

A third approach, originated by Dr. Dorson, highlighted five themes or areas of interest and concern which seemed likely to permeate the expressive traditions of all the folks in the Region: crime and the rising tide of violence; ethnic heritage, identity, and interaction; black heritage, identity, and interaction; the lore of the steel mills; and the concept of "The Region" itself.

These various approaches are complementary. No one of them precludes the others, and all of them together combined on the day-to-day fieldwork of the Gary Gang to make up a methodological whole that was, when everything worked right, greater than the sum of its parts. Yet we all sensed, in the field and afterwards, that many other valid strategies for urban folklore must exist. Our approaches were dictated by the exercise of our own ingenuities within the bounds of our discipline's traditions, and while we were successful in many ways, we learned that the folklore of the city is complex enough to overwhelm any fieldworker and outrun any particular body of theory or method brought to bear on it.

My own approach began with such questions as: Are there people in the city for whom ethnicity is unimportant? How can a folklorist find them? What genres of expression are most important among such "non-ethnics"? Which procedures and field methods can be used to answer such questions? And can all the discoverable answers be linked together into a logical fieldwork approach that will work agreeably well in the city?

The answer to the last question is a qualified "yes"; the remainder of this paper is a personal explanation of the way in which the difficulties and problems of the urban fieldwork experience actually contributed to my search for an approach, through the mechanism that Adrienne Seward named "field shock," presumably in an analogy to "culture shock." Field shock--the particulars of my own case are revealed below--is a process and an

effect through which an individual is first overwhelmed by, and then comes to grips with, the demands of full-time fieldwork. The urban field seems particularly prone to producing field shock, in part because of the city's long-standing reputation as a place of alienation, and in part because of my initial willingness to accept unreservedly that reputation. The ultimate findings of the Gary Gang must include a rejection of the notions that urban life is superficial, anonymous, and transitory. Field shock arises when a fieldworker approaches the city expecting that city-dwellers live within a social mosaic, troubled by anomie, ennui, and overly-segmented role relationships, as we have been taught. Urban life is experientially as well-integrated as rural life, for an enculturated urban-dweller; for a folklorist coming into the Region, but not yet understanding it in a meaningful experiential way himself, personal difficulties may be inevitable. The precise nature of those difficulties will depend, of course, on the fieldwork intentions of the folklorist.

My original mandates for work in the Region seemed straightforward and simple: to document and study some musicians in the area. I wanted to interview some people who had migrated into the Calumet Region from the South. I wanted to ask and answer the same types of questions about "hillbillies" in the Region as those being researched by my Gary Gang colleagues among blacks, Croats, Latinos, and Lithuanians: What sorts of ties do they maintain with their places of origin? Which traditions and institutions help provide them with esoteric solidarity in the city? How are they characterized exoterically?

I also wanted to take a good many pictures of various sorts of scenes in the Region. My purpose was to produce a photographic report on the tangible, visible environments, cultural and natural alike, that formed the aggregate setting for traditions of all types in the Region in the summer of 1976. In order to accomplish this task, even cursorily, I ended up taking, developing, and mounting over five hundred 35mm slides. These were added to the growing mountain of "Region" materials produced by the field activities of the Gary Gang.

The goals above seemed reasonable and proper ones for a folklorist about to venture into the city, and I expected to proceed with my work in a manner little different from that of my previous fieldwork in rural New York and Indiana. But the work did not proceed very smoothly at first, and some of the obstacles I encountered seemed to affect other Gary Gang fieldworkers as well.

Mechanical problems, to begin with, presented themselves in the field in what seemed like an escalating pattern of technological rebellion. Collectively we broke tape recorders, cameras, and our two videotape units in a variety of interesting and expensive ways. Over a hundred slides of mine were severely damaged by an unannounced change in the manufacturer's formula for the development chemistry. Dr. Dorson achieved a specially intense but short-lived notoriety in the Gary Gang when he dropped the project's Nikkorex camera, putting it out of commission for nearly three weeks. Richard March and I conducted a fascinating round of short interviews, using a videotape recorder on the streets of downtown Gary, only to find that the wind noise picked up by our unprotected microphone made the sound track all but unintelligible. During one overlapping period in the Region, John Hasse and I spent more time trying to get emergency repairs and special connectors for the tape and videotape recorders than in the observation of musical performances and the interviewing of musicians and singers.

Nor did mechanical problems appear in connection only with the Gary Gang's own equipment; the telephone switchboard at one of the motels we used proved to be a late Stone Age model, given to unexplainable and incurable fits during which it would randomly disconnect callers and listeners, or provide all users with an abstract concert of clicks, buzzes, and tweets. To compound our difficulties, this particular switchboard was manned by the motel staff only sporadically, and only between the hours of 10 A.M. and 4 P.M.

These sorts of "nuts-and-bolts" problems, trivial and humorous as they seem after more than a year's time, nonetheless eroded my own efficiency and morale and that of my colleagues while we were in the field. But technical difficulties of one form or another comprise only a small part of the range of potentially problematic field experiences that can contribute to field shock. A much more serious set of problems arises from the types of truncated interpersonal relations that necessarily seem to obtain in the field, not only among informants but also among the fieldworkers and between a fieldworker and the individuals he meets.

Field shock may be a predictable and foreseeable experience for any folklorist working in a cultural setting substantially different from his own. Its characteristic symptoms include the feelings of vulnerability to the personal and emotional demands of informants, of being overwhelmed by the ethnographic task undertaken, of the conviction that the methods chosen, the data being gathered, and the contacts being made are all wrong: too many, too shallow, too few, too superficial, too confused. The fieldworker may begin to see himself and his initial hypotheses as wholly inadequate, incapable of achieving his goals and unable to understand the relevance of all the questions that were so glibly asked in the library before the fieldwork began.

Field shock came quickly and convincingly in my case. I launched off on my first days in the field to make the abortive videotape already alluded to, and managed to set up an appointment with a relatively unreconstructed Southerner and self-named "hillbilly" named Luke Bates. Simultaneously I began to haunt a bar in Hessville, one of the major subregions of Hammond. The tavern, called "The Pioneer Tap," had been suggested to me as a likely place to meet "hillers" who worked at the mills and whooped it up at the bar in the evenings. I followed many other leads as well; for example, I hunted up an old acquaintance named Craig Jones, now living in Crown Point, who set up a session during which his friends and co-workers described and characterized the various cities and towns that collectively make up the Region.

These various meetings, interviews, and observations proved exciting and interesting, and always valuable indications of the universality and ubiquitousness of folk traditions. Luke Bates related his life story to me in the living room of his home in Hobart, adroitly reeling off the adventures of his youth in Alabama and chronicling his life in the Region as an in-migrating Southerner. My conversations with fellow drinkers at the Pioneer Tap could only be preserved in the form of notes made after each visit; note-taking while in the bar aroused suspicion and hostility, and tape-recording was impossible because of the loud voices of loquacious industrial workers and the even louder music of "The Labor Gang," the bar's resident country-rock band. The conversations themselves seemed to revolve around incidents that were, in principle, motifiable, including some of those recurrent themes postulated by Dr. Dorson, "crime" and "the mills" in particular. I talked about music and tried to establish closer ties to Calvin Belt, star instrumentalist of The Labor Gang and a Southerner like Luke Bates. Belt played the unlikely combination of electrified fiddle and electric organ for his band, and though he talked briefly about the band, he remained somehow distant and uninterested in me and my questions.

Calvin Belt's reaction to me--or rather his non-reaction to me as a folklorist--sent me off into the first throes of field shock. I felt that the problem lay in the shallowness of the relationship between me and the people I had been meeting. Even when brief encounters and afternoon interviews were productive, as with Luke Bates and Craig Jones, there seemed to be something lacking about it all. I felt rejected and rebuffed by the people I was there to study, the people I kept running into by the hundreds (or so it seemed) in the course of a day. I began to feel that my goals were not so straightforward, and were not going to be easily met.

My alternate project--taking slides of the Region to record what it looks like physically

and symbolically to the people who move in and through it--became my refuge from the upsetting and confusing world of real people, even though I knew the environment was secondary and that I was there to meet and study the people. I attempted to move through the Region by car, taking extended "photo tours: down the main lines of travel: Broadway Avenue from Gary to Merrillville, Ridge Road west from Glen Park, Industrial Highway 912 from the Illinois state line to its terminus in East Chicago. I found in these places images that hinted at the same themes and concepts our informants brought into their ordinary conversations in ways that seemed oblique and confusing to me, the outsider. The stereotyped view I was given of "the typical hillbilly's house in New Chicago"--it always has a car or two up on blocks in the front yard--proved to be real enough to be photographed. The signs in downtown Gary store windows advertising guns, chemical mace, and other "police equipment" provided a convincing view of the impact of crime on the mass urban consciousness. Mills and shopping centers, people at parades and residential street scenes, bridges and roads and railroad tracks, and slums and farms and mansions, churches and refineries and shops, all these types of settings I photographed and noted; and all the while I was working myself deeper and deeper into a state of confusion and depression over my lack of ability to cope with all I was seeing. Each new day began with thoughts of bewilderment over what I had seen the day before. Each day I intended to get out there and really make the contacts I needed, an intention that was too quickly modified to a simpler wish, for a useful set of photographs that would speak eloquently about the Region, as I could not. Each night ended with confusion over what I had seen, anger at the aloofness and alienation of the Regionites, annoyance with myself for my own ineptness as a field-worker, and thoughts about the futility and nebulousness of the entire project. I kept trying, in vain, to understand the Region better, but my efforts were blocked by my own stereotyped view of the city as a place in which people remain aloof and unfriendly. It may well be that field shock, in and of itself, is not dependent on the nature of the field, but my acquired

misunderstanding of the city precluded any easy way out of my emotional doldrums.

It is difficult to remember and reconstruct the low point of my period of field shock, but unquestionably its end came when I got around to interviewing a young resident of Hammond who had grown up in East Chicago. George Scott and I had initially met on the 5th of July at the Bicentennial Fireworks and festivities held at the Roosevelt High School field in East Chicago. He welcomed my interest when I first talked to him, as he set up lights for the rock band he worked with. He said he'd be happy to talk more with me, and moreover agreed to give me a tour of his neighborhood in East Chicago, during which he would try to point out for my camera all the places of either personal or community significance. I actually made several photo tours with George Scott, and came to spend a fair percentage of my remaining field time with him and the rock band. The group was called "Shank, Shank, and Tootsie," a name they had whimsically picked as "the name of the law firm you'd least like to find representing you if you got busted." George and his brother Mike held down steady jobs at the mills and also ran the complicated system of lights used by the band. As George and Mike took me through their old neighborhood, we served as mutual guides. I explained to them what folklore was, what kinds of things traditions are in general, and told them about my own recollections of significant people, hangouts, and happenings in South Shore, the community in Chicago where I had grown up. Through these conversations we discovered mutual similarities and differences; the patterns of our talk suggested new lines of conversation and prompted George and Mike Scott to tell me what to make special note of in their community. We all had our stories to tell: of the routes traditionally taken while out for an evening's "cruise" looking for girls, parties, or other "action"; of the characters we knew and recognized in our own neighborhoods; and of the games we played and the

personality-forming events we all experienced in urban settings. Sometimes our knowledge and lore overlapped; for example, George and I both dimly remembered the great Whiting oil fire of the early 1950s, which sent up a column of flames and smoke visible night and day from my home in Chicago as well as from his in East Chicago. There were also areas with no parallels: talk of the Whiting oil fire prompted George to mention the "Northern Lights," by which he meant the glow visible for miles along the horizon when large quantities of molten slag are dumped by special trains from the steel mills. I knew the sight of the glowing horizon from my youth in South Shore, but the term "Northern Lights" was unknown to me, nor would it have made sense, since the mills lie southeast of my old home, but to the north of almost every place in the Region.

The texts of my conversations with the Scott brothers are important and fascinating contributions to the Gary Gang's data base, but the fieldwork experience that produced them was even more important for me personally. The approach which I developed with George Scott was not preplanned as an ethnic, generic, or thematic one; rather, it grew almost spontaneously as I slowly developed a fieldwork philosophy that was relativistic, intensely personal, and intentionally emic. My own reactions to the size and diversity of the urban field, as I saw it, required that my involvements with informants not be too superficial, too brief, or too formal.

George Scott not only suited my own desire to meet someone who did not overtly present his identity in ethnic terms, but also he was the first person to do so who accepted me in the intangible ways that put one at ease and, ultimately, lead to real rapport. We rapidly became comfortable with one another in conversation; he set about the description of his past and present life in a way that seemed to bring me into the folk, that made me a part of his network of friends. My confusion began to ebb. Fieldwork, first with the Scott brothers, and later with others, became more satisfying and productive and I overcame the gulf between myself and my informants. I lost the feeling



that "they" are unaccountably and inescapably different, and the anger and frustration that arose from my being an alienated outsider slowly dissipated. The feelings of despair left me as I was assimilated, as I became more able to relate quickly to George's stories about himself, his neighbors, and his friends, and as I began to respond to them with similar ones of my own.

The recommendations that emerge from my fieldwork and field shock experiences must be adjusted by each fieldworker, according to personality, intentions, and style. But it seems clear that one ought to seek out and encourage at least one informant who, by the end of the fieldwork period, accepts the folklorist as a friend and who understands his new friend to be a folklorist. If field shock is, at least in part, a reaction to superficiality, then it can be obviated only by an approach that prevents a superficial view from being accepted too easily. Such an approach demands that the folklorist cease absolutely to believe in any fundamental and irremediable differences between himself and "the folk." At the same time, the fieldworker can strive for analytically helpful objectivity by including in his notes the details of his own feelings of frustration and field shock, as well as a continuing assessment of the human relationships that grow more personal with each passing day. The folklorist cannot present himself as a detached interviewer interested only in running a tape recorder and directing the course of inquisitorial conversations. To move meaningfully into someone else's social network it is essential to spend a good deal of time in ways that sometimes seem far removed from what we usually think of as active fieldwork. To engage in fieldwork survey activities all the time in an unfamiliar or threatening place (which the Calumet Region surely was at times) can virtually guarantee both the physical exhaustion of the fieldworker and the even more crippling and demoralizing effects of field shock at its worst.

The folklorist, in short, can avoid or minimize field shock to the extent that he can develop friends within the field area. For a time, the specifically folkloristic line of inquiry may be left to itself; it inevitably reappears as the natural course of adjustment and social learning in new human networks is followed. At the same time, a solid and holistic base for very specific and highly directed folkloric inquiry is established. The folklorist who is accepted as part of a small social group can study it as an insider, can observe the establishment and maintenance of traditions within the group, and can perceive the significance of those traditions that will consistently elude the outsider. Still, the folklorist has the ability to mentally return to the "outside," in order to generalize from what he learns among his newfound friends and acquaintances. Moreover, there is a system of ethical constraint built into such a personal approach: it is difficult to forget or negate the rights and obligations owed by all folklorists to their informants, if the informant in question has become a friend.

Perhaps field projects in folklore ought to occasionally involve us for as many months as I spent days in the Region. The folklorist would then have time to pass through a period of field shock and emerge from it with a sharpened understanding of his own place among the people he studies. When field shock passes, the folklorist can do the best possible work by presenting himself to individual people--no longer need they be called "informants," as if they were only interchangeable voices emerging from a tape recorder--as an inquisitive friend.