

# EUROPEAN ETHNOLOGY AS ENGAGED TOPOSOPHY

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## ABSTRACT

In this essay, I shall argue that Ethnology can be seen as a scientific approach to the *local* that promotes a comparative understanding of the “own” and the “other” (and hence of encounters and conflicts) both among humans and between human and non-human subjects, viewed as part of a “local household”. The three approaches are not competing with one another but flowing together, building on and mutually conditioning one another. Their starting point is *topography*, the thorough description of place; this flows into *topology* – the interpretation of place with a view to improving the conditions of conviviality – and *toposophy*, understandings of how lived experience forms our worldview and beliefs grounded in the wisdom of place. In the question of how we express these beliefs in our definitions of the Local, the cycle, in a sense, returns to its starting point.

KEY WORDS: European ethnology, toposophy, topography, topology, interdisciplinary sciences, regionalism.

## ANOTACIJA

Straipsnyje tvirtinama, kad etnologija – tai mokslo disciplina, siekianti moksliskai pažinti *lokalumą* taikant lyginamąjį „savos“ (kultūros) ir „kitos“ (kultūros) supratimą. Pabrėžiama, kad etnologijos mokslas visų pirma yra suvokiamas lokaliame tradicinių kultūrų tyrimų kontekste, o minėtoji skirtis išryškėja tiek tarpžmogiškuose santykiuose, tiek ir santykiuose tarp žmonių ir aplinkos. Etnologijos esmę sudaro trys skirtingo lygmens sampratos. Jos tarpusavyje nėra kontrastingos, o nuosekliai viena kitą papildo, sudarydamos trilypę sistemą. Pirmasis lygmuo – *topografija* (*topography*), tiesioginis vietovės aprašymas. Jis įeina į *topologijos* (*topology*) sampratą sudėti – vietovės aprašymų objektyvių ir subjektyvių mokslinių interpretacijų lygmens. Trečiasis lygmuo – *toposofija* (*toposophy*), t. y. sampratų, kaip tebesitęsiančios pasaulėžiūros ir tikėjimų formos atsispindi realiame vietinių regiono žmonių gyvenimoje, tyrimai.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: europietiškoji etnologija, toposofija, topografija, topologija, tarpdalykiniai mokslai, regionalizmas.

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In the English-speaking world at least, Ethnology has for too long suffered from an antiquated “stones, bones and tones” image. With no disrespect to the scholarship of the ancestors of the subject as represented, for example, by John Rhys’ 1889 lectures on *The Early Ethnology of the British Isles* with their focus on archaeology and philology, my project is the renewal and reorientation of Ethnology<sup>1</sup>. The present essay proceeds from the perspective of (European) Ethnology to explore the contribution such an approach can make to the study of Human Ecology, raising the question of what kind of ethnology – in terms of research practice and its theoretical foundations – would be the most appropriate and useful in this context, and what is needed to achieve this. Using a term from my mother tongue, I could describe what I am ultimately trying to achieve as the re-establishment of *Heimatkunde* as an ethnologically informed human ecology of place. A brief

<sup>1</sup> See: KOCKEL, U. *Regional Culture and Economic Development. Explorations in European Ethnology*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002; KOCKEL, U. EuroVisions. Journeys to the Heart of a Lost Continent. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 2003, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 53–66; KOCKEL, U. Liberating the Ethnological Imagination. *Ethnologia Europaea*, 2008, Vol. 38, No. 1, p. 8–12; KOCKEL, U. Putting the Folk in Their Place. Tradition, Ecology and the Public Role of Ethnology. *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures*, 2008, Vol. 17, No.1, p. 5–23.

sketch of the current position and problems of (European) Ethnology is followed by an examination of three interconnected types of it, which leads to reflections on processes of understanding and interdisciplinarity, and finally to a discussion of what ethnologists can and should do, why, and how they might go about it.

In this essay, I shall argue that Ethnology can be seen as a scientific approach to the Local that promotes a comparative understanding of the “own” and the “other” (and hence of encounters and conflicts) both among humans and between human and non-human subjects, viewed as part of a “local household” (*oikomene*). It is also an applied regional science with a specific local and/or regional focus, relational and system-oriented, with a primarily political and socio-economic purpose; as such it concentrates on communities, and on issues such as migration and hybridization, and uses multi-sited methods. Finally, it can be regarded as an approach to cultural philosophy that brings issues of origin, perspective and the goal (or *telos*) into view, emphasizing self-reflexive analysis, lived experience, and responsibilities that arise from one’s chosen position. In practice, ethnology is a cyclical process of understanding that moves through these different versions in the course of actual research.

The three approaches are not competing with one another but flowing together, building on and mutually conditioning one another. Their starting point is *topography*, the thorough description of place; this flows into *topology* – the interpretation of place with a view to improving the conditions of conviviality – and *toposophy*, understandings of how lived experience forms our worldview and beliefs grounded in the wisdom of place. In the question of how we express these beliefs in our definitions of the Local, the cycle, in a sense, returns to its starting point.

(European) Ethnology is often perceived as interdisciplinary fusion. This requires the practitioner to be familiar with a range of disciplines. Methodological pluralism is a characteristic of ethnology that can be useful in this context. Ethnological concepts are “medium-range theories”; elementary ideas must be “checked out” in the concrete actuality of place (without ever losing sight of the global connectedness of the same). We need to cultivate an ethnology that is both: grounded and polycentric, undisciplined and open-minded, innovative and tradition-minded. Polycentrically grounded, it knows no dominant paradigm except that of diversity and ecological awareness. As a craft, it understands tradition as a process of change, and will not only observe the world but take participative action. This requires a vision of the future that is not worked out in contradistinction to the past, as is so common in socio-economic development informed by other approaches.

### **A Subject of Many Names**

Unlike other university subjects, whose disciplinary identity – internal diversity and indeed divisions notwithstanding – is constructed by means of a common subject designation, “European Ethnology” has come to be known in German as a *Vielnamenfach*, a subject of many names. With over half of all university programs nowadays being called *Europäische Ethnologie*, other designations range from the classical-paradigmatic *Volkskunde* (folklore) through the sometimes more, sometimes less *Empirische Kulturwissenschaft* (empirical cultural studies) and the increasingly popular *Kulturanthropologie*, to mainly media studies centered approaches. This diversity has its origins as much in the nationalisms of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries as in the turbulent political history of the subject during much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The finer points of these descriptive distinctions

need not concern us here; they have been discussed at length elsewhere<sup>2</sup>; for concise, critical surveys in English<sup>3</sup>. Behind the long debate over the name of the subject, which has been particularly vigorous in German-speaking universities, lies a set of deeper issues that concern the substance and purpose of the discipline. Hence the debate has much wider, international resonances, evident in recent discussions about the name and direction of the *Société Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore* (SIEF), the subject's main international association<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, the conditions for the development of the subject, under whatever name, have been rather different in the different European countries. While there are over twenty university institutes in Germany alone, in the United Kingdom, for example, researchers and teachers are working in an institutional context where (European) Ethnology as a separate university subject barely exists in practice. The few programs outside the School of Scottish Studies at Edinburgh University are attached to other subjects or constellations of subjects<sup>5</sup>: English (BA/MA) at Sheffield; Celtic Studies (MA) at Cardiff; Cultural History and Social Anthropology (MA) at Aberdeen; History, English and Politics (MA) at Ulster. At the time of writing, only two of the four designated professorial chairs are actually filled, both at the University of Ulster, where one of the main ethnological research programs, entitled "Habitus and Habitat", has developed human ecological perspectives since 2005. In the face of ever tighter public funding regimes, almost all humanities and, increasingly also, social science disciplines across the world are confronted with a growing crisis of financial legitimacy. Since the mid-1980s, universities in the United Kingdom have seen the rapid decline of modern languages; philosophy has disappeared in many institutions or survives precariously in functional association with larger subjects. With the exception of History and English, only subjects with a market value that is recognizable immediately – read: without critical reflection – appear to be in favor these days. In view of this constellation, not only Ethnologists need to be able to demonstrate their specific contribution, that is, what they have to offer that other subjects cannot provide in much the same way – or even better (usually meaning: cheaper). This problem is neither new nor locally limited<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> See: BAUSINGER, H.; JEGGLE, U.; KORFF, G. & SCHARFE, M. *Grundzüge der Volkskunde*. Darmstadt: WBG, 1978; GREVERUS, I.-M. *Kultur und Alltagswelt. Eine Einführung in Fragen der Kulturanthropologie*. München: Beck, 1978; BREDNICH, R. (ed.). *Grundriss der Volkskunde. Einführung in die Forschungsfelder der Europäischen Ethnologie*. Berlin: Reimer, 1988; WIEGELMANN, G. *Theoretische Konzepte der Europäischen Ethnologie. Diskussionen um Regeln und Modelle*. Münster: LIT, 1990; KASCHUBA, W. (ed.) *Kulturen – Identitäten – Diskurse. Perspektiven Europäischer Ethnologie*. Berlin: Akademie, 1995; KASCHUBA, W. *Einführung in die Europäische Ethnologie*. München: Beck, 1999; GÖTTSCHE, S. & LEHMANN, A. (eds.). *Methoden der Volkskunde. Positionen, Quellen, Arbeitsweisen der Europäischen Ethnologie*. Berlin: Reimer, 2001; GERNDT, H. *Kulturwissenschaft im Zeitalter der Globalisierung. Volkskundliche Markierungen*. Münster: Waxmann, 2002; HALLER, D. *dtv-Atlas Ethnologie*. München: Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag, 2005; JOHLER, R. & TSCHOFEN, B. (eds.). *Empirische Kulturwissenschaft. Eine Tübinger Enzyklopädie*. Tübingen: TVV, 2008;

<sup>3</sup> See: KOCKEL, U. *Borderline Cases: The Ethnic Frontiers of European Integration*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999; NIC CRAITH, M.; KOCKEL, U. & JOHLER, R. (eds.). *Everyday Culture in Europe. Approaches and Methodologies*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example: NIC CRAITH, M.; KOCKEL, U. & JOHLER, R. (eds.). (...), 2008; ROGAN, B. The Troubled Past of European Ethnology. SIEF and International Cooperation from Prague to Derry. *Ethnologia Europaea*, 2008, Vol. 38, No. 1, p. 66–78.

<sup>5</sup> KOCKEL, U. Turning the World Upside Down. Towards a European Ethnology in and of England. In: *Everyday Culture in Europe. Approaches and Methodologies*. Eds.: M. Nic Craith, U. Kockel & R. Jöhler. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008, p. 149–63.

<sup>6</sup> Cf.: BAUSINGER, H. *Volkskunde. Von der Altertumforschung zur Kulturanalyse*. Darmstadt: Habel, 1971; BURCKHARDT-SEEBASS, C. (ed.) *Zwischen den Stühlen fest im Sattel? Eine Diskussion um Zentrum, Perspektiven und Verbindungen des faches Volkskunde*. Göttingen: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Volkskunde, 1997; KÖNIG, G. & KORFF, G. (eds.). *Volkskunde '00. Hochschulreform und Fachidentität. Hochschultagung der deutschen Gesellschaft für Volkskunde, Tübingen, 9.-11. November 2000*. Tübingen: TVV, 2001.

In the following passages, I will try to illustrate three versions of Ethnology, setting way markers for a further discussion, which will consider aspects of the hermeneutic process and issues of interdisciplinarity, before finally turning to the question of what Ethnology can and should do today, why, and what concrete activities and concerns that might involve.

### **Topography: Ethnology as a Subject Specializing in “From-Here-Ness”**

As a first step – and perhaps the most obvious, in view of the classical self-image of *Volkskunde* as a partner and mirror of *Heimatkunde*, the knowledge and deep understanding of one’s local place – Ethnology may be defined as a subject specializing in the indigenous. But immediately I need to pause and clarify terminology before proceeding any further. Thinking between languages has its pitfalls; not only are there often no precise translations of terms – the attempt to find suitable terms for evolving concepts from among an existing vocabulary has to be mindful of current meanings that may limit their usefulness. With regard to the former, I am using the term “subject” throughout as a synonym for the German *Wissenschaft* because the English “science” has a rather more restricted meaning. The more literal German translation of “subject”, *Fach*, has more limited epistemological connotations. In the present section, the two coincide, but elsewhere in the essay I use “subject” in the broader sense of *Wissenschaft*. Three other terms used at the beginning of this paragraph also need commentary. *Heimat* and the subject dealing with it, *Heimatkunde*, are widely regarded as untranslatable in the sense of an immediate and accurate correspondence. This has in itself given rise to an extensive, more or less critical literature<sup>7</sup>. For the present purpose, these terms are important, and a working definition is needed. *Heimat* refers to an historical ecology of belonging, and *Heimatkunde* to the body of knowledge that, mediated through deep understanding, forms the contextual foundations of tradition. These definitions are not unproblematic and potentially controversial, but they will serve for the moment. The third term requiring a comment is “indigenous”. In the heading for this section, I used the somewhat awkward phrase “from-here-ness” instead, because the term “indigenous” has particular colloquial as well as academic meanings. There is a conceptual connection between this “from-here-ness” and *Heimat*, and to tease this out in English will need further work, resolving the tension between “native”, “indigenous” and other related terms that are often used interchangeably. At the end of this essay I come back to that point, but for the time being the German term *Hiesige* will serve to avoid confusion that might arise from the use of “indigenous”. Grammatically, it has a triple gender – as a masculine or feminine noun it refers to a person who is “from here”; as neutral noun it covers everything else that is from – or in whatever way else constitutes – that “here”. It should be noted that the term has not been thoroughly theorised in Ethnology or any other subject I am familiar with, and thus may carry certain intellectual risks that demand a careful and considered use for the present purpose.

<sup>7</sup> E.g.: FLUSSER, V. *Heimat und Heimatlosigkeit*. Köln: supposé, 1999; KLUETING, E. (ed.) *Antimodernismus und Reform. Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Heimatbewegung*. Darmstadt: WBG, 1991; KROCKOW, C. *Heimat. Erfahrungen mit einem deutschen Thema*. München: Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag, 1992; SCHMIDT, B. *Am Jenseits zur Heimat. Gegen die Utopiefindlichkeit im Dekonstruktiven*. Wien: Deuticke, 1994; BOA, E. & PALFREYMAN, R. (eds.). *Heimat – A German Dream: Regional Loyalties and National Identity in German Culture 1890-1990*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000; HECHT, M. *Das Verschwinden der Heimat. Zur Gefühlslage der Nation*. Leipzig: Reclam, 2000; SCHLINK, B. *Heimat als Utopie*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2000; BLICKLE, P. *Heimat: A Critical Theory of the German Idea of Homeland*. Rochester / NY: Camden House, 2002; TÜRCKE, C. *Heimat. Eine Rehabilitierung*. Springe: zu Klampen, 2006.

In my own research, I first encountered the term *Hiesige*, as the German translation of a Slavonic term, in connection with the recent history of Central Europe, in particular the Kresy region, which between the two World Wars formed the eastern part of Poland<sup>8</sup>. In that region the term is derived from the ethnic self-ascription that many local people used in census returns. Earlier, when looking at discourses about the location of the “center of Europe”, I had already noted the Ukrainian variant of the Polish and Belorussian terms in the provocative interpretation offered by Adrian Ivakhiv: “The most genuinely nomadic [...] may be those designated by the simple term *tuteishyi*, the word for those who are simply ‘from here,’ even if that ‘here’ changes in relation to the ‘theres’ which have shaped and defined the territory [...] over its many imperial and political-economic realignments”<sup>9</sup>.

If understood in this sense, the term *Hiesige* loses some of its rather old-fashioned aura. At the same time it becomes clear that the term has analytical potential beyond its descriptive use in regional historical observations. (European) Ethnology as a subject specializing in studying the *Hiesige* cannot – and must not! – be content with the detailed description of a putatively “own” culture, because such description, if it remains unreflected, is invariably drawn upon to support the celebration of that very “own”, however well-intentioned, and the experience of old-style *Volkskunde* has demonstrated that such celebration of the “own” tends to produce disregard or indeed contempt for the “other”, with often murderous consequences. Instead, any Ethnology studying the *Hiesige* must consider the “own” always in conjunction with the “other”, because it is impossible to conceptualise either in isolation. That approach leads to a focus on the “own” in the “other” and the “other” in the “own” as the foundation of a comparative understanding of the “own”. Similar ideas are behind Munasu Duala-M’bedy’s “xenology”<sup>10</sup>. Duala-M’bedy postulates the non-existence of the *Fremde* (the “other”) as such in order to turn the spotlight on the constructed nature of the same. His approach is eminently sensible and analytically fertile, but does reflect the contemporary postmodern hyperindividualism, according to which the Ego is the root of all actuality. While the constructivist approach has much to commend it, I would caution that we should not lose sight entirely of the material actuality beyond the image. Yoshiro Nakamura’s “xenosophy”<sup>11</sup> offers an interesting perspective in that regard, but it does not go far enough.

Even such a comparative approach offers no safeguard against the derivation of claims of “purity”, whether in the course of research itself or by political interests drawing on it. And even where there are no implications of superiority involved, such claims are problematic, as they can rarely be empirically sustained. Self-assured culture bearers, such as “traditional” musicians in Ireland, have long recognized cultural forms and practices as authentic as long as they fulfil their cultural purpose in a given context, regardless of their origin<sup>12</sup>. This points us to a particular quality of the *Hiesige* vis-à-vis the “own”; to stay with the example: “traditional” Irish music is internationally recognizable as such even when it is shot through with other influences. Hence the study of the

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g.: TREPTE, H.-C. Das Problem der ‘Hiesigen’ (tutejsi) im polnisch-weißrussischen Grenzraum. In: *Krynki: Annus Albaruthenus*, 2004, p. 67–87.

<sup>9</sup> IVAKHIV, A. Stoking the Heart of (a Certain) Europe. Crafting Hybrid Identities in the Ukraine – EU Borderlands. *Spaces of Identity*, 2006, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 38.

<sup>10</sup> See: DUALA-M’BEDY, M. *Xenologie. Die Wissenschaft vom Fremden und die Verdrängung der Humanität in der Anthropologie*. Freiburg: Alber, 1977.

<sup>11</sup> See: NAKAMURA, Y. *Xenosophie. Bausteine für eine Theorie der Fremdheit*. Darmstadt: WBG, 2000.

<sup>12</sup> See: KOCKEL, U. ‘Authentisch ist, was funktioniert!’ Tradition und Identität in drei irischen Städten. In: *Ort – Arbeit – Körper. Ethnografie europäischer Modernen*. Eds. S. Götsch, W. Kaschuba & K. Vanja. Münster: Waxmann, 2005, S. 127–134.



*Hiesige* must not be concerned with issues of “purity” and its maintenance, but rather with how intercultural encounters and conflicts are negotiated in local everyday cultural contexts. Consequently, Ivakhiv defines the *Hiesige* as the true nomads, and thus shows the deep connection of “own” and “other”, as I have tried to tease them out in my work on *Trenngrenzen* and *Mischgrenzen* – the former being borders that keep people and cultures apart, the latter frontiers where they mingle<sup>13</sup>.

The significance of place must not be overlooked or underestimated in all this. We hear and read a lot today about “globalization” and the ever increasing global networking of all spheres of everyday life. Academic terms can have an amazing tendency to mutate into metaphysical powers. Thus globalization is seen by many as an unstoppable force of socio-cultural and economic change. That is reminiscent of the idolatry and fatalism that modernisation – yet another metaphysical power – is supposed to have dispensed with long ago. It is rather questionable whether every negotiation of intercultural encounters and conflicts in local everyday culture constitutes an aspect of globalisation. In historical perspective, cultural encounters, conflicts and exchanges are nothing new. To deduce without critical reflection a general and inevitable cultural globalization from the undeniable economic globalization – the increasing global spread of a neo-liberalist version of the capitalist model of the economy (at least up until the most recent crisis of the financial system) – would mean to reduce the analysis of local events and actuality to merely economic factors. Although these factors are surely of enormous importance and need to be appropriately taken into account, Ethnology as a subject specializing in the *Hiesige* ought to play its role in the concert of academic disciplines by emphasizing that this is by no means the whole story; that, in fact, the most important aspects are being left out in such an analysis. There are many interdisciplinary interfaces where Ethnology can act as mediator and filter – between the local-specific level of the applied and the universal-generalizing level of theory – and thus become a kind of locally grounded conscience of research endeavors.

### **Topology: Ethnology as Applied Regional Science**

Therefore, in order to remain credible, Ethnology as a subject specializing in the *Hiesige* must work locally and spatially specific, but should not lose itself in the collection and contemplation of highly detailed descriptions of individual cultural expressions – important as these details may be for purposes of documentation and as data sources. Instead, its researchers should be system-oriented and think relationally; by that I mean not so much the playful engagement with hypothetical-metaphorical global system connections on a purely conceptual level, but rather the recognition of concrete cultural-ecological networks and their everyday actuality. In this sense, Ethnology can be regarded as an applied regional science; thus its often criticized lack of grand theories, compared to other social science and humanities subjects, may appear in a different light. Not that I would want to advocate a crude inductivism or some reactionary hostility to theorising. The former forgets that all interpretation requires an ex-ante theoretical framework, while the latter masks a universal theory that refuses to examine the political “facts” that it presupposes. Ethnology as applied regional science is concerned to contribute to the formation of locally and spatially grounded theories that are actively geared towards socio-economic and political change. This could, but need not, be

<sup>13</sup> See: KOCKEL, U. Heimat als Widerständigkeit: Beobachtungen in einem Europa freischwebender Regionen. *Komplexe Welt. Kulturelle Ordnungssysteme als Orientierung*. Eds. S. Götsch & C. Köhle-Hezinger. Münster: Waxmann, 2003, S. 167–176; KOCKEL, U. Frontiers. In: *Von Alltagswelt bis Wandmalerei. Eine kleine Enzyklopädie. Ina-Maria Greverus zum Fünfundsiebzigsten*. Eds. G. Welz & R. Lenz. Münster: LIT, 2005, S. 62–63.

understood in the sense of a “Grounded Theory”; that approach has its own problems and controversies, which cannot be discussed here at length<sup>14</sup>.

The “Farewell to Folk Life”, which the Tübingen School postulated at the end of the 1960s<sup>15</sup>, was an expression of the paradigmatic turn away from traditional *Volkskunde*, which had its roots in the romantic national movements of the nineteenth century. In its place, the protagonist sought to create an academic subject studying culture in ways and pursuing questions that are of contemporary social and political relevance, taking account of societal conditions, and developing a critical stance vis-à-vis past as well as present life worlds. Dieter Kramer<sup>16</sup>, playing on the literal meaning of the German term as “turning (=averting) need”, spoke of the *Notwendigkeit* (=necessity) of studying culture as an element of understanding, but also of active social change on the way to an appropriate theory of culture. The appropriateness of such a theory is determined not least by its local and spatial depth and its relationship to everyday experience and the life practices of the human beings to whom it refers. Within this perspective of (European) Ethnology as applied regional science, ethnographic community studies have therefore not only flourished in spite of wide-spread prophecies of doom, but have become a core concern addressing new dimensions<sup>17</sup>.

The “Farewell to Folk Life” was declared at about the same time as Anthropology was tentatively beginning to “come home”<sup>18</sup>. By adopting perspectives of (American) Cultural Anthropology, (European) Ethnology – initially mainly at Scandinavian universities – became partly anthropologized. This process of anthropologization brought new questions into focus: migration, “creolization”, tourism, to name but a few. Along with the more traditional community studies based in a single locality, a new, “multi-sited” ethnography was developed as a method of dealing with such phenomena, which had largely been neglected, if not indeed denied by classical *Volkskunde*. It might seem that the flourishing of a “multi-sited” ethnography in particular contradicts, at least superficially, the image of Ethnology as an applied regional science that I am sketching here. However, this apparent contradiction only arises in the abstract spaces of a pure constructivism. Even research that proceeds in a “multi-sited” field ultimately takes place in discrete sites, that is, in concrete places. The same applies, after a fashion, to field research in the virtual world of the Internet. Location-specific studies in this field need to be assessed according to their engagement with actual life worlds. Where their relevance can be demonstrated with concrete examples, they certainly contribute to an Ethnology envisaged as applied regional science.

The “Farewell to Folk Life” also coincided with the recollection – or, perhaps more accurately: the rediscovery – of the submerged political roots of the subject in the *Allgemeine Statistik* (=Public Administration; literally: “General Statistics”) of the Enlightenment. Whereas during the eighteenth century the main focus was on the collection of topographical information that was considered useful for the formulation of modern policies, and thus the gaze was directed primarily from the top down, nowadays that direction has become generally reversed. The conditions and needs of particular places have become the point of departure. Thus Ethnology as applied regional science is clearly and closely related to interdisciplinary approaches to “endogenous development”,

<sup>14</sup> For a critique of the approach, see, e.g.: THOMAS, G. & JAMES, D. Reinventing Grounded Theory: Some Questions about Theory, Ground and Discovery. *British Educational Research Journal*, 2006, Vol. 32, No. 6, p. 767–795.

<sup>15</sup> See: GEIGER, K., JEGGLE, U. & KORFF, G. (eds.). *Abschied vom Volksleben*. Tübingen: TVV, 1970.

<sup>16</sup> See: KRAMER, D. *Von der Notwendigkeit der Kulturwissenschaft. Aufsätze zu Volkskunde und Kulturtheorie*. Marburg: Jonas, 1997.

<sup>17</sup> See: WELZ, G. Village as Ecosystem. An Environmental Approach to German Community Studies. *Anthropological Journal on European Cultures*, 1992, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 81–102.

<sup>18</sup> See: JACKSON, A. (ed.). *Anthropology at Home*. London: Routledge, 1986.

that is, development generated “from within”, that have been advanced since the 1970s<sup>19</sup> and have since found their way into regional policies, for example, the LEADER-Programs of the European Union. In this policy process, culture has increasingly come to be regarded, and treated, as a resource for local and regional economic development. With this revaluation of culture, Ethnology is facing challenges which take us far beyond the empirical aspects of an applied regional science, and into the realm of philosophy.

### **Toposophy: Ethnology as an Approach in Cultural Philosophy**

These challenges have less to do with the fundamental question of what “culture” is, could or ought to be, which belongs in the abstract spaces of philosophizing, than with the quite concrete philosophical question of the subject’s role in the concert of the disciplines. An academic subject that labels itself as “European” must necessarily contemplate that designation, especially if it sets out to study the *Hiesige* from the perspective of an applied regional science. What precisely is “European” about (European) Ethnology? To what extent is the subject matter of (European) Ethnology also, primarily, or indeed exclusively “Europe”, and which “Europe” is intended here? One could answer these questions quite pragmatically, in the sense of an always contingent definition of boundaries that may change from case to case, from one study to the next. At the practical level, there would be nothing wrong with such an answer. However, I am concerned here with something more fundamental – the attempt to locate a general starting point for analysis. In terms of cultural philosophy, (European) Ethnology may be understood in at least three different ways, which are not mutually exclusive but tend to overlap.

As an approach to cultural philosophy, (European) Ethnology can, first of all, be interpreted as thinking from and with Europe. This interpretation foregrounds the spiritual – and to a lesser degree also the geographical – origin of particular ideas. Speaking at the 2001 congress of the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore (SIEF) in Budapest, Konrad Köstlin, at the time Professor and Chair of European Ethnology at the University of Vienna, characterized the subject as a specific form of curiosity. With this characterization, he was not implying that this curiosity had arisen from and was feeding on the specific, physico-geographical soil of the westeurasian sub-continent. Geography may provide the, in many ways, inescapable culture-ecological framework, which is certainly important. But what Köstlin was pointing to here was the necessity for (self-) critical reflection on the history of the subject and the ideas that have made it, seen in the context of their particular cultural-philosophical moulding. To put it more simply: We have to start digging where we stand<sup>20</sup>. However much we may resent the fact that we have been thrown, by the accident of our birth, into a particular cultural context that nowadays, justifiably, has been disparagingly labeled “Eurocentric” – we cannot pretend that we could shake off that context by following a set of right and proper intellectual exercises. It would seem more productive to me if (European) Ethnologists engaged creatively – as far as possible – with the inevitable Eurocentrism of their human ecological existence. That includes the courage openly to own up to this context and its implications, to think from and with Europe – not against it for the sake of a misunderstood principle.

<sup>19</sup> See, e.g.: STÖHR, W. Alternative räumliche Entwicklungsstrategien endogener ‘selektiver Eigenständigkeit’. *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, 1983, Vol. 8, No. 3, p. 117–134. For a more detailed discussion see: KOCKEL, U. (...), 2002.

<sup>20</sup> See: McINTOSH, A. *Soil and Soul: People versus Corporate Power*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. London: Aurum, 2004.



Ultimately, Eurocentrism is only a particular version of anthropocentrism<sup>21</sup>, and as long as we are caught up in anthropocentric thinking, critics of Eurocentrism ought to heed the folk wisdom about stones and glass houses.

As an approach in cultural philosophy, (European) Ethnology can thus represent a point of perspective: thinking out of and about Europe, which thereby is recognised as the stand point, the location of an emic perspective. Unlike Anthropology before its “homecoming” from the colonies, (European) Ethnology could never quite hide behind the fiction of a clear separation between the emic and the etic (which, of course, does not mean its practitioners did not try). Its perspective today must incorporate the aforementioned critical self-reflexivity as a foundation, without which any unframed thinking proceeding from Europe would be dangerous – it would easily slide from an observational perspective into a normative-hierarchical Eurocentrism the likes of which we have just liberated ourselves from. Moreover, we must also, from this perspective, bring Europe itself into focus, as a concept and percept. Whatever we view with an ethnological eye we need to, therefore, examine for its relationship with Europe. That does not mean we have to or even only should raise challenging questions about Europe – whatever that may be – in each and every study. It does mean, however, that each and every study we undertake says something about where we are located, whether we like that or not, and therefore we need to be aware of this connection. The worlds of lived experience that we write about melt into our own, personal worlds, whose cultural context is, invariably and immediately, precisely Europe with which we sometimes have such great conceptual and ideological problems. We cannot but think *out of*, that is, from within that context, and thus it is vital that we always also think carefully *about* Europe.

Provided we accept all that, the next question is: why and wherefor? Does a subject that calls itself “European” have any obligation, moral or otherwise, to think specifically about and for the sake of Europe, or is that a peripheral matter? Moreover, should these thoughts be directed at what Europe can, should or may be, or should “European” Ethnology be satisfied with reflexive descriptions of European lifeworlds? As an approach in cultural philosophy, (European) Ethnology must face the challenge of defining Europe not just descriptively, but decidedly normatively, even while recognizing that all such definitions will remain tentative and inaccurate. Constructivists and deconstructionists have long and comprehensively declared Europe as “dead”. But if Europe is “dead” – or does not exist (any more) for whatever other reason – what does that mean for (European) Ethnology? On the other hand, if Europe is still “alive” resp. in existence, what responsibilities arise from that fact for a subject that bears a clear reference to the subcontinent in its name? What is Europe, and where is it? Elsewhere I have thought at length about this problematic<sup>22</sup>. The answers may vary according to the vantage point from which (European) Ethnology looks at Europe, and who is there looking with it – which political interests, but especially which locally specific interdisciplinary networks. Questions about the identity of Europe must be raised in ethical, aesthetic and ecological terms, not only because Europe has been defined all too often via the identity contrast of Judaeo-Christian vis-à-vis Islamic.

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<sup>21</sup> Cf.: MALL, R. *Mensch und Geschichte. Wider die Anthropozentrik*. Darmstadt: WBG, 2000.

<sup>22</sup> See: KOCKEL, U. *EuroVisions (...)*, 2003; KOCKEL, U. Ieškant Europos vidaus ribų: ekoetnologiniai pamąstymai apie vietos ir istoriškumo prasmę. In: *Lietuvos Etnologija – socialinės antropologijos ir etnologijos studijos*, 2007, Vol. 7[16], p. 57–76.

### **Ethnology as Cyclical Process of Understanding**

The three versions of (European) Ethnology outlined here are not in competition; rather, they flow into one other, are interwoven, build on and condition one another. (European) Ethnology as the subject specializing in the study of the *Hiesige* is the basis and starting point for the process of understanding. The reason for this is not some narrow inductivism that clings to an empiricism of small spaces, but the fact that all life is taking place *in places* – where we are. That may sound banal, but should not be forgotten, least of all in a subject that thematises everyday lifeworlds.

When we accept that, then the next question is: what are the implications of this focus on the *Hiesige* for conviviality in real-life contexts? In the *Hiesige*, diverse individuals and groups find their common denominator, whatever may separate or even only distinguish them. Communalities and particularities, in their respective, locally specific and historically grown combinations, create places and spaces. What demands does that bring for policy makers, in particular at the local and regional level? A subject that is, and can be, “local” in ways few others can match has a moral duty to make a concrete contribution to policy-making especially at these levels.

How does lived experience, taking place locally, shape our worldview? What – which not immediately tangible actualities – do we believe in? That includes not just supernatural beings, but also ideas, such as “Europe”. What do we mean by it, and how does this meaning form, how does it reflect back on, our lived experience? Questions such as these cannot be answered purely empirically, but require philosophical – and occasionally perhaps also theological – reflection, without which we could hardly pose, let alone answer the fundamental question: What or whom do we mean by “us”? And thus our hermeneutic cycle returns to the Local; we are back “in place” and need to ask ourselves: How do we express those beliefs that form our worldview in the – everyday as well as academic – definition, the drawing of the boundaries, of the *Hiesige*?

### **Ethnology as Interdisciplinary Nuclear Fusion**

It seems to me that a Ethnology is particularly well equipped to deal with these issues. Its polycentric history has resulted in a diversity of not just names, but methodologies, which in turn creates potential for synergies in the concert of the disciplines that go way beyond the mere exchange of data and ideas that so often passes for interdisciplinarity, towards the generation of genuinely interdisciplinary innovations in the ways we study our world. Ethnology can bring diverse approaches to (a) common (set of) core point(s). A tiny university subject, compared to giants like history or sociology (not to mention the sciences), it nevertheless can be a central force that can help to mediate and translate between diverse approaches, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to generate fresh approaches. To be able to achieve this, (European) Ethnologists need to be a bit of everything, to be at home in various subject disciplines, but they must take care not to dissipate their energies with a superficial assembly of far-flung approaches that is only too often misunderstood as interdisciplinarity – or misrepresented as such by “critics” who either cannot or will not understand the value of genuinely interdisciplinary work.

In practice, interdisciplinary research typically takes place in eclectically composed groups where the subject disciplines remain distinct but their boundaries may become fluid. Genuine interdisciplinarity is an epistemological project concerned with the gestation of new methodologies and research questions. These build on the fundus of participating subjects, but reach out beyond these. The methodological pluralism of the subject of many names can come in most useful here.

According to their respective individual institutional and geographical associations, (European) Ethnologists find themselves in personal constellations through which they can pursue such interdisciplinary projects, guided by a personal curiosity that, quite apart from the availability of financial resources, is a key motivation for all research<sup>23</sup>. In an essay on the German artist Joseph Beuys as ethnological field worker, I have tried to explore this a little further<sup>24</sup>.

### **Wherefor a European *Ethnology*?**

Let me come back to my earlier question: Wherefor Ethnology – the comparative research on cultural differences and commonalities? Ethnological research opens up horizons of understanding the “own” or “self” and the “other”, and thus can provide valuable inspiration and practical help for intercultural communication – which may mean both communication *of* culture and communication *between* cultures<sup>25</sup>. The relatively localised reference frame of theoretical concepts offers a necessary contrast to the universalising theories of other disciplines.

Ethnology examines facets of identity in everyday lived experience (including academic research itself), both in the public and in the private sphere, as performance and as cultural heritage – whether autologically (concerned with the “self”) or xenologically (concerned with the “other”), and problematizes the resulting combinations<sup>26</sup>. The communication of culture(s) can take the form of academic or indeed popular teaching; it may also involve participation in conflict resolution and the bringing together of different groups. Both types require a kind of mirror function: the people who are being ethnographically described and ethnologically analyzed ought to be able to recognize themselves without distortion as participants. But how do we deal with the imperative of veracity that arises from this requirement, in an age when the relativity of all values has been cheerfully proclaimed? Not least because of such questions it is vital for Ethnology to maintain fertile contacts with theology and philosophy.

Günter Wiegelmann’s use of the term “theories of the middle range” (*Theorien mittlerer Reichweite*)<sup>27</sup> has been criticized by colleagues<sup>28</sup>, but remains worth considering. Ethnology as outlined here must always be developed locally and/or regionally (without losing sight of the international/global dimension!). Such an Ethnology, which is supported primarily by theories of the middle range, has a unique advantage over other subjects when it comes to testing elementary ideas against locally-concrete actuality.

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<sup>23</sup> See: KOCKEL, U. *Liberating (...)*, 2008.

<sup>24</sup> See: KOCKEL, U. *Morphogenetic Fieldwork and the Ethnologic of Toposophy. Meditation on a Coyote Wandering on Rannoch Moor*. In: *Beuysian Legacies in Ireland and Beyond. Art, Culture and Politics*. Eds.: C.-M. Lerm Hayes & V. Walters. Münster: LIT, 2010 (in press).

<sup>25</sup> See: NIC CRAITH, M. & KOCKEL, U. (eds.). *Communicating Cultures*. Münster: LIT, 2004.

<sup>26</sup> See: KOCKEL, U. *Heritage versus Tradition. Cultural Resources for a New Europe?* In: *The European Puzzle. The Political Structuring of Cultural Identities at a Time of Transition*. Ed. Marion Demossier. Oxford / New York: Berg-hahn, 2007, p. 85–101.

<sup>27</sup> See: WIEGELMANN, G. *Theoretische Konzepte der Europäischen Ethnologie. Diskussionen um Regeln und Modelle*. Münster: LIT, 1990.

<sup>28</sup> See, inter alia, the appendix in: WIEGELMANN, G. *Theoretische Konzepte der Europäischen Ethnologie. Diskussionen um Regeln und Modelle* (2<sup>nd</sup> exp. ed.). Münster: LIT, 1995, S. 213–251.

### Wherefor a *European* Ethnology?

But why do all this in a “European” manner, as suggested by the subject’s name? Both the Self/Own and the Other must be localized historically, or dissolve in the vacuous space of pure discourse. Any such localization must recognize the historicity of the approach itself, both in its continuous becoming that is bound within specific circumstances, and in its potential for actively shaping the future. In this context, declared communalities require critical reflection. Patterns of identification, whether autological or xenological, have to be measured historically. Differences should be acknowledged where appropriate, not simply denied out of a sense of “political correctness”, and forms of dealing with them should be carefully worked out. In doing this, some of us inevitably find themselves standing on European ground, both physically and spiritually. From that vantage point, the historical conditioning of our respective individual approaches – in the personal and local as in the societal and global – and their creative power in its potentials and limitations have to be critically evaluated. What is at stake here is the way in which we treat the pasts on which we aim to build our futures, fully aware that tradition may well be a subversive force<sup>29</sup>.

Nowadays communalities are emphasized widely and in the most varied societal contexts; differences tend to be played down. This can only partially be explained with reference to the by now somewhat old-fashioned constructivism prevalent during the postmodern frenzy. The reasons for this wide-spread “fear of difference”, diagnosed by Werner Schiffauer<sup>30</sup> already in the mid-1990s, have still not been sufficiently interrogated. After the fashion for multiculturalism, there is currently a renaissance of the concept of cosmopolitanism. Contrary to a popular misconception, “cosmopolitan” does not mean a world without differences, but rather cultural lifeworlds whose participants, for all their differences and sometimes because of them, are able to live well together.

### So, what kind of Ethnology...?

In the opening paragraphs of this essay, I described my ultimate aim as “the re-establishment of *Heimatkunde* as an ethnologically informed human ecology of place.” The subject has disappeared from the school curriculum during my lifetime, replaced by what appears to be a more objectifying, scientifically detached *Welt- und Umweltkunde*, which roughly translates as the study of global and environmental issues. The anchor of the *Hiesige* is lost in this approach. There are historical reasons for this purging of any emphasis on the Local; in the past, such emphasis has frequently led to excesses – from parochialism and bigotry to orchestrated mass murder. And yet, for many people, place and their cultural connections with it remain significant at multiple levels, and therefore we need an approach that is capable of dealing sensitively with any issues that arise from such situated relationships, be they material, symbolic, or whatever else.

Ethnology as outlined here is, in some sense, contradictory in itself, but it is precisely from these internal contradictions that it derives its coherence. For all its groundedness rooted in the *Hiesige* it is a thoroughly polycentric subject with no dominant paradigm; instead it has multiple forms and colors. That makes it difficult to classify, and one could therefore with some justification describe it as undisciplined; but this is not a lack of discipline for the sake of any canonical disobedience, but rather one that is capable of, and – hopefully – open for interdisciplinary innovations.

<sup>29</sup> See, e.g.: KOCKEL, U. Putting the Folk (...), 2008.

<sup>30</sup> See: SCHIFFAUER, W. The Fear of Difference. New Trends in Cultural Anthropology. *Anthropological Journal on European Cultures*, 1996, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 49–62.

Aware of its precursors and subject traditions, it engages with these both critically and creatively. Ethnology can – and I would even say: must – be diverse, in order to contribute through its emphasis on differences to a genuinely cosmopolitan understanding of culture.

Jonas Frykman and Nils Gilje<sup>31</sup> remind us that a key universal of (European) Ethnology is that there are few universals. The meaningfulness of universal theorizing has been questioned in (European) Ethnology for some time, for example by Manfred Eggert<sup>32</sup>. At a time of shifting paradigms, when climate change and a growing discontent with global capitalism call into question the dominant ways of looking at the world, what may appear as weaknesses from the perspective of established academic discourses may be the subject's strengths:

- To be locally grounded and polycentric means that there is no dominant paradigm, except an emphasis on diversity and the call for an ecologically-founded awareness.
- Methodological pluralism means that there is no fear of crossing disciplinary boundaries, with methods determined by research questions rather than by any disciplinary canon.
- Problem orientation means that the focus is on the concerns of the *Hiesige*, and equipped with a pragmatic sense for differentiation.

This kind of Ethnology is and remains an academic subject; at the same time it can be understood as a craft, not only in a rhetorical sense. Following Richard Sennett<sup>33</sup>, “craft” can be seen as a process of change built on tradition, and which involves not only observing the world, but actively intervening in it. In that sense, (European) Ethnology as outlined here – a cultural-philosophical approach towards an applied regional science deeply grounded in the *Hiesige* – requires a vision of the future that has been developed with, not against the past, and is able to draw on the support of traditions without becoming their prisoner. The local and regional referentiality of research will reflect back on the forms of ethnological practice. This Ethnology will therefore – commonalities of interests and ideas across geographical or disciplinary boundaries notwithstanding – always develop (sometimes very) differently in different locations. In the spirit of that approach, no universal answers can be given to the question of how this might look in any particular local context. Hence the geo-cultural reference (e.g., “European”) in the subject designation may well change with the location where it is studied, or indeed with the person engaged in such study.

A note of caution is needed at the end, regarding some serious objections to this approach. The charges of “romanticism” and “essentialism” I have addressed elsewhere<sup>34</sup>, and will deal with in more detail on another occasion. Watching the leader of the British National Party, Nick Griffin, perform on the BBC's “Question Time” (22 October 2009) drove home the dangers associated with terminology. We need to operate with terms that others understand, even if demagogues employ such words as “indigenous” for their political ends, and may even abuse our research to support their agenda. That is no comfortable position to be in. One way out would be to avoid certain questions because our findings might be misused. If we persist with an approach grounded in the *Hiesige*, we need a clear terminology, even if no term can ever be protected entirely from misuse. There are tensions within our analytical usage of terms such as “indigenous” or “native”, which need to

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<sup>31</sup> FRYKMAN, J. & GILJE, N. Being There. An Introduction. In: *Being There. New Perspectives on Phenomenology and the Analysis of Culture*. Eds. J. Frykman & N. Gilje. Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2003, p. 10f.

<sup>32</sup> See: EGGERT, M. Zur Theoriebildung in der Europäischen Ethnologie. Ein Diskussionsbeitrag zu Günter Wiegelmann. *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde*, 1974, Bd. 70, S. 58–63.

<sup>33</sup> See: SENNETT, R. *The Craftsman*. London: Penguin, 2008.

<sup>34</sup> See: KOCKEL, U. Putting the Folk (...), 2008.



be worked out. I have tentatively used the former to describe anyone who roots themselves in a place and the latter for anyone who was born into it; the two may have much in common but may pull in quite opposite directions. The term *Hiesige* covers both and more, encompassing the ecological context of “from-here-ness”. More work is needed on this. Some may argue that an approach grounded in the particular is counterproductive for comparative research. I would ask how we might usefully – not just superficially – compare unless we thoroughly know the specifics we are comparing. Comparative understanding – as the ancestors of Ethnology in the eighteenth century knew well – is a safeguard against xenophobic misappropriations of local specificity. In that sense Ethnology – as a deep, human ecological topography of the *Hiesige* that informs a comprehensive, comparative topology – contributes towards our understanding of toposophy, *Heimatkunde* – the wisdom of places.

#### Notes

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## EUROPIETIŠKOJI ETNOLOGIJA KAIP AKTYVIOJI TOPOSOFIJA

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### Santrauka

Straipsnyje tvirtinama, kad etnologija – tai mokslo disciplina, siekianti moksliskai pažinti *lokalumą* taikant lyginamąjį „savos“ (kultūros) ir „kitos“ (kultūros) supratimą. Pabrėžiama, kad etnologijos mokslas visų pirma yra suvokiamas lokaliniam tradicinių kultūrų tyrimų kontekste, o minėtoji skirtis išryškėja tiek tarpžmogiškuose santykiuose, tiek ir santykiyje tarp žmonių ir aplinkos. Visa tai yra suvokiama tiek iš dvasinių, tiek iš materialiujų kultūros apraiškų. Taigi etnologija atstovauja regioninio pobūdžio taikomiesiems mokslams, kur greta regionalistikos svarbūs yra ir politiniai, socioekonominiai aspektai, neišvengiamai išryškėjantys regioninių bendruomenių gyvenimo kaip jų sėslumo, migracijos, kultūrinių santykių ir tarpusavio įtakų su kitomis kaimyninėmis kultūromis rezultatas. Be to, ji siejasi ir su kultūrine filosofija, aptariančia regiono gyventojų socialinės kilmės, jos raidos ir perspektyvos, pasaulėžiūros ištakų bei vėlesnių jos formacijų visumą ir akcentuojančia paskiro asmens elgsenos, gyvenimo būdo, patirties ir socialinės atsakomybės aspektus. Taigi realioje tikrovėje etnologija – tai cikliškas regiono žmonių gyvenimo suvokimo procesas, pasireiškiantis daugiaplane, kompleksine savo tyrimų visuma.

Etnologijos esmę sudaro trys skirtingo lygmens sampratos. Jos tarpusavyje nėra kontrastingos, o nuosekliai viena kitą papildo, sudarydamos trilypę sistemą. Pirmasis lygmuo – *topografija* (*topography*), tiesioginis vietovės aprašymas. Jis įeina į *etnologijos* (*topology*) sampratos sudėtį – vietovės aprašymų objektyvių ir subjektyvių mokslinių interpretacijų lygmenį. Trečiasis lygmuo – *toposofija* (*toposophy*), t. y. samprata, kaip tebesitęsiančios pasaulėžiūros ir tikėjimų formos atsispindi realiam vietinių regiono žmonių gyvenime, tyrimai. Aptardami esminį klausimą, kaip mes suvokiame šias tradicines gyvenimo apraiškas *lokalium* aspektu, sugrįžtame į pradinę ciklo padėtį.

Etnologija (europietiškoji) dažnai suvokiama kaip tarpdalykinis mokslas. Taigi etnologas privalo būti susipažinęs su kitų, gretimų, mokslo sričių pagrindais. Metodologinis pliuralizmas šiame kontekste yra būdingas etnologijos mokslo bruožas. Etnologinės koncepcijos tėra „vidutinio lygmens“ teorijos, kurių teiginius būtina patikrinti konkrečios vietinės (regioninės, lokalinės) tradicijos aktualijose. Ir visa tai reikia padaryti neatsiejant nuo bendrojo, globalaus, šių teiginių patirties konteksto. Etnologijos mokslas turi vystytis abiem kryptimis – būdamas tiek apibrėžtas, tiek ir daugialypis; nesusietas su vienintele mokslo disciplina ir nešališkas; novatoriškas ir tradicinis. Daugialypumo prasme jis negali turėti jokios kitos vyraujančios paradigmos – tik begalinės gyvenimo modelių įvairovės pripažinimą. Šis mokslas privalo bet kokią tradiciją suvokti begalinio jos procesualumo kontekste, ir ne vien pasyviai visa tai stebėti, o ir aktyviai dalyvauti šiame procese. Tai yra įmanoma tik turint aišką ateities gyvenimo viziją, pagrįstą ne vien istorinės, bet ir daug gilesnės ir įvairiausių socialinės bei ekonominės regiono gyventojų patirties analize.

Etnologija gali būti suvokiama ir kaip mokslas, turintis vidinių prieštaravimų. Kita vertus, būtent taip – dėl vidinių etnologijos priešpriešų – šis mokslas išlieka visuminis, darnus. Etnologijos mokslo objektus nėra lengva nuosekliai suklasifikuoti, ir tai galima vertinti kaip ne vientiso, o daugialypio mokslo ypatybes. Kita vertus, atvira šio mokslo tyrimo objektų sistema leidžia etnologijai visada išlikti gyvybingai, kūrybingai ir – kas svarbiausia – atvirai bet kokioms tarpdalykinėms

inovacijoms. Sąmoningai suvokdami istorines šio mokslo pagrindėjų patirtis, galime jas visada vertinti tiek kritiškai, tiek ir kūrybiškai. Etnologija yra (ir turi būti) įvairialypė ir daugialypė, nes kitu atveju mes niekada nesugebėsime joje suvokti nuolat atsinaujinančių ir kintančių šių laikų kosmopolitinės kultūros sampratos nuostatų.

Lyginamasis tyrimo metodas, kurį etnologijos mokslo pagrindėjai dar XVIII amžiuje laikė esminiu, yra universalus saugiklis, leidžiantis apsaugoti nuo ksenofobinių bandymų suabsoliutinti vienos kurios nors lokalinės tradicijos specifiką visuotiniu mastu. Šia prasme etnologija yra gili, humaniška ekologinė *topografija*, pagrindžianti visapusišką ir išsamią lyginamosios *topologijos* esmę, ir galiausiai lemianti regioninės gyvensenos patirties bei išminties – *toposofijos* – tyrimų visumą.