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Pascal Dibie FRANCE

Ethnology of the Door

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The author

Pascal Dibie is a professor of ethnology at the University of Paris Diderot-Paris 7, where he is co-director of the division of sciences of the city. He is the author of an ethnology of a village in Burgundy conducted in two parts at a thirty year interval that has become a classic in the discipline: *Le Village retrouvé*, ethnologie de l'intérieur (Grasset, 1979) and *Le village métamorphosé, révolution dans la France profonde* (Plon, 2006). He is also the author of *Ethnologie de la chambre à coucher*, which has been translated into fifteen languages and has sold 30,000 copies (Grasset, 1987; Métaillé, 2000), *La Tribu sacrée*, ethnologie des prêtres (Grasset, 1993; Métaillé, 2004), and *La Passion du regard, essai contre les sciences froides* (Métaillé, 1998).

Bibliography

- Ethnologie de la porte, Ethnology of the Door* (Métaillé, 2012)
Le village retrouvé - Essai d'ethnologie de l'intérieur, The Rediscovered Village - Essay on the Ethnology of the Interior (Éditions de l'aube, 2008)
Le village métamorphosé - Révolution dans la France profonde, The Radically Changed Village - Revolution in the Heart of France (Plon, 2006)
La Tribu sacrée, The Sacred Tribe (Métaillé, 2004)
Ethnologie de la chambre à coucher, Ethnology of the Bedroom (Métaillé, 2000)
La Passion du regard, A Passion for Observation (Métaillé, 1998)

Zoom

Ethnologie de la porte, Ethnology of the Door (Métaillé, 2012)



What is a door?

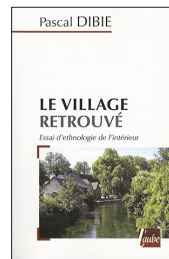
Its very definition implies the existence of an "outside," of what is "beyond the door." Here we are: doors are first seen from the inside of the house by one who is inside. From this starting point, everything is left to the imagination: inside, outside, open, closed, well-being, danger. This is why we humans have set ourselves up to be great paranoiacs as well as gods and technicians! There is no

place we have wanted to sleep that we have not barricaded, not a field we have not fenced, a temple we have not charged, nor a family or city we haven't protected. Our doors are everywhere, be they narrow exits or monumental gates.

From the Magdalenians of Etiolles to the gate of Ishtar in Babylon, what madness took hold of us? From Greek porticos and triumphal Roman arches to Jesus preaching at the gates and the Hell that invents them, our door-related imagination was built little by little. We armed castles with drawbridges and symbols, shut women in then made ceremonious entrances, invented labels for men as well as for books. We raised barriers everywhere, eventually inventing borders, Cities spread, society became disciplined, numbered, invented rules that it displayed at the gates: prestige, standards, death, one can read everything at the gates of our lives. Folklore appropriated thresholds, nourishing our beliefs and our strange rites of passage. Others like us from an elsewhere close by or far away did the same: jnouns and locks keep watch in Africa, while in China people still calculate the direction of openings, the balance of the entire universe depending on each door. In the Amazon, doors are within us, whereas in Oceania, they are a long path of partnership.

Doors are for each of us a daily source of joy and worry simply because, of all our daily objects, they represent an inexhaustible world of thoughts.

Le village retrouvé - Essai d'ethnologie de l'intérieur, *The Rediscovered Village – Essay on the Ethnology of the Interior* (Éditions de l'aube, 2008)



urban sprawl.

Going back on the sacrosanct ethnological principle of “distance,” Pascal Dibie makes his own village a site for study. Through his experience of rural life and his travels in the Americas, he offers us an empirical, documented analysis of the 1980s rural environment in the face of

Le village métamorphosé - Révolution dans la France profonde, *The Radically Changed Village – Revolution in the Heart of France* (Plon, 2006)



“We got on the high-speed train of modernity without really noticing, and when we look out the window, the landscape goes by so fast we can’t read it or even remember what we’ve see. I have the impression we’ve become specialists of the forgotten.”

Twenty-seven years after *Le Village Retrouvé* (1979) was first published, ethnologist Pascal Dibie has published *Le village métamorphosé*—a new set of universally valid observations made from Chichery, in Burgundy, where he has lived since childhood. He takes us on a mind-blowing trip deep into the heart of our emerging rurbanity, observing society as it goes through one of the greatest mutations in its thousand-year history. Focusing on our most humble activities and the banality that records our days on the long calendar of history, the author describes a quotidian in which the world of signs and landscape architects is king; cars, cybernetics and consumption are the mistresses of our minds, our time and our economy; religion has become so abstract that funeral rites have been changed and we are allowed to exclude our dead; agriculture has become outrageously “scientific” and our landscapes are being catalogued as elements of our heritage, etc. An ancient society is dying as individuals express their egotism and the peasant or farmer (paysan), a person in a rural locality (pays), has become a highly trained, de-cultured technician who has been able to find a niche in the mist of the globalization that is overtaking and devouring him. This ethnology, disguised as a story in which naked thoughts cross paths with field notes, portraits of masters, and deep reflection, places *Le village métamorphosé* among the greatest works of Human Earth.

La Tribu sacrée, *The Sacred Tribe* (Métailié, 2004)



Through an ethnology of proximity, a sort of voyage within the “tribe of the soul raisers,” that is, diocesan priests, Pascal Dibie clears up many mysteries.

The exemplary day of a rural parish priest, the ingrained and authorized gestures the priest makes from the moment he gets up to the moment he goes to bed, the question of donations at the root of Christianity, the “invention” of mass, liturgical vestments, communion wafers, the monstrance or tabernacle, and the techniques for discerning the vocation or the announced disappearance of parish priests: from his resolutely rationalist perspective, the ethnologist observes and describes in minute, attentive detail, the Christian culture that constituted us and continues to surround us everywhere in France.

Ethnologie de la chambre à coucher, *Ethnology of the Bedroom* (Métailié, 2000)



The great adventure of human rest is presented here, not without humor, as an odyssey on a ship christened “mattress.” The author depicts Roman emperors theorizing in bed, rehabilitates the rois fainéants (the do-nothing or lazy kings), surprises the

Church in the middle of the bed and relates the invention of the couple’s bedroom. He takes us into Amazonian room-villages and children’s dormitories in India, hops from beds of romance to beds of suffering, springs from there onto a Chinese emperor’s throne after having, in the meantime, taken a little nap on an ice floe, chased away drafts, braved parasites, and visited our cellars and attacks to end up in Japan in a fold-away room. Pascal Dibie tells us everything we ever wanted to know about bedrooms and holds up a mirror so we can finally do the impossible: watch ourselves sleep.

La Passion du regard, A Passion for Observation (Métailié, 1998)



A fascinating book that reminds us that practicing ethnology means accepting not only one's own gaze, but that of others, and that this discipline does not tolerate half-heartedness, for the science changes as it fuses with its subject(s). It describes an ethnology that

is being rebuilt on new foundations so solid they escape the retro fashions and vague currents of the day.

