

## THE MAPPING OF FOLK CULTURE AS APPLIED FOLKLORE

William Nicolaisen

Since my teaching and research are two-pronged and in a not unusual combination pursue interest in language as well as in folklore, I have a certain amount of terminological trouble, and I suspect that my terminological problems are only an outward manifestation of a conceptual muddle in which I find myself -- at least at the time of writing this paper. I have every confidence that this conference will throw light on areas -- which to me at present are at best a darkish gray -- but, unfortunately, this light will be shed too late to be of any benefit to this communication. Please understand, therefore, that I am wrestling with the term and concept in question in what you might call pre-Pittsburgh darkness.

The term which is my stumbling block is, as you may well imagine, the word "applied." From the applied sciences I expect that they will make available to me and my fellow men in a utilitarian and/or humanitarian way the results based on pure research or theory. In applied linguistics one would want to see our knowledge of the structure, history, psychology, etc. of language made use of in the improvement of linguistic communication -- whether for the handicapped individual, for the disadvantaged social or ethnic group, the international relations between different linguistic groups and any other level, or any occasion on which language appears to be used whether by design or by neglect, inadequately. However, as you know, the term "applied linguistics" has become almost synonymous with the teaching of Language X (mostly English) as a foreign or second language, and the concept of applied linguistics has consequently been robbed of the many facets which one potentially might have thought of as meaningful and useful for it. However that may be, the basic notion of applied science or linguistics, or whatever other topic one may think of as falling into this category, appears to be the utilization of the results of pure research, theoretical study, academic inquiry -- call it what you like -- for the purpose of enriching human life in a very practical way. This doesn't mean, of course, that the practical outcome may not be the opposite of what was intended so that we may get impoverishment instead of enrichment, despair instead of hope, destruction instead of improvement; but I'm optimistic enough to think that the application of theoretical results is normally intended for the betterment of the human condition and not the reverse.

Certainly with regard to applied folklore, I cannot conceive of any destructive intent. As I see it, this would be a contradictio in adjecto. If conceived in the above framework of thinking, then, we dare not even allow the alternatives "for better or worse" as a possibility -- the plowing back as my Edinburgh colleague, Hamish Henderson, used to call it with reference to a well-known agricultural practice. "Plowed back" folklore is surely only conceivable as leading to and being meant to lead to fertility -- renewed fertility, if you like -- and not sterility. It would be nice and very satisfying if I could now continue by saying that the mapping of folk culture is likely to bring about directly or indirectly such freshly fertile regeneration. The trouble is that I personally find it very difficult to make such a claim and see such a connection.

Initially, I was not at all certain therefore whether the subject matter of this paper would be even vaguely appropriate for this conference. But your chairman's encouraging reply, "If a folklore atlas is not applied folklore, I don't know what is," gave me at least the hope that the mapping of folk culture might have some significance in this weekend's context after all. I, consequently, changed the title of my paper from "The Mapping of Folk Culture and Applied Folklore" to "The Mapping of Folk Culture as Applied Folklore." What is the justification for this change -- for this title?

Before I attempt to answer this question, let me outline very briefly the actual project that I have in mind when I talk about the mapping of folk culture -- and I apologize here to those members of the audience who were present when I first made this proposal in Los Angeles last November -- for the next four minutes, fifty-seven seconds. I think the time has come for America, particularly for the United States, to plan and execute the systematic gathering of folk cultural data with reference to both the material and the non-material aspects with a view to making the geographical distribution visible in map form. Once a number of such maps have been produced, these, together with the relevant commentary, would become combined in an atlas which I have given the working title American Folklore Atlas. What I have in mind is a combination of the ideas embodied in the various European national folklore atlases and in the plans for the so-called Ethnological Atlas of Europe and its Neighboring Countries, a project which is now well beyond the planning stage and is on the verge of producing its first maps. On this side of the Atlantic, the states would correspond roughly to the individual European nations, and their federal connections would be the equivalent of international relations in Europe. The American Folklore Atlas would, therefore, correspond to the European Atlas, not the individual national ventures. Obviously, these are only somewhat limping comparisons; but with regard to organization and presentation of the American project, they should, nevertheless, be helpful. As long as we bear in mind that the United States is both at an advantage and at a disadvantage in this respect in comparison with Europe; that is, linguistically, the country is more -- much more -- homogenous, but the scatter of the various ethnic folk elements is much less compact as is only to be expected in a country of immigrants. The mapping of folk culture in America would up to a point imitate but also extend the European venture. Our main drawback does, of course, lie in the paucity and scrappiness of the collected material, whereas in some geographical areas and certain aspects of folklore, much has been collected -- nothing or very little has been gathered elsewhere. A completely new collecting venture would, therefore, have to be initiated with a strong emphasis on systematic gathering of information in comparable form. This may, in fact, help to put folklore collecting in this country on a completely new and very desirable basis.

Well, what kind of material is to be collected and mapped? This is how I put it in the original proposal: obviously, opinions on this subject will differ as much as there are individual approaches to our discipline. Personally, I would favor coverage of as wide a range of topics and items as can be listed under the headings "folklore" and "folklife;" from folk legends to house types, so to speak. Certainly, I would strongly oppose any permanent division between the material and non-material aspects of our field and the reflection of this division in -- let us say -- two separate atlases and two separate undertakings leading to such atlases.

Within such comprehensiveness, one would, of course, have to be selective in the number of significant mappable items to be included, always bearing in mind the ultimate published size of such an atlas and the maximum number of maps to be drawn. In this respect, I find the list of topics treated in the first 120 maps of the Atlas der deutschen Volkskunde very enlightening: annual secular celebrations, corn as a designation for grain, what kind of being sits in the moon according to the folk imagination, shapes of cradles, who brings babies, annual bonfires, riding games, outdoor games, games with Easter eggs, who brings the Easter eggs, existence of Mother's Day, birth and name days, presence of advent wreaths, gift-bearers at Christmas, name of the Christmas tree, St. Martin's day customs, noise-makers, the twelve nights, various names of Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve, Nicholas and his companions, figures of Christmastide, Epiphany, origin of babies, designation of the harvest festival, racks for sheaves of grain, names of the sheaf, conclusion of the grain harvest, gifts on the first day of school, ways of saying good-bye, change of servants, birds whose call announced death, designations of faith healing, forms of windmills, instruments of the dance band. After World War II, a new series of maps added the following items in 48 presentations: Women's work in agriculture, the suitor, popular veneration of the saints, burial gifts, pastries for All Soul's Day, the funeral feast, domestic teamwork, customs at christening, second sight, demons jumping onto person's shoulders, table customs, bread spices, forms and nature of neighborly help, distribution of the confessions. There's an obvious bias in these two lists towards the investigation of items of customs and belief, many of them lexical and onomastic, against a Christian and rural background, and even if supplemented by topics from the Dutch, Swiss, and Austrian atlases, the two series are by no means exhaustive.

A great many topics come to mind straightaway, especially in the areas of material culture and folk narrative as well as from non-folkloric disciplines, if these are useful as analogies or possible explanations, such as geographical or soil maps to accompany one on field patterns, or a map showing the migrational habitat of the white stork in relationship to the distribution of the belief that the stork brings the babies. Naturally, in a country with a much more heterogeneous background like the United States, not all items could and would be studied on a nationwide scale -- particularly investigations concerned with certain ethnic and linguistic survivals and influences would have to be conducted on a more regional basis. One would not ask questions concerning the Pennsylvania Dutch in Arizona or investigate Spanish folk drama in the state of New York, I take it. In general, however, I would plead for the choice of selected items from a fairly comprehensive list of items which might be studied meaningfully in an American context. One might do worse in this respect than to choose suitable topics from those to be mapped by the International European Atlas as a starting point and pioneering enterprise, as well as a link with the various "old countries."

This brings us to our second point: How and from what sources is the material to be collected? Presumably, the two main methods to be employed would be field work and the postal questionnaire. Clearly, the first of these two is preferable in every respect, but it would be impracticable and unmanageable if applied exclusively -- even if one were to employ every folklore student, every member of a folklore society, and every folklore enthusiast. If information for the Swiss Folklore Atlas was collected at 387 selected points over a period of six years -- that

is, from 1937-42 -- then a country more than 500 times larger than Switzerland would have to find something like 200,000 informants or at least selective points with probably more than one informant in each and a proportionate number of field workers. The survey for the atlas would have to rely largely on a combination of personal interview and postal inquiry. In addition to placing carefully prepared questionnaires into the hands of live field workers, a kind of less personal service would have to be developed which would allow the informant to correspond directly with a center -- local, regional, state-wide, or nation-wide. Field work without a questionnaire would run the risk of serious omissions in the interviewing procedure, whether one uses tape recorders or pencil and paper.

With regard to many aspects of folklore and folklife a questionnaire would ask for supplementary photographs and drawings in addition to oral and/or written information. Different questionnaires will, of course, ask very different questions. As I see it, those devised for the American Folklore Atlas would attempt to combine the acquisition of both contemporary and historical information with varying emphases. It would be wise to include among one's selected items not only those which are still relevant and productive, but also those which survive as mere fossils, as well as those which have become, more or less, recently obsolete. In fact, the mere mapping of that which still exists will lose a great deal of depth and historical perspective without such background information.

For the historical aspects, apart from the reminiscences of the oldest inhabitants, extracts would, of course, have to be made from books and other printed publications, as well as from manuscripts of all kinds. And for this purpose a host of volunteer helpers could be employed, some of whom might not necessarily make good field workers.

I also have a number of suggestions regarding the cartographic problems and aims, the ultimate published form, the location of national and regional headquarters, finance, etc. But this is not the place to reiterate these. It suffices to say that the American Folklore Society has established a committee which is, at present, investigating as many aspects of the project as may come to mind and which hopes to meet in Washington, D.C., in November for a real working session to assess the possibilities and the practicability of such an atlas in the most frank and critical fashion. The committee will then report back to the annual general meeting of the AFS. I can say, however, at this point that things seem to be shaping well, and quite a few positive and constructive comments have already come in.

The question which still remains for us to answer is: How does the American Folklore Atlas qualify as applied folklore? As I said earlier, there's no direct route from one to the other. But the way I see it, in order to forge a link, an additional interpretation of the term "applied" would be necessary. By this I mean that the presentation, the shape of the publication, the mode of making the results of research available is in itself a kind of application, even if ultimate usefulness has not yet been established. The imaginative and systematic structuring of raw data for information, instruction, utilization, is surely also application. In fact, I would be much happier if these two conceptual levels "applied" could be kept terminologically apart so that one would refer to the informational and the other to the responsive level. I've been wrestling with these terms, but for the time being I can't think of anything better. To

my mind, a folklore atlas or the mapping of folk culture is applied folklore on the level of appropriate selective information -- not in the realm of the revitalization of the folk scene, the plowing back, or whatever this kind of process may be called. It is as such a necessary step towards enabling us to put to use certain types of folklore research properly, essentially those with an underlying quality of geographical distribution but also with an interest in historical veracity and social appropriateness.

What I'm trying to say is that a folklore atlas is not applied folklore in the sense in which the deliberate instruction in lost or dying arts and crafts, the teaching of folklore in school, the revival of certain dances, the reconstruction or imitation of house styles, the making and playing of old instruments, the organization of folklore festivals, the application of folk medical knowledge to psycho-therapy would be. But I think the atlas would be applied folklore insofar as it makes use of the results of theory, research, and academic investigation by making them available in an appropriate form to serve as a reliable informative basis for the proper and fruitful application of folklore in the other sense; that is, in the one of functional response. Particularly in its visual, non-verbal approach does a map or a series of maps establish relationships between data which are not easily provided or defined by mere verbalization. The immediate visual presence of the geographical "where" makes a much stronger impact than a verbal description, however accurate.

Well, if I haven't managed to talk you into the concept of the two levels, or if I've even extended the terminological muddle to an audience of about a hundred, certainly there isn't time to start all over again.