Ethnologies

Hermann BAUSINGER, translated by Elke DETTMER, *Folk Culture in a World of Technology* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1990, 187 p., ISBN 0-253-31127-0)

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This collection of essays drawn from *Volkskultur in der technischen Welt* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer GmbH, 1961) and *Volkskunde* (Darmstadt: Carl Habel Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1971) distils the essence of Bausinger's contributions to modern German folklore theory. Despite the usual problems one encounters when reading English translations of German prose, a close and careful reading of the text yields valuable and unexpected insights into the transformations undergone by folklore within the context of rapidly developing technology and a market economy. But the reader must also carefully consider the limitations of the theoretical constructs behind Bausinger's bold and sweeping generalizations about the nature of folklore in an information-saturated society.

Bausinger defines the study of folklore as a "sociology of relations" which attempts to map relationships between communities caught in the throes of social transformation wrought by technology's power to dissolve class and ethnic boundaries. Three of the book's five chapters outline the processes of social, temporal, and spatial expansion which basically characterize modern social transformation. In these chapters, Bausinger demonstrates a folkloristic method which eschews an interest in the social base or the motif-historical relationships between folklore forms in favour of a concern with "mentalities and their social foundation". However, his method retains the broad comparative perspective of diffusionist approaches as well as their preoccupation with the material forms of folklore. In the process, his generalizations at times appear superficial and give short shrift to the symbolic, historical, and ethnographic context of folkloric performance. This "broad brush" approach, in turn, creates problems in the articulation of his essentially sound concepts of social, spatial, and temporal expansion.

Bausinger postulates that science and technology provide effective means for the rapid transmission of an unprecedented amount of information in modern society. As this flood of information descends upon communities and consumerism asserts its powerful influence, a formerly linked unity of theory and practice within these communities begins to dissolve. The sheer weight of new information expands a community's "horizon of the familiar" to the level of the nation-state. In the process, technology generates new information which undermines symbols once central to a given community's group identity and normative structure. A spatial expansion of information transforms the exotic into the familiar and ultimately facilitates a transformation from hierarchy and patriarchy to a society organized cooperatively within a market economy. At the same time,

technologies such as the invention of the printing press engender a temporal expansion of information which takes the form of a "historicizing preservation of forms". For example, the Grimm Brothers' highly expurgated and edited collection of Märchen effectively froze and, in time, destroyed what was once an oral tradition based on the imaginative, playful rearrangement of narrative elements. The Grimms' work represents a successful attempt to standardize the symbolic in an attempt to legitimize a particular ideological interpretation. As in Bausinger's discussion of the German *Heimat* movement, what was once a dynamic, shifting, and multi-associational collection of symbolic configurations becomes transformed into a series of metonymic constructions designed to propagate specific ideological propositions.

The processes of spatial and temporal expansion engendered by technological forces create a social expansion. As they successfully aspire toward bourgeois forms made available through technology, the working class itself begins to disappear as do former autocratic bastions of power and privilege. But folklore itself does not disappear. Rather, a reaction against technological change ensues in which communities use folklore forms to construct a counterworld which represents avoidance and escape from technology and the social alienation caused by mass marketing. For example, Bausinger cites the modern ascension of the anti-technological joke to a prominent place in oral traditions with highly developed technologies.

But Bausinger's pessimism, his unwillingness to incorporate Marxist perspectives on folklore as resistance against hegemonic forces in society, and his omission of any discussion of reflexivity or meta-awareness on the part of those who intentionally practice folklore lead him to the proposition that folklore inevitably undergoes a transformation into what he terms "folklorism", a concept roughly similar to Dorson's use of the term "fakelore." While Dorson envisioned fakelore as a creature of corporate entities attempting to market their products, Bausinger sees the creation of folklorisms as doomed attempts by communities to preserve their traditions while simultaneously marketing the products of those traditions in the open marketplace. For Bausinger, the commodification of folklore forms by the folk themselves engenders a process of historicization which ultimately transforms what was once functional, multi-associational, and symbolically fluid into a vapid metonym of nostalgia for what was lost and cannot be regained. As Bausinger himself states, "When the present is furnished with the ornaments of the old and the original, the future often seems merely the projection of a lost past."

This pessimistic view of modern folklore obviously has political implications. In part, it attempts to explain the rise of National Socialism in modern Germany as it implicitly warns of the consequences behind the transformation of what was once functionally authentic into an ideologically charged, inauthentic representation. Reminiscent of a perspective on social phenomena taken by

Martin Heidegger, Bausinger's resolutely empirical approach deals more with a comparison of supposed concrete realizations of ideas (i.e., forms of folklore) than with the questions of intention, motivation, and strategy which underlie those realizations. Despite the fact that this collection of essays raises far more problems than it solves, Bausinger has effectively isolated and charted the precise nature of the challenges folklorists face in working with advanced technological societies. His consistently gloomy assessment of the future of such traditional genres as storytelling, festival, and folksong implicitly suggest their transforma-tion into new genres perhaps better suited to the artistic articulation of socially constituted mental constructs within the informational chaos of modern society. For that reason alone, this book should be required reading in any Folklore curriculum.

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David C. WOODMAN, *Unravelling the Franklin Mystery: Inuit Testimony* (Montréal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991, xiv+390 p., ISBN 0-7735-0833-3).

The rediscovery of America in 1492 was only the first in a long series of European attempts to reach Asia by a westward route. Continuing belief in a water passage through or around the New World lay behind dozens of unsuccessful searching expeditions. The navigable strait proved to be a geographical illusion created out of hope, hoax, and scientific error that persisted for 350 years.

In the early nineteenth century, continuing rumours encouraged the British Admiralty to begin an official search for a northwest passage. Profit was one motive; the perceived need to prevent Russian and American expansion into British North American territory was another. National pride also played its part. England was mistress of the seas, owner of the world's largest navy and merchant marine, and her ruling class felt the need to prove her pre-eminence in all things maritime. As John Barrow, Second Lord of the Admiralty from 1804 to 1845, pointed out, England had to be first to conquer the northwest passage or "be laughed at by all the world".[1] Under his goad, expeditions under Captains Ross,

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1. John Barrow quoted in Richard J. CYRIAX, *Sir John Franklin's Last Arctic Expedition*, London, 1939: 19-20.