

Does Ethnology Have a Future?

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The title of this paper may seem unnecessarily provocative. Ethnology is understood throughout the world as a term and as a disciplinary concept that denotes a sister field to anthropology even if, as a field, it has been somewhat squeezed out of the larger picture of pedagogy and research by the dominance of anthropology in the Anglophone and particularly the North American academic world. The reasons for this exclusion are of course not hard to seek: the rise and phenomenal growth of anthropology in North America after World War II, and the proliferation of anthropology departments across the United States in particular has meant the confining of 'ethnology' in usage there to a section of the American Anthropological Association, to the association with museum collections and, less flatteringly, to the evolutionist and comparativist work of nineteenth century scholars such as E. B. Tylor, Sir James Frazer, Herbert Spencer and Lewis Henry Morgan. The term is sometimes, though now less commonly, used as a synonym for cultural anthropology in the English-speaking world generally (cf. Hammond 1964). If, then, it has been in decline as a term in this world of language and discourse, is it also moribund as a discipline?

A recent statement by the anthropologist Adam Kuper sets the challenge: in his summary of the state of play in anthropology, he observes, 'Within anthropology, the intertwined European traditions of ethnology and folklore studies are today so feeble that they probably cannot survive. They have been pushed on to the nonacademic periphery in most Western European countries, and in Eastern Europe, where they have persisted, they will probably be among the many unremarked casualties of the present political reorientation' (Kuper 1994: 114). Remarking on the founding of a European Association of Social Anthropologists and its first conferences in Portugal (1990) and Prague (1992), Kuper sees a fresh vitality to social anthropology in Europe, mainly as a result of North American influence. Yet he strangely fails to mention the development of European regional ethnology and its attempts since the late 1960s to forge research paradigms that, drawing on both the work of European sociologists and North American anthropologists, explore questions of identity, ethnicity, power and agency in a changing Europe, as recent issues of the journal *Ethnologia Europaea* show.¹ Europe, it has been said, is the last anthropological frontier; but it is surprising that an anthropologist well-versed in the history of his field would omit all mention of

this development. Just as seriously, Kuper neglects to cite the vigorous debate among folklorists in the United States as to the future of their field. In such a context, when chairs and programmes of ethnology proliferate in Scandinavia, Central and Eastern Europe, and folklorists are debating their paradigmatic history, we are entitled to ask why these fields (which are often associated although they have somewhat different histories) should be banished from the table.²

In Europe, of course, the picture historically is rather different. Whereas it was European anthropologists who initially energised American work through Franz Boas and his students after the turn of the twentieth century, ethnology under that name fell on hard times in Europe, its postulates in ruins because of the demise of Darwinian theories of biological, social and cultural evolution and as a result of field studies by Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown and their successors. Radcliffe-Brown, notably, proceeded to adapt the theories of the French sociological school (especially those of Émile Durkheim), while North American scholars inherited the emphasis on culture introduced at the turn of the century by the Berlin-trained, anti-evolutionist Franz Boas. But even as the brilliance of British social anthropology began, after World War II, to give way to North American advances in cultural anthropology because of the contrasting emphasis on 'society' in British anthropology and 'culture' in North America, ethnology as a particularly European field of interest began to revive under the enthusiasm and guidance of figures such as Sigurd Erixon. The focus then was on what had formerly been called 'folk life', the holistic study of peasant or rural culture as a comparativist programme within Europe itself. Content to leave the development of anthropological horizons to colleagues in the former colonial powers (Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands) and the United States, ethnologists in Europe began after World War II to stake out their territory within the borders of the continent.

Not that their methods *per se* were radically different from those of post-Malinowskian anthropology: but the forging of a 'European regional ethnology' along lines that banished extreme ideological baggage (such as had been evident in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union), and the incorporation of historical data meant avoiding some of the pitfalls into which anthropology had fallen in its exploitation of African, American, and Asian peoples (Kuper 1996). Nevertheless, until the dominance of positivism had been questioned there was also some exploitation of rural peoples throughout Europe, mainly because of the conceptions of backwardness and time-lag that had long distinguished the study of the European peasant.

It was this conception, of course, that had led Tylor and Andrew Lang into their famous comparisons of 'peasant customs' and 'savage myths' as a prelude to theories of cultural evolution, these in turn linking the European rustic historically to his colonial counterpart (Dorson 1968). Instead of the grand comparative schemes of the Darwinians, ethnologists between the World Wars initiated a programme of documenting national folk culture, often built around museums, archives and the field studies of professionally-

trained collectors. But this programme, motivated by a rather naive conception of folk life, has increasingly had to face up to some hard facts about economic and demographic changes in 'this other Eden, demi-paradise' and stringent criticism from within the field itself. The need for a more selfconscious, context-sensitive ethnography, for example, has meant a drive towards introspection and novel theory-building on the part of the researcher. One could say that the twentieth century has been one in which ethnology lost its innocence and, in effect, attained adulthood.

ORIGINAL SIN: INNOCENCE ABROAD

In the beginning, then, ethnology was innocent. Like folklore a burgeoning science in the early nineteenth century, it began as a way of making sense of Otherness, of cultures and societies that seemed strange and exotic to Western travellers, imperial civil servants, or Presbyterian missionaries. It grew up under the shadow of an antiquarianism that was itself a child of the Enlightenment and anti-Enlightenment, and was realised parallel not only to the Romantic movement in literature and the arts but also to the struggle for national autonomy on the part of former imperial territories in Europe. Folklore flourished as scholars delved, first, into the history and prehistory of their country's popular customs through archival research and, later by means of field studies in, for example, the counties of Britain. As the nineteenth century progressed, folklore and anthropology took centre stage, and it was eventually the evolutionist anthropology of Tylor, Frazer and Morgan that triumphed: the latter's *Ancient Society, or Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery through Barbarism to Civilization* (1877) influenced Marx and Engels, not least because Morgan saw himself as a member of the commercial and industrial middle class and its achievements. Ethnology as a term gradually fell by the wayside despite vigorous attempts by scholars in the Folk-Lore Society to keep it in the picture as part of the study of rustic and savage culture worldwide (e.g. Gomme 1892).

In an earlier paper I gave a somewhat cursory picture of the interrelationships among the allied fields of ethnology, anthropology, folklore and sociology (Porter 1999). In this essay I am concerned to locate the wider context of both 'ethnology' and 'Scottish ethnology', a project that may be ambitious but needs to be attempted if the current status of ethnology in Scotland and Europe is to be understood. But I do not intend here to trace the history of ethnology throughout the twentieth century, except to note the emergence of 'European regional ethnology' as a field in the Nordic countries and Central Europe since World War II. Even as early as 1918 the first Swedish professor of European ethnology, Nils Lithberg, occupied a chair known as 'Nordic and Comparative Folklife Research' (Löfgren 1996). The overtones of ethnology as a 'national' science, whose project was essentially to interpret a national folk culture, was a striking contrast to the diffusionist and comparative approach that had preceded it. Despite the fact that national borders were often irrelevant to traditional folk culture,

the discipline was often confined to work within individual states, the idea being that combining these national pictures would not only yield a more detailed picture of folk life on the European level, but would also fulfill a longing to compile and present, as a lesser-known part of cultural history, the panoply of indigenous folk life. Sigurd Erixon's enthusiasm for ethnology lasted from the 1930s until the 1960s, when work in Germany began to scrutinize the Nazi past of the discipline and to banish the idea of a national *Volkskunde*. This was, in truth, a 'farewell to folk life' (*Abschied vom Volksleben*) in Germany that was partly brought about by the ideological slough into which folklore there had fallen in the 1930s. But the subsequent analysis of folklore in terms of a modern industrial society was a challenging programme that decisively wrenched the discipline away from its traditional focus on rural culture (Bausinger 1990, Scharfe 1993). It also led to a renaming of the field in universities: 'Europäische Ethnologie' instead of 'Volkskunde' (Korff 1996).

The banner year of 1968, similarly, marked a time of revolt against older styles of ethnology, and a turn towards fieldwork and especially community studies of groups on the periphery of society, fishing villages, rural hamlets, and so on. In widening the frame of reference from rural pursuits, urban subcultures later came under scrutiny: women, children, the elderly, immigrants, deviants; and this brought ethnology within striking range of some of the programmes of sociology. Marxist influences were beginning to make themselves felt, especially through the work of the Frankfurt School, and through the writings of Raymond Williams, E. P. Thompson, and Stuart Hall. In this light, themes of social domination and subordination came into focus. Taking a direction pointedly distinct from their earlier positivistic fascination with peasant or urban culture, ethnologists began to reflect on identity and the ways in which their own sense of identity influenced their work. 'Latent ethnicity' directed attention to the researcher's own class, gender and cultural background as markers that could shape, consciously and unconsciously, their theories and methods (Hofer 1996).

To explore this self-conscious idea further, French and German researchers convened at Bad Homburg in 1984 to discuss their 'mutual strangeness that is the beginning of trust' (Chiva and Jeggle 1987: 11). What emerged, not unsurprisingly, was the dissimilar intellectual style of these two national groups, their differences in language, terminology and concepts, and the imprint of their distinctive historical past. This 'latent ethnicity' has also been evident in the discourses of not only French and German but obviously British, American and Japanese scholars (Galtung 1981). Language, history, enculturation and individual personality all matter in the understanding of basic concepts and their history. A classic case is, of course, the distinction between the French concept of *civilisation* and the German *Kultur*, words which contain a wealth of associations for native speakers of French or German but which often are, for outsiders, difficult to grasp (cf. Elias 1978). Such concepts do have immense significance for the idea of a 'national' ethnology, and for the 'nationalising' and 'historicising' aspects of European peoples, including Scotland (cf. Kaschuba 1996).

WEST OF EDEN: ETHNOGRAPHY EXPOSED

No one can escape the problematic of terms (and the concepts they embody) in ethnology, anthropology, folklore, sociology and the human sciences generally. This is inevitable given the mental constructs with which scholars have been dealing since these fields were first conceived in the early nineteenth century. It is well known that concepts such as 'folk', 'tradition' and 'orality' (not to mention 'culture' and 'art') are bedevilled by a breadth of reference that makes close definition hazardous and nice distinction frustrating. These terms do have their equivalents in other (European) languages and they thus suggest common problems in the history of scholarship. The recourse to understanding 'native' terminology, and ethnomethodology as a whole, seemed likely for a time to rescue anthropology and folklore from a creeping ethnocentrism. Yet such attempts often foundered because of other problems in the fundamental attitude of fieldworkers: an unwillingness to admit to private interest or profit, to political exploitation, or to institutional agendas has continued to cast a shadow on interpretations of classically Malinowskian (or better, Lévi-Straussian) smallscale, remote, 'cold' societies as some kind of 'reduced model' of Western culture (cf. Firth 1970, Leach 1970).

Could ethnography – the detailed description of single cultures – free itself from these built-in distortions? As soon as this problem became evident, some suggested that 'native' or 'indigenous' ethnography should in principle take over from that of 'outsiders' who often seemed bemused by indigenous customs, obsessed with minor details, or gave the wrong signals by appearing in a village or 'remote' culture burdened with camcorders, tape recorders, digital cameras, and a 'collector's' attitude. This has happened in an increasing number of instances as Western scholars in particular have been forced to become more sensitive to the history of exploitation brought about by their predecessors (Asad 1973; Cohn 1996; Fabian 1983; Said 1978). But even more importantly the fieldworker, instead of producing a monograph couched in terms of a spurious authority and from which he or she is the absent author, must be written back into the text as part of a dialogue that conveys more of the multiplex cultural context (Clifford 1983, Geertz 1973, 1983). The subsequent path towards selfconsciousness has been a painful one for many researchers who choose to immerse themselves, sometimes uncomfortably and at length, in a very different world in order to understand it. At times, the issue of who is, in fact, an 'insider' or an 'outsider' has complicated folklife studies of Western societies. But the spotlight has been turned, by so-called postmodern anthropologists, on the fieldworker and his or her motives, character, and methods, and on the production of what is, in their ethnographic writing up of fieldwork, not so much analysis and explanation but rather, another cultural text produced for a different audience (Clifford and Marcus 1986, Marcus and Fischer 1986).

The very presence of the fieldworker, in any case, had been seen to mark a change in the everyday life of those among whom he or she lived; and the people themselves could

no longer be acceptably described as 'informants', a word that demeans them to the level of suppliers of information. Rather, the principles of exchange and reciprocity and the mandates of reflexive anthropology led the fieldworker to see that intersubjectivity through dialogue (but not self-effacement) is both an ethically preferable and more perceptive way to proceed.³ Interpretive anthropology 'reflects on the doing and writing of ethnography itself' (Marcus and Fischer 1986: 16), and 'demystifies much of what had previously passed unexamined in the construction of ethnographic narratives' (Clifford 1988: 38). Introspection and self-criticism on the part of the academic fieldworker made this a very different project from the butterfly collecting of an earlier generation. Where formerly the field had been peopled by rustics and savages, the world of the ethnologist was now transformed to include 'co-workers' and even 'teachers' – guides to fuller understanding of reflexive cultural meanings which can change and shift depending on context and mood. Ethnography no longer consisted of, as Malinowski had asserted, simply seeing things 'from the native's point of view', but an exchange of knowledge and worldview based on trust and negotiation. This development, despite or perhaps also because of its radical suppositions, has been roundly criticized for its extreme subjectivity, narcissism, allusiveness, and a tendency to reduce all problems to those of field narrative. Secondly, 'postmodernist' ethnographic writing masks its own power plays while analysing the power plays of others (Borofsky 1994: 26). The major issue, as a consequence, is how to use a variety of textual formats to reconstruct social worlds and also, just as importantly, to explore how these texts are received by both the intellectual disciplines and the social worlds ethnographers seek to capture (Atkinson and Coffey 1995).

WHOLLY WRIT? ANTIDISCIPLINARITY AND THE TEXT

While postmodernism was overtaking anthropology in terms of its central method (ethnographic fieldwork), the issue of 'the text', and the way in which writing and representation were part of a semiological apparatus, were coming to dominate literary studies. The French journal *Tel Quel* had, since the late 1960s, been drawing attention to the way in which 'text' could be applied to any cultural phenomenon and thus analysed in terms of the signs it employed: Roland Barthes and others were influential in this development. 'The text' then became a kind of 'antidisciplinary object' that cut across conventional disciplinary lines and also brought into question traditional methods of determining the 'meaning' of a particular work. This trend was reinforced by global demography, which saw the movement of peoples compelled by economic or political forces to live and be enculturated in very different social contexts. The political voices of ethnic minorities, women, and marginalised groups added to the questioning, not only of traditional critical methods, but also of traditional disciplines. Departments in the humanities and social sciences both felt the brunt of these attacks. The postmodern crisis, as it has been called, brought with it not only a sense of conflicting but equally valid

interpretations but also, in academic courses, a rising tide of 'cultural studies', in which a radical sociology of modern urban life was allied to a critique of mass media – film, music, and television as well as novels and other forms of verbal publication.

According to some commentators, anthropology in Europe (unlike that in North America) was unaffected by these incursions. Rather, the influence came from the contemporary sociology of Bourdieu, de Certeau, Foucault, and Habermas: Habermas in particular was involved in a debate of the 1970s that ranged over the philosophical and political spectrum of social theory. A major issue was that of culture in the modern state: if culture was a crucial site for understanding both resistance and incorporation within a postwar order that was 'democratic' yet driven by new forms of domination, how could politics address this problem? Shaped by the tradition of critical theory in Germany, in answering that question Habermas turned his attention to an analysis of the public sphere conceived as a 'realm' outside the marketplace and the state yet not reducible to private life. In this he discussed the historical evolution of the public sphere in Europe, identifying various meeting places and communication media that enabled discussion to take place. Critical of the social impact of the mass media, Habermas sensed that the resources of critical consciousness are being eroded and depleted by the influence of mass culture. His rather pessimistic conclusion was that, in the present, both the state and the market are intruding on the public sphere, and that engagement in rational discussion is the best way forward. Such discussion is necessary for genuine democracy to thrive (Habermas 1989).

Even more pertinently, Habermas established early in his career a mechanism for analysing how the conditions of intellectual production cannot be separated from historical events affecting the relationship of universities, the mass media, and the market (1971). Bourdieu took up the issue of disciplinary positioning via a struggle between the Sorbonne and the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* to achieve intellectual prestige in the context of a general devaluation of humanistic knowledge. For him there was a close relationship between the crisis in prestige that conditioned the decline of 'academic criticism' and the proliferation of interdisciplinary projects which eventually gave rise to the paradigm of textuality. According to some critics, however, Bourdieu missed the fact that the 'new criticism' was not simply reproductive nor restricted to the sphere of institutional criticism. What had happened was that the social conditions that supported the coherence of the author as an example of subjectivity had been remapped: Habermas's public sphere had been realigned to provoke a crisis in the categories created by intellectuals within that public sphere. New forms and organs of communication had proliferated, reconstituting the public through technology and subjecting its intellectual life to new constraints such as, for example, the space, time and speed of a magazine article (Mowitt 1992: 74–76).

How, then, did the antidisciplinary nature of textuality affect the established disciplines? Disciplines still form the organising intellectual hub of a curriculum, and curricular expansion is consistent with disciplinarity. But the recent struggle over the

humanities curriculum, both in Europe and North America, has been fought in the 1980s and 90s between partisans of the newer social movements who naturally want to promote radical extensions of democracy into educational institutions and thus bring about the empowerment of minorities.⁴ The nature of the text allowed scholars to interrogate and assess a realignment of traditional subjects. One American folklorist has noted that, while the genres of scholarship are blurred, their boundaries crossed, their territories newly appropriated, it does not mean that they all turn into muddled thought, lacking the discipline, language and history that their names signify (Ben-Amos 1998: 274). On the other hand it has not been of particular utility to claim, as some have done, that universities should return to teaching classical languages or philosophy in order to help students to think logically. Rather, it has been at the points where traditional disciplines meet that the ambivalence of the text has become a useful tool for intellectual expansion: Platonic dialogues, for example, can be taught along with studies of slavery in Athens (Mowitt 1992: 220). Still, the coming of the text with its ideological underpinning has helped to carve out two flourishing 'metadisiplines': cultural history and cultural studies.

PARTING THE RED SEA: CULTURAL HISTORY, CULTURAL STUDIES

Cultural studies has established itself in both Britain and North America (although along somewhat different lines politically), and evolved beside the parallel attempt to establish a metadiscipline of 'cultural history', which to some extent addressed the concerns of university students from different backgrounds because of influence from the social sciences and its attention to the history of ideas (cf. Braudel 1980). One North American historian, noting some twenty years ago the rise of what he called 'social science history', remarked that it was a specialty not defined by time, place, and an aspect of social life; the 1979 meeting of the Social Science History Association included topics such as labour history, ethnicity, demography, violence, and criminal justice (Tilly 1981: 28–29). The new approach to history developed to some extent in response to a dissatisfaction with an older form of cultural history, especially in France during the 1960s and 1970s. At that time, history had a dominant position in the universities: in the humanities, history was second only to French literature and was well ahead of linguistics, psychology, or sociology. Measured by standards of institutional legitimacy, history was surpassed only by French language and literature, classical studies and philosophy (Chartier 1988).

It was this dominance that the newer social sciences tried to displace, and the challenge came in a variety of forms (including structuralism) which focussed on history's traditional objects of study or on its methodology. By applying models often adapted from the natural sciences, the social sciences moved to undermine the dominant position of history in both the academic world and the public sphere. By importing into the humanities new principles of legitimacy that rejected history as an empirical discipline,

the social sciences attempted to convert their institutional fragility into an intellectual hegemony. This in turn provoked historians into areas of novel research: beliefs and religious patterns, kinship systems, rituals, forms of social interaction and so on. But the specific aim of cultural history is 'to note how, in different times and places, a specific social reality was constructed, how people conceived of it and how they interpreted it to others'. 'Representation' was already felt to be a better term than the older concept of *mentalité* because it permitted the description of three modes of social relationship: first, the classifying practices by which reality is constructed in contradictory ways by various groups; second, the practices that provide for the recognition of social identity, a way of 'being in the world', and signifying (symbolically) a rank or status; third, the forms by means of which 'representants' mark in visible and perpetuated fashion 'the existence of the group, the class, or the community' (Chartier 1988: 9–10). Ethnologists can easily recognise these relational modes as consistent with their own contemporary interests (Christiansen 1996, Köstlin 1996, Löfgren 1996, Niedermüller 1994).

According to its protagonists, cultural history is to be understood primarily as the study of the processes by which meaning is constructed. Leaving behind the earlier idea that endowed texts and works with an intrinsic, absolute and unique meaning which it was the critic's task to identify, history of this kind has turned to practices that give meaning to the world in plural and even contradictory ways. Furthermore, the cultural historian investigates the relationship of his or her subject to other, closely related branches of knowledge: literary history, for example, or the epistemology of the sciences and philosophy. It is not surprising that the names of Bourdieu and Foucault readily crop up here, as well as those of classical reference such as Durkheim and Mauss. The break between sociology and history resulted in debates over methodological differences that were in reality struggles for predominance, both between and inside disciplines and in the intellectual world in general. The problem, however, has not been one of mere power struggles; it lies in the need to consider the divergences that have arisen in the academic world, or the evolution of academic disciplines, by situating them in their intellectual space (Chartier 1988: 4–9; cf. Burke 1984, 1997). Here, 'oral history' – the interviewing of eye-witness participants in the events of the past for the purposes of historical reconstruction – provides a method that links cultural history to the fieldwork of ethnologists and anthropologists. In a number of recent studies, anthropological techniques and interdisciplinary bridges have been specifically evoked (Dunaway and Baum 1996, Perks and Thomson 1998).

'Cultural studies' is a somewhat different case, although it arose, in part, as a response to the coming of 'the text' and critiques of modernity. But from the beginning in Europe it was not restricted by a reaction to traditional paradigms as was cultural history. Rather, cultural studies has been at once interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and antidisciplinary in its embracing of both an anthropological and sociological conception of culture.⁵ A decisive orientation toward the analysis, often Marx-inspired, of contemporary urban industrial societies was evident in its early phases, but this has

since broadened to include aspects such as nationalism, ethnicity and identity (Giroux and McLaren 1993). Three main models of research predominate: studies of cultural production, of 'text', and of lived cultures (Johnson 1995: 575–612). Rejecting the notion of 'culture' as identical with 'high culture', cultural studies demands that all forms of cultural production should be scrutinised, both in relation to other cultural practices and to social questions (cf. Grossberg, Nelson, Treichler 1992: 4). Much of this stemmed from concerns about the new ways social domination operated in the postwar world. Shifts in the social organisation of cultural and communications media brought imports from the United States (rock music, jeans, the shopping mall, music videos, theme parks) that flagged up critical questions about democracy, equality, and the relationship of politics and culture. The Frankfurt School had influentially drawn attention to these problems (e.g. Adorno 1950, 1991, Marcuse 1966; also Althusser 1969), and ethnologists too have turned their attention to the impact of popular culture and modernity on traditional forms (e.g. Köstlin 1997).

The problem of social change in Europe was also investigated by semioticians such as Barthes, who has analysed culture as a historically sedimented collective system of meanings that retained traces of earlier social relations and had the capacity in the present to structure categories of thinking and thereby obscure or naturalise power (Barthes 1972 [1990]). In England, Richard Hoggart had seen the communities that provided roots for ethnic or class solidarity dispersed by urban renewal, de-industrialization and American popular culture; these factors also effaced an older sense of place (1959 [1992]). The historian Peter Laslett documented 'the world we have lost' (1969 [1983]). The work of Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson shaped much of the thinking in 'British cultural studies' in its early phases (e.g., Thompson 1963, Williams 1958; cf. Easthope 1997, Johnson 1995). The ideas of Antonio Gramsci, notably, began to encourage conceptions of hegemony and resistance in the analysis of popular culture by scholars at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, founded by Hoggart in 1964. Other centres of study emerged later at Leeds, Leicester, Glasgow and Cardiff (Turner 1996).

Questions of gender, race and so on were opened up in a wide-ranging set of enquiries into the lived practice of, for instance, subcultures, who often formed collective identities based on the notion of a counterculture (Hebdige 1979). Folklorists, aware of Gramsci and his writings on folklore, had also pointed out this contestatory role of culture (Lombardi-Satriani 1974), and Gramsci's insights on cultural hegemony ultimately found their way into American anthropology via cultural studies (Nelson and Grossberg 1988). Since Hoggart's time new urban forms (planned communities, theme parks, tourism) have stimulated a postmodern generation of critics to see how these forms could structure collective action (Jameson 1991, Lyotard 1984). Hoggart and Williams had turned to sociology, ethnography and social history in the 1960s for ways to contextualise the text, 'to flesh out the sense of reading and response as forms of culture produced by the activity of a whole society' (Easthope 1997: 6). But

in doing so, they left themselves open to charges of moralising attitudes, and there resulted a tension between what Stuart Hall has called the culturalism of Hoggart and Williams and latterday Marxist structuralism (Hall 1980). Mass media, for example, was transforming traditional culture; but forces such as rock music also disturbed conventional cultural hierarchies, and this led to a reassessment of culture itself and its economic base. 'Culture' became an arena for struggles linked to collective interests and political power (Long 1997, 18–19). It also functions, prominently, as a subject for discussion in open forum when topics such as race, class and gender prove too personal or too sensitive. At any rate, as gender, race, nationalism or sexuality are increasingly seen as irreducible to the logic of class or capital, some describe this newer intellectual terrain as 'postMarxist' (McRobbie 1992).

NO CONTINUING CITY? ETHNOLOGY'S FUTURES

Power, indeed, is a recurrent topos in all these intellectual fields, and this confirms the scrutiny by critics of not only the foundations of knowledge but the foundations of society (cf. Wolf 1994). Further, does the ambivalent role of 'cultural studies' in the academy mean that it threatens to replace traditional disciplines such as anthropology, folklore, or ethnology? Is it some kind of critical substitute, in a world dominated by global capitalism, for Marxism, Eurocentrism, or even anti-Americanism (Jameson 1995)? It must be admitted that, even in the not-too-distant past, ethnologists in Europe have to some extent colluded in fabricating national identities as an assertion of cultural and historical superiority. In the academy, moreover, ethnology's traditional concerns can in recent times be seen to merge with, or even disappear into, the ethnologisation of social and historical disciplines, a process somewhat similar to that affecting the relationship between history and sociology (Chartier 1988). While in Germany it appears that *Volkskunde* (the study of folklore) has all but disappeared because of its ideologically-compromised role in Nazism, recent research of a more obviously sociological kind there has centered on, for instance, the fast-food complex, which is closely related to a mobile society and its life-style. As Konrad Köstlin has pointed out, the world-wide ubiquity of MacDonald's or other American-based chains mediates the feeling of absolute security in a confusing world; at the same time, in former Eastern Bloc countries these food outlets act as a symbol of freedom and modernity. But this similarity and universality of the fast-food complex can also contain within it negative associations, such as loss of individual and local identity (1996: 171). The same food is prepared in the same way whether one is in Deauville, Dresden or Dundee.

Then what of local identities, regional cultures, even national traditions in the face of computer-driven globalisation and multi-national companies who make decisions that transcend national autonomy? In the past twenty or thirty years there has been fashionable use of the terms 'invention' or 'reinvention': invention, for instance, of

culture (Wagner 1975), tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), (primitive) society (Kuper 1988, Moscovici 1993), race (Lott 1999), ethnicity (Sollors 1991), history (Bann 1990), progress (Bowler 1989) and so on.⁶ This suggests the notion that people construct their history and culture anew from time to time according to individual or collective needs, such as notions of a heroic past (the heroisation process) or national status (the nationalisation of culture) or external pressures (political or economic threat) (Löfgren 1989). But how 'new' is much of this invention? There exists, for example, as much a 'tradition of invention' as an invention of tradition: James 'Ossian' Macpherson, in his influential re-working of Gaelic songs and narratives in English translation, was merely one in a long line of 'inventive' adapters of tradition in Britain and Ireland, such as Geoffrey of Monmouth or Iolo Morganwg. It is mistaken to infer or suggest that invention is, first of all, newly made out of whole cloth rather than piecemeal and with an eye on past models. The word 'invention' unfortunately suggests this very notion of something new, whereas 'adaptation', 'reworking', or 'recasting' older ideas might better fit the process. Hobsbawm and Ranger's much-quoted book on the invention of tradition makes a distinction between traditions that have evolved over lengthy spans of time and those that are invented for ideological (usually nationalistic) reasons. But many have pointed out that the line is hard to draw. The theory, moreover, of Hobsbawm that nations and nationalism cannot predate 1780 has been effectively demolished: the early experience of nation-forming in the British Isles has indicated how 'nations' were gradually formed out of tribes and tribal complexes (Hastings 1997).

Given that the construction of reality is as much a mental process as a phenomenal set of 'facts', and that the business of the academic world is to examine, analyse and propose new ways of seeing, how can ethnology proceed as an enterprise? Furthermore, what is 'Scottish' ethnology, and how does it fit with both a 'European' ethnology and a more globally-oriented anthropology? There is no question that anthropology has flourished in the United States, not only because of the relative wealth of resources in its universities and research institutions, but also because of the nation's juncture in world history as a powerful economic and military force. But the coherence of the field has been, as some see it, weakened by individualism and the constant need to 'slay' the paradigms of one's predecessors, only to see them return to life as if discovered for the first time (Wolf 1994: 220). Anthropologists' ignoring of work in related fields, too, may be based on a myopic view – a kind of intellectual solipsism, as it were – that little of significance happens outside its national as well as its disciplinary boundaries. Folklorists in particular complain vocally about anthropologists' (and historians') ignorance of their field (cf. Ben-Amos 1998; see also Becher 1989, Christiansen 1984, Cohn 1987, Lindqvist 1992). Economic and institutional power are all at work here: ethnology and then anthropology in Britain were at their height from the 1870s until the 1950s, when Empire was diminishing and prestige waned. Anthropology in Britain has to some extent fed from the transatlantic trough: noted scholars (Talal Asad, Mary Douglas, Robin Fox, Philip Gulliver, Stanley Tambiah, John Middleton, Victor Turner)

left for posts abroad in the 1970s as the general academic context for anthropological work declined and sociology began its rise to popularity (Kuper 1996: 180).⁷

This is not to belittle the original work in British anthropology as a whole through the 1970s and 1980s; but when one takes into account that there are over 10,000 professional anthropologists in the American Anthropological Association, and that the society has 34 sections defined by topic of study (e.g., feminist, political-legal, education, nutrition, agriculture, consciousness, work, cultural, humanistic, linguistic, medical, psychological, urban anthropology) and six interest groups (ageing, American Indian/Native American/Alaskan native, East Asia, Melanesia, post-communist cultural studies, ritual), there is no question where the power and influence lie. The American Ethnological Society, founded in 1842, is one of the sections of the AAA; it has nearly 4000 members and publishes a journal, *American Ethnologist*, which promotes scholarship on 'ethnology' in the broader sense of the term. It is in this 'broader sense' (namely comparative, historical and regional analysis) that any understanding of ethnology – whether as an 'American' or as a 'European' enterprise – must be sought. And as Adam Kuper has observed, the most suggestive and subtle kinds of comparison are today regional in scope and historical in conception (1994: 116). British as well as American anthropologists are turning to the study of Europe (Goddard et al. 1994, Macdonald 1993). It is not, of course, an enterprise that belongs to any country or continent or even discipline but is, rather, a means of understanding the human condition. This in turn means not only furthering an ethnology of the West (and Europe) as the cradle of these, humanistic fields but also, in more immediate terms, an 'ethnology of Scots in and beyond Scotland' (rather than simply the national enterprise that is suggested by the conjoining of 'Scottish' and 'ethnology').

A 'national' ethnology, therefore, can only be one strand in a layered approach to this understanding, the other strands being the local, the regional, and the transnational or international. Any one of these cannot justifiably stand on its own as the subject of enquiry, for to do so would be to confine the question of identity in the modern world too narrowly. Identity is created or emerges around local, regional, and national concepts, around language, around gender, class and occupation: some anthropologists have referred to this as a sense of 'belonging' (Cohen 1982, Macdonald 1997). But it is also an emergent aspect of individual and social life, as factors from both within and without impinge and develop change, whether gradual or dramatically swift. In the case of ethnology in and of Scotland there has perhaps been, as there was in Ireland after independence, a focus on the local, regional and national to the detriment of the transnational, the minority immigrant or transient, as well as of gendered and the social class distinctions: there are few cultural studies, for instance, of an Edinburgh or Glasgow bourgeoisie that has immense social influence and power in commercial and legal spheres. Social analysis has in this sense begun to overtake cultural analysis; but sociologists have begun to see that a study of social history must include cultural factors if it is to understand behavioral conventions and traditions.

In the ethnology of Scotland, nevertheless, nativistic and national agendas directed towards the rural, the past, and the remote tend to dominate research. I would argue that ethnology must begin to free itself from idealised conceptions of Scottish culture in its local, regional, national or even transnational dimensions. That is not to say that those with whom ethnologists work do not have such idealised conceptions; but it is in keeping with trends elsewhere in Europe – and in ethnology as a whole – for the ethnologist to divest himself or herself of the national bias that distorts basic concepts and guides method into an uncritical ‘authority’ and unselfconscious empiricism. Empirical findings, description and analysis have their place; but prosaic, surface description of cultural phenomena in terms of a local or national history is no substitute for a cultural analysis of this local/ regional /national/ transnational world as seen through multiple eyes and minds – these imaginings, inventions and constructions that are all around us in different classes of society, in women, men and children and heretofore largely invisible immigrant communities (Brah 1996), as well as in ‘outsiders’, tourism, and the culture of long-established emigrant settlements abroad. Such analysis must in turn lead to a general theory of Scottish culture and identity at different social and diasporal levels.

To argue that these communities and topics have become the domain of the sociologist is to miss the point: sociologists have only recently turned to an analysis of specifically urban (European) culture under the influence of the Frankfurt School and others. The role of sociologists, in addition, and that of their discipline have been partially absorbed into ‘cultural studies’, more so, I would venture, than for anthropology or ethnology, which still retain their association – not always correct or deserved – with Third World, peasant or rural cultures. But these affinities must in any case be thrown off if such disciplines are to forge a fresh sense of identity and purpose: oral traditions, for instance, have become important for historical interpretation as much as oral accounts of ‘what happened’ (Henige 1974, 1982). Oral history here begins to approach the methods of ethnology and cultural anthropology as its practitioners see that there is no ‘objective’ account in the popular historical imagination (cf. Thompson 1988).

As I see it, ethnology in Scotland and elsewhere must harness three strategies to safeguard its disciplinary future: first, it must vigorously defend and promote its traditional devotion to historical and comparative studies (this need not preclude field ethnographies, indeed ought to promulgate ethnography as a balancing factor); second, it must forge new theories out of its own disciplinary history and from the confluence of related fields; third, it should engage in ruthless critique of its theoretical and methodological assumptions, especially in matters of representation. The first of these strategies is what will distinguish ethnology from an anthropology suffering from a proliferation of competing paradigms (Borofsky 1994: 11–12; in any case, comparison takes place at both conscious and unconscious levels, and it is now the scholar’s task to bring to consciousness and understanding those ‘unconscious’ comparisons). The second and third will, one hopes, rescue ethnology from the descriptive and often complacent, ‘common-sense’ empiricism into which it can readily fall.

These strategies can readily be integrated into a Scottish cultural framework. A glance at ethnological topics recently undertaken at an academic level in Scotland displays the possibility for such integration: folk revivals and their relation to 'mature' traditions; emigrant traditions and their relationship to both source and host culture; the traditions of twentieth century immigrant communities; sport and contemporary culture industries (e.g., tourism); urban studies; issues surrounding older traditions (e.g. Gaelic oral culture). Allied to these topics are theoretical perspectives (e.g. feminism) and scrutiny of the political agendas behind representations of ethnology. An ethnology of Scots people, both within 'national' borders and abroad, should seek to uncover the range of cultural constructions that contribute to ideas of identity, local, regional, national – or even those inspired by the British Empire, for in this last kind of identity Scots were often complicitous. The confrontation with history, especially unpleasant or awkward historical events, will involve a range of responses that include insight, confession, invention, dissimulation, evasion and re-imagining, and these deserve careful interpretation through published accounts. It is in this sense that ethnologists have learned to shun the selective rhetoric of 'heritage' and to carry forward the task of interpreting a complex, conflict-laden culture under a banner of ethical awareness. For the tasks of ethnology in Scotland cannot be confined – as they have been at times – to rural or 'backward' areas; instead, ethnologists need to confront past lacunae, present and future goals, the work of sister disciplines, and the technology that is transforming human behaviour. They must also, *pace* Kuper, find a sense of urgency if defensible conclusions on identity and tradition in the modern world are to be reached.

NOTES

- 1 *Ethnologia Europaea*, vol. 1 (1967–). A recent issue of the *American Anthropologist* (vol. 99/4, 1997) devoted to 'provocations of European ethnology' largely ignores the work of contemporary European ethnologists.
- 2 It is as well to note here the contemporary revival of 'rhetoric' as a method or technique of intellectual persuasion (see Hutton 1992).
- 3 Influentially outlined by the French sociologist Marcel Mauss in his *Essai sur le don* (1925; *The Gift*, 1954). It is difficult to gauge just how specific this influence was in terms of modifying the 'authority' of the ethnographer. The practice however of giving, receiving and taking belong, as Annette Weiner has shown, to more complex temporalities, extending the effects of the gift beyond death (1992). Mauss was concerned primarily with the problem of agency in society, one taken up in turn by Malinowski, Edmund Leach and others; see *Current Anthropology* 36 (1995), 711–18. For reflexivity as anthropological technique, see Marcus 1994: 45; for reflexivity in the sociology of knowledge, see Ashmore 1989, Woolgar 1988.
- 4 Interdisciplinary movements such as 'American Studies' or 'Canadian Studies' may have grown out of a concern for both cultural identity and issues that were being lost in the

cracks among disciplinary boundaries. The attempt by such broad movements to become disciplines has usually failed because, although starting from a critical perspective, the more successful they have been the more they have retreated from radical critique. In American Studies, interdisciplinarity was a vehicle for challenging institutional hierarchy, but in the end did not offer an alternative; as it became more entrenched, interdisciplinarity receded in importance and critical work has been left to research groups (such as Women's Studies) involved in radical social change (cf. Giroux et al. 1995).

- 5 It is ironic that the anthropological conception of 'culture' has passed into popular thought when anthropologists are now questioning the term's utility. The essentialist and reified conception of culture devised by anthropologists can be found not only in everyday discourse but has been adopted by Third World elites in their nationalist rhetoric, providing an ideal instrument for claims to identity, 'phrased in opposition to modernity, Westernisation, or neocolonialism'. Culture, so reified, can be deployed against foreign or outside researchers, who can be pilloried for having stolen 'it', sold 'it' in the academic marketplace, or simply misrepresented 'it' (Keesing 1994: 303–304).
- 6 'Inventing' – no doubt in the wake of nineteenth century patent legislation – has acquired this sense of 'creating novelty'; consequently, in recent literary and humanistic contexts it has been accompanied by these similar terms: not only 'reinventing' but also 'construction' and 'imagining, for example, in terms of both disciplines and their subject matter; see Atkinson 1990 (textual constructions of reality), Brett 1996 (construction of heritage), Cohen 1985 (symbolic construction of community), Cubitt 1998 (imagining nations), Hymes 1969 (re-inventing anthropology), Macdonald 1997 (reimagining culture), Searle 1996 (construction of social reality), Tonkin 1992 (social construction of oral history). For Scottish topics, cf. Gold and Gold 1995 (touristic imagining), Pittock 1991, 1997 (historical invention of Scotland, Britain), Smith 1998 (constructing identity in the visual arts). The anthropologist Marshall Sahlins (1999) has recently argued against the easy functionalist dismissal of the peoples' claims of cultural distinction (the invention of tradition) and for the continued relevance of such distinction (the inventiveness of tradition).
- 7 But folklorists and ethnologists should not be afraid of being 'marginal' (Oring 1998). In any case, centrality and marginality in terms of knowledge or even economic power are relative concepts, not universal values (see Cockcroft 1994, Stoklund 1992).

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