

Folklorists in Public:
Reflections on Cultural Brokerage in the United States and Germany

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Having attended the first German-American folklore conference in Bloomington, Indiana, in 1988, where public folklore was nowhere to be seen, I am particularly struck by the divide that this topic has opened up at the Bad Homburg Symposium ten years later. That divide looks something like this. While *Volkskunde* has a long institutional history and bad conscience about how the discipline was instrumentalized in the past, American folklore has a short institutional history and optimism in the potential for a critical public folklore practice to serve progressive ends. Public folklore in the United States is flourishing, for the time being. It has never existed in this form in German-speaking countries, nor is it likely to emerge in the foreseeable future. To read the Bad Homburg symposium proceedings is to see a faultline between the *Volkskundler* and folklorists gradually emerge and coalesce.¹ The struggle to find a common language and common ground reveals just how incommensurable the two situations are. They cannot be mapped onto one another. The terms do not translate. Different historical experiences have produced different dispositions to the issues at hand. It is the aim of this afterword to reflect on the divide.

Incommensurabilities

Public folklore, a term of recent coinage in the United States, refers to the professional mediation of folklore for the public. (See Baron and Spitzer 1992.) *Public folklore* may be distinguished from *applied folklore* (the application of folkloristic concepts and methods to a wide variety of social and cultural concerns); *commercial popularization* of folklore; and what I will call *vernacular modes of cultural display* or the popular arts of ethnography. There is no German term or adequate translation for *public folklore*, as can be seen from the awkward literal translation *öffentliche Folklore* that Hermann Bausinger offers to make just that point.

By public folklore, the Americans refer to their *own* mediations of folklore for the public. By *öffentliche Folklore*, the German-speakers refer to what *others* do with folkloristic knowledge. The confusion is captured perfectly in Wolfgang Kashuba's gloss on *öffentliche Folklore* as "'public folklore'—but without 'public folklorists.'" (6) This is a conceptual impossibility both in German and in English, but for quite different reasons. It is impossible in English, because the Americans define public folklore as something that only public folklorists (and their colleagues) can produce. Without public folklorists there can be no public folklore. They would not use the term to refer to what others do with their knowledge and certainly not to the misuse of their expertise. It is impossible in German, because

¹ As I was unfortunately not able to attend the Bad Homburg symposium, these reflections are based on the proceedings. I thank Regina Bendix and Gisele Welz for the opportunity to contribute to the proceedings.

öffentliche Folklore is by definition public presentations of folklore in which folklorists are *not* involved. (Bausinger 1) To say that "folkloristic knowledge is much in evidence in public, while folklorists are not," may be a fair description of an *öffentliche Folklore* without *Volkskundler*, which is what I think is meant here, but not of public folklore. In other words, public folklore and *öffentliche Folklore* are not translations of one another. They refer to different phenomena. The public folklorists are in the business of mediating cultural representations, while the *Volkskundler* want to control how their terms and concepts circulate in the public sphere. What *öffentliche Folklore* would seem to need is not an *öffentliche Folklorist*, but an academic *Volkskundler*.

It is no accident that when Bausinger offered a literal translation of public folklore, he did not propose *öffentliche Volkskunde*, but *öffentliche Folklore*. As Mary Beth Stein notes, "in everyday German the word *folklore* (as opposed to *Volkskunde* defining the field of study) connotes the commercialization of folk traditions and objects for mass consumption." (3) Terms such as *folklorism*, *folklorismus*, and now *öffentliche Folklore* follow from this association. It does not help that in English, "that's just folklore" means that something is untrue, or that we use one word, folklore, for our subject matter and our discipline. Not surprising then that *Volkskundler* should associate the term *public folklore* with *folklorismus*, *folklorism*, and *fakelore*. The term *public* (as opposed to *academic*) just seems to intensify this association. Of course, the *Volkskundler* have theorized how the very act of studying folklore begins the process of its mutation into folklorismus, as Konrad Köstlin, citing Bausinger, points out in this volume. Adding to the confusion, the German-speakers conflate the English terms *folkloric*, *folkloristic*, and *folklorismus*, while American folklorists distinguish *folkloristics* (the discipline that studies folklore) from *folkloric* (cultural expressions that model themselves on folklore, but are not folklore) and rarely use the terms *folklorismus* or *folklorism*, which are European coinages. In other words the English neologism *folklore*, coined in 1846, has migrated into other languages, where it has a life of its own.

To further capture the incommensurabilities of our ways of thinking, consider the distinction between *folklore* (the discipline and the disciplinary subject), *public folklore* (the professional mediation of folklore for the public), and *the popular arts of ethnography* (uses of folklore and folkloristics by the public). These three categories do not map easily onto the two categories that *Volkskundler* distinguish, namely, *Volkskunde* (the discipline) and *folklorismus* (popular [mis]uses of folklore). Whereas this distinction would once have separated authentic or first-order folklore from phony or second-order folklore, today it is marks rather the distinction between authoritative *Volkskunde* knowledge and the popular uses of it, though the earlier distinction has not completely disappeared. This symposium is particularly useful for the way that it reveals the *Volkskundler* struggling to find some middle ground and looking for it in the form of a critique of *öffentliche Folklore*, rather than in the activism of public folklore.

I have taken pains to lay out this terminology because it so precisely reveals, first, how public folklorists have opened a space between folklore and what our German-speaking colleagues understand as folklorismus; and second, why it is so difficult to talk about public folklore in German. Not only are folklore and *Volkskunde* not exact translations of

one another, but the English term *folklore* has also entered various European languages, German among them, where its meanings diverge from English usage. While ambiguities in translations from German to English add to the confusion--Has the word folklore has been transposed or translated from German into English and what does it mean in the German text?—those ambiguities are also catalytic. They require that we attend carefully not only to conceptual distinctions in English and German, but also to subtle differences in our disposition and sensibility, themselves products of our particular historical situations. How these terminological ambiguities will be communicated in the German and English translations of these proceedings should provide even more food for thought.

This symposium is about cultural brokerage, negotiation, and translation. While the subject on the table is the relationship between folklorists, the "folk," and the public, the participants had first and foremost to broker, negotiate, and translate between folklorists and *Volkskundler*. It has been difficult to find a common language, literally.

Distorted Mirrors

As Bausinger suggests, *Volkskundler* view the public as naive and their "questionable performances of folk costume associations or perhaps worse of overdone folk music events on television" with "pity and condescension." (1) *Volkskundler* approach these "traditional public performances," this folklorism, with suspicion and mistrust --and not without reason. What Bausinger calls *öffentliche Folklore* seems to be so contaminated by its history and so vulnerable to backsliding that responsible *Volkskundler* must maintain a distance from these activities, while actively producing a critique of them. After all, the discipline of *Volkskunde* itself and an earlier generation of *Volkskundler* were themselves part of the contaminating history. Residues of that history seem to survive in *öffentliche Folklore*, precisely because it does not seem to produce its own internal critique. The *Volkskundler* feel a visceral aversion to these displays, which suggests that *öffentliche Folklore* functions as profoundly disturbing rear-view mirror. These public displays activate deeply incorporated cultural practices. They are extremely difficult to "purify," for those engaged in them seem to have forgotten, if they ever even understood, how they were once used.

Volkskundler who keep their distance from such folklorisms are keeping the memory of their contamination alive. Mary Beth Stein aptly characterizes Bausinger's position then she writes that German disengagement is "a matter of professional honor," not only after the period of Nazi *Volkskunde*, when it was "an applied science in the service of the state," in the words of James R. Dow and Hannjost Lixfeld, but also today in relation to immigrants. (4) The *Volkskundler* have learned a bitter lesson from the misappropriation of folklore for reprehensible ends by fascist regimes and are thus wary of "amateurs, ...the corruptibility of the discipline," and the need for disciplined reflexivity at arm's length. (Burckhardt-Seebass 6) As Bernhard Tschofen observes, "because its history weighs so heavily on its shoulders..., [t]here is no other way to follow up *Volkskunde* than with a critical and reflexive approach." (2) Wolfgang Kaschuba and Gisele Welz are on the alert for how the keywords of our discipline are deployed in public discourse for reactionary ends. They are quick to detect the "ethnicist and racial biases" in discourses of

tolerance (multiculturalism, cultural diversity, political correctness) and the practices that flow from them (celebrations of cultural difference in the form of exhibitions and festivals). (Kaschuba 3)

As the *Volkskundler* expressed more than once during the symposium, they find themselves in a double bind. They insist that is necessary to maintain distance from public uses of folklore, but complain about being excluded or not respected as authorities in these matters. For all their critical reflexivity, they cannot stop an unsophisticated public from distorting their specialist knowledge. They seem to have no control over what that public does in the name of their discipline. Were the discussions we hold among ourselves to enter the public sphere, this too could be considered a dimension of public folklore understood as the role of the folklorist as a public intellectual. Christine Burckhardt-Seebass writes about public folklore as "a form of scholarly practice in the public sphere" and suggests that folklorists in Switzerland "seek the role of the critical observer and defend it," rather than "place special weight on becoming 'cultural ambassadors.'" (5-6)

But the *Volkskundler* say that they have been slow to adopt even the role of public intellectual. Commenting on a dialogue in the press about Berlin's cultural mix, Kaschuba notes that "Not a single ethnologist or folklorist took part in this discussion about folklore, ethnicity, and multiculturalism, or indeed had been invited to do so." (2) From an American perspective, it is surprising to hear that one must be "invited" to speak? Why, in the past, have *Volkskundler* "never tried to take the initiative to be 'public scholars' in an active sense"? (Kaschuba 6) Not that folklorists can claim to have done otherwise. The larger question is the role of the public intellectual and especially of folklorists and *Volkskundler* in that capacity. This too could be understood as an aspect of public folklore so that the kinds of critiques we generate for each other might enter a larger public debate. This is what Kaschuba proposes when he writes that folklorists must interpret and broker their own cultural practices, as well as those of others, and that they need to do so in the midst of academic life and not only at a remove from it. The trenchant critiques and theoretical analysis provided by the *Volkskundler* at this symposium are vital to the integrity of public folklore as an enterprise and should be the cornerstone of training for this profession.

The American public folklorists explain that they derive their expert knowledge and authority not only from folklore scholarship, but also from a growing body of experience and critical engagement with specific modes of cultural mediation. They are engaged in the representation of culture through professionally mediated performances, demonstrations, and exhibitions. Burckhardt-Seebass, referring to Konrad Köstlin's comment during the discussion, offers a trenchant summary of these differences, as seen from the European side: "we study the kinds of institutions that Robert Baron represents, we do not participate in them." (6) American scholars also study these kinds of institution. That does not preclude their working within them. As Richard Kurin observes, public folklorists are cultural workers, rather than cultural commentators. That means "working with the very people they 'study'" through the process of brokerage that he has developed in practice and in theory. (4) It also involves advocacy, which could be seen as the other side of critique and compatible with it, if not actually a way of putting critique into practice, constructively. Mary

Hufford, Frank Korom, and Robert Baron provided examples of just this. Their goal is to work with living practitioners of traditional art forms in a spirit of cultural equity, rather than to make them into folklorists, though that has also happened.

Mutual Implication

Folkloristic knowledge, like other kinds of knowledge, enters into the arenas it is about, sometimes with the expert guidance of folklorists and *Volkskundler*, more often without. As Anthony Giddens (1991, 28) has noted, "The chronic entry of knowledge into the circumstances of action it analyzes or describes creates a set of uncertainties to add to the circular and fallible character of post-traditional claims to knowledge." Welz, referring to the work of Ulrich Beck, notes "the growing autonomy of 'knowledge users'" and knowledge producers such that "academically produced knowledge becomes more important in social life than ever before, but scholarship's claim to expertise and truth is simultaneously devalued."⁽⁸⁾ It is not only that ordinary usage has (mis)appropriated our terms and concepts and failed to recognize our authority, but equally, if not more important, the worst offenders seem to lack our disciplined reflexivity.

Consistent with the changing nature of science itself, our work depends not on "the inductive accumulation of proofs, but on the methodological principle of doubt," in Giddens's words. (21) However unsettling such doubt might be to scholars, it is "existentially troubling for ordinary individuals."⁽²¹⁾ Consider how those who dress up in folk costumes would respond to Peter Niedermüller's radically constructivist proposition that "the deterritorialization of culture and ethnicity" be understood in terms of "the fluid and constantly shifting result of boundless and flexible construction processes."² (4, 7) Or, that locality is produced by globalization, rather than arising from some kind of primordial rootedness?

The *Volkskundler* complain that they have no control over the (mis)appropriation of the knowledge they produce. As Kaschuba notes, "Folklorists or ethnologists wield in fact hardly any public influence which would be able to correct or control the usage" of their terminology. (5) Welz concurs: *Öffentliche Folklore* consists of "distorted caricatures of our theories, hopelessly outdated when compared with current disciplinary discourses." (4) This, as Niedermüller astutely observes, is "an old theoretical, political, and ethical dilemma of folklore studies, namely, the political and social instrumentalization of our keywords." (1) Such uses of our language and concepts, he notes, would seem "to be a constitutive feature of these disciplines."⁽¹⁾

It might be helpful here, following Raymond Williams (1983), to treat folklore, Volkskunde, variations on them, and the cluster of terms related to them, as keywords-- his entry for *culture* in *Keywords* might

² On Niedermüller's call (8) for the relational and contingent nature of ethnicity and ethnic identity, we might want to revisit the history of efforts to theorize these concepts. See Frederik Barth (1970), Michael Moerman (1965), Werner Sollors (1986, 1989, 1996), and Philip Gleason (1992). This work, by European and American scholars, working in Southeast Asia, North Africa, Europe, and the United States, not only spans the last thirty years, but also explores the history of these concepts.

serve as a model. This would require that we first distinguish between specialist and ordinary usage, trace the ways that they are implicated in one another and account for both. We short-circuit that process when we complain that ordinary usage steals and distorts specialist terms. Bernard Tschöfen's call for "an analysis of ethnographic knowledge and their influence in everyday images of folklore" is consistent with this approach. () So too is Niedermüller's call for inquiry "into what happens to our theoretical keywords, to our theoretical legacy in the different political settings of late modernity." (1)

Disciplinary Rubbish

We actively produce outmoded knowledges through our own critical processes. Like radioactive waste, it is hard to dispose of our intellectual garbage. It has to go somewhere and the paths for its outflow are well defined. Recycled in the heritage and culture industries, our old ideas will eventually be succeeded by our newly old ideas. How could it be otherwise? The faster we move, the harder it is for those who would use our ideas to keep up. According to Köstlin, speed and acceleration, hallmarks of our time, help to produce our disciplinary subject, our historical asynchronies, and at ever faster rates, by recycling what is being left behind but is still present.

Our old ideas are not dying quickly enough, however. As Dorothy Noyes reminds us, we, like the folk, have a responsibility to our past, if only in the interest of our professional survival. She asks, "How do we keep our disciplinary inheritance from going to waste?" (4) Is there not a certain poetic justice in public folklorists exhibiting outmoded folk practices, while the folk (and in particular the provincial intellectuals) give "visibility to our outmoded concepts"? (5) Noyes notes the role of local teachers, clerics, and bureaucrats in regional historical societies and museums, as well as in documentation and preservation projects, and heritage festivals and exhibitions.

After all, repudiation is a constitutive feature of our field, for it creates a zone of non-normative practices that become a veritable coral reef for folklorists. First, these practices are collected and studied in the mode of foreclosure under the sign of errors and superstitions. Or, they are presented in the genre of the burlesque, with the aim of inducing feelings of shame and disgust, not unlike the sentiments of scorn and condescension expressed towards *öffentliche Folklore* during this symposium. Then, the radical potential of the outmoded is recovered and can be studied in new terms. Gottfried Korff, citing Gerhard Ritter, describes how this process works in the museum. In dialectical fashion, real distancing (getting rid of old things) gives way to transvaluation (determining what is historical and worthy of preservation). This process is consistent with the rubbish theory of Michael Thompson (1979) or the notion of heritage as giving the dead and dying a second life as an exhibit itself. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998a, 151-152) or the image of the museum rising from the rubble, in the case of Michael Fehr's work (1988).

It is in this way, historically, that the field of folklore has constituted itself. (See Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1990, 1995, 1996a, 1998b.) I detect in this symposium the beginnings of a new disciplinary subject, constituted yet again through repudiation, only this time what is repudiated

is not Catholic ritual or Jewish ceremonialism or peasant paganism, but vernacular versions of our very own disciplinary outmodedness. What superstition was to religion, folklorism is to folklore—someone else's mistaken version of our disciplinary terms and concepts. We produce this phenomenon through our repudiations. It is in the nature of repudiation that they should be emotionally charged. As Ruth E. Mohrmann notes, in her response to Charles Briggs, "The daily fight against ignorance is tiring and the forms of one's intellectual practice in society are being tested daily." (2)

One of the most striking differences between the folklorists and *Volkskundler* is precisely a certain structure of feeling, to use Raymond Williams's resonant phrase. (Williams 1977) Such feelings anchor the disengagement of *Volkskundler* and the engagement of public folklorists. Like the reformers of old, we are committed to correcting the errors of a naive public for such ignorance is bad for them and bad for us. Will a time come, as in the past, that the tables will turn and we will find in these outmoded and repudiated folkloristic practices, in these atavisms preserved by vernacular versions of ourselves, possibilities for our own future? They may well last longer than our discipline—as Noyes notes, the traditional intellectual or amateur folklorist, "is the kind of person who calls himself a folklorist, who is not ashamed of the word.... Provincial intellectuals are the people who still care about folklore." (5) Moreover, Catalonian organizers of local folk dance and music groups consider themselves, not her, to be the "real" folklorists. I had a similar experience, when Mrs. Rae Faust, who was born and raised in Lublin, Poland, at the turn of the century, would say to me in Yiddish, "You are a folklorist? I'm the folklorist! What do you know?" She had a point. After all, I could never hope to duplicate what she did indeed know.

Evacuating the Lifeworld

If the old *Rücklauf*, as Köstlin describes it, was about replanting that which it described (giving folklore back to the folk), the new *Rücklauf* is about the folk taking folkloristics, as they understand it, unto themselves. Walter Hävernich's suggestion that "one ought to perhaps publish *Volkskunde* research in Latin" is one solution. To some extent we already do this when we write in a theoretical language that is unintelligible to anyone except our colleagues, and even we may not understand each other. Where then does the solution lie? Shall we withhold what we know from those who will misuse it? Or, shall we communicate and demonstrate our best ideas more effectively to them, not in the form of a reprimand or lecture, but through engaged practice and cultural brokerage? If, following Köstlin, "*Volkskunde* is the discipline concerned with the realm of the *thus far* not questioned, the taken for granted" (emphasis added), then we sow the seeds of our own destruction. Restated, *Volkskunde* is the discipline that brings the taken-for-granted into view, which, as Köstlin rightly notes, changes its character completely—it ceases to be taken-for-granted. It is no longer what it once was. I take this as the gist of Cantwell's distinction between *habitus* and ethnomimesis. It is the difference between life and folklore.

It does not follow, however, that "There will be less and less that will not be spoken of." First, this is not so much a description of how *Volkskunde* evacuates the unsaid from the lifeworld. It rather marks out the limits of *Volkskunde* to find what is newly taken-for-granted. It also

indicates the success of older assumptions in escaping the discipline's categories. We might keep this in mind when considering the applications proposed by the Roths, who seek to detect, reveal, and change tacit understandings and concomitant behaviors that obstruct intercultural communication—in a word to intervene in the *habitus* at the center of Robert Cantwell's meditation on the logic of practice. Cantwell is interested precisely in how "dispositions" can resist the efforts of folklorists to excavate and instrumentalize what is below the level of consciousness.³ If I read Cantwell correctly, he is making a case for the importance of what cannot be recognized and therefore protects itself from folkloristic representation. So is Kaschuba, who suggests that "in the face of rampant culturalisms, ethnology ought to strive to be less complacent, less easily applicable."(quoted by Bendix, 4) Perhaps in this way, Bendix suggests, it may be possible for folklorists to protect the revolutionary or emancipatory potential of the field from becoming reactionary, as has occurred in the past, or from the unintended consequences of good intentions.

Second, the issue is not so much how *Volkskunde* atrophies the taken-for-granted as it is the emergence of new lived relations to what has been brought into consciousness. That relation, as explicated by Haym Soloveitchik (1994), is more ideological than it is mimetic and it produces new cultural formations in their own right, like a Jewish religious stringency that is historically unprecedented, as well the emergence of klezmer music, which has moved far beyond its beginnings as a revival music. (See Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998d.) We might rethink, in this light, Kaschuba's comments on "people arriving today in Berlin with Russian passports and Jewish birth certificates," who study Yiddish and turn to Jewish ritual. He characterizes what they are doing as "no recollection of a hidden cultural heritage," but rather "social integration by cultural disintegration." They have gone ethnic, they have tribalized, "following the rules of German history and citizenship in a very logical way."(7)

American public folklorists are coming to recognize the possibilities in the popular arts of ethnography, a point made by Noyes. Even vernacular modes of cultural self-presentation mutate from the metacultural to the cultural as they become ways of life in their own right, rather than demonstrations of the outmoded. I have in mind Native American powwows, the klezmer music phenomenon, the particular forms and uses of new Native American museums, and other cases where the gap is narrowing between our professional knowledge and mediation, on the one hand, and vernacular modes of cultural performance, on the other. We have, as it were, been learning from each other.

Public Folklore and the American Academy

Folklore only established itself as an independent field in the American university during the last fifty years, a bittersweet history illuminated by Roger Abrahams, who has played such a vital role in shaping this field. To do so, Richard M. Dorson believed it necessary to distinguish clearly between the disinterested study of folklore (pure scholarship) and the popularization and application of folklore. While this

³ Cantwell and his invocation of Bourdieu's practical mimesis might also be read against public folklore's self-definition as a representational enterprise and in tandem with Haym Soloveitchik's mimetic society. (Soloveitchik 1994)

strategy was intended to make the academic discipline respectable, its most enduring effect, to Dorson's chagrin, may well be the emergence and professionalization of public folklore. Were he alive today, what would he make of William Ivey and William Ferris, two folklorists, heading up the National Endowment of the Arts and National Endowment of the Humanities, respectively. The academic field that he established is by no means secure. It may even be disappearing within the university as departments and institutes change their name, merge with other departments, or simply go out of business. (See Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1996b) In contrast, the American Folklife Center and the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, both of them federally funded and national in their responsibility, now seem to have better long-term prospects than the flagging folklore programs at the University of Pennsylvania and University of California in Los Angeles.

Robert Baron, who has steadily and consistently worked to professionalize the field of public folklore and stimulate reflection on its theories and methods, calls for folklore programs to provide practical training relevant to a career in public folklore, assuming, of course, that academic programs will survive. But what about the academic folklore programs? Offering practical courses will not enhance their academic standing and academic standing is the key to their survival. How then might academic folklore programs forge a relationship with public folklore that would breathe new life into the discipline? This is a call for nothing short of a repositioning of folklore, not only in relation to other disciplines, but also in relation to the various stakeholders in cultural policy. Briggs is on the mark when he says that "both 'academic' and 'public' folklorists participate in institutionally situated metacultural debates," particularly around "tradition" and "heritage." (1) While he outlines strategies for ensuring that public folklore initiatives do not backfire, I would like to suggest the usefulness of his formulation for rethinking the agenda for academic folkloristics. Although individual scholars have moved in this direction, the field as a whole and folklore programs in particular have yet to make the paradigmatic shift. As Regina Bendix and Gisele Welz note in their preface to this volume, public folklorists have played "a central role as an agent of transformation in disciplinary self-examination." (14) They have done so on the basis of "a rich experiential knowledge about the problematic relations between theory and practice." (19)

The current generation of public folklorists are, for the most part, academically trained in folklore. In light of the precarious situation of folklore in the academy, what can aspiring public folklorists look forward to? Consider how folklore and *Volkskunde* measure up to the three steps that academic disciplines need to take if their are to be successful in their professionalization. Drawing on the sociology of science and cognizant of other models of knowledge transfer, Bendix and Welz outline them as follows. First, disciplines must establish a monopoly on jobs. Second, they must control specialist knowledge, procedures, and terminology. Third, they must build "institutions that organize the practical application of scholarly knowledge in society." (15)

With respect to the first step, public folklorists may not have a monopoly on public folklore jobs, but they have positioned themselves strategically for them. Not only have they succeeded in establishing folk arts funding programs and controlled the guidelines at the national and state

level, but also they have been entrepreneurial in creating their own not-for-profit organizations. As for the second step, the *Volkskundler* have made it clear that they do not have control over their specialist knowledge, procedures, and terminologies. The competition comes less from other specialists than from amateurs. Finally, public folklorists have been remarkably successful in building institutions that organize the practical application of folklore knowledge to public life. However, unless academic folklore programs rally, the entire enterprise, like a house of cards, could collapse—unless, that is, we are looking to a future of public folklore without academically trained public folklorists. Or, alternatively, existing graduate folklore programs may become masters programs in public folklore or new ones created, in line with the explosion in the American university of specialized masters programs in new or newly configured subjects, some of them integrating theory and practice.

Museums and the Academy

In Europe and in German-speaking areas, in particular, as Bendix and Welz note, "the only field within German discourse that has seen comparable reflexive engagement is the museum," an engagement, from what I understand, that is concerned with the politics of cultural representation. In German-speaking areas, as well as in other European countries, *Volkskunde* (and *Volkerkunde*) were, and to some degree still are, museum fields. In an effort to modernize these fields, scholars have tried to move them out of museums, situate them more squarely within the university, and free them from museum collections. That has meant greater attention to theory, as well as to topics other than material culture, and to new ways of configuring research problems in new kinds of research sites. As Bausinger notes, once they were free of the museum, *Volkskundler* found that their "disciplinary view opened up, and this widened horizon brought about a dismantling of the traditional genres and fields." (7)

Museums are not so nimble. Their history is materialized in collections and they are committed, some might say condemned, to preserve and interpret those collections forever after. Long after the knowledge formations that sedimented themselves in those collections have moved on and moved out of the museum, those knowledge formations are preserved in the museum. There is no longer the close fit between the museum as an institution, a knowledge formation, and a collection. To the extent that older museums continue to do the same kinds of collecting, research, and exhibitions long after the founding discipline of *Volkskunde* has migrated to the university, they may become an intellectual backwater. Or, they may develop as an independent medium devoted first and foremost to exhibition and public education.

If, in the past, museums were engaged in research that produced collections that were exhibited to the public, today the new generation museum is more likely to mount exhibitions, collect what is necessary for the exhibition, and direct research to the exhibition. This what Korff means when he notes a shift of emphasis in museums from the depositional to the expository. (5-6) In other words, new generation museums are orienting themselves first and foremost to people—to their constituencies, not only their visitors, but also the communities whose culture they mediate. They are redirecting their mission from basic research and collection development to exhibition, education, and leisure. Public folklorists find

work in such museums, where their ability to organize public programs that involve local communities is specially valued. They are less likely to be engaged in primary research related to the museum's collections, unless that work is directly connected to an exhibition project. In contrast, if I understand the situation correctly, *Volkskundler* working in museums can reasonably expect to be doing primary research and do not think of themselves as being engaged in a kind of public *Volkskunde*. As Bendix and Welz characterize the situation, their public practice is secondary and undertheorized. (24) Moreover, as Christel Köhle-Hezinger suggests, in her response to Roger Abraham's musings on the American academy and public folklore, *Volkskundler* would rather do their research at the university and, if anything, feel undervalued in museums.

Public folklore, like public history and public art, is an engaged practice and it finds its parallel within the new museology. Museums in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand have been undergoing profound changes in terms of their institutional form, managerial culture, economic basis, and the museum medium itself. These changes are linked to the particular histories of these countries, whether they are postcolonial settler societies, understand themselves as multicultural or bicultural, engage a painful history of subjugation, or attempt to redress persistent inequities based upon race, gender, sexual preference, class, disability, or age. Not only have new national museums opened within the last twenty years, but also local communities have been forming their own museums, a prerequisite in many cases for the repatriation of their ancestral objects. (See Karp, Kreamer, and Lavine 1992.) They are increasingly present within the very infrastructure of museums—that is, those whose culture is on display are not only shown and seen in museum representations, but also they are increasingly part of the very fabric of the institution. This is particularly clear in the National Museum of the American Indian in Manhattan, the Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa (known as Te Papa), and in the new national museum of Australia, which is under construction.⁴

In her discussion of how minority museums in the United States are taking "the identity politics of cultural representation into its own hands," Welz notes that German historical museums, concerned as they are with the construction and deconstruction of national identity, are less likely to address these issues than are the ethnographic museums. (1) However, as she explains, the ethnographic museums, while attentive to cultural diversity and intercultural communication, have historically focussed on non-European primitive cultures. Guestworkers, aka immigrants, fall through the cracks, though there are efforts, through public programs and specially in the schools, to address their presence, with varying degrees of success.

It comes as something of a surprise that the *Volkskunde* and ethnographic museums in German-speaking countries, as characterized during this symposium, seem to have insulated themselves from developments in contemporary art, including not only the institutional

⁴ About the National Museum of the American Indian, see <http://www.si.edu/nmai/>, with special reference to the exhibition *All Roads Are Good* <http://www.si.edu/organiza/museums/amerind/exhibit/exroad.htm>. See also <http://www.conexus.si.edu/main.htm>.

critique of such artists as Hans Haacke, but also the kinds of experimentation within art museums and alternative venues for contemporary art that are transforming normative museum practice elsewhere. It is no longer possible to assume that objects will be the basis for exhibitions or collections the basis for museums. Beth Hatefutsoth/Museum of the Diaspora, in Tel Aviv, was conceived in the fifties and opened in 1978 as a museum without a collection—there was to be no collection as a matter of principle.⁵ Its first director, Jeshajahu Weinberg, put forward the model of the concept or story museum. He was also responsible for conceptualizing the permanent installation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in televisual rather than artifactual terms. When I asked him for his definition of a museum, his answer was "a story in three-dimensional space." Not surprisingly, Weinberg was a theatre director before he became a museum director.

Note that Tokofsky, in describing the Museum of Tolerance, mentioned tableaux, but not artifacts. Objects are not integral to that museum's main exhibitions, though several things are shown in a few vitrines outside the core installations. Given the mission of the museum, to establish the certainty of the Holocaust in the face of denial, it should come as no surprise that the Museum of Tolerance (and other Holocaust museums) eschew the "playful. challenging reinscription of objects and memory" in displays of historical reality called for by Korff and advocated by Tokofsky (18), on the model of the Museum of Jurassic Technology. The Museum of Tolerance is already walking a fine line by using dramatic recreations to tell the story of the Holocaust, so to speak, and ushering visitors into the final room, which is to all intents and purposes a concrete gas chamber with video monitors. The Museum of Jurassic Technology is a tour de force in recovering the possibilities of scientific uncertainty.⁶ Nothing could be further from the mission of Holocaust museums, though what Gilad Melzer has called "irreverent memory," does indicate generational shifts in structures of feeling associated with the Holocaust.

Contrary to the assumption that museums are about others, Te Papa operates on the principle that people come there to see themselves, though not quite in the sense of "inner ethnology" that Peter Sloterdijk suggests as the basis for the "authentic museum of today." (quoted by Korff 4) Te Papa, consistent with the philosophy of Ralph Applebaum, who designed the permanent installation at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, believes that people are more interested in stories than things.⁷ Moreover, new generation museums are producing new spaces of embodiment and "experience," predicated on immersion, a high-energy engagement of the senses, and intense emotional involvement. Among the most innovative, each for its own reasons, are science centres, museums of science and technology, and children's museums.

While there are European museums of *Volkskunde*, even if they have changed their names, there is no Museum of American Folklore, nor has there ever been one. There are, however, American museums of folk art and they have tended to trace their intellectual genealogy to the field of art

⁵ About Beth Hatefutsoth, see <http://www.bh.org.il/>.

⁶ About the Museum of Tolerance, see <http://www.wiesenthal.com/mot/>. On the Museum of Jurassic Technology, see <http://www.mjt.org/>.

⁷ About Te Papa, see <http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/default.html>.

history. Indeed, folklorists and folk art scholars have often been at odds, as reflected in Baron's criticism of the overaestheticized presentation of folk art in museums. They are separated as well by the very nature of the phenomena they present. While things can be separated from their makers and displayed on walls and in vitrines long after their makers are dead, performances cannot be separated from their performers. Moreover, to show performance is to exhibit people, with all the issues that raises. (See Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998a, 34-47) The festival is the "museum" for presenting folk performance and the development of the festival as a presentational format is one of the signature achievements of public folklorists.

The genealogy of the festival as a presentational form has long been associated in the United States with cultural activism in the context of immigration. One need only look to the immigrant homelands exhibitions and festivals organized by social workers in immigrant neighborhoods during the first decades of this century. (Bogen 1917, 252-257; Eaton 1932; Abramovitch 1996). This was public folklore *avant la lettre*. It used historically specific modes of mediation, many of them developed to perform the nation at home and at world's fairs—pageants, tableaux, booths, vitrines, and immigrants in national dress, folk music and dance ensembles, work demonstrations, recitations, declamations, and lecture, parades and processions. This is the genealogy of that public folklore genre par excellence, the folklife festival—a showcase of live performance, demonstration, and interpretation. In such festivals, even material culture is treated as performance, as process, and the working knowledge, not just the artifacts, is on display. The folklife festival is not such a "strange species of cultural production," when seen in historical perspective. (Bendix and Welz, 18, quoting Richard Bauman) If there is a strange new species, it might be the serious attention that folklorists like Bauman are devoting to it.

Public Folklore as an Art Practice

Precisely because they are dealing first and foremost with people, not collections of objects, public folklorists are responsible, and accountable, to all the stakeholders in the exhibition events that they create—the institutional sponsors, the performers and their communities, the public, and their professional colleagues. In this respect, they have more in common with certain forms of public art than they do with folk art scholars and museums. I have in mind the innovative projects, commissions, and exhibitions at the Karl Ernst Osthaus Museum, directed by Michael Fehr, in Hagen, Germany, and in particular the extraordinary memory room created by Sigrid Sigurdsson (1995) and completed by visitors to the museum.⁸ In the American context, there are the "dinner parties" of Suzanne Lacy, the AIDS Memorial Quilt, the Los Angeles Festival organized by Peter Sellars, the work of such theatre groups as LAPD and Elders Share the Arts, and the "reverse anthropology" of Guillermo Gomez-Peña and Coco Fusco. (See Taylor 1998, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998c.)

⁸ See Karl Ernst Osthaus Museum <http://www.hagen.de/KEOM/>, The AIDS Memorial Quilt <http://www.aidsquilt.org/quilt/>, and Guillermo Gomez-Peña <http://www4.ncsu.edu/eos/users/m/mcmusgro/public/ggpindex.html>.

In the digital context, there are many projects that would reward our attention. I mention only two. Activist photographer Susan Meiselas has created *akaKurdistan*, "a place for cultural memory and exchange," which she defines as "a borderless space [that] provides the opportunity to build a collective memory with a people who have no national archive."⁹ Artist photographer Lorie Novak, who launched *Collected Visions* in May 1996, describes the project as a participatory Web site that explores the relationship between family photographs and memory."¹⁰ Examples could also be cited from the work of experimental documentary film and video artists. What the work of public artists and such museums suggest is that the very forms and media, not just the content, need to be reinvented for they are powerful instruments with their own agency, and terms such as documentation and representation require not only their own deconstruction and but also to find appropriate modes of practical realization. These projects are far from the kitsch of the worst-case examples repeatedly cited by the *Volkskundler*.

While these artists and curators do not identify themselves as public folklorists or their projects as public folklore, they are germane to our discussions. They prompt us to rethink public folklore in the terms in which it is being defined here—as cultural representation—and to reinvent the forms and media that are being deployed to that end. Noyes is quite correct when she notes that "many folklorists work with people who have as much access to the media of representation as we do," and some of them may well be more savvy than we are in the use of these media. This accounts in part for Baron's call for including practical training in graduate folklore programs.

Beyond Representation

Just as culturalism, modernity, globalization, and identity are coming under ever more intense critical analysis, as evidenced in this volume, so too are construction and representation. (See Dominguez 1992, Lynch 1994.) Representation refers both to *visibility* (public folklore as the representation of culture) and *participation* (cultural citizenship). (On cultural citizenship, see Flores and Benmayor 1997, Hall and Held 1989, and Miller 1998.) As a first step, we might rethink "visibility politics," the notion that the key to setting things right is being seen. (See Phelan 1992.) Based on her work in Appalachia, where she is as much an applied as a public folklorist, Mary Hufford argues eloquently for the efficacy of visibility ("an assumption that cultural visibility enhances political footing"), which she links to identity, and the role of public folklorists in producing both. (8)

The tension between the visibility poles (to be seen or not to be seen) is captured in the difference between affirmative action (make note of differences and act affirmatively in relation to them) and anti-discrimination (ignore differences and proceed as if they did not exist). Those opposed to affirmative action have called it affirmative discrimination. It is in this context that we might think about the proposal for intercultural communication by Klaus and Juliana Roth. Their work relates to "diversity training," an emerging field in the United States. Diversity workshops are

⁹ See <http://www.akakurdistan.com/>

¹⁰ See <http://cvisions.nyu.edu/mantle/index.html>.

part of a longer history of sensitivity training, prominent right after World War II, which was designed to overcome racial prejudice in a spirit of "tolerance," or to use the language of the Roths, to "facilitate ethnic co-existence," foster better cross-cultural understanding, manage cultural diversity, and "ease the social consequences of globalization and increased culture contact." (12-13) This work, which pays particular attention to non-verbal communication and taken-for-granted practices and understandings, is closer to applied than to public folklore as Baron would define it. The experience of Jews during the Nazi era speaks to the dangers of visibility and its lethal relation to identification, with repercussions that extend to the United States.

At Ellis Island Immigration Museum, the ground floor exhibition includes a variety of displays showing how many immigrants have arrived in the United States and where they settled. A map that lights up when you press a group's name shows where in the United States that group settled in significant numbers.¹¹ Nowhere in the list of hundreds of groups, including such small ones as Manx (Isle of Man), are Jews to be found. A bulb will light up for Israel and for Palestine, but not for Jews. When I've asked the National Parks Service ranger guide, on more than one occasion, why Jews are not on the list (or for that matter anywhere else on the ground floor, with one exception), the answer is "They are a religion, not a nationality." How the ranger came to that determination is another matter. Jews are absent because the information on displayed is based on the census and Jews are not a census category. It is true that the census, as matter of principle, does not count the adherents of a religion and that Judaism is a religion. However, it does not follow that Jews in the United States can be so easily defined, as can be seen from a survey in 1944 that asked scholars and leaders of the American Jewish community about how Jewish immigrants should be classified. The compilers of the report came to the conclusion that American Jews should not allow themselves to be classified, a prerequisite for being counted by the census. In other words, they should not allow themselves to be made visible in this way. (YIVO Institute for Jewish Research 1945; see also Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1994). As a result, Jews cannot be found in the census or seen on the ground floor of the Ellis Island Immigration Museum today—except, that is, for a few Yiddish words they are said to have contributed to American English. That exhibit, a wooden "language tree" whose leaves bear words that entered American English from immigrant languages is not based on the census.

Visibility can be disempowering, that is, it can be used to disempower.¹² It can be used to accuse, to shame, and to punish, as the pillory, the public execution, and the anatomical dissection of criminals attest, and as a powerful tool of subjection, as Saidiya Hartman eloquently demonstrates in her study of slavery. Exhibitions have been used precisely to achieve this goal, to mention only *"Degenerate Art": The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*, organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1991, which doubles the effect by showing (and therefore shaming) how the Nazi's shamed by showing. *War of Extermination: Crimes of the Wehrmacht from 1941 to 1944*, the controversial exhibition

¹¹ For a picture of the map and other displays based on the census, on the ground floor, see http://www.libertystatepark.com/inside_ellis_island.htm. See also <http://www.nps.gov/stli/serv02.htm>.

¹² I discuss this process as foreclosure in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998a, 159-165.

organized by the Hamburg Institute for Social Research in 1995, that forced visitors, many of them former soldiers in the Wehrmacht (or their relatives) to confront what had been denied about their role in the genocide. (Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung 1996)¹³. Many other examples could be adduced.¹⁴

One might protest that these examples are not germane to a discussion of the affirming visibility that public folklore offers. One might argue that like chicken soup, celebrating culture might do some good and can't do any harm. But, as several *Volkskundler* noted, multicultural festivals can obscure and even impede the economic and political handicaps faced by those whose culture is celebrated. (See also Bennett 1998) Even with the best intentions, as Welz, Briggs, Korom, and others have noted, cultural activism, particular in the form of cultural celebration, can have unwelcome consequences. Hufford suggests the kind of sophistication, strategy, and long-term commitment that is necessary for the work of a public folklorist—or more accurately, a blend of public and applied folklore—to achieve its goals. So does Welz in her analysis of the Harvest Festival in the Gallus quarter of Frankfurt, an object lesson in how poorly those who organize such events understand how they can backfire, or more cynically, how multicultural programs are a blueprint for how to achieve gentrification with as little resistance as possible. These issues are nicely captured in Tony Bennett's recent theorization of cultural diversity policy. (Bennett 1998)

If Hufford's public folklorist is a Trojan horse, which works by stealth, Welz's account calls to mind a watchdog, whose vigilance might make it harder for celebrations of culture to proceed naively or cynically in the name of multiculturalism, heritage, and identity. These images aptly capture the engagement and disengagement that defines the divide between folklorists and *Volkskundler* on the matter of public folklore.

¹³ The New Press (New York) will publish this volume in English translation in October 1999 in conjunction with the exhibition, which will be shown in New York.

¹⁴ The Museum of Genocide (also known as Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum) is located in the former *Security Jail 21*, previously the Tuol Svay Prey high school, in Phnom Penh. See <http://www.asiatour.com/cambodia/e-03phno/ec-phn20.htm>. This museum unflinchingly states its subject in its name. In contrast, the name of the Museum of Tolerance/Beth Hashoah, discussed by Peter Tokofsky, emphasizes its universal message in English (Museum of Tolerance) and its particular message in Hebrew (Beth Hashoah means "House of the Holocaust"). Similarly, the Peace Memorial Museum in Hiroshima documents how the atomic bomb devastated the city, but makes no specific reference to the bombing in the name of the institution.

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