

## An Interview With Henry Glassie

*Interviewed by Gregory Hansen*

Along with his research, writing, and teaching at Indiana University, Henry Glassie continues to develop museum exhibitions and other public programs on folklore both in the United States and abroad. I began this interview with a question about his work as a state folklorist in Pennsylvania during the 1960s, asking him about the accuracy of the perception that he was working more as a community-based scholar rather than as an arts administrator. Professor Glassie explained that the question was difficult to address because he was surprised by the way it was framed. We both recognized that the vocabulary used by public folklorists has changed significantly since the time that Glassie began public folklore work in the early 1960s. To answer the question, Glassie provided a history of his involvement in folklore work both inside and outside of academe. His answer reveals that to understand the contemporary dichotomy of public/academic folklore requires an understanding of the history of both the discipline and practice of folklore. His interview also asserts that folklorists could benefit from developing a better history of folklore that includes contributions made from folklorists working outside of the academy.

After finding out what specific activities Glassie was completing when he worked in Pennsylvania, I began side two of the tape with a brief summary.

**GH:** Okay, we were looking at the models that you were working on—what your charge was originally coming into Pennsylvania.

**HG:** I think your shift in sentence was more accurate. That is, I felt like I had a charge. The environment for my practice is crucial to state no matter how many times. It's civil rights. So I was in the business of feeling that I was doing civil rights for everybody. And that's what I wanted to do. But I'm not certain that I would've thought that I was working on a model. I don't think I would've had that perfectly articulated. The Irish Folklore Commission was part of the model, but I didn't have any model for the other thing that I was doing: it was just clear to me that I ought to be in Harrisburg working for the people.

**GH:** When you left Pennsylvania, they didn't hire anybody else until later on when they brought in Shalom Staub, right? Or was there anybody after you?

HG: No, there's no connection between what Shalom was doing and what I was doing. When I left, Dave Hufford had that position. He's a great folklorist.

Certainly, when you're talking about applied folklore—or we're supposed to—that was a slip, but a good one because we're talking about public folklore. But in those days, it was called “applied folklore” and not “public folklore.” That was the word that was around. David Hufford has been a hero, I would say historically, of applied folklore, and he took that position after I did.

I don't think for me, honestly, it was any big deal to change from being a public folklorist to an academic folklorist because I don't think that's how I was thinking of it. I was a folklorist, and as a folklorist, I needed employment. If you had asked me in graduate school what I was going to do with my life, my supposition was that I would find a job teaching high school English. It's interesting how later people say, “Oh, there are no jobs.” But I really lived in a moment when there really were no jobs. I mean, it didn't even occur to me to get a job teaching folklore at a college. Preposterous. There were almost no folklore classes. The ones that were being taught were already in the hands of a few very famous people like Tristram Coffin and Richard Dorson.

There were a few people doing folklore. But if you were in graduate school, you were not going to go off and teach folklore. That never was a part of my vision. I thought that what I would do was to teach high school English, just to make a living. But I was a folklorist, and so what I wanted to do was just to be a high school teacher in a place that was rich in folklore. My vision was that I would document that place and it would be the best documented locality in the history of folklore. That was my dream.

But the reason that this is pertinent to your question is, you see, a high school teacher was just a way of making a living. To go off and become a college teacher was just a way I was making a living. In every case, what was continuous across those three possibilities for my career—high school English teaching, state folklorist of Pennsylvania, being a professor at Indiana University—is that I was a folklorist. That's what I was. To this day I'm nothing other than a folklorist. So for me, as a folklorist, I just needed a way to make a living. My living allowed me to do fieldwork, which is what I wanted to do.

If I had, later on, a kind of dream, I guess it would have been that America would have been able to afford full-time field workers, and I would have been the first to sign up. I like to teach, I really do. I've never been bored a minute in the classroom. But I really love to do fieldwork. If I could do fieldwork all the time—I'm telling the truth—I would do fieldwork all the time. It's an altered state of consciousness. I love

fieldwork because your mind is constantly at work. There's not a lazy split second. And I like that state. To me, it's exhilarating. It's euphoric.

In other words, Gregory, I didn't think I was doing something different than what Ralph Rinzler was doing. I wasn't doing something different than what Richard Dorson was doing. I was doing the same thing that those two men did. They were doing folklore; I was doing folklore. So when I was in the state folklorist position, I thought I should be doing fieldwork. When I got the university position, it never occurred to me that I was not supposed to do what would be later identified as public work.

I really think that you should put all folklorists back together and then divide it on who is actually doing work in the public rather than where the source of the cash is. I think you would find a certain order of academics—despite the fact that their cash is coming from a university—are really doing public work.

When I was first at Indiana, I was on the Applied Folklore Committee, and I was clearly on that side of things. Dorson was clearly on the other side. Dorson denounced the Applied Folklore Committee. We were driven out of the American Folklore Society in a meeting in Washington, D.C. The applied folklore committee was Bob Byington, Dick Bauman, and myself, and then Ralph Rinzler and a few people at the Smithsonian. But this was before the state folklorist boom because there were no state folklorists. Really, the public folklorists were, in that period, all of the people who were at that meeting in Pittsburgh in 1971. Some of them worked at universities; some of them worked in museums; some of them worked in state government.

Before the period of public folklore that you evoke, there were earlier periods. One is the folklife festival period dominated by Ralph Rinzler. That grew very naturally into applied folklore as a little mini-period with the 1971 Pittsburgh meeting as the main event. The papers of that conference were published in the *Folklore Forum*, and it was a very special moment. It was a consolidation of the beleaguered applied folklore group, which would have been a minority in the American Folklore Society. While a minority, it really had the young energy. Now you look at us as old guys, but it was Roger Abrahams, Dick Bauman, Bob Byington, a small number of other people, and myself. And those people were acting in the 1960s mood in folklore. That's just what the times were, that simple. It was the mood of civil rights, and it was the mood of resistance to Vietnam as applied to folklore. It meant that we should be doing something with public, with social, with moral consequences with folklore. It wasn't public versus something else yet.

It was in its first moment the festival, and in the second moment, it was applied. And then there would be applied versus, maybe,

scholastic. Dorson believed in the scholastic vision of folklore, and of course he wrote all these things at the time about the way that folklore had been misused in Germany, misused in Russia—and Dorson's absolutely right. But the people in applied folklore would have said that it is precisely to prevent this type of abuse that you have to be self-conscious about application. If you're not self-conscious about application, in fact, you can become duped.

Our position was, "Dorson, you're right. Folklore has been co-opted, and it's precisely by thinking about the applied issues that we will prevent its co-optation in the future." I didn't want to say publicly that I didn't want America to co-opt American folklore. I was always a little ambivalent about the interest in folklore by the Smithsonian and the National Endowments because it seemed to be so easy for American powers to co-opt American tradition. I don't think people today are as self-conscious of that as they ought to be. That's the reason why, then and now, I'm quite ambivalent about public folklore disconnected from its pure research option. That is to say, I'm not taking a Dorsonic position but quite the reverse. The person who is doing quick and dirty fieldwork to bring performers to the Mall is complicit in the reaffirmation of American power. I'm not interested in that. I'm saying it kind of gently, but I'm not interested in that. I think that we could put wonderful performers on the Mall and at the same time public folklorists should have the freedom to be able to document some traditions too dangerous to be celebrated on the Mall.

I understand celebration. I've built museum exhibits—plenty of them. I know that you don't put junk in a museum exhibit. You put good things; you want to move people. But the museum exhibit can't be the only thing that's the result of one's work. It just can't be the only thing because you have to celebrate in a museum exhibit. I know people are trying to develop criticism in a museum, and I think that those exhibits usually are goofy. You don't put a bad fiddler on the stage of the National Mall in Washington. It's stupid. But bad fiddlers need study.

That's why I believe you can't drive an accurate folklore if our goal is celebration. If our goal is pure celebration, in fact, we become complicit in the consolidation of a certain political power. I don't know about you or anybody else who would be reading this, but I can't say that I find myself satisfied by either of the political parties that are running things now. Whatever regime is in power is being reinforced by the existence of the Folklife Festival on the Mall. That's the truth of it. I would be more comfortable with that if there were an allowance for, at the same time, an examination of issues that you can't put on the Mall. Dangerous things. Or maybe sordid things, maybe ugly things. Or maybe beautiful things that just don't work in a folk festival. I would be much more comfortable

with public folklore if the public folklorists were—as they should be—free to do a lot more pure research and to document things that maybe couldn't be festivalized.

Like you said, everybody in the public sector business understands everything that I am saying, much better than I am saying it, but at the beginning there was that hope: the hope that public folklorists could do pure fieldwork. When it was betrayed, it worried me, not only academically but also politically. So, I feel more free politically as a teacher than a lot of people would be in the public because they can't say things. I mean, David Hufford got in trouble when he was at his job with the Pennsylvania museum commission because he was the editor of *Keystone Folklore Quarterly* and he published an article on Polish jokes. But you see as an academic, no one would have questioned his right to publish an article on Polish jokes. But as a public folklorist, that is something you couldn't do in Pennsylvania. If you are going to intentionally deny a big part of what you wish to do, then you should have recourse to a different activity. That is why you should be allowed as a public folklorist, in my opinion, to do a lot of really pure folklore work with no goal whatsoever. So that in the public sphere, you don't feel like you are amputating yourself in order to serve as one has to serve.

If I am going to live a full life, I have got to do both of those things. That is, both of those things that I understood at the beginning of my career as my obligations. One of them is to do research that nobody interferes with, and the other is to put myself purely in service. I really think that in the public environment, that is a terrific frustration, not having the right to do pure research.

I think it is interesting historically that in the beginning there was Ralph Rinzler, and in the beginning there was pure research in a kind of very loose combination with service. The next phase was the applied folklore period. That period was really the period of the raising of political consciousness and increasing awareness of what folklore was doing politically in the world. It needed to be defended against and, in fact, in some cases furthered. It was that raising of political consciousness that disturbed Richard Dorson. Dorson is often seen as someone who was against public folklore. That is completely wrong. He had no objection to folklore being done in the museums. In fact, one of the very last things that Dorson planned was to take up reestablishing the Bureau of American Ethnology—but now for all Americans. Dorson invited Ralph Rinzler and the Director of the Smithsonian Press out here to Bloomington in order to draw the plans for a massive series of volumes that Dorson and the folklore community at IU would work at in cooperation with the Office of Folklife Programs. My reason for saying that is to show that Dorson wasn't hostile to public folklore at all. That is anachronistic. That

is building our worries back into an earlier time. The contemporary public/academic distinction wasn't Dorson's. Dorson's distinction was a pure/applied distinction. He objected to applied folklore—to folklore being applied towards political ends. But he didn't object to folklore being studied in the museums or the Smithsonian having folk festivals. Dorson did not have anything against folk festivals. Dorson was there at the Smithsonian Folk Festival. He loved it. That wasn't the problem.

In a way it is interesting that the pure/applied distinction would have transformed into the public/academic distinction because in fact it isn't a proper dichotomization. In the public realm, there is pure and applied, and in the academic realm there is pure and applied. But because there was a kind of a sense of continuity from applied folklore to public folklore, you didn't notice the development of a kind of leisure domain—which was the de-politicizing of public folklore in that moment. It isn't really that public folklore grew out of applied folklore. That would be a story that we could tell, but it would be false. If you look at the characters involved in applied folklore, some of them were in the public, but more of them were academics. What they were concerned about was political issues.

The next phase would be the phase of the National Endowments, and the purpose, I believe, of the National Endowments, was to depoliticize the academy. I believe covertly that was the construction. What happened was suddenly a lot of grants became available for scholars. In an earlier day, there were no grants for folklorists. It wouldn't have crossed my mind. Now graduate students talk about how they will get their grant as though it were an entitlement. When the National Endowments were established and grants became a big part of it, people began to realize they could apply for a grant and with a grant, they could do work. But of course, the work they were going to do was not going to be overtly political. And so the kind of job or tasks shaped up very differently in the humanities and the arts—not heavily political for sure. Once the endowments were there, then grants were available. People began to think in a new economic way about being a folklorist. I think the Endowments—it's not paranoid—I just believe that politicians are political, and I believe the Endowments were instituted when they were precisely to de-politicize the academy.

GH: Well, that's in line with the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory because Walter Benjamin says that in capitalism politics becomes aestheticized which is the opposite (in communism).

HG: Well, I think that is what's happened. I think today when people use Marxism it is in an aesthetic sense. I hear people constantly using Marxist

language whose political positions are on the right, often the far right. But they have learned a kind of language which they use in an aesthetic way and probably dupe themselves into thinking that they are of the left.

The political was reduced to the aesthetic, and that happened with a number of events. One of them was obviously the downfall of Nixon, and then there was the ending of Vietnam and the kind of drift from politics among young people in general. But I think the Endowments have participated in a general shift away from the political in the academy and in the public.

I think that is the next step. With that next step, what you have to do is configure and imagine what the public folklorist will do. It is at that moment when I think the paradigm that you have described is really an accurate presentation. This is a micro-history which should be of some interest to folklorists. I think by that time we are a full decade after the birth of modern public folklore and the folklife festival. By this time now, Bess Hawes has heroically managed to get a great many state folklorist positions, and there are lots of implications of those positions. One of them is the overuse of the word "folk art" with the National Endowment for the Arts. Suddenly a lot of people who didn't care about folk art began to care about it, and folk art became an interesting battleground intellectually. That is not a major issue, but it was one that was interesting to me because of my concern with folk art.

But more, it was a matter of having these folk art coordinator positions. Because they came out of the NEA, and I witnessed all of that because I was on the very first folk arts panel at the NEA. You can see how the world changes, but youth mattered then. I think there was a rule that someone had to be under thirty on that panel, and that was me. There I was, representing a youthful view. But I was on that very first panel, and I watched all that happen. I continued to serve on the panel very often, and I thought that Alan Jabbour did a wonderful job and the NEA was great. You know I love the Endowments. I think the Endowments are wonderful. Just because I love them though, it doesn't cause me to think of them as not being implicitly deep de-politicalizations of the intellectual life of our times.

But Bess Lomax Hawes had to figure out how in the world you could have someone who was a state folklorist. Necessarily, but unfortunately, she didn't entertain the possibility of putting those state folklorists in the universities. So that is really the moment in which I think that dichotomy which we are now cursed with arose. It wasn't there in the Rinzler period. It wasn't there in the applied folklore period. It was a function of, I think, a mistake.

I guess it was supposed to look democratic, but there was some kind of attitude of not aligning ourselves with those pointy headed

professors. But I think it would have been much, much wiser and folklore would be a much healthier entity today if a percentage of those state folklorist positions had been founded at universities.

Why is the university less legitimate than the state arts agency? It's beyond me. They are both public. It seems to me that the state folklorist should have been positioned in any institution from which the work of a state folklorist could have been done. It is possible that if more of them had been in universities, then we would not have this absurd dichotomy dividing our discipline. It might have been that folklorists would have demanded more rights to do pure research. It is conceivable they would have saved everyone's professional lives as folklorists. Everybody would be happier. At a university, where a lot of professors get some time to do research, they could have made a comparable demand. But you see, the trouble was putting all these people in positions where there was no natural right to do research. All of them were deprived of the right of the folklorist to do research.

A kind of nine-to-five-ism can set in. So people find it very hard to do folklore work outside of work time, especially if you are being paid to do fieldwork. It is odd for five o'clock to roll around and for you to keep on working. Their work became their job. It was in contrast to the vision that drove me as a child. My job was what I earned my money with, but my work was to be a folklorist—more or less the way I still see it.

But, at any rate, I think things went wrong because, good as it was, young folklorists were positioned in agencies that didn't understand pure research whereas universities would have to understand pure research. As a result, public folklorists were deprived of the pure research option. And the result of that was a lot of things; one of them was a lot of frustration about what they were doing. I am just talking about friends of mine, and this is what they were saying. "Look, I don't have enough time to do serious work."

The second thing that they are saying raises an even tougher problem. So often, friends in the public sector have said that they don't get recognition. There is no way to say it more simply. You don't get recognition from service. You just don't. That is just not the kind of activity for which one gains recognition. So, there is a double frustration.

### **Editors' Note**

The following section of this interview was completed on December 6, 1999, one week after the first interview was completed. I began this session by asking Henry Glassie if he wished to develop his comments about the lack of recognition that folklorists receive for completing work in the public sector. In this interview, Glassie first recollects his own concerns with doing non-academic folklore work in the 1960s. He then provides insights into

ways of resolving tensions between academic folklorists and those working outside of institutions of higher education. The interview concludes with a discussion of specific ways to address challenges created by making a dichotomy between public and academic folklore work.

HG: My own major frustration when I was in a state folklorist position was impermanence. That isn't the frustration I often hear from the people who are in public work now. But that was my frustration. I didn't feel that the kind of work I was doing was allowing me to contribute to the permanent record. I'd put on a folk festival, and everything was terrific about it except that it was over. So my frustration, if I look back to my days, was the way that I saw it as being so evanescent. And that might not bother some people.

I am also not convinced that we really have much political impact. I am not convinced we really have very much cultural impact. While I really do think that public folklore has done a lot of good in the world, generally, things in the world have been moving in a direction absolutely opposite to the desires of folklorists. Less political, more rightist, less concern for people, less concern for the environment. I don't exactly think things are going to hell, but I do really believe public folklore and academic folklore have to be on the right side. But if you look at the large picture, you'd say basically it hasn't done much good.

GH: That's what Robert Cantwell talked about at AFS when he said that the public folklorists are speaking about cultural issues and trying to come up with a resistance argument to the people in power but no one's listening.

HG: Yeah, or maybe the arguments are not being made correctly. Or who knows? I'm not saying now that public folklore is bad, but I'm trying to recapture my own feelings. And my own feelings very early in this business were that we would like to make a difference. I honestly don't think we make much difference—that the big evolutionary momentum is just against us. It is so much against us that many of us are in fact giving up to the extent of actually becoming complicit and furthering that globalizing evolution momentum. And those people might be judged negatively by history.

My point is that there's not much we can do about it. If there's not much that we can do about it, then we've got to be in it for something else. And the thing that I'm in it for is being a part of the permanent record. And that's not egotistical because I honestly don't care whether I'm remembered, but I care dreadfully whether Haripada Pal and Peter Flanagan and Ahmet Sahin and these people about whom I've written are part of the permanent record. And they are. Let's say

if I make a CD-ROM. I'm absolutely certain that in twenty years it will be not readable by any machine available in the United States. So they'll be lost. But if I write a book, a book is always there. Books are permanent. Books are part of the permanent record, and I'm very doubtful whether any of this machinery about which we're excited now will be part of the permanent record. The Indiana University Press, at this moment, can't read its files from eight years ago because they can't get a machine that will read those files.

That was my personal biggest frustration and sadness about being in the public. It doesn't seem to be that that's the one that I hear from my colleagues in public sector. When I'm just talking conversationally, I hear two things. One is, there is not enough time to really do good fieldwork. And number two, there's a sense of not getting recognition for the work done. All I can do is to be compassionate and yet say that in my own work, nobody gives you enough time to do fieldwork. Fieldwork time is seized, not given. If you have the right to do a little bit of fieldwork and get paid for it, that's wonderful. But that doesn't mean that you'll ever get paid. There is no one that will ever pay anyone enough money to do adequate fieldwork. Fieldwork time is seized. It's stolen—just as writing time is.

I'm paid to be a teacher. I'm paid to do the job. That means that the time that I've put into being a folklorist—doing fieldwork and writing about that fieldwork—is all stolen. It's weekend time, it's late at night time. It feels to me that a lot of times, maybe the real complaint is the salary. Maybe hidden in the complaint about not getting enough fieldwork time is a complaint about the low salary. While I'm not paid to do the work that I want to do, I am paid enough money so that on the weekends I can do it. Or at nighttime I can do it. Or in the summers I can do it. So that I get time off, and basically I'm not ever paid to do my folklore work. But I can make it possible because I'm paid enough. So that's a virtue of the academy.

Nobody gets enough time to do fieldwork. If that's not really the issue, then I think this issue of recognition is close to the problem. For me, it was the problem of not making a permanent contribution to the permanent record. Festivals came, festivals went. There was nothing left. Maybe I've altered somebody, maybe I haven't. But if I've got a book in the library, I've altered the world, permanently. For all time. I'll die; people will forget me. But the book in the library is there. It's there. So that seems to me a real difference.

Recognition is a serious problem, and I understand completely. I am sitting here, and I have built from the ground up, two outdoor museums, the Conner Prairie Museum in Indiana and the Museum of Frontier Culture in Virginia. If building museums made people well-

known or got them credit, I would have a lot of credit. I would imagine that 90% of the staff at both of those museums has never heard of me. It might be 100% of the staff at Conner Prairie. I can't get upset about that.

If you have got a whole life during which what you have done is to make things and then the director of an institution gets the credit, then you feel like you're making no progress. You ask yourself, "What have I done? I have struggled to make this thing and nobody is giving me any credit."

Well, it doesn't bother me at all because I am not in it for that. I have these books. I wouldn't call it very exalted or glorious, but I get enough credit from something that I have a great desire to do—which is to be a part of the permanent record. So, there is a little circle. I have a desire and that desire leads to creation. The creation brings me enough credit.

All the work that I have done in the public, in a matter of pure time, is probably equal to the time that I have put into academic work. For all that work, I have gotten nothing back. Not a penny in my paycheck reflects that I have done that work. There is just no concrete consequence to having done that public work. Ralph Rinzler made a fantastic contribution by developing the folklife festival on the mall. They have concerts to remember Ralph. But slowly but surely it will happen that Ralph Rinzler will only be the author of a rather small monograph on the Meaders family pottery of north Georgia. That's where his permanent presence in the record will be.

It is not so different in the academy. MacEdward Leach was the person who founded the department at the University of Pennsylvania and a great friend of Stith Thompson—and in a sense equal to Stith Thompson as a folklorist. He has already pretty well drifted from people's attention because he didn't produce much. I am not critical of Leach; this is just recognition of how the world works. Ralph Rinzler made one of the best ethnographic films ever made. There is no good copy of that film. The original footage was destroyed, so the only thing we have is a kind of secondary, tertiary copy. This is only 1967: we are not talking about 1867.

GH: The line of tension that shows up is that often times, the public folklorist winds up working as an administrator. I remember hearing Nancy Nusz one time speaking when I was first getting into this about fifteen years ago. She said that if you want to be a public folklorist, you have to recognize that you are going to have to be an arts advocate—whether you want to or not. So, as a result, you're going to work on administration and keep pushing that. I think that is where the issue of the recognition comes in because you have got to get

people to understand what you're doing, who you are, why it is important and continually politicking it. And you work to build up that infrastructure, but it is always very precarious. I think that is one of the things that happens also on the academic level.

HG: Yes. That is exactly right. It is perfectly possible for a person who is an administrator to take delight from being an administrator. Their art is in the actual manipulation of other people and the manipulation of institutions so as to get something done. If that is in itself as intrinsically delightful as for me writing is intrinsically delightful, then it is its own reward.

If you are doing something that you love, if you are a gardener and you love gardening, you don't need recognition as a gardener. What you get out of it is simply what you put into it. I really enjoy writing, and I love fieldwork. I don't have to get anything out of it. I don't have to get any recognition for a lot of what I do because it is its own reward. As long as it is its own reward, which it is for many administrators, then that is fine. But that is not what I hear from a lot of public sector folklorists. Instead, what I hear is frustration because they maybe are not predisposed that way.

What a lot of folklorists seem to want is a kind of academic recognition. I would just say that my understanding of the terror of that is, that I'm an academic but I don't get any recognition from doing that kind of work either. I just think anybody who wants that kind of recognition—if that's what they want—they are in the wrong damn business. In the same way, that's what I was saying about permanence, if that's what you want, then you need to work towards that.

If people want recognition, then the thing that concerns me is that in public sector folklore, there is no way to arrange it. They just are not going to set up the kind of system by which somebody gets the same credit for writing a book as setting up a museum exhibit. I've built lots of museum exhibits. I don't feel like I have gotten any credit for them. I've gotten great pleasure from it because of the artists. I love being an expeditor for those artists. I love the fact that a lot of artists that I champion have made money from that. I love the fact that they have gotten recognition. That makes me so pleased that I keep on doing museum exhibits. But I am not confused that they are going to make me known or anything.

GH: Well there is a certain amount of bad faith out there too because you get a rhetoric in the public sector a lot of time that is saying, "Well this

is not about me as the folklorist it is more about, for lack of a better term, ‘the folk.’” But then you get people moaning about lack of recognition and problems like that.

HG: But see, I understand what they are saying. I understand the frustration because I really want to do something for the people, the “folk”—it’s not my language—for the artists that I am interested in championing. I am convinced I have done a lot for them. If you talk to them, I guarantee they would tell you I have done a lot for them. To do that for them, those exhibits have been crucial.

Contributions to the permanent record aren’t things that immediately are that beneficial to the people we used to call “the folk.” Which means that—in my case—I have got to build museum exhibits or things like them because I want to contribute to the artists with whom I work. I want to affect their lives positively and immediately. I don’t want them to just be remembered historically. I love the fact that I have run into people in the world who know about Hugh Nolan and Peter Flanagan and the heroes of Ballymenone. When I was in India this summer I met this wonderful Indian scholar who had read *Passing the Time In Ballymenone*. He had read it and understood it, and I could have a conversation with this man about Peter Flanagan on the other side of the world. To me that is wonderful, but it didn’t do a damn bit of good for Peter Flanagan. He is just as dead as a doornail. The fact that he is known to some man in India doesn’t matter. But the fact that I built a museum exhibit at the Fermanagh County Museum with his picture in it—Joe’s picture is in it and his father’s picture is in it. That is different. That really meant something to Peter Flanagan in his life. He wasn’t dead. It wasn’t something happening over in India; it was something that happened to him in his own home place. It was exhilarating for that to happen to him.

But that thing that I did for him got me zero credit in the academy. It got me no credit among public folklorists. I don’t complain about it, but I just note that they, in return, can’t expect it either. You just don’t get credit for putting on an exhibit at the Fermanagh County Museum that aids Peter Flanagan, so you have got to be doing it for a purpose other than credit. I will continue until I die doing it for that reason—and that is to benefit the people with whom I work.

GH: And that is part of your rationale for why public folklore needs to be in a complementary relationship to the academic folklore and vice-versa?

HG: And vice-versa. Or the thing that I would say is that Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett was right in saying that it was a false dichotomy.

I think it is worse than that. It is a destructive dichotomy. The public folklorist who doesn't at the same time consider himself or herself an academic folklorist is cutting himself or herself off from that very recognition that every public folklorist tells me they want. Well, they are not going to get it from museum exhibits. They can say to me, "Why don't you give credit?" Well, it's not my power to give credit.

I still will always do museum exhibits, but I don't expect anything back from it. It just doesn't bother me. I am just delighted that people walking through the Indiana Art Museum right now, will go into that Islamic Gallery and there is a plate by Mehmet Gürsoy. People who never will read my book will just say, "Oh, Turkey. Beautiful." From that kind of vague reaction no credit accrues. But it's good, and we've got to do it. I am absolutely convinced that we have got to do it.

To say this whole thing in principle—when one does fieldwork that is good, the person who does good fieldwork will absolutely and without question be obliged to do both academic and public work. That is really the simplest formula that I could offer. I can go back and talk about complaints that people will make, and I respond to them by saying, "Nobody will ever pay me or you or anybody else enough money to do good fieldwork." It has to be done out of passion, commitment, drive, love.

I think that the will to do fieldwork is the big issue. Once one has the will to do fieldwork, then he or she will come into deep engagement with the human beings with whom we are doing fieldwork. It is this engagement that is really required by contemporary theory—to do fieldwork that answers the theoretical requirements of performance as articulated by Hymes and Bauman. If you are going to do work that is good enough to get the data to be able to handle the contemporary dominant theory in folklore, then you're going to stay long enough to really be friends with people.

I'm not even talking about ethics. I don't even have to bring up morality. If you stay long enough to really be good friends with people, you're going to certainly want to do two things. One of them is you're going to want to help them directly, and you're going to think about how to help them. One of the ways might be a museum exhibit; it might be any number of other public things. I've felt that in every instance. Not only did I write *Passing the Time in Ballymenone*, but I also wrote the little book *Irish Folk History*, which was a gift directly back to the community. I gave that book to every single household in the community of Ballymenone. Today if you go to Ballymenone, many people have *Passing the Time in Ballymenone*. Generally you find that it's opened to the pictures of themselves and not read. But the little book is read to

pieces. It's filled with tea stains, and people have opened it up because it has just the texts from the community.

So that was an obligation from doing good fieldwork. The fieldwork that was good enough to handle the theory of performance to produce the book *Passing the Time in Ballymenone* also caused me to be close friends with the people. I was striving to figure out some way to benefit them. I gave them this book for the community, and I worked with the director of the local county museum to put on an exhibit on Ballymenone.

If you know contemporary folklore theory, you have to do good fieldwork. You have to. If you don't do really good fieldwork, then all you're doing is continuing to refine the theory or continuing to tell people that they ought to be doing this kind of work—instead of actually doing the damn thing. But as you know perfectly well, I'm a practitioner and I don't pretend to be a theorist of performance. But I'm convinced that it's the best way to do folklore.

You want to do something for, let's call it "the public." You make a public gift. Well, that's building a museum exhibit in the county museum, developing educational materials that are used in the county schools. There also ought to be a gift made to the discipline. But if the gift is only to the discipline, then we have failed. The gift also has to be a much larger and more general gift. What you do for the discipline is you write an article. For the real public—you really want to do something public—you write a book that gets readership that's beyond the discipline and beyond the academy. The point is some of the responsibilities you can call "academic" and some of them you can call "public." But I would say that all of them are the simple result of doing adequate fieldwork.

GH: So you're ultimately fusing the whole rift between academic and public folklorists to base it in solid fieldwork?

HG: That's the answer. To me, that's the answer. If academics were doing good fieldwork, they would also do public things. If public people were doing good fieldwork—I'm intending this to be challenging—if public people did very good fieldwork, they would also do academic things. They would not be satisfied by the fact that all of their work and the people with whom they'd interacted were not going to be on the permanent record. They would not be satisfied.

They would feel an obligation, a moral obligation as heavy as any moral obligation that the public people have ever put on the academics. I, as an academic, will return that. If you don't write a book, you've betrayed your people. I believe it. Absolutely. And

conversely, I believe if you don't do something for them, like an exhibit or festival, you've betrayed them. Absolutely. If you do good, proper fieldwork, you won't ever have to stop and think about whether you're answering your moral as well as academic responsibilities because you'll do them both without a blink of the eye.

But I wish for there to be a somewhat broad vision of what both of these kinds of work can be. Let me give you a good example because it comes impeccably out of the kinds of things that I'm saying. I was in Oregon and picked up a high school anthology of the literature of Oregon. The first things in that high school anthology were translations by Dell Hymes of Native American myth. That's really public work. In the manner of great academic folklorists, of great theoreticians, Hymes is not going to stop at theory. I imagine there are lots of folklorists who don't even know this part about Dell's work.

What a wonderful thing! Every high school kid in the state of Oregon opens their book up to an anthology of literature, and the first entry in the entire book is an ethnopoetic transcription of a Native American myth. What a victory.

Right now I am working with the National Museum of Bangladesh to develop an exhibition. It is to be opened next May, called "Contemporary Traditional Art of Bangladesh." That's going to have an impact on the artists' lives in a direct and financial way. And it is a step toward gaining them presence in the permanent record. It's really a wonderful thing. I've certainly found it very exciting, as I've gotten more and more involved in South Asian studies, to find that people from India are really excited to see these Hindu arts alive in Bangladesh. There are so many nice political ramifications because it causes them utterly to rethink what this nation of Bangladesh is. An Islamic nation—but one in which all of these Hindu things flourish. Some Hindus in India just didn't think that was possible. So there's a kind of softening that occurs. But that's very long range.

You see, these long-range things are wonderful. It's very important for the book to get in the *New York Times*. It's very important for intellectuals to read it. I like the fact that a career diplomat reviewed the *Art and Life in Bangladesh* book and talked about its foreign policy implications. People are going to go to these countries, and they will read books of this kind to really get to know the place. It's a nice compliment. But that's pretty diffuse, away from the realities of daily life.

When we talk about doing proper fieldwork and therefore making proper friendships, then you want to do things that range all the way from getting money into people's pockets—there's simply nothing wrong with that—through gaining for them some sense of recognition and respect. Ultimately, it would be our hope to have some impact on

the world that will cause conditions to be better. But if we're only doing a third of those things—that is, somehow trying to have an impact on the world, so the conditions of people will be better—then the problem is that we're going to wait for the rest of our lives to have that happen. And maybe it's going to happen and maybe it's not.

So there is a need in the construction of our profession to figure out a way to get some recognition to the people who create things. At least I don't think that that recognition will come to anybody except those who create permanent things. There also needs to be some way that we can get recognition of these people that we're working with. The problem with that is that when they get recognition, we probably don't. And I think we should just be happy with that.

GH: And eventually people will discover what we're up to if we build up enough of an infrastructure in administrative things. Eventually you'll get folklorists in charge of the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

HG: That's right.

GH: I'm an optimist. I really think now is a great time to be a folklorist.

HG: Absolutely. Absolutely. What you want is someone who can appeal to everyone, and it might be someone who is just properly situated. And so in the case of Bill Ferris or Bill Ivey, they can absolutely appeal to the academics at one end. In the case of Bill Ivey, you have to be able to appeal to the artist. Of course you can appeal to the artist and you can appeal to the academics. At the same time, these guys can link to the public, and they can certainly move through Congress and find themselves comfortable among legislators. There is no one in Congress, of course, to the left, but Ivey and Ferris can move among everybody from the center to the far right. You know? That is not hypocrisy; that is just being a folklorist. You can see, certainly I can, some virtue in many different positions. And then you can also see some virtue in many different options for creative work. And one of them certainly for many people would be administration. In Bill Ferris's case, he is a fine administrator. In Bill Ivey's case, he is a fine administrator.

GH: If you are in government agencies like the NEA or NEH, as a folklorist you recognize that bottom-line thinking isn't the only answer. So maybe your festival is put together to celebrate the Bicentennial and help to pay a tribute to patriotism, but you also know that there are other things going on there too that you are very tuned into as a folklorist—that you really care about. The patriotic tribute might be

important in a certain way but what really matters is to get that thing going. And you find those kinds of things going on all the time. There are opportunities when you're even in very conservative political organizations like a school board.

HG: Absolutely, absolutely. This is adopting a position from the public sector point of view. It is not real hard for me to do because I do all those things. But one of the things that strikes me as really confusing and really corny about the academics is that they sometimes criticize public sector people for having to operate in the realm of compromise. It is as though the academy weren't a matter of compromise? Just crazy. You have to have your book published. Every book published is a matter of compromise. You have to teach in an institution where the Board of Trustees is composed of exactly the same kind of people that people in the public sector have to deal with all the time. You can hide your head in the sand, but the fact is that all of this exists in compromise. I think it is very easy to look at the National Endowments as historically being in the process of de-politicizing the academy. I believe that, but it wouldn't stop me one second from working with the National Endowments.

I'm not certain I have to adopt a conspiracy theory, but I think that it was understood that academics are easy to buy off. They could be bought off, and I think that the National Endowments have helped to buy off the academy and to de-fang the academy. But that doesn't mean that I am against the National Endowments at all. I have cooperated with them and always will. I have gotten lots of grant money from them, and I've written a thousand letters of recommendations to those things. I admire what they do.

You see it's the same thing. If you are going to put on a national folk festival on the Mall, you're celebrating the Fourth of July. You're celebrating the nation, and it's a patriotic act. I understand the irony in that. I understand the almost unbearable irony in a Native American presentation being made in that environment. I mean, genocide is what happened. It's what happened. During the Civil War, every general that was not good enough to kill Confederates, they sent out to kill Indians. No government really has a record as horrible as the United States government. So that you would bring in a potter from Third Mesa to make a demonstration on the National Mall in order to reinforce the vision of America, I mean, you would have to be hip to those kinds of ironies. It wouldn't stop me at all from participating in the festival. Nor would it prevent that Hopi potter from being there

either. They understand too. But they also understand this is an opportunity to get involved. They are trying to make a living as potters.

GH: Well, that's the reality that they live in. It just becomes very augmented on July 4<sup>th</sup>.

HG: Yeah. It's the reality that I live in. All of us can note these points of irony. So, I think that one of the things that is curious is any plea to purity. We are all compromised.

GH: Well part of academe is our critical perspective. They train us here to look at an argument, to look for something wrong. And then there is a tendency to dismiss the whole book. One of the things that really frustrates me in graduate classes is when the discussions on the books turn into a gripe session where everybody explains all the minute little points that they didn't like in one chapter, so they dismiss the author and everything else.

HG: Especially if that author was a historical author. That's simply falling into the trap of progress. Every book in the history of the world ever written has mistakes in it. Every book has virtue. Every theory ever devised for folklore is a good theory, and every theory ever devised for folklore is deficient. I said earlier in this conversation that I feel myself an adherent to the kind of performance valence in folklore and I do. I think performance is a wonderful theory, but it has its imperfections and limitations as well. Every theory does. Every theory is good, and every theory is bad.

One of the things that my Sufi pals in Turkey all say is, "Reality is of its nature mixed." It always has a bad side, and it always has a good side. You can fixate on the bad or you can fixate on the good. If you fixate on the good, their argument is that you are beginning to move properly along the course that God designed for humankind. That feels right to me. So that it doesn't matter whatever institution. It can be the NEH, I respond to it in that way. You give me Indiana University. I see problems in IU, but I also see virtue.

Give me any theory in folklore history, I can find virtue in it. I don't arrogate to myself the sensation that maybe I am on God's path through life like my Sufi pals, but I think they are philosophically correct. You can lead a negative and destructive life, and in a negative and destructive life, you can always find something wrong. It doesn't matter what it is. Pick up *Moby Dick*, you can find something wrong with it. But what a stupid thing to do.

GH: Well that highly critical edge comes from a very naive Utopian vision I think.

HG: I think that is exactly right.

GH: Yeah. And you don't have that Utopian vision when you are in areas where you have to politick for your job all the time. All of the sudden, you recognize a certain way of weighing out costs and benefits.

HG: Exactly. And that's the way life is. It's the way all of life is. It's no different in the university. It doesn't seem ultimately to be very different from having done both these things. I don't think it is ultimately very different to work in public folklore and academic folklore.

GH: One of the reasons why Betty and I got interested in all this was the bad feelings that were coming out of the Pittsburgh meeting. There were serious issues that were raised that I think were largely dealing with economics. But on the other level, I just drove away from Pittsburgh realizing this was just a huge lovers' quarrel more than anything—when there gets to be problems between academics and public folklorists. Everybody's hearts are, I think, striving to be in the same place.

HG: I think that is true. Insofar as people are folklorists, they are the same. That's another thing that I have tried to say in all this. If you are a folklorist, you are a folklorist. The thing that I would say about something like the recent Pittsburgh meeting is that folklorists are supposed to be students of communication. That is one of the ways to validly define folklorists. But how could folklorists who are students of communication, be so bad at communication? And I am not even talking about particular individuals and their inarticulate sentences. That is excusable.

Rather, why couldn't we establish a format? Why shouldn't we be sufficiently good as theorists of communication to establish formats in which conversations could occur? It just amazes me that we can't do it. But the thing about the Pittsburgh meeting was that that meeting had repetitive instances of people talking past each other. Screaming and not really developing an argument in any kind of friendly way so that people would patiently listen to one another. It reduced to a lot of people making certain strident, corny, ill-considered, shallow comments. And it wasn't because they are not good people. It was because the construction of the event was wrong.

How can folklorists not figure out how to have a better meeting than other academics? And yet folklore meetings are just like every other meeting in the world. That is just stupid. There is no other word for that. Pittsburgh was a lovers' quarrel, but the thing you hope for lovers is that, living together, they might be able to make an exchange to forestall the argument. But this is a really modern lovers' argument. This is like husbands and wives that have taken jobs on opposite coasts and meet twice a year to make love in St. Louis—and instead fight. Well, yeah, that figures.

GH: Well, what gets me at the meetings is that so many people are just sitting and listening to react rather than to understand. And that is so opposite of what we do in fieldwork.

HG: In fieldwork we patiently listen to other people. We give them all the time in the world they want to make their point. We learn about turn taking and exchange and a kind of gentility. We even hold back when we hear things we don't like. But, it's crazy that our academic meetings would reflect none of that which we, in theory, learned by doing our fieldwork. Even to the standpoint of the other possibility too—which ought to be in there—which is the great performance. See, I think that we are really foolish in folklore not to allow, let's say, the likes of Alan Dundes to really just do a great performance, instead of squashing him into the same little twenty-minute slot. He is a star of the folklore business. We ought to allow our stars to be stars.

I think it would be great to really have a conversation between public and academic folklorists. But I don't think the AFS could ever be that place. Bizarre, but that's what I think.

GH: I don't know if that is endemic to folklore or if it is in other disciplines too because *in talking to anthropologists I find that they are really hard on the leaders in their field too*. I have heard that among rhetoricians in that area. I am not excusing it among folklorists because I don't think we should. But I think we get so critical in our own field that we don't recognize the value and the good things that are going on right here.

HG: I think that it is a general state of affairs in the academy and that's true. But then, it is my right to assert that folklorists ought to learn. It's really the point that I have been driving the whole time. Folklorists by virtue of the kind of work that they do, ought to learn about the world in a way better than most people. I think that is really true. One of the things that we should learn is the kind of honor, the respect that is paid to the seniors in any viable community. One of the ways that the

community exists is by virtue of the respect that it pays to the seniors. In whatever community we have studied, we ought to have seen the kind of honor. In Turkey, they kiss the hand of such people.

There are things that you do to make that respect known and folklorists should know that. So, if people in other disciplines don't pull it off, I can excuse them because they all are stuck in the ivory tower—but we are not. We should know better. In the same way, if they can't manage to put together a meeting in which communication really occurs, then I can excuse them. They are not students of communication. They shouldn't necessarily know how to do that. If they are historians, they are locked into the word. They believe in writing.

We've seen great storytellers. We ought to be able to come to an academic meeting and give a presentation that is oral and enlightened and interesting and logical. Furthermore, if there is an issue about which we should communicate, we ought to be able to do that. If there is a respect that ought to be shown to the elders, we ought to be able to do that. If there is a way that you incorporate young people—folklore is relatively good at that—give young people their turn. Allow them to participate.

GH: It's interesting that we focus on AFS because that's so much of the area where there is a gathering point between the public folklorist and the academic folklorist. And I think that is where we really need to work in terms of getting out healthier relationships on all parts around.

HG: I agree. It's unfortunate that AFS is the one place where the academic and the public people come together because it is a flawed entity.

I think the thing that the AFS, for example, ought to do is figure out where a much more informal kind of exchange can occur and whether it can be longer. You look at the schedule and there are time slots of 15 minutes. People bounce in and out of rooms—which is very discourteous. I mean, everybody's a fieldworker. How in the world could they have ever thought it was a decent thing to come in the middle of a session? That's just a discourtesy.

The AFS has become what it is, and it's a separate entity. There needs to be, in my humble opinion, a set of smaller events like Bill Hansen and Greg Schrempp's myth conference earlier this summer. That was good. It was small enough that there was an interaction around it. I think the thing to do is to have little conferences on themes, and the AFS can just continue to be what it is. But if people really want to have things happen, they ought to have little conferences on themes. They ought to just naturally include a lot of people from the

public sector and a lot of people from the academy and let them work together on a theme—which is not a theme of public and academic—but to figure out what matters. Almost everything we're interested in would be a topic that would be interesting to a certain number of people in both of those realms, and they just come and be part of it.

GH: Jack Santino's Holiday, Festival, Ritual, and Public Display conference—that was a good time up there.

HG: Yeah, see that's the kind of thing. We ought to figure out some interesting, little, inexpensive conferences where we draw people together. And a lot of them could be generated out of the kinds of interesting problems developed in the public sector. Just make the academics come by inviting them.