



Panel 10.2. Imagining the Rural: The Politics of Rural Representation

Panel organiser: Hartman, Rebecca, Eastern Oregon University, USA

Cultural production – documentary photography, painting, literature, architecture – has been critical to the ways in which ‘the rural’ has been imagined, defined and experienced. This panel explores the theme of the culturally produced ‘rural’ and the ways in which those representations of the rural are deployed for policy and political purposes, used to construct narratives of aesthetics, designed to ‘document’ notions of authenticity or nationalism, or consumed and displayed by urban and country dwellers alike.

Questions addressed are: How have depictions of the rural communicated, constructed, and contested ideologies of class, national history, and/or the state? How did these depictions intersect with, reflect or affect the lives of rural peoples? What transnational comparisons of the culturally produced rural might deepen our understandings of rural history? In keeping with the goal of this conference to consider the question of defining rural history, and asking how it can be narrated, the panel offers an opportunity to explore from a historical perspective a question that may be at the center of reflecting upon how rural history is narrated – does examining the ways in which a society ascribes meaning to the rural through cultural production provide insights into that society, particularly as it continues to urbanize?

Chair: Ineichen, Martina, Archives of Rural History, Bern, Switzerland

Thursday, 22 August 2013 // 1000 – 1200 // Session 10 – Room A-119

Paper 10.2.1. „Look in her Eyes“: Cultural, Political and Personal Constructions of Dorothea Lange’s „Migrant Mother“

Cannon, Brian, Brigham Young University, USA

This paper analyzes the iconic place one particular photograph holds in the American imagination of the Great Depression, and explores the complex ways in which diverse Americans have constructed particular meanings through the use of “Migrant Mother”.

10.2.2. The Aesthetics of Improvement in Rural Domestic Art and Architecture

Paper

Samson, Daniel, Brock University, Canada

The discourse of improvement both transformed and reproduced key liberal and physiocratic ideas on the place of agriculture in modern political economy. All major Anglo-American writers on improvement picked up on a particular aesthetic. Drawing upon an English patrician ideal, improvement writers crafted images of the proper relations within the rural household, the tasteful ordering of landed property and the role of the family patriarch in governing his realm. Nineteenth century British North American painters created domestic, private art for the rural elite which illustrated, literally, that idealized vision of country life. Not only did these images appropriate that traditional, physiocratic ideal of agriculture as an ancient and honourable activity, but they also contributed to fostering liberal notions of the individual, the patriarchal family and a political economy of improvement that would, with time, more fully embrace the market and social change.

10.2.3. Toward an Indigenous Parkland: Saskatchewan Métis beyond the official story, in photograph and narrative

Paper

Andersen, Chris, University of Alberta, Canada

Canadian research on 20th century Métis (one of three Indigenous peoples recognized in Canada’s constitution) has, when it has dared to explore it at all, tended to depict Métis communities – always rural – as developmentally stunted and morally defunct. Much of the information used to produce narratives about these communities took the form of official reports that empirically documented the apparent truth about these communities. Using photographs and interviews from Métis themselves, this presentation seeks to provide a more complex alternative to such official narratives. Not simply to counter official discussions about developmental or moral “lag” but rather, to open up a whole world of how rural life in the Parkland was negotiated by its inhabitants as Métis community members attempted to fit themselves into the changing political economies of rural twentieth century western Canada.

10.2.4. Gender Implications in Representations of the Rural in 1950s Photo Reportages

Paper

Joris, Elisabeth, Independent scholar, Switzerland

The alpine and pre-alpine world are some of the most common subjects used in Swiss photo reportages. As a genre, they are of a documentary character. Much more, however, they have served as projections by readers from more urban surroundings. This means that photo reportages even from the 1950’s have influenced Switzerland’s self-image and its outside image like hardly any other medium has done. In my report, I specifically focus on the gender implications of this Swiss self-image as conveyed by photo reportages. There is no rigid dichotomy of publicity versus privacy evoked by assigning femininity to the private domain and masculinity to the public domain in pictures of the rural world formed by agriculture and stock breeding. Nevertheless, social conditions marked by gender specific hierarchy are mirrored in the design, the use and the appropriation of space. What is dominant in the photo reportages is, however, the dichotomy of urbanity and rurality characterized by gender stereotypes. The consolidated idea of sharing a common destiny involving mountains and valleys was upheld in war-spared Switzerland even after 1945. Many photo reportages continued to breed a static image of rural life. They showed, in particular, women in traditional costumes representing the tranquil image of a world hardly changing. Just as important are, however, photo reportages inspired by the tradition of social reportage dating back to the 1930’s, documenting poverty and the social divide within the rural population.

Participants

Andersen, Chris

Chris Andersen is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Native Studies at the University of Alberta. He is currently Associate Dean (Research) and the Director of the Rupertsland Centre for Metis Research. His research interests focus on the classification of the Metis in the Canadian courts and census and he has two books coming out. The first is titled “Metis”: Canada’s Misrecognition of an Indigenous People and is being published with the University of British Columbia Press. The second, with Maggie Walter, is titled Indigenous Statistics: an Indigenous Quantitative Methodology, and is being published by Left Coast Press.

Cannon, Brian

Brian Q. Cannon is Professor of History and Director of the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, USA. He specializes in the history of the rural American West. He received his Ph.D. in history from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is past president of the Agricultural History Society and the author of over two dozen articles and two books: Remaking the Agrarian Dream: New Deal Rural Resettlement in the Mountain West and Reopening the Frontier: Homesteading in the Modern West.

Hartman, Rebecca

Rebecca Hartman is an Associate Professor of History at Eastern Oregon University. Her research areas are twentieth-century US women and gender, with a focus on rural

geographies. She is currently working on a project tracing the history of mobile home parks in the United States.

Ineichen, Martina

Martina Ineichen is a scientific collaborator at the Archives of Rural History in Berne. She studied History, Human Geography and Gender Studies at the University of Basel. Together with Roman K. Abt, Katja Hürlimann and Bertrand Forclaz she is currently working on the edition of the traverse-thematic volume Economy in rural areas to be issued in June 2014.

Joris, Elisabeth

Elisabeth Joris received her doctorate from the University of Zurich. She was a co-founder of the group Critical Upper Valais and the opposition Valais publication The Red Anneliese, as well as a co-editor of the feminist magazine Olympe. She has published numerous articles on women’s and gender history in Switzerland. In 1986, with Heidi Witzig, Dr. Joris published a pioneering collection of sources on women’s history in Switzerland.

Samson, Daniel

Daniel Samson teaches in the Department of History at Brock University in Ontario, Canada. He is the author of numerous books and articles on Canadian rural and agrarian history.