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## Book Review

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***Faces of the North – The Ethnographic Photography of John Honigmann.* Bryan Cummins. Toronto: Natural Heritage Press. 2004. Pp.192. ISBN: 1-896219-79-9.**

In *Faces of the North – the ethnographic photography of John Honigmann*, Bryan Cummins deftly weaves the strands of biography, visual anthropology, and ethnography to chronicle and pay tribute to the work of anthropologist John Honigmann. Cummins has created a thoughtfully crafted and meticulously researched book that will appeal to both the academic and lay reader.

John Honigmann, a professor with the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, was the first anthropologist to conduct fieldwork among the northern Algonquians, northern Dene and the Inuit from the early 1940's to the late 1960's. Cummins blends deep sensitivity and academic rigor to convey his respect for Honigmann's significant contributions to the discipline. Of lesser renown, but of no less significance for the anthropologist, are the hundreds of photographs that Honigmann captured during his three and a half decade career. It is these - or, at least, a small portion of these archival images – that the author wishes to share with his audience. Cummins' discerning choice of visuals reveals the revelatory, haunting and elusive nature of Honigmann's photographs. Layers of stunning historical images speak to Inuit and First Nation cultural identities, their response to social change and to the dynamic nature of cultural continuity that is expressed in the persistence of traditional values and practices. Honigmann's ethnographic images reflect the span of his diverse research interests. Honigmann's ethnographic career, as summarized by Cummins, incorporated well over a dozen trips into the field on three continents that included the Canadian north and his work with the Slave, Kaska, Cree and Inuit, as well as trips to Austria and Pakistan. Cummins defines Honigmann's approach "as general ethnography with a particular interest in aspects of mental culture." Honigmann's articles, reviews and monographs examine the "fundamentals of most

traditional ethnographies” but, as Cummins details, extend well beyond these boundaries “to examine specific aspects of the societies in question” such as the exploration of acculturation, “ethos,” and “ethnographic reconstruction.”

Honigmann’s extraordinary photographs provided glimpses into the everyday life and activities of First Nations and Inuit cultures in the Canadian north through character studies, portraits of families and child rearing, and themes of inter-ethnic relations, modernization and tradition. As Cummins observes, Honigmann’s work reflects a “richness of spirit” that is especially apparent in his Kaska photographs. His remarkable images convey cultural change and the persistence and continuity of traditional values and practices in the wake of growing, external, political, economic and cultural influences. For these reasons alone, *Faces of the North* is a valuable contribution to the literature.

Cummins breaks down the book into six chapters and three parts. Chapter One defines and explains “the north”, which he sees in ethnographic terms, i.e., the Subarctic (eastern and western) and the Arctic. Chapters Two and Three, respectively, examine the history of anthropology, including the discipline in Canada, and the history and development of ethnographic film and photography. These chapters are comprehensive and well written and will be of interest to both students and anthropologists who wish to review the history of the discipline. Chapter Four and Five consider Honigmann’s use of ethnographic photography and his development as a professional anthropologist, including his shifting research interests and orientations. The final chapter, which may have better served as an appendix, is an ethnographic overview of each Subarctic and Arctic nation.

The strengths of Cummins’ book are numerous; Honigmann has for too long been ignored, which makes this biography both welcome and long overdue. Cummins’ publication is timely with respect to the growing interest in the history of anthropology and a continuing interest in ethnographic film and photography. The pictures, as noted, are breathtaking. Cummins does an admirable job of summarizing the nations of the north and providing an overview of our discipline’s history, especially in Canada.

Cummins has a half dozen anthropology books to his credit and it is evident that with his instinct for accuracy, he would not have

made some of the errors that appear in *Faces of the North*. His publications *First Nations*, *First Dogs* or *Only God Can Own the Land* evidence his precise and detailed nature. It is these traits – especially the precise use of terms that are lacking in *Faces of the North*. As a minor criticism, a map, for example, is captioned as a “cultural area” instead of a “culture area,” while the latter term—the correct term—is used in the text. Elsewhere, a caption refers to a “Dene elder of the Kaska nation” a somewhat redundant statement because it is understood that if the individual is Kaska, he is also Dene. We can only assume that these flaws must be editorial in nature.

In *Faces of the North*, Cummins devotes Chapter Three to the subjects of photography, anthropology, representations of the cultural “Other” and the nature of Honigmann’s photographs. Cummins reminds us that the ethnographic photograph serves as a complex site of negotiation between subject, photographer and audience. Photographs are open to multiple interpretations and this multiplicity is thoroughly dealt with by Cummins throughout the chapter. Cummins analyzes and examines the manner in which Honigmann’s ethnographic imagery changed over time to “reflect his research interests and academic leanings.” His richly detailed Kaska portraiture, for example, speaks to his interest in the anthropological school of thought of “culture and personality” while his photographic images of the Cree of Attawapiskat clearly articulate his anthropological concerns for the integrity of traditional Cree culture. Honigmann’s photographs are ethnographic in all respects. His visual representations transcend exoticization and the “noble savage” stereotype. Honigmann’s work speaks to his anthropological concern with acculturation, subsistence practices, the visual representation of cultural authenticity and the role of the past and its relationship to the present. His unromantisized ethnographic photographs demonstrate the persistence of movement and change rather than cultural stasis.

*Faces of the North* is a book that is to be respected for its content and concept. Cummins’ rich narrative and visually energetic work illuminates Honigmann’s stream of visual memories and research for all to see. The documented legacy of Honigmann’s work enriches us and the brilliance of his photographic imagery remains as a testament to the cultural landscapes to which he was witness.

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**References**

Cummins, Bryan

1999 God Can Own the Land: The Attawapiskat Cree, the Land and the State in the 20th Century. Highway Bookshop: Cobalt, Ontario.

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