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Jorma Puranen – Imaginary Homecoming – A Study in Re-engagement

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Jorma Puranen – *Imaginary Homecoming* – A Study in Re-engagement

One of the defining characteristics of both contemporary anthropology and contemporary arts practice has been the use of quotation and metaphor. To engage with the complexities, instabilities, constructiveness and contingency of meanings, there has been a severe disruption in the traditional relations between the subject of anthropology and the ethnographic museum on the one hand, and arts practices on the other. These ideas are grounded in part in the subversions and problematics of post-modernism, which have fostered a profound scepticism and blurred boundaries in relation to disciplinary authority and in relation to visual practices that depart from traditional forms of anthropological and historical representation (Marcus and Myres 1995; Schneider 1996). In other ways the post-modern practice of 'defamiliarising the past [can] also serve as a prelude to renewing contact in unforeseen ways' (Holly 1996:5), opening new spaces of engagement and interpretation.

It is in this context that I want to discuss *Imaginary Homecoming*, the work of the contemporary Finnish photographer Jorma Puranen. It exemplifies the exploration of an intersection of those histories of peoples, anthropology, the archive and the material image that have threaded their way through these chapters. The primary vehicle for this exploration, both literally and metaphorically, is a series of historical anthropological photographs of Sami people from northern Scandinavia. These were translated into compellingly beautiful and elegiac installation pieces in the landscape of the far north, which were then rephotographed and contained within the frame of the black and white print (Figure 9.1). Re-engagement here is complex, embracing the images

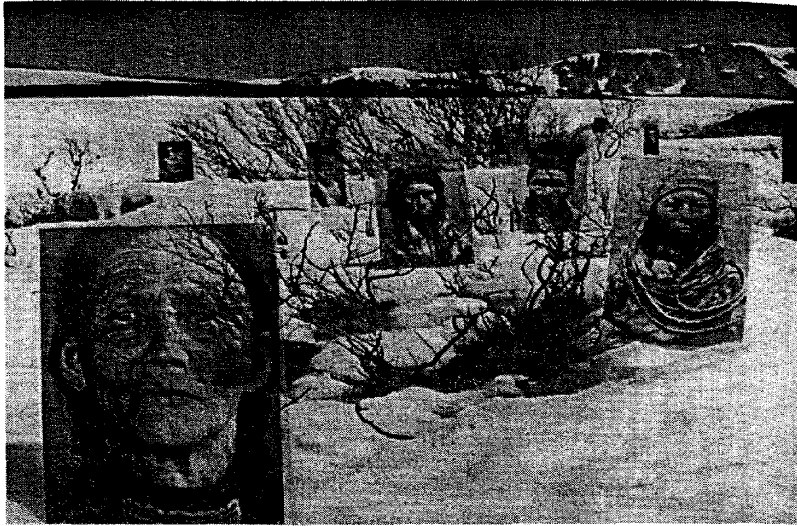


Figure 9.1 From *Imaginary Homecoming*. Photographer: Jorma Puranen. (Courtesy of the photographer.)

themselves, Puranen's relationship with them, their referents and their potential in the modern context of social identities. Such an approach is reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's suggestion that the truth of history does not involve the representation of an eternal past, but rather the production of an image, in relation to an agent (here the artist) and a present moment – 'The truth of history is performed when we take the risk of making history rather than assuming it to belong only to the past' – awakening becomes a condition of writing history. This opens up a space for exchange that is part of that continuum of dialogue between image and the culture of use, where photographic objects enliven rather than entrap meanings (Cadava 1997:72–3; Brothers 1997:12). Such projects are not unproblematic, of course; however, as I hope to suggest, by acknowledging its own contingent nature and engaging critically with the character and meanings of certain historical images, *Imaginary Homecoming* does something to liberate the photographs from the interpretative grids in which they were enmeshed (Kerr 1999).

The histories explored in this re-engagement with photographs and their projection into new spaces and new forms of articulation are

concerned with the intersecting histories of the minority Sami people of northern Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia, of other European peoples, and of science and of photographic practice as they came together through the demands of nineteenth-century anthropology. I have chosen this particular body of work because it encapsulates the various intersections, tensions and biographical processes that have formed the foci of these essays. As I argued in Chapter 8, expressive photographic practice that stresses the subjective and poetic as a mode of exploration has the capacity to penetrate and articulate contradictions and nuances that might be lost in textual forms. Through constructive engagement with elements of ethnographic practice and the history of photography, especially anthropological photography, Puranen has experimented with modes of visual elaboration that open up variations on the imagery of ethnographic and documentary photography. Because *Imaginary Homecoming* demonstrates a great trust in the constructive opening of the creative act, it also possesses undeniable heuristic potential (Maresca 1996:195–6).

Imaginary Homecoming is thus an expressive re-engagement, repositioning and renegotiation of such historical images. It represents a dynamic articulation of history as a continuing dialogue between past and present concerns. The entangled histories of these images are worth reflection. To understand the significance of *Imaginary Homecoming* the images must be situated in the history and consumption of nineteenth-century photographs of Sami people as 'anthropological documents', and the 'texting' that accrues through their preservation in archives devoted to that area of Western classification and intellectual endeavour. Yet at the same time, through the social being of the subjects of the photographs, the photographs embody a form of 'retention' that represents the sedimentation of past experience as an active starting-point for the present.

It was an encounter with nineteenth-century images of Sami people, both as engravings in travel literature and photographs in ethnographic and folklore archives, that first suggested to Puranen the possibility of exploring visually the imaginative historical projections that had gathered around the peoples of the north of Scandinavia. Although not Sami himself, Puranen comes from northern Finland and has had a long association with the region. He had been working there since 1975 when he met an elderly woman, Martta Ortonen, who introduced him to the local community and through whom he learnt of the rich oral history of the region. Her death was like the 'death of a book'.¹ He worked photographing everyday life, organising exhibitions, teaching

photography and contributing to Sami publications, such as *Sápmelas*. However, the starting-point of the *Imaginary Homecoming* project was in 1988 when Nils-Aslak Valkeapää of Pättikå, near Enontekiö, Finnish Lapland, showed Puranen a book he was working on, *Beaivi Áhcázan* (The Sun My Father), which was published later that year. In it were reproduced portraits of Sami people that he had found in the Musée de l'Homme in Paris (Puranen 1999:11). These photographs had been taken under the direction of Prince Roland Bonaparte on his visit to northern Scandinavia in 1884, and numbered some 400 negatives, 250 of which were portraits. They became the basis for Puranen's visual investigation of Sami history and its intersections and encounters. The Bonaparte photographs consist of pairs of portraits in the style of scientific reference (see Figure 9.2); although there is no measuring rod in the image, a number, held on a metal clamp, is inserted into the space of the sitter. This number itemises the subject of the photograph and refers back to an accompanying list of data that gives basic anthropometric information as well as details of name and age.

To this corpus Puranen added other photographs of Sami people found in scientific archives in Finland, France and Britain. Many had



Figure 9.2 Sami boy. Photographed for Prince Roland Bonaparte. Albumen prints, 1884. (Courtesy of the Royal Anthropological Institute.)

been produced intentionally as anthropological documents. Others, for instance, those of traveller Lotten von Düben taken in 1868 and 1871, had been absorbed into anthropological discourse, as their content was deemed to have anthropological interest. This mode of representation, which, as we have seen, constituted a major representational trope in photographing colonialised peoples over a wide range of interlinked photographic practices, became one of the predominant ways in which Sami people, as Europe's own marginal people, were portrayed. Such images functioned as vehicles of communication inside the scientific community, as part of the homogenisation expressed through a scientifically universal visual language (Dias 1997:97). From the mid-nineteenth century Sami people became increasingly 'anthropologised' – described, measured and contained within a scientific discourse. As late as the 1930s substantial data-collecting projects were undertaken in the north of Scandinavia, Sami people being offered medical treatment in return for submitting to the camera and measuring tape. The dissemination and consumption of generalised 'types' reached beyond the boundaries of science. The aesthetic of 'scientific reference' and the de-individualising language associated with it became more widely absorbed in popular representations, to the extent that the broader manifestations of these controlling and distancing tropes came to dominate the representation and consumption of both non-European peoples and marginal 'anthropologised' groups within Europe. Consequently, anthropological and anthropometric photographs constituted a major element in making Sami people visible. The links made between biology and culture in the nineteenth century meant that this visualisation assumed a moral dimension, as indicators of value cohered around the notions of 'primitive' and 'civilised' – tropes of particular significance in relation to Europe's definition of its 'internal other'.² I am going to concentrate here in particular on the Bonaparte photographs, because we can see them operating clearly within a visual economy that connects with the production of anthropological meaning on a number of levels and that forms the focus of *Imaginary Homecoming*.

Bonaparte's Photographs

In 1884 Prince Roland Bonaparte, the son of Napoleon Bonaparte's nephew, undertook a three-month scientific expedition to Lapland in the course of which he 'endeavoured to study the Lapps from two points of view – anthropometrically and ethnographically'. His agendas were grounded strongly not only on the objective, positivist links between

photography and the emerging discipline of anthropology in general, but more specifically in the French school of physical anthropology. Throughout this work Bonaparte used Broca's method of anthropometry, measuring about 150 individuals (Bonaparte 1886:210–11). In the 1870s Bonaparte had studied with the polygenist Paul Broca, generally acknowledged as the founder of modern physical anthropology and the major influence in the field well into the 1880s. Much of the methodology was drawn from medical or biological science and was premised on precise observation and measurement within comparative anatomy. A biologically determined model of culture was premised on the resulting classificatory and representational methodologies.³ As Dias has argued, the visual was integral to the production of such models. The desirable photographic manifestation of these ideas was articulated by Broca in his *Instructions generales pour les recherches anthropologiques* (1865).⁴ Like the project that Huxley and the Ethnological Society attempted with the Colonial Office (see Chapter 6), it emphasised the requirement of clear, systematic photography of the subject, in full face and profile, capable of yielding raw data in the delineation of 'racial types' for comparative study. However, Bonaparte was also influenced by La Play, a liberal economist and social theorist, who advocated a detailed study of the conditions of family, religion and social integration in the interests of moral progress and the remedy of the ills of the human condition. These ideas were especially present in the person of François Escard, Bonaparte's librarian, who had been closely involved with La Play, and whose influence permeates the ethnographic notes and accounts of the expedition (Delaporte 1988:7–8).

Bonaparte's Sami photographs, taken by his secretary M. G. Roche, are in many ways different from other sets of anthropological images that he had made, in that they were the result of travelling and working in the region. Many of Bonaparte's other photographs were taken without that cultural dimension of place. Rather, he photographed groups re-enacting culture as spectacle in the shows and exhibitions of Western Europe, for instance the 'indigenous and mixed race groups' from Surinam at the Amsterdam Colonial Exhibition of 1883 (Bonaparte 1884), the Omaha group at the Jardin d'Acclimation, Paris in 1884 ('Peaux-Rouges' 1992) or Australian Aborigines from Queensland, toured by R. Cunningham, and photographed by Bonaparte in Paris in 1885 (Poignant 1993). Yet despite the expedition locus of their making, the resulting images appropriate the Sami subjects into the normalised visual conventions of nineteenth-century science, for they were products of the same intention, to provide objects of study and

of classification within the visual agendas of late-nineteenth-century French science. With a tension between aesthetic forms of presentation and content that was not uncommon, many of Bonaparte's photographs were disseminated in portfolios, red half morocco and buckram, embossed with gold lettering. Each contained mounted albumen prints, stamped with Bonaparte's impressive blind stamp of a double-headed eagle and accompanied by a printed booklet containing anthropometric and other descriptive detail.

The contexts of the making of all these images emphasise the scientific spectacle of classifiable bodies. But they also point to the mutually sustaining relationship by which scientifically legitimated notions of race and culture, the primitive and the exotic, informed popular culture, enhancing the popularity of the shows and legitimating the exotic spectacle in which photography, including Bonaparte's portfolios, both set and maintained the agendas of visibility. This convergence is illustrated by a 'performance' of the Sami images at a meeting of the Anthropological Institute in London on 9 June 1885. Such a performance establishes the photographs in a number of trajectories that form the focus of Puranen's exploration in *Imaginary Homecoming*. At the meeting, Prince Roland Bonaparte exhibited a 'very large collection of photographs of Lapps'.⁵ There followed a short lecture by Bonaparte on the physical anthropology investigations of his expedition: 'Note on the Lapps of Finmark (in Norway) illustrated by photographs' (1886). The paper linked strongly to the display of photographs and stated that 'Each Lapp was photographed in full face and in profile, the two positions being rigorously exact, whence it follows that all these photographs are comparable among themselves' (1886:211). This was followed by a substantial paper on the ethnography of the Sami by anthropologist Professor Keane, who brought along a Sami group, then performing at the Alexandra Palace, as living exhibits (1886).⁶ They were listed in the minutes of the meeting alongside the photographs.

To members of this Institute, devoted as they are to the special study of mankind, an intellectual treat of the Alexandra Palace, which without inconvenience to ourselves, offers us a rare opportunity of observing on the living subject the physical qualities, social usages and domestic life of perhaps the most interesting group of aborigines still surviving in Europe. A section, as it were, of the Arctic region of Lapland has been brought to our very doors . . . They are here in our very midst . . . a compact family group, affording with their 'furniture and fixings' objects

and implements of daily use, some even of their domestic animals [there was a dog present], a picture in miniature of the whole life of the people drawn directly from nature (Keane 1886:213).

Finally, there was a paper on the 'Physical Characteristics of the Lapps' by Dr J. G. Garson who, with Professor Keane, had examined the Sami at Alexandra Palace (1886:235–8).

This little history of the meeting on 9 June 1885 has been outlined because it serves to encapsulate not only the interplay of the scientific and the popular, but more importantly the visual, textual and physical appropriation of Sami people into the discourses of Western science in the nineteenth century, their 'typification' for consumption, and the way in which the physical reality of people, object and photograph assumed a contiguous evidential quality. The anthropological object had been created from disparate forms of evidence, the truth value of which was mutually sustained in a symbiotic relationship.

Within a specifically Finnish local agenda, which especially informs Puranen's work, the visual rhetoric of scientific objectification that delineated Sami as 'distanced' and 'outsiderness' was manifest in two ways. Visualisations played, first, on the marginal status of Sami people in socio-economic and political terms in the emergence of the modern nation-states of Scandinavia and, secondly, in racio-cultural terms as Europe's 'aboriginals'.⁷ In Finland the years 1924–1928, in particular, were a period of intense anthropological fieldwork under the auspices of the Finnish Academy of Sciences. It built on a substantial tradition of internal ethnography and anthropology of both Sami and non-Sami populations that had been undertaken since the mid-nineteenth century.⁸ The Academy of Sciences had established an anthropological committee in 1924, under the directorship of Yrjö Kajava, which was directly linked to the political and historical sensitivities of the newly independent state of Finland. This provided a measure against which Finnish Nationalist agendas could be placed in the 1920s, when Finnish notions of identity needed to define, amongst other things, 'civilised' Finns against 'natural' Sami. Thus, like so many constructions of 'otherness', such categorisation was as much an exercise in self-definition as a scientific endeavour. This history of national self-definition constitutes a reflexive undercurrent in Puranen's exploration of the intersecting histories of Sami and non-Sami.

In drawing heavily on these various anthropological and historical images and their implications, *Imaginary Homecoming* subjects them to an expressive repositioning and renegotiation. As such it represents a

dynamic articulation of history as a continuing dialogue between past and present concerns, while at the same time forming a broad critique of the 'cultures of imaging and imagining'. As Thomas has recently argued, while there are differences between the ways in which artists and historians or anthropologists re-use and represent the past for the present, nevertheless, art works are interpretations, in their own right, of the issues that preoccupy historians and anthropologists, and they invite comparison with texts of various kinds. They are co-interpreters of the issues that preoccupy scholars and artists alike. They present different ways of expressing, exploring and stating the relationship between the past and the present, and translating culture from one space to another, yet each is partial (N. Thomas 1999; Edwards 1997). It is the result of this cultural appropriation, visual fracture and historical intersection, the cultural stage on which the performance of the images was played out, that Jorma Puranen's photographs confront.

In making *Imaginary Homecoming* Puranen rephotographed anthropological photographs. Significantly, this was done in both positive and negative forms. These copies were enlarged, printed on large plexi-glass panels, and inserted in the landscape of northern Scandinavia, the land of the Sami. Alternatively they were printed, as positives or negatives, on polyester sheets and wrapped around trees or hung in bushes. As such, the subjects of the photographs reconnect, literally, with the land. The installations were then rephotographed (see Figure 9.1.). These pieces constitute an imaginary, metaphorical homecoming that plays on both the iconic and the indexical qualities of the photography (Puranen 1993:96). First, there is an iconic merging of historical human form and contemporary natural forms. Second, at an indexical level, the displacements of Sami people become manifested through the relationship of the photograph to its absent referent. Something of Barthes's indexical romanticism is at work here 'The Photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being . . . will touch me like the delayed rays of the star' (1984:80).

Mirroring contemporary anthropological concerns with the form of voice and authority in cultural representation, *Imaginary Homecoming* presents a clear articulation of the paradox of photography itself as identified by Sekula: 'The hidden imperatives of photographic culture drag us in two contradictory directions, toward "science" and the myth of objective truth . . . and toward "art" and the cult of the "subjective

experience" . . . In its own erratic way photographic discourse has attempted to bridge the gap between the extreme philosophical and institutional separation of scientific and artistic practice' (1987:124–5). Thus *Imaginary Homecoming* juxtaposes two historically specific notions of photography, the positivist and the mutable. The positivist realist images of the nineteenth century operate within a metonymic rhetoric of substitution – here the objectified body. Yet they are transformed, becoming part of a reflexive visual exploration in the late twentieth century, where self is positioned historically in that very set of dynamic and ongoing relationships that *Imaginary Homecoming* explores.

Puranen's photographs thus assume a metaphorical character as the photographs move from the symbolic space of appropriation, the archive, subsumed in other people's writing of history, to the symbolic space of belonging, being in and of the land. *Imaginary Homecoming* resonates with quotation and metaphor. It creates at one level a redemptive statement in relation to cultural marginalisation and inequality. At another level a mytho-poetic history emerges from the spiritual engagement with the land and the people of the far north, as the theatricality of the performance of these historical photographs moves them from the informational, through the representational, to the contemplative.

The context of the original making of the anthropological images, used so lyrically by Puranen, emphasises, as I have suggested, the scientific spectacle of classifiable bodies. Some of Puranen's images in *Imaginary Homecoming* specifically address the processes of scientific objectification through the deliberate, formal repetition of precisely those forms that characterised it in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The blankets or plain wooden walls, which isolated the subject for scientific scrutiny and provided powerful tropes, are repeated. However, as Maresca has argued, the background cloth – rendered invisible in anthropological photographs through cropping – despatialised the subject and reduced the body to a formal mapping. *Imaginary Homecoming* deliberately repeats this trope, but shows the edges of the cloth, and thus the containment and the constructedness of framing (Figure 9.3). The clips on the securing cords, the way the wind lifts the corner of the cloth, deliberately point to the provisionality and construction of the original images. As we saw with the Huxley project photographs, intrusion into the constructed anthropological space provides a point of fracture – only in Puranen's case it deliberately articulates the conditions of making. Further, the whiteness of the snow in the landscape,



Figure 9.3 From *Imaginary Homecoming*. Photographer: Jorma Puranen. (Courtesy of the photographer.)

one of the defining features of the geographical and historical imagination in the north, has a visual resonance with the whiteness of the blanket or sheet in front of which Sami people were arranged for the mapping of their bodies (Maresca 1996:219–20, 224). However, in the stylistic re-enactment of historical ways of photographing, the dead and the living are brought together. The plexiglass panels of historical images, placed (or is it re-placed?) in front of the scientific sheet, are held by living hands and reveal the presence of the living behind them. Yet the layering of the images is sometimes ambiguous and the visual correlations destabilised. The viewer cannot always distinguish the precise layers as temporal relationships, the dead from the living, the past from the present. Like so many other photographs in *Imaginary Homecoming*, the boundaries between past and present are intentionally blurred. Consequently, the work not only reuses and juxtaposes

historical representations of Sami but refers, through its own formal structures and devices, to the way in which Sami have been imaged over the years.

Not only are the 'quoted' images historically specific; they become present through quotation within the work itself. Sometimes images are doubled. Either by light shining through images, imprinting them into the land or on to trees, or through repetition, their multiple uses throughout the work reflect the multiplicity of historical meaning. Individuals of the past appear in different photographs of Puranen's, as they move into different spaces with different emphases – sometimes cohesion, sometimes dispossession. Identities shift, transposed and transported, connecting past and present, person and community or culture, through repeated presence.

The return is saved from a mere cultural atonement of post-colonial romanticism by the way in which the work confronts viewers with their own history and the nature of photographic appropriation. As the viewers look through the images into the landscape beyond, they are confronted by the faces of the past in the earth, on trees, staring straight into the camera, almost through the camera: '... The historical portraits, as it were, block our path when we might be tempted simply to admire the beauty of the landscape. The eyes of the past, so to speak, scrutinize the immense changes that have befallen the northern landscape during this dying century' (Puranen 1999:12). The temporal intersection that photography allows comes together in a spatial intersection, rearranging and reconstituting the spatial dimension of historical experience. The gaze is arrested at the picture plane. The Sami in Bonaparte's photographs look back at us through Puranen's, the viewer is held in the tension of mutual knowledge of what has passed, the gaze – so often problematised – is mutually acknowledged. One is reminded here perhaps of Trachtenberg's comments, following Nodelman, on the dehumanising Zealy slave daguerreotypes made for Agassiz: 'The subject's awareness of being in the presence of a spectator who shares his space and "narrative time" opens a wedge between the mask and the self, the persona and the person – between self-presentation and self-awareness. This acutely strained double awareness signals back to us our own presence as spectators, the pressure of our own gaze upon the portrait subject' (Trachtenberg 1989:53–6). Yet what discussions of gaze have taught us is that perception and indeed cultural understanding always involves a circulation of oppositions, a process of movement back and forth that undermines the fixity of the two poles, inside and outside. The artist working with quotation and

metaphor has to attempt to make what will, forever, be a provisional metaphorical construction, resonate in a way that will remain visible through the circulation of positions (Holly 1996:83). While the viewer is acutely aware of the historical nature of that gaze, re-viewing is placed inescapably in the continuing discourse. Viewing is no longer innocent. We are returned, for instance, to a reality of the experience of encounter and of intensive anthropological fieldwork around Petsamo, north-east Finland, in 1926. From the shape of Bonaparte's camera reflected in the eyes of his subjects to the reflection of Puranen's installations in the land, the encounter and the manifold histories projected from it become encapsulated, stilled; yet that very stillness heightens the historical moment as only photography can: 'Stillness is the moment when the buried, discarded, and the forgotten escape to the social surface of awareness like life-supporting oxygen. It is the moment of exit from historical dust' (Seremetakis 1994:12).

Some Representational Dilemmas

If the seductive, melancholic beauty of the work evokes an aesthetic or emotional response, it could be argued that this is in danger of subverting the work, of overpowering not only more complex meanings, but also masking important ethical issues. Does it heighten awareness of the issues facing Sami people in the twenty-first century?⁹ Through the very return of the images in these formal terms, are they merely being reappropriated into yet another Western discourse? Is the work, which results from a form of anthropological fieldwork, just another kind of 'text', with the problems of politics and of ethics and authorship to which traditional ethnography is subject (Schneider 1996:196)? Does it, or can it, articulate intersecting and contested histories? There are certainly other ways of telling the stories that Puranen attempts to articulate. As Said has argued, the 'Native' point of view is not merely an ethnographic fact or a hermeneutical construct: it is a continuing, protracted, sustained resistance to cultural forms of anthropology and political policy and dominance (1989:220). Further, through rephotographing, is Puranen reasserting the technology of dominance and appropriation, despite his careful self-positioning, conscious of the way in which he, as a photographer, is implicated in this tradition? 'From the very beginning, when I made the first picture, I was conscious of my own role as an offspring of the same tradition. I put there among the Sami my own pictures made in a similar vein in the early 1970s, to show that I didn't consider myself innocent' (Ripatti

1993:10–15). Does the success of this work – it has been shown to date in France, Canada, Britain, Spain, Germany and the Netherlands – become exploitative through absorption and performance within international, institutional structures of contemporary art, the photographer's intentions notwithstanding? For issues of the ethics of fieldwork remain, the production of texts and acknowledgement and access given to indigenous groups in the final execution, presentation and interpretation of works (Schneider 1996:196–7). It would appear significant that the press release for the first major exhibition of *Imaginary Homecoming* in the far north of Finland at the Samimuseum, Siida, in the summer of 2000 speaks of the 'awakening' being in Barcelona and London but the 'homecoming' only truly happening at Siida.¹⁰

These are key issues of translation, authority, legitimacy and multivocality, which have been as forceful in anthropology as they have in arts practice. Detailed comment on them, important as they are,¹¹ is beyond the scope of my particular concerns here, namely photographs as sites of intersecting histories and their potential in the articulation of those histories. However, in response to the questions I have just posed in relationship to Puranen's work, one might cite Foster's contention, in his essay 'The Artist as Ethnographer', of the problems inherent in the assumption that an artist not perceived as culturally and/or socially 'other' has only limited access to the 'transformative alterity' of radical or politicised practice in a given context, while artists perceived as 'other' are assumed to have automatic access to it. He goes on to argue that such a productivist position, which enabled the cultural politics of marginality, has at the same time disabled the cultural politics of immanence relevant to the post-colonial global situation, where models of centre and periphery are destabilised (1995:303–5). It would appear that the intersections in Puranen's work are attempting to address that immanence, although, conversely, its strong romantic impulse, in formal terms, threatens to restate the purely oppositional role of marginality.

Foster's position, and its concern for the structural effects of assumptions about alterity, is broadly echoed by Thomas and others, arguing that the rhetorics of 'decolonisation' replace one set of privileged authorities with another, both of which run the risk of being premised on an essentialism that threatens to romanticise or normalise the 'other' voice (N. Thomas 1997:230; Coombes 1994:218–21). There is a danger that concern with who is speaking is such, that one fails to hear what is being said.¹² The deterministic polarisation of historical authority neglects the fluidity and ambiguity of identity, the intersections and

the shifting and various encounters that constitute past experience, the constituent nature of 'the content of particular renderings' and the role of contested and overlapping agencies within them (Pujade 1994). In many ways it is the discursive formations that both constitute and are constituted by Bonaparte's photographs and the later material from the Finnish Academy of Sciences that, as examples of 'particular renderings', give *Imaginary Homecoming* much of its power.

It is perhaps interesting to consider Puranen's photographs alongside those of the Australian photographer of Aboriginal descent, Leah King-Smith. Although coming from a radically different cultural space as an indigenous artist re-engaging with the 'anthropological archive', her series *Patterns of Connection* (1991) has certain points in common with *Imaginary Homecoming*. Both are making critical interventions in the anthropological archive as key strategies of the work. Like *Imaginary Homecoming*, *Patterns of Connection* has become extremely successful internationally, being shown in Europe, North America and Japan as well as exhibited widely in Australia. In it, King-Smith replaces and refigures historical photographs of Koori (Aboriginal) people from the La Trobe Collection of the State Library of Victoria. They are the kind of photographs found in anthropological archives the world over. Massively enlarged and manipulated in fine cibachrome prints, ghostly figures move through a contemporary painted and photographed landscape of King-Smith's own making. Like Puranen's imaginary homecoming, the source photographs 'show subjects inscribed in history, within a nexus of power and knowledge. These figures are positioned within a particular narrative of the past then recontextualized in the present. This reconstructed past . . . draws on memory, narrative and myth, positioning the subject within identity politics' (Marsh 1999:117).¹³ As with all such projects, there is a danger of collapsing into an essentialism in the attempt to repossess and articulate Aboriginal cultural identities.¹⁴ Yet repossession and re-engagement with such images is an essential step towards redetermining people's self-esteem (Croft quoted in Williamson 1999:219). Both these works use the quotation to convey meanings that, at one level, are diametrically opposed to their source. However, they differ in that King-Smith's images largely obliterate the originating contexts of the original photographs by remaking them, whereas Puranen's, through their referencing of historical tropes, such as the plain backdrop of scientific photography, constitute a re-reading of and engagement with the historical ambiguities inherent in such an exercise and an acknowledgement of what Bhabha has termed 'the process of subjectification' (1994:67).

Quotation itself is, however, not unproblematic. Joan Kerr's discussion (1999:236) of similar dilemmas of legitimacy and the pitfalls of romantic paternalism, in relation to Australian artists quoting from the early European artists of colonial Australia, would seem to resonate with the problems I outlined earlier. Not only is there, as I have suggested, a risk of essentialising complex historical values, but also a danger that the artists replicate rather than dislodge the curatorial and/or scientific authorities that a work was intended to critique. However, as Kerr goes on to argue, there is a crucial difference between quotation and appropriation. The former comes from within. Owens has argued that images appropriated into contemporary arts practice are emptied of their resonance, their significance and their authoritative claim to meaning (1992:54). While highlighting the borderline between appropriation and quotation, such a claim would seem to go too far for work such as that of Puranen and King-Smith, and indeed equally powerful work of re-engagement such as Carrie Mae Weems's interventions in Zealy's slave daguerreotypes which were made for Agassiz. In this work, *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried*, daguerreotypes, enlarged in black and red, are placed in oval vignettes and overprinted with linked statements: 'You Became a Scientific Profile', 'A Negroid Type', 'An Anthropological Debate', '& a Photographic Subject'. Rather, I would argue that in such quotation the historical images are not emptied but engaged with, challenged. Their claims are still present, but they are powerless in relation to the changed meanings with which the images have become newly imbued. It is precisely the articulation of multiple meanings and contested histories *within* the photographs, an awareness of their original meanings and possible meanings in between, that is integral to the efficacy of the artistic intervention. The international success of the work might constitute an institutional form of appropriation; but the intentions of the work, its roots and its realisation at a local level constitute quotation to critical effect, for they open another space for the subjective contemplation of histories.

Counterpoints

Imaginary Homecoming faces complex and ambiguous dilemmas of this kind. Yet, as Robert Pujade has argued (1994:48), the aesthetic quality itself also works towards the destruction of ethnocentrism. The ghostly figures, shimmering in the landscape, emerging from (or is it into?) trees, transform the space into something ineffably bound to the people themselves, belonging in terms of human spirit. At one level it is intensely

romantic, and as Marsh has argued in relation to King-Smith's work, appeals to a contemporary nostalgia for spiritual roots. But at the same time it is also potentially powerful and reaffirming as '... a "strategic" essentialism [that] can trigger a dynamic discourse' (Marsh 1999:114, 117). The ambiguities of the work are essentially those of photography itself, with its rawness, mutability and indeterminacy. The work attempts to resist essentialising discourses by making clear its own limitations in terms of representation. Rather than pondering the relation with what might have been lost, this re-engagement with images of anthropology's history tries to suggest what we might perhaps still find (Puranen 1999:12). In the same way as I suggested with the very different photographs of Jenness and Acland, *Imaginary Homecoming* attempts to clear a space from which alternative histories might emerge.

This reading is also positioned through counterpoint. It is here one senses the possibility of Foster's cultural politics of immanence, for Puranen does not present us with an unmediated, restated arcadia but a complex set of relations in which the land is central. It is a cultural landscape in which, Puranen asserts, we are implicated as the battle for the northern environment takes a new shape, with the land being investigated as a potential mineral resource.¹⁵ These are histories that cannot be tied only to questions of ownership of the past, but must address ownership of the future through a repositioned relationship between centre and periphery. This becomes clear in some of the works that confront the fragile homecoming in the face of actual fracture. These images explore the complex set of contemporary relations concerning land. The formal and actual dislocations of railways, barriers, surfaced roads and opencast mineral extraction intervene in the 'homecoming' as harsh interjections. The stress is on the communications that tie old Sami lands to global networks. The photographic frame is full of power lines and telecommunications, railway tracks and fences to contain snow, all enabling a different land use from that of the traditional economies. Details of contemporary economic exploitation of the land, such as cars, camper-vans and hotels, further puncture arcadian impulses.

Overlaid on opencast mines and railway tracks leading to industrial plants are images of Sami people (the same images that peopled the landscape) arranged in rows of stark frontality, in a way that recalls the anthropological intention of many of the photographs (Figure 9.4). It is a new deindividualising appropriation, of the individual entangled in a web of globalisation. From this resonate two further appropriations:



Figure 9.4 From *Imaginary Homecoming*. Photographer: Jorma Puranen. (Courtesy of the photographer.)

first, land and body, and by implication culture; and second, the threat to landscape, which is a threat to memory and history, the very being of social existence. The formal language of the photographs is that of fracture. No light passes through the images, whereas in the landscape images there is a more embracing 'homecoming' as the rays of the Arctic sun project images into the land – like the 'sun pictures' of early photography, rays of light inscribe the image.

The formal arrangement of some of the photographs within the frame of Puranen's work also suggests, conversely, the format of the family album. Rows of faces, arranged in a narrative of juxtaposition, look out at the viewer. In this reading, the portrait mode also points to disquiet. The traditional dimensions of existence represented in the humble family photographic portrait sit uneasily in a consciously disjointed relationship with the background space. In this space, change is represented as a violent penetration and intervention with the landscape forms. The same formal language of fracture is at work. This is a social reality in which the dislocation of the northern lands makes it increasingly difficult to sustain traditional economic patterns, and people are drawn increasingly into the institutional systems of the

nation-state and dependency culture. Furthermore, the contemporary interventions anchor Puranen's photographs to a precise temporal moment measured against the 'atemporal' metaphor of homecoming, with its tranquillity and timelessness of snow and birch trees, a place of refuge and a place of coherence. It is perhaps in these images that the tensions I have already suggested become visible; the fragility and disquiet deep within some of the photographs that make up *Imaginary Homecoming* are brought to the fore through the juxtapositions in a way that articulates their haunting quality. Yet conversely it is in these images that one might argue that *Imaginary Homecoming* becomes a form of ethnographic commentary, making incisive statements about the cultural realities and experience of the people of the far north at the end of the twentieth century.

The juxtaposition of contradictory ideas resonates through the series. The redemptive qualities of homecoming and the spatial dimension of landscape are counterbalanced in the confrontations and imbalances of intersecting histories. Perhaps the key to evaluating such a project is the recognition that 'histories are cultural projects embodying interests and narrative styles, the preoccupation with the transcendent reality of archives and documents should give way to dispute about forms of argument and interpretation' (N. Thomas 1997:34). Such a view allows space for the multiple elements of *Imaginary Homecoming* to co-exist. The viewers (and by implication, the 'archive', the residence of images) are drawn into their/its own place in these histories. They can never be free of each other, each pointing to the possibilities of other histories within the other.

This in itself poses some problems. Since it is impossible to return every archival image, literally, to the place of its inscription, the process becomes selective. To this extent *Imaginary Homecoming* might be seen as engaging in a problematically generalising discourse based on an undifferentiated Sami.¹⁶ The merging of the portraits spatially and the compression of time suggest the collective vision. Nevertheless, through its very title the work removes itself from the possibility of realist statements. The possibility of completeness or closure of narrative is precluded, stressing the way in which the significance of the photographs is symbolic within the homecoming. Importantly, however, Puranen's re-engagement with the images goes beyond merely returning photographs at the metaphorical level. Indeed, following Valkeapää's *Beaivi Áhcázan*, it was the recognition of people and names in relation to the documentation of anthropological photographs that formed the original impetus for the work: 'I was in Paris, among millions and

millions of people, sitting in a dark museum and going through photographs of the Sami. I recognised some names, knew they had to be the grandmothers and great grandfathers of people I knew in Kautokeino. There they were, they had been waiting in those boxes for a hundred years. I thought that I maybe should do something about it' (Ripatti 1993:12). Although Bonaparte's photographs are 'types', they are meticulously documented, with the names and ages of the subjects given. This is paradoxical information, in that it functions both to label the scientific specimen, and, through Escard's sociological interests, to individualise and socialise the subject. It is precisely this kind of documentation, collected to enhance the various scientific meanings of the photographs, that opens the space for re engagement and a 'homecoming'. The documentation moves photographs into a totally differently constituted informational space and enabled them, as active socially salient objects, to move back from the public collective anthropological space of the archive to a private space of consumption as the photographs circulated in the local community and in schools. It is a return with both an individual and a collective level. The new dynamics of viewing translate the 'type' into the individual, restoring autonomous personhood. Berger's comment, so pertinent in the case of Jenness's D'Entrecasteaux photographs, is equally so here: 'If the living take that past upon themselves, if the past becomes an integral part of the process of people making their own history, then all photographs would reacquire a living context, they would continue to exist in time, instead of being arrested moments' (1980:57).

Again, such a position cannot be dismissed as mere romanticism, for it reinserts the possibility of individual experience in the historical record and alternative histories. A lack of written history, especially for the elderly of the communities, in conjunction with the displacements and deprivations of forced removals and volatile political boundaries, gives visual histories particular potential. They are complementary sources to oral histories. As Maresca has argued, images here 'speak', they are interlocutors. From this perspective photographs become, as I suggested in earlier chapters, a form of orality that would not exist independently of the photographs. The photographer here, in terms of memory, reunites material form (in the photographs as objects) with language form, rendering words visible (1996:203–4, 210). Added to this is Puranen's own return, and perhaps that of anthropology, for, as I have suggested, *Imaginary Homecoming* has strong elements of reflexivity and auto-critique, which position the relationship between the photographer and the subject.

Conclusion

Finally, one must consider briefly these photographs as physical objects, for this has been central to Puranen's photographic 'performance' of these images. Further, the materiality of the photographs in the archive impressed itself upon Puranen '... these material objects – faded, ripped and worn-out photographs of people long deceased – become vivid and strongly present' (1999:11). The photographs move from image to object to image, reflecting the materiality of the photograph as object and the people it re-presents, moving in different spaces, all of which contribute to the biography of the *object*, integral to which is re-engagement with the *image*. Although I have been discussing *Imaginary Homecoming* as a series of photographs, the work has also been shown in installation form. Becoming almost theatre or re-enactment of the social biography of the original images themselves, the photographic objects move from their making in the lands of the north in 1884, to the archive, to return to the north of Norway and Sweden as fleeting installations made to create the images, to the local communities, and then to spaces of the global contemporary art world, for instance the 1992 Rotterdam Photography Biennale or the Photographers Gallery in London in 1994, where the plexiglass panels were shown as free-standing installations in front of a photo-mural of birch trees in a landscape. In these installation 'performances' of *Imaginary Homecoming* the photographs themselves are actually enclosed in space, an inversion of photography's usual spatial relationship, the images refiguring in each space. The sheer physical power of the photographs in installation forced a response, which was grounded as much in the power of the object as in the power of the image.

In many ways *Imaginary Homecoming* might be seen as an 'entangled object' (N. Thomas 1991:125), changing as a socially and culturally salient object, in defiance of its maker's intentions and their material stability and appearance, as they perform, projecting new meanings, in different spaces and at different times. Thus the photograph becomes the site of the fluid renegotiation of the past. It is not merely evidence in terms of pure document – what people wore, how they lived. It is ineffably of the past and of the present, as it moves through different spaces. Historical photographs here become explicable through re-engagement and the creation of new visual material. Puranen's work represents an exploration of the space between the historical document as such and the expressive investigation of that document, including the assumptions, classifications and significances in which it is enmeshed.

At a metalevel it constitutes precisely an instance of criticism consciously disrupting the 'naturalisation of the cultural', which, Barthes argued, is repeated and reinforced at almost every level of cultural apparatus, of which 'the archive' is held paradigmatic (Sekula 1987:119; Barthes 1977). In the course of this process, the authority of the photographic text is recentred to suggest new meanings and new relevances.

Notes

1. Jorma Puranen, personal communication.
2. For a summary of the history of anthropologies of Europe, see Schippers (1995).
3. For a summary see Stocking (1968:56–8).
4. Similar systems were published by Quatrefages in his *Instructions générales aux voyageurs* (1875) and later by Topinard, 'Instructions anthropométriques pour les voyageurs' (1885). Whatever their individual differences they stressed the non-verbal in racial description and point to the centrality of images in constructing knowledge within medicine and comparative anatomy. See Dias (1994:89–90, 1997).
5. This portfolio of pairs of photographs of scientific reference, still in the collection of the Royal Anthropological Institute, London, partially duplicates the 250 portraits in the Musée de l'Homme.
6. There is a large and growing literature on ethnographic spectacles of the nineteenth century: see for example Thode-Aurua (1989) and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1991). Lapp (Sami) groups had been exhibited as human spectacles, performing their own culture on a number of occasions in the nineteenth century. For instance there was a group at Bullock's Museum in London in 1822. Accounts would suggest that they were viewed as a form of stoic 'noble savage' surviving against all the odds in a very difficult terrain and climate on the edges of 'civilised' Europe (Altick 1978:273–5). Sami people were amongst the first groups at Hagenbeck's 'anthropological-zoological' exhibition at the Tierpark in Hamburg in 1874, and re-enacted their daily life to large and enthusiastic audiences.
7. An imagery still perpetuated in tourist literature, travel documentaries and so forth.
8. Finland was a Grand Duchy of the Russian Tsar throughout the nineteenth century, becoming an independent nation-state in 1917. I. K. Inha's photographs

of the peasant life of Karelia, for instance, made in the 1890s, were integrally connected to a Finnish sense of national identity. The series included re-enactments, somewhat erroneously posed, of the chanting of oral poetry, the roots of the *Kalevala*, the Finnish national epic. Some of the photographs were published as *Suomi Kuvissa* (1896) and presented the divided borderlands of Karelia as a unified Finnish entity in terms of national consciousness.

9. For up-to-date information on a wide range of Sami issues see <http://www.yle.fi/samiradio/enlink.html>.
10. Press release for *Imaginary Homecoming* Samimuseum, Siida, June – November 2000. I am grateful to Arja Hartikainen for this information. The Sami word *siida* means 'home' or 'village'.
11. There is a massive and growing literature. See, for example, Araeen (1991); Jahnke (1999); Livingston and Beardsley (1991); Marcus (1995); Tsinhnahjinnie (1998:41–56); N. Thomas (1998).
12. 'On the issue of authorship, it may indeed be a good thing if Bengali history is written by Bengalis rather than Americans or Australians, but it is certainly a bad thing if the identity of the writer is reduced to his or her membership of a national, minority, or subaltern group and taken to be more important than what is actually written' (N. Thomas 1997:29).
13. For two excellent discussions of the issues in relation to *Patterns of Connection* see Marsh (1999:113–17); Williamson (1999).
14. There is a massive literature on post-colonial identities, hybridity and arts practice, beyond the scope of this essay: see for instance Bhabha (1994), S. Hall (1996) and Spivak (1990).
15. Puranen, personal communication.
16. Indeed, the nomenclature 'Sami' was resisted by some of its constituent people: for example, Skolt Lapp people, who saw their own specific identity, the name they called themselves, subsumed within a wider politicised cultural description (Ingold 1976: 232–4).