

EXPERIMENTS IN A TIME OF OVER-ABUNDANT DISCIPLINARY HISTORY

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There is a lot of past scholarship – not only but also in ethnology. New dissertations fill library shelves next to older works, a plethora of studies emerge from ongoing research, conference proceedings and ever more journals find their way into print and circulate in cyberspace. Listservs inform us regularly of calls for papers and of new publications and send us the table of contents of the latest journal issues, including this present one. The sheer mass of it all can bring about a sense of oppression vis-à-vis all that came before and happens next to us, in our mother tongue and many other tongues, of which, perhaps, we are able to read, well, one or two at best. Billy Ehn and Orvar Löfgren have demonstrated how academic life, patterned by constant evaluation, comparison, and hence potentially despiritizing or embittering competition, impacts the emotions of scholars (Ehn & Löfgren 2007). How is one to select? How is one to know, what of the past is relevant for the present? In the course of our training, we are generally exposed to selections of the past: theoretical paradigms and their methodological consequences form part of the disciplinary curriculum. The selection will be imprinted by our teachers and how far ranging or narrowly they interpret their role as intermediaries between a discipline's genesis and history and its present role in academy and society. Fellow students and our own adventuresomeness to read beyond the curriculum also shape our sense of discipline and intellectual belonging – whereby the former need not be congruent with the latter. An unruly and in-

trinsically interdisciplinary field such as ethnology with its focus on everyday life – synonymous with “potentially everything” – makes the interaction between past and present all the more difficult. To top it off, departmental contours, university reorganization, cuts and expansions further contribute to a need for alliances and opportunities or opportunism – depending on how one experiences the steady transformations – that hardly cater to a nurturing of disciplinary identity built on firm knowledge of its past.

The present collection of papers gives insight into this very selectivity and into alternative ways of handling the past creatively. They allow us to see what young and younger scholars in the ambit of Lund and Copenhagen have chosen from the disciplinary past, in what intellectual style they shape this encounter, and what goal they might strive for. The freshness of this “what,” “how” and “to what end” may occasion something of a sting to European ethnologists committed to both properly unfolding the field in its national and European trajectories over more than two hundred years, and engaging with disciplinary history in the manner of historiography and supported with the considerable amount of scholarship available for such tasks. Grasping the discipline's growth entails major research in and of itself, as demonstrated in various lines of inquiry surrounding the ethnological and anthropological disciplines – and mentioned here, but briefly and superficially as a contrasting context into which to

place the present papers. One might think of Giuseppe Cocchiara's classic tracing of the field in Europe at large (1952, English translation 1981), or of the sustained effort on the part of George W. Stocking regarding the history of anthropology, for which he was able to interest many others so that an entire series of edited works could emerge, covering topics from fieldwork (Stocking 1983), to museums and material culture (Stocking 1985), to the romantic tenets inherent to some anthropological beginnings (Stocking 1989), to mention just a few of the themes he encouraged research on. Similarly, cooperation and comparison – and a lot of legwork – is evident in the fourfold examination of social anthropological history offered at the opening of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle (Barth et al. 2005), as well as in the historiographic endeavor edited by Henrika Kuklick (2008). Grappling with disciplinary history in our field invariably also leads one to the politics of ethnological knowledge production, and a sensitizing for the ideological vulnerability of the field, whether it be called ethnology or folklore or yet something else.¹ This has been thoroughly investigated particularly in Germany (e.g., Bausinger 1971; Brinkel 2012; Emmerich 1971), Ireland (e.g., Briody 2008; Ó Giolláin 2000), and Estonia (Kuutma 2005), with many case studies on selected aspects of ideological histories completed (e.g., Klein 2003) or under way elsewhere. Finally there is the history of disciplinary emergence in its complex interaction with socio-economic milieus and the serendipities of knowledge transfers brought about by persons and places, as pursued in a multi-part research endeavor led by Wolfgang Kaschuba in Germany (e.g., Dietzsch, Kaschuba & Scholze-Irrlitz 2009; Kaschuba et al. 2009; Welz, Davidovic-Walter & Weber 2011), again just naming one example. All of these endeavors took and take time, and next to everything else that an academic professional has to undertake (see the first paragraph of this essay), the disciplinary past can easily turn into a foreign country that is not among the top ten places one hopes to still visit.

The present articles are, therefore, deliberately cast as a visit with aspects of European ethnology's past,

and the kind of travel guides I just sketched above equally deliberately do not form part of the baggage. Trained and positioned differently amongst one another, these authors' travels also have highly divergent contours and outcomes, which hopefully will encourage others to consider past theories, archival deposits, individual oeuvres and lacunae in canonical topics as suitable sites for mental journeys.

Of the present articles, Signe Mellemsgaard's portrait of Bjarne Stocklund comes closest to a more traditional historiographic engagement, with its focus on an individual scholar (such as, e.g., Zumwalt 1988, 1992) who pursued rupture and continuity, the familiar pairing of terms in twentieth-century social and cultural research. Ethnology all over Europe, as well as of course sociology, have addressed tradition and modernity, as well as tradition and innovation, critiquing a scholarly mindset focused on continuity alone (e.g., Bausinger & Brückner 1969). Yet even Mellemsgaard's query contributes to the broader endeavor launched by these essays in as much as she, too, looks at the research and thinking practices that characterized Stocklund as an ethnologist. Also engaging with one protagonist from the past, but in completely presentist mode, Frida Hastrup's paper is at the farthest end of the experimental spectrum assembled in this issue. She reads and uses nineteenth-century Norwegian ethnologist Eilert Sundt's observations and thoughts on ethnographic work and the goals he formulated for this work, and extrapolates from it generalizable tenets on what ethnography is: putting Sundt's practices next to her own, and intermeshing that with field consultant and readers' participation "enables me to argue that ethnography is always about crafting and articulating different ideas, perspectives and practices in order to craft and articulate more ideas, perspectives and practices." Seeking to avoid any semblance of ethnography as representation, Hastrup writes from the purview of a globally mobile ethnologist, who experiences her work as a cooperative endeavor that "continually processes the world" and simultaneously participates in crafting a world to live in. Faded out are space and the particularities of historically circumscribed location, gender and

status of the researcher, distance as well as the cumbersomeness of largely paper- and print-driven communication vis-à-vis the speed of communication in a digitally connected globe. The relevance of the “professional” disappears as he and she are shown to be but participants in world making. The specificities of Eilert Sundt’s agency disappear in this effort to understand universals of ethnographic practice. Hastrup concludes that ethnography communicates “ways of living with the knowledge that alternative ways are (logically, if not always actually) possible,” and maintains curiosity about these very alternatives. In this collapsing of time, place and circumstance, what disappears is the sense of purpose and responsibility a given disciplinary actor brings to the mix in a specific time and place. This may healthily lessen the self-import that inheres to disciplinary historiography, but it also lessens the sense of responsibility, purpose and meaning an individual is provided with or has to construct for her or his ethnographic doings within contextual specificities.

Karin Gustavsson’s uncovering of fieldwork photographs and sketches opens vistas to a very different engagement with history, focused not on timeless disciplinary universals but rather seeking to witness the concrete ways of being in the field on the part of (then) young ethnologists measuring and photographing houses, leaving in their documentation very little evidence of the kind of interaction and co-creation of knowledge foregrounded by Hastrup. Illustration 2, “Having dinner together,” with three properly suited men, even wearing ties, emphasizes the very distance between objects and makers. Giving space to the connection of builders and houses, rural hosts and urban academic guests is irrelevant for the task at hand, never mind whether it was felt and known in the experience of the measuring team: it was not part of the question to be answered. The picture transported me mentally to a photo showing the Swiss Volkskundler Richard Weiss and a group of his students posing with a cowherd in front of an alpine hut sometime in the early 1950s. The cowherd wears the attire suitably worn for working with livestock in high altitude, Weiss and his students wear suits and mid-height shoes, which could not be less

appropriate for the setting but mark the difference in milieu and purpose and allow one to imagine the peculiarities or rather, the normalcies, of ethnological study trips en groupe of that time. While the “thought collective’s” assumptions about objectivity and photography have to be revised in Gustavsson’s assessment, the suggestive power of photography is so present, that it has made it even on the cover of this issue of *Ethnologia Europaea*: a fieldworker wearing a student’s cap – thus marking status in the field – jumping out of one of the measured houses bears testimony to the spirit present in this ethnological labor. Perhaps this was a rare snap shot, but it provides contours for an atmospheric contrast I glean between this Swedish practice of material culture research and stories I was told during my graduate training in folklore in the United States. There, one was introduced to stories about the lone researcher seeking traces of old houses, shying away neither from brambles nor the viles of poison ivy, and triumphing with evidence, carefully measured, photographed and drawn by himself, all attesting to the crafty mind of pioneer builders. Team effort and the assembly of an archive in Sweden smile at us out of such a photograph, while the scholarly loner in search of proof for his hypothesis is part of oral history in the USA. While the contributors to this issue may, in general, be weary of disciplinary history in and of itself, and comparison of this sort may lack appeal, Gustavsson’s unearthing of disciplinary practice does open comparative horizons slightly akin to Johan Galtung’s classic essay on intellectual styles (1981).

How else can one experiment with disciplinary pasts? Fredrik Nilsson starts with a set of historical source materials: reports on smugglers finding ways to transgress borders and evade border patrols provide seeds for a re-consideration of the parameters of present and past ethnological work on borders. Reports on smugglers having access to better and faster boats than the coast guard brings into focus speed as an elementary, largely overlooked component of border studies. In addition to the actual, measurable speed permitted by a given means of locomotion through land, water, or air, one immediately thinks

of the felt speed or lack thereof by transgressors and pursuers, refugees and oppressors – dimensions that thicken the sensory and emotional understanding of the arbitrariness of borders. Anders Kristian Munk and Torben Elgaard Jensen develop their experiment out of the present: mapping endeavors in science and technology studies (STS) are brought into conversation with the folklife atlases of the early and mid-twentieth century. Here it is past ethnologists' critical engagement with the theoretical premise underlining their method that might stimulate STS researchers with regard to the premises underlying their work; out of the juxtaposition, ethnology might reconsider its departure from mapping and consider its use under new theoretical premises.

Tine Damsholt and Astrid Pernille Jespersen's experiment in uncovering disciplinarity in close encounters of the interdisciplinary kind struck home for me the most. For close to a decade, cultural and social anthropologists in Göttingen were involved in planning and carrying through an interdisciplinary project on cultural property with colleagues in economics, law, and subdisciplines of both. Even as the project draws to a close, principal investigators and perhaps even more so the junior scholars involved, recognize the power of disciplinary habits and the chasms that some conceptual and methodological differences cannot overcome without challenging disciplinary habits. Very often, we felt simply frustrated that "the others" still had not grasped, for example, our practice-based and dynamic concept of culture without realizing that for their methodological toolkit, a thickly contextualized and historized concept led to more variables than a potential model could accommodate. The interdisciplinary collaboration became an additional fieldsite. The ethnographers in the team, blessed by their discipline's capacity to find ethnographic interest in everything, used participant observation to better grasp what made the others tick; they pointed to events and discussions that illustrated blockades in understanding, and at least some of the other players participated in these cross-disciplinary reflections, some of us made interdisciplinarity the focus of an additional collaborative research and writing endeavor (Bendix,

Bizer & Noyes, in preparation), and most firmed up their sense of what their own discipline could competently do while hesitating to formulate how this competence could benefit the interdisciplinary goal. Damsholt and Jespersen journeyed along this latter path but carried it to a potent conclusion. They felt irritated with the concepts and associated tasks allotted to them within an interdisciplinary project focused on innovation, but used this friction productively to examine the semantics of every day life – one of the concepts at issue in this project – in its permutations within ethnology's disciplinary past. The disciplinary self-understanding gained in their genealogical query helped them to turn about their contribution to the overall project so as to augment for the other participants how innovation needed to be reconceptualized so as to find accommodation within everyday life. While laborious in its rigor, Damsholt and Jespersen's focused engagement with ethnology's past is what one would want to recommend to all – not just ethnologists – who are headed into interdisciplinary undertakings. The insights, approaches, and concepts accumulated in a discipline's unfolding can be pruned to reveal their relevance in informing research about the present and contribute to the future.

Barbro Klein once gave the following advice: "I am thinking about a daily exercise that I do in my current work, one that often calms me down: I am part of a field but I am constantly open to other fields. I think this kind of positioning is essential for scholarly work" (Klein & Löfgren 2004: 108). The experiments assembled in this issue suggest an expansion to this advice, particularly if the (academic) world we live in and the mountains of ethnological historiography I sketched initially are causing stress and uncertainty: just as we can be open to other disciplines while being part of a particular field, we can be open to disciplinary history with the perspectives, interests and ethnological practices of the present.

Note

- 1 Due to the particular history of ethnology in Sweden and Denmark, work carrying the term *folklore* in its title may be automatically associated with research on verbal arts or even just narrative and therefore ex-

cluded from purview of a younger generation; in addition, the naming and renaming of the field in Sweden, from folklife to ethnology signalled departures from particular ways of inhabiting the discipline. During a workshop on naming the discipline in Göttingen, Orvar Löfgren noted that one way of handling the past and its national confines in Sweden was irony (Klein & Löfgren 2004: 96–97). The pragmatic handling of disciplinary names within one locale does lead to a narrowing of perception of what the field has and can contain and occasionally renders the notion of a European ethnology a misnomer, as for a long time one has practiced “ethnology in European countries.” Even now, we tend to teach only excerpts of the disciplinary past of our national traditions and enmesh into our practice particularly those excerpts of international scholarship, particularly Anglo-American and French, that appear theoretically exciting. The excitement, in turn, is subject to an economy of notability that furthers the pragmatism of keeping focused. Every national or even local ethnological tradition interacts with international trends differently, making it even more difficult to web between the European ethnologies (Bendix 2004).

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