

Introduction

Nation and Language at the Frontier of National Culture

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Europe has many roots and many identities. Never has this fact been made more evident than in the ongoing attempt to institutionalise the European cultural heritage in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Europe is, among other things, a set of values issuing from the Gracco-Latin synthesis, a constellation of ideas about the rights and obligations of human beings emerging from the Renaissance, as well as a certain number of politico-moral principles that served as the motor for the American and French Revolutions. For better or worse, a deep spiritual and cultural legacy is the thread of European history. The backbone of that legacy is national language. The crisis of the European nation-state, brought about by economic and cultural globalisation, racing technological change and the hybridisation of the European public sphere through transnational migration and heightened world consciousness, has raised new questions about the viability of national categories in the late-modern age.

Globalisation is a composite process which functions on multiple levels. Generally speaking, it comprises the expansion of telecommunications, mass tourism and mass culture, technology, arms trade, ecological overload, etc. A narrower definition, however, brings to light the limits of the nation-state as a category for the identity or self-understanding of cultural collectivities: national values, national rights, and national control. Globalisation implies the displacement of the cultural subject from a national subject based on national cultural references,

national values, national political categories and, not least, a national concentration of cultural power, all of which determine the organisation of a nation's self-understanding (Beck 1999; Habermas 1998).

The legitimacy and rights of national cultural institutions are by and large provided and controlled by the principle of the right to self-determination, ensconced in the 1789 *Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen* and to some degree codified in the principles of international law. These principles determine, both formally and informally, the legitimacy and viability of cultural forms and cultural organisations. It is common knowledge that the national foundation for this constellation of forms, values and organisations has tended toward obsolescence, to the jubilation of some and the discontent of others.

The modern nation-state did not emerge as an autonomous entity. It was born in a constellation, the expression of a certain innovation in the relations between the individual, a collectivity and the understanding of the rights and privileges connected with that constellation. In contrast to its feudal predecessor, the moral right to existence possessed by the nation-state does not derive from the self-referential nature of its legitimacy. The moral right to existence of the nation-state is no longer derived from a link to the sovereign or to religious authorities. Rather, its legitimacy is self-referential by nature, self-present, self-manufactured by the very cultural identity of a people.¹

These claims refer to a historical framework. The dawn of European modernity in the 18th century is the birth of the constellation uniting *nation state – national identity – national culture*. If there is indeed a European cultural heritage, it is this inter-linking of culture, state, and identity. This kernel is “the European” in its purest form.

This book asks to what extent *language* or more precisely, *written culture*, is a variable in this equation. Few would doubt that it plays a significant role. The age of globalisation and the formation of “post-national” collectivities force us to reconsider the roots of national language in the constellation *nation state – national identity – national culture*. To what extent is language a necessary brick in the edifice of national culture, and thereby in the modern construction in general? How does the modern nation understand itself through its written culture and how is that written culture shaped and determined by the legitimizing force of the nation-state, henceforth in times of peril?

1. Haugen 1972

The contributions to this volume sketch answers to these questions by revisiting a particularly interesting *case* of nation-building: the Norwegian. The case of Norwegian nation-building is particularly interesting since it contains a double kernel. On the one hand, as is the case with all processes of national self-affirmation, the Norwegian nation-building process is *oppositional*: it opposes the legitimate uniqueness of the Norwegian cultural or ethnic collectivity against the hegemony of another, in this case the Danish. However, the Norwegian case contains also a *second* oppositional moment. New Norwegian arises as an opposition to the opposition, an alternative understanding of the meaning of the Norwegian ethnocultural collectivity. It is an opposition which not only affirms itself through political action, but co-determines the hegemonic cultural understanding and the language form favoured by it.

This volume aims to contribute to a discussion of the origins of the constellation whose twilight we may very well be witnessing. It is divided into two sections. The first section presents individual contributions to an explication of the relation between modernity, nation, written culture. Each chapter is followed by a critical response intended both to dialogue with the chapter at hand, as well as to point to alternative critical approaches. The second section presents results of the research involved in creating a Master's degree programme (*hovedfag*) in *New Norwegian Written Culture*.

Part I begins with a broad social anthropological *tableau* painted by Jack Goody. This opening chapter places the constellation *modernity – nation – written culture* in a broad (indeed global) and critical context. Goody's comprehensive treatment of the Asian and African cultures presents both enforcement and a sharp critique of the generality of European written culture and the universality of the constellation at the heart of these studies. In the following chapter, Narve Fulsås describes the historical background – both European and national – for the emergence of New Norwegian written culture. He concludes by analyzing the assumption that the New Norwegian movement, though counter-cultural in its essence, was *not* forcibly counter-modern. Fulsås thus produces a critique of the common theoretical presupposition equating cultural avant-gardism with modernity in general. In the following chapter, Kjell Lars Berge explores the theoretical presuppositions of New Norwegian as a means of *text production* by opening it to semiotic analysis. Berge's analysis permits a typology of New Norwegian texts, thus clarifying the relation between the New Norwegian “field” of meaning and the cultural field in general. The New Norwegian text,

Berge demonstrates, is not simply one text among others. It is rather a text-type, a genre, shaped and determined by the social and cultural conditions in which it arises.

The following chapter by Idar Stegane opens Part II, 'Empirical considerations'. Stegane analyses the emergence of New Norwegian against the backdrop of a New Norwegian public sphere. Stegane's earlier work on the concept of public sphere has opened numerous lines of research in the field of New Norwegian and revolutionised its study. His chapter here brings many of his earlier concepts to bear on the question of the modernity of written culture in the Norwegian context. The final chapter of the first section, by Helge Sandøy, takes up the notion of the New Norwegian written culture from a linguistic perspective by analysing the general opposition between written and spoken language. As is well known, this opposition is central to the legitimacy of New Norwegian, its central moral anchoring being that it in many contexts better reflects spoken Norwegian than the alternative. Sandøy shows, among other things, the extent to which the ideal correspondence between written and spoken language is "clothed" and in a sense obfuscated by culture.

Part III presents the general introduction to a report, authored by Odd Monsson and others, intended to form the basis of a curriculum in *New Norwegian Written Culture* at Volda University College, Norway. Unlike the research-oriented contributions of Section I, the report presented here, "New Norwegian as Field of Study", has a general and pedagogical function. It reflects the work of a group charged with the task of designing a subject of study which dovetails both with other subject studies and degree programmes, opens for the possibility of higher, doctoral studies, and also creates a place for new and original understanding of written culture in general, and New Norwegian written culture in particular. The report is followed by two critical responses, providing the project with both philosophical and social context.