

Microhistory

Karl Appuhn

Historical practice trough the isolation of ideas, beliefs and actions by individuals or small groups

Geertz:

Culture = system of symbols that permits individuals to relate and comprehend the external world

Geertzian method: ‘thick description’ First look at individual ‘parts’ to then arrive at a systematic explanation of the correlatoins

Every system of social exchange (symbols) is unique

trying to give historical form to the experiential dimension of structure & how structure constrains individual choice

- Founders of microhistorical method argued that the funamental unit of analysis should be peoples names
- It reauires different techniques and subjects, but also different standards of evidence and proof

Traces by exceptional acts can reveal previously unknown dimen- sions of human experience.

As individuals we relate to the world trough the particular. creating understanding trough fragmentary pieces of data.

William Sewel:

- 1. Models OF reality
- 2. Models FOR reality
- 1. Template for describing/reproducing reality
- 2. The way that existing social & cultural conditions provide the basis for judging new productions

disjuncture between the two drives historical change, as people attempt to make the two coincide in lived experience

A history (tribute)

Reflections.

Both in the classical and microhistorical sense as much data as possible is gathered to eventually sup- port a narrative or theory. An overaching explanation about why things happen the way they do.

A history (tribute) is different in intention. It consists of a very concious selection of data. Yet there is no ‘narrative’ or ‘theory’ being extracted from it, except the observation that it happens again and again.

what is present in this lack of overaching theory is the immense awareness of the ‘experiential dimension of structure’. How often intangible, systemic violence is physically experienced and manifested. This history is thus interwoven with awareness of the systems that shape our ideas of history and everyday reality.

A history (tribute) is historical in nature but has the unique feature that it creeps very casually into the contemporary world. As I write this the last case I read about happened one week ago. The intention then is not to shine a light on one particular period of history. But to articulate this ‘history’ as a method of understanding reality in a much more real way. One that more truthfully reflects the absurd, poetic and painful nature of reality, politics and human experi- ence.

The same will probably go for my ressearch. using and sharing peoples names is the main way to pay respect to the individuals that undertook this action.

From the point of view of academic doctrine the thing I am trying to do is hopelessly broad and therefor not a valid way of practicing history. Academic does not equal serious or interesting however. That means I will have to rely on different, more subjective stand- ards of succes and evidence

Placing this act at the center of history is in a sense making it ‘the quintessential act’ of human existance. When being confronted with this perspective one is forced to imagine what would drive a person to undertake this. And trough this, to understand why the person did it. In the context of the contemporary west demanding this sense of understanding for the extremity of it is very important for me.

Understanding of the world trough the specific/par- ticular. Putting yourself on fire is probably one of the most ‘particular’ things you can doe. Everybody recognizes instantly how absolute it is