

## “INDUCED NATURAL CONTEXT” IN CONTEXT

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FOLKLORE STUDENTS of several generations have grown up on Kenneth Goldstein's *A Guide for Field Workers in Folklore* (1964). When they prepared to go into the field, they used his *Guide*, and they consulted it again when they arrived there. His cogent advice followed them, tucked conveniently in their pocket or pocketbook, reassuring them in doubt and offering solutions in uncertain situations. In the loneliness of the field, the *Guide* became a companion to which researchers turned in crisis and in joy. Make “safety copies of all recordings and notes” (p. 143), Goldstein's sound advice followed them wherever they went. If pay an informant you must, consider it as a gesture of “good will and friendship” rather than “a payment of incentive” (p. 170); and for your own sake stay away from any “hostile factionalism” that is inevitably present in any community (p. 73).

When the *Guide* first appeared, one reviewer welcomed it as “an attempt to bring together ideas, suggestions, and theoretical statements which reflect a needed cross-disciplinary point of view,” and “highly recommended” it as “stimulating and provocative” (Black 1966:353). Another hailed it as an “excellent field manual” that “is designed to make [the field work] experience . . . much richer,” noting his “praiseworthy ethnographic bias” (Dundes 1965:547). And in the *Journal of American Folklore*, Arthur J. Rubel emphasized the significance of the book for anthropologists: “It reflects current anthropological interest in cultural cognitive systems” (1965:359). Almost thirty years later in a book devoted solely to research and method in oral traditions and the verbal arts, in the midst of a list consisting of the the most recent books in the field, Ruth Finnegan mentions Goldstein's *Guide* and comments parenthetically that it “is still useful despite its date” (1992:57). Later she points out that his “categories of ‘natural’, artificial’, and ‘induced natural’ contexts . . . can be criticized and extended, but are still extremely illuminating distinctions to start from” (1992:76).

Both reviewers and casual commentators singled out the *Guide's* contribution to the practice of fieldwork in folklore. They welcomed its interdisciplinary nature. However, in the hindsight that thirty years may provide, it appears that they failed to fully apprehend the range of Goldstein's disciplinary borrowing. In most cases they have been misled by Goldstein's own explicit statements, focussing on his synthesis between methods in folklore and anthropology. A closer reading, however, reveals another discipline looming right behind these two academic siblings in the study of culture. Its presence becomes apparent in Goldstein's casual statements, anecdotal examples, and formal methodological concepts. Consequently, in practice and in purpose, the *Guide's* contribution to folklore extends far beyond fieldwork, implicitly proposing a research direction that was new at the time of its publication. Since Goldstein himself has hardly pursued this direction systematically, and since others have not joined him with sufficient vigor to form a scholarly trend, the novelty of this direction has not worn off and its promise awaits fulfillment.

Goldstein alluded to the rudiments of such a research direction in his *Guide*. At the same time he clouded them with some ambiguity and a certain degree of duality of purpose inherent in the book that has obscured his ultimate vision of folklore. Every guide book or manual has by definition an ideal addressee. A tourist guide's readership is self explanatory; a sex manual aims at the inexperienced, unimaginative, or simply bored lover. Goldstein wrote his book for the consummate folklore collector: "He is the most important element in the scholarship of folklore" (p. 2), because all further "evaluation, interpretation and analysis" (p. 2) are dependent upon the materials the collector harvests in the field. For Goldstein, folklore collecting is the ultimate scholarly experience, and although he realizes that its enjoyment depends on temperament, he implicitly hoped that the book would make all folklorists of varying persuasions converts to collecting. Realistically yet optimistically he states:

This book cannot make a folklorist a collector. A methodology is only one of the requirements for successful collecting. More important is the individual who would become a collector. If he does not have the inclination, temperament, or personality for collecting, he will not become a successful field worker merely by using the methods and techniques given here. While it is true that his inclination can be changed by inspired instruction, temperament and personality go so much deeper that it is unlikely that they could sufficiently be affected. Still, any one is capable of doing a certain amount of collecting, though not in the "field." One can collect from family, friends, and neighbors, and to such collectors the basic requirements for obtaining data will apply as much as they do to qualified field workers. (p. 9)

Goldstein's message filters through the conditionals, the "if," the "while," and the "still": collecting folklore itself will be an inspirational experience. Although he knows otherwise, the initial negative statement that opens the quoted paragraph transforms at the conclusion into an expectation that all

mentators singled out the *Guide's* contribution to folklore. They welcomed its interdisciplinary approach. That thirty years may provide, it appears, a range of Goldstein's disciplinary borrowings, dismissed by Goldstein's own explicit statements about methods in folklore and anthropology. It reveals another discipline looming right behind the study of culture. Its presence becomes apparent in anecdotal examples, and formal elements, in practice and in purpose, the *Guide's* approach, beyond fieldwork, implicitly proposing a new time of its publication. Since Goldstein's approach systematically, and since others have not formed a scholarly trend, the novelty of this promise awaits fulfillment.

Elements of such a research direction in his work are shrouded with some ambiguity and a certain uncertainty in the book that has obscured his ultimate goal. A book or manual has by definition an ideal reader; a sex manual aims at a bored lover. Goldstein wrote his ideal collector: "He is the most important element in the collection, because all further "evaluation, interpretation, and analysis are dependent upon the materials the collector provides. Folklore collecting is the ultimate scholarly activity because its enjoyment depends on temperament. A book would make all folklorists of varying temperaments. Realistically yet optimistically he states:

Folklorist a collector. A methodology is only a means to successful collecting. More important is the collector. If he does not have the inclination for collecting, he will not become a collector. Only by using the methods and techniques that his inclination can be changed by inspired personality go so much deeper that it is not so easily affected. Still, any one is capable of collecting, though not in the "field." One can collect in the home and neighbors, and to such collectors the same data will apply as much as they do to

though the conditionals, the "if," the "while," the "when," itself will be an inspirational experience. The initial negative statement that opens the book leads to a conclusion into an expectation that all

folklorists will discover the joy of collecting. The "collector" is both the main protagonist and the addressee of the *Guide*. Goldstein advises him; evaluates his action; places him in real, fictive, or hypothetical situations; rescues him out of complex relationships; and weaves both story and theory around his personality.

At the same time Goldstein cast his ideal collector in another role—that of a scientist. He prepared the *Guide* out of "a concern with the status of the discipline of folklore. It is part of a larger effort to raise the discipline to the level of a science (a social science retaining close ties with the humanities, to be sure)" (p. 13). The *Guide* would clearly spell out the principles for adequate description of folklore processes: "Such documentation, which is essential if folklore is to achieve scientific status, can be supplied only by trained professional folklorists guided by a body of theory, or by amateurs trained by such professionals" (p. 14). In short, Goldstein's collector has a dual mission: not only does he have to save folksongs, folktales, proverbs, riddles, and customs from real or alleged oblivion, but he has to conduct his rescue operation along scientific principles.

According to the views that dominated folklore research up to the forties and the fifties, lagging behind other disciplines in the social sciences, there was a clear distinction between collecting, which still had to be accurate and detailed to have any value, and analysis, which ensued as the scientific research stage, involving primarily type classification and motif identification. Such a division is clearly apparent in the discussions in a mid-forties conference (Anon. 1946), and in a set of four mid-century symposia (Thompson 1953) from which Goldstein quotes, and in several studies to which he refers (Addy 1902; Burne 1902; Crooke 1902; Dorson 1953, 1957a, 1957b, 1964:1-20; Dundes 1962; Grainger 1908; Jones 1946; Leach 1962; Lindgren 1939; Opie 1953; Seligmann 1902; Skeat 1902).

However, for Goldstein these two roles were inseparable. He recognized that the scientific process began in the field and before, and could not be delayed until the material reached the archive. The formulation of the research problem, the selection of informants, the questions posed to them, and the context of collecting all have direct bearing on any procedures to which a subsequent scientist would subject the collection. Goldstein thus removed the scientific work in folklore from the desk to the field. Goldstein would have agreed with his contemporary, the philosopher of science Norwood R. Hanson, who, in the course of discussing another discipline, pointed out that "by the time a law has been fixed into an [hypothetico-deductive] system, really original physical thinking is over" (Hanson 1969:70).

But where could Goldstein find the necessary models for such a conception of the collector as a scientist, for they were absent from folklore scholarship? MacEdward Leach, Goldstein's mentor, wrote about the problems of collecting oral literature (1962), but he defined his issues in historical, not scientific, terms, assessing, among other things, the impact of the collector's historical assumptions concerning the origin of folklore in a specific region on

the data that he recorded (quoted in Goldstein 1964:19). Anthropology, with its emphasis on the exotic, could have been helpful, but not sufficiently so, particularly since Goldstein is emphatic that his *Guide* would serve the fieldworker in "essentially rural, agriculturally-based, non-industrial communities" (p. 10), and he has taken a guarded attitude towards "its application to non-folk, aboriginal, non- or pre-literate areas of the world" (p.10). In short, Goldstein requires of his fieldworker to act in the dual roles of collector and scientist, yet at the same time he is rather vague about the models of scientific folklore toward which he aspires.

Yet, although Goldstein did not articulate his sources of scientific inspiration, his *Guide* provides some preliminary clues, which he amplified in some of his later works. In his introductory presentation to his book, Goldstein states: "The *Guide* is based on collecting experiences and experiments conducted in "folk" communities" (p. 10). Now, Goldstein's prose is rarely alliterative, and the phrase "experiences and experiments" immediately stands out. Historically, folklore has not been an experimental science. Occasionally some field workers came upon experimental situations serendipitously—a classic case is the Zuni rendition of the Italian version of "the Cock and the Mouse" (Tale Type 2032, "The Cock's Whiskers") that Frank Hamilton Cushing told them and a year later recorded as a native Zuni tale (Cushing 1901:411-22; reprinted in Dundes 1965: 269-76; see Cushing 1979, 1990). The few occasions in which experimentation has been used in folklore deliberately occurred when psychologists applied their trade to tales and songs (Bartlett 1920, 1932), or when folklorists sought to confirm or refute the role of memory in oral transmission (see Dundes 1965:246-47).

Therefore, the apparently casual use of the term "experiments" is deliberate and symptomatic, indicating some notions Goldstein had in mind but did not make sufficiently explicit, and revealing his orientation toward experimental psychology. Indeed he clearly lists books in "the fields of psychology" (p. xiii) among the works that he read in preparing his *Guide*, and he defers to psychology as the only field in which he feels a lack of competence, yet recognizes its import to his scientific field work. He states:

The present work does not include methods requiring special training and techniques, such as psychological or projective tests designed to obtain information about personality functioning. When a revised edition of this book is made, it should include one or more chapters on such techniques by persons properly qualified to instruct in them. (p. 11)

Until Albert Lord had fully developed Perry's formulaic theory (1960), memory had been thought to have a central role in oral transmission, and hence experiments concerning the remembrance of things past seemed to test the central process of oral transmission. But Goldstein wished to extend the role of experimentation in folklore to other area, such as creativity, rise and decline of tradition, aesthetic principles, and the role of the individual in the formation and continuation of tradition. For him the field was for the folklorist what the

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laboratory for the psychologist. While he glorified collecting, his *Guide* put an  
 equal emphasis on experimentation with oral tradition. In that sense Goldstein  
 was a proponent of experimental folklore. In a later study that resulted directly  
 from his fieldwork "experiences and experiments" in Scotland Goldstein spe-  
 cifically cast the scientific procedures of folklore in these terms. His essay  
 "Experimental Folklore: Laboratory vs. Field" (1967) not only set up a pair of  
 opposition that had been crucial to his conception of folklore, but actually  
 named as "experimental folklore" the direction that he implicitly outlined for  
 the discipline in his *Guide*.

From such a perspective, the *Guide* is not just a handbook for fieldwork,  
 but a proposition for the construction of folklore on the basis of experimental  
 principles. Goldstein prefers the kind of scientific psychological methodology  
 that develops and confirms knowledge through experiments. He tends to for-  
 mulate folklore as a positivistic science, and in spite of his academic back-  
 ground in statistics, he does not select analytical models from sociology, in  
 which quantitative statistical analysis has provided the positivistic scientific  
 basis, but rather turns to psychology—and specifically cognitive psychology—  
 as the more appropriate and more relevant model for the science of folklore.

Some European folklorists—Wesselski (1931:127-31), Anderson (1951),  
 and Ortutay (see Anderson 1956:5-6)—preceded Goldstein in conducting ex-  
 periments in folklore. While he acknowledged and criticized them (1967:73), it  
 is necessary to point out a major difference between Goldstein's experimental  
 folklore and the experiments that preceded him. Anderson, Wesselski, and even  
 Ortutay conducted their experiments within the framework of the  
 historic-geographic method. The first sought to confirm, and the second to  
 falsify, the theory of oral diffusion of narratives. Memory, forgetfulness, and  
 narrative re-creation have been some of the core concepts of a diffusion theory  
 that presupposes exclusive reliance on oral transmission. Therefore, when  
 Anderson sought to validate such a theory he considered it necessary to confirm  
 the reliability of memory in narrative recall. In contrast, Wesselski, who con-  
 sidered print to be the stabilizing factor in folktale transmission, set out to  
 demonstrate the unreliability of memory.

But Goldstein took a completely different path of research. He was not so  
 much concerned with the diffusions of tales or songs, nor with the possibility of  
 the dependence of this process exclusively on oral means, memory, and recall.  
 Rather, he sought to examine experimentally the dynamics of folklore in  
 society. For Goldstein folklore is a science of social and verbal interaction. To  
 be sure, memory, recall, and verbal creativity are part of his concerns, but he  
 regards them as significant processes in and of themselves and not as instru-  
 ments in the diffusion of texts. Furthermore, the folklorists and the psycholo-  
 gists before him experimented with folklore in situations that were analogous to  
 the psychological laboratory, whereas Goldstein has preferred the natural con-  
 text of folklore performance in society. For him, this was the only context in  
 which experiments could be valid. In spite of Goldstein's personal and emo-  
 tional attitude toward field collecting and his many singer-friends, he conceives

of the field as the science laboratory of folklore, and his "natural context" as the ideal situation for experimental folklore.

Significantly, Goldstein illustrated his typology of contexts (pp. 80-87) with only two specific examples. The first of them, which involves an experiment, concerns the question of recall:

For many informants the loss of situational familiarity and meaning is so great that they cannot perform effectively. One of my informants in northeastern Scotland could not recall his songs in an artificial context. Outside of his shoe repair shop he felt lost when attempting to sing his songs. I brought him his shoe-mending equipment and asked him to fix my shoes and sing his songs. The attempt was a failure. I took him at his word when he told me: "If you come tae me shop, I'll fairly fill yer tape wi' song while I mend yer sheen there." In the natural context of singing while working in his own shop, he performed some thirty ballads without pause, hesitation, or memory loss; in the artificial context I was able to garner only imperfect and fragmentary texts and tunes. Needless to say, the only meaningful observations of his performance style worth reporting would be those made in the natural context of his shop. (p. 85)

The second example, in which Goldstein addresses the impact of natural context on the singing style of another Scottish informant, illustrates his division between the roles of scientist and collector that a field worker may have. "My duty," Goldstein states "obviously, is to describe her performance styles as observed in natural context; the artificial context was valuable only for obtaining the texts and tunes of the material themselves" (pp. 86-87). The scientist, in other words, must conduct his observations and experiments in the natural state of folklore; for the collector, on the other hand, the artificial context may do.

When natural context is unobservable, the experimental scientist can resort to the manipulation of situations and induce the natural context (Goldstein 1964:87-90; 1968). Logically, the concept "induced natural context" is an oxymoron. "Induced" labor, as many mothers know, is no longer natural, even if it is distinct from some more radical medical interventions. But in the context of experimental folklore the concept makes sense. It is an experimental situation in which the field worker, as scientist, manipulates his informant, causing harm to none, in order to simulate a situation that takes place in society without the field worker's presence. It is a collecting situation that is natural and in which the collector minimizes his presence so as to minimize, in turn, his influence on the data to be collected.

Ruth Finnegan, who is sensitive to the ethical issue of "covert" actions by a field worker, finds it a valuable concept and method. She writes:

But there is also a variety of "natural induced" contexts in which the performers know their performances are being recorded but do not find performing in this kind of situation strange. Thus researchers sometimes exploit local conventions by inviting a praise singer to perform at a party,

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contributing towards the cost of putting on a memorial ceremony, or acting as host for a regular session of riddling and story-telling, whilst not concealing the presence of a tape-recorder in the background (often ignored). Since, after all, performances regularly depend on the instigation of groups and individuals it may not seem unnatural for the researcher to take an overt role. Such settings clearly have some advantages over fully "natural" contexts. Merely waiting around hopefully may mean never having access to certain genres or events. The practice of induced settings may even be a locally recognized one, as in putting on displays for a visitor or for special occasions. Compared to "artificial" settings, "induced" performances may be closer to the normal interactions, particularly if involving an audience—often important for performance. (Finnegan 1992:80-81)

Goldstein himself offers two examples of 'induced natural context' taken from his own "experiences and experiments":

Having found out what the normal context for riddling was in northeast- ern Scotland, I invited six of my informants over for a social evening on Saturday night. When the moment seemed appropriate, I led the conver- sation in the directions of riddles and posed one that I had heard from an informant who was not present. I then took the role of a participant observer and was able to study the situation in depth during the two hours that the riddling session went on. In the meantime, my wife sat in the background and made notes on each of the riddles posed. Since there was usually five or six minutes [break] between the time when a riddle was recited and the answer was given, she had sufficient time to write out each riddle and indicate the name of the poser. I made notes on my observa- tions of the riddling context immediately after my informant friends left the house later that evening. By playing the role of the instigator, I was able to hide the real purpose of the evening from every one of the other participants, thereby assuring a more natural context.

I have also been able to avoid using accomplices from among the folk by having a member of my own family play that role on certain occasions. Wishing to observe marbles games in action as played by the children in the neighborhood, I had one of my daughters bring several of her schoolmates to our home so that I could observe them while they played on our rear lawn. Generally, such games were never played in the presence of adults because most of the home owners on the block were angered by the children digging holes in their lawns in order to play their marbles games. My daughter introduced her friends to me and asked if it was all right to play marbles. After I gave my permission, my daughter dug the hole for the game about 15 feet from where I was sitting (accord- ing to a pre-arranged plan), so that the game would be in full view to me. I busied myself pretending to be writing letters, but actually was taking notes on the situation. (Pp. 89-90)

The natural and the induced natural contexts are methodological concepts in Goldstein's experimental folklore. Yet a method without a theory is like a play—actions without a purpose that have no consequences. What, then, are the theoretical foundations of the science of folklore that Goldstein builds in his *Guide*? Having broken with the diffusion theory of folklore that the historic-geographic school addressed, and not having embraced the literary-historical approach that his mentor, MacEdward Leach, taught, Kenneth Goldstein set in his *Guide* the foundations for a new folklore theory, a theory of cognitive folklore. Goldstein's theory of cognitive folklore seeks, in a sociological-psychological and interactional tradition, to infer from human actions how people process their traditions in their minds and how they apply these traditions in their daily lives and culturally defined specific occasions and social events. While the *Guide* reflects a certain degree of preoccupation with the adequacy of documentation as a basis for the formation of folklore as a science, the details Goldstein asks his fieldworkers to note indicate his goal of establishing folklore as a social science that deals with psychological issues of tradition. 'Natural' and 'induced natural' contexts are the only situations that will yield reliable scientific observations having any value toward the formulation of a theory of cognitive folklore. While such a theory may, in the final analysis, offer some universal principles, Goldstein conceives of human cognition as cultural dependent and situationally conditioned. Therefore it is necessary to observe traditional performances and actions within their cultural and situational contexts. His *Guide* spells out the basic requirements for scientific observation, documentation, and experimentation that would establish cognitive folklore as a social science.

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