

FOLKLORE TODAY AND FOLKLORE TOMORROW? FOLK'S PROBLEMS IN THE SHRINKING WORLD

**A Musing on the (Current Research) Field¹ for the Discipline –
Evolving from an Analysis of the Draft Program for the American
Folklore Society's Annual Meeting. (Held in October 2009)**

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In August 2009, when the draft program for the Annual Meeting of the American Folklore Society had recently come to hand, the present writer felt that it might be helpful to gain from it an impression of the apparent shape of the current research in conceptualizing the discipline. Accordingly, he then decided² analyzing carefully the sheets of the spaced out – and perhaps somewhat provocative – ordering of this meeting's many listed offerings. [The draft itself has been given the page numbers (1–47), for subsequent clarity of reference and possible sequencing, as the whole field of research and practice moves towards charting – and embracing – the existing challenges for the future that come from so much un-evenness of social and economic opportunity, let alone comparable social justice.]

And so an initial attempt was made to try to discern possible themes and patterns in the listings, concentrating on the titles of the proffered papers rather than on the workshops, half-day tours, other program clusters or subtitles. While the many sections and paper-titles are alike, obviously influenced by the framing need for general groupings, it is believed that various equally meaningful groupings may be identified from a close reading of the draft listings.

There follows an unordered series of clusters, formulated much as they occurred to the present reader:

A. The preservation of the identifiable – the traditional. (As encouraged by contemporary performance). This has always to be done with the related and appropriate ethics of respect.

The relevant draft titles may be grouped here (number in the brackets refers to the page in the program):

‘The [effective?] Transmission of Folktales in Modern Society’ (7); ‘Preserving America’s Cultural Traditions and the American Folklore Society’ (28); ‘Cultural Sustainability: Beginnings’ (7); ‘Folktales as Self-Help Narratives’ (29); ‘Stories We Tell Ourselves: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Performing Community Stories’ (29); ‘The Self-Representation of Marginalized Communities in Localized Museum Settings’ (30); ‘Tradition, Cultural Landscape and the Reverence for Place³: Experiencing Social Ethics through Attitudes towards Spatial (Re-)Presentation’ (40); ‘American Common Sense and the [New] Problem of Common Knowledge’ (8); etc.

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[The emotive notion of ‘special’ or ‘significant’ place is very much stressed, with semantics of approval, as under various of the following clusters.]

B. The [distanced or somehow lost] atmospherics of place or out of place and linked activities – practices of such transformation, dislocation and transgression, these in both colonial and global contexts, etc.

These fables concerning personal identity, appearance, behavior often seem to relate to the processes of *Memory*, *Transgression*, *Pride*, etc., and to the necessary saving of beloved landscapes, the use of power and related ethics, etc.; some typical papers – *inter alia* – being:

“Join Proud Irishmen” – Place, Memory and Protest in an Irish American Community’ (4); and cf. ‘Dislocation and Supernatural Encounters on the Irish Border’ (19);

‘Folk Dress and Slovak Identity in the Old and New Worlds’ (7); ‘Landscapes of Discontent’: “Saving the Commonwealth for Future Generations” (4); cf. the more assertive and explorative nature of – ‘Developing an Anti-Semitic Motif Index’ (18); ‘Abandoned Property Ordinances and so Gentrification in West Virginia’ (4); ‘Competing Discourses and Social Power, in South Central Missouri Landscapes’ (4); ‘Blue Ridge Mountain Music, History, Performance’ (4); ‘Sweet River, Happy Valley, Along the Yadkin River’; ‘Out of Place – Local Narratives’ (11); ‘Approaching Places Ethically and Spiritually’ (16); ‘Folklore and Fields of Care: Toward a Place-Based Ethics’ (16); the seeming ecological ‘Folklore, Place and Alternative Energy: Seeking Contemporary Connections’ (16); ‘Weather Lore of Place’ (21);

“It Takes a Village to Change the World” – Proverbial Politics and the Ethics of Place’ (22); and ‘The Poetry of Landscape and Memory’ (26).

C. There is also projected an early and stimulating preservation workshop, focused on ‘Writing About Place’, with various searching and identity re-enforcing sessions around this theme, such as:

‘Translating Place and Land: Ethics of Transformation in Colonial and Global Contexts’ (3); ‘Translated State – Misreading State Symbols’ (3); ‘Transgression, Power, and the Ethics of Place’ (3); ‘Navigating the Way Home: Community Singing’ (11); ‘The Tall Tale and the American West’ (15); ‘Forgotten Images and Resurrected Memories, Ordinary Stories in an Extraordinary Town’ (15); ‘Folklore and Fields of Care: Toward Place-Based Ethics’ (16); ‘Folklore, Place and Alternative Energy’ (16). Many of these merging into meaningful reflections on particular landscapes, as in the initial congress tour, ‘Western Landscapes’ (1); ‘Metaphoric Place in the Story of a Female Factory Worker’ (5); and the notion of reverence for special place, as in ‘Cemetery Workers as Caretakers of the Living and the Dead’ (30).

A matter of some related significance, recently announced from Australia, is the projected International Conference on Migration, Citizenship and Intercultural Relations, to be held on the Burwood Highway Campus of Deakin University in Melbourne, on 19–20 November, 2009.

Advertised information states that its conference concentrates its focus on:

- Multiculturalism, Identity and Citizenship Race, Ethnicity and Intercultural Relations
- Transnational Work and Temporary Migration
- Muslim Diaspora in the West
- Moving Beyond Xenophobia : Race Relations and Social Inclusion
- Transnationality and Global Ethic Announced Social Development, Possibility or Failure.

D. Specific place

This is also much related to material helpfully recalled from museums and from the glibness of so much recent profit-based tourism, as in:

‘Creation of Authenticity and Nostalgia in the Public and Private Space of a Museum’ (2); ‘Folklorists On Line: A New Model to Change the Way Museums Work’ (21); and the applied and, indeed, universal example:

‘Tourism and the Politics of Place: Framing Heritage, History, and People’ (21); and the clearly therapeutic ‘The Worst Thing after Katrina was the Silence – Reclaiming the Community through the Language of Public Memory’ (6). Compare this with the last October 2009 offering ‘Google, Hyper-locality and Folk Geography’ (21).

E. Ethics, aesthetics of living spaces, and harmonious citizenship

This topic cluster is clearly concerned with the ever more common international aspects of migration, citizenship, and inter-cultural relations, one which is signaled by the now so challenging immigration settings, by the need for intercultural relations, by living spaces' [racial] problems, and by the need for social inclusiveness, as well as the more fore-grounded issue of global ethics. And all of these are to be played out in more and more countries and hitherto very traditional, conservative, local communities.

This contact or collision prone topic is really one of the post-modern notions of the most appropriate and sensible, restorative uses of hitherto spared communal space, as well as the small private places, in an over-crowded world. Some attractive, challenging, or psyche-refreshing titles for the micro-focus are:

'Back Yard, Front Yard, or on the Roof: Ritual Space in the 21st century' (20); 'From Print to (Library/ Other) Commons: Theories of Public Space' (20).

F. Institutional / organizational lore – mystique and its adaption, mischievous or less harmful:

This is variously treated, especially as it emerges into the surrounding society, but it is concerned with micro-cultures, often of the workplace, and their part in bonding in or excluding:

'The Ethics of Institutions: Pitfalls of an Engaged Folklore and Tales from the Federal Courts' (3); 'Translating Place and Land: (Ethics of) the Use of the Golden Eagle Symbol'; or 'Translated State: The Misreading of Hawaiian State Symbols'.

G. Personal experience narratives, renditions, reportage

E.g. the story-teller's position, recollections:

'Imagination and Interpretation in Personal Experience Narrating' (5); 'Authority and Narrative in Children's Assemblages' (5); or 'The Child as Witness in Verbal and Visual Art' (5).

H. Cultural performances, representations, emotional releases, e.g. the wearing of a particular stipulated dress – especially female and domestic as in:

'Weddings as Cultural Performance' (5); 'Space...and American Christian Cultures of Listening' (20); 'Women Serpent-Handlers in Contemporary Appalachia' (5); 'Latter-Day Saints': their place 'in between the Singles Ward and the Family Ward' (5); those persons, situations where the [otherwise ignored individual is silently projecting aspects of the (slighted) self] – 'Wearing Identity' (12):

‘Writing a Narrative. With Dress’ (12); ‘Displaced Fantasies: Carnival Costumes’ (19); and/or the related ‘The Emotional Content of the Mardi Gras’ (20).

I. The folkloric dimensions of food – and of the too often dangerous personal destructiveness of machine line activities:

‘Culture and Local Food Systems’ (38–39); ‘Culinary Tourism’ (21); ‘Community Cookbooks’ (20); ‘Place-based Food Ideologies in an Urban Ghetto’ (35); ‘“A Place Apart”: The Reawakening of Irish Food Culture in West Cork’ (35), etc. and the loosely related repressing of cultural awareness, as in ‘Can Manual Workers be Reflexive: Observations on the Praxis of Mechanical Reproduction’ (8).

J. Folk art and [thus the mnemonics of] (necessary) remembering of traditional craft skills:

‘The National Network for Folk Arts in Education’ (33); ‘Indigenous Place-Making and the Uses of Non-Literate Cartography’ (34); ‘Making Rugs’ (22); ‘Weaving Words, Connecting Lives’ (6); ‘Current Studies in Folk Art’ (22); ‘Traditions in Scandinavian Woodcarving’ (22); or, the highly significant – ‘The effects of Colonial Discourse in Mass Media on the Consumption of Global Folk Art’ (22).

‘Life Pictures and Family Stories: Grave Markers as Autobiography, Biography’ (20); ‘Written in Stone: Representing Memory and National Identity in Europe’s World War II Cemeteries’ (20); and ‘Cultural Sustainability and Self-Documentation’ (37). [Clearly this links with the respect section, as listed above.]

K. Public and socially shared folklore – and the more focused study of the same

This matter is to be given various treatments, as in the broader society or the universal setting, etc., e. g., ‘Ethics, Politics and Goals in Establishing a Regional Public Folklore Program’ (6); ‘Forum: Voices Sharing Traditions: The Art of Interviewing Tradition Bearers’ (16); or the representative, universal topic, ‘Memorial Trees: Ethics and Ritualized Landscapes of Remembrance’ (33).

L. Contemporary legends, their (dis-)functions and their core of post-modernism cynicism, menace:

‘Heroes and Villains? Legendary Priests’ (10); ‘UFO-Abduction Narratives and Technologies of Tradition’ (10); ‘The Nightmare of AIDS from a Familiar Stranger’ (11).

M. Children, the young, and their private, autonomous worlds, music and dance, etc.:

'Listening to Migrant Children on the Process of Negotiating a New Ethos of Place' (10); 'Paying Attention: Folk Games of College Students' (10); 'You Tube' (14); 'Language Immersion in Preschool' (14) or 'Puppet Play' (14).

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There are also two fields of more recent prominence and significance:

N. Water and the associated lore:

(a) traditional associations, e.g., 'Ships That Pass in the Night' (p.9), and
(b) the more ecological dimension, e.g., 'Place Matters: A Wooden Boat Builder in the 21st Century' (9); 'The Ethics of Creativity on the Rice Plains of Louisiana;(9); and 'Narrative Stewardship and the River Community at New Jersey' (9); and

O. Animal and the human interaction, such lore:

'Do Animals Tell Stories? A Closer Look at the Narrative Dimensions of the Human-Animal Divide' (7); and 'The Ethics of Placing the Human in a Taxonomy of Scale' (7).

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P. The transmission of further research into folklore, as from now

There were a large number of topics, variously listed, which seemed to be concerned to appraise or re-evaluate various aspects of styles in the state of scholarship and research across the field, these including (*seriatim*):

- 'The Future of Communication in Folklore Books' (13);
- 'Various Journals in the Field' (14);
- 'The Satiric in Labor Song' (14);
- 'The Power of the Lullaby' (14);
- 'The Form of Value in Global Traditions' (18);
- 'Bridges: Local, Global and Transnational' (18);
- 'Narrating Identities' (19);
- 'Classifying Time, Experience and Memory' (19);
- 'Finding Home: Certainty and the Expression of Place in Writing' (35);
and
- 'The Apotheosis of Our Former Selves – Myth, Jokes and Nostalgia' (36).

Very clearly, the largest issues were perdurable ones at the core of the discipline, – these as are now selected by the present writer – including:

'Discourses of Veneration and Repudiation in Folklore Research' (23); 'Stigma, Tellability, and Reflexive Scholarship' (23); 'The Erosion of Traditional Boundaries⁴ in Academic Culture' (24); 'Re-contextualizing [the place of] Folklore in Literary Works' (37, 38); and 'Wrestling with the Present: the Subject of Heritage' (39).

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AND WHAT OF THE CONFERENCE ITSELF?

It is hoped that this analysis may not be deemed unduly subjective or even impertinent. And yet it may well be justified, for it is also the case that no delegate can attend more than a very limited selection of the sessions, these audited always being dictated as much by time available, as personal interest might suggest. Her/his experience is all too likely to be fragmented, and so thereby to miss the implications of the whole.

Perhaps the lessons to be learned by much musing over the 47 sheets – and the above-presented series of extrapolations from the labels and clusters to be found therein – is the fact that lore, belief, speculation, rumor and the like are remarkably robust in the present period and so very much more in the mainstream of the lives of us global folk in our 'village', than would have been conceded in earlier times. In other words, the subject – and its urgency – have alike become that much more immediate, ubiquitous and socially and personally significant.

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ANOTHER BAROMETER FROM THE AUSTRALIAN SCENE IN THE SPRING OF 2009

In the same week, the third in August, 2009, there crossed my desk another clue to the inter-woven worlds of regional memory, popular history, violence/crime, and, surely, the whole world of folk story.

It was the 24 pages outline program⁵ for History Week to be held in mid-September – in the State of New South Wales, Australia, of the organized events, commemorations and the like flowing from an invitation to explore the theme, 'Scandal, Crime, and Corruption'.

While the whole program was a mix of folk culture and legend, the lurid event – the heroic, the defiant, the unjust in public acts – of the solitude of the incarcerated, the adumbrations of notorious places, the whole – more than 150

events, locales, scandals, incidents of corruption and the like – suggests overwhelmingly the retentive power of folk memory to capture minute details if they appealed, titillated and had been oral narrative heard in earlier years. It also highlights the fascination with the outré, and testifies as to the enthusiastic involvement in this memory-field of innumerable groups, schools, universities, the book trade, the police, and so many of the more assertive or imaginative in the whole fascination with the inherited and more ‘traditional’ aspects of the nation’s public discourse over crime, notoriety, and morality.

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There is a surprisingly similar set of core notions as to public memory, (national, perceived) values, the affirmation of identity, and concern for the well-being of the traditional society in so many other recent publications such as newsletters from our general field. Consider here, for example, the *ISFNR Newsletter* (that of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research, Number 4, for June 2009).⁶

And so it may well now be enough to craft some more general thoughts as to the slow progress of folklore studies from the eighteenth century, from the antiquarian, the quaint, the sensational and, perforce, the largely rural, through the industrial, and the urban, to the vaguely patronizing, and so to the present new urgency. For the media-manipulated and all-embracing interests of so many lie in conforming to the pressures that threaten to swamp both the personal identity to the eclipse of the friendly, social and therapeutic elements in the daily lives of us all.

A FIELD FOR RECOVERY⁷ OF PERSPECTIVE

Now the core driving force to what we may call the present, newly directed folklore studies would seem to be concerned with all of us as growing individuals, with the whole person, the whole landscape, the total style of living, and so with an ever deeper respect for the different diverse that is so much more common in the present global world order. In short, folklore is concerned with the modes of diversity in our real life and living together, with the nuances that have to be understood in the real-life situations of living together in community.

Thus we must need to embrace the distinctive, and the ethnic minorities that have so much expanded since the expansion of the European Union, or the various troubles in the Middle East and various specific regions in South

East Asia. For we must assist all diversity to enrich and deepen the range of human experience, and the moral value and therapeutic aspects of life. For we have now come to understand more profoundly the significance to the full living of our own daily culture and environment – as well as respecting those of the strangers now in our midst. In the process we may well come the more readily to a new appreciation of the organically created, and the truly authentic.

Now, with more public understanding than ever before, we may say that it is our culture that warms and individualizes our circumstances in this global world, where we may choose transnationalism, rather than sensationalism, and so be compassionate and understanding persons, the better able to deal the enormous threats that would seem to be in the path of the planet and all of its dwellers.

And so it is that folklore in 2009 seems to be concerned to remedy or explain some of the past's prejudices, the problems of the far too common minimal literacy, the role of the ever more intrusive media and the distractions of internet games and other escapisms. Further, we must embrace and celebrate the fact that the threatening and all-embracing global society would seem to have given wings to almost all of the traditional forms that folklore might have taken in the last two or three hundred years.

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ANOTHER WAY OF VIEWING OR CONCEPTUALIZING SOCIETY'S NECESSARY – AND INEVITABLE – WAY FORWARD

It has now seemed appropriate to me – in this penultimate section – to refer to a Japanese system of living that has anticipated many of the notions as to the present pressing needs for all mankind, and about the ever more central role that a 'new conception of the potential of folklore', as we may now choose to regard it, should play in the globalized world in which we live.

Accordingly, I will refer now in some detail to a single, most powerful and reasonably available representative text, *Education in life-fundamental culture: Growing up with nature as teacher*⁸ (1995), by Morita Yuzo. The latter was then the Chairman of the Youth Friendship Association and Director of the Yagai Bunka Kenkyu-jo (Institute for Outdoor Culture Research) in Japan.

His text has an introduction and then is set out in twelve chapters and this I will follow, in paraphrasing a select quotation, to bring out some of the core ideas so similar to those above.

Introduction

The continual advance of civilization and, consequently, the greater complexity of the larger societies bring greater risks to the normal functions of the human mind and body. The post-industrial age makes it so much harder for us to acquire – and pass on to our children – ‘the wisdom and knowledge required for living truly humane lives’, something that they do not realize as they succumb so quickly to the transient. Indeed, indeed, since the mid 1980s,

“Educators have been troubled by a rash of new and difficult problems – violence, juvenile delinquency, bullying, fear of leaving ‘the security of home, and other behavioral abnormalities verging on pathology’.” (p. 1)

In response to this moral and identity crisis, Yuzo then proceeded to develop his plan for ‘life-fundamental culture’, focusing on folk-ways for younger children, these usually practiced out of doors, being thus in sharp contrast to the formal knowledge of the classroom. This revolutionary change, he can affirm, has resulted in ‘a sense of the joy of living’, much practical knowledge, and the desire to acquire intellectual vigor and physical strength.

However, technology has threatened so many of the most ordinary realms of human experience – play, contact with nature, exposure to tradition – that were always taken for granted, – and so now they are at risk of being lost, and with them the ability to live harmoniously in human society. For contemporary children

“cannot by themselves judge or distinguish between good and evil and they do not know the real joys of creativity and innovation.” (p. 3)

Indeed, he goes on further, to argue that the key and time-honored customs need to be placed on a theoretical basis and, therefore, organized into systematic educational programs (p. 3) “thus we must develop the theory to sustain these ‘life-fundamental’ culture activities”.

Section I

Youth education is the proper training of those who will and can best succeed to the greatest legacy, the true and enriching inherited culture, but, in the outdoor sense, this must always contain that which is vital to life, genuine, and that does not fade even with the passage of time. These bounties may be summarized as the practice of nature observation – of plants, trees, fauna, marine life, and of meteorological formations; outdoor recreation, endurance walking, outdoor play and traditional games, these bestowing fitness, courage, good judgment, and self-assertiveness; history and traditions, falling under

two distinctive headings: Festivals⁹ and Annual Events; and One's Exploring the Community.

This last aspect of the individual's learning is then glossed thus: the principal aims of this program are:

- 1) increased awareness of the natural environment;
- 2) understanding of the social environment;
- 3) awareness of local history and
- 4) real communication with one's society (p. 9).

This list of therapeutic community activities is concerned with the basic abilities needed for all to become mature citizens, as well as gaining access to the cultural heritage that will help them to live a richer life, the potentially richest possible life when they grow up.

It is also pointed out that all these are so much more significant necessities now, what with small families of only one generation living together, with parents absorbed into excessive work patterns, and (all) the children driven into an American-inspired ruthless – and highly fragile – competitiveness.

Section II: Children of the high-tech society

Since ancient times, the basic training of children for adulthood was carried out primarily in the home, in and through the forms of household discipline, of training in manners, and also outside in the community. However, the post-1945 intense educational training has made children over-protected, often deprived of household tasks and of spontaneous play, lacking vitality, initiative, being unduly egotistic, impervious to the needs of others and having a phobia-like attachment to home. This whole complex has thus been styled the basic-capacities-deficiency (BCD) syndrome.

This activity-overload has produced solitaires, too intellectual by far, too busy, often much afraid of the dark, over-stimulated by various media, so that they 'are chronically tired, absent-minded... fatigued' (p. 12). It is also made very clear that the remedy is time spent out of doors, and so near to nature, where a healthy tiredness and not overloaded nervous systems are by far the most likely result.

Section III. Raising cheerful, healthy children

Post-1945 Japanese society has generally been riddled with allergies, poor health, and with numerous physiological problems produced by psychological stress, fatigue, lack of sleep, malnourishment, starvation, vulnerability to viruses, etc.

Thus Yuzo sees the ongoing core task to be that of cultivating vitality and, as concomitant, an unconstrained non-hindered imagination¹⁰, sociability, the will and ability to stay fit, and to develop the inner defensive strength to nurture body and spirit, this best attained through:

- 1) contact with the out-of doors in all four seasons;
- 2) ample exposure to the sun;
- 3) ample outdoor play and recreation;
- 4) the necessary experience of hunger, thirst and fatigue;
- 5) early rising and early to bed;
- 6) adequate exercise including walking;
- 7) nourishing food;
- 8) moderate eating and drinking;
- 9) a serious effort towards mental and physical revitalization; and
- 10) a continuing easy closeness to nature, especially in outdoor activity.

Section IV. Personality and individuality

This section discussed these two possible ways of looking at the essential differences between the group and the society itself. It is stressed that both are needed, but groups need both institutions and wisdom, whereas personality refers to the traits and talents of a particular person, as they are recognized – and valued – in that society, in short for the leader role. Yet personality must not be accompanied by distrust in others, but, rather, the ability to learn from others through experience, as well as tradition, custom and ethics. Accordingly, individuality must be contained, lest it should undermine the greatest gift in the leader, a social conscience. It is also stressed that so many of these desiderata are formed in childhood, whereas the less altruistic, selfish individuals lack an ingrained sense of social obligations and responsibilities.

Section V. The rediscovery of ‘fundamental attributes’

This section is really a reflective focus on the difference between the instructional nature of teaching – cf. the Latin *doceo* (‘I teach’), which would become the role of the Christian religion, where there was certitude between what could be implanted in the individual – and then contrast this with the ancient Germanic languages’ notion in the word, *learn*, i.e. a concern with what ‘needs to be understood’. Then the person practicing this slow, patient, activity, will thus come to his/her sense of that acceptance of the ways and mores of one’s society, community, group. With such learning, the youth can grow into the society, as the individual member matures into a more adult understanding of

it, in fact of its 'educational anthropology'. Namely, this means the acquisition of folk wisdom, practical knowledge and survival skills, as well as regular excellent health.

Thus the folk learning embraces both customs and good moral behavior within the family and also towards those outside it, Yuzo defining its implanted, encouraged qualities as the following:

“thoughtfulness, kindness, drive [i.e. motivation], endurance, conscientiousness, ambition, a sense of justice, a sense of responsibility, and self-respect.” (p. 18)

Yuzo's concerns about 'education' are clearly that it opens up individuals, lest it should falter spiritually, physically, and in the sphere of social, community participation, of perception, expression, and of selflessness. His challenge is that we need many more 'opportunities and arenas for learning the specific lifestyle skills that link person to person, and support and enrich the dialogue between our society and the individual maturing member of it.

Section VI. Cultivating humaneness

This short section is concerned with the right hemisphere of the brain that is responsible for non-logical, intuitive, integrative functions, including creativity and enthusiasm. Clearly both hemispheres in combination shape our personalities, but with the full impact of the left hemisphere only coming together about the age of fifteen. These are, ideally, in a harmony then, in order to achieve a proper balance, and so an appropriate individual character development, which he then defines as cultivating: “Energy, imagination, ability to carry out tasks, the fascination of real endurance and enthusiasm, total immersion in a pursuit, experiencing the joy of beginning the processes of learning and understanding.” (pp. 21–22)

Section VII. Nature is universal truth

This section may be summarized in the following way:

“There are places all over the world that are believed to be sacred and all of them are places where the natural resources are abundant so that the greatest number of people feels exalted by lingering there.” (pp. 23–24)

This then leads to his larger reflection that true meaningful culture may be defined as 'the ethos evolved by human beings in response to their environ-

ment or with (tamed) nature' and the deep regret that the conceptual systems known as 'religions' have created so many battles for ascendancy, rather than promulgated an understanding of the universal need to live by universal truths.

Section VIII. Nature and language

Yuzo's approach to language is intensely poetic, deeming all languages and dialects to have been primarily local¹¹ or parochial, being word lists:

“of detailed descriptions of the objects used, the floral and faunal life observed, and to have either withered, or, as populations spread, the experience and the perceptions of society came to be shared over wider areas, the use of words for daily conversation spread, tribes were formed and unified languages took shape.” (p. 25)

His next section thus focuses on the imprinting effect of the mother tongue, one always emotionally and culturally grounded in our primal, earliest experiences, spoken in our daily lives from birth through to eleven or twelve years, and so less learned than imprinted.

Taking Japan as an extreme case, he would argue that the second half of the twentieth century has seen so much of language acquired as a result of book learning, rather than from play or from nature. Slang he sees as a social phenomenon of short duration or significance, antipathetic to traditions, the mind and the heart, and working to effect a cheapening of the joys of a true maturity in harmony with family and the natural environment.

Section IX. Deep stratum or surface stratum culture

All racial, colonial societies have had the vast majority of their members aware of the natural environment and familiar with man's common ideas about it, whereas the more 'civilized' people are familiar with much human intervention in this. Now there may be shared norms in the lifestyles of all, with the core folk wisdom being accompanied by appropriate language, customs, and physical and mental discipline. The core is passed down directly by parent to child, is strong in local flavor, and difficult to universalize. The private surface culture, although it may make life refined and enjoyable, tends to change with the times, and so be susceptible to a commercial nexus. Yuzo argues that the deep stratum in culture is best transmitted to all members of the society through compulsory education or, if you like, the common experience of all those in that community.

Section X. Forms of play¹² and cultural traits

This section is remarkably perspicacious in its focus on the original ‘ethnic’ background to all children’s play, the factors of leadership, early paternalism, solidarity, with power based on seniority, ability or merit, and so a progression from innocence, through sharing – a time where children worked alongside their parents – then advance to adult competitiveness. Yuzo argues that the loss of the second phase – that of practical skills, appreciation of the artistic, and the practice or imitation of ‘crafts’ – has been tragic for the [Japanese] individual and the society as:

“...the acquisition of the shared fundamental culture had needed to succeed to enable young people to grow into better human beings.” (p. 32)

Indeed, this section quietly moves to stress that these early communal activities are fun, relaxing and entertaining, with deeper functions such as competition, and the following of rules. Accepting defeat, choosing leaders, practicing adult roles, and taking risks in order to reap rewards, are all involved, as well as the ‘play’ affording situations – formal and informal – that can serve as harmless releases of hostility, competitiveness, as well as challenges to the imagination.

Thus, it is argued that culture can only be transmitted through: domestic experience, play, discipline of mind and body, contact with grandparents, and the early recognition that the young are and will be (the) transmitters of culture. And so,

“...without age-diverse group play, annual customary events and festivals, it would be extremely difficult to transmit anything of a society’s culture.” (p. 34)

Section XII. Life-fundamental education as the nature-experience and one’s basic learning

His last summary section stresses that all beings are part of two environments, the natural and the social, the first, when fully understood, giving us *mores*, ‘moral values’ and ever teaching us the value of work, the potential for every man’s advancement, the meaning of the passage of time and the deep wisdom of co-existence. This realm of intuition, observation of all around us and that deeper understanding will teach us the whole range of necessary respects, whereas the social world is the world of the acquisitive person, the world of moral and other challenges, and the world of reasoning. Yet it is also the one which has so tragically threatened nature, meddling with its greedy processes, for ‘gain’.

And so, his penultimate challenge to all people phrases it, is to remember that – since ancient times, human beings have attained their optimal potential by learning from and within the natural environment, [while] nature has fostered the development of [various] complex and traditional cultures. (pp. 35–36).

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AND SO, A RETURN TO THE ISSUE OF THE PLACE OF FOLKLORE NOW IN THE VARIOUS DISCIPLINES TREATED AT THE TERTIARY ADULT LEVEL

This last and much-cited Japanese essay has, I trust, assisted us to see more clearly the place of Folklore in the various disciplines that are deemed worthy of study in the early 21st century.

In Australia there had been an effort in the later 1980s, as the society moved towards its Bi-Centennial of White Settlement in 1988, that Folklore and Folk Studies should be a tertiary discipline but that suggestion fell away into oblivion, despite a National Committee recommending that step, and since then there has been a reluctance to place the discipline within the academy, despite the amazing growth of ‘heritage’ activities. And in the United Kingdom the same process – as already indicated in both Japan, and Australia – had occurred, despite the awareness of conservative resistance to the movement in many areas of society. And here Professor Widdowson¹³ may be once again quoted:

“The second half of the twentieth century has witnessed a remarkable resurgence of interest in the cultural heritage of Britain. This manifests itself in a variety of ways...increased public awareness for the need of the conservation of the natural environment, widespread concern to discover more about the traditional modes of lifestyle and behavior which are felt to be characteristic of British people as a whole and of the complex networks of regionalism social and ethnic groups, with their more localized affiliations, which exist and interact with the macro-culture.”
(p. 209)

Although John Widdowson’s essay is wide-ranging, its core is remarkably similar to both the initial Congress analysis and the report from Japan, and his concern is with the whole corpus of folklore, including language despite the more recent preoccupation with ‘customs, beliefs, arts and crafts’ (p. 210). Indeed, the most telling parts of his paper and address are to be found in his early challenge:

“In most other countries of the western world, folklore stands alongside other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences as a fully fledged subject in its own right. Its actual and potential contribution to cultural life is not only widely acknowledged, but also capitalized upon for a variety of utilitarian and/or aesthetic purposes.” (p. 210).

It is not my purpose to paraphrase this fine paper, but, rather, to now quote one of its penultimate challenges to dynamic community action, to government decision and so to the greatest educational recognition of one of the cornerstones of British [or, indeed, any other country’s] – history, culture and so identity, an action never more needed than in the face of the overwhelming pressures on it in the shrinking world. I quote from his final appeal:

“Tradition informs and pervades virtually every aspect of public and private life in England today, from the panoply and pageantry of state investing the monarchy, parliament, church, the judiciary and the armed forces, through civic ceremony and social hierarchy to the more mundane established routines of our working lives and our domestic arrangements.” (p. 219)

His other tone, which is of more gentle reflection, is then encapsulated in a manner much like the Japanese scholar cited above:

“Is it traditional for the English to decry their own traditions? If so, the arrogance this betrays is not only unique, but clearly belies the fact that, as in every other culture, tradition is an essential ingredient of the glue that holds our society together.” (p. 219)

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NOT A CONCLUSION

This musing began with an analysis of the American Folklore Society’s Draft Program for October 2009, and it has covered much ground, but the core message would seem to be the same, that one must be imaginative, committed to the cause, and wanting desperately to shed light on various of the myriad subjects that the folk must need to learn and share.

The denial of facilities for teaching, exasperating though it is, makes the work of collection, and then of ultimate sharing and publication that much more difficult, and so that it is much more satisfying when attained. All the technologies that have shrunk the world project across the globe at frightening speeds, and places that were once thought of as remote, distant in cultural

terms, are now presented as familiar. Yet this time-space compression is not necessarily true for everyone in all locations. Nor is it the case that television images of others far away assist real understanding of the social fabric of other countries and concern for the less fortunate.

And the key factor for folklore knowledge and understanding is the sudden and often proximate factor of intercultural migration, an event which demands greater sensitivity from all, even as it is needed to combat environmental degeneration and the horrifying disruption of traditional ways of life. And this may also be folklore in the best sense that can draw us into new social relationships and understandings which transcend the conventional political, economic and cultural boundaries. Yet it is the deepest understanding of folklore which will enable us to understand and sympathize with these upheavals which bring to us divergence of identity and lifestyle. An integrated economy does not allow for the divergences of traditional mores, diets, dress or religion.

The last point to make is that it is folklore – or the richest and most sympathetic study of their social history and culture – that can and does explain other people’s experiences, values, their talk and identities¹⁴, and so will best obtain our respectful and sympathetic imagination at this time of the greatest global national and cultural maelstrom.

NOTES

¹ This is a personal response to the many pages of provisional titles and suggestions for dialogue which are the advance documents for this very considerable national — and in some part international — Annual Meeting.

² A further prompting for this analysis of the field, as it is configured at the present time, was given by the recent news in our discipline that Emeritus Professor J. D. A. Widdowson, the former head of the National Centre for English Cultural Tradition, based at the University of Sheffield, in England, was considering the launching of a new electronic folklore journal with the likely title of ‘Tradition Today’.

More recently Professor Widdowson — in addition to the retention of his interest in his long running university-affiliated, but more public, Traditional Heritage Museum, 605, Eccleshall Road, Sheffield, S11 8PR, England — has established a new research centre outside that city, the postal address being: Spring Hill, Woodside, Edale S33 7ZB, United Kingdom.

He had also, fairly recently, given a brief but helpful history of the University’s academic and more folklore-based ‘traditional’ Center in his ‘A History of NATCECT, in Sheffield (U. K.)’, published in *Australian Folklore* 21, (2006, pp. 12–15). [The acronym stands for ‘The National Centre for English Cultural Tradition’.]

³ Much of this refers to public space, whether civic, religious, recreational, progressive (i.e. concerned with right of way), or memorial and reverential.

⁴ This is, clearly, an issue in almost all of the social sciences and the humanities, while a similar lowering of earlier barriers and walls of earlier exclusions is commonplace in the physical, medical and other sciences.

⁵ This was issued by the History Council of New South Wales, for, as the Premier, N. Rees, states in the booklet, 'New South Wales is both the starting point of modern Australian history and the place of our national story [and] so is full of contending narratives. (*op. cit.*, p.2)

⁶ I have refrained from either direct quotation – or any form of précis – of the surprisingly similar thoughts to be found there in the words of the ISFNPR President, Professor Ülo Valk, in his message to the other members, 'Dear Friends in Folklore Research'. (*loc. cit.*, pp. 3–4)

⁷ It may be called that J. R. R. Tolkien, in his 1930s essay, 'On Fairy-Stories', in his treatment there of the phenomenology of Hope, had referred to one of both notions' benefits was 'recovery... From the drear, the prison, and from despair'.

⁸ This work was published in 1995, and then translated by Lynne E. Riggs, and published in English by the Youth Friendship Association in Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo, Japan.

⁹ These may be found discussed in *Folklore: An Electronic Journal of Folklore*, Vol. 7 (1998), in Kristin Kuutma's 'Festival as Communicative Performance and Celebration of Ethnicity', and, more generally – and for Australia, in *Folklore: An Electronic Journal of Folklore*, Vol. 34 (2006), in my own article, 'The Range – and Purposes – of Australian Public Festivals that are Functioning at Present'.

¹⁰ This might very well be measured by the degree of enjoyment of riddles in a community. And so compare the 2007 paper in *Folklore: An Electronic Journal of Folklore*, Vol. 35, namely 'Riddles as a Community Psychological Phenomenon in Folklore: Myths, Fairytales, Personal Literature, Art', by Ana Stefanova.

¹¹ This is certainly the case with the many of Australia's closely regional aboriginal languages, as was first noticed by the surveyors, missionaries, police authorities and field anthropologists in the discrete areas of New South Wales, in the later nineteenth century.

I have developed this now fairly standard notion in my cultural text, *The Land of Ulitarra: Early Records of the Aborigines of the Mid-North Coast of New South Wales* (first edition in 1964, and in a fully revised 'bi-centennial' edition in 1988).

¹² It is, surely, significant that there has just (April 2009) appeared the excellent, two-volume, Sage-issued *Encyclopedia of Play in Today's Society*, edited by Rodney P. Carlisle. The work with more than 450 individual entries is both readable and remarkably perceptive in the way in which it finds and analyses the ubiquitous patterns of play, both traditional and new, as are needed in every healthy society.

Key themes are the sections on: history of play; play and education; psychology of play; sociology of play, as well as many other penetrating and sophisticated questions on issues like video and online games.

¹³ His article, 'English Language and Folklore: A National Resource' in *Folklore*, Vol. 101: ii (1990), is to be found at pp. 209–220.

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¹⁴ Although it was read later, the present writer is pleased to note the degree of sympathy for his analysis and proposals that may be found in this electronic earlier paper, Gerald L. Pocius's 'Folklore and the Creation of National Identities: A North American Perspective'. Its electronic reference is <http://haldjas.folklore.ee/rl/pubte/ee/bif/bif1/pocius.html>.