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Vernacular museum: communal bonding and ritual memory transfer among displaced communities

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Eclectically curated and largely ignored by the mainstream museum sector, vernacular museums sit at the interstices between the nostalgic and the future-oriented, the private and the public, the personal and the communal. Eluding the danger of becoming trivialised or commercialised, they serve as powerful conduits of memory, which strengthen communal bonds in the face of the 'flattening' effects of globalisation. The museum this paper deals with, a vernacular museum in Vanjärvi in southern Finland, differs from the dominant type of the house museum, which celebrates masculinity and social elites. Rather, it aligns itself with the small amateur museums of everyday life called by Angela Jannelli 'wild museums' (2012), by analogy with Lévi-Strauss' concept of 'pensée sauvage'. The paper argues that, despite the present-day flurry of technologies of remembering and lavishly funded memory institutions, there is no doubt that the seemingly 'ephemeral' institutions such as the vernacular museum, dependent so much on performance, oral storytelling, living bodies and intimate interaction, nevertheless play an important role in maintaining and invigorating memory communities.

Keywords: vernacular museum; memory; heritage; Karelia; Finland

Introduction

As part of a research project focusing on memory practices and heritage building among the European communities displaced by World War Two, I conducted several field trips to Finland and Russia in the period between 2010 and 2014. This fieldwork involved visits to numerous places associated with the collective memory of the Finno-Karelian population evacuated from their homeland in present-day Russia in the aftermath of World War II, and their descendants. I was struck by the ubiquity of memory objects related to the ancestral homeland in the ceded territory in people's private collections. Some of these collections are rarely seen by anyone outside the closest circle of family and friends; others – referred to as 'museums' by the collectors – represent a communal resource, and perform memory work beyond the confines of a single household. They seek to provide a connection with the 'roots' in ceded Karelia based on sensory experience, engagement with material culture and performance.

In this paper, I use the term 'vernacular museum' to encapsulate the 'domesticity' of the practice, while at the same time pointing to its grassroots public politics and its role within the broader ethno-national discourse. According to the Oxford Latin Dictionary, the adjective *vernaculus* means both 'of or belonging to one's household, domestic [or] home-grown'; and 'of or belonging to a country [or] native, indigenous' (Souter, Wylie, and Glare 1968, 2038). As I explain later in the article, this crossover between the private and the public is the most salient characteristic of the practice. Alternative terms circulating in heritage-related literature — such as 'private collection', 'biographical collection', 'amateur museum', 'lay museum' and 'DIY museum' — are less effective in capturing the hybridity of the practice. Also, I use the word 'museum', rather than 'collection', because that is how the owner/curator herself refers to her endeavor, as a tactic to 'legitimise' it and endow it with the desired cultural capital.

Vernacular museums are not unique to Finland, and neither are they exclusively related to memories of displacement. In the 1990s, historian Raphael Samuel noted a multiplication of 'do-it-yourself curators and mini-museums' within Britain's memory-making sphere (2012, 27). Samuel described this new trend in representing the national past as more democratic, feminine and domestic than earlier versions. It privileged, he argued, the private over the public sphere, and relied upon 'hearth and home', rather than on 'sceptre and sword', as 'tradition-bearers' and 'symbols of national existence' (Samuel 2012, 161).

Widespread across the globe, house museums come in a variety of forms. Defined as a 'genre of history museum that uses old houses as settings within which to exhibit the material culture of domestic life' (West 1994, 456), house museums have been popular in Europe and the United States since the mid-nineteenth century. In 'Western' culture, the stately country house or manor has become an iconic image of national heritage and identity (Young 2007, 61). The genre of the house museum is dominated by the houses of social elites (Smith 2006, 116), and often celebrates prominent white male entrepreneurs, politicians or military leaders (West 1994, 456).

The case study I deal with in this paper differs from the majority of house museums, in that it is both non-elite and intensely feminine. It is a private collection deeply imbricated in the public life of the local community. Susan Pearce and Paul

Martin describe the recent wave of collecting practices that as a ‘generally populist and democratic activity’, related to a particular aesthetic, which tends to ascribe value to ordinary objects, and which can be seen as ‘fuelled by the obsession with retrospection at the beginning of the twenty-first century’ (2002, xii). Sharon Macdonald noted an increase in the number of museums in Britain, as well as a ‘stretching of their range and variability, including a blurring into other kinds of institution and event’ (2011, 4). As a counterbalance to the corporate museums and museum franchises at one end of the spectrum, Macdonald identified a proliferation of small museums focusing on the culture of everyday life of times gone by. These small museums – a symptom of what Macdonald calls the ‘fetishization of private life’ in today’s society – ‘sanctify’ mundane household implements and ‘stabilise’ their meaning by becoming their ‘final resting place’ (2002, 92).

One such collection is owned, curated and managed by Irma Hyytiäinen¹ in Vanjärvi in southern Finland. I first visited Irma, a first-generation evacuee from the Vyborg (Finnish, *Viipuri*) municipality in ceded Karelia, in July 2012. On that occasion, I conducted an in-depth interview with her, as well as taking copious notes and photographs of her farm and museum. Since then, I have read about and witnessed Irma’s communal work and public appearances, and have come to appreciate the role she plays as educator and tradition-bearer for the local community she belongs to.

Remembering Karelia: a historical backdrop

Karelianity has played a pivotal role in the Finnish national discourse since its early nineteenth-century inception. The birth of Karelianism goes hand in hand with the Finnish national awakening. The early decades of the nineteenth century witnessed an upsurge of interest in Karelia’s folk tradition (Fingerroos 2008, Harle 2000, Sihvo 1989). According to political scientist Vilho Harle, Karelia became the ‘cultural Eldorado and Mecca, the land of great poems, myths, and fairy tales’ (2000, 173). Indeed, the very foundational narrative of the Finnish national discourse, the Kalevala, is based on folk poetry collected by Elias Lönnrot in the villages of Viena Karelia. The trend of romanticising Karelianity as a model of primordial unadulterated Finnishness continued in the latter half of the nineteenth century and indeed well into the twentieth, with many prominent nationalists drawing inspiration from the Karelian soil.² To this day, Karelia has retained its significance as an idea and an ideal, the cradle and the destiny of the entire Finnish nation. Against the background of this history, it is much easier to understand the near-perfect nesting of Irma’s life story within the collective story of the Karelian evacuee community, and within the broader discourses of the Finnish nationhood.

Irma’s vernacular museum needs to be understood in the context of the patterns of memory transfer, which have evolved since World War II, in step with the Finno-Russian relations and with the precarious Cold-War balance of power more broadly. In World War II, Finland was engaged in three separate, but interrelated armed conflicts: the defensive Winter War in response to the Soviet invasion (1939-40), the counteroffensive Continuation War (1941-4) and the Lapland War against Germany (1944-5). The resulting territorial losses, which included a large part of Finnish Karelia, were accompanied by a massive evacuation of some 420,000 of the Finnish population, and their resettlement in the remaining Finnish territory (Paasi 1996, 113). When the Karelians had to leave their homes in the turbulent 1940s, they did that cohesively, *en*

masse. The powerful effects of this original *esprit de corps* were twofold: during the evacuation itself, the shared experience strengthened empathy, mutual support and a feeling of communion among the uprooted population; later on, it provided a salutary setting for the development of a memory unencumbered by potentially destructive inter-communal divisions.

When a solution needed to be found to accommodate the displaced population from ceded territories, the Finnish government opted for a strategy that reflected in practice the discursive significance of Karelianity and the Karelians. The Karelians were not a marginal group at the fringes of the Finnish nation; rather, they were the very yarn the national fabric had been woven from. Seamless integration was a policy prerogative, and so was a concern not to tear the social and economic patterns that had been in place in the ceded territory (Engman 1995, 235-7).

When hundreds of thousands of evacuees poured into Finland in 1944, the country was impoverished by the war effort, and burdened by the urgency of having to pay war reparations. Nevertheless, the government of the time adopted an approach to this gargantuan task, which was as ambitious as it was courageous: rather than placing the arrivals in camps, they were to be integrated with the rest of the population in a manner designed to reproduce their previous life conditions as closely as possible (Jakobson 1998). This was to be achieved by assigning evacuees from each village in the ceded territory to a particular municipality in Finland's remaining territory (Engman 1995). If they had owned or rented land in the ceded territory and had derived income from agriculture, they were entitled to receive compensation and buy property in their new place of residence through the government's resettlement plan; if they were factory workers and city dwellers, they were likely to be able to continue with industrial labour in urban settings. Some of the land assigned to the new settlers came from the state, the local municipalities and the church, and some was expropriated from private landowners (Engman 1995).

The village of Vanjärvi, where Irma Hyytiäinen runs her vernacular museum, is an example of a community created as a result of such resettlement policies. Vanjärvi is a village of some four hundred inhabitants in the Vihti municipality in southern Finland, around fifty kilometres northwest from the capital Helsinki. It has been declared as national heritage by the Finnish Museum Authority (Finnish, *Museovirasto*), being one of the largest settlements of post-World War II evacuees from ceded Karelia in Finland as a whole. The entire area, covering almost 1,400 hectares, once belonged to a grand manor owned in the nineteenth- and the early twentieth centuries by the aristocratic Linder family. The first subdivision of land occurred in the years following World War I, with former tenant farmers establishing independent estates. Following World War II, the remaining land was further apportioned to accommodate Karelian settlers, mainly from Heinjoki and Viipuri areas. More than seventy new farms were created, covering 1354 hectares of land (Museovirasto 2009). Despite its heritage listing, Vanjärvi remains a 'non-place' for the mainstream Finnish tourism industry. It does not appear in glossy brochures, and neither does it attract busloads of tourists.

Given the opportunity to stay in physical proximity with their former social networks, the Karelian evacuees had favourable circumstances to preserve their traditions and memories through extended family gatherings and homeland associations, while at the same time gradually penetrating into the overall fabric of the Finnish society. This aspect is crucial for understanding the Karelian memory transfer in the late twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries. The judicious resettlement policy following the war ensured that even during the years of so called 'Finlandisation',

when any public expressions of nostalgia for the lost territory could be interpreted as menacing for the country's relationship with the Soviet Union, regular gatherings and a range of activities aimed at preserving Karelian traditions continued within extended families and numerous Karelian societies. As a consequence, Finland was further 'Karelianised', 'with Karelian woven wall hangings and Karelian rice pasties. The exuberant but soft Karelian dialect and even the traditional wailing for the dead have become part of the Finnish scene' (Sihvo 1989, 72).

During the Cold War, any tangible records of the old homeland were highly valued, with photographs and household implements receiving a near-iconic status. Many of these objects remained within their original household, but their public display did not begin in earnest before the 1990s. Vicariously, they stood for a physical experience of the ancestral homeland, which was beyond reach, with large parts of Russian Karelia and the Leningrad Oblast allowing only limited or no access to Finnish visitors (Raivo 2004).

In the late 1980s, literary historian Hannes Sihvo (1989), himself an evacuee child who had dedicated a large part of his career to writing about Karelian literature and culture, complained about the desire to reproduce the entire 'Karelian country' in Finland proper. With sensorial gratification impossible *in situ*, it was enacted within the Finnish post-war borders. This involved primarily the material recreation of sites with a highly symbolic value for the national narrative, such as landscapes associated with wartime battles (Raivo 2000a, 2000b), orthodox religious landscapes (Raivo 2002), and timber architecture built in the traditional Karelian style (Böök 2004). A notable architectural example is the Bomba conference centre, a replica of the original Bombin house in Suojärvi in the ceded territory.³

Irma Hyytiäinen and her late husband Niilo created their vernacular museum in the 1990s, primarily out of desire to serve their village community, in which they were both active. The timing of this initiative coincided with the 'Karelian memory boom' of the 1990s. The boom was boosted by a set of propitious circumstances: first, the end of the Cold War and the opening of the Finno-Russian border, which encouraged former evacuees to visit their old homes – or what was left thereof – on the Russian side; second, the looming generational change among the population of former evacuees, which demanded that significant traditions be reinvigorated and passed from the 'silent generation' to the 'baby boomers' and their children; and third, the growing interest in oral history and experiential research in Finland and elsewhere. Today, many descendants of the Karelian evacuees continue to visit their ancestral homes as a regular holiday destination, and at times even form friendships with their current occupiers (Lehto and Timonen 1993).

Both Irma and her husband belong to the generation of 'evacuee children' (Finnish, *evakkolapset*), who had experienced the displacement at a very young age. Now approaching their eighties, these people still identify strongly as the original Karelian evacuees, and work passionately to keep their memories of the displacement alive for the coming generations. Their activities – enriched by a 'soft' personal dimension – tend to rely on private networks and voluntary engagement. Motivated by camaraderie and communal spirit, they are far removed from the mainstream institutional frameworks and the commodified market regime.

Meaningful things, binding narration

In the lives of the Karelian evacuees and their descendants, things related to the 'old homeland' are of particular importance. Whether they are still used as working utensils, or displayed as mirrors of the self and mnemonic devices, they always respond to present-day and identity-driven concerns and agendas. Almost every person of Karelian descent I have spoken to has something to show: a hand-woven wall hanging, a grandfather's clock that survived the evacuation trail, a pair of birch-bark shoes or a food container stamped during the evacuation with the number of their municipality in the ceded territory. Some of these household collections have developed into small-scale institutions with limited public access, which serve the purpose of maintaining communal bonds and preserving Karelian traditions. A notable antecedent to vernacular museums similar to Irma's, Hyrsylän Mutka in Nummi-Pusula in southern Finland, dates back to the 1980s, and is owned, curated and managed by former celebrity dancer Aira Samulin. Other vernacular museums based on private collections are less publicly exposed, but equally significant as sites of communal bonding and ritual memory transfer. An example, which bears strong resonances to Irma's museum, is Liisa Ake-Helariutta's Evakkotupa (evacuees' *tupa*, or combined living room and kitchen) in Parainen near Turku in western Finland.

Things are not simply passive evidence of a past that no longer exists: rather, they are constitutive of the very dynamics of social reproduction. They have 'social lives' (Appadurai 1986), and are governed by complex temporalities. Arjun Appadurai has described a hypothetical life cycle of a thing as follows: '... today's gift is tomorrow's commodity. Yesterday's commodity is tomorrow's found art object. Today's art object is tomorrow's junk. And yesterday's junk is tomorrow's heirloom' (2006, 15). Material things are central to memory-related practices. They make the past accessible – and thus ostensibly usable – in the present. The use of material things as mnemonic prostheses, as well as symbols of a person's individual self and collective identities is well documented, and has featured prominently both in creative literature (Nalbantian 2002) and in academic enquiry across a range of fields and disciplines.⁴

Heritage scholar Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has made a distinction between what she called 'companion objects', which grow old with the owner and are integrated in the owner's daily life; 'souvenirs', which are selected prospectively as reminders of a particular event or experience; 'memory objects', which are created retroactively in an attempt to recapture a past occurrence'; and 'collectables', which have a history of their own prior to being acquired by the collector, at which point they are 'liberated for semiotic retooling' (1989, 330-2). The roles things perform, however, are contingent and changeable. In the eclectic disarray of Irma Hyytiäinen's collection, there are, significantly, objects pertaining to all of these categories.

The timber farmhouse, which houses Irma's sprawling collection of memorabilia (Figure 1), has no plaque identifying it as a museum. Instead of a plaque, a household pennant is hoisted on a pole nearby, displaying the sixteenth-century Karelian coat of arms, with a Swedish sword and a Russian scimitar ready for combat (Figure 2). To identify the building as a place of memory, the visitor needs prior knowledge, gained through social networks related to the Karelian community.

A visit to the collection is experienced as a liminal moment, in which material memorabilia serve as props in a ritual of admittance into the *communitas*. The collection performs its 'museumness' periodically each time Irma unbolts the heavy door to let

someone in. In the interim, the locked farmhouse is a dormant time capsule, a storehouse of potentialities for a reconstruction of an idealised communal past.

Seventy-five-year old Irma is retired, and splits her time between household chores and community engagement. She is the 'god-mother' or sponsor (Finnish, *kummi*) of the local primary school, where she helps with activities aimed at passing the Karelian memories to the school children. Occasionally, memorabilia from her collection are loaned out to be used in reenactments, recitals and stage performances organised by the village community. Their function is thus both didactic and ritual, in the sense that they serve both as conveyors of tradition and knowledge, and as signs of covenant with the Karelian evacuee community.

The narrative meanings of Irma's vernacular museum are negotiated through the encounter between the owner-curator and her guests. Like oral tradition in general, the stories told are improvised and thus revised with each rendition. Irma's curatorial authority is based on her authentic lived experience of the evacuation, and its purposeful articulations with the collective memory of the evacuee community. Her narrative is rich with evocative images that have already found their way into the collective lore, such as moving cattle, makeshift overnight accommodation in schools and churches, and bomber aircraft zooming above, over the moving columns of evacuees. All of these pertain to a code familiar within the Karelian community, and are also drawn upon in the historical reenactments of the evacuation:

Irma: When we left for the first time, I was two-and-a-half years old. I do not remember much about it; we went to Jyväskylä, and I remember that I was very scared in the train. But when we returned, I do not remember the year when we returned, but we left in 1939. It could have been 1941. I cannot say it for certain because I do not know. But then in 1944, just before Juhannus,⁵ we left for the second time. I had just had my seventh birthday, I happen to have the same birthday as Marshal Mannerheim. When I was born, he celebrated his seventieth birthday. And Mannerheim, think about it, [...] he was a military officer, and he was given the job as president for a while.

I remember the second time much better. We were at home then, so it couldn't have been 1941, it must have been later. The yards had not yet been cleaned. We were warned not to touch anything; there were all sorts of grenade shells and everything in the yards. Soldiers had been there, of course. And our house had not been burnt down. And they warned us not to touch anything and to wait until the cleaning patrols arrive. But my husband's cousin, Niilo's cousin, a boy, and his friends, they had been warned

not to touch anything in their own yard, but they did not obey. They had taken a grenade or something. Niilo's cousin said, 'You must not take it' and started running, managing to get under a fence. The grenade exploded in the other boy's hand, and they had to collect the pieces of his body from the branches of trees.

We left [Karelia] just before Midsummer in 1944. My father was at the front. My mother had a bicycle, on which she loaded all our things, as much as she could, and the cow was following us on a leash. My brother and I were seven and five years old, and we were pulling a sheep on a leash. We walked to a station, I cannot remember which station, but it probably was not Viipuri, because our place was seventeen kilometres from Viipuri. [...] Every now and then, when the aeroplanes came, we ran to the forest for cover. [...] They flew over us towards Viipuri. They bombed Viipuri, but luckily they did not bomb us. But I saw that large fleet coming. I do not know, I do not think the children were as scared as the adults, who had more to worry about. We just did as they told us.

[...]

We travelled by train. I do not remember exactly where we stayed overnight. Now I am sad that I did not ask my mother at the time. But I know that we stayed in some schools; we spread some carpets or lied down on the floor. I remember there were many steps in the school. Some people were cooking food for us. I remember we got cabbage soup, which had only a few cabbage leaves swimming about, but at least it was warm. I cannot remember if we had bread, but we must have had some. I remember how my aunt was mending stockings on the steps after our meal.

Irma is now showing me some of the things from her collection: an old cigarette holder, a spade and a laundry cauldron are elevated to the role of protagonists in the evacuation narrative:

Irma: I also remember that both my ears started aching, the pain was terrible. But one could not get a doctor there. But *Vaija* [Karelian for grandfather], my father's father, took his cigarette holder with a hand-rolled cigarette, and he inhaled and then blew tobacco smoke into my ear. I cannot remember if that helped straight away, but no doubt the pain stopped at some stage. That is how they did it in the past.

[...]

Then we built a new house; my father built it [...] That was hard work, back then. My mother worked as a laundress for the vicarage, and the lake was very close. My mother had her cauldron there, to wash the linen and the carpets. As children, we could swim on that sandy beach. Our childhood was so beautiful.

Irma's vernacular museum stores many documents and things that tell stories of daily life on a Karelian farm during the war, and those that talk about evacuation and resettlement: notes from 1942 and 1943, announcing the obligation to contribute to the war effort in potatoes and grain; a war-time death notice, with the names of three fallen soldiers from the same family. On one of the shelves, there is a wooden ashtray, delicately hand-carved by Irma's father while he was on the frontline near the Svir River (Figure 3). Irma's eyes fill with tears:

Irma: This is a souvenir carved by my father. They were on the front for a long time, so they crafted by hand all sorts of things. I also have a jewellery box that he made. It reminds me of him when I look at it.

My mother embroidered this cloth in preparation for her marriage. It was shown at an exhibition in Vanjärvi. She made this in 1936, before getting married.

There is a diary from a farmer's almanac, recording the date when he left ceded Karelia and the names of the stations his train passed through and the places where they slept,

'in the forest,' 'in a cottage,' 'Karelian village'; lists of the cattle, horses and other animals that accompanied people on the evacuation trail, how many animals, where they came from, where they were heading to. Several old suitcases (Figure 4) represent, vicariously and symbolically, the enforced journey of the displaced Karelian community.

The application for compensation lodged in 1945 to the Finnish authorities by Irma's father and grandfather, reads today as a mnemonic device, an official record of the tangible assets that once represented 'home': a house, two heated buildings, two buildings with no heating, a grain storage, another storage building, a smithy, a cow barn, a cellar, a well, and an outside toilet. In addition to the actual application, there are also official documents instructing the evacuees how to apply for compensation, and those listing the planned destinations for each Karelian village: Ruskeala, Vihti, Parikkala, and so on:

Irma: Everything had to be described, the type of building and when it had been built, 1935, 1939. These are the measurements, the type of flooring and ceiling, how much everything cost. That was the value of the property left behind in ceded Karelia, according to the owner. But the official assessment may have been different; they had other ways of determining it.

On a large table in the middle, there are several books: memoirs by former evacuees about their experience. There is also a framed copy of Marshal Mannerheim's Order of the Day, issued in May 1942 to Finland's mourning mothers. This, which explicitly invokes women's role as reproducers of the nation, is familiar to most Finns and cuts deeply into the national psyche:

Irma: That one had been in the attic. It is not in the best condition, but I brought it down here anyway. You can see that it is quite worn, this Order of the Day addressed to the mothers of Finland.

Many of Irma's things document women's household labour, before the advent of electricity: a milk separator (Figure 5), a washtub and a washboard, birch-bark baskets, a charcoal pressing iron, a laundry mangle, a bread shovel. Some of these things are family heirlooms, some have been purchased, and some have come as donations from fellow Karelians. Implements used mainly by men also abound:

Irma: Here is an iron [to iron clothes] from the old times, and some coffee beans. In the old days you had one iron on the stove, and you ironed using a second one [while the first iron was warming up on the stove]. Here is one of the first laundry mangles, you put bed sheets here and turned and they became smooth. This is a table model; you attach it to the edge of a table. Now they all use electricity.

[...]

Do you know what this is? A bread shovel. I still bake my own bread.

[...]

This is a ladle that was used by boys, when they went to the forest to herd cows. They had their puukko knife with them, and made this ladle from birch bark, to get a drink from a creek or fountain.

At this point, the collection seems to become increasingly less 'disciplined', veering away from the central theme of a romanticised Karelian past and towards the curator's personal life story. Part of the collection is dedicated to Irma's working life: an old Singer sewing machine; some pins and wooden clothes pegs and an antique doll from the Helsinki toy factory at which she used to work; two framed certificates from the 1960s, awarded to Irma for her skills in machine-milking cows; and a gold medal she received in 1978 from one of Finland's largest women's organisations, the Rural Women's Advisory Organisation (Finnish, *Maa- ja Kotitalousnaisten Keskus*), for her performance in a tractor-driving skills demonstration held at Helsinki's Senate Square. Next to the wall, there is an archive of old agricultural magazines and newspaper clippings.

As a result of what has been called the 'museum effect' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991, 410; Macdonald 2002, 99; Phillips 2007, 98), all of these objects assume a status of being 'special', even to a certain degree sacred, and paradoxically also representative of the lost Karelia, the evacuation, and the resettlement of the Karelian population. Collections, Baudrillard (1994, 1996) has argued, transform the everyday prose of objects into poetry. Divested of their function and abstracted from any practical context, objects in collections take on a subjective status: in a collection, an 'object' becomes a 'piece' (Baudrillard 1994, 8). The objects in Irma's collection are thus meaningful both as 'biographical objects' (Morin 1969; Hoskins 1998), paradigmatic of the curator's life and personal identity in all its variegated facets, and as 'history objects' (Hoskins 1993), related more specifically to the points, in which Irma's life story articulates with the foundational narrative that animates the entire evacuee community. In her museum, the private and the public, home and museum, the *oikos* and the *polis*, converge and feed off one another.

Storytelling, performance and the maintenance of tradition

Having analysed almost 600 house museums in the United States, United Kingdom and Australia, Linda Young has produced the following taxonomy for their classification: hero-related house museums commemorate someone important, who either lived there or just passed through; collection-based house museums display a collection of house objects worth conserving in their original location; design-based

museums showcase objects based on the aesthetic or technical features of their design; house museums related to a particular historic event or process that evolved within the house itself; sentiment-inspiring museums, which promote a positive spiritual or communal feeling); and country house museums, which are a 'product of multi-generational development of the house, furnishings, collections, and gardens' (Young 2007, 63).

In Irma's museum, it is 'sentiment' that matters more than any other category: a sentiment that is both personal and communal, and that possesses a rationality of its own. In this, Irma's museum is akin to what Angela Jannelli, extending Lévi-Strauss' concept of 'pensée sauvage', has called 'wild museums':

For Lévi-Strauss, the savage mind is a way of thinking which, although different from the positivistic or scientific thinking, is rational in its own way: the savage mind is not irrational, but its rationality differs from the one taken for granted in Western scientific discourse. (Jannelli 2012, 24-5)⁶

Despite the present-day flurry of technologies of remembering and lavishly funded memory institutions, there is no doubt that the seemingly 'ephemeral' institutions such as Irma's vernacular museum, dependent so much on performance, oral storytelling, living bodies and intimate interaction, nevertheless play an important role in maintaining and invigorating displaced memory communities.

Irma's vernacular museum in many ways aligns itself with this recent wave of small vernacular museums. It is an example of a household collection aimed specifically at community maintenance and vernacular commemoration, which thrives as part of an organic community, of which both Irma and the visitors are members. Irma's authority as a historical witness and a prominent community figure endows the collection with authenticity and legitimacy.

Irma's presence at each visit affords visitors a feeling of intimacy and belonging. Meanings are not fixed or imparted from above, but rather co-created interactively through conversation. As an excellent and passionate performer and storyteller, Irma does not hesitate to demonstrate how the objects in her collection were used in times gone by (Figure 6), or to enliven her stories with bodily movements, gestures or dramatic performance. Observing her, one is almost inadvertently reminded of the traditional Karelian rune singers and performers of folk laments, who have carried the Karelian cultural memory through the centuries. Like Irma, these singers were the esteemed members of and pillars of social life in their communities; they were the living archives of the Karelian communal memory; they were storytellers, who regarded their own lives as the very material, of which larger collective narratives are made (Kennerley 1966); and finally, they were performers capable of generating affect and soliciting allegiance to the community.

All museums are, in Foucauldian terms, heterotopias, in which 'time never stops building up', governed by the quintessentially modern desire to build a 'place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages' (Foucault 1986, 26). Irma's vernacular museum allows visitors to reenact, however briefly, the sacred and circular time of the ritual. With its hybridity and the malleability of meaning created through personal oral narrative and intimate impromptu encounter, it serves as an

effective catalyst for intergenerational bonding within the local Finno-Karelian community.

Notes

1. Irma has kindly granted me permission to use her name in this article.
2. These include novelist Juhani Aho, poet Eino Leino, artist Akseli Gallen-Kallela, architect Eliel Saarinen and composer Jean Sibelius, to name only the few.
3. The Bomba centre was built in Nurmes in Finnish North Karelia in 1978.
4. Although any attempt at cataloguing the relevant corpus here is bound to be only a tip of the iceberg, the following list will illustrate the range of approaches across the social sciences and humanities spectrum, related to the cross-overs between materiality, memory and identity: (Appadurai 1986, Baudrillard 1996, Bourdieu 1984, 1977, Csikszentmihályi and Rochberg-Halton 1981, Dittmar 1992, Hoskins 1989, 1993, 1998, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1989, Miller 1997, 2008, Yates 1966).
5. St John's Day or Midsummer marks the celebration of the summer solstice. In Finland, it is celebrated on a Saturday between the 20th and the 26th of June.
6. Translation is mine.

Figures



Figure 1. Irma Hyytiäinen's vernacular museum in a farm building in Vanjärvi in southern Finland. All photographs were taken by Maja Mikula.

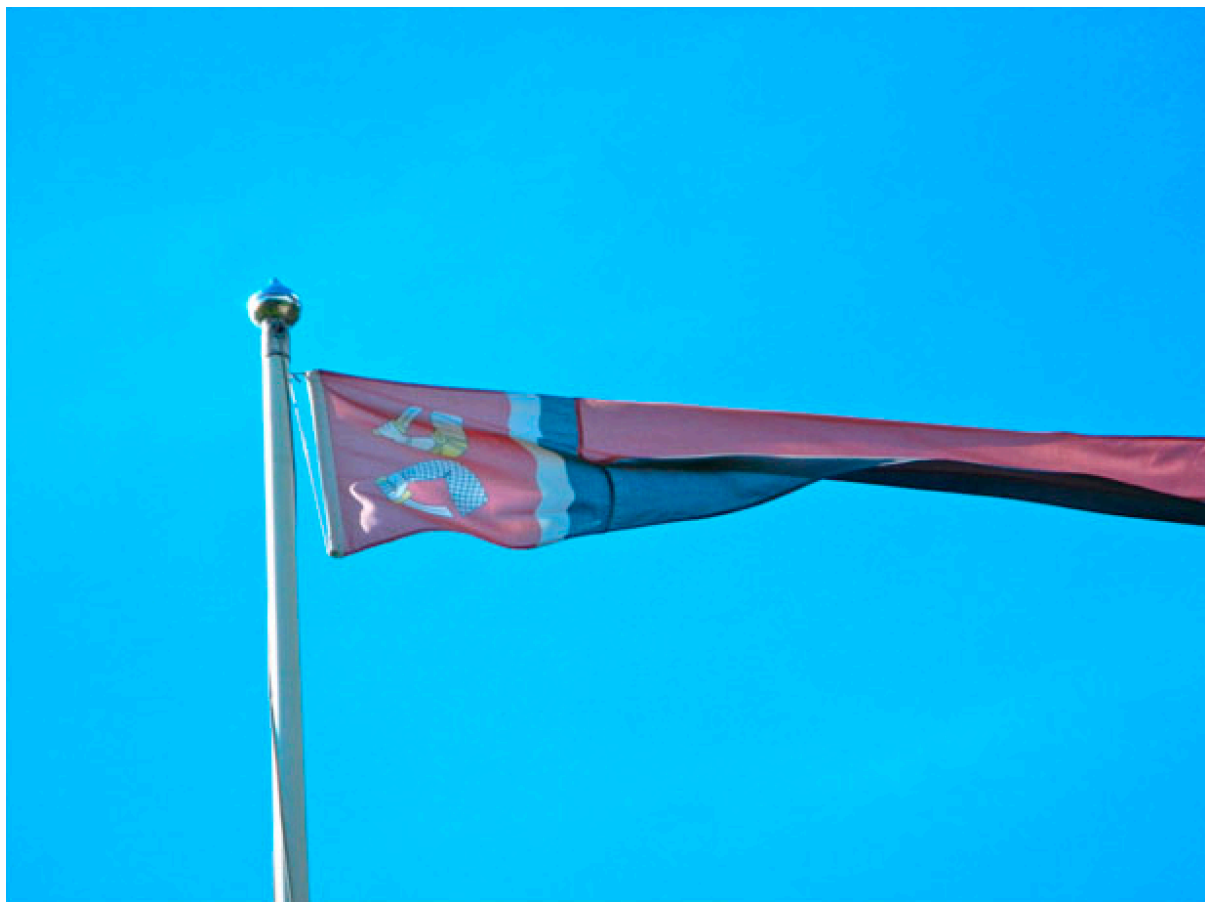


Figure 2. Household pennant with the Karelian coat-of-arms.



Figure 3. Wooden ashtray hand-carved by Irma Hyytiäinen's father.



Figure 4. An old suitcase representing the Karelian evacuation trail.



Figure 5. Milk separator.



Figure 6. Irma Hyytiäinen demonstrating the use of a milkmaid's yoke.

Notes on Contributor

Having taught extensively in the International Studies and Cultural Studies programs at the University of Technology Sydney, Maja Mikula is currently based at Nottingham Trent University, as a Senior Research Fellow in the School of Communication, Culture and Media. Maja's most recent publications include *Historical Reenactment: Narrativity, Affect and the Sublime* (Rethinking History 2014), *The island monastery of Valaam in Finnish homeland tourism: Constructing a 'Thirdspace' in the Russian borderlands* (*Fennia-International Journal of Geography* 2013) and *Highways of Desire: Cross-Border Shopping in Former Yugoslavia, 1960s-1980s* (CEU Press 2010).

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