

Out of the Tower
Essays on Culture and Everyday Life

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Essays on Culture and Everyday Life

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Preface

Special anniversaries and significant birthdays are often occasions for taking stock. And so it is with the *Tübinger Vereinigung für Volkskunde* [Tübingen Folklore Studies Society]. The TVV, as it is known to its members, was founded in 1963, making this year the fiftieth of its existence. The executive board of this non-profit publisher decided that this should be a moment to step back and have a look, not at the past, but at the present, and to make the TVV more widely known internationally. Thus the idea for this volume was born: a collection of recent essays published by scholars currently working at the TVV's academic home, the *Ludwig-Uhland-Institut für Empirische Kulturwissenschaft* at the University of Tübingen. It is the TVV's first English-language volume.

The TVV was established, according to its by-laws, to provide a forum for research being conducted at the institute. It began with a series called *Volksleben* in 1963, whose evolution closely reflects that of the field of *Volkskunde* [folklore studies] as a whole, particularly as it was re-defined in Tübingen and re-named *Empirische Kulturwissenschaft*. Not long after the TVV and its first monograph series was founded, debates about the discipline's focus and research paradigm began to heat up. They came to a head at a conference in Falkenstein in 1970, in which scholars from folklore studies departments all over the German-speaking countries convened to discuss whether a paradigm shift should result in a change to the name of the discipline. If the subject of research was not to be *das Volk*—a term whose nationalist overtones had become unbearable to the postwar generation, particularly in light of the extent to which the discipline had become a handmaid to National Socialist ideology during the 1930s—why should the field be referred to as *Volkskunde*? At the same time, the TVV published a landmark edited volume titled *Abschied vom Volksleben*, which meant a “farewell to folklife,” to the life of the *Volk* as a central concept of the discipline and at the same time to *Volksleben* as the name of

the series. From 1970 onward, the series has had the straightforward title *Untersuchungen des Ludwig-Uhland-Instituts der Universität Tübingen* [Studies from the Ludwig Uhland Institute of the University of Tübingen], clearly reflecting the TVV's embeddedness in an academic department, the first in the German-speaking countries to change its name—to *Empirische Kulturwissenschaft*—under the directorship of Hermann Bausinger. In the course of the early 1970s most other *Volkskunde* departments changed their names as well—to “European Ethnology” or “*Kulturanthropologie*,” suggesting that *Volkskunde* should be understood as part of the cultural and social anthropological disciplines, an anthropology of Europe (those departments which generally focus on regions outside Europe are usually called either *Ethnologie* or *Völkerkunde*). The change to the name of the Tübingen department signaled a stronger orientation toward sociology, and it has continued to strive to maintain a balance between the ‘social’ and the ‘cultural’ in its analytic framework.

The reasons behind the designation *Empirische Kulturwissenschaft* (EKW) are perhaps best explained as resulting from the context of the re-naming debates around 1970. As Gottfried Korff points out (1996), part of the strategy of the denationalization of *Volkskunde* in Tübingen was to distance the field from German philology, which it did by positioning itself in closer proximity to sociology, which, not least due to the importance of the Frankfurt School, was considered by many to be among the most important fields in humanities at the time. This proximity was signaled by the modifier ‘empirical’. *Volkskunde* had gained the reputation of lacking methodical rigor, and this was seen as part of what made it susceptible to manipulation by Nazi ideologues. Thus, the study of popular culture and the everyday was to be raised to the level of a social science. No longer merely *Kunde* [study], the field was to be considered a bona fide *Wissenschaft* [science]. Under Bausinger, the Ludwig Uhland Institute was relocated to the Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences, where it has remained to this day, another effect of his efforts to transform folklore studies into a social science based on a critical theory of society.

This shift did not reflect or lead to a marginalization of folklore or oral traditions as a subject, however. Research on folk narratives, popular religion, and popular media remained alive for many years to come, but *folklore* was perhaps more firmly subsumed under what is often more broadly thought of as *folklife*, which includes material culture, norms and conventions, customs and rituals, in a word: the everyday. The field's object of study was not social interaction per se, but its character as a product of culture, “that complex whole” in E. B. Tylor's famous definition. In *Volkskunde*, his introductory volume of 1971, Bausinger calls culture “the other side of society,” and stresses that each is inseparable from the other (cf. Bausinger 1999, p. 270), so that studying culture can be a social science. In his afterword to the new edition of 1999, he notes that

in the intervening years, *Empirische Kulturwissenschaft* had moved closer to cultural anthropology. The sociological methods and questions had not proved as fruitful as had been hoped, and the field turned more strongly toward methods of fieldwork and participant observation in the course of the 1980s, following Clifford Geertz's suggestion that the task of cultural analysis was to write "thick descriptions" (Bausinger 1999, p. 304). The adoption of *Kultur* into the name of the discipline has also created new responsibilities: an ongoing and intensive reflection on how 'culture' is to be defined, an engagement with the 'writing culture' debates, and a sustained consideration of how 'culture' relates to 'society'. Furthermore, the folklore-studies disciplines were pioneers of the cultural turn in historical writing in Germany. EKW has also always been a discipline that encompasses cultural history and historical anthropology, leading to many collaborations with historians in research projects and conferences.

As if it were not difficult enough that the institutional distinction between *Volkskunde* (with European societies as its subject) and *Völkerkunde* (primarily focused on non-Western societies) cannot be exactly mapped onto the distinction between 'folkloristics' and 'social anthropology' in the English language, the complexity of the debates surrounding the renaming of *Volkskunde* departments present a real challenge to translators into English. EKW is often directly translated as 'Empirical Cultural Science'. Since the word 'science' in English is less broad than *Wissenschaft*, which is used both for the humanities (*Geisteswissenschaften*) and the natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*), this translation is unsatisfactory. Though EKW is oriented toward the social sciences, the currently dominant qualitative, hermeneutic, and microhistorical methodology makes the term 'science' an uncomfortable fit. Perhaps this is why another widely used translation has been Empirical Cultural Study or Studies. This choice, however, opens another can of worms: the proximity to Cultural Studies in the tradition of the Birmingham school. To be sure, there is overlap between the research interests in these fields. However, to translate EKW as Cultural Studies (with its emphasis on literature, film, and other media) would not do justice to EKW's breadth, its theoretical commitments, its ethnographic and historical methods, and not least, its own disciplinary genealogy.

In the present volume, therefore, we have decided to translate EKW as 'historical and cultural anthropology'. The use of the adjective '*kulturwissenschaftlich*', which is sometimes used in combination with '*volkskundlich*', but has largely come to replace it, is usually translated as 'anthropological'. Accordingly, the scholars themselves (*Kulturwissenschaftler*) are referred to as 'historical and cultural anthropologists'. On occasion, the term 'cultural studies' will be used, its lowercase form indicating its distinction from the Cultural Studies programs in English-speaking countries. The 'old' *Volkskunde* is translated as 'folklore studies', *Volkskundler* as 'folklorist'. *Volkskunde* has,

in spite of all the changes, remained the umbrella term for the departments whether or not they have changed their names. The professional society is still called the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Volkskunde* (DGV), and it is in this sense that the TVV has retained its final ‘V’ as well. In keeping with this practice, where the term *Volkskunde* is used as a collective term for the discipline at large, it may also be translated as ‘folklore studies’. We do this knowing full well that the English term ‘folklore’ is itself hotly debated (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998), as current discussions in the international society SIEF (*Société Internationale d’Ethnologie et Folklore*) about whether to change its name reflect. There is certainly no perfect solution, but only because this vibrant and ever-evolving field will not be boxed into traditional disciplinaries that translate across all the various historical genealogies. It is an outstanding characteristic of German *Volkskunde* that it continually reflects on its own participation in the constitution of a thing called *ethnos*, *Volk*, or folk—or for that matter: popular culture and the everyday. The investigation of their instability as concepts affects by necessity attempts to label the institution.

The ‘Tübingen school’ is well known for its radical stance in Falkenstein and its pioneering of the new *Volkskunde*, particularly in the revolutionary contributions of Hermann Bausinger, the institute’s director and department chair for over three decades (1960-1992). ‘Tübingen’ has stood for a thoroughgoing examination of the entanglements of *Volkskunde* with nationalist and racist ideologies, including its exploitation of and by National Socialism, always seeking to understand the ways in which its knowledge production has been linked with politics and power structures and to increase the field’s scholarly reflexivity. In the infelicitous year of its founding (1933), the *Institut für Volkskunde* at the University of Tübingen was given rooms in the sixteenth-century castle, *Schloss Hohentübingen*. Office and library space was provided in the *Haspelturm*, the ‘reel-tower’ in the southwest corner of the fortress, named presumably for a reel attached to the outer wall to hoist supplies up into the storage areas. The interior decoration installed with the institute’s founding—elaborate wooden door frames and stairwells with carvings and paintings intended to evoke the spirit of *Volkskultur*, complete with dedications and mottos in antiquated rune-like lettering, stylized swastikas, trees, masks, and the floral designs of rural folk art—has been left in place, a tangible reminder to scholars in Tübingen of the problematic history of their discipline. Some have viewed the daily confrontation with this provocative heritage as an important reason for Tübingen’s relatively early and radical reckoning with its Nazi past (cf. Korff 1996, p. 16). Even today, it can be tolerated only with a strong sense of irony and distance. Perhaps it is also a reason that scholars in the *Haspelturm* have felt impelled to move out beyond their own rich collections and well-stocked library and gather data in field research, engaging with the everyday lives of ordinary people. The essays

collected here reflect that commitment not to get too comfortable in the (ivory) tower or in the reputation of a particular 'school'. Mindful of the institute's past, this collection wishes to present an overview of the kind of work coming out of the *Haspelturm* at the present, with an eye to the future.

The history of the discipline and reflection on its central concepts has remained a focus of research in Tübingen, as the first set of essays in this volume shows. The second set highlights the continuation of a research interest in how locality is produced in southwestern Germany. The growth of migration studies coming out of the *Haspelturm* at the doctoral level and beyond, presented here in the third section, reflects the importance it has had in the curriculum at the institute in the last decade. That *Empirische Kulturwissenschaft* is not only a cultural anthropology of the present day, but also encompasses studies in historical anthropology, microhistory, and *Alltagsgeschichte* is reflected in the fourth set of essays. The museum, an important institutional base for historical and cultural anthropologists, as well as the objects which are their *raison d'être*, represent a fifth area of research flourishing at the institute, as the essays in the final section demonstrate.

Finally, we wish to express our heartfelt thanks to Michael Robertson, DPhil, for his superb translation of all the contributions to this volume.

THE EDITORS

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Folklore, Culture, Everyday Life
Perspectives on the History of the Discipline

BERND JÜRGEN WARNEKEN

The Primitivist Legacy of Folklore Studies

In folklore studies, the need to link the founding of the discipline with mentalities and developments in specific countries seems obvious—more so than in almost any other field of research. Although not mistaken, this assumption is nevertheless still too hasty. The establishment of folklore studies as a research field through the foundation of numerous societies and journals at the end of the nineteenth century was a Europe-wide phenomenon. Between 1878 and 1888, associations for folklore studies were formed in Britain, Spain, Italy, France, and the Netherlands. The first international conference of folklorists was held in Paris in 1889. National societies for folklore studies were started in Germany, Austria–Hungary, and Switzerland in 1890–1896. And although specific national traditions of thought strongly influenced the programs of each of these associations, they were nevertheless partners in a common project: the collecting and saving of cultural phenomena that appeared to be threatened by contemporary economic and social developments. In addition, many of the founders of folklore studies held an evolutionary view of culture, in which European folk cultures were regarded as having a similar heuristic value to that of the anthropology of non-European cultures at the time: they were declared to be archeological sources. George Laurence Gomme, one of the founders of folklore research in Britain, wrote in 1892: “The essential characteristic of folklore is that it consists of beliefs, customs, and traditions which are far behind civilisation in their intrinsic value to man, though they exist under the cover of a civilised nationality ... its constituent elements are survivals of a condition of

human thought more backward, and therefore more ancient, than that in which they are discovered.”¹

How far this “backward” extended was defined in quite different and often quite vague ways. Wherever the developmental scheme familiarized by Edward B. Tylor and Lewis H. Morgan (savagery—barbarism—civilization) was used as a basis, however, as was largely the standard practice, it was at any rate regarded as an accepted fact that many basic traits of traditional folk culture had formed at the level of “savage societies.”

The flaws and errors involved in this approach have long since become clear. To the extent that it seeks archetypes as primal forms, it inevitably fails—for the simple reason that it is not possible to identify any ultimate starting-point. When the goal is set more modestly, to search for “ancient” cultural patterns that have outlasted the ages, it becomes a form of methodological reductionism that insists doggedly on the *longue durée* of individual elements of complex cultural structures while neglecting the question of their changing composition, semantics, and function. The unilinearism of primitivist theory is just as problematic as the flawed abstraction of primitivist methodology—cultural differences are placed on a single temporal track that is at the same time regarded as a course of development and progression, with European culture, and bourgeois culture in turn, appearing as the culminating peak. This conceptual prerequisite inevitably suffers from the false equation “primitive = primal”: the more distant and alien a cultural phenomenon is from one’s own culture—or, to put it more precisely: from the self-image of that culture—the greater its age is estimated to be and the closer it approximates to a fictitious original or natural state.

Putting it in a rather simplified way, one could speak of four major “antipodes” here with which the culturalevolutionists of the time constructed their “primitive” counterparts in the opposite hemisphere. The signs that counted as “primitive” stages of development were: (1) socially homogeneous forms of society; (2) unreflective and irrational ways of thinking and acting; (3) a low degree of self-control and sublimation of instincts; (4) the predominance of collective patterns of thinking and acting. The extent to which these pairs of opposites reflect reality is still a matter of controversy today. However, they are certainly unsuitable as general schemes of cultural history. As Malinowski already demonstrated, individual family bonds, for example, are not the most recent ones in all societies, and bonds with large social groups are not always the older form of association. And as Hans Peter Duerr has shown in detail, control

¹ George Laurence Gomme, *Ethnology in Folklore* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1892), p. 2.

of affects is by no means a result only of the bourgeois and European developments of the last few centuries.

However, it would only be half true to regard the cultural evolutionism of the period as being a theory of false contrasts. Its conception of the relationship between “primitive” and “civilized,” and of primitive and civilized groups, is an ambiguous one. The idea of a unilinear evolution is divisive to the extent that it assigns advanced and less advanced positions along a developmental line to individual cultural forms or to entire group cultures. It is unitive to the extent that it places them all on one and the same line—implying that “uncivilized” is no longer regarded as being the Other as such or as a pathological aberration, but rather as a preliminary or elementary form of one’s own present-day culture. The Germanist and folklorist Eugen Mogk wrote in 1907, for example: “In each human being there exists a dual person, as it were: a natural being and a cultural being. The latter is seen in his reflective and logical mentality, and the former in his associative mentality.”² It is difficult to miss the parallel here with another new science that was emerging in the same period—psychoanalysis. Sigmund Freud wrote, “In dreams and in neurosis we find the *child* once more, with the peculiarities of its thinking and of its emotional life. To this we would add: and also the *savage*, the *primitive* human being, as he presents himself to us in the light of the study of antiquity and of other peoples.”³ Admittedly, it can hardly be claimed that the mainstream in folklore studies in the German-speaking countries has ever shown any interest in affinities with psychoanalysis (whereas Freud, for example, closely followed research in anthropology and folklore studies). There can be no doubt, however, that early folklore research contributed to the disillusionment of the bourgeois ego, which had hitherto regarded itself as “master in its own house.”

But the primitivist paradigm of folklore studies implied not only that the conscious part of the individual should be aware of the unconscious part and the rational part of the irrational part. It also directed the focus of interest towards *inter*-national links between what are known as civilized and primitive peoples, as well as towards *intra*-national links, to common features and affinities between the upper classes and lower classes.

In an essay on anthropology in Germany in the Wilhelmine period, Benoît Massin notes, “Almost all leading German anthropologists residing on the Reich’s territory, from the founding of the German Anthropological Society

² Eugen Mogk, “Wesen und Aufgaben der Volkskunde,” in *Mitteilungen des Verbandes deutscher Vereine für Volkskunde* 6 (November 1907), pp. 1–9; here p. 4.

³ Sigmund Freud, *The Schreber Case*, trans. Andrew Webber (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 70.

in 1870 to World War I, professed a belief in the unity of the human species.”⁴ This position also held sway in the field of folklore studies that was newly emerging: the assumption of fundamental homogeneity resulting from similar predispositions (although similarities resulting from migration and exchange were not denied). In the first issue of the *Zeitschrift für österreichische Volkskunde*, Michael Haberlandt, for example, proclaimed, “We will have to recognize a deeper principle of development than that of nationality in the multiple identity of naturally occurring popular expressions that extends beyond all national boundaries. It is an ardently desired goal of the present journal to prepare for this insight and to strengthen it in everyone who carries out observations among the people. The journal will take complete impartiality with regard to national matters as its guiding principle in the strictest possible way.”⁵ This program was implemented in countless individual research studies that attempted to find parallels between domestic and foreign cultural phenomena—customs, narrative motifs, shapes of objects—and thus provide evidence of an intellectual community of the peoples. The dangers of this type of search for parallels have been mentioned: the tendency to ignore the context and to make thin rather than dense comparisons, not to mention lapses into speculation. However, its merits undoubtedly include the fact that it promoted an interest in foreign cultures and opposed nationalist and racist distinctions. In a book entitled *Die Volkskunde*, published in 1903, one of the founders of the discipline, Raimund Friedrich Kaindl, wrote: “What the brilliant F. Max Müller ... notes regarding the salutary effect of comparative language studies—that they spread a feeling of the closest fraternity, so that we feel at home where we used to be strangers, and transform millions of so-called barbarians into our own flesh and blood; the same applies to the fullest extent to comparative folklore studies as well.”⁶

So much for the *inter*-nationalism of primitivist folklore studies. With regard to *intra*-national references and relationships, there was a strong intention to overcome the intellectual’s spontaneous need to mark social distinctions. “Raw naturalness” was not to be regarded as a strange, foreign opposite pole, but rather as a prototype for one’s own culture. The development of society, we read in Adolf Strack, a leading German folklorist of the time, had led to growing social division, as a result of which everyday knowledge among the

⁴ Benoît Massin, “From Virchow to Fischer: Physical Anthropology and ‘Modern Race Theories’ in Wilhelmine Germany,” in George W. Stocking, ed., *Volksgeist as Method and Ethic: Essays on Boasian Ethnography and the German Anthropological Tradition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), pp. 79–154; here p. 87.

⁵ Michael Haberlandt, “Zum Beginn!” in *Zeitschrift für österreichische Volkskunde* 1 (1895), pp. 1–7; here p. 1.

⁶ Raimund Friedrich Kaindl, *Die Volkskunde: Ihre Bedeutung, ihre Ziele und ihre Methode* (Leipzig: Deuticke, 1903), p. 46.