

## **Words, Worlds, and Conceptual Travel: *Emic* and *Etic* as Tools for Theory-Work in Cultural and Historical Sociology.**

Coined by linguist and anthropologist Kenneth Pike (1967), the concepts of “emic” and “etic” have become established terms in social science research: the former denotes the viewpoint of a cultural insider, while the latter captures the perspective of an outsider observing an unfamiliar cultural world. Rather than adjudicating which approach yields more legitimate social scientific knowledge—or whether the distinction is ontologically tenable—this paper argues that the *emic/etic* contrast functions as a productive conceptual pivot: one that might guide the reconstruction of evidentiary networks (i.e., handling what John Goldthorpe [1991] dubbed as “relics”) and generate theoretically grounded social scientific accounts. After situating this argument within recent discussions on the activity of theorizing (Reed 2008, 2011; Fuhse 2022; Navarrete 2024; Farzin, Guggenheim & Krause 2024), the paper demonstrates the heuristic value of the *emic/etic* distinction through two canonical works in cultural history: Carlo Ginzburg’s *The Cheese and the Worms* (1980) and Robert Darnton’s *The Great Cat Massacre* (1984). By showing how this distinction sharpens the intelligibility of evidentiary chains and the “analytical architectures” underwriting social scientific accounts (Mayrl & Wilson 2020), the paper offers a methodological contribution to archival and qualitative research practice—while also working to bridge the persistent gap between theoretical reflection and empirical inquiry.