

Summaries

The seers of Medjugorje; professionalization and management problems in a Yugoslav pilgrimage centre

Mart Bax

Seers play an important role in the founding of pilgrimage centres and the related devotional movements in the Christian world. Yet, very little is known about their role and the course of their lives *after* that formative stage. The Yugoslav case of Medjugorje provides a unique opportunity for a closer examination, for all its seers are still alive and half of them in operation; they can thus be studied directly and in detail. It appears that the formerly young children have turned into quasi-professional brokers in religious goods and services. Therewith they have become a threat to the official religious leaders of the movement, the parish priests of Medjugorje. The article describes the process of professionalization, the consequent management problems for the priests, and the ways in which the latter try to cope with these problems. Although primarily intended as a detailed description of one single case, the article also offers some tentative conclusions for further research on the subject.

'Sunny Boy': drivers, cars and Highlife in Ghana

Sjaak van der Geest

Drivers in Ghana are 'cultural heroes'. They have escaped from the fetters of the community and shuttle between village and town. But their position is fragile. They are still depending - financially and socially - on their family. Their enterprise may collapse due to bad luck or evil work by jealous others. Drivers and car owners express their bravura and their worries in texts written on their vehicles. This article focuses on these inscriptions and tries to understand them in their social and cultural context. Particular attention is given to a number of inscriptions mentioned in a popular Highlife song.

Between light bulb and transistor: girls in the electrotechnical industry 1940-1960

Annemieke van Drenth & Aty Pilon

Since World War II an increasing number of girls has been employed in the electrotechnical industry in the Netherlands. This article reports on oral history research among these girls. It focusses on their shopfloor-culture, which is analysed as a specific way of dealing with the daily regime of the workplace.

Contacts with colleagues, laughing, talking and supporting each other in difficult situations are important aspects of this culture. This is related to processes of socialisation and identification, specifically regarding sexuality. Taking this culture seriously, the authors show its significance for the girls in developing a specific female identity.

On the methodologies of description and identification in historical-sociological research in the tradition of Elias

Gerhard Nijhof

Two theoretical approaches to the writing of history are discussed: a descriptive approach in which historical events are described in their local meaning at the time; and an interpretative approach in which the historian adds new meanings to the local meanings of historical events. Both approaches imply a different methodology and a different conception of science. In this article studies of sociologists working in the tradition of Elias are analysed. In all of them one can observe a combination of description of local meanings and present-day interpretations. These interpretations are criticized for their re-formulation of historical events as indications of an unequivocal historical process of civilisation. In such a re-formulation a conception of history as a coherent development is presupposed.

As a solution to this problem a methodology is suggested which conceives historical documents as local readings of historical events without constructing coherence by re-interpretation.

Society as a text. A response to Gerhard Nijhof

Nico Wilterdink

Gerhard Nijhof's article in this issue of *AST* is criticized. Nijhof's argument rests on three main assumptions: (1) description, which is to be distinguished sharply from interpretation, is the goal of science; (2) pure description in history and social science is possible if and only if the field of research is confined to 'local meanings' (i.e. verbal statements by the investigated subjects); and (3) description of local meanings cannot be combined with interpretation in other terms. It is argued that these three assumptions are patently false. Criticism is extended to sociological symbolism or constructionism in general, and a plea is made for a sociology which takes the interconnections between symbolic meanings, material conditions and power-dependence relations as its focus of attention.