of hobbyist reenactors. When hand-stitching my kit for various local events of medieval history reenactment, I was following the precise instructions set by the British nation-wide reenactment organisation, Regia Anglorum. Among hobbyists, the historical accuracy of materials, patterns and manufacturing techniques is subject of dedicated study and the very compliance may be interpreted as a test of belonging. As Jerome de Groot has pointed out,

Reenactors decry sloppy costumes and what is perceived to be inauthentic behavior. They vie to create the appearance of historical fidelity and position themselves within a hierarchy of the genuine: whereas the ‘farb’ [novice] is liable to wear hand-knitted chain mail and fight with a plastic sword, the hardcore reenactor will go to extreme measures to ensure that his uniform and equipment conform to the requisite standards and that his body is sufficiently chastened. (de Groot 2008, 103)

In the Evacuation Trail, things with verifiable history related to ceded Karelia and evacuation alternate with pieces borrowed from museums and heritage collections and those made by participants specifically for the event. Empirical accuracy is thus not the participants’ main concern. What matters most is a symbolic resonance with the foundational narratives of their personal and communal identities.



Figure 2. Children and farm animals, Kangasala 2013.



Figure 3. Horse-drawn cart, Kangasala 2013.



Figure 4. Objects from family collections, Kangasala 2013.



Figure 5. Military uniforms, Somero 2012.



Figure 6. A vintage vehicle, Somero 2012.

Conclusion

Narrativity and narrative have been much-debated topics in contemporary historiographic theory. The impulse to narrate, Hayden White famously argued, is natural and universal (1981, 1). What is more, White posited that historiography is the natural domain of narrativity, because 'it is here that our desire for the imaginary, the possible, must contest with the imperatives of the real, the actual' (Ibid. 4). For White, the 'reality' of the events is not determined by the fact that they actually happened; rather, it depends on their capacity to become included a meaningful narrative sequence. Furthermore, since narrative and ethics go hand in hand, histories are always predicated upon the existence of a narrative closure, a sort of final 'assessment', which is always moral in nature (Ibid. 20).

For some time now, philosophers of history have been looking for ways to move away from the conventional empirical epistemological model of dealing with the past, which would be more attuned to our postmodern sensibilities. The way forward suggested by Frank Ankersmit was that, in order to ‘get rid of epistemology’, historians should ‘focus on sublime experience’ (in Moscalewicz 2007, 253). In the Evacuation Trail, plot lines from the Finno-Karelian ethno-national lore act as a Gestalt, within which the experience gained via sensorial stimuli is perceived. These plot lines, when performed and experienced physically by a ‘community-in-the-making’, trigger what many perceive as the experience of the sublime.

Representations of the past through reenactment, of course, challenge the conventional historiographer’s practice of ‘objectivity’, ‘distance’ and ‘sole authorship’, branded by a specific ‘author-function’.¹⁰ Rather, through embodied co-creation, the participants form connections with one another, and this inter-subjective experience serves as a springboard for collective identity construction. Benedict Anderson (1991) has famously argued that the printed novel as an authorial genre provided, in the eighteenth century, the means for representing the nation as an essentially modern imagined community. The popularity and success of the Karelian Evacuation Trail suggests that the fragmented inter-subjective co-creation has the capacity to perform a similar function for postmodern collectivities, traumatised by displacement and rapid social change.

Notes

1. This work was supported by the European Union under the FP7-PEOPLE-2012-IIF program. The beginning stages of research were completed under the auspices of the University of Technology Sydney.
2. According to the organisers, close to 500 people participated in the 2014 Trail in Virolahti (evakkovaellus.fi).
3. Some of the interviews were conducted in the Finnish language, and subsequently transcribed and translated into English; others were originally conducted in English and then transcribed. I am thankful to my husband, Toivo Talikka, whose help, support and overall enthusiasm for the project have been invaluable. A video I produced of the Kangasala event is available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=PPCX_Y002mw.
4. Kantele is the traditional Finnish string instrument, similar to harp and typically made of birch wood.
5. The Society, which stands behind the Karelian Evacuation Trail, was founded in 2002 in Vihti, in Southern Finland.
6. The term used in psychoanalysis to denote this method of dealing with trauma is 'abreaction' (German, *Abreagieren*) (Freud and Breuer 2004, 13).
7. In particular, the refusal of the Swedish-speaking areas to accommodate the evacuees is sometimes still seen as a 'way of selfishly escaping responsibility' (Engman 1995, 237).
8. Liuksiala was Gustav Vasa's [king of Sweden 1523-60] cattle manor in the early 1500s. The wife of Eric XIV, Karin Månsdotter (Finnish: Kaarina Maununtytär), was

given the manor as a donation in 1577. She lived there until her death in 1612. The manor has been in the possession of the Meurman family since 1821.

9. The Lottas were the Finnish women's auxiliary corps, specialising in social assistance, educational activities, civil defense and, most importantly, support to the military on the frontline. They were named after Lotta Svärd, a fictional character from Runeberg's *The tales of Ensign Stål* (1952 [1848]), who cared for the Finnish soldiers in the Finnish War of 1808–1809. Charged as a fascist organization by the Soviet Union, the Lottas were abolished in the wake of the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947.
10. Following Foucault, I use the term to refer to a name 'attached' to a particular discourse, which legitimises its circulation within a society (1984).

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