

## PROPOSAL FOR A CENTER OF APPLIED FOLKLORE

Richard Bauman

One of my principal goals as Chairman of the Committee on Applied Folklore is to do away with the need for the Committee, not by going out of the applied folklore business, but by institutionalizing our efforts in this area still further. My presentation today is intended as a gesture in that direction. I should make clear, however, that although some of the ideas and proposals I will put forward today in connection with establishing a center or clearinghouse for applied folklore have the backing at least in principle of the other members of the Committee, I have not consulted them on this proposal and so should be regarded for the time being as speaking only for myself. On the other hand, it is only proper to acknowledge that my concern in this area is shared by others, most publicly, perhaps, by Ben Botkin, whose own proposal for an Applied Folklore Center was published, apparently ahead of its time, ten years ago. I hope that now the time is ripe.

Obviously, considering the nature of this gathering, this is not a formal proposal to be approved or disapproved or enacted into law. It is, rather, a working paper, intended as a basis for discussion and debate, though I am prepared to take the matter further should support for the proposal be forthcoming, or opposition from the forces of evil not be overwhelming. One further point: in what is to follow, I have tied up the proposal for a center with a series of rather specific proposals concerning the organization and support of such a facility. Please bear in mind that my suggestions are not irrevocably bound together and it will not be necessary to throw out the baby to get rid of the bath.

Since my remarks will be based as much on what I consider to be the present state of the art in folklore as on the way I believe things ought to be, it might be best to begin by indicating some of the things that seem to me to be going on in our discipline.

First of all, the dismal state of the job market notwithstanding, it is clear that folklore is still in a period of expansion as an academic discipline. New graduate programs in folklore are emerging and the older established ones are growing. More and more undergraduate courses in folklore are being taught every year and the idea of undergraduate majors or concentration programs no longer sounds so unlikely as it used to. Even further, folklore is making its way strongly into high school and grade school curricula at a gratifying if challenging rate. At all these levels, for some even including the graduate level, the purpose of these programs is not necessarily or even primarily to train new generations of professional folklorists, but to develop in students a sensitivity to traditional culture and the esthetic dimension of life, and to foster an appreciation for cultural diversity. In this realm, I maintain, teachers of folklore are engaging in applied folklore up to their very ears. Much the same, on similar grounds, might be said of the people involved in the operation of folklife museums.

Second, while there has always been a strong impulse among folklorists to contribute their efforts to the protection and preservation of folk culture in the face of social forces which threaten to obliterate it, it

appears that there is more work of this kind going on now than ever before -- perhaps because it is needed more now than ever before. Folklorists in increasing numbers are acting as spokesmen for their informants and their communities in confrontations and transactions with the larger society. They help to set up performance tours for traditional performers or marketing schemes for traditional craftsmen, or work for the preservation of traditional buildings or perform any of a host of other services on behalf of the people with whom they work. This too is applied folklore, though it may not be recognized as such.

Third, the involvement of folklorists in the kind of applied folklore which comes closest perhaps to applied anthropology, is also increasing at an accelerating rate. We have heard at this very meeting from people involved in the application of folklore to the practice of medicine, to housing, to municipal zoning, and to community action programs. There are also folklorists engaged in developing the areas of folklore and labor relations, folklore and the law, folklore and urban development, folklore and economic redevelopment, folklore and social welfare, folklore and community relations and so on. It may be that we are being forced to realize that society can no longer afford the luxury of "pure" disinterested scholarship without reference to its practical applications; it may also be that we are coming to recognize that theory and method -- the central concerns of the scholarly folklorist -- may be advanced as well by applied folklore, insofar as the latter affords opportunities to test methods and hypotheses and draws attention to new problems for investigation; it may be that it is finally penetrating our consciousness that even to study folklore is to change things. Still, I am less interested in reasons right now than in calling attention to clear trends in the discipline, though obviously I consider these trends to be productive and even vital, or I wouldn't be serving on these committees and making these proposals. The crucial fact is, that at one or more of the above points, applied folklore touches the overwhelming majority of professional folklorists in the United States, and the next question becomes, what are the ways by which we may respond to the situation?

One possibility, of course, is to do nothing and let matters simply take their natural course. Work in applied folklore would continue to be a matter of individual effort and individual initiative, more or less as it is now. This alternative may appeal to a certain laissez-faire spirit in some folklorists, and appear as the least evil to those who oppose the idea of applied folklore altogether. On the other hand, it seems to me to be wasteful of opportunities, manpower and resources, as each folklorist has to go out anew and track down his own information, go through his own trials and errors and achieve his own hits and misses.

Another alternative would be to set up a new society or organization, much as the anthropologists have done in the Society for Applied Anthropology. That Society has certainly thrived and prospered in its thirty years of existence, holding its own annual meetings and publishing its own journal, Human Organization. It is, however, separated from the main body of anthropological scholars, having no official connection with the American Anthropological Association. This organizational independence might seem to reaffirm and validate the essential separateness of applied and "pure" anthropology, and a like solution for folklore would probably not be uncongenial to those folklorists who believe in the validity of such a separation or fear that the scholarly integ-

rity of existing organizations would be compromised by involvement in applied work. If, on the other hand, as I believe, the distinction between "pure" and applied research is not necessarily a hard and fast one, and even the situational separation between the two kinds of activity is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain, then perhaps a strict institutionalization of the separation will appear less desirable.

My own position is that it is not desirable at all. As I have stated, I believe in the unity of the discipline in its applied and scholarly aspects and what I have to propose here stems from this commitment. In a word, I think that the American Folklore Society, as the national professional organization of folklorists should recognize and support applied folklore within its own structure, and that the most effective and productive way of doing this would be through the establishment of a clearinghouse or center for applied folklore. Let me first suggest what might be the functions of such a center, and then take up the problem of the relation of the center to the Society.

Among the activities which might be undertaken by a center for applied folklore are the following:

1. The establishment and maintenance of a central registry of resources and personnel in applied folklore. This might include (a) a registry of agencies, organizations, communities or groups which might benefit from the work of folklorists so that those who are interested in engaging in work of this kind may be kept up to date on the opportunities that exist; (b) a registry of folklorists who have been, are, or would like to be engaged in applied folklore, as a means of facilitating the coming together of people with complementary interests in this field, either as colleagues or as expert and client; (c) a file or library of resources for applied folklore, including literature, films, equipment, etc., as well as a file of potential sources for the financial support of applied folklore. This last might be an especially important function, insofar as money is what makes it all happen. In this connection, the Committee on Applied Folklore has already proposed to the Executive Board of the AFS a workshop on Folklore and the Federal Government to explore the possibilities for funding of work in folklore by various government bureaus and agencies -- not only in applied folklore but in folklore research as well. In other words, a workshop in grantsmanship. This is just one example of the kind of venture which might in the future be undertaken by the center for applied folklore itself. In order to make all these registries and files work, of course, the center would need to conduct periodic surveys of folklorists as a means of gathering information and keeping it up to date.

2. A second function might be the publication of materials in applied folklore for the use of folklorists and their clients, for instance, materials on the teaching of folklore, on the use of folklore in ethnic studies programs, on the preservation of folk crafts and architecture, on the use of folklore in public health programs, and so on. The sale of these materials might help to defray the expenses of maintaining the clearinghouse, but I'll get to the question of funding in more detail a little later on.

3. Another possibility might be the publication of an occasional or periodical newsletter concerning applied folklore. I have in mind something like the newsletter of the American Anthropological Association or the one put out by Council on Anthropology and Education, though perhaps we might start off with a mimeographed production before getting into offset. A publication of this nature might serve many purposes, including the dissemination of information on current ventures in applied folklore, opportunities for work, resources, techniques, principles, problems, etc. It might also serve as a forum for the debate which is bound to arise when folklorists get out into the world.

4. The center might be responsible for development and coordination of liaisons with other applied disciplines, such as anthropology, sociology, and psychology, and with organizations representing potential fields of application for folklore, such as those mentioned above. I myself know of several professional organizations that are anxious to develop liaisons of this kind.

5. The center might undertake the coordination of a regular session on applied folklore at the annual meetings of the American Folklore Society.

This is just a partial list and could easily be expanded. Even as it stands, though, I think it indicates how useful a center for applied folklore could be. Let's leave it at that for now, and move on to organizational matters. I have already stated my conviction that the center should be an agency of the American Folklore Society. It could be administered perhaps by a committee set up by the Society, with the chairman of the committee serving as director and another member serving as editor. Details of this kind ought not to be too difficult to work out, when and if the support of the Society is forthcoming. Somewhat more problematic, though, is the matter of finance. It would be best, of course, if the center could be made as self-supporting as possible, and this might be accomplished by several means. One possibility would be to make the center a membership organization with dues of, say \$2.50-3.50 per year. Members might be billed for dues on an optional basis together with the annual billing by the Society. Alternatively, the center newsletter might be distributed by subscription and this too could be a source of revenue. And, as I have suggested earlier, the sale of published materials might also help to defray the expenses of the center.

In addition to these internal means of raising funds, it will be almost essential to seek institutional support for the center, most likely from a college or university which might provide at least office space and clerical assistance. One of the reasons I am here today is that Point Park College, because of its location and even more because of its proven willingness to support folklore activities, might be an excellent place for the center for applied folklore to be located.

Now the foregoing possibilities would all be by way of cushioning the impact a center for applied folklore would have on the financial resources of the American Folklore Society and that is why I mention them first. I submit, however, that the Society should have a financial stake in the center as well, and be prepared to contribute financially to its establishment and support, within the bounds of reason and

necessity. These matters will all be thoroughly, probably even hotly, debated by the time the proposal has run its course, but it seems clear as a matter of principle that if the Society does undertake the venture, it should be prepared to support it with money on the line.

I stated at the outset of my remarks that at this point they constitute merely my own views and suggestions, though they derive in spirit and even occasionally in detail from the ideas and suggestions of others, especially the other members of my committee and also Ben Botkin. My purpose in presenting them here in this form is twofold. First, as I mentioned earlier, it seems to me that Point Park would be an especially appropriate place to establish a center for applied folklore. Second, and more important at this stage, I concurred with Bob Byington that a meeting devoted to the field of applied folklore would be a highly appropriate place to give the idea of a center for applied folklore a **thorough** airing before an interested group of folklorists, as a means of assessing its further potential; if support for the idea is forthcoming, much of it will be from people who are here at this conference. Considering the panel of commentators Bob has assembled, I am confident the idea will get a very thorough working over before we leave the room this afternoon.

[For a very brief summary of the panel discussion, cf. Dick Sweterlitsch, "Applied Folklore: Debate Goes On," FOLKLORE FORUM IV, 1-2 (January - March 1971): 15-18. A transcript of this discussion is on file with the FOLKLORE FORUM.]