

Annotation

The doctoral thesis hereby submitted is an ethnographic reconstruction of the world perpetuated in Czechoslovakia in the period of the so-called really-existing socialism by gamblers. Even though that world is now a thing of the past, the character of the referential reality itself has called for an ethnographic, and not an historical, perspective: gamblers leave no tangible traces. By the same token and at the same time, there is an all-too-real peril that one of very specific and robust worlds will disappear in the past for good without a record or description that might have contributed to our understanding of the social conflict of the given era. The essay betrays doubts about the institution of “marginality”, taking for granted that disparate historical objects are equivalent. It introduces the gamblers’ world as one arising from specific organizational principles and governed by specific logic; the world of the weak who, facing the overpowering might of the regime, tried to become stronger and to defend their autonomy more fruitfully than they might have done elsewhere. One of the key features of the essay is its methodology: given the progress of ethnography from erstwhile arm-chair research to participant observation to the current studies using observing participation, this thesis goes even further. Having spent 22 years in his field, the author was an actor first, and became an ethnographer only much later. So the author’s/actor’s involvement was absolute, and only subsequently did he face the task of stepping out of the “sound and fury” of practice, the task of detachment. This methodological experiment calls for an adequate way of representation anchored in a declared and consistently applied double mode of narration: on the one side, the “story from within”, on the other the “story from without” offer a conceptual and theoretical approach for similar narrations. This way the presented experiment touches the very edges of the eternal gap between various social worlds and the discourses about them, between two logical forms the one of which organizes actors’ practices and the other the grasp thereof.