

Perspectives of European Ethnology

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The current identity discourse inside and outside ethnology is – for different reasons – since more than a decade connected with political rhetorics. It includes a frequent labelling of artifacts and attitudes as “ethnic” and the use of history in search for key-words as “roots” and “authenticity”. Since ethnologists often are authors or mediators of plausible metaphors they seem to serve as story-tellers, as entertainers.

Since ethnologists offer materials for the construction of the self by interpreting habits, rituals etc., contemporary everyday-life turns out to be a scientified one and has lost its quality of indisputable self-evidence. Modern lives have to be narrated and explained by stories. People have learned to use a set of options and thus are enabled to celebrate a ‘virtual identity’ which turns out to be the everyday practice.

Interpretations surrounding identity brought up by ethno-sciences as well as its creators achieve more importance since ethnological knowledge is to be regarded as an integral part of modern lifestyles. They demand responsibility. The planned celebrations for the year 2000 e.g. are stuffed with cited patterns of culture marking a change.

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I. Identity quarrels and the consumption of the past

Some European ethnologists feel themselves surrounded, endangered and even conquered by social history, cultural and historical anthropology. Even history of art and literary sciences now call themselves Cultural Studies, ‘Kulturwissenschaften’ (Glaser/Luserke 1996) and seem to do our jobs. Noble disciplines which gain their self-confidence from the dignity of high-class objects of self-evident acceptance (like ‘art’, ‘literature’ or ‘history’) seem to have laid claim on fields which we believed to be ‘ours’, such as popular art and iconology, village-life or the interpretation of folk beliefs. They freely use the ‘soft’ and ‘narrative’ methodological approaches and textualization strategies of ethnology as well as of folklore studies. Sometimes they seem to be better informed about the specific approaches our science has developed. The triumph of Cultural Studies seems to be a complete one. But its ambivalence is marked by

the question if it is going to replace ethnology while on the other hand the relation towards traditional fields remains indistinct.

The very moment museums are of public interest again, the study of artefacts and of museology seem to be no longer subjects of ethnological interest, as Nils-Arvid Bringéus pointed out in his final editorial of *Ethnologica Scandinavica* (Bringéus 1994). Even the study of folk costume and similar traditional fields which we thought to be very clearly “our” topics have started to be more and more associated with other sciences having been influential and successful in the book market using for instance the word ‘folk culture’ (Peter Burke et al. 1984). Indigenous fields of European ethnology seem to disappear and the story of the vanishing discipline ethnology (Volkskunde) on the one hand and the ethnologization of social and historical disciplines on the other is a new field of discourse within the scientific community (Brückner 1992).

Two strategies can be observed. On the one

side there is an effort to transform the historical orientation of our discipline into a social inquiry. The other shapes its perspectives towards modernity and its central topics such as identity, authenticity, ethnicity and – again – continuity: constructs which have a strong tendency towards homogeneity and roundness as opposed to modern societies which are described in terms of segregation, diversity and individualization. As a result modern world-views are filled up with ethnographical knowledge.

Palle Ove Christiansen (1988) has discussed omit aspects of “Construction and Consumption of the Past. From *Montaillou* to *The Name of the Rose*” and that so called “microhistory” of world-views, which seems to have become an entertaining genre of general interest. Natalie Zemon Davis’ story of Martin Guerre has been adapted as a film starring Gerard Depardieu. The world-view perspective makes us feel familiar with lived history, its tendency towards a descriptive neutrality and its compactness of a good story allows an easygoing adaptation to one’s own biography and makes history as well as identity a segment of the entertainment industry.

II. ‘Ethnic’: the career of a word

In the meantime construction and consumption of the past happens in terms of ethnicity. Ever since the paradigm of European ethnology shifted from social facts to ethnic roots (which includes after all ‘ethnic cleansing’) the conception of ethnicity has tended towards biological interpretations. A liberal *Volkskunde* (European Ethnology), which once had described and interpreted a friendly and mostly harmless identity game in ‘developed’ societies turned out now to offer arguments against the strangers and has showed all societies as less developed than we (and they) thought.

There is a new focus on authenticity and continuities. Recently the concept of ‘continuity’ was revitalised (and camouflaged), coming back onto the stage through a surprisingly wide backdoor that was opened by Fernand Braudel and the *Annales* School and their idea of a “longue durée”. Since then this idea of persistence is supported calmly by anthropological as

well as psychoanalytical groups and their concept. Further intensified by a rising discourse of biologicistic and ethologic axioms the conception of continuity leads step by step to the assumption of undiscussable and unchangeable anthropological constants as the essentials of human nature. In addition, feminist studies try for example to elaborate women’s competence for “the gift” from past or exotic worlds as “a fundamental feminine attitude” and to perform it as a playground for contemporary orientation (Joy 1996).

Sociobiologists’ theories are being discussed and are becoming popular. The statement of an anthropologically constant human desire for territory, for instance, sharpens the immigration-policy. The popular theory of a genetically steered (and thus legitimised) nature of male unfaithfulness which was – seemingly all of a sudden and all at once – discussed in a range of newspapers and (life-style) magazines in spring 1995, presenting an easy understandig of human behaviour. Modern life-style magazines in particular offer stories which in respect of their high plausibility fit into modernity. Will we be able to deconstruct evolutionistic biological approaches by cultural, social and historical argumentation?

Social and political changes during the last ten years have found their ideological and conceptual foundation in our forefathers. Johann Gottfried Herder is supposed to be one of the founding fathers of our science. His ideas have been carried out in some post-communist countries through explicitly ‘ethnic’ violence and wars. At the same time in western countries a revival in terms of ‘ethnicity’ and ‘culture’ took place which is labelled as ‘ethnic’. This is more subtle but only seemingly harmless. In France, in the Canadian province of Quebec as well as in Argentina we can discover ideas promising national homogeneity by means of linguistic purification. The current migration from East to West set free ethnic argumentation in politics and social life in many countries, like in Germany. The so-called ‘ethnic cleansing’ or other violent ethnic movements may have hit us as individuals but we seldom discussed and analysed them as ethnological problems. However, if we were to cast a glance at the historical

parentage of these processes, we should recognize, that they have to stay in the middle of our scientific field.

In the science- and media-made feelings of the approaching 'fin de siècle' we can record everywhere a rollback to simple models and solutions such as 'ethnic pureness'. But we mostly discuss our own lives in terms of soft ideas of friendly nationalism and smooth multiculturalism which the ruling classes have adopted as moral measurements of postmodernity. In this respect multiculturalism has the touch of a colourful home-made exoticism. Multicultural exoticism is practised as a tamed and colonized form of strangeness. It replaces the terms of social status in this process of social transformations and presents itself as an elaborated competence of postmodernity and as an enrichment of everyday reality.

III. Storytelling and the microlevel

Hardly any subject within German ethnology has attracted so much research energy in recent years than the fast-food complex (Tschofen 1993). Since Ulrich Tolksdorf's valuable analysis of Ronald McDonald's (Tolksdorf 1981) quite a number of scholars have done field- and especially brain-work on the subject; "tast-work" sometimes was also included. Obviously it was not a wrong decision to focus on the fast-food complex. Without any doubt food has undergone one of the most indicative changes in everyday life of modern societies. It is linked in many ways to social processes like industrialization, the division of labour and its subsequent separation from the home. Further nothing seems to be more adapted to a mobile society and its life-styles than a type of food which is industrially prepared and which is intended to be served and to be eaten quickly. Fast-food can be characterized through its distinctive functions; cultural aversion and sympathy are very much connected with it. Fast-food divides classes of taste and symbolizes distinctions in orientations, ages and world-views. The ubiquitous food of McDonald's can be described as a kind of soul-food, for example for American soldiers overseas, which could symbolize the 'national food' and which could be advertised as "a bite

from home" and "a bite from home" when the first McDonald's restaurants started next to the US-Army barracks in Germany.

The ubiquity of McDonald's can mediate the feeling of an absolute security, the feeling of being in a way at home anywhere in the world. Pictograms above the food-counter depict the food in the same quality with a great reliability accords to a world-wide standard. At any place in the world where you can find McDonald's you can be sure to have a clean toilet as well. In a way Marshall McLuhan's vision of the global village came true: the world became unified as a "food-village". Pop-artists like Andy Warhol or Tom Wesselmann have indicated the hamburger to be one of the icons of modernity. Fast-food has developed a symbolism which reflects modern feelings comparable with blue jeans and their values or t-shirts. It is one way in which contemporary youth culture celebrates the globality of its own lifestyle. At the same time in former Eastern bloc countries McDonald's restaurants function as symbol of western values of freedom and modernity. The symbolic meanings sketched here are to be lived and to be experienced in different segments of our societies. But this positively accentuated similarity (and in a way world-wide equality) can easily be turned into a negative notion as levelling and loss of identity and as an unification of the world which overwhelms the ethnic and hinders the individual in elaborating his identity.

In this sense fast-food became a redundant object of cultural critique in western ethnology. The contemporary ethnological discourse on regional and local food is based on and rooted in the assumption of a future uniformity of the modern world and it is directed against it. The inversion of different meanings which could be done today with great ease illuminates the central role of interpretation of culture in modern societies. Modern existence – so Foucault (Foucault 1991) told us – has fallen out of a given order. Modern orders (plural!) are to be established as intentional acts by their users. Today nothing exists in our world without an interpretation and without a story for its legitimacy (Köstlin 1995). The fast-food paradigm includes stories as well. It includes stories of our existence which are researched, construct-

ed and invented by ethnologists (among other story-tellers in modern societies) talking about (and thus creating) hidden languages, niches, communication styles, counter cultures, places of identification, localities and training fields for young people, areas of contacts and multi-cultural experiences.

IV. McDonaldism and regionalism

Ethnological fields – the smaller the better – do not exist in reality but are created and defined by scholars. So our attitudes toward McDonaldism are not only a matter of taste but also of professional deformations. As protagonists of the small entities we should heartily dislike it. But to fit it into our frames of reference we explain it mainly on the micro-level as a cultural niche with its own language and rituals which we dignify as "fast-food culture".

On the other hand McDonaldism and regionalism are components and results – two sides of the same coin – of modernization. McDonaldism, so one could argue, has not only provoked a unification of taste all over the world but has also re-inflamed modern regionalism. It is to be taken for granted that the rise of regional culture (not only in the so called western world) has got its power as a counterpart of unification. The rise of the new European cuisine-movement "slow-food" may illustrate that. "Slow-food" is an absolutely modern phenomenon quoting an image of European food-history and culture. It is supposed to be the common type of preparing and consuming food in a distinctive, especially European way. "Slow-food" raises an objection to acceleration. The idea behind is bolstered by a historical imagination called 'European' and in its homogeneity well supported by our science. The existence of a SIEF-Commission on Food Research and Food Habits underlines the fact that food is one of the most important (and therefore best researched) fields of everyday life which is – following the new paradigm – supposed to be responsible for shaping identity and ethnic symbolism. The accessibility of the so called ethnic food makes it a communicative and comparative factor in everybody's life. Ethnic cuisine is very often linked with our touristic experiences and orien-

tations. Showing our preference, let's say for Italian food, we will be involved in a complex life-style which may also include our furniture, clothing and musical attitudes.

V. Selected "his-story"

Since we argue with 'history', anniversaries seem to be natural events. On the occasion of the centennial of the Nordiska Museet in 1973 Albert Eskeröd presented a book on the church-boats in Dalecarlia. Artur Hazelius, the founder of Nordiska Museet and the Skansen open-air-museum turned these boats into an icon of Swedish folk-culture during his travel by boat to Leksand in August 1857. In his diary he records his rich impressions later to become so meaningful for the Swedish museum-scene as well as for national feelings: "It was an indescribable view, a view not to be seen in any other place in Sweden, or perhaps anywhere else. Those who have not seen such a boat do not know what folklife in Dalarna means. Men and women in the local costume, which cannot be seen without the greatest pleasure by any patriotic mind..." (Eskeröd 1973, 184). His impressions had been felt by artists in a similar way before and became an integral and popular part of national feelings.

It seems not to be an accident that Eskeröd drew attention to the church-boats. He tells his readers in the beginning of the 1970's a story of the genesis of being Swedish. He describes and interprets the boats as a picturesque scenery and a national event in the context of their popularisation since the mid 19th century. Artists had been painting pictures of the colourful and strenuous rowing; the motif was subject matter in printed popular art. "Indescribable" and "nowhere on earth" – these are the key words which made images, boats and the event a stable and distinctive icon of Swedish culture which could be brought up as the 'origin', the 'roots' or 'the ground' of the Swedish nation against accelerated change. But in Eskeröd's book we can find more than compensating functions of healing images and much more than mere celebration of folk-culture items in the heart of a Swedish landscape which became depicted as an ideal of Swedishness. As far as I

understood it or with respect to the story told, it is a fascinating interpretation of Swedishness and modernity in the beginning 1970's.

1. Eskeröd interprets the boats as contemporary phenomena, which are linked through their presence to the Viking Age. The archaeological excavations are testimonies of a morphological continuity (or cultural fixation?) which is alleged as cultural coherence. On the island of Sollerön, which is supposed to be especially famous for the best boats to be built, Eskeröd was able to find that the same type of nails which have been dug out from the earth, were still in use. The heroic Viking past leads to the boat-builders of today.

2. Not only the evidence of the age of the boat construction is proved. The boats give evidence for a historical profundity which ties the cultural and social descendant as national continuity from far back: even the Roman historian Plinius is quoted and thus involved in that story. Eskeröd knitted the technical traditions of boat-making with the village solidarity based on joint responsibility and put it in the focus of cultural analysis. By accentuating egalitarian principles and the mutual responsibility which is documented by engraved markings and the calendar of duties, he describes how the group of farmers undergoes a principle of rotation similar to a guild with an alderman on top. Necessarily, we were taught, emerged a "pleasant way of life in a very democratic order". This system existed – so we read – until the end of the 19th century when modern traffic and a bridge built in 1892 reached Sollerön.

3. Eskeröd extends modern society or looks for its roots in the very origin of Swedish social life. Those boats, he argues, have been built since times immemorial on Sollerön. And – very important – those boats have been used in nearly all the Swedish provinces with three exceptions: the old Danish provinces Skåne, Blekinge and Halland.

Like a mirror those boats reflect the national success-story of the purest form of Swedish democracy and pass it from early to present times. Trained for a long time in small communities – that's what we are told in the story behind the story – Sweden seems to be in its peasant strata a rural society without classes.

All this takes place right in the heart of Sweden in the midst of the nation. Nowhere else is this boat-culture so richly developed as exactly in this place. Following this idea the area around Lake Siljan is declared to be the heart of Sweden and its rural democracy. Built on this location the boats have been transported into nearly all Swedish provinces: boats function as messengers of a Swedishness spread out directly from its heart. The last boat in the 'old' tradition had been built by an historical society in 1941 – Eskeröd informs us. And, I have to add, it was the third year of war which was inflamed by Germany. I do not want to decide if this was just by accident and a mere expression of traditionality or if it had a deeper meaning. My argumentation would be supported by the latter understanding of the boat as 'political'.

VI. The participant observer

Modern people in Western societies are very similar to that artificial figure science has elaborated by describing the scholar as 'participant observer'. This ethnological figure exists in a strong tension between a desire to take part and to be fully integrated in the totality of his object's life on the one hand, while on the other it practises the contemporary necessity of being mobile and not too much bound to a certain place, only one group etc. Some of our scholars have been dressed even in an urban environment or at conferences as hunters or trappers and combined it with an outfit that was approximated to their objects in a manner of possessive identification. Joining conferences with their professional out-door tools they seemed to be ready to go into the 'field'. So the participant observer as a figure of our scientific practice in a way reflects our modernity.

Everybody in our time is permanently an observer as well as an actor playing a role deep down in history and explained by stories like the one that my youngest t-shirt experience shows. The t-shirt wrapping taught and informed me: "James Dean und Marlon Brando haben es weltberühmt gemacht... T-Shirts sind ein Stück Kulturgeschichte." In that way history is woven in the t-shirt. You cannot wear them without their history. That declares our world

mainly as an interpreted one. The naiveté of earlier periods is – if ever true – no longer possible. The structure of the argumentation by cultural science has become popular. Everybody is a scientist (inventor, explainer etc.) of his own life, handling a set of identities.

VII. Corporate culture

During the last decades and especially in Western countries ethnology has given friendly and smooth comments on the development of the type of society it is paid by. Politicians have realised the important role of those cultural sciences which have the capacity to explain modern life to a broad public without hurting it too much. In some countries of the former Eastern bloc European ethnology participates in efforts to (re-)establish the nation. Ethnology as an interpreting and thus legitimating science is about to explain how our own society works and functions. In that way it operates as social engineering by cultural explanation. The artistry of interpretation is about to neglect for example class difference. A review in *Ethnologia Scandinavica*'s 1994 volume notes: "In today's Nordic Society ... it's not *comme il faut* to emphasize class differences. Consensus has taken over from class struggle, both in reality and in research. Instead of these class differences (which still exist) an ethnicisation of culture has taken place. Culture has no linking to class but has to be Swedish, is to be nationalized" (ES 1994, 177). In other words: there seems to be a lack of critique towards developments of modern societies. Thus ethnologists share in the fabrication of national identity and are part of an elite group which contributes to cultural interpretation of social conflicts which are then labelled as 'ethnic' or 'cultural' in both Western and Eastern contexts. It may mean that ethnology transports people into another mood and hides such categories as class and social structure just by definition. Ethnicity, regionalism and the production of regional and national identity can be described as a deprivation of social or class identity just by shifting the parameters of description. So the modern management of cultural diversity by learning and teaching 'Intercultural Communication' is con-

sequent (Roth). Following that idea all stories to be told must be streamlined for their function as 'therapy-stories'. They must not be true but they have to fit public discourses.

VIII. Identity and difference

The discussion concerning the European Community showed the way in which 'Ethnoscience' supported the construction of a collective identity and practised a regression which accentuates differences by calling them ethnic. This culturalisation by means of ethnic specifics stresses differences although lifestyles and the type of communication very often are much alike. Obviously there is no 'identity' possible without its counterpart 'difference', but most comparative studies argue in terms of culture in managing ethnicity and neglect the similarities favouring the colourful 'own'.

The symbols used for such a characterization are to be found in mainly historically deepened strata of everyday life (Niedermüller 1994). This includes a problem in describing the 'Alltag': the very moment we illuminate the self-evident existence of everyday life we destroy precisely this very quality. Everyday life has to become a reflected one and loses its undisputed self-evidence. The nationalization and ethnicization of culture as well as the culturalization of the social strata are supposed to lead towards homogenization through lifestyle and their environments. This our science – among other story-telling institutions – is about to invent new solidarities which are based on national, gender etc. items and their collective stories. What may have been an easygoing game of colouring and illustrating the greyness of modern societies now appears to take a dangerous turn against the others, those who are different, those who have not the same attitudes towards sex, towards cleanliness, houses, women, gardens, haircuts, towards ecology or towards bicycles, towards strangers.

Tamás Hofer once mentioned that *Volkskunde* is a discipline which describes the story of folk culture for its 'own' people, in its own country and in its own language (Hofer 1979). European ethnology, I continue, explains to people what is their practice. It tells stories

referring to that 'own', and creates identity by means of assumptions of authenticity. This is the point linking European ethnology to post-modernity and making 'folk culture' attractive for modernity. What Hofer once described is exactly the same today concerning the individual. The 'Selbstthematisierung' (Hahn 1988) – to talk about the self in cultural terms – could lead in different directions. It may run into a confession of being guilty and into the glorification of its 'own'. Both directions are easily connected with each other.

IX. The Scientification of everyday-life

The local newspaper in Tübingen told about the production of apple cider in an old apple-press. All the instruments used for this procedure are usual objects on display in the small local museum. The long article: "Historisch gepresste Äpfel" (Schwäbisches Tagblatt, Tübingen, 20.09.94) said that despite the rainy weather a large section of the local community attended the celebration of their own history. The "Winzerkapelle Harmonie", a local band, joined them and the local choir "Liederkranz Unterjesingen" sang its songs. A local community celebrated its own cultural and historical roots by quoting 'history'. In terms of postmodernism this event was perfectly adjusted to their everyday life which is unthinkable without the celebration of their ties to the local and its history. This local self-celebration changed the event of making cider into an "old custom", having a new meaning, or a new 'sense'. The story is not much different from a scientific description which enables us to speak of an ongoing "Verkulturwissenschaftlichung der Welt" (Köstlin 1995). Celebrations of wine-, onion-, cucumber-, cider-festivals are such events. Today they are used by the local population to strengthen what political rhetoric calls 'local identity'. Local identity is a construction, made and defined by word-artists like scientists. Scientific experts who have talked about 'Heimat und Identität' for more than a decade thus gave keywords and structure for political ideologies. For a society which could be blamed as unintelligible and unstructured those keywords function as a rhetoric for the reduction of complexity.

This is not very new: European ethnology has always been an agency of modernisation and a result of modernisation. Obviously it was necessary to have an interpretative model against a modernity in which a lot of people seemed to suffer, surely not everybody, but those who wrote and interpreted life in terms of 'alienation', rapidity of change, social chilliness, thus explaining and guiding people's individual experiences. Our science shared the creation of the constructed reality we live in. Today we can be aware that reality is not really real but this recognition must not prevent us from treating it as a 'genuine' reality.

European ethnology once seemed to have an object which included the belief in the benefits of the discipline. Today all of this and the identity of this science is in question. The common idea of European ethnology some twenty years ago was socially determined having two accents: the research of the life of the majority and an emphasis laid on the lower strata (and to their benefit!). Today the life of the majority has been destroyed by a vague interest in everything which seems to be somehow strange and exotic. We have realised that adventures are to be found 'just around the corner' (Bruckner/ Finkelkraut 1980). Often we discuss our own identity under the pretence of any other's. In the search for a structure we try to practise rituals we invent for our own consolation, knowing as scholars and as individuals that rituals are important for the stability of one's life.

Back again to fast-food. We can interpret fast-food practice as a ritual. We may even tell stories about the banal eating of junk-food. We take refuge in an analysis of the microlevel hoping that the macrolevel is an equivalent picture of the discovered totality of the fast-food-milieu with its semiotic structure of communication. But our questioning (for identity, entity, groups) and our technique tend to create and to homogenize (and in the same moment to isolate) what we are describing. Since we have, for example, labelled the Döner-Kebab or the Greek Gyros as an ethno-fast-food we are on the way to revitalising our 'own' food and celebrating it mainly in terms of ethnicity (Köstlin 1975).

X. What we are?

So we are – as mentioned above – never quite at home but participant observers. We are not a society deeply rooted like old trees which should not be transplanted but – we are as our object – people who have feet to move. And we should let people take part in that insight we have discovered, that man can be nomadic and have to live in reflexivity and in same moment bound to that dream of continuity, roots and stability. In a world which is described as rapidly changing, people seem to feel a lack of permanence, which is not thinkable without the horizon of modern mobility and instability and – sometimes – the anarchy of abundance. The idea of stability as well as of mobility are historically grown essentials. Both are as modern as all historical sciences – including European ethnology – which for 200 years made people believe that ‘culture’, which was elaborated in an historical process, is somehow nature.

Some philosophers have pointed out the role of arts and culture in softening the damage caused by modernization, arguing that people were unable to cope with the acceleration of changes of all kinds. In their opinion the humanistic sciences should no longer be sceptical but produce interpretation and orientation (Marquard 1986). In this conception culture has to enhance the speed of the technical development in our societies. It offers positive comments instead of questioning at which point the exacting demands of modernity could be inhumane. The limited piece cut out which we call ‘world-view’ should be widened to the question of power relations which are involved in the politics of national (regional, local etc.) identity. The acquisition as well as the maintenance of power in our societies is closely connected to the ability to make a particular construction and interpretation or definition of reality a dominant one instead of stressing the contemporary multivocality of symbols, attitudes etc.

Thus, in a critical accompaniment of the modernization of the society ethnology could shape its contours again: orientated to the present and offering a comparison with the past and at the same moment searching for the elite and groups which have constructed modernity

and its past time orientations and showing values as man-made facts. But if they are man-made, invented or constructed, they also are to be changed – in a discourse by human beings. Culture must be described as the man-made part of the environment. We should accentuate culture as man-made and women-made. Reconstruction is also a de-construction naming the consumption of traditions and history and the new and highly important difference between history and memory (Nora 1988). The question is: do we re-bewitch the world by naturalizing the ‘givenness’ of ethnicity or nationality (and all the other social forms) and so lessen the potential of reflexivity.

Our modernity – and this means in this paper the last 200 years – has brought forth the scientist as a new type of story-teller. Our human existence has become more and more scientific with the help of cultural interpretations. Sciences invent and offer ‘sense’ and have reached new fields of interests, namely what they (the sciences) call ‘everyday life’. Ethnologists practise that on the level of nation, folk or individual and since they have chosen the name ‘Ethnology’ the discourse in terms of ethnicity has received an additional legitimation. So sciences are – among other intellectual elites of interpretation – involved in the invention and creation of invisible but real frames of action.

XI. Virtual ethnicity

Today we cannot just handle things. We have to reflect on nearly everything that we do. The public discourse initiated by the intellectual elite has taught us to be politically correct (this movement along with the ‘urban legend’ seem to have their origin in US-campuses). In a world which is described as aesthetically structured we have to decide. Our ‘habitus’ demands consideration and creates attention – our own attention and the attention of others. We are creating ourselves more than in the past by acting in society and we are controlled much more by the society inside our body, concerning for instance morals, garbage, our attitudes toward strangers, women, dogs and children. We have to “perform ourselves” in nearly every situation. The ‘normal’ biography does not exist

any longer. Most people start their working life later, their biographies are more frequently interrupted and a career in the traditional sense is less normal than before. Most people will not climb up a career-ladder but move from job to job. We have to explain and legitimize ourselves, we have to invent our individual story. All this has an impact on our science's questionnaire.

What is the modernity of ethnology? It is the banality of everyday life – which by then becomes more meaningful as a part of that identity-kit of modern life. It may seem somehow strange that people are worried about who they really are. What now seems so necessary may be characterised as a result of a surplus. The luxurious kind of curiosity is an integral part of our modernity, but is not spread out as a matter of course. Most people do not have the time to think about it. The assumption that all people everywhere are interested in consciousness and selfhood is a false one. The contemporary fascination with self-identity is an essential part of our history and has developed as a popularised one that process called 'modernization'. The more this popularization expands, the more people put forward individualization and a claim on what is called 'identity'.

Ethnologists could try to put the issues of ethnicity and identity into a framework of knowledge and historically established morality. Ethnologists once told as a central story that identity in the past was simple and clear. Today folklorization tends toward an interpretation of ethnicity which is colourful and various. If Max Weber was right when he claimed "Entzauberung" as a criterion for modernity, our main purpose would be to bewitch the world again. This exactly happens more and more in a private and individualistic manner which – for instance by means of the esoteric – is offered in a mass market. And this is one of the paradoxes of our time: we quilt our identity with mass culture which we combine in an individualistic way. The 'urban legends' (Brunvand) of the type "Råttan i Pizzan" (Klintberg 1986) in the late 80's are analysed as indicators leading to situations we are afraid of. The softening story behind those interpretations explains to us that even modern society is able to invent adequate

stories not unlike former societies did. Creativity and storytelling has not vanished, it still exists; modern legends are handled as equivalent with the old ones. The word 'legend' links us with the past and deepens the stories as well as the individuals in continuity.

XII. Ethnologists as entertainers

Ethnologists are – among others – the new story-tellers in modernity. The other thing is – and so far we are ahead of the historical sciences – we know that there is not only one truth existing. We want to know about life-conditions and life-perspectives of ordinary people in the past. But we ask – in so far we are constructivists – who tells us the story and through which eye-glasses has the story been told.

But the context of 'everyday-life' often fits too easily into modern life-conditions. In their soft version the stories tend to convert the banalities of life into entertainment. Excavating all the matters of course and interpreting them does involve ethnologists in a dilemma. The very moment science illuminates those matters which have been undiscussed – as said before – they are changed. Focusing banalities raises a new situation making the undiscussed into an object of discourse which loses its quality of being a matter of course. Banalities have lost exactly that very quality which made us admire their untouched and undiscussed naiveté. At least in German speaking countries no 'Volkskunde-Institut' can avoid a call from a radio station on Friday 13th or on Valentines-Day. In our modernity nothing can exist without a story explaining its meaning and moulding its reception and integration into lives. Ethnological knowledge – as simple as it often seems – became a constituent of our lives.

More and more ethnologists discover the niches and add new stores of knowledge – this can be the story of the tremendous difference between Danish and Swedish practices in doing the dishes (Linde-Laursen 1995) or the female story of the secrets of women's hand-bags as well as the story of the perception of the male bald head, topics which were both treated at the Congress of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Volkskunde in 1995.

Those stories, filled up with eclectic elegance, offer more and more specified worlds of descendants. Now every group has its own historian. Each group and each society obviously needs its story-tellers. They shape – if they are successful – a common world-view including and thereby defining their own group and the individual. More and more intermediate institutions like ‘networks’ fill the place between the individual and the state authorities. More and more groups dedicated to one-issue-movements – which therefore must not exist permanently – originate. They will need stories and they base themselves on stories which the experts offer.

A consequence of that individualism and segregation is the collection and the musealization of the private, the personal life-history-museum that nearly every individual in the western hemisphere has installed as a documentation of his or her ‘own’ biography (Köstlin 1994). The use of photographs for the documentation of everyday life can be added to that observation. People now do historize themselves. Material enough for an attentive ethnology. It is not by accident that we normally are involved in the field we are doing research on: we reflect ourselves as a nation, as workers, as homosexuals, as women, as men, as mothers or fathers, as animal-lovers, as wine-drinkers or beer-preferers, as people who are afraid of dying, as those who have had a childhood and reflect it – and every story needs a teller as an authority for the explanation of our own life.

This leads to another point which marks the responsibility of our science. Interpretations offered by cultural sciences are an integral part of everyday life. The scientification of everyday life is ‘in’. The idea of ‘society’ is such a construction (which assumes totality). The interpretation of our ‘roots’ as an absolute necessity for a human individual and also for a group was claimed by the sciences. Human memory seems to be replaced by what we call ‘history’, a product which scientists as experts in modelling history, memory and culture have created (see for example centennials or millenniums). If history fills our memory, consequently a virtual identity based on expert stories will be thinkable. The scientific input in everyday-life has

grown immensely, nothing remains unresearched. In the meantime everybody is his (or her) own expert using ‘own’ life ideas (Beck 1995) for their individual construction of a biography (Hofer/Niedermüller 1988) which fits in his/her life-style.

Ethnologists are not alone in that field of story-tellers. But they may be more successful because their stories fit into everyday life and into contemporary life strategies. Today people are interested in knowing how people in the past have solved their problems or how people in other cultures do. Thus a past called our ‘own history’ gets a touch of exoticism and is as well as any other foreign culture ‘exotic’. If this is so, our own life can be understood as an adventure. People start to look on themselves, they are creative scientists of their own. Ethnicity now can be a virtual one – what it already is if you think for instance of a Swiss woman with a Islamic shador as an identity marker or an Austrian learning Jewish history and practising Jewish religious calendar customs. We understand that our identity is a composed one – even if we don’t realise it. It becomes more and more important for that virtual ethnicity that we not only share the values but know and communicate the stories behind.

Ethnologists coproduce the contours of a common narrative. This narrative can be a story which allows the nation or the group to perform itself. If this narrative is based on soft differences which create a slight diversity it may enable the members to perform themselves in an easygoing way. The common narrative tells the story of the national and the self as liberal, friendly, aggressive or boring, as hedonistic or extremely moralistic (Löfgren 1989) and installs artefacts and symbolic routines (Niedermüller 1994). But even a soft story can be turned into an aggressive one by accentuating and interpreting even slight differences as identity-markers.

Looking in different directions for an historical or cultural anthropology we have brought ourselves in new nets of discourse. This is helpful. Otherwise what would remain for European ethnologists would be a marginalized area of the banalities of everyday life (into which some have already escaped). It is not the

only chance to look into the niches and to put the banalities as our driving forces on the altar of celebrated identity. Our actual job is a critical discovery of the self-evidence (for instance of ethnicity). It is more than the reconstruction and production of the ingredients of a corporate culture which seems to be more necessary (at least more asked for) than ever before. Once we have erected the construction and production of realities in shaping nations, groups just by description; are we simply replacing the old class model by a cultural one? In Germany (as well as in other western countries) male teenagers for decades have stolen cars (James Dean in "Rebel Without A Cause", 1955) and damage them on risky tours. Since they are labelled as 'crash kids' their behaviour is culturally expressed; and told as a story it seems integrated in a relatively normal biography of a male youngster.

Science has to name interests and should look for the authorities which are setting marks and thus should be more than a story-telling institution. Through that healing attitude which stories mostly include, a lot of questions and aspects have been lost during the last years. Ethnology took part in the ethnicization of culture supporting a camouflage of the social dimension of conflicts (Kaschuba 1995). Since the narratives of the 60s and 70s have lost their integrating power the common story of ethnicity has been raised and revitalized again. We put forward what we discuss and give key words for the political rhetorics: angels, ethnicity, fast-food. By writing books and planning symposiums we initiate, create and strengthen discourses on certain topics. And we know: in deconstructing the stories we de-construct our role as scientific authorities. There is a turn towards literarization which makes us neglect our job: we describe our own lives and invent colourful stories pretending it is somebody else's life. We describe what does not change and look for an entertaining interpretation, a good story.

But, we should not streamline our stories too much and function like a therapy-institution which entertains a certain segment of the society. Since globalization seems to emerge a society in which compulsory leisure will be the order of the day, the demand for entertainment

will rise and will include appeasing purposes. Since Folk-Culture is regarded as a storage-depot for various identity games the rhetorics of identity gain an easy going plausibility. A new CD with traditional music is advertised as follows: "Authentizität, Originalität und Unterhaltsamkeit zeichnen diese neuen Tonträger aus."

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