

A CONVERSATIONAL APPROACH TO OCCUPATIONAL FOLKLORE:

CONVERSATION, WORK, PLAY, AND THE WORKPLACE¹

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1. Some Problems of Occupational Folklore

The problem of the scope of folkloristics is especially acute when dealing with workplaces, despite the recent broadening of folkloristic interest to include the routines of various kinds of informal groups. Such groups can be seen to be displaying behavior which, if not "traditional" in the sense of a body of directly observable and historically repeatable materials, "traditionalizes" experience. That is, the routines of the group in question create a sense of history, longevity, or tradition for that group, and a recent programmatic statement by Hymes² establishes "traditionalizing" as an activity of special interest to folklorists.

But even with this shift in emphasis, the folkloristic quest for occupational traditions is still hindered. While it is true that such "traditionalizing" of experience is a possible direction for occupational group activity, some facts argue against this as a dominant mode of expression. Consider, for example, that workers are often driven by economic impulse. This is not to say that workers are unfriendly to each other on the job or that there is a lack of pride in one's occupational skills, but that the possibility of a strong sense of groupness is often undercut by the exigencies of making a living, and by family and social life which is carried out beyond the confines of the workplace. That residential neighborhoods are often organized along lines unrelated to occupation and that workers often change jobs to secure financial security or personal satisfaction argues that, for many workers, the workplace is a domain highly differentiated from other spheres of activity. While the workplace is usually not seen as unpleasant (when interviewed, there is a very strong trend on the part of the workers to stress the positive aspects of their work experience⁴), situations of traditionalizing most commonly occur in the world outside the workplace. This impulse can be seen even in the classic researches of George Korson and Mody Boatright among the coal workers and oil workers of America. Here, even though many instances of complex songs and folk narration were recorded, such instances were usually noted as occurring away from the workplace, such as at evening entertainments and on picket lines.⁵ In such cases, workers of a single industry made up the population of the residential area surrounding the workplace. Since the nature of their work was relevant to the experience of all within the residential community, it was a prominent resource for the composition of the content of songs and stories, and it is probably safe to assume that some of the occasions of singing and storytelling were situations of "traditionalizing." However, expressions which may be relevant to workers in a given occupation should not be confused with the relevances of the workplace. That is, a story about a workplace in a traditionalizing situation might be most likely to occur away from the workplace.

When the folklorist chooses to search for materials which can be seen as traditional due to their repeatability and their "traditionalizing" function, for the reasons outlined above, he may find himself thwarted at the workplace.

Some analytic strategies might circumvent my claim about the importance of "traditionalizing" and workplaces by counter-claiming that any evidence of some kind of repeated activity that the fieldworker or the group notes constitutes some kind of traditionalizing. In such a scheme, the activity which is repeated through time could be seen to function to promote group solidarity, to provide a sense of history, or social cohesion, and the activity's recurrence provides an established behavioral path by which the group can safely orient itself for interaction. All of the above accounts could be seen as aspects of "tradition-

alizing," and as accounts they are possible explanations of activity. What I am trying to do here is develop a folkloristic scheme (admittedly borrowing from ethnomethodology/conversations analysis) by which something that is co-demonstrated by interactants is reportable by the analyst and not something that could be argued as being characteristic about the data, but which cannot be reported to be an active concern of people who produce the data. By this I mean that I want to come to an understanding of the sense-making practices people employ in interaction, which produces a sense of stability. "Traditionalizing" would be a particular mode of stability.

It is certainly not the point of this paper to recommend that there can be no folkloristic view of the workplace. Rather, it is suggested that a folkloristic inquiry into the workplace might concern itself with whatever relevances occur, and with the methods for carrying out and maintaining the sense of activities, rather than with the slavish dedication to the notion of diachrony, either in the form of scholars' claims of historicity of materials, or scholars' interest in depicting groups involved in behavior with a "traditionalizing" impulse.

An analytic strategy that attempts to show how activities or routines are relevant and make sense to the formulators of activity would want to report on the formation of whatever occurs, regardless of definitions of or of genres of folklore. "Folklore materials" in the traditional sense would become relevant as they are integrated into a group's activities. That is, although storytelling can be an organizing force in activity,⁶ it usually occurs as part of another activity,⁷ and the scholarly practice of collecting, comparing, and analyzing stories which scholars see as united by form or content or "feel," makes the assumption that they all function or construct situations in more or less the same fashion for all their occasions of formulation. While many stories could obtain to themselves similar functions, we cannot assume this to be the case for each incident of storytelling. Thus, the study of narratives per se is recognized here as part of the tendency of scholarship to divide up the world into categories, as if "categories" could have an existence outside the creative manipulation and meaningful assembling of the interactive environment by human beings.⁸ For the scholar, "categories" become the manipulated environment and, once established, they become the relevances to which the world is fitted; data is selected according to the exigencies of a construct, and new knowledge is created by the scholar. Thus, if the goal is to perform some kind of description of people's activities, this goal can be obfuscated or limited by such scholarly constructs as genres or categories of culture. This is not to deny the importance of the literature, but to point out that the analyst should examine the object of study on the terms in which it presents itself, whether or not the object lends itself to the findings of prior research. By setting aside such devices as categories, people's activities can be more easily described in terms of what the activity accomplishes, and whatever scholarly constructs come out of such a stance must be shown to have relevance for the activity being reported.⁹ Thus the folkloristic emphasis on "activities" could include stories as they are part of a situation, but not as entities that have an existence of their own apart from their independent occasions of formulation, and any activity could obtain analytic import.

Such an approach might be termed folklife, but not in the sense of oral lore and material culture which "adds up" to a group's traditional way of life. Rather, what I mean is everyday activity which is formulated and maintained by the group under investigation.¹⁰

Therefore, the study of what people do to keep a sense of traditionalized activity alive could be expanded to include what people do to maintain activity generally. Stability is something that is part of all respectable definitions of folklore. Here I merely point out that "traditionalness" is just one organizing feature people can employ, but that stability--that things go on normally--is a more basic organizing feature of folklife and ought to receive treatment. Whether people accomplish an activity by categorizing, by developing a sense of tradition, or by trading insults, the methods of formulation ought to be considered crucial to the creation of the activity and its sense of stability.

2. Establishing a Sense of the Workplace

When dealing with a workplace it becomes important to show how a sense of a workplace is brought about. In this respect, it should be noted that conversations often center around various aspects of work and play. The following utterance occurred in a casual meeting of workers as they met at the onset of the work day (see note 1 for an explanation of my transcription procedure and a description of the shop):

I. B: C'mon, I'm serious today. Come on, Dan, no joking today.

The above utterance shows that seriousness/not seriousness is an opposition that people can understand and advance in conversation. When people refer to joking in the above manner, they mean that what is being done is not to be taken as really representative of the talker's idea about the real order of things. In the example above, Bill proclaims to be "all business" as a reaction to a string of instructions by commenting jokingly about their serious nature and then setting to task. Bill's remark is a reference to a work/play dichotomy.

Not only is seriousness or the lack of it a topic in the shop, but various aspects of working are also brought out in conversation. The following sequence was recorded one day at five o'clock in the afternoon:

II. De: How about gettin' loaded? I punched out at five o'clock.

B: It's five?

De: Uh huh.

L: Really?

De: Uh huh.

In the above sequence, five o'clock is noted by Deanna, Bill, and Lance as an appropriate quitting time--Deanna by her invitation to get loaded, now that the work day was over, and the others by their amazement that it was already so late.

The following was recorded at the outset of the day's activities.

III. L: There's the rock-and-roller. What time is it?

D: Nine-o-seven.

L: Dock him fifteen points.

D: How's the concert, Bill?

The exchange above constructs the situation as one where Bill is late--that is, he has arrived after nine A. M., after everyone else has arrived at the workplace. The remark is plainly not serious, as Lance refers to Bill and a "rock-and-roller" (Bill attended a concert the night before) and threatens to dock Bill on a nonexistent point system. Clearly, then, the time of day can be a resource for constructing a sense of temporal boundaries of work. In neither of cases II or III was the work day immediately begun or terminated, regardless of the understanding about nine A. M. and five P. M. built into the dialogues. Importantly, though, such understandings become resources for conversation which serve the exigencies of understanding in terms of whatever else is taken as being relevant to the speakers. In case II, the time of day achieved meaning as a report on the lateness of the hour, and in case III as a mock threat of retaliation for tardiness, whereupon the conversation shifted to the return of a transistor radio to the shop and Bill's report on the concert. While the usage of the time of day as beginning or ending the work day is connected differently to the two exchanges, their use as a temporal boundary of a shop in each case bands the speakers together as a community of understandings. Everybody knows that the work day is from nine to five, and everybody knows that actual labor does not necessarily begin or end at either time. We can learn from this simply that productive labor during a work day is a relevance of the speakers.¹¹

If these observations about a work/play dichotomy and temporal boundaries of the job seem a bit too obvious for a paper which bills itself as scholarship, let me point out that the establishment of such relevances and the occasions of their manipulation by the people involved is what establishes this community as an occupational community. Community is an ongoing creative accomplishment of individuals' manipulating relevances they come to understand, and not a function of ethnicity or region or similar scholars' organizing devices. Community forms around whatever is seen as relevant to the community formers. Similarly,

no rule about the beginning or ending of the work day is being claimed here. Rather, rules are seen as phenomena created and relied on by people to apply to an activity, thereby making the activity understandable in terms of the rule¹² in the same way that proverbs are often said to make sense of troublesome problems by naming it as recurrent.¹³ Therefore, invoking the nine to five work day as a "rule" has no special, all-encompassing status in defining when work must or must not go on. What is significant is that the people involved in exchanges II and III can identify and endow with significance the existence of various aspects of the working experience. It is such knowledge that is displayed in natural conversation, integrated with other topics and relevances, that creates a sense of occupational community.

Not only can the day be noted as organized for work, but the visible results of the undertaking can be seen as an important achievement. The following conversation was recorded one morning as the workers drank coffee before setting upon the day's work:

- IV. L: Today's what, Tuesday? (Laughs)
 X: ()
 L: I wish it was Monday and I had what I had done now. I wish it was a month and a half ago. Two months ago. Come out close, not quite there, were close.
 X: Deadlines are a bitch.
 L: Impossible (), give up on it. Say, Richard, give me all your money and don't worry about it. I'm sure he's gonna be disappointed in my progress.
 P: Richard?
 L: Ruh-Ruh-Richard.
 X: He doesn't really know what goes into something like this.
 L: Neither do I. That's the problem. Or I wouldn'ta told him, "Oh well, have it in a week after you leave."

In the above, the talk centers around falling short of deadlines and the projected disappointment of Richard, who is paying Lance to head up the job of constructing and installing photographic sinks in the do-it-yourself photograph developing store he is refurbishing. Possible work relevances, then, are that there can be timetables for the production of certain items, exchange of money for production can take place, and someone can be seen as responsible to another for the production of certain items.

Obviously, conversation can refer to topics other than occupational relevances, but the knowledge about the workplace was a major topical concern among the workers. The reliance on work relevances in conversation demonstrates that the workers assume each other's knowledge about the workplace, and together with the actual labor that takes place indicates that the workers are in a state of incipient labor. That is, a sense of the workplace is frequently reinforced by reference to aspects of the work situation, and such understandings contribute to an overall sense of the workplace as a place for the organization of activity so that some product or result is an object of accomplishment.

A major set of cues in deciding the overall sense (or theme) of the setting for the member is made of those various objects in the setting. By typifying these (social) objects as those-likely-to-be-in-my-organizational-setting, the member gets a firm suggestion that he is, in fact, in an organizational setting.¹⁴

Among the understandings concerning the workplace is that conversation and other activities are developed in such a way that they are not noticed as violating the workplace's work impulse. Conversations tend to be short; they occur in situations when workers are moving from task to task, and they avoid social situations that cannot be halted to attend to some other work exigency. That is, social activities, such as going out for a few beers, are simply not done; beer can be imbibed on the premises during a short break or while operating, say, the band saw, but not as a temporally extended occasion in itself. A certain degree of displaying involvement with the production of photographic sinks is given, and other activities are developed in such a way that they are seen as adjuncts to productive labor. With regard to the latter point, it should be noted that one day Bill was threatened with

dismissal upon his announcing his intention to take a mid-week vacation. Thus, although I would not claim that there is a set work day or a set rate of work, I would claim that the workers must demonstrate a certain degree of involvement with their ongoing enterprise--working. That is, there is an understanding about beginnings and endings to work which must be done, and about regular attendance which establishes working as a domain that is set apart from other activities (although work and play activities can be fitted into the framework of the workplace). The implication is that conversation not only accomplishes the workplace's sense, but is organized in various ways in order to accomplish many tasks, and ethnography of the workplace might begin by describing how activities within the workplace are formed. One such method is the reliance on conversational social structuring.

3. Social Structuring

In the last transcribed sequence, Lance displayed his responsibility to Richard, the owner of the photographic shop, to get the sinks done on time. At about the same time that sequence was produced, the workers in the shop indicated that a work schedule they saw as more intense than usual was accounted for by the fact that Richard was returning from a vacation and Lance wanted to have something to show for the time he was expected to have put in working. In other words, something which might be called social structure was conversationally developed: there is a relationship between Lance and Richard with certain behavioral expectations or differentiating obligations between them noted by the talkers. Common sense could dictate, then, that all activities in the shop were related to the particular arrangement between Lance and Richard, and much has been written concerning the workplace as an arrangement between a boss and the workers. I submit that it would be an acceptable scholarly hypothesis that work output is the direct result of pressure brought to bear by the formalized linkages between operatives in the shop. Lance could be seen as responsible to Richard, the other workers responsible to Lance, and pressure constructed by acknowledging that Richard will be returning and will expect to see some tangible results for the money he has invested.

There is no doubt that human beings can arrange themselves so that one person is socially responsible to another. All conversation might be seen as socially constructed in this way, since conversation rests on the assumption that it can continue in understandable fashion as long as both talkers can successfully tie utterances together, and that once a conversation is going, conversationalists have certain obligations to respond to the other talker.¹⁵ Social structuring can also occur in certain kinds of conversational sequences, as in the following:

- V. L: There's the rock-and-roller. What time is it?
D: Nine-o-seven.

In the above sequence, social structure is accomplished by Lance requesting information from Dan. The sequence shows that Lance has realized a difference in attributes between Dan and himself (Dan carries a timepiece while Lance does not) and together they can negotiate an exchange of information based on this realization. Lance is a requester of information, and Dan is a giver of information. Finally, the obligations that people can be seen to have towards one another can become a topic, as in Lance's fear of being too far behind in his work to suit Richard. The notion of social structure, then, is a flexible aspect of discourse formation, and as a topic in the woodworking shop under consideration was a resource for giving a reason for the work to get done quickly.

I bring this up to show some of the ways that workers--and all people, including scholars--can employ in conversation, and to show that social structure is a phenomenon dependent on conversational manipulation. Therefore, if we look at social structuring as an interactive accomplishment, we can view avowals of pressure as topical exigencies of the moment. That is, conversationalists create topical relevances and methods of bringing about their communication in such a way that the actors can agree on the sense of what it said. Thus, on the level of topic, if two or more people agree that there is an increased work load due to the imminent return of the boss, we cannot assume that this is a continuing relevance to the workers, or that they adhere to a schedule of increased work. Such claims organize the meaningful aspect of expressions according to the moment, but cannot be said

to be operating in all conversations within the workplace, regardless of the attractiveness of such a view for fulfilling the scholarly impulse of organizing a wide body of material. Rather, topical phenomena such as occupational social structure and role expectations of others are merely ideas which are known about and can be used to formulate conversations which can be seen to common-sensically encompass a wide range of phenomena without the need to spell out their relationships, if any. Therefore, the depiction of worker-boss relations found in Lance's apprehension about Richard's return, or in coal miners' protest songs, are possible interpretations of events but do not tell us much about the ongoing creation of the social structuring of a workplace. Rather, the overwhelming majority of work situations employ the devices of social structuring in such a way that activities can be smoothly accomplished. In the case of Lance's "Dock him fifteen points," Lance acknowledges Bill's lateness not as a grievance, but as a mock jab at Bill. Lance--the foreman, the one who previously expressed worry over showing his superior a satisfactory amount of work done--acknowledged Bill's lateness by poking fun at it, after which the conversation turned to the presence of a radio in the shop and the rock-and-roll concert Bill attended the night before. Lateness was a relevance for continuing a casual conversation, and was not a warning from boss to worker.

Therefore, the study of occupational life might begin by describing how a workplace gets its sense as a workplace and how this sense is manipulated, rather than by selecting a situation-specific bit of knowledge--whether song, story, or conversation--and making it central to the explanation of the setting. In addition, although I have claimed that there is a certain work impulse built into the work enterprise, I do not find "work techniques" a phenomenon that can be reported. Outside of work's conversational relevance, demonstrations of work occur between the worker and his tools and materials. It is an activity that is not remarked upon, and it is taken for granted that "everything's going fine." Hence, there is no data to work with; there is no evidence of workers co-orientation to this. I do claim that it would be interesting to note the conversational manipulation of social structure as "work" and "play" are formulated.

4. Work and Play

As I have shown, social structure often plays a formative role in the construction of discourse. In casual, "non-productive" discourse such as Lance's teasing Bill for being late, one worker can note some failing on the part of another. So when Lance noted Bill's lateness, he set himself up for that situation as someone who abides by the rules (as opposed to Bill, who doesn't). No solution or action is taken by anyone present on the issue. Rather, the conversation shifts to Bill's noting the transistor radio playing and then to the rock-and-roll concert Bill attended the night before:

- VI. L: There's the rock-and-roller. What time is it?
 D: Nine-o-seven.
 L: Dock him fifteen points.
 D: How's the concert, Bill?
 B: What is this bullshit?
 D: Hurt transistor's back in town.
 B: Oh, gettin' wired up.
 D: Yup.
 P: How was it?
 B: Ah, pretty good, pretty good.
 P: He have a band?
 B: Yeah, oh yeah.
 D: How was Kinky Phudman?
 B: He played two fuckin' songs and they were both good, so there.
 D: Just be thankful those are the only two good songs he knows.

The above dialogue displays how the workers can develop conversation as an activity by noticing an attribute of one of the people present, such as the knowledge that Bill went to hear Bob Dylan and the Rolling Thunder Review the night before. In this case, the question and answer sequence brings out a report on the concert, including the structuring of the

relative merits of a musician. Bill's report puts Kinky Phudman (Kinky Friedman) in the category of better artists, and attributes to Dan the opinion that Friedman's music leaves something to be desired. There is an assumption of some kind of scale for rating musical performers, such a scale being a form of constructed social structure which makes sense for the situation in which it is formulated.¹⁶ Other ways of constructing social structure of musicians vis-à-vis one another by non-musicians might include noting presumed musical influences, the personnel of bands and/or their hierarchy of leadership, different kinds of musicians (classical vs. popular, or performing vs. studio), or patterns of business or friendship association. As part of the report on the concert, Bill's positive review is directed to Dan and the running debate the two of them have had about the merits of Friedman's musical abilities. The positive review, then, is offered as empirical proof of the artist's merit, and the point of difference--the disagreement over the state of Friedman's musical abilities--is continued by Dan who qualifies Bill's remark. Thus, noticing and evaluating the attributes of someone or something can provoke disagreement between the talkers, constructing a disequilibrium between them. A social structure based on the rightness each speaker attributes to himself and the wrongness each speaker attributes to the other can be constructed. In this case, the inquiry about Friedman was a resource for the assumption of a social structure of musicians (the topic), which was then a resource for developing social structure between the conversationalists.

The freewheeling integration of topics and social structuring, the "vulgarity"¹⁷ and the lack of coming to a firm decision on the topic indicates that this conversation was not serious, but was a demonstration of friendship among community members. Disparaging someone is not a serious offense; it's "just talk," conversation developed for its own sake. In this light, it is worth noticing that a worker can also disparage himself:

- VII. L: They're coming to take me away, ho ho. They're coming to take me away, ha ha he he. The funny farm. Where life is beautiful all the time. They're coming to take me away, ha ha ho ho he he.
- D: I don't know, Lance.
- L: Neither do I, Dan.

In the above, Lance looked up from his work and recited the words of a popular record of a few years back, bringing attention to himself as a candidate for the insane asylum, which is agreed upon by Dan. For the purposes of conversation, an idea of social structure based on a scale of insane/not insane was constructed, whereupon both talkers agreed that Lance is insane.

In the above examples in this section, I have shown social structure to be a device in the formulation of relations between the workers, and about others of whom the workers have knowledge. Social structure was manipulated as a topic and as an organizing feature in the development of conversation as an activity.

Conversation can also be developed in such a way that it directs other activity, and often this kind of discourse contributes to the workplace's status as a place for constructive endeavor. In the following, Bill and Lance are referring to the placement and ownership of a cutting tool.

- VIII. L: There was one yesterday.
- B: Well, I put one right here.
- L: This one's yours.
- B: No, it isn't.
- L: Bullshit, it's the one Rich used to have.
- B: Turkey. You're the one who gave it to me to use. You want me to cut there back what shows here?
- L: A tad less.

In the above conversation, Bill and Lance argued over the original owner of a tool, culminating with Bill insulting Lance, and then asking for instructions, which Lance supplies. (The conversation before "There was one yesterday" did not record due to noise in the shop.) Asking Lance for instructions is a frequent activity in the shop. The request itself was straightforward: information that is given concerning how to do the work

is given and taken in a way that is clearly understandable. As conversation formulated to direct other activity, the conversationalists concentrated on accomplishing a single meaning about their action rather than going from topic to topic by noticing additional attributes of what is being discussed. The request is taken seriously, although insults and other verbal play can be integrated within the conversation as long as they do not interfere with direction giving.

Similarly, when Lance initiates instructions, he does so in a way that is made to fit into the friendly pattern of activity of the shop. For example:

- IX. L: Wanna do a set of thirteen instead of fifteen of those?
 D: What?
 L: Wanna do a set of thirteen instead of fifteen struts? Did you mark out fifteen?
 D: () sixteen. I think I marked out fifteen struts.
 L: Well, why don't you make it thirteen.
 D: O. K.

Clearly, in the above Lance was giving instructions, but his request was given and taken in a positive light. His instructions are not orders barked military style, but are framed in a manner that relates to Dan's desires. Dan is asked if he wants to do something, as if the decision is up to Dan. Although "everybody knows" that they are performing a job, and they are acting on the directives of Lance, such cut-and-dried distinctions are kept out of the discourse. Rather, Lance's instructions are given in the above manner, or in the passive--"such-and-such needs to be done"--or Lance explains the function a bit of work will bear on the completed job. By attending to the exigencies of the task, the social arrangement between Lance and the others underlies the topic of work exigencies and rarely emerges as a conversational topic. While insults and kidding around, which disparage a worker and which formulate social structure, are much in order in developing conversation as an open-ended activity, great care is taken to avoid discourse of this nature when conversation that directs work occurs.

Such a device goes a long way on "keeping the shop cool." Framing requests and answers in a way that appears more like doing a favor or accomplishing a necessary task sets the work up as something proposed "out there," of which Lance is merely an agent. Consider the following in the light of what has been said about work directing discourse (At this point, Bill is complaining that Lance had given him a measurement for cutting some pieces of wood, all of which turned out too long. Lance wants a final cut made, which angers Bill, since he is chosen to make the extra operation):

X. L: No, can't put it in like that, Bill. And that's all there is to it. Here Lance was referring to the construction of sinks as an impossibility if certain pieces are not cut again. The quality of the product, and not Bill's labor, is taken as central. Bill responds by evaluating Lance's instructions in a negative light, bringing social structure from the realm of the relationship between talkers to a qualitative statement--topic--about Lance's instructions:

B: Well, when you give instructions. You know what I mean. All these, these are all gonna be long cause they're all cut exactly.

Lance's reply brings up the possibility that they won't all have to be recut, and reaffirms the work's importance by referring to it without referring to Bill:

L: Uh-uh, ain't necessarily. And if they are they'll all have to be cut down.

If they all have to be recut, this is a matter of procedure and not a personal order from Lance to Bill. It's what has to be done, and not what Bill had stated was a prior direct order from Lance. Lance simply did not respond to the personal conflict aspect of Bill's response, and the discourse was wound up with Lance's explanation of curvature variation of individual pieces of wood, and the need for individual measurements, whereupon Bill resumed cutting. Bill's obliging the request returned the shop to normalcy, since the argument was averted.

By this example I am not trying to represent Bill as agreeing in his mind with Lance's directive. What is significant is that Lance consistently attended to the work as a

projected accomplishment and not as the result of interpersonal pressure. Verbally noticing and acting on interpersonal differences on the level of topic is suitable to talk as an activity in its own right, but not to directing a physical task where, if allowed to continue, it could disrupt work, either by playful jokes and insults or by serious arguments. Activities in the shop are carried out in a spirit of equality: when conversation is developed as an activity in its own right, anyone can insult anybody, but when work activities are being formulated, personal conflicts are rarely the topic and indeed can block the activity. In the latter, polite speech is featured.

5. Conclusion

This paper has taken issue with some of the taken-for-granted of the study of folklore, such as the importance of bodies of lore, in order to show how a folkloristic ethnography based on oral/aural transmission might be done. The occupational community under consideration was seen as an accomplishment of the workers who interact in a way that is mutually understandable to create a sense of shared knowledge. That it, both "folk" and "lore" (or "society" and "culture") are formulated (or "orally composed") and skillfully maintained to create a sense of a workplace. I disavow any existence of a large-scale folk community based on anything but the relevances built up through interaction, or of an international body of occupational folklore. Instead, I submit that the creation and successful manipulation of the relevances of the workplace gives a person a sense of being a worker, and workers (and people outside a workplace) can formulate and integrate work and play activities and structure themselves according to the nature of the workplace and their activities.

Manipulating the senses of work and play might be seen as a central activity in many workplaces, since notions of work and play are constantly being invoked. Workers in many workplaces must be able to understand the temporal and productive impulses of work, yet also be able to decide on the seriousness of such relevances according to particular situations. Furthermore, competency as a member of a work group may entail individuals' acceptably recognizing the situated importance of work or play, and demonstrating that recognition by conversationally placing themselves in appropriate relationships to each other.

The central feature of workplaces, then, is not stories, or strikes, or strongmen, or worker-boss alienation, or a static system of interpersonal linkages, or any special body of "material." Rather, a sense of the workplace is an interactive achievement, and one way workers' activities are carried out is by creating social structure as underlying and topical aspects of discourse, enabling the community members to accomplish conversation as an activity, conversation as a director of other activity, work and play.

NOTES

1. My thanks to Dan Kremer for introducing me to this occupational scene. For the record, the scene was a custom woodwork shop in Salt Lake City, Utah. As a help in deciphering the excerpts of transcripts: L is Lance, B is Bill, D is Dan, De is Deanna, X is an unidentified worker who was involved in another phase of construction, and P is Phil. Lance was the head of the wood shop, while Bill and Dan were hired help. Deanna was a secretary and odd jobs person in another phase of the construction. Phil was the intrepid folklorist and occasional "volunteer." () indicates portions of the transcript which were inaudible. The conversations were recorded on a cassette recorder left running in the wood shop. The sole exception is in the exchange beginning "Today's what, Tuesday?" which

was recorded in a room in the photography shop. Words or phrases which appear in quotation marks are those which are: 1) descriptive comments appropriate to the speech of my informants, 2) words and phrases which enjoy current usage in folklore scholarship but which I do not want to present as working definitions for this paper, or 3) constructs whose importance I wish to emphasize.

2. Dell Hymes, "The Sun's Myth and the Nature of Folklore," Journal of American Folklore 88:353-54.
3. In his On High Steel (New York, 1974), pp. 158-59, Mike Cherry notes that workers in construction gangs he worked in "worked together, had a few drinks after work together, but rarely socialized in areas unrelated to the job."
4. For examples, see the articles and interviews contained in Peter L. Berger, ed., The Human Shape of Work (Chicago, 1964) and Kenneth Lasson, The Workers: Portraits of Nine American Jobholders (New York, 1972).
5. Examples of folklore occurring away from the workplace are found in George Korson, Coal Dust on the Fiddle: Songs and Stories of the Bituminous Industry (Philadelphia, 1943), p. 17; Korson, Minstrels of the Mine Patch: Songs and Stories of the Anthracite Miners (Philadelphia, 1964), pp. 2-4; Korson, "Coal Miners," in Pennsylvania Songs and Legends, ed. George Korson (Philadelphia, 1949), p. 356; Harry Botsford, "Oilmen," in Pennsylvania Songs, ed. Korson, p. 412; Howard C. Frey, "Conestoga Wagons," in Pennsylvania Songs, ed. Korson, pp. 247-49; Earl Clifton Beck, Songs of the Michigan Lumberjacks (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1941), p. 3; and Mody Boatright, Minstrels of the Oil Fields (El Paso, Texas, 1945), p. 34. In many instances in industry, folklore performances are seen as interfering with work or even endangering the safety of the workers.
6. According to Harry Botsford's "Oilmen," p. 412, Gib Morgan would give private storytelling sessions in a bar. Setting up storytelling, singing or general entertainment sessions was the job of some wandering minstrels in various occupations.
7. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "The Concept and Varieties of Narrative Performance in East European Jewish Culture," in Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking, ed. Richard Bauman and Joel Sherzer (New York, 1974), p. 284.
8. The work of the ethnomethodologists was useful in developing this idea; see especially Don H. Zimmerman and Melvin Pollner, "The Everyday World as a Phenomena," in Understanding Everyday Life, ed. Jack Douglas (Chicago, 1970), pp. 80-103.
9. That is, sensitizing, rather than operationalizing concepts. See Severn T. Bruyn, The Human Perspective in Sociology: The Methodology of Participant Observation (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1966), pp. 31-34, and Barney G. Glaser and Anselm Strauss, The Discovery of Grounded Theory (Chicago, 1967), especially the chapter headed "The Constant Comparative Method."
10. Alexander Fenton, in "An Approach to Folklife Studies," Keystone Folklore Quarterly 7, no. 1: 10, recommends a focus on the everyday lives of people. My proposal differs in that I do not recommend operationalizing into genres as Fenton does.
11. My use of the term "relevance" follows its usage in Richard H. Grathoff, The Structure of Social Inconsistencies (The Hague, 1970), p. 110: "Relevance in a social situation implies the 'interlocking' of mutual tendencies toward some common social object."
12. See D. Lawrence Wieder, "Telling the Code," in Ethnomethodology, ed. Roy Turner (Baltimore, 1974), pp. 144-72.
13. Roger D. Abrahams and Barbara Babcock Abrahams, "A Sociolinguistic Approach to Proverbs," Midwestern Journal of Language and Folklore 1, no. 2: 60.

14. Marty Klein, "Members' Methods of Doing Change," master's thesis, (University of California, Santa Barbara), p. 11.
15. See Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson, "Systematics for the Organization of Turn Taking," in Language 50, no. 4:696-735.
16. My remarks on social structure-category formation have their origin in the idea of "membership categorization devices" as discussed by Harvey Sacks. See especially "On the Analysability of Stories by Children," in Ethnomethodology, ed. Roy Turner, pp. 216-32.
17. Gail Jefferson, "Error Correction as an Interactional Resource," Language in Society 3:198.