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## METATHEORY IN FOLKLORISTIC STUDIES AND PHILOSOPHY OF ART

### Summary

The subject matter of folkloristic studies, their methods and boundaries in relation to other disciplines are being increasingly questioned nowadays. Growing numbers of folklore students are returning to the fundamental axioms and concepts of folkloristics to re-examine them. In our opinion, such discussions belong to philosophy rather than to folkloristic studies: they go beyond folkloristics and, in fact, do not belong to science in the proper sense. The axioms and postulates of a given scientific discipline cannot be proved by using the methods of that same discipline. On the other hand, the mere linking of the concepts of philosophy and folklore will seem dangerous to many people. Modern scientific disciplines, particularly the humanities (where one would least expect it), prefer to abandon philosophy. As a form of pre-scientific thinking, philosophy is equated with unscientific thinking and rejected as such. However, those same scholars who fight shy of philosophy themselves raise eminently philosophical questions — which are forced upon them by their subject matter. Confronted with the basic postulates of folkloristics, forced to leave the province of their own discipline, students of folklore sometimes adopt the methods of other disciplines uncritically. This would not necessarily be a bad thing if only the adopted methods were suitable for the level of study at which they were used. It is the opinion of the present author that the main postulates of folkloristics cannot be defined fully in terms of other disciplines, since folkloristics is not a branch of another discipline. An examination of the postulates of folkloristics is only possible within the framework of the philosophy of folkloristics or metatheory of folkloristics. We believe that a distinction can be made within folkloristic studies between papers (studies, monographs) devoted to specific folklore material, then theoretical and methodological studies (discussing the regularities of processes in folklore, methods of field work, classifications, analyses, comparisons, etc.), and studies dealing with the fundamental concepts of the discipline of folkloristics (defining folklore, establishing relations between folkloristics and neighbouring disciplines, specifying the meaning and objectives of folkloristic research, etc.). Just as field research in folkloristics is not possible without theoretical assumptions (explicit or implicit), so also are both field studies and theory impossible without metatheoretical, pre-scientific foundations. Though practice, theory and metatheory are dialectically interrelated in all truly scientific and scholarly work, in actual application one must bear in mind the differences among these levels. Metatheoretical statements are not scientific in nature, but they logically precede theory and determine the theory, methods and objectives of work. Metatheoretical concepts are often implicit rather than explicit, and the disparity between them and the theory advocated by an author is therefore all the more probable.

Still, there is hardly a folkloristic scholar (either a collector of folklore or an expert in communications) who does not recognize, explicitly or implicitly, on at least one of the three levels of analysis, the relatedness of folklore and art. This fact alone is sufficient to justify an examination of the relationship between folkloristic metatheory and philosophy of art. In the present author's opinion, the relatedness of art and folklore lies at the root of distinction between folkloristics on the one hand and ethnology, sociology and other social sciences on the other. But the nature of the relationship holding folklore and art together remains an open question. Is folklore a form of art? What is the nature of the bond that makes oral literature, folk dances, music, etc. a whole which forms the subject matter of folkloristics?

In order to clarify the reasons for re-examination and change in folkloristic studies, we start with the term »folklore« itself and point out its indeterminacy, which was present when the term was first used and has not been corrected until the present day, so that »folklore« remains an uncertain, vague, and ambiguous term. A careful study of the term reveals its protean properties. The label »folklore« can be used to cover almost any aspect of human spiritual or material culture.

However, the problem does not only lie in misunderstandings concerning the term »folklore«. Disputes are also caused by the fact that modern folkloristics is changing its subject matter. Taken in its traditional designation, the scope of folklore does not extend to cover the entire field of interest of present-day folkloristics. The view of folklore as something that belongs only to the past, to peasants or »primitive« people, has been abandoned. But the question still remains how one should define the »new« folklore and distinguish folklore from non-folklore and folkloristics from related disciplines — all this at the time when the autonomous status and need of folkloristics is being challenged.

Objections raised against folkloristics can be reduced to two complex views. First, folkloristics isolates the so-called spiritual culture of the people from its spatial and temporal context and hypostatizes it as a separate entity. The hypostatizing is usually achieved by giving the oldest available form the status of the »original«. The methods by which the »original« state is reached are not reliable and what is legalized as the original, uncorrupted form is just a multiply idealized reconstruction. This approach presupposes the existence of some petrified, almost immutable way of life »in times past«. Any deviation from the hypostatized original state is seen by students of folklore as a process of decadence and decline. Their main task, as they see it, is to save the last vestiges of folk culture threatened by urbanization. They fail to realize that in this way they put up folkloristics as a discipline designed to check the process of historic development.

These objections are justified only in relation to one (now largely overcome) orientation in folkloristics, but not in relation to modern folkloristics.

The second major objection to folkloristics is that it has no method of its own but rather relies on the methods of other disciplines (ethnology, sociology, musicology, literary scholarship, choreology, teatrology, history of art, etc.) in the study of its own subject matter. If each science or discipline must have its own subject matter, or field of study, and its own methods, then folkloristics is neither a science nor a discipline. But there are sciences which apply the methods of one or more other sciences to their own subject matter. The more complex the subject of study, the more disciplines are needed to study it fully. We take the view that folkloristics is an association of different disciplines held together by their subject of study. The subject of study in question is the process of folklore, understood as artistic communication whose main characteristic are events in context. What holds together the different branches of folklore (oral literature, music, dancing, theatre, architecture, etc.) and what makes them a homogeneous and coherent subject of folkloristic study is the integration of the text («work») in the context. Works of painting and sculpture are only to a certain extent exceptional in this respect. Though the arts of painting and sculpture produce materialized works (and the «contact» communication is replaced by «technical» communication), the dominant function of these works is extra-aesthetic (decorative, utilitarian, sacral, etc.) rather than aesthetic (artistic). It seems that a conscious aesthetic function is alien to the folkloric process. The fact is that the folkloric text lives only in the context, from which it cannot be extracted without changing its true nature.

One may now ask what is the task of folklorists and folkloristics in connection with this process. Isn't the process sufficient in itself? Is the task of folkloristics exhausted in the description and analysis of the model of functioning of the folkloric process? What is the task of folkloristic practice? Is it confined to the gathering of material for theoretical and metatheoretical considerations?

The answer to this last question is negative. The main task of folkloristic practice is the recording (fixation) of the folkloric artistic text (literary, musical, dancing, theatrical, pictorial or sculptural) for purposes of study and possible application outside the original context. The isolated text (recorded in writing or by means of some technical instrument) is no longer a folkloric text but its record. However, the record can be used as evidence of the folkloric process and also as a fixed work of art with an aesthetic (artistic) function. As such, it may provide inspiration for new works (including folkloric) or serve as a model for the design of an industrial product.

It is important to distinguish the fixation of the text for purposes of study and use outside the context from the fixation of the text in the context. An awareness of the artistic value of an event does not manifest itself only in a desire to capture a given moment by means of a camera or tape-recorder. An awareness of value leads to «petrification». Even the participants themselves begin to feel a

need to preserve the folkloric event in its »original« form. The folkloric event thus ceases to be a living process and becomes a living record of the text — a reconstruction. Both the context and the function of a »petrified« event change, and the event itself transforms into the so-called second existence of folklore.

It was our purpose in this paper to stress the need for cooperation between folkloristics and other disciplines studying art. But it should not be forgotten that the folkloric process takes place only in its original context and that it therefore demands the kind of field investigation that art history, comparative aesthetics and philosophy of art do not otherwise use. Without an integration of field research, theoretical and metatheoretical study it would be impossible to tackle all three levels (texture, text, and context) of the folkloric artistic process of communication.

(Translated by V. Ivir)