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CULTURAL BROKERAGE
Forms of Intellectual Practice in Society

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The Journal of Folklore Research, a publication of the Indiana University Folklore Institute, was established in 1964 under the title Journal of the Folklore Institute. Devoted to the scholarly study of folklore, the Journal provides an international forum for current theory and research. The Editorial Board welcomes substantive articles of current theoretical interest to folklore as an international discipline.

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SESSION II

Theorizing Practice: The Reflexive Turn in Public Folklore

Mary Hufford

WORKING IN THE CRACKS: PUBLIC SPACE, ECOLOGICAL CRISIS, AND THE FOLKLORIST

The state’s divided. Some of them have to work in the shadows to help you out.
— Randy Sprouse, Director, Coal River Mountain Watch, Sundial, W.V.

Folklore is not alone in experiencing the kind of identity crisis that has us imagining new names for the field. As Bill Readings argues in his book The University in Ruins, the backdrop against which we have defined our discipline is shifting not only in the academy but also in the broader social arena, in tandem with the decline of the nation-state and the rise of the transnational corporation. Though the power of the nation-state is waning, its continuing official recognition of academically-trained folklorists as experts comes to us as a resource. We might think of it as a place to stand amid the ruins—ruins that include structuralism, constructivism, cultural relativism, positivist social science, and the ideal of “decontaminated critique” (Stewart 1996).

Out of this intellectual and institutional debris we must somehow refashion our field and our disciplinary object. Our fieldwork teaches us that such refashioning flourishes outside the academy, where vernacular worlds wrought of the shards of history and everyday life “contest and sometimes even subvert the imagined worlds of the official mind and of the entrepreneurial mentality that surround them” (Appadurai 1990:7). We find ourselves with one foot grounded in the official spaces of the academy, the government, and the private sector, and the other anchored in the “between” of a constantly emerging vernacular.

Public folklore’s practice of assisting in creating visibility for vernacular worlds in a democratic public sphere fits William Sullivan’s concept of civic professionalism: “professionalism opposed to the narrowing implicit in its technical form, a professionalism designed to complement and strengthen a new civil politics” (1995:61). Hindsight shows that folklorists, narrowly viewed as authenticators of tradition, have helped erect that backdrop against which moderns define themselves (Köstlin 1997a:263). What has
the supple and constantly shifting vernacularity folklorists now study to do with strengthening a new civil politics?

One effect of the globalizing economy and society is a proliferation of heritage legislation, programs, and sites. Folklorists are among the culture workers bidding for contracts to help cultivate local and regional identities in places hard hit by global economic restructuring and related displacements (Abrams 1994). Though “heritage” could signal a new round of “aesthetic compensation for economic backwardness” that sustains the status quo (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1988), critics argue that it can also be staged as readily from the political left as from the right (Corner and Harvey 1991). “Heritage” may even offer a way to “rebuild and enhance connectedness” (Sullivan 1995:233), but connectedness to what?

A chronic threat of instability seems endemic to a discipline that engages with alternative worlds taking shape in cracks formed by the grid of Enlightenment ways. We may stand in the spaces of the grid, but our passion is for what’s in the cracks. That the official institutions defined by that grid tend to constitute our disciplinary object as “leftovers” rather than “alternatives” makes our position all the more intriguing. How can we maneuver around within our tight allocation as authenticators of “tradition” to focus on the forces holding “folklore” and “modernity” in place, and from there to recast “traditions” as the stuff of which alternative modernities could be made?

Building on Michel de Certeau’s metaphor of poaching in the cracks of the planned world as a paramount modern practice, we might think of the spaces on the grid as private hunting preserves, the provinces of academic departments and government agencies alike. In the United States, the official space of folklife embraces a wide array of genres and their producers—cowboy poets, icon painters, gospel and blues singers, Afghan rug weavers, bread makers—the sorts of forms outlined in the American Folklife Preservation Act. This appears to be a neatly outlined preserve, but the boundaries lose clarity at close range. Professionals working in public folklore tend to have their eyes on what’s ill-served by a particular process of carving up the world. We scavenge in the exclusionary enclosures of art, education, history, suburbia, and themed landscapes to create a public space for what might otherwise be left out, bringing such phenomena as low-rider cars, graffiti, sheep painting, narco-corridos, and roadside memorials from the margins into the center, however transiently. Folklore doesn’t fit on the grid because it is not about the building of knowledge, but about illuminating what Foucault terms the “insurrection of subjugated knowledges” (1980:81). This insurrection is always at risk of being contained, miniaturized, domesticated, and marginalized by a status as folklore, particularly where folklore is allowed to become the province of a narrowly defined and defended profession.²

The idea of working in the cracks of a hegemonic order derives from Michel De Certeau’s study of “the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical, and makeshift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of ‘discipline’” (1984:xiv-xv).³ The idea of modeling public folklore (and indeed the entire business of dwelling in the ruins) on vernacular practices draws on Kathleen Stewart’s proposal to model anthropological discourse after what she calls “the space on the side of the road.” Her image is based on the local practice of reporting things that happen, unplanned and accidentally, en route. Such happenings, which unfold literally in spaces on the sides of roads, license those marked by them to fashion narrative spaces that disrupt linear discourse and form imaginaries in which to dwell on the side of America’s relentless track of progress. What would the subversive project of “arresting transcendent critique” (Stewart 1996:21) look like as public folklore?

To an extent, this is how public folklore already operates on its less public, tactical, and decidedly makeshift side. Heritage planners look to folklorists for genres, performers, and sites to fill in gaps in the corporate state’s transcendent narrative of progress. Inverting the transcendent narrative, folklorists attend to stories that lie immanent in deindustrialized landscapes created by capital flight (Hudson 1992; Abrams 1994). We’ve gained access to the preserves of art and education, largely under the banner of folk arts, but we’ve taken little advantage of the fertile ground that public anthropologists have broken in historic preservation and environmental planning. For example, with the concept of “traditional history,” the Navajo Nation’s historic preservation office has forced the unmarked “history” that means “Western history” to show itself (Downer et al. 1994). And with the notion of “traditional cultural properties,” the National Register of Historic Places has expanded “cultural properties” to include sites that moor localities for subaltern publics—sites tied to local practices of narration, craft, and the staging of seasonal events like ritual immersion in rivers (Parker and King n.d.).

The division of governments and academies into domains that deal with environment (hard sciences) on the one hand and culture (social sciences) on the other helps to reduce ecological crisis to a mere environmental problem, when in fact, as Ulrich Beck points out, ecological crisis is an effect of “a profound institutional crisis of industrial society itself” (1994:8). We’re caught in the bind of a system that hires archaeologists to certify that there are no cultural resources to obstruct the path of development and folklorists to authenticate the abiding culture of displaced peoples (Hufford in press). Overcoming the barriers that hold nature and culture and subject and object rigidly apart entails a great deal of maneuvering (Stewart 1996:74–75).

When folklorists have been invited to participate in environmental impact assessment, they are expected to do so as detached social scientists. Yet
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know Latin complained about being closed out of the discourse: "A contemporary protested that to give plants hard Latin names when they already had easy English ones would mean that in the future only learned botanists would be able to identify them: to class them botanically...so that nobody but a botanist can find them out, appears something like writing an English grammar in Hebrew. You explain a thing by making it unintelligible" (1983:86).

Such knowledge is continuously subjugated through its reproduction as folklore in the arena of environmental education. For example, popular nature guides to this day anachronize alternative medicinal and domestic uses for plants, consigning them to pioneer and Native American pasts. Staged repeatedly in campfire talks and guided nature walks, such folklore helps to define the experience of modernity in spaces set apart for that purpose (Kostlin 1997a). It also exemplifies, in a romantic guise, what Barbara Rose Johnson terms a "discourse of debasement": a universal discourse fundamental to the process of controlling the periphery and its wealth of cultural resources. She argues that "[t]he pervasiveness of this discourse in the everyday language, media, school curriculum materials, and in the views and policies of external agents (teachers, agricultural and fishery extension agents, shopkeepers, and so forth) eventually destroys the self-esteem and sense of worth of peripheral populations and removes their motivation to control their destiny" (1995:116). Similarly, physicist Vandana Shiva notes that "[c]entral to the privatization of knowledge and biodiversity is the devaluation of local knowledge" (1997:68).

Enshrined as folklore and enclaved in past times and spaces, local knowledge falls conveniently beyond the pale of environmental review. Of the deliberate acts of forgetting that underlie the clearing of spaces for development, Keith Basso writes, "What is ignored are the cultural instruments with which [the Apache] fashion understandings of their environments, the ideational resources with which they constitute their surroundings and invest them with value and significance." Basso further points out that human ecologists searching for statistical regularities and functional interdependencies "are usually obliged to regard the semiotic dimensions of human environments as 'epiphenomena' that lie outside the proper sphere of their concern" (1984:48). Reconstituting that "proper sphere of concern" is partly how I see my work.

How do we imagine our participation as folklorists in the public sphere? In a collection of essays critiquing the Habermasian model of the public sphere, Nancy Fraser argues that a viable model needs to take into account the existence of multiple publics, some weaker and some more powerful than others. The publics she terms "subaltern" are the publics that folklorists tend to broker into the larger public sphere. In fact, the American
Folklore Preservation Act of 1976 codifies an assumption that cultural visibility enhances political footing and that political footing depends on the capacity to anchor oneself publicly in the material world (Bressler 1995). Thus, the American Folklife Center was rationalized as a way for Congress to serve the interests of underrepresented constituencies—i.e., subaltern publics.

Fraser’s public sphere is a Habermasian “theater” wherein “political participation is enacted through the medium of talk” (1992:110). Public folklore operates on the premise that this participation involves not only talk, but also a wide range of forms of display (Bendix and Noyes 1998). Here the concepts of performance and genre are among folklore’s most valuable contributions to a workable model of the public sphere. Public folklore in the United States has for several decades的确是Dell Hymes’s call to recognize that “the shaping of deeply felt values into meaningful, expressive form is present in all communities, and will find some means of expression among all” (1975:348).

Reconstituted as “folk arts,” such meaningful forms come to enact presence and participation in the public sphere. Critics contend that a rather dicey quid pro quo is this: The subaltern public gains presence in the public sphere by lending its expressive forms to the state’s plenum. Nations achieve presence and worth in a global arena by possessing and displaying their cultural properties before the world (Handler 1988; Cantwell 1993). Heritage legislation is redolent of such imagery. For instance, promoting his Heritage Areas Act of 1993, New York’s Maurice D. Hinchey argued, “The story of the family heirlooms tossed out with the trash because no one knew their value at the time is a familiar one. It is our responsibility to see that the nation’s heirlooms aren’t similarly discarded.” In the accumulation of such heirlooms, it’s not hard to see the collective version of possessive individualism, an ideology of endless self-development (Handler 1988). How can the promotion of folk arts subvert this ideology?

Marshall Berman argues that “the cultural commodity market offers the only media in which dialogue on a public scale can take place and no idea can reach or change moderns unless it can be marketed and sold to them” (1982:118). What are the ideas we market through vernacular material expression? Can we possibly exploit the entrepreneurial mentality to undermine its corrosive effect on the communal?

It seems to me that public folklore’s engagement with mimetic materials, whether folk arts or landscapes, contributes to what Scott Lash calls a “hermeneutics of retrieval.” The goal of this hermeneutics is to “lay open the ontological foundations of communal being-in-the-world,” in part by pointing to “a grounded set of substantive goods as the basis of any set of communal ethics” (1994:146). The “substantive goods” here embraces not only folk arts, but also the commons that modernization continually plunders.

Consider, for example, the present assault on the commons by “the Terminator,” a potato genetically engineered by Monsanto, a Saint Louis-based chemical corporation. Developed with public dollars under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Terminator is a group of genes that can sterilize the seeds for any crop plant, eventually ensuring Monsanto’s control of the fertile seed supply. Writing for the New York Times, Michael Pollan notes that “[t]he Terminator will allow companies like Monsanto to privatize one of the last great commons in nature—the genetics of the crop plants that civilization has developed over the past 10,000 years” (25 Oct. 1998, p. 62). In anticipation of this sort of enclosure, heritage seed banks are proliferating.

The end of the commons marks the beginning of folklore. We are well acquainted with the way in which various forms of cultural mitigation have helped to foreclose the very commons to which they are a concession. In the United States, national parks have been formed as a way of setting natural and cultural heritage apart, out of the path of bulldozers. The establishment of the Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks in the Appalachian mountains during the 1930s eerily replayed the clearances effected in England centuries earlier. The clearances were accomplished during a period of intense interest in Appalachian folklore as a threshold to a national myth of Anglo-Saxon origins (Batteau 1990; Whisman 1983). Here what was displaced culturally became the object of display. Every national and state park I have been to in the Appalachian Mountains, for instance, has a pioneer farm, village, or museum with interpretive signage paying homage to the hardy early settlers in the manner of the landscape gardens, a way of anachronizing a way of life shown to be inevitably doomed.

The national parks embody figurative clearings that conceal the acts of forgetting, which subaltern publics remember (Williams 1985; Perdue and Martin-Perdue 1979). Beyond the borders of Shenandoah National Park, for instance, descendants of evacuees incorporate as “Children of the Shenandoah.” They have begun to stage their own hermeneutics of retrieval, asking that the story of displacement become part of the park’s public presentation (Dean 1997).

Modernity’s occluded view of what’s outside the garden forms a proper topic for a hermeneutics of retrieval, but the aesthetic canons of the garden inhibit the telling of these stories. Many of the American Folklife Center’s field projects have been undertaken in collaboration with the National Park Service. In the early 1990s, Rita Moonsammy, Dillon Bustin, Karen Hudson and I participated on a planning team for a cultural heritage center on the New River Gorge National River in West Virginia (Hufford and Moonsammy 1992). The New River Gorge makes a perfect landscape garden. As Ken Sullivan, then-historian with the state’s division of culture
and history, remarked in a video, “In the New River Gorge you can find within close confines . . . a lot of history that in other parts of Appalachia occupied a lot more space both geographically and in time. So New River makes a nice case history in industrialization: how it happens, how it stops.” Sealing this history firmly in the past, the state’s legislators have banned the practice of strip-mining for coal within view of the river, where whitewater guides take hundreds of visitors a day during the summer season.

On the heels of the New River project, I began working with a scientific organization, the Lucy Braun Association for the Mixed Mesophytic Forest (Hufford 1999). This project was centered on the Coal River watershed, just south and west of New River. The Lucy Braun Association’s primary interest was in local observations of forest decline and the relationship of this decline to acid rain, primarily generated by coal-fired utilities plants in the Ohio River Valley. The “commons” at risk in this case were the global commons of air and a forest that satisfies a global need for carbon-sequestering sinks. Among ecologists, the mixed mesophytic forest (a.k.a. the “Mother Forest”) is known as the world’s oldest and biologically richest temperate-zone hardwood forest. Ostensibly, our role in the project was to document local observations of forest decline and to assess cultural impacts, but the tape-recorded conversations and events register a rather different project, a project of anchoring a local public in the public space of the mountains.

This public space, officially owned for two hundred years by absentee owners, has long been used as what anthropologist Beverly Brown (1996) terms a “de facto commons.” We might think of this commons as one of those falling spaces of industrial capitalism—spaces privately or publicly owned that appear to be abandoned and on the fringes—the vacant lots in cities, the open tracts of land in the countryside. Thinking of them as follows keeps in mind their chronic susceptibility to development through gentrification, extraction, and public works, but meanwhile available for materially mooring subaltern publics. We find a prime example of this in the casitas of New York City, traditional country houses built by the Puerto Rican community in abandoned lots and used for socializing and gardening until the city steps in with other plans (Zeitlin 1994).

It is in such spaces that displaced publics (whose commons were confiscated by industry and the state) stage reappearances. These publics, and their modes of retrieving presence, warrant our attention. Over the past century on Coal River, occupying such spaces has been a vigorous cultural practice. Massive slate dumps become places for male fraternizing around campfires; abandoned highwalls stabilized by earthen wedges become “hill climbs” scrawled with the graffiti of off-road vehicle trails; and “sediment pools” designed to filter water en route to a stream become “party ponds.” For more than a century, land companies have more or less tolerated practices that amount to living off of the “lord’s waste”—wherein people hunt a variety of game, gather herbs, berries, and roots, scavenge for firewood and coal, and visit cemeteries and homesteads from which ancestors were evicted. Thus, vast tracts of land have become a de facto commons for people on Coal River, an exceedingly vulnerable space in which its public is anchored.

In the 1990s, federal clean air legislation created a demand for the clean burning coal of central Appalachia, which coal companies are extracting through a method known as “mountaintop removal.” This method is dismantling 500 square miles of mountains in the state, most of it in the counties immediately to the west of New River. On Coal River, this means loss of access to a de facto forested commons in which a subaltern public has anchored itself for generations. The ecological crisis and the destruction of the commons on Coal River are precisely what have been screened out of the view of recreational users on New River.

How to get it back into view? Countering the New River Gorge’s denial of the strip-mining, the Stanley family creates a park next to its cemetery on the top of Kayford Mountain. To get to this park, and the local concerts and pig roasts staged there on all the national holidays, one has to drive through the very famous and deteriorating settlements of Cabin Creek, along the only public road in the state from which mountaintop removal may be seen. The Stanley family’s toehold is in fact assisted by the Federal Antiquities Act, which bans mining within three hundred feet of a cemetery—an instance of legislation that protects the footing in space of subaltern publics. Here the public display of traditional food, music, and potholes punched into the cemetery by “flyrock” dynamited from the mines calls attention to industry’s enclosure of public space (and its communal ethic and aesthetic) in the mountains. It gets favorable attention from U.S. News and World Report, Business Week, ABC’s Nightline, the New York Times, and the Washington Post.

Is there a role for folklorists in this, or is this, as Dorothy Noyes has asked, “a conversation that is already going on without us”? I look at the names on a listserve for a task force on mountaintop removal in which I participate. This listserve enunciates in cyberspace a mini-public sphere that includes members of the Coal River Mountain Watch (directed by a former United Mineworker member), lawyers, foresters, ecologists, writers, a sociologist, a folklorist (me), an anthropologist, and a variety of other activists. We mediate as opportunities arise. While lawyers think of ways to intervene in suits against industry and the state, scientists critique the U.S. Forest Service’s report on forest health, and activists write letters to editors, I work on cultural issues. This may involve sending comments to state and federal agencies (as a citizen), attending meetings (as a board member of a group called Appalachian Voices), interviewing state officials about
and history, remarked in a video, "In the New River Gorge you can find within close confines ... a lot of history that in other parts of Appalachia occupied a lot more space both geographically and in time. So New River makes a nice case history in industrialization: how it happens, how it stops." Sealing this history firmly in the past, the state's legislators have banned the practice of strip-mining for coal within view of the river, where whitewater guides take hundreds of visitors a day during the summer season.

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cultural policy and writing articles that focus on cultural issues and the state of the commons (as a folklorist).

Ultimately the subjugation of knowledge and skills that sustain the commons amounts to the suppression of alternative ideas in what is supposed to be a free market system. Folklorists and other culture workers in some instances have brokered such knowledge back into the marketplace of cultural ideas. Examples that come to mind include Yellowstone National Park's recourse to Native Americans to manage burgeoning buffalo herds (Howell 1994); the efforts made by the City of Charleston, South Carolina (with funding from the NEA folk arts program) to secure access to sweetgrass for basketworkers whose presence is important in the tourist economy (Rosengarten 1994); Open-Hearth Education's retraining of industrial workers to interpret their heritage (Abrams 1994); and City Lore's advocacy on behalf of the Puerto Rican casitas, arguing that these serve as social clubs that ameliorate delinquency and ultimately reduce the city's crime-fighting expenses (Zeitlin 1994). In all of these examples, the cultural brokerage consists of making connections among aspects of life held rigidly apart in the process of environmental review, of bringing what environmental review has made "epiphenomenal" back to the center.

In southern West Virginia, as New River becomes a node in a new and official Coal Heritage Trail erected to bolster tourism when the coal is gone, a subaltern public on Coal River refashions and displays a history assembled from the ruins of a co-opted commons. Out of the bridge that spanned the river at the now-dismantled coal town of Edwight, one man built a traditional log cabin in which he displays artifacts of a confiscated way of life, artifacts he scavenged from roaming the mountains behind the gates. The New River Gorge National River is grafted onto this commons, private and quasi-public spaces-such scavenging models a practice for us, in which there is little room for maneuver. The space of folk arts seems hardly big enough to contain or address the problem of publics suppressed rigidly apart in the process of environmental review, of bringing what people, places and events.

By the closure of commons around which they have formed. But such a space does provide a kind of anchorage for what I see as public folklore's real practice: scavenging in a wide range of preserves to make room for realities spoken, sung, danced, cooked, hunted, sewn, cultivated, and built around the cracks of a hegemonic order that is never complete.

Working in the cracks is a way of deploying Bourdieu's "systematic uncovering of the unthought categories which themselves are precursors of our more self-conscious practices" (Lash 1994:154). For a useful discussion of how folklorists have strategically defined folklore in ways both broad and narrow, see Steve Zeitlin's forthcoming article "I'm a Folklorist and You're Not," in the Journal of American Folklore.

3. One often hears the term "infiltration" used by public folklorists describing their work to each other. For instance, writing of a colleague's discomfort with the outsider status implied by the term "infiltrate," Sue Euterio comments, "I often use the term 'sneak,' as in, I've been sneaking folklore into the curriculum I've been teaching in a high school for the last few years" (1998:5).

4. I want to thank Rosanne Healy, a botanist at Iowa State University, for bringing this to my attention.

5. Displays of the sort folklorists are interested in often constitute what Scott Lash calls "aesthetic reflexivity on everyday life... via a mode of not conceptual but mimetic mediation" (1994:136).

Gisela Welz

FOLKLORISTICS AS AN INTERSTITIAL PRACTICE:
RESPONSE TO MARY HUFFORD

In her paper, Mary Hufford suggests that the discipline of folklore studies, which is always in and of the public sphere, can be infused with a new, critical, oppositional, and even subversive energy if we model ourselves and our practice after the interstitial cultures we study. Michel de Certeau evocatively described these vernacular cultures as lacking a space of their own but flourishing in cracks and crevices, where they are easily overlooked. Cunning and Eigensinn (obstinacy) enable them to make poaching raids upon the system, taking advantage of opportunities that open up just for the blink of an eye.

At the symposium, I took heart in Hufford's assertion that, as she put it in her presentation, "scattered among the enclosed worlds of official preservation and progress" we can create "room for maneuvering" by working in the cracks. She suggests then that there is a "gap between what folklorists think they do and what the public seems to think they do." Public sector folklorists tactically profit from an image of affirming the ideology of the national-state, and by extension, of the market economy. It is under the cover...
cultural policy and writing articles that focus on cultural issues and the state of the commons (as a folklorist).

Ultimately the subjugation of knowledge and skills that sustain the commons amounts to the suppression of alternative ideas in what is supposed to be a free market system. Folklorists and other culture workers in some instances have brokered such knowledge back into the marketplace of cultural ideas. Examples that come to mind include Yellowstone National Park’s recourse to Native Americans to manage burgeoning buffalo herds (Howell 1994); the efforts made by the City of Charleston, South Carolina (with funding from the NEA folk arts program) to secure access to sweetgrass for basketmakers whose presence is important in the tourist economy (Rosengarten 1994); Open-Heartland Education’s retraining of industrial workers to interpret their heritage (Abrams 1994); and City Lore’s advocacy on behalf of the Puerto Rican casitas, arguing that these serve as social clubs that ameliorate delinquency and ultimately reduce the city’s crime-fighting expenses (Zeitlin 1994). In all of these examples, the cultural brokerage consists of making connections among aspects of life held rigidly apart in the process of environmental review, of bringing what environmental review has made “epiphenomenal” back to the center.

In southern West Virginia, as New River becomes a node in a new and official Coal Heritage Trail erected to bolster tourism when the coal is gone, a subaltern public on Coal River refashions and displays a history assembled from the ruins of a co-opted commons. Out of the bridge that spanned the river at the now-dismantled coal town of Edwight, one man built a traditional log cabin in which he displays artifacts of a confiscated way of life, artifacts he scavenged from roaming the mountains behind the gates. The New River Gorge National River is grafted onto this commons, but not simply as a stage for the public display of culture. People on Coal River go fishing in the New River and bring back what they catch to stock Coal River, where they fish in holes steeped in history, named for local people, places and events.

Searching out the cracks in the system, anchoring common worlds in private and quasi-public spaces—such scavenging models a practice for us, a way of dwelling, as Readings says, in the ruins. Folk arts, narrowly defined and presented in preserves that screen out the broad view, comprise a space in which there is little room for maneuver. The space of folk arts seems hardly big enough to contain or address the problem of publics suppressed by the closure of commons around which they have formed. But such a space does provide a bit of anchorage for what I see as public folklore’s real practice: scavenging in a wide range of preserves to make room for realities spoken, sung, danced, cooked, hunted, sewn, cultivated, and built around the cracks of a hegemonic order that is never complete.

In her paper, Mary Hufford suggests that the discipline of folklore studies, which is always in and of the public sphere, can be infused with a new, critical, oppositional, and even subversive energy if we model ourselves and our practice after the interstitial cultures we study. Michel de Certeau evocatively described these vernacular cultures as lacking a space of their own but flourishing in cracks and crevices, where they are easily overlooked. Cunning and Eigensinn (obstinacy) enable them to make poaching raids upon the system, taking advantage of opportunities that open up just for the blink of an eye.

At the symposium, I took heart in Hufford’s assertion that, as she put it in her presentation, “scattered among the enclosed worlds of official preservation and progress” we can create “room for maneuvering” by working in the cracks. She suggests then that there is a “gap between what folklorists think they do and what the public seems to think they do.” Public sector folklore tactically profits from an image of affirming the ideology of the nation-state, and by extension, of the market economy. It is under the cover...